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Master Thesis

Antinomian Piety in Nineteenth Century Kabylia: A  
Case Study of the Hermeneutics of Si Mḥand's Poetry  
through the Lens of the Carnavalesque Theory

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## Abstract

This study delves into the poetry of Algerian poet and thinker Si Mḥand through the framework of Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the carnivalesque, with the objective of analyzing his antinomian piety. Si Mḥand's poems depict a multifaceted God, encompassing qualities of mercy and apathy, thereby unveiling a dynamic and living perception of the world. The research argues that Si Mḥand's poetry represents a departure from established norms, indicative of a transformative shift in the local ethos subsequent to the 1871 Algerian insurrection and its consequential repression, and investigates how Si Mḥand's personal encounters with tragedy become symbolic representations of divine essence in his poetry, exemplifying a dualistic conceptualization of God that captures the prevalent sentiments of nineteenth-century Kabylia. The study indeed contends that the image of God presented by Si Mḥand aligns with the prevalent societal values, embodying a hybrid and individualistic form of piety that resonated with his contemporaries.

## Foreword

I would like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to my supervisor Dr. Jacob Høigilt, beyond being a superb professor you have been an unequalled supervisor. You have enabled me to complete this thesis, albeit over a longer period of time than expected. Throughout this endeavor, your steadfast support remained, even when my ideas seemed unsure or strained. From the depths of my heart, I thank you for your patience, your guidance and beyond, you are admirable. I wish to meet you again in the near or distant future, and I hope you are satisfied with the work we have done.

To Dr. Kristin Soraya Batmanghelichi, you are an esteemed professor, these two years studying with you have taught me many things and have enabled me today to write better but also to think better.

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To Hammadi Z., my dear uncle, words fall short to express my gratitude. You bestowed upon me a cherished treasure, your personal library. Within those pages I consumed out of passion, I found myself revived, resurrecting this project once doomed to dive. Appreciation fills my being for you.

To Marium M., my dear friend, through your original conversations and your unconventional outlook on life, you have often healed my heart, scarred by the cold of those long winter nights. You inspired me to find justice in life's injustice and craft beauty out of ugliness. You were to me what the poet of this thesis was to a whole society: a catalyst for change and a balm to the heart. I hope that life will bring us together again.

To Amélie F., my brave friend, you have been my second family, an example of resilience, and it was through you that I captured and found myself stirred by the wanderings of a peerless artist.

To my father, it is you who forged the aesthete that I am, I owe you my sensitivity to the beauty of the verses, my appreciation of the divine, and this sense of unconventional humor that allowed me today to put the finishing touches to this little project. To my mother, my iron mother, you were my harbor of peace, you allowed me to shelter from the worries of this world, and it is due to you that I do not give up. You forged my logic and my critical thinking; it is thanks to you that I can write today out of passion. Finally, to you my brother, my dearest friend, your laughter and your stories cradled my

darkest winter nights, you are the prism that allows me to see the world in its plurality, and that fuels my curiosity for the past.

I bid you farewell with this poignant verse by Si Mhand; a poem that lingers in my soul, its touch profound and grand:

If destiny were not so treacherous and sly,  
It would beam like an infant, oh my!  
And fairness would guide its every deed,  
Dear mother, who urged you to bear and feed?

Here I stand, akin to a wayward hound,  
Roaming aimlessly on paths unfound.  
Within me, all has crumbled and gone awry,  
A soul in ruins, my spirit's weary cry.

*Loubida S. Sheehal*

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## Exploring Antinomian Piety: A Literary Analysis of Poetry as a Window into Unconventional Devotion

The theme of this research revolves around the examination of the carnivalesque piety manifested in the literary works of Si Mḥand u Mḥand (1845/48-1905/6), an eminent Kabyle poet and thinker of nineteenth-century Algeria. In accordance with the theoretical framework proposed by Mikhail Bakhtin regarding the carnivalesque, this study delves into an analysis of Si Mḥand's poetry and his distinctive approach to concepts such as God and tradition. By scrutinizing Si Mḥand's literary oeuvre, it becomes evident that his poetic compositions intricately intertwine with the carnivalesque elements prevalent within Kabyle culture, which encompass a penchant for subversion and the deliberate upending of societal norms. To comprehensively comprehend the broader cultural and political context of late nineteenth-century Algeria, characterized by colonial domination and cultural resistance, the research expands its scope to also encompass other contemporaneous poems penned by Kabyle poets. These additional works offer a wider spectrum of insight into the prevailing sociocultural milieu and serve as compelling testament to the various forms of resistance and assertions of identity exhibited during that era of history. Through meticulous analysis, this research endeavors to uncover the manifold ways in which poetry functioned as a potent vehicle for cultural resistance and the reclamation of identity amidst the pervasive forces of colonial oppression.

Furthermore, this study acknowledges the profound influence of mystical Islamic traditions upon Si Mḥand's poetry and intellectual discourse. The local mysticism prevalent in Si Mḥand's cultural milieu provided him with a conceptual framework through which to explore the intricate dynamics between the individual and the divine. It additionally enabled him to critically examine and challenge the prevailing rigid religious and social hierarchies characteristic of his era. Consequently, the carnivalesque elements discernible in Si Mḥand's literary creations can be perceived as an integral facet of a broader spiritual and cultural emancipatory endeavor.

This research aims to enhance the scholarly comprehension of the intricate and dynamic cultural traditions prevalent in North Africa, particularly with regard to their interplay with colonialism, resistance, and spiritual exploration. By focusing on the literary contributions of Si Mḥand, this study offers a vantage point through which to examine these multifaceted themes.

The research holds significant interest for several reasons. Firstly, it illuminates the cultural and religious milieu of late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century Algeria, which have historically received limited attention within mainstream anglophone academic discourse. Through an in-depth analysis of Si Mḥand's poetry, this research unveils the intricacy and richness of North African cultural

traditions, while simultaneously showing the ways in which these traditions were shaped and influenced by the forces of colonialism, resistance, and spiritual exploration. The thesis aims to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the diverse cultural tapestry of Algeria.

Secondly, the thesis accentuates the significance of the carnivalesque as a potent mode of cultural resistance. By delineating the carnivalesque elements inherent in Si Mḥand's poetry and the works of his contemporaries, this study showcases the influential role played by humor and subversion in challenging dominant cultural and religious discourses. Through the lens of the carnivalesque, this research not only sheds light on the transformative power of these elements but also underscores the manner in which marginalized communities utilize cultural expressions to assert their identities and contest oppressive power structures. Consequently, this research offers valuable insights into the ways in which cultural forms become potent tools for resistance, engendering socio-cultural transformations and encouraging the articulation of marginalized voices.

### [A Post-Orientalist Approach to the Study of Islam:](#)

I engage with the religious dimensions of Si Mḥand's poetry through the analytical framework proposed by Ahmed in his seminal work *What Is Islam?*—there, he presents a nuanced understanding of Islam that acknowledges the complexity and apparent contradictions inherent in its historical practices.<sup>1</sup> He conceptualizes Islam as both an abstract theoretical construct and a concrete historical phenomenon.<sup>2</sup> Ahmed's analysis focuses on the human and historical aspects of Islam, highlighting how Muslim societies have attributed significance to their actions and customs, even when they seemingly deviate from Islamic legal norms. This conceptualization of Islam encompasses not only textual scriptures but also takes into account the dynamic social and historical evolution of the religion and the diverse interpretations associated with it.

Drawing on Ahmed's insights, I argue that Muslims throughout history, from the thirteenth to the nineteenth century, have manifested their Islamic identity through diverse, creative, and often divergent trajectories.<sup>3</sup> This multiplicity of interpretations has led to the emergence of multiple meanings associated with being a Muslim. By adopting a hermeneutical approach, which recognizes the importance of a shared language that facilitates meaningful communication in all its variations,<sup>4</sup> I am able to view Islam as an analytical category that extends beyond fixed textual sources. Instead, it

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<sup>1</sup> Shahab Ahmed, *What Is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic* (Oxford: Princeton University, 2015), 6.

<sup>2</sup> Ahmed, 6.

<sup>3</sup> Ahmed, 81.

<sup>4</sup> Ahmed, 323.

is understood as a discursive process embedded within Muslim societies at large, including the specific context of Kabyle society.

In this way, we can discard prevailing conceptions of Islam that tend to essentialize *sharīʿa* —Islamic law— and instead explore the historical expression of Muslim identities in ways that may appear contradictory to established legal doctrines, such as the consumption of wine. By challenging a legalist understanding of Islam, which limits its scope to the realm of law, this research aims to recognize that the social and historical phenomenon of Islam encompasses norms that extend beyond legal prescriptions. Furthermore, it seeks to acknowledge the existence of contradictory practices pursued by individuals who identify and live as Muslims, without perceiving their behaviors as transgressions against their Islamic faith.<sup>5</sup> Ahmed’s work, particularly the fifth and sixth chapters in part III of his book, provides valuable insights for re-conceptualizing Islam. Ahmed emphasizes the process of truth-making and meaning-making, emphasizing the role of various sources in shaping Islamic identity.<sup>6</sup> In addition to textual scriptures, such as the *Qurʾān*, Ahmed highlights the significance of contextual factors and social realities in the discursive construction of Islamic identity. This inclusive conceptualization acknowledges the diverse sources of meaning that contribute to the formation of normative Islam.

By drawing on Ahmed’s framework, this study aims to incorporate the historical and cultural context in which Si Mḥand lived and composed his poetry. It seeks to challenge essentialist and monolithic perspectives of Islam, thereby facilitating a nuanced understanding of the complex religious traditions of the Kabyle people. Additionally, it aims to explore the interactions between Kabyle religious practices and the broader Islamic and North African cultural spheres.

## Antinomianism in the Literature

Derived from the Arabic term *ibāḥa*, antinomianism holds a distinct place within Islamic religious law, as it was employed by medieval heresiographers, both *Sunni* and *Shīʿī*, to designate religious tendencies, actions, or groups deemed permissive in nature.<sup>7</sup> This concept, rooted in philosophical and theological dualism, establishes a binary relationship between good and evil,<sup>8</sup> or more precisely, between the permissible and the forbidden. The range of antinomian practices spans

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<sup>5</sup> Ahmed, 81.

<sup>6</sup> Ahmed, 345.

<sup>7</sup> (J. Schacht), ‘IBAHA’, in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, Encyclopaedia of Islam (Brill, n.d.), III:660b, [http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/ibaha-SIM\\_3015](http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/ibaha-SIM_3015).

<sup>8</sup> Cyril Glassé, *The New Encyclopedia of Islam* (Rowman Altamira, 2003), 51.



from inclinations to approach but not surpass religious prohibitions to deliberate violations of religious prescriptions. For instance, the deliberate breaking of the *Ramaḍān* fast during the declaration of the *qiyāma* —resurrection— at the stronghold of Alamut in 1164 exemplifies this phenomenon.<sup>9</sup> Antinomianism has also found expression within popular culture through well-known sayings transmitted in the form of *ḥadīth*.<sup>10</sup> Among these, the most renowned is often attributed to either Abu Hurayra or ʿAlī, stating, “I have two bodies of knowledge from the Prophet; one you know; if I told you the other, you would cut my throat.”<sup>11</sup> The undisclosed second body of knowledge epitomizes the epigrammatic and antithetical usage of this dualistic framework.

The antinomian currents of Islam, on the other hand, have often manifested themselves in Sufism, or more accurately, within the diverse range of practices that fall under the umbrella of Sufism. Karamustafa, in his article *Antinomian Sufi* and book *God’s Unruly Friends*, situates the concept within the broader framework of mystical piety that emerged during the ninth to thirteenth centuries.<sup>12</sup> Drawing from the writings of heresiographers and the criticisms put forth by both *Sunni* and *Shīʿī* schools of thought, Karamustafa argues that there were indeed individuals or groups who expressed critical perspectives toward the prevailing social and religious establishments of their societies, resulting in their branding as antinomians.<sup>13</sup> However, it is noteworthy that Karamustafa’s work primarily focuses on Persia, certain Turkic-speaking regions, and the Arabian Peninsula. This geographical limitation is also evident in the existing literature on the subject, which occasionally skims upon Egypt and Syria, but rarely extends beyond those boundaries. In light of this, I propose that the term ‘antinomian’ or similar designations may not have been present in nineteenth-century Algeria, mainly because these antinomian currents did not encounter vehement opposition, allowing them to remain undefined by opposing factions and to fit within or become normative categories of piety.

These individuals who deviated from legalistic interpretations of Islam were subject to criticism not only from the ruling class but also from notable *ʿulamāʾ* —religious scholars, some of whom dedicated specific works to denouncing them. One of the earliest and most comprehensive lists of antinomians can be found in a relatively minor work by Ghazālī titled *The Idiocy of the Antinomians —Ḥamāqāt Ahl al-Ibāḥa*. In this treatise, Ghazālī condemns antinomians as individuals who had forsaken all prescribed religious rituals and embraced wanton sexual behavior. He elaborates that they freely

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<sup>9</sup> Glassé, 51.

<sup>10</sup> An account that carries religious, legal, or ethical significance in Islam.

<sup>11</sup> Glassé, *The New Encyclopedia of Islam*, 51.

<sup>12</sup> Ahmet T. Karamustafa, ‘Antinomian Sufis1’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Sufism*, ed. Lloyd Ridgeon, 1st ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2014), 101, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CCO9781139087599.008>.

<sup>13</sup> Karamustafa, 103.

consumed wine, shamelessly used ill-gotten wealth, and indulged in all manner of bodily pleasures, justifying their execution.<sup>14</sup>

Another scholar, al-Nasafī, presents a list of twelve condemned groups that share a common disregard or outright rejection of *Sharīʿa*.<sup>15</sup> It is worth noting that many of the groups denounced by al-Nasafī overlap with those condemned by Ghazālī, although al-Nasafī's stance is more nuanced, and he only considers mass execution permissible in one case.

Within Islam, antinomians are often associated with movements that either transcend or oppose *Sharīʿa*. Two notable movements that emerged as identifiable social collectives were the *Qalandariyya*, which thrived in Syria and Egypt, and the *Haydariyya*, which originated in Iran.<sup>16</sup> Concurrently, the archetype of the *wise fools* —*ʿuqalāʾ al-majānīn*— gained prominence in medieval urban culture, gradually becoming conceptualized as ‘the one captivated by God’ —*al-majdūb*.<sup>17</sup> These wise fools were characterized by their violation of social conventions, yet they were tolerated and sometimes even revered for their apparent detachment from worldly matters, often being accorded a status of sanctity as *awliyāʾ Allāh aṣ-ṣāliḥīn* —God's friends.

It is within the framework of this understanding of Islam and antinomianism that the subject is approached. Antinomianism, as a philosophical and theological concept, challenges conventional moral and ethical codes by positing that certain actions deemed taboo or sinful can be viewed as morally acceptable or even beneficial. In the context of Si Mḥand's poetry and his embrace of the carnivalesque, it can be argued that his work exhibits elements of antinomianism, as it subverts established religious and cultural norms in order to assert an alternative form of spirituality and identity.

### Exploring Antinomian Piety: The Significance of Transgressive Religious Devotion

The concept of piety, as a moral virtue and a philosophical construct, finds elucidation through the careful examination of Plato's *Euthyphro*. This dialogue serves as a pivotal platform wherein Euthyphro, a knowledgeable Athenian soothsayer, defends the notion of piety as a universal truth, positing its innate existence within every individual. Consequently, piety assumes a paramount role as the axis for determining justice and prevailing morality. The significance of this debate transcends

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<sup>14</sup> Karamustafa, 112.

<sup>15</sup> al-Nasafī, ‘Risāla Fī Bayān Maḡāhib At-Taṣawwuf’, in *At-Turāṭ al-ʿArabī*, ed. ‘Alī Akbar Ḍiyāʾī (Damascus, 1992), 127–29.

<sup>16</sup> Ahmet T. Karamustafa, *God's Unruly Friends: Dervish Groups in the Islamic Middle Period 1200-1550* (London: Oneworld Publications, 2006), 39–46; Michel Boivin, *Le Soufisme Antinomien Dans Le Sous-Continent Indien: La'ī Shahbāz Qalandar et Son Heritage, XIIIe-XXe Siècle* (Paris: Cerf, 2012).

<sup>17</sup> Karamustafa, ‘Antinomian Sufis1’, 115.

triviality, as it holds the power to shape the fate of Euthyphro's father, who stands accused of involuntary homicide.<sup>18</sup>

Drawing a parallel to the just Zeus, who condemned his own father for unjust actions, Euthyphro contends that imitating the divine constitutes an act of piety. At first glance, this reasoning appears lucid, yet Socrates astutely identifies a central ambiguity: Is piety to be construed as emulating the divine simply because it is divine, implying adherence to Zeus' demands and, by serendipity, a commitment to justice and the punishment of the unjust? Alternatively, should piety be understood as aligning with justice itself, and by serendipity aligning with Zeus' desires?

The ensuing dialogue between Euthyphro and Socrates sheds light on Euthyphro's conception of piety as intricately connected to the concept of divine law, encompassing actions and principles traditionally deemed pleasing to the gods. Euthyphro endeavors to justify his decision to prosecute his father for manslaughter based on his commitment to following divine law. Nevertheless, Socrates challenges this perspective by positing that mere adherence to the law is inadequate. He asserts that the gods command certain actions because they are inherently good and just, suggesting that piety entails comprehending and aligning oneself with what is morally right and virtuous. Socrates further regards piety as a foundational component of an individual's moral character, maintaining that it necessitates the correct observance of moral principles.

In fact, within this dialogue commonly regarded as Plato's exploration of piety, Socrates repeatedly inquires of Euthyphro the meanings of *eusebia* and *hosiôtês* in relation to piety. However, these terms do not appear to be precisely synonymous. While *eusebia* appears to encompass actions and attitudes that demonstrate an individual's devotion to the divine, particularly when it is perceived as a source of moral authority, *hosiôtês* implies a rectitude, righteousness, or justice that may not necessarily align with traditional norms but rather with an intrinsic sense of what is morally right. Socrates, by employing both terms interchangeably, endeavors to prompt Euthyphro's contemplation of the morality and propriety of actions rooted in customary practices and empirical conventions. Thereby, this narrative introduces a discernible contamination of the concept of *eusebia*—an ingrained traditional and ritualistic disposition towards the deities of *hosiôtês*—by associating it with the inherent pursuit of justice, thus establishing a reciprocal relationship between the observance of *eusebia* and the recognition of moral rectitude and vice versa. This juxtaposition introduces the concept of antinomian piety, wherein traditional norms and established customs are challenged in matters of religious observance and moral conduct.

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<sup>18</sup> Platon, *Euthyphron*, trans. Victor Cousin, 1822.

## The Role of the Carnavalesque in Illustrating Antinomian Piety

It is first in the literary treatment of piety in this story that we recognize its very first carnivalesque aspect. Indeed, Bakhtin, the Russian philosopher and literary critic, considers that the Socratic dialogue rests on a basic principle which is the dialogical nature of truth.<sup>19</sup> The dialogical nature of truth in Socratic dialogue refers to the idea that truth is not something that can be determined or discovered by a single individual in isolation, but rather emerges through a process of questioning, debate and discussion between different perspectives.<sup>20</sup> For Bakhtin, this idea of dialogical truth is central to his understanding of language and communication, considering that language is inherently social and that meaning is constructed through dialogue and interaction with others. In other words, the meaning of a word or statement is not fixed or predetermined, but is constantly negotiated and renegotiated in ongoing conversations. He thus emphasizes the importance of the *polyphonic* nature of discourse, which means that there are multiple voices and perspectives at play in any literary conversation.<sup>21</sup> In this sense, truth is not a static or unitary concept but instead emerges from the clash and interaction of different viewpoints and ideologies.

The carnivalesque aspect of the dialogical nature of truth would refer to the idea that truth is not only constructed through serious and rational discussion, but also through humor, satire and parody. For Bakhtin, truth is not a fixed or stable concept, but rather a dynamic and ever-changing concept, influenced by social, historical and cultural factors.<sup>22</sup> In the carnivalesque, the established order and hierarchy are temporarily suspended, and people are free to express themselves in unconventional and sometimes even absurd ways. The result is a sense of liberation and renewal, as people are able to question and subvert the dominant ideologies and power structures of society.

In Plato's dialogue on piety, the carnivalesque aspect is evident in the use of irony, satire and other rhetorical devices to challenge the assumptions and beliefs of Euthyphro. Socrates does not assert an exclusive possession of an absolute truth, but instead supports his discourse with the essential process of anacrisis, which involves the stimulation of speech through speech, thus forcing his interlocutor to become familiar with the noble object of the conversation, piety. This approach compels his interlocutor to become acquainted with the noble subject matter of their conversation, namely, piety. The utilization of irony, which Bakhtin contends is a diminished form of carnivalesque laughter, facilitates a familiarization process that exposes Euthyphro's contradictions and enables Socrates to

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<sup>19</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, ed. Caryl Emerson, vol. 8, *Theory and History of Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 109.

<sup>20</sup> Bakhtin, 8:110.

<sup>21</sup> Bakhtin, 8:22–43.

<sup>22</sup> Bakhtin, 8:134.

undermine his interlocutor's claims to knowledge and wisdom. Consequently, new possibilities for truth emerge.

This relationship presupposes a carnivalesque assimilation of interpersonal dynamics within the dialogue, entailing the eradication of social barriers that separate individuals. Additionally, it anticipates a familiarity of attitudes towards the subject of contemplation itself, irrespective of its inherent nobility and significance—in this case piety. Consequently, piety undergoes a process of carnivalization, experiencing a revitalization within a text where visual and verbal representations establish a distinct rapport with reality, thereby embracing its carnivalesque connotation.

### Si Mḥand's oeuvre

Si Mḥand (1845/48-1905/6), a renowned Kabyle poet of the nineteenth century in present-day Algeria, exhibited a poetic style characterized by its simplicity, clarity, and depth of feeling delving into themes such as love, loss, and the transient nature of life. Apart from his poetic prowess, Si Mḥand's talent as a storyteller added to his acclaim, as his tales and aphorisms continue to be celebrated for their profound insights and wisdom. Notably, Si Mḥand's poetic works, known as *isefra*<sup>23</sup>—singular: *asefru*—in the Kabyle tradition, were published in collections on multiple occasions, including significant editions by Ammar n Said Boulifa in 1904, Moulud Feraoun in 1960, and Mouloud Mammeri in 1969.

In his extensive analysis of Si Mḥand's poetry, Mammeri examined the poet's linguistic and stylistic choices, highlighting his innovative contributions to the development of Kabyle poetry. Moreover, Mammeri emphasized Si Mḥand's remarkable ability to capture the ordinary experiences and emotions of the Kabyle people in his verses, portraying their values and traditions.<sup>24</sup> Brugnatelli echoed this sentiment, agreeing that Si Mḥand's poetry not only mirrored his personal encounters but also reflected the collective experiences of the Kabyle community.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, Si Mḥand employed his poetic creations as a medium for social and political commentary, offering insights into the challenges and issues faced by Kabyle society during the colonial period.

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<sup>23</sup> Isefra refers to a poetic genre that encompasses various forms of oral poetry. It is characterized by its rhythmic structure, rich imagery, and use of metaphors and symbols. One key aspect of *isefra* lies in its oral performance tradition.

<sup>24</sup> Mouloud Mammeri, *Les Isefras de Si Mohand* (Paris: Maspero, 1969); Mouloud Mammeri, *Poèmes Kabyles Anciens* (Alger: Awal, 1988).

<sup>25</sup> Vermondo Brugnatelli, 'L'oeuvre de Si Mohand Ou-Mhend Dans La Littérature Amazighe', *La Culture Amazighe et Le Développement Humain*, 2006.

Conversely, Adli posited Si Mḥand as a poet who challenged the prevailing modes of expression, striving to forge a new and authentic form of Berber poetry rooted in the everyday experiences of the people. According to Adli, Si Mḥand's poetic endeavors aimed to depart from established conventions and offer a fresh perspective, encapsulating the essence of the lived reality of his community.<sup>26</sup>

Within the realm of Si Mḥand's poetry analysis, Brugnattelli observes a prevailing sense of ambiguity and ambivalence. Si Mḥand's poetic compositions often exhibit a propensity for multiple meanings and interpretations, deliberately leaving room for readers to derive their own understandings.<sup>27</sup> This intentional strategy employed by Si Mḥand appears to be a conscious effort to challenge conventional modes of thought and stimulate critical engagement among his audience, urging them to scrutinize their personal experiences and the surrounding world. Adli on the other hand accentuates the significance of Si Mḥand's utilization of irony and satire as potent tools for undermining prevailing power structures and exposing the inherent contradictions within Kabyle society. In this context, Si Mḥand emerges as a precursor to the subsequent Berber cultural and political movements, employing his poetry to subvert established norms and shed light on societal incongruities. Adli's perspective positions Si Mḥand as an influential figure whose artistic expression transcended the boundaries of traditional poetry, catalyzing transformative forces within the Berber cultural landscape.<sup>28</sup>

In his article titled *Rétrospective des Décrits sur Si Mohand et Poèmes Inédits (Extraits d'un Mushaf – Manuscrit de la Zaouïa d'Illoulen Oumalou, Kabylie)*, Berrichi provides a retrospective of the different writings on Si Mḥand and presents unpublished poems extracted from a manuscript of the *zawiya* —religious edifice— of Illulen Umalu —a commune south-east of Tizi Ouzou. Berrichi argues that the study of Si Mḥand's poetry and life has been limited by a narrow approach that often focuses on his literary style rather than his cultural and historical context.<sup>29</sup> To rectify this, Berrichi advocates for an interdisciplinary approach that situates Si Mḥand's work within the wider framework of Kabyle culture and history.

Moreover, Berrichi introduces a collection of unpublished poems attributed to Si Mḥand, positing their significance in illuminating the breadth and profundity of his poetic output. Berrichi asserts that these poems shed light on Si Mḥand's engagement with a diverse range of themes encompassing love, nature, spirituality, and politics. Additionally, these compositions serve as evidence of Si Mḥand's ability to craft aesthetically pleasing and intellectually stimulating verses. By examining these hitherto

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<sup>26</sup> Younes Adli, *Si Mohand Ou Mhand : Errance et Révolte*, EDIF 2000 (Paris, 2001).

<sup>27</sup> Brugnattelli, 'L'oeuvre de Si Mohand Ou-Mhend Dans La Littérature Amazighe'.

<sup>28</sup> Adli, *Si Mohand Ou Mhand : Errance et Révolte*.

<sup>29</sup> Boussad Berrichi, 'Rétrospective Des Différents Ecrits Sur Si Mohand et Poèmes Inédits: Extraits d'un Mushaf – Manuscrit de La Zaouïa d'Illoulen Oumalou, Kabylie', *Études et Documents Berbères* 1–2, no. 25–26 (2007).

unknown poems, Berrichi endeavors to foster a more nuanced understanding of Si Mḥand's poetry and life, one that incorporates his cultural and historical context—a direction that I aim to build upon in the present study.

Building upon Berrichi's approach, this study seeks to expand the existing scholarship on Si Mḥand by incorporating a broader range of interdisciplinary perspectives. By delving into the cultural and historical context that shaped Si Mḥand's artistic endeavors, I aim to deepen our comprehension of his poetry and its significance within the Kabyle cultural milieu. Through an analysis of Si Mḥand's works, this study endeavors to elucidate the intricate interplay between artistic expression, cultural dynamics, and historical developments, thus contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of Si Mḥand's multifaceted contributions.

## Theoretical Premise and Methodology

The objective of this research is to examine the manifestation of antinomian piety in Si Mḥand's poetry by employing the carnivalesque framework. By applying the carnivalesque categories, which encompass the logic of familiarity evident in language usage and depictions of God, as well as the concept of *misalliances*, drawn from Bakhtin's theoretical framework, this study aims to shed light on the unique characteristics of Si Mḥand's poetic expression. Bakhtin's notion of misalliances pertains to the convergence and mingling of diverse social classes, cultures, and ideologies that occur within the carnivalesque realm. This concept holds particular significance in the investigation of Si Mḥand's poetry and his engagement with the carnivalesque, as his work exhibits a blending of diverse cultural and religious traditions while concurrently critiquing the rigid social hierarchies prevalent during his era.

Drawing upon Bakhtin's framework, I posit that piety itself can be regarded as a spectacle, characterized by a collection of observable elements or phenomena. This fervent devotion, manifested through religious duties and practices, cannot be divorced from the prevailing societal value system, as it is primarily subject to the framework of virtue or, more precisely, to a moral law or force whose primary arbiters are members of the society. Similar to a spectacle, piety is thus subject to the collective evaluation of others and cannot be confined to self-proclamation alone. Analogous to the carnival and its diverse festivities, an act or figure imbued with carnivalesque qualities "brings together, unifies, merges, and amalgamates the sacred and the profane, the lofty and the lowly, the sublime and the trivial, wisdom and foolishness."<sup>30</sup> Exhibiting multiplicity, the blending of opposites, and various ruptures, the saint and their contentious piety assume a carnivalesque dimension, often marked by polyphony and a critical gaze toward authority in specific contexts.

During the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, the carnival functioned as a temporal and spatial construct that stood in opposition to the prevailing official culture characterized by a serious, religious, and feudal ethos.<sup>31</sup> Similarly, in Persia during the fourteenth to seventeenth centuries, the piety of the dervishes established itself as a tangible temporal and spatial domain of resistance against the hegemony of the *eulamā'*—religious scholars. In the context of nineteenth-century Kabylia, the piety of saints was shaped within a century-long struggle against the dominance first of the Turks and later the French settlers.<sup>32</sup> In this regard, the concept of antinomian piety, which denotes a temporal and

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<sup>30</sup> M.M. Bakhtin, *La Poétique Du Dostoïevski*, trans. I. Kolitcheff (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1970), 171.

<sup>31</sup> M.M. Bakhtin, *L'œuvre de François Rabelais*, trans. A. Robel (Paris: Gallimard, 1970), 12.

<sup>32</sup> Younes Adli, *La Kabylie à l'Épreuve Des Invasions: Des Phéniciens à 1900* (Alger: Zyriab Editions, 2004).



spatial realm where the norms of ordinary life are suspended and hierarchical order is subverted,<sup>33</sup> becomes a fundamental premise to be acknowledged within these particular circumstances.

According to Bakhtin's analysis, in a social order that lacked classes or a centralized state, the serious and comic dimensions pertaining to divinity, the world, and humanity were seemingly regarded as equally sacred and "official."<sup>34</sup> In this context, the profane elements encompassing blasphemous humor, eroticism, artistic engagement with the divine, and celebratory expressions held a significance on par with other religious and political aspects of life. However, the transition toward a more structured and hierarchical society gradually rendered the coexistence of these aspects as 'equal rights' untenable.<sup>35</sup> Consequently, the primitive facets of existence were relegated to an unofficial sphere where, as Bakhtin suggests, they assumed modified meanings and emerged as the primary forms of popular expression and cultural sentiment.<sup>36</sup> In this light, the carnivalesque impulse necessitated an alternative outlet for its manifestation, which, within the milieu of nineteenth-century Kabylia, found expression in the realm of oral literature, specifically poetry.

Antinomian piety emerges as a potent manifestation of popular culture, possessing such resilience that it coexists alongside the sacred tenets of Islam and the prevailing intellectual currents of the era. The fact that renowned scholars such as Ghazālī, al-Nasafī, and al-Jawzī dedicated works to it during their time attests to its visible and, at times, disconcerting presence. This antinomian piety can be understood as possessing an inherently symbolic and subversive dimension, straddling the realms of the sacred and the profane, as well as the refined and the grotesque. As in the case of the deformed hunchback, Quasimodo, who was grotesquely elected Pope of the Fools, this general reversal of values culminates in the social ascension of the *darwish* and his acquisition of the status of saint.

In this study, the carnivalesque categories are not conceptual constructs awaiting interpretation, but rather a vibrant and tangible perception of the world that finds expression in lived experiences. The idiosyncrasies of Si Mḥand are examined as a distinct category intricately intertwined with the notion of familiar contact, as it enables the unrestrained expression of suppressed aspects of human nature in a concrete manifestation.<sup>37</sup> As articulated by Gellner, "The saint is he who [...] allows nature to speak through him ... even in the form of unbridled desires ... One seeks through him a kind of complicity with heaven."<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Bakhtin, *La Poétique Du Dostoïevski*, 170.

<sup>34</sup> Bakhtin, *L'œuvre de François Rabelais*, 14.

<sup>35</sup> Bakhtin, 14.

<sup>36</sup> Bakhtin, 14.

<sup>37</sup> Bakhtin, *La Poétique Du Dostoïevski*, 170.

<sup>38</sup> Ernest Gellner, *Muslim Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 154.

Within the scope of this study, I pose the ensuing question: How did Si Mḥand's antinomian piety unfold? This investigation is structured into three distinct chapters, each addressing specific queries:

1. What were the contextual circumstances that contributed to Si Mḥand's emergence as a prominent figure among the populace?
2. What characterized Si Mḥand's personal perspective and engagement with the divine?
3. How did poetry exert its influence on the religious imagination of the contemporaneous society?

## Methodology

My research endeavor involved the transcription of poems collected by various authors, including Hanoteau, Mammer, and Boualem, featuring works by Si Mḥand u Mḥand and other relevant poets within the scope of this study. This task was accompanied by the assistance of a native speaker, as it presented challenges, particularly when confronted with phonetic elements absent in the Latin script. Notably, the prevalence of labio-velarization phenomena in Northern Berber dialects proved noteworthy. This covert coarticulation of vowels ([u/w]), conventionally denoted as C<sup>w</sup> or C<sup>o</sup> by Berber speakers, exhibited associations with labial sounds —[bbw]— and, more significantly, with palatal-velar consonants —[kw/kkw, gw/ggw, γw, xw, qw/qqw].<sup>39</sup>

Indeed, Tamaziyt, with its various regional variants, covers a geographical area extending from North Africa to the Sahara-Sahel: in the Rif we find Tarifit, in the Chleuh domain we find Tacalhit and in Kabylie we find Taqbaylit.<sup>40</sup> Although Berber is essentially an oral language, the Berbers have their own Libyan-Berber writing system in Latin letters and also the *Tifinay*. The latter is an alphabetic system with traditionally rather limited uses—funerary, symbolic and playful.<sup>41</sup> Today, this alphabet is still used by the Tuareg and is being extended, in adapted forms, to Kabyle circles, where since the beginning of the twentieth century, Berber writing has been based on the Latin alphabet, with various adaptations.

In the pursuit of accurately representing Kabyle poems and names, a deliberate decision has been made to transcribe them in accordance with a specific framework. This transcription approach recognizes a

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<sup>39</sup> Salem Chaker, 'Labio-Vélarisation', in *Encyclopédie Berbère*, 2008, 28–29.

<sup>40</sup> Salem Chaker, 'Résistance et Ouverture à l'Autre : Le Berbère, Une Langue Vivante à La Croisée Des Echanges Méditerranéens. Un Parcours Lexicologique', in *Mémoire de La Méditerranée* (Paris, 2001).

<sup>41</sup> Salem Chaker, 'La Langue de la Littérature Ecrite Berbère : Dynamiques et Contrastes', *Études littéraires africaines*, no. 21 (2006): 10–19, <https://doi.org/10.7202/1041301ar>.

fundamental distinction between Kabyle and Arabic phonetics, particularly with regard to the absence of long vowels in Kabyle and the presence of distinct phonetic sounds. Unlike Arabic, Kabyle lacks a phonemic distinction between long and short vowels. Consequently, the transcription process necessitates careful consideration to accurately capture the unique phonetic qualities of Kabyle words. The tableau or framework being employed allows for a systematic representation of these distinct sounds in a consistent and comprehensible manner. By adopting this approach, the intention is to ensure that the transcribed Kabyle poems and names accurately reflect the phonetic nuances and characteristics inherent to the Kabyle language. This methodology acknowledges the significance of maintaining linguistic authenticity and promoting effective communication in the study. It is worth noting that the transcription process seeks to strike a balance between phonetic accuracy and practicality. While striving for fidelity to the original Kabyle pronunciations, the chosen transcription system also takes into account the ease of use and accessibility for readers who may not be familiar with the intricacies of the Kabyle language.

#### Standard letters:<sup>42</sup>

Letter	Neo-Tifinagh (IRCAM)	Pronunciation
A	◦	/æ/
B	⊖	/b/ and /v/
C	Ⓒ	/ʃ/
D	Λ	/d/ or /ð/ similar to <i>th</i> in the word ‘ <b>there.</b> ’
E	⋈	/ə/ similar english unstressed <i>a</i> in the word ‘ <b>attack.</b> ’
F	Ⓕ	/f/
G	⌘	/g/
H	Ⓞ	/h/

<sup>42</sup> Ameer Meftaha, ⵎⵓⵏⵉⵔ ⵉⵎⵓⵏⵉⵔ ⵉⵎⵓⵏⵉⵔ ⵉⵎⵓⵏⵉⵔ (El Maarif Al-Jadida, 2006).

I	ⵉ	/i/
J	ⵓ	/ɜ/
K	ⵏ	/k/
L	ⵙ	/l/
M	ⵎ	/m/
N	ⵏ	/n/
Q	ⵓ	/q/ or /g/ further down to the uvula (uvular). Similar to Arabic ‘ق.’
R	ⵔ	/r/
S	ⵙ	/s/
T	ⵜ	/t/ or /θ/
U	ⵓ	/u/
W	ⵡ	/w/
X	ⵛ	/x/ Similar to Arabic ‘خ.’
Y	ⵢ	/j/
Z	ⵣ	/z/

### Other letters:<sup>43</sup>

Letter	Neo-Tifinagh (IRCAM)	Pronunciation
Č	ⵉ	/tʃ/

<sup>43</sup> Meftaha; Centre de Recherche Berbère - INALCO, *Tira N Tamaziɣt: Propositions Pour La Notation Usuelle à Base Latine Du Berbère* (Paris: INALCO-CRB, 1996).

D	E	/ðˢ/ Similar to Arabic ‘ظ.’
Ǝ	ⵏ	/ʕ/ Similar to Arabic ‘ع.’
Ġ	ⵛ	/dʒ/
Y	ⵡ	/ɣ/ Similar to French <b>R</b> .
Ḥ	ⵏ	/ħ/
Ṛ	ⵓ	/rˢ/
Ṣ	ⵔ	/sˢ/
Ṭ	ⵉ	/tˢ/
Z	ⵍ	/zˢ/

#### Labiovelars:<sup>44</sup>

Letter	Neo-Tifinagh (IRCAM)	Pronunciation
B <sup>w</sup> / B <sup>o</sup>	ⵀ	/b <sup>w</sup> /
G <sup>w</sup> / G <sup>o</sup>	ⵁ	/g <sup>w</sup> /
Y <sup>w</sup> / Y <sup>o</sup>	ⵡ	/ɣ <sup>w</sup> /
K <sup>w</sup> / K <sup>o</sup>	ⵢ	/k <sup>w</sup> /
Q <sup>w</sup> / Q <sup>o</sup>	ⵣ	/q <sup>w</sup> /
X <sup>w</sup> / X <sup>o</sup>	ⵤ	/x <sup>w</sup> /

<sup>44</sup> Centre de Recherche Berbère - INALCO, *Tira N Tamaziɣt: Propositions Pour La Notation Usuelle à Base Latine Du Berbère*.

Other phonemes:<sup>45</sup>

Letter	INALCO equivalent	Neo-Tifinagh (IRCAM)	Pronunciation
Ṭ	Tt/Ss	ⵜⵓ	/ts/
Zz	Zz	ⵝⵞ	/dz/

This was followed by a translation into English.

In the context of this thesis, an issue has been encountered pertaining to the potential presence of Arabic technical words or Arabic names that necessitate transcription. To address this matter, the utilization of the aforementioned table has been determined as suitable. This decision is based on the fact that the Kabyle language incorporates Arabic consonants and more—except for the sound “ʿ” like in *eulamāʿ*’ that shall be added. For the representation of Arabic vowels, the inclusion of long vowels, specifically *ā*, *ū*, and *ī*, has been chosen. By adopting this transcription framework, it becomes possible to maintain consistency and avoid the use of multiple frameworks. It should be noted that certain terms in Kabyle may bear resemblance to Arabic words, given the extensive historical coexistence of the two languages in the region. However, it is crucial to differentiate between them. For instance, the Kabyle terms *xwen* or *leid* should not be conflated with the Arabic term *ixwān*—commonly transcribed as *ikhwān*—or *al-ēid*, despite their visual and phonetic similarities. From both a linguistic and historical standpoint, these terms are distinct entities. In the Arabic language, the definite article used is ‘*al-*,’ whereas in Kabyle, a Berber language, the masculine definite article is typically ‘*a*’ and the feminine definite article is ‘*ta...t*.’ As a result, Kabyle employs ‘*argaz*’ to signify ‘**the** man’ and ‘*tameṭṭut*’ to indicate ‘**the** woman.’ Nevertheless, there are some exceptions in Kabyle where words retain the French or Arabic definite article, particularly when they have foreign roots. For example, the word ‘*leid*’ maintains the initial ‘*l*’ reminiscent of the Arabic definite article ‘*al-*.’<sup>46</sup> On the other hand, from a historical standpoint, the term *ikhwān* for example pertains to a political movement that emerged in the second half of the twentieth century in Algeria and refers to *Jamāʿat al-Ixwān al-Muslimīn*—Muslim Brotherhood—that was founded in Egypt in 1928, which holds no connection to the former term *xwen*, which is further explained in detail in the thesis.

<sup>45</sup> Centre de Recherche Berbère - INALCO; Meftaha, ⵔⵉⵎⵓⵏⵉⵢⵓⵏ | ⵜⵓⵎⵓⵏⵉⵢⵓⵏ ⵜⵓⵎⵓⵏⵉⵢⵓⵏ.

<sup>46</sup> Faouzi Adjed, ‘Vers Une Normalisation Du Kabyle: Articles et Pronoms’, n.d., 4–12.

The present study has centered on the retrieval of Si Mḥand's poems that feature in the anthology of five authors, namely Hanoteau, Boulifa, Mammeri, Boualem, and Luciani. This focus was chosen primarily due to the accessibility of these sources. Secondly, as Si Mḥand's poems are often found in multiple collections, their inclusion served as an affirmation of their authorship. For instance, Boulifa's collection contained several poems that were initially attributed to Si Mḥand, but upon closer inspection, were deemed to be of another author's creation —this was often clarified in a footnote. This study's selection criteria were based on relevance to the research, and thus, poems that dealt with themes such as love, fraternal relationships, and colonial events were excluded.

The process of translation proved to be extraordinarily laborious, surpassing expectations. Due to the scarcity of an all-encompassing online Kabyle or Berber dictionary, I was compelled to consult numerous dictionaries, both digital and printed, in my pursuit. I express my gratitude to both Samy D. and Samira S. for their invaluable assistance in the translation endeavor. While I managed to comprehend certain segments of the poems, other sections remained enigmatic. Samy's extensive efforts in deciphering the meaning of rare Kabyle words, as well as establishing connections with other Kabyle native speakers who generously shared their personal translations, were truly monumental. My knowledge of Arabic and French proved advantageous in discerning the meaning of Kabyle words that share similar roots, such as the Kabyle word for pomegranate '*lgrenat*' and '*la grenade*' in French or the word for repentance which is '*ntub*' in one of the poems and '*at-tawba*' in Arabic. Finally, it is imperative to emphasize that no reliance was placed on the French translations provided within these books, the translations provided by the aforementioned authors served as a supplementary opinion to our collective endeavors.

The endeavor of translating Si Mḥand's Kabyle poetry, as well as other poems examined within this study, represents a complex and consequential undertaking where I have also focused on preserving the rhyming aspect of translated poems in English to uphold their artistic qualities, thereby facilitating a partial comprehension of their artistic essence among non-Kabyle speakers. This translation effort assumes significance in its ability to broaden the accessibility of Si Mḥand's literary corpus beyond the boundaries of the Kabyle-speaking community and preserve both its meaning and the spirit of its rhymes, these translations act as conduits for cultural exchange, fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation of Si Mḥand's poetic achievements.

Mammeri's collection of Si Mḥand's poetry is widely regarded as one of the most accurate compilations, owing to the extensive research and compilation efforts he invested over several years.

Additionally, Luciani's collection holds significance due to his direct interaction with Si Mḥand, enabling him to record the poems in their original Kabyle dialect. Exploring Luciani's collection has shed light on Si Mḥand's linguistic choices, employment of dialect, and preservation of the oral poetic tradition. Finally, the inclusion of Boualem's collection in the study of Si Mḥand's poetry holds significant scholarly value, since his collection may potentially contain poems that have not been documented by other collectors, thereby augmenting our understanding of Si Mḥand's poetic corpus by introducing previously unexplored material.

Visiting the province of Tizi Ouzou and Si Mḥand's birthplace proved to be a valuable undertaking. Immersing myself in the region for a duration of fifteen days in May-June 2023 provided an enriching experience that fostered a deeper comprehension of the local culture and customs that influenced Si Mḥand's poetry. The opportunity to engage in dialogues with native Kabyle individuals about their perspectives on Si Mḥand's work further contributed to the exploration of his literary contributions. To facilitate effective communication, a translator assisted in bridging the language barrier during interactions with the local community. Furthermore, insightful discussions with acquaintances hailing from the region added valuable perspectives to the research endeavor. Moreover, engaging with students studying the history and culture of the region at the University of Mouloud Mammeri in Tizi Ouzou offered an additional layer of interpretation and analysis of Si Mḥand's poetry.

Regarding the initial section of the paper, which delves into the historical and social context circa 1871, my research drew upon archival resources available in Algeria, including the national library of Hamma and the municipal library of Jijel and Bejaïa, as well as online sources. Preferring a narrative that transcends a purely military focus, I complemented factual accounts with poetic testimonies of the same events. This approach served to humanize the chapter and offer a narrative that amplifies voices that may have been overlooked in traditional historical narratives.



# Chapter One:

## Context of Si Mḥand's Emergence as a Popular Figure

In the mid-nineteenth century, Kabylia was still independent from the French administration; the various expeditions carried out against the region were aborted when faced with the resistance of the Kabyle, in particular, of Bu Bayla, who raised the populations of the Djurdjura and the Babors.<sup>47</sup> General Randon, who took over the drudgery in 1851, had the same difficulties and used methods similar to those of his predecessor. Indeed, like Bugeaud, he thought that it was necessary “to leave on the ground traces of [their] victory by destroying part of the wealth of those [they] have defeated.”<sup>48</sup> This materialized in destructions and human losses beyond comparison with previous experiences and,<sup>49</sup> atrocious sanctions for the peasants, the felling of orchards as testified then by Iḥağ Muḥammad Bacir through the collection of Hanoteau:

Lyella iğaç taḍraḥ,	He departed, the fruit abandoned on the soil,
A yizriw idammen fnan,	Oh, mine eyes, where the crimson ceased to boil,
D amkul wa tasas tejraḥ,	Each liver beholds its shattered core,
Yaf taḥkayt id nay idran. <sup>50</sup>	For the tale of our misfortune, we deplore.

After the Babors expedition which broke the independence of eastern Kabylia in 1852, Randon penetrated in 1854, in the heart of the Kabyle Massif: Si Ṭaher, his sister Faḍma n Sumer,<sup>51</sup> Bu Bayla and so many others put up a strong resistance, and it is only in 1857 that they were defeated at Icerriden, west of Larbea nat Iraten.<sup>52</sup> Following the military campaign of 1857 and its severe consequences in the history of the region, General Hanoteau collected poems that documented a determining period “where Kabylia as Athens, after the battle of Chaeronea, began to doubt its gods;”<sup>53</sup> this was a turning point in the mystical and philosophical tendencies of Kabylia, which up to that point had considered the peace in the region as maintained by the local saints.

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<sup>47</sup> Tahar Oussedik, *Bou-Baghla: L'Homme à La Mule* (Reghaïa: ENAG Edition, 2006).

<sup>48</sup> C.A. Julien, *Histoire de l'Algérie Contemporaine: La Conquête et Les Débuts de La Colonisation (1827-1871)*, vol. 1 (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1979), 390.

<sup>49</sup> Salem Chaker, ‘Une Tradition de Résistance et de Lutte : La Poésie Berbère Kabyle, Un Parcours Poétique’, *Revue Du Monde Musulman et de La Méditerranée*, no. 51 (1989): 14.

<sup>50</sup> A. Hanoteau, *Poésies Populaires de La Kabylie Du Jurjura* (Alger: Bastide, 1922), 137.

<sup>51</sup> Lit. Of Sumer, the village.

<sup>52</sup> Farida Aït Ferroukh, ‘Situation d'Impasse et Agents de La Culture’, 2002, Editions du Tell edition, 56.

<sup>53</sup> A. Hanoteau and Letourneux, *La Kabylie et Les Coutumes Kabyles*, vol. 2 (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, n.d.), 103.

We find this representation of the world clearly expressed in the generational narratives written by the author Taklit about the village of Bugaë, which is located northwest of Setif and south of Bejaïa. Indeed, the elder Slimen, founder of the hamlet in the eighteenth century, decided to settle with his family on Mount Tafat following a dream that he interpreted as coming from the local saint. It is said that Mma Tafat –lit. mother light– had made this summit the place of her retreat. She used to go there every year when the almond trees bloomed in spring and meditated alone, as “contemplation could only be achieved alone in the intimacy of nature.”<sup>54</sup> When the wishes were granted, it was the manifestation of the miracles of Mma Tafat; the mountain dwellers then paid homage to her in summer by organizing *zerda* –rejoicings that can last several days and paced by the rhythm of the *zorna*<sup>55</sup> and the tambourines, and it is with a heart filled with emotion that they invoked the *baraka* –divine grace– of Ma Tafat.<sup>56</sup> Towards the end of August, the harvest festivities became a celebration in honor of the saint. She is then described as a *buhaliya*, “a naïve woman inspired by the good.”<sup>57</sup>

These thaumaturgists then seem to constitute an essential component with a well-defined role in the Maghreb population, a role that was articulated around a certain devotion to their land and which, in Benachenhou’s analysis, provoked very intense feelings among the population.<sup>58</sup> Hence, such a saint would transform himself into a dove, which would come and fly near the women gathered in the cemetery around a grave. Another would spread out a sheepskin on the wave of the ocean, crouch on it, and sail on this delicate boat across the vastness of the ocean; another would feed his pupils with a crust of lime torn from the walls of the school, transformed into a succulent cake in the mouths of the children.<sup>59</sup> Moreover, the salutary storm which rose in favor of the Algerians to rout the armada of Charles V was provoked by the Algerian saint Sidi Dada who, seeing the enemy vessels, entered the sea, gave a blow to the sea and provoked the terrible waves, cause of the Spanish debacle.<sup>60</sup>

Although dead, the saint continues in the general conception to accomplish miracles. His spiritual action carries on, contrary to the orthodox Muslim belief.<sup>61</sup> It is especially in the visions and dreams that one witnesses his perennality, the Saint appears to one through one’s senses.

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<sup>54</sup> Saâd Taklit, *Djebel Tafat: Bougaâ de 1830 à 1962 Histoire et Légendes* (Alger: Dahlab, 2012), 29.

<sup>55</sup> A double-reed wind instrument of the large oboe family. Camille Penet-Merahi, ‘L’Ecriture Dans La Pratique Des Artistes Algériens de 1962 à Nos Jours.’ (Université Clermont Auvergne, 2019), 58.

<sup>56</sup> Taklit, *Djebel Tafat: Bougaâ de 1830 à 1962 Histoire et Légendes*, 30.

<sup>57</sup> Taklit, 30.

<sup>58</sup> A. Benachenhou, *Connaissance Du Maghreb: Notions d’Ethnographie, d’Histoire et de Sociologie* (Alger: Editions Populaires de l’Armée, 1971), 137.

<sup>59</sup> Benachenhou, *Connaissance Du Maghreb: Notions d’Ethnographie, d’Histoire et de Sociologie*.

<sup>60</sup> Benachenhou, 137.

<sup>61</sup> Benachenhou, 137.

Indeed, this approach maintained in people's minds that Kabylia had never been defeated because it was under the protection of the forty saints – *rabein n curfa*— sparing the mountains from the French penetration.<sup>62</sup> The *scholar-Sufi*<sup>63</sup> Ḥusayn al-Wartilānī already asserted in his time that “the power of the Turkish sovereign is without effect on the populations [...] and only the influence of the marabouts and the men of good will exert itself somewhat on them.”<sup>64</sup>

In a context of acute crisis, the nineteenth century will see the expansion of the *Tarahmanit* –lit. the clement, in Arabic known as the *Rahmāniyya*, a kind of brotherhood which will play, in addition to its role of spiritual and religious authority, a political and even military role; its *xwen* –adherents of the confraternity, integrated the ranks of the insurgents at the time of the various insurrections which took place in Kabylia.<sup>65</sup> Indeed, the functioning of the *Tarahmanit* had demonstrated that it allowed for equal opportunities in terms of access to education and to religious leadership, it brought with it the possibility that a confrere from outside the family could be appointed to replace the *cix* —leader, either during the latter's lifetime, or elected by the confreres.<sup>66</sup> This simple distinction, that I conceive to be the point for the embrace of democracy in Kabylia, will result in the *Tarahmanit* becoming a real counterweight to Ottoman power and later on the French,<sup>67</sup> for it should be noted that the rivalries that divided the caliphates so sharply did not exist among the *xwen*. All the *Tarahmanit*, having the same rule, the same ritual, the same *dikr* —remembrance and invokings of God, could change their *mqaddem* –the officiant of the confraternity– without failing their religious duty.<sup>68</sup> For Adli, the current succeeded in consolidating the management of the region's relationship with the sacred by introducing the mystical link through Sidi Mḥemmed u ʿabderrahman bu Qebrin, its founder.<sup>69</sup>

Upon his return to the At Smaeil —his native village— after several missionary activities in Sudan, India, Hedjaz and Turkey,<sup>70</sup> Sidi Mḥemmed bu Qebrin enjoyed such success that he soon had the marabouts of the neighborhood against him, whose lodges and places of worship were deserted in

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<sup>62</sup> Adli, *La Kabylie à l'Épreuve Des Invasions: Des Phéniciens à 1900*, 130.

<sup>63</sup> A concept that I borrow from Eric Geoffroy, specialist in Sufism and the Shādiliya tariqa. E. Geoffroy, *Une Voie Soufie Dans Le Monde: La Shādiliyya* (Paris: Maisonneuve & Lacrose, 2005).

<sup>64</sup> Ḥussin al-Wartilānī, *Nuzhat Al-Anzār Fi Faḍl 'ilm at-Tārīkh Wal-Akhhbār al-Mashhūra Bi Ar-Riḥla al-Wartilāniyya* (Alger: Editions Pierre Fontana, 1908).

<sup>65</sup> Aït Ferroukh, 'Situation d'Impasse et Agents de La Culture'.

<sup>66</sup> Adli, *La Kabylie à l'Épreuve Des Invasions: Des Phéniciens à 1900*, 124.

<sup>67</sup> Benachenhou, *Connaissance Du Maghreb: Notions d'Ethnographie, d'Histoire et de Sociologie*, 142.

<sup>68</sup> Louis Rinn, 'Chapitre XXX: Les Rahmanya - Si Mahmed-Ben-Abd-Er-Rahman-Bou-Qobrin (1208 de l'Hégire. -- 1793-1794 de J.-C.)', in *Marabouts Et Khouan - Etude Sur l'Islam En Algérie*, Adolphe Jourdan (Alger, 1884), 479.

<sup>69</sup> Adli, *La Kabylie à l'Épreuve Des Invasions: Des Phéniciens à 1900*, 125.

<sup>70</sup> Rinn, 'Chapitre XXX: Les Rahmanya - Si Mahmed-Ben-Abd-Er-Rahman-Bou-Qobrin (1208 de l'Hégire. -- 1793-1794 de J.-C.)', 452.

droves to come and hear his lectures and receive Sidi Mḥemmed's *baraka* —grace,<sup>71</sup> which earned him an invitation to come and profess at the grand mosque of the Ḥamma, in Algiers, where his reputation as a scholar and miracle-working saint had already preceded him.<sup>72</sup> This event was followed by a decisive incident, namely that some marabouts and *euḷamā*' of Algiers accused him of wanting to create a schism. They got him to appear before a tribunal, to explain and justify his alleged ecstasies, revelations, dreams and apparitions.<sup>73</sup> The trial was concluded with the acquittal of Sidi Mḥemmed<sup>74</sup> who then decided to return to Kabylia to found the Taraḥmanit order in his native village of At Smaeil.

The aforementioned incident serves as an illustration of the dichotomy between the urban Islamic practices, which were closely aligned with the political center during the Turkish period, referred to as *ddula tineslemt* –lit. Muslim state,<sup>75</sup> and the local Islam that encompassed a distinct paradigm deemed heretical by the former.

The widespread acceptance of Taraḥmanit among a significant portion of the population attests to its credibility beyond just its scriptural components and highlights the paradigm shift that occurred as it came to embody the values and worldview of the local ethos. This appropriation of religion is exemplified in the leadership structure of the order, where Taraḥmanit diverges from orthodox practices that restrict leadership positions to men. In the nineteenth-century Kabylia, the Taraḥmanit's emphasis on popular practice over scriptural culture allowed for the emergence of Lalla Xdiḡa of At Smaeil and her daughters as the *de facto* directors of the order, as they were the individuals to whom the devotees' wishes were primarily directed.<sup>76</sup>

Another prominent figure exemplifying this phenomenon is Lalla Faḍma n Sumer, to whom was attributed the honorary title of *Lalla*, feminine of *Sidi*,<sup>77</sup> denoting a revered and holy woman;<sup>78</sup> and which signifies her acquisition of both mystical and military authority. Leader of the Kabyle revolt and a combatant representing the tribes, she participated in several battles and won the battle of Haut

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<sup>71</sup> Rinn, 453.

<sup>72</sup> Rinn, 453.

<sup>73</sup> Rinn, 'Chapitre XXX: Les Rahmanya - Si Mahmed-Ben-Abd-Er-Rahman-Bou-Qobrin (1208 de l'Hégire. -- 1793-1794 de J.-C.)'.

<sup>74</sup> M. Bachtarzi, *Le Livre Des Dons de Dieu: Glose de La Rahmaniyya*, trans. P.A. Giacobetti (Alger: Ronéotypé, 1946), 5.

<sup>75</sup> Sadek Bala, 'Notice Sur Le Cheikh Al-Wartilani Sidi al-Hûsin, Un Savant-Soufi de La Kabylie Au XVIIIe Siècle', *Awal: Cahiers d'Etudes Berbères*, no. 33 (2006): 39.

<sup>76</sup> The visibility of the female gender and their active participation was also distinctive of the confederation. Indeed the Taraḥmanit order had a large number of female followers or *xwatet*, having superior *mqedmat* everywhere it formed groups of some importance Rinn, 'Chapitre XXX: Les Rahmanya - Si Mahmed-Ben-Abd-Er-Rahman-Bou-Qobrin (1208 de l'Hégire. -- 1793-1794 de J.-C.)', 457.

<sup>77</sup> Farid Benramdane, 'Espace, Signe et Identité Au Maghreb: Du Nom Au Symbole', *Insaniyat: Revue Algérienne d'Anthropologie et Sciences Sociales*, no. 9 (December 1999): 1–4.

<sup>78</sup> J.M. Dallet, *Dictionnaire Kabyle - Français* (Paris: SELAF, 1982), 437.

Sebaou in 1854.<sup>79</sup> In 1857, however, Marshal Randon's troops succeeded in occupying At Iraten following the battle of Icerriden, where she was arrested and imprisoned.<sup>80</sup> In his book entitled *Poésie populaire de la Kabylie du Djurdjura*, Hanoteau noted some popular poems following the tragedy from which the following verses, of Qassi n-at-u Yaḥya from Adeni —At Iraten, we read:

Amallah! a Faḍma n Sumer,	Oh fate, so cruel and unkind,
Lalla am amzur <sup>81</sup> d lḥenni ,	Faḍma of Sumer, the lady with henna hair entwined,
Isemis inuda <sup>82</sup> lerac,	Her name resonated through the tribes wide,
Yabb <sup>w</sup> iṭ tyab ur talli,	He bore her afar, she's lost, no trace to be found,
Ahaṭ di bni Sliman,	Perchance at Bni Sliman, she'll yet be unbound,
Sil a yizri a d lḥamli. <sup>83</sup>	Flow, torrents of tears, my anguish unveiled, In sorrow's embrace, my spirit is veiled.

The following poem also encapsulates the profound anguish experienced by the poet upon witnessing the devastating destruction of his village:

A jaggaḥ deg lmaqamaṭ	Midst chapels laid waste, a sight so forlorn,
Sidi Eli u Tayer n ṭizi	First, Sid Eli u-Tayer, from pass of the morn,
Ajaebub deg ufos ines	With a monocular held firm and tight,
Yer Waylal zidet tamuḥli	[Randon] beholds Waylal's sweet and tranquil sight,
Amallah a rabein ṣaleḥ	Oh fate, how cruel thy hand does play,
Mmi ṭeryiḍ a Bu Ziki <sup>84</sup>	Forty saints, where were you that day, When flames engulfed Bu Ziki's air; Did you not hear the cries of despair?

<sup>79</sup> Oussedik, *Bou-Baghla: L'Homme à La Mule*, 50.

<sup>80</sup> Malha Benbrahim, 'Documents Sur Fadhma N'Soumeur (1830-1861)', *Clio. Femmes, Genre, Histoire*, no. 9 (1999): 247–56.

<sup>81</sup> 'Cherche - Amzur', accessed 13 May 2023, <https://www.dictionnaire-kabyle.com/search/?translation=kab&query=amzur>. Hanoteau originally transcribed the term 'amm amezour' and translated the verse as follows: the lady with headbands and henna. However, the term seems to mean hair according to general usage.

<sup>82</sup> 'Phrases Avec : Inuda — Tatoeba', accessed 13 May 2023, <https://tatoeba.org/fr/sentences/search?query=inuda%20&from=kab&to=fra>. The term seems to designate the act of searching, a literal translation would be: 'her name has searched the tribes' which would be unclear. Following various discussions with Kabyle speakers, the meaning given to this phrase is 'her name explored the tribes' or 'her name travelled the tribes' which would mean that her name—the person—was famous and popular among the tribes.

<sup>83</sup> Hanoteau, *Poésies Populaires de La Kabylie Du Jurjura*, 132. Lit. Translation: O woeful fate Faḍma of Sumer/ the lady with the henna hair/ Her name echoed the tribes/ He took her away, she is missing, she has disappeared/ Maybe she is at Bni Sliman/ Flow my tears in torrents

<sup>84</sup> Hanoteau, 129–30.

The colonization of Kabylia by the French had far-reaching ramifications on the region's economic landscape, leading to a destabilization of the socio-political order and subsequent uprisings that occurred in 1864 and 1865, both of which were met with severe repression. In the aftermath of these events, a significant portion of the Kabyle population rallied behind an unofficial leader, Si Amezian u Ḥaddad of Sedduq –in the Soummam valley, who assumed the role of representative for the Tarahmanit movement in the Tel and Kabylia regions. This same individual, known as Cix aḤaddad would go on to play a decisive role during the insurrection of 1871. The subsequent actions of the *xwen*, became more organized and strategic, merging with the efforts of the *imsseblen* and the *sebbahi*,<sup>85</sup> the latter will appear more clearly in 1871 as fighters without the preeminence of a religious banner.<sup>86</sup> Historical accounts by Hanoteau and Letourneux documented their participation in battles fought by At Iraten against Bey Muḥammad *ad-Dabbah* –the slaughterer, in 1745.

The core meaning of the *imssebel* – sing. of *imsseblen* refers to a devoted individual who willingly sacrifices their life in defense of the land against foreign invaders.<sup>87</sup> Adli emphasizes that traditionally, *imsseblen* were not sought after for tribal conflicts, but exclusively reserved for defending the land against external conquerors.<sup>88</sup> The process of recruiting these volunteers was marked by veneration and involved a saint organizing the selection after consulting with village leaders. When presenting themselves as *imssebel* candidates, individuals customarily provided their name, their father's name, their tribe, and their village as a form of identification.<sup>89</sup>

Following the Franco-Prussian War in August 1870 and the subsequent downfall of Napoleon III's Empire, Algeria underwent a transition from military to civilian rule as the Third Republic took hold.<sup>90</sup> During this period, a series of decrees were issued between October and December 1870, among which the most significant was the *Crémieux* text. This text, known as the *Crémieux* Decree, marked a turning

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<sup>85</sup> The name is the French form of the Ottoman Turkish word *sipahi* meaning cavalry. The spahis were originally a traditional cavalry corps of the Dey of Algiers. They were then, after the conquest of Algeria by France, integrated into the *Armée d'Afrique*, which depended on the French army Laurent Mirouze and Stéphane Dekerle, *The French Army in the First World War - to Battle 1914: Uniforms - Equipment - Armament*, vol. 1 (Vienna: Verlag Militaria, 2006), 391.

<sup>86</sup> The *sebbahis* rebelled in January 1871 in the center and east of the country. This rebellion, supposedly encouraged by the Tarahmanit, of which a significant number of *spahis* were members, was hardly repressed due to the lack of mobilized troops. M. Kedidir, 'Insurrection de 1871 (al-Moqrani, Mohamed et Cheikh al-Haddad).', in *Dictionnaire Du Passé de l'Algérie : De LaPréhistoire à 1962* (Alger: Edition DGRST / CRASC, 2015), 251.

<sup>87</sup> Adli, *La Kabylie à l'Épreuve Des Invasions: Des Phéniciens à 1900*, 133.

<sup>88</sup> Adli, 133.

<sup>89</sup> Adli, 133–34; The Tarahmanit officially counting between 250,000 and 300,000 followers, not counting the women who in the sole commune of Akbou in Bejaia, amounted to a number close to 4,000. Rinn remark that they were actively involved in all the Algerian insurrections, not always as direct instigators, but at least as "active agents coming to blend in with the combatants, exciting them with their religious preaching." Rinn, 'Chapitre XXX: Les Rahmanya - Si Mahmed-Ben-Abd-Er-Rahman-Bou-Qobrin (1208 de l'Hégire. -- 1793-1794 de J.-C.)', 479.

<sup>90</sup> Kedidir, 'Insurrection de 1871 (al-Moqrani, Mohamed et Cheikh al-Haddad).', 251.

point in the colonial policy towards Algerians, as it abolished indigenous offices perceived as lenient and too closely aligned with the native population. Additionally, it aimed to dispossess farmers of their lands and enforce radical assimilation policies.<sup>91</sup>

As tensions escalated under the new colonial administration, Cix lMoqrani declared his belligerence<sup>92</sup> and mobilized an army of 1,500 infantry and cavalry from tribes in Greater Kabylia, the Central region, and Hodna.<sup>93</sup> In this insurrectionary climate, Cix Amezian aḤaddad, contacted by the emissaries of lMoqrani, resolved to declare war on April eighth at Sedduq. This declaration galvanized nearly one hundred thousand soldiers to join the cause, as coastal tribes joined the conflict, igniting a swath of unrest stretching from Tipaza to Collo in the east and from Bejaïa to the oases of Msila.<sup>94</sup> The draconian means used by the French army, infinitely superior to those of 1867, succeeded in putting an end to the insurrection and a terrible repression fell upon Kabylia where death sentences and exile to Cayenne and New Caledonia reigned.<sup>95</sup> The first General Governor, Vice-Admiral de Gueydon, former Governor of Martinique and Maritime Prefect, stated that “the rebels will be treated as rebels and not as belligerents [...] the indigenous people are defeated and must submit to our law.”<sup>96</sup>

According to Ageron, the severity of the repression inflicted upon the Kabyle insurrection far exceeded the magnitude of the uprising itself.<sup>97</sup> The individual and collective sequester dispossessed the region of more than 2,639,000 hectares,<sup>98</sup> in other words, an area 58 times the size of Oslo today. This extensive land seizure precipitated a substantial transfer of Kabyle property into European ownership,<sup>99</sup> with more than five thousand French people acquiring concessions the subsequent year.<sup>100</sup>

In the aftermath of these events, the Kabyle people found themselves destitute, stripped of their resources and amputated of their lands. Echoing the sentiments of the era, a contemporary poet poignantly expressed the plight of the Kabyle community, stating that for them, the situation could be described as one of ruin and deprivation:

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<sup>91</sup> Kedidir, 251.

<sup>92</sup> The declaration supports the recognition of the state of war and allows protection and submission to the laws of war.

<sup>93</sup> Kedidir, ‘Insurrection de 1871 (al-Moqrani, Mohamed et Cheikh al-Haddad).’, 251–52.

<sup>94</sup> Kedidir, 252.

<sup>95</sup> Aït Ferroukh, ‘Situation d’Impasse et Agents de La Culture’.

<sup>96</sup> C.A. Julien, *Histoire de l’Algérie Contemporaine: De l’Insurrection de 1871 Au Declenchement de La Guerre de Libération (1954)*, vol. 2 (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1979), 10.

<sup>97</sup> C.R. Ageron, *Histoire de l’Algérie Contemporaine* (Paris: PUF, 1980), 42.

<sup>98</sup> Julien, *Histoire de l’Algérie Contemporaine: La Conquête et Les Débuts de La Colonisation (1827-1871)*, 1:494.

<sup>99</sup> Julien, 1:494.

<sup>100</sup> M. Gaïd, *Les Beni-Yala et Les Vérités Historiquessur l’insurrection de 1871* (Alger: Imprimerie Générale, 1952), 177.

Waḥed u sebēin d leflas  
Irza medden deg ammas<sup>101</sup>

In the year of ‘71, our fortunes were undone,  
A ruinous blow, our backs heavily weighed upon.

## The Emergence of Si Mḥand

It is there, marked by the pandemonium that resulted from the terrible repression of 1871, and following the weakening of the Taraḥmanit that the melodies of Si Mḥand will emerge from the prevailing cacophony. Si Mḥand u Mḥand At Ḥamaduc (1845/48-1905/6) was born in Icereiwen upstream of Tizi Rached in the confederation of At Iraten in Kabylia.<sup>102</sup> His family was that of the At Ḥamaduc, his father, Amezian At Ḥamaduc had as wife Faḍma At Seiḍ of Taddart Bʷada, as for his paternal uncle Cix Arezqi, he was a scholar in Muslim law and head of a Taraḥmanit branch.<sup>103</sup> Si Mḥand’s introduction to the study of the Qur’ān commenced under the guidance of Cix Arezqi, followed by his further education at the esteemed zāwiya of Sidi ʿabderrahman of Illoulou, where he delved deeper into the intricacies of Muslim law, among other subjects.<sup>104</sup>

The Icereiwen community used to inhabit a village of the same name, situated atop the ridge presently occupied by the military barracks of Fort National. Following the 1857 campaign and the subsequent arrest of Lalla Faḍma n Sumer in close proximity to the village, Marshal Randon, in his pursuit to establish a fortified center, displaced the inhabitants through expropriation.<sup>105</sup> Consequently, the displaced Kabyles sought to establish a new village, which they aptly named after their former place of residence. Historically, the village boasted a religious edifice, the zawiya Meammra, where the teachings of Sidi Xlil were disseminated. It was within this *zawiya* that Si Mḥand commenced his Quranic studies.<sup>106</sup> The *zawiya*’s founder is believed to have been a dervish, and one of his great-grandsons, Cix u ʿrab, had played a significant political role in Greater Kabylia prior to 1857.<sup>107</sup>

Si Mḥand inherited a strong Quranic and scriptural background through his family traditions, significantly shaping his linguistic and referential framework. After gaining knowledge in Muslim law, he attained the status of a *ṭaleb* —advanced learner of Islamic jurisprudence. His family then became

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<sup>101</sup> J.D. Luciani, ‘Chansons Kabyles’, *Adolphe Jourdan Imprimeur-Libraire de l’Académie*, Revue Africaine: Bulletin des Travaux de la Société Historique Algérienne, 43, no. 232 (1899): 19. In several works the poem is attributed to the poet Smaïl Azzikiw although the latter is not mentioned in Jean-Dominique Luciani’s collection. Lit. translation: 1871 was the year of our ruin/It broke our backs.

<sup>102</sup> Magdalena Nowotna, *D’une Langue à l’Autre: Essai Sur La Traduction Littéraire* (Aux lieux d’être, 2005), 94.

<sup>103</sup> Berrichi, ‘Rétrospective Des Différents Ecrits Sur Si Mohand et Poèmes Inédits: Extraits d’un Muḥaf – Manuscrit de La Zaouïa d’Illoulou Oumalou, Kabylie’.

<sup>104</sup> Mouloud Feraoun, *Les Poèmes de Si Mohand*, Les éditions de Minuit (Paris, 1960), 23.

<sup>105</sup> Ammar Ben Saïd, *Recueil de Poésies Kabyles: Texte Zouaoua* (Alger: Typographe Adolphe Jourdan, 1904), 107.

<sup>106</sup> Ben Saïd, 109.

<sup>107</sup> Hanoteau, *Poésies Populaires de La Kabylie Du Jurjura*, 83.



involved in the Kabyle insurrection of 1871 and was annihilated in the defeat of Icerriden. Si Mḥand witnessed the sequestration of his family's property and the confiscation of their lands, which were then distributed to settlers, leaving them destitute and marginalized,<sup>108</sup> family members were hunted down and executed, his uncle faced deportation to New Caledonia, and his father was executed at Fort National —present-day Larbea nat Iraten. Si Mḥand's own survival was owed to Captain Ravez, the head of the Indigenous Bureau, who deemed his death unnecessary.<sup>109</sup> Thus, he entered a period of instability and wandering, while his family was dispersed. He traversed various towns intermittently returning to his village. The scattered At Ḥamaduc sought refuge in other hamlets of Tizi Rached, finding allies in Bushel and Takaṭ. The poet's mother relocated to a different village with her youngest child, Mezian, while Si Mḥand's elder brother, Akli, departed for Tunisia, taking with him the majority of their father's remaining fortune.<sup>110</sup> As for Si Mḥand himself, he embarked on a nomadic existence, moving from one town to another, seeking employment but periodically returning to his village of origin.

A wandering poet, Si Mḥand spent most of his life traveling through Kabylia and various parts of Algeria on foot, enchanting audiences with his recitations. His extensive travels brought him to numerous towns and villages, with references to Aqbu, Sidi Eic, and Tazmelt resonating in his poetic verses as cherished memories.<sup>111</sup> Si Mḥand also ventured into cities such as Annaba, Bouira and Algiers. To get to Annaba, he used to go through Michelet— present day Eīn al-Ḥammam— nestled in the Atlas Mountains and the Tiḡuyda col. He then reached Tazmelt in the foothills of the Djurdjura —*Ġerġer*— mountain in the province of Bejaïa, Mecdella, Maillot, for a well-deserved halt at Akbu in the Soummam valley. From there, he joined Setif northeastern Algeria, in the high plateau region known as the Tell Atlas. From Setif at the end, he arrived at his chosen destination along the Sibus river, a watercourse in northeastern Algeria that flows through the Constantine Province and serves as a natural border between Algeria and Tunisia before eventually reaching the Mediterranean Sea.<sup>112</sup> During his travels, Si Mḥand would occasionally assume the role of a public writer, assisting workers who wished to send news to their families back in their villages. However, the most remarkable and astonishing of Si Mḥand's journeys was his arduous trek on foot to Tunis via Bizerte. This mythical journey exacted a toll on his physical strength, and as Adli emphasizes “only his conviction and

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<sup>108</sup> Mohand Aït Hamadouche, Mouloud Mammeri, and Tassadit Yacine, *Si Mohand: Isefra*, Orphée&La Découverte (Lion, 1994), 8.

<sup>109</sup> A. Lahlou, '1871 Dans La Poésie Orale Kabyle', *Etudes Françaises* 57, no. 1 (2021): 13.

<sup>110</sup> Berrichi, 'Rétrospective Des Différents Ecrits Sur Si Mohand et Poèmes Inédits: Extraits d'un Muḥaf – Manuscrit de La Zaouïa d'Illoulen Oumalou, Kabylie'.

<sup>111</sup> Adli, *Si Mohand Ou Mhand : Errance et Révolte*, 43.

<sup>112</sup> Adli, 45.

obstinacy helped him to accomplish, laughing at the stone borders but deeply outraged by the ingratitude of men.”<sup>113</sup>

Several reasons justify thus the anthropological analysis of Si Mḥand’s hagiographic journey: his century is one of upheavals, whether social, historical or spiritual. Stricken down with anathema in spite of himself, he seized the flames of the inferno of At Iraten and crafted them into masterful literary creations, concealing the grotesque reality of the landscape. Wandering from village to town, he transformed the tears of terror experienced by the people of his time. Si Mḥand emerges as a poet and author, the creator of a divine satire that transcends conventional boundaries.

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<sup>113</sup> Adli, 45.

# Chapter Two:

## Mḥand and the Portrait of God

Scarred then by his own destitution, by the horror he witnesses in 1871, Si Mḥand adorns himself with an antinomian piety, seemingly rooted in the *tamusni*—wisdom or knowledge according to Mammeri<sup>114</sup>— that he both practices and carries. For this Kabylia which is at a historical crossroads and at a pivotal juncture of its mystical and philosophical conception, Si Mḥand, in his persona, embodies two antithetical figures of the Kabyle literature: the cunning and irreverent *Mqidec*, alongside the wise and experienced *Amyar azemni*.<sup>115</sup> Acting as a guide and advisor. His poetry serves as a unifying force, bringing together disparate elements such as the sacred and the profane, the lofty and the mundane, the sublime and the trivial, as well as wisdom and levity.<sup>116</sup>

Drawing upon the Ahmed's approach to religion, it becomes evident that piety is not a uniform or stagnant construct but rather a multifaceted and evolving phenomenon influenced by a range of factors including personal experiences, cultural traditions, social norms, and political structures.<sup>117</sup> Therefore, when examining Si Mḥand's piety, it becomes crucial to consider his individual and societal background alongside the wider religious and cultural milieu of Kabyle society during the nineteenth century. For this purpose, Ahmed highlights the significance of exploring symbolic and performative practices in shaping religious experiences and expressions of piety.<sup>118</sup>

Si Mḥand's upbringing within a family tradition rooted in Quranic scriptural knowledge bestowed upon him a solid foundation of religious literacy, impacting his vocabulary, moral principles, and

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<sup>114</sup> Mouloud Mammeri et al., 'Dialogue on Oral Poetry', *Ethnography* 5, no. 4 (2004): 511–51.

<sup>115</sup> Mqidec, known as Hdidwen in other regions of Algeria, embodies a character typically associated with cunning and mischief. Often portrayed as a diminutive man or a small child akin to the iconic Little Thumb, Mqidec assumes the role of a protagonist in various narratives, such as the tale of *Mqidec & the Ogress*. In this particular story, Mqidec employs his wit and deceit to outsmart the ogress and evade the threat of being consumed. In contrast, Amyar azemni symbolizes the embodiment of ancestral wisdom within Kabyle folklore. Depicted as an elderly man adorned with a flowing white beard, indicative of his advanced age, Amyar azemni assumes the roles of a guide, advisor, and even a judge. His presence serves as a beacon of sagacity, offering valuable guidance and counsel to those in need. P. Mougin and K. Haddad-Wotling, *Dictionnaire Mondial Des Littératures* (Montreal: Larousse/VUEF, 2002), 136; M. Banham, *A History of Theatre in Africa* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 59; Emmanuel Plantade, 'Tertullien, Témoin Des Contes d'Afrique Du Nord', *Erudition Antiqua*, no. 9 (2017): 79.

<sup>116</sup> M. Bakhtin, *La Poétique De Dostoïevski*, trans. I. Koltitcheff (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1970), 171.

<sup>117</sup> Ahmed, *What Is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic*, 81.

<sup>118</sup> Michael E. Pregill, 'I Hear Islam Singing: Shahab Ahmed's What Is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic', *Harvard Theological Review* 110, no. 1 (2017): 149–65, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017816016000420>; Milad Milani, 'Shahab Ahmed and the Hermeneutics of Islam', *Journal for the Academic Study of Religion* 33, no. 2 (3 February 2021): 185–203, <https://doi.org/10.1558/jasr.42442>.

social values.<sup>119</sup> To gain a partial understanding of Si Mḥand’s lived and conveyed piety, it is essential to delve into the performance of his life, his poetry. Indeed, in this impasse where he found himself unable to perform the role that in the order of things should have been his —cleric of a village, as an indefatigable traveler he chooses to face a landscape that is continually changing at the rhythm of his footsteps, and the fixed village that he finds himself *held* to interpret, is his being, which remains fixed, and which is constantly faced with external struggles —men, events— and internal scuffles —love, longing. These specific traditions and context find resonance in Ahmad’s perspective on Islam, where the fluidity and adaptability of religious practices intersect with individual experiences and the socio-cultural milieu.

According to Ahmed’s perspective on Islam, this aforementioned interpretation holds significant validity. Ahmed’s theoretical framework posits that individuals do not possess predetermined identities or fixed roles; instead, they construct their identities and make sense of the world through their interactions with others and the symbols and interpretations associated to those interactions; hence the emphasis on the importance of context and cultural interpretation in understanding Islamic traditions and cultural practices.<sup>120</sup> Si Mḥand’s conscious decision to embark on a path of traveling rather than conforming to the conventional role of a village cleric can be viewed as a symbolic act of resistance against prevailing social norms and societal expectations that would have confined him to a predetermined position. His poetry can also be seen as a way of making sense of his experiences and conflicts, and conveying his own sense of piety. Through his poetic compositions, Si Mḥand introduces novel implications and symbols that invigorate our perception of his identity and lived encounters, enabling a more nuanced understanding of his intricate existence.

Within Si Mḥand’s poetic repertoire, numerous verses poignantly delve into the themes of human ingratitude and the pettiness of individuals. These following verses serve as illustrative examples, highlighting the breadth of Si Mḥand’s poetic exploration of these subjects:

Euhdey tikli d lmselmin,	I disavow all ties to Muslim creed,
At wec ḥal d dдин,	To those of diverse faiths indeed,
Widak ur nesei lmadheb,	Those of no principle nor creed,
Yer lear ay seān tismīn,	Shame and dishonor are all they heed,
S issey testḥīn,	

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<sup>119</sup> Bouich Abdenour, ‘Translated Poems of the Berber Kabylean Poet Si Mohand Ou-Mhand (1845–1906)’, *Xanthos: A Journal of Foreign Literatures and Languages* 1 (2019): 47.

<sup>120</sup> Ahmed, *What Is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic*; Shahab Ahmed, *Before Orthodoxy: The Satanic Verses in Early Islam* (Harvard University Press, 2017).

A uliw barkak l̥ṣeb,	All that is grand and all that is fair, their envy and fear they
Mmi teyliḍ ḥed ur k issin,	cannot bear,
Medden ak d lkarein,	Oh heart, be still, do not despair,
Aka xir yalha ujerreb. <sup>121</sup>	In times of trouble, none seem to care,
	Ingratitude from all people I see,
	But it matters not, for every trial is a blessing to me.

Si Mḥand has also articulated his perspectives on specific historical events during the colonial period.

Di l̥yaci la ten issgaḡi, <sup>122</sup>	The Frenchman, with haste, rallied the crowd,
Di l̥eid <sup>123</sup> ur ten yeḡi,	No time for them to enjoy the holiday shroud,
Ṭaḍentiyyi gujlent tullas,	My heart aches for the damsels, orphaned or bereaved,
Wama at sukarḡi,	While the wretched, the dregs, are deceived,
Nzant lmraḡi,	The meadows are sold, no longer their own,
Bu tiyuga hat d axemmas. <sup>124</sup>	Once owners, now sharecroppers, bemoaned.

In addition to these themes, Si Mḥand's poetic repertoire encompasses profound explorations of poignant love experiences and the yearning for lost companionship. Through his verses, he delves into the complexities of human emotions, reflecting on the depths of affection and the enduring impact of separation. This is exemplified in the following selection of his poems, which eloquently encapsulate the range of sentiments associated with love and longing.

Ḥkuṭ i sabqa lbenat,	Tell the fairest maiden in all her grace,
Ṣḥab lgrenat,	Whose skin rivals the blossom of pomegranate lace,
Qbel aṭ nisin ntub,	Before her presence graced my world, I was devout,
Fellas ay neḡa ṣlat,	Neglecting prayers, all reason I did flout.
Crab u labsant	In wine and absinthe, my solace was found,
Duxan u lkif mektub	Tobacco and kif, my vices unbound.
Txadeiyyi zzin n ṣifat	Deceived by the allure of transient grace,
U rani fi ḥalat	Alas, a woeful state now I embrace,

<sup>121</sup> Ben Saïd, *Recueil de Poésies Kabyles: Texte Zouaoua*, 104.

<sup>122</sup> Ben Saïd, 212.

<sup>123</sup> Boulifa explains that the 2,000 *convoyeurs*, enlisted and sent to Madagascar, were in fact called to go either to Algiers, Bejaïa or Philippeville —present-day Skikda, the day before *leid tamziant* — lit. the beautiful feast or Ramḍān feast as it is called in other regions of the country. This sudden call, obliging each recruit to leave his home, to separate from his family on the day of their most beautiful feast, greatly grieved the poet who wept over the sad fate of all the abandoned girls; there were, in fact, among the volunteers, many married people and fathers of families.

<sup>124</sup> The term *xemmas* refers to free men who are bound to the owner of the land by a sharecropping contract: four fifths of the harvest goes to the owner and the remaining fifth is for them. R. Bellil and Institut national des langues et civilisations orientales Centre de recherche berbère, *Les Oasis Du Gourara, Sahara Algérien: Fondation Des Ksour. II* (Peeters, 1999), 99.

<p>I bedlen tmer s u xerrub.<sup>125</sup></p> <p>Also</p> <p>I yaḍiyi lqelbiw iḥcer,  Ma ara d nfekker,  Leḥbab ukud netmecci,  Hatan auk agumaḍ i lebḥar,  Baeden i u qeṣṣer,  Iḍul u brid si tikli,  Yenyayi uliw s lekfer,  A lfahmin lḥeṣr,  Isteemel ḥed ur it yecqi.<sup>126</sup></p>	<p>For who has traded dates for lowly carob's trace.</p> <p>I pity this heart, so tightly bound,  When thoughts arise, its depths resound,  For friends I cherish, far and away,  Across the seas, they roam and stray,  Distance separates our conversations,  A journey too long for such relations,  Revulsion grips, my heart in despair,  O soul that comprehends the burdens we bear,  Though feigning indifference, it weaves its disguise,  Within, it trembles, concealing its cries.</p>
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These examples, replete with symbolism and metaphorical expressions, serve as prominent testimonies to the discourse articulated by Si Mḥand, a figure of public significance. In his poetic endeavor, he transcends the realm of personal existence, recognizing that his village, tantamount to his essence, cannot be confined to the boundaries of a solitary individual. Consequently, his piety assumes a communal dimension, one that is neither secluded nor internalized, but rather finds expression and embodiment through the medium of his poetic language and performative artistry, reverberating for the world to apprehend. This approach acquires particular significance when examining Si Mḥand's piety, as his poetry diverges from dogmatic controversies and rigid adherence to prescribed religious rituals. Instead, it delves into the lived experience of faith and destiny, encapsulating a deeply personal and idiosyncratic relationship with spirituality and its manifestations in practice.

Drawing upon Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque, the present argument posits that Si Mḥand's poetic style embodies a transformative shift in the perception of reality, whereby the present assumes a preeminent status as the primary mode of existence. Within the conventional poetic genres of the era, such as *tiqsidin* —epics or long narratives, the subjects are situated within the realm of the absolute

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<sup>125</sup> Ben Saïd, *Recueil de Poésies Kabyles: Texte Zouaoua*, 162. In Algeria, the date is a precious fruit that occupies an important place in the culture and culinary tradition of the country. It is the primary fruit with which the fast is broken during Ramḍān, and is often offered as a sign of hospitality and generosity on special occasions. The carob tree, on the other hand, is a plant that grows abundantly in certain regions of Algeria and produces a fruit called carob. Although carob is also used in Algerian cuisine, it does not have the same cultural value as dates. Thus, the expression 'do not trade your date for carob' means that you should not exchange something of great value for something of lesser or little value.

<sup>126</sup> Ben Saïd, 138.

past, steeped in myth and legend.<sup>127</sup> This temporal positioning engenders a palpable sense of detachment between the reader and the subject matter, as if the events unfold from a distant vantage point. In stark contrast, Si Mḥand propounds his subjects within the immediacy of the present, eschewing any epic or tragic distance. Consequently, his poetry emanates an aura of unmediated and even colloquially familiar engagement with living contemporaries, wherein all are cast as active participants within the shared social and cultural fabric. This novel orientation toward reality aligns strikingly with the quintessential traits of the carnivalesque, characterized by its fervent emphasis on the present moment and the quotidian aspects of existence.

At its outset, permeated by a profound sense of personal decline, the poet undertakes to weave the motif of injustice as a recurring theme within his artistic expressions. Evidently, the notion of injustice in its broad sense, or the perceived wrongs endured by the poet throughout his life, assumes a significant role in shaping his innermost being. Such experiences engender a distinctive and idiosyncratic bond with the divine, one that defies conventional codes of conduct. This unconventional spiritual connection becomes evident within the ensuing poem, wherein the poet's intricate relationship with God unfolds, characterized by its departure from established norms and expectations.

Zik nni nek d ṭaleb,	In days of yore, a cleric I was
N seṭin n ḥizb [...],	With sixty suras read without a pause
Di lemḥayen neṭeṭiḥ,	Then afflictions and sorrows my spirit bore,
Nuday d ak <sup>w</sup> leyrib,	Through exiled lands, I traversed, yearning for more.
Kul lbilaḡ baddey fellas,	I journeyed to cities galore
Tura [...],	Now, in misery's clasp, my spirit feels ensnared,
S ḥif umea ccarb,	In the solace of drink, my solace is tackled.
Win i yiwten Reb at iḡas . <sup>128</sup>	To those who point fingers, casting blame and disdain, God's retribution shall visit, bringing equal pain.

In this poem, Si Mḥand demonstrates a subversive approach to God and an acceptance of the trials and tribulations that have befallen him. Through his words, he acknowledges his previous role as a cleric, indicating a past commitment to religious devotion and his familiarity with Islamic teachings, as evidenced by his mention of having memorized sixty suras. However, his narrative evolves to

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<sup>127</sup> Ali Chwimet, 'Le Paradigme de "Nous" et "Vous" Dans l'Oeuvre de Lounis Ait Mguellet: Etude Semantique' (Bouira, Akli Mohand Oulhadh, 2019), 38.

<sup>128</sup> Aït Hamadouche, Mammeri, and Yacine, *Si Mohand: Isefra*, 28–29. Yore I was a cleric/ With sixty suras [...] / Then I suffered all the pains/ Travelled all the places of exile/ Approached all the cities/ Now [...] / I undergo the misery and the drink/ But to whoever blames me God will send the same evils.

encompass a narrative of suffering and exile, implying that he has encountered profound difficulties and challenges in his personal journey. Yet, rather than resenting or rejecting these hardships, Si Mḥand exhibits a sense of acceptance and resignation towards them. His line “*di lemḥayen neṭeaṭib,*” translating into how he suffered all the pains, reflects his willingness to endure and experience the full range of tribulations that life has presented him. This stance signifies an acknowledgment of the inherent nature of human existence, where suffering and adversity are integral components.

Si Mḥand’s subversive approach to God becomes more apparent in the subsequent line, “*win i yiwten Reb at iqas,*” equating with the meaning of whoever blames him God will send the same evils. This verse conveys his belief in divine justice and retribution, suggesting that he perceives God as an active agent in the distribution of both blessings and hardships. Moreover, it implies that the blame or judgment placed upon him by others holds little significance, as the adversity he faces is ultimately determined by God’s will. By linking his misery and indulgence in drink to a higher purpose, Si Mḥand challenges conventional notions of piety and righteousness. His perspective suggests that even in moments of despair and in seeking solace through drinking, he is still subject to the divine plan. Consequently, any condemnation or reproach directed at him for his circumstances would be tantamount to questioning the wisdom and choices of God, bordering on blasphemy.

Si Mḥand’s spiritual trajectory appears to be influenced by the *uṣyya* —spiritual lineage—<sup>129</sup> of Sidi Mḥammed bu Qebrin which played a formative role in his youth. These core beliefs eventually shaped Si Mḥand’s perception of his place in the world as that of a transient traveler, a “stranger” who “forces [his] mind to meditate.”<sup>130</sup> Through his affiliation with the Taraḥmanit, he develops a distinct understanding of God, echoing the teachings of the confederation’s founder.

His creative impulse, far from being faded by his impotence to regain a place that had been but could no longer be, lead him to conceive his tragedy as a spectacular representation of divine essence. The depiction of the divine acquires a dual nature. On the one hand, it presents the Almighty as transcendent and separate from the material world. On the other hand, it also depicts the Bestower of destiny as immanent, intimately connected to earthly matters and actively present in the material world. This perspective allows for a direct and personal relationship between God and human beings. Within this framework, Si Mḥand ventures to address God with audacity and irreverence in some of

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<sup>129</sup> the term carries the meaning of testament or advice. Within the Taraḥmanit order, it pertains to the spiritual guidance imparted by the leader to his disciples or followers. It can encompass both the oral teachings shared during the master's lifetime and the written instructions left behind after their passing, which serve as guidance for their successors.

<sup>130</sup> Rinn, ‘Chapitre XXX: Les Rahmanya - Si Mahmed-Ben-Abd-Er-Rahman-Bou-Qobrin (1208 de l’Hégire. -- 1793-1794 de J.-C.)’.



his poems. By navigating this delicate balance between the transcendent and the immanent, Si Mḥand’s poetic expression reveals his willingness to engage with the divine in a manner that may be perceived as impertinent or daring. Through his exploration of the duality of the divine and his audacious engagement with God, Si Mḥand embarks on a spiritual journey that transcends conventional boundaries. His poetry becomes a conduit for expressing his distinct understanding of the divine and his intricate relationship with the material world, demonstrating a nuanced approach to faith and a personal interpretation of religious teachings.

The poet’s exploration of the duality between the transcendent and immanent aspects of the divine finds expression in various facets of his poetry. One such manifestation can be observed in the following poem, where Si Mḥand contends that true understanding of God transcends mere scriptural knowledge. Instead, he suggests that a deeper comprehension of the divine can be attained through the lived experiences of individuals on Earth, including his own personal encounters.

Wi yebyan Rebbi at i waḥhed	He who loves God shall meditate on his unicity
Di Si Muḥ u Mḥand	Through Si Muḥ u-Mḥand
Ya ḥeṣra deg zik ines	Oh fateful fate, in days of yore
Iyra leq <sup>w</sup> ran ijewed	He delved in Quranic lore
Sidi Xlil iḡhed	A master of Sidi Xlil’s verse
Ma ḍebren di zin ines	His beauty’s worth, they did converse
Ziyemma Rebbi ijerred	Indeed, by God’s divine decree
Dex <sup>w</sup> an aked carb	Tobacco, wine, his sustenance be
D lkif ay d lqut ines	<i>Kif</i> , <sup>132</sup> too, for nourishment and delight,
Ad ak iniy awal ḥessed	As destined in his earthly plight
Rebbi akka ijerred	I shall unveil a truth, listen well
Mačči d lfehmi ay nxuṣ	This is how God designs
Ssney ayen ur issin ḥed	Doubt not my wisdom, for it is profound,
Ula ad naewed	Knowledge veiled, by mortal eyes unbound.
Nennum nreffed Imexṣuṣ <sup>131</sup>	Without repeating, I’ll tell you true, I’ve helped the indigent, more than a few.

The poet assumes the responsibility of his own engagement with earthly pleasures, such as the consumption of tobacco, wine, and *kif*—cannabis, while simultaneously justifying these indulgences

<sup>131</sup> Aït Hamadouche, Mammeri, and Yacine, *Si Mohand: Isefra*, 108–9.

<sup>132</sup> *Kif* refers to a type of cannabis or marijuana, often in the form of a powdered or resinous substance.

as manifestations of God’s will. Through rhetorical implication, Si Mḥand intimates that his participation in these earthly pleasures does not estrange him from God but rather aligns him with the divine will. This poetic assertion underscores Si Mḥand’s belief that the material realm is not devoid of divine presence or purpose. By intertwining his personal experiences with the divine, he challenges conventional notions that dichotomize spirituality and worldly existence. Si Mḥand implies that his engagement with earthly pleasures is not antithetical to his spiritual journey but rather an integral part of it—a manifestation of the divine essence that permeates both the sacred and the profane. Thus, his poetic exploration allows for a reinterpretation of the relationship between the material and the divine, highlighting the multifaceted nature of human experience and its inherent connection to the divine realm.

In the conventional understanding, God is commonly conceived as a pure and sacred being, while the consumption of intoxicating substances is typically regarded as morally wrong and impure. Nevertheless, in the context of the examined poem, the poet introduces a portrayal of God that includes a divine will endorsing the utilization of tobacco, wine, and *kif*—cannabis— as a means of sustenance for the protagonist, thereby blurring the demarcation between the sacred and the profane. This inclusion of these substances in God’s will resonates with the concept of the carnival, a social phenomenon characterized by the temporary inversion of societal norms and the acceptance of unconventional modes of expression. The juxtaposition of Si Mḥand’s religious education and his indulgence in these substances emphasizes the dual nature of human existence; his knowledge of the Quran and his indulgence in tobacco, wine, and *kif* represent a tension between the spiritual and the physical, the divine and the earthly. This duality aligns with a recurring theme within the carnivalesque tradition, where the celebration of the grotesque and corporeal intertwines with the veneration of the spiritual and intellectual realms. Consequently, the atypical portrayal of God’s will in this poem can be interpreted as an artistic manifestation of the carnivalesque spirit, embodying acts of subversion and the appreciation of alternative forms of expression.

In a notable instance, the poet, in one of his final poems composed during his imminent demise, recites the carnal desire he had for two women —presumably the nurses who took care of him during his stay at the Saint-Eugénie hospital in Michelet,<sup>133</sup> while closing each tercet with the recitation of the Islamic oath — *Cahāda*, a sacred and solemn declaration central to the Islamic faith.

Walay snet n teḥdayin,                      Two fair maidens caught my sight,  
cbant tisek<sup>w</sup>rin,

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<sup>133</sup> Ouahmi Ould-Braham, ‘Une Biographie de Si Mohand Est-Elle Possible ? Un Poète Kabyle Du XIXe Siècle « Revisité »’, *Études et Documents Berbères* 1, no. 19–20 (2002): 15,20.

La ilaha illa lLah,	Like partridges in clear daylight,
Lsant llebsa n iṛumiyin,	There is no God but <i>Allāh</i> ,
B ḥal tibiljikin,	In European garb they are dressed,
Muḥemmed Raşul Llah,	Belgians, I surmised, at best,
A wi yeṭsen yid sent saetin,	And Muḥammad is the envoy,
Yeḫul ney yeqim,	Ah who will have them for two hours in his bed,
A Rebbi steyfir Llah.	Pray if you must, or let it be,
	Oh God grant me forgiveness. <sup>134</sup>

Brugnatelli posits that within this poem, the poet firmly believes that the God with whom he has maintained an unwavering bond, despite his vicissitudes, can comprehend and pardon the frailties of his servant.<sup>135</sup> However, I perceive a different interpretation. On the one hand, one could consider that the Islamic oath —There is no God but Allāh, and Muḥammad is the envoy— is there merely to underline the poet’s appreciation of the beauty of the two women he likens to partridges, traditionally associated with allure and allurements—but also with temptation.<sup>136</sup> Marveling at divine creation, the oath here would replace the function of the phrase *Māshā’ Allāh* —God has willed it. Nevertheless, if not mistaken, the reference “*La ilaha illa lLah [...] Muḥemmed Raşul Llah*” holds profound religious significance, reinforcing the poem’s grounding in Islamic tradition. Yet the poet deliberately divides the oath in two and organically integrates it with the couplet about the beauty of young women, and then introduces more explicitly, this time without the use of metaphor —the partridge— the utterance on carnal desire.

The incorporation of the phrase “*La ilaha illa lLah*” signifying there is no God but *Allāh*, in immediate proximity to the depiction of two girls likened to partridges engenders a striking dichotomy between the terrestrial and the divine realms. This deliberate conjunction produces an oxymoronic fusion wherein the juxtaposition of the latter half of the Islamic declaration of faith and the subsequent portrayal of the girls donning European attire and exhibiting Belgian characteristics generates a perceptible dissonance and discord, giving rise to a carnivalesque ambiance.

The poem reaches its zenith of controversy as the speaker unabashedly expresses his yearning to have the two girls in his bed for a duration of two hours, dismissing any consideration for prayer or the ethical tenets of Islam. This rejection of prayer in favor of carnal desire assumes the form of a satirical mimicry of religious devotion. The audacity of this moment is further intensified by the utilization of

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<sup>134</sup> Brugnatelli, ‘L’oeuvre de Si Mohand Ou-Mhend Dans La Littérature Amazighe’, 61.

<sup>135</sup> Brugnatelli, 61.

<sup>136</sup> Jean Chevalier and Alain Gheerbrant, *Dictionnaire Des Symboles Mythes, Rêves, Coutumes, Gestes, Formes, Figures, Couleurs, Nombres*, 11th ed. (Paris: Robert Laffoni S.A. & Editions Jupiter, 1990), 740.

the line “*a wi yeṭsen yid [...]*” signifying ‘ah who will have them [...]’, insinuating that the speaker is not alone in harboring such desires. Concluding with the line “*a Rebbi steyfir Llah*” meaning Oh God grant me forgiveness, the poem reiterates the religious tension that pervades its essence, albeit serving as an ironic punchline, given the subject matter at hand. The inclusion of naturalistic elements, such as the comparison of the girls to partridges and the mention of European attire, contributes to the poem’s carnivalesque impact by anchoring it in the realm of the corporeal. The poem’s language is characterized by simplicity and directness, while the speaker’s desires are presented with matter-of-factness, amplifying their scandalous and provocative nature.

It is imperative to acknowledge that the literary analysis categorizes the poet’s discourse as ‘deviant,’ ‘scandalous,’ and even ‘blasphemous,’ with the notion of scandal encapsulating overt acts of transgression within the public sphere.<sup>137</sup> Si Mḥand’s poetry can be interpreted as embodying a distinct carnivalesque quality, as he deftly engages with the established norms and conventions of Kabyle society and religion, employing unexpected inversions and subversions.

### The Familiarity of the Sacred in Si Mḥand’s Work:

Close to God by his wisdom, but closest to men by his gluttonous desires and amorality, Si Mḥand is reminiscent of the king’s fool who in his archetypal dimension embodies the spirit of disorder and the enemy of limits, thus wielding impertinence in all its forms. As a Berber living under French colonial rule, Si Mḥand was keenly aware of the ways in which traditional religious practices were often used to justify colonial power structures and oppressive cultural norms. In this context he seems to have embodied the counterpart to absolute power, the fool, who comes to compensate for the impossibility of saying ‘the king is naked,’ galvanizing that power to convey messages on an alternative, offbeat, disruptive yet no-stakes mode.

In this context, laughter becomes a powerful tool for challenging established authority and expressing resistance. Si Mḥand’s carnivalesque laughter is indeed ambivalent. On the one hand, it is directed at the oppressive forces of colonialism and the rigid social hierarchy of Kabyle society portraying the absurdity and hypocrisy of those in power, mocking their pretensions and exposing their weaknesses. On the other hand, Si Mḥand’s laughter is also directed at something higher, namely God. His poetry employs a playful and irreverent tone when addressing God depicting him as a fallible figure. As previously discussed, the concept of God’s manifestation encompasses a duality, where earthly aspect

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<sup>137</sup> Aït Hamadouche, Mammeri, and Yacine, *Si Mohand: Isefra*, 14.

becomes concretely perceptible through people's experiences, if not the poet's own experiences. It is within this framework that the notion of an artisan-like deity, whose works may be fallible and even subject to questioning, finds resonance within the collective consciousness of the local audience. The familiarity of Si Mḥand's depiction of God is thus nurtured through the fusion of irreverence and familiarity, ultimately shaping the reception and understanding of the divine figure.

Familiarity holds a significant role within the cultural framework of the carnival. During this festive occasion, established norms and hierarchies undergo temporary suspension, facilitating an environment characterized by playfulness and creative expression. The familiar is inverted, distorted, and subverted, allowing for new and unexpected meanings to emerge.<sup>138</sup> In this sense, familiarity in the carnivalesque is not a comfortable or static notion, but rather a dynamic and subversive one. The familiar is rendered unfamiliar, while the unfamiliar is rendered familiar, engendering a state of ambiguity and potentiality. This transformative process facilitates the generation of new forms of knowledge, as the familiar is not taken for granted but instead subjected to critical examination and imaginative exploration. To illustrate Si Mḥand's approach more concretely, explicit examples shall be presented to highlight the manifestations of this carnivalesque familiarity.

Kulci yur Rebbi mektub,	In God's hands, all is fated,
Sæa yaṭnub,	One day He'll aid, never belated,
Sæa ihadder i uxaṣṣar. <sup>139</sup>	Yet, another day he is leading you to calamity's ravine.

The initial verses of this poem present a perspective aligned with the fatalistic underpinnings found in traditional Islamic theology, asserting the overarching predestination by God. However, the subsequent lines inject irony and paradox, challenging this fatalism. The assertion that God alternates between providing assistance and contemplating one's misfortunes introduces an element of unpredictability and arbitrariness. This irony, rather than stemming from a profound veneration of the divine, seems grounded in a familiarity with the world and its uncertainties.

Qessam agi d zzamel,	This God, a wretched entity in my plea,
Kulyum d aḥellel,	Daily I implore, on bended knee,
Dayam naṭnaji yureṣ,	Yet those who lack valor, He does heed,
Ifka i urnelli d lefḥel,	Cloves' fragrance, He bestows in excessive deed,

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<sup>138</sup> Bakhtin, *La Poétique De Dostoïevski*.

<sup>139</sup> Aït Hamadouche, Mammeri, and Yacine, *Si Mohand: Isefra*, 46–47.



anguish and afflictions of the heart. This plea underscores Si Mḥand's belief in God's omnipotence and capacity to intervene in human affairs. Nevertheless, it also exhibits an irreverent audacity, indicating a degree of familiarity with God's powers that surpasses conventional notions of reverence and deference.

The aforementioned examples shed light on the portrayal of God in Si Mḥand's poems, unveiling a complex and multifaceted depiction. God emerges as a Janusian figure embodying contradictory qualities: merciful yet simultaneously apathetic, indifferent, elusive, volatile, and capricious. This portrayal mirrors the ever-shifting landscape that engulfs the poet and reflects the shattered values that have permeated his being. Consequently, the representation of God materializes through a dynamic and fluid perception of the world, defying fixed interpretations. Indeed, by presenting God in such a manner, Si Mḥand humanizes the divine, rendering God more relatable and accessible. It is crucial to note, however, that this familiarity does not aim to disrespect or diminish the divine essence. Instead, it serves as a catalyst for divine renewal and the establishment of a new order. Si Mḥand's familiarity with God becomes a transformative force, challenging the prevailing state of affairs and beckoning for profound metamorphosis and revitalization. In this context, Si Mḥand's familiarity signifies not merely a rejection of the status quo but a fervent call for transformative change and renewal.

Si Mḥand's poetry exhibits a carnivalesque quality through the deliberate use of rhetorical devices, notably irony, to challenge the established assumptions and beliefs of the audience. Rather than presenting himself as the sole proprietor of an absolute truth, the poet embraces unconventional perspectives and fearlessly delves into forbidden realms of sapiential thoughts. By doing so, he compels his listeners to become intimately acquainted with the exalted subject matter of his verses, whether it be God or another noble theme. This process of familiarization serves as a catalyst for the emergence of new possibilities of truth. However, it necessitates a carnivalesque dismantling of the barriers that traditionally separate the audience from the poet. It demands the dissolution of social and intellectual distances; moreover, it presupposes a familiarization of attitudes towards the object of the poem itself, however noble and important it may be—in this case God. The subject of the poem is thus carnivalized because it is allowed to be redefined, because it undergoes a revival in a text where the image and the word are placed in a particular relationship with reality, thereby embracing their carnivalesque meaning.

The process of familiarization with the limitations of conventional moral frameworks appears to be made possible via the confronting of the unfamiliar and the abnormal, enabling the audience to reevaluate its own moral assumptions and the limitations imposed by societal norms. As outlined by Bakhtin, the introduction of madness and unusual moral states can act as catalysts for critical reflection,

prompting individuals to explore the boundaries of conventional moral frameworks and examine their underlying assumptions.<sup>141</sup>

There is in fact in the Mḥandian genre the emergence of a moral and psychological experiment that is represented through the portrayal of man's unusual and abnormal moral and psychic states, such as madness of all kinds. These phenomena carry a formal generic meaning that serves to destroy the epic and tragic totality of a person and his destiny. In doing so, they reveal the possibilities of another person and another life within that individual, causing him to lose his finalized quality and cease to signify a single thing, as we shall see in the following poems.

Wi yewten deg ney la smeḥ	Whosoever blames, thou art unshriven,
Deg gul ay nejreḥ	Within the heart, afflictions are riven.
Armi la nzehhu s nneqma	Amidst misfortune, I find solace sought,
D leeḥeq i gezelgen leryaḥ	It is the passion that distorts the wind,
Lamči day njaḥ	In truth, I'm not crude or inclined,
Ur igsan ḥed lewqama	None possesses virtues of such merit,
Tebeay ṛrayiw iṣaḥ	Reason has guided me, not the path of right,
Di lmeḥnat i nṣṣeḥ	In miseries, counsel takes its flight,
Armid yeg <sup>w</sup> ra deg ndama <sup>142</sup>	Until regrets, alas, are my plight.

In the presented poem, Si Mḥand assumes the role of a wounded protagonist. Through acts of indulgence driven by defiance, “*armi la nzehhu s nneqma*” translating to being entertained by misfortune, he rebels against the confines of conventional moral and ethical norms. The intensity of his passions distorts his will, giving rise to an abnormal moral state that defies established notions of propriety and self-restraint. Nevertheless, Si Mḥand also acknowledges the inherent limitations of his actions, asserting that he is not crude but rather guided by a wayward reason. He traverses the path of trials, eventually finding solace in repentance, thus exemplifying a form of moral experimentation that is simultaneously unconventional yet still grounded in traditional conceptions of right and wrong. By presenting this portrayal of an unusual and abnormal moral and psychic state, Si Mḥand brings attention to the constraints and contradictions inherent in conventional moral and ethical norms. In doing so, he challenges the established order and invites exploration into the intricate complexities of the human psyche.

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<sup>141</sup> Bakhtin, *La Poétique De Dostoïevski*.

<sup>142</sup> Aït Hamadouche, Mammeri, and Yacine, *Si Mohand: Isefra*, 74–75. Whoever blames me remains unforgiven / it is in the heart that one is wounded/ until I am entertained by the misfortune/ it is passion that distorts the winds/ it's not that I'm crude/ No one has the merit of his virtues / I followed my reason instead of the right thing/ I find advice in the miseries/ Until ending in regrets.



Ata ul yedhec mskin,	Behold, the heart, impoverished and dismayed,
Ġant lfahmin,	Forsaken by sages, in solace not stayed,
Yugrad weħdes deg lyaci,	In solitude, amidst the crowd, it resides,
D lweed Rebbi ag tmeccin,	It is God's grand design, where all fate abides,
Iṭebudu iṭemħhin,	Rewards and punishments, in His hand they rest,
Deg lyeṛdis ħed ur yelli,	No mortal claims mastery of his fate,
Kul wa d lmeħna i teb <sup>w</sup> in,	To each, their own miseries do they bear,
Ibsel ur i uksin,	Lost in realms of unreason, no defense to ensnare,
Yeemed abrid yeṛ ifri. <sup>143</sup>	Thus embarks upon the path to their own abyss, unaware.

These verses exhibit a prominent utilization of naturalistic imagery, particularly evident in the depiction of the heart afflicted and forsaken amidst a bustling crowd. This imagery evokes a sense of vulnerability and powerlessness. Further down, the poem also highlights again the vulnerability of human beings when confronted with the irrational and inexplicable aspects of existence. The phrase “*ibsel ur i uksin*,” which conveys the sense of loss in the unreasonableness from which one cannot defend himself, implies a state of confusion and helplessness in the face of life's uncertainties. Furthermore, the lack of a defensive mechanism further reinforces the idea that individuals are susceptible to the forces that shape their lives. Moreover, the imagery of facing the way to the abyss suggests a descent into madness or a state of psychological crisis which expands the possibilities for investigating the intricacies of the human mind and the means through which individuals engage with life.

Grejd nnehta s lyec	Heavy sighs escape my oppressed chest,
Aqlay nedderwec	Here I stand, in madness, distressed,
Nteṭ leħram neṭaemid	By defiance indulging in forbidden affair,
Lbaeḍ izha yetfeħcec	While some revel, joyful, without a care,
Iṭbeddil di lqec	They change their attire, their garments anew,
Iyli di lkeswa d ajdid	Unlike us, upon whom He pisses,
Lamci am nek <sup>w</sup> ni lbec	On a bench I lay, burdened and forlorn,
	In the café, spending leïd, my fate's scorn,

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<sup>143</sup> Ben Saïd, *Recueil de Poésies Kabyles: Texte Zouaoua*, 142. Lit. Translation: Here is the poor surprised heart abandoned by the sages/ it ended alone among people/ All is accomplished by the order of God/ Who alone can reward or punish/ no one is the master of their own ease/ To each his own misery/ Lost in the unreasonableness from which one cannot defend himself/ He undertakes the path to his abyss.

F lbenk I nferrec

Di lqahwa ay nečča leid<sup>144</sup>

The concluding poem demonstrates Si Mḥand’s deliberate engagement in sinful acts and transgressions finding solace in the fleeting nature of the consequences of his actions, he identifies himself as in a state of madness and distressed, “*aqlay nedderwec*,” sinning by defiance in the day of *leid* —a holy day. This disposition towards sin and transgression stands in stark contrast to the traditional religious morality that emphasizes repentance and seeking forgiveness, especially in that particular day. Presenting sin and transgression in such a bold manner given the circumstances, can be understood as an expression of antinomian piety. The oxymoronic combination of sinful behavior and the celebration of *leid*, a sacred Islamic holiday, within the profane and mundane setting of a café, serves to accentuate the stark contrast between the solemnity and ritual associated with the holiday and the irreverent context in which Si Mḥand situates himself as knowingly sinning. The use of the expression “*greyd nnehta s lyec*” which translates to sighing oppressed, suggests a sense of resignation or acceptance of his own sinful behavior, while the depiction of the fates dispenser pissing on him and slumping on a bench introduces a crude and sacrilegious touch to the poem, thereby further accentuating the carnal and earthy nature of the scene. This deployment of naturalistic imagery aligns with the conventions of the carnivalesque, which often underscores the earthy and bodily facets of human experience in contradistinction to the traditionally elevated and sacred elements of religious observance. In this instance, the incorporation of naturalistic and profane particulars engenders a sense of familiarity with the everyday, forging a contrast with the solemnity and ceremonial practices associated with established traditions.

In conclusion, I perceive Si Mḥand’s poetry as an endeavor to decipher the nature of God, drawing from a textual lineage and presenting itself as a collection of syncretic depictions. It is important to acknowledge that Si Mḥand belongs to the cadre of poets entrenched within the oral tradition, intimately connected with his audience, reliant on their receptivity and willingness to receive and memorize his sapiential messages. As Yacine astutely points out, his poetry is subject to “censorship, filtration and codification,”<sup>145</sup> from the very outset, ensuring its retention within collective

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<sup>144</sup> Aït Hamadouche, Mammeri, and Yacine, *Si Mohand: Isefra*, 50. *leid* is a Kabyle word that translates to festival or holiday in English. It refers to a special occasion or celebration that holds cultural and religious significance in the Islamic calendar. The term is specifically used to refer to two major festivals in Islam. *leid tamaziant* which marks the end of *Ramaḍān* —the month of fasting, and *leid lkbir*, which commemorates the willingness of Abraham to sacrifice his son as an act of obedience to God. *Lit. Translation: I sigh oppressed/ Here I am all demented/ Sinning by defiance/ Some feasted and are cheerful/ They change clothes/ They dress themselves in new garments/ It's not like us that He is pissing on/ on a bench where I lay down/ In the café I spend leid.*

<sup>145</sup> Aït Hamadouche, Mammeri, and Yacine, *Si Mohand: Isefra*.

remembrance rather than fading into oblivion. The image of God that he declaims is thus subject to the general appreciation of others, constrained by the prevailing value system operative within his society. Si Mḥand's antinomian piety is thereupon a hybrid and individualistic piety, moulded within the social space through his rhymes that communicate a language of concrete and sensitive symbols that resonates with his peers.

# Chapter Three:

## [...] *Vox Dei, Vox Poetae*

In traditional Kabylie, the *tiqisdin* –sing. *taqsit* which are hagiographic legends or epics, played a cardinal role in the establishment of the prevailing values in society.<sup>146</sup> If initially they were transmitted intimately through matriarchal channels within the family circle or during religious celebrations, their exposure was extended so that these epistles of sapiential messages invested with abundance an important socio-economic space, the weekly market.

In the variegated souks, hebdomadal commercial spaces, resonate the hoarse voices of the aedes and troubadours, masters of the rural verb, declaiming the legends of the prophets and saints. A circle forms around them and the peasant listeners return to their homes in the evening, their spirits filled with the aura of the prodigies and deeds of the religious and legendary figures. The weekly market knew here its eminently cultural and educational character, which completed its social functions—matrimonial alliance, conflict resolution, finalization of inter-villager projects, etc.— and economic purposes — sale of agricultural products and supplies, winter loans, etc.<sup>147</sup>

In this time-space where orality prevails, the poet of oral tradition is intimately linked to his audience. Depending on his group and the disposition of his people to receive and memorize his sapiential messages, he constitutes a privileged channel of expression and a ferment of the collective thought and values. The poet thus defines the hermeneutic premises of the Kabyle mountain dweller, who then gives a rank to each prophet, not according to the chronological and historical emergence of each of them, which the poet disregards, but according to the place that each prophet occupies *vis-à-vis* God,<sup>148</sup> so that we find, for example, Moses put forward as God's confidant, Mohamed as God's beloved, Abraham as God's dearest friend and Shuaib as God's advisor.<sup>149</sup>

Should we consider the position of the poet in Kabyle tradition, Lahlou postulates that “the *vox populi* was careful to distinguish the poet from the occasional versifier.”<sup>150</sup> To the true poet, a supernatural, even sacred dimension, was readily acknowledged considering that rhapsodic eloquence was a gift from celestial realms. An illustrative example is found in the renowned figure of Yusef u Qasi, an 18<sup>th</sup>-

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<sup>146</sup> Youssef Nacib, ‘Les Traits de La Culture Locale Dans Un Poème Hagiographique Kabyle’, 2002, Editions du Tell edition, 38.

<sup>147</sup> Nacib, 39.

<sup>148</sup> Nacib demonstrates this explicitly in his analysis of *Tiqşidin n sidn Musa*. Nacib, 40.

<sup>149</sup> *Dictionnaire Des Symboles Musulmans Rites Mystique et Civilisation* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1995).

<sup>150</sup> Lahlou, ‘1871 Dans La Poésie Orale Kabyle’, 117.

century poet who was endowed with ample oral knowledge. Over time he was regarded as a saintly figure and bore the title of *amusnew*—a designation pertaining to that of a sage and a man of wisdom. He enjoyed a wide audience among the populace and was therefore able to act as an intermediary in various disputes—for instance, he put an end to the tribal conflict between his tribe and that of the At Yenni thus fostering an atmosphere of amicability.<sup>151</sup>

From his poetry transpired the Kabyle society of the time with its customary laws, its code of honor and its cultural territoriality. Within this context, he presented himself as a designated figure with a divine mandate. Through his poetic expression, the *amusnaw* assumed the responsibility of conveying divine messages and perspectives, thus asserting his authority and spiritual connection.

Nek d afṣiḥ d Ajennad	I am a poet from Ath Jennad’s fair land,
yur Rebbi id uyeḃ <sup>152</sup>	Anointed by God’s divine hand.

According to Aït Ferroukh, the *tamusni*—from which the term *amusnaw* derives—is a concept that brings together a *savoir-faire* and a *savoir-vivre* that entails adherence to codes and values, as well as a foundation of intellectual knowledge.<sup>153</sup> The *tamusni* would therefore be a holistic wisdom that encompasses both the theoretical and practical dimensions of life, emphasizing the integration of knowledge and action. For those who hold it, Banham notes that the people accepted from him the act of transgression because the *amusnaw* would then be “beyond” the law:

“They say: ‘If this *amusnaw* does this kind of thing, he can afford it, but I cannot transgress the *taqbaylit*, the code of honour, this is something I cannot afford, I can only conform [...] He can transgress: he is beyond. For me, if I transgress it is by failing, it is because I am not up to it.’”<sup>154</sup>

The acceptance of transgression suggests that individuals who possess *tamusni* are regarded to be outside the realm of the law to a certain extent. This notion implies that the wisdom and moral authority of the *amusnaw* surpasses legal constraints and traditional societal norms. The acceptance of transgression can be interpreted as a recognition of the higher wisdom and moral insight possessed by individuals who embody *tamusni*. It implies that their actions are guided by a profound understanding of ethics and morality, which allows them to act in ways that may deviate from conventional norms but are still accepted by the community.

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<sup>151</sup> K. Bouamara, ‘Yusef-U-Qasi’, in *Hommes et Femmes de Kabylie* (Aix-en-Provence: Edisud, 2000).

<sup>152</sup> Mammeri, *Poèmes Kabyles Anciens*, 132.

<sup>153</sup> Aït Ferroukh, ‘Situation d’Impasse et Agents de La Culture’, 66.

<sup>154</sup> Banham, *A History of Theatre in Africa*, 237.

This acceptance may stem from the belief that the *amusnaw*, through their deep understanding and embodiment of *tamusni*, possess a heightened moral judgment that surpasses mere legal frameworks. Their actions are perceived as being aligned with a higher moral order, one that goes beyond the limitations of written laws and regulations. Nevertheless, it is essential to approach this observation critically. While the acceptance of transgression by the *amusnaw* may indicate the recognition of their moral authority, it should not be taken as an endorsement of unrestricted behavior or an excuse for violating laws without justification.

In a similar vein, it is worth exploring other examples that portray the qualities attributed to individuals who embody the *tamusni*. Defined by this same title and subject to lyrical omens, Cix Muḥand u lḤussin, a contemporary of Si Mḥand u Mḥand, composed his verses with an otherworldly inspiration, demonstrating a connection to a higher source. Mammeri describes Cix Muḥand's speaking style as extraordinary, almost divine, with a rhythm that seemed to come from an inner source. Witnesses claimed that he would sway back and forth, as if he was listening to two angels positioned on either side of him, who were dictating his answers.<sup>155</sup> Cix Muḥand thus illustrates another characteristic that exemplifies how the *amusnaw* was perceived within society. His rhythm of speech is considered divine, exhibiting a natural flow and harmony that could appear to surpass human capabilities. This divine rhythm suggests a higher influence at play guiding the words of the *amusnaw*—this is what is conveyed by the image associated with him oscillating from right to left as if he was listening to two angels positioned on either side of him. It is as if Cix Muḥand became a vessel through which the spiritual realm channels its wisdom and guidance.

Lastly, to get back to Si Mḥand u Mḥand, the poet composed his verses under the guidance of an angel who breathed the verses into him, the mayor of his native village, Ḥacur Nabyi, narrates that Si Mḥand stopped at a crossroads to rest, where he had an apparition who asked him to choose between recovering his father's lands or becoming a poet. He chose to leave the lands and become a poet; the apparition then placed a condition on him that he should never repeat his verses.<sup>156</sup> In a similar vein, Mammeri reports that:

“Moḥand was at the edge of a source [...] when, on the other side of the sump – *amdun*, he witnessed an angel who immediately put him on notice to choose between two terms: ‘Speak and I will do the verses - or do the verses and I will speak –hder nek ad

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<sup>155</sup> Mouloud Mammeri, *Inna-Yas Ccix Mohand: Cheikh Mohand A Dit* (Paris: CERAM, 1989), 42.

<sup>156</sup> ‘Histoire du poète kabyle Si M'hand ou Mhand’ (Dzair TV, December 2013), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uDQfhMDR7mM>.

sefruy - ney sefru nek ad hadrey. Do the verses, said Mḥand and I will speak –sefru nek ad hadrey.’ From that day on, whatever he wants to say, he can say it in verses, because it is he who speaks but the angel who informs.”<sup>157</sup>

Would it, therefore, be proper to conceive of Si Mḥand as an *amusnaw*?

The masters of the verb seem to belong to the category of saints, According to Mammeri, the poet is involved in a world that is both foreign and superior to ours, almost divine in nature. He embodies the essence of the prophets, who are the interpreters of a higher power, with the poet serving as Its voice among us.<sup>158</sup> Nevertheless, strict prophetological rules authenticate the divine character of a claimant to prophecy. As Daryush Shayegan explains, *nubuwwa* is an intermediate state between *walāya* –the esoteric of the Friends of God, and *risāla* –the prophethood of the Envoy of God, which brings an exoteric religion, “for not every prophet –*nabiy*– is necessarily an apostle of God on earth, whereas every Envoy, every apostle is necessarily a prophet.”<sup>159</sup> It is then said of the poet who possesses the gift of eloquence in Kabyl: *tetunfekkes* –it is given to him. For Lahlou, the source of this gift can only come from the parallel world of the genies –*jinn*, whom the exceptional poet receives his inspiration from, that is why one says of an inspired poet: *yetwemlek*, i.e. that he is a possessed person.<sup>160</sup> In a more universal register, Basset equates the poet with a man who senses an inner force driving him to create a work of fiction, without knowing its origin, and the compulsion to connect words and ideas in rhythmic harmony, even when his conscious will appear to have no role, he is a man who considers himself to be under the influence of a higher power that has possessed him and speaks through him.<sup>161</sup>

Therefore, the poet would only be the instrument of a force that comes from elsewhere and of which he considers himself to be a humble vector. Immersed in the Islamic culture of lyrical eloquence, the Kabyle poet of oral tradition derives his authority and legitimacy mainly from what appears to be a supernatural authority. Nevertheless, let us remember that not every rhymer was in fact recognized as a poet, and not every poet was in turn recognized as an *amusnaw*. Si Mḥand u Mḥand is then situated at the juncture of the marginal troubadour —an inexhaustible reveler, and the wise cleric entitled to interpret the divine. Si Mḥand u Mḥand’s poetry can be seen as troubadour-like in its emphasis on individual expression and its critique of social norms and conventions. At the same time, his poetry reflects quite an engagement with Islamic mysticism, which emphasizes the importance of direct

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<sup>157</sup> Mammeri, *Les Isefras de Si Mohand*, 12.

<sup>158</sup> Mammeri, 13.

<sup>159</sup> *Dictionnaire Des Symboles Musulmans Rites Mystique et Civilisation*, 352.

<sup>160</sup> Lahlou, ‘1871 Dans La Poésie Orale Kabyle’, 117.

<sup>161</sup> Henri Basset, *Essai Sur La Littératures Des Berbères* (Alger: Carbonel, 1920), 331.

personal experience of the divine. In this sense, Si Mḥand u Mḥand's poetry can be perceived as the creative output of an individual who is constantly exploring the limits of his own consciousness and the boundaries of his society. Yet, at the same time it conveys a deep attachment to Islamic theology and jurisprudence, suggesting that an intention to interpret the divine in ways that may not be accessible to the general populace—thus resonating with the spirit of the *tamusni*.

### Embodying the Shift in the Local Paradigm

At the time of the insurrection that razed his village Si Mḥand was around twenty-six years old, he carried within himself the memory of that which was and that which is no longer. Memory is a bundle of meanings of multiple layers of reference and as Aït Ferroukh puts it, in Kabylia it is what holds authority.<sup>162</sup> As a matter of fact, Kabyle society lacks political centers for organizing the social units of each tribe, confederation, or village. The memory of the society, which is an open corpus enriched by the group's experiences, is what prevails.<sup>163</sup> Si Mḥand's work, however, does not seem to integrate this central aspect of his culture, and thus I am inclined to postulate that, as a witness of the rupture that occurred in his landscape, Mḥand the poet, the one charged with the Platonic function of being *the world's artisan*, who recreates and reorganizes it, chooses to bury with his words the manicheism of yore and sketches out the beliefs of the morrow—the Mḥandian *asefru* will indeed stamp its mark on people's minds.

The *asefru* embodies a genre: the heptasyllabic tercet, which with Si Mḥand, will take precedence over all the other pre-existing genres: the *tiqṣidin*—edifying, noble genre, the *izlan*—light, lyrical genre.<sup>164</sup> He doesn't appear to refrain from shattering the *tiqṣidin*, a lyrical form that may have been too literary in his eyes, and resorts to a popular, even coarse, language and derision. Unlike the collective expression of the *izli*, Mḥand's verses sing of the most individualistic and isolated feelings without any social reference according to Yacine,<sup>165</sup> mirroring the exile he undergoes and the crumbling social fabric of the time.

It can be argued that Si Mḥand's rejection of the *tiqṣidin* and his preference for a more popular—or coarse—language in the *asefru* reflects his anti-establishment stance and his desire to break away from the constraints of formal poetry. The *tiqṣidin* was a highly regarded and rigidly structured form of poetry that was associated with the literary elite, and Si Mḥand's rejection of it can be seen as a

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<sup>162</sup> Aït Ferroukh, 'Situation d'Impasse et Agents de La Culture', 67.

<sup>163</sup> Aït Ferroukh, 67.

<sup>164</sup> Aït Hamadouche, Mammeri, and Yacine, *Si Mohand: Isefra*, 13–14.

<sup>165</sup> Aït Hamadouche, Mammeri, and Yacine, 14.



rejection of the established literary order. Instead, he sought to express himself in a more direct and accessible way, using language and imagery that would be familiar to his audience. This rejection of literary conventions and embrace of the vernacular is a common feature of many literary and artistic movements throughout history and can be seen as a way of challenging established power structures and asserting the autonomy of the artist. Additionally, Si Mḥand's use of derision in the *asefru* can be seen as a subversive strategy aimed at ridiculing and exposing the vulnerabilities of those in positions of power. In this sense, Si Mḥand's poetic genre can be seen as a reflection of the social and political realities of his time.

The poet rarely mentions the values of yesteryear, and if he does so, he never defines them. This avoidance of explicitly defining them can be interpreted as a reflection of his antinomianism. As an antinomian, Si Mḥand rejected the idea of strict adherence to religious or cultural norms, and instead emphasized the importance of individual experience and perception. By not defining values, Si Mḥand was able to promote a more subjective and individualistic approach to morality and ethics. Furthermore, his focus on the present moment and the experiences of individuals living in that moment shows that he was not interested in dwelling on the past or romanticizing it. Instead, he was able to emphasize the importance of the present and the individual experience over the authority of tradition. An illustration of how he subtly skims over the notion of past values can be observed in the poem below:

[...] Negg <sup>w</sup> rad di zman unḥis	In this age of values, jostled and swayed,
Cceh a rḥay yellan d amruri	Hail to you, pioneer, in paths you have made.
Ar ḥedduḍ ḥafi	Though barefoot you tread, unyielding in stride,
A k yunfun medden i ḥaḥwis <sup>166</sup>	Repelling companions, in isolation you reside.
[...] D itran i yi ḥwanasen	Only the stars, steadfast, as my confidant,
Kra iεaq <sup>w</sup> alen ay εucrey	With sages, in discourse, I freely enchant.
Garasen ḥusemmay	Among their circle, a name I proudly proclaim,
D imaxlal d taddart nsen <sup>167</sup>	The fools of their village, we bear that acclaim.

In the aforementioned poem, Si Mḥand adopts a cynical perspective regarding the obstacles encountered by individuals endeavoring to establish their distinctive presence amidst a milieu

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<sup>166</sup> Boualem, *Florilège de Poésies Kabyles: La Viatique Du Barde* (Tizi-Ouzou: Editions de l'Odyssee, 2005), 120–21.

<sup>167</sup> Boualem, 118–19.

characterized by disrupted values.<sup>168</sup> Through skillful employment of tone and imagery, the poet evokes a profound sense of shared experience and empathy, thereby inviting the listener to forge an emotional connection with the challenges encountered by those who dare to deviate from societal expectations. However, the reservation deliberately maintained throughout the poem also serves as a poignant reminder of the inherent risks and sacrifices entailed in such a pursuit. The juxtaposition of invitation and reservation employed by the poet engenders a nuanced atmosphere, which fosters empathy in the audience toward the struggles of pioneering individuals, while simultaneously cautioning them about the potential consequences. This composition serves as a reminder that the pursuit of differentiation and individuality is not devoid of difficulties, necessitating preparedness to confront societal opposition and endure isolation.

In conclusion, up until 1871, social structures had changed little, with traditional poetry celebrating mainly the prowess of saints.<sup>169</sup> But after the insurrection, the repression that followed, and the social disarray of this difficult period led to a more individual and above all individualistic poetry, as embodied by the works of Si Mḥand.<sup>170</sup> Indeed, his poetry represents a departure from the established norms of his time, reflecting a shift in the local paradigm. He introduces novel perspectives, individualistic themes, and unconventional modes of expression —the *asefru*. His work adeptly embodies and encapsulates the dominant popular beliefs that permeated nineteenth-century Kabylia and beyond. This assertion is substantiated by the existence of discursive productions associated with his work, which gave rise to well-known apophthegms, such as ‘*anerez wela neknu* – rather be broken than bend.’ The resonance of these expressions extends beyond Si Mḥand’s poetry and finds echoes in the works of prominent figures like Matoub Lounes (1956-1998), a singer and activist known for his dedication to the Berber cause and human rights who was later assassinated for his music either by the *gendarmes* or by the Islamic Army Group.<sup>171</sup> Notably, Matoub Lounes titled one of his songs after the aforementioned apophthegm. This intertextual connection serves as tangible evidence of Si Mḥand’s ability to capture and reflect the prevailing

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<sup>168</sup> The couplet “Cceh a rray yellan d amruri/ Ar ṭedduḍ ḥafi” “Hail to you, pioneer, in paths you have made/ Though barefoot you tread, unyielding in stride,” conveys a sense of irony and cynicism, denoting that those who aspire to stand out will inevitably confront arduous trials and tribulations.

<sup>169</sup> Emile Dermenghem, ‘La Poésie Kabyle de Si Mouh Ou Mohand et Les Isefra (1951)’, *Documents Algériens*, no. 57 (November 1951).

<sup>170</sup> Dermenghem; Denise Brahimi, ‘Si Mohand, Pour une Relecture de Jean Amrouche’, *Études et Documents Berbères* (Paris: La Boite à Documents, 2007), 236, Cairn.info, <https://www.cairn.info/revue-etudes-et-documents-berberes-2007-1-page-233.htm>.

<sup>171</sup> Lounis Aggoun and Jean-Baptiste Rivoire, *Françalgérie, Crimes et Mensonges d’États* (Paris: La Découverte, 2005), 686; Jean-Pierre Tuquoi, ‘Une Fraction Des GIA Revendique l’assassinat de Lounès Matoub’, *L Monde*, 2 July 1998.

popular beliefs of his time, as his words continue to reverberate and find relevance in subsequent artistic and socio-political expressions.

## Conclusion

Si Mḥand's poetic corpus exemplifies his engagement with the mystical traditions and cultural heritage of the Berber people, showcasing the fusion of diverse influences within his work. The impact of French colonial culture and his adherence to Islamic orthodoxy contribute to the multifaceted nature of his poetic expression. Through this amalgamation of influences, Si Mḥand strives to establish an alternative spiritual and cultural identity, occupying a liminal space between orthodoxy and heterodoxy. His syncretic poetry serves as a medium through which he articulates his antinomian piety, challenging established norms and conventions.

Positioned as a discerning observer, Si Mḥand critically examines Kabyle society and the manifestations of Islam in his region. His poetry not only captures the intricate interplay between various cultural influences but also offers a nuanced portrayal of the complexities inherent in societal norms and religious practices.

By employing Shahab Ahmed's analytical framework, which recognizes the existence of social and historical norms beyond the realm of Islamic jurisprudence, this study underscores Si Mḥand's utilization of poetry as a means to express his antinomian piety. While certain practices depicted in Si Mḥand's verses may appear discordant with Islamic legal principles, they are deeply intertwined with the intricate tapestry of individual and collective identity. Consequently, Si Mḥand's poetic corpus serves as a reflection of the intricate dynamics that shape the practice of Islam within the Kabyle region, where local historical and cultural influences profoundly influence religious observance.

Si Mḥand's poetry serves as a vivid illustration of antinomian piety, revealing the integration of cultural and social practices within the framework of Islamic faith, despite their deviation from prescribed legal norms. Through his poetic expression, Si Mḥand illuminates the intricate interplay between local cultural practices and the practice of Islam. His verses unravel the complex negotiations and adaptations that unfold within the realm of religious observance. By delving into this intricate interplay, Si Mḥand's poetry offers valuable insights into the multifaceted nature of religious practice in the Kabyle region and how cultural influences shape the expression of faith.

However, approaching the concept of antinomianism within Si Mḥand's poetic corpus calls for a cautious and nuanced perspective. While his poetry may challenge established religious and cultural norms, it does not entail a complete rejection of moral or ethical principles. Rather, Si Mḥand's body of work should be understood as a discerning evaluation of the rigid and hierarchical systems prevalent in his historical era, coupled with an exploration of alternative realms of spirituality and cultural identity. Therefore, while the concept of antinomianism provides valuable insights for analyzing Si Mḥand's poetry and his engagement with the carnivalesque, it is essential to avoid oversimplifying his

work as a wholesale repudiation of all moral or ethical frameworks. Instead, his poetic creations should be regarded as intricate and multifaceted inquiries into the complex intersections of spirituality, culture, and identity within the context of colonial domination and cultural resistance.

Applying Shahab Ahmed's methodology, which acknowledges the existence of social and historical norms beyond the legal framework of Islam, provides valuable insights into Si Mḥand's ability to articulate his antinomian piety through his poetry. Despite certain practices depicted in his verses appearing to contradict Islamic law, they are deeply rooted in the traditions and identity of the Kabyle people. Si Mḥand's poetry thus serves as a reflection of the intricate dynamics inherent in the practice of Islam within the Kabyle region, where local cultural practices exert a significant influence.

In essence, Si Mḥand's carnivalesque poetry exemplifies antinomian piety by demonstrating how cultural and social practices can be integrated into the practice of Islam, even when they deviate from the religion's legal norms. Through his poetic expressions, Si Mḥand endeavors to convey this complexity and showcase the coexistence of local cultural practices alongside the practice of Islam. His poetry serves as a testament to the multifaceted nature of religious observance, highlighting the interplay between cultural influences and the spiritual realm.

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