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## Interpreting Djinn's Actions: Ritual and Theological Knowledge in Moroccan Sufism

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**Abstract.** This article aims to understand the role of theological knowledge in performing a curative ritual practice promoted by Moroccan Sufi leaders among the Hamdouchiya Brotherhood. According to local Islamic belief, *jnun* (pl. of djinn) are responsible for misfortunes that befall individuals. The search for a job, the materialization of a marriage, motherhood, or the cure (of diseases) are part of the set of demands made by women during ritual sessions convened in Sufi lodges. In these sessions religious specialists facilitate interactions with *jnun* during trance experiences with the personality of 'Ā'isha Kandīsha, one of the most famous female djinn in Moroccan society. Based on ethnographic research (2012–2017), I highlight the embodied practices mobilized both by Sufi leaders and believers to solve their conflicts or face their misfortunes. Understanding body language cannot be performed without explaining the communicative context. In this sense, the analysis gives particular attention to the reciprocal positioning, influence, and exchange between humans and *jnun* during the arrangement (both physical and conceptual) of Sufi rituals. The cult of saints in Morocco further allows people to criticize the theoretical-methodological limits imposed between “orthodoxy” and “popular Islam”. These terms conceived as a binary, would make it difficult to understand, for example, new possibilities for obtaining an “Islamically legitimate cure” i.e., one recognized as belonging to a traditional mode of production of knowledge within contemporary Moroccan society.

**Keywords:** ritual, knowledge, jinn, Islam, Sufism, Morocco

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## Действия джиннов и их толкования: ритуал и богословское знание в марокканском суфизме

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**Аннотация.** Прослеживается роль богословского знания в рамках целительных практик, которые проводятся марокканскими суфийскими лидерами – по-

следователями братства Хамдушйа. Согласно локальным исламским поверьям, разнообразные несчастья и неудачи, которые могут случиться с людьми, происходят по вине джиннов. В связи с этим поиск работы, заключение брака, материнство или излечение (от болезней) входят в широкий спектр запросов, которые женщины озвучивают в ходе ритуальных сессий в суфийских обителях. Во время таких сессий через вхождение в транс религиозные специалисты обеспечивают взаимодействие своих «клиентов» с джиннами, а именно с персонажем Аиши Кандиши, которая считается одной из самых известных женщин-джиннов в марокканском обществе. Основываясь на материалах этнографического исследования (2012–2017 гг.), предложено проанализировать телесные практики, которые применяют как суфийские лидеры, так и верующие для решения своих проблем или противостояния своим несчастьям. Вместе с тем понимание языка тела невозможно без коммуникативного контекста. В связи с этим особое внимание уделено взаимному позиционированию, влиянию и обмену между людьми и джиннами во время организации суфийских ритуалов, в том числе и организации на концептуальном уровне. Показано, что исследование культа святых в Марокко высвечивает те теоретико-методологические ограничения, которые накладываются концептуальным различием так называемого ортодоксального и народного ислама. Противопоставление этих категорий не объясняет, например, новые возможности получения «легитимного» в рамках ислама лечения, т.е. такого лечения, которое вписывается в традиционный для современного марокканского общества способ производства знания.

**Ключевые слова:** ритуал, знание, джинн, ислам, суфизм, Марокко

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## Introduction

This article aims to understand the role of theological knowledge in performing a curative ritual practice promoted by Moroccan Sufi leaders (*muqaddims*) among the Hamdouchiya<sup>1</sup> Brotherhood (*ṭarīqa*). According to local Islamic belief, spirits (*djinn*; pl. *jnun* in Morocco) are responsible for misfortunes that befall individuals. The search for a job, the materialization of a marriage, motherhood, or the cure (of diseases) are demands made by women during ritual sessions (*ḥadra*) convened in Sufi lodges (Crapanzano 1973; Rausch 2000; Marechal, Dasseto 2014; Bartel 2016). In these sessions religious specialists facilitate interactions with *jnun* during trance experiences with the personality of 'Ā'ishā Kandiṣha, one of the most famous female *djinn* in Moroccan society (Akrimi 2006; Claisse-Dauchy, Foucault 2005; Lebling 2010; Bartel 2016).

Several sectors or sub-branches (*tā'ifā*) linked to the Sufi Brotherhood claim to be able, upon payment from religious experts, to reveal the *jnun's* identities when supplicants are faced with the possibility of a family member being affected and possessed by *jnun*. These specialists combat what are considered to be evil forces that provoke situations surrounding an individual life crisis (Turner 1967a). In Morocco, the notion of a therapeutic system

is organized on the premise that individuals – at some point in their lives – can demonstrate physical or psychological imbalances due to the actions of *jnun* (Aouattah 1993, 2008; Amster, El Aoued 2013). Resorting to religious practices in the face of such occurrences becomes an effective way to promote a definitive resolution or minimize the negative effects.

The effectiveness of these rites rest on a set of desires and motivations for those seeking healing. This situation converts to a series of existing control devices that express the manifestation of an experience called the “sacred”. The mobilized symbols and ritual actions of these religious agents act in partnership with the sensory, emotional, and cognitive dimensions of individuals (especially among women) who, during the pilgrimage (*ziyāra*), aspire to a therapeutic experience. In this article, I emphasize that the systemic character of therapeutic experiences must be analyzed both by the healer and by the individual who wants it.

Healing experiences, through the activation of saints among Moroccan women, are not restricted to mere sociability and cathartic practices they can acquire (Mernissi 1981). Some academic research has dealt with the question of searching for these religious agents in concrete situations of distress. Many of these studies demonstrated that the choices women made were not always about the same saint. In the end, they emphasized that women may resort to multiple saints due to their social specialties as recognized by them (Laghzaoui 1992). Women's religious daily practices create this circulation among Sufi groups in order to achieve ritual efficacy. This situation maintains connectivity from the point of view of those who wish to go through such experiences.

Manipulative discourse by Sufi leaders has attracted much attention in various adjacent domains of anthropological research in Morocco (Maarouf 2007; Rhani 2009; Amster, El Aoued 2013; Mateo Dieste 2013). Indeed, this kind of expression is a form of communication that puts the addressee in a situation where Sufi leaders tried to reveal, i.e., the interpretation aims to process the contextual premises and inferential enrichments that support cognitive effects with the expected content. In the context involving *jnun*, the cure models are a topic relevant in the literature, and configure a central contribution of the role of words and body language in ritual actions by religious specialists (Greenwood 1981; Aouattah 1993; 2008; Mekki-Berrada 2013; Mateo Dieste 2015). Words are open to a wide range of articulations and subjective interpretation. To minimize this, Sufi leaders' communication with the pilgrims tried to include some elements such as facial expression, tone of voice and, specially, body language.

I wish to highlight the embodied practices mobilized both by Sufi leaders and believers to solve their conflicts or face their misfortunes. Understanding body language cannot be achieved without explaining the communicative context. In this sense, the analysis gives particular attention to the reciprocal positioning, influence, and exchange between humans and *jnun* during the ar-

rangement (both physical and conceptual) of Sufi rituals. The cult of saints in Morocco allows people to criticize the theoretical-methodological limits imposed between what is usual in terms of common understandings of “orthodoxy” and “popular Islam”. These terms, taken from conceptions of modern Islamic religiosity, make it difficult to understand, for example, new possibilities for obtaining an “Islamically legitimate cure” (*al-ruqya al-shar‘iyya*) i.e., recognized as belonging to a traditional mode of production of knowledge within contemporary Moroccan society (Spadola 2014). This idea of Islamic legitimacy in the therapeutic process allows a rethinking of the disputes in terms of an orthodoxy available and mobilized for specific purposes and, many times, desired as correct and linked to the subject’s daily practices. On this point, the tension between discursive tradition/authorized discourse (Asad 1986) and religious life (Schielke, Debevec 2012) permeates the local arena since the problem of authority and the relationship between ethics and symbolic action remains a real point of reference in Morocco. In this sense, rethinking the agencies of specialists and the subjectivities of the individuals involved make it possible to problematize the performances and efficacies mobilized by healing rituals (Naamouni 1993; Boissevain 2006).

Based on ethnographic research (2012–2017), the method through which my interpretations are attained consists of direct observation, which requires the researcher’s involvement in the activities of the social group in which he lives so as to establish the conceptual principles and ritual actions that organize the experiences of its members. In practical terms, this means that I attended, with proper authorization, residences rented or lent to the pilgrims. They carried out the possession rituals through musical performances of groups linked to the Hamdouchiya Brotherhood, available in the village of Sidi ‘Ali (location: Mrhassiyine Province, Meknes-Fez Region).

The problem of knowledge, which is what individuals employ to interpret and act on the world (Barth 2002), becomes central to the issue of expanding the ability to understand the ethnographic religious context contemplated in the article through the analytical category of ritual. The actions invested by Sufi leaders, above all, from the organization of rituals, guarantee the possibilities of distributing the power of blessing (*baraka*), which aims to resolve the misfortune experienced by individuals affected by *jnun*. These rituals can function in terms of a system of communication<sup>2</sup> of words and acts organized by religious specialists who interact with the invisible plane – related here to the world of *jnun* – since Sufi leaders possess knowledge of the type and the way of acting of these beings within human reality.

In order to achieve some effect on the interventions provided by *jnun* to individuals, Sufi leaders end up being holders of specific knowledge, containing, respectively, the facets of action formulated about different traditions of knowledge proposed by Barth (2002). His description cites three facets of action: a) a substantive body of statements; b) a medium range of

these representations; and c) a social organization where the circulation of these types of knowledge can be made possible. This set of principles allows the religious experts to establish an authority status where each ritual arena is developed, based on constant contact with individuals who manifest states of possession attributed to *jnun*.

### The Moroccan religious context

Morocco incorporates an ethnic and religious composition that includes an estimated population of over 36 million. In terms of ethnicity, Njoku (2006) indicates that most of the population in Morocco are Arabs (70%) and Berbers (30%). In the field of religiosity, it is worth noting the presence of a minority of Jews (0.2%) and Christians (1.1%); however, the population is predominantly linked to Sunni Islam (98.7%) and with a multiplicity of actors that are part of an expression of Islam that is dominant in the Maghreb region (territory that encompasses Morocco, Western Sahara, Algeria, and Tunisia).

The phenomenon of the cult of saints (maraboutism) acquires relevance in the formation of religious brotherhoods, as is the case of Hamdouchiya. The term marabout identifies the existence of men with powerful forces capable of modifying reality and is based on the notion of *baraka* (Doutté 1900a, 1900b; Dermenghen 1954, 2005). In Geertz's (1968) seminal comparison between expressions of Islam in Morocco and Indonesia, the author distinguishes two sources of this power: on the one hand, the performance of miracles (*karāmāt*) is carried out through the possession of specific knowledge and, on the other, it is assumed through a hereditary relationship (through genealogies).

One ethnographic perspective on the rites and practices that seek to reduce or eliminate the influences of *jnun* – through the intervention of a saint – Maarouf (2007) describes *baraka* as a quality inherent in certain beings and things, translating these experiences into processes of inheritances transmitted by people recognized as bearers of sanctity. In this sense, *baraka* manifests itself as a form of material prosperity, physical health, or benevolent attitudes towards individuals in contact with these forces. In addition, the saints have a social value related to their religious legacy practiced in life and the virtues that their miracles appeared to the people (Geertz 1968; Crapanzano 1973).

The charismatic role of the saints in Morocco produces a phenomenon responsible for the formation and expansion of religious brotherhoods that may be described as “popular” (Brunel 1926; Nabti 2010). This kind of organizational structure has the figure of the disciple (*murīd*) as its reason for being. From the perspective of these brotherhoods, the Sufi leaders are responsible for disseminating *baraka*, which comes from their specific saints,

and maintaining the traditions that date back to the lives and legacy of those men. This fact guarantees a differentiation between the various groups existing in the country (Spillmann 1951; Arabi 2006; Dalle 2007; Abitbol 2009).

These aspects of religious organizations appeared in Morocco throughout the 13th century, taking the form of a Sufi tradition presented through the model of brotherhoods (Crapanzano 1973; Cornell 1998). The saints represent the Sufi master (*shaykh*) as being alive, characterized by a mystical way or method (*tarīka*) to be transmitted among his disciples associated with their types of miracles (*karāmāt*). Furthermore, the production of theological knowledge and ritual practices among the local Sufi leaders is manifested concomitantly with the use of musical rhythms that help the body performances displayed during the rituals of possession of the participants, with the *jnun*'s acting as their central focus.

The actions of the Sufi leaders of the Hamdouchiya are concentrated in the urban center of the city of Meknes (former imperial capital of Morocco between 1672 and 1727) through an articulated network of religious activities establishing integration with the other rural villages in its surroundings. The ethnography of Crapanzano (1973) analyzed the role of the myths of Sidi 'Ali ben Hamdouche (1666–1722) and his disciple, Sidi Ahmed Dghoughi. This form is responsible for the ritual identities of the Brotherhood. Some members of the Hamdouchiya Brotherhood are also popularly known for practicing bodily self-harm during the ritual session, where some participants seek to display cuts on the parietal and frontal parts of the head achieved with the aid of knives (Herber 1923; Park, Boum 2005; Bartel 2016; 2019), and for evoking the figures of these two saints during the confrontation with the *jnun* in the ritual sessions (Crapanzano 1973; Marechal, Dasseto 2014).

These actions guarantee the circulation of the *baraka* from the saints. This force is responsible for combating the *jnun* in the ritual arenas. In summary, these two saints form the religious legacy (tradition) available to the Hamdouchiya. Every ritual session can only finish when total control of the states of possession manifested by individuals is achieved. The order of these experiences depends on the theological knowledge constituted and applied by the local Sufi leaders. However, this scope may incorporate other ways of understanding as the Sufi leaders own experiences throughout these constant confrontations involving the *jnun*.

Once the Sufi leaders are not part of a direct lineage (genealogy) linked to both saints, who guide their virtues and ritual practices, these local agents have a problem concerning the expansion and distribution of their *baraka*, since this is only available based on the acquisition of new knowledge. These sets of knowledge mobilized by religious agents create a guide to ritual practices such as the performance of the *jnun* in the configuration of their ritual arenas. Each new experience successfully carried out under the aegis

of effectiveness in the face of the malefic effects of the *jnun* reinforces the formation process of the religious authority of Sufi leaders over individuals through the recognition of their powers.

The Sufi leaders observe the bodily performances mobilized by possessed individuals in two different ways. Firstly, as an exchange demanded by *jnun* to satisfy themselves. Secondly, as a relation used by individuals to temporarily suspend the effects of the misfortunes attributed to the *jnun*. However, it is up to the Sufi leaders to face the *jnun*, trying to minimize their harmful effects on individuals. In general, some parts of the ritual session seek to negotiate or even eliminate the evil forces of the *jnun*. The *baraka* available among the saints of Hamdouchiya and the ritual actions carried out according to the theological knowledge of Sufi leaders thus form the basis of the effectiveness of these experiences.

### **Religious daily practices**

Individuals with misfortunes are responsible for expressing during some phases of the ritual development bodily performances linked to states of possession<sup>3</sup> (self-control: *ḥāl*/no self-control: *jidba*). According to religious specialists, the triad of intention<sup>4</sup> (*nīya*), intellect<sup>5</sup> (*ʿaql*), and self<sup>6</sup> (*nafs*) constitutes a religious structure through which the *baraka* of the patron saints of Hamdouchiya (Sidi ʿAli ben Hamdouche and Sidi Ahmed Dghoughi) combats the evil forces of the *jnun*. The inclusion of these categories means that the theological knowledge and ritual actions mobilized by Sufi leaders can find symbolic means to express themselves.

The nocturnal period is privileged in the composition of the exorcism ritual due to the shared belief that the *jnun*'s dispositions manifest themselves with greater intensity during this temporal moment. "*At night, they [jnung] are closest to us. In this way, they can reveal themselves better*". Those were the words of a pilgrim who organized a ritual trying to solve his wife's misfortunes. The following ethnographic examples aim to look for preliminary interpretations of the therapeutic or healing process during the development of my fieldwork.

Ali (36 year old man, electronics technician, and resident of Meknes) rented the entire 2nd floor (about 100 m<sup>2</sup>) of an available house in Sidi ʿAli to treat the infertility – inability to bear children – of his wife (Haja, 28 years old, housewife) using the exorcism ritual. The living room was organized by Ali's relatives. The place was filled with guests (about 30) awaiting the entrance of the Sufi leader and his musicians. From the first floor, the group climbed the stairs with the religious expert in front of them while the other musicians (five percussionists and two flutists) followed, one by one, playing their musical rhythms.

The room was divided into two areas. The first, was reserved for the musicians since the floor had some rugs to sit on. Here, there was also a ceramic brazier for burning incense (*jawi*) in black (*khal*) and white (*byad*) colors. The second place was distributed to the people seated on the sofas. After a few minutes of musical performances, standing at the entrance of the room, the musicians headed to their reserved place. Mohammed (32 year old man, Sufi leader since the age of 26, and a resident of Rabat) sought to settle in a central point of the enclosure, standing on a rug, very close to Ali and his other family members.

While the rhythms from the Hamdouchiya Brotherhood were performed by the musicians, the Sufi leader performed body movements in synchrony with the drums, such as: a) oscillations with the shoulders, arms, and hands in multiple directions; and b) jumps into the air with both arms close to his hips. On rare occasions, Mohammed shook his head. But when he did it, he tried to match their rhythms with that of the drums. After about 15 minutes, the religious expert finished the first part of the ritual session. These pauses – which are also repeated many times throughout the ritual – signal the opening for the requests and prayers by individuals for the saints’ *baraka*. It’s relevant to recognize the figure of the religious specialist at this moment as a central point that converges the pilgrims’ actions.

Any individual during an exorcism ritual can express their desire to contact the *baraka* of the saints of Hamdouchiya by showing a sum of money to the Sufi leader. The religious agent in question usually approaches interested individuals and, as soon as he receives a sum from their hands, he asks who will receive the saints’ *baraka*. In addition to this, he can ask someone about their reasons to seek this kind of blessing. Rachida (35 year old woman, civil servant, and resident of Meknes) handed over a 50-dirham bill (\$5.50 in November 2012) to the Sufi leader. She asked Mohammed if he could pray for her sister, who has been unemployed over the last two years. As soon as the religious expert transferred the amount of money to one of the musicians, he recited the following words that would form a prayer, to circulate and distribute *baraka*:

Moroccan Arabic (Darija)	Transliteration
١ <i>Ah sidi salli ‘ala nbi.</i>	1 Oh, my lord, pray to the prophet.
٢ <i>Salli ‘ala nbi.</i>	2 Pray to the prophet.
٣ <i>Lah y j’el l-mahebbha hia lokhra.</i>	3 Perhaps God provides love for the afterlife.
٤ <i>Lah y bellegh l-maqsoud.</i>	4 Maybe God fulfills the intention.
٥ <i>Lah y bellegh l-gharad.</i>	5 Maybe God accomplishes the goal.
٦ <i>Lah y j’el l-mahabba li lahu y khelsek lah.</i>	6 Maybe God will provide love for him, and he will pay you.
٧ <i>Amin amin wa lhamdu lillah rab l’alamin</i>	7 Amen amen may God lord of the worlds be praised.

Everyone in the room answered the Sufi leader. After each sentence pronounced, all the participants responded with “*amen*”. They held their hands



up to their chests as they received the words from the religious expert. The position of the hands in front of the individuals' faces indicated the receiving of a blessing through the prayers. It is relevant to notice that the term "*maqsoud*" mobilized by Mohammed indicated that the power of Allah's divine providence (as the metaphor of love in sentence 6) was responsible at that moment for the transformation of the participants' lives. However, the value of this kind of prayer still lacked more information about individuals, as Mohammed said, conducting everybody to a new interpretation of the situation.

Mohammed tried to mean with the word "*maqsoud*" (what is sought) something deliberate, intentional, willful, premeditated, or designed by the participants for their lives. He explained that the human's intention is not located in the eyes or mind but is visible and closer to the body. In this case, the bodily dimension endeavors to make sense of and mediate real-world events that are attributed to malevolent forces based on the tripartite view of the person's concept (intention, intellect, and self). Mohammed said each one should evaluate their activities critically and try to understand the source of the evil forces: from the interior (*nīya*, *'akl* or *nafs*) or the external world (*jnun*).

As Rachida's sister was not there during the performance of Mohammed's prayer, it would be up to Rachida to transmit those pieces of knowledge expressed by the Sufi leader directly to her. Mohammed warned Rachida about Haja's unemployment situation. He told her that these misfortunes could only be changed by passing this understanding proposed by him on to her sister's daily life. The use of the intellect over this *jnun* manifestation did not depend only on the will of Allah but "*it is directly related to the intention [al-mutaealiqat dial-niya] constantly elaborated by the individuals*", he said. In this sense, the *baraka* from the saints dispensed by the religious agent would only produce the initial possibilities for the constitution of a new self.

The Sufi leader did not summarize the effectiveness of his prayer in terms of evoking the saints in everyday life. Mohammed, going further, argued that he would be the conduit for making a source of powerful *baraka* available. The access to this source, according to him, would be limited to only a few individuals located in the enclosure. With his right hand, the Sufi leader ended up pointing to six subjects (two men and four women) present in the room and complementing his speech, he stated that these individuals could receive the self-control states (*ḥāl*) over their selves. This fact prompted gifts of more amounts of money for him during the act. Mohammed repeated the prayer and emphasized the relevance over the *baraka* of the saints in the suppression of misfortunes. In this view, the benefits from the *baraka* can only achieve success in partnership with the intention (*nīya*) or good judgment (*'akl*) of the afflicted person.

Sometime later, the musical rhythms of Hamdouchiya would return to the precinct with the hand gestures/command of the Sufi leader, but this time,

involving the lack of self-control states (*jidba*) in front of everyone. Two women jumped from different positions on the sofas located in the room and, simultaneously, ran towards the musicians. The bodily performances of those women included the projection of the head forwards and backward relative to the bodily axis. Besides this, they placed their hands behind the back or at the level of the lower back.

The repetition of these bodily performances caused the veils (*hijāb*) of these women to fall on the floor. This situation showed the annulment of rationality (*ʿaql*) and the rapture of the self (*nafs*) by *jnun* since Islamic norms of conduct would require the covering of the women's hair in public i.e., only uncovering would be allowed only in front of the closest male relatives (grandfather, father, uncles, husband, son, and male siblings). However, this situation was not considered an act of disrespect. Instead, the local discussion was about the capability of the bodily performances imposed by *jnun*. As a result of the lack of self-control during these states (*jidba*) and the expression of these bodily movements were understood to reveal the intentionality (*nīya*) of these women.

Mohammed recognized the presence of *jnun* in women's bodies. The states of no self-control (*jidba*) indicated not only the action of *jnun* but the change in the notion of the person by the participants, following the tripartite view (intention, intellect, and self) of the Sufi leader. Once interpreted as a sign of evil forces and their influence or bad faith, hypocrisy, duplicity, or insincerity of women, Mohammed tried to obtain more information about this duo with their relatives. After he could not hold prayers anymore, Mohammed tried to change his religious approach, not based on the spread of an alternative Islam of the Salafist version in Morocco (as recitation, and the effort to strengthen one's attachment to God). At this point, focusing on the role of non-legalistic Islam as Sufism and popular Islam (Spadola 2014; Švedkauskas 2017; Mateo Dieste 2021), he tried to manipulate music as an instrument of communication with *jnun*.

Mohammed's strategy focused on the intensification of musical rhythms after identifying the presence and performance of the female *jinn* known as 'Ā'ishā Qandīsha. The increase in intensity of the musical cadences in ritual had the purpose of exhausting the women's physical strength. Such periods only occur after 15 or 20 minutes when they fall to the ground due to the consequences of those states of no self-control (*jidba*). According to the Sufi leader, controlling the musical cycles of the ritual sessions opens a channel to communicate a deal to the *jnun*, thereby exhibiting that these negotiations are possible. Mohammed chose this action because, according to him, observations about the bodily (*jism*) and self (*nafs*) condition of these women would serve as a basis for his interpretations involving 'Ā'ishā Qandīsha's intentions throughout her ritual arena.

In the beginning, the Sufi leader considered that his prayers did not affect any of the states of no self-control (*jidba*) displayed by the women. Mo-

hammed had been suspicious of the intention (*nīya*) of both since their entrance into the ritual session. “*Only after they [jnun] are satisfied I can recite a prayer or propose something else*” (in this case, the use of incense to purify or protect momentarily), as Mohammed told me. After a conversation among the organizers of the ritual session, the Sufi leader found the cause of the misfortunes associated with those female-*djinn*-possessed women were related to their difficulties in finding men who were available for marriage. As described in previous works (Westermarck 1968; Rausch 2000; Claisse-Dauchy, Foucault 2005; Bartel 2016), the difficulty of contracting a marriage constitutes a dominant symbol (Turner 1967b) of the misfortunes among women who visit the village of Sidi ‘Ali. From the perspective of the Sufi leader, only the *baraka* from the saints could provide some resistance, even if temporary, to the living condition of these women regarding the transformation verified in their bodies and selves because of ‘*Ā* *ishā* *Ḳandīshā*'s actions.

### Conclusion

Misfortunes are sources that raise questions about reality in diverse cultural contexts. The classification and search for effective means against their effects are part of some of the actions performed in a religious community. Religion is crucial in producing and guaranteeing order in the world. It offers a response to the problem of meaning (Firth 1959; Geertz 2000). Thus, the various forms of misfortunes, interpreted here as sources of instability in the social order, are notable for situating the notion of chaos (Berger 1967) as something to be avoided in order to ensure the meanings of human experiences.

Csordas (1994) discusses the intrinsic relationship between self and experience, in which it is highlighted that some aspects of cultural phenomena, such as the field of symbolism, could not be properly understood through intellectualist approaches. According to him, language would function as a vehicle that would allow the intersubjective expression of individual experiences, if the cultural principles inscribed in the use of language would only be symbolic indicators of the bodily processes that constitute the experience itself. I agree that the vocabulary of experience develops and delimits the intellectual, sensory, and emotional sets mobilized by the subjects as they provide the instruments to transform such experiences into public forms. Communicating and describing experiences allows for comparisons and inquiries based on the experiences of others or the normative principles of religious systems.

The interface between religious specialists and pilgrims who are seekers of cures from saints or *jnun* has limitations for an in-depth analysis of subjectivities, given the fluid nature of the latter (Boissevain 2006). Even so, I insist that the devotional forms manifested in rituals indicate the intersubjec-

tive character of the production of healing or protection experiences based on religious norms, as in the case of Islam. The current therapeutic process offers a creative element of providing order to individuals' social lives. They build bonding relationships between pilgrims with the healing and/or protective forces with the local saint from the mediation of specific agents legitimized by their traditional forms.

If every prayer is a form of ritual speech adapted to society (Mauss 2003), the uses of the words acquire relevance for both religious specialists and pilgrims. The ethnographic data indicate the words have real power (Tambiah 1968), but they were undoubtedly much more in touch with the actions of the *jnun*. These situations indicate the relevance of words during the ritual action. In my ethnographic fieldwork, words uttered during the Hamdouchiya ritual session included the stereotypical behaviors formed by sequences of bodily performances. The effectiveness of the ritual does not only rest on it being determined and declared by dogmas. In the end, the development of theological knowledge by a Sufi leader is a central component because it meets the desires of a set of subjectivities inserted in distinct religious traditions (Sufism and popular Islam).

The bodily performance developed in the ritual sessions provides a dynamic model for the transmission circuits of *baraka* from the Hamdouchiya's saints. Only through them, can Sufi leaders exercise authority through mobilized knowledge, given the set of statements used, the ability to influence individuals, and the organizational structure available (Barth 2002). In short, such situations guarantee a degree of effectiveness in applying associated experiences to the problem of misfortunes, based on the attributions and responsibilities linked to the actions of Sufi leaders.

#### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> The transliteration of Arabic terms was done according to the *Encyclopaedia of Islam (EI)* published by Brill. The term Hamdouchiya was the only exception among the Arabic words.

<sup>2</sup> Analyzing Sri Lankan exorcism, Tambiah (1985) interprets ritual as a system culturally constructed by symbolic communications. The ritual dynamic consists of patterns and sequences ordered by words and deeds. These elements express the multiple means of content and arrangement ordered by varying degrees of formality (conventionality), stereotypy (rigidity), condensation (fusion) and redundancy (repeat). The central point is the emphasis given by the author to the dual character of ritual as performance.

<sup>3</sup> I use the term according to the propositions of Lambek (1981). In his view, the limits between trance and possession are heuristic/arbitrary and therefore cannot be distinguished and considered as isolated. For a contrasting perspective, see Boddy (1989) and Lewis (1971).

<sup>4</sup> The term is equivalent to the forms of thoughts in the face of everyday situations. Having an intention considered "correct" corresponds to the elements of an exemplary life endowed with the value among Muslims. In Morocco, the expression "you have a white heart" (*andak l-qalb byad*) indicates a quality valued by individuals in their interactions.

<sup>5</sup> The term designates the ability to judge the facts of reality and, often, its use is associated with the notions of sense or intellect (Eickelman 1985).

<sup>6</sup> The term is close to the idea of ego and provides the inner forces (*animus*) to individualities (Pinto 2006).

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