

SAINTHOOD AS A FORM OF CAPITAL: THE CASE OF MARABOUTISM IN MOROCCO

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The concept of capital is one of the key notions which are used in the field of the social sciences. Capital can manifest itself in various forms, both material and immaterial. When it comes to the latter, an example that illustrates it with great accuracy is sainthood, which is the feature that defines the status of marabouts in Morocco and the Maghreb as a whole. From the perspective of Islamic theology, the question of sainthood in Islam is controversial. However, the author of the paper assumes that it is valuable to analyse it from the point of view of the social sciences as there is no doubt that it is a social and cultural resource which has a great impact on the lifestyle and status of an individual who is considered to possess it. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to show that the concept of capital – especially social and cultural capital – can be applied to the phenomenon of sainthood in Islam and to analyse it using the example of Morocco.

Keywords: Morocco, Islam, maraboutism, capital, social capital, cultural capital

Introduction: The Concept of Capital

The concept of capital is deeply rooted in the social sciences and it is understood in many different ways. Most often it is associated with the economic and financial aspects of human life. However, other forms of capital – such as social, political and cultural capital – have gained popularity as valuable tools of analysis of certain aspects of social life.

First of all, it should be stressed that there is an inherent relationship between capital and labour which consists in the fact that – as Pierre Bourdieu explains – “[c]apital is accumulated labor (in its materialized form or its ‘incorporated’,

embodied form) which when appropriated on a private, i.e., exclusive, basis by agents or groups of agents, enables them to appropriate social energy in the form of reified or living labor”.¹ The characteristic of capital is that it shows a tendency to accumulate over the years. It produces profits and reproduces itself in the same or a more developed form and, therefore, it lasts. Capital means resources of a different kind that can be exchanged for other resources and that – if used or invested – can multiply their value.² Moreover, one form of capital can be converted into another one, which happens with rather a high frequency.

Capital can manifest itself in various forms, both material and immaterial. When it comes to the latter, an example that may be given in order to illustrate it is sainthood, which is the key feature of marabouts in Morocco and other Maghreb countries. From the point of view of Islamic theology, the question of sainthood (and saints) in Islam is a rather controversial issue. However, I believe it is valuable to analyse it from the perspective of the social sciences as there is no doubt that it is a social and cultural resource which has a great impact on the lifestyle and status of an individual who is considered to possess it. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to show that the concept of capital – especially social and cultural capital – can be applied to the phenomenon of sainthood in Islam and to illustrate how it works in Morocco.

Over the past few years social capital became one of the key concepts in the social sciences and, perhaps, one of the most useful scientific terms for the analysis of social relations which are present in various human communities. The concept has been developed by various authors and applied to explain a wide spectrum of phenomena. As Alejandro Portes indicates, there are three main ways of defining social capital: the notion in question can be perceived as: “(1) a source of social control, (2) a source of family-mediated benefits, and (3) a source of resources mediated by nonfamily networks”.³ Moreover, social capital can be viewed in either an individualistic or a collectivistic perspective. In the context of Moroccan marabouts the former point of view seems to be more appropriate. One of the most prominent authors who have adopted individualistic perspective is Pierre Bourdieu. According to his theory “[s]ocial capital is the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition – or in other words, to membership in a group – which provides

¹ BOURDIEU, P. The Forms of Capital. In RICHARDSON, J. G. (ed.). *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, p. 241.

² SZTOMPKA, P. *Słownik socjologiczny. 1000 pojęć* [Dictionary of Sociology. 1000 terms], p. 132.

³ PORTES, A. The Two Meanings of Social Capital. In *Sociological Forum*, 2000, Vol. 15, No. 1, pp. 1–2.

each of its members with the backing of the collectivity-owned capital, a 'credential' which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word".⁴ Defined in such a way, social capital is the "property" of certain individuals.⁵ Bourdieu claims that there are two factors which determine the amount of social capital of a person: first of all, the size of the network of connections that one can effectively use while in need and, secondly, the amount of economic, cultural or symbolic capital of the people to whom he is connected.⁶

James Farr expresses the view that "[i]n a way both compact and capacious, the concept of social capital boils down to networks, norms, and trust".⁷ Moreover, it should be stressed that it is based on values such as trust, solidarity and loyalty which find their fulfilment in self-organization and self-governance. Personal contacts and relationships as well as family and social networks thanks to which one may gain the advantage in various fields of human activity are also within the scope of the above-mentioned notion.⁸ As Dilshod Achilov puts it, "social capital cannot be generated by individuals acting only by themselves in isolation from others".⁹ Therefore, social capital is located in the network formed by social relations, of both a formal and an informal nature, in which a person has their own place. To simplify, one's social capital is made up of one's personal contacts. Bearing in mind the above, it becomes clear that social capital is founded on social bonds, mostly ones of a direct nature.

In the Arab world, social capital is based chiefly on relations which result from family, tribal and patron-client bonds. It should be stressed that all these types of social bonds are not solely of an emotional nature but they may also have a material dimension. In Arab societies the possibilities and opportunities that an individual has thanks to their personal contacts are seen as strengths and resources that may turn out to be helpful in plenty of daily-life situations. Therefore, it does not seem inappropriate to try to look at this phenomenon through the eyes of an inhabitant of the Middle East and North Africa. Such a perspective will enable us

⁴ BOURDIEU, P. The Forms of Capital. In RICHARDSON, J. G. (ed.). *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, pp. 248–249.

⁵ SZTOMPKA, P. *Socjologia. Wykłady o społeczeństwie* [Sociology. Lectures on Society], p. 255.

⁶ BOURDIEU, P. The Forms of Capital. In RICHARDSON, J. G. (ed.). *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, p. 249.

⁷ FARR, J. Social Capital. A Conceptual History. In *Political Theory*, 2004, Vol. 32, No. 1, p. 8.

⁸ SZTOMPKA, P. *Socjologia. Analiza społeczeństwa* [Sociology. Analysis of Society], pp. 224 and 366.

⁹ ACHILOV, D. Social Capital, Islam, and the Arab Spring in the Middle East. In *Journal of Civil Society*, 2013, Vol. 9, No. 3, p. 270.

to see that the moral assessment of certain actions and situations is not unambiguous but that it may vary according to the culture one belongs to.

“Official” and “Popular” Islam in Morocco

Islam is not a monolith and, when explored, shows its different faces. Moroccan Islam is a vivid example of this diversity and the division into “official” Islam and “popular” Islam – which is present in Western studies¹⁰ – is perhaps one of the most noticeable distinctions within it. It should be stressed, however, that both the concepts are highly complex and in many cases it is problematic to define them as well as to differentiate between the former and the latter. Moreover, the interplay between the two notions sometimes makes it impossible to identify the borderline which separates them. According to one model – which is based on certain simplifications – “official” Islam is taught in the mosque and *madrasa*, it is based on knowledge of the Koran and Sunnah as well as rigorous obedience to the norms of Islamic law. By contrast, the “popular” form of Islam adds some elements of local beliefs, traditions and customs to the formal creed. It is important to mention that “official” Islam is often recognized as “pure” Islam, that is the one which is founded on the rules which derive directly from the divine revelation (the Koran) whereas “popular” Islam is quite frequently seen as full of innovations (*bid'a*), that is foreign elements, rules or ideas. Due to this saturation the “popular” countenance of the Muslim religion is sometimes assessed by Islamic theologians as a degeneration of the true faith or even, in extreme cases, some kind of apostasy. Such a view conforms with fundamentalist discourse which is only one, albeit loud, voice in the discussion on the nature of the Muslim religion. Therefore, while talking about “official” and “popular” forms of Islam, we should bear in mind that models are useful analytical tools but the fact is that in the real world they rarely appear in their pure form.

In Morocco, the problem of the coexistence of “official” and “popular” Islam is closely connected to the nature of the Moroccan monarchy. Ernest Gellner has shown that historically the monarchy was built mostly on towns which were the centres of trade and religion. It also enjoyed the support of tribes which were granted certain privileges. It has to be emphasized, however, that some tribes did not accept or even rejected the power of the monarch. In such circumstances a specific form of religious life arose. The society shared the same faith which was revealed in the Koran but there were some differences in the way people professed it. In order to familiarize oneself with the Koranic revelation one

¹⁰ See for instance the works of Mohamed Chtatou, Ernest Gellner, David Montgomery Hart or Clifford Geertz.

needed to have some level of literacy. The inhabitants of Moroccan towns had more possibilities to master the skills of reading and writing than people who did not follow an urban lifestyle. At the same time, the Muslim religion was practised by people who had virtually a different way of life and attitude towards central power. Their access to the centres of education, including religious schools, was rather limited. In such a situation the same religion was experienced differently by individuals who belonged to the various segments of Moroccan society, which led to the development of the “official”– “popular” division within Islam.¹¹

Ernest Gellner also raised the question of the coexistence of the two types of religiosity within Moroccan society, claiming that towns create conditions favourable to the development of a form of religion which is rather reserved in practice and has a more “academic”, learned nature. In the towns it is not only easier to learn how to read and write but also literacy is considered to be valuable. Moreover, those who can read gain direct access to the divine revelation and, hence, do not need to turn to intermediaries of any type. There is no hierarchy or cult of personality and, therefore, the emphasis is put on the equality of all believers. Urban religion shows certain traits which Ernest Gellner names “type *p*”. The syndrome is characterized by such features as: stress on Scripture and literacy, strict monotheism, puritanism, minimal hierarchy and egalitarianism between believers, absence of mediation, obedience to rules rather than following emotions, lack of ritual excess. This type of religiosity shows an inclination towards moderation and sobriety. As for the religious life of the tribes which inhabit Morocco, it might be said that things are the other way around. In comparison to inhabitants of the towns, tribesmen do not display a high level of literacy which makes direct access to the Koran rather complicated. As the Book cannot be read by a person, the need for an intermediary arises. On the one hand the intermediary should mediate between the human and God whilst on the other hand they should serve as a go-between for the tribes which seek help in solving inter- and intra-tribal disputes. Furthermore, “popular” religiosity demands not only scriptural forms for conveying religious content but also rituals which take on sumptuous and more ecstatic forms. In tribal communities religiosity is very different from religiosity in the towns. Ernest Gellner calls it “type *c*”. Among its distinctive features the author lists: personalisation of religion, which is accompanied by a tendency to anthropolatry, concrete images of the sacred and its proliferation, lack of puritanism, ritual indulgence, mediation, hierarchy, religious pluralism, local incarnation of the sacred.¹² As he puts it, “the town constitutes a society which needs and produces the doctor, whilst the tribe needs,

¹¹ GELLNER, E. *Saints of the Atlas*, pp. 6–7.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 7–8.

and produces, the saint”.¹³ We should remember, however, that it is a kind of model. In reality both the described forms of religiosity not only coexist but also interpenetrate and interchange.

In relation to the above division into “Islam of the Book” and “Islam of the Sanctuary”, and hence into well-educated Muslim scholars residing in the towns and illiterate tribesmen, David M. Hart argues that Ernest Gellner overestimated its significance and that the division was transformed into a dichotomy which did not exist before the 20th century.¹⁴ In fact the opposition between “official” and “popular” Islam was an important part of French colonial policy, which was based on the *divide et impera* rule. It was closely linked to other divisions exploited by the French: Arab–Berber, centre–periphery (which referred to the historical *maḥzan–sība* opposition), urban–tribal and colonial–local. Islam was professed equally by the Arabs and Berbers and therefore the French tried to weaken it by separating the former from the latter. Moreover, the Muslim religion was an essential factor which integrated the Maghreb as a geographic region – a part of the world which was under the colonial influence of France.

From my point of view “popular” Islam may be perceived as an image of “official” Islam in the eyes of members of local communities, both tribal and non-tribal. Not having an in-depth knowledge of the Islamic rules in its “dogmatic” form, the people in question live and act in a manner which conforms with their idea of how these rules function. In these circumstances local, popular elements find their way into official beliefs and become part of it.

The Idea of Sainthood in Moroccan Islam

“Popular” Islam in Morocco takes on various forms and the veneration of saints is perhaps the most significant of them. Bearing in mind that absolute monotheism (*tawḥīd*) is the main pillar of the Muslim religion and that *širk* – which means ascribing “partners” to the singular God¹⁵ – is the gravest sin a Muslim can commit, it is clear that the veneration of saints stands in opposition to the dogmas of Islam and, moreover, is often perceived as the expression of a

¹³ GELLNER, E. *Saints of the Atlas*, p. 8.

¹⁴ HART, D. M. *Hombres de tribu musulmanes en un mundo cambiante: bereberes de Marruecos y puḡtunes de Pakistán, islam tribal y cambio socioeconómico* [Muslim Tribesmen in a Changing World: Moroccan Berbers and Pakistani Puḡtuns, Tribal Islam and Socioeconomic Change], p. 72.

¹⁵ The sin of *širk* is committed by a person who claims that there are any gods or idols besides the singular God. See DANECKI, J. *Podstawowe wiadomości o islamie* [Basic Knowledge of Islam], p. 106.

heresy.¹⁶ The notion of an Islamic saint is controversial in itself: in Islam there is no idea of sainthood as such. Sainthood is an attribute of God and it can be ascribed only to Him. Furthermore, there is no formal procedure for declaring someone a saint as occurs, for instance, in the Catholic Church (canonization). In the context of “popular” Islam a saint is one who is regarded as such by others and who, at the same time, considers himself to be a holy man. Moreover, someone enjoys the status of a saint as long as they have a considerable standing and influence resulting from their position. We may therefore deduce that the status of saint has a strongly discretionary character.¹⁷ It is important to stress that one may become a saint when either dead or alive, and sometimes by birth.

The question of sainthood in Islam is the subject of debate, also when it comes to the scholarly literature. The notion of a (Muslim) saint is present in Western Islamic studies but, when talking about North Africa, pious men and women are perhaps more often referred to as “marabouts”¹⁸ than “saints”. However, it should be emphasized that they call themselves *igurramen* (sing. *agurram*).¹⁹ It is worth adding that in Islam a person who is characterized by particular piety is said to be “close to God” (*qarīb Allāh*) or “God’s friend” (*walī Allāh*).

¹⁶ For instance, a perspective of this kind was presented by the founder of Wahhabism, Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab. Being in favour of radical monotheism, he claimed that the manifestations of *širk* are: veneration of saints, asking the Prophet Muhammad or saints for intercession (*šafā‘a*), worshipping idols and tombs, using amulets and talismans as well as magic, witchcraft and astrology, drinking alcohol, smoking tobacco and drugs, believing that the deceased can have an influence on worldly matters, participating in Sufi ceremonies, being friend with non-believers and giving shelter to heretics. For more on the views of Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab see *Ibid.*, pp. 421–426.

¹⁷ It is worth stressing that quite a similar phenomenon exists also among Moroccan Jews. Once there were certain charismatic rabbis, known for their great wisdom and piety, who are now said to be saints. Their tombs turned into places of pilgrimage for followers of Judaism thanks to the belief that the holy men in question possess supernatural powers and give their blessing to those who visit them. MELLO, A. La communauté judéo-marocaine: diaspora et fuite des élites. In *Autrepart*, 2002, No. 22, p. 60.

¹⁸ The word “marabout” (in Arabic *murābiṭ*) designated the inhabitant of a *ribāṭ* (pl. *rubuṭ*) – that is a fortress which was used to guard the borders. Sometimes it also served as a shelter for merchants and travellers. As time went by, the fortresses turned into monasteries inhabited by members of Muslim brotherhoods – the marabouts. Later on, the notion was used to designate a person known for their piety. The name of the Almoravid (*Al-Murābiṭūn*) dynasty which ruled the north-western lands of North Africa and the Muslim part of the Iberian Peninsula in the 11th and 12th centuries also refers to the word *ribāṭ*. It has to be stressed that the Almoravids came from the Berber tribes and were, at the beginning, a brotherhood lodge.

¹⁹ The word *agurram* derives from the Berber language.

Juan Antonio Pacheco claims that the idea of sainthood was developed in the early centuries of the existence of the Muslim community and is reflected in the writings and practices of the Sufis. Since the 12th century, together with the development of Sufi brotherhoods, the veneration of saints in Islam started to exert more influence and one of the reasons behind it was that many Sufis set a good example by living a life full of piety and humility. In result, according to the author, sainthood became synonymous with Sufism.²⁰

***Baraka* as Social and Cultural Resource**

The problem of the status of a saint is multifaceted and rather complicated. Saints are said to be descendants of the Prophet Muhammad²¹ and their basic attribute is *baraka* – that is God’s blessing, which enables them to perform miracles of various kinds (at least in the eyes of the people who expect such miracles). What is important is that a man who is endowed with the blessing is also protected from evil. When it comes to academic study, *baraka* may be defined as some sort of charisma that allows the saints to gain influence of a political nature. It appears that *baraka* may be perceived as a relationship between saints and their environment: someone who possesses *baraka* feels that they are endowed with God’s blessing and, at the same time, the others are convinced that the person is blessed. Moreover, due to the fact that in Morocco there are families of saints, the blessing may be perceived as some kind of good which is handed down from generation to generation.²² It should be stressed, however, that it is not inherited equally by every member of a given family which is due to the fact that the

²⁰ PACHECO, J. A. *El Magreb. Visionarios, Adalides y Poder político* [The Maghreb. Visionaries, Warlords and Political Power], pp. 98–99.

²¹ Paul Rabinow claims that “[j]ust as the shurfa in Morocco are not a class, or even a group, they do not occupy any defined status position by virtue of being shurfa. Sherifhood, in and of itself, does not carry any ascribed status. Rather, it is more likely to be an after-the-fact legitimation of status achieved than itself the source of such achievement or position”. RABINOW, P. *Symbolic Domination. Cultural Form and Historical Change in Morocco*, pp. 21–22. Sometimes, however, things are the other way round. For instance, the power of the Alaouite (*Al-‘Alawiyūn*) dynasty results also from their sharifian genealogy.

²² A similar view is expressed by Jerzy Rohoziński in his analysis of sainthood in Azerbaijan. The author states that sainthood is hereditary and it is a feature of families, not of individuals. ROHOZIŃSKI, J. *Święci, biczownicy i czerwoni chanowie. Przemiany religijności muzułmańskiej w radzieckim i poradzieckim Azerbejdżanie* [Saints, Flagellants and Red Khans. Developments within Muslim Religiosity in Soviet and Post-Soviet Azerbaijan], p. 243.

distribution of God's blessing relies only upon His will. *Baraka* is usually inherited by male members of a family, though in some circumstances a female may gain it as well.²³ Paul Rabinow indicates that there is also an alternative means of transmission of holiness: the leader of a brotherhood lodge who is not related to a certain saint but follows the example of one can be endowed with the marabout's *baraka*.²⁴ Mohamed Chtatou notes that one can also acquire *baraka* by living a pious life. Furthermore, someone who is endowed with God's blessing "by birth" can "improve" its quality by fulfilling the idea of piety.²⁵

Holiness makes the saints perfect patrons of cities and villages, which – as Mohamed Chtatou indicates – is typical not only of Morocco, but also Tunisia and Algeria. It is believed that the saints bring blessing and protection, and sometimes a city can have more than one patron. For instance, Marrakech is acknowledged to be "the most fortunate" of all the Moroccan cities thanks to the fact that it has seven patron saints.²⁶ Henri de Castries gives a brief description of the profiles of the seven holy men, pointing out that they lived at various points in time between the 5th and 10th centuries.²⁷ He also indicates that in Marrakech there are so many sanctuaries and tombs of the saints that the city is said to be "the cemetery of the saints" (*Marrakūš turbat al-awliyā*).²⁸ Apart from providing patronage for cities, the marabouts can also be patrons of certain professions. In order to support this argument, Doctor Légey gives the example of *Sīdī* Mohammed ben Salah, a saint from Marrakech who protects butchers.²⁹ In this light it seems apposite to refer to the remarks of Maria-Àngels Roque, who finds two features shared by holy men of Maghreb and Christian saints. The first of

²³ Maria-Àngels Roque indicates that in Maghreb there are two types of women who enjoy the status of a saint: those who are sisters, wives or daughters of a saint and those who are saints thanks to their own qualities, independently. ROQUE, M.-À. *Religión popular, espacio activo de la mujer maghrebí* [Popular Religion, Active Space of Moroccan Woman]. In GÓMEZ PELLÓN, E., GONZÁLEZ VÁZQUEZ, A. (eds.). *Religión y patrimonio cultural en Marruecos. Una aproximación antropológica e histórica* [Religion and Cultural Heritage in Morocco. Anthropological and Historical Approach], pp. 186–187.

²⁴ RABINOW, P. *Reflections on Fieldwork in Morocco*, p. 50; RABINOW, P. *Symbolic Domination. Cultural Form and Historical Change in Morocco*, p. 17.

²⁵ CHTATOU, M. Saints and Spirits and their Significance in Moroccan Cultural Beliefs and Practices: An Analysis of Westermarck's Work. In *Morocco*, 1996, No. 1 (New Series), p. 70.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

²⁷ DE CASTRIES, H. *Les Sept Patrons de Marrakech*, pp. 29–48.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

²⁹ LÉGEY *Essai de folklore marocain. Croyances et traditions populaires*, p. 318.

them is that saints possess various “specializations” while the second one is that their cult is limited territorially and, therefore, they are worshipped locally.³⁰

Bearing in mind the above, it is worth mentioning that the average Moroccan most often has no knowledge of the biographies and achievements of the saints whose help he seeks, nor of the legends about them. Such conclusion can be drawn from Paul Rabinow’s research conducted in the village of Sidi Lahcen Lyussi³¹ and David M. Hart’s fieldwork carried out on the Ait Waryaghar tribe.³² I must say I made quite similar observations while talking to some inhabitants of Casablanca.³³ In the neighbourhood of the old *madīna* of Casablanca one can find a sanctuary (*qubba*) of *Sīdī* Belyout who is said to be a patron saint of the city. Trying to collect some information about the life of the saint, I asked the people who were praying there about some legends of the marabout. Unfortunately, no one was able to say anything about the achievements of the holy man or the miracles he is believed to have performed. I did learn, however, that these people perceived the sanctuary similarly to a mosque – that is a place which is *ḥarām*.³⁴ When it comes to another saint worshipped locally, *Sīdī* Abd ar-Rahman, things were pretty much the same. The tomb of the marabout is located on a small, rocky island near one of the new boulevards of Casablanca which stretch along the coast

³⁰ ROQUE, M.-À. Religión popular, espacio activo de la mujer maghrebí [Popular Religion, Active Space of Moroccan Woman]. In GÓMEZ PELLÓN, E., GONZÁLEZ VÁZQUEZ, A. (eds.). *Religión y patrimonio cultural en Marruecos. Una aproximación antropológica e histórica* [Religion and Cultural Heritage in Morocco. Anthropological and Historical Approach], p. 178.

³¹ RABINOW, P. *Reflections on Fieldwork in Morocco*, pp. 116–117, 121 and 124.

³² Not much could be said about the patron saint of the Ait Waryaghar and other saints worshipped by members of the tribe. HART, D. M. *Hombres de tribu musulmanes en un mundo cambiante: bereberes de Marruecos y puñtunes de Pakistán, islam tribal y cambio socioeconómico* [Muslim Tribesmen in a Changing World: Moroccan Berbers and Pakistani Pujtuns, Tribal Islam and Socioeconomic Change], pp. 75–79.

³³ David M. Hart stresses that “popular” Islam is not a phenomenon which is characteristic only of rural areas. It exists in urban areas as well. However, sanctuaries located in the cities are more difficult to find. *Ibid.*, p. 73.

³⁴ The *qubba* of *Sīdī* Belyout is made up of two courtyards which a person has to cross in order to reach the “right” sanctuary. As was explained to me, only Muslims are entitled to enter inside as this place is considered to be “*ḥarām*, just like a mosque”. I must say that in the *qubba* there was one particular detail which I noticed: in the doorway of the second, smaller courtyard there was a woman who was sitting there and selling thin candles just like the ones used in Orthodox churches. As this is not something usual for places of Muslim worship, I felt quite surprised on seeing it. On the basis of direct observation and free-form interviews with the inhabitants of Casablanca. Casablanca, April and May 2014.

of the Atlantic Ocean. The people whom I met near the sanctuary could only tell me that probably the saint came to Morocco from Baghdad.³⁵

Mohamed Chtatou expresses the view that the belief in saints is deeply-rooted in the consciousness of the Moroccan people³⁶ which is one of the reasons behind the lack of success of orthodox Islam in Morocco. Muslim fundamentalists try to eliminate every manifestation of “popular” Islam and to convert Moroccans to orthodox Islam (which means: to the form of Islam which is professed by members of a given religious group). The fundamentalists, however, have been unsuccessful because they forbid people to believe in symbols which have existed in Moroccan society “for ages” (claiming that these are manifestations of idolatry and *širk*) and, at the same time, they want Moroccans to believe in abstract religious ideas. According to Mohamed Chtatou history shows that the orthodox form of the Muslim religion has never been able to meet the expectations of ordinary people. In consequence, it has never been able to take root in Moroccan society. Nowadays the followers of the fundamentalist path in Islam are inclined to accept some elements of “popular” religiosity, recognizing them as manife-

³⁵ On the basis of direct observation and free-form interviews with the inhabitants of Casablanca. Casablanca, April and May 2014. It should be added that when a person wants to ask a saint for help, they should visit the tomb. At the same time, one should not forget that saints do have their “specializations”. Therefore, it is important to know which saint can be of help in a given situation and what kind of rituals a pilgrim has to perform in order to be sure that their prayers will be answered. Usually the request should be followed by an offering which is later distributed among members of the saint’s family. Sometimes people who want to pay tribute to a certain marabout organize celebrations in his honour. Such a feast is called *mawsim*. In this respect it should be added that Maria-Àngels Roque mentions the sanctuary of *Sidi Abd ar-Rahman*, claiming that it is a place of pilgrimage of mostly women who ask for fertility (especially for the possibility of giving birth to a son), finding a husband, luck or healing a nervous disease. ROQUE, M.-À. *Religión popular, espacio activo de la mujer maghrebí* [Popular Religion, Active Space of Moroccan Woman]. In GÓMEZ PELLÓN, E., GONZÁLEZ VÁZQUEZ, A. (eds.). *Religión y patrimonio cultural en Marruecos. Una aproximación antropológica e histórica* [Religion and Cultural Heritage in Morocco. Anthropological and Historical Approach], p. 188.

³⁶ The power of maraboutism in Morocco is reflected in the impact it has on popular culture. In the 1970s there were some music bands which – in their artistic creation – made clear references to the phenomenon of sainthood in “popular” Islam. For instance, they played the instruments which were traditionally used by Muslim brotherhoods, sought inspiration in the music played during sessions of the brotherhoods and invoked the names of various saints before they played a concert. Some references to maraboutism can also be found in Moroccan cinema and theatre. CHTATOU, M. *Saints and Spirits and their Significance in Moroccan Cultural Beliefs and Practices: An Analysis of Westermarck’s Work*. In *Morocco*, 1996, No. 1 (New Series), pp. 78–80.

stations of Moroccan identity. In this way they adapt to the present socio-political reality.³⁷

Bearing in mind the above, it seems that in the reality of Moroccan social life there is a unique relation between *baraka* and manifestations of cultural capital. According to Pierre Bourdieu, cultural capital can take three forms. First of all, it can exist in an embodied state, as the long-lasting mental or physical disposition an individual shows. These features are acquired by a person through their own work and the time devoted to performing it. It can be said that these are external goods which have been converted into an integral part of a given individual. The scope of this capital depends on the individual capabilities of a person and, consequently, it is a combination of their innate characteristics and the merits they have acquired. Secondly, cultural capital can manifest itself in an objectified state. In this situation it takes on the form of cultural goods, such as books, pictures, instruments, monuments etc., which demonstrate various theories or their criticisms. These goods are transmitted both symbolically (as cultural capital) and materially (thus as a form of economic capital). Thirdly, cultural capital can also show up in an institutionalized state, such as objectively confirmed or legally guaranteed qualifications acquired, for instance, as a result of academic education. Thanks to institutional recognition of such competencies, they can be measured and compared.³⁸

In relation to this distinction, one can – in my opinion – draw the conclusion that *baraka* is an important social and cultural resource which is at the saints' disposal. It is acquired thanks to the fact of being a descendant of a person who is acknowledged to be a holy man and, at the same time, it remains a *sine qua non* condition of holiness. The blessing has a significant impact on the place of a marabout in the network of social relations, his status and lifestyle. In this respect *baraka* is a manifestation of social capital. When it comes to the idea of cultural capital, *baraka* itself is neither an ability nor a skill. It is, however, the basis for the development of certain competencies which allow a saint to “enforce” his holiness. The extent to which a person possesses this resource depends on their individual capabilities and some effort has to be put into acquiring and developing these talents. Furthermore, the “effectiveness” and prestige of the marabouts does have an influence on their financial standing: if a saint has the reputation of being a “professional”, people are more prone to use that saint's services and, in consequence, they treat him generously by giving him gifts. It is therefore clear that if *baraka* is used wisely it can – indirectly – change into a material good. This, in turn, may be perceived as an example of the

³⁷ CHTATOU, M. Saints and Spirits and their Significance in Moroccan Cultural Beliefs and Practices: An Analysis of Westermarck's Work. In Morocco, 1996, No. 1 (New Series), p. 78.

³⁸ BOURDIEU, P. The Forms of Capital. In RICHARDSON, J. G. (ed.). *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, pp. 243–248.

conversion of social and cultural capital into economic capital. The blessing can also be transformed into political capital. The Moroccan royal family is perhaps one of the most vivid examples of this phenomenon. Members of the Alaouite dynasty boast their sharifian genealogy, which has helped them win political power and exercise it effectively up to the present day.

Possessing *baraka* and being – or claiming to be – a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad are, undoubtedly, important features of the saints, albeit not the only ones. Ernest Gellner gives two definitions of a saint which are, from my point of view, complementary. According to the first of them: “*agurram* is one who is descended from the Prophet [...] and thus a *sherif*, is visibly a recipient of divine blessing,³⁹ *baraka*, mediates between men and God and arbitrates between men and men, dispenses blessing, possesses magical powers, is a good and pious man, observes Koranic precepts (or any held to be such) is uncalculatingly generous and hospitable and rich, does not fight or engage in feuds (nor, by extension, in litigation), hence turns the other cheek”.⁴⁰ He also follows a distinctive lifestyle: tries not to divorce, secludes women who belong to his family (by keeping them out of sight of any stranger⁴¹) and, as a rule, does not marry his daughters off to men who belong to the “lay” part of the community.⁴² The second of Ernest Gellner’s definitions says that: “*agurram* is simply he who is held to be one”.⁴³

³⁹ Ryszard Vorbrich claims that *baraka* may be transmitted not only to people but also to objects. VORBRICH, R. *Górale Atlasu marokańskiego. Peryferyjność i przejawy marginalności* [Highlanders of the Moroccan Atlas. Peripherality and Manifestations of Marginality], p. 200.

⁴⁰ GELLNER, E. *Saints of the Atlas*, p. 74. See also GELLNER, E. Political and Religious Organization of the Berbers of the High Atlas. In GELLNER, E., MICAUD, CH. (eds.). *Arabs and Berbers. From Tribe to Nation in North Africa*, p. 60.

⁴¹ See GELLNER, E. *Saints of the Atlas*, p. 182.

⁴² GELLNER, E. Political and Religious Organization of the Berbers of the High Atlas. In GELLNER, E., MICAUD, CH. (eds.). *Arabs and Berbers. From Tribe to Nation in North Africa*, p. 60. In the other work, Ernest Gellner stresses that it is much easier for a saint to get married than for a “lay” man (including marriages with “lay” women). Talking about protecting wives and daughters who belong to a saint’s family from the eyes of a stranger, the author indicates that it is done by an arrangement of the space inside the house of a marabout that allows the women in question to stay “invisible”. Yet at the same time he emphasizes that such situations do not occur very often. As a rule, women of Berber origin who live in the High Atlas do not veil their faces. With reference to this fact, Ernest Gellner suggests that wearing a veil is an expression of “urban sophistication” and is related to modernity. GELLNER, E. *Saints of the Atlas*, pp. 140 and 182.

⁴³ GELLNER, E. *Saints of the Atlas*, p. 74. In the work cited above the word *agurram* sometimes appears in italics and at other times it does not. The quotes used in the text reflect the original notation.

Status and Functions of Moroccan Saints

Bearing in mind the two definitions quoted above, let us take a more detailed look at the status of the Islamic saints in Morocco. Some of the marabouts' activities – such as mediating between God and humans – can be seen as the performance of a religious function whereas others, like using supernatural powers (for instance, in order to move to distant locations, influence natural phenomena such as sunset or become invisible⁴⁴) or giving a blessing (for example to heal someone or increase their wealth) – may be perceived as the realization of magical functions which refer to the personal faith of certain individuals in the existence of specific cause-and-effect relationships for which, in many cases, there is no rational explanation. The rest of the competencies ascribed to the saints do, however, have a real, material dimension. People who ask for a miracle or blessing⁴⁵ present the marabouts with gifts of various types which, in consequence, increase the property of the saints and their families. Therefore, it seems that the income of the saints is relatively stable or, at least, predictable. This, in turn, gives them an opportunity to be generous and hospitable, which means that they possess features that are highly valued by Moroccans. As the saints are rather affluent members of their respective local communities, they sometimes give away some of their wealth to the less well-off. By such acts they raise their prestige and so does the fact of being perceived as people of great piety and good nature. When it comes to the reluctance to take part in feuds or disputes of any kind, we should not forget that, apart from the moral dimension, it has also a practical one. An important social role played by the saints is that of mediator or arbiter, that is someone who should simply be above suspicion of being partial or tendentious. Furthermore, what makes it possible for the saints to take on such

⁴⁴ CHTATOU, M. Saints and Spirits and their Significance in Moroccan Cultural Beliefs and Practices: An Analysis of Westermarck's Work. In *Morocco*, 1996, No. 1 (New Series), pp. 68–69.

⁴⁵ While elaborating on the role of Islam in Middle Eastern societies, Michel Gilsenan indicates that there are two Arabic terms which refer to the manifestations of grace – *mu'ǧizāt* (sing. *mu'ǧīza*) and *karāmāt* (sing. *karāma*). The former of the notions can be translated as “miracles”, the latter as “indications of divine power”. He also stresses that there are two levels of reality. The first dimension (*zāhir*) is the one in which people live their daily lives while the second one (*bāṭin*) is the hidden reality. There are also hidden powers that reflect the relations between God, humans and nature and their flow from the hidden dimension of reality is possible thanks to the mediation of a saint. It is in the nature of miracles that they break up the order of things and the daily routine by showing the unseen yet “true”. Moreover, miracles have certain patterns and forms, though they manifest themselves in various ways. GILSENAN, M. *Recognizing Islam. Religion and Society in the Modern Middle East*, pp. 75–79.

a pacifist attitude is their sainthood itself. No one would raise his hand against a person who is sacred and, consequently, the marabouts do not face the need to defend themselves. As for obedience to Koranic rules, we should have in mind that the saints enjoy a special status in Islam. They lead a holy life and, somehow by definition, are expected to follow the principles of the Muslim faith. It is worth noticing, however, that in most of the cases these rules do not spring directly from the Koran but they rather reflect some kind of idea of what such norms should be like and this vision is enriched with elements of the local culture and beliefs.

Perhaps what deserves more attention while analysing the position of the saints within their respective local communities are the functions of mediator and arbiter. In order to fulfil these two roles, a saint should have considerable standing. Only someone who is held in high regard by the others has the power of solving disputes effectively. Ryszard Vorbrich calls marabouts “a specialized group of mediators”,⁴⁶ which indicates one of the main aspects of their professional activity. While choosing a mediator, one should take into consideration many factors, such as the respect enjoyed by a saint, his authority and the network of his family and kinship relations. To sum up, we can refer to the words of Ernest Gellner who rightly stresses that “[a] Berber *agurram* dead or alive, but especially when dead,⁴⁷ is not expected to behave like a Roman judge”.⁴⁸

Another important matter while settling a dispute is a proper choice of the place in which it will be done. In many cases such a choice is conditioned by the nature of the feud itself: if it is a problem about a minor issue, the procedure for solving it can take place in a local mosque, but a complex and serious matter should be discussed in a more appropriate place, that is a sanctuary (*zāwiya*, pl. *zawāyā*). The chosen *zāwiya* should be “neutral”, which means it should belong to a marabout who is not biased towards any side of the conflict. At this point a small, yet significant, remark should be made: the *zāwiya* is a place with many social functions. Its role is not restricted to being a place of worship and a political centre where disputes are solved, important questions discussed and information

⁴⁶ VORBRICH, R. *Górale Atlasu marokańskiego. Peryferyjność i przejawy marginalności* [Highlanders of the Moroccan Atlas. Peripherality and Manifestations of Marginality], p. 198.

⁴⁷ Ernest Gellner explains that an *agurram*, while alive, may have his own reasons – other than loyalty to his own relatives – that incline him towards certain types of behaviour. For instance, he can benefit from collaboration with his kinsmen’s enemies. When it comes to a deceased saint, it is assumed that he would be partial to his kinsmen and family members and would protect them from any hazard. GELLNER, E. *Saints of the Atlas*, pp. 109–110.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 110.

exchanged. It can also be a shelter for those who seek refuge or want to rest during their journey. But probably the most meaningful task it fulfils is that of a place which brings together the local community.⁴⁹ It seems fitting to conclude that the *zāwiya* is one of the traditional bases of civil society in Morocco.⁵⁰ Although it may not fit Western definitions of civil society, the significance of this institution for some segments of the Moroccan society should not be downplayed. Due to the relatively large number of holy men who carry out their activities in a given area, apart from the “main” *zāwiya*, in the region there are also other sanctuaries which answer to the needs of the people who live in the neighbourhood. Finally, it can also be a local centre of Sufism.⁵¹

To return to the mediatory dimension of the marabouts’ professional activity, it should be noted that a considerable number of them do not originate from the land where they provide their services.⁵² It is also a feature of many Moroccan saints and David M. Hart gives an example of such a situation. He indicates that *Sīdī* Bu Khiyar, the patron saint of the Ait Waryaghar tribe, was also of foreign origin. Most probably he came to Morocco from Algeria.⁵³ It seems that such a state of affairs may have, at least theoretically, an impact on the manner of carrying out mediations. A saint who moves to a new place which is not inhabited by his relatives is not bound by any obligations which result from loyalty and solidarity towards one’s own family and therefore he does not have a vested

⁴⁹ Among the functions of *zāwiya* Ira M. Lapidus lists also those of a hotel, hospital, school, market, court and refuge. LAPIDUS, I. M. *Islamic Societies to the Nineteenth Century: A Global History*, p. 417.

⁵⁰ NÚÑEZ VILLAVARDE, J. A., GARCÍA-LUENGOS, J. et al. *Redes sociales en Marruecos. La emergencia de la sociedad marroquí* [Social Networks in Morocco. The Emergence of Moroccan Society], pp. 28–29. See also ÁLVAREZ OSSORIO, I., KETITI, A. et al. *Sociedad civil y transiciones en el Norte de África. Barcelona* [Civil Society and Transitions in North Africa], p. 42.

⁵¹ LAPIDUS, I. M. *Islamic Societies to the Nineteenth Century: A Global History*, p. 417.

⁵² This is true not only for Morocco but also for other parts of the Arab world. Mohamed Arkoun – in a talk with Tassadit Yacine – gives the example of the marabouts of Kabylia: they do not have the same genealogy as the local people and therefore are not bound by any commitments which result from solidarity. As a result, their judgements are based only on the power of judging which is the attribute of God and His Prophet. ARKOUN, M., YACINE, T. *De la condition féminine au maraboutisme: regard sur la société Kabyle. In Awal. Cahiers d’études Berbères*, 2000, No. 21, p. 71.

⁵³ HART, D. M. *Hombres de tribu musulmanes en un mundo cambiante: bereberes de Marruecos y pujtunes de Pakistán, islam tribal y cambio socioeconómico* [Muslim Tribesmen in a Changing World: Moroccan Berbers and Pakistani Pujtuns, Tribal Islam and Socioeconomic Change], p. 76. See HART, D. M. *Imjjat: Genesis of a Rifian Lineage, Genesis of a Rifian Vendetta. In Morocco*, 1997, No. 2, p. 35.

interest in showing favour to any part of the local community. However, this may (and normally does) change as time goes by. In this context the remarks of Ernest Gellner seem to be particularly apposite. He says that the saints can be perceived as “artificial foreigners” who are needed by many societies in order to rule them or arbitrate between them.⁵⁴ When there is a lack of “real” foreigners, it may turn out to be necessary to “invent” them. According to Gellner, the saints can be seen as *sui generis* “missionaries who have betrayed their trust, albeit unwittingly”,⁵⁵ who live in a given region permanently – in the sense that on the one hand they preach and act in a way which is expected and desired by the local people, on the other hand they give the feeling of identification with Islam to these people. This makes the saint more useful than another person whose task is to disseminate the Muslim faith – that is a local *faqīh* who, admittedly, received a religious education, albeit not a thorough one. The *faqīh* does indeed have knowledge of “official” Islam but either he does not understand the local reality well or does not accept it as it is. Furthermore, he is also someone from “the outside”. The *faqīh* is not related to the local people and neither does he share their identity. By contrast with the saint, his social status can be described as a rather low one.⁵⁶

The strength of the marabouts has its source in their prestige and authority. The level of these two factors is indicated by the number of people who make use of the services of a given saint. Taking into consideration the fact that such interactions are of benefit for both the sides, we may classify them as patron-client relationships. In exchange for a mediation or blessing the saint gets some goods as a gift. If his services bring the expected results, the person will make use of them more frequently which, in turn, will enforce the relationship between the saint and his client. From the point of view of the saint such a bond is desirable for political reasons. We must not forget that the saints are generally pacifists; they should not fight or use physical force, and that is why they need someone to guarantee their security and defend them. The client may therefore turn out to be an ally.

⁵⁴ Ernest Gellner points out that this is also the reason why most dynasties are of foreign origin. GELLNER, E. *Saints of the Atlas*, p. 299. It seems that the Prophet Muhammad himself was faced with a similar situation. When he emigrated to Yathrib in order to gain protection from the persecution he experienced in Mecca, he played the role of mediator. He was expected to set life in Yathrib in order by arbitrating between tribes that were at variance.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 300.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 299–301.

In Morocco, marabouts generally live “aside” tribes⁵⁷ and sometimes there can be found whole villages inhabited exclusively (or almost exclusively) by the saints and their families.⁵⁸ I agree with Ernest Gellner who, analysing the role of the marabouts among the Berbers in the Atlas Mountains, stresses that the activity of the saints can only be understood in the light of the needs of the local community. These needs result from the structure and marginality of the community as well as from the attitude of opposition to the central power combined with respect for descendants of the Prophet.⁵⁹

It is important to stress that the saints are useful for local communities as they supply services of various kinds for their members. Apart from mediating between groups which are at variance with each other, the saints sometimes play the role of “court of appeal” in the process of settling a dispute. They also provide suitable conditions for a collective oath (which is one of the key procedures of customary law), supervise the elections of tribal leaders⁶⁰ and, if the need arises, they may become leaders themselves (for instance, when tribes face the necessity of joining together their forces when in danger). Owing to the fact that the marabouts are relatively stable elements of the social landscape of a given region, they contribute to the development of some kind of continuity which, as it appears, can be perceived in terms of stability. The saints care about maintaining order and positive relations between tribes as well as for the protection of travellers, trade and ceremonies, including religious ones. Furthermore, their sanctuaries are available for such public events as elections or collective oaths. What should be said about the saints is that they act as centres of information for members of the local community and they are helpful for all those who need to redefine their place within the tribal structure or find a new one.⁶¹ The marabouts are also seen as the ones who can intercede for other people before God (*šafā’a*).⁶²

Holy men play many important social roles within local communities, a fact that determines their status. In this respect it should be said that the social and

⁵⁷ VORBRICH, R. *Górale Atlasu marokańskiego. Peryferyjność i przejawy marginalności* [Highlanders of the Moroccan Atlas. Peripherality and Manifestations of Marginality], p. 200.

⁵⁸ GELLNER, E. *Saints of the Atlas*, pp. 154–159; ARKOUN, M., YACINE, T. De la condition féminine au maraboutisme: regard sur la société Kabyle. In *Awal. Cahiers d'études Berbères*, 2000, No. 21, p. 74.

⁵⁹ GELLNER, E. *Saints of the Atlas*, pp. 298–301.

⁶⁰ The elections of tribal leaders are described in detail by Ernest Gellner. *Ibid.*, pp. 81–93 and 100–104.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 78.

⁶² CHTATOU, M. Saints and Spirits and their Significance in Moroccan Cultural Beliefs and Practices: An Analysis of Westermarck's Work. In *Morocco*, 1996, No. 1 (New Series), p. 64.

cultural capital of a saint can be converted into political capital. Mohamed Chtatou indicates that thanks to their considerable standing the marabouts have enough power to influence electoral campaigns. At the beginning of an electoral campaign some candidates for local or parliamentary elections seek help from the marabouts, asking for their blessing and making offerings. All this is done in public, in the presence of members of the local community, and in the end the candidate holds a feast, to which everyone is invited. Furthermore, the author shows that if a politician who has the support of local people feels that one of his opponents threatens his electoral success he can solve the problem in a manner which is rather unconventional (in comparison to present-day political standards), by asking a saint to convince that opponent to change his mind and withdraw from the electoral competition. It should be added that such negotiations also have a financial dimension.⁶³

Concluding Remarks

There are various forms and shades of sainthood. Owing to the fact that there are quite a few families which trace their genealogy from the Prophet Muhammad and his descendants, the saints form a social group that is characterized by a high level of internal diversification. Among them there are those who are active as well as those whose sainthood is latent. A latent saint is one who is the descendant of a saint but who leads secular life instead of following the path of sainthood. It should be added, however, that such “hidden” sainthood can be activated if the conditions are favourable⁶⁴. Being a saint means being a highly esteemed member of the local community and sometimes it is also a lucrative “profession”. Therefore it may happen that some kind of rivalry arises between the saints. Bearing in mind that the saints are *ex officio* pacifists, all feuds or arguments in which they take part have a negative impact on their reputation. Paul Rabinow gives the example of the descendants of a saint who inhabited the Moroccan village of Sidi Youssef (near Sefrou) and who lost their spiritual position due to

⁶³ CHTATOU, M. Saints and Spirits and their Significance in Moroccan Cultural Beliefs and Practices: An Analysis of Westermarck’s Work. In Morocco, 1996, No. 1 (New Series), p. 78.

⁶⁴ Paul Rabinow argues that it is not possible to know who exactly will actualize the potential of sainthood. It depends on the personality and character of an individual. RABINOW, P. *Symbolic Domination. Cultural Form and Historical Change in Morocco*, p. 23.

mutually destructive fights and squabbles.⁶⁵ Sainthood is a social status that has to be negotiated constantly.

The question of sainthood in Islam is important not only from the point of view of Islamic theology and law but also from the perspective of the everyday functioning of Moroccan society and, as such, it deserves in-depth and interdisciplinary studies. The marabouts perform many functions – which are not only of a religious and magical nature, but also have social and political dimensions – and provide a wide range of services for the local communities in which they live. The saints form a social group which has its own distinctive features and sainthood is the most fundamental and significant of them. It is sainthood that determines the social status of the person who is considered to have it. It is a considerable resource which makes the saints powerful and respected. It is, therefore, a phenomenon which is a form of both social and cultural capital and it can be converted into other kinds of capital, namely the economic and political.

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⁶⁵ RABINOW, P. *Reflections on Fieldwork in Morocco*, p. 71.

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