

Entangled Histories

Religious Discourse and Franco-Spanish Colonialism Through the Lens of an American in Morocco's Rif Region

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ABSTRACT

This paper critically engages with Vincent Sheean's *An American Among the Riffi* – a 20th-century American travelogue – to interrogate the intertwined histories of religious rhetoric, socio-cultural portrayal, and Franco-Spanish colonialism in Morocco's Rif region (1921-1926), shortly after the Battle of Annual, led by Mohamed Ben Abdel-Krim EL-Khattabi. Focused on Islamic studies in the West and the reevaluation of Orientalist narratives, the article utilizes a bi-faceted methodological approach: a comparative historical analysis to examine Sheean's account against colonial archives, and Foucauldian discourse analysis to dismantle his cultural perceptions of the Riffian community. By situating the text within the broader context of Western travel literature on Muslim societies, the study identifies a gap in the scholarship, particularly regarding the Rif War's religious and anti-colonial dimensions. The analysis reveals a pivotal critical finding: Sheean's representation of Riffian cultural and religious practices – often framed through vilification or miscomprehension – reflects established Orientalist tropes that conflate Islamic identity with resistance to European colonialism. The essay contributes to Islamic Studies in the West by tracing how American travelogues shaped perceptions of Muslim societies during colonial conflict.

KEYWORDS:

Religion; Discourse; Colonialism; Islam; Representations; The West; Orientalism.

تواريخ متشابكة

الخطاب الديني والاستعمار الفرنسي الإسباني من خلال عدسة مواطن أمريكي في منطقة الريف بالمغرب



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الملخص:

تتناول هذه المقالة كتاب *أمريكي بين الريفين* لفنسننت شين؛ رحلة صحفي أمريكي إلى شمال المغرب لتغطية حرب الريف بعيد معركة أنوال التي قادها محمد بن عبد الكريم الخطابي. ترمي هذه الورقة إلى استنطاق التاريخ المتشابك مع الخطاب الديني والتصوير الاجتماعي والثقافي إبان الاستعمار الفرنسي الإسباني لمنطقة الريف المغربي (1921-1926). يركز هذا المقال على الدراسات الإسلامية في الغرب وإعادة تقييم السرديات الاستشراقية، ويستخدم مقاربة منهجية ثنائية الأوجه: التحليل التاريخي المقارن لفحص رواية شين في ضوء الأرشيف الاستعماري، وتحليل الخطاب مستعينا بمقاربة ميشيل فوكو لتفكيك التمثيلات الثقافية للمجتمع الريفي. من خلال وضع النص ضمن السياق الأوسع لأدب الرحلات الغربية عن المجتمعات الإسلامية، تحدد الدراسة فجوة تم إغفالها من طرف الباحثين تتعلق بالأبعاد الدينية والاستعمارية في حرب الريف. ويكشف التحليل عن نتيجة نقدية محورية تعكس تمثيل شين للممارسات الثقافية والدينية الريفية، التي غالبا ما يتم تأطيرها من خلال التشويه أو سوء الفهم، مبني على النظرة الاستشراقية التي تخلط بين الهوية الإسلامية ومقاومة الاستعمار. وتسهم المقالة في مشروع "دراسات الإسلام في الغرب" من خلال تأريخ الكيفية التي شكلت بها الرحلات الأمريكية تصورات المجتمعات الإسلامية أثناء الصراع الاستعماري.

الكلمات المفتاحية:

الدين؛ الخطاب؛ الاحتلال؛ الإسلام؛ التمثيلات؛ الغرب؛ الاستشراق.

I. INTRODUCTION¹

The subgenre of travel writing remains a rich literary genre that encompasses a wide range of cultural and historical narratives. Travelogues transcend being mere entertaining accounts that focus on plain illustrations of journeys throughout the globe, albeit they entail the worldviews of their writers. Put differently, the subjectivity of travel narrators overwhelmingly prevails in their selected stories about a particular people within a certain time, blending sometimes reality with fiction. Hence, it is incumbent upon critics and academic researchers to unveil the biases and fictional tales, equipped with analytical, textual, and content analysis approaches.

Owing to its status as an attractive destination, located just ten miles away from Europe, Morocco has always been an alluring subject for numerous travel writers who have documented their notes, comments, and views about their trips in celebrated travel records mainly in French and English. This paper restricts its scope of research to American travel writings, which might be traced back to the eighteenth-century captivity narratives in the so-called 'Barbary Coast' of North Africa. Twain's account *The Innocent Abroad* (1869), Edith Wharton's *In Morocco* (1920), and belated travel writers such as Paul Bowls and Vincent Sheean, to name but a few, constitute mainly the travel writings that depict Morocco as an archetype of the East at large with complete neglect to Morocco's specific history and culture. In this regard, travelogues

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عبد اللطيف لبقادري، توليف متشابكة: الخطاب الديني والاستعمار الفرنسي الإسباني من خلال عدسة مواطن أمريكي في منطقة الريف بالمغرب، مجلة اجتهاد للدراسات الإسلامية والعربية، مركز اجتهاد للدراسات والتكوين، بلجيكا، مج. 2، ع. 3، يونيو 2025، 73-91.

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are worth studying as they shape living testimonies of how Morocco has been perceived and represented to Western readerships.

This qualitative type of research aims to investigate how Vincent Sheean represents, in his travelogue, Islam through a Christian lens in the Rif of Morocco. Since its publication in 1926, Sheean's journal failed to pique the interest of any notable Moroccan academics, which caused his travelogue to fade into obscurity. Being a young journalist, he was appointed by the *Chicago Tribune*¹ as a reporter to Morocco to cover the Rif resistance in 1925 against the Spanish colonization in the North and conduct an interview with Mohamed Ben Abdel-Krim Al-Khattabi, a well-known figure in the Rif and the Arab-Islamic world as well. His name was engraved in Morocco's history, and his triumph and militant tactics inspired later world leaders and revolutionary figures who fought against colonial hegemony: Ho Chi Minh, Mao Zedong, and Che Guevara—to name a few.

An American Among the Riffi is not a mere travel diary that contains its author's observations throughout his voyage. Instead, it includes historical interpretations and perceptions. History is a trip per se in which historians become travelers. It is generally known that history cannot be dissociated from travel writing studies due to their interconnected and crisscrossed nature. Whereas numerous historians in the past were primarily concerned with the ascendance and demise of kings, "such voyagers concentrated on issues that were not deemed – at the time – to be historical elements: traditions, customs, feasts, fauna and flora, architecture, food, art, and common people's and royal staff's home lives."² Now that travel journeys encompass, at the level of content, a sheer amount of miscellaneous historical, geographical, and ethnographical knowledge, they are widely considered to be among the sources on which historians rely. Hence, the significance of such travel writing on the Rif of Morocco in helping produce historical accounts is invaluable. In this respect, historians are left with the heavy and painstaking task of sifting factual stories from imaginary ones, equipped with a theoretical framework, based on comparative, historical, and sociological criticism,

¹ See Sheean's first article about the Rif in the *Chicago Tribune* in Daoudi (2022, p 27)

² Chaouch, Khalid. "Interdisciplinarity and the (Re)- writing of Moroccan History: The Contribution of English Travel Narratives and Captivity Accounts". In *Cultures and Languages in Contact IV*. Ed. R. Erguing et al. 2017, p 86

knowing that history and sociology are two constitutive components of the historians' field of expertise. Surprisingly enough, some travelers allow themselves a certain kind of audacious authorship. In this line of reasoning, Henry Fielding (1996) opines that travelers tailor, embellish, and feed journey narratives with their authors' imagination and memories, namely those travelers who do not write their journeys immediately, albeit after a while when they are back home, paying no regard to potential lapses of memory, which is the exact case of Sheean's journal.

REPORTERS IN THE RIF REGION

The Rif War had a substantial influence on global society. The battles in the Rif were widely reported in the international press and drew the attention of global leaders, intellectuals, and journalists. The conflict was viewed as a symbol of resistance against colonialism, inspiring anti-colonial movements across the world. Given that, numerous European and American correspondents visited the Rif during 1924 and 1925, seeking an interview with Mohamed Ben Abdel-Krim,¹ who welcomed foreign reporters as they were the media platform through which the Riffian cause was disseminated. However, some correspondents, such as Henry Wales, Floyd Gibbons, and Clarence Streit, did not enter the Rif. They remained in Rabat, Fez, and Tangier, relying solely on Spanish and French military and political press releases.² By contrast, Ward Price from the *London Daily Mail* and Paul Scott Mowrer, who represented the *Chicago Daily News*, were the first journalists to meet the Riffian chief. Yet, Furneaux (1967) asserts that Idriss, the son of Mohamed Ben Abdel-Krim, found Mowrer's descriptions of his father and of the Riffian community ridiculous, which shows Mowrer's ignorance (p. 144). More important than the previous testimony about Paul Scott Mowrer, Daoudi (2022)³ reveals the mistranslation of the handwritten message that Mohamed Ben Abdel-Krim sent to the American people in 1924, published in the

¹ See Shean (1926, p. xxix)

² See Larry Rue, *I fly for News*. 255-307, 1963; "Writers Win Fame", "The Chicago Tribune", Feb, 1963; qtd. in Daoudi (2022, p 24)

³ See the introduction of Daoudi Mohamed (2022) in which he states his comments on his translation of *An American Among the Rif*

Chicago Daily Mail. Mowrer translated the Arabic word “Amir” into “Sultan,”¹ which, according to Daoudi, is an inaccurate and dishonest translation (pp. 50-51). One is perhaps permitted to grasp the extent to which some journalists and travelers bend the narratives, complying with what people wanted to hear, regardless of distorting facts. At the time, Western literature disseminated the idea that Mohamed Ben Abdel-Krim was a separatist or a new pretender to the Moroccan throne, like El Roghi (Bou Hmara), an unsubstantiated allegation. Furenaux (1967) refutes this claim, affirming that Mohamed Ben Abdel-Krim forbade Riffians from praying for him during the Friday Prayers and rejected the title “Sultan” (p. 85). Another noteworthy later reporter is the young American journalist, James Vincent Sheean, whose narrative—*An American Among the Riffi*—will be the focal point of the following section.

PREVIOUS STUDIES

As stated earlier, this travelogue has remained understudied by critics and academics. There are only a few articles dealing with Sheean’s work. Moustaid (2022) asserts that *An American Among the Riffi* serves as a model for a new generation of American journalists whose work was closely linked to other literary genres. Among these celebrated journalists and authors is the Nobel Prize-winning author Ernest Hemingway, who was a friend of Vincent Sheean and worked with him as a war correspondent for various newspapers in Spain and France. Sheean was part of an American network of authors and poets for whom he also published biographies. At that time, the American press had strong ties with France, which provided it with considerable latitude, prompting numerous newspapers to open subsidiary offices in Paris, where Sheean then worked.² Being settled in Paris between the interbellum and fascinated by France might be considered suggestive evidence of Sheean’s positive attitude toward the French imperial policy in Morocco. Needless to

¹ See Daoudi (2022), the appendix picture (7) that illustrates the message of Ben Abdel-Krim to the American people

² See Moustaid. Mohamed. "أمريكي بين الريفيين: السرد والحدود بين الصحافة والأنثروبولوجيا" [*An American Among the Riffi: the Narrative and the Boundaries between Journalism and Anthropology*] March 2022. URL: <https://institute.aljazeera.net/ar/ajr/article/1855>

say, France was a popular destination for countless American youngsters who were seeking new adventures and great liberty.

Again, Moustaid (2022) concurs with what Sheean himself asserts in his autobiography (1937): that during his undergraduate studies, he became interested in the Islamic world, notably the history of the Wahhabi movement, and subsequently authored a book about Iran.¹ Sheean, while not being an anthropological expert, employed journalistic narration, observation, discussion, and inquiry to provide rich raw material about the Riffian people, their language, religion, and customs. From an American perspective, he voiced sympathy for the difficulties faced by women. He was not a "fast food" journalist who simply covered military news without a scientific background, as many journalists do, but was briefed on expert research regarding the region.²

Despite several misconceptions owing to the lack of academic studies on the Rif at the time, Sheean maintained his interest in the region and published a critical article on an ethnographic novel about the Riffians – *Flesh of Wild Ox* (1932) – by the American anthropologist: Carleton Coon (p. 3). Critically speaking, one might feel confused by the previous assumption, as the anthropologic studies – Coon (1931) and Hart (1976) – were conducted after Sheean's visit to the Rif. Yet the only accounts that Sheean refers to in his travelogue are *Agadir* by Joseph Caillaux, Twain (1867), and Harris (1921). Given that Sheean was only exposed to travel writings about Morocco, one might argue that these writings influenced and shaped his perspective on the Riffian community. Furthermore, Sheean (1937) himself straightforwardly admits in his autobiography that there were not any ethnographic or anthropological surveys about the Riffian community on which one could rely at the time; such material became available only three years after his visit to the Rif – alluding to Coon's *Tribes of the Rif* – (p. 117).

THEORETICAL APPROACH

It has been argued that knowledge, in the Foucauldian sense, can serve as a tool for exerting authority over other individuals and communities. Put

¹ Sheean, Vincent. *Personal History*. Garden City. Publishing Co. 1937, pp 14-15

² Ibid, Moustaid

differently, the long history of Western travel texts reflects the strong linkage between documentation and power that characterizes colonial discourse.¹ Acknowledging the complicity of travel literature in imperial expansion, Pratt (1992), in a study entirely devoted to travel accounts, asserts that countless travel books are merely a means to an end in the Machiavellian sense. That is, the legacy of European imperialism is an outcome of premediated journeys, aimed at reconstructing and reproducing “the rest of the world” (pp 4-5). By the same token, Anjum Faraz (2014) observes in his analytical study of travel writing “that travel narrative is directly or indirectly linked with the European project of colonialism.” “Notably, American and European travelers have been charged with supporting the colonial project in Morocco” (Chaouch, p 85). This suggests that the bulk of travel accounts constitutes an essential part of the ideological apparatus of empire-making, when excursions become raids and pilgrimage becomes a crusade. According to Robert Clarke (2018), travel narratives have been deeply implicated in naturalizing and celebrating the ethos of European hegemony over the last 500 years. This culminates in several accounts where travelers romanticize the colonizers and eulogize their imperial policy toward the colonies, while vilifying the colonized peoples who, as well-stated in Karl Marx’s essay, “can’t represent themselves, yet they must be represented.”² This indicates the extent to which the patronizing and paternalistic perspective of Western travelogues is saturated with power discourse.

David Spurr’s account, *The Rhetoric of Empire*, argues that travel narratives provide a plethora of information for future colonial administrators about the conditions and environment of their prospective colonies by describing, deploying, and alluring them to possess these parts of the world. Hence, adopting the Foucauldian concept of the power-knowledge relationship, such colonial travel accounts engender discursive authority both over subordinate colonies, by subjecting them to ordeals, and over imperial officials, by

¹ See also Bejjit, Karim. *الرحلة و صورة الآخر: قراءات في نصوص الرحالة الأوروبيين حول المغرب* [Morocco: description and travel; European travellers’ writings], Dar el Aman. 2013

It is an interesting critical study of European travel accounts on Morocco during the 18th and 19th centuries.

² See Marx. *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. 2nd edit. Chapter 7. 1889, p 62

generating legitimacy of their conquests. Similarly, it is the cultural formation and practice that Edward Said highlights in *Orientalism*, illustrating the tremendous impact of such narratives on the making of imperialist empires.

In light of the aforementioned critical approach, this paper will analyze the structure and discourse of Sheean's narrative: *An American Among the Riffi*. Through textual and extratextual analysis, this essay will reveal what the text conceals and the unvoiced meanings that demonstrate the author's perspectives toward Morocco and the Rif region. It will also introduce Vincent Sheean's paradigm upon which he relies to depict the socio-cultural and religious practices during the Rif War of Independence (1921-1926).

RELIGIOUS DISCOURSE

Religious speech remains instrumental in the context of the representation of the East and related studies. It is debated that religions such as Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and others are frequently depicted in this discourse as exotic, mysterious, and even fundamentally inferior to Western religious traditions. Orientalist researchers and authors regularly analyze and represent Eastern faiths through a Eurocentric or Americentric prism, imposing Western religious concepts and frameworks. Religious and messianic rhetoric may be interwoven with imperialistic enterprises, serving to justify and legitimize Western colonial goals. An examination of religious discourse in *An American Among the Riffi* illustrates the intricate dynamics of power, representation, and cultural exchange between Western/American Christianity and Moroccan/Riffian Islam.

Islam and Wahhabism

One might be astonished by Sheean's determination to depict the Riffian chief and his community as devotees of Wahhabism (p. 59). To fathom this unjustified claim, it can be argued that Sheean's prior perceptions played an immense role. It suffices to mention that during his undergraduate studies at the University of Chicago, Sheean worked on the history of the Wahhabism movement in the Middle East. This explains, as Daoudi (2022) notes, that Sheean's knowledge of Islam and its practices may have been limited to Wahhabism, which emerged and flourished on the eve of the 19th century (p.

46). In the same vein, Hart (1976) disagrees with Sheean's judgment, arguing that Mohamed Ben Abd-el-Krim, driven by the Riffian nationalism, was a *Salaffi Islahi* (conventional reformist), influenced by both Mohammad Abduh, one of the icons of the Arab Renaissance and the Young Turks Movement, which called for a constitutional monarchy in the Othman Empire (p. 372). Moreover, historians confirm that Sultan Mulai Sulaiman introduced Wahhabism to the Moroccan Sultanate, though it failed to make a noticeable impact on Moroccans. Given that, one is invited to grasp a paramount conclusion: Sheean clearly lacked precise knowledge of the historical background of Wahhabism in Morocco.

Christian vs Islamic Education

As stated earlier, the superiority discourse forms the backbone of the Orientalist perspective. That is, there exists a power relation between colonizers and their subjects that implies the superiority of one race over another. Sheean does not fail to touch upon this discursive language and its allusions, as seen in the following quote that compares and contrasts Riffian education with that of Americans:

He [a Riffi] got his pencil to work and checked over the answers, and then gave up with a despondent sigh. He said he did not understand how such things were done without figuring out; he admitted it was the superiority of Christian education, which the Koran could not combat. (p. 219).

The excerpt introduces a form of superiority discourse rooted in the comparison between Western/ American and Eastern/Moroccan education. Sheean argues that the capacity to solve problems through logic and reasoning, symbolized by the act of "figuring," is a product of American education, which he believes is superior to Moroccan Quranic education.

From an academic standpoint, it is important to recognize that the passage represents a particular individual's perspective and does not necessarily reflect the opinions of the broader Christian or Islamic communities. When discussing such topics, it is crucial to avoid generalizations and stereotyping.

The link between the act of "figuring" and a more excellent education is a significant component of the quotation. While critical thinking and problem-

solving skills are crucial parts of education, it is essential to remember that these abilities are not exclusive to any “religion” or ethnic group. It is a misconception to suppose that these qualities belong solely to Christian education or that they are inaccessible in Islamic education, since both systems may encourage critical thinking skills in their unique ways.

Such comparisons risk reinforcing an "us versus them" mindset and lead to a contentious debate that diminishes the significance of varied educational approaches. It is crucial to appreciate the variation within and across religious traditions, as well as the reality that educational institutions within each religion can differ greatly.

Concerning the pedagogy of Moroccan education, Sheean notes that Arab boys “memorize the Koran by screaming it verse by verse, year in and year out, in a little crowded room where a score of other Moslem boys were screaming the same or other verses at the same time” (p 157). Here, Sheean reduces education in Morocco/Rif to memorizing and reciting verses without involving any mental or intellectual effort. This implies the inferiority of this kind of education, whereas Western/American education is portrayed as much better; thus, leading readers to understand that graduates of Moroccan/Riffi schools may not be intellectual competitors to Western/American ones.

It is also important to address the implicit bias in the statement regarding the Koran's inability to combat this perceived superiority of Christian education. This unjust assumption disregards the intellectual and educational contributions made in Islamic scholarship and the rich tradition of critical thinking found within Islamic education. Put differently, the Western historiographical tradition attributes progress to the West, ignoring the tremendous Arab civilization. Overlooking Arab scientific scholarship has become a trend among foreign and alienated domestic intellectuals. Indeed, while much of Europe experienced political fragmentation and limited scientific development during the Middle Ages, Arab civilization in Andalusia (Islamic Spain) and Baghdad flourished, making significant scientific and philosophical advancements. Arabs were not just translators of Greek philosophy but also built on the legacies of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. Additionally, contrary to Western historiography, Arabs were not merely Bedouin conquerors; they established a great civilization in Andalusia that included Muslims, Jews, and Christians under non-sectarian, progressive laws,

exemplifying an early form of enlightenment before the European Renaissance.

Islam and Christianity: Forced Juxtaposition

Sheean's narrative teems with terms and concepts related to binary divisions such as Islam versus Christianity. The travelogue frequently addresses the Rifians as "Mohammedan people" and the Arab nationalists as "Mohammedan leaders" (pp. xiv, 100, 254, 264). In this respect, Sheean reveals his perception of Islam, which aligns with most Orientalist scholars, referring to Muslims as Mohammedan. Said (1978) argues that an analogical constraint shaped the efforts of Christian intellectuals to comprehend Islam: because Christ is the foundation of the Christian faith, it was supposed – quite wrongly – that Mohammed stood in the same relation to Islam as Christ to Christianity. Hence, Islam was given the controversial moniker "Mohammedanism," and Mohammed was labeled an "impostor" (p 60). Sheean, indeed, failed to grasp the profound connotation of the Arabic term 'Muslim', which is derived from the Arabic root (*aslama*), conveying the meaning of submission and peace. A true Muslim believer surrenders to Allah (God), not to Mohammed, who is His messenger to all mankind, not just Arabs. The Prophet Mohammed, peace be upon him, was tasked to receive God's revelation and to deliver it without any personal interpretation: "Nor does he speak from his (the Prophet) own desire; it is an Inspiration revealed by Allah."¹ Wrongly labeling Muslims as Mohammedan reveals the common denominator between Sheean's account and Occidental essentialist scholarship: the imposition of foreign projections onto distinct cultural contexts (Rif/Morocco). This exemplifies a theological episteme that personifies faith, attributing Buddhism to Buda, Confucianism to Confucius, Christianity to Christ, and "Mohammedanism" to Mohammed, peace be upon him. This is, indeed, an epistemological flaw not grounded in rigorous analysis. The Prophet Mohammed represents Islam, not its founder. "Muhammad is nothing but a messenger before whom the messengers were abandoned"². The Almighty reminds us that Muhammad is only a mortal messenger like others

¹ Quran, 53: 3-4.

² Quran, 2:144.

before him who were sent by God to His creation, calling people to worship and obey God. When their appointed times ended died and God reclaimed them. Abu Bakar Siddiq –the closest companion to the Prophet– announced immediately after the Prophet’s death: “whoever worships Allah, He is alive and has never died, and whoever worships Muhammad, he is dead.”¹ Given that, Sheean's narrative reveals a total ignorance of these fundamental creeds of Islam.

Jihad vs Crusade

Sheean mentions two terms, “Koran and sword”, as a natural collocation in various contexts throughout his travel journal, associating them with the Riffian community. This prompts readers to wonder how, in 1925, swords were still utilized in the Rif/Morocco unless Sheean refers to them figuratively. Yet this does not negate his crystal-clear intention to portray the Riffians as medieval Muslim devotees, still clinging to swords as weapons once emblematic of the Islamic empire-making era in the Arab peninsula. Furthermore, this forced collocation alludes to a lingering historical allegation – created by Western historiographers – that Islam was disseminated by the sword, through bloodshed, and coercion. However, current statistics suggest otherwise: Islam has now become the fastest-growing religion in the West, with neither guns nor swords.²

In the following passage, Sheean also depicts the Rif War as a “Jihad” against the Christian Crusades, rather than a war for the independence of Morocco, which was colonized by imperial powers:

The conflict here is one of the most sharply significant of all the conflicts wherein Islam, or any other Asiatic religious civilization, is asserting its right to independence. Mohamed Ben Abdel-Krim is the leader without whom the blind forces of Islam could never have reached any kind of organization in Morocco...he has now definitely assumed the role of Islam’s leader against Christian invasion. His

¹ See Sahih al-Bukhari (*Hadit* 3668)=

² See Lipka, Michael, and Conrad Hackett. "Why Muslims Are the World’s Fastest-Growing Religious Group." Pew Research Center, 6 Apr. 2017, <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2017/04/06/why-muslims-are-the-worlds-fastest-growing-religious-group/>

appeal to Islamic consciousness has been succinct and forceful. He has become the champion and hero of the revolt of Islam in the western half vanished Islamic empire. He was considered a leader of Islam, one of the hopes of the Moslem revival ("Introduction", pp. 11, 12, 13).

Examining the embedded messages within this excerpt, it is clear that they center on Islam and its role in the context of the Riffian cause. This remark emphasizes the gravity of the fight, which includes Islam, or any other religious civilization in Asia, demanding its right to independence. Sheean understands the significance of this fight within the religious discourse and highlights the struggle for independence as a primary issue, albeit with a religious tint. The excerpt also implies that Mohamed Ben Abdel-Krim was instrumental in mobilizing Islamic troops in Morocco. According to the author, Islam would not have reached any degree of organization in the Moroccan context without his guidance. Furthermore, the passage emphasizes Abdel-Krim's role as a leader of Islam in repelling Christian invasion, establishing him as a prominent figure in the theological discourse surrounding the Rif struggle. The travelogue recognizes Abdel-Krim's appeal to Islamic consciousness as succinct and strong, portraying him as one of the optimistic figures contributing to Islam's revival. This suggests that Abdel-Krim effectively appealed to Muslim religious sensibilities, mobilizing them in resistance to perceived threats against Islam. The quote further presents Abdel-Krim as the champion and hero of an Islamic revolution in the western part of the lost Islamic empire, implying his substantial influence on regional religious devotees. His status as a leader in the Islamic community is underlined; he is depicted as one of the optimistic leaders fostering Islam's resurgence. According to the author, Abdel-Krim's deeds and influence have the potential to reinvigorate Islamic faith, establishing him as "the expected *Mehdi* (savior)."

Inversely, Sheean touches upon Christianity as opposed to Islam, alluding that the colonial intervention of French and Spanish powers is primarily driven by holy motives. In his narrative, Sheean mentions the term "Christian" more than fifty times in a variety of collocations, such as the Christian army, invader, nation, economy, and intelligence, to name but a few. This signifies the messianic discourse with which the travelogue is imbued, thereby leading

readers to perceive the Rif War as a crusade or jihad against the “infidels,” as the following excerpt plainly demonstrates:

The glory of Castile and Aragon ends here, against the flinty obstinacy of Islam. Centuries of “crusade,” centuries of jihad, and the pride of Castile at last humbled. That Last Will and Testament of Isabel la Catholica, for instance; the great Queen of Castile, with all her acumen and almost uncanny far-sightedness, had never been able to realize the un-resilient, eternal hardness of the “infidel” whom no Spaniard could finally conquer upon his own ground (p. 169).

The passage above clearly illustrates messianic discourse in the context of the war between Castile, Aragon, and Islam. Messianic discourse refers to the expression of messianic creeds or expectations, often marked by the belief in the arrival of a savior or divinely guided figure who will bring about a desired transformation or triumph. In this case, the quote portrays a narrative of conflict between Christianity (represented by Castile and Aragon) and Islam, in which the former expects to ultimately conquer the latter, but fails to do so.

Sheean deploys powerful language to emphasize the perceived Islamic faith, highlighting its "flinty obstinacy" and "un-resilient, eternal hardness." These illustrations shed light on the perceived resistance of Islam to the efforts of the Christian forces. The excerpt also invokes the historical concept of the crusade, which carries messianic undertones by framing the conflict as a holy war fought to defend Christianity and ultimately triumph over Islam.

The allusion to Isabel La Católica, the Queen of Castile, shows appreciation for her vision and wisdom, suggesting that she was a key figure in the war against Islam. Yet, despite her intelligence and strategic acumen, the passage implies that even she could not completely overcome and comprehend the perceived impenetrability of the "infidel" Riffians. Thus, the Spanish colonization of the Rif is portrayed as a fulfillment of the Queen's will, derived from divine commands.

From an academic perspective, it is significant to critically investigate such messianic discourses and the underlying proclamations they propagate. The passage reflects a binary framing of the conflict, setting Christianity against Islam and depicting the latter as an irreconcilable foe. This type of discourse perpetuates clichés and reinforces the notion of an inherent clash of

civilizations, as prophesied by Samuel Huntington. The latter claims that Islamic fanaticism would pose the greatest jeopardy to Western global dominance.¹

CONCLUSION

It is vital to approach historical narratives with a nuanced understanding of the diversity and complexities within social, cultural, and religious groups. In light of the textual analysis, it becomes clear that Sheean fails to acknowledge the diversity within Islam or the historical and geopolitical factors that shaped the struggle between Christian and Islamic powers. The key points of this essay center on three focal conclusions: First, engaging in a more comprehensive analysis would require consideration of the multifaceted dynamics of the interactions, including political, economic, and social factors that contributed to the outcomes of the War in the Rif. Second, Sheean's travelogue completely overlooks the purely economic and political imperialist project whose orchestrators employed all necessary means to achieve their ends. Ultimately, invoking religious sentiments remains the driving force that serves a threefold purpose: stirring hatred among people based on faith, legitimizing the military intervention in the name of God, and waging religious wars instead of fostering tolerance and understanding. A case in point is George W.B.'s statement in 2001, when he described the American interference in Iraq and Afghanistan as a "crusade against Terror."

¹ Huntington, Samuel P. "The Clash of Civilizations?" *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 72, no. 3, 1993, p 31.

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