

London School of Economics and Political Science

Ethics and politics of Algerian Sufi brotherhoods

An ethnographic study of Oran's *popular* Islam

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Declaration

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Abstract

This thesis is an ethnographic study of Muslim communities in Oran, a coastal city in the North-West region of Algeria. It is concerned with how the public presence of Sufi orders - notably rituals, parties, festivals and conferences - contributes to the nation-building process. It begins by looking at the Algerian state's religious policy, exploring the limits of political legitimacy by analysing the state's attempts to define national Islam and to associate it with the Sufi, mystical tradition. It presents the state's ambiguous relationship with Sufi brotherhoods and explores the role played by religion in national projects of modernity. By examining people's experiences of "baraka", I argue that a new understanding of spiritual power, as a combination of transcendental and immanent forces, brings us to reconsider God-humans relations in our analyses of secularism. In this perspective, I show that the community's social activities derive from the harmonious flow of divine forces in the city, and argue that the power of political rituals like presidential visits in mausoleums, and Muslim celebrations like Saints-day festivals, emerge from a blend of divine and popular energy. Nations, like religion, need to be 'mediated', and this thesis demonstrates religion's ability to invoke immanent power that is potentially foundational for a fused political-religious imagination. This work thus, is also an exploration of tensions and movements between immanence and transcendence.

This thesis is dedicated to Bénédicte Leperre and Henri Joassin.

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Introduction

December 2016

A Friday night, ending a week of parties and religious ceremonies, celebrating the prophet Muhammad's anniversary (al-Mawlid al-nabawiy). I have been in Oran for almost a year, living in a flat just above the zawiya Habriya, in Maraval, a district close to Oran's city centre. This flat is owned by the family of Sheikh Habri, the leader of the zawiya, who welcomed me into this community. But this night is special, and I do not spend it with members of the "Habriya". Masinissa, a friendly man whom I met at the wa'da (a religious festival) of the Taybia (another zawiya in Oran), the previous summer, invited me to join him and attend the end of Mawlid celebrations, taking place at another zawiya, in the city's suburb. On the second floor of the zawiya a large room is full of men and children, people are sitting and standing everywhere, even on the stairs. We are late and the "dhikr" ceremony has already started; it is a vibrant, noisy, enthusiastic place; people are singing and "remembering", reciting the names of God in harmony. Towards the end, it is the children's turn to participate in the ceremony. For half an hour, they sing, recite stories, evoke the prophet Muhammad's history. They are serious and disciplined.

Then the sheikh asks them to come, individually, and collect their presents: religious books. They each get up in turn, walk up to the sheikh, and return to their places. As the zawiya's leader was about the call the last pupil, he surprises me by calling me to the front of the room and asking that I join him in offering the last book. I am then invited to sit down next to him. The group shifts its attention, to focus on me. I was not even aware that the sheikh knew who I was, or even that I was present at this ceremony. I introduce myself to this large audience, speaking into a microphone, and start a discussion with the Sufi sheikh, in front of everyone. Long speeches then follow - political personalities are also present for the event - until the sheikh turns again to me and whispers: "I am going to ask you to stand up. We would like to give you a gift. So please get on your feet, and this man over there, the imam, will come and dress you in a gandura [traditional dress]". I had not seen this coming, but accepted the gift with pleasure. A few moments later, I am standing in front of the packed room. Everybody is looking at me. I know that many of the people that are present tonight might see this gift as the start of a conversion process. It is a recurring topic at the zawiya Habriya. Sheikh

Habri also offered me a similar dress, and many Habri followers believed that it would transcend me and help me to convert.

The imam and I are standing in front of the assembly, and he places the gandura over my shoulders. It is a very solemn moment. Something spiritual is transmitted through the gift, but the gift in itself seems to possess spiritual power. “You will see, this gandura, it will give you an aura”. But what kind of “aura” does this gandura offer? Is this gandura a divine, transcendental object, because it is a “religious” dress? Or is it something more immanent, which connects me to the people of this Sufi community?

I

A reconfiguration of the religion-politics relationship in Bouteflika’s Algeria

From material religion to immanent national imagination

The importance and value of this dress, and of such objects, in this kind of ceremonies, shows that religion often remains “material religion” (Engelke, 2011: 209). When Sheikh Habri offered me a Qur’an, at the end of fieldwork, he gave me precise instructions, asking me to touch it only with cleaned hands, never after sports or sexual intercourse, “It’s God’s words”. A transcendental, out-of-this-world God, speaking from a freshly printed book; material things can demonstrate a form of divine presence in the world. A paradox? The example from the vignette similarly reveals a recent move in the study of religion, from the analysis of religions as systems of ideas, beliefs, values (Lindquist and Coleman, 2008) to an understanding of religion as “embodied practices that cultivate relations among people, places and non-human forces” (Morgan, 2013: 347). But looking at religion from a material perspective does not move us away from the study of religious meanings and worldviews. To the contrary, it will lead us to understand how divine forces are present and represented in the sensible world (Boylston, 2013), and will inform us on people’s ideas and beliefs.

Such objects, for example, are representative of strong ideological tensions within monotheisms on the issue of mediation. The power of the traditional dress must be likened to that of a human or a body, as a mediating thing for power. People attribute

power and agency to saints' tombs and bodies, to books and relics, even to food. In this respect, the Christian Eucharistic presence can be seen as "bodily, pneumatic, dynamic" for Catholics and the Orthodox, whereas Reform Protestant churches would deny the presence of "divine power" in the Eucharist (Boylston, 2013: 264). It is because "material religion" informs us on the nature of God's presence in the sensible world, questioning the power relationship between God and humans, that its analysis sheds light on rival interpretations within a religious tradition. Though I insist in this thesis in the power of mediating objects, things, humans, looking at the immanent circulation of divine energy in various spaces, bodies, objects of the city (chapters 2 and 3), I show that Sufi dhikr rituals allow for both transcendental and immanent imaginations of God (chapter 5).

The possibility of another - divine - world and the existence of a transcendent God have political consequences, insofar as the kind of power they generate has the ability to legitimise political institutions. Benedict Anderson famously opposed religiously "imagined" communities to nationally "imagined" communities. He considered that the religious relied on a vertical conception of time, emanating from a transcendent world, while the nation was tied to a horizontal conception of time, being about the this-worldly and the historical. This proposition has been challenged at different levels. It can be argued that it fails to see the religious foundations of national imagination (Gat, 2013) and the extent to which the imagined nation's potency relies on an "otherworldly residence" (Webb, 2018: 73). For Webb, "nations" and "religions" "are interdependent, otherworldly social formations - "imagined communities" oriented along transcendental axes" (2018: 69). In this perspective, I further show in this thesis that religion and nationalism are not inherently different in their ideological form. But I stray away from Webb's position when I argue that it is religion's ability to invoke immanent power that can also provide foundations for a fused political-religious imagination. In a certain way, I am not far from Anderson's original argument, as I use my material to support the idea that religion, with the example of Sufi orders, provides the ground for people from an "imagined political community" to feel part of a "deep, horizontal comradeship" (Anderson, 1983: 7).

Beyond studies of secularism: power and puissance in “popular” Islam

The work of national imagination is not a passive process and is often the fruit of state policies. As the post-independence history of many Arab states shows, religion has been an effective tool to gather people under a same banner and legitimise a political regime. Anthropological studies of secularism can be very useful to understand current power relationship between the Algerian state and religious institutions like Sufi orders and *zawiyas*. In the Asadian tradition, secularism is analysed as a regime of power, as a system of production and control of subjectivities. The question of power, in these studies, is tackled from a Foucauldian perspective. The state produces discourses that discipline individuals and generates forms of self-discipline. With a large definition of secularism, Asad, Ali Agrama and Mahmood are able to consider Egypt as a secular state and we may be tempted to follow a similar path with the analysis of the Algerian state’s religious policy. Power is at the heart of these theories of secularism, and religion is just a piece in the unfavourable, hierarchical relationship with the nation-state. The sovereign state, as the powerful entity, imposes its vision of God to its power-delegating society.

I look at the state’s power in this manner in chapter 1, by describing the ways it supports and imposes a certain vision of Islam. But I agree with Samuli Schielke when he calls anthropologists to reconsider, in our analyses of secularism, the type of relations that humans have with God. It brings us to understand secularism as a power relationship between God and humans; and, in North Africa as in other parts of the Muslim world, we would tend to observe, indeed, a shifting relationship, where “humans claim more power for themselves” (2018: 4). In the following chapters, I will thus attempt not to focus only on the relationship between the state and its “citizens” but will develop an argument on power that considers the evolution of people’s relationship with God.

In this perspective, I am interested in the concept of power as a force emanating from a multitude. I do not deny the pertinence of a vertical, hierarchical, transcendental analysis of spiritual power, notably as it was proposed by many anthropologists of Islam (Addi, 2009; Gellner, 1981; Soares, 2007), often inspired by Weber’s sociology of charisma. But I argue that we should also conceive power as a horizontal, circular, immanent *puissance*, which generously spreads in various spaces of the city, and which

many people, objects, things can monopolise. It is the reason why I consider that the object of this anthropological study is “popular” Islam. I think that this concept is particularly pertinent for my analysis, even though the use of the idea of “popular religion” has been controversial in anthropology, notably because of the hierarchical order between forms of religion that it seems to suggest. In this respect, I try to come back to the idea of “a people” that is at the root of the concept. A people can be understood as a body of citizens (“demos”) but also as the common, ordinary base of a population, “something that is both multitude (“plethos”) and the rabble (“ochlos”), that is, the mass of most citizens (“hoi polloi”) and the poorest” (Bouvet, 2012: 24).

The concept of “popular religion” has been problematic in recent years because it prompted us to think in terms of binary classifications. Popular practices were opposed to elitist activities. Rational, reformist Islam against maraboutic, superstitious Islam. Rural, unschooled religion against urban, literary religious reasoning. These debates go back to the works of Clifford Geertz and Ernest Gellner, who famously argued that the rise of legalist, reformist Islam would overshadow the superstitious practices of the Islam of saints and marabouts. In this thesis, I do not use the term “popular” in order to oppose popular practices to another, “elitist” form of religiosity. To the contrary, this study attempts to describe the wide audience of these activities, and the circulation of spiritual power in multiple, connected spaces of the city. It also argues that it makes sense to think of popular Islam when we look at the “mystic” spirit and history of this city. Though I realise that some beliefs and practices, like the veneration of Saints or the dhikr ceremony, can be seen as marginal (see Schielke, 2008), I show that they take place in places and times (of the year, of the week) where they are combined with a wide range of other mass-mediated activities. In chapter 4, for example, I use the case of Saints-day festivals to illustrate the social diversity of these celebrations, with mystic rituals and dhikr ceremonies taking place alongside traditional stick fights and tribal spectacles.

Moreover, the use of the term “popular” enables me to avoid the question of ideological (and theological) hierarchies, as I address God’s complex personality in this environment and argue that people’s ethics stem from the various ways they represent and imagine the divine’s powers and commands. Throughout this thesis, I try to avoid using conventional categories to classify my informants’ practices; and my chapters describe encounters between people with various understandings of the divine. In Living

Islam (2005), Magnus Marsden's work in Chitral, Pakistan, showed that the complexity of Muslim lives - mentioning reformist supporters being Sufis and love poets, or ulemas believing in the power of love amulets - had to encourage anthropologists to be wary about these categories. Though I often use the term "Sufi", it is far from ideal, but it enables me in most situations to name people and give an (imperfect) idea of their beliefs.

Finally, even though I show that "Sufi" orders and brotherhoods have a strong international, regional dimension (in chapter 1), I argue that the feeling of national consciousness is strong enough in this environment to consider that the object of this study is "Algerian" popular Islam.

For my informants, as it was underlined in the beginning of this introduction, this popular Islam encompasses something inherently material. Mausoleums. Saints' tombs. The Sufi sheikh writing verses on lucky papers. Books, the Qur'an, hagiographies. The smell of incense, in Abdel Qader Jilani's cave, on Oran's Mount Aidour. The food, also, with large plates of couscous, which people share on Fridays, after the prayer, before the dhikr ceremony. On saints-day festivals: sweets and candies, thrown into the crowd. Therefore, it is also "material religion", in a certain sense, that has often been threatened by Salafi trends from the 1980s. As manifesting the presence of God in the sensible world, destroying a mausoleum was a way to attack an idea of the divine. In this respect, the history of the state's relationship with popular Islam is also a material history.

Algerian zawiyas, the French colonial state and the Algerian institutions

To understand this material history, and this relationship with Algerian institutions, we must situate it in a broader historical context, and evoke the relations of Sufi brotherhoods with the French colonial state. During the first period of the colonial era, in the 19th century, brotherhoods opposed and resisted French rule, and many of the popular uprisings were organised and conducted by them (Kassem, 1983). Already, in colonial times, some French officers, like Louis Rinn, the author of the famous "Marabouts and Khwans" (1984), thought that it was necessary to limit the influence of the brotherhoods by regulating them, by integrating them into the framework of an official Islam. The cultural influence and the educational role of the zawiyas represented

a danger for the French state. The lack of concrete data on their activities, despite the work of French military officers, made them suspicious (Turin, 1971).

It is in this context that the colonial administration decided to get closer to the heads of brotherhoods. Their ambiguous relationship with colonial authorities changed their political image. While they had long contributed to preserving a local religious identity, they became the target of reformist movements in the early 20th century. Reformism in Algeria developed considerably in the 1930s, thanks in particular to the influence of Sheikh Abdelhamid ben Badis, a preacher from Constantine (McDougall, 2006). But the question of the brotherhoods' relations with colonial authorities is far too complex to be reduced to a resistance/collaboration scheme. The opposition between reformist movements and the brotherhoods, as in the 1990s between Islamist groups and Sufi *zawiyas*, is sometimes superficial. The idea of reform (*islah*) spread throughout the country in the 20th century, and some brotherhoods, such as the *Rahmaniya*, were considered more reformist than others. Once again, there is no homogeneous ideological model within the *tariqas*. Therefore, one must keep in mind, from this period, their cultural influence, their role in preserving a religious identity, and the counter-power that they could represent for a state.

In the 1950s, at the beginning of the war of independence, the brotherhoods' relations with the colonial state changed, as the relationship with the FLN was tense and several *zawiya* leaders were murdered (Carret, 1959). Carret's work is relevant for this thesis because it shows how religious leaders, already at that time, compromised their spiritual prestige by entering the political sphere. But the situation remains complex to assess because the relationship of brotherhoods to the state, as their relationship with the FLN or the Ulemas, was not homogeneous. As Carret shows, even within a single brotherhood, individuals had different attitudes and opinions.

The recent history of this relationship can be divided in two periods. After the independence, from 1962 to the late 1980s, a period of discretion and mistrust. From the 1990s until today, a progressive return and increased public visibility.

The war of independence was fatal for a great number of *zawiyas* in Algeria. Some of them were physically destroyed by the French army and Algerian nationalists,

as they could be considered in each of the camps as “potential hideouts” or as “centres of collaboration” (Scheele, 2007: 312).

With the independence in 1962, the victory of the Front de Libération Nationale (FLN) was also a success for Islamic reformism, which was soon turned into “state religion” (ibid.). As Scheele shows, “the very few *zawâya* that were reconstructed after independence were turned into state-run Islamic teaching institutes of a reformist and anti-maraboutic outlook” and the village imam, “formerly recruited from among the local maraboutic families and paid by the local community, was gradually replaced by an imam chosen and paid by the ministry of religious affairs” (ibid.).

To describe the Algerian state as it developed during the first 25 years after independence, Fanny Colonna speaks of a state "of religious essence" (1995: 23) and evokes a "totalitarian cognitive structure", relying on reformist ideas. Colonna shows that reformist movements, from the 1920s to the 1940s, had legitimate aims (to restore an independent nation and state), but that their ideological strategy (destroying popular languages and cultures, imposing classical Arabic, sanitizing rituals), threatened the religious diversity of Algerian society. It is this totalitarian strategy, implemented by the Algerian state after independence, that Colonna criticizes.

The new Algerian state sought to control religious institutions, its properties, its symbols, and took control of religious education. The ministry of “*habous*” was created, to manage religious properties, and would become the ministry of religious affairs. Religion was going to serve the state (Vatin, 1981). It was part of a more general state religious policy that aimed at using Islam to legitimise the regime while neutralising potential opponents that could also exploit the power of religion. Though the influence of *zawiyas* on people’s beliefs and practices did not necessarily decrease, their political role and place in the public sphere were limited by the state’s will to control and define religion.

Although the religious orientation of the state was resolutely reformist (with many *ulemas* having key positions in the Ministry of religious affairs), we note that the Ben Bella government sought - from the beginning of the Algerian republic - to establish a relationship with the population, with a popular and mystic imagination and a political communication based on festivals, liturgies and commemorations (Carlier, 1995). What

we will see with Bouteflika's policy in the 2000s and 2010s thus takes root directly in the recent history of the Algerian state.

The 1970s were marked by the decline of Orientalist studies. In this context, anthropological studies on Algerian Islam were not plentiful. Nevertheless, historians, like Mohammed Brahim Salhi, were interested in the issue, and notably focused on the Kabyle myth and its relationship to the religion: Kabyle society would be a secular society, without a strong religious structure, and would thus only be superficially Islamic. His doctoral dissertation (2004) was an extension of his previously study of the Rahmaniya, and his work thus further showed that religion was not a peripheral detail in the Kabyle experience. On the contrary, it is by focusing on this region that he described how two types of relations with God - with Sufism and reformism - clashed in Algeria.

It was with the Boumediene government (1965-1979) that the offensive against the Algerian zawiyas was harsher. But it was also during this period that the ulema, faced with the socialist and collectivist policies of the state, began to oppose it. The most conservative were disappointed by the 1976 national charter, considered too secular and not very Muslim, in a context in which politics gradually opposed religion.

The Iranian revolution in 1979 had a symbolic impact for Muslim conservatives in Algeria, shortly after Boumediene's death: the revolutionary ideal was not only national or socialist but could have religious connotations. The Iranian revolution thus inspired Algerian Islamist movements in the 1980s and 1990s. During this same period, while conservative religious movements were increasingly popular, Chadli Bendjedid's presidency (1979-1992) was more favourable to the zawiyas, probably because of his kinship ties with Sufi leaders (Andezian, 1996). This presidency marked the end of an era, that of a powerful and legitimate FLN, and ushered in a long period of tension within Algerian society.

We must indeed look at the state and society to understand the political crisis of the 1990s and the civil conflict that followed. With strong demographic changes, part of the Algerian population, the youngest, had difficulty integrating into the labour market.

The state had to respond to these new issues, but the FLN governments in the late 1980s had lost their revolutionary aura and political legitimacy. When the FIS (Front Islamique du Salut), the main Salafist movement, was legalised, its use of religious symbols enabled it to gain political legitimacy. On the social level, the movement began to replace the state by initiating charitable actions and organizing them at the mosque level (Khatir, 2016). The mosque then played a special role. As a social institution, it distributed food, clothing, helped the elderly, offered arbitration and marriage counselling.

It is in this context that the public role of the brotherhoods was gradually rehabilitated by the Algerian government.

The 1990s and the civil conflict between armed Islamist movements and government forces play an important role in the argument of this thesis. As we have mentioned, this conflict inaugurated a change in the government's religious policy. To restore the legitimacy of the state, the government sought the support of "civil society", notably by renewing its ties with local associations and institutions - which include religious associations and *zawiyas* (Brahim Salhi, 2010). As we will see in the first chapter, the organisation of a national *zawiya* seminar in 1991 can be interpreted as being part of this policy.

This new policy does not mean that the religious ideology of the Algerian state changed. As we shall see, the government is above all concerned with controlling religious institutions, activities and practices, and to associate religious symbols with the nation-state (and sometimes with government leaders). I do not think there is any State-specific ideological policy on religion. Government support for *zawiyas* since the civil war, for example, has not coincided with new religious education programs. And it seems to me that the government is above all seeking a balance of power; it has no coherent ideological project.

But it is still possible to describe how the rise of political Islam in the 1980s and the 1990s' civil war deeply changed the state's relationship with *zawiyas*. Facing the growing popularity of political Islam, the Algerian government started to rely on the image of *zawiyas* to associate national Islam with a form of religiosity that could be seen as opposed to Islamist values. Using conferences, the media and popular public events,

the Algerian state attempted to promote, officially, a form of national, authentic, local Islam, sometimes based on Berber and African values, as opposed to a bad Islam imported from abroad.

Popular Islam and Sufi orders now officially play an important role in the construction of the state “anti-extremist” religious imagination. In this framework, Islam is the state religion, officially following the Sunni tradition and the Maliki rite. It is managed by a ministry of religious affairs, which is responsible for organising worship. For Mohammed Aïssa, current minister of religious affairs, “Algeria does not conceive the Maliki rite as an identity but as a way to serve society” (in Ghanem, 2018). The ministry supervises clerical staff, regulates facilities for prayer, manages properties held by religious institutions (the Habus). It controls religious education, be it in public schools, mosques or universities, and through seminars and academic conferences (Andezian). It is notably thanks to these kinds of events, and with the help of mass media, that the state can define what constitutes good religious practice and beliefs.

In this perspective, this thesis shows that Sufi brotherhoods evolve in an environment of suspicion and criticism, and that their activities and their past history are constantly challenged. In the following chapters, we note that this environment must be taken into account in order to better understand the context in which these practices occur. The recent history of the zawiyas in North Africa is important, as we have mentioned, because the relationship with the French colonial state, but also the role played by the zawiyas in the protection of an "Algerian religious heritage" during the colonial period, are recurring questions in public debates on the activities of Algerian zawiyas.

Salafists, in terms of ideas, are the main detractors of the Sufi zawiyas, but the most recurrent criticisms do not necessarily come from religious groups. Zawiyas are sometimes considered the last representatives of ancestral traditions, and their lack of modernity and old-fashioned activities are thus often pointed out, not only by Salafists, but also by the Algerian elites, the press, and the youth. Sheikhs and Sufi zawiyas respond to this type of criticism in different ways, as we will see in Chapter 5.

Another recurrent criticism is that of the zawiya's relationship to power and politics. It is related, in a way, to the question of the colonial period, and is just as difficult to answer for Sufi leaders. The press is relatively free in Algeria, and journalists do not hesitate to reveal the links of some sheikhs to politicians and political parties. This question is indeed very present throughout this thesis, with the accounts and stories of several leaders of zawiya. In general, they have two ways to answer the question. Opacity is a first way out: they do not really respond to it. The second option is to assume the political dimension of the Sufi zawiya. Religious leaders often do so by evoking the necessary peace and stability of the political regime. They enter the political sphere, not for personal reasons, but 'to protect the Algerian nation'.

This changing political relationship between the state and Sufi orders is the background from which an Asadian approach would read relations between religion and politics in this context. In this thesis, I am not only looking at top-down projects of state Sufism, secularism or anti-Salafism, but I propose to go beyond an Asadian approach by inquiring into a bottom-up perspective that tracks the emergent and relational popular conceptualisations of the relation between people and God, and between people, God and the political-public sphere.

Power and ethics in the Sufi and Islamic traditions

Looking at popular conceptualisations of these relations, this discussion will lead us to reflect on the evolution of Sufi and Islamic traditions. From material religion and popular Islam to immanent imaginations of God, I embrace Lambek's argument that "religious traditions are primarily concerned" "with articulating (in thought and in practice) the boundaries and relationship between immanence and transcendence" (2014: 14 in Reinhardt, 2016: 76). In the Islamic tradition, God is generally represented as a transcendental, out-of-this-world God, but as a rich and diverse religious tradition, Islam does not constitute a single, coherent body of ideas and practices. What interests me in the idea of tradition is the productive power of its rival interpretations. I agree with McIntyre when he writes that "what constitutes a tradition is a conflict of interpretations of that tradition, a conflict which itself has a history susceptible of rival interpretations" (1977: 460-1 in Reinhardt, 2016: 80). Even in the zawiya, in the Sufi environment in which I undertook fieldwork, people had different understandings of

God and thus engaged in various ways with the Islamic tradition. Even though I follow Ahmad's argument, when he challenges Asad's concept of "discursive tradition" (Asad, 1986), that "Muslims also refer and relate to other texts - oral and written - which are not necessarily and always the founding texts" (Ahmad, 2011: 110), I will show that the Sufi and Islamic tradition, in the Oran's popular Islam that I analyse, mainly rely on the founding Qur'an and Hadith; it is from these texts that people develop rival interpretations.

The first source is the Qur'an, which was revealed by God to the prophet Muhammad, which was then followed by the Sunna, with the collection of Hadith. With the expansion of its geographical and political base, upon contact with different populations, the Islamic tradition diversified. In Islam's legal and theological schools, tradition gives a lot of importance to the vertical dimension of the transmission of knowledge. From the first jurists and founders of the schools to the doctors of law that interpret and apply it, there is a vertical relation of transmission that is in line with a certain spirit of Islam. This type of relation is also present in Sufi lineages and spiritual genealogies, where wise masters have transmitted rites and knowledges to their disciples over centuries. This question of verticality must be traced back to Muhammad's revelation. A relation of verticality "appears immediately, in Islam, in the major event of the history of humanity: the Revelation" (Charnay, 1977: 81). It is with the word "tanzil", literally meaning "descent", that the revelation is mentioned. After the revelation, this relation of verticality "also appears chronologically in the succession of the Prophet's generations" (1977: 82), with more and more distance between them: "his Companions, those who know them, those who only knew his Companions", etc. Charnay's account is interesting because he does not only view this idea of vertical relation as a question of knowledge, as some truth or vision of reality that is transmitted from God to the prophet Muhammad, from the prophet to his Companions, and then following other genealogical lines, but also as a question of energy and power. He argues that the spatial and temporal distance between the steps of these lineages are accompanied by a loss of this energy. In chapter 2, I explore this idea of spiritual power and propose a new interpretation of these vertical circuits of transmission, which are still pertinent to understand the history of these Sufi orders or schools of law. I show that Charnay's argument is indeed relevant, but I argue that it is only a theological perspective, and that the existence of this kind of spiritual power or energy is lived and

experienced differently in Oran. Focusing on the horizontal and circular dimension of the transmission of power, I highlight its ordinary character, and show that it brings us to reconsider our linear understanding of space and time in this Islamic context.

In this verticality and horizontality debate lies the question of people's relationship with God, a problem that is unresolved and omnipresent in Muslim societies. Is man totally separated from his creator? Is union with the divine possible, thanks to rites and prayers? The Islamic tradition offers various answers to these questions, which bring us to consider in different ways the presence of God in people's lives. Even though I illustrate, in this dissertation, the multidimensional character of divine presence in the zawiya Habriya, it seems to me that there are two main conceptions of God in Islamic cosmology. A first is an absolutist understanding of God's relationship with his creatures. There is an infinite distance between man and God, and divine power is absolute and total. It is a God that one fears and must obey, and man's main aim is thus to best follow God's law on earth. The other vision of God's relationship with human beings reveals man as a potentially transcendental being, who can surpass himself, rise and unite with the divine. It may be a less a union than an experience of the divine. With rites, techniques, mystic practices, human beings can contemplate and feel the presence of God on earth.

In this respect, Ernest Gellner (whose PhD thesis at the LSE, in 1961, was a study of a Berber zawiya in Morocco) described a pendular movement between the legalistic, legalist trend and the ecstatic, sensual, charismatic one. Charnay sees in this distinction the shade of Blaise Pascal, with a God sensible to reason opposed to a God sensible to the voice of heart (1977: 112). In Oran, these two understandings were not necessarily incompatible. After the mosque, on a Friday, men would go to the zawiya. Looking for an experience of the divine, for a communion with God and Muslim Saints, did not prevent them from having a strict relationship with God's scripture, nor from observing and respecting rigorously his law on earth. As Omar Chaalal, the president of the "National Union of Algerian Zawiyas", once said to me, the aim of *the pious Muslim* is to combine the walk on the esoteric path with the observance of the exoteric law.

This thesis is also an exploration of this tension, and I agree with Samuli Schielke when he argues that it is a productive one. God is omnipresent in people's lives and

plays a considerable role in their actions, choices and ways of reasoning. Adding to its omnipresence, God has many faces and appears to humans in various ways. In chapter 5, a visible, norm-making figure of God coexists in the *zawiya* with an invisible divinity that can only be experienced but not known. At the same time, God's figure as a visible, understandable being can be both loved and feared, intimidating and caring. All these imaginations, the different relationships humans have with God, are productive because they offer many different ethical solutions to their life problems. It is in this perspective that this thesis is not a study of a Sufi or Islamic tradition. It does not analyse Sufi, mystic or Muslim practices, but attempt to better understand people's various and complex relations with God. Sufism has long been associated to esoteric trends, but I argue that the psychological variety of God-humans relations in this popular environment limits the pertinence of such classifications.

II

Religion from a "Sufi" perspective: studying popular Islam in Oran

Sufism, Sufi orders, and the zawiya Habriya

After a year of research I had the intention of observing and participating to the activities of a "Sufi brotherhood" and "Sufism", as a concept and a tradition, was supposed to be the object of a great part of my study. But defining Sufism might be as complex as trying to capture the nature of the Islamic tradition. The idea of Sufism was first associated with Islamic asceticism (Trimingham, 1969). We do not exactly know the origin of this term, but many historians argue that it comes from these ascetics' clothes, who were dressed in "coarse garments of wool (*suf*)" (1969: 1). Then it was the notion of sainthood (*walaya*). It is a controversial and polemical concept in Islamic theology, but a crucial notion to understand the spirit and organisation of communities gathered within and around *zawiyas*. These communities were gathered around a central figure, a man with charismatic personality. For Andezian, it was the anthropological necessity, in these societies, "to create extraordinary human figures, gifted with supernatural power, like the gods and masters of ante-Islamic traditions" (2001: 15). Without challenging Andezian's historical argument, this thesis argues that we should not overestimate the role of these characters in these communities. I notably show that

these communities can be autonomous, that numerous actors have the ability to carry on the zawiya's main activities (the dhikr, notably), and that the sheikh's mediating position is not always interpreted as a divine intercession.

I continue to use the terms "Sufism" and "Sufis", throughout this thesis, for several reasons. The links between Sufi ideas and the popular practices described in this dissertation are indisputable. The dhikr ceremony, in particular, plays a fundamental role within the Sufi community of Oran. This is the highlight of the week, which brings together all members of the Habriya, but it is also a frequent ritual in the week, during the evenings that bring together members of other zawiya's but also, more widely, Muslims of Maraval and Oran. We must then observe that the dhikr (which means "remembrance": remembering God and the names of God) was a major activity of the first Sufis, from the 9th century. This activity, and this concept, was part of the Sufi lexicon, developed from the first centuries of this tradition, which allowed it to spread thanks to its accessible and intelligible character (Green, 2012).

It is also important to emphasize the importance of the idea of tradition in Sufism, as well as the constant reference to major texts and past human figures. As Nile Green (2012) shows, one cannot reduce Sufism to a (mystical) experience, with the danger of disconnecting this experience from the religious history to which it is connected. I use these terms in this thesis (Sufism, Sufis, mystics) but my argument seeks to show how the activities and experiences described fit into a local history and a specific religious tradition. These Algerian Sufis are not mystics disconnected from the Islamic tradition. They are deeply attached to the Qur'an, hadiths and holy figures of Islam, to which they constantly refer in their practices. But their activities and those of their brotherhoods are also explicitly linked to the history of Algeria and the Oran region.

Therefore, my use of these terms is tempered by my desire to better understand the Islamic tradition, and I try not to reduce Sufism to a current, a compartment of Islam. This is one of the limits of the dominant academic discourse on Sufism. Instead of being treated as an "integral and integrated element in the ongoing lives and consciousnesses of Muslims", it is often considered as "a compartmentalized or specialized occasional activity carried out by Muslims" (Ahmed, 2017: 124). As Shahab Ahmed writes in his brilliant book on Islam, "Sufism is rarely regarded as normative and representative Muslim self-construction and self-articulation; rather, it is usually regarded as

alternative and particular self-construction and self-articulation” (2017: 124). And this is one of the important points of this thesis. The idea of a "popular" Islam allows me not to consider these practices and beliefs as being on the margins of Oran society. Even when criticized or questioned, most of these activities do not polarize the population and provide a common cultural base upon which society relies.

My main field site was the zawiya Habriya, in the district of Maraval, in Oran. The term zawiya can be literally translated as “corner”; some historical sources mention the corner in a ribat, where the sheikh had his prayer-mat (see Abun-Nasr, 2007: 179), and it became quickly associated with the practice of Sufism, being the structure “that acquired a distinctly Sufi character from the thirteenth century” (ibid.). The term was then used by Sufis in later centuries “for the house, or the room in the house, where a reputable Sufi sheikh meditated and taught his disciples” (ibid.).

But, whereas the ribat was generally a place where people would stay, sleeping and living there, zawiyas were not hostels, and became over the centuries the centres “of a branch of one of the tariqas, where its sheikh taught his disciples and the local members of his tariqa performed its communal dhikr ceremony” (ibid.). A zawiya thus refers to specific spaces, but also to a community, which belongs to a Sufi order, a tariqa. First tariqas (plur. “turuq” in standard Arabic) appeared in the thirteenth century in the Islamic heartland (the Middle East and the Maghrib) and must be understood in a context of decline of the religious authority of the caliphs. Their appearance was “a process of legend-building” (2007: 84), as they were not founded by their eponymous Sufi sheikhs, but by disciples who then claimed their spiritual authority. These Sufi sheikhs were teachers and preachers, and “their legends presented them also as uncompromising spiritual guides who earned the caliphs’ hostility by their defiance of the institutionalised religious authority exercised in their name” (2007: 86)

The use of the term tariqa goes back to the eleventh century. Sufis’ tradition of piety was first defined as al-tariq, the “path” (to God) and it then evolved to evoke al-tariqa, the “method”, “thus presenting it as a method by which the believers are set on the spiritual path to God” (Abun-Nasr, 2007: 79). For Trimingham, mystical philosophies in Islam emerged in reaction to the “external rationalisation of Islam in law and systematic theology” (1969: 2). The “ways”, i.e. the tariqas, were not organised

brotherhoods at their beginnings, but spiritual methods and modes of worship. Trimingham makes a distinction between the *tariqa* (the method) and the *ta'ifa* (the organisation). According to him, *tariqas* became organised groups, brotherhoods, from the 15th century; in the Maghrib, “this stage coincided with the appearance of Sharifism and what the French call maraboutism” (1969: 67). In the 13th century, Sufis thus “came to use it [the *tarîqa*] also in the sense of a special path to God validated by the *walâya* of a prominent Sufi sheikh” (Abun-Nasr, 2007: 79). The notion of *walaya*, as evoked, is important to grasp. In the hagiographic literature, it is understood by Sufis as “a special authority with which God endows his special confederates, the *awliyâ'*, and view it as an expression of his grace” (2007: 181). This spiritual guardianship is “to be sustained by a spiritual power, which they call *baraka* and which they believe manifests itself in human life as *karâmât*” (ibid.). These miracles are not supposed to be performed “by the *awliyâ'* themselves, but on their behalf by God”; it is important to note this fact, as it is one of the reasons they are often attacked by reformist thinkers. In chapter 2, I challenge this theological understanding of spiritual power and propose to view *baraka* as a popular expression of power.

Scheele defines the *zawiya* by looking at its functions in rural life in Maghrib regions; she writes that, “generally constructed around the tomb of a local saint, they served as teaching institutes of varying quality where the teachers of the village Qur'anic schools would be educated, as sites of pilgrimages, institutes of charity, hostels, and meeting places for religious brotherhoods” (2007: 306). In the urban context of Oran, I show that this definition still applies, though these functions might be split among *zawiyas*. This labour division has important consequences and alters our perception and definition of the *zawiya*. Some are reduced to their educational role, serving as teaching institutes and following the state recommendations, others focus on their social and spiritual role in their local communities. In this thesis, the *zawiya* *Habriya*, in Oran's neighbourhood of *Maraval*, is a starting point and will bring us to move around the city and visit the various connected spaces in which the power of popular Islam circulates. As the methodology section will show, I insist on the fluidity and openness of these spaces by re-appropriating the concept of “brotherhood”, notably by showing how the absence of a formal, well-defined organisational structure facilitates horizontal relations and communication between individuals.

A complex relationship with reformism, scripturalism and modernity

The zawiya Habriya is a branch of the tariqa Shadhiliyya-Derkawiyya. The official founder of the Shadhiliyya tariqa is Abu al-Hasan al-Shadhili (d. 1258), a Maghribi preacher and teacher, but the tariqa was transformed into a structured organisation under the leadership of one of his Egyptian disciples, Taj al-Dhin Ahmad Ibn Ata' Allah (d. 1309) (Abun-Nasr, 2007)¹. By that time, Sufi beliefs and practices were already strongly criticised. Ibn Ata' Allah was a contemporary of Ibn Taymiyya, who famously attacked the Sufis' belief in the spiritual power of the awliyâ; and Ibn Ata' Allah "made a lasting contribution to the consolidation and expansion of the Shâdhiliyya tarîqa by the leading role he played in defending Sufi beliefs against their detractors" (2007: 110). When looking at the work of historians, it is interesting to observe that these early tariqas "did not have a single supreme head or a fixed religious rule" (2007: 110). Concerning the Shadhiliyya, "the only Sufi ritual Ibn Ata' Allah expressly commended was the dhikr ceremony, but he fell short of setting fixed rules for its performance (ibid.). It is an important fact to consider because it is always difficult to define what unites all these different trends and movements under the idea of Sufism; and the dhikr ceremony is clearly a unifying practice. In chapter 4, I analyse the festive character of mystic Islam by looking at three important events in the life of the Oran's mystic communities, where the dhikr ceremony play an important role in the ethics of love, friendship and solidarity of the zawiya.

In the 14th and 15th centuries, the influence of Sufi sheikhs increased in the Maghrib (Trimingham, 1969), in a way "that whole tribes came to regard themselves as their descendants" (1969: 84). The idea that a sheikh's baraka could be inherited became popular: "All holy men had now to call themselves *sharifs*, and baraka became, not just a gift, but something that could be passed down and inherited" (ibid.). We can evoke for this period the idea of a "maraboutic revolution", which is characterised by the saints' expansion to the East, coming from the Moroccan South (Andezian, 2001: 21). This

¹ One of the first great Sufis in Maghrib, according to Trimingham, was Abu Madyan Shu'aib al-Husain (1126-98), who I evoke at the end of Chapter 1; he is one of the most beloved Saints in North-West Algeria. On one of his travels to Iraq, he met Ahmad ar-Rifa'i, who become a friend. There was no important tariqa after Abu Madyan, but al-Shadhili was the disciple of one of his pupils, 'Abd as-Salam ibn Mashish (d. 1228). It is thus through the intercession of Abu Madyan that the Shadhiliyya tariqa relates to the Rifa'iyya.

social change is important to mention, as it had an impact on people's conceptualisation of energy and power. In chapter 2, I attempt to understand the ambiguous, and sometimes contradictory, views on processes of transmission of baraka. I describe notably how an elitist vision of baraka, based on its hereditary character, coexists with an ordinary and popular image of baraka, as a spiritual power that everyday objects, clothes or even food can possess.

From the 15th century to the 19th century, the transformation of tariqas into organised brotherhoods prepared in a way 19th century's revivalist and reformist movements. For Trimingham, this evolution of Sufi movements is revealing of a weakening of "the mystical content of Sufi orders" (1969: 103) and a victory of legalists over esoteric doctrines of Islam. In the 19th and 20th centuries, Muslim societies underwent profound change, facing scientific and military successes of European (Christian) states with a sense of decline that generated a desire for Islamic renewal. The role that Sufi orders had during this period, notably in Africa, will allow us to better understand the nature of their activities in unstable, transitory or declining periods. As it has been the case for centuries, Sufi practices were criticised "for opening the door to idolatrous superstition" and "an attitude of passive withdrawal which resulted from an otherworldly orientation" (Esposito, 1998: 39). In this context, Sufism was not realigned "with the more orthodox path" and reformers did not "bring the inner path of Sufism into harmony with the more exterior path of Islamic law" (1998: 39). Rather, they "redefined Sufism, emphasising a spirituality that stressed a this-worldly, activist Islam", where "prayer and political action were joined together in the earthly pursuit of God's will" (ibid.). In North Africa, the alliance of Malikism and Sufism began with Sidi Boumedine (Lalmi, 2004), a famous Sufi saint who had a strong influence on the brotherhoods of western Algeria, as evoked in Chapter 1.

Unlike the Salafiyya, Sufi orders "had no concrete plans for religious revival, and did not even call for a reform of the religious law" (Abun-Nasr, 2007: 183). The focus was on the social dimension of their activities, urging Sufi followers "to participate actively in the life of their societies", rejecting "the identification of Sufi piety with ascetic poverty", and emphasising "the religious merits of useful work" and "profitable economic activity" (ibid.). A good example, in the 19th century, is the politics of the Sanusiyyah order in North and West Africa. Muhammad Ali ibn al-Sanusi founded a

movement that then led to the creation of modern-day Libya. The order “was both a reformist and missionary movement” and its adepts were “militant activists who united tribal factions in the name of Islamic solidarity and brotherhood”, with Sufi lodges that served “as religious, educational, and social centers, places for prayer and religious instruction as well as social welfare and military training” (Esposito, 1998: 40).

Regarding these movements, the literature notably mentions the idea of “Neo-Sufism”, defined as “Sufism reformed on orthodox lines and interpreted in an activist sense” (Rahman, 1979: 206 in Howell and Van Bruinessen, 2007: 132). For Voll (1982), Neo-Sufism was not only about political activism and a revived focus on the study of Hadith, but was also a reformulation of Ibn Arabi’s ideas, with a stronger focus on God’s transcendence, suggesting that Sufi philosophy was mainly about pantheistic, immanent conception of divine presence. The problem with this view is that it supposes a very specific definition of Sufism, as it can be argued that Neo-Sufi ideas “could already be found in the earliest Sufi authors” (Howell and Van Bruinessen, 2007: 133). This thesis will certainly not stop blurring the lines, as it describes a combination of transcendent and immanent imaginations of God and looks carefully at the *zawiya*’s “this-worldly” social activities. It also argues that reformist discourses and the state’s definition of religion had an impact on the organisation of Sufi orders, with an increased rationalisation of practices.

This discussion will bring us to put in perspective the supposed “decline” of Sufi orders, as well the arguments that challenged this interpretation. Trimmingham’s analysis of this decline was based on societal and generational factors. He considered that Sufi orders and their leaders would be obsolete in the face of Salafi-type reformers and “secularised new men” (1971: 250 in Howell and Van Bruinessen, 2007: 134). With a changing, modern society, the youth would be less interested in the old activities of Sufi brotherhoods. This argument is also related to a certain (transcendental) vision of transmission: the old world disappears with the old sheikhs, and “there is no one to succeed; their sons, in their intellectual outlook and dominant interests, no longer belong to their fathers’ world” (ibid.). This view is particularly interesting as the *zawiya* Habriya survived for two decades without any official leader, only thanks to the vitality of its community, before the two Habri brothers resumed control. Geertz, in Islam observed, analysed the evolution of the religious landscape in Morocco and Indonesia, going from

classical, mystic Islam to the legalism and scripturalism of reformist Islam. Gellner's argument consisted in a historical model, a system in which Muslim society oscillated between Sufism and scripturalism, relying on David Hume's work on religion, "a theory of oscillation or flux and reflux, from polytheism to theism and back" (Howell and Van Bruinessen, 2007: 137). The main problem with these analyses, as I evoked it earlier, is that these currents of the Islamic tradition, described as antagonistic, have always existed side by side. Even within a single *zawiya*, as this thesis shows, ideas and practices do not constitute a homogeneous bloc. Some followers may have a kind of pantheistic view of God. They come to the *zawiya* to touch the saint's coffin and express their hopes. The Sufi sheikh can write a Qur'an's verse on a small paper and give it to them as a good charm. For others, the leader of the *zawiya* is not a charismatic, extraordinary figure, but a man with great religious knowledge. Such people may come to the *zawiya* to think and study, reading books and asking for wise advice.

Theories on the decline of Sufi orders have been criticised for a long time, and van Bruinessen and Howell's collective book on Sufism and the Modern (2005) was very important in that respect. It is still relevant to engage with these views on decline because they do not only challenge the "modern", "rational" dimension of Sufi activities, but reveal something about modern societies' relationship with religion. Some of these arguments indeed rely on the changing relationship between religion and politics to support ideas of decline. Therefore, they can provide relevant analyses to reflect on state politics and modern definitions of religion.

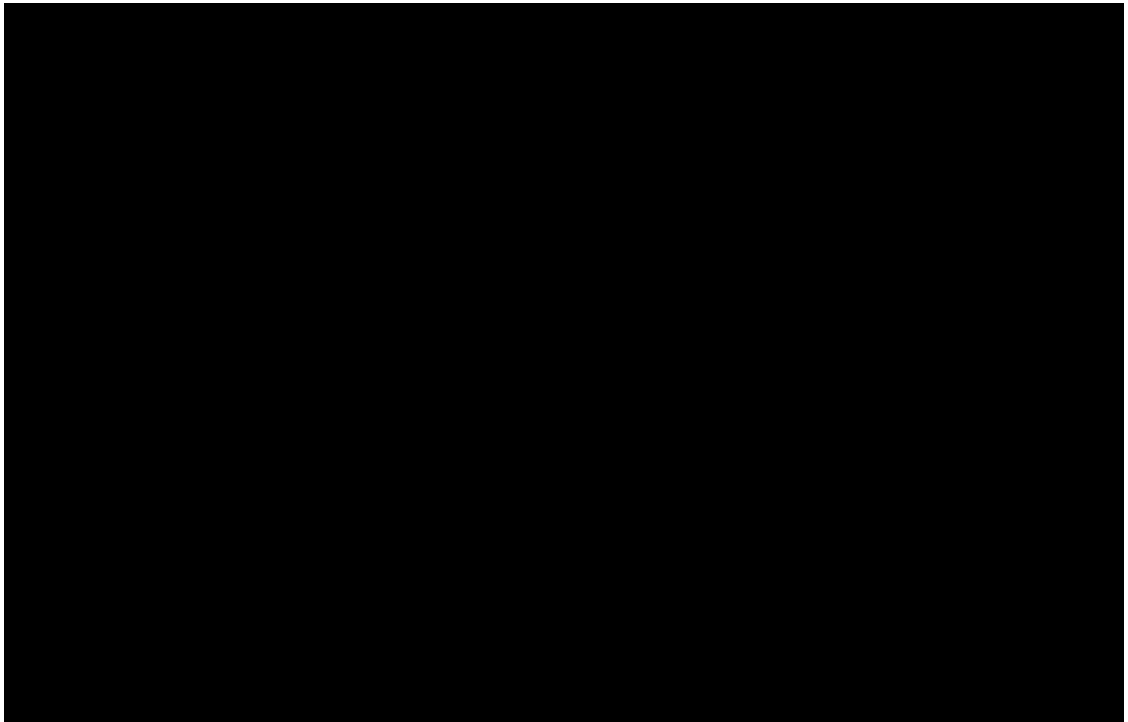
Michael Gilsenan, in 1967, for instance, developed a fascinating argument on the decline of Sufi orders, relying on his study of an Egyptian Sufi brotherhood, the Hamidiyya Shadhiliyya. He argued that this order was still successful in the modern period because it could rationalise its structure and transforms its organisation. Focusing on "increasing functional differentiation as a core aspect of modernity" (Van Bruinessen, 2005: 140), he showed that "the various social, economic and educational functions that the order had served in the past [...] are presently better served by the specialised modern institutions of trade unions, political organisations and so on" (ibid.). Other Sufi brotherhoods, for Gilsenan, will decline because they will not be able to face the competition of these institutions. Frederick de Jong (1974) challenged this view and "suggested that the chief factor contributing to this particular order's growth was state

patronage, not bureaucratisation” (Howell and Van Bruinessen, 2007: 141). In Algeria, as evoked earlier in this introduction, processes of secularisation and the state’s definition and control of religion also introduced a high degree of rationalisation and bureaucratisation of Sufi orders. The regulation of zawiyas went through their legal recognition as religious associations, and the ability of healers and marabouts to serve as doctors depend on state authorisations.

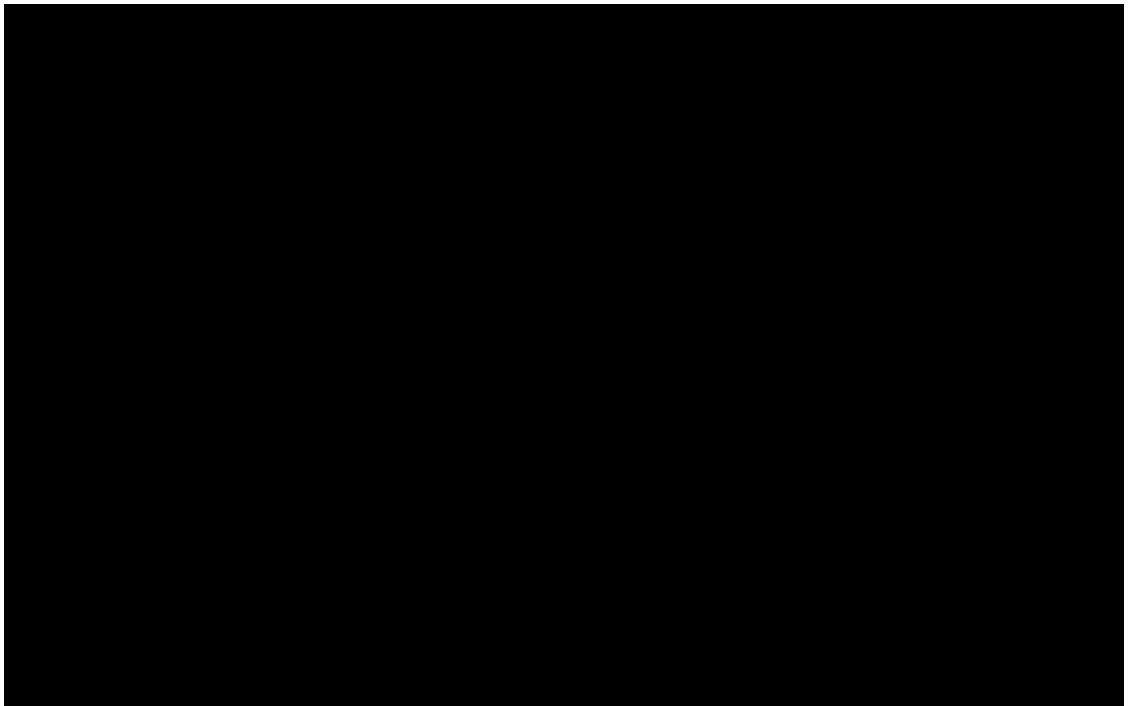
But de Jong and Gilsenan both argue that Sufi orders suffer and must adapt to this modern, secular environment to survive. I agree with these analyses when they observe the emergence of new pressures and highlight the changing political environment. But I do not describe Algerian Sufi orders as rigid, bounded, institutionalised structures on which these constraints could be effective. It is also the reason why the idea of Sufi “brotherhoods” may be more relevant. I insist in this thesis on the flexible, moving and creative character of these “structures” and on the relative autonomy of these communities. Moreover, it is difficult in this context to consider Algerian zawiyas as passive actors of their relationship with the state. The regime’s legitimacy crisis and the strong local base of the zawiyas make them crucial partners for the government.

III

The fieldwork



Map 1. The Algerian coast and Oran.



Map 2. Oran and the district of Maraval.

This study took place in an urban environment, the city of Oran, a coastal city of the Algerian North-West. The history of Sufism in Algeria is strongly related to the Oran region, which is close to the Moroccan border. A classic book in Algeria's anthropology of religion is Sossie Andezian's monograph on Saints from the region of Tlemcen, another famous city of this area, based on a work published in the late 1980s. In a context marked by a "return of religion" in Algerian society, Andezian proposed a study of "mysticism" that looked at the variety of people's "experiences of the divine", describing rituals and ceremonies, notably from the perspective of women, and without using binary classifications opposing reformism to Sufism or scripturalism to ritual Islam. I am indebted in many ways to this fascinating work, and I wish to contribute to her analysis with this study of Oran's popular Islam. Since the 1980s, after the 1990s' civil conflict opposing the state's army to "Islamist" forces, the "return of religion" was notably transformed into an official support to Sufi orders, the Algerian government using the positive, - "moderate" and "apolitical" -, image of popular Islam to display its anti-extremist religious policy, notably in a post-9/11 international context.

Beyond the question of the state's influence on religious issues, with its ability to control and define religion, this thesis argues that there has been a reconfiguration of the relationship between religion and politics, and traces the changes in the foundations of political legitimacy. With twelve months of fieldwork, over a period going from February 2016 to June 2017, my main field site was the zawiya Habriya, in the Oran district of Maraval. The zawiya was my window onto a very large religious environment, in which I could explore the circulation of baraka, as a transcendent and immanent source of power, in various spaces of the city.

The urban dimension of this fieldwork is crucial. A popular image of Sufism describes it as a movement of meditative ascetics, retired from the turbulent world in depopulated, - mountainous, arid, rural -, areas. But it was from the beginning an urban movement, "the city was the initial cradle of Sufism" (Salvatore, 2018: 158). Indeed, Sufi movements first started to appear in a context where the Islamic empire's religious legitimacy was challenged "by the emerging shari'a minded Islam of the clerical network" (Rahimi and Salvatore, 2018: 257). For Salvatore, the general environment of criticism of this period allowed for "alternative modes of piety to emerge and variably blend with shari'a-mindedness" (ibid.). This historical argument is pertinent because it highlights these religious groups' inclusive, cosmopolitan, popular dimension by

connecting them to the urban environment in which they first could prosper; they were “formed in major urban centers in the ‘Abbasid new capital Baghdad with its burgeoning cultural scene, as well as in major cities like Cairo, Damascus, and Tabriz” (2018: 257-58). Salvatore also argues that it is this cosmopolitan, non-imperial culture of the city, and these groups’ ability “to absorb subsequent waves of non-Arab populations” (ibid.) that explain the successful transition from an ethnic Arab Islamic state to a universal political-religious structure. In the light of the long history of binary representations of the Islamic tradition (High/Low Islam, Scripturalism/Popular Islam, Reformism/Sufism etc.), he shows that these movements, early on, never offered “counter-visions” to shari’a minded Islam, but were rather complementary to these forms of religiosity, adding “counterpoints to shari’a normativity”. It supports Hodgson’s idea that these movements were from the start aligned with “Hadith moralism” (Hodgson, 1974, vol. 1: 393 in Salvatore, 2018: 158) and follows Green’s argument on Sufism’s appeal to the masses, seduced by a religious vocabulary to which people could easily relate with the scriptural stories they knew from oral transmission (Green, 2012).

These historical points further explain the influence and capacity for openness of Sufi groups, as urban, inclusive, cosmopolitan centers, offering modes of piety grounded on Islamic scriptures. They synthesise two of this thesis’ arguments. Firstly, that the geography of the zawiya, in this popular neighbourhood of Maraval, facilitates interpersonal relations and the building of community networks. Secondly, that the focus on the Qur’an and Hadith as a common ideological base allows the zawiya, and its extended domain, to be frequented by a large population, - and not only “Sufis”. The constant reference to scriptures explains the popularity of these forms of religiosity. It is one of the reasons why I use this idea of “popular” Islam, not in opposition to a higher, elitist form of Islam, but as a reference to its ability to gather people from various backgrounds and with different religious expectations and ideas.

From a methodological perspective, I thus was not living in an enclosed environment, in an isolated, elitist Sufi order, outside a restless world. Most of the time, I was with Sheikh Habri, at the zawiya Habriya, in Maraval, but it was a starting point. During the day, I stayed with people who were coming and going at the zawiya. In the evening, I followed them in parties and events taking place in zawiya and other places of the city. It could be official, “Sufi” events, like mystic parties, with a shared meal and a dhikr ceremony. But, very often, people from the zawiya were invited to ordinary

parties, celebrating life events with friends and family, and I would join them. In weekends, Sheikh Habri sometimes went to conferences and religious seminars. Once I got to know him better and become a good friend, he started to invite me and I thus accompanied him when he attended events in Tlemcen, Mostaganem and Relizane, as well as in Oran.

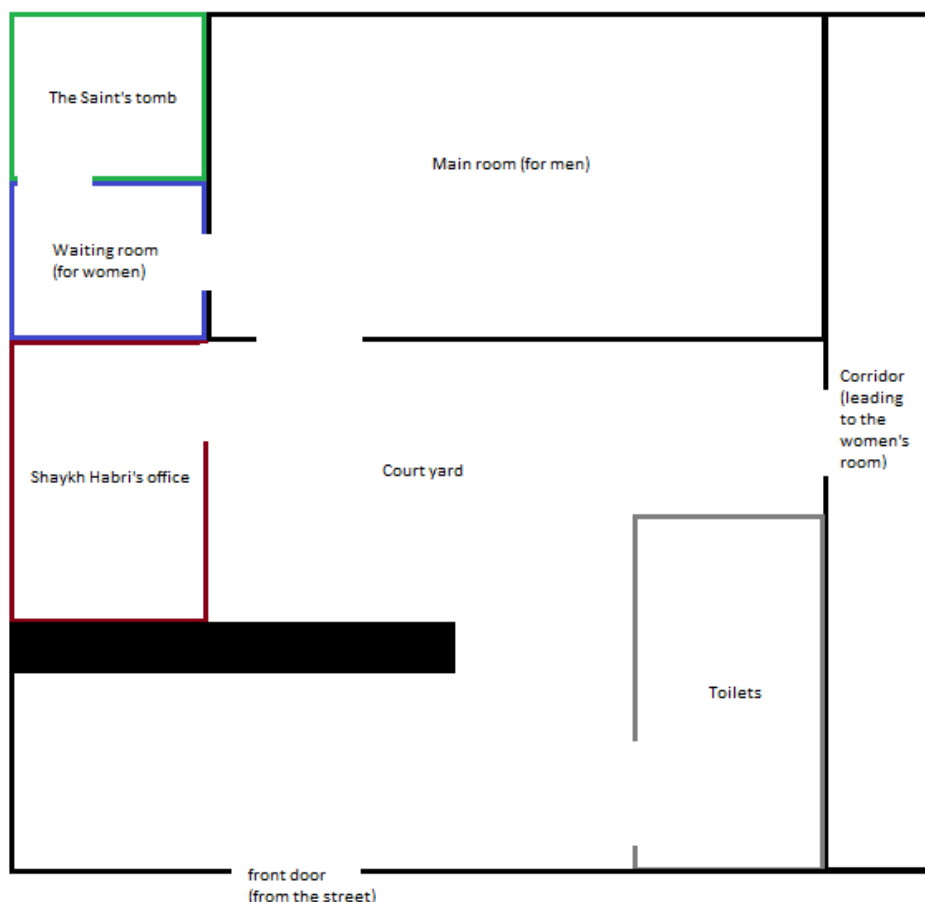
It is notably by relying on an analysis of the various networks of this popular Islam that I show that one of the historical characteristics of Sufism is its ability for “building connectedness” (Salvatore, 2018: 161). Studies of Sufi orders often focused on the question of charisma and on the master-disciple relationship, but I try in this thesis to insist on the notion of “brotherhood”. For Salvatore, the flexible structure of the brotherhood was one of the other keys to success of Sufi movements. The term of tariqa, a “path” or a “way”, denotes “a mild organizational structure that rarely, if ever, entailed a fully-fledged corporate institutionalization” (2018: 161). It is an important idea for this thesis because it highlights the horizontal, fraternal dimension of the Sufi group and the openness of this “mild” structure. It notably explains the ease with which the divine baraka circulates from one space to another, between objects, things and individuals. This notion of brotherhood is also important because it shows that I was more interested, in this thesis, in the life of the group and in the relations and interactions between individuals than in the classic Sufi master-disciple relationship.

It is thanks to my relationship with Sheikh Ahmed Habri that I was able to settle into this community and take part in the life of these groups. The question of my personal beliefs was very important and I presented myself as a Christian. I thought that it was safer for me but it also acted as an ice-breaker, attracting people’s curiosity and opening great discussions. As a Frenchman and a foreign intellectual, writing a thesis “on Algerian zawiyas”, I felt that many of my informants saw this experience with me as an opportunity to reveal the “true” nature of Islam. They could counter the negative image of Islam conveyed in French media following the terrorist attacks in Paris (2015) and Nice (2016).

Most of the time, I would write at the end of the day, every night, but I always had took a smartphone and a voice recorder with me. When needed, I could take short notes and pictures. I did about forty interviews and most were prepared in advance,

meeting people at their homes or in particular places. But sometimes I would seize my chance to speak with someone that I would maybe never see again. Many of these interviews were done in French. With Arab-speakers, when my grasp of Algerian Arabic was not sufficient to conduct the interview by myself², I had friends to assist me during the interview and help me with the translation of the audio files' transcripts.

I spent the first few weeks in Oran in a flat just above the zawiya. As Sheikh Habri's son used to live in this apartment and was planning to come back, I had to find another place and was welcomed by Leila, a non-married woman in her fifties, who did not frequent the zawiya but became close to the sheikh. Her flat, at the first floor of a beautiful house, was a five minutes walk from the zawiya. We lived together for three months, until summer. When Sheikh Habri knew that his son was going to stay in France, where he had found a job, he proposed me to return to the zawiya, where I then stayed until the end of my fieldwork.



Map 3. The zawiya Habriyya: a man's perspective

² I lived in Algiers for three months in Autumn 2015, before fieldwork in Oran, where I took classes in Algerian Arabic at the Centre d'Etudes Diocésain, "Les Glycines".

The zawiya Habriya

Therefore, the main zawiya mentioned in this thesis is that of Sheikh Ahmed Habri, the “zawiya Habriya”, in the district of Maraval (second map) in Oran. The roots of this zawiya are in Morocco, in Oujda, like many other brotherhoods of the Oran region. In the biography of the Sheikh Habri, we can read that his ancestor, at the beginning of the 20th century, moved a lot from west to east to escape the colonial authorities. First in Oujda, then in Aflou, in the south of the Oran region, he also settled for a time in Annaba, in the Constantine region (in the Algerian North-East). But according to Sheikh Habri, to speak of an Algerian zawiya, or of a Moroccan zawiya, does not make sense, because the national borders and the current states were not the same. Sheikh Habri was born in 1960, but his father died in 1961. While he lived in Oujda for a long period, he went to Oran in the 1950s, where he founded a new branch of the zawiya. After his death and until the end of the 1980s, there was no official leader of the zawiya. This period coincides with the era of repression that we have mentioned. Zawiya continued to exist, but their public presence was diminished, and the great events and festivals they once organised no longer took place. This was also the case of the Habriya zawiya. The stories that I collected show the persistence of a strong community, despite the absence of an official leader.

I consider the district of Maraval as the second social circle studied in this thesis. The members of the Habriya zawiya are very close to the communities of the other zawiya of the city. Even though they are tied to a zawiya in particular, these zawiya do not function as closed and sectarian clans. In Maraval, we were particularly close to a branch of the Tidjaniya, and to the Taybia zawiya. It took less than 15 minutes to reach one or the other. I had some contacts with moqadems (a sheikh’s right-hand man, or a representative) of branches of the Habriya, which seem relatively autonomous. They share the name, reputation and spiritual prestige of the Habriya, but do not report to the leader of the brotherhood. The organisation of the brotherhood is rather flexible, and there is no clear hierarchy. The functioning of these tariqas is not comparable to that of modern organisations.

Current Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika also comes from Oujda. According to Sheikh Habri, he has strong familial links with the zawiya. He is rather

proud of it. In his office hang photos of him, with President Bouteflika, when he visited the zawiya in the 2000s. But the zawiya Habriya is rather discreet and does not appear in the media, unlike the zawiya Habriya Belkaidiya (a branch of the Habria), whose links with the Bouteflika family are proven. These two zawiyas are not particularly close and this shows all the more the importance of the link that binds the zawiyas of Maraval, more than the relations of spiritual allegiance.

This is also one of the important arguments of this thesis. I contrast these urban and social zawiyas of Maraval, integrated into their environments, with this zawiya of reformist inspiration, more a school than a Sufi centre, close to the current government, which is located on the outskirts of the city but is disconnected from the area in which it settled in the late 1990s.

An important point to note, when one is interested in Habriyya, is that the Shadhiliyya brotherhood (the original tariqa of the Habriya) had a social understanding of its spiritual mission, from its very beginning. Its founders do not isolate themselves from the world but seek to participate in it (Geoffroy, 1996). The Derkawiyya was also from Morocco. Sheikh Derkawi (1739-1823) was born in the Fez region and is considered a major player in the mystical and Sufi environments of the 18th century Maghreb (Zekri, 2005).

The members of the zawiya Habriya

My sociological data comes from information collected during conversations with members of the zawiya. The main event of the week was the dhikr ceremony on Fridays, which brought together 25 to 40 people. It was a pertinent sample of the population of the Habriya, as its regular members rarely missed it.

The group I had access to was mostly male. During the Friday ceremony, for example, another room in the zawiya was receiving women from the community, so I could not attend the women's rituals. The data collected on women come from my social interactions outside the zawiya, and from interviews with women emblematic of the Habriya community.

I collected information about most male followers of the Habriya. Their age and marital status are interesting indicators, and provide information on their social position in the community. They can be classified into four age groups. Married adults, aged 25 to 65, are the largest group, accounting for about 50% (16/33) of the zawiya's male population. In a second, relatively large group, we have older men (65+), often retired, considered as wise men and trusted men in the zawiya (about 20% : 7 or 8 people). We then have two smaller groups of equivalent size (5 people each): non-married adults, and children, teenagers and young adults, who often accompany their father.

We can also divide them into four groups, according to their professions. The first concerns the unemployed and those in precarious situations. It includes 6 people (about 18%). In the second, we find small employers and own account workers, often tradesmen and craftsmen. This represents in the zawiya a group of 8 people (about 24%). We then have a group of employees and civil servants, who often work for public institutions (the city of Oran) or state-owned companies (the oil company Sonatrach), but also as employees of small local businesses, such as the type mentioned in the second group. This third group comprises 13 people (about 40%). Finally, a last category takes into account intellectual, artistic and scientific occupations, often in the education and health sectors, with 6 people (about 18%). Rural occupations are not represented in this classification. Some of the older members were peasants, but they have been retired for many years.

This classification is representative of the main group of the Friday ceremony, but the figures change if we are interested in the attendance of the zawiya during the week. Women are more present than men on other days, and that is also why I was able to document their experiences. This is also true of the men on the sidelines of the main groups (young and retired men, non-married men), who came to relax, seek advice, help or work for the zawiya. My thesis is organised to understand the "religious" experience of all these people. I was present every day in the zawiya, for everyday moments but also for the weekly Friday ritual, as well as for festivals and other events of the Sufi community of Oran, taking place outside the zawiya Habriya.

Other methodological issues

In this religious environment, I was not allowed to live with an Algerian family. If I had been a woman, it probably could have been possible. I mostly followed the recommendations of the sheikh, who did not want me to disturb the family of a man from the Habriya community. Although this situation, from an anthropological point of view, does not seem ideal, it had many advantages. The main problem was the lack of a family perspective on the activities of the zawiya. The point of view of a family, of its daily life and of its relations with the Sufi community, could escape me. On the other hand, living in an apartment just above the zawiya, I was always available for the activities of the community. For the followers of the zawiya, I was associated with the physical place of the Habriya. The sheikh only had to knock on my door, and we would leave together to join friends or attend the party of another zawiya. So, I had access to the zawiya from the point of view of the zawiya, and not from the perspective of a family, or of a particular member of the zawiya. It was a different angle.

For three months, during the first part of my fieldwork, I lived in another area. The apartment of the son of the sheikh was not available. Being hosted by Leila, an unmarried woman in her fifties, I lived in a building a few minutes' walk from the zawiya. This change was positive, and provided another perspective on the zawiya, as you will see in the next chapters. Leila was not a member of the zawiya, so it was an outside point of view, and that of a woman. Thanks to her and her friends, I had access to new and relevant accounts for this thesis. It was not, of course, an easy flat share, and Leila's reputation, by welcoming a man so young, and a stranger, could be in danger. I followed her rules and recommendations so that she remained in good standing within the community.

The question of language is important. The Oran dialect is a complex, unique mixture, borrowing from Arabic, Berber, French and Spanish. My command of the dialect was approximate, and I often spoke in French with my sources, especially at the beginning of my fieldwork. This may have had an impact on my research, particularly because Francophones are often elite or middle-class people. But I am sure I have had access to a wide variety of people, and I have always made the necessary arrangements to understand, make myself understood, and translate key interviews for this thesis, as

the following chapters show. I was surrounded by people in the zawiya, who helped me to collect this data, when I needed translations but also to meet other people and integrate other social circles.

The foreign researcher, to my informants, had the aura of a more "neutral" researcher. Local anthropologists may seem more partial. In people's minds, they may already have affinities and allegiances. This is what Akli Hadibi evokes in his study on the Kabyle zawiya of Sidi Wedris (1995). He explains that any reflection on a zawiya is equivalent to taking a stand. Even if any anthropologist, no matter how he approaches his subject, finds himself in the same situation after a few weeks or months. Mohand Akli Hadibi is right when he shows how theoretical discourse often allows, in a certain way, to justify certain practices and to criticize others. And this research work, despite its ambitions, is also subject to this criticism.

My friendship with the leader of the zawiya also raises some questions about the potential biases of this thesis. The relationship of friendship we developed over several months may affect my overall argument, causing me to depict his character in an empathetic or flattering light. I took the following steps to ensure my research remained as objective as possible. I surrounded myself with people who did not have the same opinions as him, and who did not hesitate to express different positions. I paid a lot of attention to the social and political context to be able to situate the sheikh's actions and words in this specific environment. Moreover, his friendship was also a relationship of trust, and allowed me to be integrated into an extensive social network within the Sufi communities of Oran. This is also the strength of this work.

I was not only focused on the Habriya. Following the sheikh in his everyday activities, I was able to document the life of a sheikh and his followers, which goes beyond the sphere of the zawiya. I then became involved with other sheikhs and other disciples, and followed the rhythm of these communities as I received invitations from them.

IV

The chapters

Chapter 1 explores the power relationship between the state and Sufi elites. With an analysis of state-sponsored Sufi conferences in Algeria, I argue that we can understand the state's attempts to define national Islam and gain influence in other countries' religious politics within the framework of our studies of secularism. In this respect, I show that Sufi elites are good partners for the state, though the nature of the Sufi tradition and the structure of its brotherhoods explain the multilateral dimension of their power relationship. This chapter is the only one, in this dissertation, which does not take place in Oran, and it enables me to illustrate the national and global context in which I propose this study.

In chapter 2, I propose an understanding of spiritual power (baraka) that goes beyond the transcendental, vertical definition that has been dominant so far in the anthropology of Islam. I show that my informants often had a transcendental, historical view of baraka, but I demonstrate that they also hold another concept of baraka as a horizontal, immanent force that belongs to the collectivity of worshippers and ordinary people, which is accessible by them and that can inhere in places and objects as well. This conceptualisation enables me to look at political rituals from a new perspective, arguing that Algerian politicians visit zawiyas during electoral periods not only to get the saint's blessing, but to connect with ordinary people and show a sense of community belonging. It shows how religion's ability to invoke immanent power can provide foundations for a fused political-religious imagination.

In chapter 3, I extend the discussion on the nature of power by exploring the connections between a sheikh's power, the zawiya Habriya, its extended territory and their philanthropy. When this power is transcendental and transmitted by prestigious ancestors it is accompanied by a sense of duty and social responsibility. But I mainly focus on the zawiya community's ability to generate and distribute baraka, beyond the question of the sheikh's power. When this power is related to a territory, to a population and to community practices, it circulates from space to space, through rituals (the dhikr ceremony) and ordinary activities (working), with people and objects spreading it. It

thus does not only legitimate the moral worth of a Sufi sheikh but creates a flow of power around a community that forms a certain kind of ideal sociality.

Chapter 4 deals with different kinds of religious celebrations: Sufi rituals, mystic celebrations and saint-day festivals. I explore the connection between the religious and the social by showing how Sufi ceremonies generate social relations. I argue that the regularity of parties and celebrations in the neighbourhood, even outside the “Sufi” sphere, maintains a bond between people and provides a basis for the imagination of the political community. By exploring the “folkloric” aspect of saint-day festivals, I show how the aesthetic and affective experiences of these events reveal the success of nationalist projects. As these events are assimilated to national traditions, they have federating power and affect people’s imagination of the nation.

Chapter 5 examines the ethical consequences of people’s imagination of the agency and presence of God. Materially present in the world, through texts and words, I show that God in the zawiya can be a transcendent, rule-making figure, who prescribes social, gendered norms for everyday behaviour. Analysing the Sufi sheikh’s use of advice as “reflexive materialism”, it makes God’s presence the basis for contestation and creative ethical practice. It allows for immanent critique and engagement with the religious tradition. But when God makes himself less visible in the zawiya, it leaves the possibility for people to have a therapeutic experience of the divine, be it individual or collective. It does not ask them to live in a certain way, but to live “well”. From these perspectives, I argue that the connection between God’s pluridimensional character and people’s ethical experiences further demonstrates the dialectical aspect of the relationship between transcendence and immanence.

In chapter 6, I explore the ideological pressure on mystical and popular activities, in spite of the state’s official support of Sufi orders, with many kinds of practices considered as backward and “non-scientific”. Explaining the role played by the definition of religion in projects of modernity, I show how Sufi sheikhs are asked to “rationalise” and “purify” their techniques, and to expel “charlatans” from their ranks. Though most people go to the zawiya for the “science” of the Sufi sheikh, but for its traditional, ritual medicine, I analyse Sheikh Habri’s use of biomedical ideas and terms as a way of explaining *a posteriori* the efficacy of his spiritual techniques, rather than as

a “mimicry” of biomedical science. Moreover, even if I do not subscribe to the dichotomy opposing mystical, experiential knowledge to a scripturalist, text-based interpretation of truth, I still describe an environment that makes possible the existence of a non-“rational”, open-ended view of knowledge.

CHAPTER 1

Sufi sheikhs, popular Islam and the Algerian state

An international Sufi conference in Mostaganem

In January 1992, Hadj Ali, a professor at the University of Algiers, published an engaging paper about the first “national seminar of zawiyas”, organised in May 1991 in Algiers, at the beginning of the civil war. The political situation was unprecedented. With sheikhs and moqadems starting to speak in public again and medias spreading their message, Hadj Ali evoked the “public reappearance” of the “Islam of tariqa and marabouts” (1992: 60). The seminar was entitled “the opening up of zawiyas in front of contemporary challenges” and lasted three days. Despite the political environment, in a context favourable to “Islamist” movements, the question of the rise of the FIS³ was said to be marginalised. In *El Watan* (an independent newspaper), a journalist was surprised that the “true issues” were “sidestepped”: “they did not talk about Wahhabism, about Shiism, which shake the Algerian religious sphere” (1992: 61). Yet, Hadj Ali’s article still shows that this seminar offered criticism of the religious atmosphere of the time. Sheikhs and scholars notably challenged the importation of “rites and practices coming from the East” and the refusal of “imported doctrines” stand out in their speeches. A “national association of zawiyas” was created at the end of the conference, on 30th May 1991. Made up of a high council of 99 members, it was responsible for the preservation and promotion of the heritage and activities of Algerian zawiyas, and gave birth, a few years later, to the National Union of Algerian Zawiyas” (UNZA).

I propose here to bring the reader into the world of these Algerian Sufi conferences. I mainly focus on the annual conference of the UNZA, which took place in Mostaganem in May 2016. Twenty-five years after the national association of zawiyas

³ A Salafi-inspired movement and “the first contemporary organization to more substantially erode the state’s control of Islamic discourse and institutions” (Sakhtivel, 2018).

was founded, this seminar, still as many Sufi conferences in Algeria, was a state-sponsored event and can be analysed in this perspective, including through its diplomatic dimension. But the international focus of the seminar, reuniting sheikhs from Asia, Africa and Europe, and its discourses, show how some borders disappear and how others are created. The conference was a dynamic space in which national boundaries were crossed and new religious entities had the potential to arise. There was a tension between the intention of the nation-state to capture and direct the significance of Sufi Islam, and the capacity of the encounters within this forum to escape such intentions.

In this chapter, I analyse these two forces together: first, to understand the discursive use of Sufi orders and events by the Algerian state, and to explore their relationship since the early 1990s; and then to reflect on the politics within these global manifestations of Sufism. This chapter will thus tackle, in a certain way, the secularism of the Algerian state. Anthropological theories of secularism have often been focused on state power, analysing relations of power between the state and individuals, notably looking at the ways in which such political institutions interfere in the affects, beliefs and ethics of individuals. In this perspective, a good definition of secularism could refer to “the claim of the modern state to classify and regulate the entirety of social space, part of which entails what constitutes the religious” (Rasanayagam, 2011: 100). This chapter is thus less an attempt to describe the emergence of a “transnational Islam” (Grillo and Soares, 2004; Roy, 2004) through the organisation of these international conferences, than an analysis of the relationship between the Algerian state, Sufi orders and popular Islam.

I

The Algerian state, Sufism and Sufi orders: top-down projects and global issues

Without challenging the pertinence of Asad’s definition of secularism, some authors have shown its limits and inability to capture the totality of this concept. Samuli Schielke, notably, regretted the absence of “faith” and argued that “the question of how and what kind of relations humans have with God” was “the key issue of secularity in monotheist contexts” (2018: 4). I attempt in this dissertation to tackle the idea of

secularism through its different dimensions, and I will discuss Schieke's criticisms in the following chapters. This chapter, however, focuses on the state's attempts to define the religious. Importantly, I show the potency and impotency of its attempts to do so in the context of a contemporary global social field of religious dialogues. Globalisation changes the nature of Sufi institutions' power, and limits the state's ability to regulate the social space. I indeed show that the circulation of ideas is now a large battlefield, where states are competing for influence, notably when it comes to spreading national and religious ideals. This is another way to critique the accounts of secularism pioneered by Asad and his students, as they limit their analysis to the national realm.

The foundation of the national seminar of *zawiyas* in 1991, marked a turning point in the history of the state's relationship with Sufi institutions. As Werenfels shows, the state's agenda was then "to rehabilitate and promote Sufism after three decades of political repression, economic marginalisation, and social stigmatisation, with the goal of enhancing the regime's social base and religious legitimacy" (2014: 277). These politics of promotion of Sufism had two goals. One was to support the domestic political interests of the regime, using the image of Sufism and the religious legitimacy of Sufi leaders. As Scheele puts it, the appeal to the *zawiyas* could be seen as "a last desperate attempt to recapture religion, to 'recycle' its traditional' institutions in the state's own image" (Scheele, 2007: 314; also see Burgat, 2003). The other was an international strategy, an attempt to export a local, national vision of Islam, using brotherhoods as diplomatic actors, or to raise the esteem of Algeria on the international stage by promoting the positive image of Islamic mysticism - relying on a good-bad Islam rhetoric (see Mamdani, 2002).

As part of the domestic project from the 1990s, of protecting Bouteflika's regime, 'political pilgrimages' were organised, for almost each big electoral campaign, so that the President and candidate could visit Algerian *zawiyas* and make sure to receive their support. Many politicians, besides the president, continue these practices, whatever their political inclinations; Werenfels also mentions Islamists and Trotskyites (2014). In chapter 2, I use the example of Chakib Khelil, a former minister of Energy, exiled to the USA because of personal issues with the Algerian justice system, who came back to Algeria in April 2016, when I was starting fieldwork. During this time he made a tour of *zawiyas* in an attempt to clear himself from the negativity clouding him. Bouteflika

was already very sick in 2016, and Khelil, one of his closest friends, was a legitimate candidate for his succession.

At the international level of diplomacy, Sufi orders have been used by the Algerian (and other) regimes to build transnational networks of influence. During the event I attended these policies revealed the regional rivalry between Algeria and Morocco (and the Moroccan kingdom seems to be a few steps ahead). The Tijdaniya order, for example, with its millions of followers in West Africa, represents an important potential for these two states. Moreover, in Europe and the “Western” world, Sufism has currently a very positive image, associated with mysticism and moderate Islam. At play is therefore an interesting politics of communication, which seeks to identify national Islam in Algeria with Sufi “values”. In this respect, the role of the ‘Alawiya order in Europe, where it is popular and influential, is representative of this trend. It is not a coincidence that the international conference I describe in this chapter took place in the gardens of the original centre of the famous tariqa, in Mostaganem. The context and configuration of this conference thus radically differs from that of 1991, and cannot only be reduced, from the perspective of the state, to the Islamist question. It is crucial to understand the diplomatic, international dimension of the event and this will be the object of key sections of this chapter.

The event I attended was a “Sufi” conference and yet, “Sufism” is a polysemous word that can refer to different traditions. Though I rely in this chapter on my informants’ use of the term, I also analyse, through the example of these conferences, how people in these events generate their own Sufi tradition through these encounters. I do not attempt to propose a definition of Sufism, which is always problematic, but try to reflect on the possible ways a global tradition can be imagined and produced. Such conferences are fascinating, because they offer a reflective dialogue between a tradition and some of its official representatives, being thought and produced at the same time. The “sheikhs” and “followers” who attended this event came from various countries, with different backgrounds and cultures, but they all say that they belong to a common “Sufi” tradition. They situate it and attempt to define it, being in a constant dialogue with its representations, discourses, practices and redefining its history.

In Mostaganem, in May 2016, people gathered to think about the contemporary relevance of Sufi practises, beliefs and ideas, and to self-consciously reflect on their place within the Islamic tradition. This chapter, in this respect, also explores the vitality and changing forms of this Sufi tradition created in international dialogue. Ironically perhaps given the state sponsorship of this event this vital Sufism contrasts with the homogenising discourse of the Algerian state on the core values of a “traditional Islam”. In addition an important theme here will be that although the discourses of religious elites attending the conference are in the context of global issues (“war on terror”, the Syrian conflict, the rise of ISIS, the war in Yemen etc.), they also respond to national dynamics. This chapter thus also attempts to understand how political discourses on national and international Sufism circulate through such international events and how religious elites engage with and at times manipulate the state and its projection of Sufism. So rather than seeing the events as determined by their state sponsorship and its project of state sponsored Sufism, I explore their dynamic, creative and unintended effects.

May 2016

An international Sufi conference in Mostaganem

Together with Sheikh Habri, we left Oran at 6 am. He came early to pick me up with his car, where I was staying, three streets away from the zawiya. It did not take long. Oran and Mostaganem are next to each other and look alike - both coastal cities of the Algerian West. Mostaganem has perhaps more Sufi grandeur with its renowned zawiyas and mausoleums. The seminar was organised by the UNZA and its president, Omar Mahmood Chalal, had a plan to make this city the symbolic capital of the “World Union of Sufism”, as I will show later in this chapter.

The hotel hosting the event was a luxurious building by the sea, managed by the Algerian State and normally fully reserved for dignitaries. Usually these were the engineers of the main oil company, the national “Sonatrach”. In this setting, the sheikhs of prestigious tariqas took their place. Others were located a bit farther off, in the bungalows of a family oriented tourist complex. To inaugurate the event, the UNZA chose one of the beautiful, 1970s faculties of the University of Mostaganem.

Multicoloured banners mingled with Algerian flags. Nestled on a little hill, from a raised area, we could see the sea.

The seminar theme was the pertinence of the “Mohammedan referent” in “the challenges of tomorrow”. It started with the singing of the national anthem. Everybody in the large theatre stood up. A five-minute film retraced the great moments of Algerian history, including the years of resistance and the struggle for independence. Political figures introduced the session. These included: Lakhmissi Bezzaz, the general inspector of the ministry of religious affairs; Omar Chaalal, the president of the association; Laroussi El Mizouri, a former Tunisian minister of religious affairs; and the Wali, the “president” of the region, who rounded off the ceremonial introduction. For two days sheikhs and scholars explored the contemporary role of Islam and Sufism. They talked about globalisation, consumer society and materialism; but also tackled questions of “terrorism” and “religious extremism”, which, from their perspective, often constitute two sides of the same coin.

The event lasted three days. The first two with conferences and cultural events. The third and final day with the writing and signing of a joint text by all the representatives of zawiyas, to create a “world union of Sufism”. During each of the first two days, after a morning of conferences, the afternoon was dedicated to visits of the region’s cultural heritage sites. The first day, at the mausoleum of Sidi Lakdar Boukhlef; the second day, with a lunch at the ‘Alawiya, next to the famous gardens of the zawiya, followed by a dhikr ceremony at the zawiya Bouzidiya; and a final visit at the Palace of Culture of Mostaganem. The event, whether or not it leads to a concrete political structure, was a media and diplomatic success. Press articles were laudatory, celebrating the creation of a world union of Sufism. Mostaganem was appointed as the cultural capital of the movement, and Algiers its administrative centre.

How should we locate this event in relation to state discourses of Sufism, and to the encounters and dialogues that escape the intentions of these discourses? These are the questions I will explore in the following sections of the chapter, starting with a discussion of the event’s relation to state civic discourse on peace and religious tolerance.

II

Sufism and the Algerian state: civic discourse on peace and tolerance

I explore in this section the tone of the state's discourse and the kind of values it promotes, arguing that it is based on a good/bad Islam rhetoric, which has been very popular in the last two decades. Muslims are told, since the 9/11 terrorist attacks, "that there is a fault line running through Islam, a line that separates moderate Islam, called "genuine Islam", from extremist political Islam" (Mamdani, 2002: 767); and states appropriate these discourses. This rhetoric circulates in many other national settings from Europe and the USA (see Safi, 2011) to Central Asia, such as in Uzbekistan (see Rasanayagam, 2011). In this framework, good Islam is a tolerant, peaceful and open-minded religion, and is portrayed as an authentic and ancestral Islam, associated with the national values of the state. Bad Islam comes from outside and is exported by foreign powers that interfere with the nation's concerns. As in Rasanayagam's analysis of Uzbeks' definition of religion, but unlike the Western model of secularism, this good, "modern" and tolerant Islam is not expressed solely in an internal space of private morality. This construction of a national, public good Islam cannot be understood without replacing it into a larger ideological context. The global "war against terrorism" and Europe's perception of Islam further encourage the state to build and maintain this discourse. To examine this phenomenon in Algeria, I use the example of academic conferences that have been organised and/or supported by the government, analysing the ideas and values conveyed during these events. My data for this chapter relies on participant observation, but also on my reading of the local and national press during the time of my field work.

Since Bouteflika rose to power in 1999, the Algerian state has supported Sufi orders and encouraged a more "traditional" vision of Islam, often associated with Sufi values. We can explain this, firstly, by looking at the domestic interests of the Algerian state. After the civil conflict and the state's opposition to political Islam movements in the 1990s, the Algerian government has looked for seemingly apolitical and docile partners who could help promote the political stability of the regime. Secondly, with the multiplication of "Islamist" terrorist attacks since the 2000s, and with Sufism conceived

as a form of tolerant, moderate Islam, a pro-Sufis politics became a strategic move for rulers attentive to their country's standing in the "Western" world (Werenfels, 2014).

In this context, the government has sponsored each year many pro-Sufis conferences. These events have an important after-life and they circulate far beyond their ending. Modelled after international academic conferences, they invite sheikhs, but also academics and scholars, to present papers on various religious and societal issues. In Mostaganem, there were, each day, different panels, topics, and guests invited to lead the discussions. Conferences took place in the morning and in two main sites, at the hotel or the local university, in conference rooms and amphitheatres. There were two main topics: the contemporary relevance of Muhammad's teachings and the challenges of the twenty-first century; and Islam's responses to globalisation and the emergence of new technologies, the Internet etc. The positive discourse on Islam, promoting peace, tolerance and supporting interfaith dialogue, was mediated by the presence of national radios and TVs and by print journalists. When the congress started, I was sitting just behind the delegation of foreign sheikhs when cameras and teams of journalists came to interview these international guests, asking questions about their knowledge of local Saints and Algerian religious heritage. These reports were then passed on to foreign media. If we take the example of France, articles were published in national newspapers and magazines such as *Libération*, *RFI*, *La Croix* and *Jeune Afrique*; all offering an enthusiastic image of Sufi Islam and a positive review of the international congress. In *Jeune Afrique*, Sufism was pictured as "an antidote to fanaticism", whereas *RFI* talked about "the voice of tolerant and peaceful Islam". *Libération*, a popular left-wing newspaper, invited Eric Geoffroy, an Islamologist and famous Sufi in France, to react to this congress and talk about these "values of peace, alterity and universality" that Sufism conveys. We can thus argue that the media coverage of such an event enables the Algerian state to circulate a positive image of its religious policy on a national and international stage.

The performance of civil discourse was coupled with a concrete performance of diversity and tolerated difference. The academic platforms were complex spaces, made of diversity but aiming for some idealised form of uniformity. National and regional differences were performed, but the aim of the event was also to present a common, shared Sufi ideological platform. In this respect, the vague, homogeneous performance

of civil discourse was key to this collective initiative. An example of this was the lunch I had on the second day of the seminar with other foreign visitors. We had been invited to have lunch together at the zawiya 'Alawiya. I was seated with new friends from Milan and two Sufi figures from India. A few months after the Paris attacks, and after decades of violence in the Muslim world, the question of religious extremism was at the heart of our debates. In India, religious tensions and the rise of Islamophobia have been legitimised by a global anti-Muslims climate, since the early 2000s and the 2001 terrorist attacks in New-York (Banerjee, 2010). For Amin, who came from a Sufi order in Mumbai, the dialogue between religions was vital, and he evoked the multireligious experience of India:

“It is frequent in India, where we work hard to promote such dialogue, with Christians, Jews, Hindus, and it is vital to fighting religious radicalism”

This international event was not, for him, his first “inter-religious event” outside of India. He had been invited to Italy, “to see the Pope in the Vatican.” He had also been a few times to Egypt, at the invitation by associations of Christian Copts. In a similar perspective, I describe in the following section an international event in Baghdad, which also aimed to promote a dialogue between religions to which personalities representing the three monotheistic faiths were invited. These events are emblematic of a global trend in Sufi movements to promote interreligious dialogue. This call, fostered by public authorities in many cases, can be observed in Asia and Africa, but also in Europe, where religious orders have gained more influence in the last decades. In spite of their ambition to offer an internationalist global response to these issues, these initiatives often enter into the framework of a strategic national policy. This is clearly visible in Algeria when in May 2016, at the inauguration of the Islamic Cultural Centre of Bejaïa, in Kabylie, Mohamed Aïssa described “a full year of interfaith dialogue”, “that will notably manifest with a cultural and religious caravan [...] that will travel through the country” (in *La Croix*, 20 May 2016). Conferences and seminars play a major role: sheikhs, public officials and politicians come to these events and lend credibility to the image-building of a peaceful Algerian Islam associated with Sufism. Conferences provide public spaces where values of tolerance and fraternity are related to Sufi orders, and where this identification can gain national and international public recognition.

In other Maghrib countries, similar events take place during the year. In Morocco, the government sponsors Sufi musical events, festivals and conferences, which mostly advocate similar moral and political values. Muedini (2015) shows that these events bring together academics and performers “around a variety of themes such as Sufism, human rights, intercultural dialogue, religious tolerance and human development” (Meghraoui, 2009: 207 in Muedini, 2015: 79). The most emblematic festival is the week-long Fez Festival of Sacred Music, which offers “exotic representations of an Islam that is inclusive, diverse, and unthreatening” (Langlois, 2009: 2 in Muedini, 2015: 80). In Tunisia, important works have focused on the staged spectacle “el-Hadhra”. Jankowsky (2017) does not consider it a “top-down implementation of cultural policy by the state” but acknowledges that “commentators and concert-goers in 2015” presented the spectacle as “a statement challenging religious extremism [...] through an embrace of the country’s Sufi heritage” (e.g. Abassi, 2015; Barnat, 2015 in 2017: 872).

In Algeria, two other examples of conferences are pertinent to highlight, where political figures promote these Sufi values. Both took place in April 2016; one was in Adrar, in the South of Algeria, and the other in Ourgla, another famous city of the Algerian Desert. At the Ahmed-Draya African University of Adrar, under the “high patronage” of President Bouteflika, the Algerian minister of Interior Affairs, Noureddine Bedoui, praised the “efficient role” of zawiyas in easing the civil conflict, and associated Sufism with “values of friendship, fraternity and tolerance” (in *Liberté*, 4 April 2016).

Once again, these values were put forward in the context of the region’s “struggle against cross-border extremism”. In Ouargla, for the fourth edition of the “national conference on the zawiya Kadiriya”, sheikhs, imams and diplomats invoked the role of the famous tariqa Kadiriya in the fight against religious extremism and terrorism. These events crystallise the diplomatic discourse of the regime, where Sufi values are presented as “the voice of wisdom, tolerance and fraternity” against the rise of “religious intolerance and fundamentalism” (in *El Watan*, 22 April 2016).

The performance of civic discourse, beyond its moral tone, also relies on a call to tradition. It refers to a common past and uses familial figures: grand-parents and “ancestors”. In his speeches, when he pays homage to Algerian Islam, Mohamed Aïssa

indeed often refers to “traditional Islam”, using varying terms: “Islam of ancestors”, “ancestral Islam”, “Islam of our grandparents”. Calling for a “salutary return to our ancestral Islam”, he mentions the “moderation” and openness” of the Islam that “pushes us to accept other religions, and considers that we have links of fraternity with all human beings”, and argues that the “Algerian, moderate and healthy tradition” is “marked by maraboutism” (in *El Watan*, 10 April 2016). Identity is performed with the use of specific words, which are sensational forms that can be seen as mediating the relationship between people and the nation.

In North Africa, these evocations are not only made by Algerian politicians. Governments of the two other Maghrib countries also highlighted in the last decade, in various ways, the relationship between their “traditional” Islam and national identity. It is even more explicit in the case of the Moroccan government. At the Sidi Chiker National Gatherings of Sufi partisans (another important festival in Morocco), in Marrakech, Mohammed VI stated (in remarks read by the Moroccan Minister of Religious Affairs) that Sufism was “indeed one of the characteristic spiritual and ethical components of the Moroccan identity” (Sidi Chiker, 2011 in Muedini 2015: 81). Mohamed Aïssa uses more generic terms to refer to Sufi, mystic, and maraboutic traditions. Moroccan national politics and its relationship with Sufism has a longer history, while the image of Algerian Islam has never really been associated with this Islamic tradition. In the region of Oran, from Tlemcen to Mostaganem, most zawiyas are related to Sufi lineages coming from Morocco. The Moroccan royal families have often been in competition with Berber tribes and Sufi leaders, and governments have learnt over the years how to use the religious legitimacy of Sufi sheikhs, whereas the Algerian government’s interest in Sufi orders is very recent, dating from the 1990s.

It is thus in this North African political context that the Algerian state promotes Sufism and Sufi orders, and supports pro-Sufis conferences in which values of peace and tolerance are brought out. But it is not only about offering the image of a peaceful, tolerant and universal Islam. These conferences are complex events and spaces, and are more than just the place where this kind of civic discourse is performed. In Mostaganem, in May 2016, different Sufis, sheikhs, moqadems and followers, from different historical and cultural backgrounds, met in a heterogeneous space of encounter. It became a space of explicit meta reflection on what it means to be of a particular Sufi tradition, and what

it is to be a global Sufi; it also meant that this international conference was a space of influence.

III

Power and influence in a globalised world

Power, from a state's perspective, has always been a question of territory. It was the first preoccupation of early modern states (Foucault, 2004), and borders were crucial for them. How could they make their territories bigger? Government was first and foremost about governing a territory, and then about controlling its subjects. With globalisation, states' power has changed and has become more diffuse, taking new shapes, being less focused on territory and less based on coercion. "Soft" power matters. With global flows of ideas and opinions, governing a territory now implies controlling ideas and seeking influence outside a state's borders; and religion does not escape the question of influence. Saudi Arabia's promotion of its national version of Salafism in the world, financing schools and universities, selling millions of books in fairs and conferences, is a prime example of this phenomenon. On its territory, a state can thus promote certain ideas and attempt to define religion and religious practice in a certain way. It can also forge alliances with foreign groups that share the ideas and values it aims to promote. In this respect, Sufism is a very unique tradition, as it is not associated with a specific territory, in the way schools of law or theological (Sunni and Shia) traditions often are. I thus propose to consider these strategies of influence as part of our understanding of secularism. Globalisation evidenced the problem of vanishing borders for nation-states, but it also gave them the opportunity to expand their influence outside of their territories. The national definition of religion must be analysed in a new perspective, as something that can be protected (within the state's borders) but also conquered (outside of the state's territory).

Therefore, I consider this international conference to be a space of influence. The state's influence, firstly, trying to spread certain ideas and convey a positive image of national Islam. But the various groups I describe in this section also come with their own interests, and with their own power and ability to influence. This event is an opportunity for these groups to represent and promote their national and local cultures. In a certain

way, I was also a medium of influence for Sheikh Habri. My presence and my status as a foreign graduate student interested in this subject validated and legitimised his zawiya, while also giving credit to the “local” Islam he represented. It is also the reason why - as you will see , I was quickly integrated by the event’s organisation into the group of foreign sheikhs and personalities, and was invited to the important events at the colloquium.

A heterogeneous space of encounter

Various groups of people were gathered for this conference, with different interests and expectations. There were religious, political, intellectual elites, mainly from Algeria, but also from neighbouring North African countries, notably from Libya and Tunisia. Being with Sheikh Habri, I could have a small glimpse at some of the political intrigues taking place in these places. The most recent statement that Omar Chaalal, the president of the UNZA, made about the organisation of a “tour of zawiya” for Chakib Khelil, did not please the Algerian government. As a result the minister of religious affairs, Mohamed Aïssa, did not come personally to inaugurate the conference. He was replaced by Lakhmissi Bezzaz, the general inspector of the ministry. During conferences, eminent people and authorities led the discussions. A Libyan figure of the Kadhafi regime, sheikh Mohammed Echaoumi El Idrissi, was in attendance. He was widely considered as a legitimate personality to run the World Union of Zawiyas that was going to be created. Local politicians, and the organisers of the event, built and maintained networks. There was even a kind of “VIP” square, a small room in the centre of the hotel, where important figures could meet and talk. On the second day, after a seminar, leaving the conference room, I was accidentally invited by two security guards to go into this room. This is how I first met some of the people that are mentioned in this chapter. I could tell that Sheikh Habri was uneasy with the atmosphere of the conference. He seemed to disapprove all these social events with semi-political aims. He wanted to see old friends and greet his old companion, Omar Mahmood Chaalal. He only stayed for half a day, explaining “I have got work to do at the zawiya!”

Foreign sheikhs at the conference did not form a homogeneous group. There were Malian Tijani sheikhs, Italian converts from Milan, Shia Sufi followers from Iraq and Iran, etc. Yet the conference took place as if these different groups shared the same interests and had the same expectations from the event. Their presence was important

for the prestige and standing of the event, and had a symbolic dimension. It was a confluence of Sufi traditions, coming from three continents and a multitude of social and political environments. The first day, in the bus that drove us around the different Sufi places of Mostaganem, I talked with two Italian followers, from a branch of the Shadiliyya in Milan. Later, I spoke to an Iranian sheikh from Qom, and finally to a couple of Bangladeshi Sufis, and I wondered: what do they all have in common? This conference allowed them, and me, to reflect on this question: what does this kind of global event say about “global” Sufism?

Beyond the question of civic values, the presence and discourse of Shia figures, notably Iranian and Iraqi sheikhs, provided a first hint, showing that Sufism could here be defined negatively, that is through its relationship with other ideological projects, as an anti-Salafist or anti-Wahhabi Islamic trend for example. As I will show, Iranian sheikhs were pleased to meet with potential allies in their state’s regional war against Saudi Wahhabism. The conference indeed had at times an explicitly political character. When we visited the shrine of Sidi Lakhdar Boukhlef, for example, numerous speeches mentioned, not only the war against “Daesch”, but the global conflict against Saudi Arabia’s Wahhabism. But for many of the Sufis attending the conference, global Sufism could not be reduced to its political aspect. They were certainly concerned by the rising popularity of Wahhabi ideas, but this did not systematically translate into an interest in the regional conflict taking place in the Middle East. For the recently converted Italian Sufis, or for the Indian followers that I met at the ‘Alawiya, Sufi identity was not necessarily a political issue, nor the international conference a political space.

Local sheikhs, moqadems and their Sufi followers seemed to come from another world compared to the international participants. They came from various parts of the country, and were symbols and representatives of what Geertz and Gellner would certainly call a “maraboutic Islam”. This conference, from their perspective, was just one of the many events that take place in the year (see chapter 4). This brings us back to the national dimension of the conference and to the pro-Sufi politics of the current government. Sheikhs from the Oran region are used to attending these government sponsored seminars. They frequently see each other on such occasions, though this particular event was more spectacular. It is an opportunity for them to meet old friends. Many of them are active on online social networks: they take pictures with friends, with

famous Sufi sheikhs, post them on Facebook; performing their belonging to a translocal network of Sufi orders. Famous and older, more established sheikhs slept in the prestigious hotel, where the conference took place, while Sufi followers, moqadems or sheikhs from less prestigious zawiyas were welcomed in the bungalows' dormitories of a cheaper hotel. I slept there, with people from Tamanrasset, Tlemen and Relizane. The atmosphere was friendly and festive. People had breakfast and dinner together, in the large common room of the hotel, and they often stayed late at night to smoke and talk outside. The first day walking with Sheikh Habri on the way to the main hotel's restaurant, we met the old sheikh of the 'Issawa, a prestigious tariqa with many zawiyas in the region. With this local population and the presence of sheikhs from all over the region, it is not only a maraboutic "Algerian" Islam that we find at the conference, but an Islam of brotherhoods, lineages and alliances. People meet with these very old sheikhs, bow in respect and kiss their forehead. The event is therefore more than an international conference or a political meeting, and it offers a space for religious leaders from the Algerian West to renew their ties of friendship and loyalty.

Doing religious diplomacy with anti-Salafism discourse

This colloquium was thus a space of encounter between Sufi, mystic traditions and various other social and national groups. Despite their differences, the anti-Salafi tone of the event, alongside the message of peace and tolerance, was predominant. It was also a good opportunity for the Algerian state to maintain links with important diplomatic actors of the Muslim world. In such events, religious structures are a means for public authorities to preserve and enrich bilateral relations with other nations on a "sacred breeding-ground" (Sambe, 2010: 847). As Sufi currents in Islam go beyond the Sunnite-Shiite divide, Sufi orders often appear as powerful inter-State intermediaries and can be used in the framework of a country's religious diplomacy. A "religious diplomacy" has various objectives and can be carried out by both state representatives and non-state actors (Abourabi, 2015). In the "Arabic-Muslim" context, François Constantin defines these activities as "Islamic modes of diplomatic action" (1994), and States use them to spread their networks, increase their influence and exercise "soft power".

Two Muslim countries are often cited as having ambitious religious diplomacies: Saudi Arabia and Morocco; and Algeria's relationship with these two countries has a

long and complicated history, informing in many ways the trajectory of its religious diplomacy. The Algerian Republic has long been built up by opposition to the Moroccan Kingdom, notably in its relationship to religion and in the choice of its diplomatic alliances. On the one hand, Rabat is close to Western nations and Gulf monarchies, and is opposed to Algiers on the Western Sahara issue. The religious dimension of the Moroccan monarchy is strong, with religious elites close to the Kingdom, and an effort to inscribe the royal dynasty in the history of Islam (Zeghal, 2003). On the other hand, Algeria has long been a symbol of independence for “third-world” countries since the 1960s and has continued to develop a tradition of non-alignment and non-interference. As a socialist secular nation in its first decades, the Algerian State had an ambiguous relationship with religious institutions; it used the symbols of Islam and associated them with its nationalist politics, but aimed at controlling religious authorities, rather than giving them political power. But both countries have been facing the spread of Wahhabi ideas for a few decades, and Algeria’s religious politics and diplomacy, since the 1990s and its civil conflict, now seem to take their inspiration from the Moroccan strategy. The Algerian State has progressively been redefining its national religious identity by including Sufi culture and traditional Islam as major elements, and has started in the last decade to use Sufi orders as diplomatic instruments.

The international conference in Mostaganem, in this respect, was an excellent opportunity to bring together anti-Wahhabi religious figures from various countries of the Muslim world. This initiative was not only made possible by the good will of the UNZA and should be inscribed in a more general system of relations between Muslim religious associations. In the same way that Shiite figures from Iraq and Iran are invited to Algerian Sufi symposiums, Algerian Sufi sheikhs also travel to countries in South-West Asia for similar events. Sheikh Ahmed Habri, with whom I attended the event in Mostaganem, travelled to Iraq twice in the last five years. The UNZA was invited for a conference in Bagdad, and Sheikh Habri was asked by Omar Chaalal to represent the association there. Leaders from the three monotheistic religions were invited. It was not only an opportunity for religious dialogue, but a diplomatic way to show that the Iraqi political regime was open and liberal.

These events, as academic events, be it in Bagdad or Mostaganem, include conferences and talks. But they are also cultural events, and an excellent opportunity to

highlight the religious culture of the host nations. Visits to famous mausoleums in the region explicitly reveal the shared religious heritage. In Mostaganem, sheikhs from India, Iran or Bangladesh were invited to visit the zawiyas Bouzidiya and 'Alawiya, and the mausoleum of Sidi Lakhdar Boukhlef. In Bagdad, Sheikh Habri was pleased to see the shrines of "Sidna Al Husayn" [Kerbala] and "Sidna Ali" [Nadjaf]. For him, it was a "smart way to show that Shiites are open to other religions", but it was also a concrete experience, for the Sufi leaders that were invited, of the common Sufi heritage.

Religious actors like Shiite Sufi sheikhs were thus invited, but also academics and diplomats from Shiite nations. Amir, for example, a prominent figure of the Iranian embassy in Algeria, was preparing a doctoral thesis in international relations at the University of Algiers, analysing the future geopolitical role of Turkey, Iran and Israel in the "Middle-East". I met him on a bus between two visits, while we were heading to the zawiya 'Alawiya. His presence was not fortuitous. He mentioned how Algerian-Iranian relations "got better over the years", adding that they "have many projects together that are coming in", and that the event in Mostaganem was "emblematic of this dynamic". The Sufi sheikhs from Iran were from Qom, the "second capital of Shiism, with Teheran". As religious figures, they did not represent the Iranian State the way Amir did, but rather, they represented Sufi Shiism, and it was Algeria's relationship with Wahhabism that was at stake here.

With Wahhabism characterised as the common enemy, Sufism was considered as a path for reconciliation between the branches of Islam, and the event gave a significant public audience to this voice. The congress started with an enthusiastic call, from the UNZA President, "to wipe out Salafists". And Slimane Al Moussaoui, an Iranian academic, later argued that Sufi movements should be able to gather Muslims from all over the world and "revive the umma [nation]". Algerian Sufi sheikhs, Iranian academics, Malian Tijani followers all rally around a supposed shared cause. The religious diplomacy in action here facilitates discussions between these various kinds of actors. Sufism is understood as a common culture that "needs to be defended against the rise of Wahhabism" and as an ideological structure that can be employed against a shared political enemy. In the Algerian case, such events reinforce diplomatic ties with Shiite allies in a period of strong geopolitical tensions and are outlets to oppose Wahhabism, as a religious ideology, without breaking ties with Wahhabi countries such as Saudi

Arabia. In this perspective, international events such as this Sufi conference generate a religious mode of diplomatic action that is widespread in other Muslim countries; but they also reveal a new global voice in Sufi politics. Globalisation provided excellent means of proliferation for Wahhabi ideology and there is a sense in Sufi circles that religious orders have been too passive in the last decades. With this new, global voice, a peaceful discourse on interreligious dialogue and tolerance takes place, and interestingly uses the same words that can be found in the Algerian State's rhetoric on traditional Islam.

IV

Sufism, popular Islam and modernity

In addition to the conference's performance of civic discourse and its anti-Salafist tone, I would like to consider another important topic of the event - the question of modernity - which will allow me to reflect on the history of the Algerian state's relationship with Sufi orders from another perspective. Even though the strict opposition between a local, popular, Islam and a reformist, modernist tradition has been outdated (see Osella and Osella, 2008; Soares, 2000), notably with historians and sociologists underscoring "the doctrinal continuities and overlap between Sufism and Islamic 'reformism'" (Soares and Osella, 2009: 9; evoking Metcalf, 1982; also see Salvatore, 2016), we must still recognise that the analysis of the supposed decline of Sufi orders in the 20th century (Gilsenan, 1967; Geertz, 1968; Gellner, 1981), and the reformist outlook of the Algerian state's religious policy after independence, often focused on and criticised the un-modern, irrational character of local, popular practices (Howell and Van Bruinessen, 2007). In this perspective, the 1990s civil war and the Bouteflika presidency had an important impact on the state's religious policy, and I argue that the reconfiguration of the religion-politics in Algeria also implied a renewed discourse on science and modernity. On the other side of this argument, reformist ideas and state politics also had an important influence on popular practices, as we will see in chapter 6. Though I do not argue that there is a Sufi homogeneous discourse on science and modernity, it is still relevant to observe the convergence of some political and Sufi elites on these issues. In this section, I use the examples of Omar Chaalal, the president of the UNZA, and Mohamed Aïssa, the minister of religious affairs. As we will see, they both

think of modernity as a concept that should be detached from its Western definition and Eurocentric vision, and associate it with values of authenticity and tolerance. As they both understand the politics behind definitions of modernity, their representations of the “modern” reveal their own political biases.

In addition to the performance of civic discourse and the anti-Salafist stance, the political message emerging from this conference also conveyed strong criticisms of modernity and globalisation, with a will to defend national cultures and traditions. In the context of 2016, the “war against ISIS” and the threat of terrorism constituted the two main global issues of the time. These topics were omnipresent in the discussions, often in an explicit way, sometimes more implicitly, and these debates could not be dissociated from the social and geopolitical context in which they took place. In this respect, “modernity” and “globalisation” were often perceived, among others, as explanatory factors of the violence of these phenomena.

Let us start by taking the example of Omar Chaalal, the president of the UNZA and the organiser of the event. I met him at his home, in Mostaganem, a few months after the conference and the founding of the “World Union of Sufism”. On many issues, his views coincide with those of the minister of religious affairs. But his strong anti-Salafist stance, which differs from the ambiguous position of the state on this issue, is representative of the engaged, political discourse of these Algerian Sufi elites. And it goes beyond the Sufi/Salafi debate, echoing the debates taking place in these conferences, which offer, as we saw in the first sections, concrete opportunities to invoke contemporary global issues. When I interviewed him, Omar Chaalal compared the “modernists” to the “Salafists”. He made a distinction between “moderns” and “modernists” to show the ideological dimension of “modernism”, as an imperial ideology threatening traditional values:

“The problem we face is terrorism. But is not only Wahhabism, it is also modernity, the so-called modernity. Who are ‘the modernists’? There are many of them in Algeria. They are not ‘moderns’, I must specify, they are ‘modernists’. And we have the Salafists. We have both”

Modernity, as he views it, associated with “materialist globalisation”, is an instrument of power in the service of European/American culture, and it would be naïve

not to see how it is used as a conceptual means of cultural domination. It is not only about ways of “being modern”, but it is also about adopting signs and symbols of modernity that are in line with European and North American culture. And as in many studies of people’s experiences of modernity, fashion is an emblematic practice of these modes of consumption:

“They think that modernity means consumerism; that if you wear jeans or a shirt, you are a modern person. But it is only a matter of appearance. They just want to look like modern individuals. I will give you an example. In Algeria, we have a culture, we have a civilisation, we have customary law, we have civil and constitutional law. Why should I want to act like an American? For them, being modern means to be American. But look at Japan, it is modern, but they preserve their traditions. And us, we have people who are modern, and at the same time, who do not disown their cultural heritage. But you cannot be like them for ‘modernists’, you must be an American; otherwise, you are not modern. You must do like the French, but why don’t the French do like us? We have the modernists, and we have the Salafists, both are related. They are extremists”

In this almost anti-globalist discourse, Salafists and “modernists” are both portrayed as extremists and are symbols of cultural colonisation. Modernity, when it fosters “materialism”, “consumerism” of Salafism, thus becomes a way of life that needs to be fought with ideas and values; and Sufism appears as a solution. In the media, Chaalal, also a doctor in medicine and a graduate of the University of Paris, wrote that Sufism was “the best treatment for current pains, to free the Muslim nation from materialist globalisation, and revive it”. One could even talk about a call for a defensive jihad, defending Islamic and local culture against the invasion of foreign values. When I asked him about the World Union of Sufism that they had founded, his first words were about the past role of the “ribat”, which preceded the advent of zawiyas, and these words were laudatory. Jihad might be, in his perspective, as in Deeb’s analysis of pious Shiite women, a cultural “struggle”, as “a work of proving to the West that Muslim [women] can be both pious and modern” (Deeb, 2006: 153).

The parallel made between Salafists and “modernists” manifests a will to defend traditional values against the threat of outside foreign cultures, be them Wahhabi “Arab” or modern “Western” ones. The call for tradition is used as a cultural bullwark, and Mohamed Aïssa and Omar Chaalal both distance themselves from the idea that societies

cannot cope with modernity without departing from tradition, and they thus attempt to re-appropriate this concept.

Aïssa's discourse on tradition, as discussed in the first section, is accompanied by a cutting critique of modernity. Though he is critical of what is generally seen as products of modernity (i.e. new technologies, globalisation, consumerism, etc.), his use of the word "modern" enables him, for example, to consider that "traditional Islam", "as our ancestors transmitted it", is "a modern and tolerant Islam": modernity is criticised when it refers to values and principles coming from the "West", when it is a cultural threat, but is praised when it is a marker of contemporary relevance. The call for tradition, for culture, is made by reference to a true, authentic Islam that is not dependent on modernity or its objects. While many Islamic movements used new technologies, like the Internet, to spread their values, Aïssa considers that Islam, "in its authentic sense", can be found "in zawiyas", and not "in cybercafés, and even less in CDs". The word "modern" is used by Aïssa without referring to North European or North American modernity as he associates traditional Islam with a modern understanding of Islam. The issue here seems to be more in the "mono-civilizational definitions of modernity", to use the words of Göle (2003: 19), rather than the idea of modernity as these Muslim intellectuals conceive of it.

Attending this kind of international conference brings us to incorporate a transnational analysis, looking at "the ways in which we can attend to our interlocutors' engagements with discourses that emerge in and travel through transnational contexts of power, capitalism, and militarism" (Deeb, 2009: 109). Both Aïssa and Chaalal engage here with "Western" conceptions of modernity by proposing new definitions of what being modern means in Islamic and Algerian contexts. While Sufi sheikhs could again intervene in the public sphere since the 1990s, with the medias spreading their words and official conferences being organised, it is interesting here to observe the relative convergence of their positions. Evoking spiritual and cultural understandings of modernity, their conception of the modern does not have the connotations that it used to have in the 1960s and 1970s, when it was associated with ideas of socialism, economic development and technological progress.

V

Regional and national imaginations of popular Islam

In spite of this reconfiguration of the state-religion relationship, and the role bestowed to Sufi sheikhs and zawiyas in this pious environment, religion's cosmopolitan dimension can raise aesthetic issues. Even though the state uses the image of popular Islam to associate it with the nation's religious identity, the Islamic tradition often escapes national borders.

These conferences, reuniting Sufi elites and taking place throughout the year, mark and signify the multiple identities of the Sufi tradition. The region of Oran, near the Moroccan border, is singular in this perspective. Most Sufi orders of the region come from Morocco, and the roots of the tariqa system do not conform to national boundaries. The sheikhs and moqadems that I met during fieldwork, in spite of their strong patriotic discourses, were often proud regionalists, having many ties with Morocco and families from the other side of the border. Sheikh Habri's family, for example, comes from Oujda, a Moroccan city close to the border, and one of his brothers looks after the local zawiya there. It is a famous city in the history of Algeria, also being the place where president Abdelaziz Bouteflika grew up in the 1940s and 1950s, and where he frequented the Qadiriya as a young religion student. In the Oran region, in Tlemcen, in Mostaganem, Sufi Islam is based on a multicultural heritage, with North African, Mediterranean, European roots, which extend from Spanish Andalusia to Kabyle cities and villages. Though people may know that Sufism, as the Islamic tradition, has its roots in many different cultures, the organisation of these events and the topics that are chosen make explicit this multicultural tradition.

An interesting example can be used to illustrate this phenomenon. One of the many conferences that I attended in 2016 took place in November, in Tlemcen another splendid city between Oran and the Moroccan frontier. It was an academic event, focusing on the life of Sidi Abu Madyan, the great Muslim poet who lived in Spain, Morocco and Algeria in the 12th century, and was entitled: "Sidi Boumediene, the hub of Western Islam". It had many similarities with the international conference of the UNZA. The audience was less international, but the speakers came from many different

European and North-West Asian countries (including: Turkey, Palestine, France and Spain), and it once again brought together many of the local sheikhs that were present in Mostaganem (Omar Chaalal among them). The taxi driver who drove me to the conference was furious after this title, associating “the West” to figures such as Georges W. Bush (and the war in Iraq) and Nicolas Sarkozy (and the war in Libya). To link the name of Abu Madyan, a beloved Saint in Tlemcen, to American neo-conservatism and French neo-colonialism, was for him a form of blasphemy. His views stemmed from his own personal experience of Europe. He had lived in France for a few years, back in his youth, and had suffered from his social status in French society, “we are still considered as colonised individuals over there”, “Europe is not a place for us”. But for the organisers of the event, the University of Tlemcen and the Centre of Andalusia Studies, this event was an opportunity to show the multicultural identity of the region of Oran, and the non-Eastern particularities of North-African Islam. Europe and Islam were not considered as isolated monoliths. And by differentiating Eastern from Western Islam, such events made public the belonging of Sufi orders in the Algerian North-West as part of the history of Europe and the Mediterranean.

Abu Madyan was born in Cantillana (Spain), lived in Fès (Morocco) and Béjaïa (in the Kabyle region), studied with Abdel Qader Jilani in Mecca, and died in Tlemcen. As a Muslim Saint of the Al-Andalus period, he is emblematic of the early European dimension of Islam. French and Spanish speakers were invited to talk about Sufi poetry, but also Kabyle academics, who discussed the intellectual influence of the city of Bejaïa at the time of Abu Madyan. So the event highlighted a brilliant Islamic tradition that took place outside the classic ‘Arab world’ as most people perceive it. The history of Sufism makes it easier to connect with Europe. With the Al-Andalus period and its great Saints, it underlined the intellectual contribution of Europe to the Islamic tradition and the Islamic, and Sufi, identity of Europe. The place of Islam in Europe is related to the place of Europe in Islam, and these events are interesting in this perspective. Islam, because it is Berber, Andalusian, Mediterranean, is also European: your culture is also ours, and our culture is yours. But it is also an ideological response to those who attempt to monopolise Islamic “culture”, showing that culture is not confined geographically.

The reference to the Andalusian period of Islam is interesting because it does not necessarily contradict the state’s discourse on Algerian Islam. Mohamed Aïssa, in

conferences and opinion columns, frequently evokes the Andalusian roots of the Algerian religious tradition. I do not see the connection between these discourses as revealing of the submission of Sufi elites to a larger political project. Sufi elites are not passive agents of the state's identity discourse. Rather, it shows that the interaction between national and transnational dynamics is not necessarily conflicting. The cultural wealth of the Sufi tradition feeds these nationalist discourses on religion, and Sufi elites take advantage of this relation by putting forward a vivid, engaged discourse that supports their vision of Islam. On many points, the discourse of Sufi elites affirms and accentuates the voice of the state. When the ministry of religious affairs promotes the Sufi, Berber identity of the "Islam of our ancestors", with an implicit anti-Wahhabi stance, these Sufi elites often go further, with a strong, explicit anti-Salafi position. These discourses seem quite free, not constrained by state politics and official communication tools. We saw it with Omar Chaalal's stance on modernity and Salafism, but we can also observe, from these religious elites, the emphasis on a more regionalist view of the Sufi tradition. The Algerian state cannot control the borders of its national religious tradition, and the complexity of the Sufi tradition makes this politics even more complex. In this respect, it can indeed be argued that, in spite of their displayed internationalism, the imagination of Sufi Islam by these Algerian religious elites tends to produce a North African, Maghribi tradition, by opposition to Persian or Arab traditions with which they often seem to be in competition.

In these perspectives, these Sufi conferences, organised by religious associations and universities, supported by the state, are part of a global environment, but answer national concerns. The state has its own agenda, and promotes a moderate, tolerant, open Islam, to which the national religious tradition is associated. Sufi *zawiyas* and popular Islam are considered as important components of this traditional "Algerian Islam". This chapters highlights the convergence of the political and Sufi elites' discourses, in the political and geopolitical context of 2016, marked by the war in Syria and the rise of ISIS. But it also reveals the complexity of these discourses, not giving in to a binary vision of Islam, which would reduce the Sufi tradition to a kind of mystical, apolitical culture.

On the contrary, without essentialising, this chapter has analysed the political dimension and engaged character of living, vivid and transnational Sufi traditions. These emerge from spaces of encounter designed to drape the Algerian state in the aura of good

Islam, but the discourses and projects that emerge often escape this state project. Instead, various forms of Sufism with distinct understandings of the ties that bind devotees emerge. At one level, an international elite of Sufi leaders attend a global round of interfaith conferences as individual representatives of a civic public. At another level, local religious leaders interweave state discourse on Islam with critiques of modernity to justify their own prominence within a national Sufi project of preventing the ills of modernity. And on a further level, men like the Sheikh Habri attend these conferences to renew the brotherly and lineage like ties of an Algerian popular community of Sufism.

In the following chapters, I leave Mostaganem and delve into my fieldwork in a non-elite Sufi community in Oran, at the zawiya Habriya. This urban field gives me the opportunity to tackle the question of power from a radically different perspective. The power I explore is not only that of the state and its Sufi elites, but a complex, multiform and diffuse popular *puissance*. Focusing on this will allow me to pose the question of power, politics and religion differently. It will allow the matters of God and faith to be placed at the centre of my analysis of local and national power relationships. We will reverse the perspective of reading public Sufism in Algeria as an expression of ‘deeper’ political and economic interests. Instead we will start to see politics and economics as a way of renewing the powerful exchanges among communities of worshippers and between humans and God.



Fig 1. Mostaganem: the symbolic capital of the “World Union of Sufism”?



Fig 2. The Algerian national anthem at the international Sufi conference in Mostaganem.

CHAPTER 2

If mystical power is immanent, where does it come from?

Puissance and pouvoir in Oran's popular Islam

Anthropologists of Islam have been deeply interested in the issue of power for the last twenty years. Secularism, notably, understood as a regime of power, was a central focus of these studies. This work revealed how nation-states produced and imposed forms of discipline and ethics in affects, attitudes, relationships etc. Understanding secularism has thus long consisted in looking at how the production of such forms of ethics was organised and structured. Samuli Schielke recently argued (2018) that the main issue raised by secularism, in monotheist contexts, was less the production of certain affects by hegemonic political structures than the type of relations that humans had with God. What if the key issue, Schielke asks, remained “faith”? In this perspective, Schielke’s argument invites us to look at changing conceptions of power by focusing on the ways people conceive of the relationships between humans and God. He suggests that we should focus on whether and how humans “claim more power for themselves” (2018: 4). In this second chapter, I draw on this approach to explore how in contemporary Algeria people conceive of their relationships to divine power and how they aim to transmit or tap into it. To achieve this, I will focus on the theological concept of Baraka reinterpreting previous histories and anthropologies of Baraka through my ethnographic findings.

In the zawiya Habriya as you enter you encounter a representation of divine power that fits with classic interpretations of Baraka. One of the first things one sees is a picture of the lavish genealogical tree of the Habriya family. This majestic tree, with its deep roots, dominates the main space of the zawiya. During Friday festivities, when the dhikr takes place, Sheikh Habri sits on a chair, in front of the assembly of fuqara, just under the frame. It illustrates his transcendental power, keeping and reinforcing his legitimacy as a Saint’s descendant. He is not only a marabout, a doctor or a religious

leader, but a charismatic person with direct links to the prophet's family. His power comes from deep historical time that is connected to the present in its living embodiment in himself. When someone comes for medical assistance, he is offered a seat that faces the frame's wall. When treated by the marabout, - hearing Qur'anic verses while Sidi Ahmed Habri puts a small ring of copper in the patient's ear -, he cranes his neck to the side, often because of pain, and thereby sees the holy names of the Habri family. The treatment has to be seen as a whole: the physical act with the copper, the religious ear with the Qur'anic verses, and the eyes focused on the spiritual ancestry.

I explore in this chapter the nature of Sheikh Habri's power and legitimacy. In the sheikh's view, power comes from his ancestors' *baraka*, and is transmitted vertically, through familial lineage. As illustrated in the ethnographic example above, this vertical understanding of transmission can be represented by the Habriya's familial tree. This depiction of power seems coherent with Weber's theory of charisma, where power relies on one's own potential or puissance, be it called grace, mana or, as we will observe, *baraka*. Weber's theory of charisma has inspired many academics in the anthropology of Islam, notably in their analysis of *baraka*, a spiritual "power" that a few chosen individuals, - members of the Prophet's family, Muslim saints, Sufi sheikhs -, possess. A weberian understanding of *baraka* makes it a transcendental power, coming from above, from a supernatural, divine entity. This chapter indeed shows that my informants often had this transcendental, historical view of *baraka*, being something that can be acquired through hereditary transmission or through the transfer of specific skills. Yet as I will demonstrate they also held another concept of *baraka* as a horizontal immanent force that belongs to the collectivity of worshippers and ordinary people, accessible by them and that can inhere in objects as well.

As I will show the existence of this immanent power pushes us to think again about our interpretations of *baraka*, and of charisma and power. The English word power is not entirely adequate to capture all of these meanings. In French, two words translate the notion of power ("puissance" and "pouvoir") and Gilles Deleuze's use of the idea of "puissance" will be most pertinent here. I see Deleuze's *puissance* as immanent power, "the power to act rather than power to dominate another" and "the ability to affect and to be affected" (Smith and Protevi, 2018). I draw here on this idea of power as a horizontal, circulating *puissance*. By looking at more ordinary manifestations of *baraka*,

when people without a divinely blessed lineage or even objects or food can still possess it, I argue that we can think of baraka's puissance as such immanent power. From this perspective of ordinary people's understanding of their relationship with the divine, I can reinterpret Weber's theory of charismatic power. I do not deny its significance, but I argue that it is only a partial account of charisma.

I will show that the sheikh's power, embedded in a system of relations connected in various ways with the zawiya, does not only rely on inherited charismatic qualities. His power rests on immanent puissance and relations with his followers. Importantly this insight also allows us to understand the state and politicians' participation in Sufi ritual differently. Rather than just borrowing the authority of transcendental vertical power, they are seeking to make a horizontal connection between themselves and the immanent power of baraka that exists in the community of worship and in the mundane world. Legitimacy arises from these exchanges with the national community and its spaces. I will argue that such tactics of accessing divine power immanent in the mundane world and among the populace have intensified with the transition towards more unstable political conditions for democracy in Algeria. Overall, my goal is to explore the nature of political legitimacy from within my informants' categories of understanding of the relationship between divine power and the world.

I

The verticality of power in the anthropology of Islam

The representation of baraka as personal charisma has been the norm in the anthropological literature and studies of power in Muslim and Sufi societies. It has been generally defined as blessing or "grace" (Soares, 2007), and is supposed to be possessed by individuals with particular qualities. Charisma had an important role in Max Weber's political theory, which has influenced many generations of anthropologists. In the anthropology of Islam, this influence is best represented by Clifford Geertz, whose famous book, "Islam observed", compared Indonesian and Moroccan Muslims. He was one of the first to describe baraka as a political object and on the basis of this founded what we could call a cultural account of power: "the problem is to decide who (not only, as we shall see, among the living, but also among the dead) has it, how much, and how to benefit from it" (1968: 44) and wrote that baraka was not, "as it has been often

represented, a parapsychical force, a kind of spiritual electricity”, arguing that some Western writers, “anxious to force it into a pigeonhole with mana, magical power”, simplified it “beyond recognition” (1968: 44). He thus defined baraka as “a talent and a capacity, a special ability – of particular individuals”, analogous to “personal presence, force of character, moral vividness” (ibid.).

This view corresponded with a particular understanding of Muslim political systems. For Geertz, baraka played an important role in Muslim societies because it created intermediary powers between central power and believers. In Michael Gilson's ethnography of a Sufi order in Egypt, we find a similar emphasis on the personalised character of baraka; the author shows that the tariqa's founder's successor “had organisation rather than baraka” (2000: 87) and that “it was the task of the officials to organise the baraka”. By associating baraka with charismatic authority, he argues that it is through the concept of baraka that the reproduction of the founder and saint is constantly being performed. In his book, he describes these biographies written by officers who knew the saint personally, “written in formulaic, [...] hagiographic terms” (ibid.), and which transcend his spiritual power and charisma. More recently, Benjamin Soares takes a similar direction when he equates spiritual power with “God's favor”, talking about “important Muslim religious leaders”, and with “a whole host of related notions in the region's vernaculars, such as ‘gifts of Gods’, as well as baraka, hurma (Arabic, sanctity), and ni'ma (Ar., prosperity)” (2007: 82). This conception also goes along with the idea that baraka is necessarily related to holiness, as it was argued by Westermarck (1916).

These views fit the symbolic representation of baraka as observed in the vignette at the start of this chapter. Baraka here is a personal, charismatic object, which is transmitted from branch to branch, from a saint to the next, coming from the prestigious and powerful family of the prophet Muhammad. However, these theories of baraka have often relied on a presumed Weberian understanding of charisma, arguing for example, that “baraka corresponds to Max Weber's definition of charisma, in that it makes obedience possible without the use of the physical force” (Addi, 2009: 336). It is true that Weber considers charisma as a form of authority that is not based on force or on vested interests, but on the belief that other people have of one's power. One is legitimate, not because he is elected, or because he is the strongest person, or the most

intelligent, but because there seems to be a natural popular consensus about his power. As with Clifford Geertz's view of baraka, Weber's theory of charisma was part of a larger sociology of politics. Charisma, in his view, had something irrational and revolutionary, and emerged in the unstable periods of a rational-legal bureaucratic system. But it is only one part of Weber's definition, as I will explain later.

From a theological and etymological perspective, the most relevant definition of "baraka" tends towards the more personalised version. In its theological interpretation, the divine authority of the Sufi sheikh (walâya) manifests itself as baraka. In the Qur'an, as explained by Abun-Nasr, "the singular noun baraka does not occur", "but its plural barakât is used in it in the sense of the blessings God bestows on the believers" (2007: 76). In his view, the Qur'an may express the idea that the Prophet's descendants have "a special right to the leadership of the Muslim community", as Verse XI:73 evokes the blessing of the members of the Prophet's family, the Ahl al-Bayt: "The mercy of God and his blessing (barakâ-tuhu) be upon you, O Ahl al-Bayt". God is described as the only source of "barakat", the word "tabarakat" is used to glorify him, and mubarak is the participate form that defines elected people, chosen by him to have baraka (Chelhod, 1995).

The presence of charismatic figures in Sunni Islam, as an "emissary religion", to use Weber's terms, might still seem paradoxical. With a transcendent, omnipotent God, a non-divine prophet and an egalitarian message, Islam was not a natural home for charisma (Lindholm, 1998 in Werbner & Basu, 1998). But the Qur'an is finite and its moral message is thus complicated to fully interpret, and Lindholm shows that it left room not only for analogical reasoning and explications from respectable ulemas, "but also for charismatics who claim a special capacity to intuit God's desires" (1998: 211). It is also the reason why, and I will analyse this question in more detail in chapter 3, this form of power is associated with moral and ethical responsibilities. Territories are territories of power, but also moral territories, and I will show how the sheikh's power manifests through the good of his community.

These anthropological and theological theories fit the stories told by Sufi sheikhs and the mythologies that go along with the history of Saints and zawiyas. If you talk to Sheikh Habri, he will tell you that there is only one way to have baraka, and "it is by blood"; but the genetic transmission is a necessary but not sufficient condition. Spiritual

gifts follow a vertical, familial line, but at the end, charisma and personality make the difference.

II

Charisma at the zawiya Habriya

During my first three months in Oran, one of the fuqara, Seddiq, a man in his sixties, replaced Sheikh Habri one day per week, usually on Tuesdays. He was not a relative of the family, not even a charismatic figure of the community, and I wondered how he could stand in for Sheikh Habri without having the specific spiritual "qualifications" for it. Even though his legitimacy was not explicitly challenged by people coming to the zawiya, the attendance when he was present significantly decreased. Seddiq could not give any spiritual advice, nor resolve conflictual situations, and limited himself to act as a doctor; though sometimes he would bless food or bottles of water by reciting Qur'anic verses. And Sheikh Habri would always come to me, the day after, and express his pride: "Did many people come yesterday? No? That is not surprising; they knew that I would not be there". I realised later in the year that Seddiq's "job" (he was paid for it) was only a temporary position. Sheikh Habri's brother, Ali, was the official "substitute", but a conflict between the two of them, earlier in the spring, resulted in this peculiar situation where an ordinary follower "kept" the Sheikh's baraka while he was away. Seddiq was a nervous, ill man, often complaining of his low social status in the zawiya. He seemed to be well treated by other fuqara, but suffered from the lack of consideration of the Habri family. He often told me that he was Sheikh Habri's cousin, explaining that he too had some baraka; but Sidi Ali refuted this version:

"You know how it is, Thomas, people always make up stories. They want to show that they have blood from Saints. Our grandfathers were friends. They grew up together, coming from the same village. So now he thinks and says everywhere in Oran that he is a Habri"

"Being a Habri" means having some Saintly blood. The name of the Habri family has a strong spiritual resonance in the neighbourhood. It is built on a prestigious history, related to the national bigger picture, and to the mythical figure of the great-great-grandfather, Hadj Mohamed El Habri, a character that inspires people to this day. He is present in their discourses, dreams, visions; and his great baraka is a means of fulfilment.

I especially had this impression from discussions with female fuqara. Talking to a woman, after a dhikr on a Friday, she described her relationship to the saint in its dimension of enjoyment:

“We were doing the dhikr, reciting the names of Allah, it was very intense, and loud, all together, and I could feel a presence in my breath, and I saw him, in the room, next to us, like a ghost, and there was a lot of joy. It was incredible, I felt fulfilled”

He is a moral figure and a life example. Sheikh Habri would always refer to him in his stories, in his fables, during the Friday ceremony or in his everyday relationships with people, to illustrate a point or a piece of advice.

The figure of the Saint and the historical memory of the zawiya play an important role in the organisation of baraka. I described this earlier, in the first section with Gilsenan highlighting the relevance of biographies, “written in formulaic, [...] hagiographic terms” (2000[1982]: 87). Many of these books circulate in these communities of mystics. Sufi sheikhs sometimes have their own editors, make a few pamphlets and distribute them at conferences, festivals and other public meetings. Sheikh Habri’s great-grandfather is also omnipresent in people’s stories and moral vignettes. He was transformed into an ethical figure and has been an example of perfection. His presence in the zawiya reinforces the legitimacy and authority of the leading figures of the zawiya. For followers and people coming to the zawiya to enjoy the space’s baraka, the Saint is the baraka, in a certain way. Hadj Mohamed El Habri, his great-great-grandfather, founded the zawiya in the 19th century, and forged a new spiritual path. He had to obtain a formal authorisation from his master, a great sheikh from the tariqa Derkawiya. I have heard many times the story of his “spiritual” birth:

“The origin of zawiya is the Derkawiya. It is by spiritual bonds that my great-great-grandfather became affiliated to this tariqa. The story, it is that this man could not stop doing the dhikr; the dhikr and only the dhikr; he would lock himself in; so the Prophet came to him, not like in a dream, but more like a vision, and he said to him: you have to take the tariqa. And the prophet said: but on one condition, my zawiya will have to live on until the end of the world. And so my grandfather left home to become a murid of Sheikh Ahbi Derqawi”

This story, which Sheikh Habri tells followers and visitors of the zawiya, supports an elitist view of baraka. An idea of power that is offered to a few, chosen individuals. In Sheikh Habri's view, his great-great-grandfather was not like everyone else, he had a specific gift that even other Sufi students envied him for, and it was the reason why he had to found his own zawiya. As the story goes, his ancestor was not the only murid of the Derkawi sheikh. There were also the "sheikh El Bouzidi" - who will become "the spiritual master of sheikh 'Alawi" - and another famous regional figure, the sheikh of the tariqa Bouabdeliya. But his grandfather had a particularity: he did not remain a murid for very long. And it generated jealousy among the students. They said to the Sufi master:

"Why do you let him leave? We, we stayed for years, and you have never let us go to found our zawiyas"

And he responded:

"I, I only did one thing with Sheikh Habri, it was to recognise, approve his will, he already had everything. The prophet gave him everything"

Sidi Ahmed explains this difference by the distinction between the sharia, "real, concrete things", and the haqiqah, "things that we do not see". And in his story the famous master went on:

"For the haqiqah, he had everything, he came, he needed someone to confirm his power, and I did so. But he already had everything. He was ready"

This charismatic conception of baraka reveals how people explain how certain individuals possess special "power". However its focus on personality is only one part of the Sufi conception of power in Oran and Algeria. There is also another part of power, which is the immanent, popular, abundant aspect of baraka.; This baraka flows into uncharismatic people or mundane objects, which in turn become powerful. In the following section, I draw on Deleuze and Foucault's concept of puissance and of mobile power to provide a broader account of baraka.

III

Power as horizontal, circulating *puissance*

In the same way as Deleuze and Foucault, I would like to think of power not as something being, but as something that circulates between beings. It is not a concrete phenomenon, and does not only belong to specific people, to a saint or a sheikh, to a politician, or a member of the Prophet's family. I do not want to constrain it to a system of vertical relations, or as something concentrated within the hands of a few individuals. I showed in the introduction that for Deleuze, the French word "puissance", rather than "pouvoir", seems to be more adequate. In this respect, *puissance* can be understood as immanent power, "the power to act rather than power to dominate another" and "the ability to affect and to be affected"⁴ (Smith and Protevi, 2018).

Baraka, in this perspective, is a relational concept. It is not a fixed, bounded object, but something that can be shared, which is precisely why it has an important political value. A professional politician will seek out the Saints' baraka because it is also ordinary people's baraka; it will connect him with these people. It is not only about the sheikh's blessing; it is about a divine energy that the Algerian people are supposed to share. The community of the nation is represented by this immanent power folding concepts of the relationship between the divine and the sensible world into the formation of a democratic nationalism. It creates the possibility too of being part of a collective history, to be connected with the Saints and famous "big men" of Algerian history by sharing in their collective source of power in the world. The Algerian politician strives for being part of his people, to become one with them. Baraka, in this respect, is not only monopolised by a religious aristocracy; the professional politician wants to connect to this common force that everybody can possess. It will revive his attachment with ordinary people.

My view is that religion and nation share a similar "otherworldliness" (Webb, 2018) as they both rely on humans' ability "to imagine other worlds" (Bloch, 2008: 2056). The nation, as religion, thus also needs to be 'mediated', and I argue that 'material

⁴ Even though this idea of "puissance" is more adequate, I will continue to use indifferently these terms in this thesis, for the sake of clarity.

religion', through the community of worshippers, can play this role; the religious community is used as an affective material.

Religion, in this perspective, allows for the construction of immanent power, a force that is present in the world, in the objects, persons and relations of the sensible world. It may seem counterintuitive; we can indeed think, like Anderson when he opposes religion and nationalism, that religion is only about the transcendent and the other world, while national "imagined" communities are oriented along this-worldly, historical axes. But I aim to show in this chapter that religion invokes immanent powers and can thus fuel the democratic and nationalist imaginations of political communities. It is also one of the reasons why I embrace the idea of "popular" religion. Politicians coming to the zawiya are not only motivated by the opportunity of accessing divine power through the Saint's blessing, I argue that they also come for the popular power that flows through the zawiya. They want to share a few moments with people that they see as average, ordinary Algerians. They sit on the same carpet, eat the same dates and drink the same milk; talking about everyday life, mundane things; baraka is about sharing this horizontal, fraternal power. Anderson did not see religion's ability to provide a common ground for people to feel part of a "deep, horizontal comradeship" (1983: 7 in Webb, 2018: 72). To support this argument, I thus develop in this chapter the idea of a circulating, immanent and diffuse idea of power. The nature of power, in this perspective, depends on the type of relations humans have with their conception of the divine, in this case with God, with Allah.

A theological perspective might help better understand this general question about people's relationship with divine forces. Many debates, many quarrels between schools of thought in Islam - for instance between Sufis and Salafis - rest upon the question of the shape of the space existing between God and his creatures. Anderson, on this issue, argues that in modernist Islamic cosmology, "between God and man there is an immeasurable distance. God is all powerful", "man is nothing than His creature", and power is thus "removed from the world, since it lies with God" (1990: 70). He shows that it raises the question of political inequality: "If all men are equally abject in the eyes of God, what is the religious basis for the political rule of one man over another?" (ibid.). Our question would then be: how different is Sufi cosmology in that respect? As we can see, in Sufi brotherhoods - and not (necessarily) for Sufis and mystics themselves - the

personalised vision of baraka as power can justify the authority of some individuals, thanks to the blessed legitimacy that God gave them. My argument in this chapter is that this understanding of baraka is not dominant, at least not always, and often coexists with a view of baraka as an object associated with fertility and productivity, which is diffuse in the world and nature. It is the reason why I think that Weber's ambiguous definition of charisma helps us to consider the cosmological complexity of this coexistence.

We are close, in my view, to a kind of pantheistic power similar to the one Anderson describes in his idea of Javanese power, as “an intangible, mysterious and divine energy which animates the universe” (1978: 7 in Borchgrevink, 2003: 53). In Gilsean, the ambiguity is present too, and this type of force is also considered as something that ordinary people can experience, “In the zikr men experience a concentrated power. They call out and chant the Names of God, thrust backward and forward in violent rhythmical movements, give themselves up to forces that seem to come from outside, from the word of the Divinity that reaches down into their nerves, their breathing, their innermost physical and emotional natures” (2000[1982]: 89). The difference between these ordinary people and gifted individuals, in his view, is the time required to obtain baraka: “They [the ordinary members of the orders] have to constantly seek out baraka while the religiously privileged holy men and their descendants possess it by definition” (2000: 91). For many Sufi schools, divine and human worlds do not differ, and “the ‘next world’ is immanent in this world” (Kugle, 2007: 4): “Judgment day is this moment and none other. God's presence is here and not elsewhere. God's presence permeates the world, behind or within or despite its appearance” (ibid.).

It is thus not only an innate quality and a gift of God, but a force that can be transmitted and that ordinary people can reach with practice. It is also why I think that political leaders look for the Saints' baraka, not only because of the legitimacy they would gain, but because they know that it is popular force that everyone can experience. It is something that can connect them with these ordinary people. The force of the cosmos then becomes the power of the demos; and it is an important power when the time for elections comes.

IV

Can they all be powerful? Seers, healers and the baraka of ordinary mystics

To better grasp the baraka of ordinary people, a good place to start is the figure of the healer, in Oran, representing a more independent, flexible figure than a Sufi sheikh. A successful healer does not necessarily belong to a lineage of religious personalities, and is not totally dependent on a network of followers. They occupy a more meritocratic, democratic position. A priori, everyone can be a successful healer, as it depends less on class, race or gender than the other religious and spiritual positions of authority. Nevertheless they are still respected people, playing major roles in the city. As explained later in chapter 3, sheikhs are often healers and have some medical training, but being a healer is also a full-time profession. It offers a certain social status, some prestige, and in some cases one can live from his healing activities.

The examples used in this section are interesting because they show some of the social aspirations and desires of these healers. For Jamila, it is a professional vocation. She earns a living as a healer, and met Sheikh Habri because she needed an official authorisation to work. Hadj is an amateur healer. He always had stories to tell about the people he cured, and he indeed had a certain reputation, though contested, in the community of the zawiya. The aim of this section is to go beyond the aristocratic, vertical understanding of baraka, to show that many different types of people can possess baraka, and to understand the issues this raises for religious elites.

Jamila and Samir

I have met multiple times with Jamila, a female healer from Ain Turck, a coastal city at the border of Oran. She first came to the zawiya to meet with Sheikh Habri, to get the official authorization to practice her medicine. Her husband, Samir, who claimed to be a retired "general" from the Algerian army, accompanied her, and introduced her to me as a "sheikh", a female "sheikh"; which I later learnt annoyed Sheikh Habri: "He gives her too much importance, she is not even a recognised healer".

Our conversation was interesting. Samir kept talking about Sidi Ahmed's grand-grand-father, who he knew a lot about, as he had met him personally, and was fascinated by the family tree, which was the object of much discussion with Sheikh Habri. One of the holy names of the tree has his favours, as I often encountered in the field: Sidi Abdel Qader Jilani. Samir claimed to have an exclusive relationship with him. He alleged that

he could see him in dreams and visions: "I have a strong relationship with him, it is like a common breath, he appeared to me, physically I mean, as I see you now".

Highlighting his wife's medical gifts, he explained how she received them by doing a "tour" of zawiyas in the whole country: "During thirteen years, she visited more than 370 zawiyas, to acquire spiritual gifts. And thanks to God she became a healer". In his view, such talents, therefore, are not innate; they could be learned or obtained through the intermediary of Saints, sheikhs, healers, zawiyas: "One has to deserve it, to be worth the gift, because it does not happen to every person who wants it. It is a lot of work and patience to get there".

Later in the year, I attended an evening ceremony taking place at their home, in Ain Turck. Followers from many different zawiyas were invited, notably fuqara from a local branch of the tariqa Issawiya, a Sufi order from Meknes (Morocco), famous for its folklore (see Andezian, 2001). Their moqadem was in charge of leading the ceremony. Samir came to me during the ceremony, to give more details about the event, especially the financial part, but also to praise the baraka of his wife. I was surprised to hear him say their home was also "a zawiya", a view that did not coincide with Sheikh Habri's description of Jamila's activities, who only gave her a three-month authorization to practice as a healer. But Samir did not see it that way: "Yes! Yes! It is a real zawiya. We obtained the authorization". The financial aspect of the ceremony's organisation worried him, but he was pleased about the potential baraka that would flow into his home:

"I organise this party every year. Well, my wife organises it. I only finance it...! It is a significant investment. But I enjoy it, and it is mainly for the faith. Because this is what matters the most: there is some baraka, so it is a win in the end"

However, though he financed the ceremony, there was still an auction sale at the end of the evening. People could give whatever sum they wanted, and be offered some sweets wrapped in paper in exchange. The Issawi moqadem then pronounced some gratifying words and blessed the donor. But Samir was quite honest about it, telling me: "Yes there is a spiritual aspect, but it is also for the commercial side: all of this is very expensive, look, I even had to add 5000 dinars this morning, but it is also for the guests to participate, so this auction sale allows us to do that in a pleasant atmosphere".

Later in the night, in the car back to Oran, Sheikh Habri and two other fuqara talked about the healing party revealing their uneasiness. They addressed the various strategies used to monopolise baraka, making fun of Samir's bragging and ambiguous relationship to money and spirituality. Sheikh Habri had a moral stance:

"He is a fool. He was the host, but the moqadem did not even know his name. He is just a businessman, exploiting his wife's talents. And his bragging... He always claims that Abdel Qader Jilani came to him, in his dreams... But he is a fraud... If Jilani were here, he would be just behind him, and would chase him with a stick!"

Sheikh Habri's comments were quite critical, and also extended to his wife. He did not always consider these healers as "true mystics" and he was sceptical. The relationship between the sheikh and this couple brings out personal rivalries, but also revealed two contradictory conceptions of power, which are both credible and legitimate in Oran's context. Jamila was criticised by Sheikh Habri, but she had a good reputation among her fellows, and was considered a successful healer in Aïn el-Turck. It is in a competitive setting that these two conceptions of power face each other. These gifts, these medical and mystical abilities, enable those who acquire them to enhance their social status in the city. It was also the situation of my friend Hadj.

Hadj

Baraka's power generates desires among the population and can be put to the profit of social aspirations. Like Samir, Hadj - a sixty years old, unemployed man living with his sister (a famous lawyer in the city) - frequently evoked his talents of divination and medical gifts. The story behind his magic is interesting. Hadj had been frequenting Sheikh Habri and the zawiya for the last two years, but he did not consider himself a real follower of the zawiya. He had a "first" sheikh back in his youth years, whom he deeply admired, and he claimed to have received a part of his baraka after his death. He would always come to me and try to find out about my past and foresee my future, giving me names and numbers, trying to guess familial and personal stories. But most of his stories concerned his medical talents and his practice of "roqya" (a form of exorcism), curing people (mostly women) when traditional medicine was not efficient. He would come to the woman, put a hand on her head, recite some Qur'anic verses, and the lady would be cured in a few days' time. I spent a lot my time in the field with Hadj. His French was

very good (he had studied literature at the university of Oran) and we frequently had interesting conversations, on various issues. But it was important for him to show me that he was not only a follower, or a friend, of Sheikh Habri, and that he could also be his equal. Without evaluating his talents or spiritual power, his relationship with the zawiyas' community shows the social value of such abilities in Oran's society. In a society that highly regards values of labour and family, the power of baraka offered some prestige to this man. Hadj's story also puts in perspective the competition, the rivalries and jealousies, that the complex and ambiguous distribution of this spiritual power generates. Hadj's gifts were not unanimously praised within the Sufi community. Ali, Sheikh Habri's brother, though having strong friendship ties with Hadj, listened to his stories with contempt, and once offered his own sociological understanding of his friend's willingness to demonstrate spiritual skills:

"Hadj and Seddiq share a similar problem: they are both sick, and I do not see how sick people could cure other sick people. You know, the zawiya is like a small clinic, a spiritual clinic. People come here for real physical issues, of course, but many of them are also lonely, socially lost people, without a home, without a wife, without kids. And this is the situation of Hadj. He is a poor man. In France, he would be homeless. Here, in Algeria, with the Muslim culture, with the Arab culture, he is taken in by his family, he lives with his sister, because the system works like that... But you imagine that it is quite sad to claim having such gifts in these circumstances."

While interviewing Ali, I wondered why living a "miserable" life would prevent one from having spiritual talents? He completed his argument:

"Listen. It is not the fact of not having a house, a wife or a job that means that you cannot have this kind of skill. But having a gift, having some baraka, means that you can benefit from it yourself. Someone with this sort of life, this is not credible. It is like a sick doctor that asserts he can cure a disease that he could not cure himself. There is no logic at all"

Ali's illustrations and medical metaphors suggested that the economic and social context had a high impact on people's will to monopolise baraka. However, these comments were also to be understood in the light of a more general "spiritual" competition, as Ahmed and Ali Habri were considered as the main holders of spiritual power in this street of Maraval, and may thus see some followers as potential rivals. As it was mentioned in the first paragraph, Hadj was, during certain periods, very present at the zawiya, and his stories and remarks about his medical gifts would annoy the two

sheikhs. It was not only about the personal competition between them, but also because it challenged their more genealogical conception of baraka. It was a personal, as well as an ideological issue. On one hand, sheikhs coming from a lineage of Saints and gifted marabouts. On the other, individuals from ordinary families, looking to get into this prestigious field.

The examples of Jamila and Hadj are interesting because they contest the elitist view of inherited power, as it was supported by Sheikh Habri and his brother Ali. Neither of them have any noble title, nor any prestigious ascendance. History and genealogies do not matter, as it is their very ability to mobilise people who believe in their power that legitimises their power. What these stories point to is thus a belief in some immanent power, something that they possess and that they could develop, even though Hadj's power is also related to his personal history and to his links with his former sheikh. When we think of this horizontal, circulating power, we realise that the criticisms and doubts of the Habri brothers aim to stem the generous flow of such power. My relationship with Ahmed and Ali Habri, who were both trying to denigrate Hadj in front of me, reveal their fears of the nature of their power being contested.

V

A certain view of power and its cosmology

But I would like to go even further. This debate cannot be reduced to the question of the division of power, between those who would have some (the elites) and those who would not (the poor). The issue of charisma is pertinent, focusing on the personal/non-personal character of baraka, but it brings us to consider power only in terms of relationships between human beings. What is at stake here is a vision of the world, a cosmology. My argument, as I outlined it in the second section, is that baraka is not stable, it circulates, though it can also be captured, situated and localised. I first draw on the word's etymology and on theological parables to support this view, before using more academic anthropological examples.

In a old paper, Joseph Chelhod argued that baraka was "inherent to an object that symbolises affluence and prosperity" (1955: 70), with power offering strength and

fertility: "when a thing increases in number and volume, whatever its use, it is said to have some baraka" (1955: 80). Even a new-born baby or newly-wed will be said to have some baraka, as creations or actors of future human creations. Here, it is not a narrow use of the term "fertility". As Bloch shows, it is more in the sense of "fecundity" or "productiveness" (1982: 7). There are many other stories in the history of religion about the quantitative dimension of baraka. In Christian history, Jesus is known for its miracles, and notably for the "multiplication of the bread". Chelhod also evokes the story of "Salman the Persian", who was offered a golden ingot by Prophet Muhamad, transformed it in forty golden ouquiya, and gave them to his master in order gain freedom from slavery. The etymologic history of the word baraka also tends to exhibit this fertile, productive dimension. The root "b-r-k" in Literal Arabic expresses the idea of blessing. But it also conveys, in Semitic languages, the action of squatting, primarily used for animals, like camels (Cohen, 1928 in Chelhod, 1955), as there is in Arabic another word expressing kneeling for human beings, raka'a. But the two terms are obviously related. In the same way, in Algerian Dialectal Arabic, rekba means "knee"; and this use is thus still revealing of the semantic evolution of a baraka-rakiba metathesis. Rakiba also has another meaning; it can convey the action of copulating, of sexual intercourse, for both animals and human beings, and the kneeling position is thus associated with a sexual position (Chelhod, 1955). Cohen demonstrated that the sexual dimension of squatting was not unique to Arabic culture and languages, and that there was also a relationship between the knee and the creation of familial bonds in many other Indo-European languages. This link is relevant in this chapter because the knee is understood as a potent, powerful member, and is associated with the idea of strength and procreation (Cohen, 1928).

It is thus possible to argue that, before the spiritual meaning of blessing, the word baraka conveyed an idea of creating power; with fertile abilities for a father, and great posterity for a family (Chelhod, 1955). Chelhod saw the familiar image of a father with his children on his knees as a rite of recognition and adoption, putting them under his protection, and displaying their belonging to the family. But, more than a ceremony of adoption, Chelhod argues, it is a transmission of power: by blessing his children, the father "gives a part of his potent and mysterious strength that lives in him" (1955: 79). Islamic history has many other examples that confirm this bodily understanding of power transmission; Chelhod evokes the battle of Badr, during which a Muslim fighter kissed the stomach of Prophet Muhamad to acquire his baraka. The etymological history

reveals its association to notions of power, strength and vitality; and the familial example used by Chelhod highlights the protective dimension of baraka. In the same way that a father will place his children under his physical protection, a Sufi Sheikh can offer, with the blessing of the dhikr, divine protection to a family and their home, as we saw with Rania's call. Rania wanted to "purify" her home, and asked Sheikh Habri to come to her house with some of his fuqara, to share the power of the zawiya through a ceremony.

Other fascinating ethnographies support this understanding of baraka as a productive power. We find a similar association between blessing, holiness and fertility in Bloch's analysis of the Zafimaniry house (1995). He shows that the house is the symbol of marriage and that its aesthetics objectifies this relation. In this perspective, the "holy" house, where people go and ask for a blessing, is the house that "has successfully produced offspring" (1995: 80). It is also relevant because of the eternity and permanence of marriage that the symbolic representation of the house enables. With the house, marriage does not end with the physical death of the original couple; it transcends mortality. Moreover, beyond the relationship with fertility, it also gives us the opportunity to compare this large, decorated, "holy" house with the zawiya. The zawiya is also a concrete space, a house, a building, which grows over time and becomes more sophisticated. The Saint is there. Sidi Mohamed Hadj el Habri is present in the house. People come to pray, to reflect, to enjoy the baraka of the place. It is a fertile house. Spiritually: it continues, year after year, to produce generations of muridin and fuqara. And it is also part of social reproduction: women come to the zawiya, attend the dhikr ceremony and ask for the sheikh's help to create generative powers of kinship and fertility. They have children thanks to the Saint's baraka, but also with the help of Sheikh Habri, who gives precious advice on familial and conjugal issues.

In this perspective, the zawiya is a productive space, not only for its own community of students and followers, but also for the outside community, in Maraval, in Oran. The zawiya's baraka is not exclusive. Indarra, a Basque concept, has similar qualities, denoting strength, power, abundance, energy. Not only possessed by charismatic figures, but also by more conventional and ordinary things, it is "what makes all species grow" and "a vital quality that inheres in things and beings" (Ott, 1992: 193-194). In her ethnography, Ott highlights, like Ali Habri (Sheikh Ahmed's brother, mentioned above), the procreative dimension of indarra. She evokes a man who fathered thirteen children, being judged as having "too much indarra" and being "quite incapable

of controlling it” (1992: 209). Some people have baraka or indarra, and others do not. In this respect, linking power to abundance and prosperity, Ali makes a similar argument, and further shows the connection between baraka and a kind of cosmological idea of growth. Someone who has baraka also has creative power, and thus an ability to connect in a more profound way with the surrounding cosmos.

This relationship between baraka and growth and fertility should not be surprising for anthropologists of religion. The tomb of the ancestor, such as the shrine of the Muslim Saint, have long been analysed as sources of fecundity. In Watson’s description of Cantonese funerary rituals, the deceased’s daughters-in-law carry a green cloth (the Chinese colour that represents growth and fertility) and “are expected to rub their unbound hair against the coffin just prior to its removal from the village” (1982: 173). Watson explains that they expose themselves to the pollution of the dead to take on its fertility and be able to reproduce the lineage.

All these ethnographic examples are pertinent because they illustrate the properties of baraka and power. But does our definition not risk becoming too elusive? Can it really capture the essence of power? Are these concepts - mana, indarra or baraka - not too vague and fuzzy, as Geertz or Bourdieu deplored, mentioning the “almost empty essence of baraka” (Bourdieu: 1977 in Soares, 2004)? Probably, but it is because they all share a deep relationship with the cosmos, with their surrounding environment and Nature, as Anderson’s idea of power demonstrates. And it is because the will to power is the main ethos of life and the cosmos that this mystical power exhibits properties of productivity and fertility.

This definition enables me to easily interpret the baraka of objects, which was problematic with the personalised vision of power. How could we explain that non-living objects had “moral vividness”? Could an ebeya (Algerian dress) have “personal presence” and “force of character”? A zawiya, a house, a room, even food, can have baraka. A zawiya will have some baraka because of its connection with a tariqa, meaning that the building embodies the spiritual power of Saints and sheikhs who belong to the tariqa. Often, a shrine or a coffin, with the body of a Saint, is not very far. This is the case in the zawiya Habriya, where a particular room is devoted to the sacred dead body of Sheikh Habri's father. When people in Oran organise ceremonies in their homes, for

births or house-warming parties, they seek the blessing of religious figures; they want to purify their houses and make sure that their children have a good start in life.

One of my friends, Rania, once invited Sheikh Habri to come to her home, “with four fuqara”, to purify it, based on a vision that a healer had of her. The healer was a good friend of hers, and was asked a few days prior to cure her daughter, who did not feel good and thought she was being possessed by a djinn. She came to Rania’s place and the treatment was effective, but she insisted on the need to purify the flat, so that the family could live in better conditions. The ceremony took place on a Friday evening, and looked like a shorter version of a typical Friday “dhikr”: with the singing and reciting of Qur’anic verses, but without the discussion part. While we had dinner - an excellent couscous, biscuits and tea - they were all very silent. The recitation seemed to be enough to purify the house. This example shows how baraka is desired as a means of purification and protection for one’s home, and thus how buildings and places can be recipients of baraka. These rituals of purification also happen when a house is suspected of being bewitched. There were a few of them in Oran, which were often uninhabited. The action of sheikhs or healers can thus help restore baraka to the building.

Food also gives a good idea of baraka’s presence in non-human entities. As we will see in the following chapters, the mediation turn in the anthropology of religion showed the important role played by food in religion’s materiality (Boylston, 2013). And this chapter further supports the idea that the analysis of “the media of its materiality” (Engelke, 2012: 209) helps to better understand the relations and distribution of power (Hovland, 2018).

Chelhod (1955) mentions the codes of "Arabic" hospitality, with a man visiting a friend in his Syrian home, to illustrate the back and forth movement of baraka from the host to the guest. Focusing on the coffee offered to the man, he argues that it represents the abundance and prosperity of the host's home: "the etiquettes requires from the guest that, once he finished drinking, says: ‘may your coffee be permanent’, meaning, ‘may your house be always prosperous and protected from misfortune'" (1955: 70). The coffee is thus synonymous with abundance and prosperity. In Oran, the role played by food is crucial for understanding the dynamics of the circulation of baraka. From the milk served with couscous, to the tea, bread and dates, in some contexts food has a particular role in the dynamics of circulation. The example of the ebeya, a casual

traditional dress for men in Algeria, can also be used here, as an illustration of the spiritual power that some objects possess.

During my time of fieldwork, I was offered ebeyas. The first time was by Sheikh Habri, after a Friday dhikr, at the request of a follower. This follower, an old man, fond of philosophy (he frequently quoted Blaise Pascal), always asked me to dance during the ceremony, "you will know the truth if you dance with us"; and he wanted me to wear the ebeya for the same reason: "it will give you baraka, and you will be one of us". It was a sort of short ceremony when Sheikh Habri offered me the ebeya, and it was quite unusual for him to do this: "you have to know that it is an honour, I have never done this for a follower". Another Sheikh, from the tariqa Alawiya, on the seventh night of Mawlid, offered me a gandura (another different kind of dress for men) at the end of the dhikr. It is the story that I mentioned at the beginning of this thesis' introduction. I did not expect it, and it was a very solemn gift ceremony. Towards the end of the ceremony, the Sheikh came to me and discreetly told me: "You will soon have to get up. We would like to give you a gift. So you are going to stand up, and this man over there, the imam, will come and put a gandura on you". I accepted, of course, but it was a strange situation. This happened on the seventh night of the anniversary of Prophet Muhammad's birth, and the room was full of Sufi followers, all looking at me. I did not want to give the wrong impression, but it seemed like a conversion ceremony. We were standing up, the imam and I, in front of the assembly, as he puts the gandura on me. Something spiritual is transmitted through the gift, but the gift in itself possesses spiritual power. I had a brief talk with the Alawi Sheikh right after the ceremony, and he expressed a similar view:

"You will see, this gandura, which we offered you today, it will give you an aura. I wanted to make you this gift because there is a lot of good in you"

In these situations, the gandura acts as an open door. To wear it is to connect with this community, it is being part of a conversation, in a relation with these Sufi followers. I could thus personally experience how connected it made feel to the people in the zawiya. It was powerful. This dress did not have power on its own, but was instead polarised under a certain set of circumstances - the seventh night of the Mawlid, the party and ceremony, my presence as a special guest - which converted it into a social technology of inclusion. Baraka, in this perspective, is not only a certain type of power,

but a relation. A horizontal connection with the people, a vertical one with the history of these Saints and zawiyas. It is not just the holiness of saints that inhere in the children, families and objects they leave behind (Kugle, 2007) but their ability to connect and bound people together.

VI

The spiritual foundations of political power?

In this last section, I explain how this chapter's analysis of baraka sheds a new light on our understanding of political rituals, notably by looking at the political pilgrimages that Algerian politicians often undertake to increase their levels of legitimacy.

Weber's analysis, as Benedict Anderson showed, supported a certain kind of historical argument on the evolution and spread of rational-legal bureaucracy, and his influence on Clifford Geertz is obvious when one looks at his teleological argument on Islam, as a religion progressively going from a magical, maraboutic state to its modern, scripturalist version. Anderson argues that "in Geertz's description of Islamic evolution in Morocco", "the rise of scripturalists at the expense of marabouts can be seen as the ascendancy of religious rationalism vis-à-vis magical religion" (1990: 76). In Weber and Geertz, ideas of progress and historical movement thus prevail, but Anderson demonstrates that there can be breaks and ruptures in such historical movements, arguing that, "although the older idea of Power may be residual in societies dominated by religious or secular rationalism, it is likely to emerge into prominence under conditions of severe stress and disturbance of routine assumptions - when institutions explained and legitimized in terms of the hegemonic cultural mode appear to be breaking down or to be in decay" (1990: 77). He further adds in a footnote that "it should come at no surprise in this perspective that the religious rationalism of the scripturalists in Morocco was superseded, during the crisis of decolonization, by the more ancient "maraboutic" tradition in the person of Sultan Mohammed V" (ibid.).

Without wanting to make anachronisms, and knowing that I cannot compare current Algerian context with much older Moroccan situations, I would like to describe

the re-emergence of this older idea of power in Algeria in a context that saw the weakening of the legitimacy of the Algerian regime's power (which was based on the mythology of the revolution and its independent party, the FLN) since the 1980s. A good indicator of people's decaying confidence in Algerian political institutions is the level of abstention in local and national elections. Facing its legitimacy crisis in the 1980s, the regime opened itself to multipartism in 1989, under the presidency of Chadli Bendjedid. The Algerian people then voted against the government's party in 1990, and again to reject terrorism in 1995. Since this period of political instability, hope for change turned into large popular disenchantment, and the Algerian people have massively abstained on most elections (see Hamadouche and Zoubir, 2009).

More recently (March 2019), the mass protests in numerous Algerian cities, after President Bouteflika announced his will to run in presidential elections (for a fifth mandate), show the Algerian regime's weaknesses and lack of popular legitimacy. In this period of institutional distrust, I argue that it is not surprising to see Algerian political leaders have been trying to rely on maraboutic traditions to offset their lack of legitimacy. We can use the example of political pilgrimages, the "zawiya tours" that many of them undertake before an important election. I rely in this section on one particular case - which happened when I was in the field - in which the former minister of Energy, Chakib Khelil, a potential candidate to Bouteflika's succession, suddenly came returned from his American exile to visit zawiya and have the Saints' blessings. I thus rely, partly, on a personal reading of charisma and baraka to understand this political phenomena, but I argue that it is only one piece of the puzzle.

Abdelaziz Bouteflika, the current President of Algeria, was elected in 1999. This election took place in a context of violence, at the end of a bloody civil conflict, and there was an important need for national reconciliation. During the year he was elected, he organised a "tour" of zawiya in all wilayas (regions) of the country to meet with sheikhs and their Saints. Newspapers mentioned the "baraka" of Sufi Saints and the blessing that they would offer the future president. This tour was supported by the major association of zawiya, the "National Organisation of Zawiya" (ONZ), and the press believed that it had a significant impact on Bouteflika's popularity and credibility (El Watan, 12/04/2016: 9). This national organisation was created a few years ago, as seen in chapter 1, and was aimed at offering a supporting base for the regime, together with other associations. The Rassemblement National Démocratique (RND), the second most

important political party in Algeria, was also founded in this perspective. It could support the main party, the FLN, while giving the impression of an efficient multiparty system.

Bouteflika went on these kinds of tours for most of his electoral campaigns, after the first successful one in 1999. For his reelection campaign, he made his candidacy official at the zawiya Rahmaniya, and had received the sheikhs' blessing in Djelfa for his fourth electoral win, in 2014. Chakib Khelil, a former Energy Minister, and a long-time friend of the President, made a similar attempt from March to June 2016, while I was in the field. He had been living in exile in the USA since 2010, due to corruption scandals that were legally threatening him in Algeria, and his tour of zawiya was probably planned by the current government to clear him from these affairs; many commentators, in the national press, even argued that it was "a preparation from the former minister to succeed to Bouteflika" (El Watan, 3/04/16). The smokescreen was generally criticised by the written press, but was supported by many television stations, even privately-owned ones. On the first days of his tour, *Liberté*, a liberal newspaper, used the following title to describe the situation: "Zawiyas for blessing, TVs for promotion" (4/04/16). Though most zawiya did not support this initiative - including the Habriya and the UNZA (the new version of the ONZ, who supported Bouteflika from 1999 to 2014) - these tours illustrate the influence of zawiya and the appealing power of their sheikhs' baraka. I once had the opportunity to interview a local political figure in Oran, Kamel, a university professor, who told me that most politicians truly believed that sheikhs could offer them luck and favour their political ambitions with their blessing:

"Potential candidates, like Khelil, they are looking for zawiya, because they are a symbol, because they have political influence, it is true. But it is not only that. They have a spiritual power, and that, in politics, when you are a politician, you believe in it, of course, it is not only influence that matters"

We should consider this tour as a ritual that takes place over an extended period of time. Anthropologists have long shown that ritual helps legitimise authority (Turner, 1967; Bloch, 1989; Rappaport, 2000). Though a ritual can enable agency and creativity (see chapter 5), it is also a tool that can be used by the powerful to discipline or manipulate individuals. The politician goes from one state to another, from the position

of a mediocre politician to that of an official candidate (and potential elected figure). But he might need something that goes beyond the political: a supernatural, divine legitimacy. The legitimacy is here supposed to be provided by the Saints' baraka. Moreover, it shows that democratic legitimacy is not sufficient for these politicians, or that it is not effective, especially in these periods of political instability. The legitimacy of democratic elections is challenged, as they need something more.

This brings us back to the initial question: why? Why do sheikhs have baraka, and why would it legitimise (and also generate) a person's power? One mistake would be to think only in terms of religious legitimacy. It is of course important. The Algerian regime is a republic, not a theocracy, but Islam has been an official element of the state's identity since the independence, and it is thus not surprising to see professional politicians seeking some kind of religious blessing.

But the professional politician also needs democratic legitimacy. Not only does he want to show that he has God's blessing, he must also prove that his political ambitions are supported by his people. He must connect with them, and I therefore argue that the Saints' baraka is also, and maybe more, ordinary people's baraka, and that in this perspective it can help individuals, such as these politicians, connect again with the Algerian people. Instead of an aristocratic view of baraka, reserved for religious elites and a few select individuals, baraka can be seen as a symbol of the ordinary and the power of the demos, which politicians need, if they want to show that they truly understand the needs of the nation. The professional politician is often depicted as an individual that is detached from common, everyday realities; and rituals often help change this perception.

In his ethnography of French political rituals, Abélès (1988) described how the inauguration of a train station in Nevers by president François Mitterrand is representative of his link with the provincial land where he was elected for the first time, as a young member of the national assembly. In this article, Abélès also analyses Mitterrand's annual pilgrimage to the rock of Solutré, in the heart of Bourgogne, on the Whit Monday, a ritual made "to relive in memory the war years when, newly escaped from Germany, he went into hiding nearby" (1988: 396). It is a fascinating example because it is a popular, republican ritual with a strong religious dimension. The French president walks every year to ascend the high point of Solutré with his friends, "the

faithful”, dressed with “rustic simplicity”, and shows his attachment to “the values of the soil” (ibid.). But this event also has an important vertical dimension, not only because of the transcendental values that it highlights (Republic, Nation, Land) but also because of the Christian symbolism of this day of Pentecost, which commemorates “the effusion of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles and the disciples of Christ” (1988: 398).

Another French ritual is the presence of the president, every year, at the Paris’ International Agriculture Show. The president arrives, shakes farmers’ hands, touches cows and eats local charcuterie. It is a symbol of the president’s connection with the land and soil, in a country where food and gastronomy are important elements of national culture. In Algeria, the baraka is not in the charming Normande cow, but rather in the old Sufi sheikhs, not far from a shrine or a zawiya, and bearing with it an “authentic” national religious tradition. Paradoxically, it is interesting to interpret this moment from this angle: the politician’s meeting with the zawiya’s sheikh is maybe more the encounter with the human world than with a divine one. In this perspective, is there a shift in the source of baraka?

William Mazzarella, in his book on mana, quotes Eric Santner, who says that sovereignty is “excorporated”: “it is now normatively supposed to reside not so much in the singular bodies of kings as in the distributed flesh of the people” (Mazzarella, 2017: 162). He completes this point by mentioning Shils’ idea that “modern democracies have not so much witnessed a comprehensive withering of the sacred, what Weber (following Friedrich Schiller) called disenchantment, as a simultaneous attenuation and generalization of charisma” (ibid.). It does not bring us to leave out the baraka and transcendental aura of charismatic leaders, but rather to take into consideration the immanent charisma of peoples and communities, an idea that I will address further in the following chapters.

Despite the provocative title of this chapter, power in this Muslim society is neither entirely immanent or transcendental. It is a dialectical relationship. Spiritual *puissance* may come from outside and from within, from above and from below; and this ambivalence makes it an attractive tool for political power. As Max Weber argued, the legitimacy of (political) power can rely on traditions and sacred institutions; and I described in this last section a dialogue between revolutionary, republican institutions

(the war of independence, its revolutionary flavour and the FLN) and religious, mystical ones (Algerian zawiyas, shrines and Muslim saints), which I all consider as religious “affects”; a view that I will further develop in chapter 4. In this respect, I also argued that such legitimacy, in democratic contexts, could be based on power’s ability to connect with ordinary people. Although Benedict Anderson argues that religion and political nationalism are inherently opposite imaginations and practices of power it is clear from the case of baraka, and of these French rituals, that they are not. Religion can contain a mobile, immanent imagination of a community bound by divine power. It can provide the foundation for a fused political-religious imagination.

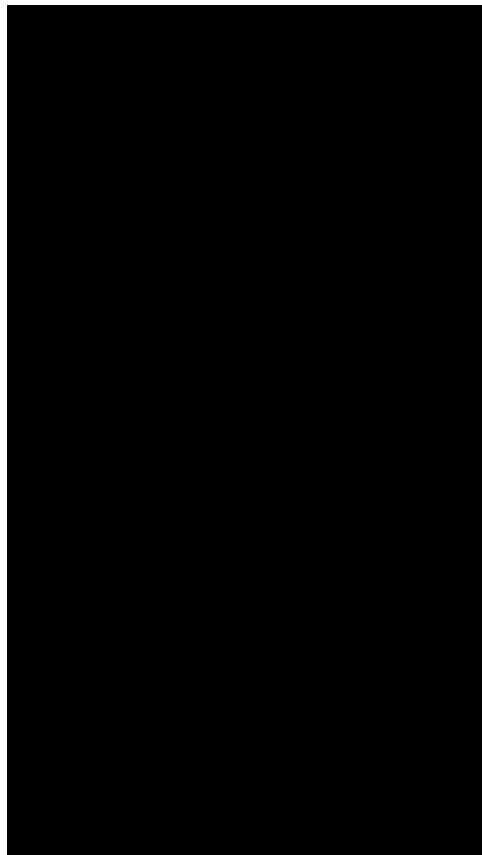


Fig 3. Sheikh Ahmed Habri. His family tree is behind him.

CHAPTER 3

God's gifts to Maraval

Power, baraka and territories

The first day of Ramadan ends. It is 7.30pm. Together with Sheikh Habri, we leave Maraval and head the city centre. It is time to prepare for the evening, to go find some “chechia”, a delicious cake made of semolina, sugar and almonds that people eat with tea after supper. In the car, with the windows open, this small trip is a good introduction to the city's identity in this month of fasting. The city is unified in public spaces of solidarity. We pass by these various areas of the town where “charity” is distributed. They are plentiful. Nightfall has not fallen yet, but everywhere, on squares and pavements, tables and chairs are arranged. We generally find two bottles on each table, - water and soda -, and some bread. And people start to gather in these places. “They are poor”, Sheikh Habri tells me, “they do not have anything to eat, so they come here when the night falls, during the whole time of Ramadan”. “Charity” is also organised at a smaller level, with lots of families that spontaneously offer meals to the most impoverished. These families seem to be quite well known in Oran, as we can see groups of people, queueing in front of particular houses and blocks of flats. In the city centre, streets are overcrowded. So many cars, tightly parked, packing the pavements. Each family wants its small bag of “chechia”. We park the car and go to a popular bakery, “L'Algéroise”, where people are in line to get their bag. Kids are excited. On the homeward journey, we pass by the square of Sidi Snoussi, where Sheikh Habri has his office, and where the (zawiya's) religious association also organises a system a food distribution. The place is ideal because the square is large, and right in the middle of a very popular area in Maraval, at a crossroads crowded with shops cafes and bakeries. The association has volunteers, who prepare the food in the large room in front of the Sheikh's office, which usually serves as a classroom during the rest of the year. Food resources come from donations from companies and industrial firms, and are also financed by public subsidies, thereby linking religious and economic productivity.

People in Oran consume a lot of bread, and each day bakers come to Sidi Snoussi and offer baguettes. When there is extra food or too many baguettes, volunteers sometimes canvas the streets of the area to hand out the leftovers. Sidi Snoussi is the central place where this system of food distribution takes place, but there are two other sites where the association is active in Oran: Boulanger and Aïn el-Turck. Two lorries head there each day to deliver large stocks of food.

In this chapter, I explore the connections between a sheikh's power, a zawiya, its extended territory and their social philanthropy. By describing and analysing the philanthropic dimension of the zawiya Habriya, I extend the discussion on the nature of power. When this power is transcendental and transmitted by prestigious ancestors, it is accompanied by a sense of duty and social responsibility. When this power is related to a territory, to a population and to community practices, it circulates from space to space, through rituals (the dhikr ceremony), with both people and objects spreading it. In this form power does more than simply legitimise the moral worth of a sheikh such as Sheikh Habri. It creates a flow of power around a community that forms a certain kind of ideal sociality. Volunteers at Sidi Snoussi are very active during Ramadan, followers from the Habriya community prepare meals and treats for the dhikr ceremony, the zawiya, and with the help of Talabi and Mehdi, welcome the poor and "feed souls".

I

Power, responsibility and ancestral duty: transcendental and immanent perspectives

Many studies have shown that it is common for Sufi orders to play a similar social role in their community to that of the zawiya in Oran. In Pakistan, Rehman and Lund-Thomsen (2014) analysed the supply of social support by Sufi institutions with a case study of a Sufi "lodge" in the city of Jhang. They use Langford's definition of social support as "assistance and protection given to others, especially to individuals" (Langford et al.: 1997 in Rehman and Lund-Thomsen, 2014). They make a distinction between four different types of social support that are particularly present in the literature: "emotional support (affect, esteem, concern), appraisal support (feedback, affirmation), informational support (suggestion, advice, information), and instrumental

support (aid in labour, money, time)” (Israel: 1985 in Rehman and Lund-Thomsen, 2014). In the case of the Sufi lodge, they add another category: spiritual training. They thus describe how disciples were offered advice on their professional life or postgraduate studies (informational/appraisal support), jobs or direct financial aid (instrumental support), help with everyday life issues (emotional/psychological support) and spiritual training. Their article aimed to contribute to research on the “role of charity as a source of social support in the Islamic world” (2014: 379). I would like to extend this approach and delve a little more deeply into the role, both historically and in the present, of religious institutions’ creation of sociality. I will explore how this relates to a particular conception of power, worth and social obligation.

In Algeria, the social activities of Sufi orders have always been important. The historical literature generally depicts three distinct periods in the history of zawiyas since the beginning of colonisation. A first one during the colonial period, where zawiyas and marabouts were very involved in their local communities, maintaining Islamic traditions, providing religious education, reconciling social conflicts, etc (see Scheele, 2007). A second era, after national independence and with the advent of the nation-state: political leaders kept zawiyas out of the public sphere for a long time, they were no longer great centres of education, but thanks to their underground presence they maintained a strong social influence. The third period is depicted as a time where the rise of modern civic organisations and Islamist movements in the public sphere tends to go hand in hand with the decline of the sheikhs’ legitimacy and activities in the social sphere.

Parallel research on Islamist movements has also explored the social support they offer in the region and more generally in the Muslim world. Maarouf (2010), for example, compares and contrasts the social welfare work of maraboutic sites and Islamic minorities in Morocco, and shows how they both “accommodate marginalised individuals and juvenile delinquents in addition to its anomic educated and employed populations” (2010: 657). His argument focuses mainly on drug addicts and smokers, and shows how Islamist self-discipline contrasts with less rigorous maraboutic habits. He takes the example of a Salafi carpenter who trained seven teenagers from the margins of Moroccan society and forced them to give up their “life of vagabondage” and “adhere to a fanatic Salafi conduct” (2010: 657). I did not encounter drug or alcoholic addicts

during fieldwork, but I came across a few followers who did not or could not respect society's social norms. Some were sick, some were defined as "mad", others just did not have any family, did not marry and were isolated individuals.

These ethnographies, together, bring us to consider the question of producing, giving and distributing a life-sustaining form of power. One way to pursue this theme is to examine the sheikh's values, looking at his discourse on action and responsibility, and I argue that the zawiya's action on and with society also derives from the sheikh's conception and practice of baraka. This baraka gives him power but also an amplified sense of responsibility.

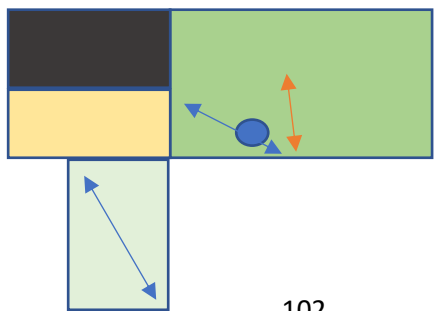
Because of his baraka, the zawiya's sheikh has the responsibility to house the poor, feed them and take care of their needs. A Sufi sheikh does not only have a spiritual responsibility to God, he must help others and make the world a better place. In Mittermaier's ethnography of a Sufi "khidma" in Egypt (2014), a sheikh explains to Nura's mother, who started the khidma, that "it is not enough to pray to God: you need to do something; you need to give" (2014: 58), telling her: "Open your home, give food to people, give them something to drink" (ibid.). The Egyptian khidma looks like the Algerian zawiya, and Nura is evocative of Sheikh Habri, even though he does not really cook himself: "She cooks for her guest everyday" and "takes the practice of giving food to be the very core of Islam" (ibid.). In Maarouf (2010), the creating power of the Sufi saint "Mulay Brahim" is also highlighted, he who has the power "to dig springs and make water flow in his own region" (2010: 661). Because "he creates life by proxy", he has "the extraordinary power to ameliorate the social conditions of the poor and the oppressed" (ibid.). In this respect, what often struck me with Sheikh Habri was his engaging discourse on the Sufi sheikh's responsibility to be involved in "this world's affairs" and to be a man of action. In his view, "a Sufi sheikh cannot remain isolated from the world", "he has to act to improve people's lives".

This discourse must be understood from two perspectives. Firstly, he often felt that he had to justify his involvement in the city's political affairs. In the first few months after my arrival, he did not tell me that he was a member of the RND, the second most important political party in Algeria, and I had the impression that he did not entirely assume these activities. It was thus important for him to put in perspective the popular

image of the ascetic Sufi master, withdrawn from the city with his small, bounded community, in the mountains or in the countryside. He had to compete with this rival understanding of the Sufi tradition. He often took the example of Abdel Qader, considered by many Algerians, today, as the “father” of the Algerian nation, who was a Sufi Qadiri follower yet played an important political and military role in the 19th century, in the first early wars against the French. Secondly, the importance of the genealogical lineage and the weight of his sheikh’s familial past - which I could observe with the multiple references made everyday to the father and grandfather’s stories and actions - enable us to understand how this sense of duty is directed towards a higher, transcendental world. The Sufi sheikh’s social works are not only motivated by compassion and empathy towards the destitute, but are also encouraged by the feeling of a moral debt to his noble ancestors; Sheikh Habri’s management of the zawiya was strongly influenced by his perception of his ancestors’ personalities, values and ethics. It is in this perspective that I consider that responsibility and power are connected. The medical care that the sheikh offers at the zawiya is a good example of the services that derive from this sense of responsibility.

Sheikh Habri’s medical care

At the Habriya, the sheikh cures people and advises them. He is a popular “doctor”, and people listen to him with great attention. The zawiya is thus a medical space, first. Then, an office, a space for consultation. People sit on the office’s bench like others would lie down on the couch of a therapist. People do not have to pay, but they generally do. Because they are not “sacred” spaces, you can keep your shoes on in these areas. In the following plan of the zawiya’s main room (in green), where you can also see the sheikh’s office (in blue), the two arrows delineate these two spaces. In black is the shrine’s room and in orange the place where women sit when they wait for the sheikh. The blue circle represents the chair on which people sit when they get cured by Sheikh Habri. The red arrow is the thin screen used by Sheikh Habri to protect women from the masculine gaze in the main room.



Every day, from 8 am to 7 pm, Sheikh Habri thus mainly provides two kinds of services: he offers medical assistance and cures many types of diseases; he gives advice and counsels people on various everyday matters. People in Maraval see him as a religious authority and as a wise man, and thus often come to see him looking for a neutral, impartial judge (more details are given on this in chapter 5).

People who come for the sheikh's baraka are not necessarily Sufi followers. Visiting Sheikh Habri is often a good alternative to the traditional visit to a biomedical doctor when one is feeling ill. The "maraboutic", medical role of Sheikh Habri is not surprising, as many sheikhs and moqadems fulfil this function in zawiya or near Saints' shrines. In cities, in villages, these marabouts often have their own medical specialities. At the Habriya, as described in chapter 6, people mostly come when they have back and hip pains. As shown on the plan, sick people come to the zawiya and sit on the chair, facing the kitchen, in front of the main door. But medical work is not restricted to this space. Sheikh Habri often moves around bringing his baraka with him to many different areas of the city. Everywhere in Oran, there are men, women, objects, flats, houses to cure or purify. People in Maraval generally come on foot to the zawiya, but they can also call Sheikh Habri on the phone. It is easy to come and see him for such problems, and the cost is low.

Sheikh Habri does not have a fixed rate and accepts whatever people want to give him. This too was the policy of his great-grandfather. Sheikh Habri justifies this policy for three different reasons. First, he finds a moral justification in the non-fixed price, because it means that anybody can see him whatever their income. Secondly he argues that this keeps the act of curing entirely spiritual. This is important to prevent the healing from being affected by financial concerns. Sheikh Habri wanted to make a pure gift, but at the same time did not intend to insult people if they wanted to enter a relation of reciprocity through a financial payment. Thirdly, Sheikh Habri offers a practical reason, to protect himself. Sometimes a cure or a Sheikh's magic does not work, and when someone spent a considerable amount of money, they may denounce him to the police or justice courts.

To understand Sheikh Habri's concepts of gifts and prices, it is important to contextualise these in a more general discourse on human responsibility and action in

the sensible world. Sheikh Habri is a very unique individual, with a strong character and personal ethics. But we can associate these personal values with a certain Sufi understanding of the world. The idea of individual responsibility is very present in Sufi traditions. Human beings must edge closer to divine perfection. By trying to imitate God, they are called to “take on the qualities of God” and “to approximate God’s care” (Kugle, 207: 32). We can interpret Sheikh Habri’s pricing policy in relation to these Sufi ethics. He did not want to be considered as a simple trader.

With his ancestors’ baraka, he had the duty to use the saint’s power to act for the good. Medical care is encompassed in such a project of Godliness. This concept of healing as coming from divine power brings us back to a transcendental, vertical understanding of power. Having talked for months with Sheikh Habri, I quickly realised that he had a strong sense of connection with his great-great-grandfather. It was often so intense that when he spoke of his ancestor’s actions and values it was as if he had known him personally so intimate and present were his comments. As mentioned above he often used his ancestor’s stories to justify his own actions as well. His vertical ties to his ancestor bound him to access to a godliness that he enacted in the world in part through healing. This is why his pricing system could not be that of the mundane world of trade. Sheikh Habri’s invocation of his ancestor also show how memory, power and responsibility are connected. To remember his ancestor was also to make himself into a powerful, just man.

But the source of power, as we saw it in the previous chapter, is not only transcendental, and the argument developed in chapter 2, with the idea of a circulating, diffuse power, will bring us to look at charity and social works from a different perspective. My ethnographic material and this vision of immanent power will enable me to support Mittermaier’s argument, developed in an article on Islamic voluntarism in Egypt (2014), where she makes a distinction between a concept of compassion, “with strong Christian, liberal, and humanist connotations”, and a “practice of dutiful giving” that she observed with her Muslim interlocutors in Cairo (2014: 519).

She considers that this Christian notion of charity “reinscribes the hierarchical, one-sided relationship between donor and recipient” (2014: 527), as an action taking place between a compassionate volunteer and a suffering soul. By contrast, the kind of religious duty she evokes “highlights interdependence” (2014: 520), with a “complex triadic system of mediation - between God, donor and recipient” (2014: 527). Indeed, in

her view, her informants are often less interested in engaging in a relationship with the other than trying to interact with God. She does not draw a fixed portrait, people's motivations and intentions are unstable. But Mittermaier shows that God's position in this interdependent relationship varies; sometimes, giving to the poor is giving to God, or even being with God, - so God is assimilated to the recipient -, other times it is the donor that "is merely a medium for God's generosity" (2014: 526). My aim in this chapter, however, is not to assimilate my interlocutors to Mittermaier's Egyptian volunteers, but to offer another perspective on her conception of religious duty. I argue that this conception of duty depends on the existence of a circulating, diffuse power - as evoked in the previous chapter - in which the idea of an omnipresent God is preponderant. We can indeed see that God is in many places. He does not only keep the donor's spirit, - giving him divine power or making him his mediator -, but he is also the recipient of this power.

In the following section, I am thus going beyond the transcendental view linking power and social responsibility by exploring the "triadic system of mediation" behind the zawiya's dhikr ceremony. By describing the role and presence of God in food sharing, in line with the previous chapter, I analyse the horizontal exchanges taking place between God, donors and recipients in the circulation of food in the zawiya, notably between more focused phases of "remembrance" of God. Looking at these phases of food sharing as being integral to the dhikr ceremony enables me to argue that the human-divine relationship is being constantly "re-membered" (Boylston, 2013: 271). It also gives me the opportunity to illustrate how the zawiya's community, beyond the question of the sheikh's power, generates and distributes its baraka.

II

Food for the body, God for the soul: the fuqara's baraka

"Bismillah", "in the name of God". On Fridays, followers generally come at the zawiya after the prayer at the mosque ("zuhr"). Couscouses are brought for the lunch. One or two are prepared by the Sheikh's wife, and the others (between 4 and 6 large plates in total) by some of the guests. It is a pleasure for followers to bring the couscous that they prepared beforehand, and it is also an excellent way to give back to the zawiya.

After a Friday ceremony at the zawiya, one's stomach, soul, and heart should be fulfilled. And it is thus an honour to be included in this spiritual circuit of circulation by providing the food that will be shared among fellow friends and followers. When there is more food than needed, Sheikh Habri always finds a way to give the leftovers to a follower or someone in need. Once, for example, there were construction workers outside, and he asked Talabi to give them the couscous plate. These practices continue outside the periods of grand feasting. The main free service that the zawiya offered was providing food at lunch, every day, every week without interruption (except during Ramadan). The meal was generally cooked by the sheikh's wife, sometimes by Talabi when she could not do it. Between three and six of us frequently had lunch there. We were sitting on the carpets, with one or two small tables set up. Talabi, Mehdi and I formed the first circle, the ones who were at the zawiya almost every day. Then, there was a second circle, with Shlif, Hadj and Belgacem. Shlif came very often, though Hadj and Belgacem were less regular.

From the perspective of a "collective" meal, "commensality", the sociological and anthropological literature has long been focusing on the community aspect of the event, exploring the link formed by individuals when they share a meal. By finding themselves in the same place, by eating the same food, people create a bond and enter into a social relation. Commensality has the ability to both federate and exclude; it can unify people and at the same time generate boundaries between groups (Douglas, 1972). For the Ethiopian Orthodox Christian with whom Tom Boylston worked, it is "the starting point of daily ethics. Eating together is the first sign of community belonging" (2013: 260). Even though I can use this understanding of meals as acts of community belonging to analyse the sharing of food at the zawiya, I do not focus in this section on human to human relations but rather consider the presence and role of God in these moments. As this chapter is looking at the zawiya's distribution of power, I propose to see food as a mediation of God's presence and as an expression of baraka's potential. God's presence in the world, through the medium of food, seems even more controversial in Islam than it is in the Christian tradition - as exemplified by the debate on the symbolic/tangible manifestation of God in the Eucharist between Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant churches. Though the Islamic God is often considered as an all-powerful, transcendental figure, he still manifests in the sensible world and people act and speak in his name, notably when they are about to eat. "Bismillah", "in the name of God", as

my friends would say at the start of the meal. Following Mittermaier's argument on the "economies of baraka", I show in this section that the zawiya, like the world, is "full of baraka" and that "God's generosity is boundless" (2013: 285).

In the zawiya, it was interesting to observe that Sheikh Habri made a definite distinction between those who were clear outsiders, who were left behind, and those who did not make any effort to join and participate in their family's work, while they had the opportunity to do it. Consequently, he did not treat Talabi and Mehdi on the one hand, and Shlif and Hadj on the other hand, in the same way. For him, Talabi had no home and Mehdi was stricken with illness, and they were thus two legitimate fuqara. Conversely, Ahmed and Shlif had wives or sisters at home to have a familial meal with. The word fuqara (from the singular faqir) is pertinent to understand because it has two different meanings in this context. It is used by Sheikh Habri to name his followers, the people who regularly come to see him, either during the week or for the Friday ceremony. It literally means "poor" in modern Arabic, but it can be compared to the word "miskin", meaning "in need" or "destitute". Mittermaier contrasts passive and active poor, the passive are "those who ask for nothing" (the faqîr) and the active, "those who beg" (2014: 65). Other words are used to refer to a Sheikh's follower, such as the term "murid", but it is more adequate for a student, so it is very different. It can be argued that people coming to the zawiya are spiritually poor and want to feed their souls. The word "poor" must thus not be understood in its financial dimension. The zawiya is a productive space not only from a materialist perspective, by filling people's stomachs with couscous and dates, but by providing songs and prayers that feed their "poor" souls. As Sheikh Habri once told me, "the zawiya is here for both the belly and the heart".

In this respect, he often spoke about Algerians' special relationship to food. When he wanted to highlight that a person came to the zawiya or an evening party just to have a good meal, he used to say: "for us, it is always the same, the bread or the nation ("le pain ou la patrie"), and at the end we know what to choose!". It was a frequent joke he made, but at the same time, he did not appreciate when people abused of the zawiya's hospitality. He was often annoyed by the behaviour of his friend Hadj, reproaching him for his opportunism. I once did not see Hadj for two consecutive months, and I wondered where he was, if he went travelling or was abroad. Sheikh Habri had a straightforward answer: "when I went to Marseille, Ali replaced me, and did not prepare any meal for

lunch for a week. When Hadj and Belgacem got used to it, they left and now they do not come to the zawiya anymore. The bread or the country! It is always the same thing”. In his view, people who are only driven by the carnal element of feasting at the zawiya do not behave ‘properly’; they do not understand the spiritual dimension of food sharing.

In a similar perspective, in Mittermaier’s ethnography of a Sufi khidma in Egypt, one of her informants, Nura, draws on “a Qur’anic understanding according to which poverty refers to the human condition more broadly” (2014: 65). It is why the distinction between active and passive poor is interesting. Nura refers to a verse (35: 15) that mentions human beings as those “in need of God”, that is, “poor toward God” (al-fuqara’ illa Allah), contrasting the human condition with that of God, who is “rich and self-sufficient (al-ghani)” (ibid.). Mittermaier thus argues that the category of “the poor” should not (only) be understood from an economic or material perspective, and that the people who come to the khidma are driven by spiritual needs. Like Sheikh Habri, Nura “serves food to whoever walks through her door” and she “expects nothing in return, not even gratitude” (ibid.).

Nura and Sheikh Habri’s examples show that the zawiya, by producing and distributing food, satisfies both physical and spiritual needs. In chapter 2, I mooted the power of the dhikr ceremony, which was transmitted through a feeling of communion with the divine, and my data points to the way the puissance of these meals relies on similar mechanisms. These special meals are made for (couscous, biscuits) and sometimes during (tea) the dhikr ceremony. Sheikh Habri always insists on the importance of these moments of relaxation and tasting. The followers rest between more focused phases of the ceremony. They savour the moment, enjoying sweets with a glass of tea, talking about everyday issues with friends. Sheikh Habri, and the zawiya, takes care of their followers, imitating God’s care for its creatures. God takes care of them, and is not only present in their words and songs, but also in these products of earth, which they consume. As living creatures, human beings are non-finite, growing and declining beings, and the presence of God helps with filling people’s bodies and souls. Everybody is poor from this perspective; the “faqir”, the poor, the destitute, in the world of zawiyas, are universal. God’s power is not accessible, but the zawiya, with its saints, its sheikh, its neighbourhood and active community, is one of its creative media.

These moments of discussion and relaxation, between the more focused phases of the ceremony where people sing and “remember” the name of God, are very important. From a materialist perspective, they are opportunities for the fuqara to rest and relax, to let off steam and regain some energy. Singing and dancing are very physical activities, where people’s bodies are being tested. But it is necessary to go beyond this materialist understanding to comprehend the other meaning of these moments. Rather than treating them as secondary phases of the dhikr ceremony, or even as moments taking place outside the ceremony, I would like to argue that they are integral to it. When we think of the dhikr, we indeed often focus on the prayer and the speaking-singing phase - the “remembrance of God, the incantation of God’s name” (Werbner, 1998: 103). It is in these moments that the potential for communion with God seems at its fullest. Yet the small feasts taking place after such acts of remembrance are equally important. The followers regain the energy that they will spend after, to remember the names of God. They absorb the food’s baraka that they will then give back to “the Creator”. Easting and expelling. It is a continuous, eternal exchange between God and the faqir.

It is not surprising to see that, in Boylston’s analysis of Ethiopian Christian practices, the feast held on a saint’s annual holiday is known as “zikkir” (2013: 270), and Wendy James and Michael Lambek also previously drew the parallel with the Arabic term (in Boylston, 2013). For Sheikh Habri, the role of food sharing in the dhikr was crucial, - he was often annoyed when these moments were marginalised in the ceremonies that he attended in other zawiyas -, and the organisation of the food distribution, - from tea preparation to the offering of biscuits -, was generally managed by the zawiya’s key, charismatic personalities, like Bachir or Mohammed, one of the eldest members of the community. In this perspective, eating the food is “actualizing, - re-membering, re-constituting - the human-divine relationship” (Boylston, 2013: 271). And this different understanding of the dhikr also further supports Mittermaier’s idea of “interdependence” between God, donors and recipients (2014), illustrating one of the many ways divine power circulates in the zawiya.

This analysis of the spiritual dimension of food sharing enabled me to move my lens from the Sufi sheikh to the zawiya’s community. I will continue along that path and will now look at the role played by the zawiya’s extended area. In Oran, when the time of Ramadan comes, a support system sets up in the city to assist people who do not have families to break the fast with. At the level of the zawiya, the square of Sidi Snoussi,

where the office of Sheikh Habri is, is used to welcome and feed between 50 and 100 people each evening. Sheikh Habri was very proud to tell me that the Habriya was one of the only zawiyas in Oran to keep this tradition alive during the Ramadan:

“The other zawiyas, in the city, they do not do that. The Taybia, for example, they do the prayer, the five prayers, there are sick people too that come for the writing and so forth, and they welcome many groups of people for their wa’da, but they do not provide food at every lunch or for Ramadan as we do”

The square of Sidi Snoussi is emblematic of the zawiya’s relationship with its neighbourhood, Maraval. The zawiya Habriya is not an isolated unit and its power and social activities ultimately depend on its lasting connection with the surrounding environment. In the following section, I focus on the question of labour and rely on Simone Weil’s notion of “rootedness” (1943) to analyse the circuit of relations and exchanges taking place between the Sufi sheikh, the zawiya’s followers and its territory.

III

Rootedness, work and power: connecting to a place and to the world

Simone Weil’s idea of “rootedness” (*enracinement*) will enable me to explore the connection between power (puissance) and territory. It will allow us to better understand how the sheikh’s power also derives from his connection with the zawiya’s extended territory and to explain why the zawiya is a space of vitality and divine communion for those who work there. In *The Needs for Roots* (*L’enracinement*, 1943), Weil argues that “roots” are conditions for the growth and flourishing of the individual. She does not see society as a static entity but highlight humans’ need for stability and security. In her political philosophy, roots manifest “human subjection to material and historical conditions” by “including the need to participate in the life of a community, to feel a sense of connection to a place, and to maintain temporal links” (Rozelle-Stone and Davis, 2018). In her view, the issue of rootedness is a spiritual one, it can enable the individual to reach a higher, transcendental state of communion with the world, as “a rooted community allows for the development of the individual with a view toward God or eternal values” (Rozelle-Stone and Davis, 2018). I notably use this idea by looking at the question of labour in the zawiya; I consider, following Weil, that “the establishing of roots enables multiple relations to the world [e.g. on the level of the nation, the

organically developing community, the school) that at once nourish the individual and the community” (Rozelle-Stone and Davis, 2018). The spiritual dimension of Weil’s work gives me the opportunity to look at God’s presence in this relationship between the individual and the territory. In line with this chapter’s previous sections, it helps me to further illustrate the triadic character of people’s relations in this context, this time going beyond the dual understanding of wage labour.

Before exploring the triadic system of relations in the zawiya, I come back to the Sufi sheikh’s social works, - when he arranges local disputes -, to show that Sheikh Habri and his spiritual power depend on his ability to maintain a link with the zawiya’s surrounding territory. I then focus on the question of labour, looking at the situations of four people working for the zawiya, and I argue that participating in the life of the neighbourhood and feeling a sense of communion with a place enable my informants to connect with both the sensible and the noumenal world.

Power and territory: connecting to the zawiya’s neighbourhood

In Maraval, Sheikh Habri is not only a doctor, but a local moral authority. He settles disputes and resolves local issues. As I will show in chapter 5 public figures like a Sufi sheikh use practical judgement and deliberation to interpret religious norms and advise people on everyday moral conundrums. These are often associated with kinship and financial problems. They include cases where: a woman is unhappy in her marriage; a divorced lady is looking for a new husband; whether it is wise to accept money from a dishonest man; how to come to an agreement with a non trustworthy neighbour. People coming for such adjudications are not “Sufis” or “mystics”. They have generally heard of Sheikh Habri by word of mouth, and trust him because of his religious legitimacy (see chapter 2).

Most of the time, these consultations take place in the sheikh’s office, where private issues can be discussed in a calm, private space. This office is a space of reflection, where people take their time to think and make considered decisions. It must be distinguishable from the formal sheikh’s office in Sidi Snoussi, which is an administrative, political space, where he takes care of bureaucratic matters. Consultations can also be made over the phone. Many women call him on one of his mobile phones, for a quick chat or a piece of advice. He has been living in the

neighbourhood for years, observing people's lives and thus being attentive to people's needs and problems.

A good way to understand the specificity of the zawiya Habriya is to compare it with the zawiya Belkaidia, in Sidi Maarouf. Sheikh Habri often compared the conviviality of the Habriya with the austerity of the Belkaidia. He held a strong moral stance and considered that this zawiya did not respect the authentic spirit of Sufism. For him, the "spirit" of Sufism was to take care of people such as Mehdi and Talabi, while, in "Sidi Maarouf, at the Belkaidia, you will only find rich people, students, and politicians". The two zawiya are indeed very different. They each represent two traditions in the history of "Algerian" Islam. One is educational, with a reformist outlook, while the other is more focused on community practices and social activities. Their respective geographical locations are interesting in this respect.

The Belkaidia is in Sidi Maarouf, a popular district of Oran, in its periphery, but the location does not have any impact on its activities. Its students and followers do not come from Sidi Maarouf, most of them are outsiders. The zawiya does not have a good reputation among the local population. The young students, future imams and theologians, come from all over the country. I met a few of them, from Annaba, Mostaganem and the Kabyle region. Though the zawiya is focused on teaching Qur'an and Fiqh, they also carry out a dhikr ceremony, on Thursday evenings. There is a huge parking space in front of the zawiya. Followers come from all over the city - from outside the immediate neighbourhood-- with their cars. Important events, such as the "Durus Mohamedia" (the lessons of the Prophet) in the Ramadan period, are not open to the public and attendance is by invitation only.

It is in this perspective that I argue that the zawiya Habriya, as well as the Taybia or the Tijaniya (other popular locally embedded zawiya in Oran) are different from such exclusive spaces. They are much more integrated with their local environments. The history of the zawiya is related to the history of Maraval. People from the neighbourhood come on foot to the Habriya and are not necessarily students or followers. To settle disputes and resolve local issues, Sheikh Habri must know this local environment. When someone comes to him with a problem that concerns another neighbour, for example, it is easy for him to pick up his phone and directly come to an arrangement with the neighbour.

The sheikh's power is thus also related to a connection to a territory, and the zawiya should not be dissociated from its surrounding environment, which is not the case of the Belkaidia, as my comparison shows. Indeed, my argument on the circulation of power would probably not apply to the zawiya Belkaidia. Despite its regional influence and national standing, it did not put down roots in its neighbourhood (Sidi Maarouf). It is a school for the elite and a prestigious zawiya, built quite recently in the late 1990s, while the zawiya Habriya has been in Maraval for more than 60 years. Ahmed Habri has been the zawiya's leader, sometimes sharing these responsibilities with his brother Ali, since the late 1980s, and his intimate knowledge of the district is therefore the fruit of many years of experience. The sheikh's power thus also has a very practical dimension. Power and responsibility are connected, but the reason why people trust his judgement also lies in his personal involvement in Maraval's life for many decades.

Working for the zawiya: connecting to a place and to the world

This connection with the local environment also explains the specific nature of the jobs offered by the zawiya. Sheikh Habri often employed followers and I met and lived among many of these men during my time of fieldwork. The question of labour will enable me to extend the discussion on the circulation of power. This is not ordinary mundane labour. What happens when one's job has social and spiritual significance? Does one have more baraka if one spends most of his time at the zawiya? Does work for a sheikh produce a special kind of aura of power? Not only do I argue that the zawiya generates power because it is a religious place, supposed to be filled with God's energy, but I also show that its force comes from its connection with its surrounding environment as well. People working for the zawiya do not only feel God's energy as a transcendental, vertical entity, but connect with a world full of baraka through their labour. In this respect, I still rely on Mittermaier's notion of "economies of baraka" (2013: 285), which highlights the "boundless God's generosity" (ibid.), but associate it with Weil's idea of "rootedness" to show how people's "roots" generate ties with the sensible world and with God, which "at once nourish the individual and the community" (Rozelle-Stone and Davis, 2018).

I focus here on the stories of four people: Talabi, Mehdi, Bachir and Salah. As we will see Salah's perspective on labour is very different from the three other followers.

While Talabi, Mehdi and Bachir have strong links with the Habriya and the community life of Maraval, Salah lives in Tlemcen and does not have friends in Oran anymore. He is cynical and disillusioned about the qualities of sociality that these communities of grace generate. Through the account of these four people's perspectives on working for the sheikh I will further excavate the concepts of divine power manifest in the zawiya.

Talabi used to be a construction worker. He was working part-time for the zawiya when Sheikh Habri suggested he quit his job to come and live at the zawiya. As Sheikh Habri described it:

“when he arrived in Oran, he was working as a labourer, and he used to come every evening at the zawiya. One day I asked him if he wanted to join me and work for the zawiya, rather than being on construction sites. I said that he would be able to eat at the zawiya, and that I would give him an extra 200 dinars per day for his work. And he accepted”

“Talabi” is a nickname: he had been studying the Qur'an for years in various zawiyas of the region. As a “taleb”, a student, he now knows the sacred book of Islam by heart. In the neighbourhood and at the zawiya, he is the one people seek out when they do not remember a verse of the Qur'an. Even Sheikh Habri is glad to have him around when he has lapses of memory. Oran is not Talabi's native town, and in general he has relied on zawiyas while on the road to welcome him, offer him work, accommodation and Quranic teaching. He has lunch at the zawiya, with a meal cooked by the sheikh's wife, but has dinner in various other places in Maraval. At midday, Schlif generally comes at the zawiya with a local newspaper, and they both search for a funeral or birth ceremony nearby to attend in the evening. Talabi does not “work” for the zawiya, he is part of it.

Mehdi is in a different situation. He has a family he can count on, but seems to feel a burning need to be present at the zawiya every single day. He is a very lean, frail man who almost never speaks or sings. He has a special relationship with Sheikh Habri, who protects him as if he were a child. He barely eats and always seems secluded from other followers. He appears serene and relaxed when he is at the zawiya, usually sitting on a carpet with a large book in his hands. I very often ran into Mehdi in the streets of Maraval, walking from or to the zawiya, alone, his eyes fixed on the horizon. Sometimes,

he slept at the zawiya, with Talabi. They would sleep in the main room, using improvised beds from carpets and cushions. The zawiya has functioning facilities, a small kitchen, toilets and a long sink for the everyday washing. It is also widely considered good to sleep there for the spiritual attributes of the place. When I met Sheikh Habri during my first trip to Oran, he invited me to spend the night at the zawiya, and he told me that I would have good dreams and could meet with Muslim Saints or the Prophet Muhammad. Saints and Prophets might indeed visit you more often in your dreams if you sleep in a place where people recite verses from the Qur'an every day of the week and for dhikr ceremonies. In the evening, after helping and assisting Sheikh Habri all day, Mehdi, Talabi and Schlif would often go to parties together, looking for a good meal.

Bachir officially works as an electrician, but has many other manual jobs. He is very involved in the zawiya, often singing and leading the dhikr on Fridays. But his involvement is not limited to being only religious in nature. Whilst he is not as present as Mehdi or Talabi, he often comes to help Sheikh Habri for important ceremonies during the year. He does not have a car and uses the tram line to commute to the zawiya. For instance, he would stay after an evening ceremony to clean the floor and wash the pots and pans of the zawiya. When Bachir takes care of the electric systems of the University of Oran, he earns 600 dinars per day: "but it is not enough. Life is very expensive today, it is hard to buy some fish, or fruits, or meat, but it is how it is, this is our lives". His wife does not work. His grandfather was a follower of the zawiya, but it was not him who brought him there:

"It was a friend of mine who suggested I come, and I enjoyed it. I was 14 years old, I was quite young! But after that day, I went every day, on evenings, after the school, to have some rest in a calm place"

He lives in a flat that is owned by his wife's family. He invited me to his home to have a cup of tea once, in a flat in the town-centre of Oran, in a building located behind the Sacré-Coeur Cathedral. It was "temporary accommodation", as they would have to leave the block of flats within the year. The landlord, one of his wife's uncles, wanted to reclaim his flat. Bachir used to live in Maraval when he was single, in his parents' home, in a house close to the zawiya. Housing is a big issue in Algeria. The

government invested in a few housing programs in the last decades, and Ahmed was waiting to know if he had been selected for one of these programs.

Like Talabi and Mehdi, Bachir does not really “work” at the zawiya. He helps Sheikh Habri, and does him favours, even though his contribution is often remunerated. Their links with the zawiya are strong. They are not atomised individuals, ready to work anywhere for a good salary. They are related to a space, a city, a cultural history, and participate in the life of the zawiya. In this context, God offers labour, but labour cannot be reduced to monetary transactions. By serving Sheikh Habri, Talabi and Mehdi serve God and the Habriya community. Labour is productive because it is embedded in a circuit of fertile power relationships. Laura Bear (2013) describes similar relations of power between humans and the divine in her ethnography of shipyard work on the banks of the Hooghly River, in India. She shows how precarious workers in Howrah understand their acts of labour as transactions. The productive energy of their labour is never lost, but transferred to the ship while they work on it. In this perspective, the vitality, health and life of humans do not disappear in their acts of labour, but remain alive in entering the ship, thereby filling it with a divine force, or shakti. The shipyard workers use these concepts to argue for the value and worth of their paid labour.

For Talabi, Mehdi and Bachir work within the Habriya community also partakes in and generates a fertile power. In their cases, it is because the point of their labour is the construction of community rather than of simply making a living. They conceive of the zawiya as a space apart from such profane questions. In this space the productive energy of Talabi, Mehdi and Bachir also infuses the Habriya with special qualities of sociality. The zawiya remains active, - people can come everyday to eat, pray, celebrate God -, thanks to their productive acts of labour. For these workers in the zawiya their work is part of sacred productive transactions that are more than acts of wage labour.

A counterpoint to this perspective was provided by Salah, who I met early on in my fieldwork in the zawiya. He had worked for more than 30 years for the Habriya, “I was kind of the slave of the zawiya”, he told me. His account was interesting, he saw work in its concrete, materialist perspective, and had a negative opinion on the zawiya’s working system. I had a few conversations with him during these first ten days in Maraval, and I was very surprised by his critical tone. For him, the zawiya’s focus on providing food and/or work, rather than education, was a mistake. He considered that

the zawiya, by employing followers in precarious situations, was “exploiting poverty”. His discourse was quite surprising as he came back to Oran to work as a builder for the zawiya, and was quite happy to see Sheikh Habri and be back in the neighbourhood. In the first days of fieldwork, I got to know him better by accompanying him to the evening ceremonies and parties taking place each week in Maraval. He is 59, was born in Belgium and raised in France, a country he left in 1976. His family situation is reminiscent of Hadj, though he does not have the economic and financial resources of a friend or family to help him. He was married twice, but both marriages ended in less than a year. Like Hadj, he thinks that his situation would get better in Europe, where the women are “less materialist” and less focused on the financial status of their potential partners. He was not as religious as the many Sufi followers that I met in Oran. He just temporarily left Tlemcen, where he now lives, to mend the floor of the zawiya’s court yard, but he does not want to go back to his life as a permanent worker for the zawiya. His thirty years in Maraval are now behind him. He looked at Mehdi and Talabi with contempt and pity for them. When I was talking to him, it was as if the zawiya had no “magic”. He could accomplish the same work at another place, it did not matter to him, it would have had the same impact on his financial situation.

For Mehdi, Talabi and Bachir, working at the zawiya provided more than a financial reward, and what they were doing at the zawiya amounted to more than a source of livelihood. Similarly to shipyard workers on the Hooghly river, the place of work and products of work play a vital role in the circulation of fertile power. But in this case, it is because of the special sacred qualities of the place where work happens. The zawiya Habriya collects the productive energy of everyday workers and spreads it among humans, spaces and objects through various rituals, ceremonies and moments of gatherings. It was particularly obvious for Mehdi, who lived with his family but came every day to the zawiya to help Sheikh Habri in various tasks and chores. Sheikh Habri was like a father to him. The zawiya is thus not the same space for Salah that it is for Talabi, Mehdi and Bachir. Despite the material transaction for their labour, they do not only work for the sheikh and the zawiya but are active parts of the community, generating and benefiting from its spiritual aura and power.

But the zawiya, as I will show in more details in the following section, is a small piece of a large, “spiritual” environment, and gives access, for these workers, to a great

web of relationships in Maraval. I explained that, for Talabi and Mehdi, the zawiya is a starting point. They live and work there during the day, and then move around various spaces in the neighbourhood, to meet with friends and attend mystic parties. For Bachir, working for the zawiya enables him to maintain strong links with the neighbourhood, where he grew up as a child. It is in this perspective that I consider that these people's work generates powerful "roots" and nourish relations with the community. Moreover, the analysis of these relations is interesting insofar as I show, following Weil's argument, that enrootedness can be associated to the individual's experience of a higher, divine world. Participating to the community's life and feeling a sense of communion to a place are opportunities, for these Sufi workers, to connect with both the sensible and the noumenal world.

IV

Power and territory: the *wilayat* of the zawiya Habriya

What we could conclude from the previous sections in this chapter, is that we might overestimate the role of the spiritual leader in these processes of circulation of power. In line with chapter 2, I have argued that the flow and distribution of power did not only depend on the actions of great saints and Sufi sheikhs. I relied on the work of Amira Mittermaier (2013, 2014), notably by using the idea of a world "full of baraka" to analyse the miraculous and generous flow of energy in the zawiya's spaces, first by looking at food sharing in the dhikr ceremony, then by focusing on the relationship between power and territory. These two sections show that trading with God's energy does not entirely depend on the power of charismatic leaders. Great anthropologists of Islam and Sufism, like Pnina Werbner, also developed an understanding of baraka as expression of divine excess, abundance and generosity, aimed at going into "the structured, mundane world" (1998: 95) but her analysis remained attached to the figure of the Sufi saint, as "the infinite giver through whom flows the bounty of Allah to his followers below him" (1998: 105). Rather than focusing on charismatic events and powerful characters, I am looking at forces emanating from ordinary people's actions, exploring how they circulate between various spaces in the city. I am using the idea of "wilayat" to define the zawiya's spiritual extended area, but with a hint of irony, as it is not supposed to evoke the spiritual influence of a community or brotherhood. In Werbner

and Basu, the “Sufi notion of *wilayat* refers to spiritual dominions controlled by famous saints” (1998: 12).

In this respect, the power of a saint, of a sheikh, generally applies within a certain spiritual domain, the *zawiya*. But a circulatory view of power brings us to consider the circuits of exchanges taking place between a sacred home centre and peripheral sites, or even between a few sacred centres and a multitude of peripheral sites. The *zawiya* Habriya is the sacred home centre, where the community of followers gathers and the *dhikr* ceremony takes place, every Friday. People come to pray, discuss, share food prepared for the occasion, as detailed in the previous section, and then go back to their mundane activities. People come from different places, but most are from Maraval, a vast neighbourhood in the south of Oran. In exploring the interaction between these different spaces and the movements and circulation of people in Maraval, I further show that the *zawiya*’s power is also the power of its community and its members - of their circuits of sociality.

This last section gives me the opportunity to provide more ethnographic details on key spaces and places. There are many other spaces that are connected to and belong to the *zawiya*’s extended area - notably saints’ shrines, other *zawiyas* of Maraval, and the streets and houses in which celebrations and mystic events take place - and the following chapters will devote time to their analysis. Here however, I focus on the descriptions of Maraval (the *zawiya*’s district), the *zawiya* Habriya (as a physical place, not as a community) and the Sidi Snoussi square, where important social and political events take place.

Maraval

The Habriya is in Maraval, Oran. The district is neither a working-class neighbourhood nor an up-town area. It is close to the centre of the city. In Oran, a long tram line (18 km) goes from the popular district of Sidi Maarouf to the station of Es Senia, near the international airport. Maraval is close to the “Suret  de Wilaya” station, 15 minutes away from the “Place du 1er Novembre”, the main square in the town. It mainly used to be a residential area, with a lot of houses huddled together, but in the last twenty years, it has become an important place for commerce, with many wholesalers

and warehouses. It is a very lively area, especially in the morning, when merchants come to collect their goods. You can also hear the yelling of fruits and vegetables merchants, going around the streets carrying their produce on the donkeys' backs; and sellers of "garantita", a local sandwich made of a chickpea gratin in baguette bread. In these streets, young boys play football, almost all day long outside school time. The area of the zawiya is located between a shopping avenue and a traffic artery. Even though there are many cars coming back and forth, they do not speed along because people often want to stop and go shopping. Unlike the city centre, there are more houses than blocks of flats, where many families live. They often have more than two floors and provide accommodation for most members of an extended family. This is different from the buildings in the centre or the periphery of the town, where the size of flats often only allows for one or two nuclear families to live. Kinship and family seem to be more atomised. In Maraval, with many big families living together, people are integrated into family solidarities. It is for individuals who live outside this system of familial solidarities, or are not well integrated into it, that the zawiya offers a powerful web of social relations.

The zawiya Habriya

The Habriya is one of the main zawiya of the area, along with the zawiya Taybia. It is in the residential part of the district, with many big houses and families. The zawiya refers here to a specific building, where people come to pray, sing and dance, eat and drink, but it also refers to a community. People from various parts of Oran belong to the zawiya, but do not necessarily attend the dhikr ceremony on Fridays or other important events of the week on a regular basis. Nevertheless many of them have a strong emotional link with the zawiya. They grew up in Maraval, their grandparents were serious followers, or they learnt the Qur'an with teachers from the Habriya when they were children. It is an interesting category of "followers". Though I did not see them often at the zawiya, I had many opportunities to share a meal or a cup of tea in the various evening celebrations taking place in Oran throughout the year.

The zawiya's geographical position is important and may explain its privileged status in the area. Not in the city centre, but also not far from it. Close to a long, busy and noisy four-lanes avenue, the "Mekki Khalifa" avenue. This long avenue is

insufferably sunny and dusty all day long, while the street of the zawiya, on “Chari’ Mezouaghi Mohamed”, perpendicular to the avenue, faces the East and is protected from dust and rays. It is not particularly busy. Cars are parked on both sides of the street and people drive slowly, as many families live in the area. Children can play football without fearing being hit by a car. After school, the street is shady, and they often play until dark, which annoys Sheikh Habri. Coming from the long avenue, this street seems protected from the loud and noisy atmosphere of the area. Many people come on foot to the zawiya, to rest on the carpets, or for a cup of tea with the sheikh. They drop in after work and school. The Zawiya gives some rare, precious time outside the time of labour or of family. You can choose a book from the elevated shelf in the main room, sit quietly and read the Qur’an or some hadiths. You can pray, but you do not have to. Many just come for a friendly chat or to have a nap, notably in the last hours of a Ramadan day. The zawiya is a shelter.

Sheikh Habri lives in a district two minutes by car from the zawiya on the other side of the arterial road. Everyday, he wakes up early and goes to the zawiya at 7.30/8am. He works until noon, staying in his office, behind his desk, where he meets with his potential clients and “patients”. At noon, it is time for him to go home and collect all the food for lunch that his wife prepared in the morning. He brings it to the zawiya and gives it to Talabi, who makes the final preparations. A large kitchen is in the flat above the zawiya. Because a small court yard separates the flat and the kitchen, you do not have to enter the flat to get access to the kitchen, which has a separate key. Talabi thus goes there everyday, takes enough plates and spoons for all the people who come for lunch, and brings everything downstairs. I could understand that Talabi really enjoyed these spaces, which gave him more freedom and room to move around. Sheikh Habri rarely went upstairs so Talabi could enjoy some free, solitary time there, using the court yard’s outside area to dry his clothes and the kitchen to wash utensils and prepare food. At 1pm, the food is ready to be served. Small tables, to sit at cross-legged, are hidden behind a door, in the “women’s” room. The sheikh’s wife is a great cook, and meals were varied everyday. Couscous is generally reserved for Fridays, when everyone comes for the dhikr ceremony. It is not an explicit rule, as it was possible to eat some during the week, but it is an ideal meal to prepare when hosting large groups of people. For the other days, a vegetable soup was a frequent dish (“chorba” or “hlila”), with a salad or a side of pasta. The distribution and consumption of meals always takes place in the zawiya’s

main room. Sheikh Habri brings the food that his wife cooked, and Talabi prepares and sets tables for everyone.

In the main room, a series of objects and symbols mark the space's relationship with God and the prophet Muhammad. On the walls are framed Quranic scriptures, genealogical trees and large, inoperative clocks. A hollow in one of the walls indicates Mecca's direction. In the middle, stones are used for ablutions. It is an open, living space. The door, until nightfall, is never closed, even when the sheikh is not present. People come in and leave their shoes outside. When they are alone, they can pray. When they are together, they can recite the Quran together and sing. The main room is, above everything else, the space for the dhikr. Essentially, the dhikr consists in reciting and singing the names of God so as to reach a physical state that enables one to feel God's presence in one's body. It is how bodies become recipients of power, and how they can thus be its emissaries. This puissance that shakes them cannot be contained in one body. It must leave it, move, and be shared. The zawiya is a starting point, a base. The dhikr ceremony can often last hours, and when it ends it will always lead to another one, held in a neighbouring house, a few steps from the Mezouaghi Mohammed street. After 6 pm, the Habriya followers have a chat, tell each other stories, and when the evening comes they leave the zawiya together to join another gathering in Oran. The Friday dhikr, at the zawiya Habriya, is the starting point of the week, and envelops the world with its baraka.

Sidi Snoussi

Sheikh Habri has an office in Sidi Snoussi, in a building in the middle of a square, not far from the zawiya (around 2km away). This office is a place of sociality and politics. During my time in Oran, for example, Sheikh Habri used it for a political meeting of the RND. The square is very accessible and a large classroom, located in the same building, next to the office, is large enough to welcome the party's militants. There is a long, rectangular court yard outside, where people can sit and talk, have a drink or a cup of tea. The meeting was quite successful. It was at the beginning of the electoral campaign for the legislative elections; many people attended and the main local representatives of the party (a senator and a deputy) were pleased to have assembled so many militants together.

Sheikh Habri also takes advantage of Sidi Snoussi's square for more informal meetings, notably when his network can be useful to put people in touch. I was rarely at Sidi Snoussi but I was once invited to join him there because he wanted me to meet one of his friends, Rima, a journalist in her thirties, from Relizane. This journalist was interested in interviewing me, but the true reason for her presence was for her to meet with a member of the Algerian senate. She did not know him, but Sheikh Habri did because they were good friends, and he was glad to help people connect with significant political figures. Their meeting was thus planned at Sidi Snoussi, in Sheikh Habri's office. Rima had known Sheikh Habri for a long time. As he used to say, she is "a child of the Habriya"; their respective grandfathers knew each other. She has been a journalist for nine years, always on the radio (for "Radio Relizane"), preparing live shows and breaking news. The senator was a member of the friendship group Algeria-France in the senate. He had been in the Senate for three years, used to be the mayor of a small city and, according to Sheikh Habri, was the brother of the national police force's general. Sheikh Habri often organises these kinds of meetings, but this was one of the rare occasions when I could attend.

As explained in the first and second sections, it is also where the association organises the distribution of food during Ramadan. Each day, an army of volunteers prepares meals for the break of the fast. This takes place in the classroom in the courtyard, where tables are set up. It is a very popular event, and many people are expected to come. Compared with the zawiya, or with the different sites that welcomes mystic celebrations during the week, in Maraval, Sidi Snoussi seems a more secular place. Dhikr ceremonies never take place there, nor do meetings of Sufi followers. It is a religious school, an administrative office, a place for political meetings, and a social space. It highlights the extension of the zawiya's power and allows us to put in perspective, once again, the relative importance of the sheikh in these spiritual and social activities; like in the zawiya, where the community of disciples can lead the dhikr without the sheikh, in Sidi Snoussi a community of volunteers organises the allocation of resources during the time of Ramadan. Yet Sheikh Habri is still very present, as a symbol, a voice, the representative of mystical power. But Sidi Snoussi is also, like

Maraval's people's homes and their workplaces, a mundane world into which baraka flows.

The zawiya Habriya is thus the sacred centre from which networks of connection linked by the Sheikh Habri radiate outwards to places such as Sidi Snoussi. In line with the argument developed in chapter 2, I have attempted here to go beyond a transcendental view linking power and social responsibility. I did not challenge Sheikh Habri's spiritual power, which manifest through his medical talents and his ability to provide advice, but I showed that they were also dependent on his knowledge of the local environment and his unique personality - beyond the question of his genealogical lineage. Moreover, looking at the presence and circulation of baraka in community practices (like the dhikr ceremony) allowed me to highlight the interdependent character of the human-divine relationship, and to further illustrate a more horizontal, immanent understanding of power. The power of these spaces and the forces emanating from people's actions spread out in the religious events that I analyse in the following chapter. It will illustrate and detail the relationship between the zawiya, Maraval and its population. As I have been arguing that this flow of power depends on a certain unity between the religious and the social, I try to push the analysis further and attempt to understand the political consequences of these circuits of exchange.

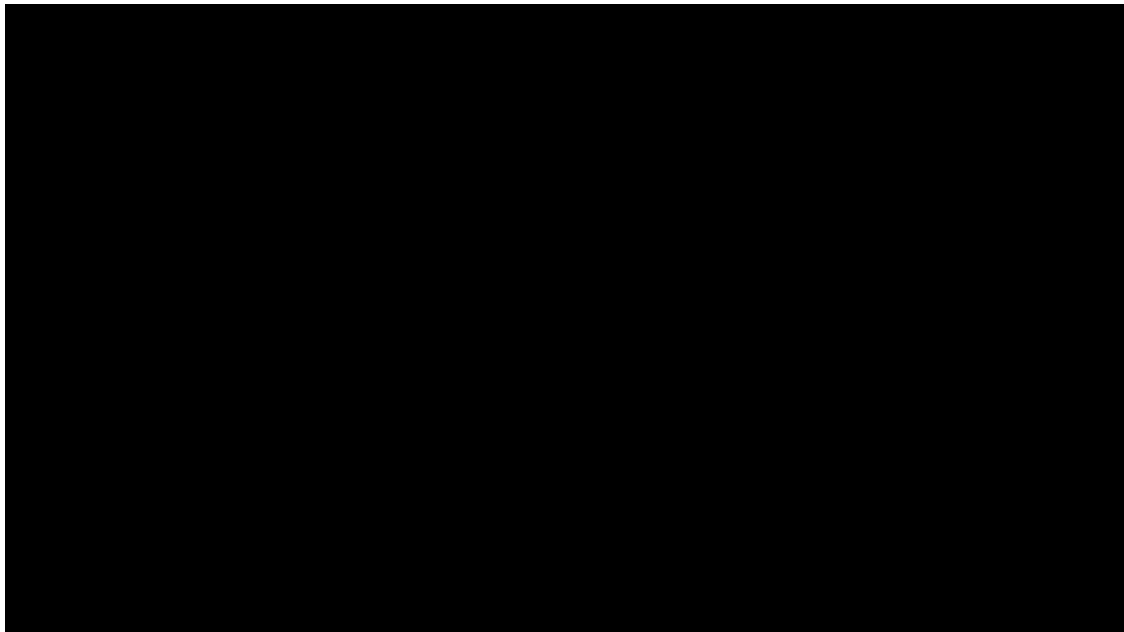


Fig 4. A typical Friday afternoon at the zawiya Habriya.

CHAPTER 4

The power of Muslim celebrations

Religion, nationalism and popular communion

In this chapter, I will ask a simple, familiar question: how do religious events and rituals participate to the imagination of political communities? I focus on three main types of events, which all derive from the life and activities of Oran's Sufi communities. The first one is the dhikr ceremony, which I explore this time by looking at its collective dimension, highlighting the fraternal bonds it generates. By describing the inclusive evening celebrations taking place during the week in Maraval, I then leave the zawiya and spend some time in the streets of Maraval. I show how these celebrations generate affects that are community-building, notably thanks to these events' ambivalence and social diversity. Finally, analysing Oran's "wa'das", I describe the importance of these religious affects in the production of political attachment (to the nation) and argue that the mythification of Saints-day festivals help to generate a popular imagination of national history.

I

Food and comradeship in the zawiya Habriya

In the previous chapter, I showed that food played an important role in the human-divine relationship, notably by relying on the works of Amira Mittermaier and Tom Boylston. In this section I am looking at the dhikr ceremony from another perspective, exploring human to human relations and the dhikr's ability to generate a bond between people. I will again take the example of food, but this time without

focusing on God's presence. Anthropological studies in the last few years have focused on the individual and moral experience of the dhikr (Pinto, 2017; Vicini, 2017), notably by responding to accounts of Islam which concentrated on subjectification processes in the constitution of the ethical self (Mahmood, 2005). Even though I do not underestimate the power of the dhikr's individual experience, which I explore through the question of food - full of baraka (in chapter 3) - or through the ethical experience of the divine (in chapter 5), I focus here on the type of social relations that these ceremonies generate.

At the Habriya, every Friday starts with a welcoming couscous. Followers pray at the mosque, nearby, and then come to the zawiya. These two spaces are complementary, and this is something that my informants explicitly claim. Bashir once told me that the mosque was "a stricter place", that it was "less social": one goes there "to wash and to pray"; while the zawiya was useful for other needs and was a place "to rest, to read, and to eat!"; and that it was "for the poor and fuqara". I asked him how these two places were different because I knew that he was often at the mosque, and that he was friend with the two local mosques' imams. His view is revealing of the connections between the mosque and the zawiya: "they are [the two imams] very friendly. They do not come to the zawiya, but are still Sufis in a certain way, because most of them [talking about imams, generally] learnt the Qur'an in zawiya's".

Mosques and zawiya's here are not in competition. Fifteen to twenty people are present for the shared meal, and twenty to thirty for the ceremony. Most of them wear an ebeya, the traditional dress. And these are, mostly, light ebeyas; either white or beige. There is no strict code to follow (though most women wear the hijab). Men usually have a three day beard, but many also have long beards and moustaches. The long beard without the moustache is typical of Salafi culture, but some Sufi followers also have it. The moustache is popular in Algeria, notably among men forty years and older. It is different for the haircut, which must be short for men. Long hair can be worn, but it must be looked after. Sheikh Habri would say that, though appearance does not matter, cleanliness and hygiene do.

As described in previous chapters, food is an important issue. Food and values of conviviality are related. I would always hear, "Kul! Kul!" (Eat!). For Sheikh Habri, lunch is very important because it helps to not be too hungry in the evening, and to sleep

serenely after dinner. He always told me that meals mattered for Sufis because one “must feed its body to feed its soul”. He had a nice joke about it, a story of a Frenchman from Algerian descent. His parents used to be followers of the ‘Alawiya, and advised him to go to Algeria to be initiated to local Sufism. He left the city, went to Mostaganem, liked his trip, and when he came back, his parents asked him what he learnt from the sheikh’s teaching and from the zawiya. And he told them: “I learnt that one must have a big stomach to be a true Sufi!”.

A similar joke is mentioned by Hoffman, quoting a sheikh he met in an Egyptian Sufi khidma: “The essence of Sufism is food” (1995: 479). Note that food, and especially couscous, is associated with life rituals and other ceremonies. Sheikh Habri also has another loved proverb: “couscous is for birth, for death, and for every Friday”. During most of my fieldwork, I lived in a flat just above the zawiya. Most days, at 5 pm, I had tea with Sheikh Habri. I generally brought some biscuits and we had pleasant conversations about what happened during the day. As during lunchtime, everybody was welcome.

These frequent moments of food sharing allowed me to quickly get closer to Sheikh Habri and the members of the zawiya. As it was evoked in the previous chapter, this dimension of commensality has been the object of many anthropological studies. The literature shows that it is often a sign of belonging to a community (Boylston, 2013), “a way of establishing closeness” (Bloch, 1999: 133) and, thus, “one of the most powerful operators of the social process” (ibid.). We can argue that the impression of popular communion is reinforced by the fact that people often eat a common substance and in the same plate. Sharing a common substance generates the illusion that “gives rise to the primitive notion that one is thereby creating common flesh and blood” (Simmel, 1997: 131 in Boylston, 2013: 261). Bloch further shows that “particular groups of people may view some foods as better social conductors than others” (1999: 135). The couscous dish, in this perspective, is a very efficient social conductor. It is served in a single, large plate, on a round table, and the semolina makes it easy to eat with tablespoons, without having to divide the dish in separate portions. Therefore, it reinforces the visual illusion that people share the same, common substance.

The Sufi tradition did not always have this kind of relationship with food. In the first few centuries after the Prophet Muhammad’s revelations, many Sufi groups

supported an ideal of rigorous and ascetic lifestyles (Salvatore, 2018) with a “greater jihad” encouraging individuals “to purify the soul of all forms of evil and negligence” and “to resist its desires through fasting and other forms of asceticism” (Hoffman, 1995: 469). To illustrate the evolution of the Sufi tradition on this issue, Hoffman takes the example of the Shadhiliyya (the Habriya’s roots), which “was originally a middle-class Order that departed from earlier tradition by encouraging its followers to work for a living and dress well rather than (at times hypocritically) advertising their poverty” (1995: 476). In line with Sheikh Habri’s discourse on food and spiritual poverty, Hoffman argues that “Shadhili interpreted poverty in a spiritual sense, allowing a person to be “poor toward God”, i.e. recognizing his need for God, without renunciation of all material things” (ibid.). But the Sufi tradition’s relationship with food, as the literature on food sharing and my example show, is more than a spiritual issue and does not only question people’s attitude towards God. It tells us something about human to human relations within the Sufi group, but also reveals a certain mode of sociality, based on hospitality and fraternity, with individuals from outside the circle of the zawiya - as we will discover in the next section of this chapter.

The dhikr ritual lasts between two and three hours. Sheikh Habri pays close attention to the rhythm of the ceremony, and alternates phases of singing and praying with moments of discussion. He does not really lead to the ceremony, but he is the one choosing and imposing who will. He is like an orchestra conductor, who does not play nor sing. The ceremony does not have any clear structure, but it is generally divided into three periods: each time they sing, pray; have some tea and biscuits; and then have a discussion. Most of the followers men in their thirties and older. Some of them come with their sons, so it is not unusual to see children or teenagers. Discussions taking place between the different phases of the ritual are not “debates”, nor are they long speeches by the sheikh. He does not monopolise speaking time. Some followers are more talkative than others, especially when they are more charismatic. There is a group of four or five young men, in their thirties, that is often involved in the discussion or in the leading of the ceremony. Some of the older followers are very entertaining. The dhikr ceremony often takes on the qualities of a stage play with long monologues and soliloquies. One of the older followers during the ceremony, a retired police officer, often walked around the room, loudly proclaiming in French: “Eat! Pray! And pray to God!”. Note that my presence probably had an impact on people’s interventions in the dhikr’s phases of

discussion. When one of the followers wanted to talk to me indirectly, although he was addressing the whole audience, I would easily know because he would speak in French. It happened often with one of the eldest followers, who was always evoking Blaise Pascal's philosophy to support his arguments. I called him "Blaise" in my field notes, and he aligns with the idea of the typical "Sufi" that I held before starting fieldwork. He would always describe the struggle against ego and how Sufis attempt to find God in a kind of self-annihilation process. All of these examples show the importance of speech and discussion in the rituals that draw the core of the Sufi community together.

During the more focused phases of the dhikr, people's hands meet, and voices unite. It will be hardly surprising that Durkheim's idea of collective effervescence supports an understanding of power as something circular and contagious. For Mazzarella, his theory of ritual "helps to explain the social production of representational potency - of meaning that matters" (2017: 82). He shows how Durkheim identifies contagion as something culminating in "unified rhythm" and "movement":

"Every emotion expressed resonates without interference in consciousnesses that are wide open to external impressions, each one echoing the others. The initial impulse is thereby amplified each time it is echoed, like an avalanche that grows as it goes along... Probably because a collective emotion cannot be expressed collectively without some order that permits harmony and unison of movement, these gestures and cries tend to fall in rhythm and regularity, and from there into songs and dances"

(Durkheim, 1995[1912]: 217-218 in Mazzarella, 2017: 83)

Such phenomena can certainly be observed more easily in small zawiya such as the Habriya. With between 20 and 30 people attending the dhikr ceremony each Friday, the sense of collective harmony can be perceived, for example, when almost everyone joins to form a large circle in the central room, standing up, singing and dancing. Sometimes, religious figures from outside the zawiya came, as guests, and even led the ceremony. Once, it was the moqadem from the Alawiya, who I had met before, in Ain el-Turck with the Issawiya. He prepared the tea with the eldest, and then led a part of the ceremony. There is always a small area of the main room that is devoted to the preparation of the tea; and two followers generally take care of this task. They can all do it, and it can change every week, but it appears that some of them like to do it more than other; and it is often the eldest of the zawiya who is in charge

Some days, the dhikr would never really stop. Evening ceremonies would often take place on Fridays, so people could stay late at the zawiya until a group of followers would decide to leave for another ceremony, in another location. It was not difficult to find another event nearby, so they would stay late and then leave on foot together at 7 or 8 pm. I therefore continue this discussion in the following section, where I explore the festive, collective, fraternal dimension of these “mystic” parties that take place during the week in Maraval and Oran. They seem more open to the public because they are more visible, as they often play out in the street and welcome people coming from various backgrounds. It enables me to explore in more detail the connection between this Sufi milieu and its surrounding neighbourhood, and thus to show the strong unity between the religious and the social in this context.

II

The power of mystic parties: love, fraternity and *politics*

In this section, I explore the political aspect of fraternity, a form of love that I found in the various “mystic” celebrations taking place in Oran. In line with the previous section, I am looking at processes of community building and question the importance of affects in religious and political communities. Even though these events often take place in semi-public spaces - under large, open tents, in streets closed to traffic - and welcome a diverse population, I do not describe them as proto-public spheres. Rather, I argue that they are political because of their regularity, which maintains a bond between people and provides a strong base for the imagination of the political community. The social diversity of these events, the high number of people attending them and the variety of the spaces they offer, generate encounters between individuals who do not necessarily meet during the remainder of the week, and it goes beyond the Sufi sphere. In this respect, this ethnographic material ultimately highlights the “social indissoluble unity [...] between what is often called the ‘religious’ and what is often called the ‘social’” (Bloch, 2008: 5).

In Mahmood’s ethnography of the Egyptian piety movement, fear is one of the important elements that regulates the relationship between human beings and God. The

moral selves that Salafi women cultivate, and their strive for perfection, often derive from their fear of an omniscient, powerful God. It will not be surprising to argue that the Sufis' relationship with God goes through the display of radically different feelings. In Schielke's analysis of the Egyptian mawlid, for example, it is not fear but love that animates the participants to the prophet Muhammad's birthday festival. He shows that "visiting the shrine of the saint and celebrating his or her birthday" is not only "an expression of love for the family of Prophet (ah al-bayt)" but also expresses "the mutual love of the pilgrims for the festivity" (Schielke, 2003: 158). His ethnography is interesting because he links the "motive of love" to the "motive of charity and equality" when he observes that the "the free food offered in the khidmas is represented as a central moment of the festivity, an expression of love and equality" (ibid.). Schielke never claims that equality is actually performed, arguing in a footnote that it "is imaginary to a significant degree" (ibid.), given social and political hierarchies in Egyptian Sufi khidmas.

Though I agree with him, having observed strong social differences and separations in Oran's zawiyas, I would however argue that the various celebrations in the city bring out other forms of love. The dhikr, which plays an important role in these events, is important in this perspective because it is a very concrete manifestation of love. Love for and from God, for the Sufi sheikh, but also love for your fellow "brothers". I use this idea of fraternal love as a starting point to understand the kind of social relation that develops in these religious gatherings. Arendt's use of the idea of "friendship" (1958) is useful because, by opposing it to the notion of fraternity - making it an unpolitical form of social relation - she highlights the sentimental and affective base of religious and national communities, and thus further illustrates the connection between religion and nationalism.

For Arendt, fraternal love, just like romantic love and passion, raises a problem for politics. She considers that these forms of love are not only unpolitical, but antipolitical. In her view, inspired by the Greeks' understanding of the public, politics is about speech, common deliberation and reason, and should not imply feelings and emotions. In this perspective, "a new public vinculum [bond] should bring people into a common mode of living, without any recourse to more-or-less naturalistic bonds such as family, ethnicity, race, nation, the Volk, religion, or a shared origin of humanity"

(Chiba, 1995: 508). Nation and religion are thus seen as two similar types of “naturalistic” bonds that threaten the political.

Rather, I would argue that such affective and sentimental bonds reveal a tension inherent in politics, as I will show in more detail in the two following sections. It is indeed difficult to say that they are not political, as I agree with Ronald Dworkin (1986) when he argues that both friendship (the cold, dispassionate form of love for Arendt) and fraternity are potent tools for community-building. The anthropological literature, and notably the analysis of religious rituals, is indeed very talkative on this issue. Durkheim’s famous concept of collective effervescence, as acknowledged in section I, shows how collective emotions can generate a strong sense of community belonging.

Following Durkheim I consider that the intensity and regularity of social relations tends to produce ideas and moral ideals. In his view, notably developed in his famous work on forms of “religious life”, human societies are founded and rely on these collective experiences and on spirit of association (Durkheim, 1912). Looking at rituals enacted in Australian tribes, he argued that the life of these communities cyclically oscillated between two phases, which were very similar to the distinction he made, in *The Division of Labour in Society*, between mechanical and organic solidarities (Bellah, 1990). He described a time that was devoted to people’s independent activities, with a dispersed population, divided in small groups. And he identified another time, where the population gathered, in specific places, “condensing”, for periods varying from a few days to a few months, “where we celebrate a religious ceremony” (in Bellah, 1990: 14).

I attempt to describe these types of moments in this section, where people from various backgrounds, working in different environments during the day, come together in these weekly events in the evening, interacting with each other and getting closer. Fraternity, in this perspective, does not provide the base for constituting political activity - if we use Arendt’s terms - and cannot be seen as proto-public spheres. However, rather than consisting in speech, common deliberation and discussions on the public good, these moments generate fraternal links - manifested in acts of tenderness, compassion, generosity - which reinforce the sense of community belonging and can then support forms of political imagination.

Here I will describe one of these celebrations. An event made of different events. One area for the dhikr ceremony, another to have a cup of tea with friends, one for

sermons and prayers, etc. Death ceremonies were typical events taking place in the evening. I attended many different types of celebrations when I was in Oran, but I focus on this type of events here because they were the most inclusive. Death rituals have long been analysed from a political perspective. The regeneration of the life of the community out of death is a classic theme in the anthropology of religion. By exploiting affects and emotions, they can legitimate a social order and a community's political organisation (Bloch and Parry, 1982). My view in this chapter is that these inclusive ceremonies generate affects like fraternity that build and maintain social bonds. And these affects, as I will further explain in the following sections, participate to the imagination of the political community.

A few large tents, set up in the street, long carpets scattered across the floor; the road is closed. It happens quite often in the area. The street is used by the family for the event. They appropriate the street, but everybody in the district is free to attend. It is free and public. In local newspapers, you can find, in the last pages, the dates and times of the day's ceremonies. Talabi and Shlif, for example, often read it to know where they could have dinner in the evening; and it is not seen as something odd or immoral. The organising family expects many people to come, especially for a funeral. It is a good sign for the person that travels to the next world, so it can be considered a relationship of reciprocity between the dead's family and those who attend. The streets are crowded with parked cars. The atmosphere is not joyful, but is not dull either. The ceremony celebrates the death of a friend's mother. Sheikh Habri's friend is quite young, probably in his late thirties. Sheikh Habri knows him because he had been helpful many times, most notably when he recruited his son to work at the Volvo plant: "What would he think if I could not come to his 'mother's night'?" The same kind of food is always served: a large plate of couscous (for four or five people), some bread, and generally two bottles (water and soda).

Let us now consider another time in the year, at the Tidjaniya branch of Oran, not far from Maraval, in Tlemcen street. The mother of the Tidjani moqadem had just died, and Sheikh Habri is a good friend of his. The tariqa Tidjaniya is very famous, but is more popular in West Africa and Morocco than in Algeria. Getting to the zawiya, we find the same atmosphere. The street in front of the zawiya is closed, and a large tent has been installed. Most of the people present are in the zawiya, but there are many people are still outside; there are lots of chairs and carpets. As it is not far from the

zawiya, followers of the Habriya are numerous. Kaddour, left the zawiya with us, waiting until Sheikh had finished his last tasks. Mehdi and Talabi were already here when we arrived. They were both inside the zawiya, but not at the same table. Belgacem was not far either. The different zawiyas of the city have their respective communities, but are not secluded, as I have argued in chapter 3. The evening ceremonies that take place during the week are a good example of these living social networks between Sufi communities. That night, there were also a few followers from the zawiya Taybia; and the corpse of the Tidjani moqadem's mother was going to be buried the day after, in the cemetery that is close to the zawiya, not far from Sidi Hasni's shrine. At the end of the ceremony, we passed by this street. Sheikh Habri wanted to commune at the cemetery; Sidi Hasni, the saint of the tariqa, is a loved saint among Habriya followers, and it is thus a very special zawiya for him.

This was only the first day of the ceremony for the moqadem's mother. It lasted three days. More people came for the second day. I would estimate between 150 and 200 people. When "Aisha" started (the evening prayer), everybody was on the floor, with no free space left at all; A few imams were invited, and they took turns leading the event, doing long monologues and telling stories about life and death. There was an amplifier outside, with a grave and sizzling sound, for those who were in the street, on the carpets or under the tents. What was striking in this second day was the social and generational diversity of people present. I could notice it from the different types of outfits. Some men seemed to have just gotten out of their office, with their casual black suits and white shirts. Others, younger, just left the football pitch. They wore Adidas/Nike tracksuits and Real Madrid/Paris Saint-Germain football shirts (probably the two most popular European clubs in Oran). Most of them, of course, were in traditional, light djellabas. And many children were playing and running around, in front of the zawiya, irritating the old men who were grumbling because they could not hear what the imam was saying. The speech of the last imam lasted more than twenty minutes. A very eloquent man, the audience listened to him very carefully. Talking about death, one of his stories involved the come-back of a dead man to Earth. A master asked his student: "How would he behave?". "He would do the prayer, fast, and praise the glory of God on Earth". And the master said: "So act today as if death already came to you".

After the speech, it was time to have dinner. Seeing the number of people present, I wondered if and how they were going to feed all of them. At least 150 people were in

the zawiya and outside. But the whole family had prepared the event. From the corridor's stairs, next to the zawiya, probably leading to the flat of the moqadem's family, small tables started to arrive, one after another, and the food followed, as usual: couscous, bread, water and sodas. I was sitting next to Sheikh Habri, and Ahmed, a good friend of his, suddenly popped up at our table, just at the right time. Always the good timing! People teased him and laughed. The four of us shared the meal; another old man joined us. One of the imams walked behind Sheikh Habri and was glad to see him. He put his hand on the sheikh's shoulders, kissed him on the forehead. During the whole evening, he looked after him, bringing some tea, adding a cushion for his back, etc. We left the zawiya at 11 pm.

Everybody in Maraval organises this kind of celebrations for the important life events of their relatives. It is thus not specific to Sufi communities. But there is some group solidarity between the members of the city's zawiyas. When a friend's relative dies, or when a friend of a friend's relative passes away, it is not uncommon to invite other people and followers to come and join the celebration, even when they do not personally know the deceased's family. These were interesting events in the week for me because they allowed me to meet and talk with members of other zawiyas of the region. While zawiyas, during the day, have their own events and ceremonies, these events brought together sheikhs, moqadems, followers from the "mystic" communities of Oran. Sheikh Habri often attended these events even though he did not want to. He had a certain sense of responsibility and always told me that he "had" to go, to show his presence and involvement in the life of these communities. The ethnographic example above shows that people were very happy to see him, and he was often treated as a special guest. It was important for him to come, and his moral stance here was also related to a certain political understanding of society. He would rarely say no to an invitation, did not differentiate between followers and non-followers, and despised "those sheikhs" who only came when there was "good food on the table". His presence was important because he was a symbol of unity. Many followers would finally decide to come to that "mystic party" when Sheikh Habri confirmed that he would be there.

These events are ambivalent because they mix two experiences that seem independent: the union of the soul with the divine - the mystical, spiritual experience - and the union of the individual with his social, human environment - the collective

experience -. Because the dhikr is not a solitary experience, though it is not totally a collective one either, as we will see in more details in chapter 5. One does not only prepare someone else's funeral, one is prepared for one's own death. The power circulating here is not only a divine power, coming from above, but a popular, fraternal form of power, emanating from the assembly.

The saint, too, is not only a saint because he comes "from above", with his divine ascendance, but because he is buried in a certain soil; he sleeps in a fertile ground and gathers people from this same area. His presence, often manifested by a shrine, is federating. Similarly to Greece only becoming Greece with Apollo, and with its sanctuary, in Delphi; from a divided territory to a unified political entity (Debray, 2003). Divine forces generate a popular form of power, because it is the strength of the divinity that neutralises, before transcending them, "the centripetal forces of local interests" (2003: 35).

Therefore, I see these mystic, popular gatherings as an extension of the area of the Sufi order. And yet, even if we find mystics and "Sufis" there, we still surpass the borders of the brotherhood. The population attending these events is not limited to Sufi followers. There are multiple spaces for different publics, which mark in a way the festivities' ambivalent relationship with baraka. On one side, people sing and dance. Divine communion. On another, people eat, drink. Popular communion. During the dhikr, the sheikh is not necessarily the main leader, and followers succeed each other to run the session, manage the rhythm of the ceremony. The community is almost autonomous and is not limited to the presence of an important figure. It is the force in numbers that generates its power, and not only the existence of charismatic personalities, as I argued in the previous chapters.

These events' ambivalence, their social diversity and openness enable the feeling of fraternity that I describe to target a large population, beyond the Sufi sphere that was the focus of the first section. Various kinds of people meet, after a day of work, eat and pray together, share a laugh, and through acts of tenderness and generosity they build and maintain bonds that are community-building. In the following section, I will prolong this discussion on religion's relationship with the social and, to a certain extent, on the political nature of religion. The ambivalence of festivities, with the conjunction of mystical and popular experiences, is reinforced in religious festivals. Festivals and anniversaries, in the honour of saints and great zawiyas, which I consider, once again,

as extensions of the area of the zawiya - and a proof of its local roots - are larger and more ambitious. I will still look at the fraternal dimension of religious events, exploring their ability to reinforce people's impression of community belonging, but will do it by showing the tension between religious and national imagination.

III

Algerian popular Islam and the power of history

In the two following sections, I will be looking at the relationship between religious and national imagination by bringing us to two saint-day festivals that took place in Oran, in the summer of 2016. The two events had strong similarities, but their differences will allow me to analyse this relationship from new perspectives. Firstly, I insist on the folkloric aspect (as an emic category) of these events, and argue that the mythification of these festivals generates a certain popular imagination of national history, relying on a range of aesthetic and affective resources (Mookherjee, 2011), and based on the association of the tribal history of saints and zawiya with the history of the nation. I notably use the circulation of flags during the wa'da to show how imagined communities refer to a blend of religious and national "other worlds" (Webb, 2018). I then demonstrate that these events must be understood within the framework of the state's religious policy, promoting a form of "moderate", "tolerant" Islam - as discussed in chapter 1. The interesting point here is that academic conferences are organised alongside the festival and serve this religious politics. I thus interpret this example and the popular success of these events as affective conductors that legitimise the political regime.

I focus here on the summer's wa'das, which are other examples of great convivial events that zawiya organise. These are public festivals, lasting from three days to a week, where followers from various zawiya come together, celebrating their union with various activities during the day, and reciting the Qur'an when the night falls. These events are a great opportunity for Sufi zawiya to represent themselves publicly. The "wa'da" is organised by one main zawiya that invites all other branches to come and celebrate. The word "wa'da" can be translated as a "promise". With the word "maou'id", which means a "meeting", a "fixed moment" or a "rendez-vous", it shares the root

“wa’d”. This is important to stress because it is not supposed to be an annual casual meeting of zawiyas, each summer, but rather the promise of a renewed alliance between religious “tribes”. Such Saints-day or Sufi festivals have different names in the Arab-Muslim world. In Algeria, it is also referred to as “moussem”, but it has different connotations. In Egypt, Schielke (2003, 2008) analysed the festive culture of “mulids” and showed that they were considered by modernists “as a bida’a, a superstition, an expression of backwardness, or a form of folklore at best” (2003: 155). Like the wa’da, the Egyptian mulid is “open to everyone to participate in” and includes “a complex mixture of pilgrimage, ecstatic piety, community celebration, trade, and amusements” (2012: 21).

In the summer of 2016, the two wa’da I attended were organised by the Taybia. There was normally only one event, but because of a split in the zawiya’s leadership, one part of the family lineage decided to organise its own wa’da. I describe elements of the two wa’das to give a broader perspective. I show that they are religious as well as social and political events, analysing the public dimension of the celebrations by highlighting three main events taking place within the big festival that the is wa’da. (1) With the academic conference organised for the beginning of the wa’da, the event brings together religious and political elites. Like the international conference in Mostaganem, ideas and values conveyed by the talks fit the image of Algerian Islam that the government has been promoting under the presidency of Bouteflika. (2) Sufi communities related to the Taybia reunite in the main family house to pray and recite the Quran during the night. It is the main religious/spiritual ceremony and brings together Sufi followers from various areas of the Algerian West. (3) These Sufi communities, in a ritual of allegiance aimed at showing their loyalty to the Taybia, offer in the evenings of the wa’da a great spectacle to the population of Maraval. This festive spectacle brings together, in the street, near the zawiya and its shrine, Sufi followers, locals, families, children etc. People come to see Algerian “folklore” and to “celebrate their traditions”.

I left the zawiya, with Sheikh Habri, in the early evening. As always in July, the night takes its time to fall in Oran. When we arrive, the street, *char’a* “Bouamama Boulenuar” (a local liberation fighter, who died in 1962) is already overcrowded. Bouamama is a famous name in the region. Sidi Abu ‘Amama, before him, was already

leading the resistance in the South of the Oran region, at the end of the 19th century. It is very hot outside, I wear a short sleeves shirt, but most men still have their long traditional ebeyas. And hats, some turbans. Two lines of houses face each other. We go into the main house. As usual in such events, women are on the first floors, preparing food, while all the men are on the top floor of the house, on the roof, under the dark night sky. It is difficult to get there, too many people are sitting on the floor. I weave in and out, find a small space to sit. The man next to me is very pensive, focused, buried into a large Qur'an. There are quite a few microphones for sound quality, but there is one main speaker, who gives the rhythm of the recitation, often reviving the audience. This man is from Adrar, a city in the Saharan desert, probably a moqadem of the Taybia. He came with many followers. Their presence is significant because a wa'da also has a political meaning. Branches of the zawiya Taybia, coming from various parts of the country, are supposed to come and show their loyalty to the tariqa during the event.

This ritual of allegiance was even more explicit during the second wa'da, as the representatives of the branches came to demonstrate their loyalty through various activities. For the Taybia, it is also a matter of prestige. Sufi orders are in competition with each other. I could see it when I talked with Mohamed Ouanezar, a journalist for the Algerian newspaper "L'Expression" and a Taybi follower, during the second wa'da I attended:

"The Taybia is a very influential tariqa, even more than the Tidjaniya, and the tariqa draws its spiritual source from this fertile South. Every zawiya that is affiliated to the Taybia came to drop off their flags in the morning. It is a very specific ritual. They offered the flags as a symbol of allegiance, and they will take them back once the wa'da is over"

Mohamed was very friendly, and invited me into the house to show me the room where the flags are stored during the time of the wa'da. For him, the wa'da was really about reuniting all the branches of the tariqa for a week.

I could see many Habriya followers during the ceremony. These events are open to all, not only to the Taybia disciples or to other Sufi followers. Even though it shows the strong level of communication and relations between zawiya in Oran, I doubt that it can even be called a "Sufi" event. People are invited to recite the Qur'an and many in

the area answer the call. The first part of the recitation session ended when dinner time came. The first session was intense. Just before the end, the man next to me, who was reading the Qur'an, had started to cry. During the whole ceremony, with his long black ebeya, his head was lowered, his eyes shut. He was very focused, absorbed in his reading, and could not even talk nor sing. Odd sounds were coming out of his mouth, sometimes as if he was whistling. He was almost in a trance. For dinner, I shared a meal with members of the Taybia family. One of them was an academic and an engineer, working in France for a school of engineering in Lyon (INSA). His wife was from Oran and had a PhD in biology. She was a geneticist and was also teaching at a university in France. The night of recitation ended in the morning. But we left earlier than that, with Sheikh Habri. I only realised after that many of the people attending could recite the Qur'an by heart. Talabi was also there. Others, who did not necessarily learn the sacred book by heart, could recite the sura they knew, when these verses came up.

The following day was more "folkloric", as many of my informants would say. It also took place at the zawiya Taybia but the main activities were outside, in the street. With Sheikh Habri, we arrived earlier than the day before, as the festivities started at the end of the afternoon. In the middle of the street, closed for the occasion, two/three groups of men, in traditional dresses, draped in white and blue fabric, armed with rifles, brandished flags, sang and danced. Fireworks exploded. It was not a "fantasia"; there is not any horse rider. We were not, unfortunately, in the desert. There was no horse riders. There was not enough space for horse parades. These groups, as previously mentioned, represent zawiyas related to the main tariqa Taybia, coming from different wilayas, as demonstrated by their flags. They also recall the historical relationship between tribes and zawiyas. Maraboutic lineages used to confer more prestige (and baraka) to tribal leaders. The show is interesting in this perspective, as it shows the dialogue between these zawiyas, and suggests a renewed alliance based on a divine contract. Each group is independent, prepares its own choreography for the event, forms autonomous circles, but at the end these circles open and let the standard-bearers meet with the other group representatives.

The event is less of a mystical experience than the day before, and I argue that it offers aesthetic and affective experiences through which the imagination of the nation is associated with the history of local saints and zawiyas. Many families, parents and their

children, came to see these small regiments of Sufi soldiers. They came as spectators, just as I did; with their mobile phones and cameras, filming and immortalising the event. It is a little window opened into the past, when Sufi orders were armed political groups and sheikhs their leaders. It is also a display of “culture”. People coming to the event say that such shows are part of “Algerian traditions”, and I therefore see the street as both a religious and national public space. In this urban environment, I would be tempted to argue that it is a kind of mobile museum - which people want to see as long as it is alive - if the idea of museumisation was less associated with the colonial state (Anderson, 1991: 128). The show lasted for a few hours. Each follower had his rifle dancing from one hand to the other, throwing it into each other’s hands, and then into the sky. It is through these various activities that History is performed.

There are commercial activities in the street. People use the popularity of the event to set up stands and sell traditional sweets, biscuits, and cups of tea to families. In another part of the street, old men fight with sticks. This is a famous sport in Algeria. It is very spectacular and people form circles around them. The festival’s atmosphere is relaxed. In the evening, I would go there alone, without Sheikh Habri. The festive environment makes it conducive for encounters. It is how I met Yacine, a young musician, who plays the oud in one of the city’s popular bands, and his uncle, Massinissa, a journalist for a local radio (mentioned in chapter 2), who is also in charge of the management of cultural goods in the Oran region for the Algerian government.

I could also recapture the festival’s atmosphere, and its ambivalence, every Tuesday at Abdel Qader Jilani’s shrine, which I describe in chapter 6. There were men and women, young people and older ones, merchants, singers and dancers etc. In the Qubba, on the top of Mount Aidour, there was no gender segregation, and it was puzzling to see and hear men and women singing together. For the people from Oran, the celebrations and activities taking place there, every day (though Tuesday was a little out of the ordinary), were not necessarily experiences of the divine. Many families and couples came to have a nice day, to walk around and picnic on the grass of the park. It is a place to gather with friends, to find some peace, outside the sound and fury of the city.

We could say that these spaces are sometimes religious, sometimes profane, but the soothing atmosphere of the profane space can also be explained by its spiritual aura.

The young couples that I met there, for example, climbing to the top of the Mount with their motor scooters, did not necessarily believe in the divine power of the Saint, and considered all this “folklore” as fragments of their Algerian traditions, but they also came because of this special, peaceful atmosphere that the qubba, the Saint and the mythic history of the place generate. There is the fog, the mystery, the hidden power of the shrine, and it is thus not only an aesthetic performance, despite the sun, the blue sky and the fantastic view of Oran. Not far from the qubba, near the gardens, local bands played traditional instruments, singing and dancing, to entertain the visitors of the day. Walking around, you could hear, at one point, the voice of the local marabout meeting theirs. Like a small, weekly festival, where the borders between the sacred and the profane is tenuous.

Coming back to the wa'da, we were then invited to enjoy a nice couscous with the host family. I had the opportunity to talk with the French-Algerian engineer I had met the day before. He was with his uncle, who was also from Tlemcen. We had a long discussion, in which they told me more about the role of this event:

“These groups come from various wilayas, we can see their flags on the front window of the house. They are armed, because it symbolises the role that they used to have. Outside cities, in douars, moqadems used to do everything for their community”

The engineer evoked the relationship between these groups:

“They all invite each other, every year, there is reciprocity going on. Yet they all come from the four sides of the Algerian West, from Tlemcen, Adrar etc. But these are moments of union and spiritual communion”

If we compare these events with the celebrations taking place during the week, we observe that the people in attendance are more diverse, but that they are less intermixed. The different spaces (where they do the dhikr, where they eat and drink with family, where they pray and meditate) are more distinct, more clearly divided. Outside, in the street, the space seems indeed separated from the mystic rituals taking place inside the zawiya. There is an aggregation of small events within the main event, which is not the case in the festivities of the week. God seems to be expelled from certain spaces. He becomes an actor, a performer, the object of a spectacle. There is one image that is, in

that regard, significant: in the street, through a window, we can see in a room people doing the dhikr ceremony, men from the Taybia singing, dancing, going into a trance. Kids and their parents watch them from outside, with astounded eyes. The mystic ritual is fixed, becomes a folkloric spectacle. God seems to be confined to a space, but it is not the case of the saint, who joins up the two worlds. The saint is divine, directed to the sky, the paradise, but he is also settled in the soil, in the same ground as human beings.

These festivals are representative of the success of nationalist projects. Unlike Muslim festivals in India, for example, which can, in some cases, highlight the country's religious divisions and become ethno-nationalist events (see Parvez, 2014), Oran's saints-day wa'das are popular events gathering people and families coming from various backgrounds. Despite the presence of different Islamic trends in Algeria, a large majority of people in the country share a set of common beliefs and ideas about God, so festivals cannot be the place for the performance of religious differences. But they can be used symbolically to produce political attachment to the nation (Hobsbawn, 1983, Parvez, 2014). The example of flags, and the way they circulate during the wa'da, is interesting in this perspective, as they refer, like maps (Ramaswamy, 2002: 151) and anthems (Butler and Spivak, 2007: 73), to a "territorial imaginary" (Mookherjee, 2011: S13). These flags represent different tribes and zawiyas, and come to the wa'da each year to get re-united. It can be seen symbolically as an act of allegiance to the main tariqa, as my informants would say. But an important part of the ritual takes place outside, in front of the zawiya, under the Algerian flags that decorate the banners between the buildings of the street. I would not argue that it illustrates these zawiyas' allegiance to the national flag, but rather that it further shows how imagined communities rely on a blend of religious and national "other worlds". As evoked in chapter 2, this argument further illustrates religion's ability to invoke immanent power that is potentially foundational for a fused political-religious imagination.

Here, it is thus more than a religious public space; though the saint's territory seems to be in the street, it serves and shares the interests of the nation-state. Generating a sense of community belonging, the festival takes place with the blessing of the Saint, under the authority of the Algerian flag. People coming for the festivities are not only friends, comrades and companions, but whole families, with parents, children, uncles, cousins etc. During the Saints-day festival, people reunite and celebrate a territory, a

district, a certain history of the area. It is the festivity of a human territory, before being one of a God. And the history of the locals, in this district of Oran, can be observed in their words: “It is our traditions, our folklore”. The past is fixed, objectified, and hides a potential power. It has the ability to transmit certain stories - more than others - a history, a mythology, and can thus give meaning to the present and future of a political community. These celebrations are the justification of this presentation of history.

IV

Festivals, conferences and Algerian Islam: religious and national traditions

These spaces convey power because they are filled with history. Therefore, they are coveted by political actors, who may want to monopolise this popular power or be associated with it. My ethnographic data shows once again the importance of the state’s role in the construction of a territory’s religious identity. By showing that these popular events generate political spaces, I explain that the religious politics of the state does not only rely on strategic ideology or realpolitik, but takes into account the “religious” power of these saints-day festivals. It is thus not only the image and discourse of “popular Islam” that interest the state, but these events’ ability to use affects and feelings, gathering and federating people around common history and values.

Though the two wa’das were pretty similar, the second one gathered more people and organised a cycle of conferences for the first two days of the week. In this respect, it looked like the international conference organised by the UNZA in Mostaganem. “Peace and tolerance in Sufi thought” was the theme of this year’s conference. Inter-religious dialogue and contemporary geopolitical issues were again at the heart of their debates. It seemed very “modern” to organise such intellectual events, and it was an important moment for the zawiya. A sunny day, at the mosque Ibn Badis, a beautiful, recently built mosque in the South of Oran, with many conference rooms. Sheikh Habri told me that mosques were now being built not only for prayers and community gatherings, but to host such events. We were welcomed into the largest room, which bears the name of Emir Abdel Qader, the “father” of the Algerian nation. A portrait of him sits in front of the room. The event was supported by public authorities. In the

morning, the second speaker was the representative of the state's board of religious affairs in Oran. He mentioned the two legislative chambers, the National Assembly and the Council of the Nation, which had representatives in the room, and congratulated the organisers of the tenth anniversary of this annual meeting "in favour of peace, union and reconciliation". He ended his speech by paying homage to the man who initiated this meeting: his "Excellency, President Abdelaziz Bouteflika". It was covered by local and national media. I was even interviewed by a television station when someone told them that I was doing research on the zawiyas. In retrospect, this was probably a mistake as I had a few issues with local police in the weeks following the event.

After the talks, they had prepared a feast in the family house for the guests. It was an impressive house, with four floors and many different rooms: a small mosque, rooms for praying, court yards and a mausoleum. Portraits of famous family members were displayed everywhere on the walls. A house of old aristocrats; a Sufi aristocracy. It was very generous and all the people present at the mosque that day were invited to come and join. The prestige of the house was at stake. The meal took some time to come. A good hour had passed between the arrival of the guests and the arrival on tables of the barbecued whole lamb, a "mashwe". One whole lamb per plate, cooked, still steaming on each table. A true feast. A couscous then followed, for desert! It was gargantuan. There was at my table, next to me, a man who had just gotten married, two hours earlier. After the ceremony at the town hall, he went to the mosque with a friend, to pray, met some of the members of the Taybia family, and they were then invited to join everybody for lunch at the zawiya. The events that followed in the next few days were quite similar to that of the first wa'da. In the evening, the "folklore". Old men fighting with sticks. Young tribesmen with their rifles. Families in the street, couples, children playing. Merchants selling sweets and tea and small, fake rifles. At night, prayers. Followers recited the sura of the Qur'an. It started late in the evening and finished in the morning.

Such events, and their rituals of allegiance, were important in times of war and tensions (between tribes or against a common, colonial enemy, for example), both symbolising and creating alliances between tribes. The role and importance of the rifle (mukahla) recalls the military actions of tribes, notably in "razzias" between tribes or against French authorities, as historical sources show (Mesnier, 1914 in Ben Hounet, 2008). Marabouts and sheikhs were not only spiritual and religious guides, but political

leaders. The socio-political context has changed. Tribal politics is still relevant to analyse in order to understand social issues in less urban areas (see for example Ben Hounet, 2010), but here it is the question of national politics that we must integrate into our understanding. I argue that the event's focus moved from the ritual of allegiance to the academic conferences, which I think is symptomatic of the change in the zawiya's politics. Without its political dimension, the ritual of allegiance is reduced to its symbolic performance. The original politics of the events have been transformed into a tradition, the allegiance ritual into a spectacle.

We find in the literature the analysis of similar cases. In Tunisia, state-sponsored festivals, such as the "spectacle" el-Hadhra, reveal a "shift toward folklorisation" (Jankowsky, 2017: 870). Jankowsky shows how this festival extracts "Sufi music from its religious institutional context", desacralizing Sufi sounds and resacralizing public space (2017: 872), and uses the idea of a "contextual gap between ritual and spectacle" (ibid.), which he derives from the linguistic notion of intertextual gap (Briggs and Bauman, 1992). By arguing that "there is always a gap between a performance and its precedents", he incites us to look at the ritual's previous performances to evaluate the distance between the event and its religious institutional context. He concludes for the festival of el-Hadhra that these performances "maximise the gap". Though the conceptual tools he uses are pertinent, I would however argue that the wa'da in our context seems to minimise this gap. Followers from many different Sufi orders attend the event, participate in prayers and in the recital of Qur'anic verses, and people and families come at the end of the day for the more popular spectacle, but the structure of the event still adheres to the ritual trajectory of a tariqa. The specificity of Sufi orders cannot be obscured, as it is the case in the el-Hadhra spectacle, because of the unity and coherence of the event.

I would rather explain the ritual's folklorisation in terms of a historical gap between the performance and its political meaning. Zawiyas still have a social, spiritual, medical, even political, role; but that political role has changed, at least in urban settings such as in Oran, and does not stick to tribal structures anymore. In this perspective, national politics is crucial to take into account, as these events take place in a certain political and ideological context. The multiplication of wa'das and moussems in the country is recent. Twenty years have passed since the 1990s civil war, and these events

have been since tolerated and encouraged by public authorities (see Adel, 2000). And we can observe, not only a discourse on peace, tolerance and inter-religious dialogue, but a promotion of “ancestral Islam”, the “Islam of our grand-parents”. The two phases of the event can thus be understood in this perspective. The academic conference further promotes values of peace and tolerance, associated with Sufism. The festive aspect of the wa'da displays a positive, entertaining image of what is supposed to be an old Algerian Islamic tradition.

But the ideological argument does not paint the full picture. These popular events are encouraged by political instances because they are, precisely, political events. A frequent argument says that Sufism is promoted by the state because the state considers Sufism as an apolitical ideology, which is thus less likely to question its institutions. Even though the history of Sufi orders in the region tends to challenge this view, the current conservatism of North-African zawiya supports this idea.

However, and this is one of the main points of this section, the historical force and popular dimension of these events, organised by and related to Sufi brotherhoods, show they are certainly not apolitical. Families and friends gather around a saint, a territory, and these events are moments of glorification and mythification of a tradition. These events of fraternity and popular union are crucial for a young nation-state, especially when it is a “republic”, a public, common thing. During a slow process and thanks to these kinds of events, the republic is being built and imagined. People gather and observe their collective history, their shared traditions and common good.

I thus argue that these popular, community events, essentially “religious” (as saints-day festivals), can be considered as national rituals. This argument depends on the proposition, developed in chapter 2, that nation and religion are not inherently different in their ideological forms, and on the analysis of the production of affects in nation-building processes. When Travis Webb writes that “‘nations’ and ‘religions’ are both manifestations of this otherworldliness [as the essence of the modern world]” (2018: 63), he is close to Maurice Bloch’s understanding of the different forms of the social, when Bloch argues that the transcendental social derives from humans’ ability to live very largely in imagination (2008: 10). The difference with Bloch’s position probably lies in their understanding of what is “modern”, as Webb’s “modern worlds” are certainly far more recent than the “modern human society” Bloch considers in his

analysis. For Bloch, religious-like phenomena (religion or, therefore, nationalism) “are an inseparable part of a key adaptation unique to modern humans”, as “the capacity to imagine other worlds [...] is the very foundation of modern human society” (2008: 2).

Moreover, these events show how politics’ legitimation does not come from itself but from exterior affects, and thus how heteronomy resists autonomy. For Nancy (2006), taking the example of the French republican model, affects like “fraternity”, “solidarity” or the “French revolution” support and legitimise the political regime. In Algeria, as seen in chapter 2, the legitimacy of national politics has also relied on similar affects, with the main political party - the FLN - using the history of the war of independence and the prestige of national liberation. But “affect is essentially heteronomous” (2006: 109), as the principle of autonomy consists in thinking of politics (and here, the state) as deriving “its legitimation from itself” (2006: 107), with the polis giving itself “its own law” (2006: 103). The history of the state, in this perspective, is thus a history of resistance, as “autonomy resists heteronomy throughout all representations of democracy” and “heteronomy resists autonomy in the force of affect” (2006: 109). Affects like fraternity, national liberation or beliefs in a divine other-world can thus combine and resist the rational foundations of politics.

It is in this perspective that we can propose a short history of how such affects are produced in contemporary Algeria. Affects can be generated when religious events like this saint-day festival progressively become national traditions. Such national traditions have federating power and affect people’s imagination of the nation; they come with their families to celebrate the saint’s day, have the sheikh’s blessing under the banners - together with Algerian flags - that decorate the street.



Fig 5. The wa'da of Sheikh Moulay Hassan, in Oran.



Fig 6. The wa'da's festivities in the daylight.

CHAPTER 5

God's many faces

Divine power and its ethical manifestations

In the last three chapters, while relations with the divine have been central to all my discussions of power, I have not yet examined how people understand God's actions and presence in the *zawiya*. Instead I have looked at the agency of worshippers in actualising and accessing divine power. My focus in this chapter is on the ethical consequences of people's imagination of the agency and presence of God. Starting with a transcendent, rule-making God, who prescribes social, gendered norms for everyday comportment, I show that God is a visible figure, represented in words, texts and norms, but also in objects and spaces. Arguing that such concrete, accessible representations of God allow for immanent critique and engagement with the religious tradition, I analyse the Sufi sheikh's use of advice as a form of "reflexive materialism" (Reinhardt, 2016), making God's presence the basis for contestation and creative ethical practice. When God is an invisible figure, it becomes an object of experience, and can thus have therapeutic qualities. People's experience of the presence of the divine, in their bodies, for example with the *dhikr* ceremony, can provide well-being. It is a God of joy and comfort, appearing through personal and collective experiences.

I make a distinction between two main forms of ethics in this chapter. The first one relies on a dialogue with God and its message. It is an all-powerful God that gives moral instructions, explaining what is good and what is wrong to do. Here, I focus on the importance of the Sufi sheikh's role in this dialogue, as his use of advice reveals a form of "immanent critique" (Ahmad, 2011: 116). The second form of ethics appears as an encounter with God. It is a search for a higher self, which takes the form of an experience of the divine. I am inspired by Pierre Hadot's use of ancient philosophy's ideas of "ethics" (1995), but also prolong the discussion on self-cultivation practices

(Mahmood, 2004; Mittermaier, 2012; Vicini, 2017) in the anthropology of Islam. In line with one of the main arguments of this thesis, I show that this ethical experience is less dependent on the Sufi sheikh, highlighting the community's autonomy and the individual's power.

I

God's presence in the world through words, texts and norms

On a Spring evening in 2016, at 6 pm, just an hour before the Sufi sheikh goes home. A woman enters the zawiya. Sheikh Habri is sleeping on the bench/couch of the central room. He wakes up, welcomes her, and they start discussing. He sits on the bench while she stands, in front of him, explaining her issues. She is 51 and has just divorced her husband, who left her for a younger woman. She is wearing all black, her hair is covered by a hijab. I look at them, while they are talking, and suddenly, I see her removing her veil and revealing her long, brown hair. Sheikh Habri just asked her to do it. He makes movements with his hands, trying to arrange something with her hair and her hijab. He wants to show her how she can be pretty, elegant while still wearing the hijab. The nuance is interesting: the hijab is an object of modesty and purity, but, in this perspective, should not prevent women from being elegant. Sheikh Habri is considered as a sort of reassuring, asexual, paternal figure ; and his knowledge and legitimacy allow him to offer advice on many different topics . His positions, in this context, seem rather liberal. He knows the text and is attached to its literal meaning, but always tries to catch its spirit to adapt it to people's issues. In this situation, what matters to him is to help this woman find a new husband. Later, asking him about this story, he told me, "in the Qur'an, God says that he looks into our hearts, and does not watch your clothes. He will judge you on the basis of your life".

This ethnographic example paints a portrait of God, as understood from the perspective of the zawiya and reveals different aspects of God's ethics and personality traits. The most revealing aspect of this vignette is the normative character of God's power in the world. God is not only a distant force in which people believe. The message that comes from God's direct presence in the world has ethical consequences. People

attempt to live according to their perception of God's ethical commands. People's views might come from their own reading and understanding of God's scriptures, but they are also influenced by the interpretations of scriptures provided by figures of authority and by institutions. In this example, a woman is trying to follow God's rules and norms in relation to her everyday practices of clothing according to her own ethical sensibilities, but is not sure how to do this. Some schools of Islamic law consider that women should wear a veil, the hijab, to cover their head, but the complexity of Islamic scriptures makes them hard to interpret on your own. So, people like this woman often ask for the help of local figures of authority to understand them.

Sheikh Habri's authority in this example shows a form of knowledge coming from a supernatural, all-powerful figure, which is then transmitted to a few people in the world, who are able to explain and diffuse it. As he possesses baraka and is a man of knowledge, people such as the women in this example come to the zawiya to consult with him on everyday ethical dilemmas. In this case, though God appears in the world as an autocratic, norm-making figure, he is also kind and loving, and only wants the best for his creatures. A part of God's power is given to some intermediaries so that they can interpret divine scriptures and help people to find the path to a good life. It is not a God-fearing attitude that we find at the zawiya. Instead people aim to find help and counsel via the Sheikh. Importantly in all these aspects of God, it is essential that he is present and accessible in the space of the zawiya. Divine laws do not belong to an "unseen" sphere. They can be translated, communicated to human beings, through objects (religious, sacred texts) or human intermediaries.

As Matthew Engelke points out all religions have to resolve the question of mediation in the material world of unseen forces - what is different is how difficult or problematic this process is: "All religion is material religion. All religion has to be understood in relation to the media of its materiality. This necessarily includes a consideration of religious things, and also of actions and words, which are material no matter how quickly they pass from sight or sound or dissipate into the air" (2012: 209). The problem of mediation is even stronger when people deal with a transcendent, out-of-this-world God; as Tom Boylston puts it, "how is the ineffable, the incommensurate, or the other construed as manifesting in sensible form? How does the abstract become tangible?" (2013: 259). In the fore-mentioned ethnographic example, God is represented

rather than being present. In the zawiya, there are books on the shelves, - the Qur'an, Hadith, collections of stories, hagiographies, carrying words from God and the prophet Muhammad. God is represented and his words are interpreted. Therefore, a question arises: does a distant, transcendent God, who manifests itself through words, texts and norms, still reside outside the phenomenal world? With a form of "reflexive materialism" (Reinhardt, 2016), moral norms produced by God's various representations may bring us to challenge our understanding of transcendental and immanent imaginations of the divine. While religious texts and words manifest God's will and affect people's behaviours and actions, they also permeate objects and spaces. By taking the example of the zawiya's gendered arrangement, I propose to observe God's representations by looking at the ways in which the various spaces of the zawiya are organised.

In the zawiya Habriya, the main spaces were gendered for different reasons; one was a strategic move from Sheikh Habri, in an aim to prevent any possible criticism from Salafis. The other was motivated by Sheikh Habri's own personal ethical choice, as he suggested that it was still important, Salafis or not, to preserve the purity and sobriety of the zawiya. The main room of the zawiya is reserved for men. It is the room where the Friday dhikr ceremony takes place and where men sit during the day, praying and reading, talking with each other, waiting for Sheikh Habri. There is another room for the female dhikr ceremony, which people can access through an outside corridor leading to Sheikh Habri's sister's house and property. His sister leads the dhikr ceremony on Fridays. The gendering of space in the zawiya may remind us of Bourdieu's famous analysis of the Kabyle house, a structuralist homage to Lévi-Strauss, with the opposition between a masculine world and a world of male/female and female/female relations (Bourdieu, 1972[2000]). The zawiya's feminine spaces are not directly accessible from the street, but lead towards an inside courtyard, while masculine spaces are apparent from outside and open to the exterior. When I lived in a flat just above the zawiya, one of the windows was closed and I did not have the sheikh's permission to open it, as it led into this courtyard.

On other days, while waiting for Sheikh Habri, women wait in a small room next to the main one. There is a settee where they can sit. The main room is thus a masculine one, but divided in two parts during the day by a wooden screen, when Sheikh Habri is

in his “doctor” role. This does not mean that women cannot access the main “male” room, but rather that, when they are cured by Sheikh Habri there, men should not look at them, and should be behind the wooden screen. Sheikh Habri was not too strict about this division and men could still circulate easily in this space, but when they did cross the boundaries he carefully monitored men’s glances and behaviours. I too, was asked to sit behind the screen when a woman was being cured. It is interesting to note that this space has not always been arranged in this way. When I asked Sheikh Habri about it, he suggested it was a necessary change to preserve women’s bodies from the masculine gaze, but he also told me that he used this screen to quiet Salafis criticism, who used to say that the zawiya was an impure Islamic space because of its mixed character: “I do not want to see an Islamist coming here and say: ‘look at this sheikh, he lets men and women look at each other and discuss in the same room, it is against Islam’”. Tellingly, women were generally surprised to be obliged to sit in a different room. Though it is not uncommon in Algerian zawiya to have rooms dedicated to female activities, this room is so large and central within the zawiya that it does not seem natural, even for pious women, to have the access to this forbidden space.

The small size of the room dedicated to women was a real problem as it often became overcrowded. Three or four women could sit on the bench, but others had to wait, standing, while the central room was large and empty. This crowding happened quite often because Sheikh Habri frequently went outside the zawiya for personal matters, and when he came back it was not unusual to see a group of seven or eight women crammed into the room. This led to very strange scenes such as a whole family coming in, with the husband sitting in the big empty room while his wife and two children waiting in the other crowded room. However, it is interesting to note that children were generally not considered along these gender lines. They usually stayed with their mother, even when the father was also present, but there was not any informal rule that forbade them to circulate in any of the two spaces. Young girls were not women and were “tolerated” in the central room of the zawiya, though they could not attend the dhikr ceremony the young boys could (who in turn could not attend the women dhikr ceremony either).

In Sufi ceremonies and parties, women and men are also separated from each other. I observed a similar division in conferences and academic events: people are not

“obliged” to sit with people of the same sex, but the division is often quite natural. Only in political meetings, did I not see such borders between genders. For parties and ritual ceremonies, within the family that organises the event, women cook and eat together, inside the house, and men take care of the distribution process, from installing tables on the floor to bringing large plates of couscous. Elders often take care of the tea at the end of the meal. But the separation between men and women is sometimes more fragile. Sufi ceremonies are sometimes organised by women. I described in another chapter the party that the woman healer from Ain el-Turck holds every year around May, where she invites followers from many different zawiyas in the region. When I attended the ceremony, with Sheikh Habri and a few disciples of the Habriya (Hadj, Belgacem, Mehdi, Talabi), it was an Issawi moqadem who was leading the dhikr ceremony. Most of the Sufi followers present that evening were from this branch of the Issawiya. It was a house with many floors, with women were preparing the food in the first and second floors, and the ceremony taking place on the roof, on the open air, under a large tent. Only men were there at the beginning, but the absence of the main organiser of the event seemed odd, and women were then invited to join the small crowd of men on the roof. A new gender division of the space appeared. A first circle of men, sitting crossed-legged on carpets. A second circle of men, sitting on chairs, not on carpets. Women were on the left side of the space, most of them standing. But these spaces were not strictly delimited. The border was weaker. On chairs, some men were sitting beside women and many discussions could take place in this in-between area. Rania and Zac, two friends of mine, were present and came close to Sheikh Habri and I. They are also friends with the woman that organises the event. Hadj was far from the informal masculine space, playing with a woman’s children and talking to her.

This unstable gender division of the space generated a few problems. Sheikh Habri did not like the way Hadj behaved during the ceremony. He comes with Habri followers and thus engages his own responsibility: “people invite you to have dinner with them, at their homes, they do not expect you to talk with their wives and sisters. One cannot do that”. When we left the party, Hadj stayed behind and Sheikh Habri suspected that he was using this opportunity to talk with women and “have their phone numbers”. He was very upset, “he does not behave well, I was embarrassed”, and they did not talk for a few days after this episode. In Sheikh Habri’s view, Hadj’s marital situation is a problem that needs to be resolved, because it makes him behave

unethically. As he sees it, what happened in Ain el-Turck was just an example of his general behaviour, as he observed, for instance, that Hadj, at the zawiya, was always sitting on the side of the bench that allows him to look at women when they wait in the other room. It is interesting to see how Sheikh Habri paid close attention to these details. The screen protects the woman's body from men's gaze, but there is not any door separating the central room from the women's room.

In the zawiya, a transcendent, rule-making God thus prescribes social, gendered norms for everyday behaviour. It is a visible representation of God, in words, texts and norms, but also in objects and spaces, as the zawiya's gendered layout shows. Though God does not seem to be present in this world, he is represented materially and people can interact with him. In the following section, I show how such concrete, accessible representations of God allow for immanent critique and engagement with the religious tradition.

II

God in the zawiya Habriya: a loving, accommodating norm-making figure

God is a visible, represented figure, and appears through various laws, codes and norms. This form of divine appearance is a global, historical phenomenon and is shared by the three monotheisms. What can then differ is the nature and psychology of God's presence in the world. God's power produces religious norms, but the implementation of these norms is strongly influenced by people's representations of God's psychology. It varies from one space to another. Unlike the judgemental God, often present in Salafi representations, I argue in this section that God in Maraval's zawiya is a loving, assuaging, accommodating character, who appears through the mediation of creative, pastoral Sufi sheikhs. I offer a few different ethnographic examples in which this help was sought and offered to both men and women. Through these I will illustrate how the sheikhs' representation of a loving, caring God offsets the weight and importance of religious norms.

I am using Irfan Ahmad's notion of "immanent critique", as "a form of criticism that uses tenets, histories, principles, and vocabularies of a tradition to criticize it in its own terms" (2011: 109). This idea of critique resonated with Asad's definition of

religious tradition, as he shows how people engage critically with the core texts of their traditions. Asad, in *Genealogies of religion* (1993: 208), uses the example of Saudi intellectuals and persuasively shows how through the medium of *nasîha* (advice) the young ulema (in the wake of the Gulf war) offer engaged critique of the Saudi Arabian state and society” (Ahmad, 2011: 115). It is in this perspective that Reinhardt considers that such types of immanent critique, as a form of criticism taking place within a tradition, can be understood as “reflexive materialism” (2016: 79); as concrete words and discourses that engage with God’s representations in the world. Ahmad’s article mainly focuses on academics and intellectuals, describing their level of engagement with the Islamic tradition, and only evokes a few examples “of immanent critique from the everyday life of ordinary Muslim subjects” in his conclusion (2011: 123). The examples I give here allow me to complete his argument, looking at an original case. The type of immanent criticism that the Sufi sheikh proposes comes from a certain understanding of the “everyday life” of “ordinary Muslim subjects” (ibid.). But the sheikh is also, in the context of this Islamic public sphere and republican *demos*, an intellectual figure and a religious authority.

Sheikh Habri is the important exemplar for the brotherhood. His brother, Ali, also had a leading position, living in the house just next to the zawiya, but he was less involved in the family’s activities. Sheikh Ahmed Habri indeed managed almost everything, from the Friday dhikr ceremony to everyday curing and counselling activities, to bureaucratic and political matters. The door of his office, at the zawiya, faces the entrance of the main room, and it is almost impossible to enter the zawiya without catching his gaze. He is like a radar, observing and monitoring everything he sees. He is an open-minded and relatively tolerant person, but takes a critical look at society, often overtly judging people’s behaviours. This personality and his social position, as a Sufi sheikh, with his baraka and religious legitimacy, thus lead him to be an exemplar and guide. He has a role in the moral regulation of society, noting its problems and attempting to resolve them.

This chapter leads me to evaluate the moral role and the social position of women within the zawiya. In a way, like many researchers before me (Coulon, 1988, Dunbar, 2000, Bop, 2005), I show that Sufi brotherhoods provide women independent spaces to express their spirituality. The autonomy of these spaces is nevertheless relative, be it

because of the patriarchal structure of the brotherhood system, or because of gender relationships in Algerian families. These spaces are regulated by male religious figures who have political power within the brotherhood system. Decision-making power is passed from one man to another. Husbands often control the mobility of their wives. Men, in many situations, allow women to go to the zawiya, or in zawiya-like spaces like the mausoleum of Abdel Qader Jilani, as we will see in this chapter.

Like Bop (2005), I would add that women retain a role of discipleship within this system and are not treated as true religious leaders (when they potentially could be). The Sheikh's sister, for example, takes care of the women's ceremony on Friday, but does not have the same status as her two brothers. She did not receive from her father the same political power as her brothers. But we must be careful and avoid hasty conclusions. If political power is not equitably distributed among genders, the magical and mystical power of women, in the Islamic imagination, often exceeds that of men. The woman, and the mother, have a strong reproductive and creative dimension in religions. In Islam, we can associate this role with the idea of baraka and mystical power, as I showed in the previous chapters. It is a power that men often fear, and that they cannot deny, but they can instead control and regulate it. This is what Sheikh Habri does, for example, when he is instructed by the state to control healers and marabouts by formally declaring their activities, by officially allowing them to work – knowing that they are often female healers. Women therefore potentially have a mystical power equal, if not superior, to that of men, but within the zawiya they are only disciples and cannot access social and political positions equal to those of men.

In the first weeks of fieldwork in Oran, I was surprised to see how Sheikh Habri was considered as a kind of reassuring, asexual, paternal figure. As a result, he escaped usual wariness and people trusted him and sought his counsel without fear. People came often to the zawiya to ask for advice, and frequently called him on the phone. His mobile phone was a very important object in the life of the zawiya. In Oran people do not necessarily have cars, or do not use them. They would go to the zawiya on foot, so counsel via mobile phone provided a less time consuming and more instantaneous means of communication. It also enabled Sheikh Habri to be in touch with women, who did not live in Maraval, and who could not often get around. From Ain el-Turck to Fleuris and the “Amendiers”, the mobile phone was a source of advice and a technology of the good

life. With Rania, Leila, Zineb... Sheikh Habri was a religious authority, a wise figure, and a friend. Zineb is an interesting example because she almost called him everyday. The two of them met twenty years ago, thanks to the RND, when local politics became more open to religious associations. When I interviewed her, she told me that Sheikh Habri was, not only a very sympathetic man, but a “humoriste”, someone you could have a laugh with:

“Yes! He is! Isn’t it? He has a good heart. He always tells you to follow the good path, he even gives you examples, for people who followed this or that path, and who did not get what they wanted. When he talks to you, you feel that he gives you the chance to touch concrete things, and not abstract ones. Because the abstract is in the secret of God. And he always gives concrete examples, examples of people who lived this or that experience. And, most importantly, he is very generous. We feel that Islam makes everyone more generous, more welcoming and helpful”

Zineb lived in the district of Boulanger, and worked for the national company in charge social security, being responsible for nineteen of its medical centres in Oran. During the interview, she described the role Sheikh Habri had with women, and the kind of ethical advice he offers:

“It is easy to talk to him, because we feel safe with this kind of person. He is reassuring. We are safe, and we are understood. And he pushes us, he encourages us, so that we can go on growing, so that we can become good women. And if, you see, if he sees that you look at something that should not be looked at, he puts you on the good rails again, ‘what you ask is not possible, you cannot make it’. There is an Algerian proverb that says: ‘better look at your feet, than further away’”

Sheikh Habri’s abilities of practical judgement and deliberation are crucial to understand how he offers ethical advice to individuals. People, and notably women, come with familial and conjugal issues, have professional careers and complex lives, and must negotiate with an ambivalent moral environment, made of multiple and often contradictory values. Sheikh Habri’s relationship with women shows how figures of authority like a Sufi sheikh offer practical advice with a certain image of God in mind. His representation of God as a figure with a supportive role reveals how he engages with his religious tradition. The ethnographic example described at the beginning of this chapter is representative of an important part of Sheikh Habri’s work. His way of reasoning starts from the tradition, from his knowledge of core texts, but he uses his

understanding of people's everyday lives to offer pertinent personal advice. This way of dealing with such issues is in itself an interpretation of the spirit and aim of these core texts, as other trends in Islam would reject this flexible approach to religious scriptures. In this respect, it shows the liveliness of the Islamic tradition, as "a conflict of interpretations of that tradition, a conflict which itself has a history susceptible of rival interpretations" (McIntyre, 1977: 460-1 in Reinhard, 2016: 80).

Marriage is a very important issue in Algerian society. Marrying makes you an adult. It means that you probably have a job, that you can have children and a family. Single life is a difficult situation for people in age to be married, and is even harder for Algerian women (Ouadah-Bedidi, 2005). It is less socially tolerated than the male single status, notably because of the question of virginity before marriage (Charpentier, 2012). As it is considered a shameful situation, it generates social and familial issues: difficult access to accommodation, moral suspicion, surveillance in the neighbourhood, familial disapproval. Non-married people are thus not well integrated in Algerian society; divorced people and the youth suffer from these integration issues. For young people, it is quite complicated to find a good partner, as families are involved and often it is not an individual decision. For divorced people, social pressure and society's gaze makes marrying again an important matter.

In Maraval, Oran, the zawiya implements God's command, and thus plays here an important role, before and after marriage. Sheikh Habri pays attention to people's issues and help them to find solutions to their life problems. With his network and the Sufi community, he can act as an intermediary and connect people that do not necessarily know each other. As he always has his mobile phone in his hand, he can receive calls from women with unstable familial lives, without having to directly meet with them.

For instance, this was the case with Leila. Once she had met the sheikh, she could not stop calling him for advice or just to have a chat. She was quite lonely but never explicitly asked for his help finding a husband. It was more Sheikh Habri who wanted to find her a husband. Marriage here is an institution that regulates and codifies gender relations, and the sheikh wants to intervene in situations where marriage is not present and thus cannot fulfil its role. It seemed obvious to me with Leila's case, and Sheikh Habri tended to justify many of her problems by pointing to the absence of a man in her

life. He could also explicitly intervene, by finding and arranging meet-ups with single men. But he also gave personal pieces of advice about how to find a good husband. I came across women who, after their divorce, did not know how to get men's attention in a religiously appropriate way. This was on display in the introductory vignette.

This next example will be useful to illustrate my point. In most situations, women come to the zawiya to address family problems with their children, their husband, or their family-in-law. On my first day at the zawiya, a woman came to Sheikh Habri to bemoan her husband's level of involvement in the family's affairs. She argued that he did not treat her well. She talked with Sheikh Habri and he asked her to write the details of her complaint on paper, so that he could think about it and then discuss it with the husband. He then met with the husband and gave him a few pieces of advice so that the situation could improve between the two of them. For Sheikh Habri, "if the woman had gone to a justice court for this problem, it would have become an 'affair of state', the husband would have been furious that a private matter took such proportions, and he would have asked for divorce".

Sheikh Habri organises meetings between two spouses in his office to talk and find an arrangement rather often. It does not necessarily go well and in this small office many violent verbal disputes take place. People scream and shout. Once, a woman was very upset by her husband's behaviour. When a couple gets married, the wife generally leaves her family to live with her husband, either with him alone or with his family. But in this case, her husband was not very hardworking and her family (her father) had to pay all the bills, taxes, rent etc. The situation was problematic because the man did not fulfil the financial responsibilities that his marriage imposed. But her complaint went beyond the financial aspect of marriage. She described her husband's absences: he rarely had dinner with her and their children and often did not sleep with her. Sheikh Habri concluded that it was a sexual issue and that the husband, through his behaviour, made him think that he was seeing someone else. Therefore, he met the husband in private a few days later, once again in his office, and asked him to put more effort into being present for his wife and family, reminding him of his marital duties.

I took the example of Sheikh Habri in this section because the zawiya Habriya was my main field site. But I was also very close to the Taybia zawiya, situated in

Maraval, not far from the Habriya (see chapter 4). There, I was able to interview Sheikh Moulay Hassan. This conversation provided me with an additional example of the presence of a God-accommodating figure, who seeks to pacify relations between family members through the mediation of religious elites.

The zawiyas Habriya and Taybia, which are both in the district of Maraval, look like each other. The two sheikhs know each other well, and the main moqadem of the Taybia is a good friend of Sheikh Habri; he often comes to the Habriya for various affairs and is sometimes involved in the Friday dhikr ceremony. It is important to stress that a moqadem plays an important role in the zawiya; he is often the first interlocutor for people coming for help or advice. When I came to the Taybia to interview Sheikh Moulay Hassan for the first time, it was the zawiya's moqadem who was taking care of the problems of a small group of women. Sheikhs and moqadems, as religious authorities, have an important social role in helping individuals to deal with everyday issues. Given the role played by kinship, and the vast amount of literature revolving around questions of marriage, reproduction and posterity within Islamic texts, it is only logical that people's everyday issues involve familial and conjugal relations. How can I find a good husband? What should I do to get on better with my wife? Why can we not have children?

When I interviewed Sheikh Moulay Hassan, I wanted to know more about the reasons why people came to him as a first step. He told me that people had "problems, in their lives" and that most of them were women trying to deal with family issues. His tone is quite patriarchal but shows the importance of dealing with wife-husband relationship issues in the everyday role of a Sufi sheikh in Oran:

"Women have problems with their husbands. Here is, my husband, he wanted to divorce. My husband did this, he does not listen to me. My husband does many things. You see, it is the husband. She repeats it all the time: the husband, the husband, the husband. So, in many cases, I give pieces of advice for such problems. Here is, you must not do that, it will come etc. Sometimes, I invite the two of them, wife and husband, to talk with them, and then I tell them what they should do, that they are on the good path, what they should not do etc. Because there are many, many issues for a woman. Notably, what a woman does not like, is that her husband may have another wife, so I always try to arrange these things. But it is not the only problem, there are many other problems in a family, for examples, cases of thefts,

between families, there are many things, there are some people who do not get on with other people, who do not understand them, so we try to improve things between them”

As in Iran (Osanloo, 2006) or Morocco (Grosso, 2013), women seek spaces in these societies where they can draw on the judgement of authority figures. From their relatively powerless position, they draw down the attention of the powerful, seek their intervention and advice. These encounters can sometimes create a freer space than the web of kinship in order to develop ethical sensibilities and gender roles (Osanloo, 2006). In Iran, “the family court becomes a key arena in which they express their grievances and resist different aspects of patriarchal authority, be it that of the state or the male head of the household” (2006: 200). Or they can impose problematic moral gendered norms (Grosso, 2013). Although very different from these legal situations, the *zawiya* does allow women in particular to draw on the authority of religion, god and the sheikh to guide them, and potentially gain some agency for themselves as a result. Women who go to the *zawiya* to complain about personal issues are often helped by the sheikh, who gives arguments and religious legitimacy to their demands. Moreover, as the example of Zineb shows, at the start of this section, Sheikh Habri tends to encourage these women to advance their careers and progress from a social perspective. Within a framework defined by his perception of the Islamic tradition, Sheikh Habri promotes ideals of self-realisation and individual emancipation, understanding humans as autonomous beings with social aspirations and desires.

This way of engaging with the Islamic tradition, this “immanent critique”, a dialogue with and within a tradition, can also be found in the various pieces of advice provided to men by sheikh Habri. The last example of this section reveals men’s everyday relationship with Sheikh Habri, and further illustrates his creativity and the loving, accommodating character of God’s figure. Men also came to see him, even though it was less frequent. Honour and “pudeur” prevented many of them from having a discussion with a public figure like the sheikh, especially on family issues, about their wife or children. These had to remain in the private sphere. Therefore, the facets of everyday life being discussed often pertained to money issues, problems of succession, related to the sharing of goods between brothers, or fathers and uncles.

One afternoon, a middle-age bricklayer, a stocky man with a thin face wearing black shirt and trousers, opened the door of the zawiya. It was his first time at the Habriya, and he had never met the sheikh. He had money troubles and needed a loan, and his friends advised him to knock on the sheikh's door, saying he could probably help him. His problem was quite straightforward. As a young father, married for a few years, he had promised his family to build a nice house, in Oran's suburb, where they reside. But he lost the use of his arm after a work accident, and now he could not fulfil his lifelong family dream. He had looked for every possible solution, asking his friends, his family, father and uncles. A few months after the accident, some good news came. A man, a friend of a friend, wanted to offer him the amount of money that he needed. But this man was a wine merchant and made his fortune in the trade of alcohols. People know that God forbids it, and he was now worried that he could not accept this tainted money. According to a hadith, transmitted by Abou Daoud and Ibn Madjah, "Allah cursed wine, its consumer, its producer, its backer, those who carry it and those who collect it". What could he do? Would he be cursed by Allah, if he accepted the money? Would it mean that he was part of this economy that Allah forbade? Sheikh Habri was sitting in front of his desk, facing the worried bricklayer, who was settled on the room's couch. He did not say a word, paying close attention to this young father's story, letting him talk until the end, without interrupting him, with his chubby look and compassionate gaze. After a short time of silence the verdict came.

It is quite simple, he told him, you know what the Qur'an says, and hadith, but Allah looks in people's hearts. This wine merchant is not an honest man, with his business he harms many people and their families, and usually, ignoring your specific situation, I would have advised you to refuse this offer. But what kind of other solution are you faced with, today? You are a bricklayer, and you cannot build houses anymore. You had a job, and you cannot support your family anymore. Maybe Allah is coming to you to help, and maybe this man, this trader, tries to redeem himself by the same occasion. Then you should accept this money, and make good use of it.

The question of alcohol is a recurrent problem for Muslims. As on many other issues, Islamic texts offer various types of answers, with different levels of interpretation, of understanding, of symbolic and hidden meanings, allegories etc. Sura and hadith often call out to each other, and may contradict each other. As for many other

text-based religions time and history have marked these scriptures. Is it the wine, or drunkenness, that Allah forbids? If this money comes from the trade of wine, will I be cursed too? This young father, by accepting the money of the wine merchant, leaves it up to Sheikh Habri's advice, which attempts to capture the spirit of the scripture, rather than giving a literal reading of it. This man was not a Sufi disciple and never came to the zawiya before, but needed the opinion of a legitimate religious figure. Maybe he would have decided in the end, whatever the sheikh's recommendation, to accept the money of the merchant. But it tells us something about the zawiya's relationship with religious norms. The Sufi sheikh does not give injunctions but only tells people what he thinks is fair. In Sheikh Habri's view, people are free and responsible.

I therefore agree with Irfan Ahmad when he writes that "reason and critique are integral to Islam" (2011: 116). Departing from the Kantian notion of critique, which is based on the idea that reason is self-originating and autonomous, immanent critique is "connected to the ethos of a culture as it seeks to question it; it is connected to the tradition even as its goal may be to reconfigure it" (2011: 116). Islam is more than a set of texts and rules to follow; it is a living being, read and reread, interpreted everyday in light of new situations. It is the reason why public figures like these Sufi sheikhs have an important role. These marabouts and Sufi sheikhs have a popular, informal character that make them credible and legitimate in these neighbourhoods. It is their knowledge of everyday issues, their local integration that give them popular legitimacy, in addition to their religious legitimacy.

III

The dhikr ceremony: an ethical and therapeutic experience of God's invisible power

In the last two sections, God was a visible figure; with divine scriptures, he appears to the world as a set of texts with an ethical message. Religious authorities interpret and articulate his "Reality" in the world. Even though God's psychology can

be different from one space to another, the presence of a norm-making God remains dominant. However, we also find in the *zawiya* the presence of an invisible God, who remains silent and does not ask individuals to live in a particular way. But people still try to engage with him, and many of them, notably through the *dhikr* ritual, are looking to have a direct experience of the divine. Ethics, in this perspective, is an attempt to go beyond the limits of the self, to reach a transcendental state. I focus in this section, for the last time in this thesis, on the *dhikr* ceremony. While I explored the social, dimension of this ritual (chapter 4), I come back to the divine experience explored through food sharing (in chapter 3), but I insist here on its therapeutic aspect.

Since the beginning of this thesis, and as I demonstrated in the last three chapters, it has been clear that religious traditions, as Lambek argues, are moving and flexible, and are constantly striving to articulate “(in thought and in practice) the boundaries and relationship between immanence and transcendence” (2013: 16). In spite of people’s belief in a transcendent, out-of-this-world God, I have privileged thus far an analysis of the immanent power of Algerian popular Islam, be it through the description of *baraka*’s circulation in the city or by looking at people’s engagement with the Islamic tradition and the possibility of immanent critique. But I still agree with Reinhardt when he argues that “religious transcendence is co-constitutive with religious immanence” (Reinhardt, 2016: 76), as my nuanced understanding of *baraka*, in chapter 2, shows. Moreover, the immanence of words, of God’s reality through the Qur’an, may not be dissociated from the transcendental world in which God resides, in the Islamic tradition. As a vertical, authoritarian figure, can God be really present in the phenomenal world? Indeed, focusing on a material analysis of religion may lead us to forget, as Reinhardt suggest, the transcendental character of religious worlds. By asking this question: “What about transcendence, the dimension of religious worldmaking that remains beyond - hidden, untouched, unseen, unheard or unfulfilled?” (2016: 76).

In this respect, people try to respect God’s laws and to live good lives according to religious norms, but they also attempt to experience God and embody divine power. This tension in the nature of God, expressed through its exoteric and esoteric manifestations, is at the heart of Islamic philosophies and theologies and is resolved in different ways within Sufi and other traditions (Jambet, 2011). I would like first to show that God can appear in the world as a transcendental, collective experience. Yet it is an

ethical and therapeutic experience: it has an impact on bodies and provides a sense of *bien-être* (well-being). People directly come into contact with God's power, with the bodily and collective experience of the dhikr as the sole intermediary. Sheikh Habri is comfortable with the dhikr's therapeutic dimension, and often encourages people to come to the ceremony when his advice or magic are not effective. Sometimes, indeed, when he cannot directly help his "patient", he tells people to join the group of Sufi followers on Friday for the dhikr ceremony. He compares this kind of "psychological" support with the way European doctors manage these issues:

"In Europe, you have your medicine, we give you pills, some Valium, one, two, three tablets, and gradually it becomes a drug and you cannot stop. At the zawiya, this kind of person, without being an adept or a follower, can come and fit well in a small group of women for the ceremony, and the dhikr and the songs, with the Qur'an, can appease her"

To illustrate God's manifestation in the zawiya as a therapeutic figure, I first rely on the examples of two women I spent time with in the early period of my fieldwork, Leila and Samia. During the first three months, I lived with Leila, a non-married woman in her fifties, in a flat near the zawiya. One day, Leila and Samia were both invited to join the zawiya's group of women for the Friday dhikr ceremony, but the event impacted them both in very different ways (I could not attend this event, so my view is only based on their comments). These two opposite experiences of the dhikr ceremony allow me to further support the view of a multi-dimensional God.

Leila did not really like the zawiya. Being quite a lonely woman, she often called sheikh Habri, for a chat, but he was her only link with the zawiya. Her relationship with religion, and with Sufism, is interesting because it brings out the collective dimension of Sufi practices at the level of the zawiya. Leila saw religion as a private activity, which is why I think that she did not enjoy the general atmosphere of the zawiya, with its collective rituals. I had an interesting discussion with her about these issues. She felt like someone who did not need anybody to be a true Muslim. She did not go to the zawiya, nor the mosque. She does not see religion as an opportunity for further sociability. Once, on a Friday, I invited her to join me at the zawiya, "just to see". She did not have many friends, and I felt that it could be good for her to meet other women. I was surprised when she accepted, but at the same time it showed that she too realised that she needed

to get out from her home sometimes. She did not like it. The ceremony was too long and she did not get into it. She found that people were not tidy and that the room was not clean either, “they should think about cleaning all these heaped carpets”. At home, Leila was obsessed with cleaning, spending at least three hours per day on household tasks. She did not eat or drink any of the food that was offered at the zawiya. No couscous, tea or biscuits: “even if I wanted to, I could not, and I never had couscous in public, it disgusts me!”. She was, however, impressed: “they serve couscous every week like today? It is a lot of work. They are doing a great job”.

With the dhikr ceremony, religion brings women together and reinforces the cohesion of the group. We know that the zawiya is a space of sociability, and we must note that the Sufi group of women we talked about here is open to integrate new people. We could say that cleaning and tidiness were important issues for Leila, but the main problem was that this way of practising religion did not fit her beliefs and relationship with God. She could not integrate with a group of women that did not share these beliefs. Leila never married and is an only child. Her father is still alive but she does not have any relationship with him. Her mother, was his cousin and his first wife, passed away. He then had five children with his second wife, who died too, and four with his third (and last) one. Leila was very close to her mother. A few years ago, she became sick with cancer, and over time “everybody gave up on her”. All these years, she took care of her mother and grand-mother. The three of them were living together. Leila explained that she never married because she was very happy with these women, “I was filled with happiness, I did not need a man”. Even when she had marriage proposals, she refused, “I had many of them, but it did not interest me, I was fulfilled with my mother, we were like two sisters, we had perfect harmony”. She showed me pictures of her, her mother and grand-mother. One of these pictures was taken at a marriage ceremony in France. She was wearing a traditional dress from Constantine, - a beautiful city to the Algerian North-East -, and looked happy and beautiful. She used to work at the time. Her mother died a year ago and she has been struggling with her loss ever since. She reminded me of this line from Khalil Gibran: “When you are sorrowful look again in your heart, and you shall see that in truth you are weeping for that which has been your delight”.

I would tend to think that her situation is uncommon in Algerian society, yet, while she said that she did not like the dhikr ceremony for her first time with the women

group at the zawiya, she still went there another time with her friend Samia. When we talked about it, Leila said that it was Samia's fault, that she still did not want to go there, but "my friend really wanted to go there, she wanted to take her mind off things a bit". Samia had issues with her husband. It was her second marriage, and they had a daughter together, but they did not get on well anymore. She worked in the art industry in Oran, and it seemed that the public character of her job annoyed her husband: "I am an artist, while he is down-to-earth and does not understand me. He is quite harsh with me". She ran a cultural centre in Oran and organised concerts, theatre plays, conferences. When I met her, she showed me pictures of her with famous figures of the Raï music scene, notably with Cheb Khaled and his musicians. Going to the zawiya was indeed a good idea. Samia enjoyed it and it seemed good for her to leave the pressure of the familial space. When they came back from the zawiya, she recalled the "relaxed atmosphere" of the ceremony.

It was not surprising that a woman like Samia liked the dhikr's atmosphere. Passionate about music and dancing, she found herself, in the middle of drums and the singing voices of women, in a familiar environment. She told me that it had calmed her, that she could think about something else, and temporarily leave aside her conjugal issues. This is the reason I insist on the therapeutic properties of the dhikr. The dhikr ceremony is a collective experience. For Fatima, a frequent follower of the group, it "triggers" certain states, certain behaviours (the French term used by Fatima was "déclencher"). By being one with the other women of the group, they unite by singing, dancing, and have the impression of becoming one with God, as they can feel the love from God in their bodies. According to Fatima, it requires certain abilities, or at least some skills that can be learnt with time:

"Not every women can see it, can feel it. There are exceptions. Some people who are sane, in their body, in their mind, full of this love for God"

The rhythm of the dhikr ceremony, when they sing, when they breathe, when they dance, generates this impression of collective harmony, as the sounds and movements of bodies seem to converge into one being. I develop here the analysis made in chapter 4, by focusing on the question of joy.

I was not present for the women's ceremony, so the following analysis relies on my observations of the men's dhikr ceremony, every Friday. The sense of collective harmony is something that one can feel and hear, with the voices that join the choir, and that one can see: when the dancing joins the singing, bodies, which were not yet united, get up, stand and form a circle. They take each others' hands, and the united singing voice is now also a united moving body, singing and dancing its love for and from God. The union of bodies is an important element of people's experience of transcendence. It is not the body of an autonomous individual anymore, and the dhikr is an experience of this de-individuation. The individual frees himself from his body, forms part of a group, with a new and larger sense of being. He can experience a feeling of harmony that goes beyond the classic boundaries of the individual body. It is one of the main differences between Hadot's spiritual exercises and Foucault's techniques of the self. With Foucault, individual joy and pleasure come from people's inner selves, while Hadot argue that the sense of joy achieved by Greek and Roman philosophers comes from the self's awareness of his position in nature and universal reason. As Vicini explained it, the ethics of Ancient Greek philosophers cannot be separated from the "parallel act of externalisation towards a transcendental, universal reason" (2017: 123). As Seneca, though with a different spiritual exercise (finding his joy in the group's experience of transcendence), the religious follower can truly feel that she is part and within the cosmos itself:

"Seneca does not find his joy in 'Seneca', but by transcending 'Seneca'; by discovering that there is within him - within all human beings, that is, and within the cosmos itself - a reason which is part of universal reason"

(Hadot, 1995: 207 in Vicini, 2017: 123)

In line with other recent works that highlighted the limits of the self-cultivation paradigm in the anthropology of Islam (Schielke, 2009; Mittermaier, 2012), Vicini proposes in his work "to take into full consideration the role of transcendence and God in self-cultivation practices in Islam" (2017: 124), a call that is welcome here. In this reading, Mahmood is accused of relying on Foucault's biased reading of Hadot, but I think that it is only partially true. Foucault did not misread Hadot, but was in a conversation with the ethics of Ancient Greek philosophers, which Nietzsche opened in the 19th century, and which Hadot proposed to update. It is thus less a misreading of

Hadot than another interpretation of Nietzsche's ethics. But Nietzsche, Hadot and Foucault are all pertinent because they show the relation between knowledge/belief and practice. A philosophical or theological system is not only about belief, it is about living it, cultivating it, and we owe a lot to the self-cultivation paradigm for bringing these ideas in the anthropology of Islam. But the therapeutic dimension of Islam and Sufi ethics should be considered with more attention, and this is why coming back to Nietzsche's work might be relevant.

When Nietzsche evokes the idea of practice, in "The Dawn of Day" ("practice! practice! practice!", §22), he argues that it is "a therapeutic necessity" (Astor, 2014: 494), as it was for the Greek philosophy that Foucault and Hadot refer to. The therapeutic dimension of spiritual practice relies on the diversity of the inner activities of the individual. When Hadot asks us to make a distinction between Christian asceticism and ascetic ideas in Ancient philosophy, he shows that bodily exercises are not only about discipline, in the form of abstinence or restrictions, but also relate to the inner activity of the individual mind (Hadot, 2002; Astor, 2014). For Nietzsche or Hadot, a philosophical life, for the Greek man, is a movement of elevation, and I argue in this chapter that the transcendental practice of dhikr aims at bringing individuals to a higher state of their selves. They sing and dance, move their bodies together, forming a sense of being that goes beyond the individual, autonomous being. Each of them is one part of the group, while also being the whole group, and aiming at being the whole cosmos, as being with God.

The dhikr ritual is fascinating because it brings us to the heart of the question we have been investigating in this chapter: if God is accessible to humans, where does divine reality find itself? If the dhikr experience is an experience of God, according to my informants, it does not tell us in which world this experience takes place. If God is an invisible, transcendental figure, we can assume that the dhikr ceremony allows the experience of an idea of the divine residing outside of this world. But is it really the case? Though Vicini focuses on the transcendental aspect of these rituals, and the act of "externalisation", we should not leave aside the group experience, as a cosmological experience, connecting people to the phenomenal world, offering the possibility of the communion with the divine. It makes us come back to the idea that "religious

transcendence is co-constitutive with religious immanence” (Reinhardt, 2016: 76), and shows once again the relative power of the community.

Moreover, what I observed in Oran, looking at popular beliefs and practices, in these Sufi spheres, is hardly surprising when one goes back to the history of Sufi theology and Islamic philosophy. We can easily find, for example, this multidimensional character of God’s presence in Ibn Arabi’s work, where God is uncreated and eternal, visible and invisible, transcendent and immanent. The phenomenal world, for Ibn Arabi, is an outward manifestation of “Reality” (God), but is not Reality and “does not represent the ‘totality’ of God’s existence” (Kamal, 2017: 414). Islamic philosophy, as in other monotheist theologies, is imbued with this ambiguous relationship between God and the phenomenal world.

IV

Solitary encounters with the divine

Collective spiritual exercises do not have the monopoly of experiences of divine reality. The women’s community and the collective atmosphere of the dhikr ceremony is one way to pray, relax, get into ecstatic states etc; but women can also feel and appropriate God’s power without the intermediary of the community. Spaces or objects in themselves can be such intermediaries, as we saw in chapters 2 and 3. The shrine of Sheikh Habri’s father is a good example. On Fridays, the two dhikr ceremonies take place around at the same time. From the main room, we can hear the voices coming from the other room. The room with the tombstone of Sheikh Habri’s father is between the main room and the space where women do their dhikr ceremony. It is an important emotional space, where people come to rest, think, meditate, pray. It is a space of joy and sadness. They can come and sing for hours, their hearts filled with happiness. At other times, they will touch the coffin with their hands, and start to cry. It also happens during dhikr ceremonies: once, a woman temporarily left the ceremony, to spend some time to think and pray near the coffin. I was in the other room, in-between, on the settee, writing about the male ceremony. I then started to hear someone (lightly) crying. When the crying turned into screaming, I got up to see if she was ok. She cried and shouted, her head moving up and down. She was alone, but followed the rhythm of the drums

outside the room. Two children, probably hers, entered the room, but they did not seem afraid or disturbed by the scene. It was just a normal event.

Walking around in Oran, we can see that these mystic spaces, the *zawiya* here but also many of the shrines and mausoleums in the city, are appropriated in many different ways by women. Be it in the district of Sidi Houari, in the historical centre of the city, or at the Mount Aïdour, on the heights of Oran, saints' shrines are predominantly feminine spaces, where women come to talk, pray and meditate. Note that we can differentiate the women's relationship to shrines and *zawiyas*. A *zawiya* generally offers more than a shrine in that it often has a room dedicated to the famed saints and sheikhs of its genealogical line. This proximity manifests materially with a tombstone and a coffin, while most shrines in Oran are not mausoleums but cenotaphs. It makes a difference because people who come in these religious spaces comprehend death in a radically different way when they come close to a material symbol and character of death. This aspect is also why they are strong emotional spaces, where people can sing and get into ecstatic states, but also cry and shout; they are both positively and negatively charged spaces.

On the top of Mount Aidour, at the site of the shrine, I talked with a woman who comes every week to spend some time in the famous cave of Abdel Qader Jilani. It is a very important day for her. A day of joy and happiness, which she waits for the whole week. She has been going around *zawiyas* and shrines for "five or six years". She has two sons and is very proud of them, both are students, and one of them has a degree "in chemistry". But she is the only one in her family to visit shrines and *zawiyas*:

"Yes, I feel more religious than my husband, I need it more than him. So, I come here and feel... appeased"

She comes here alone, without the help of any friend or group, by her own means. She does not have a car: "I use the "clandestine" way or the bus. Well, not really by bus, but with the cars that go by, the taxi cars or by hitchhiking". As in the many cases described in this chapter, her relationship with shrines and Sufi sheikhs allows her to deal with everyday life issues. She lives in the district of Koka (Les Amendiers) but does not like it. She told me that she was begrudged by her neighbours:

“People in my area are not nice, they are not good people. No, really. I, I behave nicely. My children, they are nice too, they are well-bred. They are good boys. And the others, they are jealous. Because my sons are successful. What do they do, everyday? Guess! They do witchcraft on us. In front of my door. To send me bad waves. Yes, it happens often. Because people are bad”

But she does not come here to be protected, she comes to relax:

“I only come for God. This cave is like a shelter. I come here to relax. When I am here, I really feel at ease. And when I go home, I feel better. It is just an hour, every week, if my husband agrees! Here it is. If he does not, I do not climb. Yes, he is a bit strict with that”

This is not a situation where she tries to act directly against these “bad” actions”. Rather, there is this malevolent environment in which she lives, and the short retreat at the Saint’s cave provides a temporary space of calm and serenity. It is important to note that this woman is related to the Habriya. I had never seen her before, but she sometimes meets with Ali, Sheikh Habri’s brother. She is not a “Sufi follower”, strictly speaking. She does not attend the dhikr ceremony on Fridays:

“On Fridays, I stay at home, with my family. Sometimes, I go the zawiya el Habri, but only in the morning. I stay an hour, and then I go back, at home”

Like Leila, she has a private relationship with religion. She comes to Mount Aidour by herself, prays and meditates with the “red” marabout; she sometimes goes to the zawiya, to meet and talk with Sheikh Ali, but does not attend the women’s collective ceremonies. Yet, unlike Leila, she is still involved in this “world of shrines and zawiya”, though in a way that stands apart from more typical forms of collective Sufi practices.

The zawiya Habriya is in an urban environment, so I would be inclined to say that it offers less opportunities for this kind of solitary/contemplative mystical experience of God. But mountains and caves, when they are close to a city, as is the case in Oran, connect these forms of practices, make the link between the public, collective zawiya and the Saint’s shrine, which is an “other-worldly” space and seems out of time and space. As we can see here, this woman lives in this urban environment, is entangled in a web of social relationships that connect her with the zawiya, but also finds the time

to leave the urban sphere to join this divine, out-of-this-world environment. We discussed her relationship with Sheikh Ali, and she told me how kind he was with her, always saying that she was “a saintly woman” .

Many organised groups of women also come to the Saint’s shrine on Tuesdays. I observed something similar at the zawiya Habriya; on Fridays, with groups of women coming from Habriya zawiyas (branches of the zawiya, led by a moqadem) from rural, secluded areas. They generally arrive in the morning and spend the day at the shrine or at the zawiya. The main difference from the shrine at the top of Mount Aidour is its mixed population. Inside the building, in the afternoon, there were both men and women of different generations. It is not organised like a classic dhikr ceremony, there is not any structure. People arrive, get in the room, some stand, other sit. A man suddenly gets up and tell stories about Abdel Qader Jilani. Some women start to sing. It is a very emotional space: between “youyou” ululations and tears, between songs and speeches.

God is encountered in many forms of relationships within this world of zawiyas, as these various examples show. These encounters are not just normative, they are creative and fluid, generating space for the creation of a sense of agency and ethical freedom. A good way to theoretically think about this is to take Schielke’s approach that looks at how people understand the agency of God. It is the pluri-dimensional character, Schielke argues, which explains the productive tensions between the divinity’s ability to unite all human and superhuman qualities in this world, and the (human) incapacity to find an equilibrium between these qualities. Schielke takes the example of the 99 names of God, which are representative of the multiplicity of divine attributes in the Quran, and uses a poem from one of his informants to express the tension between these qualities. Between the visible and the invisible. Between the God who forgives and the God who punishes. Between the one who supports and the one who disciplines; etc. These tensions are productive because they compel humans to make choices. They enable God’s creatures to have multiple types of relationship with the divine. These relationships are not uni-dimensional, and this lively, continuous, uninterrupted conversation explains the creativity of the various paths, characters, practices and ideas of the Islamic tradition. They can be the source of schools and communities within this tradition, but they can also meet and discuss within one of these sub-traditions; as it would be a mistake to consider these sub-traditions as homogeneous blocks of ideas and practices.

In this chapter, I tried to follow the footsteps of God in Oran's popular Islam, a complex and ambiguous path. I encountered a all-powerful, out-of-this-world God, but whose presence manifests itself materially, with words, texts and moral codes, notably through the Qur'an and Hadith. Humans can interact with God's words. They can interpret them, and they struggle with the tradition that this material religion generates. It is in this perspective that I refer to the "immanent critique" that such religious traditions allow, analysing the role played by these Sufi sheikhs in their dialogue with a distant, mysterious God. But the possibility of immanent critique, offered by these texts' material presence, should not let us forget the existence of an invisible, immaterial God, who yet is still accessible to humans through the mystical experiences that I describe in this chapter. It further illustrates individuals' power and the community's ability to interact with God without the mediation of the Sufi sheikh. But the nature of these experiences continues to question the place of divine reality. Do they provide access to a supernatural world, beyond the phenomenal world, or are they experiences of an inner, in-this-world divine reality?

CHAPTER 6

What can mystics know and experience?

Mystic activities, Islamic reform and Science

I analyse in this chapter the impact of the ideological environment on mystic and popular practices. I describe this environment as a combination of moral and technological injunctions, empowered by the increasing presence in Algerian society of a visible, normative and legalistic figure of God and by the technical superiority of “modern”, “rational” sciences. The Algerian case is interesting because the state, after independence, supported the rise of a society based on a socialist, heavy-industry economy, armed with a strong belief in the power of science and technology (Deeb, MJ, 1997). This relationship with “modernity” can be also analysed through the lens of modern nation-states’ political project of secularism (cf Asad, 2003). Whereas the secular model in many countries consisted in relegating religion to a private sphere of morality, the Algerian regime’s modern secular project – given its symbolic use of religion as a legitimation tool – focused on certain forms of religiosity and attempted to expel from the public sphere “un-modern”, “backward” practices. This context can thus also explain the state’s distrust of *zawiyas* during this period (from 1962 to the 1990s), with many of them being associated with superstitious and occult practices.

In spite of different political contexts, the definition of religion indeed played a major role in many nation-states’ projects of modernity. Be it through anti-religious campaigns in Central Asia (see McBrien, 2010, Rasanayagam, 2011), in Soviet Russia (see Kormina, 2013) or here in Algeria with the state’s conflicting relationship with its local saints and *zawiyas*, we observe that religion was “objectified and redefined in ways consistent with modern, secularised notions” (McBrien, 2010: 123). The rise of “Islamist” movements in the 1990s accelerated the public return of these mystic and popular brotherhoods, with the support of the state, but the ideological pressure placed

on their activities did not lessen; they had to “rationalise” and “purify” their practices, and expel “charlatans” from their ranks. It is in this context that I demonstrate how Sheikh Habri has been justifying and explaining his activities by using terms and examples coming from biomedical techniques. I argue that he does not mimic scientific techniques – a phenomenon that is observed in other instances (see Langford, 1999) – but uses them to illustrate how science can explain a posteriori truths known or experienced with revelations or mystic unveilings. Even though I do not subscribe to the dichotomy opposing the Sufi, mystical, experiences of truth to scripturalist, discursive knowledge, I still describe in this popular environment the persistence of a non-“rational”, open-ended view of knowledge that “keeps wonder alive” (Scott, 2013: 860).

I

Mystical practices in Islam: reformist and anthropological perspectives

For the last three decades, in the Muslim world and in Algeria, mystical practices have been attacked and challenged by “Islamist” movements. These practices have included the use of music and dance, visits to shrines and tombs of saints, the intercession of Sufi sheikhs and the belief in their special powers. In Oran, for example, many “qubba” and shrines have been abandoned or neglected, under the pressure of fundamentalist movements. Zawiyas, Sufi followers and other civil society actors have been renovating these buildings since the 1990s. The criticisms made by Islamist movements must be understood in the framework of the more general critique of magical, mystic or Sufi practices made by reformist movements since the 18th and 19th century, and by modernist thinkers in the 20th century. Reformist thought does not constitute a single homogeneous block (Dallal, 1993), but central to it is the will to revive and reconcile Islam with modernity, be it through the return to a “golden age” of Islam, or by reopening the gates of *ijtihad*.

These arguments generally ascribe an important role to science in their rhetoric. Islam is associated with science, is used to support modern discoveries, and magical and superstitious practices are identified as the unwanted part of religion, as a disease that

offers the wrong image of religion. And this image is striking because it also follows the movement of ideas in our own tradition, in the history of anthropology, and especially in the anthropology of religion.

The intellectualist/rational tradition, with Edward Tylor (1871) and James Frazer (1890), developed an evolutionary theory of religion with a continuum ranging from magic to science, through religion. Max Weber also had in mind an evolutionary understanding of religion, but one in which religion would culminate in a version freed from “magical means” and “mysterious incalculable forces” (Weber [1918] 1991: 139, in Eneborg, 2014). Liberal Protestantism, in his view and his time, succeeded in eradicating superstitious and magical practices. Though anthropologists later criticised this tradition, highlighting the persistence, in industrial and urban settings, of magical views of the world, ancestral cults and mystic practices (Evans-Pritchard, 1965), great anthropologists of Islam also predicted a Weberian evolution of the Islamic tradition from the “classical styles” of Islam, with their rural saints and maraboutic practices, to the “scripturalism” of urban reformists (Geertz, 1968; Gellner, 1981). The anthropology of Islam has developed since this period, notably under the theoretical impetus of authors such as Abdul Hamid el-Zein (1977) and Talal Asad (1986), who criticised essentialist distinctions between “Great” traditions and local, “folk” variants of Islam. From Asad (1986) and Mahmood (2005) to Marsden (2005) and Schielke (2010), important work has compelled anthropologists, in the end, to pay more attention “to the ‘everyday’ life and experience of people who happen to be Muslim” (Rasanayagam, 2018: 93).

This has led to a superseding of the categories of “great and little traditions”, and older anthropological ones of magic, science and modernity. But our informants can be highly aware of how they place their own everyday practices of Islam in relation to a long history of critique and debate about ‘proper’ forms of reformed Islam and/or of modern religion excised of magic. As Schielke has argued in relation to pietist Islam in Mahmood’s work, we cannot take a single type of Islam whether pietist or Sufi as being a sealed space of practice. As this chapter will show, the conversation between various philosophical, religious, Islamic traditions affects informants’ debates about religious practice. This is rarely resolved into a completely purified practice of one type of Islam, but instead generates ambiguity, creativity and complexity. As we will see in this chapter, we come across: a Sufi sheikh who believes in biomedical methods; a “rational”

old lady who is afraid of haunted houses and a FIS Islamist leader cured thanks to Sufi healing techniques. I have tried to draw lines, to establish boundaries, but people's religious practices usually escape our attempts at systematisation.

On the whole, this chapter is also an argument against the rigid demarcation of Islamic practices as only carried out by specific groups of people, and argues against a single stream of dialogue about correct practices within different 'schools' of Islam. Faith and doubt are motivated by a range of encounters with different Islamic and modernist discourses of belief, science, magic and religion.

The first section starts with an ethnographic vignette that gives a sense of the mystic identity of Oran. It illustrates the tension between conventional religious knowledge – as text-based knowledge, based on the teachings of the Qur'an and Sunna – and ritual action. I then delve into the main criticisms that are made against Sufi and mystic practices. These criticisms are well-known, but I use my field notes to illustrate their contemporary resonance for my informants in Oran. Using Sheikh Habri's example, I show how the use of biomedical vocabulary to describe and explain ritual medicine techniques is revealing of this environment of doubt and polyglot traditions of modernity and faith. But I argue that, despite the sheikh's biomedical discourse, most people come to see him for his ritual medicine and supernatural gifts. I thus show that the environment of modernist and reformist doubt cannot compete with the mystical identity and mysterious atmosphere of Oran. In this respect, despite a popular Islamic discourse on science, people's mystic experiences support the idea that some truths may eternally lie outside the realm of human knowledge (but not from experience).

II

'Popular' religion, doubt and magic: spending the afternoon with Abdel Qader Jilani

The mountain Aïdour in Oran, peaking at 430 meters and overlooking the city and the bay of Mers el-Kebir, is a very popular place in the region. Families come every day to spend time on the hill or visit the three main cultural buildings of the site: the fort

and the chapel of Santa Cruz, and the “qubba” (shrine) of Saint Abdel Qader Jilani. It is one of my earliest memories in Oran. I met first Sheikh Habri on a Wednesday of April 2015, and the following Saturday, we were visiting the qubba of Sidi Abdel Qader Jilani together. The “guardian” of the qubba, a kind of moqadem, is a good friend of the Sheikh; he often comes to the zawiya when he is not meditating on the mountain. From its elevated position, the qubba offers a great view of Oran. A bit lower than the peak, just under the level of the plateau, there is a mythical cave, filled with the spirit of Abdel Qader Jilani. Rania and Zac, two friends of mine, the day I interviewed them, told me that I should visit this cave Tuesdays, when people come to be healed there: “you should go there, see Abdel Qader Jilani, on a Tuesday, you will see all these women coming to their demons”. One day, I followed their advice and decided to head to Mount Aïdour. It was a beautiful, warm, sunny day in the end of November. Sheikh Habri calls the guardian of the qubba, and he sends me a taxi. In Oran, each day of the week has its Saint. Or rather, as the taxi driver that brought me to the mountain told me, “for each qubba, there is a day”. Tuesday: Sidi Abdel Qader Jilani. Wednesday: Sidi Hasni. Saturday: Sidi Houari. In each qubba, someone is in charge of welcoming visitors, quite often a woman, who stays all day long inside the small building.

When we arrive on the peak of the mountain, the “folklore”, as the taxi driver described it, is already apparent, alluding to the festive atmosphere of the place, with the presence of musicians, traders and possible healers. There are three main areas where people gather: the qubba, the park/garden and the cave. In the garden, I notice a group of musicians; they play the drum and the flute. People relax, take a stroll in the park, picnic on the grass, listen to the music. After the end of each musical piece, a woman harangues visitors and asks them for money. As the day progresses, there are more and more people: many families, women, but also younger groups and a few couples. The site offers a romantic view of the city. As a popular, frequented place, it is also a commercial area. Small businesses flourish as more people arrive, selling bottles of water and cups of tea, sweets, cakes, and bread. An odd man, dressed in a red gandura, walks around the park’s corridors, yelling and dancing. I spent some time talking to people there, and then went down to the cave. A woman, who looked familiar, who I had probably met at a zawiya, is seated at the entrance, cross-legged. As I talk to her, she takes from a pocket of her dress a small bottle of fragrance, these popular tubes that can be found in every “souq” in the country, and sprays on my hand a dash of perfume.

I enter the cave and walk down a dark corridor until I hear voices and laughter. I can smell incense. After a few steps, I am welcomed by another woman, then a man, the man in red I had noticed earlier; they are placing candles on the floor, and all around this room of the cave. He starts singing, “Santa Maria... Santa Maria...”, and I begin to understand that he is one of the local marabouts of the site. As I try to understand what is happening, he tells me, with his husky voice: “here, it is the great marabout, Abdel Qader Jilani. The son of Mohamed. I pray for the saints, the prophets. Maria, Jesus, Mohamed”. And the woman goes on: “people come here to pray to God. I, I come every Tuesday”, “look, look, for Santa Maria he is lighting candles”. The “red” marabout also comes here every Tuesday: “yes, he has a special responsibility, every Tuesday he must come, put some flowers, incense, candles, and pay homage to saints. Thanks to all of this, saints come and are present in the cave, like Maria, as he keeps talking about her”. An hour later, a new group of four women enters the cave. Two adults, around thirty years old, a younger one, probably around my age, and a little girl. One of the two women has not been feeling well in the last few weeks and has dreams, she thinks that the marabout can cure her. It is not her first time here, but it is the first time she has come for healing.

She lays down on the floor. The marabout squats, next to her, holds her head in his hands and recites verses from the Qur’an. The woman’s daughter is standing, just beside her, and anxiously looks on. Her friend, not far away, is more relaxed. Many people gather round; they were attracted by the voice of the marabout. The ceremony lasts between ten and fifteen minutes. Words from the Qur’an flow, and suddenly the woman wakes up, gets up, and turns around to face the man and the crowd. She shivers, breaths loudly, and then wants to sit down again. The marabout resumes his singing. Everybody in the cave carefully observes. His voice is heavy, its echo bounces on the walls. The woman’s daughter becomes more worried and begins to cry, yelling: “Mum! Mum?!”. But her mother is completely stunned and cannot answer her calls. After the ritual, I spoke with the healed woman’s friend, Ines, as she explained why they decided to come here: “I came to accompany my friend. She had dreams, yes, she had dreams early in the week. So, they told her to go to the zawiya of Abdel Qader Jilani. She used to come here often, but she had not been for a long time”. But she herself does not believe in this kind of ritual “it depends... each of us sees it differently. I personally do not believe in it. But her, she really thinks that... it works on her. So, I come with her, I

support her, because I know that she tends to fall so, yes, here we are. But for me, all of this, it is just a historical site. So, I am here to observe. She thinks that there can be a positive psychological impact on her friend: “it is like a placebo effect. And it might work, she might feel better after that. It is a psychological thing”. Her friend wanted to be cured by this man, in particular, because he is known as a competent healer. But, in Ines’ view, the red marabout is just a magician, in Mauss’ sense. Magic is practical, like a technology and a concrete tool to be used; and the magician does not really do anything, he just prays and guides people during the ritual:

“It is not necessarily the man who makes it happen. It is because, here, there is the shrine of... Abdel Qader Jilani. But it is not this man who looks after it [the ritual]. This Abdel Qader Jilani was a true saint, so he benefits from his aura. He, the man, is just here to guide, to accompany people, to know what to say and what they should say. Because the people who come here, they do not understand, they are here to see, but they do not know how to do, so it is he who prays and does all the stuff”

Ines is French-Algerian. She has family in Lyon, Paris, and Nantes. She is a firm believer, but seems to think that Islamic ritual medicine is not rational. In her view, it is not the role of sheikhs or healers to cure people (or other religious figures); and she would distinguish religion from magic. She does not consider that religion should have anything to do with magical practices; religion is a private thing:

“No, I do not frequent zawiyas, I do not believe in them. I am Muslim, but I believe in the good God and the Prophets. But this, it is too spiritual. It is not my thing. It is as I was going to a medium or something like that. I, I only believe in my dreams, and in God and the Prophets. It is as simple as that”

From her discourse, I see two different elements. Firstly, the supernatural dimension of mystical Islam, associated with ritual practices, which makes it appear as irrational. Secondly, Islam as a private religion, which is accessible without the intercession of religious authorities. It is even more striking when she discusses the role of the Qur’an as the sole legitimate source of religious knowledge:

“For me, we all have our own convictions, so we go where we feel best. But, everything we need is in the Qur’an, whether we like it or not. That is, fourteen centuries ago, if we read and read the Qur’an, there is everything in it”

She therefore believes in all the accounts described in the Qur'an, like djinns or spirits for example, but does not see how man, like a sheikh or a saint, would be able to see or do things that normal human beings cannot see or do. She is an educated person, relying on her knowledge of core Islamic texts, but does not seek any help or intermediation in her access to that knowledge. She considers that, as an autonomous individual, one has the ability to understand and interpret these core texts by herself. This relationship to knowledge must be understood within the framework of a larger theory of Islamic knowledge, which has been popular in the last thirty years. It shows how better education opportunities and the spread of new media technologies has made religious knowledge more accessible to the public (Eickelman, 1992, 1999). With an understanding of truth as something that can be arrived at "through the efforts of individual actors engaged with the foundational texts of Islam" (Salomon, 2013: 823), it challenges the authority and legitimacy of religious characters, be them Sufi sheikhs or ulemas.

In this understanding of knowledge, truth seems to be portrayed as something clear and accessible. It is also the Salafist approach, rejecting both mystical and traditional knowledge; knowledge of God's will is accessible through "scientific means", that is, with induction "from the Qur'an and Sunna" (Salomon, 2013: 823). However, though Inès' relationship with God reveals a personal, non-mediated view of knowledge, I would not argue that she sees divine truth in this perspective. As is the case of many people who visit this holy site in Oran, I would consider that their knowledge is neither totally defined nor fixed, and that their experiences and practices reveal doubts and uncertainties. Inès considers that Abdel Qader Jilani is "a true saint", but doubts that God's power could be transmitted to any human being in particular. She comes to the holy place with her friend to help her with her issues, does not believe in zawiyas, yet still evokes that saint's "aura" that permeates the space. As Pelkmans puts it, "Doubt is about wavering between different options and thus presumes an awareness of, and a (somewhat) active stance towards, the dubious object. This in turn tends to be resolved in, or leads to stances that lean towards, either belief or disbelief" (2013: 15). Talking with Inès, one could think that she is at the end of her reflection, not that she does not believe, but that she knows that these rituals cannot be effective. Yet the existence of this reflection shows that doubt is still suspended, that it cannot be resolved, and therefore, that she believes more than she realises.

The various discourses at play on religion, magic and belief produce contradictions, uncertainty and creative uses of traditions. They also generate a productive doubt that motivates various forms of experimentation in religious practice. When I was in the field, I was often surprised by the high level of conviction that people displayed about their beliefs. The possibility of doubt was rarely evoked. This led me to understand that doubt was not necessarily something that could be easily put into words, that it could sometimes only be enacted. Through people's actions, their activities, ritual and mystic practices, the ability to doubt was revealed in a clearer way.

This ambivalence was present in the form and configuration of this Saint's site, which is conducive to luck and baraka. Even when people do not explicitly believe in the power of saints, sheikhs or healers, they come to enjoy and benefit from the divine and positive atmosphere. As a woman told me:

"Today, people come because it is a marabout. They ask God to give them a happy and healthy life. They come for happiness. To feel good in your life, to have a good relationship with your husband. If you love a woman... There is still hope. To get the evil eye out, for the good vibes. So, they come here, they take a walk, it is a nice trip for them, a good way to get a change of scenery. There is happiness, there is happiness, there will always be happiness"

Despite the social and generational diversity, and the variety of reasons for which people come at the top of Mount Aïdour on a Tuesday afternoon, I thus argue that the site's baraka plays a crucial role in people's motivations to go up to Jilani's shrine.

Various women from all over the city come each Tuesday to be cured by the local marabout. They may know someone in their neighbourhood, a Sufi sheikh or professional healer, but, by word of mouth, everybody in the city seems to know about the miraculous healing practices taking place in the cave close to the qubba of Abdel Qader Jilani. Others are simple believers. They come here to find a quiet place, a shelter, a sanctuary; like a zawiya, but maybe with more prestige and baraka, as the place is associated with the glorious Iraqi Saint. It is a festive and popular space, but at the same time, outside the agitated, turbulent world of the urban city. And the geography of this elevated, isolated site matters, with a parallel between space and time: it gives the

impression that this moment stands outside the realm of normal, this-world time. People can participate in the festivities taking place in the park, enjoying the warm atmosphere, but they can also think, pray and meditate. You can also find a few groups of men, like the Sufi followers who gather around a cup of tea, close to the qubba. The site is like another zawiya for them, another place with a spiritual aura where they can eat, drink, and talk with friends. Their journey is less about being a short pilgrimage to the Mount Aïdour, in the middle of the week, to pray and meditate, than it is about providing another opportunity to connect with their peers. Finally, younger people, couples, and groups of friends, use the site as a recreational area. Coming by scooter, moped, or with their cars, they picnic and play card games on the grass. They do not (necessarily) come to pray, or for spiritual activities, but the presence of two important religious sites connect them with the roots of the city. While Abdel Qader Jilani never, officially, came to Oran, he is the most famous saint in the city, and a local favourite. This qubba for many people is a symbol of Oran; it is not only a mausoleum, it gives the image of a holy city, protecting its people from its elevated position.

In monotheistic religions, mountains have great mythical and mystical significance. They represent the junction of two worlds, between heaven and earth, between the natural and supernatural worlds. In the Old Testament, it is the place chosen by God to reveal his presence to the prophets, by Abraham, for the sacrifice of his son Isaac, and then by Moses, to give the Ten Commandments to the Jewish people. In the New Testament, it is a place of teaching for Jesus, notably the Beatitudes, as illustrated in the “Sermon on the Mount”, and is the earthly place where he revealed himself as the son of God. In Varzi’s monograph on post-revolution Iran (2006), the story of the *The Conference of the Birds* (1177), written by the Persian mystic Farid al-Din Attar (in the 12th century), parallels the author’s anthropological and mystical journey in Iran. The birds are looking for a mystic leader, the Simurgh, hidden at the top of the Qâf mountain, in a place inaccessible through common knowledge or intelligence. The dialogue between the mountain and the cave, in these religious traditions, can illustrate the dialectical character of the analytical pairs I have been using so far, between the transcendent and the immanent, or between the visible and the invisible worlds. While the mountain can symbolise, with its slope, the individual’s spiritual, luminous ascension, the cave, in the dark, hidden within the mountain, is representative of the sensible world (Neuve-Eglise, 2008). These groups of people that climb to Mount

Aïdour, I argue, whether they believe or not in the power of saints and their mausoleums, nonetheless join the crowd of believers for spiritual reasons. The Mount's mystic power brings them to the saint's shrine And, at one moment or another, they are attracted to the qubba, especially when the people inside start to sing or dance loudly. The Mount's transcendental, potent power is linked to the immanent force arising from the rituals taking place in the qubba. These rituals, as evoked in chapters 3 and 4, connect people and make them feel part of the same community, in a spiritual place that makes the junction between the visible and invisible worlds.

People who climb to the Mount Aïdour do not conventionally believe in magical practices and the power of saints, they would never attend a dhikr ceremony or ask for a sheikh's services, but they are in these ambivalent situations where their practices and activities reveal a relationship with the divine that is not necessarily expressed through their words.

III

Science and Islamic reform in Algerian society

This atmosphere of doubt and mistrust vis-à-vis mystic and popular activities is accentuated by modern injunctions to Islamic reform and science. Looking at the 20th century's forms of religious revival, anthropological and sociological research has been exploring, since the 1970s, the many "ways in which modernity both produces and shapes religion" (Sharabi, 2015: 223). Notably, anthropologists have highlighted the relationship between religious revivalism and certain conceptions of modernity, focusing on revivalist movements' use of modern technology (Hirschkind, 2006; Roy, 2004) and on their appeal to modern rationality (Deeb, 2006; Sharabi, 2013). With the "rationalisation" of religion came new ways to consider the possibilities of thinking and acquiring knowledge. It was one of the arguments for the supposed decline of Sufi orders: with the rise of modernity, Sufi ways of knowing – as "experiential", "infused", "intimate", "mystical knowledge" (Karamustafa, 2004 in Salomon, 2013: 821) – were going to be replaced by a scripturalist, discursive understanding of knowledge (Voll, 1994: 46-49 in Salomon, 2013: 821). I do not think that this dichotomy is pertinent for

analysing the zawiya's activities and people's various ways of accessing divine knowledge, but it does allow us to understand the kind of challenges that such experiential, mystical knowledge raises for rational, modern (and religious reformist) ways of reasoning. I thus focus in this section on these criticisms, and on how people respond to them.

Muslim Brotherhoods, Algerian Ulemas, Salafis... Reformist movements are numerous and still have an important influence on Algerian society, despite the 1990s' civil conflict and their unstable relationship with the state. The Islamic Front for Salvation (FIS), a Salafi movement, was the most popular in the 1980s and 1990s. Its relations with Sufi zawiya was not one of complete separation, as Sheikh Habri explained:

“A few years ago, a head of the FIS, who naturally despised zawiya, had problems with his sciatic nerve, but systematically refused to talk to us, the ‘un-Islamic’ marabouts. He followed one his friends’ advice, went to Mecca to be treated, used sacred water and followed the instructions of a ‘true’ Muslim doctor, but it got worse. Worse and worse. For fifteen days, the whole time of his pious journey in the holy city. He came back in Oran, still refusing the Sufi option, but finally, at the end of a few more weeks of pain, he turned up at the zawiya. I did not know him and, from the front door of the zawiya to the white chair where I invited him to sit, he was contorting in pain. I put my hand on his head, recited a few verses from the Qur’an while placing the copper into his ear. He was sweating from every part of his body; his head was very hot. And then, suddenly, his whole body cooled down; he got upright and started to walk. He was cured. He was the one telling me his story in Mecca. We became good friends. He did not start frequenting the zawiya, nor did he become a Sufi, I do not want to exaggerate, but since this day I know that he says good things about zawiya to his Islamist colleagues. And I know that from reliable sources.”

Sheikh Habri's story creates credibility and aims at showing the superiority of Sufi practices. It illustrates how important it is for Sufi zawiya to illustrate their effectiveness through their ability to convince people, highlighting the complex dialogue of doubt and faith that zawiya operate in. Whether his account is true or not, it also gives an idea of the ideological tensions between Salafi movements and Sufi zawiya, revealing a certain way in which these popular practices are considered by reformists and Salafists.

Since the 1990s and the civil conflict, these tensions have softened and the moral pressure has been less important, notably thanks to the state's support. But the networks of these movements and their growing popularity, notably among the younger population, summon *zawiyas* and Sufi orders to react and to adapt their practices. Sufi sheikhs and *zawiyas* encounter three main recurrent criticisms: the accusation of *shirk* and polytheism, the non-scientific nature of mystic practices, and their festive character.

Shirk and polytheism

Wahhabism has had a long and lasting influence on contemporary Islamist movements. The most popular trend within the main Islamist party, the FIS, in the 1980s and 1990s, was dominated by Salafism. The Muslim Brotherhoods have been involved in the Movement of Society for Peace (MSP), another important political party, but do not have the same influence and popularity in Algerian society. One of the issues between Salafists/Wahhabis and Sufis comes from Sufis' relationship with saints, prophets, and other religious figures. Salafists and Wahhabis argue that worshipping saints (or ancestors) is "shirk" (associationism): no human being other than God can be treated as God, or with the same respect as God.

This criticism is not specific to the Islamic tradition. It is at the heart of monotheistic theology: if "magic" is banned in the Bible, it is because it is seen as "a form of causal action to manipulate God" (Tambiah, 1990: 7). From the birth of monotheism and the rupture with pagan gods, the problem has always been the individual's physical relationship with God. Even prophets cannot be "possessed by God" or conceived "as being a 'vessel' filled by God" (1990: *ibid.*). They are just relaying a message that God gave them.

Even anthropologists like Gellner also considered that the polytheist critique of "traditional Islam" was legitimate. As shown by Eneborg (2014), Gellner combined Ibn Khaldun's "eternal circulation of elites" and David Hume's notion of "flux and reflux between polytheism and monotheism" (Gellner, 1981: 54), to show the constant movement of religion from polytheism to monotheism, thus arguing, for Lukens-Bull, that "popular Islam, with its saints, tombs, and mystics, is polytheism" (1999: 9 in Eneborg, 2014: 421). I addressed this issue with Sheikh Habri in one of our conversational interviews. His answer is interesting because it directly neutralises the controversy. In his view, there is a misunderstanding, and the "polytheist" critique does not have any ground:

“The people who come to see a saint’s tomb, they say to God: “God, we want this, this and this”. And thanks to the saint, who worked hard, who was faithful and loyal, we ask in the name of the saint, but we do not put him in the position of God. But it is like you, for example, I know your father, so I can tell: I know Thomas, he is my friend, so you can do me a favour because I am your son’s friend. Because there are Salafists who think that people going to the zawiya consider the saints as God. So, give me this, or give me that. But, these people, they do not necessarily have to say it, but deep in their hearts, they know that a saint is not a god. They just cannot say it clearly. When a poor person comes and says: “oh, Sidi Ali, you must help me”; he knows that Sidi Ali cannot do anything and that only the good God can come and help him. The Saint is an intermediary, because he worked hard, he is loved by God, and it is through him that they want to talk with God. And thus, there are some Salafists that take it for shirk, which is the worst thing that can be”

Yet, we can observe that the criticisms raised by Salafists and Wahhabis had an impact on the way Sufis and zawiya reflect on their culture and practices. We can see it through Chalal’s discourse on modernity (in chapter 1), which is critical of many “magical practices” (and which also challenges Sheikh Habri’s “medicine”, looking at it with contempt), but also through the different uses of “science” and “folklore”, or through the valorisation of zawiya that focus on education and religious schooling. I had an interesting conversation with Muhamri Mustafa once, one of Sheikh Habri’s friends, who helped him to unify zawiya into a common union in the 1990s. For him, the rise of ‘Islamist’ movements in the 1980s, and the increasing influence of Wahhabism, accelerated the awakening of zawiya and Sufi sheikhs in the following decade. But his discourse shows how this awakening was supposed to be accompanied by a change of behaviour in Sufi actors, i.e. to make some practices cleaner or to “rationalise” them:

“Our activism was done through contact with the population. It was direct contact. Before talking to the movement, to followers, to activists of the Wahhabi branches, we had to enlighten our camp, because we could not talk publicly, or with these movements, as long as these people were not awakened. And many of these behaviours were in contradiction with the message, some behaviours were close to charlatanism. And the Wahhabis attacked us on these topics, on the behaviours of these charlatans. And to change that, it was a lot of work, and it is not over.”

There was thus a need to “reawaken” Algerian Islam and to purify it. This supports the idea that “there remains a lingering influence of this Weberian notion of ‘disenchantment’ on modern typologies of religion and magic”, and that this

understanding posits “an opposition between ‘magical thought’ and ‘scientific rationalism’” (Eneborg, 2014: 420). In a context of change (urbanisation, globalisation, mass education), some authors posit that maraboutic techniques are being “modernised” (Eneborg, 2012, 2014) while others suggest a process of re-Islamisation, encompassing these “traditional” practices but also other areas of daily life (Dieste, 2014). These two views are not incompatible. A “modern” ritual will follow the instructions and elements of knowledge present in the Qur’an and the Hadith, and will use the Qur’an as the main instrument of the ritual. Issawi techniques, for example, with their display of ecstatic trances, are accused of associating people with genies (which is shirk), producing a “dependence of the possessed person with respect to the spirit” (al-Jeraissy, 2002, in Dieste, 2014). What I found interesting in the field was the different levels of acceptance and legitimation of these techniques. As I will show, Sheikh Habri, for example, in his medical rituals, treated afflictions as problems of the body, as inside issues, rather than as consequences of a genie’s action; and he saw Issawi rituals more as performances of culture and tradition, and less as pure Islamic practices. But, at another level, Mahmood Chaalal, an allopathic Doctor of Medicine, looked at Sheikh Habri’s techniques with contempt, and considered that they did not respect neither Islamic nor modern medical principles. At these different levels, sheikhs and healers disqualify others on the basis on their own conceptions of religion (“true Islam”), medicine, and science.

Science

The non-scientific argument is recurrent in political and religious debates in Algeria and is not only found in Salafi rhetoric. Popular practices can be “popular”, but they must be rational and modern, and zawiyas must be scientific. Algerian “ulemas”, for example, from the “association of ulemas”, have a long history of conflict and tensions with zawiyas and Sufi sheikhs. Abderrazak Guessoum, the president of the association, in an interview with Salima Tlemçani, said that he had nothing “against zawiyas, if they are Qur’anic and scientific, and that they preach the right understanding of the Qur’an” (*El Watan*, 18/04/16: 6-7). This distinction is interesting insofar as most zawiyas in Oran would probably be considered non-scientific if we followed this definition. The use of the words “science” and “scientific” is very present in the discourses of Muslim intellectuals in Algeria. These words have the power to make credible, legitimise, or disqualify various positions or practices. In Oran, the only

“scientific” zawiya would certainly be the Belkaidia, as it focuses on the education and training of future religious elites.

But, even within Sufi movements, sheikhs and intellectuals appropriate this discourse on science. At the wa’da of the Taybia, an international conference took place during two days, before the official celebrations and the arrival of the branches and delegations of the tariqa, as evoked in chapter 4. I attended the conference with Sheikh Habri, and I remember the speech of one of the Sufi intellectuals there. It was at the Abdelhamid Ben Badis mosque, in the east of Oran, a splendid building built from 1999 to 2015. One of these religious scholars argued that the true, authentic objective of zawiya was “science”. He developed an argument around the idea that Sufi tariqas had a kind of political mission. They had to pave the way:

“Science is constructive, it builds, it looks towards the future, it sends us to the moon; there are Muslims that do not understand that; it is not a war for oil that we should fight for, it is a war for knowledge; the product of knowledge is far more important than the product of oil”

The word “science” seems to have various meanings in this context. While the idea of “science” can refer, from a doctrinal perspective, to a return to the texts, the Qur’an and Sunna (Salomon, 2013), it seems here to relate to technological advances and the production of a certain type of knowledge. And his conception of “knowledge” reveals a more “discursive”-oriented understanding. Both uses of these terms show, once again, the importance of a “transnational analysis” (Deeb, 2009), as they illustrate my informants’ engagement with discourses that travel through “transnational contexts of power, capitalism, and militarism” (2009: 109). In my view, this intellectual alludes to the situation of the Algerian rentier state in the capitalist competitive system, and the focus on an oil-exporting economy that neglects the importance of knowledge and education. It illustrates how such discourses on science and modernity also depend on larger international political issues.

“Folklore”, music and dancing

Finally, in addition to the zawiya’s “polytheist” beliefs and “non-scientific” knowledge, the criticisms often mention the festive character of Sufi rituals, with the emphasis on music and dancing, which Salafists say are forbidden in Islam. The use of the word “folklore”, in this perspective, is emblematic of this phenomenon. It has in

Algeria a very pejorative connotation. It does not only refer to popular traditions, but says something about the festive, mystic, transcendental character of the practice it refers to; a dimension of religion that many reformists would consider un-Islamic.

At the extreme end of the “scientific” spectrum, we can find the most festive *zawiyas*, with a strong emphasis on music and dancing, like the *Issawiya* in the region of Oran. There is a branch of the *Issawiya* in Oran, and I once attended one of their famous ceremonies, in a house of *Ain el-Turck*, near the end of spring. Sheikh *Habri* explained after the ceremony that the “folklore” (using this word, in French) was a particularity of the *zawiya*. This word seems to also have multiple meanings in this context. What would make a *zawiya* more folkloric than another? The degree to which it uses music and dancing as a support for transcendental activities is a first possibility. But the difference in terms of intensity, for example, between the *Habriya* and the *Issawiya*, is negligible. Rather, the difference lies in the variety of instruments that each of these *zawiyas* uses. Rituals and ceremonies at the *Habriya* have a strong musical and auditory dimension, but they do not use as many instruments as the musicians of the *Issawiya* do. On Fridays, for the *dhikr* ceremony, we see a similar ritual, with a man in the middle of a circle of followers, who plays the drum, while all the other “*fuqara*” sing and dance. What is different here, and thus considered to be more “folkloric”, is the number of musicians and the diversity of their instruments. The musicians produce something more technically elaborate and aesthetic rather than solely spiritual.

At the *zawiya Habriya*, the sheikh and his disciples felt directly targeted by these criticisms. People came every day to worship the sheikh’s great-great-grandfather, and each day Sheikh *Habri* practised non-scientific ritual medicine; every Friday, songs and drums combined in a very festive ceremony. But Sheikh *Habri* was also very critical of some of these practices. Taking for example his remarks with regard to the *Issawiyya*, we can see that he uses a modernist vocabulary to favourably locate the *Habriya* practices within a hierarchical system. The *zawiya Habriya* is not a “scientific” *zawiya*, but it is not a “folkloric” one either, from his perspective. Moreover, Sheikh *Habri*, as I will show in the following section, often uses a biomedical vocabulary to explain his medical and spiritual techniques. He does not mimic scientific techniques, but uses ideas and terms that can explain a posteriori the effectiveness of his spiritual practices. Even though people coming to the *zawiya* for his spiritual gifts did not especially care about his “scientific” explanations, it was important for him to justify and legitimise his

techniques from a modern perspective. I show that his arguments take place within a larger modernist discourse, which develops a materialist approach to mystic and supernatural phenomena.

IV

Science, biomedicine and the Sufi sheikh's power

Sheikh Habri does not have strict “office” hours. So, often there is a queue with half a dozen people waiting for him to arrive. Generally, most of the crowd are women and children, waiting in their designated female space. One day I arrived to find a family waiting with a young boy. He was feeling ill, probably just a sore throat, and Sheikh Habri had something to cure him: “with some egg yolk before sleep, he will be cured by morning”. Sheikh's Habri medical skills are praised in the local community. Even Hadj, who is often quite critical of him, admits that he has a true gift in this field:

“you know, people that come here generally went through a variety of other treatments before, without any long-lasting results. Once the sheikh treats them, with this small piece of copper placed in the ear, they magically recover”

Talking throughout the year with the many “patients” of Sheikh Habri, I saw people from many different backgrounds. Many, French, from Algerian descent, on holidays in Oran to see their families or looking for a marabout to treat their pains. Once, three young men, probably around my age, had come from Blois and Orleans. One of them suffered from his sciatic nerve: “we asked around, in the neighbourhood, and they all indicated this place”. They were not familiar with Sufism or the dhikr ceremonies taking place on Fridays, and just came to the zawiya for the sheikh's maraboutic skills.

But is Sheikh Habri really a marabout? Do we use the appropriate categories when we reference “maraboutic”, “mystical” or “magical” skills? What about “modern” medicine (which we call here biomedicine)? Did Sheikh Habri consider himself a biomedical doctor? In the field, these categories seemed as unstable to me as they were to my informants. My conversations with Hadj were interesting in this perspective,

because he always wanted to know how I tackled these issues, and what I thought of these practices that may seem magical and irrational from an outsider's point of view. He would tell me: "why, according to you, are these techniques more efficient than what you do with modern medicine?" As a foreigner, I too was drawn into the debate about credibility and doubt around science, religion and magic. But Hadj did not believe that Sheikh Habri's 'medical' technique had anything medical: "it has nothing to do with medicine, it is something divine, spiritual, exceptional. Not many people have this kind of gift". His argument differed from Sheikh Habri's view, who often supported the effectiveness of his treatments by comparing them with modern medical techniques. And sometimes, when he took a day or two to rest, he asked other people to replace him, sometime his brother Ali, but sometimes also people who are not supposed to have such gifts (Salah, Seddiq). So, it is not entirely "divine" or "spiritual". There is something to the actual technique of the sheikh's medical act.

Moreover, when Sheikh Habri attempts to legitimise his technique, he often uses biomedical science to support his claims. When people want to know more about the way he cures sciatic nerve pains he blends the religious/spiritual cause with the scientific explanation, referring to studies and current research about the topic. He cites a TV report from a French channel (TF1) to show how biomedicine finally explained what his great-grandfather found more than a century ago. We could think that there is an injunction to modernity that makes religious leaders like the sheikh feel obliged to explain his medical practices with contemporary tools. In these situations, the legitimacy of these practices seems to increase with the mimicry of biomedicine. It is a phenomenon that can be observed, for example, in Langford's work with Indian Ayurvedic doctors, both educated and folk practitioners, who "seek legitimacy by imitating European medicine" (Langford, 1999: 32), and which has raised, in both contexts, political considerations. As mentioned in the first chapter, with Omar Chaalal's discourse, the authenticity of these practices is always questioned, notably through their cultural relationship with other spiritual – here medical – traditions. It thus brings us to consider these practices, not only in the competitive and ideological environment that we described, but also in a postcolonial context built on identity discourses.

In this respect, we could argue that it is just another way to show that traditional (Algerian and Islamic) practices are often one step ahead of biomedicine. However, from Sheikh Habri's perspective, his practices do not mimic European medicine. Instead

Sheikhhe uses biomedical tools and principles to support ideas that have been explained for centuries by Islamic medical philosophy. Moreover, even though the literature on Islamic practices shows the negative influence of genies (djinnns or “djoun”) on common afflictions (epileptic convulsions, paralysis, rheumatic pain, sciatica etc.), and thus the legitimacy of this explanation from an Islamic perspective (Greenwood, 1981, in Dieste, 2014), Sheikh Habri rarely used this argument to explain such afflictions. Being famous for curing people’s sciatic nerve pains, he would often explain to them, in a very concrete, materialist manner, how the little ring of copper that he introduces in their ear will absorb the power that causes the pain. Sheikh Habri, therefore, does not imitate biomedical practices and techniques, but uses terms from a more prestigious medical field to adapt to an environment of doubt and distrust. He is proud of his tradition, and probably even convinced of its medical superiority – at least concerning his own speciality – but does not hesitate to change his vocabulary to target new audiences.

Yet I am not sure that people were very receptive to Sheikh Habri’s biomedical explanations. Most of his patients came for a religious solution to their physical problems. There were plenty of biomedical doctors in a big city like Oran, so the consultation of a Sufi sheikh was never supposed to replace the biomedical treatment. For Sheikh Habri, it was mainly a problem of legitimacy, in a context of medical competition (with other sheikhs and healers) and devaluation of mystic and magical practices. He had to prove the value of his skills, and to show that they were not non-scientific, as many people claimed. For his patients, we must then think more in terms of cultural efficacy, following the work of many medical anthropologists. With ritual medicine, the Sufi sheikh also sells a mystical relationship, connecting the patient’s body with Muslim Saints and, maybe, with God. Langford (1999), for example, evokes Lévi-Strauss’ seminal analysis of a Cuna healing song in “The Effectiveness of Symbols”, which shows how the manipulation of symbols can explain physical effectiveness of cures (Lévi-Stauss, 1963a in Langford, 1999: 26).

In this respect, the role of the Qur’an in the legitimation process of these practices cannot be neglected. Qur’anic text is used by Sheikh Habri in almost all his techniques: writing Qur’anic verses on pieces of paper as healing amulets, reciting Qur’anic verses on food, bottles of water (in demand every day from passersby on the road), and during most of his healing rituals. If we decompose his main technique, the one he is famous for, of curing problems with the sciatic nerve, we observe two phases in the medical rite:

the use of copper, aimed at channelling the power circulating in the body; and the recitation of Qur'anic verses, which gives a divine/spiritual dimension to the act. It may seem like a contradiction, but it supports the idea of a hybrid technique. It also shows that the sheikh is not just a doctor but a religious figure. Though it is “modern” to explain his technique through the means of medical studies, the Qur'an remains the main source of healing. And his patients, as I see it, are more attached to this religious symbol than to the concrete biomedical ritual.

But even the miraculous properties of the Qur'an could be explained from a scientific, biomedical perspective. Islamic modernists developing scientific explanations of passages from the Qur'an in the last century, and the sheikh's “scientific” explanations of the medical properties of the Qur'an, are in line with these modernist interpretations of the sacred book. For Eneborg (2014), these discourses have enabled a new perception of the Qur'an, going from an early understanding of its magical properties to a modern version, where its healing properties are explained by science. In Eneborg's view, these modern interpretations of the Qur'an can be seen more “as an attempt to modernise magic than as an attempt to purify religion – an example of modernity reinventing magic” (2014: 429). These modernist attempts often aimed at countering the Orientalist view of a “magic” Qur'an. They did not deny the supernatural qualities of the sacred book, but tried to offer rational explanations of these qualities. In my view, the sheikh's use of biomedical terms stems from a similar intention.

This kind of relationship between traditional practices and biomedicine can also be found in people's interpretation of the norms deriving from religious texts like the Qur'an. In the field, I was in the position of a potential convert, and a frequent argument that was raised to convince me was, indeed, the display of modern scientific discoveries that had been, in fact, already explained and justified, even implicitly, in Islamic texts. One example that often came up was the discovery by Jean-Jacques Cousteau that freshwater and salt water could not be mixed, something that is already evoked in the Qur'an. When I was living in Algiers, I had interesting theological and philosophical discussions with young people, and their arguments were often based on scientific studies or articles found on the Internet. Internet forums, websites, social networks and video platforms offer a wide range of references to support these claims. Since the 1980s, it has been common to see authors propose studies in which they attempt to scientifically demonstrate the miracles of the Qur'an. Dieste (2015) mentions the work of al-Zindani

(1980) and the “committee for investigating scientific signs in the Qur’an and in the Hadith” (2015: 47) that was organised at the 7th Saudi Medical Conference in 1982. In another example, Dieste parallels a faqih’s view on the molecular composition of genes (explaining that “they mostly come out at night, since they cannot stand ultraviolet light”) with recent studies proving “the existence of jnun” with “mathematic formulas to calculate their mass and speed” (Boutamina, 2005; Jawaid, 2006 in Dieste, 2014: 53). New information technologies facilitated access to these arguments, which now do not only circulate in academic and intellectual spheres (for ulemas and scholars) but are appropriated by imams, sheikhs, healers, and non-religiously educated people (like the students I encountered who were engineers and computer scientists but had not studied religion (in a formal way)).

I had the opportunity to meet Sufi followers developing this kind of argument about the scientific power and discoveries of the Qur’an, and more generally about physical or metaphysical truths that could not be tackled from a biomedical or “modern” scientific perspective. Once, I had a fascinating discussion with Kamel, a long-time friend of Sheikh Habri. Some followers of the Habriya have a more philosophical approach to Sufism, and Kamel was one of those. He grew up in Maraval and attended the same Qur’anic school as Sheikh Habri. Today, he is a lawyer and does not frequent the zawiya anymore, but is still attracted to mysticism and Sufism. He is the kind of person with a private relationship to religion and is thus not at ease with more collective forms of religious practices. I did not often have the opportunity to talk with this kind of believer, because they do not attend dhikr or evening ceremonies and celebrations but a few came to the zawiya to talk with Sheikh Habri or accompany a friend or family member. Kamel sees himself as a mystic, as a true Sufi disciple in a certain way, and this is precisely the reason why I was surprised by his very rational, scientific way of reflecting on mystic activities. In his view, most people, ordinary followers, come to the zawiya because of the sheikh’s aura and charisma; they are attracted by his baraka, and people follow him because of his spiritual power. But, according to him, this perspective seems to be make-believe, an illusion. People think that the sheikh has divine, miraculous gifts, that he can cure people, treat diseases, give them precious advice; but for Kamel, there is a rational explanation behind a sheikh or a saint’s talents:

“they see it as something supernatural, but the human body, and more than anything else the human mind, are such that some people can handle, for example, unbelievable amounts of pain; as a man

with a stab wound that does not realise it and goes on running [...] the human body has many secrets that we do not know or understand”

In this perspective, the sheikh does not have specific gifts, he just knows where to find the pain and how to treat it. He understands the human mind in a way that conventional doctors do not, but, at the same time, people accept the treatment and are cured because they believe in the sheikh’s power:

“Even the brain produces certain things, some influx to calm, to relax, to enable someone to sleep for example. And, when all these things come together, if you come with one of the names of God, or with a basic, naïve way of thinking, if you can find where the pain is, you will be cured, so it brought many people who believed in this kind of power, while their power was already in them, but the sheikh was only saying to them: here’s what you should do. He gave the remedy, or pave the way for a solution, but the remedy is the individual himself”

His argument is interesting: people seem to come for the cultural effectiveness of the sheikh’s skills. They come for religious and spiritual reasons: they believe in the power of the Sufi sheikh. But, in Kamel’s view, it is partially an illusion. The Sufi sheikh has some power, but is not a divine power, it is an intellectual faculty to know or understand processes that ordinary people cannot. It is not something magical. The physical effectiveness of the sheikh’s technique comes from his inner knowledge of the human body, not from his privileged relationship with God. This discourse seems to complete that of Sheikh Habri, who considers Islamic medicine as an open science, which must still be investigated and discovered. We have the impression that Muhammad’s revelation was never really finished, or that its understanding can never be completed, that it continues to offer new answers and discoveries, here through the intermediary of Muslim Saints. It is how Sheikh Habri would justify the acquisition of his technique, by explaining how his great-great-grandfather had a revelation about it. But it is not, in these perspectives, a mimicry of contemporary science, nor its denial: there are biomedical terms and techniques that can better explain contemporary Islamic practices (as we saw earlier); and there are other things that current biomedical knowledge and vocabulary cannot yet tackle, but that one day will be explained, as we see here with Kamel’s discourse.

One powerful argument in anthropology has been to explain the persistence and rise of magical practices by looking at the role these practices have played in and against the “disenchantment” of the world. The world is still enchanted, this argument goes, and the study of magic and the occult should “help illuminate the magicality, mystification and murkiness of modernity itself” (Doostdar, 2018: 18). In a brilliant book on Iranian spirituality, Alireza Doostdar strays from this view, arguing that she “is less interested in the enchantment of the putatively rational than the rationality of the supposedly enchanted” (2018: 18-19), and I would like to follow her here. Sheikh Habri’s techniques of legitimation are pertinent because they are used in a certain ideological context, that of the technical superiority of “Western” biomedical sciences. Rational explanations always came a posteriori, to understand and justify a technique that was discovered without the help of “modern science”. When the sheikh’s use of rationality fell short, it was not the technique that was challenged, but our ability to understand the mechanisms behind it. From his perspective, these techniques were always rational, not magical, and they thus had nothing to do with a spiritual re-enchantment of the world.

V

Outside the known and the visible: mystery and mysticism in Oran

But most of the people that I met, in Oran, did not come to the zawiya for the “science” of Sheikh Habri. This does not necessarily mean that they believed in the sheikh’s supernatural, divine power, that he was a Saint or a gifted individual. Rather, they thought that his ritual medicine offered something radically different from biomedicine. Despite the ideological environment, I show in this section how people’s habits and beliefs in Oran often do not respond to modernist injunctions. In particular, I argue that the atmosphere and identity of the city seem to mock such severe discourses on science, on music and dancing, on saints. I described the festive character of Oran in another chapter, but there is also a very mysterious atmosphere that I will explore. Oran is experienced as a city within a city, a world of caves, of forests, of unknown zawiya and invisible shrines. This Oran is related to the divine and inaccessible, to things that we cannot know.

The presence of the visible and the invisible, as we saw it in the previous chapter, is a very important question in Islam. God is not only visible through the Quran and its laws, he carries with him an invisible world, made of creatures and entities that do not belong to the material and sensible world. As Doostdar shows, the Islamic cosmology indeed includes “most obviously God, but also angels, jinn, heaven and hell, the interstitial realm of the barzakh, the throne (’arsh), news of the unseen in the form of prophecy and inspiration, and so on” (2018: 52). In the Quran, belief in the unseen is evoked in the second chapter, “The Cow”:

“This is the book; in its guidance sure, without doubt, to those who fear God.

Those who believe firmly in the unseen, are steadfast in prayer, and spend out what we have provided for them.” (2:2-3 in Doostdar, 2018: 52)

For believers, the category of the unseen means that some elements of reality cannot be understood, grasped, explained by rational and scientific techniques. The unseen stands outside a visible, calculable, identifiable sphere, but is not excluded from the domain of rationality.

I will now delve into the stories of such an opaque reality, as told by very different people, but mostly coming from middle/upper class backgrounds. Hadj is a follower of the Habriya, Leila does not frequent any zawiya, Rania is related to many zawiyas in the Oran region, but is not faithful to any one in particular. They all show the importance of traditional beliefs and magical practices. Hadj’s account first highlights the belief in a sheikh’s miraculous powers, which is shirk for many trends in Islam, even for most Sufi followers (a sheikh must have baraka, but he is not a sorcerer). Leila’s story shows the popularity of beliefs in witchcraft and sorcery, even among people who are not predisposed to believe in Sufism, mysticism etc. It supports the idea that a mystical and mysterious atmosphere is widespread through the whole city. In the third example, that of Rania, medicine and mystic rituals are two independent, separate fields. When biomedicine does not work, then it must be something supernatural that needs to be treated. As in Malinowski, magic comes into play in contexts where “experience has demonstrated to man his pragmatic impotence” (Malinowski, 1935: 239 in Bear, 2015: 422), and appears here as a technology of substitution to biomedicine in last resort.

I

Hadj tells me the story of his break-up. His girlfriend's parents did not like him and they used witchcraft to separate them. His girlfriend's family comes from Morocco, where they had an aunt famous for her witchcraft skills. According to him, she cast a spell on the couple so that his girlfriend could no longer have feelings for him. And they broke up after that. At the time, Hadj had another sheikh, a great sheikh and a true saint in his view, who had incredible gifts, notably known for his abilities as a seer, and for his premonitions. Soon after their break-up, he had a conversation with him, described his problems with this woman, and the sheikh told him not to worry, that justice will be done, and that he will find a spouse soon. In the weeks that followed this discussion, the aunt (who cast the spell) died from a cerebrovascular accident. Hadj explains:

“In our culture, we say that the sheikh ‘fired a shot’, like if he had a gun or was armed”

His discourse was intriguing because I had generally heard that witchcraft practices were forbidden in Islam. But for Hadj, what was witchcraft for the aunt was not witchcraft from his sheikh:

“A sheikh does what is just, and takes his commands from God, he just made a woman disappear because of all the bad things she did around her”

In his view, and as he confirmed when I tried to clarify, the difference is not in the act itself but in its motive and moral dimension. Hadj's view radically contrasts with Kamel's (evoked in the previous section) understanding of the role of natural force in techniques used in ritual medicine. Hadj believes in a world of supernatural powers, where biomedical techniques lose their explanatory forces. In his view, the woman's aunt did not really die of a cerebrovascular accident, but because someone had cast a spell on her. Hadj is an educated man and has a degree in French literature from the university of Oran. He is involved in the life of the mystic communities of the city and I noticed him at the various festivals, conferences and events of many different zawiyas, with the Issawiya in Ain el Turck, with the Alawiya in Mostaganem, etc. However, Hadj is a Sufi follower, and therefore I would not say that he is representative of the general spiritual environment of the city.

II

One day, going to the city centre by taxi with Leila, we pass by a “haunted” house. She opens the window and tells me: “yes, it is true, it is a tragic story, I know the man who lives here, his house is haunted, it has been a few years now and they cannot get over it”. What does it mean for a house to be “haunted”, I ask. “It is haunted, that’s all, that’s it, the man hears voices all day long, some ‘salam alaykum’, people talking to him, doors and windows slamming in the night, and there are apparitions: he sees cats and dogs walking around the house”. She strongly insists that it is real, and starts a conversation with the taxi driver: “Is there still the same problem? They could not get rid of it?”. Negative answer: “No, it is still haunted”. This discussion with Leila and the taxi driver was interesting because I lived with Leila for three months and I knew that she did not particularly believe in Sheikh Habri’s “science” or “magic”. I used to see her as a very rational person, being religious but not believing in traditional practices and ritual medicine such as the ones that the sheikhs perform. This haunted house, at the heart of Maraval, is not unique in the city. It is just another manifestation of the mysterious atmosphere of Oran. It is an old city, by the sea, surrounded by a few mountains. Many caves, a few forests. Some invisible zawiyas, and hidden shrines. A mysterious city, telling you: truth and knowledge are not accessible. There are things that human beings cannot know. On a night in March, attending a ceremony in honour of Abdel Qader Jilani, you could hear, from a young man claiming to be one of the Saints’ descendants:

“It is my grandfather who founded this zawiya, but it was a hidden zawiya. It did not exist when he was alive. He did not want it to exist. There were Qadiri followers all over the region, they would gather, of course, but the zawiya had to remain secret, they had to keep it invisible”. And another man would say: “In Egypt, in Sudan, everywhere in the Muslim world, there are some silent, hidden sheikhs. They do not make any waves, but people listen to them, far more than local imams, who are perched on the top of their magnificent mosques”

The hidden secrets at the heart of Oran are similar to the mysterious atmosphere that Roxanne Varzi describes in post-revolutionary Iran. When Ayatollah Khomeini came to power, Sufi brotherhoods went underground, in the same way Algerian orders did from independence until the 1980s, and mystical activities did not officially have the favours of the regime. But Varzi (2006) shows how Khomeini used religious themes of Sufism and mysticism to glorify martyrdom and consolidate the regime’s power. And

Doostdar's book (2018) further explains how, in spite of its struggle against superstitious practices, the Iranian state supported and promoted the view that mystic unveilings and revelations could not only precede but develop scientific knowledge. In the light of Sheikh Habri's discourse on his medical techniques, a quote from Ayatollah Khomeini, discussing the life of spirits after the death of their mortal bodies, will be interesting to put in perspective:

“In the near future, science will completely lift the veil from this topic [magnetism or magnetic sleep] and will make manifest the world of spirits and their eternal life and their strange phenomena, such as the insensitivity [to pain] of those in magnetic sleep, and their reports of the unseen and hundreds of other astonishing secrets.”

(Khomeini in Doostdar, 2018: 118)

This mystical character of Oran was reflected on explicitly by many informants, and was manifest in the shrine I described at the beginning of this chapter. An example of this all-pervasive mysticism came unexpectedly while I celebrated the seventh night of Mawlid (the anniversary of Prophet Muhammad's birth), a hot and festive summer night, with Masinisa, a radio journalist, who also works for the ministry of cultural affairs. He would probably say that “Oran always had something spiritual, attracting people”, certainly he told me a short and romantic history of the city:

“What I always try to deliver, as a message, what I try to say, even on the radio, it that we still wait for Oran, we still do not understand Oran, its spiritual dimension, the other part of the city, because there is something that is hidden, something that is invisible. And not everyone has the ability to see it. Since time immemorial, there have been people, there have been travellers, people who occupied the city, who colonised the region, and they have always talked about this mysterious, mystic part of Oran. I give you an example. Cardinal Jiménez, in 1509, said that there was something in Oran that he could not understand, that he could not interpret. And the same thing happened later. Almost all savants, scientists, ulemas, who came here, say that there is something different about the city”

And he would highlight its great cultural and historical heritage:

“Oran is famous for its caves; they are prehistorical caves. They were used by hermits. There are currently more than 75 prehistorical caves, and the French made an inventory of them, each one of them has a specific name. So, at a period of time, they became places for meditation. Many books tell, even during the Christian period, before the arrival of Muslims in North Africa, that there were dioceses,

churches in Oran, there were all these things. Bethioua, just at the border of Oran, it is a city that dates back to 50 BC, and in 100 AD there were churches, chapels, and this was already a mystic place, you see, before the advent of Islam”

After the long night of celebration together at a local branch of the tariqa Alawiya, and once the long speeches of the zawiya leaders were over, the two of us rested outside, under the warm sky of the Algerian summer, and Masinisa added:

“At the ceremony, you see what the imam explained, he evoked predictions from the savants, from scientists. One of them, a very famous one in the region... You know that, in Islam, we wait for someone that is going to save Islam, we call him the Imam El Mahdi; for the Shia, they expect him to come from Iran, and other people say that it will be from Iraq, etc. They all say something different. But for this marabout, according to him, it is certain, it will be Oran”

These fragments of Oran’s mystic identity reveal it to be a spiritual environment in which people, Sufis, mystics or not, evolve. In this mysterious city, where men and women rub shoulders with Saints and genies, in shrines, caves and zawiya, it is not uncommon to ask a seer for help, when one’s relative is unwell and biomedicine cannot help.

IV

In a previous chapter, I evoked Rania’s relationship with Sheikh Habri, who is a good friend of her. Her story is relevant here: a friend of hers was bewitched by a djinn, and her mother asked Rania to accompany her, to see a marabout. It was her first encounter with a sheikh, and it is certainly an important element to highlight: when people are not Sufi followers, they generally first come across a sheikh, a marabout, when they have health issues to resolve. Even when they are not firm believers, some people are tempted to accompany friends, family etc. Rania’s daughter, Zac, is a personal trainer. She lives in Algiers, but often comes to Oran during her time off, so I saw them together on many different occasions. I use their example to show that the mystical atmosphere of Oran is not limited to its official mystic communities. Zac is like Leila. She does not frequent Sufi zawiya as often as her mother. She is a firm believer but, does not wear a hijab. One day, she was feeling bad and thought that she had been bewitched by a djinn. A friend of hers was in a similar state. Rania knew a woman that could perform the ritual, a professional healer, who also “has a zawiya”. It could not be

a man because, as Zac explained, “sometimes, when we struggle, we tear our clothes up, are are thus almost naked, so it is better if it is a woman who takes care of it. We are more comfortable if it is a woman”. I thus could not attend the ritual, but Rania and her daughter described it to me during a more formal conversation, at Rania’s home in Ain el-Turck.

I relate part of this conversation below, as it raises relevant points about this healing ritual, notably the role of the Quran, the relationship between djinns and healers, and the tension between biomedicine and more traditional techniques. Zac’s case reveals the beliefs of an educated woman from a middle-class background, who does not frequent Sufi zawiyas. With the example of Rania, we learn of the boundaries, as she sees them, between biomedicine and medical rituals. Medical rituals must come when biomedicine has failed. It is something else, something divine and apart from the things that people can know, it cannot be explained by biomedical tools. Rania is a biomedical doctor, working at the Ain el Turck’s hospital, so this makes her account even more interesting.

Zac. You do not feel well, you sleep badly, have bad dreams, nightmares etc. With the “ruqya”, she reads on you, puts her hand on you, on your head, and reads a few “surat”, from the Qur’an. So, people start to convulse, those who are very ill and possessed. I did not feel good but it was not my case.

Rania. But the other girl, she was yelling and screaming. I brought her here, in this flat, to be treated. It used to be a neighbour, her mother talked about it, and we decided to do the “ruqya” with the two of them.

Zac. We did one after the other, and then we felt better, we were more comfortable. You feel at ease with yourself. And all of this, it is thanks to the Qur’an, the Qur’an cleans, it purifies. It forces the bad souls to get out. Because djinns are around, they are mentioned in the Qur’an.

Rania. They are here but you cannot see them. But the people who ‘cure for djinns’, they are with them and they can see them easily. You, you cannot see them as they are invisible.

Zac. But they are like us, like humans, and they are even more afraid of God than us. I, I did not know if it was really a djinn that was inside me, but I knew that the evil eye was around.

Rania. She had made every possible analysis, medical analysis, and there was no diagnosis. When there is nothing to say from a medical perspective, you must see something else, and quite often it is djinns.

Zac. Djinn come either from witchcraft, or because of the evil eye, they catch souls to annoy people. But there is some good and some bad in djinns, just like for us, human beings. But you, Christians, you also have your ghosts, and for us these ghosts are djinns. They are like spirits, as in this famous movie, "The Exorcist". Besides, it is quite similar, the "rokiya" talks to the sick person, tells her to get out of this soul, to let the girl finish her education, or marry, it is the same thing. I, I did not say anything, it was not that bad, but the other girl was very troubled, she said: 'leave me alone, do not read the Qur'an, you must shut up'; she was not the one talking.

Rania. She insulted the woman, without realising it. After she was done with her, she calmed down, and apologised. And now she is feeling better. By the way, it was her that you saw last time, when you came with Sheikh and his friends, last Friday. It was her, her mother could not believe it, how her daughter had become so peaceful. Because before that, they did not get on with each other, she wanted to hit her mother, she was violent.

I never saw Sheikh Habri be directly involved in this kind of ritual, associated with witchcraft and sorcery, even though he tolerated them and even gave such healers official public authorisations to practice. I was never able to determine his opinion on these techniques. I think that it was, for him, part of local folklore, that it was good for the preservation of the region's cultures and traditions; but in the end he seemed sceptical and worried by the impact of these activities on the image of Algerian zawiyas and Sufism. Because these are two different visions of ritual medicine. Both are mystical. But one is mystical because human knowledge and biomedicine could not explain yet (or perform) the techniques behind ritual medicine; and the other is mystical because it belongs to a sphere of knowledge that can never be accessed, but only experienced. Biomedicine, in this perspective, does not fail because of a lack of knowledge, but because supernatural forces are at work and thus need to be invoked.

These various examples show how strong the idea that truth lies outside the realm of human knowledge is. As Michael Scott puts it, "whereas science (or philosophy more broadly) seeks to displace wonder with knowledge, religion keeps wonder alive" (Scott, 2013: 860). Many Sufi, mystical and spiritual discourses indeed put mysticism and Sufism outside the "scientific" realm. Mystics and Sufis are often critical of what we could call rational thought or "Cartesian reasoning". There is something about Islam, about God and nature, about the world, which cannot be understood by modern science or by our human intellect, but only vaguely apprehended by our senses; people's in-this-

world experiences can sometimes only be explained, in their perspectives, by supernatural, divine forces. They demonstrate the existence of a mystical (be it medical, aesthetic etc.) truth that cannot be known but can only be experienced.

In this respect, and to conclude, I once had a fascinating conversation with Muhamri Mustafa, one of Sheikh Habri's old friends, whose father, Med Sidi Mohamed, also had a zawiya derived from the Shadiliya. When he told me about the story of his father and zawiya, he warned me that his way of reasoning would not be entirely clear or rational:

“Here, we get, if you will, into mysticism. The arguments that I will hold, they will not be based on reason, if you mean Cartesian reasoning, here we leave the rational sphere. These stories, those who have too rational a spirit, they cannot get into their minds. There is a Prophet's hadith that says: ‘you must not talk to them with words that their spirits, rather than their intellects, cannot accept’. Because it is not necessarily logical: it is God”

Mustafa's God, compared to the visible, rational, norm-making God described in the previous chapter, does not have to be logical; because he is God. With this invisible, illogical, “irrational” God, nature becomes an irrational object of study, with classic science being fallible. But I understand Mustafa's use of the word “irrational” as something ‘that cannot be explained’; and I thus do not think that it is rationality that is challenged in his discourse. Rather, he targets dogma, “those who have too rational a spirit”, those who are not able to think outside their cultural structures of reasoning. In this respect, the distinction between visible and invisible worlds, or between intellectual reasoning and sensible experience, enable rational objects of study to escape (sometimes just temporarily) the realm of modern sciences. It is in this perspective that I understand the vitality of these spiritual practices, not as a way to re-enchant the world, but in their ability to offer answers to unresolved universal problems.



Fig 7. Abdel Qader Jilani's *qubba*, on the top of Mount Aïdour. Celebrations on a typical Tuesday.



Fig 8. Mount Aïdour and its cave.



Fig 9. Oran's view from Abdel Qader Jilani's cave.

Conclusion

In the following song, the lyrics evoke the story of a disillusioned love, and the comforting, spiritual refuge offered by a call to famous Muslim saints (notably Abd al-Qader). The poet asks them for help and consolation. This song was originally recorded by Cheb Khaled (1993), a famous musician and singer from Oran and a symbol of Raï music. The lyrics below follow a live performance by Khaled, Rachid Taha and Faudel, in 1998, in Paris when it gained further popularity.

“Abdel Qader (live à Bercy)”

Cheb Khaled

Abdel Qader ya bou alem, dak el al aliya

Dawi ali ya bou alem, sidi rouf aliya

Rachid Taha

Abdel Qader ya bou alem, dak el al aliya

Dawi ali ya bou alem, sidi rouf aliya

Faudel

Sidi Abderrahman, dir mejhoudek wi et azem

Enta rajel qayem, fi kh'deemek dir maziya

(x2)

Cheb Khaled

Abdel Qader ya bou alem, dak el al aliya

Dawi ali ya bou alem sidi rouf aliya

Faudel

Abdel Qader ya bou alem dak el al aliya

Dawi ali ya bou alem sidi rouf aliya

Rachid Taha

Ya Sidi Boumediene, w ana fi ardek el amen

Ya Sidi Boumediene, ana fi ardek el amen

Ya Sidi al-Houari, soultan el ghali

W chkini ya Abdellah, soultan el aliya

Faudel

Abdel Qader ya bou alem, dak el al aliya

Dawi ali ya bou alem, sidi rouf aliya

Rachid Taha

Abdel Qader ya bou alem, dak el al aliya

Dawi ali ya bou alem, sidi rouf aliya

Cheb Khaled

Da wati el gilli ya yana dik el mibliya

Khallatni fi hira, ana el ashraq tawila

(x2)

Cheb Khaled, Faudel and Rachid Taha

Abdel Qader ya bou alem, dak el al aliya

Dawi ali ya bou alem, sidi rouf aliya

Faudel

Abdel Qader ya bou alem, dak el al aliya

Dawi ali ya bou alem sidi rouf aliya

Rachid Taha

Abdel Qader ya bou alem, dak el al aliya

Dawi ali ya bou alem, sidi rouf aliya

Cheb Khaled

Abdel Qader ya bou alem, dak el al aliya

Dawi ali ya bou alem, sidi rouf aliya

La, la, la, la, la

People disagree on the identity of the song's main character, Abd al-Qader. Some of my friends thought that it evoked the Emir Ab al-Qader, a political leader and military man, - also a mystic from the Qadiriyya -, who led the rebellion forces against the French army in the 19th century. He is widely considered as the father of the Algerian nation. Even the Wikipedia entry about the song says that "is about the Emir `Abd al-Qādir al-Jazā'irī, a famous Algerian Muslim religious leader and freedom fighter who resisted the French conquest of Algeria". But for many others, including Sheikh Habri, the song was about Abd al-Qader Jilani, the great Iraqi saint born in the 11th century, as the song's references to other important saints in Oran ("Sidi Abd al-Rahman", "Sidi Abu Madyan", "Sidi al-Houari") show. As mentioned in this thesis, Abd al-Qader Jilani is the founder of the Qadiriyya, the emir's tariqa, so they still relate to each other. The song's author might refer to both characters. Abd al-Qader, the military leader, was also a great mystic, and the ambiguity over the identity of the main protagonist could be deliberate. This debate was interesting because it mixed up religious and national figures and the different affect the song had on people. Some felt protected and safe, under the spiritual domain of these saints, and others associated the power of these saints with that of the famous political leader, transforming the song into a nationalist, sensational form. These discussions further showed the ability of sensational and material forms to fuel various political and religious imaginations.

I have been interested, in this thesis, in this question of imagination. One of my main arguments relied on the idea that our ability "to imagine other worlds" was key to human sociality (Bloch, 2008). Sharing a similar tendency to "otherworldliness", I could parallel the imagination of both God and nation. They are mediated by various sensational and material forms, which I explored in this thesis. As they are invisible and untouchable, people's access to these other worlds depends on practices, objects, ideas: flags, songs, monuments, shrines, bodies etc. In its modern form, a nation is not only a political community, as is associated with state-building processes but these forms

mediate the access to the nation and often serve to support the state's legitimacy to govern people. I first looked at the state's relationship with religion through the lens of anthropological theories of secularism. Exploring the state's ability to control and define the religious, I described its ambiguous religious policy and analysed the role Sufi orders and their communities played in Algeria's "return of religion". But theories of secularism must also question the state of the relationship between God and humans (Schielke, 2018). Looking at mediating forms, - communal singing, food sharing, ordinary objects - was again pertinent, and enabled me to show how some people could claim more power for themselves. Without denying the spiritual power of the Sufi sheikh, I tried to highlight the power of the zawiya community, by insisting on an immanent, horizontal understanding of baraka, and by describing popular religion's ability to connect people and create bonds. It is in this perspective that this form of power, as I saw it - a blend of divine and popular energy - is coveted by political elites. These discussions have led me to question many useful analytical pairs in the anthropology of religion, between the transcendent and the immanent, the visible and the invisible, the natural and the supernatural, which I tried to consider as relations and movements, exploring productive and dialectical tensions (Engelke, 2010). While mystic and popular practices and ideas are still considered as un-modern and irrational, in spite of the state's official support, I described God's pluridimensional character and people's various understandings and representations of divine presence in this environment.

Religion and politics in Algerian society

One of my first essays in anthropology, in 2012, when Mukulika Banerjee was my master's academic advisor, proposed an analysis of Bourdieu's famous paper on the Kabyle house. Bourdieu's description of the reversed house was inspired by Lévi-Strauss' structuralism and showed a coherent, systematised Kabyle world. A series of opposites served the analysis of two worlds, one focused on masculine-masculine relations, the other highlighting masculine-feminine and feminine-feminine relations. Though I was inspired by Bourdieu's writing, and by the poetic rendering of his analyses, I often felt that his portraits and descriptions were too perfect and coherent to represent social reality. It was one of the main criticisms made by his detractors, notably

arguing that his sociology of Algeria tended to separate and essentialise Arab and Berber societies (Martin-Criado, 2008).

It is one of the risks we take, as anthropologists, when we attempt to capture complex social phenomena with words and letters. In this thesis, for example, I tried to avoid any potential essentialisation of “Algerian” Islam, even though I have used this national category. The popular Islam that I analyse is Algerian insofar as my informants may come to associate their religious practices with a national tradition. It was not always the case but it often happened. The state’s religious policy also plays here an important role, with attempts to associate these forms of “moderate”, “tolerant” Islam with the national religious tradition, as has been shown in this thesis. But it is the weight of contemporary history, the memory of the colonial state and the war of independence, which has generated and maintained a form of patriotism that nourish people’s religious conscience.

The place of religion - and of religious studies - in Algerian society has been the object of numerous debates; and the various approaches to its analysis also raised plenty of theoretical and political questions. When looking at “popular” Islam, “in action” rather than fixed, I owe a lot the work of Fanny Colonna, a French-Algerian anthropologist who lived in Algeria until the 1990s. She had noted, a few years ago, that “the anthropology of Islam [in Algeria], as the everyday practice of individuals, interested almost no one” (2014: 18). The early tradition of sociology in North Africa (notably: Masqueray, Montagne and Maunier) was very theoretical, inspired by Durkheim, and - though Sufi orders got its attention - was more focused on the social organisation and political structure of the brotherhoods than in people’s practices and beliefs (2014: 18). As Sufi orders were a potential threat to the colonial state, anthropologists were used by the military to collect “pertinent” information. A student of Pierre Bourdieu for her PhD (1975), Colonna later on criticised his work on Kabyle society by highlighting the absence of religion in his understanding of the Kabyle social system, arguing that this system was analysed as if it has never been in contact with Islam.

Her work, like Andezian’s study of mysticism, taking place before the 1990s, fits in a period where popular forms of religiosity, as it has been shown, were not well

perceived by the Algerian state. While *zawiyas*, with their “un-modern” practices and beliefs, were despised and discredited before this decade, they have reengaged Algerian media, politicians and intellectuals from the mid 1990s and the start of Bouteflika’s presidency, thus legitimating the intellectual production on these topics, notably within the Algerian academic sphere. The present thesis could be an example of this intellectual production, as are the numerous conferences taking place in Algeria on Sufi issues, during the course of the year, as it was evoked in chapters 1 and 4. Moreover, I hope that this study contributes to Colonna’s work by documenting the forms of erudite, scholarly knowledge produced by Sufi elites, which go beyond common categories opposing popular to scientific Islam or oral to literary traditions, such dichotomies that have been criticised by Colonna in her earlier papers. And I also think, in this perspective, that this thesis is part of her legacy when it shows that the use of the term “popular” is pertinent enough not to be opposed to an “elitist” form of religiosity.

Andezian’s monograph on mysticism and the saints of Tlemcen (2001) is fascinating because her field work took place in a period of transition, the 1980s, which prepared the 1990s’ renegotiation of the state’s relationship with religion. Popular practices were excluded from the public spaces and started to be reintegrated. This question of the regime’s transition is interesting because the late 2010s might as well represent the end of a particular era for the Algerian state. The main political party, the FLN, has been in trouble for the last 30 years and the Algerian regime, as it has been argued in this thesis, has been looking for new sources of legitimacy. Religion can generate powerful affects, but popular demonstrations can also play this role, in the long run. We can see it with current mass protests (March 2019), with youngsters taking to the streets after President Bouteflika announced that he would be running for President, for a fifth mandate, at the April 2019 elections. Algerian flags were back on the streets, and future regimes might use the memory of such popular protests to legitimise their power one day. Focusing mainly on groups of women, Andezian’s study is valuable because she shows that religious spaces like the *zawiya* or the saint’s shrine are also spaces of sociality, and offer great opportunities for women outside the private sphere. It is also in this perspective that I analyse various spaces related to the *zawiya* Habriya in chapters 3 and 4, and I go beyond the question of sociality to show to what extent they are political spaces, federating and unifying people. Even though I necessarily had a privileged access to a world of men, my numerous interviews, discussions and

encounters with women, be it at the zawiya and other Sufi sites, or in more private spaces, enabled me not to limit this argument to an analysis of male activities.

But the main issue with Andezian's work, and with most studies of religious practices in Algeria until the 2000s, is their inability to connect this understanding of "local", "folk" religion with the country's political and cultural environment. Scheele (2007) evoked this gap in the literature on religion in Algeria, in an article where she proposed an analysis of a conference organised in 2004, held in the name of a saint from Béjaïa. Describing the interactions taking place during the conference between local sheikhs, "secular intellectuals" and Arabophone speakers from Islamic universities, she showed that common dichotomies classifying popular practices, reformist beliefs and other categories could "only be understood as part of wider social and cultural processes, dependencies, and oppositions" (2007: 325). Drawing on this work, this effort to offer an account of popular practices in Oran by "referring to broader cultural dynamics and political struggles" (2007: 305) runs through this thesis. Looking at definitions of "Algerian Islam", I analysed the tension between the nation-state's attempts to capture and direct the significance of Sufi Islam, and the capacity of "Sufi" actors to escape such intentions. By showing the political importance of religious events like saint-day festivals, I argued that they were representative of the success of nationalist projects. Beyond power struggles and tensions with current political regime, I observed the potential convergence of religious and national affects, which can be used to federate a population and/or to legitimise power. Moreover, it has been argued that the evolution and regulation of some popular religious practices must be understood in a particular national and global framework, in which categories like science, modernity and rationality are shaped and renegotiated.

Though cultural and political struggles were often less considered by anthropologists, the "re-emergence of Sufi orders in Maghrebi politics" (Werenfels, 2014: 275) had the attention of political scientists and sociologists (see Werenfels, 2011, 2014; Bekkaoui, Larémont and Rddad, 2011; Khemissi, Larémont and Taj Eddine, 2012). Relying on surveys, interviews and the analysis of the Algerian press, these various studies have shown the state's use of the Sufi orders' religious legitimacy and the promotion of Sufi Islam as part of an anti-extremism religious policy, highlighting for example the sponsoring of Sufi conferences and the frequent 'political pilgrimages'

made by politicians to get a saint's blessing. The limits of these works lie in their research methods, and I hope that this thesis contributes to this literature by offering new perspectives on these issues with its ethnographic material. Furthermore, these works necessarily tend to neglect the analysis of religious practices, offering a macro perspective that fails to fully understand the nature of religion's relationship with politics. The question of political pilgrimage, for example, cannot only be grasped, as I argued, from the view of the saint's blessing, and must take into account the popular, democratic aspect of the ritual. In a similar way, the analysis of saint-day festivals and other events like mystic parties enable us to understand how they can federate people and generate a sense of community belonging.

Popular Islam and the Algerian state

In the last two decades, since the publication of Asad's *Formations of the Secular* (2003), the question of Muslims and Muslim societies' relationship with politics, and to a certain extent with the modern nation-state, has been a major debate in the anthropology of Islam. The study of religious practices and beliefs had to consider the power relationship between individuals and the dominant political structure, here the nation-state, with its potential ability to control people's attitudes, affects and relationships, and to define religion. On a broader level, this understanding of secularism took into account the various ways a state can manipulate a religious tradition. Ali Agrama, for example, in *Questioning Secularism* (2012), showed how the concept of "shari'a" has been reconfigured, in contemporary Egypt, to fit into a particular legal framework, transforming and reducing the immense and diverse corpus of ideas that represent the idea of shari'a to a "law".

The Algerian state's relationship with religion does not escape this analysis of secularism. With the ministry of religious affairs and other institutional means, it controls religious properties (Habus) and supervises religious staff; it regulates the circulation of ideas, audits and verifies versions of the Qur'an, oversees the sale of religious books at fairs (Ghanem, 2018). It offers guidance on family laws and applies a version of shari'a to the family code. In particular, this thesis analysed the state's use of Sufi Islam as part of a strategy aiming at associating a positive, moderate, tolerant form

of Islam with the “Algerian” religious tradition. This strategy has international objectives, linked to Western perceptions of “good” and “bad” Islams, and gets aligned with a view of Sufism and popular Islam as a harmless, apolitical tradition. It is thus a discursive and political strategy, rather than a will to invent and build a national religious tradition. Indeed, though it officially supports and promotes Sufi Islam, Salafi quietists are also viewed positively by the state, and education textbooks still follow a reformist, Salafi curriculum (Ghanem, 2018).

I looked at the state’s promotion of Sufism by analysing religious conferences and saint-day festivals, exploring their nationalist dimension, the use of religion’s production of affects and the potential sources of legitimacy that they generate. I was also interested in the influence of state discourses on science and modernity, linked to the reformist tradition, but also to a larger ideological environment connected with the “Western” scientific production. I showed that it put pressure on people’s beliefs and practices and promoted a certain form of “rationalised” knowledge. However, in this configuration, Sufi orders are not passive actors in their interactions with the state, and I showed how they used current situation to promote certain values and gain political influence. Moreover, when looking at the power relationship between religion and politics, it was also pertinent to explore the question of legitimacy by exploring the human relations that religion generates. While we tended to consider that the religious legitimacy that politicians seek comes from particular, charismatic individuals’ vertical relationship with the divine, the power of religion must also be analysed from the perspective of the productive human relations it produces, and which have political potential.

The importance of inter-human relations in Sufi practices, rituals and other events brought me to think differently of on-going debates on “everyday Islam” and “piety ethics”. Anthropologists of Islam, from the 1980s, tended to focus on the Islamic tradition’s revivalist tendencies, implicitly responding to modernist arguments on supposed decreasing religiosity (Fadil and Fernando, 2015a), and thus often privileged analyses of piety ethics in their understanding of religion (Mahmood, 2005, Hirschkind, 2006). In *Politics of Piety* (2005), for example, Mahmood described the life of pious women in Cairo, participating in mosque study groups, who make themselves into virtuous subjects through various practices of self-cultivation. Without necessarily

standing in the way of these works, many ethnographic studies from the 2000s started to explore the complexity of Muslims' lives, the contradictions inherent in people's will to pursue ethical lives (Schielke, 2009, 2015) and the emotional, affective experiences of Muslims that question and may contest dominant religious norms (Marsden, 2005, 2010).

I was seduced in the first place by the concept of "everyday Islam", as it offered attention to "the ways in which people draw on ideas that they understand to be rooted to varying extents in Islam in order to figure out how to handle everything from handshaking to prayer, from dress to which cafes to hang out in and what social invitations to accept" (Deeb, 2015: 94). This "everyday" turn consisted in looking at activities that seem to lie "outside the realm of religiosity" (ibid.) and in exploring to what extent they are still influenced by people's understanding of Islam. From this perspective, the place and object of my fieldwork was original. Even though I became a member, as an active observer, of the Habriya community, I considered the zawiya as a starting point and as a piece of larger network of sociality. My position in this "religious" (and thus, social) environment enabled me to further explore the connection between the religious and the social and to analyse to what extent "religious" events also came, ironically, to fall "outside the realm of religiosity", from Sufi conferences to saint-day festivals. From the other side, extending Deeb's definition, I argued that ordinary activities, like work or food sharing, could be understood not only from the perspective of people's religious ideas and meanings, but by looking at the presence of the divine in these everyday activities.

My use of the term "popular" is connected to this analysis of the relationship between religion and the social. Though it is close to Albanese's definition of the popular as non-hierarchical, mass mediated religion (1996), I agree with Schielke and Debevec when they remark that "what is commonly described as 'popular religion' is not mass mediated and not even often known to a wide audience: devotional practices and objects, saints veneration, healing, divination, festive culture, etc." (2012: 5). However, by insisting on the ambivalence, social diversity and popularity of the religious events and places that I described in this thesis (mausoleums, festivals, street parties, zawiya), I have argued that people from various backgrounds and with different beliefs and relationships with God, meet and socialise in these spaces associated with what I called

“popular Islam”. It is not popular in the sense that a majority of people adhere to a certain set of values and ideas, but because of the ability of this form of religiosity to connect people and nourish social relations. This definition also derives from my overall argument on baraka, considering it as a horizontal, immanent force that does not only come from an outside world but emanates from human relations and communities.

All these discussions have led me to seek God’s presence in this “religious” environment. When Schielke argued that the “key issue of secularity in monotheist context” was “the question of how and what kind of relations humans have with God” (2018: 4), I realised that people ultimately claimed more power for themselves in my explanation of baraka. At the expense of charismatic, individual figures, I suggested that the power of the zawiya may rather lie in the hands of its community of fuqara, explaining in a different perspective the politicians’ willingness to visit Sufi shrines and zawiyas. As humans have been claiming more power for themselves, with the democratic model, their political representatives are now looking for both religious and popular legitimacy. I thus have attempted to go beyond a common theme in the anthropology of Sufism, which sees the saint, the “friend of God”, as the God’s main interlocutor and recipient of baraka (Werbner and Basu, 1998). Without denying the presence of these vertical representations of divine power, I argued that God’s presence, and the way that people imagine, represent or experience it, brings us to offer a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between the divine and most ordinary people. In looking at these God-humans relations, I was influenced by Mittermaier’s work on giving and sharing processes in Muslim communities, and on her concept of “economies of baraka” (2013: 284). Balancing the charismatic, transcendental character of Sufi leaders with the generous repartition of baraka in the world, I tried to contribute to this work by further documenting the interdependent relationship between God, donors and recipients.

Nation and religion as practices of mediation

It was particularly difficult, in this thesis, to locate God and define its main attributes. The observation of people’s practices, objects and ideas did not allow me identify God’s main characteristics in this environment, but it I believe that it is not

specific to this context. The different conceptions of God that circulate in the zawiya can be found in both the Islamic tradition and the other monotheisms. In the Hebrew Torah, for example, different narrative traditions intersect and describe both a distant, holy God and a forgiving, loving, intimate figure of the divine (Friedman, 1987: 236-40 in Hovland, 2018: 447). But God's pluridimensionality, as argued by Schielke (2018) is ethically productive: people's life choices are not restricted by a single, coherent body of rules to follow. And it is also analytically productive, for the anthropologist. The various analytical dichotomies used to make sense of people's beliefs and practices, between visible and invisible, immanent and transcendent, natural and supernatural, phenomenal and noumenal, are false oppositions. I agree with Engelke when he writes that these pairs "are interesting not in themselves but for the conjunctions that join them", - the "ands" -, which "are not the recognition of binary oppositions but tokens of a dialectic" (Engelke, 2010: 377). Ultimately, texts and words, community rites, singing and remembering, the Sufi sheikh's baraka "define, substantiate, and challenge the relationships between the visible and invisible worlds" (ibid.). Though I focused in the first instance on the horizontal, immanent dimension of divine power, my ethnographic material supported this idea of a dialectical relationship, which constantly reconfigures the balance between these terms. The analysis of these "media" shows us that people's beliefs are not fixed; a distant and powerful world of a transcendent God often interacts with a sung, eaten, eating God.

One of the major problems raised by the anthropology of Islam, the question of the divine-humans relationship, goes through major works in the anthropology of religion, and has received particular attention from the "mediation turn" of these last 15 years. This mediation turn encouraged social scientists to look at the sensational and material forms that mediate the relationship between God and human beings. It argues that "all religion is material religion" (Engelke, 2012: 209) and relies on the idea that religious groups, as "people almost never relate to deities face-to-face" (Robbins, 2017: 464), cannot but attempt "to bridge the assumed distance between the transcendent and humans" (Hovland, 2018: 426). For Meyer, one of the key theorists of the turn, the study of religion must even go beyond the question of belief, as religion itself is "a practice of mediation between people and the divine (or more broadly: the realm beyond the empirically perceivable)" (Meyer, 2006: 434 in Robbins, 2017: 464). The focus on sensational and material forms was pertinent for this thesis, not only because of the many

descriptions of these forms that my ethnographic material proposes, but because the insistence on the importance of mediation “brings in an important Asadian-inflected focus on the role of power and discipline in religious traditions” (Hovland, 2018: 429). Works in the anthropology of Sufism have often focused on the charismatic mediation of Sufi sheikhs, - looking at the power of shrines, tombs and other “concrete surroundings” imbued “with their sacred persona” (Werbner and Basu, 1998: 6) -, but they ultimately highlighted the hierarchical and unequal access to the divine-humans relationship, notably when special, “blessed” living bodies could themselves be the media of this relationship. In this perspective, I could move the cursor from the Sufi sheikh to other, - more “popular” -, media, describing the dhikr’s communal singing and exploring food sharing experiences of the divine. With this move, power relationships between God and humans, and between humans, could be analysed from another perspective. A more immanent understanding of baraka gave more power to “ordinary” people and to the community in itself.

This understanding of power brought me to argue about political legitimacy in a different way. I made the assumption that politicians did not necessarily visit the zawiya to meet with the charismatic medium - the Sufi sheikh - but to find another kind of medium in the zawiya community. People’s baraka was considered as giving access to both divine and human, national worlds, showing that religion could contain a mobile, immanent imagination of a political community. Therefore, arguing that religion and nationalism were not inherently different in their ideological forms, I suggest that it might be pertinent to think of a similar “mediation turn” for the study of nations. Talking about God, Boylston asks: “How does the abstract become tangible?” (Boylston, 2013: 259). As nations and religions can be both considered as “manifestations of an otherworldliness” (Travis Webb, 2018: 63), this thesis also showed that the nation, as an invisible, untouchable, otherworldly reality, needed to be mediated through sensational and material forms, i.e. flags, anthems, monuments. Here, the “intangible knowledge of the nation is kept alive by governments and communities through a range of aesthetic resources” (Mookherjee, 2011: S4). Looking at aesthetics from religion’s perspective meant that I had to understand religious forms as affects. And the first step of my argument, in the first chapters, was to see religion’s ability, through these religious communities, to mediate the relationship between elite politicians and their nation. I then insisted on the role played by religion in the consolidation of humans-humans relations,

bringing people together in the street for a festival, for example, to celebrate the history of a local saint. In these two cases, religion “refers to both a binding (religio meaning ‘to bind’) and that which binds: practice and product” (Engelke, 2010: 374). The blend of national and religious material forms further showed how they can provide the foundations for a fused political-religious imagination.

I will be attentive to future research on religion in Algeria, notably in current context. Recent popular demonstrations have revealed the youth’ desire for more transparency and democracy. The political regime must renew itself, in a political climate that does not oppose religious people to secularists, as it used to be in the 1990s, when religion and society were read as contradictory impulses. Descriptions of the demonstrations indeed show that religious and regionalist questions are side-lined, as people seem to gather around democratic and social claims. While the Algerian state seems to be officially reconciled with religion, it must now be able to treat its people’s democratic demands.

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