

# «Oh my Lord ‘Abd al-Qādir»: Text and context in *jīlāla* ritual songs in Morocco

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## Abstract

This paper is intended to serve as the written complement to audio recordings of the music of the *jīlāla* brotherhood I collected in Morocco. The *jīlāla* traces its spiritual heritage to the Sufi saint ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī (1077/78-1166), namesake of the influential Qādiriyya Sufi order. *Jīlāla* musicians traditionally perform in spirit possession rituals. They operate within Morocco together with the *gnawa*, *ḥamadsha*, and *‘isāwa* religious brotherhoods. However, few scholars have engaged with their music and their poetic texts. Drawing upon ethnographic research conducted in Meknes, Morocco, in this paper, I examine the *jīlāla*’s songs as they are performed in both the context of all-night events, where Muslim saints and spirits with distinct personalities are invoked to make their presence known through possession, and in all-female ceremonies. In doing so, I focus on the figure of ‘Abd al-Qādir, exploring how he continues to provide spiritual aid to followers and act as a shared reference for music associated with these diverse healing traditions.

*«Oh mio signore ‘Abd al-Qādir»: testo e contesto nei canti rituali jīlāla in Marocco. Questo saggio vuole essere il complemento scritto alle registrazioni audio della musica della confraternita jīlāla che ho documentato in Marocco. La confraternita jīlāla fa risalire la propria eredità spirituale al santo sufi ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī (1077/78-1166), omonimo dell’influente ordine sufi Qādiriyya. I musicisti jīlāla si esibiscono tradizionalmente in riti di possessione spiritica. Operano in Marocco insieme alle confraternite religiose gnawa, ḥamadsha e ‘isāwa. Tuttavia, pochi studiosi si sono occupati della loro musica e dei loro testi poetici. A partire da una ricerca etnografica condotta a Meknes, in Marocco, in questo articolo esamino i canti dei jīlāla eseguiti sia nel contesto di eventi notturni, in cui santi musulmani e spiriti con personalità distinte vengono invocati per rendere nota la loro presenza attraverso la possessione, sia nei riti femminili. Nel far ciò, mi concentro sulla figura di ‘Abd al-Qādir ed esploro come egli continua a fornire aiuto spirituale ai seguaci e ad agire come riferimento condiviso per la musica associata a queste diverse tradizioni terapeutiche.*

## 1. ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī and the *jīlāla*

‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī was a twelfth-century theologian from the province of Gilān (northern Iran), who made Baghdad his home and final resting place (Braune 1960: 69-70; Abun-Nasr 2007: 87).<sup>1</sup> He is remembered as having been a wandering ascetic for twenty-five years, keeping Sufism in tune with the precepts of Ḥanbali religious jurisprudence. ‘Abd al-Qādir achieved renown during his lifetime as an inspiring teacher and preacher. His life and legacy gained legendary qualities after his death (1166),<sup>2</sup> with him becoming «probably the most popular saint in the Islamic world» (Schimmel 1975: 247) and the eponymous founder of the Qādiriyya, one of the earliest and the most widespread of Muslim mystic orders.<sup>3</sup>

The Qādiriyya Sufi order appears to have emerged in Iraq and the surrounding areas towards the end of the twelfth century, and its expansion thereafter was propelled by posthumous followers of ‘Abd al-Qādir.<sup>4</sup> From the fifteenth century onwards, the Order had distinct branches and spread not only throughout the Arab countries of the Middle East but also in western and Sub-Saharan Africa, the Balkans and the Caucasus, the Indian Subcontinent, Central Asia, as well as China and Southeast Asia (Nizami 1991: 8-10; Zarcone 1996: 463-466; Trimmingham 1971: 43-44, 233; Abun-Nasr 2007: 96).

In Morocco, as in the rest of the Islamic world, the veneration of ‘Abd al-Qādir is currently widespread. The saint, typically identified with the honorific “Mūlāy” (lit.

<sup>1</sup> For scholarly works on ‘Abd al-Qādir and the Qādiriyya order, see Margoliouth 1997; Braune 1960; Trimmingham 1971; Chabbi 1973; Nizami 1991; Zarcone 1996; and Abun-Nasr 2007.

<sup>2</sup> ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī became the subject of numerous hagiographies after his death, contributing to his legendary profile as a Sufi saint credited with miraculous abilities. An example is Nūr ad-Dīn ‘Alī al-Shaṭṭanawfī’s (d. 1314) hagiographical work *Bahjat al-Āsnār*, which is an extensive source of information, though ultimately misleading. This work, written more than a hundred years after Jīlānī’s death, became one of the major sources from which several other writers derived their information. The book provides excerpts from speeches and sayings by Jīlānī, as well as praise and words of respect for him from other scholars. Moreover, Jīlānī is portrayed as the supreme saint of his epoch – esteemed by angels, spirits, and even the Prophet – as well as a great miracle-worker: he extinguishes fire, raises the dead, crushes mountains, dries up seas, walks upon water, moves through air, and is present in several places at the same time (Abun-Nasr 2007: 94-96; Braune 1960: 70).

<sup>3</sup> Several scholars of Sufism and historians have sought to understand the widespread phenomenon of venerating Jīlānī after his death and the reasons behind the rise of the Qādiriyya order (see, for example, Trimmingham 1971: 41, 233; Chabbi 1973: 102-106; Nizami 1991: 6-8; and Abun-Nasr 2007: 82-83).

<sup>4</sup> Al-Jīlānī did not found any particular organisation or belief system. The Qādiriyya seems to have been first organised by ‘Abd al-Qādir’s descendants, who gathered his followers in a Sufi order carrying his name (Zarcone 1996: 463-465). As pointed out by Abun-Nasr (2007: 88), ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī’s «metamorphosis from a reputable Sufi *shaykh* [religious leader, head of religious order] and religious scholar to the eponymous founder of a Sufi *ṭarīqa* [“path”] occurred after his death». The author further explains that one of ‘Abd al-Qādir’s sons, ‘Abd al-Razzāq (d. 1206-7), laid the foundation of his father’s *ṭarīqa* through asserting his father’s spiritual authority. By the end of the 13th century, ‘Abd al-Qādir’s legendary founding of the Qādiriyya Sufi order, as well as his legends of miracles and friendship of God became consolidated. The Qādiriyya expansion thereafter was fostered by «the personal initiative of Sufi *shaykhs* in different lands who enhanced their religious standing by acting as representatives of the prestigious Qādiriyya, without renouncing their independence as spiritual guides of their local communities. For the Qādiriyya did not have any centralised spiritual leadership. [...] Furthermore, the Qādiriyya did not have a fixed religious rule set for it by its eponymous founder which its *shaykhs* in different lands were expected to observe. [...] Consequently, the Sufi *shaykhs* in various Muslim lands who belonged to the Qādiriyya *ṭarīqa* had much leeway in determining the mystical practices they validated by his spiritual authority» (Abun-Nasr 2007: 96).

“my lord”) preceding his name, is known as ‘Abd al-Qādir Jilālī or Jilālī. Because of his prominent reputation for having miraculous powers, several legends, myths, and stories are still told and retold about him. Jilālī is fondly known as a friend of God (*walī*), a powerful saint endowed with divine grace (*baraka*), enabled to act regardless of time or place and to transport other individuals to remote places (Westermarck 1926: 49-150). What Jankowsky (2010: 34) writes of Tunisian as well as North African saints applies to the veneration of ‘Abd al-Qādir Jilālī in Morocco:

More than with their teachings, saints are associated with the performance of miracles and other acts that demonstrated that God had chosen to bestow upon them his *baraka*. This blessing is understood as transferable from a saint to supplicant. Michael Gilsenan notes that it is their “capacity for significant action” in person’s life that is central, not their status as spiritual teachers (1973: 45).

At the same time, Jilālī is strongly linked to sacred places, in which his spiritual presence is thought to reside or to which it can be summoned. Although he is buried in Baghdad and never set foot in Morocco, many shrines, domed mausoleums (*qubba*), and grottoes are found there in the name of Jilālī and are considered to be infused with his blessing (Basset 1920: 91, 107-108; Michaux-Bellaire 1913: 58; Amster 2013: 34-35). For devotees, the saint is actively present in the rituals that invoke him – for example, visiting sacred places and communicating with him, lighting candles, making group pilgrimages. ‘Abd al-Qādir is also worshipped in ceremonies carried out by many of the Morocco’s religious brotherhoods.<sup>5</sup> These individual and collective ritual practices both invoke and express saintly presence and «are made in order receive [his] blessing and protection, and as an advance on the saint’s intercession on behalf of the supplicant» (Jankowsky 2010: 34).

*Jilāla* (or *jilālīyya*) is the name by which the brotherhood (or *ṭarīqa*, “path”) is known, coalescing around the figure and memory of ‘Abd al-Qādir Jilālī.<sup>6</sup> The order is said to have been introduced in Morocco via Spain shortly before the fall of Granada (1492) by ‘Abd al-Qādir Jilālī’s alleged descendants. A prayer place (or “retreat”: *khalwa*) of ‘Abd al-Qādir in Fez was mentioned as early as 1692-3 (Michaux-Bellaire 1907: 319; Trimmingham 1971: 272; Nizami 1991: 9). However, the date at which the first Qādiriyya lodge (*zāwiya*) was established in Morocco remains unclear, as documentation before the

<sup>5</sup> ‘Abd al-Qādir also regularly appears, for example, in the ritual of *ṣṭambēli* in Tunisia (Jankowsky 2010), *tumbura* in Sudan (Makris 2000), and *diwān* in Algeria (Dermenghem 1954; Turner 2017).

<sup>6</sup> The organisation of the Qādiriyya in North Africa and in the Maghreb as described by Depont and Coppolani (1897: 293-318), appears to be in general congregational, that is, the Sufi lodges (*zāwiya*) are by and large independent, and the relation between them and the central institution in Baghdad is very loose and sometimes nonexistent. Trimmingham (1971: 272) also notes that *jilāla* is «a common Moroccan name for the cult of ‘Abd al-Qādir as distinguished from the order which is not important». Therefore, the subject is limited here to contextualising the *jilāla* brotherhood in Morocco today, whose association is primarily with the figure of ‘Abd al-Qādir and not with the Qādiriyya Sufi order. Regarding the North African manifestations of the Qādiriyya and the cultus of ‘Abd al-Qādir, see, for example, Margoliouth 1997: 380-383.

late nineteenth century is lacking. The *jilāla* were described by French colonial officials in the early twentieth century (Mercier 1906: 137-139; Michaux-Bellaire and Salmon 1906: 328-331; Michaux-Bellaire 1911: 60); nevertheless, specific accounts of their development and activities within Morocco are difficult to locate, particularly pertaining to the postcolonial era.

Between the 1960s and 1970s, the *jilāla* were documented on sound recordings.<sup>7</sup> Despite this, very little has been written about their rituals and music and still less specifically about their poetic texts. To my knowledge, the existing studies devoting specific attention to this brotherhood include that by Lahmer (1986) in al-Jadida, based on fieldwork conducted in the 1980s, and that by Yarmolinsky (2000: 301-313) in Tangier. These works are concerned with the relationship between *jilāla* practitioners and the world of possessing spirits. The former provides few references to *jilāla*'s litanies, and the latter discusses the nature of the *jilāla* repertoire and its functions, as well as the ways in which its melodies lead to trance. Nevertheless, *jilāla* identity as it presently exists in Morocco is difficult to define.

Today, the *jilāla* function throughout Morocco, especially in the north, including the cities of Kénitra, Sidi Kacem, Salé, and Tangier, as well as the region of Casablanca-Settat. Musical groups affiliated with the *jilāla* operate in small all-male groups consisting of two, four, or more musicians.<sup>8</sup> Along with the *gnawa*, *ḥamadsha*, and *'isāwa* mystical brotherhoods, they punctuate the country's ceremonies (such as sacred rituals and religious festivals) with their sound. The lines between these groups, in terms of their ritual and musical practices, can be blurry, as they share certain general characteristics. For example, all of these groups are largely involved in both pilgrimages to visit saints' shrines and tombs (*mūssem*), as well as spirit possession healing rites.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, music performed by the *jilāla*, *ḥamadsha*, *'isāwa*, and *gnawa* include supplications to Allah and his Prophet, praise poetry, as well as a possession repertoire through which Arab, sub-Saharan, and Berber spirits are invoked. However, each group has elaborated a distinctive character in its musical expression and specialises in its own songs and poetry, though many texts appear across the brotherhoods.

<sup>7</sup> *Jilala: Sufi Trance Music from Morocco*, produced by Ira Cohen in Tangier (1965) from recordings made in 1964 by Paul Bowles and Brion Gysin. *Moroccan Sufi Music* (1972), Lyricord Discs LLST 7238, recordings and notes by Philip Schuyler. Today, audio and video recordings as well as background information about *jilāla* can be found on the internet (Facebook pages, YouTube, blogs, etc.).

<sup>8</sup> Women play an important role in the music and rituals officiated by the *jilāla*, and all-female *jilāla* organisations – the *jilāliyyāt* – also exist. Scholarly works have made only brief mention of this. Self-produced audio and video recordings, sold in record stores throughout Morocco or accessible on the internet, have reported on it much more extensively. The *jilāliyyāt* are ritual officiants and musicians, mainly acting in women's ceremonies. They differ from their male counterparts in their musical instruments: they do not use the flute, instead using only frame drums (*bendir*), goblet drums (*gwell*), and a pair of kettle drums beaten with two sticks (*tblāt*).

<sup>9</sup> Unlike the *jilāla*, however, *ḥamadsha*, *'isāwa*, and *gnawa* professional troupes are regulars on festival stages and at other major events, on television, and, depending on the region, at weddings.

## 2. *Jilāla* musicians and music in Meknes

There are few active *jilāla* groups in Meknes. The one I focus on here consists of two professional musicians – a flutist (Ahmer R.) and a drummer (Ahmed G.), playing the *qaşba* and the *bendīr*, respectively.<sup>10</sup> The *qaşba* (lit. “reed”; pl. *qaşbāt*)<sup>11</sup> is an end-blown flute, about 40 cm long, with six finger holes. It is made of cane (*Arundo donax*) or metal, sometimes decorated with metal bands or incised with cross-hatched or diagonal lines forming geometric patterns.<sup>12</sup> The player holds the flute obliquely in a position that forms an angle of 75°-80°, usually with the right hand up and the left hand down, using the index, middle, and ring fingers of each hand for the fingering. The timbre is “dirty”, rich in harmonics and blowing; to this is sometimes added a further “dirtiness”, determined by the fact that the flutist sings inside the flute while playing. As music is orally transmitted, flutists learn the repertoire and techniques of the *qaşba* from other *jilāla* masters. Ahmed R. spent his teens in Sidi Kacem, where he was directly trained by his uncles – a *jilāla* flutist and a *ḥamadsha ghīṭa* (oboe-like double-reed instrument) player. Ahmed G., on the other hand, belonging to a *jilāla* family, played throughout his life (he was more than ninety years old when I did my research) within this brotherhood.

The *bendīr* (pl. *bnādīr*) is a circular single-skin frame drum, used widely throughout Morocco. It is typically made of goatskin stretched over a wooden frame, with two or three gut snares. It is held in the left hand and played with the right, striking towards the centre of the skin to obtain a bass tone and striking the rim for a sharp tone. The free fingers of the left hand may provide light ornamental strokes. Those using the *bendīr* are generally also those who conduct the ensemble and chants, since the flutists are too busy playing to sing. It is the drummer who also signals the rhythmic shifts and endings, as well as leads the changes in tempo. Additionally, a *jilāla* group may have a supporting drummer (or drummers) providing a steady pattern against which the leader introduces cross rhythms and syncopated accents. The basic rhythmic pattern involves 2/4, often divided into 6/8, metres. The rhythmic structures employed by the *jilāla*, however, are driven by an elasticity of pulsation that gives rise to considerable asymmetries.<sup>13</sup>

While the *qaşba* players tend to be professional musicians, the drummers are less likely to be. This was demonstrated by the fact that *qaşba* players, such as Ahmed R., are often invited and paid to join other musical groups (such as *'isāwa* or *gnawa*) in playing for professional engagements in private ceremonies. On the other hand, over the course of my association with *jilāla* musicians in Meknes, I saw various *bendīr* players perform with them, some as fully paid colleagues, others as more or less trainees. Their skills were

<sup>10</sup> This paper is based on fieldwork carried out in Morocco (spread over two years between 2012 and 2016), in which I mainly focused on female music and ritual practices. The observations and audio examples provided here derive from my personal recordings of *jilāla* ritual and non-ritual events performed in Meknes, and from interviews with musicians and ritual participants.

<sup>11</sup> Also called *qaşba*, *shbēb*, or *shabbāba*.

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, the image in Staiti 2021: 115.

<sup>13</sup> Asymmetrical rhythms are widely used in Turkish-Ottoman music; non-proportional rhythms are present in women's repertoires in the Balkans (see Staiti 2016).

less specialised, and they were not required to know the repertoire particularly well to provide satisfactory rhythmic accompaniment.

Vocal production is also an essential part of *jilāla* music. This vocal style is characterised by a high, strained, and hoarse sound in the male range (Audio 1). However, on several occasions, musicians indicated that in the past, in the absence of a “high” voice in a *jilāla* group, this role has been entrusted to women, members of the *jilāliyyāt* groups.

During *jilāla* performances with songs honouring black spirits and other possessing spirits (those who are traditionally associated with the *gnawa*), the musicians are joined by one or two *qarāqib* players. These are pairs of large, thick, doubled castanet-like percussion instruments made from two pieces of iron tied together at one end, which are played to mark fast rhythms in contrast with the slower ones of *bendīr* (Audio 2 and Audio 3).<sup>14</sup>

*Jilāla* music is performed for a wide audience at annual pilgrimages at the shrine of saints such as Sidi Kacem, Mūlāy ‘Abd al-Salām (Yarmolinsky 2000: 307), and Mūlāy ‘Abdallah (Lahmer 1986: 58). More often, musicians are hired to play at private ceremonies, occurring mostly in homes and hosted by clients; such ceremonies may include circumcisions; “seventh day” celebrations in which newborn children are named (*sbū*), and all-night events, *lilāt* (lit. “nights”; sing. *lila* – the same name also used by the *hamadsha*, *‘isāwa*, *gnawa*, and similar groups), where participants engage in spirit possession (*jadba*). The *lilāt* entail the successive invocation of numerous supernatural entities, including historical saints, Islamic figures, and spirits.<sup>15</sup> Through music, colours, and scents, these entities are invited to overtake their human hosts, manifesting through trance for the purpose of healing illness and providing blessings.<sup>16</sup> The end goal is not to exorcise spirits but rather to create a space for humans and spirits to forge, mend, or strengthen their relationships. A *lila* is carried out by central figures – the “master musician” (*m’allem*), who leads the musical group, and the organiser and overseer of the ceremony (*muqaddam*).<sup>17</sup> The ritual progresses in stages, each comprising a distinct

<sup>14</sup> For example, the “Basha Hammu” song (Audio 2) within the segment devoted to the red spirits (the butchers, particularly fond of blood). In Audio 3, however, the *qarāqib* is played in the song dedicated to Fājima al-Zahrā, here identified with the Prophet’s daughter. Her invocation closes the segment of the white-clothed spirits with noble links to the Prophet Muhammad (*shurfā*).

<sup>15</sup> These are male and female entities whose names are common knowledge. They are organised into cohorts and by colour. Crapanzano (1973: 140-149) categorises them as “named” spirits, who have distinct personalities and are the same beings belonging to the *jilāla*, *hamadsha*, *‘isāwa*, and *gnawa* pantheon. The collection of spirits, their order through the progression of the ritual, and even their colours, are not strict and they may vary from one region to another. This can be seen in the different descriptions of the *lilāt* performed by Moroccan brotherhoods appearing in studies completed in different cities throughout Morocco (see, for example, Pâques 1991, Fuson 2009, and Pouchelon 2015 for Marrakesh’s ritual; Sum 2011 for Essaouira; Witulski 2018 for Fez; Welte 1990 and Bruni 2020a for Meknes; Nabti 2010 for Fez and Meknes; and Therme 2012 for Zerhoun).

<sup>16</sup> Not only for healing and requests for blessings, *lilāt* are also held for reasons including the annual renewal of ties with the supernatural entities, life cycle celebrations, expressions of gratitude to the saints/spirits, and celebrations of Islamic holidays.

<sup>17</sup> Regarding *lila*, *m’allem*, and *muqaddam*, which are mirror terms that appear in most Sufi organisations throughout the country.



musical repertoire (e.g., for celebration, entertainment, to inciting a trance state), topic, dance, and function. Although the ritual sequences can differ across regions as well as within groups,<sup>18</sup> possession is always the final and most significant part of such an event.

In Meknes, *jilāla* groups open their ceremonies with a recited set of poems specific to their brotherhood, prayers calling on both their founder and the brotherhood's prominent past figures, as well as recited proclamations over individuals, followed by lines from the Qur'ān, often used within ritual contexts to provide blessings. The repetitive chants recalling God's presence (*dhikr*) central to many Sufi practices are rarely performed by Meknes's *jilāla* musicians. The longest section of the ceremony begins with the white entities, moving to the black, blue, red, and green spirits, and so on, through seven sets of spirits.

The *jilāla* possession repertoire is comprised of several sung poems whose texts and music identify and summon specific spirits and saints. The general terms employed by *jilāla* to refer to their songs are *q̣ṣīda* ("poem") – referring to the poem itself – or *riḥ* ("wind, air") – meaning melody or tune.<sup>19</sup> Most of the songs that appear regularly in the *jilāla līlāt* have similar structures and alternate between two or three phrases of equal length. Some songs are quite short, while others are longer and extend for several minutes, though consisting of melodically repetitive phrases. As the song progresses, an increase in tempo and a heightening of intensity occurs, sometimes culminating in the repetition of a phrase. This section may either lead to the conclusion or be connected to a new song. The individual songs that emerge at the end of this long acceleration process are not immediately recognisable because of the way the musicians gradually and seamlessly add melodies from the next song into the current one, until the new song emerges.

The possession repertoire consists of individual pieces, between two minutes to more than ten minutes in length, based on the invocation of a particular entity, as well as distinct pieces joined together in a suite that is explicitly related to a given saint or spirit and the manifestations of a particular cohort. A suite is typically preceded by a prelude, which includes repeated and varied melodic formulae and a variable length ranging from a few phrases to extended solos of several minutes long. The chain of songs is adjusted according to the coming and going of the segment's associated saints/spirits.

There are about a dozen saints named in the Jilālī suite, and their invocation can be based on geographical and/or genealogical associations. According to *jilāla* musicians,

<sup>18</sup> The *līla* usually comprises three main sections, with the first being a procession from the street in front of the client's home, and the second, inside the home, to bless and purify the ritual space and to welcome the spirits into the longest section of the ceremony. The third section, the focal point of the ritual, is the possession dance. *Jilāla* groups in Meknes do not perform the outdoor procession – at least in my experience with this brotherhood. Similarly, Yarmolinsky (2000) and Lahmer (1986) do not mention the procession phase in their works on the *jilāla*.

<sup>19</sup> The terms *q̣ṣīda* or *q̣ṣīda* are the same used in both ancient Arabic poetry and long poems sung in the rituals of some Moroccan brotherhoods (such as the *ḥamadsha* and *'isāwa*). The term *riḥ* appears in the work of Yarmolinski (2000) to indicate *jilāla*'s melodies, as well as in Crapanzano's book on the *ḥamadsha* as «a special musical phrase» (1973: 143), which is the favourite of a particular spirit and triggers a follower into a trance.

after Jilālī – the first to be named as their founding father – they invoke the most important saints buried in Meknes and those whose shrines are close to the city. Then, they gradually move to those furthest away, as far as the southwestern borders of Morocco. Some saints are also linked to other saints, named next to each other for reasons of kinship (e.g., Mūlāy Tuhāmī and Mūlāy Ṭayyib) or because one is the spiritual master of the other (e.g., Sidi ‘Ali ben Ḥamdūsh and Sidi Aḥmad Dgūgī). In this way, the geographical order accounts for a system of cultural references that describes the world, beginning from one’s location within it; if the same songs are performed in another place (e.g., Rabat or Marrakesh), the order in which the saints are invoked changes accordingly.

In Meknes’s *lilāt*, Mūlāy ‘Abd al-Qādir is called “the master of the saints and spirits”, chromatically corresponding with the white entities – the holy, pious ones associated with the saints of the Middle East (*ṣāliḥīn*) and noble descendants of the Prophet Muhammad (*shurfā*).<sup>20</sup> Jilālī is invoked for his own protection after the repertoire venerating Allah, his Prophet, and “God’s men” (*rijāl Allāh*). This segment of the ceremony marks the moment in which communication with the possessing spirits (*mlūk*, lit. “owners”) is officially opened and possession dances begin.<sup>21</sup>

During *lila* ceremonies, whether performed by the *jilāla* or *gnawa*, *ḥamadsha*, and *‘isāwa* musical groups, the powerful protector saint Mūlāy ‘Abd al-Qādir is welcomed through the lighting of white candles, burning of appropriate incenses (white benzoin and aloe wood), and making offerings of milk, dates, and orange-flower water. Clothing of the relevant colour is also worn by the individuals who intend or hope to become possessed during the ritual.

The musical performance and sung texts render the identity of the saint explicit to the ritual community, effectively calling his name. Upon hearing Jilālī’s songs, adherents may sense the presence of the saint, and feel an overwhelming desire to stand up, enter the performance space in front of the musicians, and dance. This dance may involve a single person or several individuals dancing at the same time, each with their own individual style and combination of gestures – such as making slow movements, stepping side to side or on the spot, making repetitive movements involving bending back and forth at the waist, and lowering the head and crossing the arms behind the back.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup> The white entities including Jilālī are the first to appear in Meknes’ ceremonies performed by the *jilāla* and other similar groups, as well as in various pantheons throughout Morocco (see footnote n. 15 for references). This cohort comprises Islamic and Berber saints whose holy sites are found around Morocco. The multi-colored Būhāla, the “vagabonds of God” led by the wandering mystic Buderbela are usually considered part of the same cohort as Mūlāy ‘Abd al-Qādir Jilālī.

<sup>21</sup> *mlūk* generally refers to the powerful entities of the sub-Sahara. While distinct in their meanings, *ṣāliḥīn*, *shurfā*, and *mlūk* are somewhat ambiguous terms, as these entities may have overlapping qualities and capabilities (e.g., being imbued with *baraka*, possessing adepts, and having holy sites in Morocco). Decades ago, Émile Dermenghem, in his work *Le culte de saints dans l’Islam maghrébin* (1954: 96-109), remarked that Sufism in North Africa makes little difference between saints and spirits.

<sup>22</sup> For an analysis of the body in trance and the codified gestures of trance performance see, for example, Kapchan 2007: 47-80 (on *gnawa* rituals); Rouget 1986: 114-115. Jankowsky (2010: 75-76) notes that in the *ṣtambēli* rituals of Tunisian white spirits, also called the “saints”, and black spirits, who are «sub-Saharan spirits [...] compel their hosts to “dance” [...] in different ways. [...] Blacks [have their] own distinctive



Each of the abovementioned musical groups invokes Jilālī with its unique rhythms, melodies, musical instruments, and lyrics, though the latter may have points of overlap. In his work on the 'īsāwa brotherhood in Meknes and Fez, for example, Nabti (2010: 269-270) mentions two songs and rhythms belonging to the *jilāla* repertoire and performed by 'īsāwa musicians with their musical instruments. However, the author does not go into depth about rhythms and gives no further information about the poetic texts.

The Haddun (“the Unique”) and the Jilaliyya (“of Jilālī”) are two songs from the repertoire of the Jilāla brotherhood [...] which is placed under the patronage of the renowned 'Abdel Qādir al-Jilānī. [T]he contemporary Aïssāwa adapted these rhythms to their instruments: they preserved the rhythms [...] and the songs of the Jilāla, but replaced the reed flutes with oboes *reta-s*. The words of the Haddun and the Jilaliyya are, for the former, a brief invocation of divine oneness and loyalty to the Prophet, and, for the latter, a plea for the protection of 'Abdel Qādir al-Jilānī. Unlike the poems sung earlier by the Aïssāwa, these songs only represent a very short time in the musical performance [...]. The Haddun and the Jilaliyya mark the end of the first part of the *lila*.<sup>23</sup>

Mūlāy 'Abd al-Qādir Jilālī is worshipped by both men and women seeking blessings, asking for spiritual aid to overcome different kind of troubles and improve their lives, or in need of physical or emotional healing. For devotees, building and maintaining this supernatural relationship bring powerful benefits; for this purpose, they engage in varying modes of communal and personal experiences. For example, by attending *lilāt*

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dance movements, as well as certain attire and other ritual paraphernalia such as walking sticks, spears, knives, or rods [...]. In Gilbert Rouget's terms, these dances for Blacks are “figurative” or “mimetic” while those of the Whites, in contrast, are “abstract”. Possession dances that occur in *lilāt* show similar distinctions. However, an abstract dance can turn mimetic. An example is the performance of the possessed by Buderbala, falling under the “whites”, who, like wandering mystics, wear multicolored patchwork cloaks to express their “vow of poverty” (Becker 2014: 118). Dancing in front of the musicians, they bend forward and sway their heads from side to side. However, depending on the experience of the possessed, the performance may require a walking stick and the use of other accessories. Moreover, in the *gnawa* ceremonies in Meknes, a mastered dancer possessed by the “vagabond of God” (*būhālī*) may wander among the audience, leaning on a stick, blessing the people who approach him, whispering in their ears, and distributing, sometimes in exchange for coins, bread and sugar, which he keeps in a patched bag. Similar performances are described in Marrakesh rituals (see Pouchelon 2015: 252; the author also mentions ritual mortification with knives in Jilālī dance [251]).

<sup>23</sup> «Le Haddun (l'«Unique») et le Jilaliyya («de Jilālī») sont deux chants issus du répertoire de la confrérie des Jilāla [...] qui se place sous le patronage du célèbre 'Abdel Qādir al-Jilānī. [...] [L]es Aïssāwa contemporains ont adapté ces rythmes à leur instrumentarium: ils ont conservé les rythmes [...] et les chants des Jilāla mais ont remplacés les flûtes de roseau par les hautbois *reta-s*. Les paroles du Haddun et du Jilaliyya sont, pour le premier, une courte invocation de l'unicité divine et de l'allégeance au Prophète, et, pour le second, une sollicitation de la protection de 'Abdel Qādir al-Jilānī. A l'inverse des poésies chantées précédemment par les Aïssāwa, ces chants ne représentent qu'un temps très court dans l'exécution musicale [...] Le Haddun et le Jilaliyya marquent la fin de la première partie de la *lila*». Frank Welte (1990: 188-190) describes *gnawa lilāt* in Meknes. Although the author does not discuss the *gnawa* musical aspects, he points out that the white cohort of entities governed by Jilālī is invoked first in the ritual sequence and that *gnawa* musicians use their instruments – the three-stringed lute (*ḥašūš* or *gunbrī*) and pairs of iron castanets (*qarqaba*). Der-menghem and Barbés (1951: 299-314) also mention the use of *qaṣba* (*guezba*) and the bendīr in ceremonies of the 'īsāwa groups in Algeria. The essay also contains musical transcription of flutes played during the rhythmic chanted poetry that opens the ceremony (*ḥizb*), complete with texts and translations.

ceremonies or by establishing intimate individual connections with the saint through visitation to shrines and sacred places.

To shed light on 'Abd al-Qādir's figure and the diverse community that continues to gather around him, I examine the Jilālī's songs as they are performed in the context of all-night events and in female spirit possession rituals. The songs are from audio recordings of the music of both the *jilāla* brotherhood and women's musical groups, which I collected in Meknes. I chose these songs because they focus on the figure of Mūlāy 'Abd al-Qādir with the purpose to summoning and inviting the saint to join the ceremony. As *baraka* is inherent in the words of the poems, music, and ceremony as a whole, for devotees, Jilālī's poems not only call forth the saint but also contain intrinsic power to manifest healing and beneficial effects.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, analysis of the poems shows that while praising the saint, they also touch on broader topics, both individual and collective in nature, and as such arouse emotion in the addressees.

### 3. Jilālī's songs

I now look at three examples of the *jilāla*'s songs or poems in honour of Mūlāy 'Abd al-Qādir and performed by *jilāla* musicians.<sup>25</sup> First, I look at *Poem I*, which provides a description of the figure to whom the verses are dedicated.

#### *Poem I*

1 'Abd al-Qādir kifl-'asl, 'Abd al-Qādir kifl-'asl, f-tāsa dahabiyya

'Abd al-Qādir is like honey, 'Abd al-Qādir is like honey, in a golden bowl

2 'Abd al-Qādir kif al-sab'a, yazhar f-khalwiyya

'Abd al-Qādir is like a lion, blooming in solitude

3 shihdū bi-hā w-a-hiyyā l-nās, rāhā naqira māshī nahās

Bear witness, oh people, it's silver not copper

4 min wād Banī 'Abbās, min wād Banī 'Abbās, braḥ shaykhī al-Jilālī

From Banī 'Abbās Valley, from Banī 'Abbās Valley, my master al-Jilālī has called out

5 f-īdū ḥarba qattāla, f-l-ḥarb yadall yshālī

Holding a killing spear, he fights fiercely in wars

6 shihdū bi-hā w-a-hiyyā l-nās, rāhā naqira māshī nahās

Bear witness, oh people, it's silver not copper

The poems dedicated to Jilālī function as a channel through which human beings can attract as well as interact and communicate with the saint. The verses of the above poem

<sup>24</sup> See, for example, Malinowski's investigation on the magical power of words (1935), Tambiah's work on the performative and transformative power of verbal and non-verbal effectiveness (1968), and Stoller's analysis of Songhay incantations focusing upon the sounds of words and instruments (1996).

<sup>25</sup> Given the difficulty of capturing song texts during rituals, the texts were collected during musical performances at non-ritual events and interviews with *jilāla* and *m'allmāt* musicians in Meknes, and the verses were translated together with them. The pieces given here are untitled and all belong to the Jilālī suite. The number of verses and their progression reflect the way they were performed at the time I collected them. However, they may vary from performance to performance; some verses, when performed in rituals, may be omitted altogether. For Arabic transliteration of song texts, the system used here is of the International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies with some minor adaptations to represent local pronunciation in Morocco.

present other key elements defining the content of the text. Through metaphors, the verses describe the saint's features to the listeners, transmitting in this way a system of knowledge about 'Abd al-Qādir. For example, Jilālī is sweet "like honey" and fierce "like a lion"; these statements are true as "silver not copper" (in lines 1, 2, 3, and 6). The text also mentions a location beyond Morocco, the Banī 'Abbās Valley (in western Algeria), which Jilālī never visited, as his preaching and teaching career was spent in Baghdad. From Banī 'Abbās, he calls his followers while holding a deadly weapon and going into battle (lines 4 and 5). Although the image of 'Abd al-Qādir as a historical figure is of «the stern, sober representative of contrition and mystical fear» (Schimmel 1975: 247), it scarcely fits that of a warrior.<sup>26</sup> For practitioners, however, these verses describe the strength through which 'Abd al-Qādir awakens the spiritual self-awareness of his listeners, encouraging them to achieve self-improvement by attaining a harmony between their actions and thoughts.

Next, I look at *Poem II*<sup>27</sup> and *Poem III*. Both are devotional poems that celebrate Jilālī. Moreover, these poems are of particular interest, as they touch on a variety of more personal topics that can profoundly impact the people who listen to them.

*Poem II*

1 *gālt yā l-ghamām yā l-ghamām yā llī sākin f-tlālī*

She said: 'oh clouds, oh clouds that inhabit hills'

2 *gālt lik a wlīdī dḥak w-mā dir f-galbak hamm*

She said: 'laugh, my son laugh and let nothing worry your heart'

3 *anā dākḥil li-l-ḥarb w-tānā f-ḥmāk a mulāy 'Abd al-Qādir*

I'm getting into war, I'm in your protection, oh my lord 'Abd al-Qādir

4 *a wlīdī shḥāl mā 'ishnā w-Allāh ḥattā nmūtū*

Oh, son, no matter how long we'll be alive I swear (by God) we'll die

5 *gālt lik a wlīdī dḥak dḥak w-mā dir f-galbak hamm*

She said: 'laugh, my son laugh and let nothing worry your heart'

6 *w-a llī wliftū a wlīdī gbdar biyā*

And the one I loved [the one to whom I began to be emotionally attached], oh son, betrayed me

7 *w-yāk a l-mayma wlīdī l-wlād w-wllāw jirān*

Oh, mother, you gave birth to children, and they became neighbours

8 *qalil al-niyya a wlīdī wakhā yimshī ḥattā li-Makka w-yīji bi-l-shāmiyya miṭwiyya*

My son, an ill-intentioned even if he goes to Mecca and brings the Levantine scarf folded

9 *a sidī Jalūl wild Khīra*

Oh, master Jalūl, the son of Khīra

<sup>26</sup> It seems unconventional in this song because the personage of Jilālī is often described as an old wise man and should therefore be depicted as such. It is possible that references to war, force, weapons, and a locality in Algeria (Banī 'Abbās) account for an overlap between the figure of 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jilālī and that of Amīr 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jazā'irī (1808-1883), i.e., 'Abd al-Qādir "the Algerian", who led the resistance to the French occupation of western Algeria and belonged to the *tariqa* Qādiriyya. Such overlaps constantly appear in the songs performed in the *lilāl* of local brotherhoods. For instance, several song texts that honour historical and religious figures flow into texts about spirits or other figures with the same name (such as Moses, who overlaps with the spirit Mūsa).

<sup>27</sup> The excerpt transcribed here is included in the [Audio 4](#) recording.

10 *w-a rāhā zīna w-hajāla*  
 She is beautiful and a widow  
 11 *anā wahdī bi-'Abd al-Qādir*  
 I'm alone with 'Abd al-Qādir  
 12 *w-yāk a l-mayma mā lqīt sabra*  
 Oh, mother, I have no patience

*Poem III*

1 *a yā l-Jilālī dīf Allāh (x 3), yā wild lāla Khīra*  
 Oh, Jilālī, I'm a guest of God (x 3), you son of Lalla Khīra  
 2 *iylā ndaqat n'ayyat 'alik (x 3), yā shīkh l-'adadiyya*  
 If life gets tough, I shall call on you (x 3), you master of the trance  
 3 *rā hājatī wqat bīn idayk (x 3), wā shnū bad' aliyā āk*  
 I need time between your hands (x 3), what's needed to get your satisfaction  
 4 *w-gāl lī shīkhī rānī lik (x 3), hājatak ma'a Allāh mqđiyya*  
 My master told me I'm yours (x 3), you matter with God is all set  
 5 *w-yā Allāh mūlāyā mūlāy (x 3), sīdī w-tahallā fiyā*  
 Oh, God, my lord my master (x 3), my master take care of me  
 6 *w-gāl lī shīkhī rānī lik, hājatak ma'a Allāh mqđiyya*  
 My master told me I'm yours, your matter with God is all set  
 7 *w-nṣar yā mūlā Baghdād, lā tashfī l-'dā fiyā*  
 Oh Lord, make the Baghdadians victorious, and don't let our enemies gloat over us  
 8 *w-nṣar yā mūlā Baghdād, shīkhī w-tahallā fiyā*  
 Oh Lord, make the Baghdadians victorious, my master take care of me

These verses mention Mūlāy 'Abd al-Qādir and Allah, highlighting the sacred nature of the songs and the spiritual experiences they provoke in listeners. However, the second and third poems show that the poetic discourse leaves space for personal and private experiences, which through their sharing become communal.<sup>28</sup> This is shown through the use of first-person and direct speech (e.g., “I'm in your protection” in *Poem II* and “my master told me I'm yours, I need time between your hands” in *Poem III*), as well as metaphors that describe personal feelings rather than feelings primarily about Jilālī (e.g., “I'm getting into war” in line 3 of *Poem II*, expressing the inner struggle of those who intone the verses; “you gave birth to children, and they became neighbours” in line 7, expressing unity, support, and closeness; and “an ill-intentioned [...] scarf folded” in line 8, stating that you cannot trust someone even if they have brought you a gift from the pilgrimage). The term *qalīl al-niyya*, “ill-intentioned”, is an epithet used to describe the object of love (regardless of gender) but with a negative connotation (see: Gintsburg 2006: 146). Additionally, there are two voices that engage in dialogue with each other (in *Poem II*, “she said”, “oh mother”, “my son”, and “she is beautiful” in lines 1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 8, 10, and 12); references to kinship (e.g., references to Lalla Khīra [Umm al-Khair

<sup>28</sup> On this topic and others explored in the following poems, see also Bruni 2020b on Meknes' women poems as well as Gintsburg 2006.

Faṭīma, al-Jilānī's mother], and “oh son, oh mother” in *Poem II*); vocatives (such *a* and *yā*) used for calling out and capturing the attention of a person who is present in the discourse setting; summonses (by God, in *Poem II*, line 4); and words expressing affection, complaints, betrayals, and impatience, among many other sentiments.

The special position of Jilālī in the life of his followers is also expressed by women musicians, who welcome the Baghdad saint with their own songs, rhythms, melodies, and musical instruments. The verses I quote below in *Poem IV* are taken from a long song in honour of Jilālī and performed by the *m'allmāt* (lit. “female craft masters”), female musical groups in Meknes (Bruni 2020b).<sup>29</sup> The leading musical instruments played by the *m'allmāt* are frame drums (*bendīr*) along with goblet drums (*gwell*), as well as a pair of kettle drums (*tblāt*). The *m'allmāt* act as musicians for the various rites practiced by women – in the female components of wedding rituals, naming ceremonies, and especially the rites of female spirit possession. As for the *jilāla* and similar Sufi groups, the *m'allmāt* call upon the protection of Mūlay 'Abd al-Qādir in the moment at which possession dances begin and when Lalla Malika, the main female spirit in Meknes's women's rituals, communicates her presence.

*Poem IV*

1 *Allāh yā Allāh a mūlāy a mūlāy yā mūlāy a makhfāk shī ḥālī* (x 2)

God, oh God, my lord, my lord, you know how I feel (x 2)

2 *iyā dāq ḥālī nshkī li-llāh yā l-ḥabība w-anā l-'abd mānshkilū* (x 2)

If I'm distressed, I confess it to God, oh my dear, and not to his slave (x 2)

3 *iyā rād sidī rabbi bi-l-khīr yā l-ḥabība w-nmshī nzūr rasūl Allāh* (x 2)

If my almighty God wants any good to me, oh sweetheart, I go to visit the prophet of God (x 2)

4 *w-llī sakhī anā msakhī bih wakhā sakhāh al-zamān 'aliyā, mshā ḥabībī w-tsār ālī, 'mar al-dayyiq maydūz 'alī*

And whoever wants to let go of me I'm not even if time has made him to treat me alike, my lover has gone and left me, I will not feel upset anymore

5 *w-Allāh mankhāf w-lā anā khawwāf yā l-ḥabība w-anā khadīm rasūl Allāh* (x 2)

I swear to God, I won't be afraid neither, oh sweetheart, as I'm the servant the prophet of God (x 2)

6 *w-āhāh w-hiyyā mūlāy al-Jilālī* (x 2), *w-nānānā w-yā mūlāy al-Jilālī*

Aahah, my lord al-Jilālī (x 2), oh nananana, oh my lord al-Jilālī

7 *āāā w-rānā marīḍa w-mā 'indī wālī, w-āhāh w-hiyyā mūlāy al-Jilālī*

Aaaa, I'm sick got no one, aahah, my lord al-Jilālī

8 *w-ghīr 'aliyyā anā f-ḥmāk, yā-l-Jilālī, w-ghīr 'aliyyā anā nahwāk, yā-l-Jilālī*

Be jealous about me, I'm under your protection, oh al-Jilālī, only on me who loves you, oh al-Jilālī

9 *w-rāhu a l-Jilālī m'a l-ṣḥāb, a l-Jilālī, w-rāhu a l-Jilālī m'a l-ṣḥāb, a l-Jilālī*

Al-Jilālī is with the fellows, al-Jilālī, al-Jilālī is with the fellows, al-Jilālī

10 *w-ranā waliyyā w-'indī waliyyā, a l-Jilālī, w-ranā waliyyā wālida waliyyā, a l-Jilālī*

I'm a woman who has woman [daughter], oh al-Jilālī, I'm a woman who gave birth to a woman, oh al-Jilālī

<sup>29</sup> The complete recording from which the text analysed here is taken comprises [Audio 5](#).

11 *shhāl al-nās ygūlū fiyā, a l-Jilālī (x 2)*

How they gossip about me, oh al-Jilālī (x 2)

12 *Allāh yu'tī l-mbārka waliyya, a l-Jilālī, wakhā msā l-khīr waladiyyā a l-Jilālī (x 2)*

God give to Mbarka a girl, oh al-Jilālī, good evening my parents, oh al-Jilālī (x 2)

13 *shhāl yataqqūlū fiyā a l-Jilālī (x 2)*

How much they would say about me, oh al-Jilālī (x 2)

14 *Allāh yu'tī l-Mbārka waliyya, a l-Jilālī*

God give Mbārka a girl, oh al-Jilālī

15 *w-ghīr 'alī yābū l-khīr a l-Jilālī (x 2), w-ghīr 'alī tfāji ḥawālī a l-Jilālī*

Only about me you who has the goods oh al-Jilālī (x2), only about me you help me overcome my troubles oh al-Jilālī

16. *ū w-ghīr 'alī nāh ḍāq ḥālī a l-Jilālī, w-ghīr 'alī yābū l-khīr, a l-Jilālī*

Only on me who is distressed, oh al-Jilālī, only about me you who has the goods, oh al-Jilālī

17 *w-ghīr 'alī tfāji ḥawālī, a l-Jilālī (x 2), w-bnānānānānā w-yā a mūlāy al-Jilālī*

Only about me you help me overcome my troubles, al-Jilālī (x 2), nanananana, oh lord al-Jilālī

This poem develops both as a dialogue with and a request for the woman singing the verses addressed to God and Jilālī. In the opening couplets, the woman appeals to God, who already knows her feelings. She turns to him when she is going through hard times since she cannot complain to anybody else (the “slave” in line 2 and the “servant” in line 5, commonly extended to “slave of God”, refer to a worshipper, a person who attends to God, the Prophet, or saints). The next verse introduces one of the main themes of Arabic poetry – journeys and pilgrimages to shrines. In fact, the woman says that if God fulfils her request, she will visit the shrine of the Prophet Muhammad (line 3).

After the prayer to God, the following verses give an account of the thoughts and feelings that trouble the one who sings – for example, the beloved who is gone (“my lover has gone and left me” in line 4); illness and/or emotional discomfort and loneliness (“I’m sick got no one” in line 7; moreover, “sick” in the spirit possession context is a word that usually implies supernatural inhabitation); the condition of the woman (“I’m a woman who gave birth to a woman [daughter]” in line 10); and gossip (“how they gossip about me” and “how much they would say about me” in line 11 and 13, respectively). In addition, this text is interspersed with numerous words and phrases expressing other sentiments such as nearness to, and love for, God, and Jilālī (“my dear” in lines 3 and 5, and “me who loves you” in line 8); their support and protection (“I’m under your protection” in line 8 and “al-Jilālī is with the fellows” in line 9); blessings and good wishes directed at other women listening to the poem (“God give to Mbārka a girl, oh al-Jilālī” in lines 12 and 14); greetings (“good evening my parents” in line 12); and resilience (“I will not feel upset anymore” in line 4 and “I swear to God I won’t be afraid” in line 5).

The text of this song, although performed in a context different from *lilāt*, reiterates some of the intertextual themes presented in the earlier poems. The poetical vocabulary deploys metaphors, ambiguous pronouns, and epithets (“him”, “they”, “whoever”, “sweetheart”) to describe various sentiments or idea – for example, the emotion of love,



the beloved (whose identity remains unclear), and separation (due to certain circumstances, or because the object of love is heartless or even ill-intentioned, as expressed in line 4). In this way, the poem enables each listener to interpret the lines idiosyncratically, according to their individual experiences. As the narration is done on behalf of a woman, she speaks about herself in a descriptive way, emphasising her sorrow and suffering, but also the overcoming of this emotional condition. Hence, however difficult the woman's situation may be, the continuous reference to Jilālī serves to soothe, console, and alleviate the woman's feelings, as expressed in the last three verses.

### 3. Conclusion

‘Abd al-Qādir is not simply regarded as a historical personality but rather as a figure of living importance who continues to provide spiritual aid to his followers. Invoked through music and poems in rituals, he continues to be present in everyday life. His ability to constantly intervene on behalf of his supplicants was expressed to me by a small group of elderly women sitting on the floor of a shrine dedicated to Jilālī in Meknes's *madina*, the old city. Inside this sacred building, bearing a plaque with the inscription “Qādiriyya”, a heap of white candles marks the space dedicated to the saint. Every Friday, a group of women, those having a relationship with ‘Abd al-Qādir or seeking to request his blessing, gather to present votive offerings, lighting candles, burning incense, and sharing food. To the saint, they tell their stories, those which cannot be told to anybody else; they entrust their inspirations and inner affections; they ask for help to alleviate their problems in life, such as health troubles, family conflicts, and work issues.

This paper highlights the relevance of *jilāla* music in Morocco, specifically focusing on poems dedicated to ‘Abd al-Qādir. While it does not aim to provide a comprehensive survey on *jilāla* brotherhood, it sheds light on Jilālī's role as a shared reference point for music associated with diverse communities, including the healing traditions of Meknes's women. Further analysis on poems sung for Jilālī may offer insights into this charismatic figure, explore the feelings and expectations of the people who turn to him, and deepen our understanding about the *jilāla*, a brotherhood with a long and rich history in Morocco, though still not widely researched.

## Multimedia Contents

The audio recordings attached to this article are based on my fieldwork in Meknes (Morocco) between 2014 and 2016 and were recorded with a ZOOM H4n audio recorder.

1. [L-'alwa](#) [4:56]. Fieldwork: Meknes, 26 December 2015. Performers: Ahmed G. (*bendir* and voice), Ahmed R. (*qaşba*). Research and audio recording: Silvia Bruni.
2. [Basha Hammu](#) [4:02]. Fieldwork: Meknes, 8 October 2015. Performers: Ahmed G. (*bendir* and voice), Ahmed R. (*qaşba*), C.M. (*qarāqib* and voice). Research and audio recording: Silvia Bruni.
3. [Lalla Fāḩima al-Zahrā'](#) [4:27]. Fieldwork: Meknes, 8 October 2015. Performers: Ahmed G. (*bendir* and voice), Ahmed R. (*qaşba*), C.M. (*qarāqib* and voice). Research and audio recording: Silvia Bruni.
4. [Mūlāy 'Abd al-Qādir](#) [3:08]. Fieldwork: Meknes, 4 April 2014. Performers: Ahmed R. (*qaşba* and voice), a drum player (*bendir*). Research and audio recording: Silvia Bruni and Nico Staiti.
5. [Al-Jilālī](#) [7:28]. Fieldwork: Meknes, July 2016. Performers: *m'allma* Thuriya al-Hūzīya (*bendir*), four players of single-headed goblet-shaped drums (three *gwell* and a *darbūka*), a player of a pair of kettle drums (*tblāt*). The musician playing the *bendir* is also the one who leads the group and sings the verses while the group members respond in chorus. Research and audio recording: Silvia Bruni.



Multimedia Contents

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