Introduction

In the summer of 1994, when I was in Nouakchott, Mauritania, researching my first book on the spread of Islamic scholarship in the western Sahel (the area of Mauritania and northern Mali),[1] I met a local Arab scholar at the archives who graciously invited me to his home. He wanted to share some primary source documents in exchange for some books I had brought with me. As I enjoyed his hospitality, sipping mint tea, a little girl of dark complexion appeared at the door. I called for her to come in, but she did not move or speak. I again called to her and asked, "I have a camera. Do you want to take a picture?" Still she did not react. The scholar's wife then entered the room and said: "Don't bother with her; she is just a slave [*'abda*]." After a while, she added that I should buy one and take her with me to Morocco in order to assist my mother in her household chores. I was taken off guard. I had naively believed that Africa was currently free of these cruel practices, yet this little girl was living proof that slavery still existed. I wanted to do something but felt powerless. I was enraged and left hastily. While still in Mauritania, I inquired about the issue of slavery, but as it was a politically sensitive issue in Nouakchott, people were apprehensive and avoided talking about it. I did learn, however, that when Mauritanians call a black person by the terms *'abd* or *'abda* (Arabic generic terms that designate male and female slaves respectively), they often refer to the blacks' family origins rather than their current legal condition. In either case the stigma persisted. I concluded

[1] Chouki El Hamel, *La Vie intellectuelle islamique dans le Sahel ouest africain. Une étude sociale de l'enseignement islamique en Mauritanie et au Nord du Mali (XVIe-XIXe siècles)* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2002).

from my conversations with Arab Mauritanians that slavery existed only rarely but its effects were still profound.[2] I realized that field work in Mauritania would be complicated, so I decided to start my research on slavery and its legacies in the country I knew best: Morocco.

Although slavery has practically ceased to exist in Morocco since the 1950s, its legacy persists in a form of prejudice and inherited marginalization. Morocco has traditionally been described in local historiography as a racially and ethnically homogenous nation, defined religiously by Islamic doctrine and linguistically and politically by Arabic nationalism. Written history is generally silent regarding slavery and racial attitudes, discrimination, and marginalization and paints a picture of Morocco as free from such social problems, problems usually associated more with slavery and its historical aftermath in the United States. Slavery and racism are issues that were previously academic taboo in Morocco. In May 1999, at a conference at Duke University entitled "Crossings: Mediterraneanizing the Politics of Location, History, and Knowledge," a Moroccan professor in the French department at the University Mohamed V (Rabat, Morocco) stated that there is no Africanicity (black consciousness) in Morocco. At the same conference, Abdessalam Ben Hamida, a Tunisian professor at the University of Tunis, said that from an ethnic standpoint the Mediterranean is a "melting pot." That same year, at a seminar about slavery in Africa directed by Roger Botte at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes in Paris, a Mauritanian scholar indignantly denied the existence of slavery and Africanicity in Mauritania and stated that "the culture of the Haratin [former black slaves] has been erased."[3] Whatever the real intentions of these Maghreb scholars were in presenting the region as a hybrid and harmonious society, this denial and refusal to admit the injustices of slavery and its legacy produces the unfortunate effect of seemingly eradicating the historical truths surrounding race and slavery and does an injustice to those who were enslaved.

The assumption that one can adequately describe the Maghreb without reference to its past demonstrates the need for more scholarly rigor than current research has so far yielded. Indeed, after a decade of researching, writing, and disseminating the findings of my critical analysis with a diverse audience in African and Islamic studies across four

[2] The legal abolition of slavery in Mauritania happened in 1981.

[3] Perhaps she implied a complete integration of the Haratin into the dominant culture. Roger Botte replied that he could provide testimonies that slavery still existed in Mauritania in that year of 1999.

continents, I noticed that progress has been made and that Arabs and Muslims from slaving societies are more receptive to breaking the culture of silence about the history of race and slavery. In July 2011, at a conference in Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia), my paper on "Othering Black Africans in Islamic Traditions" was well received by religious and secular Muslims, Arabs, and non-Arabs. I was excited to hear Sadiq al-Mahdi, the great-grandson of al-Mahdi and former prime minister of Sudan, applauding my work on slavery and its legacy of racism. But there is still a way to go as I was also shocked to hear 'Abd al-Hamid al-Harrama, a Libyan scholar of ISESCO, downplaying the history of slavery in Libya by reiterating the apologetic discourse. This discourse defends the view that slavery was not harsh in North Africa and contributes to the culture of silence by attacking and dismissing Western scholarship by labeling it as "orientalist," and this discourages Moroccans from benefiting from the rich Western intellectual heritage in the field of race, gender, and slavery.[4] It is important to note that a similar silence about slavery could be found in Europe as well. Jacques Heers, a specialist in European history, in his study of slavery in medieval Europe, has written that this silence reflects an embarrassment felt collectively throughout the centuries.[5] This is better illustrated in a recent study by Sue Peabody entitled "*There Are No Slaves in France*": *The Political Culture of Race and Slavery in the Ancien Régime*. She writes:

> "There are no slaves in France." This maxim is such a potent element of French national ideology that on a recent trip to Paris to do research on "French slaves" I was informed by the indignant owner of a boarding house that I must be mistaken because slavery had never existed in France.[6]

Moroccans do not claim that slavery never existed in their country, but the culture of silence about the history of race and slavery either located black Moroccans outside the community or completely absorbed them in it. Conversely, the most revealing testimony of slavery and its

[4] Mohamed Hassan Mohamed, a scholar from Sudan, is a clear example. His scholarship attempts to deny the history of the trans-Saharan slave trade and slavery in North Africa in general and in Morocco in particular and to accuse the West of fabricating the social ills of racism and slavery in Islamic Africa. See Mohamed Hassan Mohamed, "Africanists and Africans of the Maghrib: Casualties of Analogy," *The Journal of North African Studies*, vol. 15, no. 3 (2010): 349–374.

[5] Jacques Heers, *Esclaves et domestiques au Moyen Age dans le monde méditerranéen* (Paris: Fayard, 1981), 10 and 14.

[6] Sue Peabody, "*There Are No Slaves in France*": *The Political Culture of Race and Slavery in the Ancien Régime* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 3.

legacy in Morocco is the very existence of the Gnawa: a spiritual order of a traditionally black Muslim people who are descendants of enslaved sub-Saharan West Africans.[7] The Gnawa have retained many of the rituals and beliefs of their ancestors, expressed through the unique musical traditions of this distinct social group. Songs dealing with Gnawa origins and assimilation are still performed and are similar to those of black Americans who sang as a way to deal with their plight. In this regard, Gnawa music is analogous to the blues rooted in black American slave songs, which were widespread in the southern United States by the late nineteenth century. During my interviews with many Gnawa musicians in Essaouira and Marrakesh, they pointed out that blacks occupy a marginal position in Moroccan society as a result of their history as slaves. Another crucial testimonial is the historical memory and the living experiences of the descendants of enslaved people living in the rural south of Morocco, for example, in the Tata and Aqqa oases. In the words of as-Sudani, the grandson of an enslaved man who belonged to a rich family in southern Morocco:[8]

> This ambivalence [in talking about slavery in Morocco] is further compounded by a deep upwelling of frustration at the beliefs and attitudes shaped by the historical legacy of slavery and injustice to black people. Yet, there is still a fear of stirring up the ashes, lest they would start a fire that might hurt me and my nation, instead of helping it to overcome the scars of the past. Yes, slavery existed, especially in the south of Morocco, for a long time, and into the twentieth century. Of course, it has faded slowly, but in the beginning of the century people were still bought and sold. The majority of African people who were enslaved were Muslims, including my own grandfather and the "guard" slaves in my village. One of my uncles still remembers the names of twenty-five slaves still owned by rich white Berbers.[9]

The history of slavery in Morocco cannot be considered separately from the racial terror of the global slave trade. For racial groups such as blacks in Morocco, the problems of slavery, cultural and racial prejudice, and marginalization are neither new nor foreign. Blacks in Morocco have been marginalized for centuries, with the dominant Moroccan culture defining this marginalized group as *'Abid* (plural of *'Abd*), "slaves"; *Haratin* (plural of *Hartani*, a problematic term that generally meant

[7] See the interesting study by Viviana Pâques, *Religion des esclaves: recherches sur la confrérie marocaine des Gnawa* (Bergamo, Italy: Moretti & Vitali, 1991).

[8] The family is that of Shaykh Ma' al-'Aynayn. Ma' al-'Aynayn, a famous religious scholar and anticolonial leader, was born around 1830 in Mauritania. In the early 1890s, he moved with a large number of slaves to the south of Morocco, where he died in 1910.

[9] This is an excerpt of my interview with as-Sudani in June 2001.

free black people and/or formerly enslaved black persons); *Sudan* (plural of *Aswad*), "black Africans"; *Gnawa* (plural of *Gnawi*), "black West Africans"; *Drawa* (plural *Drawi*), "blacks from the Draa region," used in a pejorative way; *Sahrawa* (plural of *Sahrawi*), "blacks from the Saharan region"; and other terms with reference to the fact that they are black and/or descendants of slaves.[10]

The situation in Morocco was similar to the trans-Atlantic diaspora with zones of cultural exchange, borrowing, mixing, and creolization as well as violation, violence, enslavement, and racially segregated zones. The forced dislocation from a familiar place to an alien territory fits the trans-Atlantic African diasporic patterns. Colin Palmer, a scholar on the African diaspora, defines a "diasporic community" as a process and a condition. Diasporic Africans share an emotional link to their land of origin. They are conscious of their condition: assimilation, integration, or alienation and retention of elements of their previous culture in the host countries. "Members of diasporic communities also tend to possess a sense of 'racial,' ethnic, or religious identity that transcends geographic boundaries, to share broad cultural similarities, and sometimes to articulate a desire to return to their original homeland."[11] The diaspora of black West Africans in Morocco, the majority of whom were forcefully transported across the Sahara and sold in different parts of Morocco, shares some important traits with Palmer's definition of the trans-Atlantic diaspora. The legacy of the internal African diaspora with respect to Morocco has primarily a cultural significance and is constructed around the right to belong to the culture of Islam and the *umma* (the Islamic community at large). In this sense, black consciousness in Morocco is analogous to Berber consciousness and shares the Arab notion of collective identity. Blacks in Morocco absorbed some of the Arabo-centric values expressed in the dominant interpretation of Islam in order to navigate within the Arabo-centric discourse. Black Moroccans perceive themselves first and foremost as Muslim Moroccans and only perceive themselves secondarily as participants in a different tradition and/or belonging to a specific ethnic, racial, or linguistic group, real or imagined. For blacks, this Islamic identity is the determining factor in their social relations with other ethnic groups. In a way, Berbers are to some

[10] These various terms for race and their meanings will be explained in greater detail in Chapter 2.

[11] Colin A. Palmer, "Defining and Studying the Modern African Diaspora," *The Journal of Negro History* vol. 85, no. 1/2 (Winter 2000): 29.

extent in the same boat as black Moroccans, but neither is in the same boat as the dominant Arabs.

The study of marginalized groups has only recently attracted the interest of Moroccan scholarship, and writing the history of enslaved people is particularly difficult because of the lack of sources. There are no written slave narratives in Morocco, and such narratives are rare in the Islamic world due partly to the lack of a consistent abolitionist movement. One informative exception is found in Sudan, where a few narratives were committed to writing and translation due to the encouragement and sponsorship by European Christian abolitionists. For example, the memoirs of the late-nineteenth-century Sudanese slave soldier Ali Effendi Gifoon[12] and the narrative of Josephine Bakhita (1869–1947) were published at the turn of the twentieth century.[13] Scholars interested in recovering the slaves' views of Moroccan slavery are limited to oral histories and the evidence preserved in the Gnawa slave songs. Hence, all the documents I consulted were written from the Moroccan slaveholders' perspective or written by Westerners. One of the pioneering books on the history of Moroccan slavery, entitled *Serving the Master: Masters and Slaves in Nineteenth-Century Morocco*, was published in 1999 by Mohammed Ennaji.[14] In this book, Ennaji depicts aspects of the slave experience that demonstrate the cruelty of slavery in Morocco. One can also find unpublished dissertations about Moroccan slavery in the universities of Morocco and France, but most tend to describe the lives of slave soldiers in the Moroccan army and/or slavery's legal aspects, often with an emphasis on the benign features of the Islamic institution of slavery.[15] What's more, most North African books on the subject are written

[12] "Memoirs of a Soudanese Soldier (Ali Effendi Gifoon)" dictated in Arabic to and translated by Captain Percy Machell in George Smith et al., *The Cornhill Magazine* (London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1896).

[13] Trout Powell has analyzed this narrative and other important narratives in Sudan, Egypt, and Turkey at the end of the nineteenth century through the first half of the twentieth century. See her book, *Tell This in My Memory: Stories of Enslavement from Egypt, Sudan and the Ottoman Empire* (Stanford University Press, 2012).

[14] Mohammed Ennaji, *Serving the Master: Slavery and Society in Nineteenth-Century Morocco*, translated by Seth Graebner (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999). See also the dissertation thesis of another Moroccan scholar, Majda Tangi, *Contribution à l'étude de l'histoire des "Sudan" au Maroc du début de l'islamisation jusqu'au début du XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Université de Panthéon-Sorbonne Paris I, 1994). The dissertation is very informative; it traces the history of blacks in Morocco from the beginning of Islam to the eighteenth century.

[15] For instance, Muhammad Razzuq, "Qadiyyat ar-Riqq fi Tarikh al-Maghrib," *Revue d'Histoire Maghrébine*, (Tunis: Librairie des Chercheurs Arabes, n. 41–42, June 1986): 114–128. See also 'Imad Ahmad Hilal, *ar-Raqiq fi Misr fi al-Qarn at-Tasi' 'Ashar* (Cairo:

in an apologetic manner: emphasizing the generosity of Islam toward those enslaved and hence undermining the experiences and agency of the enslaved people. As for external study of slavery in Morocco, the bulk of published scholarship on slavery in Islamic lands, with Morocco only as a minor case study, was undertaken by European and American scholars such as William Clarence-Smith[16] and Bernard Lewis.[17] As yet, there is no comprehensive and analytic published book on the history of slavery in Morocco.

As for the primary sources, the records in the libraries and archives of Morocco have so far proved to be abundant and indicative of Morocco's significant historical presence and the participation of blacks in the making of Moroccan society and culture. The Moroccan archives, kept at the Royal Library and the Bibliothèque Générale (now Bibliothèque Nationale), both in Rabat, are largely unedited or unclassified and as of yet not well exploited. Moroccan historiography, mainly unpublished and published historical chronicles, although focused largely on elites and events, provides tremendous assistance on the context of the black Moroccans. Traditional Moroccan historiography is chronically and factually centered on the episodes of dynastic history. It is nonetheless possible to glean from it crucial scattered notations concerning the origins of Morocco's black people, their contributions, and the institution and ideology of enslavement. A great example is *Ithaf A'lam an-Nas Bijamal Akhbar Hadirat Maknas* by historian 'Abd ar-Rahman ibn Zaydan,[18] which is important by reason of the amount of information it contains regarding the critical roles that black individuals played in the politics of the palace and the Makhzan. But caution must be taken because Ibn Zaydan was explicitly biased in favor of the 'Alawi dynasty.

The primary Western sources such as accounts of European voyages and colonial documents present a different and often Eurocentric perspective. To maintain objectivity, I corroborated the European information with other local sources. For instance, Joseph de León, a Spanish officer

al-'Arabi li 'l-Nashr wa-al-Tawzi', 1999) and Ibrahim Hashim al-Fallali, *La Riqq fi 'l-Qur'an* (Cairo: Dar al-Qalam, 1960). See also Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, *Shaihu Umar: A Novel*, translated by Mervyn Hiskett (New York: M. Wiener Pub, 1989). This novel depicts domestic slavery in Islamic societies as on the whole benign.

[16] William Clarence-Smith, *Islam and the Abolition of Slavery* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

[17] Bernard Lewis, *Race and Slavery in the Middle East: An Historical Enquiry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

[18] 'Abd ar-Rahman ibn Zaydan, *Ithaf A'lam an-Nas Bijamal Akhbar Hadirat Maknas* (Casablanca, Morocco: Librairie Idéale, 1990).

who spent twenty years in captivity in Morocco (1708–1728), reported that Mawlay Isma'il was possibly strangled by one of his concubines named Zaydana, the mother of the prince Mawlay Ahmad adh-Dhahabi. There are two errors in the author's hypothesis: 1) Zaydana was one of the sultan's legitimate four wives and therefore not a concubine – legally, only a female slave can fulfill the role of a concubine in Morocco,[19] 2) Zaydana died in 1716, about eleven years before Mawlay Isma'il's death, hence the impossibility of this hypothesis. Information on the harem was generally based on rumors and speculations at best, since no man, let alone a foreigner, had access to the sultan's harem, or any harem for that matter, but nevertheless these speculations reflected a glimpse of the agency, intrigues, and rivalries among wives and concubines in the sultan's palace.[20] But, since Arabic sources are short in details on issues related to women, sexuality, race, and slavery, European sources provide crucial details that could fill the gap. For instance, Ibn Marjan (a black eunuch in charge of the treasury as well as the black servants in the palace during the life of Mawlay Isma'il) is mentioned in Arabic sources mostly as an important figure in the palace in charge of the treasury. However, European sources provide important details on his political activities in the palace, especially his critical involvement in the succession process. In fact, late-nineteenth-century and early-twentieth-century European travelers' accounts give testimony to the diverse and important roles that slaves occupied in Moroccan society.

My desire to fill in these historical lacunae has led me to focus on slavery, race, and gender in Morocco from the sixteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth century.[21] Over the course of those four centuries, blacks migrated voluntarily, and many of the Haratin were indigenous to the northern Sahara, but most were victims of the slave trade across the Sahara to Morocco. Although the African diaspora in the Americas is one of the major topics of current historical research on the black diaspora, a less researched but no less important aspect of the global African diaspora is that internal to Africa. The Islamization of northern Africa led to a huge increase in trade, especially in the trans-Saharan

[19] De León was probably confused about Zaydana's status as she started out as a concubine but later was promoted to the status of free wife.

[20] Chantal de La Véronne and Joseph de León, *Vie de Moulay Isma'il, roi de Fès et de Maroc: d'après Joseph de León, 1708–1728* (Paris: Paul Geuthner, 1974), Documents d'histoire maghrébine, vol. 2, 14–15.

[21] I am using the racial term *black* in the context in which it was socially constructed. I will address the whole issue of race in much greater detail later in the book.

region. As a case study, Morocco is important for several reasons. First, the library records and archives have proven to be more abundant than other archival sources in the Maghreb. Second, Morocco has a significant historical connection with sub-Saharan West Africa. And third, the black community has played a dynamic role in Moroccan society. Therefore my book is primarily slavery related. But I am by no means suggesting that slavery was the origin of the black African presence in Morocco. I am suggesting, however, that the encounter between the Berbers and Arabs and black Africans has historically been inequitable, generally in favor of the Berbers and the Arabs.

I argue that relying solely on Islamic ideology as a crucial key to explain social relations, particularly the history of black slavery in the Muslim world, yields an inaccurate historical record of the people, institutions, and social practices of slavery in the Arab world. Islam and Islamic law was surely a powerful social dynamic, but other cultural and ethnic factors figure prominently into how Islam was engendered in particular historical social settings. My study poses new questions that examine the extent to which religion orders a society and the extensive influence of secular conditions on the religious discourse and the ideology of enslavement in Morocco. The interpretation and application of Islam did not guarantee the freedom and integration of ex-slaves into society. To understand slavery and its legacy, we must therefore investigate the nature and practice of slavery in Morocco within and beyond Islam. Undeniably, Muslims permitted the enslavement of non-Muslims, of any race or ethnicity, even though the Islamic creed explicitly discourages slavery. Islamic law also prohibits the enslavement of free Muslims. History, however, is witness to many cases of Muslims enslaving other Muslims, the most outstanding Moroccan example being the enslavement of the Muslim Haratin – the so-called free blacks or ex-slaves – during Mawlay Isma'il's reign (1672–1727). The illegal enslavement of the Haratin marked a crucial turning point in Moroccan history, one that shaped the future of racial relations and black identity and that revealed the disjuncture between Islamic ideals and historical realities and between ideology and practice regarding race and gender in Moroccan slavery. During Mawlay Isma'il's reign, physical characteristics and skin color in particular were a crucial factor in identifying at least one group in Morocco – the free black people or so-called ex-slaves (sing. *Hartani*; pl. *Haratin*). The term *Haratin* referred to a group of people who occupied an intermediary position between slaves and free Muslims, and thus their social status was at times unclear. However, in addition to being identified as slaves or freed slaves, the

Haratin were invariably recognized in the historical documents of this period as having been black.[22] The episode of their re-enslavement during the reign of Sultan Mawlay Isma'il raises a series of important historical questions: Who were these Haratin and why were they enslaved? What was their status before their enslavement? How did their status change after they were freed? What conditions precipitated their re-enslavement and what role did skin color play in the decision to categorically re-enslave them? In order to answer these questions, I investigate the construction of "black" as a social category and how this changed diachronically, and explore the contrast between Islamic theories on slavery and the practice of slavery during Mawlay Isma'il's era. My analysis demonstrates that the traditional understanding of the politics and the practice of slavery in Morocco ignores important historical evidence and derives from gross generalizations deduced from Islamic legal treatises regarding the status and practice of slavery. Evidence that I present strongly suggests that in the late seventeenth century Morocco did in fact demonstrate the exploitation of blacks and the ideological foundation for a society divided by skin color. Hence, religious principles were substituted by racial concepts and a racist ideology in order to establish and preserve the social boundaries that demarcate the identities and privileges of the Arabs and the Berbers.

In this study, I focus on slavery and racial attitudes during and after Mawlay Isma'il's time, and I also discuss the beginning of slavery, the legal discourse, and racial stereotypes that existed in Moroccan society before Mawlay Isma'il. I chose this period of the history of blacks in Morocco because it best represents their collective experience and how they were perceived. It was also a special case that ironically allowed the black Moroccans a powerful role in the administration of the country. Mawlay Isma'il's project is crucial in this study because it raises questions about the extent to which the integration of black Muslims was real. Although in Islamic societies and societies influenced by Islam, the institution of slavery was not drawn strictly along racial lines, cases of racial slavery did exist, just as can be seen in the cases when Muslims enslaved other Muslims. It is important to note, however, that the same Islamic teachings provided the enslaved with resources for resistance and an identity that made it possible for them to navigate within society. In the second chapter on race, I analyze how racialist ideas and positions became not only an ideology of enslavement but also a structure based on

[22] These historical documents will be discussed in greater detail in the book.