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Print Culture and Sufi Modernity: Al-Tuhāmī al-Wazzānī's Embodied Reading of Morocco's *Nahḍa*

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Abstract

Rethinking Arabic literary modernity, this article addresses what the act of reading means as Morocco moves from manuscript to print. In 1941, a leading figure of Morocco's *nahḍa*, al-Tuhāmī al-Wazzānī, began to serialize his autobiography *al-Zāwiya* in one of the country's earliest newspapers. Heralded as Morocco's first novel, the moment marks the inauguration of a new reading public. Yet the text does not rely upon the reconfigured relationship with the reader accompanying the rise of print cultures in much of the Middle East and North Africa. *Al-Zāwiya* is a Sufi autobiography, a genre that invites its readers to assimilate the actions found within its pages. Al-Wazzānī draws upon this long tradition, using intertextual engagement to create a space of discourse that complicates the presumed secularity of Arabic literature during the *nahḍa*. Early Moroccan print culture thus provides an opportunity to reconsider the continuities of tradition embedded within modern literary practices.

Keywords

Arabic – autobiography – print – Maghreb – Sufism – typology – modernity – *al-Zāwiyah*

A Maghrebi Renaissance Man Travels East

Tensions in the Suez Canal in June of 1957 prevented al-Tuhāmī al-Wazzānī from traveling by ship as he would have preferred. Forced to go by plane, he boarded an Iberia Airlines flight in his native Morocco and followed a route that would take him through Madrid and Rome before bringing him to Cairo. He would stay in Egypt for an eight-day layover before traveling onward to the Hijaz, the pilgrimage being the real purpose of his trip. Though his time in Cairo would be brief, he would nevertheless use the experience to pen a short travel narrative upon his return, *al-Rihla al-khāṭifa: mushāhadāt wa-liqā'āt fī al-Qāhira sanat 1957* (A Fleeting Journey: Scenes and Meetings in Cairo, 1957).¹ In this, al-Wazzānī was preceded by the dozens of Moroccan travelers who had recorded their thoughts about the Mashriq, or Arab East, before him—the *rihla ḥijāziyya* (*hajj* narrative) was a favored genre in the premodern Maghreb.² What makes al-Wazzānī's text significant is the rarity such a text had become by the twentieth century, the result of something implicitly reflected in his own travel history. A leading figure of Morocco's *nahḍa*, a term most often translated as renaissance, the fifty-four-year-old al-Wazzānī had previously toured Spain, Germany, England, Switzerland, and France, yet this was to be his first visit to the Eastern countries of the Arab world. The aircraft upon which he circuitously made his way to the *hajj* marks a critical technological shift that reshaped the traditional practice of pilgrimage. Once the purview of caravans that slowly wound their way toward Mecca by land, the steamship first transformed it into a journey undertaken by sea and was itself replaced a short time later after the rise of commercial aviation. A trip that had previously

1 al-Wazzānī, al-Tuhāmī, *al-Rihla al-khāṭifa: mushāhadāt wa-liqā'āt fī al-Qāhira sanat 1957* (Rabat: Manshūrāt Ittiḥād Kuttāb al-Maghrib, 2014).

2 The distinction between Mashriq and Maghreb is far from new, with the Maghreb generally denoting the territories of contemporary Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya, and the Mashriq referring to Egypt, the Sudan, the Levant, the Arabian Peninsula and the Gulf. Before 1492 for some Andalusis, Maghreb, a term derived from the word *gharb*—west in the sense of direction—could also refer to Muslim Iberia, with Ibn Jubayr (d. 1217), famously critiquing the Mashriq in his *Rihla*, a text considered the first of its genre. There, after complaining of corruption in Egypt and Mecca itself, he exclaims, “There is no Islam outside of the countries of the Maghrib (*lā al-Islām ilā bi-bilād al-Maghrib*),” showing a Maghrebi identity figured as a contrast to the East as early as the twelfth/thirteenth century. In Fabio López Lázaro's words: “The way ibn Jubayr contrasted Western to Eastern Muslims suggests that the term ‘West’ was first used intentionally in a self-ascriptively political way in the twelfth century, by the African-European polity known as the Almohad Empire. Wherever the West was conceived, it was born in Marrakech-Seville, the twinned Almohad capitals.” See Fabio López Lázaro, “The Rise and Global Significance of the First ‘West’: the Medieval Islamic Maghrib,” *Journal of World History* 24, no. 2 (June 2013): 260.

taken pilgrims through a number of Islamic lands over a period of months now bypassed them altogether in exchange for the compressed sense of distance between airports.

Symbolically this points to a feature of al-Wazzānī's *riḥla* that reveals a meaningful, if less-discussed, aspect of modernity's entry to the Arab-Islamic world. That is, it raises the question of the broader geography of al-Wazzānī's travels. A century before, it would have been unthinkable for an intellectual of al-Wazzānī's stature and bent to have spent his time touring Europe in place of the traditional capitals of Arabic knowledge production. Nonetheless here, in the mid-twentieth century, we find in the list of countries that al-Wazzānī has seen first-hand both a restructuring of the region's geography and the degradation of the ties that had bound the larger Islamic world together for centuries. One of the central effects of the advent of European colonialism in the Middle East and North Africa in the eighteenth century was the gradual reordering of the world along a center-periphery model. Europe became the center while the Middle East and North Africa joined the regions constituting its margins. It was within this new center that al-Wazzānī had spent his time traveling. Yet the material fact of a life spent touring Europe rather than the fellow nations of *dār al-Islām*, or the Islamic lands, stands in stark contrast to al-Wazzānī's spiritual orientation and distinct brand of intellectualism. Just as he was a reformer invested in modernization, he was also a devout Sufi and *shaykh*, two facets of his personality that were inseparable from each other. His figure, then, embodies the familiar tension between tradition and modernity in all its Maghrebi specificities. As a result, both al-Wazzānī and his texts always look in two directions at once. We see this in *al-Riḥla al-khāṭifa* when he tours Cairo, both anxious to discover what the first five years of the Egyptian revolution of 1952 have brought while also faithfully visiting the city's religious sites, experiencing them through the same internal moments of transcendence he had felt at their analogues in Morocco.

This gives us a narrative that continually shifts between two frames of reference, the *dunyawī* (worldly, from *dunyā*, or world in a particular sense) and the *dīnī* (religious), as the Moroccan novelist Muḥammad Barrāda puts it in his introduction to the text.³ On one page we find al-Wazzānī marvelling at the scope and size of the *mujamma'*, Cairo's colossal example of 1940s modernism in which all manner of administrative tasks are handled. This he considers, along with the Corniche and Tahrir Square, to be among the most important urban innovations of the revolution's first years; all three, he remarks, are both

3 In Barrāda's introduction to *al-Riḥla al-khāṭifa*, 6.

“splendid in their appearance and in performing their function.”⁴ Struck as he is by these testaments to modernity, his interest is often elsewhere, which becomes clear when, a few pages later, he finds himself in Cairo’s oldest neighborhood walking through the chaos of the markets around the al-Hussein Mosque. There, he stops in his tracks upon hearing a Qur’anic recitation of *sūrat al-Kahf*. “An old blind woman, heavy, dignified in her black clothes,” her verses immediately humble him, and in an instant, he and his friends find themselves mentally transported from the world of the market and its shoppers to one approximating religious ecstasy.⁵ As the stalls and shops recede to the background of his consciousness, he writes:

وشعرت بما شعرت به عندما زرت مدينة فاس لأول مرة. فحين وقفت بباب الضريح الإدريسي، غبت فعلا عن وجودي برهة غير قليلة من الزمان... ودخلت الضريح الإدريسي وما أبصرت فيه شيئا، وإنما غمرتني أنوار فاضت من قلبي على جسدي، ثم غمرت المسجد كله، فسبحت في بحر من نور، وامتد المسجد الإدريسي عرض السماوات والأرض، وقابلت روحي أرواح أكابر آل البيت رضي الله عنهم، من بينهم آباي وأجدادي، وأخذ بيدي الآخزون حتى أوقفوني على الضريح، فصليت تحية المسجد وأنا ذو وجودين: وجود كما يراه الناس، ووجود كما هو في قلبي.

I felt the way I did when I visited Fes for the first time. When I stopped in front of the Idrīsī shrine, I actually lost sense of my own existence for no short time. I entered the Idrīsī tomb and didn’t see anything inside. Rather, I was immersed in light that flowed from my heart onto my body. It then enveloped the entire mosque and I swam in an ocean of light. The Idrīsī mosque extended to the breadth of the heavens and earth. My soul met the souls of the illustrious of the Prophet’s family, with my father and forefathers among them. They took me by the hand and placed me in front of the tomb. I prayed the greeting of the mosque while

4 He considers the *mujamma’* an accomplishment of the revolution despite the fact that the construction of the building was completed three years before, in 1949. He writes:

والمجمع مؤسسة من مؤسسات حكومة الثورة، وهي بناية عظيمة سواء في طولها وعرضها وعمقها، أم في نبل القصد منها. وتعتبر من الإصلاحات الهامة في عهد الثورة. وإذا أردنا أن نحدد أبرز المؤسسات التي تمت في أيام الجمهورية، خلال خمس سنوات، صح أن نسمي هذا الثالث: الكورنيش، المجمع، دائرة التحرير. فهذا الثالث كله عظيم في مظهره، عظيم في تأدية واجبه.

(al-Wazzānī, *al-Rihla al-khātifa*, 17).

5 خرجنا بأرواحنا من السوق وعالم المتسوقين al-Wazzānī, *al-Rihla al-khātifa*, 38.

simultaneously inhabiting two planes of existence: an existence as others saw it and an existence as it was in my heart.⁶

In this moment Egypt and Morocco, Cairo and Fez, merge, their shared similarities as key sites within the *dār al-Islām* overriding the differences between them. It is, however, chiefly the final line of this passage—*anā dhū wujūdayn: wujūd ka-mā yarāhu al-nās, wa-wujūd ka-mā huwa fī qalbī* | I inhabited two planes of existence: an existence as others saw it and an existence as it was in my heart—that I would like to suggest as a metaphor for al-Wazzānī’s literary project. Implicit within these words is the degree to which the Islamic affects the very definition of what it means to read at the moment Morocco’s Arabic literary culture moves from the world of manuscript and lithograph to the world of print. The binary that structures the affective description of al-Wazzānī’s frame of mind above as he hears a spontaneous Qur’anic recitation in the alleyways of old Cairo consists precisely of the opposition of the *dunyawī* (worldly) and the *dīnī* (religious) noted by Muḥammad Barrāda earlier. His reference to the *dunyawī* (or in his words, “existence as others see it”) points to a semantic field that includes the “worldly, mundane, secular, earthly, or temporal,” a kind of “worldliness” that ultimately contrasts with “the otherworldly.”⁷ The significance of this distinction has been charted by Michael Allan, where he notes that this aspect of worldliness, its implicit contrast with the otherworldly, is largely absent in the Arabic *‘almāniyya*, the term that has been adapted to connote secularism.⁸ Like *dunyawī*, *‘almāniyya* has its roots in a word that refers to the world (*‘ālam*), but which lacks an evocation of the spiritual as its opposite. It is in this absence that our reading of Arabic literary modernity reveals itself to be incomplete.

Through the figure of al-Wazzānī, this article will revisit several underlying assumptions about the formal shifts that occur in Arabic literature in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries generally taken for granted, including those related to the rise of the Arabic novel, its presumed secularity and its intersection with the role of reading in connection to the modern state. Any discussion of the *nahḍa* in Morocco leads to conclusions that diverge from those born of conversations rooted in Egypt and the Levant. The country has its own distinct and undertheorized archive, particularly in the Anglophone academy where the Islamic West tends to be overlooked by scholars of Arabic

6 al-Wazzānī, *al-Rihla al-khātifa*, 39.

7 Michael Allan, *In the Shadow of World Literature: Sites of Reading in Colonial Egypt* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 11.

8 Allan, *In the Shadow of World Literature*, 11.

whose focus by and large is the countries of the Mashriq.⁹ While Arabic literary modernity is ordinarily thought to include the incorporation of imported formal textual registers and/or reading practices, in Morocco, especially until the late 1950s, in most instances this is not the case.¹⁰ For nearly a century after modern print technologies were introduced and in widespread use, the types of textual discourse that characterized hand-written manuscript culture remained intact.¹¹ Similarly, the institutions tied to the practice of reading when manuscripts were the norm—institutions attached to the State or the Sufi brotherhoods (frequently at odds with one another)—did not lose their hold on the literary once the printing press became dominant; rather, they marshalled these new technologies to their own ends. The type of reading the printed text invited, produced as it was through such radically different methods, retained its connection to specifically Islamic modes of literary engagement, but with a newly formed audience. Literary modernity in this context consists not of a radically different type of text or mode of reading, but of the technologically facilitated constitution of an expanded reading public beyond the elite for whom literature was traditionally produced.

Widely acclaimed as Morocco's first "novel," al-Wazzānī's *al-Zāwiya* (The Sufi Lodge), was serialized in a weekly newspaper between November 4, 1941 and April 10, 1942 before its publication in book form later that year.¹² Not a novel at all, in fact, but an autobiography, like Ṭāhā Ḥusayn's *al-Ayyām* (*The Days*) the text's diegesis does indeed have novelistic qualities. I take this critical slippage in *al-Zāwiya*'s generic categorization as productive, because it is the novel, and the serialized novel first and foremost, that tends to be seen as the herald of literary modernity. Benedict Anderson's classic analysis of the simultaneous rise

9 The placement of the Maghreb within departments of French or Romance languages has served to magnify the problem. The resulting focus on French literary production has come at the expense of the significant body of Arabic work produced in the Maghreb without interruption for over a millennium.

10 In 1957 'Abd al-Majīd Bin Jallūn (d. 1981) published *Fī al-ṭufūla* (In Childhood), another autobiography, in this case describing the difference between the author's childhood years spent in England and those spent in Morocco, a country to which he returned when he was ten years old. Also billed as a novel, this text would likely meet the generic expectations held by European and North American audiences in a way that al-Wazzānī's text would not.

11 This is not to say there were no disruptions whatsoever. See, for instance, the case of Muḥammad al-Muwaqqit, in Gretchen Head, "Between Utopia and Dystopia in Marrakech," in *The City in Arabic Literature: Classical and Modern Perspectives*, eds. Nizar Hermes and Gretchen Head (Edinburgh University Press, 2018), 165–85.

12 Gonzalo Fernández Parrilla, *La literatura marroquí contemporánea: la novela y la crítica literaria* (Cuenca: Ediciones de la Universidad de Casilla-La Mancha, 2006), 108.

of print media and the novel, their twinned role in transforming reading into a ritualized act of mass consumption, an act which in turn produces a nationally bounded community of readers, has had a lasting effect on the importance we attribute to the genre.¹³ The world al-Wazzānī creates in *al-Zāwiya*, however, is not Anderson's world of "homogeneous, empty time ... measured by clock and calendar;" it is not the *dunyā*, but the otherworldly (what al-Wazzānī repeatedly refers to in the text as an *'ālam ākhar*, "another world"), something with overarching implications for the relationship between text and reader.¹⁴ My interpretation will rest in part on this retention of an older temporal frame, an aspect of the text that also points to alternative possibilities for comparative practice in Arabic literature. While *al-Zāwiya* resists equivalence with the novel form that now symbolizes literary modernity on a global scale, it is not incomparable, understood only and exclusively on its own terms. Just as *al-Zāwiya* will be interpreted through the Sufi autobiographical tradition, it will also be read through Augustine's *Confessions*, a text built upon a similar vision of performative reading and corporeal poetics; the two offer the reader, each in its own way, analogous literary worlds. At the same time, it is a specific type of semiosis, or vision of how the reader is expected to relate to signs, that is operative in *al-Zāwiya*. This semiosis, distinct to the Islamic tradition, is critical to understanding al-Wazzānī's projected public and the mechanics of his mode of address. These two interpretative frames aim to offer a model of how we might, as critics, balance the global with the local, the universal with the particular.

The *Nahḍa's* (Other) Reading Publics

Shifts in education, the development of discrete national consciousnesses, the rise of the press and print cultures, and increased contact with European thought have traditionally been seen as the main contributors to the constitution of new reading publics across the Middle East and North Africa in the nineteenth century.¹⁵ Recent scholarship has further refined and complicated this line of inquiry. Samah Selim proposes the presence of two distinct reading publics in Egypt: the first, cultivated by the intellectual elite and concerned

13 Benedict Anderson, "From Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism," in *Theory of the Novel: A Historical Approach*, ed. Michael McKeon (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 427–8.

14 Anderson, "From Imagined Communities," 427–8.

15 See, for instance, Sabry Hafez's "The Reading Public and the Change in Artistic Sensibility," in *The Genesis of Arabic Narrative Discourse* (London: Saqi Books, 1993), 63–104.

with the “emergent national subject,” championed a kind of novel “harnessed to the disciplinary project of a middle-class in the process of constituting itself as a national bourgeoisie,” while the second operated outside the bounds of this establishment.¹⁶ The latter was comprised of a critical mass of readers with an appetite for popular fiction that featured “a vertiginous range of hyperbolic urban characters and capitals, ... offer[ing] a seductive vision of the drama and corruption at the heart of the modern city.”¹⁷ If the first was constrained by the heavily circumscribed boundaries of the nation-state, the second was restlessly cosmopolitan. While Selim is chiefly interested in disrupting the way this type of fiction has typically been dismissed as ‘mere’ translation, Michael Allan turns his attention to the same time and place to ask a different set of questions that relate more directly to those I ask here. In *In the Shadow of World Literature* Allan considers “the transformations in print culture, libraries, schools, [and] discourses on literacy” to chart how they create a new literary public that not only affects the composition of the body of texts canonized as literature, but, more fundamentally, “*how* texts are read.”¹⁸ Interrogating what reading itself comes to mean in a modern and modernized Egypt, he positions traditional and emergent conceptions of literacy in an oppositional relationship: “a practice of reading based on memorization, embodiment, and recitation in Qur’anic schools” on the one hand, and a “practice based on reflection, critique, and judgement ...” on the other.¹⁹ Within this distinction that ultimately intersects with broader notions of what it means to be a modern educated citizen, two different interpretive communities grounded in two distinct textual traditions emerge to contest the very idea of what literature is. The result is that literary modernity in Egypt carries with it a reconfigured relationship between text and reader, one in which the literary object no longer calls for the modes of engagement traditionally associated with *adab*, but instead is read critically and mined for its aesthetic properties in line with the principles of world literature as Allan defines them.

One of Allan’s inquiries into the refashioning of *adab*, whereby it shifts to connote a new idea of the literary in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, asks how literature is “productive of the terms within which the world is understood.”²⁰ Turning briefly to the debates that center around world

16 Samah Selim, “The People’s Entertainments: Translation, Popular Fiction, and the Nahdah in Egypt,” in *Other Renaissances: A New Approach to World Literature*, eds. Brenda Deen Schildgen et al. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 49.

17 Selim, “The People’s Entertainments,” 49.

18 Allan, *In the Shadow of World Literature*, 77.

19 Allan, *In the Shadow of World Literature*, 3.

20 Allan, *In the Shadow of World Literature*, 4.

literature, I would like to pause at the question of the world that Allan raises, albeit in a way framed somewhat differently. Looking back to the passage of al-Wazzānī's 1957 *al-Riḥla al-khāṭifa* above, the text urges us to consider in which type of world we are invited to engage. Just as Selim and Allan position Egypt's new reading public(s) within a worldliness best characterized as *'almānī*, or secular, its concerns largely those of the modern citizen of a nation-state, al-Wazzānī's invocation of the world to which his audience belongs is fundamentally tied to the otherworldly (the *dīnī*, or religious, as opposed to the *dunyawī*).²¹ It is not the selfhood of a bourgeois citizen that the author presumes, but that of a member of the *umma*, or broader Islamic community (with a particular Sufi cast), relying on an alternative mythopoetic competency that requires his audience to read in a wholly different way than what we associate with the burgeoning novel of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The Islamic resonances of al-Wazzānī's work here reveal themselves as an invitation, the text gesturing to the reader to join its author in a specific domain of shared meaning.

The Persistence of Traditional Form

Modern Arabic narrative in Morocco first takes the form of an overture. Alternately called *al-siyar al-dhātīyya al-ṣūfīyya* (Sufi autobiographies) and *al-riḥlāt al-ṣūfīyya* (Sufi journeys), the type of text that inaugurates the serialized narration of early print culture hinges upon the same opposition structuring al-Wazzānī's moment of epiphany above. Catalyzed by the sounds of Qur'anic recitation echoing through the narrow alleys in the neighborhood of Cairo's al-Hussein Mosque, he finds himself between two worlds, experiencing at once the sacred and the profane. *Al-Riḥla al-khāṭifa* shares a number of features with conventional Arabic travel narrative, including much of its governing logic: it begins with the narrator's departure from a clearly marked and known place—Tetouan—and charts his arrival in another that is equally concrete—Cairo. In this moment, however, the text is generically split. Unlike most instantiations of the form, the *riḥla ṣūfīyya* has little interest in material journeys through geographies that are physical and actual. Rather, the narrator leaves the *dunyā*, turning instead towards both the *dhāt*, or self, and

21 Allan, *In the Shadow of World Literature*, 11. Allan explicitly evokes this aspect of the worldly as an understanding of the secular that has "profound implications for literature."

the *malakūt*, as in *malakūt al-samāwāt*, or the kingdom of heaven.²² When al-Wazzānī imaginatively elides the religious heart of Cairo with Fez's Idrīsī shrine, he falls back upon an alternative understanding of both text and world. In this his Cairene travelogue recalls *al-Zāwiya*, the text for which he is now best known, but also a text that is itself a reiteration of earlier Moroccan Sufi autobiographies. *Al-Zāwiya*'s relationship to this tradition, most notably Aḥmad Ibn 'Ajība's nineteenth-century *Fahrasa* (*The Autobiography of a Moroccan Soufi*), and to a lesser extent Aḥmad Zarrūq's fifteenth-century autobiographical text, *al-Kunnāsh fi 'ilm āsh* (Notebook on the Knowledge of Whatever), will anchor the remainder of this discussion.²³

I take this tack because literary modernity in Morocco does not look back nostalgically to a lost "golden age" in order to "invest in an act of generic and linguistic recuperation," as the case has been made in regard to the persistence or resurgence of earlier literary modes in modern Egypt.²⁴ Rather the adaptation of an older form to the new technologies of print served to shape a community of readers through a type of textual engagement with deep roots; here modern Arabic narrative came into view fully enmeshed in the textual practices of the manuscript culture that preceded it. It is this process of technological adaptation inaugurated in 1864 with the introduction of the lithograph machine—the first step toward a democratization of access and development of a reading public beyond the confines of the *'ulamā'*, Islam's traditional scholars—that I see as definitive of Moroccan literary modernity. In contrast to the Ottomans who initially restricted book production to non-Islamic material, or the translations of scientific and military books printed by Egypt's Būlāq press, or even the many "translated" novels published in Cairo at the turn of the twentieth century, Morocco's publishing landscape from 1865 until the

22 The specific features and vocabulary of the *riḥla šūfiyya* are outlined in 'Abd al-Raḥīm Muwaddīn's *al-Riḥla fi al-adab al-Maghribī: al-naṣṣ, al-naw', al-siyāq* (al-Dār al-Bayḍā: Afrīqiyyā al-Sharq, 2006), 91–111.

23 Ibn 'Ajība's autobiography was first translated into French by Jean-Louis Michon in 1967. The French text was then translated into English by David Streight as *The Autobiography of the Moroccan Soufi Ibn 'Ajība (1747–1809)* in 1999. The translations of the Arabic that appear here are my own, taken from the 1990 edition published by Dār al-ghad al-'arabī in Cairo. The manuscripts of Aḥmad Zarrūq's *al-Kunnāsh fi 'ilm āsh* held by Dār al-kutub al-waṭānī in Tunis and al-Maktaba al-'amma in Rabat were edited and published in Arabic in 1980 by 'Alī Khushaim as *al-Kunnāsh: šuwar min al-dhikrayāt al-ulā*. Khushaim had previously translated parts of this text into English in *Zarruq, the Sufi: a Guide in the Way and a Leader to the Truth: a Biographical and Critical Study of a Mystic from North Africa*, published in Tripoli in 1976. The text referred to here is his 1980 Arabic edition; any translations from Arabic are my own.

24 Selim, "The People's Entertainments," 38.

start of the French protectorate in 1912 was largely populated with the reproduction of works central to the Islamic tradition.²⁵ Tirmidhī's ḥadīth collection, *Kitāb al-Shamā'il*, was, for instance, the country's first lithograph, printed in Fez in 1865.²⁶ Despite their foreign origins, print technologies were overwhelmingly seen as an agent of continuity; a way to increase the popularity of traditional modes of thought.²⁷ And among the various types of books related to Islamic thought that were published in this period, Sufi texts dominated. A bibliographic list compiled in 1922 by the French Orientalist E. Levi-Provencal and the Algerian scholar M. Bencheneb reveals that a full quarter of the books produced between 1865 and 1920 were connected to Sufism.²⁸ As a result, the groundwork for al-Wazzānī's serialized narrative had been firmly put in place by the books that preceded it, Sufi texts that had been driving the industries of Morocco's lithographic and moveable type presses for decades.²⁹

From this vantage point, literary modernity looks very different. Centering genre, specifically the genre of Sufi autobiography, puts the significance of this alternative genealogy in relief because it is within the genre's function that we find both much of the text's meaning and how we come to understand the mode of reading it solicits. Attention to the persistence of a narrative form that first and foremost beseeches the reader to join a particular sort of literary community, one with a distinct sense of the world, throws into serious question the presumed secularity of Arabic literature's modernization under the *nahḍa*. *Adab's* traditional forms work in collusion here with new print technologies to create a body of literature that is less characterized by epistemological rupture and projects of nation-building than a rhetorical synthesis that marries pre-existing genres to emerging mediums. Even beyond the specific dynamics of the *nahḍa*, the question of form is no less important to how we understand the logic of the world literary system, where the decisive mechanism

25 Fawzi Abdulrazak, "Kingdom of the Book: The History of Printing as an Agent of Change in Morocco between 1865 and 1912" (PhD Diss., Boston University, 1990), on the Ottomans, 86–7; on Egypt's Būlāq press, 127. See also, Sahar Bazzaz, "Printing and the Ṭarīqa Kattāniyya: 'Abd al-Ḥayy al-Kattānī's Mufākahat dhū l-nubl wa-l-ijāda ḥaḍrat mudir jarīdat al-Sa'āda," in *Sufism, Literary Production, and Printing in the Nineteenth Century*, eds. Rachida Chih et al. (Würzburg, Germany: Ergon Verlag), 440.

26 See the Fez Lithographs Collection held by the Van Pelt Library at the University of Pennsylvania.

27 Abdulrazak, "Kingdom of the Book," 90. It should also be noted that while the Ottomans were the first to adopt printing technology within the Arabic-Islamic world, the Moroccans were among the last.

28 Abdulrazak, "Kingdom of the Book," 221.

29 The first moveable type machine was introduced to Morocco in Fez in 1906, see Abdulrazak, "Kingdom of the Book," 76.

for the international market for eighteenth and nineteenth-century novels was, in Franco Moretti's terms, that of diffusion. His well-known contention is that books from the core, primarily Britain and France, were "incessantly" exported into the "semi-periphery and the periphery," of which the Arab world would notably be considered a part.³⁰ There, they were "read, admired, imitated, turned into models—thus drawing those literatures"—including the traditional genres and forms of the Arabic tradition—"into the orbit of core ones, and 'interfering' with their autonomous development."³¹ This asymmetric diffusion, the theory holds, "imposed a stunning *sameness* to the literary system: wave after wave of epistolary fiction, or historical novels, or *mystères*, dominated the scene everywhere."³² As a view of literary history, it is heavily influenced by the Russian formalist idea of literary evolution, where the variable element of a literary text is not the content but the form. A new literary form will make its appearance against the backdrop of previous or competing texts. It will reach the height of its literary epoch as a successful form and continue to be reproduced until a new form ascends, at which point the pre-existing form will stagnate as an exhausted genre and enter the stock of commonplace literature. In other words, "a genre exhausts its possibilities—and the time comes to give a competitor a chance—when its inner form is no longer capable of representing the most significant aspects of contemporary reality."³³

What this idea allows us to see is why the question of form still matters, because it pushes us to ask if, with the rise of print culture, pre-existing forms in fact lost their ability to represent the most significant aspects of contemporary reality in the Arabic context to the degree that we often imagine. In our understanding of the shift from *adab* to modern Arabic literature something crucial is lost, or rather effaced, in our focus away from those religious institutions and practices that have come to be understood as traditional rather than modern. My suggestion here is that this isn't the whole story, something the foundational scholar of Arab modernity Albert Hourani noted in his 1983 preface to *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age*. He writes, for instance, that:

[t]o some extent I may have distorted the thought of the writers I studied ... the 'modern' element in their thought may have been smaller than

30 Franco Moretti, "World-Systems Analysis, Evolutionary Theory, *Weltliteratur*," *Review* (Fernand Braudel Center) 28, no. 3 (2005): 221.

31 Moretti, "World-Systems Analysis," 221.

32 Moretti, "World-Systems Analysis," 221.

33 Franco Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for Literary History* (Verso: New York, 2005), 17.

I implied, and it would have been possible to write about them in a way that emphasized continuity rather than a break with the past.³⁴

He follows by pointing to the quite different books that remain to be written, those foregrounding thinkers of another kind who still lived “in their inherited world of thought.”³⁵ Supported by the framework of institutions like the Azhar in Cairo, the Zaytūna in Tunis, or the Sufi brotherhoods that proliferated throughout the Arabic-speaking world, writers and intellectuals interested in innovation within the continuity of Islamic thought offer us the opportunity to think beyond the story of the *nahḍa* that remains grounded in a series of oppositions related to the larger categories of tradition and modernity.³⁶ It is, in part, this proposition that I follow in turning to al-Wazzānī and *al-Zāwiya* to propose a different way to interpret Arabic literary modernity through Morocco’s *nahḍa*. A multifaceted intellectual, al-Wazzānī was instrumental in establishing the country’s national print culture. Between 1934 and 1956, six nationalist papers appeared in the area under Spanish control and al-Wazzānī was a major contributor to half of them (*al-Ḥayā*, 1934; *al-Rif*, 1936; and *al-Umma*, 1952). He established *al-Rif*, a four-page weekly newspaper in 1936 in Tetouan while the city was the capital of the Spanish protectorate. An important vehicle for nationalist sentiment in the North, particularly in the interim between the two World Wars, the newspaper circulated until 1956, the year Morocco won its independence. It was in *al-Rif* that *al-Zāwiya* originally ran as a serial, titled “How I Came to Love Sufism” (*Kayfa aḥbābtu al-ṭāṣawwuf*) (see Figure 1), analogous to the way fictionalised narratives like the texts of Khalil

34 Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1798–1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), ix. He goes on to note that, “[i]n many ways it was such writers and teachers who continued to be dominant throughout the nineteenth century, since most Arabs who acquired literacy and culture still did so within schools of a traditional kind and continued to be affiliated to one or other of the Sufi orders.”

35 Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1798–1939*, ix.

36 Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1798–1939*, ix. It should also be noted that there has been considerable revisionist work done in recent years to Hourani’s initial ideas. See, for example, the two volumes edited by Jens Hanssen and Max Weiss, *Arabic Thought beyond the Liberal Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016) and *Arabic Thought against the Authoritarian Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018). In the former, Amal Ghazal’s “‘Illiberal’ Thought in the Liberal Age: Yusuf al-Nabhani (1849–1932), Dream-Stories and Sufi Polemics against the Modern Era” addresses the presence of an alternative Islamic/Sufi discourse in Egypt, although it appears in her reading to have been relatively peripheral. Nowhere in these volumes is the Moroccan *nahḍa*’s deep connection to traditional Islamic, and particularly Sufi, thought mentioned, including the one chapter that takes Morocco as its topic, illustrative of the degree to which this archive of material remains unexplored by the broader field.

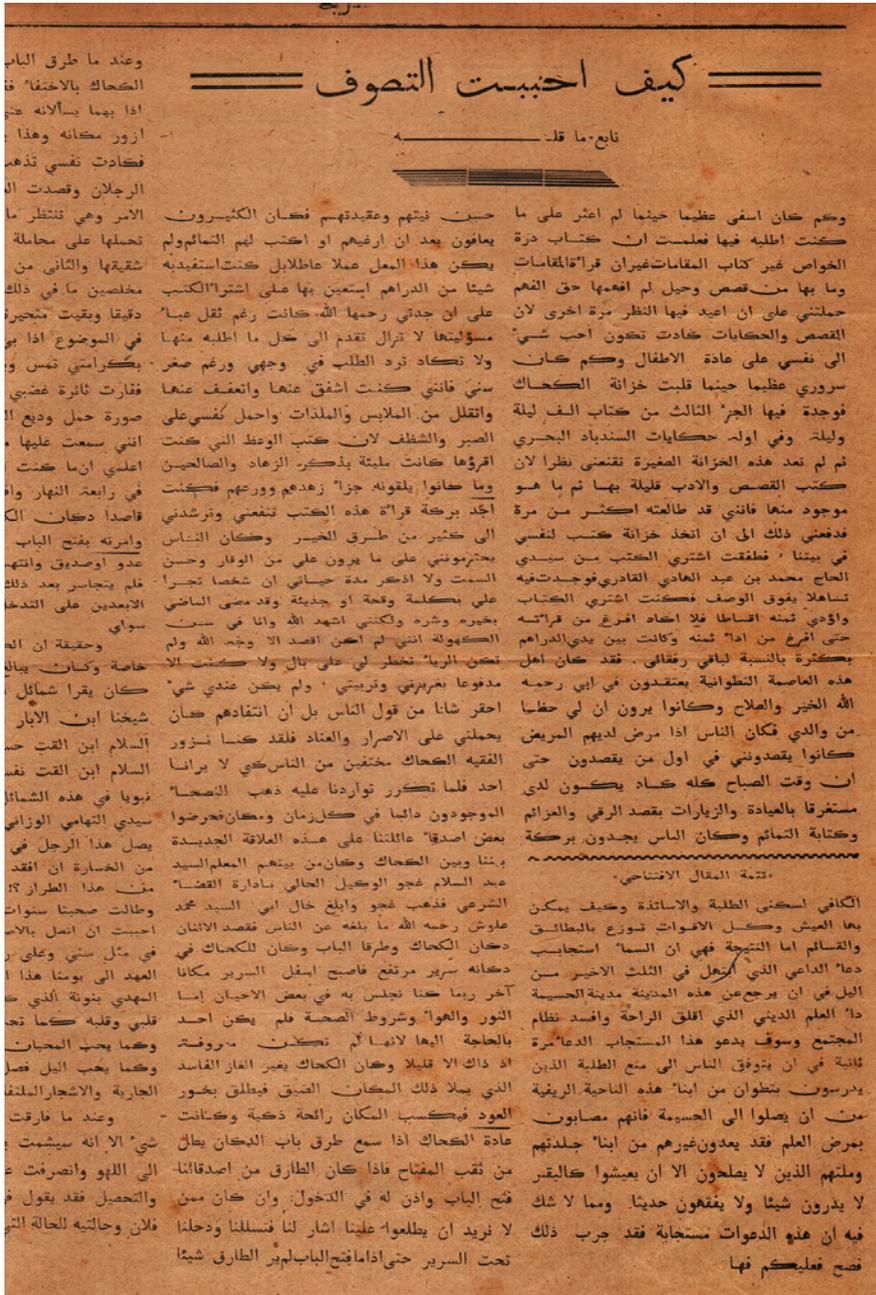


FIGURE 1 "How I Came to Love Sufism" in *al-Rif* (1941–2), scan from La Bibliothèque Générale et Archives in Tetouan

al-Khūrī, Salīm al-Bustānī, and Yūsuf al-Shalfūn featured in the periodicals of Beirut in the late nineteenth century.³⁷

Establishing the narrative's epistemological stakes, the word *zāwiya* of the book's title refers in North Africa to the physical home of a Sufi order, whether it be a small shrine and mosque or a much larger complex with teaching facilities and rooms for students. While the literary, as Allan suggests, may be productive of the terms by which the world is understood, Sufism likewise constitutes a particular type of world. That it is a world aiming to balance the *dīnī* and the *dunyawī* is made explicit in al-Wazzānī's citation of the famous Shādhilī proverb embedded within the narrative: "The body is in the shop while the heart is in [God's] Kingdom (*al-jasad fī al-hānūt wa-l-qalb fī al-malakūt*)."³⁸ Participation in the earthly world remains vital, no matter the longing for the otherworldly. Dialectically, the *zawāyā* that produced the largest part of the Maghreb's *adab* through the beginning of the twentieth century both shaped the way the world was conceptualized and continually reaffirmed it—a canon of texts written, circulated, and rewritten anew that assumed, and in turn formed, this specific mode of seeing and being in the world—a group of texts with their own particular reading public. Al-Wazzānī himself was a member of the Ḥarrāqiyya Sufi *ṭarīqa* and it is his initiation into the order that *al-Zāwiya* chronicles. My focus on the text will be threefold, though all of these aspects are interrelated. My first concern is how the act of reading itself is figured by al-Wazzānī inside the narrative. It is in his engagement with the question of what it means to read that it becomes most clear that the practice he describes is radically different from the remade relationship between text and reader that characterizes theorizations of the *nahḍa* literature of the Arab East. My second related concern is the way his initiation into the Ḥarrāqiyya Sufi order is a rewriting of the experience of religious conversion found in Ibn 'Ajība's nineteenth-century *Fahrāsa*. Here not only does the embodiment that is ultimately reading's goal come into full view, but the discursive space of a distinct reading public is equally visible. Finally, both of these features of *al-Zāwiya* intersect with the larger question of form, itself grounded in the text's temporal logic, best understood as typological. In this regard, *al-Zāwiya* not only demonstrates its continuities with the codes of premodern Arabic Sufi autobiography, it gestures outward to a global

37 Khalīl al-Khūrī's, Salīm al-Bustānī's, and Yūsuf al-Shalfūn's early novels were published in *Ḥadīqat al-Akhbār*, *al-Jinān*, and *al-Zahra* respectively; see Elizabeth Holt's *Fictitious Capital: Silk, Cotton, and the Rise of the Arabic Novel* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017). On *al-Zāwiya* as the first Arabic novel in Morocco, see 'Abd al-Raḥīm al-Sallām's *al-Riwāya al-maghribiyya al-maktūba bi-l-'arabiyya* (Rabat: Wizārat al-Thaqāfa, 2003).

38 al-Tuhāmi al-Wazzānī, *al-Zāwiya* (Tiṭwān: Jam'iyat Tiṭwān Asmīr, 2008), 113.

tradition of spiritual autobiography that relies upon the same performative mode of reading.

The Typology of (Arabic) Spiritual Autobiography

The published text of *al-Zāwīya* is divided into eleven chapters, most of which describe the narrator's life and affiliation with the Ḥarrāqīyya: "How I Came to Love Sufism" (*Kayfa aḥbabbtu al-taṣawwuf*); "How I Began to Search for a *Shaykh Tarbiya*" (*Kayfa akhadhtu aṭlub shaykh tarbiya*); "How I Entered the 'Way'" (*Kayfa dakhaltu fī ṭarīq al-qawm*); and, "After Taking the Pact of Initiation" (*Ba'd akhdhī li-l-wird*). There are three chapters specifically dealing with al-Wazzānī's friends and childhood milieu, while the final two chapters of the book are devoted to a history of the Ḥarrāqīyya order: "The Beginning of the Ḥarrāqī *Ashrāf* in Tetouan" (*bidāyat ashraf al-Ḥarrāqīyīn fī tiṭwān*) and "The early life of Sīdī Idrīs al-Ḥarrāq" (*nash'at Sīdī Idrīs al-Ḥarrāq*), a clear continuation of the hagiographical biographical dictionaries common to the premodern tradition. In contrast to the modern novel, al-Wazzānī utilizes the framework of premodern spiritual autobiography, lending it structural similarities to the narrative most often considered to have established the genre on a global scale, Augustine's *Confessions*, also notably North African.³⁹ Though al-Wazzānī works within the established conventions of the Arabic literary tradition, spiritual autobiographies share remarkable similarities across religious and linguistic contexts in the premodern period. And indeed, the *Confessions* offers not only a valuable entryway into the typological structure al-Wazzānī deploys but to his deep engagement with his own literary tradition as well. Augustine's success in crafting what would become the emblematic text for Western autobiography was largely due to the modeling of his life's narrative on the lives of Adam, Moses, Jesus, and Paul, rendering the *Confessions* a synthesis of patterns deeply enmeshed in Christianity.⁴⁰ Just as Augustine's personal trajectory is a re-enactment of all of the Christian tradition's most significant figurations, al-Wazzānī will repeat the tropes of his predecessors, making them his own.

Autobiographies are never unadulterated or complete accounts of a life. In a famous essay, Paul de Man sought to put to rest the idea that the genre is

39 Augustine was from Numidia, what is now Northeast Algeria, a Roman province at the time.

40 This is discussed at length in Avrom Fleishman's *Figures of Autobiography: The Language of Self-Writing* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), starting on pg. 50.

a simpler or more direct mode of representation, exclusively dependent on events that can be substantiated.⁴¹ The autobiographical subject, he asserts, is no less a construction of figurative language and tropes than a fiction, meaning: the appearance of equivalence between the author and the “I” in the text is simply the equivalence with the structure of a figure, which, “in its own turn, acquires a degree of referential productivity.”⁴² In regard to Augustine, early theorists of autobiography have noted that the *Confessions* are hardly inclusive of anything approaching the actual scope of Augustine’s life; rather, “a handful of experiences [were selected] that chart the graph of his progress through error to truth.”⁴³ Often explicitly philosophical or theological, the moments described in the form of a full narrative are limited to the death of his childhood friend; the theft of some pears at age sixteen; the moment of his conversion in the garden in which he hears a child’s voice tell him to ‘pick up and read;’ and the death of his mother. The narrative is centered around the pivotal conversion scene, where Augustine most notably casts himself in the mold of Paul, Christianity’s very archetype of spiritual transformation.⁴⁴ The *Confessions*’ chief figuration is its typological structure, a concept Eric Auerbach famously explained in *Mimesis* as a worldview in which time is vertically linked to Divine Providence. When the sacrifice of Isaac is interpreted as a prefiguration for the later sacrifice of Christ, which then fulfils the former, the events are both vertical and eternal—governed by God from above—outside the horizontal view of time in which history moves forward in a straight line. Isaac in this view is the type, or shadow, of Christ, the perfected antitype, or image.⁴⁵ An idea rooted in the form of narrative imitation in which the Hebrew Bible is read in such a way as to predict or prefigure events in the Christian Bible, typology bears a remarkable similarity to the narrative logic of both premodern Arabic autobiography and al-Wazzānī’s twentieth-century text, though these are scripted using Islamic rather than Christian tropes.

With history viewed vertically rather than horizontally, al-Wazzānī and his predecessors privilege, like epic, a circular narrative structure where time is

41 Paul De Man, “Autobiography as Defacement,” *Comparative Literature* 94, no. 5 (Dec. 1979): 919–930.

42 De Man, “Autobiography as Defacement,” 920–1.

43 Roy Pascal, *Design and Truth in Autobiography* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1960), 11.

44 John Sturrock, *The Language of Autobiography: Studies in the First Person Singular* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 23.

45 For an introduction to typology, see, “The Definition of Typology” and “The Elements of Typology,” 19–53 in Joseph A. Galdon, *Typology of Seventeenth-Century Literature* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, reprint edition 2018).

figured as “eternal, ... omni-temporal, something already consummated in the realm of fragmentary earthly events” rather than a process that is strictly historical.⁴⁶ Here, “[h]istory is ... not merely a succession of heterogenous events. It constitutes a divine plan. Every stage in the evolution of that divine plan represents an advance on its predecessors, but also a continuation of them.”⁴⁷ In Auerbach’s terms, “[t]he horizontal, that is, the temporal and the causal, connection of occurrences is dissolved; the here and now is no longer a mere link in an earthly chain of events, it is simultaneously something which has always been, and which will be fulfilled in the future.”⁴⁸ In al-Wazzānī’s case, and for those Arabic autobiographers who preceded him, the narrative of a life is specifically concerned with the author’s relationship to and role within the Sufi order of their affiliation. Like with Augustine, moments of conversion—not to Islam itself, but to a specific *ṭarīqa* or Sufi brotherhood—mark the plot’s climax; they are moments catalyzed, again as in Augustine, by the act of reading. These are narratives that circle back onto themselves, with markers left early in the text that predict the important religious role that the author will eventually fulfil within the context of the Sufi order. The story’s events work to show how these predictions are realized, and ultimately, how the author finally embodies the religious role he forecasts for himself in the autobiography’s opening pages. This aspect of the narrative is visible almost immediately, when al-Wazzānī’s inclination toward Islamic mystical practice is charted as something inherited, predating any conscious knowledge or choice (“Nothing was needed for Sufism to slip into the deepest part of my heart,” he tells us, “for I found it there from the first day I inhaled the world’s breeze”).⁴⁹

Centering the idea of reading and textual encounter, *al-Zāwiya*’s early moments help establish its temporal logic by indicating the author’s future exceptionalism. He ultimately crafts an image of himself as the perfect Sufi disciple, the text both forecasting this role and later showing its realization. In this al-Wazzānī’s descriptions of his earliest childhood reveal the same concerns that preoccupy his preprint forerunners. Similar to *al-Zāwiya*, Zarrū’s fifteenth-century *al-Kunnāsh fi ‘ilm āsh*, among the earliest Sufi autobiographical texts composed in the Maghreb, shows a concentrated focus on his early

46 Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 64–5.

47 Galdon, *Typology of Seventeenth-Century Literature*, 56.

48 Auerbach, *Mimesis*, 64–5.

49 فلم يكن التصوف يحتاج إلى شيء كي يسترب إلى قرارة قلبي، بل إني وجدت فيه من أول يوم استنشقت فيه نسيم الدنيا. al-Wazzānī, *al-Zāwiya*, 16.

childhood and education.⁵⁰ For Zarrūq, it was his grandmother, the *ṣāliha* Umm al-Banīn, who grounded him in the principles of belief (*wājib al-ʿitiqād*) and the narrative history of the tradition, teaching him the stories of Islam's key figures (*ḥikāyāt al-ṣāliḥīn wa-ahl al-tawakkul*) and of the Prophet's miracles and military expeditions (*muʿjizātihi wa-ghazawātihi*).⁵¹ For al-Wazzānī as well his grandmother inaugurates his reading practice, introducing him "to the beneficial *ḥadīth* and affecting homiletic stories."⁵² Even the narrator's initial discovery of his Sufi lineage is grounded in a textual encounter, described as a spontaneous epiphany:

It never occurred to me, I was completely unaware, that we had ancestors who had attained this magnitude of worship and piety ... Until I found myself in the circumstances to read *Tuḥfat al-ikhwān bi-baʿḍ manāqib shurafāʾ wazzān* and *al-Anīs al-muṭrib* and I found some of our ancestors' virtues.⁵³

The initial stirrings he feels listening to his grandmother's narrative enunciations are confirmed by the pages of *Tuḥfat al-ikhwān* and *al-Anīs al-muṭrib*, where he learns of his family's deep ties to the type of religious practice to which he aspires. Textual mediation plays a more striking role as *al-Zāwīya* continues, with al-Wazzānī's spiritual development not only fundamentally

50 Its opening sections' headings reflect these concerns (*Ṣuwar min al-dhikrayāt al-ūlā* [Images of First Memories]; *al-Waṣīyya* [The Will]; *al-Ism* [Name]; *al-Raḍāʾ* [Suckling]; *al-Jadda al-muʿallima* [The Grandmother-Teacher], etc.). For an in-depth study of Zarrūq, see Scott Kugle's *Rebel Between Spirit and Law: Ahmad Zarruq, Sainthood, and Authority in Islam* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006).

51 وكانت تحدثني بحكايات الصالحين وأهل التوكل، وغير ذلك من مقويات الإيمان. وما كانت تحدثني في موضع الخرافات إلا بمعجزاته (صلى الله عليه وسلم) وغزواته، وغرائب الكرامات، والمنقطعين إلى الله تعالى.

Aḥmad Zarrūq. *al-Kunnāsh: ṣuwar min al-dhikrayāt al-ūlā*. (ed. ʿAli Khushaim. Ṭarābulus: Libya: al-Munshaʾat al-Shaʿbiyyah, 1980), 14.

52 وكان لجدتي أم والدي أثر عظيم في نشأتي لأنها هي التي تولت تربيّتي، فكانت رحمها الله تتعهدني بالأحاديث النافعة والحكايات المؤثرة المهدبة. al-Wazzānī, *al-Zāwīya*, 16.

53 ولم يكن يخطر ببالي أوكنت غافلا تمام الغفلة عن أن لنا سلفا بلغوا إلى درجة عظيمة من العبادة والنسك... حتى أتاحت لي الظروف قراءة "تحفة الإخوان" و"الأنبس المطرب"، فوجد فيه بعض مناقب سلفنا ... al-Wazzānī, *al-Zāwīya*, 37.

informed by the autobiographies of those who have preceded him, but by the very moments in which he reads them.

In these first instances of textual encounter, *al-Zāwiya* begins to reveal that its typology is one in which reading experiences will chart the future trajectory of its narrator's path, pointing back to the question of what reading in this context means. It is to some extent a matter of how different readers relate to signs. Writing about the relationship pious Muslims hold to the Prophet, Saba Mahmood has noted the problem of assuming a "semiotic ideology in which signifiers are arbitrarily linked to concepts."⁵⁴ The question of "how a subject comes to relate to a particular sign" is not only an issue of representation or the established consensus around shared meaning.⁵⁵ Especially in matters of religion, the relation between a subject and a sign might equally be founded on "attachment and cohabitation," built on the sustained repetition of "affective and embodied practices."⁵⁶ The type of semiosis that prevails in *al-Zāwiya* and other texts of its genre is much like that drawn out by Mahmood in her discussion of the icon, a term which "refers not only to an image but to a cluster of meanings that might suggest a persona, an authoritative presence, or even a shared imagination ... a form of relationality that binds the subject to an object or imaginary."⁵⁷ The model these narratives follow in this regard is that of the Prophet's biography and the devotional literature around his immediate family (*ahl al-bayt*): the relationality that holds between text and reader is one of assimilation.⁵⁸ Muḥammad is the paragon of moral behavior whose words and actions comprise the ideal way to be in the world, "bodily and ethically."⁵⁹ His mode of inhabiting the world is emulated, often realized mimetically, his name not simply "a proper noun referring to a particular historical figure," but endowed with the "mark of a relation of similitude" for the believer.⁶⁰ The biographical literature that surrounds him calls upon the reader to assimilate the codes of conduct described within its pages in order to ultimately inhabit the world in an analogous way. The text invites the embodiment of its contents.

54 Saba Mahmood, "Religious Reason and Secular Affect: An Incommensurable Divide?" in *Is Critique Secular? Blasphemy, Injury, and Free Speech* (Berkeley [CA]; Townsend Center for the Humanities, 2009), 70.

55 Mahmood, "Religious Reason and Secular Affect," 70.

56 Mahmood, "Religious Reason and Secular Affect," 70.

57 Mahmood, "Religious Reason and Secular Affect," 74.

58 Mahmood, "Religious Reason and Secular Affect," 76.

59 Mahmood, "Religious Reason and Secular Affect," 75.

60 Mahmood, "Religious Reason and Secular Affect," 76.

The Performative Autobiography from Ibn ‘Ajība to al-Wazzānī

Reading here is performative with the narrative acting as the means through which the self is realized in line with its aspirational model. When engaging with the biographical literature surrounding the Prophet, the reader strives to embody Muḥammad’s virtues. This is similar to Sufi autobiographical literature, however, there the texts’ authors stand at a degree of remove. They, too, ultimately aim to embody particular qualities of the Prophet, but they most often cast themselves in the mold of the autobiographers who preceded them, who were themselves exemplars of Muḥammad’s virtues. Their readers will follow suit, emulating the autobiographers they read in turn. Al-Wazzānī’s implicit evocation of Zarrūq in his reiteration of the latter’s childhood descriptions follows this pattern, though it is Ibn ‘Ajība’s early nineteenth-century autobiography (*Fahrasa*) that will prove indispensable. A likely interlocutor for al-Wazzānī, Ibn ‘Ajība became attached relatively late in life to the newly founded Zāwiya Darqāwiyya, the order that ultimately gave birth to the one al-Wazzānī would later join. Cited directly no less than seventeen times throughout the text, Ibn ‘Ajība’s autobiography demonstrates the pattern of loss and compensatory gain typical of the narrative of conversion.⁶¹ Or, as James Olney describes it, the death of the old individual is enacted, laid to rest within the confines of the narrative.⁶² In this metaphoric death and rebirth, the practice of reading merges with a performance staged through the body, textual encounter ultimately elided with corporeal experience.

I would like to turn here to the most famous scene of Augustine’s *Confessions*, found in Book VIII. Titled “The Birthpangs of Conversion,” it is where the text reaches its crescendo. Reading here is doubly performative, as it is in Arabic Sufi autobiographies, though there are differences within this point of similarity. Still plagued by spiritual paralysis, Augustine sits weeping in a garden in Milan, agonized over his indecision about adopting the Catholic faith. He then experiences a revelation:

I threw myself down somehow under a certain figtree, and let my tears flow freely. I repeatedly said to you: ‘How long, O Lord? How long, Lord, will you be angry to the uttermost?’ ... As I was saying this and weeping in the bitter agony of my heart, suddenly I heard a voice from the nearby house chanting as if it might be a boy or a girl ... saying and repeating

61 Gerald Peters, *The Mutilating God: Authorship and Authority in the Narrative of Conversion* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993), 4.

62 James Olney, *Memory and Narrative: The Weave of Life-Writing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 25.

over and over again 'Pick up and read, pick up and read.' At once my countenance changed, and I began to think intently whether there might be some sort of children's game in which such a chant is used. But I could not remember having heard of one. I checked the flood of tears and stood up. I interpreted it solely as a divine command to me to open the book and read the first chapter I might find....⁶³

Opening the Bible at random, he reads an injunction against material excess and a command to put the Lord first (Rom. 13: 13–14).⁶⁴ It was, he writes, "as if a light of relief from all anxiety flooded into [his] heart. All shadows of doubt were dispelled."⁶⁵ His conversion is immediately enacted.

As imperative utterances ('pick up [!]', 'read [!]', etc.), the verbs that drive the scene's action are implicitly performative in J.L. Austin's use of the term. Their aim is not description, rather their goal is to effect an action. They do something, and the act that is their target exceeds their literal language. While most explicitly they prompt Augustine into picking up a book, and subsequently into leaving the excesses of the sensual world, the ultimate goal of these commands is his conversion, the intangible opening of his soul to a spiritual truth. Significantly, it is only Augustine's interpretative reading that makes these performative utterances felicitous; his acceptance of the convention that the practice of reading might function in this way is precisely what allows it to do so. This is the mutually constitutive relationship between the text and the self as Augustine figures it: the text is the means whereby the religious seeker achieves the version of selfhood that has been the object of his striving. Typologically speaking, he becomes the antitype that fulfils the type. By reading, Augustine realizes the archetype of Paul and becomes an ideal convert to Catholicism, yet it is only his understanding of what reading does that allows the biblical text to serve as the vehicle of his self-realization. If reading here is doubly performative, as I suggest above, it is because it has a function both inside and outside the text. Within the narrative it is the catalyst of Augustine's spiritual transformation, yet it nevertheless gestures to its audience at the same time, instructing them in how to read. Scholars of Augustine have commented that he "left his own readers the transcript of this experience ... doubtless in order

63 Saint Augustine, *Confessions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 152–3.

64 "Not in riots and drunken parties, not in eroticism and indecencies, not in strife and rivalry, but put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh in its lusts."

65 Augustine, *Confessions*, 153.

to encourage them to try his method of conversion for themselves.”⁶⁶ The work the textual encounter is meant to perform for its reader is similar to that which it performs for the author himself: it should prompt spiritual change. In this, his narrative resembles both al-Wazzānī’s and the text of his mentor in autobiography, Ibn ‘Ajība.

A thoroughly traditional scholar for the first half of his life, Ibn ‘Ajība (1747–1809) taught Islamic jurisprudence, Qur’anic exegesis, theology (*uṣūl al-dīn*), and Arabic grammar until the age of 46 or 47. Dissatisfied with a relationship to religion that was primarily intellectual, through the course of his autobiography he moves toward Sufism, a form of practice that favours the experiential. Like Augustine, the first stirrings of his spiritual transformation are staged as a textual encounter.⁶⁷ He credits a thirteenth-century book of aphorisms with opening up the possibility of an embodied piety:

My move from knowledge to practice (*min al-‘ilm ilā al-‘amal*) was prompted by my encounter with Ibn ‘Aṭā Allāh’s [d. 1310] *al-Ḥikam*, a copy of which some friends had. I made a copy for myself, read Ibn ‘Abbād’s commentary, then I took to asceticism (*zahidtu fī al-‘ālam al-zāhir*).⁶⁸

The asceticism he adopts after reading Ibn ‘Aṭā Allāh’s *al-Ḥikam* was a prominent feature of the Darqāwiyya, the Sufi order he ultimately joined. Founded by Mawlāy al-‘Arabī al-Darqāwī in the eighteenth century, the brotherhood focused on practices of extreme austerity intended to discipline the carnal self (*nafs*). Followers were urged to wear a patched robe (*muraqqa‘a*) and to beg in the market place to learn humility. With his move from Manichaeism to Christianity, Augustine’s conversion may appear more dramatic on the surface than Ibn ‘Ajība’s transition from one type of Islamic practice to another. Yet the intensity of the epiphanies he describes often surpasses those in the *Confessions* even as he remains within the realm of Islam. And while Augustine’s conversion is scripted through a rhetoric of corporeality—the bitter agony his heart suffers as he weeps is emphasized and reiterated, while his flash of instantaneous

66 Brian Stock, *After Augustine: The Meditative Reader and the Text* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 3.

67 Even Muḥammad Dāwūd, in his monumental *Tārīkh tiṭwān*, highlights the textually driven aspect of his conversion (Morocco: al-Musāra, 2008), 119.

68 وسبب انتقالنا من العلم إلى العمل أي وجدت نسخة من الحكم لابن عطاء الله عند بعض الأصحاب فنسختها ثم طالعت شرح ابن عباد فلها طالعته زهدت في العالم الظاهر... Ibn ‘Ajība, *Fahrasa*, 40.

understanding is clearly registered through the body—for Ibn ‘Ajība reading does more than this, prompting specific bodily actions, even if indirectly. The text of *al-Hikam* leads him to his *shaykh* and the repeated enactment of the physical practices he then demands of Ibn ‘Ajība creates his internal transformation. The body’s role in the process of his conversion is amplified, the change itself attributed to the performance of a series of corporal actions.

Several scenes in the autobiography point to reading as the fundamental first step in a progressive movement toward religious understanding. One shows Ibn ‘Ajība years before his conversion, when he had resolved to sell his books and live in isolation on a mountain near the grave of the revered Sufi saint Mawlāy ‘Abd al-Salām ibn Mashīsh. He was to spend the remainder of his days there in prayer when suddenly, while in seclusion (*khalwa*), he saw the local saint Sīdī Ṭalḥa in a dream. The saint leaned toward him, his beard touching his face, and said: “Study!’ *‘al-‘ilm?*’ [Ibn ‘Ajība] asked him. He said, ‘Yes, study *‘ilm* in depth.’ So [Ibn ‘Ajība] returned to the study of *‘ilm*.⁶⁹ *‘ilm*, the knowledge acquired through books, is regularly set in opposition to *taḥqīq*, realization, a type of understanding surpassing that of the ordinary scholar’s which must be the final goal. Augustine reached *taḥqīq* directly through his encounter with the text of the New Testament, a moment of reading seamlessly segueing into one of fully embodied religious insight. In contrast, Ibn ‘Ajība will need to ultimately shift away from *‘ilm* to a mode of learning grounded in the immediacy of the body. As he writes, “*‘ilm* without practice is a means without an end (*fa-‘ilm bilā ‘amal wasīla bilā ghāya*).”⁷⁰ Knowledge cannot be acquired through reading alone, but it is an irreplaceable and vital mediation. And his own text is meant to serve precisely the same mediating role for others.

Ibn ‘Ajība performs this role for al-Wazzānī but he is not his only influence; the latter’s staging of his passage from ignorance to enlightenment in *al-Zāwiya* is, to borrow a phrase from Roland Barthes, “a tissue of quotations,” ceaselessly reiterating the anterior gestures of the tradition.⁷¹ The analogy with disease, specifically a disease of the heart in need of a cure, is ultimately derived from the Qur’ān and verses like those in *sūrat al-Baqara*, where it is said of

69 فرأيت سيدي طلحة في النوم وأنا عند ضريحه فانحنى علي حتى مس شعر لحيته وجهي. فقلت في نفسي نشاوره في هذا الأمر الذي أريد وكنت عزمت على بيع الكتب والطلوع إلى جبل مولاي عبد السلام بن مشيش رضي الله عنه للمتعب. فلم يكن قدر الله ذلك. فقلت له يا سيدي إني أريد أن أترك العلم ونقطع للعبادة والتبتل. فقال لي اقرأ فقلت له العلم. فقال لي نعم اقرأ إني أريد أن أترك العلم غاية غاية. فرجعت لطلب العلم. Ibn ‘Ajība, *Fahrasa*, 43.

70 Ibn ‘Ajība, *Fahrasa*, 40.

71 Roland Barthes, *Image—Music—Text*. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 146–7.

the unbelievers that, “in their hearts is a malady” (*fi qulūbihim maraḍun*) (Q 2: 10). The most famous of Arabic’s autobiographers, Muḥammad al-Ghazālī (d. 1111), drew upon this image, creating an extended metaphor of physical illness to convey his distress before coming to Sufism. For al-Ghazālī the role of the *shaykh* vis-à-vis his disciples is that of a “doctor of hearts.”⁷² Al-Wazzānī consistently evokes the same analogy, repeating in an increasingly desperate register, “[e]very illness has a medicine, and only a doctor can prescribe it, but where can a *shaykh* be found?”⁷³ *Al-Zāwīya*’s narrator sleeps little, wakes in the middle of the night, and cries while prostrating on his prayer rug begging God to take him by the hand and deliver him.⁷⁴ “[M]y need,” al-Wazzānī declares, “was the need of the thirsty for water ...”⁷⁵ It is language distinct to the conversion narrative, for the restructuring of identity that this type of transition requires can only be charted through a metaphorical register of pain and physical suffering. Literal language here fails, the internal transformative process defying description, as does the primal feeling and instantaneous flash of perception by which it is accompanied. Time and again these experiences are represented through external signifiers, the language of acute crisis, and the body of the convert. Even the Prophet Muḥammad reportedly suffered when he first received the revelation. The earliest Arabic histories show his initial terror and exhaustion: “I had been standing,” the Prophet said, “but fell to my knees; and crawled away, my shoulders trembling. I went to Khadijah and said, ‘Wrap me up! Wrap me!’”⁷⁶

The tropes and metaphorical language common to the Sufi autobiographical tradition pervade *al-Zāwīya*, but Ibn ‘Ajība’s *Fahrāsa* is the palimpsest upon which the text is written. Forty pages into the autobiography, the narrator realizes that an acquaintance named Muḥammad al-Qādirī, a disciple of Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Kabīr al-Kattānī (d. 1909) whose family had established the Kattāniyya *zāwīya* in Fez in 1853 and were themselves intimately connected to the burgeoning world of print, holds some of “the medicine for

72 Muḥammad Al-Ghazali, *Deliverance from Error: Five Key Texts Including his Spiritual Autobiography, al-Munqidh min al-Dalal*, trans. R.J. McCarthy (Louisville: FonsVitae, 1980), 87. That al-Wazzānī borrowed al-Ghazālī’s imagery is not surprising. Abdurzak tells us that al-Ghazālī’s works were widely copied in Morocco through the nineteenth century up until the advent of print (48).

73 فإن لكل مرض دواء والدواء لا يصفه إلا الطبيب، ولكن أين يوجد الشيخ وأين يمكن أن يكون... al-Wazzānī, *al-Zāwīya*, 45.

74 al-Wazzānī, *al-Zāwīya*, 43.

75 ...كانت حاجتي حاجة الظمان إلى الماء... al-Wazzānī, *al-Zāwīya*, 46.

76 al-Ṭabarī, *The History of al-Ṭabarī: Volume VI Muḥammad at Mecca*, trans. W. Montgomery Watt and M.V. McDonald (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), 68.

the malady of the heart” from which he suffers.⁷⁷ From this point onward, Ibn ‘Ajība’s work moves to the text’s center. Forcing the eccentric al-Qādirī into serious conversation, the narrator says:

يا سيدي محمد أنت تحدثني عن التصوف وأنا لا أعرف شيئا عنه فأرجوك أن تدلني على كتاب واضح في التصوف كي أفهمه وأطلع يسيرا على هذا الفن الذي بحسب ما يظهر لي هو أعلى الفنون شأنًا وأجدرها بالإنكباب عليه، وكان بين يديه عدة كتب وهو مستند على بعضها فرفع ذراعه وهو متجرد من جلابته وعليه وعجبي أزرق اللون، فقلب تلك الكتب بين يديه وأخرج كتابا صغير الحجم ذا غلاف من الورق القوي في لون الدم الشديد الحمرة حتى ضربت إلى السواد وناولني إياه، ففتحته فإذا هو كتاب غريب الشأن فإنه شرح لمتن الأبرومية الذي أحفظه وأعرفه كما أعرف أصابعي الخمسة، فهذا هو المتن أما الشرح فإنه لرجل لم أسمع بذكره قط فإنه أحمد ابن عجيبة.

“Sīdī Muḥammad, you’ve talked to me about Sufism and I don’t know anything about it. Please, point me to a lucid book so that I can understand and comfortably know this art that seems to me to be the highest of all arts and the worthiest of pursuit.” He had a number of books in front of him; he was leaning on some of them. Then, not wearing his traditional *jallāba* but a blue foreign one, he raised his arm. He turned those books over in his hands and took out a small volume of thick paper with a dark blood red cover that was nearly black and gave it to me. I opened it and to my surprise I saw it was a book that was strange and bizarre. It was a commentary on the [grammar book] *Matn al-Ajurrūmiyya* that I had memorized and knew as perfectly as the five fingers of my hand. This was the *Matn*, but as for the commentary, it was by a man of whom I had never heard. It was Sīdī Aḥmad Ibn ‘Ajība.⁷⁸

Al-Zāwiya’s narrator opens Ibn ‘Ajība’s Sufi commentary on the grammatical text that he thought he knew and immediately slips into the realm of the sacred: “I took the book and began to read; suddenly I was in another world ...

77 وجدت عنده بعض دواء علة قلبي التي أشتكيتها, al-Wazzānī, *al-Zāwiya*, 41. The Kattānīs were among the most popular Sufi leaders in nineteenth-century Morocco and utilized print technology to popularize their order and advance their political positions with great savvy. On the Kattāniyya and its relationship to print, see Bazzaz, “Printing and the Ṭarīqa Kattāniyya,” and also Abdulrazak, “Kingdom of the Book,” 52–5; 231–5.

78 al-Wazzānī, *al-Zāwiya*, 41.

it didn't resemble anything, except what al-Qādirī and my grandmother had talked to me about."⁷⁹ Immediately beset by an internal crisis, he becomes detached from family and friends, looking back to his previous immersion in the affairs of the physical world, or *dunyā*, as little more than the errant indulgence of carnal desires.⁸⁰ "I found myself as someone newly created," he writes.⁸¹ It is Ibn 'Ajība he credits for "opening the door" in front of him (*huwa awwal man fataḥa al-bāb fī wajhī*).⁸² In Charles Taylor's terms, the experience is one of "fullness," the feeling of God's presence that "breaks through our ordinary sense of being in the world ... when ordinary reality is abolished and something ... *other* shines through."⁸³ The two frames of reference that will later shape al-Wazzānī's account of Cairo—the *dunyawī* (worldly) and the *dīnī* (religious)—become clear to him here for the first time.

Though al-Wazzānī encounters Ibn 'Ajība's commentary on the *Ajurrūmiyya* first, the template for his conversion story is the *Fahrāsa*, a text he comes upon at the age of sixteen.⁸⁴ Approaching it like scripture, he reads it not once, but again and again, internalizing the steps along the Sufi Path that he finds within its pages as a model: "I don't know how many times I read that autobiography," he writes, continuing, "until I had almost memorized it by heart."⁸⁵ His own autobiography explicitly mirrors Ibn 'Ajība's description of the days that followed his exchange of the scholar's garments for the heavy robe, or *jallāba*, of the Sufi disciple. In Ibn 'Ajība's account, the first time he wore the coarse garment and entered town with his cohorts, "people looked in amazement."⁸⁶ He heard his "lower soul (*nafsi*) from within crying and screaming."⁸⁷ The sweat poured from him. In the days that followed, he added a thick set of prayer beads (*subḥa*) to his neck, gave away all his belongings, and washed the clothes of the poor, but his moment of realization didn't come until he obeyed his

79 فأخذت الكتاب وشرعت في قراءته فإذا أنا في عالم آخر... لا يشبه شيء إلا ما كان يحدثني به وجدتي... القادري، al-Wazzānī, *al-Zāwiya*, 42.

80 نحن تائهون في غمرات الدنيا ومنغمسون في حمأة الشهوات، al-Wazzānī, *al-Zāwiya*, 42.

81 فوجدت نفسي وكأنني قد خلقت خلقا جديدا، al-Wazzānī, *al-Zāwiya*, 42.

82 al-Wazzānī, *al-Zāwiya*, 42.

83 Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge [MA]: Harvard University Press, 2007), 6.

84 وفي هذه الفترة كنت أطلع فهرسة سيدي أحمد ابن عجيبة... أنا لا أزال في حالة هي بالطفولة وأشبهه، al-Wazzānī, *al-Zāwiya*, 110.

85 ولا أدري كم مرة قرأت تلك الفهرسة حتى كادت تكون محفوظة لدي من ظهر القلب. al-Wazzānī, *al-Zāwiya*, 111.

86 الناس ينظرون ويتعجبون. Ibn 'Ajība, *Fahrāsa*, 53.

87 فلقد سمعت نفسي من داخل تغوت وتصبح. Ibn 'Ajība, *Fahrāsa*, 53.

shaykh's order to beg. "Nothing in the world has been more difficult for me, nothing has cut deeper into the arteries of my soul," he writes.⁸⁸ He would set out intending to beg, he tells us, but instead wandered around aimlessly in the *sūq*, his "sense of shame (*ḥayā*)" holding him back.⁸⁹ "I envied those among the poor who did it," he laments, "[m]any times a day my lower soul wished for bodily death ... The people passing by me covered their faces, embarrassed to see me in that condition."⁹⁰ Paralyzed, struggling to debase himself as his *shaykh* had ordered, he finally stretches out his hand. Like Augustine's despair in the garden, the moment before transformation is an acute crisis of the soul played out through the body. After the moment of conversion, however, the crisis is promptly resolved. For Augustine, his eyes fell upon the lines of Romans and all doubts dissolved. As Ibn 'Ajība opened his hands for alms he instantaneously became impervious to humiliation. His hesitation gone, he began to search out the greatest opportunities for degradation, "I aimed for those who would criticize and disapprove [of my actions] more than anyone else, in order to extract from them that which would kill the self."⁹¹

This is the structure that al-Wazzānī borrows, describing how he too is driven by a series of orders delivered by his *shaykh*. He is instructed to remove his *ṭarbūsh* and in its place wear a simple white skullcap and *jallāba*; to hang a thick set of prayer beads around his neck; to carry a special cane with him at all times. In a direct parallel to Ibn 'Ajība, he is told to go begging with the *shaykh*, experiencing the same humiliation: "By God, I didn't feel as though I were walking on the face of the earth. I wished the sky would raise me up or the ground would swallow me ..."⁹² The narrator's definitive moment of realization, however, occurs later, after his *shaykh* orders him into seclusion (*khalwa*) in one of the *zāwiya's* rooms near the roof. There he is locked in, with windows sealed to absent all light; he subsists on one small meal a day of sour buttermilk yogurt and a morsel of barley bread.⁹³ Slipping again into the

88 ثم أمرني بالسؤال في الحوانيت وأبواب المساجد. فما رأيت في الدنيا أصعب منه ولا أجهز
لأوداج النفس منه. Ibn 'Ajība, *Fahrasa*, 54.

89 Ibn 'Ajība, *Fahrasa*, 54.

90 وأغبط من يفعل ذلك من الفقراء. وكانت نفسي تمني الموت الحسي مرارا في اليوم... فكان الناس
يمرون بي ويغطون وجوههم حياء مني لئلا يروني في تلك الحال. Ibn 'Ajība, *Fahrasa*, 54.

91 وكذلك السؤال كنت أقصد به أهل الانتقاد والإنكار أكثر من غيرهم. لأستخرج منهم ما تموت
به النفس. Ibn 'Ajība, *Fahrasa*, 55.

92 والله ما كنت أشعر أنني أسير على وجه الأرض ووددت أن السماء رفعتني أو الأرض ابتلعتني...
al-Wazzānī, *al-Zāwiya*, 110.

93 al-Wazzānī, *al-Zāwiya*, 117–8.

otherworldly, his internal transformation is, like Ibn 'Ajība's before him, represented through external signifiers: he sees what lies behind the walls, hears voices, has conversations with men who are simultaneously both present and absent, and perceives everything around him, animate and inanimate alike, as actively engaged in the worship of God.⁹⁴ The experiences his severe bodily deprivation prompt finally effect his conversion, confirmed when his *shaykh* enters the room and signals his recognition of the transformation with a discerning look.

In *Politics of Piety*, Saba Mahmood rethinks the connection between performative bodily practices and piety, finding that the relationship between interiority and exteriority is often the reverse of what it would first appear to be.⁹⁵ Modesty, for instance, does not simply express itself through the veiled body, but is rather acquired through the practice of veiling. Similarly, it is the repeated bodily practices charted by both Ibn 'Ajība and al-Wazzānī that allow them to remake the self in line with the model to which they aspire. *ʿIlm*, or reading, is the first step toward ultimately embodying their ideal way of existing in the world. And just as they themselves catalyze their own transformations through an assimilative textual encounter, where they strive to affectively inhabit the text's contents, they then move to practices squarely located in the body, external actions effecting internal change. Like Augustine, whose narrative was meant to prompt his readers toward an analogous experience of spiritual transformation, their autobiographies return to this relationship between text and reader. Ibn 'Ajība and al-Wazzānī both recount their experiences in the hope of sparking the same moment of insight in their readers, of edging them toward the same path upon which their own textual encounters first set them. The type of piety Ibn 'Ajība and al-Wazzānī describe does not, for their imagined readers, precede their engagement with their autobiographers, rather these texts are meant to help produce it.

Conclusion: al-Wazzānī's Reading Public

As al-Wazzānī wrote *al-Zāwiya*, Morocco's North remained under Spanish occupation, the country's center was still ruled by the French, and a press written by and for Moroccans was in its infancy. It was only in 1933 that the colonial

94 al-Wazzānī, *al-Zāwiya*, 118. For a complete English translation of this scene, see Gretchen Head, "Sufi Dreams in the Maghreb," (*Arablīt Quarterly*, Winter 2020, Volume 3, Issue 4) 38–42.

95 Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), see in particular "Chapter 5: Agency, Gender, and Embodiment," 153–88.

authorities allowed Moroccans to publish their own periodicals, hoping that this would provide a less dangerous outlet for the expression of grievances than the protests that had rocked the country since the 1930 Berber decree.⁹⁶ Deeply invested in the country's struggle for independence, al-Wazzānī joined Morocco's first nationalist political party, *Kutlat al-ʿamal al-waṭani*, in 1935, a year after it was established. And when the *Ḥizb al-iṣlāḥ al-waṭani* was founded shortly thereafter, he not only promptly joined its northern branch, he became its deputy.⁹⁷ Although *al-Rif*, the paper in which *al-Zāwiya* was serialized from 1941 to 1942, was not the *Ḥizb al-iṣlāḥ*'s official media arm—that position was held by *al-Ḥurriya*, with which al-Wazzānī was also involved—its orientation was nevertheless visible in the line under its title that declared it an, “independent, political and cultural paper (*jarīda mustaqilla, siyāsiyya, wa-thaqāfiyya*).” It often served as a platform for the party.⁹⁸ With intention, al-Wazzānī and the other leading intellectuals of Morocco's *nahḍa* set out to cultivate a new kind of reading public. Given the clear nationalist dimension of early twentieth-century Moroccan print culture, why have I chosen to argue for the development of a reading public whose concerns are not exclusively, or perhaps even primarily, those of the modern citizen of a nation-state? This question returns to the two opposing modes negotiated by al-Wazzānī in his travelogue of Cairo, the *dunyawī* (worldly) and the *dīnī* (otherworldly). Which type of world does he presume his readers to inhabit? In which type of world does he invite them to participate? In other words, to which type of public does he address his discourse?

In *Publics and Counterpublics*, Michael Warner seeks to define what precisely is meant by “a public,” an expression often used but seldom unpacked. He characterizes it as “a space of discourse organized by nothing other than discourse itself” and then goes on to point out several of its features: It is a space oriented to strangers, characterized by an ambiguous mix of personal and impersonal address; it is a space to which anyone might belong if they only lend it their attention.⁹⁹ His fifth premise bears citing:

96 The Berber decree, issued by the French in 1930, stated that the Berber population would be governed by a separate legal code based on Berber customary law. It was designed to isolate the *Amāzīgh* from the rest of Moroccan society to ultimately assimilate them (and perhaps convert them to Christianity as the move also divorced them from Islamic law). The decree sparked wide-scale protests throughout the country.

97 Amīna ʿAwshūr, “Dawr al-Tuhāmī al-Wazzānī fī inshāʾ al-ṣaḥāfa al-waṭaniyya bi-mintaqat al-ḥimāya al-isbāniyya,” in *Aʿmāl nadwat al-Tuhāmī al-Wazzānī: al-kitāba—al-taṣawwuf—al-tārīkh* (Rabat: Ittiḥād Kuttāb al-Maghrib, 1989), 38.

98 ʿAwshūr, “Dawr al-Tuhāmī al-Wazzānī,” 38.

99 Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone Books, 2002), 67; 89.

A public is the social space created by the reflexive circulation of discourse ... No single text can create a public. Nor can a single voice, a single genre, even a single medium. All are insufficient to create the kind of reflexivity that we call a public since a public is understood to be an ongoing space of encounter for discourse. Not texts themselves create publics, but the concatenation of texts through time. Only when a previously existing discourse can be supposed, and when a responding discourse can be postulated, can a text address a public.¹⁰⁰

Much of the print culture that rapidly developed in Morocco in the 1930s and 40s was indeed concerned with the *dunyawī*, focused on the future of what would soon be an independent nation. Yet instances of the literary often remained tied to the *dīnī*, in no need of a restructured relationship between text and reader. As they do in al-Wazzānī's *riḥla*, the *dunyawī* and the *dīnī* could coexist on the page without conflict. This is because the public that is al-Wazzānī's literary addressee is not, in fact, wholly new. The medium has changed: the manuscript culture of Zarrūq and Ibn 'Ajība has been replaced not only by the moveable type press introduced to Morocco in 1906, but by the new media form of the weekly newspaper. Yet this alone does not fundamentally alter the nature of the "ongoing space of encounter" of the discourse upon which al-Wazzānī draws and participates. If a public is created by "the concatenation of texts through time," *al-Zāwīya*'s intertextuality needs to be viewed not only as evidence of the writer's influences, but as a demonstration of the "previously existing discourse" he presumes and to which he responds. It is, at least in part, a public already familiar with this discourse that serves as his addressee.

Although the discourse with which al-Wazzānī interacts has a long history, he expands the parameters of its public. No longer directed primarily toward the members of a particular Sufi brotherhood, he writes with a refigured trajectory of circulation in mind. And what had previously been a "scarce commodity," the Sufi autobiography available exclusively in handwritten manuscripts painstakingly produced by scribes, is now serialized, reproduced en masse, easily accessible to anyone with literacy. In *al-Zāwīya*, he imagines the whole of his home city's population as his community of readers; his addressee throughout is not his fellow, or even future, members of the Ḥarrāqiyya order, but rather the people of Tetouan, *al-Tiṭwāniyyūn*. Warner notes that, "[w]riting to a public helps to make a world insofar as the object of address is brought into being partly by postulating and characterizing it."¹⁰¹ The Tetouan that

100 Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 90.

101 Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 92.

al-Wazzānī brings into being is a city reeling from a string of losses; what he recounts alongside his own spiritual journey is the hardships of its recent history as experienced by its residents: the Spanish occupation of 1860; the siege of Tetouan's mountain tribes when they were taken up by Abū Ḥimāra's call to arms; the Spanish reoccupation of 1913.¹⁰² He projects and constitutes his public through a retelling of the city's shared suffering that stretches back to the exile from Andalusia that affected so many of Tetouan's residents' ancestors; modern occupation merges with their expulsion from Spain in the fifteenth century. "The people of Tetouan (*al-Tiṭwāniyyūn*)," he writes, "were completely terrified of the memory of the Christians. When Morocco could not win the war of 1860, the people resorted to evacuating the city, afraid they would be afflicted with the same fate of their Muslim ancestors in Granada."¹⁰³ Later he adds, "[w]hen the Spanish occupied Tetouan in 1913, all the memories were revived."¹⁰⁴

While a public can be created, summoned into being through discourse, it nevertheless must be grounded in reality, a possible social entity. By drawing on the city as a site of identity, al-Wazzānī evokes an established mode of belonging within the Arabic tradition. Long before the nation-state, people throughout the Middle East and North Africa identified with the cities they called home. Cairene, Baghdadi, and Fezzi had been meaningful identity categories for centuries. With the people of Tetouan as addressee, a new path of circulation is created for an old discourse. The narrative is an invitation to all of Tetouan's people to embody the ideal of religious practice described in the text, its reading meant to facilitate an encounter with the Divine. However, by establishing its public in this way, *al-Zāwiya* performs another function as well. It becomes a site of commemoration, a testimony to loss, and an invitation not just to spiritual epiphany, but to the communal grieving over a collective trauma. For the readers of *al-Rif* who encountered this text when it first ran, this is the dual function of the earlier form. While it allowed al-Wazzānī to

102 Abū Ḥimāra, whose real name was Jilānī ibn Idrīs, was a former functionary of the *makhzan* who led a revolt against the Sultan 'Abd al-'Azīz, pretending to be his brother Muḥammad. He staged the most significant part of this rebellion from the Jabāla region in the north, gaining the support of the tribes by posing as a holy man.

103 فكان التطوانيون يفرعون من ذكر النصرانية كل الفرع فلها كانت حرب سنة ١٨٦٠ م ولم يقدر للمغرب فيها الفوز لجأ الناس إلى إفراغ المدينة خوفاً من أن يصيبهم ما أصاب سلفهم مسلمي ... غرناطة ... *al-Wazzānī, al-Zāwiya*, 24.

104 وعندما احتل الاسبانيون تطوان سنة ١٩١٣ م تجددت كل الذكريات ... *al-Wazzānī, al-Zāwiya*, 24.

preserve the very core of what it means to read and write as the embodiment of Sufi practice, his turn to Tetouan as addressee simultaneously witnesses the brutality of European occupation. Meant to elicit an intuitive response or a moment of spiritual clarity, *al-Zāwiya* also preserves communal memory, resisting the effacement not just of an indigenous literary form and mode of reading, but of history.

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