

Article

Morocco as a Hub of Globalised Traditional Islam

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Abstract: Muslims on every continent have responded in a great variety of ways to the challenges of colonial modernity. Yet, it is also possible to examine broader currents within this diversity. Fundamentalism, modernism, and traditionalism are global currents which also overlap with other religions, such as Christianity or Hinduism. However, these contested and unstable categories only loosely designate internally diverse currents comprised of complex sub-currents as well as countercurrents. Fundamentalism, for example, has been used to designate various Wahhabi or Salafi movements. Modernism can refer to liberal, progressive, and even postmodern Islamic movements. Traditionalism generally refers to those movements which claim continuity with classical lineages, especially in jurisprudence (*fiqh*), doctrine (*'aqida*), and spirituality (*tasawwuf*). Muslims associated with this current generally identify as *Traditional* rather than *Traditionalist*. Traditional Islam is a global community whose participants adhere to several Sunni and Shia lineages and share a common discourse, network, and aesthetics. These participants typically depict fundamentalism as too rigid and literalist, and modernism as too eager to capitulate to Western ideologies and prone to unorthodox interpretations of Islam. However, rather than hostility and conflict with the West, Traditional Muslims tend to promote peaceful inter-civilisational dialogue, based on shared values in terms of spirituality, ethics, and indeed geopolitical stability. Morocco has emerged as a hub of Traditional Islam, along with other countries such as Jordan. It is pursuing an official policy to reinforce its reputation as the centre of a Western Islamic tradition that converges around the following four central elements: (1) veneration of the Prophet Muḥammad's descendants (sharifism); (2) Maliki *fiqh*; (3) Ash'ari *'aqida*; (4) Junaydi *tasawwuf*. This article examines how Morocco is actively engaged in shaping the regional and global Traditional Islamic community. It also proposes a decolonial world-systems analysis of how Traditional Islamic discourse relates to the lived experiences of Muslims in places such as Morocco. Based on this analysis, this article concludes that a credibility problem impedes efforts by Traditional Muslims to defend the unique ways of being, knowing, and behaving developed by Muslims against the ongoing genocidal threat of colonial modernity.



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1. Introduction

لَهُ الْمَشْرِقُ وَمَغْرِبُ يَهْدِي مَنْ يَشَاءُ إِلَى صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ

[. . .] To God belong the East and the West. He guides whomever He will to a straight path.

(Quran 2:142)¹

Muslims from around the world have attempted to formulate how to follow the divinely guided straight path after the formidably disruptive impact of the Western-centric modern/colonial world-system.² This now global world-system emerged in the late fifteenth century, after the Catholic forces of Western Europe began an African crusade by invading the coasts of Morocco, completed the crusade against Andalusian Muslims, and initiated the conquest of Indigenous America. People living in the Western Islamicate³

were the first victims of this genocidal system (Grosfoguel 2013). Hundreds of thousands of Muslim and Jewish refugees escaped genocide in Spain by fleeing to Morocco and other Mediterranean lands ruled by Muslims (El Hareir 2016). Morocco was the first site of resistance against the African crusade (Beazley 1910; Russell [2013] 2016; Simmons 2021), and Moroccans were among the earliest Muslims to be captured, enslaved, and sent westwards across the Atlantic, where a holocaust targeting Indigenous Americans and Africans was taking place. Moroccans have been responding to the challenges of colonial modernity for over six centuries (Julien [1978] 2011; Zaki and Charqi 2008). Their history is filled with evidence that the expansion of the modern/colonial world-system represents an existential threat to not only the bodies of Muslims but also to their uniquely diverse traditions of being, knowing, and behaving. Consequently, Morocco is an excellent location to begin exploring Muslim approaches to tradition in the modern/colonial age.

Scholars who are proponents of Traditional Islam tend to loosely divide Muslim reactions to the challenges of colonial modernity into the following three broad categories: fundamentalism, modernism, and traditionalism (Lumbard 2004c; Nasr 1987, 2010; Oliveti [2001] 2022). These currents partly overlap with similar ones in other religions, such as Judaism, Christianity, or Hinduism (Oldmeadow 2005), but this article focuses on Islam. As the modern/colonial world-system has globalised, Muslims who adhere to several traditional Sunni and Shia⁴ lineages have become increasingly connected in global networks, as have so-called fundamentalists and modernists. Traditional Islam has become an identifiable globalised community whose participants typically depict fundamentalism as too rigid and literalist, and modernism as too eager to capitulate to Western ideologies and prone to unorthodox interpretations of Islam. However, there are diverse currents and sub-currents within globalised Traditional Islam. For instance, a dominant current that can be labelled “late Sunni traditionalism” (Brown [2009] 2018, pp. 307–39) is comprised of several sub-currents, including a “counter-revolutionary” one, often criticized for being too close to autocratic regimes such as the United Arab Emirates and Egypt (al-Azami 2019).

This article analyses primary written sources to determine how Traditional Muslims self-represent and how they portray rival currents, such as fundamentalism and modernism. It also critically examines these categories. To begin with, these categorisations can be used pejoratively by proponents of rival discourses. It is also important to distinguish ideals from lived experience. For instance, much of the resistance to Traditional Islam among Moroccans and globally can be attributed to the widespread perception that many of its proponents are complicit with modern/colonial power structures that abuse, impoverish, and exploit Muslims. Moreover, although the tripartite categorisation presented above is useful for analysing broad trends, it is too simple to capture the complex diversity of Muslim responses to colonial modernity. Nevertheless, without denying the complexity of these sociohistorical realities, this article is deliberately broad in its scope; to paraphrase a popular idiom, it is more concerned with the forest than individual trees.

Since the proverbial forest under consideration is the modern/colonial world-system, the theoretical approach used in this article is decolonial world-systems analysis (Grosfoguel 2011; Grosfoguel and Cervantes-Rodriguez 2002). The second section examines Traditional Islam as a globalised community responding to the challenges of colonial modernity. In the third section, Morocco is presented as a global hub of Traditional Islam. Indeed, Morocco is pursuing an official policy to reinforce its reputation as the centre of a Western Islamic tradition that converges around the following four central elements: (1) veneration of the Prophet Muḥammad’s⁵ descendants (sharifism); (2) Mālikī *fiqh* (jurisprudence); (3) Ash’arī *‘aqīda* (theological doctrine); (4) Junaydi *tasawwuf* (commonly translated into English as *Sufism*; this term designates experiential Islamic spirituality). Likewise, Morocco is actively engaged in shaping the global Traditional Islamic discourse. However, there is a gap between this discourse and the lived experiences of Muslims in places such as Morocco, as discussed in the fourth section.

Ultimately, this paper argues that the decolonial potential of Traditional Islam is impeded by the widespread perception that it has played a significant role in peripheralizing

Muslims in the modern/colonial world-system. Indeed, many Muslims continue to espouse the opinion that blind attachment to tradition is to blame for their ongoing incapacity to resist Western colonialism and imperialism. This opinion dominates other global discourses about Islam, including so-called fundamentalism and modernism, but also Orientalism (Said [1978] 2003). Furthermore, many proponents of Traditional Islam are members of globalised elites whose cosmopolitan concerns are far detached from those of most Muslims. These elites are largely complicit with the modern/colonial power structures that oppress Muslims struggling to survive in the actual localities where Islamic traditions are perpetuated through sacred lineages. Traditional Islam has a credibility problem.

2. Globalised Traditional Islam

The complex historical processes sometimes referred to as *modernity* came to Muslims as a by-product of European colonialism. These processes represented an attack on Muslim bodies as well as their traditions. Indeed, the expansion of the modern/colonial—or indeed, colonial/modern—world-system, celebrated in Eurocentric historical narratives as the rise of the West, is also the story of multiple extinctions (Grosfoguel 2013; Sparkes 2020, pp. 157–206). Today, this Western-centred world-system threatens to destroy not only the diversity of human experience, including worldviews, cultures, and languages, but also the very existence of life on earth in its diverse manifestations (Crow 2010).

Muslims and Jews in Morocco and Iberia were the first peoples peripheralised by the emergence of modern/colonial Europe (El Hareir 2016; Grosfoguel 2013; Mignolo 2006). In 1415, the Portuguese launched the African crusade by invading the Northern Moroccan city-state of Sabta, better known in European languages as *Ceuta* (Beazley 1910; Russell [2013] 2016; Simmons 2021). This represented the initial turning of the historical tides, after which Muslims would find themselves fighting a defensive anti-colonial jihad against Western Europe for centuries. Only decades later, in 1492, the modern/colonial world-system was born when Queen Isabella I of Castile (1451–1504) and King Ferdinand II of Aragon (1452–1516) conquered Granada, the last Muslim polity in Western Europe, and mandated Christopher Columbus (1451–1506) to sail across the Atlantic in search of new lands and peoples to conquer (Dussel [1992] 1995). The significance of this sequence needs to be clear: The anti-Muslim crusading in Southwest Europe and Northwest Africa immediately preceded and deeply informed the invasion of Indigenous America in 1492, which gave birth to the modern/colonial world-system (ibid.).⁶ Moroccan Muslims, many of whose ancestors were expelled with Sephardic Jews from Spain and Portugal, have been defending their unique traditions of being, knowing, and behaving against the existential threat presented by the now-global modern/colonial system for over six centuries. They have a unique perspective on globalisation, tradition, and Islam, and how these categories have developed in relation to one another for over six hundred years. It is, therefore, no surprise that Morocco has become a hub for globalised Traditional Islam, as discussed below in Section 3.

One of the features of globalised Traditional Islam is its discourse, Islamic traditionalism, which has historically emerged as one of three broad discourses responding to the modern/colonial attack on Muslims and their diverse traditions. The other two discourses are sometimes called *fundamentalism* and *modernism*, especially within traditionalist scholarship (Lumbard 2004c; Nasr 2010). Such terminology is not neutral. *Fundamentalism* is a pejorative term within traditionalist and modernist discourses, just as *traditionalism* and *modernism* are used pejoratively in rival discourses. Instead of rejecting these terms or accepting them uncritically, this article explores the decolonial potential of Traditional Islam, including its discourse and terminology. It begins with the premise that in the modern/colonial era, characterised by massive genocidal and ecocidal extinctions, the defence, perpetuation, and adaptation of the world's diverse traditions of being, knowing, and behaving is a decolonial priority. To be clear, decolonial world-systems analysis does not speak *about* peripheralised perspectives, such as Traditional Islam, but *from* or *with*

them (Grosfoguel 2010, p. 36). Here, this entails adopting a position that is perhaps best described by the term “critical traditionalism”, coined by Vincent Cornell (2004).

Some Muslims have prioritised the perpetuation of their traditions in the face of colonial modernity by preserving aspects interpreted as essential and adapting non-essential ones. Their position can be labelled *traditionalist*. Others have adopted a more negative approach to tradition, depicting it as an assemblage of superstitions whose perpetuation benefits corrupt elites, including religious charlatans. They tend to blame the dizzying diversity of traditions and customs developed by premodern Muslims as largely responsible for the so-called decline of Islamic civilisation. From this perspective, tradition prevented Muslims from countering the rise of Western Europeans from the margins of the premodern African-Eurasian world to the core of a global system. Yet, those who largely consider tradition to be a problem disagree about the solution.

One broad discourse prescribes a return to the fundamental teachings of Islam as the only way back to the straight path upon which Muslims can be divinely guided in their response to Western hegemony. This position is sometimes labelled *fundamentalism*, a term with pejorative connotations within traditionalist discourse and its critique of colonial modernity, as well as other critical discourses, including secular ones. *Fundamentalism* initially referred to an early twentieth-century U.S. American Protestant movement, from which a politically militant form of evangelicalism developed later in the century (Marsden [1980] 2006; Harding 2001). Over time, the term has increasingly come to be used analogically to indicate many movements, often hostile to one another, from diverse religions, but which seem to share certain characteristics, such as rigid exclusivism and scriptural literalism. In French, *fundamentalism* in its broader usage is commonly referred to as *intégrisme*, a term that initially described a movement born within French Catholicism in the late nineteenth century, in opposition to liberal currents within the Roman Catholic Church (Geoffroy 2010). Political theorist Roxanne Euben (1997) contends that “the deployment of ‘fundamentalism’ cross-culturally requires explanation”, especially since “the application of a specifically Western and Christian term to the Islamic world is rightfully suspect.” Nevertheless, she maintains that “the word *fundamentalism* is useful across cultures inasmuch as it evokes a concern with fundamentals, origins, foundations.” For Euben, *fundamentalism* refers “to contemporary religio-political movements that attempt to return to the scriptural foundations of the community, excavating and reinterpreting these foundations for application to the contemporary social and political world” (p. 432). Indeed, it is extremely difficult to describe broad trends observable in many contexts throughout the global world-system without borrowing terms initially coined within a given context. One always approaches the universal from a particular starting point. To compensate for this lacuna, it can be useful to mention two or more terms used to describe the same reality and examine their connotations. But this article is a decolonial world-systems analysis of Traditional Islam. Consequently, rival currents are considered principally in relation to traditionalism. Other works need to be consulted for a more detailed exploration of fundamentalism (e.g., Cornell 2010; Reinhart 2010).

Modernist Islam (Kurzman 2002) also refers to diverse currents that may include or overlap with other currents, such as liberal (Kurzman 1998) or progressive Islam (Safi 2003), the latter of which is influenced by postmodern thought. From a traditionalist perspective, all these currents prescribe abandoning tradition in favour of an approach to reality inspired by the West (Lumbard 2004c; Nasr 1987, 2010). Modernism often overlaps with traditionalism in considering fundamentalism a vain attempt to reconstruct an idealised and largely imagined Islamic past, but it is based on the contention that the West has demonstrated the way forward. If this contention is accepted, it follows that Muslims and other peripheralised peoples in the global world-system must learn from the hegemon and catch up with modernity if they wish to survive in an albeit altered Westernised form (Kaddouri 2012; Laroui 1974).

From a traditionalist perspective, fundamentalism and modernism are both thoroughly modern reactions to Eurocentric modernism; both are extremes on the same ideological

spectrum positioned in violent opposition to tradition (Lumbard 2004c). A basic traditionalist contention is that “most of the current ‘fundamentalist’ movements, while denouncing modernism, accept some of the most basic aspects of modernism. This is clearly seen in their complete and open-armed acceptance of modern science and technology” (Nasr 1987, pp. 18–19). Of course, traditionalism is *modern* insofar as it is a response to modern/colonial circumstances, but it does not present itself as *modernist*. Interestingly, while drawing on a completely different discourse from Islamic traditionalism, the Latin American decolonial thinker Ramón Grosfoguel proposes a similar epistemic critique of modernity. He sees such resemblances between rigid exclusivism in the core and peripheries of the modern/colonial world-system that he considers Eurocentric modernism the hegemonic fundamentalism to which other fundamentalisms are subordinated. He writes:

If we define fundamentalism as those perspectives that assume their own cosmology and epistemology to be superior and as the only source of truth, inferiorizing and denying equality to other epistemologies and cosmologies, then Eurocentrism is not merely a form of fundamentalism but the hegemonic fundamentalism in the world today. Those Third Worldist fundamentalisms (Afrocentric, Islamist, Indigenist, etc.) that emerge in response to the hegemonic Eurocentric fundamentalism and that the “Western” press put in the front pages of newspapers every day are subordinated forms of Eurocentric fundamentalism insofar as they reproduce and leave intact the binary, essentialist, racial hierarchies of Eurocentric fundamentalism.

(Grosfoguel 2010, pp. 31–22)

Traditional Islamic discourse proposes a space beyond this colonial dichotomy. Although there are exclusivist currents within Traditional Islam, the discourse tends to celebrate traditional pluralism and accuse modernism and fundamentalism of rigidity and narrow-mindedness.

Traditional Muslim scholars typically disagree with both the premises and solutions of both fundamentalism and modernism (Nasr 1987, 2010). Joseph Lumbard contends the following:

much of the thought now produced in the Islamic world is not in fact Islamic. Western ideologies are presented by both dogmatic literalists and modern “liberal” secularists with a thin veneer of Islamic terms and sayings, while the voice of traditional Islamic thought is often muted and ignored. But through the work of scholars such as S. H. Nasr and Hamza Yusuf Hanson in America, A. K. Brohi and Suheyl Umar in Pakistan, ‘Abd al-Ḥalīm Maḥmūd in Egypt, Naquib al-Attas in Malaysia, and Martin Lings, Ḥassan Gai Eaton, and T. J. Winter in England, it can continue to be heard.

(Lumbard 2004b, p. 40)

Such scholars propose a revitalization of Islamic traditions transmitted through lineages of scholars, saints, and sharifs (Arabic: noble—*sharīf* singular, *shurafāʾ* plural, also called *sayyid* singular or *sāda* plural—these terms designate members of the prophetic household). The imperative is to transmit sacred traditions in fields such as *fiqh*, *ʿaqīda*, and *tasawwuf*.⁷ This may require abandoning certain practices and adapting to new contexts but never forsaking these lineages, which would simply precipitate the very genocidal process instigated by the West and resisted by Muslims for centuries. Proponents of tradition argue that these lineages provide the best connection to the early Muslim community and the fundamentals of Islam, as well as the best inspiration when responding to the challenges of colonial modernity. Rather than hostility and conflict with the West, Traditional Muslims tend toward inter-civilisational dialogue based on shared values in terms of spirituality, ethics, and, indeed, geopolitical stability.

In short, a specific global discourse about tradition has developed among Muslims who identify with Traditional Islam. Initial capital letters are used here in reference to Traditional Islam as a community, rather than a vague adherence to Islamic tradition. But

Muslims connected to this community do not comprise a formal institution or organization; they are participants in an informal network. Rather than firm identities, these categories serve methodologically as ideal types in a somewhat Weberian sense.⁸ It is true that some people identify as Traditional Muslims or even Traditionalists, but many others with similar views do not. Besides, people frequently associate with several groups and espouse sometimes contradictory views. Nevertheless, recognizing the unstable and overlapping characteristics of a community need not entail denying its existence.

Both the traditionalist discourse and the Traditional Islamic community have been the subject of thorough scholarly examination (Mathiesen 2013; Sedgwick 2004a). Genealogically, the discourse draws upon many sources, such as the Shâdhilî school of Sufism, born in North Africa (Geoffroy 2005; Maḥmûd 1968), and the oeuvre of French metaphysician and Sufi René Guénon (1886–1951), also known as ‘Abd al-Wâḥid Yaḥyá. Like Guénon, many of the Western scholars and religious leaders associated with Traditional Islam are attached to Sufi Orders within the Shâdhilî lineage born in Morocco (Geoffroy 2005, pp. 453–99). But Guénon’s writings are genealogically connected to extremely diverse intellectual and spiritual movements, including Hindu Vedanta, the Perennialist philosophy of the Italian Renaissance, Freemasonry, and early twentieth-century French Occultism (Sedgwick 2004a, pp. 21–70).

In his introduction to an edited volume presenting traditionalist critiques of fundamentalism and modernism, Lombard (2004c) writes the following: “Guénon’s *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times*⁹ stands as a watershed event in European intellectual history, providing an acute philosophical assessment of the presuppositions of modernity and detailing the deleterious results of their applications” (p. xiv). Moreover, he states that Guénon and his immediate intellectual successors “laid the intellectual foundations for the current generation of authors who are represented in this volume.” These contributors, who come from the United Kingdom, the United States, Pakistan, Iran, Turkey, Malaysia, and Egypt, are described by Lombard as “firmly attached to their Islamic heritage” and “educated at the highest levels of the Western educational system (p. xv).

Two influential North American Traditional Islamic scholars are Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Hamza Yusuf (Yuskaev 2013). However, these celebrity scholars are in conversation with many others, such as Ingrid Mattson in Canada and Sachiko Murat in the United States.¹⁰ This scholarly conversation benefits from a global network that includes institutions such as Zaytuna College in the United States, Seekers Guidance in Canada, Cambridge Muslim College in the United Kingdom, the Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought in Jordan, and Ibn Haldun University in Turkey. It also includes academics working in secular Western universities. British Traditional Muslim scholar Abdal Hakim Murad (2020), also known as Timothy Winter, writes the following: “Western universities often seem to be better and safer habitats for Muslim research and creative thinking than their equivalents in the East” (p. 241). But tradition is not simply about discourse. It is also about community.

A good place to begin examining Traditional Islam, or any other globalised community, is from the core of the world-system, which has a disproportionate impact on the global peripheries. Since the end of World War II, the core of the core has been the United States of America. Although it may seem that in recent decades “the cycle of American hegemony in the world-system has entered into a terminal crisis” (Grosfoguel 2020), no other nation has come to rival the U.S. in terms of combined economic, political, military, and cultural power on a global scale. Brendan Newlon (2017) observes three major Muslim communities within the United States. These communities espouse different “contemporary Islamic religious modes”, each of which “represents a different response to the challenges of modernity.” Moreover, these modes do not “represent groups, schools, sects, orders, or denominations. Rather, they refer to the different ways contemporary Muslim communities understand Islam and relate to Islamic tradition” (p. 11). Newlon categorises these modes as “Neo-traditionalism, the Progressive-Muslims movement, and Salafism” (p. 10), which closely corresponds to the tripartite distinction between traditionalism, modernism, and funda-

mentalism. A clear advantage of Newlon's terminology is that it more closely corresponds to the self-representation of Muslims critical of tradition. Indeed, *Progressive Islam* and *Salafism* are less polemical than *modernism* and *fundamentalism*.

However, *Neotraditionalism* is not a term widely used by people associated with Traditional Islam. Newlon explains that he uses "the term 'traditional' when describing premodern phenomena and 'Neotraditional' to highlight the reaffirmation of tradition's value in the face of [modern] choices between traditional and alternative ways" (p. 11). To support his usage, he cites Abdullah bin Hamid Ali (2012), who explains that he identifies as a "neo-traditionalist" because "authentic traditionalism can only be known and practiced by those who have not been influenced by modern thinking." However, Ali (2012) concedes that "the case might be that the 'tradition' is simply dynamic and adjusts accordingly with the vicissitudes of time in those areas that are generally considered to be mutable." If this is indeed the case, the prefix *neo* seems superfluous. Besides, Newlon (2017, p. 23) acknowledges that most of his informants identify as *traditional*, although they understand his usage.

Newlon further explains that his research clearly identifies a community of voluntary association connected by a shared understanding that "the intellectual and social strategies developed by Muslim scholars in the past are also the most effective means of addressing modern challenges" (p. 54). According to this understanding, "tradition is not a static vision of perfect imitative repetition of the practices of the earliest generation" (p. 65) but "a recognition of an organic historical community process that considers traits of constancy as well as change as a healthy and necessary part of its lived expression" (p. 66). Since different contexts require different responses, "Muslims have historically embraced heterogeneity in many details of religious practice as the manifest miracle of God's revelation of a religion for all people and all times" (p. 67). In contrast, Newlon depicts "the Progressive-Muslims movement and Salafism" as "two antitraditional modes" despite their differences (p. 77).

Another of Newlon's valuable observations is that U.S. Americans are increasingly influential within transnational and even global Islamic networks (p. 53). This observation can be extended to Muslims living in other Western countries as well. From the core of the world-system, it is generally easier to influence global Islamic networks than from peripheralised regions, where it can be difficult to earn more than a dollar or two per day, access the head offices of global media outlets, or acquire entry visas to other countries. However, Muslims in Western countries such as the United States often turn to African or Asian countries in search of authentic lineages (Grewal 2014, pp. 177–346).

One international publication, based in Jordan, which can serve as an excellent entry point into the globalised Traditional Islamic discourse is *The Muslim 500: The World's 500 Most Influential Muslims* (Schleifer 2022). This yearly publication, favourable to Traditional Islam, is edited by a U.S. American Muslim, Sulayman Abdallah Schleifer. Ever since its first edition in 2009, it has included an article called *The House of Islam*,¹¹ which presents Traditional Islam, Islamic fundamentalism, and Islamic modernism as the three ideological currents in contemporary Islam. According to the article, "Traditional Islam represents 90% of the world's Muslims" and is "also known as Orthodox Islam" (Oliveti [2001] 2022). Moreover, it is presented as apolitical "and largely based on consensus of correct opinion—thus including the Sunni, Shi'a, and Ibadi branches of practice (and their subgroups) within the fold of Islam" (p. 32).

In contrast, Islamic fundamentalism is described as comprising highly politicised "movements within both the Shi'a and Sunni branches of Islam—characterised by aggressiveness and a reformist attitude toward traditional Islam." Fundamentalism is said to represent "9% of the world's Muslims" (p. 32). It includes the "Muslim Brotherhood", "Wahhabism/Salafism", and "Revolutionary Shi'ism", which is said to share "many similarities with Marxist revolutionary thought", but "is only practiced in Iran." Islamic modernism is summarily dismissed as a Westernised "reform movement started by politically-minded urbanites with scant knowledge of traditional Islam." However, the article asserts that

modernism only represents 1% of Muslims and “ is scorned by traditional Muslims and fundamentalists alike” (p. 35).¹²

Undoubtedly, the categorisation of Islamic ideologies offered in the *Muslim 500* is unfavourable to so-called fundamentalists and modernists. Moreover, no credible source is cited as evidence to support the percentages of the global Muslim population represented by each ideology. In any case, no amount of evidence could lead to an exact division of all Muslims into three neat ideological categories since many individuals are influenced by more than one school of thought. Despite these caveats, or rather precisely because of its clear positionality, *The House of Islam* represents an excellent primary source to observe how contemporary Islam is analysed in one of Traditional Islam’s global hubs. Indeed, the *Muslim 500* is published by the Jordan Royal Islamic Strategic Studies Centre, which is affiliated with the Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought. These organisations benefit from the patronage of the Jordanian royal family, whose members are sharifs. Publications from the Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought are clearly intended for the global community. For example, the *Muslim 500* is written in English. As the Jordanian Prince Ghazi Bin Muhammad (2014, p. 202) remarks, the way Islam is discussed in English is “central to the very future of Islam because 80% of all Muslims in the world cannot speak or read Arabic, and because more Muslims speak English than Arabic.”ou.

Another publication of the Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought is the *Amman Message* (2006), a declaration endorsed by over 500 Islamic scholars from around the world. It reproduces this general outline presented in the *House of Islam* (Oliveti [2001] 2022) with somewhat more inclusive language. King Abdallah II of Jordan first released the *Amman Message* as a statement in 2004. Within two years, he was able to convince most of the extremely divided global Islamic leadership to unite under a consensual enterprise. They came to a historically unprecedented agreement defining who is a Muslim, who is an apostate, and who is entitled to issue Islamic rulings or opinions (fatwas). Only a small minority of those around the world who identify as Muslims are not encompassed by this broad consensual declaration, which makes it impermissible to accuse of apostasy anybody who adheres to the recognised schools of Sunni, Shia, and Ibadī jurisprudence, follows any of the classical theological schools, practises “real *Tasawwuf* (Sufism)” or “subscribes to true *Salafi* thought.” Paradoxically, implying that *unreal* Sufis and *untrue* Salafis might be apostates probably helped gather the endorsements of certain important clerics unwilling to abandon all their reservations about rival schools. Moreover, the declaration asserts that “there exists more in common between the various schools of Islamic jurisprudence than there is difference between them.” Disagreement about secondary issues is described as “a mercy”.

The widespread endorsement of the *Amman Message* may indicate that a Traditional Islamic consensus on the broad contours of Islamic adherence has triumphed internationally on an elite institutional level, but there does not appear to be any consensus about specifics. Yet, this tension is perfectly acceptable for those who position themselves as the continuators of a classical Islamic culture of ambiguity (Bauer [2011] 2021). Murad (2014) writes the following:

Those who come to Islam because they wish to draw closer to God have no problem with a multiform Islam radiating from a single revealed paradigmatic core. But those who come to Islam seeking an identity will find the multiplicity of traditional Muslim cultures intolerable. People with confused identities are attracted to totalitarian solutions. And today, many young Muslims feel so threatened by the diversity of calls on their allegiance, and by the sheer complexity of modernity, that the only form of Islam they can regard as legitimate is a totalitarian, monolithic one.

Perhaps the greatest challenge of Traditional Islam is to remain relevant in an age of confused identities and militant ideologies. After all, the modern/colonial periphery is unsafe, and its inhabitants often suffer from insecurity and alienation. An understandable sense of urgency underlies the sometimes-frenetic activism of certain Muslims. Yet, the

gravity of the modern condition requires greater calm and prudence than ever from a Traditional Islamic perspective. Muslims are believed to “need an Islamic state of mind more than an Islamic state” (Yusuf 2011). They need to fill their hearts “with affection, respect, tolerance, and reconciliation. This inner reform, which is the traditional competence of Sufism, is a precondition for the restoration of unity and decency in the Islamic movement” (Winter 2004, p. 294). Naturally, this approach utterly rejects the persistent trope that Sufis are responsible for the decline of Islamic civilisation (Sirriyeh [1999] 2013).

Still, political prudence can be interpreted as quietism, tolerance as the acceptance of corruption, pluralism as disunity, and the suprarational truth claims of Sufism as superstition bred by charlatans. While the global Traditional Islamic community encompasses people with diverse political views, even those engaged in “sacred activism” (Walid 2018) tend to prioritise problem-solving through patient and respectful deliberation. This generally entails tolerating less-than-ideal sociopolitical conditions and seeking the lesser evil rather than fighting to build a modernist or fundamentalist utopia. Guénon, and those who agree with his trenchant critique of modernity and progress (Sedgwick 2004a), can be perceived as idealizing the past, and rejecting much of what is good in modernity (Legenhausen 2002). However, Guénon accepts that certain products of modernity can be beneficial, especially technological advancements. His argument is simply that these advantages are outweighed by the disadvantages of modernity, which include the increasing probability of an apocalyptic global cataclysm (Guénon [1927] 2001, p. 47).

Certain Traditional Muslims inspired by Guénon believe in soteriological pluralism, the controversial notion that many traditions offer effective paths to salvation and spiritual enlightenment today. Guénon (2009) writes of a purely metaphysical primordial tradition that “is the primary source and the common foundation of all particular traditional forms” (p. 113). This notion is sometimes labelled *Perennialism*, in reference to the *philosophia perennis* (perennial philosophy), a term coined in sixteenth-century Italy to describe the belief that religions and philosophy share a common origin (Sedgwick 2004a, pp. 23–24). Perennialism has been accused of projecting Eurocentric conceptions of universal truth onto the diverse worldviews of peripheralised peoples in the modern/colonial world-system, a critique worthy of serious reflection (Lipton 2018). However, the belief that One Absolute Reality underlies, and indeed produces, the diversity of the phenomenal world has been held by many people outside the West, including Muslims, since well before the modern/colonial period.

Perhaps a more stinging critique from a Traditional Islamic perspective is that “any Muslim who subscribes to any form of universalism is departing from what is generally accepted to be the consensus of Islam” (Sedgwick 2004a, p. 271). Soteriological pluralism has been firmly rejected by none other than the U.S. American Sufi Shaykh of the Hâshimî Darqâwî Shâdhilî Order, Nuh Ha Mim Keller (1996), who lives in Amman Jordan. Other Traditional Muslims are more ambivalent. After rejecting the belief that other religious traditions “retain a validity of practice to this day”, Yusuf (2005) writes the following

The Perennialist Muslims in the West constitute a highly educated cadre largely made up of converts, who have done some of the finest work on Islamic materials and have presented Islam in a beautiful and illuminating manner that has made it accessible to people it would normally not have reached, and with an aesthetic and intellectual dimension that is sorely absent from many of the mainstream efforts. In spite of the aforementioned concerns, to dismiss their noble endeavours is unconscionable and mean-spirited.

(pp. 56–57)

Debates about soteriological pluralism are understandable given the importance of salvation in Islamic theology. Nevertheless, it should be noted that despite the controversy surrounding them, Traditional Muslim Perennialists represent a minority current in the West and among Westernised elites outside the West (Sedgwick 2004a, pp. 241–62).

In the end, it is important to remember that Muslims are not only motivated by intellectual or doctrinal debates. They are also driven by social, economic, political, cultural,

and even aesthetic concerns. For instance, a young Muslim may be impressed by the way people in a given religious circle dress, decorate their homes, recite the Quran, chant, or use perfume oils. While it is impossible to credibly quantify the exact proportion of the global Islamic community (Arabic: *umma*) that Traditional Islam represents, trends can be observed based on such quantifiable measures as book sales, visits to websites, attendance of events, and enrolment in educational programs. Newlon (2017) has thoroughly analysed these trends among Muslims in the United States by applying a “novel three-part theoretical approach to identifying the center and boundaries of any community through analysis of its social discourse, networks, and aesthetics” (p. ix). According to his findings, “the individuals who express one discursive position on a contended topic happen to be the same individuals who associate within one network and use the same set of aesthetic symbols to express a communal identity” (p. 10).

Applying Newlon’s method to global networks would be a valuable but perhaps too ambitious task, considering the enormous linguistic, cultural, and geographical diversity of the world’s approximately two billion Muslims. Nevertheless, there is sufficient evidence to confirm the existence of Traditional Islam as a globalised community whose discourse, networks, and aesthetics continue to attract multitudes of enthusiasts. It is also possible to confirm that Traditional Islam is contested for a variety of reasons, including the perception that it breeds superstition and that its proponents are too close to corrupt global and national elites. Perhaps this perception is connected to increasing Muslim intolerance of complexity and ambiguity, but surely it is also informed by real contradictions between proposed ideals and lived experience. Traditional Muslims could better address the ambivalence many Muslims feel towards them in places such as Morocco.

3. Morocco as a Hub

Morocco is one of several hubs¹³ of globalised Traditional Islam. Other hubs include Jordan and Egypt, which has also been a major hub for fundamentalist and modernist Islam.¹⁴ In Morocco, all three of these currents are active, but official religious policy promotes Traditional Islam, situating the kingdom in continuity with the land’s central position in the Western Islamicate well before the foundation of the current dynasty in 1666 or the nation-state in 1956.

Of course, any Islamic hub must be understood in relation to the Hijaz region of the Arabian Peninsula, where Mecca and Medina are located. Symbolically, Mecca is the centre of the world¹⁵ and Medina is the model Islamic city (Nomachi and Nasr 1997; Skali [2006] 2014, pp. 36–40).¹⁶ However, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which now rules over the sacred cities, does not represent all Muslims. Founded in 1932, this state is named after the ruling *Āl Sa‘ūd* family. Until recently, the dominant religious current in the land was the rigid doctrine of Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb (1703–1792). Known as Wahhābism, this doctrine considers most people who identify as Muslim to be infidels. Predictably, this alienates many Muslims. However, the Saudi government has publicly distanced itself from Wahhābism recently, and every year, millions of pilgrims continue to visit the two holiest cities of Islam.

In Morocco, Fes is traditionally understood as a reflection of the Medinan model. King Idrīs II (791–828) founded the city circa 808. His father, Idrīs I (745–791), established the Idrīsīd dynasty (*al-Idrīsīyyūn*), which ruled over much of the northern and Atlantic region of present-day Morocco from circa 788 to circa 985. These monarchs were sharifs. Idrīs I came to the Western frontier of the early Islamicate fleeing persecution from the ‘Abbāsīd Caliphate (*al-‘Abbāsīyyūn*, 750–1258) centred in Baghdad. To this day, Fes is known as the spiritual and cultural centre of Morocco (Skali [2006] 2014; Burckhardt [1960] 1992). And although his capital is now Rabat, a sharif is still king. Whereas Medina is the resting place of the Prophet, his companions, and his family, Fes is the resting place of Idrīs II and multitudes of sharifs and saints. By symbolically inheriting its sacred status from the Medinan model, Fes helps make Morocco a Traditional Islamic hub (Skali [2006] 2014).

But present-day Morocco was already a strategic intersection in the development of Islam west of Mecca before the foundation of Fes or even the arrival of Idrīs I. The Arab general, ‘Uqba ibn Nâfi’ (circa 622–circa 683), is remembered as the first Muslim to reach the shores of the Atlantic, in 682. From there, Muslims could only move northwards into Europe or southwards across the Sahara. In 711, an Amazigh convert to Islam named Ṭâriq ibn Ziyâd (670–720) led an army into the Iberian Peninsula. With the support of many Iberian Jews and Christians hostile to the ruling Germanic Visigoths, Ibn Ziyâd was able to defeat King Roderick (688–711) and cross the Pyrenees into Lyon within a year. This marked the beginning of an Iberian civilisation called *al-Andalus*, which flourished under Muslim rule for 781 years until 1492 (El Hareir 2011).

Described by the medieval Saxon nun Hroswitha (circa 935–circa 1000) as “the ornament of the world”, al-Andalus is remembered as a place where Muslims, Christians, and Jews produced incredible achievements in urban development, architecture, literature, philosophy, science, medicine, technology, art, and mysticism (Menocal 2002). However, al-Andalus was also plagued by long periods of civil strife and wars, during which it must be noted that Muslim and Christian rulers often became allies against their coreligionists. It was neither a place of perpetual inter-religious harmony nor one of constant jihad and crusading. Arguably, its magnificence was born of the creative tension between conflict and cosmopolitan pluralism (p. 11). Moreover, it is important to correct the colonial narrative that portrays Northwest Africa as peripheral to the European Islamic civilisation of al-Andalus.¹⁷ Indeed, “it is better to view the entire Islamic West—al-Andalus, the Maghrib, Muslim Sicily, and parts of West Africa—as a single, relatively unified cultural entity.” Developments in the Western Islamicate also “had profound effects on the rest of the Islamic world” (Cornell 1998, p. xxiv).

Whereas soldiers initially spread Islam across North Africa to the Atlantic coast and up into Iberia, indigenous Amazigh merchants carried Islam southwards across the Sahara. Islam spread very slowly and relatively peacefully in West Africa, from the eighth century until the religious wars of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Over this long period, Islamic scholars proficient in Arabic and other local languages developed a highly sophisticated religious, intellectual, and cultural tradition that is often characterised as peripheral to Islamic civilisation by outsiders. However, West African Islam has long been firmly inscribed within the broader Western Islamic normative¹⁸ tradition and is well connected to pan-Islamic networks (Kane 2016; Ware 2014).

Western Islam only emerged as a distinct tradition around the eleventh century, after several Islamic currents had competed for over three centuries to gain hegemony in the region, especially Khârijīs, Isma‘îlīs, Ḥanafīs, and Mâlikīs (M’Baye 2011, pp. 311–19).¹⁹ Moreover, the Western Islamic tradition was connected to a developing pan-Islamic tradition sometimes called “Sunni internationalism” (Hodgson 1974, pp. 255–92), but whose adherents more commonly identify as *ahl al-sunna wa al-jamâ’a* (the people of the way and the community). This broader tradition represents an attempt by a wide range of Islamic scholars to preserve unity among Muslims by rejecting sectarianism and promoting internal pluralism, a process that entails agreeing upon basic precepts and accepting differences of opinion on secondary matters.

Islamic tradition can be understood as an inspired dynamic flow from the past into the present and future (Sparkes 2020). This flow, which is neither fully conservative nor progressive, comprises unique ways of being, knowing and behaving. Different levels of tradition, from the local to the pan-Islamic, can be visualised as overlapping concentric circles. A recognisable overarching circle, called Islam, also includes Shia traditions. Islam has itself developed in constant dynamic interaction with non-Islamic traditions, such as Christianity, Judaism, and Hellenic philosophy. In short, the Western Islamic tradition is one of many regional Islamic traditions, each of which is distinct but always contested and in movement. Each level of tradition encompasses many sub-traditions, ethnicities, languages, cultures, and ways of understanding reality.

The Western Islamic tradition is centred around four elements, the first of which is sharifism (Sebti 1999). Since the earliest days of Islam, most Muslims have venerated the family of the Prophet Muḥammad. Although this veneration inspires a wide array of artistic and cultural expressions, it seems to contradict the egalitarian message of Islam, according to movements such as the Khârijîs in the early period of Islam or the many contemporary modernist, reformist, or revivalist Sunnis who associate sharifism with Shiism²⁰ (Nasr 2006, pp. 59–61). Yet, the main historical difference between Sunni and Shia Islam has not been about venerating the Prophet's family, but about whether they alone are entitled to rule Muslims politically. Many Sunnis who accept non-sharifian political leaders also accept or prefer sharifian rule, as exemplified by the Sunni sharifian monarchy in Morocco. While there are marginalised sharifs in the Western Islamicate, the historical imprint of the Idrîsid dynasty has resulted in the general association of sharifism with worldly power more than dissent. In contrast, Shia currents in Asia have evolved in the political periphery in most periods and places. When observing sharifism in Northwest Africa, one would be hard-pressed to observe anything like the deep sorrow dramatically expressed in Twelver Shia commemorations of the martyrdom of the Prophet Muḥammad's grandson, Ḥusayn ibn 'Alî (626–680), in places such as Iran and Iraq. Nor can one observe as many ecstatic celebrations as the ones regularly held at the mausoleums of eminent sharifs in Egypt (Hoffman-Ladd 1992). Such scenes occur in Northwest Africa, but the mood is usually more restrained. Idrîs I set the precedent for sharifian rule. He was considered a saint and a wise king, but not all his descendants are automatically considered saints or members of the governing class. Sharifs perpetuate the Prophet's blessed bloodline, whereas saints perpetuate his spirituality, scholars his knowledge, warriors his courage, and the same logic applies to all other Islamic fields of specialization. But being a sharif confers an extra level of prestige and auspiciousness on any type of specialist.²¹

A Moroccan scholar named 'Abd al-Wâhid Ibn Aḥmad Ibn 'Alî Ibn 'Âshir (circa 1582–circa 1631) famously summarised the other three major elements of the Western Islamic tradition as “the Doctrine of Imam Ash'arî, the Jurisprudence of Imam Mâlik, and the Inner Path of Imam Junayd, The Traveler” (Ali 2014, p. 8). Abû al-Ḥasan al-Ash'arî (circa 873/874–circa 935/936) was an Arab scholar whose theological school gradually came to dominate the Sunni tradition. Known as the scholar of Medina, Mâlik ibn Anâs (circa 711–795) founded the school of jurisprudence whose book *al-Muwattâ'* (the Approved) is the oldest surviving compendium of Islamic law. He emphasised practise over theory and disliked needless speculation (al-Ta'wîl 2014, p. 13). Sober realism and practise also characterise the Junaydi school of Sufism, referred to by Ibn 'Âshir. Indeed, Abû al-Qâsim al-Junayd (830–910) of Baghdad was known for his asceticism and temperance. By describing Junayd as “the Traveller”, Ibn 'Âshir was referring to the practice of Sufism as an orthodox methodology, a path to be travelled with discipline.

Sharifism, Mâlikî jurisprudence, Ash'arî theology, and Junaydî Sufism all exist elsewhere, but they converge mostly west of Mecca. Around this normative consensus, a whole variety of traditions and customs have flourished, including ways of speaking, moving, working, eating, loving, singing, washing, dressing, and all the other aspects that comprise the rich tapestry of daily life. Naturally, many Muslims in Morocco and elsewhere in the Islamic West reject aspects of this consensus. However, the normative tradition is influential enough that all other positions have historically evolved in relation to it, even if this relation is one of dissent or opposition. For instance, many Sufis in the Western Islamicate are reputed to experience strong states of spiritual 'drunkenness' or 'intoxication' (*sakr*) in contrast to the sobriety (*ṣahw*) of Junayd.²² In Sufi terminology, drunkenness and sobriety metaphorically describe some of the spiritual states experienced by scholars, hermits, wanderers, housekeepers, farmers, merchants, or anybody else with the potential for sainthood. Various typologies have been developed to categorise the countless saints in countries such as Morocco (Cornell 1998) or even just the city of Fes (Skali [2006] 2014). But the empirical reality is more fluid than any typology, as is observable in the often complementary and mutually respectful ways that members of Sufi Orders, mosques, and madrasas interact

with socially non-conformist ecstatic saints who live outside the framework of institutions (Dickson and Sharify-Funk 2017, pp. 112–21). In many regards, ecstatic Sufis resemble Shakespearean wise fools who keep institutional leaders in check.

Likewise, the Sufi lodge (*zâwiya* or *ribât*) came to represent a powerful institution counterbalancing other institutions once a Western Islamic tradition had emerged (Cornell 1998, pp. 34–40). Usually connected to a mosque and a madrasa (school), the Sufi lodge served as a centre of basic learning for all types of Islamic sciences and played a pivotal role in the ongoing spread of normative Islam in rural and urban areas. Lodges are affiliated with orders founded by famous Sufis. For instance, Abû Madyan Shu'ayb (circa 1115–1198), known as the Junayd of the West, is connected to the Qâdiriyya Sufi order, named after the great Sufi of Baghdad, 'Abd al-Qâdir al-Jîlanî (1077–1166).²³ Other important Junaydî Sufis of the Maghrib include 'Abd al-Salâm Ibn Mashîsh (circa 1140–circa 1227, sometimes referred to as Ibn Bashîsh) and his successor, Abû al-Ḥasan al-Shâdhilî (circa 1196/1197–1258), after whom one of the most widespread Sufi Orders in the world, the Shâdhiliyya, is named (Geoffroy 2005). Both Ibn Mashîsh and Shâdhilî were sharifs through the lineage of Idrîs I. They embodied the emerging Western Islamic convergence of sharifism and the Mâlîkî-Ash'arî-Junaydî consensus.

In addition to pursuing spiritual illumination and deep experiential knowledge of metaphysical realities (Cornell 1998, pp. 54–62), Junaydî Sufis in the Western Islamicate were greatly concerned with codes of chivalry (Arabic: *futuwwa*) that encourage “humility and a total devotion to the service of others” (p. 26). Sufis dedicated themselves to ascetic practices and spent long periods in isolation, but many also tried to contribute to their community as compassionate servants and tough critics of injustice. This worldly engagement frequently led to tensions between Sufis and the political, economic, and religious elites they tended to criticize. It also led to certain Sufi lodges playing a central role in the anti-colonial jihad against European invaders, sometimes without the approval of monarchs pursuing more pacific diplomatic policies. Anti-colonial struggles led by Sufis began in the fifteenth century, in present-day Morocco, from where they slowly spread across Northwest Africa following the pace of the invaders.

However, Sufism emerged from the colonial period with much less popular support in Morocco. After five centuries of resistance to European military and economic pressure, Morocco officially became a protectorate in 1912. Until 1956, most of Morocco was governed by France, but much of the northern coast, as well as the southern Sahara region, were governed by Spain, and Tangier was jointly governed by Britain, France, Spain, and, at times, other European powers. The protectorate was a de facto colonisation (Laroui 1970, pp. 269–346), but the authorities were perpetually faced with revolts and insurrections.

Secular and Salafi nationalists came to replace Sufis at the forefront of the anti-colonial struggle during the protectorate (Julien [1978] 2011, pp. 152–58). Influenced by Egyptian Salafism, many scholars worked to marginalise Sufism in the curriculum of al-Qarawîyyîn University in Fes. In the Northern Moroccan Rif region, a Salafi Amazigh leader named Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Karîm al-Khattâbî (circa 1882–1963) led a vigorous jihad against the Spanish between 1920 and 1926 (Julien [1978] 2011, pp. 120–27; Zaki and Charqi 2008, pp. 281–89). In contrast, the first French Resident-General in Morocco, Louis-Hubert Gonzalve Lyautey (1854–1934), presented himself as the champion of the monarchy, aristocracy, and traditional institutions that he perceived as timeless, static, and essentially non-French. During his mandate as the de facto governor of Morocco, which lasted from 1912 to 1925, he sought to co-opt and pacify Sufi orders and other traditional institutions. His traditionalism was very much a form of Orientalist folklorisation. While Moroccans occupied themselves with their allegedly timeless customs, the French could assume control of the emerging modern economic and political institutions serving the interests of the colonial metropole (Julien [1978] 2011, pp. 95–128; Rivet 2012, pp. 306–10).

As traditional Islamic institutions came under the protection of the colonial regime, many Moroccans came to see Salafism as a newer, less corrupt form of indigenous resistance. At the same time, many members of the French-educated Moroccan elite became

progressively convinced that they were just as qualified as the French to modernise and manage the country (Rivet 2012, pp. 312–16). They often internalised colonial stereotypes, constructing Arabic and Tamazight as languages spoken by the allegedly quaint but ignorant masses, whose customs include Sufi rituals. In 1946, a moderate Salafi politician named ‘Allâl al Fâsî (1910–1974) became the leader of the new Independence Party, which played a crucial role in ending the protectorate (Sirriyeh [1999] 2013, pp. 107–8). The new elites no longer tended to seek guidance in traditional Islamic institutions such as Sufi lodges.

Today, Sufism has regained a level of popularity among Moroccan elites as a “safe” alternative to militant Salafism. Since the Global War on Terror was declared by the United States in 2001, state-sponsorship of Sufism, pitting Sufism as “good” apolitical Islam opposed to “bad” political Islam, has been a policy increasingly employed by Morocco and several other countries, including Algeria, Pakistan, Russia, and the United Kingdom (Muedini 2015).²⁴ There are justifiable reasons for Moroccans to think Sufi institutions are allied with power and corrupt bureaucracies. Political instrumentalization and co-optation of Sufism by modern nation-states can be traced to the colonial practices of figures such as Lyautey. Today, in countries such as Morocco and Egypt, the state manages Islamic institutions, including Sufi orders, mosques, and even the famed Azhar and Qarawîyyîn universities. In premodern Islamic societies, education “was neither the province nor the jurisdiction of any political power.” Rulers could attempt to gain political support within educational institutions by making generous donations, “but this never, under any circumstance, meant that these rulers, as rulers, could decide on the substance of educational material, who is to fashion it, and how to teach it, all of which always remained at the hands of private scholars” (Hallaq 2018, p. 76). Moreover, rulers might punish a scholar or religious figure for threatening their political authority, but this only helped delineate institutional spheres of competence. Such a separation of powers is harder to find within what has survived of Islamdom in the modern/colonial period (Hallaq 2013). Indeed, in most Muslim-majority societies today, “classically trained Islamic scholars are government employees dismissed by many Muslims as the illegitimate mouthpieces of brutal regimes” (Grewal 2014, p. 181).

Contemporary religious policy in Morocco attempts to balance pro-Western modernism, traditionalism, and even so-called fundamentalism. As Commander of the Believers, the King is the official arbitrator between the various factions within the nation, including parties generally identified in Moroccan political discourse as *Islamist* (Fadil 2022). However, such parties must accept the King’s authority to be officially recognised.²⁵ For instance, the religiously conservative Justice and Development Party governed Morocco from 2011 to 2021. However, in terms of religious policy, any semblance of fundamentalism is at best tolerated by the monarch, to avoid any perception that the Kingdom is associated with terrorism and militant extremism. After all, the King’s sovereignty is legitimised through Western Islamic traditions such as sharifism, but he reigns over an elite primarily composed of a modernist Francophile bourgeoisie and a managerial class within the state structure inherited from the French.

Morocco’s political and economic interests are served by a religious policy that consolidates its strategic position as a regional and global hub of Traditional Islam. As part of this “religious diplomacy”, the Mohammed VI Institute was established in 2015 to train Islamic scholars and Imams in Mâlikî jurisprudence, Ash’arî theology, and Sunni (or Junaydî) Sufism (Baylocq and Hlaoua 2016). Students come principally from Northwest Africa, but also from France and several other countries around the world.

Another result of Morocco’s religious policy is the revival of Fes as not only the spiritual capital of Morocco but also a sacred regional and global centre, by promoting “religious”, “spiritual”, and “cultural” tourism (Info Tourisme Maroc 2022). In 2011, an international summit was held in Fes by the British organisation Radical Middle Way. It was attended by several religious leaders and scholars who are highly influential within globalised Traditional Islamic circles, such as the Yemeni Shaykh Al-Habib Umar Bin Hafiz,

the Mauritanian Shaykh Abdullah Bin Bayyah, the Bosnian Mufti Mustafa Ceric, and the British Shaykh Abdal Hakim Murad, as well as several Moroccan Sufis and scholars. During this gathering, a movie (Suleman 2012) was produced in which images of these Traditional Islamic leaders visiting the city are accompanied by the music of Ensemble Ibn Arabi, known for presenting the classical Sufi music and poetry of Morocco to international audiences. Moreover, the following two annual festivals with a global reach are held in the city: the Fes Festival of World Sacred Music and the Fès Festival of Sufi Culture. Festivalgoers from around the world can also explore the labyrinthic walkways of the Medina of Fes, a UNESCO World Heritage Site that showcases Morocco's traditional craftsmanship and architecture.

A refined aesthetic developed over centuries in Fes and other Moroccan cities is promoted through globalised networks. Through this process, local Sufi music has become commodified as a form of world music (El Asri and Vuilleminot 2010), and jellabas (a full robe with a hood) have become a typical attire for women and men within the globalised Traditional Islamic community. Indeed, while Fes is marketed to non-Muslims and Westernised Muslim modernists, it remains an Islamic city. The medina's mosques, madrasas, Sufi lodges, and mausoleums are only accessible to Muslims, including a steady flow of Sufis who come to visit the tomb of the Sufi Aḥmad al-Tijānī (1737–1815), whose eponymous Tijāniyya Order is especially widespread in West Africa. By cultivating these transnational and global Islamic networks, the Kingdom reinforces its solid diplomatic relations with countries such as Senegal (Sambe 2010) and Jordan.

In 2016, Morocco followed Jordan's example by taking the lead in inviting Islamic scholars and government officials to endorse a declaration proposing a pan-Islamic legal framework. The Marrakesh Declaration (2016) seeks to guarantee the rights of "religious minorities in predominantly Muslim lands."²⁶ As allies promoting Traditional Islam globally, Morocco and Jordan are competing with much wealthier countries supporting other currents, such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar, or Iran.²⁷ Yet, they garner broad international support for initiatives promoting an inclusive, pluralistic vision of Islam. Traditional Islam is even gaining increasing official recognition in wealthy Gulf states such as the United Arab Emirates (al-Azami 2019). Such efforts arguably represent signs of an internal decolonisation of Islam through a revivification of tradition, but there are reasons to remain suspicious of politics on such a grand scale. Those who prepared and endorsed the two declarations may be sincere, but their words must also be understood in the context of the Global War on Terror and the ongoing pressure on Muslims to please the more politically powerful West (Horsford 2018; Markiewicz 2018; Browsers 2011). Moreover, peaceful declarations need to be accompanied by corresponding actions. Otherwise, people whose rights are violated by corrupt Muslim elites will tend to consider such declarations to be nothing more than toothless formalism.

4. Islamic Ideals and Muslim Experiences

Like Jordan, Egypt, and several other countries officially promoting Traditional Islam as an apolitical and moderate global current, Morocco suffers from enormous class differences. Typically, imams, Quran reciters, Sufis, calligraphers, poets, carpet weavers, cooks, incense makers, and others perpetuating diverse Moroccan traditions cannot afford tickets to fancy festivals or understand enough English to read the *Muslim 500*. Contrary to Faouzi Skali, who founded both the Fès Festival of Sufi Culture and the Fes Festival of World Sacred Music, most Moroccans have not studied in France or read Guénon. Unilingual speakers of Arabic or Tamazight cannot access the cosmopolitan socioeconomic circles of the notoriously corrupt and nepotistic French-speaking Moroccan elite (Benhaddou 1997). Members of this elite do not suffer the daily indignities of compatriots living towards the bottom of the modern/colonial hierarchy, described by one Moroccan intellectual as a global *humiliocracy* (Elmandjra 2003, p. 9).

Proponents of Traditional Islam in Morocco face a credibility problem when they are closely associated with national elites, or a heavy-handed state plagued by corruption. For

example, Skali is a disciple of the Moroccan Bûdshishiyya Order, which is very closely connected to the state (Sedgwick 2004b). Another disciple, Ahmed Toufiq, has been Minister of Religious Endowments and Islamic Affairs since 2002. Proximity to power may have helped the impressive spread of the Bûdshishiyya Order in the Kingdom and to an extent in French-speaking areas such as France or Quebec, but it is surely not an advantage when addressing anybody with a negative view of Morocco's ruling elite. This is a challenge for the many intellectuals associated with the Order, including the late anthropologist Zakia Zouanat (1957–2012) and the philosopher Abdurrahman Taha, whose oeuvre was recently introduced to English readers by Wael Hallaq (2019). It is notable that Skali, Zouanat, and Taha all pursued university studies in France.

As did all the major modern/colonial powers, the French established a cultural/linguistic hierarchy that continues to produce a widespread sense of alienation in ex-colonies. In Morocco, I have been told countless times that it is preferable to be misunderstood and humiliated by a foreign occupier than by locals acting like foreigners. The general population simply does not recognise itself in the culture of the dominant class. At the same time, Westernised Muslim elites represent a liminal population never fully accepted into the colonial core whose interests and sensibilities they generally share. American anthropologist Rabinow ([1977] 1984) writes about "Frenchified Moroccan intellectuals; half torn out of their own ill-understood traditions and afflicted with a heightened and unhappy self-consciousness" (p. 143). Although Rabinow conducted his Moroccan fieldwork in 1968 and 1969, his words are still relevant.

To be clear, I am in no way arguing that Moroccans should feel guilty for speaking French or accessing any cultural heritage they wish. Contrarily to Lyautey, I do not believe they should be frozen in a folkloric pseudo-tradition and isolated from the global community. Like Rabinow ([1977] 1984), I recognise that there is "a class of Moroccans who have successfully played a mediating role between the French and their own community without succumbing to the debilitating confusion that usually accompanies the colonial presence" (p. 23). Moreover, cultures are not impermeable. Many Moroccans follow the example of premodern predecessors such as Moroccan explorer Ibn Baṭṭûta (1304–circa 1368/69 or 1377) and allow themselves to be transformed through contact with foreign cultures while remaining respectful of their own internally diverse heritage. For better or for worse, French, Portuguese, and Spanish cultural elements can no longer be considered foreign in Morocco. Cultural decolonisation requires challenging the power dynamics associated with this reality, not rejecting history. But the decolonial process is unfinished in Morocco and globally. This prevents many Muslims who are fully immersed in local and regional traditions from recognising themselves in globalised communities such as Traditional Islam.

Traditional Islam in Morocco is not only challenged by class divisions but also racial ones. Anti-black racism has plagued the Kingdom for centuries, especially since the racialisation of the early modern slave trade (El Hamel 2013). Moroccans racialised as black are marginalised, as are many visitors, foreign students, and migrants. West African students at the Mohammed VI Institute and disciples of the Tijâniyya Order visiting Fes may become targets of racism, especially if they are mistaken for irregular migrants trying to enter Europe. Under the auspices of Europe's externalised border policy, such migrants are repressed by Moroccan security forces and socially marginalised (Stock 2019). This counteracts the impact of official religious policy and the diplomatic goals of the Kingdom within Africa.

Muslim traditionalists need to reflect deeply on how migrants and refugees fit into the Islamic tradition. After all, the first group of persecuted Muslims to seek refuge was welcomed by a dark-skinned African king in Abyssinia, even before the early Muslim community migrated from Mecca to Medina. The Kingdom of Morocco traces its origins to a sharif fleeing persecution in his homeland. Moroccans and other North Africans offered refuge to Muslims as well as Jews fleeing genocide in al-Andalus. Sufi zawiyas welcomed migrants and travellers such as Ibn Baṭṭûta throughout the precolonial Islamicate

world. Today, Sub-Saharan migrants, many of whom are Muslim, are insulted, kidnapped, tortured, and even enslaved by people who identify as Muslim throughout the lands of Northern Africa (UNHCR 2020). Proponents of Traditional Islam could do more to reclaim their traditions of service to refugee and migrant populations if they truly believe Allah is watching how they are responding to this global tragedy. This is not simply a Moroccan or African problem. The many Western Muslims connected to traditional Moroccan lineages such as the Shâdhiliyya (Geoffroy 2005, pp. 453–99) might better utilise their position within the global system to help find solutions to this humanitarian catastrophe.

Discourses on tradition endorsed by national and global elites need to confront the conditions under which so many Africans—including Moroccans—are willing to die in the Mediterranean to escape poverty and humiliation, but also to send money home.²⁸ After all, the most important global hubs of Traditional Islam are relatively poor countries such as Morocco and Jordan. In contrast, modernism is centred in the wealthy core and fundamentalism in the petro-monarchies of the Arabian Gulf.²⁹ A Moroccan scholar working in a Western university or in the Gulf typically makes a much higher salary than one working in the kingdom's traditional Islamic educational institutions. It is also hard for Moroccan religious media, such as Mohammed VI Radio for the Holy Qur'an and Mohammed VI Television Channel for the Holy Qur'an, to compete with the very well-financed Islamic media outlets of the Gulf region. The contemporary global distribution of wealth does not benefit Traditional Islamic hubs. Consequently, Traditional Islam in places such as Morocco finds itself in the ambiguous position of being perceived as instrumentalised by Westernised elites but offering access neither to these elites nor to the West, nor even to the Gulf region.

As Muslims debate how to respond to the challenges of Western-centric colonial modernity, their diverse traditions of being, knowing, and behaving continue to be threatened by the powerfully homogenising forces of globalisation. Indeed, the modern/colonial world-system threatens not only how Muslims and other peripheralised human communities live, but the very survival of most earthly life forms. Since we represent over a quarter of humanity, Muslims are indispensable to the success of the global decolonial effort that seeks to stop the genocidal and ecocidal system of death and preserve life in all its diversity. Global survival cannot afford the loss of diversity within the *umma* that results from capitulating to the hegemonic ways of the West or escaping into an imagined past. Traditionalist critiques of modernism and fundamentalism eloquently, if sometimes simplistically, formulate this basic contention. However, negative perceptions about local Islamic traditions as well as globalised Traditional Islam need to be confronted in places such as Morocco. This will require acknowledging how the harsh daily experiences of Muslims contrast with idealised, romantic, exotic, or folkloric approaches to tradition, whose genealogies can be more directly traced to Lyauté than Idris I.

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Notes

- ¹ The Quran translation used is that of the Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought (Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought 2019).
- ² Decolonial world-systems analysts (Grosfoguel 2011; Grosfoguel and Cervantes-Rodriguez 2002) refer to the contemporary global system dominated by the West as simultaneously modern and colonial rather than postmodern and neocolonial because, from a peripheralised perspective, the continuities within the system are more relevant than its reconfigurations. Different intellectual justifications and political strategies have been used for centuries to peripheralise Muslims and other colonised peoples; however, the colonial logic remains constant. One decolonial theorist puts it bluntly: "During the last 510 years of the 'Capitalist/Patriarchal Westerncentric/Christian-centric Modern/Colonial World-System', we went from the 16th Century 'christianise or I shoot you', to the 19th Century 'civilise or I shoot you', to the 20th Century 'develop or I shoot you', to the late 20th Century 'neoliberalise or I shoot you', and to the early 21st century 'democratise or I shoot you'" (Grosfoguel 2011, p. 28).

- ³ The term *Islamicate* was coined by Marshall Hodgson. He explains that the term refers to “a culture, centred on a lettered tradition, which has been historically distinctive of Islamdom the society, and which has been naturally shared in by both Muslims and non-Muslims who participate at all fully in the society of Islamdom.” This usage restricts “the term ‘Islam’ to the religion of the Muslims, not using that term for the far more general phenomena, the society of Islamdom and its Islamicate cultural tradition” (Hodgson 1974, p. 58). Here, the term *Islamicate* is used “in its most inclusive sense, to refer to the dynamic mosaic of social and cultural life forms that exist not only in Muslim-majority societies, but also in diasporic Muslim communities” (Siavash et al. 2017, p. 2).
- ⁴ All Arabic terms are transliterated into Roman characters, in italics, using a simplified version of the Library of Congress System. However, proper names are given without italics, and words now incorporated into the common English lexicon, such as *Sunni* or *Shia*, are spelt using their English forms. This applies to certain proper nouns, which are commonly transliterated differently. For example, when citing an author, I favour the transcription used in the official citation—e.g., ‘Zakia Zouanat’, not ‘Zakiyyah Zuwânât’. Furthermore, the article *al* is omitted from proper names after their first mention in the text—e.g., al-Junayd is subsequently referred to as Junayd.
- ⁵ One linguistic convention important to Muslims is the traditional practice of including a prayer for the Prophet Muḥammad every time his name is mentioned, even in writing. Although this practice is dear to me, it is not conventional in non-confessional English academic texts. Therefore, the reader will find in this article the result of my own personal compromise on this point: I pray here once that the blessings and peace of Allah be upon the Prophet Muḥammad every time his name is mentioned in this document and elsewhere. Furthermore, may these blessings and peace be bestowed upon all other holy women and men in all times and places. Unfortunately, inserting even one prayer into a non-confessional scholarly text can be controversial. While I think religious studies and theology should remain distinct disciplines, I reject the widespread notion that any trace of discourse understood as theological automatically contaminates scholarship in religious studies. In fact, I seek to decolonize the secular/religious binary.
- ⁶ The modern/colonial system emerged in the Atlantic world but rapidly began to globalise. After Amerigo Vespucci (1454–1512) realised that America was not Asia, in 1502, Europeans could imagine themselves at the centre of the world, with Asia to the east and America to the west. Only twenty years later, in 1522, a naval expedition launched by Ferdinand Magellan (1480–1521) completed the first circumnavigation of the globe. Dussel ([1992] 1995) writes, “these discoveries took place within a European perspective interpreting itself for the first time as the center of human history and thus elevating its particular horizon into the supposedly universal one of occidental culture” (p. 35).
- ⁷ Traditional Muslims tend to be especially vocal about the importance of Sufism among the sacred sciences. They argue in response to condemnations of Sufism by “puritanical reformism, what we now call ‘fundamentalism’, and intellectual capitulation in the form of almost every modern ‘ism’” (Lumbard 2004a, p. xiii).
- ⁸ German social theorist Max Weber (1864–1920) developed the concept of ideal types to examine historical trends by deliberately simplifying complex data.
- ⁹ This is indeed a foundational text within Western traditionalism (see Guénon [1945] 1970).
- ¹⁰ Mattson became the first woman president of the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) in 2006.
- ¹¹ It was initially entitled *The Diversity of Islam* (Oliveti [2001] 2009).
- ¹² Interestingly, the 2009 edition estimated that only 3% of the world’s Muslims were fundamentalist, whereas 96% were traditional. Apparently, 6% of the world’s Muslims have abandoned the latter for the former, while modernism has remained with only 1% of the global Muslim population.
- ¹³ A hub is the centre of a complex network. It is an intersection through which the diverse parts, routes, strands, branches, or currents of a system connect. When these disparate parts converge, they influence one another. This interaction within and through the hub transforms the entire system, which becomes, to use an Aristotelian idiom, *greater than the sum of its parts*. Cities are the human hubs par excellence. They not only connect surrounding rural regions, but often also other cities and sometimes even an entire civilisation. Contemporary Western civilisation is organised around and through such metropolitan hubs as New York, London, and Paris, which also influence the modern/colonial periphery. Indeed, those three cities are home to many of the most famous Latin American, African, and Asian athletes, artists, entrepreneurs, and thinkers. Conversely, even in the remotest regions of every continent, one can find people wearing clothes with the logos of sports teams from these cities. People around the world decorate their homes and businesses with visual art, often reproducing the skyline of these cities or famous monuments within them. The nation-states within which these cities are located are also hubs within the global system. The United States is currently the core of this system, the modern/colonial hub of hubs. As such, it is a country that influences the entire world but is also greatly influenced by it, a fact that worries U.S. American isolationists and protectionists. However, the global world-system is too complex to be centred around only one hub. Rather, it is comprised of many systems and interconnected hubs that often rival for influence within overlapping networks.
- ¹⁴ Al-Azhar University was founded in Cairo around the year 970, whereas Al-Qarawīyyīn University was founded in Fes in 859. There is some debate as to which can claim to be the oldest university in the world since it is unclear when each institution developed from a specialised school into a full-fledged university.

- 15 Even the English language recognises the significance of Mecca as a global hub since it is quite idiomatic to state that *Mecca is the Mecca* of Muslims, just as *Hollywood is the Mecca* of moviegoers.
- 16 For a comparative discussion about the central pillar of the world (Latin: *axis mundi*) in religious traditions, see [Eliade \(\[1949\] 1958](#), pp. 367–87; [\[1957\] 1965](#), pp. 38–47). However, decades before, the French Muslim Traditionalist René Guénon wrote extensively on this subject, notably in *Le Roi du monde* ([Guénon 1927](#)). The influence of Guénonian Traditionalism on Eliade is elucidated by [Sedgwick \(2004a](#), pp. 109–18, 189–92).
- 17 I have observed this bias among Westernized elites in Morocco, who seem to consider their country more advanced than other Muslim-majority societies, due to the influence of Europe through Andalusian refugees and later Portuguese, Spanish, and French colonialism. This internal colonial bias deserves further investigation.
- 18 The term *normative* is used here both in the sense of a socially dominant norm and as a prescribed ideal. Indeed, to prescribe behaviours or beliefs, religious experts need to have some sort of dominance or authority within a given social context.
- 19 It should be noted that throughout the Islamic world, these disputes often took place in the margins of power, among scholars suspicious of the corrupting influence of governing elites. Court-appointed religious scholars were few in comparison to the majority of Sunni and Shia ulama who tried to be independent.
- 20 Whereas *Shiism* designates a clearly identifiable community and is spelt using an initial capital letter, *sharifism* refers to a tendency or trend.
- 21 It is true that many historians categorise the Idrisids as a Zaydī Shia dynasty. Moreover, the Ismaʿīlī Fātimid dynasty had a major impact on sharifism across North Africa, but rival Islamic currents took centuries to develop into the sectarian divisions we know today ([Hodgson 1955](#)). They may have given birth to today’s divisions, but they were not identical. For instance, Mālik Ibn Anās (circa 711–795) is now known as a major Sunni legal scholar, but he studied with Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq (702–765), who is mostly remembered today as a Shia Imam. Mālik supported the failed Zaydi insurrection, after which he advised Idrīs I to seek refuge in the Maghrib. Are we to conclude that Idrīs was a Sunni Mālikī or Mālik a Zaydi Shia? It seems more reasonable to posit that there was an early school in Medina which did not easily fit into sectarian divisions as they later came to be understood ([Skali \[2006\] 2014](#), p. 24).
- 22 In the Sufi tradition, sobriety is associated with Junayd and spiritual drunkenness with his one-time student, al-Ḥusayn ibn Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj (circa 858–922). Such symbolism has its wisdom and didactic purpose within the tradition but, from a historian’s perspective, it may appear facile. For instance, historical accounts of Ḥallāj’s trial reveal a complicated web of religious, legal, and political factors. Ḥallāj may not even have been executed for saying “I am the Truth” ([Ernst 1997](#), p. 71). Despite its Eurocentric Orientalist tone, the classic biography of Ḥallāj by Louis [Massignon \(1922\)](#) remains a thorough and nuanced scholarly work.
- 23 The Qādiriyya was one of the earliest formally institutionalised Sufi orders, although the Rifāʿiyya seems to have been the first ([Trimingham \[1971\] 1998](#), p. 11).
- 24 For more on the discourses reducing Muslim diversity to a “good” and “bad” binary, see [Mamdani \(2004\)](#) and [Birt \(2006\)](#).
- 25 Morocco is a constitutional monarchy in which the king can intervene at will and set the parameters in which the democratic institutions and bureaucracy manage the country.
- 26 The *Amman Message* and *Marrakesh Declaration* may be historically unprecedented in gaining acceptance from a broad spectrum of Muslim authorities at a time when the community counts nearly two billion souls. However, they build on the legacy of earlier, more authoritative documents, such as the several treaties and covenants established by the Prophet Muḥammad ([Morrow 2013](#); [Lecker 2004](#)).
- 27 This enormous difference in wealth can be observed in World Bank estimates of total wealth per capita in U.S. dollars ([Lange et al. 2018](#), pp. 225–32). Total wealth is not limited to gross domestic product (GDP). It includes factors such as natural capital and human capital. Based on statistics from 2014, Jordan’s total wealth per capita is USD 49,287 and Morocco’s is USD 40,488, whereas Saudi Arabia’s is USD 512,869, and Qatar’s a whopping USD 1,597,125. This means Morocco’s wealth represents only 2.5% of Qatar’s and 7.9% of Saudi Arabia’s. Interestingly, no estimate is given for Iran, but despite international sanctions, the Republic’s oil reserves guarantee it a certain level of wealth.
- 28 While the Moroccan state benefits from cooperating with the European Union on migration policy, it also hampers the capacity of its own nationals to emigrate. Yet, remittances from Moroccans living in the West contribute significantly to the national economy ([El Attaq 2021](#)). It is also a sad irony that countries in the core of the world-system benefit from the presence of irregular migrants whose cheap labour helps prevent inflation.
- 29 Although countries such as the United Arab Emirates or Saudi Arabia increasingly welcome certain traditionalist scholars ([al-Azami 2019](#)), they are primarily hubs for those who endorse or at least do not oppose their governments, including modernists, rather than Traditional Islamic hubs.

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