

Sacred Meals, Deritualization and Pluralization in Morocco

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Abstract: The distinction between technical and ritual aspects applies also to meals. There are domestic ritual meals, generally associated with rites of passage, and meals taken in a communal setting. This chapter is devoted to the *ma'rūf* ritual, a community meal celebrated in Morocco. We approach it as a system of symbols that convey local notions of community and family, human and jinn, sacred and profane, man and woman. We also examined the changes undergone by the *ma'rūf* in a global context characterized by deritualization by the push of puritanism that devalues local beliefs and rites.

Keywords: Sacred Meals, Interpretation, Gender, Ritual Change, Rural Community, Islamic Puritanism, Pluralization.

The distinction between the technical, functional, pragmatic act, on the one hand, and the ritual, symbolic act, on the other, applies to eating.¹ But these are not two types of action, one technical and the other ritual, but two aspects of the same action: a devout Christian says grace as a prelude to an ordinary meal, a devout Muslim says “in the name of Allah” before beginning to eat or drink. There are also ritual occasions when people eat together for reasons other than biological ones. We have domestic ritual meals, usually associated with rites of passage, and meals eaten in a communal setting.² This chapter is devoted to the ritual of *ma'rūf*, a communal meal celebrated mainly in southern Morocco.³

Our starting point is that ritual as a system of symbols can capture and transmit abstract thought. Within this perspective, we will interpret how ritual conveys local notions of community and family, human and jinn, sacred and profane, man and woman. From a dynamic perspective, we'll examine the changes undergone by the *ma'rūf* in a global context characterized by deritualization, by the push of puritanism that devalues local beliefs and rites. We will then examine how the *ma'rūf*, once the symbol of community cohesion, has become the ritual of the marginalized, how the rural community traditionally characterized by homogeneous beliefs and values is beginning to undergo a process of pluralization, following the example of urban culture.

¹ Hayat Zirari, “Entre alimentation (*makla*) et nutrition (*taghdia*): Arbitrages et réinvention au quotidien des pratiques alimentaires en contexte urbain,” *Hespéris-Tamuda* LV, 4 (2020): 385-407.

² When preparing *Rural Morocco, Socioanthropological Dictionary* (2022), my principle was to choose only subjects that I had already studied. The peasant world is too vast. Even if, I was tempted to make some exceptions for a few entries, including food, I ultimately decided not to, due the vast diversity of such entries.

³ The *ma'rūf* is celebrated in Algeria, see Yazid Ben Hounet, “The Ma'ruf: An Ethnography of Ritual (South Algeria),” in *Ethnographies of Islam, Ritual Performances and Everyday Practices*, eds. Baudoin Dupret et al., (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 50-61.

In Arabic, the word *ma rūf* means good action. It appears several times in the Koran.⁴ Locally, it refers to a meal that is sacrificed and eaten in common near a sacred place, such as a shrine or a mosque.⁵ Doutté classified it as a sacrificial banquet: “The *ma rūf* is a meal given by an individual, a family, or several families gathered on a birth,⁶ illness, or drought, to implore divine assistance. It is above all a religious event: a sacrificial banquet. An animal is always killed near the grave of a marabout and eaten by the faithful.”⁷ According to Jacques Berque, who studied the Seksawa tribes of the High Atlas, “The *ma rūf* is the seasonal rite that a group undertakes in honor of a saint. It usually involves a bloody sacrifice, the *tighersi*, but it is different from other gatherings such as the *tinubga* (a feast where two groups meet) or the *tiwitt* (an agape accompanied by palaver between groups), which have no religious significance.” “In some cases, the *ma rūf* was the result of an agreement between a group and a saint. A document from the 16th century tells how a saint asked two tribes to celebrate an annual *ma rūf*.”⁸

1. Brief description

The description of *ma rūf* presented here is based on observations made in the small Aït Mizan tribe between 1982 and 1992, as well as in 2011.⁹ The *ma rūf* is celebrated on several occasions, some of which are fixed while others are occasional. There is a *ma rūf* that is celebrated exclusively by children or women. The *ma rūf n'akourdellas* takes place after the *tach'alt* (bonfires), on the feast of *'achoura*. A group of boys goes around the houses of the village collecting eggs, sugar, flour, money and, above all, *akourdellas*, a type of sausage made from the dried tripe of the victims of the feast. Once the collection is complete, the boys choose a household to prepare the communal meal.¹⁰ In March, a woman of the auspicious lineage inaugurates the weeding of the barley fields. Together with the children, the women of the

⁴ Hassan Rachik, *Sacré et sacrifice dans le Haut Atlas marocain* (Casablanca: Afrique-Orient, 1990), 10.

⁵ Joseph Bourilly, *Éléments d'ethnographie marocaine* (Paris: Librairie coloniale et orientaliste Larose, 1932), 107, 111; Djinn Jacques-Meunié, “Sur le culte des saints et les fêtes rituelles dans le Moyen Dra et la région de Tazarine.” *Hespéris* XXXVIII, 3-4^{ème} trimestres (1951): 370-371; Emile Dermenghem, *Le culte des saints dans l'islam maghrébin* (Paris: Gallimard, 1978), 183, 194-95, 346; Paul Pascon, “The *Mârout* of Tamejlojt or the Rite of the Bound Victim,” in *Islamic Dilemmas: Reformers, Nationalists and Industrialization*, ed. E. Gellner (Berlin: Mouton Publishers, cop. 1985), 139-44.

⁶ As far as we know, we doubt that *ma rūf* is associated with a domestic rite of passage.

⁷ Edmond Doutté, *La société musulmane du Maghrib. Magie et religion dans l'Afrique du Nord* (Paris: Maisonneuve J. et P. Geuthner, 1909), 480-81.

⁸ Jacques Berque, *Structures sociales du Haut Atlas* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1978), 251-53, 259-79.

⁹ The small Aït Mizane tribe consists of three villages. They are located about 60 kms south from Marrakech and a few hours walk from the famous Toubkal peak, at an altitude of between 1,700 and 1,900 m. The everyday language is Tachelhite, but the majority speak Darija.

¹⁰ Rachik, *Sacré et sacrifice*, 9; Hassan Rachik, *Anthropologie des plus proches* (Rabat: Institut Royal pour la Culture Amazigh, 2012), 7-80.

village eat a meal known as *ma' rūf* of grass (*lma' rūf n-tuga*).¹¹ When the dowser reaches the eye of the spring (the point where the aquifer emerges), he designates a place where an animal is to be slaughtered. The sacrifice is taken to the mosque, where a *ma' rūf* is prepared for the students of the Koranic school.¹²

The stated purposes of the *ma' rūf* celebration may be collective (to prevent snow damage to the walnut tree, to ward off disease and other misfortunes) or private (piety, charity, healing, protection of the water mill). The owners of water mills (*azerg*) used to celebrate a *ma' rūf* every year to ensure the success of the mill. The clients don't pay in cash but leave a portion of the ground flour. For a certain period, two weeks or a month, the owner keeps the flour and dedicates it to the *ma' rūf* of his mill. This is done at the shrine of the saint chosen by the sacrificer. In fact, each mill is placed under the protection of a saint (*ka gat azerg i twasnad f-kra n çalih*). The *ma' rūf* is regularly dedicated to the saint invoked at the inauguration of the mill's construction.¹³

The best known and most regular *ma' rūf* is that celebrated by a small community, the village, and sometimes the small tribe. In rural areas, particularly in the mountains and oases, the village is more than just a juxtaposition of houses. It is a socio-political framework that bears a name, has a council (*jmā'a*), manages commons (mosque, canal irrigation, grazing land, shrine), recruits personnel (imam of the mosque, guardians of crop, irrigation manager) and celebrates its rituals.

In the Aït Mizane tribe, the most complete *ma' rūf* consists of eight phases: the preparatory phase, the slaughtering (*tighresi*), the *isgar* sacrifice, the cooking, the individual consumption of the first cooking of couscous (*taseksut tamezwarute*), the communal meal, the auction (*tadellālt*), and the recitation of prayers (*lfātiha*).

The preparatory phase consists of the collection of offerings (flour, butter) by the administrator (*moqaddem*) of the *ma' rūf* who represents the village council (*jmā't*). There is no set quota; each household gives what it can. The administrator is also responsible for collecting debts (*blaçqade*) incurred by certain heads of households during the previous *ma' rūf* auction. The money collected constitutes the ritual fund (*rasmal*) and is used to cover expenses, especially the purchase of victims.

¹¹ Edward Westermarck, *Ritual and Belief in Morocco* (New Hyde Park, New York: University Books [1926] 1968), 209, 218, 221-24; Hassan Rachik, "L'autre sacrifice," in *L'esprit du terrain*, ed. H. Rachik (Rabat: Centre Jacques Berque, [1991]), 61.

¹² Emile Laoust, *Mots et choses berbères: notes de linguistique et d'ethnographie, dialectes du Maroc* (Paris: A. Challamel, 1920), 427.

¹³ Rachik, *Sacré et sacrifice*, 90.

The actual ritual begins with the slaughter of animals, usually goats, by volunteer householders.¹⁴ They must follow the Muslim rites for killing animals. They must turn the animal to face the east, then say “In the name of Allah, Allah is the greatest” before slaughtering. With the help of others, the animal’s skin is removed, and the carcass is cut into pieces. Much of the meat is auctioned off; the rest is given to the women to cook.

The women, who are separated from men, put the meat in the pots. When the water begins to boil, and before adding salt and spices, a woman, who may be a ritualist specialist, takes some flour and kneads it with oil and boiled water. This mixture, called *isgar*, is offered to the jinn with the left hand while observing the ritual silence.¹⁵

Once the jinn have received their portions, the *ma’rūf* cooking begins. The women can then add salt and spices to the pots and prepare the communal meal, rolling the couscous, peeling the vegetables, etc. A few moments later, the first meal, called the “first couscous cooking” (*taseksut tamezwarute*), is served. This couscous, as the name suggests, is steamed only once, whereas it should normally be steamed three times. It is simply seasoned with oil or butter. The way it is served and eaten is unusual. A man places a large dish in front of each assistant who takes the couscous and serves himself with folded hands (*uraw*). With hands tied, so to speak, they are forced to eat directly with their mouths.

The main meal, also known as *ma’rūf* is served later and consists of large dishes of couscous topped with vegetables, meat, and sauce. Men are served first. Small groups are formed in numbers that vary according to the dishes being served. Women eat separately.

After the meal, one person opens the auction of sacrificial remains: meat, skins, butter, flour, and even unspent money. Unlike non-ritual auctions, prices far exceed the market value of the desired item. The price of a ten dirham note, for example, reaches fifteen or twenty dirhams. A climate of emulation, selfish calculations, tricks, and stratagems replaces the renunciation that characterizes the previous phases. Payment is due the following year, which favors the perpetuation of the ritual.

Prayers (*lfātiḥa*) conclude the ritual. With hands outstretched and palms turned by assistants, the imam of the mosque, or any notable, recites

¹⁴ Hassan Rachik, “Patterns of sacrifice and Power Structure,” in *Mimesis & Sacrifice*, Applying Girard’s Mimetic Theory Across the Disciplines, ed. Pally, Marcia (London: Bloomsbury, 2019), 64-76.

¹⁵ Hassan Rachik, *Le Maroc rural* (Casablanca: La Croisée des Chemins 2022), 173-77; Mohamed Mahdi, *Culture et patrimoine des nomades, Les Beni Guil du Maroc Oriental* (Rabat: Dar Assalam, 2018), 256-60; 281-88.

invocations in Berber, punctuated by *âmine*, then the first Surat of the Koran and two short customary prayers in Arabic.¹⁶

2. Interpretation

According to Lévi-Strauss, ritual can capture abstract thought.¹⁷ The meaning of a ritual is not intrinsic; it arises from the relations of opposition and correlation that are established between its elements and not from the elements themselves. To understand the meaning of a term is always to permute it in all its contexts.¹⁸ Edmund Leach supports a similar method, approaching rites as information techniques that serve to store and transmit abstract notions. To the question of how primitives manage to communicate information from generation to generation in the absence of written texts, he answered that it is through rituals that the knowledge essential to the survival of the group is transmitted. Primitives can grasp abstract ideas even if their language is not rich in abstract concepts: “Raw meat, cooked meat, fresh vegetables, putrid vegetables are all explicit concrete things, but placed in a pattern these few categories can serve to express the highly abstract idea of the contrast between cultural process and natural process. Furthermore, this patterning can be expressed either in words (raw, cooked, fresh, putrid) and displayed in a myth, or alternatively it can be expressed in with the ritual manipulation of appropriate objects. In such ways as this the patterning of ritual procedures can serve as a complex store of information.”¹⁹

In communities where writing is marginal and most knowledge is not preserved and transmitted in written documents, ritual is an indispensable source of information about social groups and their culture. It is through ritual and other sources such as legends, myths, and folktales that we gain access to the representations of the world and society held by the people we study. In this perspective, we approach the *ma rûf* ritual as a system of symbols that conveys and informs about local conceptions of the community (*jmā't*), the household (*takat*), the jinn, the sacred and the profane, the social status, the gender.

3. Culture and Nature

Ritual use of salt. People are explicit about the taboo of salting *isgar*: others ((local euphemism for jinn) don't eat salty food, salt scares them away. The prohibition of using salt is respected when the presence of jinn is desired. However, toward them off, the use of salt is recommended. In some regions,

¹⁶ Rachik, *Sacré et sacrifice*, 7-39; Rachik, *Le Maroc rural*, 238-47.

¹⁷ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *La pensée sauvage* (Paris: Plon, 1962), 126.

¹⁸ Claude Lévi-Strauss, “La structure et la forme: réflexions sur un ouvrage de Vladimir Propp,” in *Anthropologie structurale II* (Paris: Plon, 1974), 62.

¹⁹ Edmund Leach, “Ritualization in Man,” in *The Essential Edmund Leach*, vol. 1, Anthropology and Society, eds. Stephen Hugh-Jones and James Laidlaw (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000 [1966]), 161-62.

salt-free cakes are offered to them.²⁰ Before threshing, the farmer throws salt into the threshing floor to drive away the jinn. The same purpose is attributed to the ritual of placing salt on the heap of grain when the farmer measures his harvest. *Isgar* (boiled water and flour) thus emphasizes the affinity between the unsalted, the insipid, the blandness (*ilemmus*) and the jinn.

Speech Taboo. During the *ma 'rūf*, the woman sacrificing the *isgar* is not allowed to speak. The same taboo is observed in other ritual and non-ritual contexts, such as measuring the harvest in the threshing floor.²¹ Berque describes this ritual silence among the Seksawa tribes (High Atlas) as follows: “The most striking (of these practices, which are bursting with a color reminiscent of Mediterranean antiquity) is the libation of flour and milk that certain high-mountain families pour into the communal ‘basin’ at the opening of the irrigations. In Tasa, for example, a member of the old Aït Ghahi lineage carries the vase to the *chcharije* [basin] and pours it in, saying only one word: bismillah. The action is known by the stereotyped name of *ifyd*. If the bearer utters a single word on the way, the operation is no longer valid: a fine case of ritual mutism: *euphêmei*, as the Greeks say.”²²

Right and left. Sacrifices to jinn are made with the left hand²³. For women, *isgar* is prepared and offered with the left hand, since that’s what the “others” (jinn) take from the *ma 'rūf*. All offerings to the spirits are made with the left hand. This rule is emphasized in other rituals, where a woman performs all technical gestures with her left hand, throwing the grains of barely from time to time, holding the handle of the mill, turning it clockwise, from right to left. The idea of the left hand is also associated with evil, misfortune, and witchcraft. The opposition of right and left is a classificatory schema, a widespread way of coding to oppose and hierarchize, especially the sacred and the profane, the religious and the magical.²⁴

The interpretation of the *ma 'rūf* rites shows that jinn are associated with the notions of blandness, crudeness, left-handedness, and silence, and conversely, humans are associated with the notions of salty, cooked, right-handedness and speech. Secondly, the comparison of these rites reveals the structuring principle: humans are opposed to jinn as culture is to nature. Food dedicated to the jinn is on the side of nature: it is unprepared, raw, bland, tasteless. Human food, on the other hand, is on the side of culture: it is transformed by cooking, with the addition of salt and spices. Unlike the right

²⁰ Laoust, *Mots et choses*, 334.

²¹ Laoust, *Mots et choses*, 398; Rachik, *Sacré et sacrifice*, 64-7.

²² Berque, *Structures sociales*, 150.

²³ Laoust, *Mots et choses*, 315-16.

²⁴ Robert Hertz, “La prééminence de la main droite. Etude sur la polarité religieuse,” in *Sociologie et folklore* (Paris: Presses Universitaires Françaises, 1970), 85-109; Rachik, *Sacré et sacrifice*, 67-70, 106; on *isgar*, jinn, transhumance, and uninhabitedness, Rachik, *Sacré et sacrifice*, 81-2.

hand, which is associated with cultural acts, the left hand is not intended to perform regular technical and ritual acts. The opposition between speech and silence is merely a supplementary variation, a redundancy. The latent opposition between nature and culture structures much of the *ma'rūf* ritual. And it's a godsend to find at the center of this symbolic framework, a meal – the first cooking of couscous – that is neither raw nor cooked, and that is eaten individually with joined hands (neither left nor right). It's an ambiguous meal that falls between the two meals offered to jinn and humans.²⁵

Human	Jinn
Salty/spicy	Bland/tasteless
Cooked	Raw
Speech	Silence
Right	Left
Inhabited (Diurnal)	Uninhabited (Nocturnal)
Culture	Nature

Chart. Structural Approach to *ma'rūf*

4. Writing a Culture

All theoretical work requires material and practical organization, such as the creation of tables, charts, lists, index cards, genealogies. In the case of the interpretation of the ritual use of salt, for example, I made an index card listing the various contexts in which it was used or forbidden. Thanks to this technique, I gained a more comprehensive and synoptic understanding of the rite in question. The comparison of a set of index cards, created for other rites, offered even more access to the structure of the ritual. But I felt uncomfortable because I was afraid of imposing an artificial coherence on the rituals I was studying, which was only possible thanks to the manipulation of graphic techniques such as charts and index cards. Writing gestural and oral culture, for example, is not without its difficulties. Jack Goody has shown that “it is certainly easier to perceive contradictions in writing than in speech, partly because one can formalize the statements in a syllogistic manner, and partly because writing stops the flow of oral converse so that one can compare observations made at different times and at different places.”²⁶ The chart rigidly separates the notions associated with each column. The notion of raw, for example, is assimilated by the chart only to notions that share the same column with it. Observed facts support the opposite. Popcorn (baked vs. raw) offered to jinn in another ritual context is only unsalted.

²⁵ Rachik, *Sacré et sacrifice*, 58-73, 81-8.

²⁶ Jack Goody, *The Domestication of the Savage Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 1977), 11.

More precisely, the question was whether the picture I drew was ethnographically grounded, and whether it was not an artificial result of the possibility that writing a culture offered me of bringing together notions that people could not link, altogether, for lack of a chart or any other graphic procedure.

The structural approach is seductive; it calls upon the graphic techniques and the imagination of the anthropologist. But it runs the risk of turning the interpretive effort into a speculative game. The bias, the error, the trap of a structural approach is to elaborate an interpretation that gradually moves away from the ethnographic data and is reduced to a game of index cards, to the fabrication of impeccable charts that artificially separate the columns associated with this or that set of notions or rites. To avoid this kind of artificial composition or over-interpretation, which is possible for an observer who can use writing and other graphic forms, I try to keep my interpretation as close as possible to the explicit local interpretations.²⁷

All the interlocutors claimed that the jinn do not eat salted food, that they cannot afford salt: “God creates salt to separate man from others.” It is believed that sprinkling salt can help get rid of the “others.” Additionally, the symbol of salt is commonly associated with positive meanings that refers to the shared meal. Those who have eaten the same meal are said to be “associated by salt” (*cherken tissent*). Salt is the symbol of a shared meal, which in turn is the symbol of a cemented social bond. People swear by God, the Koran, the Prophet, and by salt, which refers to the shared meal (“By the salt I did not say so and so”) When one shares a meal with someone, a moral contract, an agreement, is built. The expression “salt bounds” (*tissent ar tsmuttule*) means that moral obligations bind people who share the same meal. By celebrating the *ma rūf*, which is the collective meal par excellence, the community aims to strengthen the social bonds among its members. In this sense, we can understand why a symbol of the solidity of the social bond cannot be used in the “food” dedicated to the jinn who must be kept away.

5. Private and collective

Some *ma rūfs* are cooked with wood collected from the village cemetery. This wood is taboo for domestic use. Apart from the *ma rūf*, it can only be used in the mosque to heat water for ablutions and to purify the dead. This is a symbolic way of associating this ritual with the sacred. At the same time, the prohibition against using cemetery wood for domestic cooking pits the community against the household, the collective against the private. Other rites also reveal the sacred aspect of *ma rūf*. When villagers are absent, relatives or neighbors bring them some *ma rūf*. The amount is of little

²⁷ Hassan Rachik, *Devenir anthropologue chez soi. Interpréter sa propre culture* (Casablanca, La Croisée des Chemins, 2021), 195-99.

importance; it is a *baruk* that allows all members to share the same sacred food. It's also said that *ma 'rūf* food stays in the belly for a year. It thus establishes a lasting commensality, a function attributed to all "salt sharing."

The auction phase ensures the transformation of sacred and collective goods into profane and private goods. It pits the communal meal against the domestic meal, the collective renunciation to the private appropriation. It triggers a lively competition in which the householders, or those who can, covet what their community has just sacrificed. The competition is even more intense because the debts are not due until the following year. The *ma 'rūf* combines two opposing but complementary ideas: the solidarity of the group, which does not exclude emulation, and the tensions between its members, who engage in fierce competition to own the remains of the sacrifice.

Therefore, not all phases of the ritual are governed by the norms that apply to the sacred. Berque referred to an 'embryo of credit' that includes inscriptions on written scrolls. He described the auction phase as the 'grocery of the sacred' (*Épicerie du sacré*), where accounting concerns are grafted onto the sacred meal.²⁸ It seems that Berque exaggerated the profane orientation of *ma 'rūf*: "[What dominates it] is not the communal aspect, but the contractual aspect. Auctions, forward sales, notarial registration: the secular overtakes the ancient rite of sacrifice on all sides. Individualistic debate, communal management, and purely legal transactions were already emerging. Law and religion would henceforth go their separate ways."²⁹

By classifying meals, the *ma 'rūf* conceptualizes abstract relationships between jinn and humans on the one hand, and the collective and the private on the other. However, considering the variations of the *ma 'rūf*, only the phase of the sacrificed and shared meal outside the home defines it. The *ma 'rūf* is a sacred meal because its sole purpose is to renounce the domestic consumption of food. What's more, linguistically, the same term *ma 'rūf* refers to both the ritual as a whole and the shared meal, it is said: "the *ma 'rūf* was celebrated" (*izri l-ma 'rūf*) and "they ate the *ma 'rūf* (*chchan l-ma 'rūf*)."³⁰

6. Sacred and Gender

Ritual representations are not only imbued with social or metaphysical discourse. They are linked to social status and structures. The ritual says something about jinn, but at the same time it separates and opposes women, who sacrifice to jinn with their left hand, and men, who sacrifice animals for the community with the right hand. Approaching ritual as a set of gendered roles allows us to analyze local representations of masculinity and femininity.

²⁸ Berque, *Structures sociales*, 279; Rachik, "Épicerie du sacré," in *L'esprit du terrain* (Rabat: Centre Jacques Berque, [1998]), 109-13.

²⁹ Berque, *Structures sociales*, 310-12.

³⁰ Rachik, *Sacré et sacrifice*, 75-9; 89-92.

The rather trivial starting point is that men and women do not indifferently perform the same gestures, utter the same words, handle the same objects, or sacrifice to the same recipients. How can we interpret the observed sexual division of ritual roles? First, we can see it as a duplication or extension of the social division of daily labor. Women sift barley, sieve flour, peel vegetables, roll and cook couscous; men collect money, decide on expenses, and prepare tea. The objects sacrificed also refer to the daily activities undertaken by each gender. The man sacrifices barley, the woman butter. This trivial observation deserves further study.

The ritual inability to shed blood has been explained by the fact that women, who give life, should not give death. For example, the Greek sacrificial system did not allow women to be thought of as sacrificers or butchers because the blood of fertilizing life could not be mixed with the blood of death and war.³¹ The same applies to other forms of killing, such as hunting.³²

It should be remembered that according to the Muslim religion, women are not forbidden to slaughter animals. Those whose slaughter is prohibited (*ḥarām*) are the madman, the apostate, and the sorcerer, and those whose slaughter is permitted but “not recommended” (*makrūh*) are the woman, the adolescent child, the hermaphrodite, and the left-handed person. Hadiths report that the Prophet Mohammad authorized the consumption of animals slaughtered by women. In Morocco, as in other Muslim countries, hunting, warfare (especially in the past),³³ and circumcision are male activities. But a major problem remains.

The interpretation that associates women with life contrasts the discriminatory hierarchy between men who slaughter and the women who offer food. During the Muslim feast of sacrifice the woman, usually the wife of the head of the household, blackens the victim's eyes with kohl and makes him swallow a mixture of wheat, yeast, and henna. The head of the household then sacrifices the victim, who is offered to God. The woman throws salt on the pool of blood to ward off the jinn. The division of ritual work is guided by a hierarchy between two types of sacred: one masculine and the other feminine. In ritual terms, the former is more highly valued than the latter. In terms of representation, the jinn occupy an inferior position similar to that of

³¹ Marcel Détiéne, “Pratiques culinaires et esprit du sacrifice,” in *La Cuisine du sacrifice en pays grec*, eds. M. Détiéne et J.P. Vernant (Paris: Gallimard, 1979), 207-14.

³² Michelle Rosaldo and Jane Atkinson, “Man the Hunter and Women: Metaphors for the Sexes in Ilongot Magical Spells,” in *Reader in comparative religion*, eds. L. William et V. Evon (New York: Harper and Row Publishers 1979), 129-40.

³³ Al-Bokhari, *L'authentique tradition musulmane*, choix de hadiths traduits par G.H. Bousquet (Paris: Fasquelle éditeurs, 1964), 149-50.

women in terms of social relations. The verses of the Koran expel them, and the blood of animals sacrificed to God is forbidden to them.³⁴

7. Deritualization

Historically, in rural areas, puritan movements have condemned local beliefs and rites as heretical. In the 1950s, to speak only of the recent past, local rituals were referred to as *lašnāme*.³⁵ This Arabic word (sing. *šanam*) designates the idols that Arabs worshipped before the advent of Islam. To apply this word to a local practice is to assimilate it to pre-Islamic practices and thus delegitimize it. Local rites are also, and more often, qualified as *bid'a* by local clerics (*talebs*) and young educated people influenced by reformist religious currents.

Young students, back in the village, forbade their mother to apply the usual local rites to the victim of the Muslim feast of sacrifice.³⁶ The notion of *bid'a*, which is highly controversial, refers to any innovation, belief, or custom that is not based on a precedent dating back to the time of the Prophet Muhammad. Muslim scholars distinguish between good (*ḥusna*) and bad (*sayyi'a*) innovation, asserting that useful innovations that do not contradict the foundations of religion are not condemnable. The collection of Koranic verses in a single *muṣḥaf* (codex) a dozen years after the Prophet Mohammad's death is often cited as an example of a good innovation.

Describing the rites performed by men (prayer in assembly, immolation according to Muslim rites) and women (make-up of the victim, sprinkling of salt on the pool of blood) during the sacrifice of the great feast, Hammoudi notes that everything happens as if two religions were involved.³⁷ It should be noted, however, that contrary to the discontinuity established by scholars and purists between orthodox and heterodox elements, ordinary people often perceive them as a homogeneous whole. This is the case, for example, of the woman who, before performing *isgar*, a local ritual ("little tradition"), performs the ablutions prescribed by Islam ("great tradition").

In this puritanical atmosphere, many local rituals that were no longer celebrated by the men were taken over by the women. Since 1985, the women of Imlil have taken over from the men in organizing the village's two major *ma'rūfs*. In 1987, old women took charge of collecting flour and money (five dirhams per household). Unlike traditional female *ma'rūf*, which has been reduced to food sacrifice, two goats were slaughtered. However, the person performing the sacrifice was a resident foreigner, who would never have

³⁴ Rachik, *L'esprit du terrain*, 53-69.

³⁵ Berque, *Structures sociales*, 138.

³⁶ Abdellah Hammoudi, *La victime et ses masques. Essai sur le sacrifice et la mascarade au Maghreb* (Paris: Seuil, 1988), 139-143.

³⁷ Hammoudi, *La victime*, 176-77.

assumed the role of sacrificer if the ritual had remained a male affair. From a community meal, *ma'rūf* became a meal for outsiders, women, children, and foreigners.

In 2011, information gathered in the field confirms that ritual disenchantment has been maintained or even increased. Even among women, the frequency of *ma'rūf* celebrations has clearly decreased. The “Berber ritual profusion” noted by Garrigues-Cresswell, who worked in the same valley, in commenting on the work of Hammoudi, Mahdi, and Rachik, seems to have vanished.³⁸ Many of the men and women we spoke attributed this change to the “Sunnis” (*issouniyne*, a word in recent use), rigorist reformers who repeated the same criticisms: *ma'rūf* is illicit (*ḥarām*), it's a blamable innovation (*bid'a*), it's nonsense (*khurāfāt*), it's associationism (*shirk*). However, we must distinguish between this extreme position, which aims to ban *ma'rūf* altogether, and other less categorical position. In this case, the criticism concerns only the bloody sacrifice, which the reformers believe is dedicated to entities other than God, and which they interpret as associationism (*shirk*). Thus, *ma'rūf* can be celebrated, but without the slaughtering phase. The women simply buy the meat at the village market. Considered a charitable act (*ṣadaqa*), some reformers approve of sacrificing meals in front of the sacrificer's home rather than at shrines. In Imlil, women celebrated a *ma'rūf* on Friday, July 1, 2011. The number of women participating was decreasing. This year, there were only twenty of them (one third of the village). But to make up for the lack of individual contributions, the organizers relied on the solidarity of the grocer, butcher, and vegetable seller, who lowered their prices. They also decided on the day of the celebration. The women organizers attributed the decline of rituals to the actions of the bearded men and women in khimar. They don't attend the *ma'rūf*, but the organizers send them a *bārūk*.

Conclusion

The little local story of the sacred meals is part of broader processes related to religious change, the disenchantment of the world that can be observed in the abandonment of rituals and beliefs connected to the community, the work of the land, transhumance, sanctuaries. The whole ritual relationship with the world and the environment is disappearing. The relationship with the world is becoming more pragmatic, under the combined effect of tourism, immigration, schooling, and the spread of puritanism. Structural changes in rural Morocco contributed to the weakening of rural religiosity. Puritanism could not develop in a context where rituals, shrines, and religious lineages played a crucial role in tribal political and economic

³⁸ Martine Garrigues-Cresswell, “La Profusion rituelle berbère: une nécessité sociale,” in *L'islam pluriel au Maghreb*, ed. Sophie Ferchiou (Paris: CNRS éditions, 1996), 181-88.

life. It was the upheaval of tribal structures, the increasing openness to the outside world (school, emigration, television) that favored the adoption of puritanical attitudes and the marginalization of shrines and their administrators.³⁹

As mentioned, echoes of Puritanism are not new. But unlike in the past, when it was confined to an elite of scholars and clerics, it is becoming more common and more categorical. It is no longer the preserve of a religious elite, but permeates common knowledge, which ultimately retains only the largely stripped-down injunctions of scholarly commentary. People simply say it's forbidden, it's heretical, it's associationism, it's written in the Koran, it's said by so and so.

What must be taken into consideration is the undermining of communal ritual solidarity. Attitudes diverge total or partial rejection of local rituals, defending them, mocking them, refusing to talk about them, ashamed to share them with a stranger, with me. This is one aspect of the genesis of pluralization in the countryside. It's a crucial moment in the life of a traditional and heterogeneous community whose members no longer share the same rites and beliefs. This pluralization and cultural heterogeneity are likely to make coexistence difficult. The guardians of orthodoxy, from notorious ideologues to local clerics, undermine local community solidarity in the name of the unity of an ideal Muslim community.

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³⁹ Ernest Gellner, "The Unknown Apollo of Biskra: The Social Base of Algerian Puritanism," in *Muslim Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 149-73.

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العنوان: الوجبات المقدسة، تراجع الطقوس والتعدد الاجتماعي في المغرب

ملخص: إن التمييز بين الفعل التقني والوظيفي والبرآگماتي من جهة، والفعل الطقسي الرمزي من جهة أخرى، ينطبق على الوجبات الغذائية. هناك وجبات طقسية محلية، ترتبط عمومًا بطقوس العبور، ووجبات يتم تناولها في إطار جماعي. خصصنا هذه الدراسة لطقس "المعروف"، وهو وجبة جماعية يُحتفل بها في المغرب. وتناولناه كنظام من الرموز التي تنتقل مفاهيم محلية عن المجتمع والأسرة، والإنس والجن، والمقدس واللامقدس، وأيضاً عن الرجل والمرأة. كما قمنا بدراسة التغيرات التي طرأت على "المعروف" في سياق أوسع يتسم بالتخلي عن الطقوس تحت تأثير التيارات الإسلامية الطهرية التي تنتقد المعتقدات والطقوس المحلية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الوجبات المقدسة، التأويل، الجندر، الجماعة القروية، التغير الطقوسي، التيارات الإسلامية السُّنيّة، التعدد الاجتماعي.

Titre: Repas sacrés, déritualisation et pluralisation au Maroc

Résumé: La distinction entre l'acte technique, fonctionnel, pragmatique, d'une part, et l'acte rituel, symbolique, d'autre part, s'applique au repas. Il y a les repas rituels domestiques, généralement associés à des rites de passage, et les repas pris dans un cadre communautaire. Cet article est consacré au rituel du *ma 'rūf*, un repas communautaire célébré au Maroc. Nous l'approchons en tant que système de symboles qui véhicule les notions locales de communauté et de famille, de l'humain et du djinn, du sacré et du profane, de l'homme et de la femme. Nous avons aussi examiné les changements subis par le *ma 'rūf* dans un contexte global caractérisé par la déritualisation, par la poussée du puritanisme qui dévalorise les croyances et les rites locaux.

Mots clés: Repas sacrés, interprétation, genre, communauté rurale, changement rituel, puritanisme islamique, pluralisation.