John C. Thibdeau.- *Sufism in Morocco's Religious Politics: Refractions of Piety and Iḥsān* (London: Routledge, 2023), 250p.

In response to terrorist attacks in 2003 in Casablanca and the global war on terror, the Moroccan state, under the leadership of King Mohammed VI, has involved in numerous strategies aimed at the regulation, reshaping and production of religiosity in the kingdom as mechanisms of "spiritual security." The latter implemented policies that monitor and manage religious discourse and practice as part of an all-embracing policy to combat Islamic extremism, including a restructuring of religious bureaucracy, the formation of institutions, and state sponsorship of Sufi organizations, along with more repressive policing techniques.

The Moroccan state constructed the prescriptive framework for an authorized 'Moroccan Islam' which is inscribed within Moroccan religiosity (*al-tadayyun al-maghribī*) in which Sufism plays a pivotal and distinguishing role, the contours of which were outlined and framed in (1) the creed (*ʿaqīda*) of Ashʿarī as the middle path between the rationality of the Muʿtazila and the extremism (*tashaddud*) of others; (2) Maliki as the middle way (*al-ṭarīq al-wasaṭ*) between theory and practice (*al-nadariyya w-l-ʿamal*). Their rulings are from the behavior of the people of Medina, but make room for reason (*al-ʿaql*); (3) and the school of Junayd in Sufism.

According to Thibdeau, Sufism in Morocco is a complete commitment to Islamic *Sharia* to reach the level of *iḥsān*, which is the core, soul and perfection of faith. The people of Morocco followed al-Junayd al-Baghdādī for these reasons: he is accepted by all for his moderation (*al-iʿtidāl*) and adherence to the *sharia* and ethical action without abstraction (*al-ʿamal al-ṣāliḥ bilā tajrīd*). He was not like many eastern Sufis (*al-ṣufiyya al-mashariqa*) but like the Moroccan Sufis (*al-ṣufiyya al-maghariba*). He united the *sharia* and the *ḥaqīqa* (*jamaʿ bayn al-sharīʿa wa al-haqīqa*) in his commendable character (*khuluq aẓīm*) – modesty (*tawāḍuʿ*), temperance (*iʿtidāl*), tolerance (*tasāmuḥ*), and solidarity (*taḍāmun*) that collectively incarnate virtuous piety (*iḥsān*). In the *hadith* in which the angel Gabriel comes to the Prophet Mohammed to teach the religion (*dīn*) by asking about *islām*, *imān*, and *iḥsān*, the latter "is to worship Allah as if you see him, and even if you do not see him, know that he sees you. This is the highest level and this is the level of the Sufis." Sufism in this context is seen as the level of *iḥsān* and operates as a component of public piety in contemporary Morocco to link the ethical and spiritual well-being of the individual citizen to the moral, economic, and religious security of the nation-state.

Within contemporary Moroccan public discourses, Sufism is perceived as an applied and practical tradition of ethical education aimed at the inculcation of specific virtues and the refinement of proper conduct. This 'practical Sufism' stands in contrast to the 'mystical Sufism' of abstract speculative metaphysics, as well as the

'popular Sufism' of saint worship commonly associated with the term *al-taṣawwuf* in Morocco. Practical Sufism points to applied programs of ethical development (*minhāj al-tarbiya*) that work on the individual in their intertwined social and spiritual trajectories. The author demonstrates that the purpose of his study is to explore how those programs are being developed and deployed within the social and political contexts of contemporary Morocco.

John C. Thibdeau demonstrates that the Moroccan monarchy has followed, since the last two decades, an obvious policy of religious reform and regulation, and one of the main salient features of this policy has been a clear promotion of Sufism as a basic peculiarity of the Moroccan religiosity, adding that "this rehabilitation of Sufism through state apparatuses has underpinned the regime's efforts of spiritual security and spiritual diplomacy as it seeks to establish itself as a regional political power and global religious authority" (27).

Thibdeau sees that there are three histories of religion and politics in Morocco as they evolved over the twentieth and twenty-first centuries to historicize these developments. The first one probes into the emergence of the monarchy as an effect of the colonial period. To preserve a traditional Morocco, the French constructed two antagonistic modes of religiosity that were supposed to have existed all along. In the process, this external critique of Sufism was wedded with an internal Islamic critique offered by modern Islamic reformers who sought to displace the political and religious authority of Sufis. Edmund Burke III argues, in his book *The Ethnographic State: France and the Invention of Moroccan Islam*, that Moroccan Islam was an invention of French colonial governance, and that reinforced the legitimacy of the monarchy to facilitate the foundation and perpetuation of a modern nation-state that would also recognize French colonial authority. The second history frames the intersections of Sufism, politics, and modernity in Morocco during the twentieth century. The third one analyzes the disparate elements of Morocco's twenty-first–century program of religious regulation and reform.

Since the mid-2000s, the Moroccan government has undertaken a series of religious reforms to control the appeal of Salafist religious extremism. In this case, Sufism is being used to curb the Islamists, who in turn had been supported under Hassan II to push back against the nationalists and leftists. The form of Sufism is often glossed as 'Sunni Sufism' that is consistent with the *sunna* and *sharia*. This qualification aims to normalize diverse sets of Sufi practices that exist through Morocco under the heading of Junaydi Sufism.

The use of Sufism has included a host of mechanisms including the promotion of certain Sufi orders, the sponsorship of Sufi music festivals, the hosting of conferences, and the establishment of research centers. Several influential orders include the *Būdshīshiyya*, *Tijaniyya*, *ʿAlāwiyya*, *Risaniyya,* and the *Darqawiyya al-Karkariyya*. Founded in 2006 by Shaykh Muhammad Fawzī al-Karkarī al-Hasanī al-Idrisī as a new branch of the *Shādhiliyya*, the *Karkariyya* has grown as an international Sufi order that is distinguished by their multi-colored patchwork robes called the *muraqqaʿa* and their publication of video testimonials describing experience during

spiritual retreats (*khalwa*). In this context, Thibdeau examines these practices using ethnographic and textual sources to reveal how they are situated within a curriculum of ethical education (*minhāj al-tarbiya*) aimed at the cultivation of virtuous piety (*iḥsān*). This ethical education is integral to a program of learning to see (*tanwīr*) that culminates in visionary experiences (*mushāhadāt*) and analyze the conceptual dimensions of those visions. In demonstrating the link between *tarbiya* and *tanwīr* in the *minhāj* of the *Karkariyya,* Thibdeau considers Sufism as a practical ethical tradition associated with philosophical ethics (*akhlāq*) and proper conduct and comportment (*adab*).

One of the central components of Shaykh Fawzi's curriculum of ethical education (*minhāj al-tarbiya*) is this notion of pilgrimage (*siyāḥa*).[1] While the term *siyāḥa* in contemporary contexts is commonly translated as tourism, it is imbued with a sense of journeying, wandering, and peregrination. The author in this sense translates *siyāḥa* as pilgrimage, though being sure to distinguish it from the *ḥajj* or *ʿumra as* formally authorized pilgrimages in Islam. Further, the use of *siyāḥa* in the *Karkariyya* reflects a reformulation of these traditional practices. Finally, although religious tourism has become a feature of the tourist industry with foreign members of Sufi orders traveling to Morocco to participate in annual events, the *siyāḥa* in this context does not refer to this type of religious tourism. In short, it is a kind of pilgrimage in which the journey itself takes priority, rather than the destination, which in the case of the *Karkariyya* changes each year.

In addition to these goals, the *siyāḥa* also assumes political significance insofar as it is understood as a form of *daʿwa* (most apparent in the European *siyāḥa*) and cuts across national borders, potentially bringing religious loyalties into conflict with national territories. In addition to these political dimensions, one of the textual bases for the *siyāḥa* frames it as a form of *jihad*. As such, in the context of the contemporary world, the *siyāḥa* must also be seen as a response to Islamic groups that offer interpretations and performances of *jihad* and in that regard the *siyāḥa* of the *Karkariyya* is also political, in the sense that it is a response to those who attempt to use Islamic traditions to justify forms of political violence. In short, the *siyāḥa* has an ethical dimension, in that it helps cultivate virtues, it has a 'mystical' dimension, in that it facilitates the acquisition of forms of knowledge, and it has a political dimension, in that it publicly performs a piety that is tied to the Moroccan state's authorized religiosity.

In the *Karkariyya tariqa, iḥsān* as public piety which is comprised of a set of relationships with oneself, with society, and with the divine is clearly noticeable. By accentuating these three refractions of *iḥsān*, the writer wants to prove more broadly the intersection of spiritual and social virtues that form the foundation of a Moroccan religious and national identity that also has significant implications for the political role of Morocco regionally and globally. In this vein, *iḥsān* is underscored as relationship with oneself and as relationship with others.

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1. In his book, *The Enlightened Principles*, Shaykh Fawzi defines the *siyāḥa* theoretically as, "The setting forth without a place and wayfaring without time on the principle of divestment (*tajrīd*) to expel the 'other' and obstacles in order to shatter the god of the I" (131).

Perceiving *iḥsān* as relationship with oneself, Thibdeau brings to a sharper focus the International Academic Center of Sufi and Aesthetic Studies (IACSAS), a privately funded non-governmental organization based in a working-class suburb of the Ville Nouvelle of Fes as a good example that interprets, cultivates, and performs *iḥsān* as a form of public piety. The difference between the *Karkariyya* and IACSAS as far as *iḥsān* is concerned is that the former interprets *iḥsān* as literally seeing God, whereas the IACSAS focus on practices of self-monitoring (*murāqabat al-nafs*) that develop a sense of accountability and responsibility to oneself, to others, and to the divine.

The third dimension of *iḥsān* is evidently substantiated by the *tariqa ʿAlāwiyya* and its leader Shaykh Khālid bin Tūnis. This third refraction of *Iḥsān,* as a telos in Shaykh Khālid's *minhaj al-tarbiya,* is charitable action and service to the other. This *tariqa* represents a socially engaged spirituality that situates social practices, such as giving charity, as essential components of individual and social development. Shaykh Khālid regards himself as a social critic (*nāṣiḥ*) and reformer (*mouslih*).

John C. Thibdeau's *Sufism in Morocco's Religious Politics* is an invaluable reference, for it highlights how Sufism has been constructed and deployed as part of ongoing contentions of religious and political authority in Morocco and globally. The author deploys *minhāj al-tarbiya* as the crux of his book. He broaches upon different contemporary Sufi groups whose approaches towards *minhāj al-tarbiya* vary, but they strongly believe that Sufism is a practical tradition that aims at the cultivation of virtuous piety – *iḥsān*, which implies a form of public piety in which social and spiritual development are intimately connected, that is, as the basis of a pious subjectivity consisting in relationships to oneself, to others, and to the divine. In a nutshell, Thibdeau tackles Sufism in certain thought-provoking ways: Sufism as an ethical tradition, as public piety, as a transnational ethical grammar, and as a political tool.

The book has succeeded in intimating Sufism's transnational dimensions, highlighting how Sufism is deployed as the node of social, economic, and even political networks and as an crucial constituent of spiritual diplomacy; Morocco's revived Sufi traditions are affecting the foreign policy arena, as the Moroccan monarchy has been exerting rejuvenated *zawaya* and Sufi orders as a diplomatic tool abroad, especially in parts of West Africa and the Sahel where these orders are also prevalent. This outreach is aimed at reinforcing the Moroccan monarchy's religious authority by granting it an influential leadership role in global efforts to combat religious extremism. Successfully solidifying such a role would help the Moroccan government market itself as a key partner for Western countries on deradicalization and counterterrorism endeavors, while driving engagement particularly in West Africa and the Sahel.

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