Pilgrimage, Spiritual Tourism and the Shaping of Transnational ‘Imagined Communities’: the Case of the Tidjani Ziyara to Fez

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This paper aims at analysing the role of the transnational Tidjani pilgrimage to Fez in shaping a sense of belonging among West African adepts and their identification with Morocco. It is based on the assumption that the Tidjani pilgrimage has contributed to the shaping of a religious ‘imagined community’ (Anderson, 1996) encompassing West Africa and Morocco and to the reinforcement of the position of Fez as its ‘socio-cultural centre’ (Cohen, 1992). This paper explores the different historical and political factors that contributed to the evolution and maintaining of the Tidjani pilgrimage practice and to giving sense to it, and analyses the meanings, religious as well as secular that the West African Tidjani pilgrimage has today. Whereas Moroccan national issues contribute to the State’s instrumentation of the West African Tidjani shrine and its commodification, this research has shown that also other aspects (the link between pilgrimage and trade and/or migration) have played a crucial role in maintaining the Tidjani pilgrimage and in giving sense to it. In this way, the Tidjani pilgrimage is also experienced as a communal journey especially for West African Tidjani migrants living in Europe and for whom Fez represents a geographically close central place where they can gather with their peers and connect with ‘home’. Furthermore, the Tidjani pilgrimage represents a way to narrate and construct a transnational Tidjani imagined community in which Moroccan territory and culture are integrated.

**Key Words:** pilgrimage, Fez, Tidjaniyya, transnational, imagined community

In my paper, I will analyse the West African Tidjani pilgrimage and will question to what extent the pilgrimage to the zawiya of Ahmad al-Tidjani that represents the ‘pole’ of a mainly ‘West African’ Sufi order, might contribute to the shaping of a sense of belonging among West African Tidjani and their identification with Morocco. This hypothesis draws on Eric Cohen’s distinction between pilgrimage and tourism, in which he suggests that whereas tourists tend to move towards the peripheries of their world, the pilgrims proceed towards their spiritual centre (Cohen, 1992:47). Drawing on Cohen’s interpretation of the pilgrimage site as the centre of a community, the Tidjani pilgrimage raises questions about the role of a pilgrimage in shaping a sense of belonging. This would mean that pilgrimages enable a religious community to appropriate a site, to identify with it and to patrimonialize it. Further, it would suggest that the zawiya of Ahmad al-Tidjani plays the role of a
connective space between Morocco and West Africa, enabling the creation of socialities and exchanges between two culturally distinct groups, namely the Moroccan locals and the West African pilgrims. The second question therefore, that I address in the frame of this paper touches on the role of pilgrimage in shaping ‘communities’ (Anderson, 1996) that are, such as Anderson’s nations - ‘imagined’ - but go beyond the national or local.

In order to address these questions, this paper will first introduce the different factors that contribute to the evolution and maintenance of this transnational religious journey and will question to what extent political and economic issues and patrimonialization processes of the Tidjani shrine from above support the connective role of the pilgrimage. The second part will focus on the meanings of this journey for Tidjani pilgrims and will discuss how it contributes to connecting West African Tidjani with the Moroccan territory and society. This paper is based on ethnographic research and qualitative interviews which I conducted in Fez and Dakar between February 2009 and July 2011.[1]

1) Drivers of religious mobility: the evolution of the Tidjani ziyara

The Tidjani ziyara during the colonial period

The evolution of the West African ziyara to the sanctuary of Ahmad al-Tidjani is related to the long-standing relations between Fez and the West African Tidjani centres. In addition to that, the improvement of means of transportation as well as the passing of the West African route to Mecca via Morocco, contributed to establishing the Tidjani ziyara to Fez. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, religious elites already travelled to the sanctuary of Ahmad al-Tidjani in Fez (El Adnani, 2005: 12-14). Later, after the opening of the port of Casablanca in the 1920s, the routes of pilgrimage to Mecca were diverted northwards and indirectly contributed to an increase of pilgrims heading to Fez. From that moment on, annual pilgrimages of West Africans - especially from Senegal - were organized under the supervision of the French colonial rulers. Passing by North Africa, the vessels stopped in Casablanca or Oran and pilgrims were thus given the choice to use the period of transit for travelling to Fez (Berriane, 2014: 83-89). On the eve of independence, the organization of the hajj pilgrimage was assigned to private travel agencies. These agencies also integrated a stop-over in Morocco for Tidjani adepts who wanted to combine the hajj with a Tidjani ziyara in Fez. In the 1960s, connections between Senegal and Morocco became more frequent and the number of Senegalese and West African pilgrims going to Fez increased considerably (El Admani, 2005: 21). While flows stagnated after 1970 due to the closure of the sea connection between Dakar and Casablanca and the establishment of direct flights from Senegal to Jeddah for the pilgrimage to Mecca, the West African pilgrimage to Fez never stopped completely and today is becoming increasingly important.

Trade, migration and their connection with the Tidjani ziyara

Continuity of the pilgrimage to Fez was mainly favoured by its connection with other forms of mobility, in particular trade and migration. Trade

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1. During my research, I spent 9 months in Fez and 6 weeks in Dakar and conducted 39 interviews with pilgrims, tourist agents, religious leaders and inhabitants of Fez.
activities for instance contributed to the development of the Senegalese pilgrimage to Fez (Marfaing, 2007:235-60). Today, it is still a common practice among Tidjani pilgrims to combine their religious journey with trade activities (Berriane, 2012 - Lanza, 2014). The mobility of pilgrim-merchants which initially took place between Morocco and Senegal is nowadays also extending towards Europe. Some Senegalese pilgrims who reside in Europe use their time in Morocco to supply themselves with Moroccan products that they later sell to the Senegalese community in Europe. Thus, the city of Fez has become a commercial hub for goods circulating between Senegal and Europe, indeed, meeting for pilgrimage is an opportunity to exchange goods (coming from Europe and Senegal). In this way, the zawiya has become an important element in the Senegalese Tidjani transnational territory. The pilgrimage to Morocco has also contributed to the emancipation of Senegalese female traders who, due to the religious reputation of Morocco, were able to travel to and trade there (Marfaing, 2007).

The settlement of West African migrants in Morocco has furthermore influenced the development of social spaces that facilitate the circulation of Tidjani pilgrims. Since the early 1970s, the Moroccan state has bilateral agreements in place with its African neighbours, offering study grants for their citizens. This has generated considerable flows of students to Moroccan public universities and private establishments - nowadays around 10,000 sub-Saharan are registered (Berriane, 2012:158). In the last 20 years, Morocco has also become a destination country for a growing number of migrants from West Africa, who blocked on their way to Europe have to rethink their migration projects and settle more permanently in Morocco. The existence of the resultant West African social networks in Morocco has, in return, facilitated the circulation of West African pilgrims. Senegalese students in particular play the role of middle-men for pilgrims for whom they organize the trip to Fez, guide them to the Tidjani shrine and sometimes even host them.

The West African Tidjani pilgrimage has therefore been favoured by a variety of factors and its connection with trade in particular contributed to its durability. At the same time, religion and Sufism in particular have nowadays become an important political issue and economic resource for Morocco. The Moroccan State has also begun to consider the Tidjani shrine in its foreign and domestic policies, which contributes in a certain way to the pilgrimage commodification.

The commodification of Morocco’s Sufi tradition: political issues and economic interests

The impact of the Tidjaniyya on Morocco’s politics has also favoured the recent evolution and increase of the West African pilgrimage to Fez. Due to the importance of the Tidjaniyya community in West African societies and politics, the Moroccan State has supported the development of Tidjani pilgrimage journeys and their commodification. Besides that, Sufism has become an important issue in Morocco’s foreign and domestic policies and the kingdom’s self-representation abroad, contributing in this way to the commodification of its Sufi tradition.

Moroccan policy towards the zawiya: demonstrating Tidjaniyya’s Moroccan identity

The zawiya of Ahmad al-Tidjani in Fez plays an important international political role for Morocco since it contributes to fostering relations between Morocco and its African neighbours, mainly after Morocco withdrew from the Organization for African Unity
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(OAU) in 1984, as a response to its recognition of the sovereignty of Western Sahara (under Moroccan rule since 1975). Since that time, Morocco has undertaken numerous bilateral cooperation projects with its African neighbours in order to compensate for its isolation from the OAU (Bouhout, 1996: 61). In these bilateral relations, Tidjaniyya adepts - Senegalese Tidjani spiritual guides in particular - have played a crucial role as informal diplomatic agents, lobbying towards strengthening the relations between Morocco and West Africa, and Senegal in particular (Sambe, 2010: 146).

The strategic importance of the Tidjaniyya has been remarkably visible in Morocco’s competition with Algeria, the country where the founder of the Tidjaniyya was born and where the headquarters of the order is nowadays located. In this competition, the presence of the Tidjani shrine in Fez has been Morocco’s main asset. After the Algerian government organized a conference about the Tidjaniyya in Algeria in 1984, the Moroccan state organized one year later, a similar conference in Fez. In late 2006, the Algerian government supported again the organization of a Tidjaniyya conference in ‘Ayn Madi, the birthplace of the Tidjani saint in Algeria. Six months later an international Tidjaniyya congress was again held in Fez. The aim of the Moroccan meetings was to give prominence to the zawiyah of Fez as the Tidjaniyya’s spiritual centre and to show its Moroccan origins. This was explicitly expressed during the opening message of the event in which the Moroccan king pointed out that Sufism was an important part of Moroccan history and culture and reminded the participants that the former Moroccan kings played a crucial role in protecting and promoting the Tidjaniyya, enhancing in that way, Morocco’s engagement in its international diffusion. Since 2007 and with Morocco’s increasing political and economic involvement in Africa (Wippel, 2004), international Tidjani meetings have taken place every 2 years in Fez with Morocco’s support, symbolizing in this way, recognition by the international Tidjaniyya community of the order’s Moroccan origin.

The last decade has been further marked by an important turn in Morocco’s religious policy. In order to weaken radical forms of Salafi Islam that have been developing in the country, the state took measures to promote Sufi culture as an integral part of Morocco’s religiosity and as a national cultural heritage (Darif, 2010: 180). The promotion of Sufi Islam has been further used in order to project an image of Morocco as a moderate Islamic country and as a safe destination for foreign tourists.

**Spiritual tourism in Fez: the commodification of local Sufi culture**

Due to its ancient Sufi culture and the classification of its old town by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site, Fez represents one of the main places that symbolize Moroccan Sufi heritage and has been the stage of several projects of spiritual tourism. The main NGO working in this field is the Regional Council for Tourism of Fez (CRT) which is developing tourism projects in close relation with the Moroccan ministry for Tourism in order to promote the old town of Fez.

Commonly called *Medina*, the old town is marketed by the CRT as a ‘millenary living museum and authentic destination for cultural and spiritual encounters’ (PDRT, 2005:39). In this framework, the local Sufi tradition of Fez has been remarkably highlighted: numerous Sufi shrines and lodges have been renovated by the municipality and opened to international tourists, who can in this way take part in Sufi rituals. Furthermore, two international festivals dedicated to sacred music and Sufi culture, as well as...
several international Sufi gatherings take place every year. Finally, a special accommodation package called *Ziyarat Fas* has been designed by the CRT in order to enable poor families living in the old town to find an activity as hosts and to encourage them to stay in their houses. This package, best described as ’Bed and Breakfast’ caters for tourists as well as Tidjani pilgrims, who would like to stay in an ancient house and discover the everyday life and local customs of Fez. This accommodation project uses the polysemy of the Arabic word *ziyara* that means both the visit in general and the religiously motivated visit to a shrine or grave and aims at reinvigorating and commercializing the ancient practice of hosting foreign pilgrims.

The use of the term ‘spiritual tourism’ rather than ‘religious’ or ‘Islamic tourism’ in order to define the products designed by the city imply an openness and universality of Moroccan religious heritage that reinforces the Kingdom’s image as a tolerant and diplomatic Muslim country which may be an influential international interlocutor. It reflects further the image of an open-minded and cosmopolitan Moroccan society able to embrace other religious traditions, contrasting with the images of a violent and intolerant Islam which dominate the media.

In parallel with products targeted mainly to western tourists, special projects were developed in order to promote Fez as a tourist destination among West African Tidjani pilgrims. Indeed, following the 2007 Tidjaniyya conference in Fez, the city council for tourism (CRT) has regularly organised cultural weeks in African cities during which it showcases the customs and attractions of Fez, in order to entice West African Tidjanis to prolong their stay during their pilgrimage and to combine it with sightseeing tours and leisure activities. The commercialization of Fez as a tourist destination among Sub-Saharan Tidjani adepts takes place with the blessing of the Tidjaniyya order, since local chiefs are also invited to these events.

The economic outcome of Tidjani tourism in Fez is however, rather low and periodical. While analysing the occupancy of classified hotels of Fez by tourists, I observed that the number of African visitors among them was particularly small: while French tourists spent 90,188 nights in Fez in 2012, citizens from the African continent spent only 3906 nights in Fez during the same year (Statistics from the Moroccan Ministry of Tourism). At the same time, there is direct linkage between African occupancy and the Tidjani pilgrimage because African tourists were particularly numerous during the key-periods of the Tidjani *ziyara*, namely during the *mawlid* (celebrating the birthday of the Prophet) and the period of Ramadan, both main periods for the Tidjani pilgrimage.

In addition, my investigations have shown that the majority of pilgrims prefer to rely on social networks of sub-Saharan diaspora that are present in Morocco than to book a costly transfer and accommodation in Fez. Besides that, as I noticed during my fieldwork, it is very common among locals who live in the neighbourhood of the shrine to host Tidjani pilgrims for a petty rate. The Tidjani pilgrimage, therefore, has a small impact on the informal local economy rather than on the formal tourism sector managed by the city council and the tourism agencies of Fez.

However, although the number of Tidjani tourists is rather low, the city council is still encouraging these Tidjani projects and promoting them. I would therefore suspect that the marketization of the Tidjaniyya has much more of a political goal than an economic one and aims at showing the central role played by Fez - and Morocco in general - for the transnational Tidjaniyya. Indeed, the promotion of the Tidjani pilgrimage to Fez is a means to put on stage the intangible cultural heritage that this religious journey has been representing for Morocco and to advertise Fez as an open and internationally connected Sufi city. Indeed, the ‘African heritage’ of Fez was emphasized during the last ‘Festival for Sacred Music of Fes’ that was organized in May 2015, under the label: ‘Fez in Africa’s mirror’. On the website advertising the festival, the Tidjaniyya Suﬁ shrine located in the city’s old town is described as ‘living proof of the spiritual connections between Fez and Sub-Saharan Africa’ ([http://fesfestival.com/](http://fesfestival.com/)), reflecting in this way the role of the Tidjani pilgrimage in the branding of Fez as a ‘spiritual city’.

The commodification of the Tidjani pilgrimage goes hand in hand with the patrimonialization from above by the city and the Moroccan state of the shrine of Ahmad al-Tidjani and the Tidjani pilgrimage. The promotion of spiritual tourism is therefore also a means to construct and maintain the Tidjani pilgrimage as a Moroccan cultural heritage, although non-Moroccans represent the major agents involved in it. However, as we have described earlier, the Tidjani pilgrimage has evolved independently from its political and economic instrumentations by the Moroccan state and was influenced by its connection with transnational trade.
and migration. This calls for deeper analysis of the representations and the meanings of the pilgrimage among Tidjani adepts.

II) The meanings of the Tidjani pilgrimage to Morocco: connecting with the spiritual pole, Morocco and the broader Muslim world

Due to its multiple functions - as a shrine, mosque and Sufi lodge - the zawiya is visited by a variety of groups, such as local inhabitants, Moroccan adepts and visitors and foreign adepts of the Tidjaniyya order. The variety of visitors contributes also to a variety of meanings ascribed to the zawiya and its visit: apart from worshipping the saint, the zawiya is also used as a Sufi lodge for daily Tidjaniyya rituals and as a space for leisure time, in order to chat or relax in the afternoons (Berriane, 2012: 60-61). Besides its ‘multivocality’ (Rodman, 2003:205), in this paper I will focus on the meanings that West African Tidjani pilgrims in particular ascribe to this place and show how religious representations and adherence may impact on the formation of a transnational sense of belonging.

Connecting with the spiritual ‘pole’: Tidjani interpretations of the ziyara practice to Fez

As already mentioned, visiting the tomb of Ahmad al-Tidjani was - among West African Tidjani - implicitly linked to the canonical pilgrimage to Mecca, since pilgrims tended to combine the hajj with pilgrimage to Fez. However, among Muslims, the Tidjani pilgrimage is not considered a mere compensation for non-performed canonical pilgrimage (Tidjani pilgrimage, Fez, 5.11.10) but is rather a way to connect with the founder of the Tidjaniyya (Tidjani pilgrimage, Fez, 15.05.10). According to Tidjaniyya teachings, Ahmad al-Tidjani is a saint who holds the two most elevated statuses of the spiritual hierarchy, namely the ‘seal of the saints’ and the ‘pole of the poles’ (Abun-Nasr, 1965: 28). The belief in Ahmad al-Tidjani’s central position in the celestial hierarchy that governs over the destiny of the world is at the core of ziyara practice to Fez today. Through his supreme sainthood, Ahmad al-Tidjani is perceived as the supreme shaykh whose physical proximity is rewarding and who plays the role of a mediator between worshippers and God and is the exclusive vehicle of divine knowledge and blessing. This high spiritual position is further legitimated by the descent from the prophet Muhammad that Ahmad al-Tidjani claimed.

The ziyara is conceived as a way to connect with Ahmad al-Tidjani and to get benefit from his divine emanations. As explained by a Senegalese woman I met in Fez: ‘When you come here, it is as if Seydina Shaykh (he) connects you to something’ (Tidjani pilgrim, Fez, 15.5.10). Approaching Ahmad al-Tidjani physically is conceived as a mean of keeping a privileged relationship with him, of learning about him, drawing from his spiritual energy and thus becoming a better Tidjani (Berriane, 2014: 131-167). Making the ziyara to Fez serves also as a rite of passage in order to become Tidjani: adhering to the Tidjaniyya is achieved by making a pact with the saint during which the adherent commits to perform Tidjani prayers and rituals that are referred to as wîrd. A large number of Tidjani visiting the shrine of Fez, use the pilgrimage as an occasion to adhere formally to the Tidjaniyya or to renew affiliation to the founder’s descendants (Moroccan Tidjani leader, Fez, 1.9.10). Finally, as with many other pilgrimages, making the ziyara is also perceived as means to alleviate problems of everyday life. It is in this spirit that a female Senegalese resided in Fez for several months, hoping to get pregnant and to obtain a visa to join her husband who works in Europe (Tidjani pilgrim, Fez, 15.5.10).

Thus, through the visitation of Ahmad al-Tidjani’s tomb, Tidjani expect to get access to the spiritual outpouring and guidance of their supreme shaykh. Visiting the shrine represents a moment of in-between and ‘quasi-liminality’ (Turner and Turner, 1978:3 ) during which the Tidjani adept gets closer to the divine and experiences a positive energy that - as it is believed - supports their spiritual journey and has a positive impact on their life. Similar to many Sufi orders, the Tidjaniyya has developed many branches over time and represents today more a shared heritage of lectures and rites than an organized centralised Sufi order (Triad, 2000: 14). The only element that is common to Tidjani, therefore, is their belief in the supreme sainthood of the Tidjaniyya founder. Thus, the shrine of Ahmad al-Tidjani represents a place to which all Tidjani adepts feel spiritually connected, a ‘focal point’ for the brotherhood. As with other ziyara practices, the Tidjani pilgrimage contributes therefore to mapping a Muslim world that, although it has Mecca as its uncontested centre, also has regional spiritual poles - such as Fez for Tidjani. Besides the spiritual radiation that - as it is believed in the Tidjaniyya - emanates from Fez, one can ask whether the Tidjani journey to Morocco also plays a social and cultural role in the shaping of transnational belongings.
Connecting with a living spiritual guide: the collective journeys of Madina Gounass

The connection of the Tidjani pilgrimage with other forms of transnational mobility contributes to producing ‘African’ spaces of socialities in Morocco and an appropriation of the zawiya by West African migrants. For African migrants and students living in Morocco, the zawiya represents a hub for religious and community gatherings. During religious holidays, particularly prior to the mawlid celebration, these communities move from different cities of the kingdom to celebrate this event in the zawiya. Among the African migrants living in Fez, the Senegalese seem to feel particularly close to this place where they regularly meet members from their country of origin (Berriane, 2014:139-53).

The transnational communal meaning of the zawiya is highly visible among members of the Senegalese migrant community. Since the 1970s, the Senegalese Tidjani branch called Madina Gounass organizes collective ziyara to Fez during which about 200 adepts, coming from different countries of Africa and Europe meet in Casablanca, in order to accompany their Senegalese religious leader to Fez (Kane, 2007). This Tidjani branch is mainly popular among halpulaar migrants who reside in Europe. These collective journeys represent therefore an opportunity for Tidjani adepts to gather around their living spiritual guide and consolidate in this way the transnational social networks that span between Senegal, Morocco and Europe. What is particular to these journeys however, is that halpulaar migrants living in Europe connect with their ‘home’ while doing a pilgrimage to Morocco. In the frame of increasing transnational dispersal of Senegalese society, Morocco in general and Fez in particular play for Senegalese migrants, the role of a transnational Tidjani centre.

Organized tours: remembering the Tidjaniyya and connecting with Moroccan national history

Besides the communal dimension visible in the collective journey of Madina Gounass, the pilgrimage is sometimes also combined with other visits and sightseeing tours in Morocco. The reinvention of a new ziyara practice contributed in this way to transforming the meaning of the ziyara that represents not only a way to connect with the spiritual Tidjani pole or its incarnation in living spiritual guides, but to become also a way to connect with Morocco.

In the 1990s, some Senegalese travel agencies identified a need for organizing trips to Morocco, combining the ziyara to Fez with other visits and activities (Travel agent, Dakar, 11.10.10). Since the engagement of the city of Fez in promoting the ziyara, the number of agencies proposing this type of trip has further increased and the offer was expanded to other sub-Saharan countries (Travel agent, Fez, 26.5.10). These travel agencies have devised offers that are adapted to the ziyara to Morocco with a choice of diverse itineraries to Fez. The trips are particularly designed for well-to-do customers who would like to combine a Tidjani ziyara with leisure activities and sightseeing and were planned with the assistance of Senegalese Tidjani leaders. All these journeys consist of visits to the tombs of prominent Moroccan Tidjani scholars, the greatest mosque of the country (called Hassan II) in Casablanca and the mausoleum of the former Moroccan kings that is located in the capital Rabat (Travel agent, Fez, 26.5.10). These itineraries clearly reflect how a sacred topography has been established around Ahmad al-Tidjani, in which Moroccan scholars have been integrated and beatified. But besides that and more interestingly, the transformation of the Tidjani pilgrimage in Morocco contributes to the ‘Moroccanization’ of the Tidjaniyya and its connection with Moroccan history. Indeed, it is particularly surprising to see how West African Tidjani pilgrims feel connected to the Moroccan territory. A Senegalese Tidjani scholar that I interviewed about the meaning of the visit of the mausoleum in Rabat, explained to me:

"Every Senegalese who goes to Morocco wants to visit the tombs of Mohamed V and Hassan II simply because they are the descendants of the Prophet. We, for example, do not care about the tomb of the president. No one goes to the tomb of Senghor (...) but visiting Hassan II … he is the descendant of Prophet Mohamed before being a king (...) his father had relationships with our ancestors (...) the biggest mosque in Senegal, it is Hassan II who built it. He offered it. So we consider him as [being] a Senegalese. We consider him as our venerated marabout (spiritual guide), simply because he is one of Prophet Mohamed’s descendants and all Muslims should respect the Prophet’s family and he did a lot for Senegal. There are a lot of Senegalese students there (in Morocco), who learnt Arabic, who learnt the Koran and who are now famous scholars and who helped spread Islam.’ (Senegalese religious leader, Dakar, 8.10.10)

2 Travel costs vary between 700.000 and 750.000 CFA, the equivalent of 1,100 Euros.
According to my interviewee, the visit to the mausoleum of the Moroccan kings has therefore mainly a religious meaning. In fact, the act of declaring the kings as ‘marabout’ – i.e. religious guides - ranks them higher than mere political leaders. Their visitation is furthermore legitimized by their descent from the Prophet and thus, the visit is interpreted as a display of gratitude towards the kings for their religious investment in Senegal. This reflects further the closeness of Senegalese Tidjanis to the Moroccan monarchy and the prominent role played by Moroccan kings in Senegal that leads to their beatification by Senegalese and the resultant integration of Tidjani sacred topography. Moreover, the integration of the tomb of the former Moroccan kings into the Tidjani religious journey derives from Morocco’s policy towards Senegal in which the religious status of the Moroccan king is instrumented in foreign policy interests and in which the Senegalese Tidjanis have played a remarkable role.

The connection of West African Tidjanis with the Moroccan territory shows how the promotion of the zawiya as Moroccan cultural heritage, and how a resultant religious journey may lead to identification processes with a culturally and nationally foreign territory. Furthermore, Morocco is symbolically integrated into the West African Tidjani territories. The identification of West African Tidjani with Morocco is furthermore visible in the appropriation of Moroccan fashion by the West African Tidjani community.

Connecting with Morocco and the Islamic world: the role of Moroccan dresses for Tidjani pilgrims

The combination of trade and pilgrimage has led further to an appropriation of Moroccan commodities such as Moroccan traditional cloths by West African Tidjanis. This appropriation of commodities is intrinsically linked with the pilgrimage to Mecca via Morocco and Fez that is also a way to do trade between Morocco and West Africa. As mentioned earlier, the Tidjani pilgrimage was historically made by West African adepts on their way to Mecca. The stopover made in Morocco was furthermore an opportunity for West African pilgrims to buy Moroccan goods, especially cloths. Since West African pilgrims were used to bringing Moroccan cloths on their way back from Mecca, these cloths took on Islamic connotations and have been a way for individuals to identify as Muslim (Demba Fall, 2004).

In particular, the *djellaba*, a long hooded coat worn by men and women and Moroccan slippers, have been highly appreciated by West African Muslims and are mainly worn on Fridays when visiting the mosque (Senegalese pilgrim, Fez, 25.2.10).

Moroccan dress also receives a Tidjani label and has become among Senegalese, a way to identify as Tidjani. It’s in these words that a Senegalese religious scholar, who I interviewed about this aspect, explained to me the meaning of Moroccan cloths for Tidjani:

*When you love someone, you wear like him. That’s why Senegalese wear like Moroccans. Because it’s simply love (...) if you are a fan of Michael Jackson, you would like to wear like him. So if you are a fan of Cheikh Ahmad Tidjani, since he was in Morocco, he was wearing this kind of cloths so you wear the same kind of cloths’* (Senegalese religious leader, Dakar, 8/10/10).

At the same time, my interviewee also referred to the Senegalese Tidjani spiritual guides who also used to dress in Moroccan cloths. Their status as role model also contributed to propagate Moroccan fashion among Senegalese Tidjani adepts and has made it a symbol of their adherence to the Tidjaniyya. This was also confirmed in an interview I conducted in July 2015 in Dakar with a female Senegalese Tidjani adept, who expressed that a Moroccan *djellaba* reminds her of her traditions, since her grandparents and parents used to wear these clothes. The role and meaning of Moroccan dresses among West African Tidjanis show perfectly how a religious journey that connects a religious community to a culturally foreign territory, may contribute to the appropriation of foreign cultural commodities and to make them their own, becoming in this way part of their religious and cultural identity.
Conclusion

Due to its local embeddedness and transnational connections, the zawiya of Ahmad al-Tidjani in Fez represents a shared cultural heritage. Indeed, in the representations of Moroccan officials and economic agents, this shrine is conceived as a Moroccan cultural heritage that has to be promoted. At the same time, locals are using the zawiya as a religious place for their daily prayers and pious visitations. However, the main group that has been involved since the early 20th century in shaping this place, are West African Tidjani adepts who converge on the zawiya in order to connect with the founder of their order. This contributes to developing a sense of belonging among West African Tidjanis regarding both the zawiya and Fez, a place that is an important ‘socio-cultural’ centre (Cohen, 1995) rather than on the periphery of the pilgrims world.

This raises questions about the link between religion and cultural heritage. In fact, the Tidjani journey connects West African Tidjanis with the Moroccan territory. The performance of the Tidjani journey contributes in this way to the narration and construction of a religious imagined community that goes beyond the local and national. This reminds us of other pilgrimages that enable a connection with a ‘foreign’ territory and whose performance enables one to memorialize and narrate ‘imagined communities’ that encompasses different nations and cultural groups. Examples of this include:

- the hajj to Mecca for the global Islamic umma,
- the Camino de Santiago for the European collectivity (Margry, 2008 and Gonzalez, 2013) or:
- homeland tourism for Jewish Americans and African Americans (Powers, 2011).

As other pilgrimages, the Tidjani ziyara contributes therefore to mapping a Muslim world that, although it has Mecca as its uncontested centre, also has a regional pole for Tidjanis in Fez. Through transnationalisation of the West African Tidjani community, this pilgrimage plays a role of shaping a diasporic Tidjani collectivity that is visible in the wearing of local Moroccan cloths and integrating Moroccan national leaders into the transnational Tidjaniyya collective memory.
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