Al-Miknāsī’s Mediterranean Mission: Negotiating Moroccan Temporal and Spiritual Sovereignty in the Late Eighteenth Century
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ABSTRACT: In 1779 the sultan of Morocco, Muḥammad bin ʿAbdallah (Muḥammad III, r. 1757–90), sent an ambassadorial delegation to Spain to ransom Ottoman-Algerian prisoners. The delegation was led by Muḥammad bin ʿUthman al-Miknāsī (d. 1799), who left a detailed account of the mission in his extant text Al-Iksīr fī fikāk al-asīr (The Elixir That Will Liberate the Prisoner). When juxtaposed on the historical record, al-Miknāsī’s travelogue illustrates how Muḥammad III and the Moroccan religio-political elite navigated the complex Mediterranean web of religious identity, political allegiance, and ethnicity. Positing a division between “temporal” and “spiritual” sovereignty increases our understanding of how Muḥammad III substantiated his authority on multiple levels in relation to Spain, Ottoman-Algeria, and the Sublime Porte in Istanbul. While previous scholarship has focused on a religio-political aggression against the Christian Europeans, this article employs al-Miknāsī’s travelogue to demonstrate how Muḥammad III halted religio-political aggression against Dār al-Ḥarb (Abode of War) and questioned the unity within Dār al-Īslām (Abode of Islam).

KEYWORDS: eighteenth-century Morocco, Spain, travel literature, Ottoman-Moroccan relations, captivity, Mediterranean diplomacy, Muḥammad III

On November 13, 1779, Muḥammad bin ʿUthmān al-Miknāsī (d. 1799) stood outside the walls of Ceuta—a Spanish exclave positioned on Morocco’s northwest Mediterranean coast. This small peninsula, which functions as a port and military outpost, has been under Spanish sovereignty since the 1668 Treaty of Lisbon (Abulafia 2011: 396). Here, standing at the base of the Ceutan Peninsula, al-Miknāsī began his official diplomatic mission to Spain. Sent by Sultan Muḥammad bin ʿAbdallah (Muḥammad III, r. 1757–90), al-Miknāsī was charged with ransoming Muslim captives held by the Spanish king, Carlos III (r. 1759–88). This mission,
as I explain below, fits into a larger diplomatic project by Muḥammad III to end Mediterranean corsairing, champion the release of both Christian and Muslim captives, and develop strong economic connections with Europe. As the leader of this Moroccan delegation, al-Miknāsī wrote an account of the journey for Muḥammad III’s royal library. His travelogue, *Al-Iksīr fi fikāk al-asīr* (The Elixir That Will Liberate the Prisoner), provides a detailed narrative of the delegation’s land journey to Madrid, their reception at Carlos III’s court, and their return to Cadiz where they ransomed the Muslim captives.

Al-Miknāsī’s portrayal of Spain begins in Ceuta where he describes the frivolity of the Ceutans: blasting off canons from all sides of the city and “cheering the most vivacious cheer” to mark the arrival of the Moroccan delegation.2 Aside from witnessing the pomp and extravagant gestures of the Spanish, the Moroccan ambassadorial unit also spent a night with the Muslim *mujāhadīn* (crusaders) in Ishbār, the closest Moroccan enclave to Ceuta. When al-Miknāsī translated this experience into his travelogue he did not focus on the plight of the *mujāhadīn*, nor did he linger on the question of Spanish sovereignty over the Ceutan Peninsula.3 Instead, al-Miknāsī highlights the physical characteristics of Ceuta’s trench, firmly distancing this territory from Morocco. Imagining Ceuta not as a Spanish fort on Moroccan soil, but as a Spanish fort occupying its own Mediterranean island, al-Miknāsī writes,

> And we entered the city from the area close to the sea. We passed through the first gate, then the second, and when we arrived at the door of the city we found beneath it a very wide and very deep trench. This trench is filled with water from the sea, a small boat ferrying people across. For it is a result of this [man-made] trench that Ceuta became a small island surrounded by the sea on all of its sides. (al-Miknāsī and al-Fāsī 1965: 7–8)

Al-Miknāsī’s descriptive focus unveils a unique geographic framing. His Mediterranean crossing occurs over the Ceutan trench. According to al-Miknāsī, though it was once physically attached to Moroccan soil, Ceuta has since become its own Mediterranean island, separated by the physical width and depth (*mutasa’an jidan katbir al-‘umuq*) of the man-made trench (*ḥafir*).4 This trench, which spans no more than twenty feet, can hardly be considered wide or deep. Yet, al-Miknāsī conceptualizes the Ceutan trench as the definitive boundary between Spain and Morocco. For al-Miknāsī, the trench serves as a proxy for the Mediterranean. Thus, crossing the trench to Ceuta is analogous to crossing the Straits of Gibraltar and arriving on the northern shores of the Mediterranean.
Al-Miknāsī’s geographic framing reifies the contemporary geopolitical situation: Spanish sovereignty over Ceuta. Though this status had been contested earlier and will be contested after al-Miknāsī’s voyage, at this particular moment the Moroccan courtly rhetoric supported an acceptance of the geopolitical status quo. A Moroccan katib (court official), Abu al-Qāsim al-Zayānī (d. 1833), describes Muḥammad III’s policy toward Ceuta. Recalling a conversation that he had with Muḥammad III, al-Zayānī expresses the people’s (al-nāss) concern over Muḥammad III funding the Ottoman Empire’s jihad against the Russians. According to al-Zayānī, the Moroccan people would prefer money to be used for jihad to reclaim Christian land holdings in North Africa such as Ceuta, Melilla, and Bādis. Hearing this, Muḥammad III laughed and replied, “there is no sense in attacking those three villages. Even though Ceuta is surrounded by Moroccan land, only a foolish and ignorant person would wage war against it! It is not advantageous to wage war, because it would only disgrace Islam. Thus, avoidance is the most appropriate action” (al-Zayānī 1991: 131–32). Muḥammad III’s stance is made clear in this passage. He has no interest in questioning Spanish temporal sovereignty over the Ceutan Peninsula.

Yet, this acceptance is at odds with current scholarly definitions of Morocco’s static threshold status between Dār al-Ḥarb (Abode of War) and Dār al-Islām (Abode of Islam). While most histories reiterate al-Zayānī’s conception of Morocco’s bellicose relationship with Ceuta, al-Miknāsī’s account complicates this understanding. Echoing Muḥammad III, al-Miknāsī abandons any Moroccan “temporal,” religio-political claim to Ceuta. That is, he does not focus on the current Christian occupation of an Islamic land—and all of the earthly evils that this entails. This motif, which permeates throughout his text, is most apparent in the way that al-Miknāsī replaces “temporal,” religio-political claims against the Christians with “spiritual” assertions of Moroccan-Islamic authority. Al-Miknāsī highlights the complexities of diplomatic interactions in the late eighteenth century by differentiating between the Moroccan sultan’s temporal authority, which includes his current geopolitical land claims, and his spiritual sovereignty, which extends to a pan-Mediterranean arena. As I explain below, this assertion of spiritual sovereignty allows Muḥammad III to retain his newly forged temporal relationship with Spain while simultaneously threatening the temporal claims of the Ottoman-Algerian Muslims. Here, the distinction between spiritual and temporal sovereignties sheds light on the complexities of interreligious versus intrareligious diplomatic interactions. As al-Miknāsī’s text confirms, asserting a spiritual Islamic authority had little effect on Christian-Muslim temporal relations, but held more immediate, temporal consequences for Muslim-Muslim relations.

By separating Sultan Muḥammad III’s temporal and spiritual authority, al-Miknāsī’s narrative, Al-Iṣkīr fī fikāk al-asīr, exemplifies how travel literature
involves both memory and history to struggle with the layered authorities distinctive of Mediterranean frontiers. As Dimitar Bechev explains in *Mediterranean Frontiers: Borders, Conflict and Memory in a Transnational World*, the “ill defined bonds between centre and periphery meant blurred borders that accommodated overlapping claims to authority” (Bechev and Nicolaidis 2010: 7). When dominated by competing political, religious, and economic claims to sovereignty, the frontier can become a blurred space. This confusion, however, does not imply that the frontier was an anarchic, liminal space stuck between two divergent worlds. On the contrary, the frontier as a concept in Mediterranean studies is better understood as a borderland—a space that is not merely acted upon by outside forces, but plays an effective and creative role itself. Through his negotiation of history, religion, political affiliations, and ethnic identities, al-Miknāsi alludes to Morocco’s effective role during the late eighteenth century. Laced with the subtleties of language that invoke the Islamic dominance of the Moroccan sultan as a supreme *ṣāḥib al-taṣrīf* and the acceptance of a newly founded temporal relationship with Spain, al-Miknāsi’s text negotiates the foreign and diplomatic policies of Muḥammad III within a dynamic religio-political framework.

Juxtaposed with the historical record, this text illustrates how Muḥammad III took advantage of Morocco’s malleable yet effectual borderland status to remold his temporal and spiritual realms of influence in relation to Spain, Ottoman-Algeria, and, by extension, the Sublime Porte in Istanbul. Working on two levels, al-Miknāsi’s travelogue first demonstrates how Muḥammad III’s exertion of spiritual authority over Muslims in Spain and the western Mediterranean did not hinder his temporal goals of peaceful diplomatic relations with Christian Spain. That is, his assertion of spiritual authority did not necessitate a combative religio-political division that is often understood as defining the interreligious relationship between Spain and Morocco. At the same time, al-Miknāsi demonstrates the more adversarial claim of spiritual authority within an intrareligious context. By asserting his spiritual sovereignty on a pan-Mediterranean scale, Muḥammad III established a firm temporal superiority to the Ottoman-Algerian Muslim “other.” In this way, al-Miknāsi’s late eighteenth-century text helps to reveal the relationship between interreligious and intrareligious diplomacies, problematizing Morocco’s bellicose relationship with *Dār al-Ḥarb* and its participation in a unified pan-Islamic *Dār al-Islām*.

**TEMPORAL AND THE SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY**

Beginning with Ceuta, al-Miknāi reorients Morocco’s relationship with Spain. His account surprises the modern reader because it does not reinforce the geographic binary of the northern Mediterranean shore versus the southern
Mediterranean shore. Instead, his description sanctions the current geopolitical situation by positioning Ceuta as a part of peninsular Spain. From the description of the small trench, reimagined as the Straits of Gibraltar, al-Miknāsī eschews any temporal claim that Morocco has for Ceuta. All of the people, buildings, and land are not imagined as an earthly, temporal possession of Morocco. Here, the term “temporal” invokes the meaning connected to mortality and earthly life—both of which are in opposition to the infinite and ethereal nature of the sacred or spiritual. Moreover, al-Miknāsī does not claim a religio-political authority against Christian Spain. Rather, al-Miknāsī stresses a physical, spatial division between the two places. From the very beginning of his text, al-Miknāsī’s reticence to extend Morocco’s temporal sovereignty over Ceuta problematizes the traditional conception of Morocco’s continuous religio-political struggle against the kufār (infidels) on the border of Dār al-Islām and Dār al-Ḥarb. Al-Miknāsī’s vision, expressed in his court-commissioned travelogue, suggests—at least temporarily—a desire to retreat from a hostile militaristic relationship to one defined by acceptance of the politico-temporal status quo.

On a domestic level, sultans, including Muḥammad III, fought to maintain authority as both šāhib al-waqt (temporal leader) and šāhib al-taṣrīf (spiritual manager). Mohamed El Mansour defines the šāhib al-taṣrīf as “a saint who receives from God a wider delegation of authority over all of his creatures, beyond the limits of the ‘here and now’” (El Mansour 2011: 2). This struggle was negotiated primarily on a local Moroccan level, manifest in battles over spiritual authority between the sultan and the burgeoning saint class. In the late eighteenth century Muḥammad III instituted several policies in an attempt to appropriate this spiritual authority. By directly opposing the various strata of the religious elite—the ‘ulama’ (Muslim scholars trained in Islamic law), the ahl al-bayt (aka Shurafa’, those with familial ties to the Prophet Muhammad), and the Sufis (Islamic mystics), Muḥammad III began to define an ideological framework that would support his religious authority, allow him to intervene in the religious field, and permit him to interpret sacred texts (Harrak 1989: 30, 230). Moreover he formed a royal council of ‘ulama’ in an attempt to exercise direct control over a distinct group of decision-making religious elite (Harrak 1989: 259). Finally, as a way to ensure proper religious education and a submissive religious population, Muḥammad III reinforced his patronage and influence on the Sufi ṭurūq (Sufi orders) and marābuṭūn (rural Islamic holy men). Those who chose to submit to Muḥammad III’s religious sovereignty, like the Shurafa’ at Ouazzane, were rewarded through financial patronage. Those who resisted, like the Sharqawiyya, were destroyed. Through a system of fiscal support Muḥammad III developed the Sufi orders into
“mini-makhzāns” (government branches) whose existence relied entirely on the patronage and favor of the royal court (Harrak 1989: 282).

The division between the ṣāhib al-waqt and ṣāhib al-taṣrif is rarely mentioned in scholarship that discusses Morocco’s precolonial relationship with Christian Europe and the Ottoman Empire. Historical surveys such as Amira Bennison’s article, “Liminal States: Morocco and the Iberian Frontier between the Twelfth and Nineteenth Centuries,” propose a polarized, religio-political interpretation of Morocco’s militaristic function between Dār al-Islām and Dār al-Ḥarb. Bennison claims that Morocco’s position on this frontier facilitated the creation of a religio-political state in Morocco dependent on “aggressive warrior cultures [that] evolved in conjunction with efforts to assert and differentiate communal political identity through religion” (Bennison 2001: 13). Bennison’s survey of the frontier begins to explore the effect this “aggressive warrior culture” had in relation to the rest of Dār al-Islām. Yet, her analysis is based on defining a “new hinterland or frontier to serve as the sphere of influence of the newly defined religio-political center” (Bennison 2001: 13). As an example, Bennison cites the tension over “Moroccan spiritual prestige vis-à-vis the Ottomans,” particularly during the reign of Muḥammad III (Bennison 2001: 25). Though she alludes to the creation of an “imagined frontier,” Bennison never fully defines the interaction between “spiritual prestige” and religio-political authority.

Ultimately, Bennison approaches Morocco’s role as a “frontier” state between Dār al-Islām and Dār al-Ḥarb as that which revolves around a heightened religio-political militancy against the Christian “other.” While she begins to complicate Morocco’s relationship with the rest of Dār al-Islām, other scholars have gone into greater detail. Working from the same premise of an antagonistic religio-political relationship with the European “other,” scholars have argued for collusion and unity among the Muslim Mediterranean powers in face of the kufār. Abderrahmane El Moudden’s 1992 dissertation, Sharifs and Padishahs: Moroccan-Ottoman Relations from the 16th through the 18th Centuries, substantiates this perceived unity. In his final analysis, El Moudden defines Muḥammad III’s international policy as bolstering the creation of an early modern pan-Islamism through the rhetoric of ukhūwwa (brotherhood) and ittiḥad (unity). Along these lines, El Moudden defines the latter half of the eighteenth century within a paradigm of mutual assistance between the Moroccan and Ottoman sultanates. Though Bennison and El Moudden do reference them, neither fully addresses the intricacies and stakes of distinguishing between spiritual and temporal authority. In other words, the way that spiritual authority functioned in both interreligious and intrareligious relationships remains unclear.
The language, focus, and descriptive elements of al-Miknāsī’s text point to a complication in the religio-political narratives of militaristic aggression and mutual assistance that Bennison and El Moudden respectively posit. In doing so, al-Miknāsī’s travelogue helps to unpack the complex relationship between “spiritual” and “temporal” authorities as referenced by Bennison and El Moudden. Working from the struggle over temporal power and spiritual authority within the local Moroccan context, al-Miknāsī extends this contest to a pan-Mediterranean arena. Through his travelogue al-Miknāsī contextualizes the last fifteen years of Muḥammad III’s reign from 1775 to 1790, showing that his policies halted religio-political aggression against Dār al-Ḥarb and challenged the unity within Dār al-Islām. Creating a firm temporal border, as al-Miknāsī’s opening description of Ceuta illustrates, suggests a relinquishment of Morocco’s religio-political claims to both Ceuta and Spain. In its place, a supreme spiritual authority, through which Muḥammad III assumed the role of sāhib al-ṭasrif, was extended into Spain. With no perceived objection to the Christians, this expanded spiritual area instead challenged the legitimacy of the Muslim “other” in the Mediterranean. In this way, al-Miknāsī’s text preserves the tradition of Moroccan travel literature by buttressing “Muslim orthodoxy not just on the frontier, but in the Islamic oikumene as a whole” (Bennison 2001: 18). Though al-Miknāsī travels to Spain, his preservation of “Muslim orthodoxy” is manifested not in militaristic, religio-political rhetoric against the Spanish Christians, but rather against the Ottoman-Algerian Muslims.

RESETTING THE CLOCK

Al-Miknāsī’s description of the Islamic monuments in Spain offers a more nuanced interpretation of how the Moroccan sultanate imagined its spiritual and temporal sovereignty in relation to Christian Spain. These complexities are most apparent in al-Miknāsī’s description of the minār (mosque tower) in Seville. Alluding to the similarities between the minār turned cathedral tower in Seville and the minār on the Kutubiyya mosque in Marrakech, al-Miknāsī draws a rare parallel between the two states: “And we had heard before that its (the cathedral in Seville) minār resembles the minār on the Kutubiyya in Marrakesh, may god protect it. And so I went to meet the governor of the city and he and his appointees (council) accompanied us to the minār. (al-Miknāsī and al-Fāsī 1965: 39)" Though short, this comparison is a striking element of al-Miknāsī’s text. Throughout his entire journey to Spain al-Miknāsī rarely offers any parallel between Morocco and Spain. Instead, the descriptions from his travelogue focus primarily on his firsthand experiences with little reference to or reminiscence of Morocco. Yet, this nostalgic comparison
lasts only a couple of lines and is immediately followed by a striking disparity. The ṣawmaʿah (minār) in Seville is described by al-Miknāṣi as having been desecrated by the kufār who live in it:

The infidels (kufār) that live in the aforementioned mosque tower have marred its insides with urine (bawl) and bile until it is not possible for any man to climb the tower without tightly binding his nose [to protect himself] from the harshness of the fetid stench, may God remove them from the country and make them the plunder and spoils of slaves, “for surely we belong to God and to God we shall surely return” [Surat al-Baqarah, 156]. And when we climbed to the top of the tower (minār) we greeted the city of Seville.18

This passage is clear in its denunciation of the kufār for defiling a holy site with the most wretched part of their temporal beings, bile and bawl (urine). To al-Miknāṣi this is a grave offense of a most holy place. His religious damning of the Christians is creative, cursing that they become slaves to other slaves—ironic in that Muḥammad III’s policy was to end the Muslim-Christian practice of slavery. Completing his mini-diatribe with a quote from sūrat al-baqarah used when misfortune strikes, al-Miknāṣi emphasizes the spiritual component of his dissatisfaction. Analyzed in Nieves Paradela’s reading of Moroccan ambassadorial trips to Spain, this passage is used to show how Moroccans dealt with the anxiety aroused by Christians who occupied Muslim religious spaces. In a pejorative sense, the description of the profane kufār’s usurpation of the mosque underscores the fundamental anxiety that the Muslim visitors held toward the Spanish, enforcing Bennison’s religio-political binary (Paradela Alonso 2005: 53).

Held alone, the quote above, which describes the inside of the ṣawmaʿah, clearly illustrates al-Miknāṣi’s heightened religious sensitivity to the Spanish appropriation of the long-ago mosque. However, citing only this passage decontextualizes the complexity of al-Miknāṣi’s account. In fact, his description of the ṣawmaʿah continues on the following page:

On the ṣawmaʿah, which I had mentioned before, there is a clock (makāna).19 . . . Underneath the clock is a space where the pendulums of the clock (thaqāqīl al-makāna) move. The clock has a pendulum, longer than a spear, that swings in this space. And the head of this column—that which houses the pendulum—is decorated with a piece of metal as white as crystal. On the ceiling, that is not higher than a small qanater (a measurement),
hangs the pendulum. When I asked about the whitish-brown metal that houses the pendulum, [the maker] was not aware that it was metal. Instead, he told me that it is the blade from Muslim swords. Then I inquired: what do you mean by that? And he replied that the refinement of the metal and its quality led him to this conclusion. For this clock is one of many wonders.20

The object that al-Miknāsī describes is multifaceted: a Christian clock crowns an Islamic ṣawmā‘ah. However, the pendulum of the clock—that which determines its accuracy and precision—is housed in a column plated in metal from Muslim swords. Working on multiple levels, there is quite literally a temporal object crowning a once Islamic, now Christian spiritual building. Moreover, time—the most literal sense of temporality—is driven by a pendulum, which is protected by Muslim swords. Despite the possibly abhorrent act of appropriating Islamic artifacts to use in a Christian device, al-Miknāsī does not dwell on the metaphoric. He focuses his attention on a detailed description of the clock, even citing it as a wonder. Likewise, the appropriation of the Islamic swords into a Spanish temporal object might indicate a defeat—an end to the Moroccan jihadist aims in the Iberian Peninsula. However, in another sense it represents a persistent Muslim presence, watching over the countryside from atop the ṣawmā‘ah, keeping track of the Christians’ time. Rather than defeat, it is a reminder of history. It embodies an eternal presence, connected to the Spanish temporal world, yet not directly challenging it.

Al-Miknāsī’s two different descriptions of the ṣawmā‘ah—apparently contradictory—address both the temporal and spiritual aspects of this object. He does not condemn the entire mosque, but rather divides his description between the inside and outside. This inside/outside distinction highlights the contradictory tones: an internal spiritual critique versus an external temporal acceptance. While al-Miknāsī is content to observe a superficial, political relationship with the temporal Spanish kingdom, his internal religiosity should not be questioned. Though separated from political aims, Moroccan spiritual authority in Spain is still maintained within a separate internal form. The suppression of land-based jihadist claims did not indicate the downfall of Moroccan authority in the Iberian Peninsula. On the contrary, al-Miknāsī highlights a spiritual sovereignty over the area, extending beyond political and historical borders, yet not meddling with the current politico-temporal situation. Al-Miknāsī modifies a notion that once depended on a temporal, religio-political militancy between two “religious others” to form a historical, spiritual claim, founded on reappropriating religious objects,
in order to justify a wider Moroccan Islamic spiritual authority. In this way, the spiritual claims to authority and denigrations in al-Miknāsī’s text do not directly confront the Spanish political kingdom and the newly established relationship between Spain and Morocco. Instead, the extension of Moroccan spiritual sovereignty into Spain fortifies Moroccan Islamic sovereignty in opposition to the Ottoman-Algerian Muslim provincial authorities.

In this way, al-Miknāsī’s travelogue echoes Muḥammad III’s policy of abandoning a religio-political claim against Spain and its temporal possessions. This exemplifies one way in which the spiritual and the temporal are negotiated. Spiritual sovereignty can be extended without fear of a political or military response since it is not directly tied to a temporal claim to authority. Though a spiritual claim can be detached from interreligious political interactions, intrareligious interactions are necessarily affected by a spiritual claim to sovereignty. As the following section describes, Muḥammad III’s religio-political aggression against the Ottoman-Algerians could be substantiated only within a spiritual, Islamic framework. Thus, the heightened spiritual superiority against the Ottoman-Algerians displayed by Muḥammad III and echoed in al-Miknāsī’s text held more immediate religio-political goals. As opposed to a softer claim for spiritual authority in an interreligious context, Muḥammad III’s extension of his role as ṣāhib al-taṣrīf across the Mediterranean was a direct religio-political affront—an attempt to garner temporal support from the Sublime Porte (Ottoman administrative center) in Istanbul against the Ottoman-Algerian Muslims.

THE MUSLIM OTHER

As much as al-Miknāsī’s Spanish journey encourages a reinterpretation of Moroccan-Spanish relations, it also exemplifies the complex nature of Moroccan-Ottoman relations. Specifically, in his description of a prisoner exchange, al-Miknāsī intimates a Moroccan transregional religious authority that includes all Muslims across the Mediterranean regardless of ethnicity, geographic location, or assumed political allegiance. Within the broader historical narrative of diplomatic exchanges, gift giving, and prisoner ransoms, al-Miknāsī’s text can be placed at a specific moment, between 1775 and 1786, when the Moroccan sultanate had enough social, economic, and political capital to assert its religious authority across the Mediterranean in active opposition to the Ottoman-Algerians.

Though Muḥammad III ended his jihadist aims against the Christians in 1775, a militaristic ambivalence was sustained in Morocco’s relationship with its Ottoman-Algerian neighbors. This intra-Islamic ambivalence has a well-documented history.
Abderrahmane El Moudden recounts this struggle through the Ottoman and Moroccan use of the title *caliph* and the religious connotations that pervade this term. In order to highlight the imagined identity and sovereignty attached to the term *caliph*, El Moudden describes how, from the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries, the “attitudes of the political partners toward the Caliphal concept in the political arena and its use and abuse” constituted the most important concern to both the Moroccan and Ottoman sovereigns (El Moudden 1995: 105). El Moudden illustrates the varying ways that Moroccan sultans either recognized or did not recognize the Ottoman sultan as *caliph* throughout this two-hundred-year period. For example, al-Tamgruti, a Moroccan ambassador to Istanbul in 1589, summarizes the Saʿadi (Moroccan dynasty, r. 1554–1659) view of Ottoman Islamic sovereignty, claiming that the Ottomans were “only entrusted with power and authority as proxies for those who are more entitled and qualified for such a power and authority . . . the kings of our country, Morocco (*bilādina al-Maghrib*).”

The religious rhetoric and hierarchical layers of spiritual power indicate that there was a constant struggle between the Moroccan and Ottoman sovereigns concerning the assumption of religious sovereignty. Al-Tamgruti’s opinion, which reflects the court-imagined Moroccan identity, posits Moroccan spiritual sovereignty as inclusive of all Muslims and as being greater than the spiritual sovereignty of the Ottomans, who are defined as “proxies” for the Moroccan sovereign. It undermines Ottoman spiritual sovereignty and, in turn, denies the Ottoman claim for authority over Muslims across the Mediterranean. Even though Ottoman state boundaries encompassed the Mediterranean basin, the temporal territorial claims did not equate to a spiritual sovereignty over all Muslims in this area. With this distinction in mind, Moroccan rulers imagined a battle over the spiritual frontier with the Ottomans, at times extending their claims outside of the Moroccan territorial realm.

The ’Alawite dynasty (current Moroccan dynasty r. 1631–present) continued this disdain for the Sublime Porte. In a letter from 1650, Muḥammad I reinforced the ’Alawite claim to Islamic spiritual authority, by proclaiming his certainty “that the Ottomans lack the legal [*shariʿa*] requirements that grant them the right to rule over the Muslims” (Dāhish 2011: 72). More than a century later, Muḥammad III amplified this ambivalent relationship into one of militant antagonism. Asserting his religious authority on a pan-Mediterranean scale, in 1775, he consulted the Moroccan religious scholars (*ʿulamaʾ*) for a *fatwa* pronouncing “the Algerian rulers apostates and worth being fought before the Christians.” The fact that this *fatwa* refocused Moroccan jihadist efforts, turning them against the Algerians, demonstrates the false antagonism that scholarship has created between Morocco
and Spain on the one hand, and the assumed alliance between Morocco and the Ottoman Empire on the other. Thus, when placed within the broader context of Moroccan-Ottoman relations, this fatwa shows that the relationship between the two Muslim powers was characterized by the quest to claim supreme Islamic sovereignty throughout the Mediterranean.

Coming only a few years after this fatwa, al-Miknāsī’s mission to Spain fortified Muḥammad III’s assertion of his spiritual sovereignty in the Mediterranean, and served as an affront to Morocco’s Ottoman-Algerian neighbors. By the 1780s, Muḥammad III actively took advantage of Morocco’s position between Europe and the Ottomans through gifting war materials (gunpowder, ships, and cannons), soldiers, and recently freed prisoners to the Ottomans. This may have superficially marked an increase in positive, supportive relations between the Ottoman sultan and the Moroccan sultan; however an alternative view of history, with Muḥammad III’s religious motivations in mind, offers a more subversive relationship: one where Morocco was actively discrediting Ottoman-Algerian religious sovereignty across the Mediterranean in order to gain favor from the Sublime Porte in the maghrib (North Africa). The many trips that the Moroccan ambassador al-Zayānī made to Istanbul during the late eighteenth century were replete with large gifts and lists of complaints against Morocco’s Ottoman-Algerian neighbors (El Moudden 1992: 263, 318). In this way, the Moroccan religio-political elite denigrated the primarily Turkish court at Algiers because of their “prosaic goals of accumulating riches” (El Moudden 1992: 320–21). Despite these disparaging remarks, however, the Sublime Porte never completely discredited their provincial court in Algeria and thus never fully supported Morocco in its struggle against them. At times though, the Sublime Porte expressed their perceived threat from the power of the Moroccan sultanate as exemplified in their hesitancy to accept gifts (El Moudden 1992: 288). In this sense, the Sublime Porte understood that the gifts from the Moroccan sultanate were not merely a sign of intra-Islamic unity, but rather a display of power and superiority. Though hesitant at times, the political and military stakes attached to the Sublime Porte’s jihad against the Russians proved too high for the Ottomans to turn down Moroccan aid (El Moudden 1992: 281–86).

BUILDING ISLAMIC CAPITAL: PRISONER RANSOMING

Prisoners, above all, formed an integral part of the gift exchange between Europe, Morocco, and the Ottoman Empire. The physical act of ransoming prisoners allowed Muḥammad III to extend his religious sovereignty into Europe while concurrently boasting his elevated spiritual authority in comparison
to the Ottoman-Algerians. Throughout his reign Muḥammad III ransomed approximately three thousand Muslim prisoners, the majority of whom were not Moroccan (Barrio Gozalo 2006: 287). Many of these freed Muslim prisoners were sent to the Ottoman sultan as gifts. In 1739 the first prisoner exchange occurred with the Spanish Mercedarian friars. Following this event Muḥammad III adopted a policy that established a one-for-one exchange rate: one Muslim for one Christian. For the first thirty years, exchanges were small and consisted of a few hundred prisoners at a time. However, in 1768 the largest ransom of Spanish captives occurred (Jamieson 2012: 173). This deal, brokered by Morocco between the Spanish and the Ottoman-Algerians, began with al-Ghazzāl’s negotiations in 1766. Using sources from Spanish archives, including a letter from Muḥammad III dated November 19, 1768, the historian Ellen Friedman explains that throughout negotiations, the Algerian dey (title given to the Ottoman ruler of the Regency of Algiers) was worried about the decrease in his revenue from corsairing. Consequently, when the Spanish arrived in Algiers with 1,246 prisoners, the Algerian rulers proclaimed that they “did not want Moors, but money,” and were set on accepting only cash for Christian captives. Based on the value of each captive, the exchange rate was set at two Algerian prisoners per one Spanish seaman. However, the Algerian dey persistently tried to revise this exchange rate to receive as much cash as possible (Friedman 1983: 160). The dey’s preference for money over prisoners guided his policy during the deliberations. In the end, “631 [Spanish] captives had been exchanged for 1,236 Algerians, and 819 [Spanish] captives had been ransomed for cash.” At first glance this does not seem like a failed prisoner exchange; however, al-Miknāsī refers to these exact negotiations in a lengthy diatribe that damn the Algerians. He even suggests that at least a hundred Algerians were sent back to Spain, ten times more than what the current historical record indicates.

When placed in this context, al-Miknāsī’s account of his 1779 diplomatic journey to Spain reveals how one member of the Moroccan religio-political elite defined the role that Muḥammad III played as amīr al-mu‘minīn (commander of the faithful) throughout the Mediterranean and particularly in opposition to the Ottoman-Algerian authorities. This spiritual term, which is not used lightly, implies a broad religio-political, temporal authority over all Muslims. Within al-Miknāsī’s description of the prisoner exchange, one can glean a better understanding of how spiritual claims to Islamic sovereignty developed in relation to Morocco’s burgeoning international identity. While the actual scene lasts only a couple of pages, it recounts the primary goal of his mission. From a literary perspective, this scene is strikingly different from other parts of the account. Al-Miknāsī, who usually employs a matter-of-fact tone,
adopts dramatic and hyperbolic language during this scene. In addition, it is one of the few passages where he includes multiple citations from the Qur’an and hadith (prophetic traditions). The anomalous tone and rhetoric indicate the episode’s importance. Moreover, the account repeatedly supports the legitimacy of the Moroccan sultan’s actions as amīr al-mu’mīnin not only for Moroccans, but for all Muslims across the Mediterranean regardless of ethnicity or assumed political allegiance.

Narrating this event with the explicit intent of highlighting the Muslim identity of the prisoners, al-Miknāsī begins with ambiguity in regard to the history or ethnicity of the prisoners. He starts with a straightforward account of the events, not yet describing the prisoners, but rather their excitement and their praise for the Moroccan amīr al-mu’mīnin: “It was then, when I greeted the prisoners that they cried together, their voices raised in commemoration of our prince, Commander of the Faithful, praying victory and glory for him. Their great uproar and cry for help at the side of our sovereign, our prince, Commander of the Faithful continued until their bodies shook from excitement.”

Explicitly positioning Muḥammad III as the leader of all Muslims, al-Miknāsī describes the prisoners rejoicing and praising his name as if they were loyal political subjects. Furthermore, al-Miknāsī references the prisoners’ loyalty and allegiance by placing them at the side of “our” sovereign, Muḥammad III.

After this brief section, which identifies the prisoners as subjects of Muḥammad III in his role as amīr al-mu’mīnin, al-Miknāsī describes the physical appearance of the prisoners. In contrast to his usual impassive and detached tone, in this passage al-Miknāsī is unable to contain himself. His description becomes a metaphoric and emotional account, accompanied by musical rhymed prose, a common way in which authors in the Islamic world embellished their texts. This particular prose style emphasizes not only the emotional aspects of the text, but also the traditional claims to the religious authority of the Moroccan sultanate. Writing with beautiful cadence, al-Miknāsī continues,

And I could now see that these prisoners were in such a state that the hardest rocks would soften in pity for them. Even the hearts of the infidels would rupture, their tear ducts would be left overflowing, and their hearts would billow in their chests at the mere sight of these prisoners. Here, the bewilderment grasped me and the tears overcame me. Yet I reassured them that our sovereign, our prince, Commander of the Faithful, would not abandon them. Thus we spoke to them through [Muḥammad III’s] empowerment with the King [Carlos III] on the issue of their release through the exchange of Spanish prisoners that were in Algeria."
In addition to flouting his expertise in the Arabic language, al-Miknāsī’s rhymed prose highlights the identifying marker that so commonly defines the Islamic-Christian distinction: the kufār (infidels). Throughout his comparisons, al-Miknāsī invokes this religious identifier, metaphorically proclaiming that even the kufār would not be able to bear the pain of looking at the horrific condition of the prisoners. The assertion, even metaphorical, that the infidels would be troubled by the condition of the prisoners is not completely out of line. In fact, it is “by the grace of the infidels” that these and many other prisoners were released. As discussed above, Morocco and Spain had recently been collaborating to free Christian and Muslim prisoners from captivity. In this case, it is possible to suggest that the kufār’s hearts did billow and their chests did overflow with compassion. Rather than serving as a hyperbolic allusion to the kufār, displaying the extremity of the situation in a Muslim-Christian paradigm, al-Miknāsī invokes this image to chastise another audience. His aim is to attack not the kufār, who recognize the wretchedness of the situation and are actively working to address it, but a group of individuals who failed to recognize and support their Muslim co-religionists: the Ottoman-Algerians.

At this point al-Miknāsī differentiates between the Moroccan sultanate’s relationship with the ruling authorities in Spain and those in Algeria, focusing his rhetoric on contrasting the supreme religious authority of Muḥammad III against the mundane profanity of the Algerian governor:

> When I approached him [the Spanish governor] the prisoners were still in their cuffs, yet through the blessing of our sovereign—may God support him—they received their freedom. For when I saw the condition of the prisoners and the state they were in, their malnourishment, misfortune, weakness, and their lack of faith in the governor of Algeria, I was struck. They did not wait for anything except that which came to them from the grace of God, at the hand of our sovereign, may God support him.29

The “governor of Algeria,” referenced with no Islamic rhetorical adornments or plaudits, is defined merely by his temporal, political role. This is in stark contrast to how al-Miknāsī continuously references the religious authority of Muḥammad III as amīr al-muʾminīn. Furthermore, al-Miknāsī notes that the prisoners had lost faith in the governor of Algeria. Only as a result of Muḥammad III’s divine connections were the prisoners freed. Here, a Muslim power is positioned in a most profane way, serving as the primary contrast to Muḥammad III as amīr al-muʾminīn. In this very explicit comparison, al-Miknāsī degrades the temporality
of the Ottoman-Algerians, implying their spiritual incapacity to rule over Muslims. Through this language al-Miknāsī divisively separates the actions of the Ottoman-Algerians from the grace of God.

Simultaneously, al-Miknāsī makes a concerted effort to describe Carlos III and his court in favorable terms. Al-Miknāsī praises the Spanish for treating the Moroccan envoy with caring generosity and hospitality.30 Carlos III even allowed al-Miknāsī to visit many other prisoners in order to complete the religious duty of handing out alms. This favorable description from al-Miknāsī supports secondary research that describes the peace treaties and diplomatic relations between Morocco and Spain during the latter half of the eighteenth century.31 In his narration, al-Miknāsī reinforces the graciousness of Carlos III and the strong connection between him and Muḥammad III on a temporal, political level. Al-Miknāsī does not shy away from this comparison, but rather highlights it, going so far as to praise the Spanish minister and describe his rising place in the eyes of Muḥammad III.32 Thus, the continuously depreciating religio-political authority of the Ottoman-Algerian governor parallels the rising political authority of Carlos III and his minister. This juxtaposition illustrates the spiritual sovereignty that Muḥammad III holds over the Muslims of the Mediterranean, by displaying both Muḥammad III’s connection to God’s will and the prisoners’ unanimous recognition of his authority as amīr al-mu’mīnīn.

Not only does al-Miknāsī degrade the profane authority of the Algerian governor, but he also employs specific terms including “gifts” and “sanctuary” to further define how Muḥammad III and the Moroccan religio-political elite negotiated their place between the Ottoman Empire and Spain. Drawing on the image of the gift, al-Miknāsī highlights the amicable relationship between Morocco and Spain: “At this point the governor stepped forward and selected thirty men from the group of prisoners stating, ‘These are the ones whom the tyrant [Carlos III]33 has chosen to set free as a gift’ to our prince, Commander of the Faithful.”34 Marcel Mauss presents a useful theoretical framework to unpack the complexities of a gift and the relationship that gifting implies. For Mauss, a gift is theoretically voluntary, but in reality Mauss posits that gifts are actually obligatory (Mauss 2011: 3). Thus, gifts sustain an obligatory reciprocation process and can in turn lead to reinforcing power dynamics and dominance. Gifts add an important dimension to treaties and relationships between governments. They do not signify a one-time transaction, but rather suggest a longer-term relationship founded on an exchange of like gifts.

It is important to remember, however, that this exchange occurred between the Moroccan sultan and the king of Spain; the Ottoman and Algerian parties
played only secondary roles. Muḥammad III, as an intermediary agent, took these “gifted” prisoners and regifted them to the Ottoman sultan. As mentioned above, these prisoners constituted one of many gifts offered by Muḥammad III to the Sublime Porte. While giving a gift might imply that the party is dependent or asking for protection, the exact opposite can also be true. Pierre Bourdieu notes that symbolic capital can be obtained through gift giving. For instance, a tribal chief might accumulate goods only to be able to “lavish [them] on others and build up a capital of obligations and debts.”35 In other words, gift giving does not just imply supplication; it can also demonstrate power and authority. Through this exchange of prisoners the Moroccan sultan was in a unique position of moderating authority between the Spanish king and Ottoman sultan. Taking advantage of the power dynamics and his relationship with both states, Muḥammad III tactfully used his peaceful treaties with Spain to assert a more influential and territorially broader spiritual sovereignty with respect to the Ottoman-Algerians. Hence, the accumulation and regifting of Muslim prisoners by Muḥammad III did not necessarily indicate Moroccan subservience to the Sublime Porte. Instead, Muḥammad III’s project of Muslim prisoner ransoming can be interpreted as a venture to earn “Islamic capital” in opposition to the Ottoman-Algerians.

The final part of al-Miknāsī’s description of the prisoner exchange becomes an emotionally charged plea for the security of Muslims across the Mediterranean. Al-Miknāsī’s rhetoric and narration express his view of how Moroccan religious authority trumps that of the Ottoman-Algerian governor. He implies that the sovereignty of the Moroccan sultan is the only force that can maintain security in light of neighboring states that desire temporal sovereignty and wealth while disregarding their religious duties. It is only now that the reader discovers the ethnicity of the prisoners in question and their history:

The prisoners that I mentioned above were all from Algeria and its provinces. Yet, despite their origin our sovereign—may God support him—did not overlook them. He rescued them for almost 2,000 riyals in payment. For our sovereign, may God support him, had talked to the king of Spain around 14 years ago, and determined an exchange of those prisoners mentioned for Spanish prisoners in Algeria. The Spanish King then assigned our sovereign, may God make him victorious, to send a mission to the governor of Algeria in order to complete this good deed. The king informed [the Moroccan sultan] that he had gathered the Muslim prisoners on a boat and sent them to Algeria with the intention of exchanging Muslims for Christians. However, the Algerian governor ransomed only the Turkish prisoners and refused to ransom the Arabs. Instead he exchanged the
remaining Christians for money and returned the other Muslims to prison in the country of the infidel. Just look at this sickening action and the hideous situation!\(^\text{16}\)

After describing nearly the entire exchange al-Miknāṣī references the background of this deal, the identity of the prisoners, and the roles of the parties involved. In a shocking twist, it turns out that the prisoners are not Moroccan. The cries of praise proclaiming Muḥammad III’s closeness to God, his religious sovereignty, and his unrivaled sanctuary are all made by Algerian-Arab-Ottomans. Muḥammad III sent an envoy to Spain to free Ottoman-Algerian prisoners. In this section al-Miknāṣī explains that Muḥammad III is fixing a failed prisoner exchange that had been brokered between the Ottoman-Algerians and the Spanish. Al-Miknāṣī also makes certain to emphasize that the failure of this exchange was not the fault of the Spanish, but rather the temporal worldly greed of the Ottoman-Turkish-Algerian Muslims. Marking divisions of ethnicity and spirituality, al-Miknāṣī highlights the profanity of distinguishing between Turkish Muslims and Arab Muslims:

\begin{quote}
And how is it permissible for him to distinguish between Muslims, all of whom are under his flag! For he freed his Turkish \([\text{al-turk}]\) brothers and left the Arabs \([\text{al-'arab}]\)! And even if he had enough Christian prisoners to ransom all of the Muslim prisoners he would still have had many Christian prisoners. But he preferred worldly \([\text{pleasures}]\) and ransoming the Christian prisoners for money than the Muslims, whom he returned to prison, not protecting them with faith or with any care. Yet still our sovereign, may God make him victorious, attended to their plight, every time rescuing at least one from their company, until at last he rescued all of them in anticipation of his exaltedness.\(^\text{37}\)
\end{quote}

In describing the failed exchange al-Miknāṣī mentions that the Ottoman-Algerian dey ransomed only the Turkish prisoners and left the Arabs. This division seemed important to the Algerian dey; however, al-Miknāṣī discounts the ethnic divide and favors a religious identity claiming that they were all Muslims. In addition, this last section of the exchange is replete with invocations of the Qurʾan. This is the most explicit textual reference that distinguishes the religio-political divide between Morocco and the Ottoman-Algerians. Unlike other parts of the text, where al-Miknāṣī rarely invokes the Qurʾan, he uses four Qurʾanic \textit{ayat} (verses) in a relatively condensed passage.\(^\text{38}\) This concentration of religious rhetoric shows how the Moroccan religio-political elite extended a spiritual sovereignty against other Muslims. As the historical account suggests, this tension between the Moroccan
sultanate and the Ottoman-Algerians is not new or surprising. Al-Miknāsī finishes his polemic against the Algerians, founding his attack in Islamic rhetoric and tradition. Aside from diplomatic letters, this text adds an entirely new dimension to this exchange, one that is expressly religious. Within this rhetoric, which differs from other diplomatic correspondences, the Moroccan religio-political elite established a territory of Moroccan spiritual sovereignty over all Muslims. This spiritual area extended into Europe, yet did not actively combat the emerging and highly potent ideas of European temporal sovereignty. Al-Miknāsī’s short, yet dense account of the prisoner exchange offers the historian a more nuanced perspective of the imagined role of the Moroccan sultan as sovereign over the Dār al-Islām and Dār al-Ḥarb. Highlighting the complex interstices of ethnicity, political allegiance, and religion, al-Miknāsī’s account helps to untangle these identity markers during the late eighteenth century and articulate Moroccan political motivations in a pan-Mediterranean arena.

CONCLUSION

Al-Miknāsī’s travelogue hails from a time period when Muḥammad III was able to assert a transregional Islamic authority in face of the Ottoman-Algerians as a way to bolster his stature in the eyes of the Sublime Porte. This is substantiated by other prisoner exchanges that the Moroccan sultanate organized and by the gifts that Muḥammad III continued to send to Istanbul during the 1780s. However, as al-Miknāsī’s text suggests, Muḥammad III was not necessarily pushing toward a pan-Islamism as posited by El Moudden. Rather, his diplomatic efforts were meant to bolster the Moroccan sultanate’s religious identity and sovereignty throughout the Mediterranean in order to assert religio-political authority over Ottoman-Algeria, not Christian Europe. Taking advantage of his position between Europe and the Ottoman Empire, Muḥammad III navigated and modified various pan-Mediterranean temporal and spiritual borders. Al-Miknāsī’s travelogue, which crosses these borders, informs a more subtle understanding of the Moroccan sultanate’s imagined identity throughout this region. Within his detailed account, al-Miknāsī negotiates the intricacies of Morocco’s position in the late eighteenth-century Mediterranean as one grounded in a spiritual assertion of Moroccan Islamic authority. This spiritual assertion of authority developed an expressive religio-political antagonism toward the Ottoman-Algerians while simultaneously maintaining a temporal acceptance of Morocco’s Christian neighbors. Thus, a better understanding of how spiritual sovereignty operated in a variety of settings puts into conversation interreligious and intrareligious diplomacies in the early modern Mediterranean. Al-Miknāsī’s account offers a unique
opportunity to explore the dynamics of this relationship, adding an important facet to recent studies in the field of cross-cultural diplomacy.\textsuperscript{39}

\textbf{NOTES}

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1. Merriam-Webster (2014) defines “exclave” as follows: “a portion of a country separated from the main part and constituting an enclave in respect to the surrounding territory.”

2. Al-Miknāsī and al-Fāsī (1965). The only critical edition of this text was published nine years after Moroccan independence by the leader of the Istiqlāl party: Muḥammad al-Fāsī. The fact that al-Fāsī found importance in this text is evident from his introduction, which describes an independent and strong Moroccan government, particularly on the Mediterranean diplomatic front. Moreover, al-Fāsī took a particular interest in al-Miknāsī, publishing a short biography of his life. Al-Fāsī was particularly impressed with al-Miknāsī’s diplomatic skills and his ability to successfully represent Moroccan interests abroad.

3. Though not an official diplomat, al-Miknāsī was a kātib in Muḥammad III’s court. Thus, his text reflects a close relationship to the political and religious policies of the royal court. Al-Miknāsī was raised with a proper Islamic training and held esteemed positions in the court of Muḥammad III. With a strong religious education, al-Miknāsī was well versed in the Qur’ān, ḥadīth, and sunna. This morphed into a successful career at the court of Muḥammad III with his first appointment as the archivist at the royal library. For more information, see al-Fāsī’s introduction to Al-Iksīr, 2.

4. Lane (1955: 600). According to Lane “حفير is of the measure فعيل in the sense of the measure مفعول [meaning dug, excavated, hollowed out, or cleared out, in the ground].” This meaning emphasizes the man-made aspects of the trench, implying that it was not a natural border, but instead one that was created.

5. I will discuss the current state of scholarship below. Dār al-Islām and Dār al-Ḥarb are the two conventional divisions of the world in Islamic law. Dār al-Islām is that which is under Muslim rule. Dār al-Ḥarb is an area that is not under Muslim rule but has the potential to be as a result of war. Though Dār al-Ḥarb is the standard term, this area is sometimes called Dār al-Kufr. As demonstrated by Houari Touati, these terms were used by Muslims to define the “religious and cultural barriers around the space of law, peace and salvation that bore the name of dār al-islām [sic] . . . opposed, as water to fire, to the rest of the inhabited world, which was in turn qualified, religiously, as the ‘territory of Infidelity’ (dār al-kufr)” (Touati 2010: 3–4). Moreover, Touati uses this distinction to emphasize the way the terms were used in medieval Islamic travel narratives. Touati emphasizes that Dār al-Islām was designed to “make sure that this georeligious and geopolitical unity become a space that dogmatically guaranteed the truth of a ‘living together’ willed by God” (Touati 2010: 3).

6. It is important to note here that religio-political and spiritual are not identical terms. As I explain below, the religio-political must have a temporal element, while the spiritual can stand on its own with no temporal grounding.

7. For a discussion of the analytical complexities of borderlands, see the introduction to Zartman (2009). In his discussion, Zartman emphasizes the constant mutability of borderlands, defining them as social processes.


10. Merriam-Webster (2014) defines “temporal” as follows: “1. a. of or relating to time as opposed to eternity. b. of or relating to earthly life. c. lay or secular rather than clerical or sacred.”
11. Though very similar in spelling, kufr refers to the noun “infidelity” or “unbelief,” while kufār is the plural form of the singular noun kāfir, which means “infidel.”

12. I employ the term “saint class” here with reference to El Mansour’s division between the temporal power of the sultan and the spiritual authority of the saints. In opposition to a centralized authority, the term “saint” refers to the numerous holy men who resided in both the cities and towns of precolonial Morocco.


14. Harrak (1989: 130). The Shuraḍa at Ouazzane formed the foundation of a religious community in northern Morocco, with a lineage tracing back to the Prophet Muhammad. Because of the connections to the Prophet Muhammad, Ouazzane became an important place of pilgrimage and a center for Sufi learning. Moreover, it was an important sanctuary in preproteectorate Morocco.

15. Pennell (2003: 110). The Sharqawīyya zuwīya (a Sufi lodge) was the center of a powerful Moroccan Sufi order that confronted the central government (Makhzan). This resistance ultimately led to its demise when Muḥammad III destroyed it in 1787.

16. Bennison (2001: 13). In her article, Bennison gives a more detailed discussion of the effects of the position of Morocco between the Dār al-Islām and Christian Europe throughout the medieval and early modern periods. She also discusses how the liminal position of Morocco caused it to develop a more heightened sense of religious sovereignty in order to protect the sacred characteristics of the Dār al-Islām. Though Bennison adds this texture, the specific relationship between spiritual and religio-political expressions of authority is not fully developed.

17. El Moudden’s well-researched 1992 dissertation is one of the few texts to critically examine and chart the diplomatic relations between Morocco and the Ottoman Empire in the second half of the eighteenth century.

18. Al-Miknāsī and al-Fāsī (1965: 39; all translations are by the author):

أنت الكفار الساكنين بالصومعة المذكورة قد أفسدوا داخلها بالبول و القذرات حتى لايمكن للإنسان أن يطلع إليها الا ممسكا أنفه من شدة النتن طهر الله منهم البلاد و جعلهم فيئا و غنيمة للعباد فانا لله و انا اليه راجعون, و لما صعدنا أعلى المنار أشرفنا على مدينة اشبيلية...

19. This is one of al-Miknāsī’s many relapses into the colloquial Moroccan dialect. In fact, this term for clock is still used by Moroccans today to describe any timekeeping device including wristwatches.


و بالصومعة المذكورة مكانة... و تحت المكانة فضاء تتحرك فيه ثقال المكانة ولها ثقل اطول من الرمح يتحرك في ذلك الفضاء ورأس هذا العمود الذي فيه الثقل مسمر في قطعة حديد ابيض كأنه بلور وفي أسفله ما يزيد على القناطر من الخفيف و هو الثقل فسألت عن الجديد البيضاء المستر فيها الثقل و لم اعلم انها حديثة فقال انه نصل سكين من سكانك المسلمين, فقلت و ما القصد في ذلك, فقال لصفاء حديثها وجودته و هذه المكانة احدى القدرية.


22. El Moudden (1992: 318). This fatwa was a result of the Algerian failure to attack Oran, Algeria, while Morocco was attacking Melilla (a Spanish exclave on Morocco’s north Mediterranean shore) in 1775. Their failure caused the Moroccan military expedition against Melilla to fail. Ironically, after this Muḥammad III decided not to continue his campaign against the Spanish and began questioning the religio-political authority of the Ottoman-Algerian dey (Ottoman-Algerian ruler of the Regency of Algiers).

23. See also Fatima Harrak’s argument (1989: 229) that describes Muḥammad III’s “economic open door outside and religious conservatism inside.” Harrak argues that this dual policy helped Muḥammad III consolidate and modernize Morocco. Though Harrak describes the internal conservatism, there existed “outside” moments of this conservatism particularly in relation to
Ottoman-Algeria and the Sublime Porte in Istanbul. In that vein, I argue that the economic, temporal openness with Spain and conservative, spiritual tendencies with Ottoman-Algeria operated on different levels and were not mutually exclusive policies. Instead, they worked in tandem throughout Muhammad III’s “modernization” of the Moroccan state.

فلما أشرفنا عليهم أعلنوا جميعا برفع أصواتهم بذكر مولانا أمير المؤمنين و الدعاء له بالنصر و التمكين وعظم ضحيجتهم و استغاثتهم بجانب سيدنا و مولانا أمير المؤمنين حتى أقشعرت الجلود
27. Al-Miknāsī and al-Fāsī (1965: 164):
فبعث اليهم الحاكم فأخرجهم في حالة تلين الصخور, و تمرق فؤاد الكفور, وتكرر السراقي بمدامعها تفور والقلوب في الصدور تثور. فأخذته الحيرة و غلبتهم عليها ولم ينتظروا إلا
ما يأتيهم من فرج الله على يد سيدنا أمير المؤمنين
32. Al-Miknāsī and al-Fāsī (1965: 164):
33. This was the preferred term to describe a non-Muslim ruler during al-Miknāsī’s time. While the direct translation is “tyrant,” the praise and the amicable way that al-Miknāsī describes Carlos III problematize the definition of this term. Thus, juxtaposed with the praise, the worst accusation in Islamic political culture seems out of place. The specific tone attached to this word in this context is uncertain, but it is likely that al-Miknāsī was using this term as a formality since this work was commissioned for Muḥammad III.
34. Al-Miknāsī and al-Fāsī (1965: 164):

والأساري المذكورون المسرحون كلهم من أهل الجزائر وأياليها ومع ذلك لم يغفل عنهن سيدينا أبده الله فقد أخرج منهم ذهاب الآلاف في دفعات. وقد كان سيدينا أبده الله قبل هذا ينحو أربع عشرة سنة تكلم بالطاغية واحتف عليه في فداء الأساري المذكورون بالإمامة بما الحالون الذين بالجزائر فأسند الطلبة الأمر إلى سيدينا أبده الله فبعث إلى المغاربة يحثه على تنفيذ هذه السنة فأعظم

الطاغية فحمل جميع أساري المسلمين في المراكب ووجههم إلى الجزائر بقصد مغادرة المسلمين بالنصارى فدفعهم الجزائر الترك وامتنع من فداء العرب وقد في بقيته من النصارى بالمال ورد المسلمين إلى الامير البلاد الكبر فأظهر إلى هذا الفعل الشنيع والأمر الفظيع كأنه لم يبلغه


و كيف يحل له أن يفرق بين المسلمين وكلهم أخذوا تحت علمه فخيذي أخوانه الترك وترك أولاد

البر على أن بيئة من أساري النصارى ما يفذ الثانيه من المسلم من المسلمين كلهم ويفضل يذكو

كثيرون فلأت الدنيا وفداء النصارى بالمال ورد المسلمين إلى الأسر لا يرقبون في مومن إلا ولا دم و لا

زال سيدينا نصره الله ينطبقى في إيقافهم شيئا فشيئا كل مرة يخرج منهم شرفه حتى أร้อนر جميعهم

احتسابا له تعالى وابتعاده مشوقهمущاء


قول رب العالمين إنما الصدقات للفقراء والمساكين والعمالين عليها والمولودة قانونهم في الرحال. وقال تعالى ليس لي أن أقولوا وجهوكم قبل المشرك ولكن البر من أن ينفق الله واليوم الآخر والمالكية والكتاب والنبيين وأثنى المال على حي ذوي القربى والتابئي والمراقبين والسائحين في الرحال وقال تعالى فاذا قرموا من الذين كنفروا فضرب الرحال حتى إذا فتح لهم وفداء حتى تضع الحرب أوزارها. وفداء بالمال أو أساري المسلمون كما ذكر المفسرون وقد قال سيدينا رسل الله صلى الله عليه وسلم من اعتق رقية أعطى الله بكل عظومها عضاو من النار وقال صلى الله عليه وسلم إن عطاء ربك لمن كان يريد العاجلة عجلنا له فيها ما نشاء من نريد ثم جعلنا له جهنم يلض بها مددهما مدخولا ومن أراد الآخرة وسعه لسعا و هو مومن فقولة كان سعيهم مشكو. لا كن هؤلاء من عبائه و ما كان عتاؤه يرد مخطورا. انظر كيف فتنة بعضهم على بعض و لائحة أخرى أكبر درجات و أكبر تفضيلهما.

39. See Christian Windler (2001) and Mathieu Grenet (2015). Both studies employ a socio-cultural framework to analyse Christian-Muslim relations. In doing so, their studies highlight the diplomat’s role in developing a “cross-culturalness” that deemphasizes religious markers and focuses on practice as opposed to perception. Though an important contribution to the field of early modern diplomacy, the Christian-Muslim framework fails to account for the complexities of diplomatic relations between Islamic governments. Consequently, al-Miknāsī’s account adds to the conversation because it opens up the rare lens into studying both Christian-Muslim and Muslim-Muslim relations.

WORKS CITED


