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Dreaming, dream-sharing and dream-interpretation as feminine powers in northern Morocco

ARACELI GONZALEZ-VAZQUEZ

Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in the Western Rif (Morocco), I examine three types of oneiric experiences: dreams (ahlam, manaym) and visions (ru'yan) of a prophetic nature obtained through lethargic sleep; and dream incubation (istikhara) at Sufi saints' shrines. I argue that dreaming, dream-sharing and dream-interpretation become a significant source of power for women, as they make possible a feminine management of the dead and the dead saints' discourses and actions.

Keywords: Morocco, Western Rif, dream and dream-sharing, *istikhara*

Introduction

In this article I examine three types of oneiric experiences: dreams (*ahlam*, *manaym*) and visions (*ru'yan*) of a prophetic nature obtained through lethargic sleep; and dream incubation (*istikhara*) at Sufi saints' shrines. The analysis is structured as a brief ethnography of the sleeping being and the sleeping body based on anthropological fieldwork in the mountain villages of the Ghzawa tribe in the Western Rif (provinces of Chefchaouen and Ouezzane, Morocco). First, it reflects on the figure of the 'sleeping woman' (*er-raqda*), and the use made of dreams as a form of divination. Second, it analyses the quest for visionary dreams and dream incubation (*istikhara*) in the shrine of Sidi Belghassem al-Hajj (Ued Ingusht, Ghzawa), a significant place of worship for the Baqqaliyya Sufi brotherhood.

A wide range of ancient and recent literature on dreaming, dream sharing and dream interpretation has generated a large amount of information about the contents of dreams and their interpretation in Islamic and non-Islamic *milieux*, countless reflections on the personal and social instrumentalization of oneiric imagination, and also analyses on the prestige acquired by men and women through their hermeneutic skills. In addition, many studies have explored the status of dreams and dreamers, and the capacity of both to make social changes. As Amina Mittermaier (2012) has stated, women's dreams have sometimes been interpreted as empowering the disempowered (see also Gilsenan 2000), or as offering a space for

saying things one could not say otherwise (Boddy 1989; Siegel 1978). In this article, I would also like to show that women's selves become permeable (Tomm 1991) through dreams (*manaym*) and visions (*ru'yan*). With the notion of permeable self I suggest a conception of the person that has to do with connectedness and interdependency. Relationality, as Tomm argues, is 'integral to self-determination in the model of the permeable self' (1991:54). Ghzawa men and women are involved in dreaming, dream-sharing and dream-interpretation in a gendered way. Women's dreams and visions are inscribed within the everyday life to form part of a wider process of construction of lifeways. Men involved in dream-interpretation are mainly *fuqaha* (s. *faqih*), who are socially recognized as master interpreters for their use of Islamic texts and techniques. *Istikhara* is predominantly done by women, and lethargic sleep seems also to be a predominantly female practice. In the villages of the Ghzawa tribe, many women create a useful personal inventory of cognitive and corporal experiences with certain Others – particularly with saints, the dead (mainly ancestors) and the *jnun* (evil spirits). This personal inventory, inscribed in certain social, cultural and historical contexts, and accumulated through a series of oneiric and mantic practices, memories, and narratives, generates symbolic, social and economic capital for them.

In the dreams and visions of Ghzawa peasant women, particularly those of the 'sleeping woman' (*er-raqda*), we normally find human selves interacting with the dead (*el miyyet/el-muta*) and the saints (*el-awliya*) in very specific ways, some gender-specific. Dreaming, dream-sharing (the process of discussing one's dreams with others) and dream-interpretation become significant sources of power for women, so long as they make possible a feminine management of the dead and the dead saints' actions and words. In examining the wider local context of dreaming, dream-sharing and dream-interpretation, I take into account issues related to the gender and rank of the dreamer. I also try to reflect on the fluidity of the different forms of being, in particular, of different forms of 'being within' and of 'being with' (co-existence).

Ghzawa is the cradle of the Baqqaliyya Sufi brotherhood, a territory which also contains some *zawiyas* (lodges) of the *tariqa* (Sufi order) Derqawiyya. Thus, Ghzawa is a territory where the Sufi tradition is strong, and where Sufi ontological understandings are commonly found among peasants. In Sufism, communication between the living and the dead is possible in dreams through a complex theory of space and the soul. In dreams, the sleeper's soul (*ruh*) abandons the body (*jism*) and rests in the '*alam al-mithal*' ('imaginal world'). Thus, the sleepers' souls and the souls of the dead meet in the same 'place'. Dreams and visions form part of the Sufi's mystical experiences, within which the boundaries between life and death and the places where the souls exist are fluid. The souls of the sleepers and the souls of the dead are together in *barzakh*, the place where the souls of the dead go before they join God, and therefore it is not surprising that the main people who appear to the living in their dreams are precisely those who are dead (Hoffman 1997:47). In Sufism,

the connection between the living and the dead takes place in *barzakh*. Relationality is possible and frequent. In the work of Al-Farabi, Al-Ghazali and Ibn Arabi imagination itself is called *barzakh*, a sphere between God and humans, between the invisible and the visible, between the spiritual and the material (Mittermaier 2007:231). In '*alam al-mithal*' the presence of individuals is immaterial, but figure and body exist, whereas in '*alam al-shahada*', which is the material world, the presence of the individual is materialized through the body (Corbin 1998:225).

In this article I explain certain ways by which Ghzawa women imagine the actions and words of the dead and the dead saints, and I show that they create links between significant events in their daily lives and the words and deeds of others. In short, I aim to recognize certain aspects of gendered human agency and to reflect on the way in which communication is established between different forms of being: being alive, being dead, being asleep, being with (with the dead and with the saints), and being within (within the real world, in the realm of sleep, and in the worlds defined by Sufi beliefs; for example, the '*alam al-mithal*' and the *barzakh*). Women in the Ghzawa tribe establish a precise 'hierognosis', that is, a hierarchical classification of visionary knowledge (Edgar 2011:10). Aisha, a poor peasant of the Beni Chaib fraction, believes that the first night's dreams (*lila luwwliyya*, in contrast with *lila thaniyya*, the second night) are the ones in which the visions (*ru'yan*) come true. If a person dreams before the prayer of the *fajr* (sunrise), which Aisha calls the first night, that dream will come true and its contents are a sign of something (*al-'alamat*, 'signs'). The dreams experienced after the *fajr* are sent by Shaitan (the devil). It is believed that the devil sometimes does this so a person will not wake up for *fajr* prayer. This perspective seems to echo ideas within the hadith traditions, particularly between the true vision (*ru'ya saliha*) and the false dream (*al-hulm*) that comes from Shaitan. In manipulating the boundaries between the self and other, women who dream and women who envision (whose body and mind are involved in seeing and soothsaying) manipulate the communication between the living and the dead. Dreaming and envisioning can be considered a set of techniques of the body, or of the self, that are used for the achievement of agency and power through the conscious manipulation of temporal, spatial, social and gender boundaries. Social boundaries are crossed when an authoritative religious figure – the saint – depends strongly on female agency.

Dream and vision interpretation form part of a dynamic tradition, with some peasant women in the Ghzawa tribe possessing a wide range of symbolic and hermeneutic resources with which to actively construct their reality. The analysis of the classification and interpretation of dreams and visions enables an exploration of the discursive space in which oral and written traditions and everyday life come together, and an analysis of ways in which the women can instrumentalize them. Through dreams and visions, many women of the Ghzawa tribe – those who dream every day, those who dream in the shrine of Sidi Belghassem from time to time or in

other shrines, and those who undergo prolonged or lethargic sleep – obtain visions and knowledge that are given away, shared, exchanged and sold.

Dreaming, dream-sharing and dream-interpretation

Dreaming is highly significant for the Ulad Baqqal *shurafa'* (descendants of the Prophet) and the Baqqaliyya Sufi brotherhood. Dream imagery is important in the legitimization of their patrilineal descent. Indeed, Sidi Yakhlef, the first Baqqali, an Idrissid (descendant of Mulay Idriss) who had to flee from the persecution of the Idrissids, was concealed by a Ghzawa shopkeeper (*baqqal*), who saved him from death by putting his son in his place (hence the two names Yakhlef, from *khalaf* or 'substitution', and Ulad Baqqal, 'the shopkeeper's sons'). Yakhlef fled to Ghzawa because God told him in a vision (*ru'ya*) that his sons (the *shurafa'* Ulad Baqqal) would be as numerous as the stars in the sky and they would live in the lands of Ghomara. Although the Baqqaliyya Sufi Order clearly has exerted considerable influence on the ways Islam is practised in the villages of Ghzawa, it is important to stress that in considering social, ritual and religious practices we should bear in mind their fluid and heterogeneous nature.

Dreaming, dream-sharing and dream-interpretation are potential sources of power for Riffian/Jbalan women. They are discourses, experiences and practices through which individuals, human selves, mainly women, gain access to the will of dead saints and dead relatives. Dreaming plays a significant role in the promotion of cultural, social and personal world views. Dreaming of the dead, both ancestors and saints, transfers the authority of their words and actions to the dreamer, legitimizing discourses and practices that might otherwise appear to be challenges to hegemonic cultural and social constructions. Dreamers also play a central social role, both as narrators and characters of their oneiric experiences.

Dream-sharing involves the production of a self-narrative. In narrating dreams, Ghzawa women have the opportunity to generate a discourse on different experiences and events that involves the management of the representation of the relationships between humans and their others, particularly humans and nonhumans when we refer to the body afflicted by the *jnun*. At dream-sharing times, sometimes during work gatherings, sometimes during breakfast time, women devote themselves to the 'speculative exegesis' (Descola 1989:441) of dream imagery. This symbolic work is supported by knowledge obtained from previous consultations with the *fuqaha* or with Sufi experts, with other women, or through an understanding of oral and written tradition. In the case of men, it is generally supported by the knowledge obtained from Muslim dream-interpretation books.

Dream-sharing is not always positive. A poor and old woman from the Beni Chaib fraction gave me some advice: dreams should not be told carelessly. Edmond Doutté writes that some Muslim theologians insist that the dreamer should only tell his dream to a virtuous person (Doutté 1909:408). Ibn Sirin, the most famous of the

Muslim interpreters of dreams (eighth century), goes further when he warns that dreams should not be told to a woman, an ignorant person or an enemy (Ibn Sirin, cited in Doutté 1909:408). The old woman from Beni Chaib affirms that bad dreams should not be told to anyone, and she alludes to some rituals aimed at reducing the effect of bad dreams (and their bad omens). One of these is to tell the dream to a stone. Doutté mentions other ritual acts performed after a bad dream: expectoration or performing a full ablution (Doutté 1909:408).

Dream-interpretation is a cultural and social activity (Edgar 2011). It reinforces women's capacity for being influential in the lives of others; specifically through the understanding of dreams and visions as guidance. In the villages of Ghzawa at least two competing powers exist: those of the *faqih*, socially recognized as a master of Qur'anic exegesis and hadiths (and thus, of interpretation of dreams through Qur'anic analogies); and those of several peasant women, particularly elderly women. There is a historical cultural tradition, followed in different ways by different individuals, in the interpretation of dreams. Some rules of metaphorical interpretation can be identified. Fatima, a middle-aged peasant woman, dreamt that she was preparing a wedding in her husband's village. Two days after this dream, her mother died. Fatima says that dreaming of a wedding is an omen of the death of a near relative. Aisha, another peasant woman, had two dreams. In both, her dead mother came to her and asked her for an object. In the first dream, her mother wanted the key of the house (*mefteh ed-dar*). In the second, she wanted the mattress of the bed (*al-firash*). In both dreams, Aisha was not sure if she should give her the objects or not, but finally did so. After the first dream, Aisha lost her daughter; after the second, her husband. On telling her dream, Aisha emphasizes that she could have refused, but did not. She had to decide, and she made her choice. Both dreams include well-known symbols: daughters as the key to the house, and husbands identified with the marriage bed. Aisha has shared this dream/vision with different people, particularly with relatives. If told before the death of her relatives, it would have been considered a bad omen. On being shared, the dream is accepted as explanation of her responsibility. Her actions in the dream are thought to be at the origin of the real events. In this case we see how dreaming shifts responsibility away from the waking agent/self to the sleeper. Rahma's dream also involves the presence of her mother. She had this dream when she was pregnant with her twin daughters. Her dead mother came to her in dreams and gave her two pieces of soap wrapped in clean newsprint, without any writing. These two pieces of soap were her twin daughters; the newsprint symbolized her unwritten future life. Rahma believes that dreams involving meetings with dead parents are generally dangerous (*jaterin*), but there is a way to stop them occurring: go to the cemetery, visit the parent's tomb, place a stone upon it and say 'this is the limit [*hada el-hadd*], do not come to me ever again.' In both dreams, a mother's actions give and take life. A woman, the grandmother and mother, gives and takes the life of her daughters' daughters.

Lethargic sleep

Among the Ghzawa there is a particular geography of sleep and dreams. Prolonged or lethargic sleep is the expression of an ontological tension, and it defines the existence of the following sleepers: women who remain asleep for several days or weeks (*er-raqda*); the ungendered foetuses who stay asleep in their mother's wombs for several years or until the death of the mother (*er-raqed*); and men, regarded as martyrs (*mujahids*), who died violently and are buried at funerary sites with seven tombs (*saba'tu rijal*) – recalling the legends of Ephesus and the cave in the Qur'an (*Ahl al-Kahf*), and local North African traditions about the existence of seven martyrs, generally known as the Seven Men (*Saba'tu Rijal*) (Massignon 1950:245, 1954:61). The sleepers have left a clear mark in place-names in Morocco and in the area of the Ghzawa tribe. Thus, there are examples such as 'Ain Er-Reggada ('The Spring of the Sleeper'), in north-west Morocco (also at Raqqada, in Tunis), and the Regraga tribe (etymologically, 'The Sleepers') between Essaouira and Safi (Penicaud 2005:204). Among the Ghzawa tribe, further place-names refer to sleepers: the village of Beni Na'yim bears the name of 'The Sleeper's sons' (*na'yim*, 'sleeper', from *nawm*, 'to sleep'), and in some villages there are funerary sites of the *Saba'tu Rijal* ('Seven Men', seven sleepers). The latter, the Seven Men, provide a very interesting model of the male sleeping self, which offers a contrast to the female sleeping self we are focusing upon. Places with that name usually recall a mystical, oneiric and scatological legend of great antiquity, present in Greco-Roman religion, Christianity and Islam.

The two oneiric practices at the centre of our discussion: the quest for visionary dreams by sleeping in the tombs of dead saints and lethargic or prolonged sleep, enjoy a long history in the north of Africa, particularly among Berbers. An entry of the *Encyclopédie Berbère* entitled 'incubatio' (Benseddik and Camps 2001) reminds us that in Antiquity, the Libyans provide examples of sleeping on graves for obtaining visionary dreams. According to Pomponius Mela, the Augiles (Awjila, Libya) used to sleep on tombstones and take as answers the dreams they had during their sleep (Basset 1917:513). Herodotus mentions that among the Nasamones tribe (also Awjila) 'their practice of divination is to go to the tombs of their ancestors, where after making prayers they lie down to sleep, and take for oracles whatever dreams come to them' (Rawlinson 1862:123).

With regards to lethargic sleep, in the case of Morocco and the area my ethnographic data were collected (Western Rif/Jbalan highlands), the francophone Islamicist Edmond Doutté (1876–1926) wrote about 'sleepers': 'El Bekri raconte que dans le Rif il y avait des individus appelés er reqqâda, c'est-à-dire les dormeurs qui tombaient en léthargie, restaient plusieurs jours dans cet état, puis à leur réveil, faisaient les plus étonnantes prophéties.' (Doutté 1909:415). Here, Doutté is citing from a larger text, the *Kitab al-Masalik wa'l-Mamalik* by the Andalusian geographer Al-Bakri (eleventh century). According to Slane's translation of Al-Bakri's text, the figure of the sleepers, here transcribed as *er-raggada*, existed in several parts of the

Moroccan *pays de Ghomara* (Western Rif): 'On les trouve sur les bords de la revière Laou, chez les Beni Saïd, les Beni Catîten et les Beni Irouten.' (El-Bekri 1859:200).² Interestingly, the groups that Al-Bakri mentions are located in the modern provinces of Tetouan and Chefchaouen, in the mountains of the Western Rif, very near the area now occupied by the Ghzawa tribe.

Al-Bakri explains the sleepers' actions in this way (El-Bekri 1859:232–3):

...l'un ou l'autre de ces homes-là tombe dans un léthargie qui dure pendant deux ou trois jours, et il y reste sans se remuer et sans s'éveiller, quand même on lui ferait souffrir les douleurs les plus vives, ou qu'on le couperait par morceaux. Sorti de son évanouissement le lendemain du troisième jour, il a l'air d'un homme ivre et, pendant le reste de cette journée, il demeure tout hébété, sans s'apercevoir de ce qui se passe autour de lui. Le jour suivant, il prédit ce qui doit arriver cette année-là: récoltes abondantes, disette, guerre et autres choses remarquables. Ceci est un fait qui se passe au vu et au su de tout le monde.³

The induction of lethargic sleep and the later prophetic, providential, mantic and oracular activity of sleeping women is still a reality in Morocco, albeit of decreasing importance. The examples of sleeping women in the Western Rif reveal that, considering the way in which lethargic sleep is a female corporal activity (in both the cases of the sleeping foetus, *er-raqed*, and of the sleeping woman, *er-raqda*), women have been able to instrumentalize a symbolic and social capital strategically. In the Ghzawa tribe, my interlocutors talk about several people who were sleepers at some moment in their lives. One of the most interesting examples is that of a woman in the Beni Chaib fraction who was involved in activities connected with prophecy and providence, as well as presage and premonition. She slept for several days or weeks, and through the dreams and visions that came to her while she slept, she was able to answer the questions of the faithful who gathered in her house when they heard that she had awoken. She is an important figure, as her mantic skills compete directly with those possessed by the local *faqih*. The ability to envision occupies a central position not only in the construction of personal piety, but also in social religiousness and prestige. Similarly, the production of prophetic and visionary discourse forms part of the economic capital of some women, as they can obtain goods and money for their visions. This commodification of prophetic discourse may be taken as an example of female empowerment, not only because these goods and money are received directly by the sleeper, but also because of the influence she exerts through her discourses on the lives of others. As an experience which involves interiority and physicality, prolonged or lethargic sleep is associated with to the life of the soul (*ruh*), which leaves the body during sleep and dwells in the same place as the souls of the death (*barzakh*) and can therefore communicate with them. Thus, lethargic sleep allows lasting interaction with the dead, both ancestors and saints.

The sleeping woman of the Beni Chaib fraction has oracular dreams and premonitory visions during her lethargy, most of which are connected with consultations made previously by her clients. However, others refer to people she knows, whom she informs about what she has dreamt. Detractors point out that she sometimes informs them after the event in question has taken place, suggesting that the woman was lying or that her visions were a trick. In contrast, many others provide examples of the woman's divination skills and, above all, attest to the veracity of her lethargy and the characteristics of her sleeping body: lack of movement and slow breathing for many days, sometimes up to a week.

The oracular experience of the Ghzawa sleeping women enables a strategic management and manipulation of the dead and the words of the dead, as explained above. In Islamic books of magic and witchcraft (*suhr*) there are several spells for making the sleep talk. Douffé cites the indications of Suyuti and El Bouni. Various indications are also found in Ibn Khaldun's book. Together they demonstrate the authority that images and words from oneiric experiences possess in Muslim *milieus*. In some books on the divination practices of Arab and Muslim societies, the figures of *kahin* and *kahina* are mentioned (seers or soothsayers). The Berber Damya or Dihya, called Al-Kahina, a symbol of Berber resistance to Arab penetration in North Africa, is one of the better-known ones. As we have seen, both mantic skills and oneirism are female agencies through which a woman can create a group of clients and display her authority in certain matters, particularly those related to the personal life cycles. Mantic ability and visions become vital resources for her, and enable her words to compete with those of male religious experts.

***Istikhara* at the shrine of Sidi Belghassem al-Hajj**

Sidi Belghassem al-Hajj (d. 1050/1640) is one of the most important saints in the Baqqaliyya Sufi brotherhood. His shrine is located in the village of Ued Inghust, in the Bou Hassan fraction of the Ghzawa tribe. Sidi Belghassem is said to have been a pious Idrissid *sharif* whose shrine was built in the place where his horse halted when carrying his dead body. This episode is reminiscent of the way in which the prophet Mohammed chose the place to found his first mosque. Sidi Belghassem's shrine is visited mainly for its/his *baraka*. He is thought to have the power of evicting the *jnun*, and healing the afflicted, particularly persons with mental disorders (referring to the 'aqel or 'mind', 'reason', 'intellect') (Pandolfo 1997:97).

Istikhara involves performing ritual ablutions and reciting the *salat al-istikhara* before going to sleep in the room next to the saint's tomb. *Istikhara* is an Islamic ritual practice that is believed to generate ('incubate') true and visionary dreams (Edgar and Henig 2010). This practice is commonly used to request divine guidance, or fortune/grace (*baraka*), in relation to many different matters: in Ghzawa, most frequently to make a choice on marriage or economic affairs, and in general for decision-taking in

vital moments of the life cycle. It may also be prayed when choosing the best day for visiting a saint (*ziyara*).

Ghzawa women do not always know the *salat al-istikhara*, as the formal religious education of many women is quite poor. Instead, they recite any verse from the Qur'an. Some women only ask God for forgiveness and say *Allah al-Ghafur al-Rahim* ('Allah is the Forgiving, the Merciful') (Qur'an, 39:53). The ablution is carried out with water collected at a spring at which the saint is said to have performed his ablutions ('*Ain ed-Siyyid*). A modelled pottery vessel named *barrada*, with apotropaic decorations in red and black, is used. The saint's *baraka* permeates the body during the dream, but sleeping in the mausoleum also induces a visionary dream in which Sidi Belghassem appears and heals the believer, or indicates what the believer should do to be healed.

The visit (*ziyara*) to the tomb of Sidi Belghassem al-Hajj and ensuing dream-incubation do not always focus on overnight sleep, but rather on napping. Indeed, people from nearby villages prefer to sleep there in the day, especially because day-sleeping at the shrine does not seem to receive the same attention from detractors of the practice. Seeking the intermediation of saints or simply communicating with them is regarded as 'heretic' by many Ghzawa believers. This is the basic ontological tension of *istikhara-incubatio*: *istikhara* is a quest for divine inspiration, and *istikhara-incubatio* in Sidi Belghassem's shrine essentially seeks the intermediary inspiration of one who is near to God, the saint himself.

The practice of spending the night in the saint's mausoleum – called *istikhara* in Arabic, which is akin to *incubatio* in Latin and *egkoimesis* or *egkatakoimesis* in Greek – has existed in the Mediterranean since Antiquity. In Greece, *egkoimesis* is a rite associated with worship in the Asklepeion at Epidaurus, which consisted of spending the night in the *abaton*, the room in the shrine where sacrifices and healing took place (Aydar 2009:125). The word *istikhara* has a double meaning in Arabic. It basically refers to a type of prayer or supplication (*du'a*) that follows the prayer of two *rekat*, called *salat al-istikhara*. The practice focused on here takes its name from the habit of praying in this way so as to favour the induction of a visionary or prophetic dream (Doutté 1909:413). In Morocco, as in other Muslim countries, a believer who prays the *istikhara* thinks that the decision made afterwards, and the action taken because of it, are inspired by God. Between the prayer and the instant of the decision or action, the believer experiences 'a sign' (*al-'alam*), such as clairvoyance or a dream. Praying the *istikhara* generates divine spiritual and behavioural guidance. However, it is also invoked to legitimize certain individual actions or to obtain divine sanction when God's designs coincide with the believer's inclinations. In Ghzawa villages, the *istikhara* traditionally follows the last prayer (*al-'isha*) immediately before going to sleep, in the hope that God's instruction or advice will arrive in a visionary dream (*ru'ya*). The incubation of the *ru'ya* may involve other conditions, such as going to bed in a state of purity and sleeping on the right side of the body. Sufis of Ghzawa

also practise this induction of a visionary dream in the spiritual retreat (*khalwa*). *Istikhara* is considered a form of mystic knowledge, a connection between the believer and God, or the believer and the saint. It is a form of consultation, somehow locating the responsibility of the believer's acts outside his or her person and in God. It expresses submission to divine will, whilst recognizing God's superior wisdom: *Allah huwa el-alam* ('God is the one who knows'). Thus, the believer acknowledges an inability to decide alone, and comes before the saint and God as a person in need of guidance. *Istikhara* can be better understood if we consider it a technology of the human self, as a tool for becoming (Foucault 1994). By way of the dream, as Amira Mittermaier (2010:141) explains, 'an Other addresses the dreamer'. In this case, this Other is Sidi Belghassem el-Hajj, a Sufi saint who died many centuries ago. True dreams and visions inspired by the saint, and the saint's actions and words, prevail over the dreamer's will. It reinforces women's submission to a male mandate communicated in sleep by the saint, a mandate which comes from someone near to God. This is the dual and paradoxical nature of *istikhara*, which is at the same time a tool of domination and resistance. The faithful also obtain Sidi Belghassem's blessing through the construction of their bodies as permeable. In the ritual known as *nefel*, the faithful take clay from the saint's tomb (*trab al-siyyid*), mix it with water (from the sacred spring), dip a small cloth in it and spread the mud over the part of the body that is hurting them or which feels sick. Instead of using a piece of cloth, many faithful apply the mixture with twigs from a mastic tree (*dro*) next to the shrine that is said to date from the time of the saint. In this case, the mud is splashed on the painful part of the body by hitting it with the sticks. The benefits of staying overnight, the clay in the tomb and the water in the spring are recognized by many believers of the Beni Chaib, Bou Hassan and Beni Intna fractions, and even by believers of the Erhuna and Beni Mestara tribes that neighbour Ghzawa.

The word *istikhara* also designates other forms of divine consultation now regarded as 'heretical' depending on the context. One of these is stichomancy, which consists of opening the Qur'an at random and reading any verse, or the first verse on the page, and interpreting what it says in connection with a doubt or need for guidance. Other texts in addition to the Qur'an may be used for this purpose; Sufis equally resort to the *Dalail al-Khayrat* by Al-Jazuli. In Chefchaouen, several young town girls I know often use it to clear up doubts about their present and future. The other custom involves using the *tasbih* (beaded prayer string). The *istikhara* is made by praying the Fatiha with the *tasbih* in the palms of the hands; it is then blown upon to insufflate the power of the words in the Qur'an and this verse in particular. Then a bead is chosen at random and three words are recited while moving towards the end of the *tasbih*. In Zwemer's description (1920:32–3), the words are Allah, Mohammed and Abu Jahal, or Adam, Eve and the Devil. If the word ending the recitation is Allah or Adam, the omen is good; if it is Abu Jahal or the Devil, it is bad; and if it is Mohammed or Eve, the doubt remains.

In Morocco, as in the whole of North Africa, *istikhara* continues to be practised, and it is common at many mausoleums, such as Ued Ingusht, but also in sacred tombs and caves. Dream-incubation also takes place in a rock-shelter at Jbel Alam, near the shrine of Mulay Abdsalam ben Mashish, in the Jbala. Among the Ghzawa tribe it is equally a feature at other mausoleums of the Ulad Baqqal. At Sidi Belghassem's shrine, *istikhara* possesses a double function: it is therapeutic, with the intention of healing the believer, and communicative, with the aim of obtaining a true dream or vision in which the saint offers his *baraka*, his guidance and his cure. This implies an instrumentalization of the idea of permeable body and self: a body in which the saint's *baraka* can penetrate whilst the believer sleeps. Permeability is the essential characteristic of all matter when it enters the *hurum*, the 'sacred' space of the shrine: all is penetrable by the *baraka*, including objects (which can thereby become amulets), human bodies and animals.

Istikhara is a rite stimulating a link between the sleeper and the saint, and regular visits by the believer, who thus becomes a client or faithful. The patron-client relationship is materialized through the bidirectional circulation of goods: the believer offers the saint pottery vessels with water, candles, wheat or certain sacrifices, and the saint offers the believer his *baraka*. In *istikhara*, some may see the acknowledgement of the believer's inability to reach a decision, or a pious act of submission to God's will. However, in obtaining guidance or managing this previously legitimized and authoritative will, Ghzawa women are able to find support for their own decisions, sometimes subverting gender constructions. As an example, this might be the case when the saint's will regarding marriage affairs is contrary to that of the woman's father.

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NOTES

- 1 'El Bekri tells that in the Rif there were individuals called *er reqqâda*, that is, "the sleepers", who fell into lethargy, stayed several days in this state, and following their awaking, made the most astonishing prophecies.'
- 2 'We find them on the banks of the river Laou, among the Beni Saïd, the Beni Catiten and the Beni Irouten.'
- 3 'One or another among this kind of men there falls into a lethargy that lasts for two or three days, without moving and without waking up, even if we made them suffer great pain, or if we cut them in pieces. Once he's emerged from his faint, following the third day, he has the air of a drunken man, and during the rest of this day, he rests, very dazed, without realizing what is happening around him. The following day, he predicts what is going to come that year: abundant harvests, food shortage, war and other remarkable things. This is an event that takes place before everyone's eyes and is known by everyone.'

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