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Suyang Wu

Trinity College, Hartford Connecticut, suyang.wu@trincoll.edu

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SAFEGUARDING GUARDIANSHIP:
SYMBOLIC CAPITAL AND POLITICAL COHESION IN THE KETTANIYYA
ORDER, 1908-1909

A thesis presented

by

Suyang Wu

to

The Department of International Studies

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for Honors

in the subject of

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Zayde Antrim & Blase Provitola
Thesis Advisors

Seth Markle
Department Chair

Abstract

In Moroccan history, Sufis maintained close ties with the *makhzan*, the sharifian state. Nevertheless, these ties were predicated on a balance of power relations between the two sides. A great deal of existing sources deal primarily with political activism and mystical aspects of the Sufi orders. Yet, researchers have neglected the rather complicated and nuanced connection between religious dimension and political landscapes of the sharifian state. Thus, this tendency has led to potential bias and, at worst, false pictures of the religio-political role of Sufism in interacting with the central sultanate in pre-protectorate-period Morocco.

This thesis proposes a new interpretation of the shifting relationship between Sufism and the Moroccan state in the early twentieth century. More specifically, it explores the Kettaniyya order as tangible evidence of the link between the spiritual guidance of the Sufi cheikh and his ideals of preserving religious legitimacy and ensuring national security between 1908 and 1909. Mohammed Al-Kettani, the leader of the brotherhood, had borne tremendous ire against the Alaouite sultan, Abdel-Hafid, for his failure to maintain order in Morocco. I argue that the effort to ensure the religious legitimacy of the Kettaniyya Sufi order was the main vehicle for Mohammed Al-Kettani's challenge to the political structures of Abdel-Hafid. The deployment of the *baraka* power in tandem with his symbolic weight paved the road for the creation of an institutional framework that unified rural allies to counter the Alaouite state. Henceforth, a nuanced and critical analysis of existing studies of the Sufi cheikh facilitates an understanding of a variety of

profound and essential facets of the Kettaniyya order between 1908 and 1909.

Keywords: Sufism, Kettaniyya, Sultanate, Morocco, Cohesion, Religious Legitimacy

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Even if I converted, my experience of living the religion could never be Moroccan, because I am not Moroccan and can't erase the years in which my own cultural sense of religion has been so deeply imprinted onto me. I'm embarrassed that I continued to cling for so long to the vague Orientalist fantasy.

--Rachel Newcomb "A Distant Episode"

Introduction

Newcomb, an American author married to a Moroccan Muslim, was eager to visit a Sufi tomb in Morocco for her anthropology research and learn more about saintly life via interviews with Moroccans. Contrary to the hope of obtaining information on Sufism and Sufi saints, the author realized it was difficult to reconcile her own personal status, as a Western Christian, with the Muslim community in the country. Furthermore, her desire for conversion to Islam had run into obstacles because of her long-lasting passion for "the vague Orientalist fantasy," that is, the obsession with Sufi dance, poetry, religious practices, and other exotic cultural production.¹ Acknowledging the number of Orientalists, colonial administrators, and outsiders who consistently provide biased pictures and tendentious statements about places like Morocco, Newcomb felt embarrassed, albeit unsurprised, when she perceived that the locals had been wary of her true intentions. Anecdotes like this one sparked my passion to *critically* and *contextually* explore the interplay between religion and history in Morocco. As a Chinese student who does not have any religious background and is interested in Middle Eastern Studies and Islam, I have to be as considerate and rational as possible when evaluating other cultures, religions, and histories. Especially in academic projects, as in the case of Newcomb,

¹ Rachel Newcomb, "A Distant Episode: Religion and Belief in Moroccan Ethnography," in *Encountering Morocco: Fieldwork and Cultural Understanding*, ed. David Crawford & Rachel Newcomb (Indiana University Press, 2013), 143.

positionality must be accounted for in order to minimize bias and comprehend the sources.

Hence, one of the main purposes of this thesis is to complicate some widespread generalizations by illuminating an important example of Sufism as a spiritual and political phenomenon. It also seeks to question and cast doubts on some distorted perspectives from Western scholars toward Sufism in Morocco. More specifically, this thesis investigates the Kettaniyya order as tangible evidence of the link between the spiritual guidance of the Sufi cheikh and his ideals of preserving religious legitimacy and ensuring national security between 1908 and 1909. Through the examination of this particular religious order, one is able to map out the shifting relationship between the Sufi leader and the political structure of Morocco, the sharifian state led by Alaouite sultans. In carrying out this research, I have tried to keep in mind and be considerate of potential bias and misunderstanding on the Moroccan context, especially when considering source material from outside observers.

Sufi orders have been present in Morocco since at least the 12th century. Believers have preached Islamic doctrines and Sufi principles to uneducated farmers, rural villagers, and marginalized communities in the Rif regions, far away from the urban settings. Because Sufis explore internally hidden aspects of spirits and personal enlightenment, they have been seen as an apolitical entity, especially in recent times. In Moroccan history, however, Sufis maintained close ties with the *makhzan*, the sharifian state. They were mutually interdependent, as the sultan relied on Sufi cheikhs to strengthen his role

as *Ameer Al-Moumineen* while the Sufis were in need of economic protection and recourse from the state. Without doubt, this mutual interplay was predicated on the use of power and the consistence of interchange between both sides. In some instances, especially following the Pan-Islam trend that had united the Muslim *umma*, or the Muslim community, in order to counter the French forces into the Moroccan territory in the late 19th century, Sufi communities were willing to cooperate with the sultanate, along with other Muslim tribal affiliations, for national stability;² while in other occasions, they tended to challenge the central authority either for the latter's failure of offering gifts and religious services or the incapability (and negligence) of protecting the nation from corruption and foreign invasions. As we shall see in this thesis, Mohammed Al-Kettani had borne tremendous ire against the Alaouite sultan for his failure to maintain order in Morocco between 1908 and 1909. In sum, despite their objective of ensuring social unity, cultural cohesion, and religious legitimacy, Sufis would resort to protests and resistance once contingent factors disturbed, or even subverted, the power balance with the state.

In this thesis, I argue that the efforts of ensuring religious legitimacy of the Kettaniyya Sufi order was the main vehicle for the religio-political agenda of Mohammed Al-Kettani in challenging the political structures of Abdel-Hafid. This religious endeavor paved the way for the creation of an institutional framework that unified rural allies to counter the inefficacy of the Alaouite sultanate. This charismatic leader, in his

² This idea of unity and cohesion (or coalition) would constitute a very important strategy for tribes to rise up against any opposing parties. See Edmund Burke, "Pan-Islam and Moroccan Resistance to French Colonial Penetration, 1900-1912," *The Journal of African History* 13, no. 1 (1972): 115.

deployment of the *baraka* power, combined symbolic capital and religious vitality to intervene directly into Moroccan politics.

Sources and limitations

It is no surprise to learn that Sufism plays an important, and, in some cases, a predominant role, in influencing the historicity and historiography of the Muslim nations. As a matter of fact, after a swift glance over the nature of Sufism and its historical impact on the process of nation building, I grew critical of this so-called “Islamic mysticism.” I am not intending to deny here the prominently “mystical” nature of Sufism, but, as Joseph Hill says in introducing the potential bias against this practice that it “was introduced throughout much of the now-predominantly Muslim world by scholars who practiced Sufism, and Sufi thought consequently permeated the default Islam, scholarly and otherwise.”³ According to Hill, the “default Islam” results from the scholarly prejudice against Sufism worldwide. It is shocking that a number of western modernists regard Sufism as a highly superstitious religious practice without practical values. The lack of a deepening study and a nuanced viewpoint has attributed a rather biased and tendentious trait to this terminology.

A multitude of scholarly investigations have centered on the simple, ideological binaries of democracy vs. Islam (including Sufism), Christian vs. Muslim (including Sufi), and good vs. evil. The scarcity of a more authentic and objective perspective toward

³ Joseph Hill, “Sufism between Past and Modernity,” in *Handbook of Contemporary Islam and Muslim Lives*, eds. M. Woodward and R. Luken-Bull (Springer Nature Switzerland, 2019), 2.

Sufism has led to such criticism. Therefore, it is essential to ensure impartiality and fairness in treating such kind of subject matter. In other words, one has to nuance and be critical about existing sources, be it intellectual undertakings or literary scholarships, for a clarified, detailed, and even an apologetic discourse of Sufism across continents, and, in this particular case, the colonial history of the Kettaniyya Sufi order *par excellence*.

What is known about Mohammed Al-Kettani is derived primarily from French ethnographic studies and colonial journals, correspondences, reports, and memoirs from 1907 to 1927. While such sources certainly provide significant perspectives on the life and times of the Sufi leader and his objectives, the over-reliance has led to a number of misconceptions about and prejudices against domestic society and monarchical regime. The political implications the Kettaniyya order, in particular, had long-lasting effects on the religious cohesion of the Sufi order between 1908 and 1909. Nonetheless, the academic interest of the French power had relied on their impression on the Moroccan religious rituals and their mystical aspects, and in turn, gravitated to underestimate the latter's efficacy in modernizing/reforming the country. As I would argue throughout the thesis, the French presented a highly biased picture of the Kettaniyya movement without taking so much account on the Sufi legitimacy.

More specifically, because of the heavy concentration on the notion of "military" *jihad* and armed activism, experts have neglected the role of cultural resistance (i.e. symbolic capital of Al-Kettani and his pursuance of the greater *jihad*) in linking religious dimension to the historical context of colonialism in Morocco between 1908 and 1909.

Moreover, the little or no regular access to the Moroccan *makhzan* to conduct adequate studies on the country has been accountable for the failure to produce a functional analysis of the Kettaniyya resistance against the sharifian state.⁴ Thus, the colonial administrators and policy-makers had to rely on regular reports, existing travelogues, daily or weekly journals, rumors, and other media to refine their colonial archives for developmental and tactical usage. As later sections suggest, the French even supported and financed an arabophone newspaper, “The Sa’ada,” in order to promote their colonial ambitions and propagated European ideas in Morocco. Through the usage of the Arabic language as a medium to advance their project, the French regarded the newspaper production as an effective tool to foreground Al-Kettani’s hypocritical intention and highly militant behavior in an indirect way. Thus, an excessive reliance on these largely misguided sources without critically expressing a synthetic point of view would tremendously underestimate the profound and even authentic facet of Mohammed Al-Kettani and his intent as a Sufi leader. In this thesis, I examine French colonial sources alongside recent scholarship to propose a new interpretation of the shifting relationship between Sufism and the Moroccan state in the early twentieth century. Through a careful and critical evaluation of existing studies, one is able to garner a set of invaluable information on the essences of the Kettaniyya order between 1908 and 1909.

⁴ Edmund Burke, “The Invention of Moroccan Islam,” in *The Ethnographic State: France and the Invention of Moroccan Islam* (University of California Press, 2014), 172.

The notion of segmentation

Since Sufi brotherhoods are centered on the rural region far from the urban space in Morocco, a general glance at the tribal system and the notion of segmentation will facilitate deeper understanding of the functionality and mechanism of maintaining internal order among each tribe. According to Ernest Gellner, a well-known social anthropologist, the theory of segmentation is defined as the practice of social cohesion without regulation from central authority.⁵ Segmentation is different from tribalism because the former concentrates on the “balancing and opposition of constituent groups” through social and political interests without interventions from authority, while the latter is, more or less, subject to central authority.⁶ Segmentation applies to many tribal societies with various effects. At least in the Moroccan Sufi case, however, it is not always the case that this system of segmentation maintains tribal order in the rural society. Its stability and maintenance are predicated on coherent regional authorities and their power to challenge the national government, or *makhzan*, when it becomes incapable of controlling outside forces within the country. This section will provide a general view of segmentary theory and its pertinence to the dynamics of political dissent and conflict in Moroccan’s urban and rural spaces, especially between 1908 and 1909.

In terms of gathering regional notables and religious disciples for social cohesion, the clear-cut boundaries between each tribe consolidate their inner circle. These bonds promote coherence and uniformity among tribal and Sufi forces in order to check and

⁵ Ernest Gellner, “The Problem,” in *Saints of the Atlas* (London: Weidenfield and Nicolson, 1969), 41.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 42.

challenge any opposing parties within and without the country.⁷ The close bond of the segmentation is largely due to the emergence of highly capable groups/actors who are eager to challenge the foreign invasion in defending the domestic state and their communities. The role of religion in maintaining social order has refined the traditional system of segmentation and cohesion. The bonds still exist but religious saints have to abide by the Islamic *shari'a* besides their tradition customs, or the *urf*.⁸ Therefore, the Islamic/Sufi saints have their own systematic and interdependent approach toward maintaining tribal and religious order.

Mohammed Al-Kettani, the Sufi leader of the Kettaniyya brotherhood in rural Morocco, stood out as a prominent religious figure who sought to challenge and oppose the sultan's regime in not fulfilling his promises after his enthronement in 1907, which included the containment of foreign power. The subsequent events between 1908 and 1909 foregrounded the political and religious presence of the Kettaniyya order that Al-Kettani led. The highly political-oriented segmentation mechanism he adopted emphasized the institutionalization of the Sufi community.

Furthermore, it is worth noting that the French colonial administrators observed closely the action and attitude of the Moroccan tribal and Sufi forces in the rural regions. Therefore, they discovered the trace of "an organized solidarity" within cohorts of the Sufi order, which fostered the latter's internal uniformity and cohesion. According to the colonial report in 1925, "they (the administrators) found in the brotherhood a very large

⁷ Ibid., 42.

⁸ I drew this piece from lecture notes and presentation while in Morocco last year, in the class of "The Political System of the Maghreb."

clan, led by chief who provided housing and economic provisions on an individual basis. It was a step toward organized solidarity.”⁹ This “organized solidarity” not only made possible independent mechanisms of socio-economic welfare and support within tribal and religious circles, but also, at least partially, fulfilled the spiritual satisfaction of their members. This description is important in that it helps to explain the cohesiveness of Sufi allies under the leadership of Mohammed Al-Kettani. I argue that French recognition of this “organized solidarity” during the incidents between 1908 and 1909 motivated their later profound research on the Sufi leaders in Moroccan rural society. My analysis of some of this research highlights the way different aspects of religious “solidarity,” such as rituals and collective *da’awa*, contributed to the internal cohesion and unity of the Kettaniyya order. Furthermore, it illuminates the changing orientation of Mohammed Al-Kettani and his allies between 1908 and 1909, which fused religious legitimacy with political mobilization for the sake of national and religious interests. The ambivalent relationship with different political actors in the country mapped out the politically adversarial nature of the Kettaniyya Sufi group under the leadership of the Sufi cheikh.

Mohammed Al-Kettani: a guardian of Sufi tradition

Before investigating deeper the personality and religio-political strategy of the Sufi cheikh, it is essential to lay out the geographical significance in relation to the power struggle between the French, the Alaouite sultan, and the Sufi leader. Fes, the then capital

⁹ *La Pensée Française: Organe D’expansion Française et de Propagation Nationale*, 1925, 2.

city of Morocco, was the battleground between *Bilad al-makhzan*, the land of the sharifian central authority in the urban setting, and *Bilad al-siba*, the land of dissidence in remote mountainous regions where most Berbers and rural notables were residing. The proximity between both sides not only reinforced their close ties and connections, be it cooperation or clashes, but also contained the French power from imposing control over the city. Especially in the pre-protectorate-period Morocco, the interaction between the urban space and the rural area had posed a real threat to French (European) penetration in the early 20th century.¹⁰ It was not until 1912 had the capital city moved from Fes to Rabat. The relocation of the capital (and also the sultan) to the coastal area had facilitated French penetration into the country, both because of its relatively easier communication with the metropolis and its absence from disturbances from nearby tribes. After all, the period of 1908-1911 marked a crucial transition to a relatively loose connection between the two regions. This “divorce” and rift of both sides would function as a drive for the French to effectively establish the protectorate land in Morocco in 1912.

Born in Fes in 1873, Mohammed Al-Kettani was one of the most important Sufis of early 20th century Morocco. He was among the most prominent figures of the Idrisside lineage, founded during the medieval period. The Idrissides traced descent from the Prophet Mohammed, earning members of the lineage the honorific “sharif” and enhancing the saintly authority of Sufi leaders like Al-Kettani. However, other lineages also claimed descent from the Prophet, notably the Alaouites, who had ruled the Kingdom

¹⁰ Burke, “Fez and the Muslim City,” in *The Ethnographic State*, 149.

of Morocco since the mid-17th century.¹¹ The position of the sharifian Alaouite sultan was entitled the *Ameer Al-Moumineen*, or the Commander of the Faithful, the supreme religious authority in Morocco.¹² The similar claims to religious and political authority of these two lineages paved the way for later interactions, be it cooperation or conflicts. As a matter of fact, Mohammed Al-Kettani's fame as an important political and saintly figure could be said to have made conflict with the Alaouite sultan inevitable. In fact, the power of the prestigious Idrisside lineage extended politico-religious legitimacy to the entire Kettaniyya order.¹³ This claim to legitimacy paved the road for Al-Kettani's subsequent mobilization against polarized factions in the country.

One of the mobilization strategies of Al-Kettani was to wage the greater *jihad*, the spiritual struggle in defense of Islam and its doctrines. It was this kind of “ ‘spiritual pathway’ that could unite the Sufi group together in order to wipe out all infidels and invaders who threatened the collective benefits and legitimacy of the Muslims, including the Sufis.”¹⁴ Al-Kettani unwaveringly waged this greater *jihad* for the sake of revealing his staunch and steadfast attitude toward the enemies, whether the domestic sultan or the foreign colonial forces.

In addition, Mohammed Al-Kettani upheld a particular point of view on the

¹¹ One should keep in mind that there are other ruling families who claimed religious power in the country, including the Sa'adis. For the main purpose of this thesis, however, I will only discuss the conflicts between the Alaouites and the Idrisside's descendant of Mohammed Al-Kettani.

¹² *Bulletin de l'enseignement public* (Protectorat de la République française au Maroc, 1926), 60.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 60.

¹⁴ Cheikh Anta Babou, “The Emergence of Amadu Bamba, 1853-95,” in *Fighting the Greater Jihad: Amadu Bamba and the Founding of the Muridiyya of Senegal* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2007), 58. I used this source as a major secondary source to the seminar paper last semester in the class of “Senior Seminar in International Studies.”

interpretation and reasoning strategy of religious texts. One of the most significant aspects of his approach was “the claim to interpretative authority on the basis of esotericism rather than exotericism (Sufism rather than *Fiqh*).”¹⁵ Al-Kettani represented an ahistorical Sufi who engaged in the *ijtihad*, or personal endeavor in interpreting the Sufi/Islamic creeds and sacred texts, rather than historical (and contextual) modes of interpretation associated with *Fiqh*, or the traditional practice of Islamic jurisprudence. The fundamental demarcation between his approach and that of the urban scholarly classes, as shall be discussed more extensively in the next section, was the different extent of emphasis on rationally interpreting/consulting the Islamic principles. After all, the perception of Al-Kettani’s national and religious interest, through his own comprehension of interpretational authority, deemed him a popular figure in his Sufi circle. Before probing deeper into a detailed layout of Al-Kettani’s political mobilization vis-à-vis the national sultan, the act of the greater *jihād* of the Sufi leader was undertaking, prior to the official time when Morocco had fallen into the French protectoral administration in 1912, shall shed light on the context of their adversarial nature.

Mohammed Al-Kettani assembled rural tribes and Sufis to unanimously encourage Abdel-Hafid, the then Alaouite sultan of Morocco from 1908 to 1912, to fulfill the promises he had made as part of the conditional allegiance, or the *bay’a*, including just rule and political transparency, avoidance of consulting foreign power on domestic issues, full readiness to contain any outside attacks, and other conditions that dealt with ensuring

¹⁵ Sahar Bazzaz, “Challenging Power and Authority in Pre-Protectorate Morocco: Shaykh Muhammad Al-Kattani and the Tariqa Kattaniyya.” (PhD dissertation. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 14.

domestic peace.¹⁶ Nonetheless, under pressure from the French administration in the country, Abdel-Hafid did not fulfill his promises when taking over the sultanate in 1909, which led to the uprising of the Kettaniyya brotherhood in the same year.¹⁷ This event planted the seed for ongoing conflicts and clashes between rural Sufi orders and the *makhzan*, which sparked a large scope of mobilization.

In his lifetime as a devout Sufi believer, Mohammed Al-Kettani conducted esoteric behavior in almost all aspects of his life. This ascetic performance entailed the “abstinence from European production and worldly consumption and fully abidance by the laws of God in all aspects of life.”¹⁸ The staunch upholding of Sufi Islamic doctrines served as a basis for the leader’s assemblage of rural disciples and Berbers, who were willing to follow the religious cheikh, or the saint. This fundamental principle would constitute one of the competing factors between Mohammed Al-Kettani and the urban *ulama*, who were aligned with the Alaouite sultan.

Despite the importance to his followers of his esoteric and ascetic persona, the religious and political orientation of Mohammed Al-Kettani shifted dramatically as French power in the country increased. In contrast to the previous ultra-ascetic life of a Sufi, Al-Kettani sought to pursue the Sufi-Salafist route in his later phases of career. The Salafiyya doctrines centered on the return to the pure Islam of the prophetic eras under the leadership of the rightly guided Companions and Caliphs. Nonetheless, as this

¹⁶ Retrieved from an online article content called “Ulma Nasihon: Mohammed Ibn Abdel-Kabir Al-Kettani.”

¹⁷ Trenga and Maitrot de la Motte Capron, *Journal D’un Israélite de Fès, 1908-1910*, 126.

¹⁸ Henry Munson, “Al-Kattani and the Ulama (1904-1909),” in *Religion and Power in Morocco* (Yale University Press, 1993), 62.

ideology developed in response to European colonialism in the region, Salafists were willing to adopt certain technologies and values associated with European modernity, such as the popularity of print journalism, to the extent that Islamic political and religious thought would flourish.¹⁹ Henceforth, the Sufi cheikh combined both Sufi and Salafist dogmatic and practical strategies for religious legitimacy with the goal of establishing a “representative constitutional regime” in the country.²⁰ He believed that the imposition of this regime would strengthen the religious legitimacy of both Sufi saints and the sultanate in the country and provide a check against French incursions.

When he traveled to Egypt and Mecca between 1903 and 1904, Al-Kettani witnessed European colonialism as an authoritarian and hegemonic project, *la mission civilisatrice*, in the language of the French power.²¹ The awareness of imperial encroachment served as an impulse toward further recruitment and assemblage of rural elites in order to counter outside forces. The increasing number of Sufis attracted the attention from the *makhzan*, headed by the Alaouite sultan.

Al-Kettani’s combination of Sufi tradition and Salafist ideology elevated the widespread belief in his *baraka*, or charismatic blessing.²² Al-Kettani reconstituted, if not replaced, his esoteric Sufi life in reminding the *ulama* and other religious figures of the significance of *jihad*. This reformed strategy underscored his liability as a constant

¹⁹ I retrieved all these characteristics of the Salafiyya movement from course lectures when I was in Morocco in 2019, in which the class of “The Islamic World and the West” has contributed considerably to my understanding of conflicts and clashes between the western world and the Islamic Salafiyya thought, in addition to the Maghrebian region.

²⁰ Abdellah Hammoudi, *Master and Disciple: The Cultural Foundations of Moroccan Authoritarianism* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 17.

²¹ See “Muttasawaf Istihwatihim Al-sulta al-rabia’a” in the Assabah website page.

²² Munson, “Al-Kattani and the Ulama,” 63.

guardian of Islam. Henceforth, his embracing of both the power of *baraka* and the reformist idea not only further drew a great range of popular support from rural areas to wage *jihad*, but also stood out as a clear-cut challenge to the urban *ulama*, thus “adding to the aura of sanctity and mystery that surrounded him.”²³ This served as a platform to attract a great deal of Sufi supporters and rural allies. Another objective of challenging the urban *ulama* was to establish a representative constitutional regime in the nation, that is, the fulfillment of the conditional allegiance from the Alaouite sultan.²⁴ This commitment to reform the central political regime is essential to understanding the Sufi-Salafist hybrid of Mohammed Al-Kettani’s reform project.

The ambivalence of Mohammed Al-Kettani toward the urban *ulama* was not only predicated on doctrinal and practical differences, but also political differences. On the one hand, the Moroccan *ulama* “accused him of aspiring to replace Abd al-Aziz as sultan.”²⁵ Interestingly enough, it was actions of the *ulama* that led to the growing hostility between Abdel-Aziz and Al-Kettani since the urban scholarly classes questioned the legitimacy of the Sufi cheikh in 1896.²⁶ This accusation of heresy vis-à-vis Al-Kettani propelled the Kettaniyya order’s uprising against Abdel-Hafid between 1908 and 1909.

On the other hand and more importantly, Al-Kettani complained vigorously about the inability of the scholars to maintain national order when confronting with foreign colonial

²³ Ibid., 63.

²⁴ “Ulma Nasihon: Mohammed Ibn Abdel-Kabir Al-Kettani.”

²⁵ Munson, “Al-Kattani and the Ulama,” 76.

²⁶ The details of this prior conflict between both factions (at the end of the 19th century) are complex to lay out in this paper because of its limited scope and time period, but I shall clarify some main points in the following sections. For more information, see Bazzaz, “Challenging Power and Authority in Pre-Protectorate Morocco,” 81-152.

forces, which led to the failure to contain them through the banner of Islam. According to him, the *ulama* focused exclusively on their own interests and personal fame—the role as Islamic authorities to interpret the religious texts of the Islamic religion and disseminate religious knowledge to the Muslim *umma*, or the community. Al-Kettani emphasized that this tremendously weakened the Muslims’ confrontation with the foreign power. In stark contrast with the conduct of the *ulama*, Mohammed Al-Kettani foregrounded the duty of Muslims/Sufis as guardians of Islam, which became more pronounced and prominent in his later endeavors, both religious and political. It is now time to turn to the religious and political struggle of Al-Kettani between 1908 and 1909 and how this influenced his legitimacy and popularity among the Kettaniyya brotherhood writ large.

The seed and dissemination of *jihad*

The French troops invaded Morocco in 1907, sending massive military forces to Rabat, Casablanca, and Marrakech. The French press and colonial administrators laid out the approximate number of troops, including cavalry and infantry.²⁷ Furthermore, they mapped out the environmental and demographic information in large cities in order to better facilitate the colonial project.²⁸ They even outlined the political and religious struggle between the Alaouite sultan and Mohammed Al-Kettani, in light of their divergent viewpoints toward Islam and their respective claims to authority. As Abdel-Hafid gathered urban elites and troops to topple Abdel-Aziz’s sultanate in 1908,

²⁷ *Le Petit Journal*, Parti Social Français, 1907, 3.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.

Mohammed Al-Kettani supported the former because he thought that the new sultan might rescue the nation from foreign encroachment, which was deteriorating the economic and social foundation of Morocco. Nonetheless, when the Sufi leader perceived the severe physical torture that Abdel-Hafid imposed upon his brother Abdel-Aziz instead of effectively containing the influx of the French troops, he was concerned and urged Abdel-Hafid to proclaim his authority on throne as a new Alaouite sultan in order to protect the country in 1908.²⁹ As mentioned earlier, the failed fulfillment of the conditional allegiance functioned as an impetus for Al-Kettani to mobilize the greater *jihad* against the sultan starting in late 1908. The troops of the sultanate soon subverted most of Al-Kettani's forces, which led to his fleeing to Fes in 1909. A few months later, Abdel-Hafid captured the Sufi cheikh and beat him to death in May of the same year.³⁰

The events of 1908-1909 revealed Mohammed Al-Kettani's ambivalent attitude toward both major political actors—the French colonial forces and the domestic sultan. His approach fused the maintenance of national order with religious legitimacy of the Kettaniyya brotherhood. His objective of organizing the Sufi forces in the rural regions signaled the starting point of large-scale opposition to Alaouite sultan.

As aforementioned, the different attitude toward the interpretation of Islamic jurisprudence laid the foundation of the rivalry between Mohammed Al-Kettani and the urban *ulama*. As professional jurists and Islamic scholars, the *ulama* abided strictly by the

²⁹ Trenga and Maitrot de la Motte Capron, *Journal D'un Israélite de Fès, 1908-1910*, 101.

³⁰ *Archives Marocaines*, (Publication de la Mission Scientifique du Maroc, 1927), 150. Also retrieved from *Divanah at the Time of Proving the Conquest of Muhammadiyah* (Daar al-Kutub al-I'lmiyah, 2004), 44.

religious principles underlying the Islamic jurisprudential system, the *ijma'*, or the unanimous consensus, over the *ijtihad*.³¹ Al-Kettani, on the other hand, embraced personal endeavor in interpreting the Islamic *shari'a*.³² As a long-term struggle between the two sides, each faction regarded their respective principles, *ijma'* and *ijtihad*, as more paramount than the other. It was Al-Kettani's particular emphasis on personal effort in interpreting the sacred texts and *shari'a* of Islam that aroused the communal ire of the *ulama*, who defied and denounced unceasingly the Sufi leader as an "unorthodox figure."³³ This demarcation between an ahistorical viewpoint toward interpretation and a historical/classical treatment demonstrates not only the doctrinal differences between the two, but also the increasing entrenchment of both in their own ideological and religious cohorts. The rising fault line paved the road for later outright oppositions to and overt accusations against the sharifian sultan of Morocco.

The political split between the Alaouite sultan and Mohammed Al-Kettani between 1908 and 1909 initiated the waging of the greater *jihad*, in the extent that Al-Kettani fostered "spiritual pathway" toward his cohorts and allies for the defense of religious legitimacy and national security. The colonial journal depicted the strategies and the stages of the mobilization of the Sufi leader with a particular focus on its "fanatic militancy" and "armed violence." However, I argue that this biased attitude toward

³¹ Bazzaz, "Challenging Power and Authority in Pre-Protectorate Morocco," 95.

³² *Ibid.*, 88.

³³ It is interesting to remark that the *ulama* evaluated Al-Kettani's conduct based on different approaches of interpreting the *shari'a* and the Islamic holy texts. Additionally, they did not call the latter as a "Muslim," but simply as a "figure" in order to make a distinction between them and him.

Al-Kettani's intent had downplayed the essential meaning of "the greater *jihad*," which, as mentioned earlier, stressed the religious and spiritual unity of the Muslim community in order to wipe out all threatening enemies and infidels. Therefore, the religious intention of the Sufi cheikh cemented his own symbolic capital and personality, prompting the popularity of his circles in combatting against polarized factions within the country.

The morale of the Sufi "troops" was evident in that "every day, they held meetings on the subject of *Djehad*. To this enterprise, the fanatics donated considerable sums. The army chief was El Qittani."³⁴ The "donation" and "meetings" were important and proactive in this context because they reinforced the leadership of the Kettaniyya cheikh. The scale of Al-Kettani's supporters was enormous relative to those of the sultan. As laid out also in the colonial correspondence in 1908, "Apart from the rural forces and the Fassis who continually showed up at El Qittani's to be drafted, 10,000 infantrymen were at the disposal of El Qittani to leave at the first signal."³⁵ It is worth remarking that the scale of the Kettaniyya leader's "army" that vied with the French invasion prior to the incident of Abdel-Hafid was much smaller than the one mentioned above. The 1908 deployment was due to the changing attitude and strategy of Al-Kettani. The highly mobilized forces of the Kettaniyya brotherhood (and their allies) threatened the Alaouite sultan. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the purpose of Al-Kettani's mobilizing his forces signified the spiritual *jihad* in conformance with the Islamic/Sufi principles. His approach was not meant to wage violent and physical war. As aforementioned, because of

³⁴ Trenga and Maitrot de la Motte Capron, *Journal D'un Israélite de Fès, 1908-1910*, 55.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 55.

its nature of being “a spiritual pathway” of uniting all pious believers, the greater *jihad* was a purely religious and spiritual undertaking. That was why Mohammed Al-Kettani, despite his hatred toward Abdel-Aziz, rejected simultaneously the brutal act of Abdel-Hafid toward his brother.³⁶ This deeper overtone emphasized the religious legitimacy and *baraka* power of the Sufi leader, in which this trait fostered a number of followers and allies in the rural region.

The shifting power from the Alaouite sultan to the fierce Sufi leader, foregrounded his role not only as a religious reformer, but also a political actor within the framework of Sufi resistance against the Alaouite *makhzan*. Edmund Burke, a well-known specialist in Middle Eastern history and Oriental Studies, pinpointed the demarcation between the *jihad* of Abdel-Hafid and that of Mohammed Al-Kettani in that he stated that *jihad* “had important populist overtones and was able to gain broad support. Because of the broad and substantial appeal of its doctrine, it could provide a program and an ideology for movements as different as those of Abd al-Hafiz and of Al-Kittani.”³⁷ In stressing the defining feature of *jihad* as “populist overtones,” “a program,” and “an ideology,” it becomes clear that Al-Kettani’s mobilization strategy was distinct from that of the Alaouite sultan since the Sufi cheikh possessed *baraka* power and symbolic capital. Thus, his personality did appeal to Sufi supporters. The coherent power of Al-Kettani’s mobilization in the rural arena triggered large-scale dissent against the sultan and his

³⁶ Ibid., 60.

³⁷ Edmund Burke, “Patterns of Precolonial Protest and Resistance,” in *Prelude to Protectorate in Morocco: Precolonial Protest and Resistance, 1860-1912* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), 219.

cohorts. Therefore, it operated as a base for unification and alignment within his own circles.

Instead of stressing the violent and bellicose aspects of *jihad*, Burke conveys a vision of its pervasive influence and far-flung popularity among rural notables. Using the case of Mohammed Al-Kettani as a springboard, Burke provides on the one hand, a specific picture of the meaning of *jihad* in safeguarding national benefits and religious legitimacy of a particular Sufi figure, which explicitly promoted the coherency of the Sufi communities; on the other hand, he refines the notion of contested legitimacy against the political control of the sultanate regime between 1908 and 1909.

The negotiation of power: The contentious nature of the king/saint relationship

The ambivalent attitude of Mohammed Al-Kettani toward the Alaouite sultan was tantamount to the adversarial relationship between the sharifian state of Morocco and the symbolic capital of the Sufi leader. This particular contestation was based on the changing and dynamic power relation of king/saint in Morocco, especially the reasons and evident repercussions of this potential change. The king/saint relationship played a preponderant role in illustrating the salient nature between the two competing factions.

The foundation of this balance between the two polarized factions stemmed from the dialectics of what Fatima Ghoulaichi called, “king/saint relationship.” According to her point of view, although the usage of the *baraka* was in tandem with the symbolic capital of either the sharifian sultan or the saintly cheikh, “the content and operation were highly

versatile. They were negotiated among king, saint, and the historical conditions which offered a range of possibilities that the saint and king must exploit.”³⁸ Ghoulaichi pinpointed the inseparable linkage between the historical incidents in Morocco and the power negotiation of king/saint relationship. On the basis of historical documents by colonial officers regarding the treatment of Mohammed Al-Kettani after his rebellion against Abdel-Hafid, the latter fiercely imposed his anger upon the survivors of the campaign and the Kettani allies, who were subjected to successive beating and torturing but never admitted their defeat.³⁹ The violent operation against the Kettaniyya brotherhood showcased the tenuous relationship between the state and the religious saint in the rural region. In the wake of the “rebellion,” the sultanate sought to weaken Sufi (and tribal) communities in order to ensure sovereign power over Morocco, as a sharifian state.

The highly contentious attitude of the sultan weakened the religio-political prestige of himself when confronting with Mohammed Al-Kettani’s resistance and his Sufi-Salafist viewpoint on this issue.⁴⁰ This adversarial nature foregrounded his failed regime in the eyes of the Sufi leader. The French was struck by the fact that Al-Kettani had redirected the force of his opposition to the Alaouite sultan instead of the colonial forces, which had arrived in the country in 1907. The attitude of the Sufi cheikh was clear

³⁸ Fatima Ghoulaichi, “Of Saints and Sharifian Kings in Morocco: Three Examples of the Politics of Reimagining History through Reinventing King/Saint Relationship.” (Master Thesis, University of Maryland, 2005), 18.

³⁹ *L’Afrique Française* (Bulletin mensuel du Comité de l’Afrique Française et du Comité du Maroc, 1909), 184.

⁴⁰ Hammoudi, *Master and Disciple*, 17.

when:

The Kittani passed through Beni Mtir, an important tribe between Fez and Meknes. From there he proclaimed *jihad* but the sultan declared it unworthy. Kittani and his parties suggested that this movement was not directed against the French.⁴¹

The plenipotentiary minister of France to Morocco, Regnault, drafted and wrote this statement to Pichon, the minister of foreign affairs, in order to inform him about the recent condition and deployment of the Kettaniyya brotherhood vis-à-vis the Alaouite sultan. In this message, Mohammed Al-Kettani was represented as “proclaiming his *jihad*” against an ineffective sultan who regarded the movement as “unworthy” and useless. This remark suggested that the French understood the Sufi cheikh’s opposition to the sharifian state to have surpassed his opposition to their own presence in the country. In other words, Regnault was expressing surprise that the Sufi cohorts were directing their power against their own sultan instead of the French armies.

This shift highlighted the changing political orientation of Mohammed Al-Kettani vis-à-vis the sharifian sultan, which further widened the gap between the Alaouite throne and the Sufi saint. The antagonism between the two parties was cemented by the decision the Kettaniyya Sufi group to “rebel” against the state for the sake of religious legitimacy and national interests. The tension between the two factions revealed the considerable symbolic capital of the Sufi leader.

Another effective factor in this dynamic relationship was the balance of cultural power between the Alaouite sultan and the Sufi leader. As mentioned earlier, the maintenance of power of the sultan was founded on the constant negotiation of contract

⁴¹ *Affaires du Maroc, 1908-1910* (Ministère des affaires étrangères, 1910), 107.

and allegiance, the *bay'a*. The failure of effectively negotiate or fulfill this contract would instigate popular uprisings, either from rural notables or urban elites. The colonial journal had documented some of the conduct of the Alaouite sultan since 1907. Nevertheless, the record was is full of terms such as “ardent,” “appalling,” and “excessive,” which might suggest a distorted picture of the critical events. Nevertheless, if read critically, such sources can help illuminate the nuances within this ongoing conflict, both in terms of religious *jihad* and political mobilization.

According to the colonial officials, Abdel-Hafid’s abandonment of the conditional allegiance was due to his “drinking excessively of liquors and wine in defiance of the Koranic laws. Under the fury of insobriety, he indulged himself in appalling excesses. A great deal of ardent religious marabouts left him, including that of El-Kittani, who fled to Fes immediately.”⁴² Besides the inability to wage *jihad* against the occupying French forces, Abdel-Hafid may have been perceived as insufficiently pious by his subjects. This perception likely provoked Al-Kettani’s determination to call into question the legitimacy of the sharifian lineage and the claims to authority of the sultan, which in turn led to the massive uprising against the *makhzan* forces and the relative minimization (even abandonment) of mobilization against the French. This was a turning point in Al-Kettani’s strategy. His mobilization was henceforth directed at establishing a just and transparent “representative constitutional regime” for the country.

Ultimately, this clash resulted in the sultan’s revenge and destruction of Al-Kettani’s

⁴² Trenga and Maitrot de la Motte Capron, *Journal D’un Israélite de Fès, 1908-1910*, 126.

Sufi *zawiya*.⁴³ The power relation is prominent in this context. When Abdel-Hafid perceived the latent threat of the Sufi cheikh in challenging his sharifian authority and national symbol as *Ameer Al-Moumineen*, the repercussion was catastrophic for Mohammed Al-Kettani. The Alaouite sultan brutally killed the Sufi cheikh and “secretly placed his corpse in the remote region away from pilgrimage sites, in fear of that place would later become a destination for pilgrimage and spiritual visitation.”⁴⁴ This displacement of the corpse (and tomb) manifested complicated power relation between the two parties, as the destruction and displacement of the saint’s tomb were considered religious blasphemy. In addition, the “secret” performance of burying the corpse of the Sufi leader showcased the fear of the sultan of massive revenge from various Sufi brotherhoods that were allied with the Kettaniyya order, indicating his awareness of the increasing polarization of the two factions.⁴⁵ Apparently, Al-Kettani did not “survive” under successive repressions from the sharifian sultan, but one should not downplay the impact of power relation between the two political actors in a larger sense. The following section shall examine in detail the mobilization strategy of Mohammed Al-Kettani in entrenching his popularity and symbolic capital within his Sufi order and tribal notables.

⁴³ Ibid., 55.

⁴⁴ *Affaires du Maroc, 1908-1910*, 150-151.

⁴⁵ *Documents Diplomatiques Français, 1871-1914*, Ministère des affaires étrangères (Commission de publication des documents relatifs aux origines de la guerre de 1914, 1931-1955), 474.

Cohesion and unity: paths towards consolidation

Given the large-scale military forces and the strong regional interests within religious and rural communities in Morocco, including the Sufi orders,⁴⁶ the Alaouite administration enjoyed a somewhat stabilized system prior to the intrusion of the colonial forces in 1907. Nevertheless, the regional authorities/leaders, such as Mohammed Al-Kettani, challenged the centralization of the Alaouite tradition. Indeed, the tie between the sharifian state and the rural areas signified the ongoing division between two geographical spaces, with tension arising whenever either space sought to challenge the other in light of domestic or foreign turmoil. That said, the Sufi leader would have never achieved his prestige and power of *jihad* had he not promoted inner cohesion and unity of tribal system among his fellow disciples in his brotherhood. Between 1908 and 1909, Al-Kettani fused his political power with the communal support from a great deal of tribal and Sufi forces, which mainly operated as a stronghold withstanding any opposing parties and outside encroachment per se. The following discussion will center on his approach (es) that led to the rising power.

As formulated in the theoretical section, the theory of segmentation provides a lens of regulating the interaction of political units in order to maintain order and control over highly diversified factions in the Moroccan tribal society. The coherence among group members and religious fellows serves as a significant premise of ensuring regulations and collective management in that the rural notables, under Mohammed Al-Kettani, tended to

⁴⁶ Burke listed a great deal of factors to maintain domestic order in Morocco, but destroyed in the hands of diversified religious communities and military power. For more details, see “Abd Al-Hafiz in Power,” in *Prelude to Protectorate in Morocco*, 152.

be aligned with existing power for religious legitimacy and national security. However, the Sufi cheikh had to recourse to fight against French encroachment into the country and the failed regime of Abdel-Hafid and his cohorts. As a result, he chose to direct allies in order to root out the threatening factions. In the case of Mohammed Al-Kettani and his cohorts, the act of *jihad* and political resistance against Abdel-Hafid manifests the refinement of the entrenched theory of segmentation. The exclusion from the benefits of the political system led to challenges to the regime.⁴⁷

As mentioned earlier, the embarking of greater *jihad* under the leadership of Mohammed Al-Kettani attracted a large number of tribal leaders and religious followers in combatting against the weakened Hafidiyya regime. Abdel-Hafid's retreat enraged a number of tribal leaders in that "they had been partisans of a militant anti-French stance. Much the same thing was true of the partisans of al-Kattani at Fez."⁴⁸ Burke pinpointed the united power of the "anti-French" forces in upholding Al-Kettani. Nonetheless, he used the word "militant" rather in an exaggerated manner as to signify the physical strength and scope of the military "troops" of the Sufi leader. As aforementioned, one has to be aware of the religious dimensions of the greater *jihad* in order to better understand the intention and political objective of the movement. In fact, Al-Kettani contributed to a massive amount of "militant forces" among rural populations for the sake of constituting a clear threat to the Alaouite sultan, as French forces had witnessed, while cementing his

⁴⁷ Amal Vinogradov and John Waterbury, "Situations of Contested Legitimacy in Morocco: An Alternative Framework," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 13, no. 1 (1971): 42.

⁴⁸ Burke, "The Origins and Development of the Hafiziya, 1905-1908," in *Prelude to Protectorate in Morocco*, 122.

religious ideology and goal as the guardian of Islam and charismatic leader.⁴⁹

Evidently, the traditional characteristic of the Moroccan tribal system relied upon the legitimation of *baraka*, blessing or charisma, of the Sufi saint, or leader. Mohammed Al-Kettani was one of the most prominent figures whose charisma has shaped his religious struggle against political and social corruption under the leadership of Abdel-Hafid between 1908 and 1909. This spiritual force not only operated as a foundation for his political resistance against the Alaouite sultan, but also his rallying strategy for attracting local supports. What is worth emphasizing is the indispensable role of kinship played in this leverage. Indeed, the basic element for social cohesion and solidarity was through kinship and family lineages. Ernest Gellner sheds light on the general traits of “legitimate ‘saints’ of the Atlas” as “charismatic leaders, who are identified and legitimated by the possession of *baraka*, but theirs is a charisma heavily routinized by kinship.”⁵⁰ Gellner stressed the “routinization of kinship” in pinpointing the charismatic leaders of the religious saints. In other words, he emphasized both the conventional and religious features of any saint in the Moroccan rural regions. Mohammed Al-Kettani would have never acquired legitimate popularity without his charismatic power.

In this context, kinship represented his Sufi followers in the Kettaniyya brotherhood; charisma signified his unremitting *jihad* and charismatic power in confronting with the

⁴⁹ Trenga and Maitrot de la Motte Capron, *Journal D'un Israélite de Fès, 1908-1910*, 70.

⁵⁰ Gellner, “The Background,” in *Saints of the Atlas*, 12.

Alaouite sultan.⁵¹ A number of instances further cemented the ongoing power and popularity of Mohammed Al-Kettani in assembling his allies. The following sections manifest some concrete approaches of Mohammed Al-Kettani in reinforcing his religious legitimacy, including but not limited to, the popularity of print journalism and the unifying *da'awa*, or collective calling, that served as a tremendous impetus for his movement.

The jumping point of printed culture: an alternative step toward legitimacy

Culturally speaking, Mohammed Al-Kettani instrumentalized and mobilized his Sufi and tribal circles through the various standpoint and attitude toward modernized print journalism. This cultural-political agenda crafted and honed the polarized factions in a larger extent. In the following paragraphs, I seek to analyze, on the one hand, the consolidation of Al-Kettani's Sufi-Salafist propaganda in uniting the tribal notables, and on the other hand, the role of cultural activism in carrying out his actions on site between 1907 and 1909.

The particular concentration on Mohammed Al-Kettani's gradual process toward his Sufi-Salafist ideology not only drove, but also enlarged the scope of his protests against the French power and the competent *ulama* in Fes, manifesting new skills of propaganda and cultural mobilization writ large. These modernized tools of expression redefined how the realization of countering against various political factors was attainable. At the earlier

⁵¹ For further details and inferences, see "Muttasawaf Istihwatihim Al-sulta al-rabia'a" in the Assabah website page.

phase of the French conquest in Morocco from around 1903, Mohammed Al-Kettani strove to oppose the encroachment of French power into Morocco. He founded the Arabic “The Plague” newspaper in order to counter the western influence on his country. He openly criticized “The Sa’ada,” an Arabic pro-Aziz newspaper launched in Tangier as the mouthpiece of French power in the beginning of the colonial conquest in Morocco between 1903 and 1904.⁵² On account of the incapability of Abdel-Aziz and his associated Islamic *ulama* in containing the French invasion, Al-Kettani was eager to broaden his mobilization through different approaches.

Susan Miller has explicated the political focal point of Al-Kettani’s mobilizing power in that “he determined to present himself as an alternative to the reactionary *ulama*. He broke with tradition in other ways, too; he understood the power of the printed work and published and distributed political pamphlets, spreading news of his reformist agenda far and wide.”⁵³ Setting the foundation and distribution of political pamphlets, agendas, and newspapers as a fulcrum point, Miller highlighted Al-Kettani’s “breaking up with tradition.” However, this has nothing to do with the abandonment of his Sufi tradition or ritual. Rather, the Sufi cheikh promoted his reformist agenda by “presenting himself as an alternative to the reactionary *ulama*.” As in stark contrast with the impotent Islamic authorities, Mohammed Al-Kettani emerged as an alternative figure in rooting out political corruption within the country and the colonial forces without. Put differently, the cornerstone of this “breaking up with tradition” reconstituted and reinforced his political

⁵² See “Muttasawaf Istihwatihim Al-sulta al-rabia’a” in the Assabah website page.

⁵³ Susan Miller, “The Passing of the Old Makhzan (1894-1912),” in *A History of Modern Morocco* (Cambridge University Press, 2013), 68.

orientation, that is to say, the Sufi-Salafist viewpoint through western-style print culture. Indeed, his usage of both “The Plague” and “The Sa’ada” newspaper served as an operation of drawing greater popular support as an alternative to the feeble regime under Abdel-Aziz in 1907.

Moreover, and in terms of rallying popular support in the political field, Mohammed Al-Kettani underlined and adopted cultural production as an effective means to re-establish legitimacy and popularity. The pivotal aspect of expression via press and journalism had provided Al-Kettani a firm basis for fighting against political and religious inefficiency in Morocco, starting from 1904 and culminating in his death in 1909.⁵⁴ In particular, his denouncement of “The Saada” newspaper was clear and evident in defining and defending his mobilization. The newspaper insinuated that Al-Kettani was driven by political ambitions rather than religious zeal and that his religious leadership was therefore hypocritical. At the same time it suggested that the makhzan was underestimating the threat of the movement:

The makhzan turned away from Al-Kettani, believing that the intention of the man was not for religion’s sake. Rather, he carried out other purposes while elevating his faith as a flag. Therefore, the makhzan did not watch the causes of the Sufi cheikh in an attentive way, nor did he monitor the case in a considerate manner. The makhzan itself knew what Al-Kettani was hiding from the sultan and from the Berbers.⁵⁵

This passage emphasizes the shady intentions of Al-Kettani. It also reveals that French administrators simply believed that he was eager to topple the Alaouite sultanate

⁵⁴ It is worth noting that even though his Sufi sites, or *zawiyas*, were closed following his death in 1909, the legacy of his endeavors and undertaking has never stopped growing, especially through his later disciple and relative Abdel-Hay Al-Kettani when leveraging with the French forces in 1953.

⁵⁵ See this source on “Muttasawaf Istihwatihim Al-sulta al-rabia’a.” Translation was my own.

and claimed it for himself after Abdel-Hafid. However, as biased as this French-sponsored and financed newspaper was, it still testifies to the power of Al-Kettani's call for the greater *jihad* and his gathering of rural allies and Sufis. In stark contrast with the presumptions of the French, this mobilization manifested his goals of ensuring Sufi legitimacy and protecting the nation from corruption within and encroachment without. After all, the failure of Abdel-Hafid in fulfilling his conditional allegiance ignited the resistance and large-scale protests in the rural region. Henceforth, "The Sa'ada" newspaper, along with many other colonial journals and reports, distorted the attitude and goals of Mohammed Al-Kettani, which has led to prejudices, at best, and falsity, at worst, in the historical record. Al-Kettani's denunciation of the biased "The Sa'ada" newspaper cemented the collective identity of the Sufi brotherhood and reinforced a shared consciousness of how opposition against the state could be expressed.

Patriotic *da'awa*: the fortification of the *baraka* power

Besides the powerful efficacy of and resistance against newspaper publication in rallying popular support from the rural area, Mohammed Al-Kettani had recourse to a collective calling, or *da'awa*, among fellow tribal notables and Sufi believers, in the hope of raising awareness and supporters to resist the Hafidiyya regime. More precisely, the collective *da'awa* "defines Muslim politics in the broadest sense of symbolic practice, persuasion, and transformation beyond the state's formal intervention."⁵⁶ This calling

⁵⁶ Emilio Spadola, "Nationalizing the Call: Trance, Technology, and Control," in *The Calls of Islam: Sufis, Islamists, and Mass Mediation in Urban Morocco* (Indiana University Press,

draws public attention to national security and religious legitimacy in light of domestic or outside threats. In the case of Mohammed Al-Kettani, the *da'awa* proved his symbolic weight as a guardian of Islam and an advocate of the greater *jihad* he had always striven for. The objective of this unifying communication was to call upon rural and Sufi supporters for his “authorial repetition—sainthood and the *baraka* power.”⁵⁷ The emphasis on his “sainthood” illustrated the spiritual unity to the whole Muslim/Sufi *umma* in the country in order to direct against the political order. The intersection of ritual call and national summons forged and reinforced the collective identity and shared consciousness of each Sufi during Al-Kettani’s “campaign” between 1908 and 1909. This deepening of relationships within the Kettaniyya brotherhood honed the inner cohesion of the Sufis as well as the religio-cultural defense of Sufi identity. This section seeks to explore French interest in Moroccan culture, not so much for its urban and political elitism than for its religious and rural mysticism, including Sufism and religious rituals within the peripheral regions in general. It would then trace the communicative power of the Sufi order, the *da'awa*, under the leadership of Mohammed Al-Kettani in reinforcing cohesion and unity among his Sufi allies.

The French administrators had put much attention to and interest in the mystical aspect of the Sufi orders in general, which served as a springboard for their colonial project and undertaking in North Africa. I argue that this led to neglect of other dimensions of Sufi activity, such as, in the case of Mohammed Al-Kettani, its association

2014), 3.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 36.

with the political struggle against the Alaouite sultanate between 1908 and 1909. According to remarks from a colonial report, “it seems that the deep taste of mystical obsessions was in accordance with sensual desire and infatuation.”⁵⁸ What caught the eyes of the French administrators were the ritual performances of the Sufi communities in Morocco. Even though the comparison of their rituals to carnal and erotic “desire and infatuation” trivialized the role ritual played in the Sufi community, this aspect of religious practice intrigued the French into exploring more and even attempting to promote such customs, especially in the remotely rural regions.⁵⁹ This support for the ritual aspect of Sufi tradition had several long-lasting implications, both to the colonizing forces and the Sufi groups.

The French colonizers acknowledged that “Morocco was always the land for magic *par excellence*: magic has been preserved and developed with a very particular intensity in the context of fierce isolation and Moroccan obscurity.”⁶⁰ The author of this journal page highlighted the unique characteristics of Sufi magic and ritual in Morocco. The word “isolation” conveyed the estrangement from the political atmosphere in the urban areas without and closeness of religious/mystical communities in the rural regions within; the term “obscurity” further attested to the strangeness and mystical aura of the “Sufi magic” *par excellence*. The French, given their denial of modern and civilized aspects of the Kettaniyya order, were eager to promote the mystical practices of the Sufi order not only to serve their own interest within their civilizing mission blueprint, but also to take

⁵⁸ *Bulletin de l'enseignement public*, 61.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 61.

precaution against protests and resistance, which sprang from the sharifian state, the urban *ulama*, and other parties in the country, through the “military aid” of the Kettaniyya allies. Henceforth, Sufi ritual served as a foundation for Mohammed Al-Kettani’s forging of a shared identity within his Sufi disciples, which ultimately furthered their political aims, even if those are downplayed and misrepresented in French sources.

In addition to ritual, another significant driving force of the collective consciousness of the Kettaniyya disciples was the national call, a communal *da’awa* for resistance. Regarding the communicative role of the call, the mobilizing force Al-Kettani transmitted echoed his disciples and other tribal leaders that were close to him either in distance or, religiously speaking, in soul, sending powerful messages in the name of Moroccans at large in the hope of resisting the incapable Abdel-Hafid. As mentioned before, the threat of Mohammed Al-Kettani stemmed from his questioning of Abdel-Hafid’s Alaouite legitimacy and position as *Ameer Al-Moumineen*. Although this suspicion had led to the marginalization of the Kettaniyya order, either in its religious practices or its political goal of reforming the sultanate, it strengthened the attraction of the movement among tribal and Sufi forces. Put differently, the impressive religious assemblage Al-Kettani called in order to carry out his national summon vis-à-vis the polarized factions enhanced his *baraka* power for national security and shared identity in a larger sense.

As protest and resistance became the rallying cry for Sufis and tribal forces, “Al-Kittani, informed that he would lead some forces to Rabat, called for unification and

united power against the corrupted new regime.”⁶¹ The repercussion of this calling for a large-scale mobilization was twofold. On the one hand, the reorientation of the Kettaniyya allies highlighted the religious conflict in Islam (more specifically, the regional clash) within the country. On the other hand, the particular “calling for an united power” cemented collective consciousness among the tribal forces that Al-Kettani led, which served as an indispensable force for ensuring cohesion and organization in the building up of tribal elites.

The cultural and political prestige of Mohammed Al-Kettani showcased his symbolic weight in guiding the allied army forward. Even so, the colonial archives had largely neglected the efforts of the Sufi leader in modernizing Morocco, using “biased terms” for the sake of advancing their own colonial projects. Indeed, I suggest that Al-Kettani’s religious and political legitimacy became manifested in his *baraka* power in calling upon Sufi cohesion, less so in a “militant” objective than in pursuing a “spiritual pathway” and *da’awa*.

The French journal explained that the shared identity within the heart of the Kettaniyya brotherhood under the leadership of Al-Kettani was born “not of simple political adversity, but outright demagoguery.”⁶² The term “demagoguery” had strongly distorted Al-Kettani’s original intention on prioritizing his Sufi spiritual struggle against the failed regime of the Alaouite sultanate. One should not downplay the Sufi cheikh’s role as a symbolic capital of the united rural forces for national security and religious

⁶¹ *Affaires du Maroc, 1908-1910*, 103.

⁶² Trenga and Maitrot de la Motte Capron, *Journal D’un Israélite de Fès, 1908-1910*, 60.

legitimacy. It is true that the contentious nature between him and Abdel-Hafid reinforced the shared consciousness of Sufi followers, but the collective *da'awa* functioned as a cornerstone of furthering social forces and cohesion among his cohorts. In a larger sense, the national call summoned Moroccans across regions; it “promoted the social evolution of the Moroccan People as it emphasized the cultural symbol as repeated and recognizable source of the call, in which the marginal practices now amassed to form a national practice.”⁶³ The transcendence of regional and “marginal” space consolidated a variety of Sufi orders aligning with Mohammed Al-Kettani for the sake of carrying out “social evolution” and communicative effects.⁶⁴ Henceforth, one can perceive the hidden power of the Sufi cheikh when confronting with different opposing parties since his adoption of ritual call and Sufi *da'awa* highlighted the communal consciousness of the Sufi community.

The power of the political climate of the Kettaniyya brotherhood lay on the practice of *baraka*, the divine grace and blessing, of the leader Mohammed Al-Kettani himself. More specifically, he wielded saintly/religious tool as an effective means to gather national and religious call among his community. This notion is evident from two different scenes in which the Sufi cheikh had used (the means) for political ends. Before marching his Sufi and tribal groups to claim the sultanate of Abdel-Hafid, “Sufi groups, such as those Mohammed Al-Kettani led, brought a swarm of people passed by and, in order to accomplish their goals, they had to visit the tomb and the marabout of Moulay

⁶³ Spadola, *The Calls of Islam*, 37.

⁶⁴ *Bulletin de l'enseignement public*, 60, 61.

Idris.”⁶⁵ From this remark, one can clearly perceive that Mohammed Al-Kettani convened and called up his forces before the tomb of Moulay Idrisside in order to receive *baraka*. The potential premise of summoning up Sufi disciples attached the divine grace to recognition of national benefits and religious legitimacy, tightening the collective consciousness within his Sufi disciples. In the second scenario, however, the same mobilization of troops had aimed for a massive protest against the failed regime and performance of Abdel-Hafid, whose actions greatly disappointed Mohammed Al-Kettani.

In this particular turning point, Mohammed Al-Kettani “summoned up his troops and cavaliers with about 100 mules, fully charged and equipped, and passed by the house of Zemmour, Beni Mtir, and headed towards Moulay Hafid.”⁶⁶ Again, the highly visible mobilizing power of the Sufi leader against the Alaouite sultan and his allies paved the road for a greater mobilization power. Consequently, one should not ignore the religio-political and cultural implications behind the massive mobilization of Mohammed Al-Kettani. The *baraka* power, his ritual practices, and coherent *da'awa* of tribal and Sufi forces had incited the academic taste of the French administrators. More importantly, the power relation of the Sufi leader manifested his patriotic and religious defense in Morocco between 1908 and 1909.

⁶⁵ Trenga and Maitrot de la Motte Capron, *Journal D'un Israélite de Fès, 1908-1910*, 92.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 100.

Conclusion

Through the detailed analysis and examination of Mohammed Al-Kettani's tremendous contribution to the transformation of the *makhzan* system and unification of the Kettaniyya community, it has become more apparent that the exceptional role of his representation shaped and honed a shared consciousness among his cohorts. Al-Kettani's involvement in the Hafidiyya regime reflected his active participation in the political domain in the early 20th century. The Sufi leader adopted the spiritual *jihad* in challenging the political structures of the Alaouite sultan, in light of ensuring religious legitimacy of his order and protecting the nation from disruptive forces. His religious struggle, including the introduction and preservation of the *baraka*, modeled the way the religious vitality was a vital drive to counter the failed regime. He furthered this influence by seeking political alliances with rural notables and Sufi disciples, which cemented the coherent power.

The pursuit of Mohammed Al-Kettani of "the spiritual pathway" had strengthened his role as a devout Sufi among his cohorts, allies, and disciples. The greater *jihad* was a defining feature not only in reinforcing his religious legitimacy and the *baraka* power within the rural region, but also marked the political rift with Abdel-Hafid, whom Al-Kettani believed had tremendously threatened the safety of his nation. Broadly speaking, the symbolic capital of the Sufi cheikh in connecting and unifying his religious community together serves as a significant agent in hardening the ties with his allies. His usage of print culture and collective *da'awa* had great success in the rural arena. The

cultural and political agenda he formulated substantially strengthened his ability to bring about a massive mobilization and spiritual struggle for both national and religious causes.

The complex dynamics of power relations in Morocco is worthy of attention in the viewpoints of western scholars, whose eyes have grown used to projecting simplistic and Orientalist binaries of “Western advancement” and “Oriental backwardness.”⁶⁷ In the case of the Islamic societies, such as Morocco, there is no room left for progress and development in their representation of Islamic history and culture other than static and constant Islamic concepts, including Sufi thoughts and interpretative tradition of the urban scholarly classes. Despite all these essentialist and idealist conception of the Islamic world and the Orient, it is indispensable to accentuate, in the Kettaniyya context, the creative element in Sufi cultures and histories in fighting against intellectual and political hegemony over the so-called “Other.” After all, would the religio-political objective of Sufism act as an effective antidote to modern-era Islamism and Islamist ideology, in light of its emphasis on religious legitimacy and national defense? Under the far-flung influence of radical Islamism, would Mohammed VI, the now Moroccan king, seek reconciliation with rural notables and Sufis in order to root out domestic and international threats of various kinds? Scholarly investigation on Mohammed Al-Kettani as a historical and religious agent has the merit of and opens the door for reinterpreting the nexus between religion and political agenda.

⁶⁷ I derived this thought from reading Edward Said’s *Orientalism* during the winter of 2021. See Edward Said, *Orientalism* (Penguin Random House, 1978), 246.

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Website contents:

Ulma Nasihon: Mohammed Ibn Abdel-Kabir Al-Kettani,

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