

# Şūfī Motifs in Ibrāhīm Al-Kōnī's *The Fetishists*

Jamal Assadi

Academic College for Teacher Education, The College of Sakhnin, Sakhnin, Israel

Email: jamal-a@windowslive.com, jamal-a@sakhnin.ac.il

**How to cite this paper:** Assadi, J. (2021). Şūfī Motifs in Ibrāhīm Al-Kōnī's *The Fetishists*. *Advances in Literary Study*, 9, 143-153.

<https://doi.org/10.4236/als.2021.93016>

**Received:** May 18, 2021

**Accepted:** June 12, 2021

**Published:** June 15, 2021

Copyright © 2021 by author(s) and Scientific Research Publishing Inc. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0).

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>



Open Access

## Abstract

In his *The Fetishists*, Ibrāhīm al-Kōnī uses Şūfī themes, motifs, language and symbols to present the legendary epic thought of the nature of life in the desert where he lived in his childhood and youth. His goal is to ask questions about the meaning of existence, human adventure, destiny, power and civilization through using the world of the Tuareg as an imaginary source of fiction. Al-Kōnī depicts the elements of the desert world, as if it were a mystical redeemer, with which he unites to reach the ultimate universal truth. What energizes the Şūfī context in the novel is the vital presence of Şūfī characters—*dervishes*, wanderers, disciples, saints and the various conflicts inflamed amongst individuals, groups, communities, philosophies, and cultures and between man and nature represented by the desert, sands, winds and droughts. Furthermore, in the manner of the Şūfī thinking, al-Kōnī manages to grant a living spirit to every element present in the desert, human and non-human, and animate and non-animate. All share in the construction of the soul of the world to attain through joint prayers the great universal truth of God. That is a major ingredient that goes into the fabric of Şūfī philosophy.

## Keywords

*The Fetishists*, Ibrāhīm Al-Kōnī, Şūfī Motifs, Modern Arab Fiction, The Desert Spirit

## 1. Introduction

Ibrāhīm al-Kōnī, (1948-), a Libyan writer, and one of the most cherished and famed writers in Arabic today, employs Şūfī motifs, themes, and symbols so extensively that references to Şūfism, Şūfī figures, practices and ideas, and Şūfī contexts are deployed everywhere in his fiction. We meet mystical spirits who are fond of secrets and his novels are strewn with mystical language. Consider deletion, (*al-maḥow*), solution (*ḥolūl*), grief (*wajd*), ascension (*al-'orūj*), saints, dervishes, wanderers, *dhikr*, lamp etc. Besides, there are quotes of the great Şūfīs

such as Al-Nafri, Farid *al-Din al-Attar* and Muhyi *al-Din Ibn al-Arabi*. Like Iben Khaldun, as Marcia Lynx Qualey thinks, Ibrahim *al-Koni* traces the conflicts of human generations, particularly between established peoples and the nomadic peoples. His novel, she adds, is replete with Hegelian-Şufi concepts related to the free and enslaved man, the traveling and the stable person, the believer in God and the disbeliever. And she concludes that events are often magical in the sense that they are mystical or Şufic (Qualey, 2019).

The setting *al-Koni* chooses has always the quality of Şufi connotations, the type of life that his major characters lead is, in significant ways, parallel to notable Şufi figures' lives, speech and philosophies and the conflicts these characters go through are reminiscent of the conflicts lived by Şufi figures.

But what does *al-Koni* try to discover through the medium of Şufism? Is his notion of Şufism in his fiction different from that endorsed by early Şufi saints? And how is it reflected in his treatment of his main themes and characters? In order to understand the image more deeply, the focus of my investigation will be on his great novel, *The Fetishists*. For the purpose of concentrated discussion, I will examine the setting of the novel, the range of characters, the conflict and the plot.

## 2. The Setting

*The Fetishists*, or *Al Majus* (1990-1), regarded as *al-Koni's magnum opus*, explores how two competing cultures seek to establish a utopia on Earth. In the process they clash because of the battle between a want for material welfare (embodied by gold dust) and a demand for spiritual sense, esteemed by Şufi figures. In the opening of the story, Oragh, the Sultan of Timbuktu, expresses his fear that he might be compelled to sacrifice his only daughter, Tenere, to their god Amnay and, as a result, he may lose her after he has already lost most of his authority to Fetishist Bambara, leader of the forestlands. To him, his loss implies a submission to pagan customs and, therefore, is an irreparable damage to his Islamic faith. To forestall this happening, he sends his daughter to fellow Tuareg nomads in the plain where she can find a safe shelter. Soon, a clash erupts between the representative of the ancient Tuareg Law and moderate Islam and the sects of gold dust, the agents of traditional African folk religions.

In the context, *al-Koni* records the detailed life of the tribes in Sahara: their customs, battles and challenges; their various and opposing faiths, religions and acts of wisdom; their men and women both the young and the old, the average and the leaders, their culture, language, history and heritage including their love and enmity, poetry, and singing. He does so through the use of a poetic and mystical language in which he assimilates a great bulk of the vocabulary that registers their harsh life. But what gives the Şufi condition an impetus is the Şufi connotations inherent in the setting, the plot, the conflict and the characters.

In this epic work, we enter the world of the desert which is expansively suggestive of Şufi connotations, and, in consequence, offers an ideal place where a

true Ṣūfī figure can conduct his life. Its barrenness and aridness, scarcity of rainfall, absence of modern signs and features, and severity of life, exactly fit the Ṣūfī figure's ascetic lifestyle characterized by abstinence from bodily pleasures pushed by the greed of possession of gold and power and indulgence in other material possessions often for the purpose of chasing spiritual objectives. Moreover, the desert's broadness, infinite openness, quietness, strangeness, uniqueness and seriousness, rebellious and cruel nature and complexity are in harmony with the Ṣūfī figure's spirit need to roam and think freely of God and His creation. Nowhere has *al-Kōnī*'s combination of the desert spirit and the Ṣūfī mysticism been apparent than in the opening pages of the novel. From the top of a mountain, the unnamed narrator, who frees himself from his body to observe the funny and ugly lives of people below, says,

He will not taste the flavor of life, he who does not breathe the air of the mountains. Here on top of naked peaks he comes close to gods, becomes free from his body and is able to extend his hand and pick the moon or the stars. From this position he likes to watch the people at their nadir. They compete with the diligence of bees and believe they have attained the miracle. He goes down to their land and finds that they are naughty *dervishes* who work hard in their search, but all they get is falsity, so there are hopes: a moon, stars, a miracle. All are in heaven, but the earth has nothing but falsehood (Ibrāhīm, 1992: p. 9)<sup>1</sup>.

*Al-Kōnī* puts us in a position where readers are familiar with two types of people: those who are on top of the mountains enjoying the purity of life represented by the nakedness of the peaks and blessed with the company of gods and, in consequence, can attain all far reached goals reflected in their ability to pick the stars and the moon. Although the reference is to deities, their followers mirror the true characters of real Ṣūfis. Conversely, down on the earth there are people who look like *dervishes* but they are fake people living a false life.

The moon and star are the symbol of Islam. The moon is also synonymous with the commencement of Ramadan. Moreover, the Prophet Mohammad himself is associated with the moon. In the Ṣūfī context, the moon is a positive symbol because it captures a key point in the stretched allegory of light, which is extensively used in their teachings. Stars also have compelling symbolic meaning. According to their positions in the constellations, stars are signposts to the right path but they are also the falling stars which, as the *Qur'an* declares, are thrown down by God to chase rash demons who come close to heaven to eavesdrop on God's whispers.

Then, *al-Kōnī* describes the "revered" Acacus mountain which splits into

... two smaller fairy mountains that are lost in the desert. One laid southward next to the mother mountain and looked short than its strayed brother, though he competed with his brother in going up to heavens through

<sup>1</sup>All citations from the novel are translated by the author. Henceforth, all references are cited in the texts.

two enormous structures. As for the northern mountain, slumbering in the other side of the field, its sad and mysterious peaks with their four towers by space with reverence are cracked (9).

Mount Acacus with its two sub ranges portrayed as greatly revered figures is a clear reference to the Israelites, and the two brothers Moses and Aaron. Their sacred appearances and their portrayal as lost wanderers in the desert do not only hint at Sufi figures but also find echo in the major characters and two camps functioning in the novel. In addition, number four (*arba'a*) in Ṣūfī literature signifies matter and the equilibrium between things created and the four elements (earth, water, fire, and air). It also represents the four seasons of the year (Rodrigues, 2008: p. 113).

*Al-Kōnī* creates a world whose mysterious desert looks like a barren planet under a blazing sun with no terrain, no towns, no sites. It is a massive maze coinciding with distinctive human beings who know its nature, rites and riddles and accomplish its pledges, and gratify it with prayers and charms, committed to its bonds and covenants, waiting for their harsh destiny with abundant patience and unlimited obedience. Despite its adversities and the brutality of its nature, its people love its vacant wilderness which has become their fortress, sanctuary, and the square of their equestrian and nobility. This implies that the desert is a background decorating people's conduct or a place where people live their own life full of legends and ancestral wisdoms. This type of life intersects with the experiences of the wise, the elders, the wizards, the longings of the seekers of God and freedom, and the pleasures of young people motivated by greed and power. Furthermore, the desert is a world that dictates a certain type of life. It is an extreme and cruel world where objects, events and human beings rush to the limits of their contents, scopes and boundaries. In other words, there is no room here for compromises, bargains and arguments between God and gold, between the demand for truth and the lust for power, between the nobility of the spirit and the identity of possession. This is perfectly the place and lifestyle whose environmental conditions match the religious trends of Ṣūfism. The desert makes being one component, where the spirit is submerged and cleansed so that it can merge with eternal emptiness. The Ṣūfī spirit is also felt in *al-Kōnī's* depiction of the desert man's dialectic relationship with animals and vegetation that is characterized by union. The concept of an animate universe is seen in Ṣūfī philosophy of the Muslim philosopher Shahāb ad-Dīn Yahyā ibn Habash Suhrawardī (1154-1191) (Butterworth & Mahdi, 1992: p. 336). Suhrawardī's blend of Neoplatonism and Mazdeism is echoed in his conception of an animate universe in which everything is apprehended as being the demonstration of God's light (Khan, 2016: p. 221; Abdollah, 2016: pp. 686-694).

The same period witnessed the appearance of Chishtī Mu'īn *al-Dīn* Ḥasan Sijzī (1142-1236 CE), another significant Ṣūfī teacher who came into sight in 12<sup>th</sup> century India (Orsini & Katherine, 2015: p. 463). Chishti established one of the most prominent *tarīqas* of India, called the Chishtiyya, which has placed great

stress on the Ṣūfī doctrine of the unity of being (*waḥdat al-wujūd*), oneness with God. Despite the gap between his theology and the Hindu teachings, he, endorsed the attitude that the human and vigorous livingness of the elements combine as a microcosm that condenses the entire cosmos. His concept is derived from *The Qur'an*, where God says “Of water we fashioned every living being” (*Qur'an* 21:30). Similarly, the novel emphasizes that the desert man’s relationship with everything surrounding him is an organic connection that takes the full life of the Sahara man.

In an interview with *Abdul Rahaman al-Marri* (2016), *al-Kōnī* affirms, “the wilderness is a mosque or a temple, a sanctuary” (<http://www.saqya.com>). In this world, wisdom is prominent and necessity triumphs and controls everything. In consequence, the rare water springing from the earth is esteemed, and defenses are built for it, and severe wars are waged between different tribes for gaining it. Clearly, water is a central motif derived from Islamic and Ṣūfī tales. In fact, almost all the religious groups of the world including Muslims regard water as one of the most figuratively noteworthy images. The *Qur'ān*, *Ḥadīth*, Muslim rituals, and Islamic literature contain a store of images and associations broadly indicating that water sends life, knowledge, and pureness. Aware of these associations, the Ṣūfī figures make good use of it.

Iben Rūmī’s *Mathnawī*, which narrates stories having mystical and spiritual meanings, for example, expresses the fluctuating array of import which the *Qur'ān* gives to the image of water. Water in Rūmī’s poetry, as *Cyrus A. Zargar* (2013: p. 116) indicates, always has a variety of meanings. Just as the changeable metaphor characterizes Rūmī’s style, water to Rūmī is the relentlessly changing stream of events and time.

A brilliant instance of Rūmī’s employment of the water image, in Zargarm’s opinion, emerges in the tale of a poor Bedouin, who goes to a generous caliph in quest of help (116). The expressions Rūmī uses to depict the caliph indicate a strong tie between generosity and water richly inherent in Arabic literature. The caliph is “clouds and rain,” the “water of life and a sea of generosity” (Rūmī 1: 196, lines 2258 and 2262, quoted in *ibid*). Not knowing what to give the caliph, the Bedouin wisely brings rainwater meticulously collected and cautiously brought in a cherished new pitcher. Rūmī, as Zargarm maintains, seizes this opportunity to present the merits of water. According to Zargarm, the moral of the narrative seems straightforward: a person can bring the needless caliph poverty, his only one true present, because paradoxically poverty lets the monarch realize his open-handedness. Likewise, man should leave his desire of having anything valuable for himself, and follow the Bedouin’s pattern of bringing poverty to the bountiful cradle of creation (*Ibid.*, 117).

But, Rūmī, as Zargarm affirms, uses the metaphor to give deeper implications. For Rūmī, the metaphor highlights the association between earthly qualities and godly ones emphasizing the man’s need to change his own water, i.e. his traits with pure sea water namely divine qualities. Furthermore, the metaphor, as Zargarm illustrates, provides the means of obtaining divine qualities. Man must

learn to control the spouts of the pitcher or his sense. Cosmologically, the metaphor points to God's definitive reality, as eventually all water, whether in pitcher or in the sea is the same, though it is subject to changing scales of clarity (117).

And the water motif is strongly associated with another very renowned Ṣūfī woman from the city of Basra, Iraq: Rābi'a *al-'Adawiyya al-Qaysiyya* (714/717/718—801 CE) (Smith, 2010: p. 252). Rābi'a is known as a Muslim saint with an abundance of stories exhibiting her devotion and love of God. In one such story she is said to have been walking through Basra's roads carrying a pail of water in one hand and a torch in the other, proclaiming: "I want to pour water into Hell and set fire to Paradise so that these two veils disappear and nobody worships God out of fear of Hell or hope for Paradise, but only for the sake of His Eternal Beauty" (Farīd *al-Dīn*, 2009: pp. 97-114).

Interestingly, these mystical motifs associated with water are echoed in the novel. Unlike the Sufi figures' intended lessons, water in the desert is associated with asceticism but it does not lead people to worship God better. On the contrary, its shortage and significance for their existence turn water into a semi god that is so cherished that the people of the desert consider any insult to their wells as blasphemous to their law and violators are punished by God and the desert. Violators of the law manifested in abusing water or being careless concerning the protection of water are subject to severe penalties. It determines the events, trials and contests of the people of the Sahara. To survive, they are to confront two enemies: nature represented by *al-Qibli*, the wind and the attacks of other Saharan tribes. Thus, they do their utmost to prevent the wicked wind from destroying their water resources and with them their existence. They devise mechanisms to challenge the wind in groundbreaking methods like secreting their wells. As for the human enemies, the desert people launch wars to maintain this valuable resource. And naturally, their conflicts over water are intermingled in their myths, songs and poetry.

The environmental climate of the desert inflicts its conditions and rules, and sacredness on man, as well as on the plants, mountains and ghosts. "Nature in the desert is the one that shapes people's calculations, not the other way around" (97) and "desert is the origin of man's conduct" (188). In the desert the wind and thirst are amalgamated by one philosophy that is validated and spread by a mass of believers, *dervishes*, fortune-tellers, jurists and Ṣūfī elders. Like the Ṣūfī people, man's compass in the desert is an uncontaminated sense that conserves his pureness through absolute seclusion and by the denial of possession and migration in quest of the vanished paradise. So the Ṣūfī habits, the discourse of journey and parables have the upper hand. Just like the Ṣūfī man, the desert dweller, "is liberated from the body and becomes able to extend his hand to pick the full moon or reap the stars" (9). In the same manner as the Ṣūfī figure, the desert man's spirit is dirtied when contacts with the outside world occur. So in the novel, cities and oases are situated far away on the edge of the desert that mocks modern civilization and lives its perfect, authentic way. The life, *al-Kōnī* presents, is influenced by Ṣūfī methods that have engrossed the personality of the desert

man and the facts of his environment.

### 3. The Characters

As for the characters, they generally look like ghosts or mythical beings that have nothing to do with time or reality. They live in their own imagined reality and act as if they were forerunners led to preconceived destinies. The novel essentially presents two types of opposed characters: the good who are motivated by moral conducts to preserve their society and, therefore, are reminiscent of Şūfi figures; and the wretched, vile and apprehensive characters, who represent the adversaries of the mystic people. They are flat characters who are always tough, miserable and at unease.

The list of the first group is not long. The most notable characters who denote Şūfi qualities are Moses, the Dervish and Edda, the chief and the foreman or An-Nazir, who is characterized by the purity of the character and his sacrifice of sight in order to save the Dervish. Moses, to start with, is referred to as the Dervish, a typical model of Şūfi figures. His first name is reflective of Moses, the Jewish prophet. Moses was the pure mystic leader and the wanderer who led the Israelites across the Red Sea and to Mount Sinai, where he received the Ten Commandments from God. After wandering in the desert for 40 years, the Israelites reached their Promised Land. Exactly like the Biblical Moses, *a/Kōni's* Moses wisely leads his people from the diaspora to salvation, follows religious doctrines, wanders in the desert for a long time and does not enjoy the fruits of his struggle. Furthermore, his pen name is derived from a major Şūfi term. According to *Dictionary of American Family Names*, "Dervish" is a

Status name for a Şūfi holy man, from Persian and Turkish *derviş* "dervish", a member of a Şūfi Muslim religious order, from Pahlavi *driyosh* meaning "Wayfarer", "one who goes from town to town" in search of Knowledge, he had to earn his food by his means. He could not live like a hermit in solitude he had to live in public.

Indeed, Dervish is an offspring of the Almoravids and is greatly esteemed by the desert society. So, he represents the good far-sighted character that sees what others cannot see and who alerts the Sahrawis against the fake *dervishes* seeking wealth, thieves, and killers. He is the one that inspires enigmas and through him the novel unfolds its profound and suggestive Şūfi language.

His major deed which suggests Şūfi conduct is displayed in an ambiguous scene in the novel. He castrates himself, an act of self-sacrifice, with the witch's knife to get rid of the snake that took his ancestors out of Wow, their paradise. Thanks to his wisdom, patience and heroic deeds, he manages to survive the diaspora with few others after the destruction of the tribe at the hands of the Fetishists and the sons of the *jinn* and hyenas. Now that he is self-castrated, he is like a Şūfi character concerned with the purification of inner self so that he can remove all the veils between Divinity and himself. He escapes from the Tafawot, the woman whom he loves. She is the only woman survivor after the diaspora

and the only one that can save the tribe from extinction. But Dervish gives her up and entrusts the chief to do this task.

The chief is another wise tribe leader. Although the chief's religious ideas are not comparable to Šūfists', his lifestyle and attitudes certainly resonate the life of mysticism, especially his strong hold of his religious doctrine and life. He is the governor who keeps the law derived from the holy book of the desert, *Anhi*. The book contains the law of the ancestors and their inherited wisdom, which have been lost throughout history. His search for the lost desert identity and personality reminds us of the Šūfī pursuit for the fundamental roots of Islamic identity inherent in early Islamic leaders and the *Qur'ān*.

The second type of characters are essentially anti Šūfī figures. They are mostly fortune tellers and witches who emerge without names, and with no recognized features. Their secrets unfold and their characters swell little by little before we recognize their names. One may consider Timit, the oracle, and Edkran, the fortune teller. Some of them read the "Throne Verse," the 255th verse of the 2nd *surah* of the *Qur'ān*, "*Al-Baqarah*" along with some pagan spells when in difficult situations, thus, demonstrating the synchronization of Islam with other religions.

Other characters may be added to the list. These are a handful of key figures wearing multiple masks and are reflected in a variety of characters running lustfully after authority and possession. The list includes the ruler, Sultan Org, the false Šūfī displayed as the Sheikh of the Qadiriya way, Hajj *a*-Bakai, who represents the climax of the negative human rebellion against the norms and laws that preserve the prestige and esteem of destiny, and Judge *Al*-Shanqiti, a seeker of revenge.

Importantly, the woman has a dominant presence in the novel. Take, for instance, the woman in love, Tenere, or Tafawot, Odad's mother, Dervish's mother and nanny, the lustful immortal woman, the women of the Bakai, the woman of the great merchant and the woman poet. Strangely, they are often portrayed as wicked figures representing the origin of all evils. This is seen in the scene where woman is compared to the snake that takes the Sahrawis' grandfather out of paradise.

#### 4. The Plot

The characters' portrayal receives a better dimension when shown in the plot. *a*-Kōnī points out that the inspiration for the novel is a bet between one young man and his brother who climbs a cliff as part of a bet on a camel. In *The Fetishists*, Okha challenges Odad to climb a similar slope. If Odad wins, he gains the bet, which is the heart of Tenere. The bet is about the journey of Odad's ascension to the top of Mount Edinan to win Princess Tenere. Odad represents the desert spirit with its ambitions and originality, and the great challenges he faces. Although this bet is not at the center of the novel, the ascension connotes a major symbol in Islam. It denotes *Mī rāj*, namely, the ascension of the Prophet Muhammad into heaven. Aḥmad Mūsā's, the master of most famous pupil,

Shams *al-Dīn* Tibrizī, the notable mystic figure, illustrated a book of the *Mī rāj* which is preserved in part in the *Conqueror's Albums* of the imperial Ottoman library at the Topkapı Palace at Istanbul (*Encyclopedia Britannica*, n.d.). The image signifies a chief Ṣūfī motif. According to many Ṣūfī teachers, in order for the self to attain a true Ṣūfī degree, it must undergo seven levels of development, ranging from being definitely self-absorbed and self-centered to being virtuously spiritual (James & Robert, 1997: pp. 19-23).

The novel circles around the attempt to establish the earthly city of happiness equivalent to the lost paradise, but the sin that took man's great-grandfather, Adam, from paradise into the world of earthly misery continues to haunt his descendants.

The high sand wind, called *al-Qibli*, stands out as a fundamental catalyst of events and challenges. The people of the Sahara do their utmost to stop this monster from swallowing them, their water and their existence. In response, they invent tools to confront it and create innovative ways like hiding their wells and mapping them. They even believe any insult to their wells is offensive to their law. Externally, the desert people wage battles in order to preserve this treasure and prevent the enemies from controlling it. Their battles over water are interwoven in their legends including the punishments that are imposed on those who violate the law and insult or take lightly the issue of the protection of water. Eventually, *al-Qibli* destroys everything. It destroys the water and the wells on which the life of the Sahrawis is based.

So, the desert's system of life, as already indicated, plays a central role in the plot. It has its own power and dominant presence. For example, the purity of An-Nazir's character and his sacrifice of sight in order to save the Dervish do not qualify him to be treated well. His sin following his reneging on a promise to the holy beetle causes him serious trouble. Odad, to give another example, is an important figure, who is transformed into a desert deer for ravaging the *jinn* fortresses at Mount Aidinan. Also the hunter, Amasis, a trivial character, is converted into a desert *widan* as a penalty for capturing a pregnant deer. But the essence of the transformation can be cruel or merciful depending on the character. Odad's conversion is merciful and represents his return to his ancestors while Amasis' is a cruel eternal punishment. This gives the motif of return and alternation an epic and moral dimension that is manifested in the return of the Dervish to the wolf clan, and the return of the Sheikh, both of which suggest a reincarnation of life from annihilation. Interestingly, the conversion of the Dervish and the Sheikh is surely full of Ṣūfī connotation. According to the Ṣūfī mystic philosophy, conversion (*al-ināba*) is more precise than repentance. It signifies coming back to God while cracked but energized with a repaired ambition for the spiritual trip. Ṣūfīs distinguish between three stages of conversion: transforming from depravity to repentance, from recklessness to watchfulness, and from a detached to connected consciousness with God (*jam' 'alā Allāh*) (Ahmad, 2012: p. 4).

The Sheikh and Dervish, Edda, the Chief, Odad, and An-Nazir supposedly the

wisest and most transparent characters of the novel, undergo a psychological conflict. It is characterized by a kind of interlacing between insight and human instinct which is engrossed in sin and monitored by a vigilant conscience that imposes its influence on them and judges their conduct very firmly.

There is also an external conflict between two concepts of authority: the first, represented by the Chief, (who sees all people as equal in front of God,) nature, history and authority. It affirms that people have the right to be free in their lives, decisions and futures, but they must tolerate the aftermaths of their freedom. The second vision, embodied by Bobo, agent of the Qadiriyyah way, sees people as herds and as such are not qualified to receive the truth and take responsibility for their decisions. People, therefore, need a sponsor to guide their steps, directly and daily so as not to get lost.

The conflict ends with the defeat of Bobo who commits suicide and the victory of the Chief reflecting the philosophical position of *al-Kōnī*, who in the manner of *Ṣūfism* stands with man as a human. He is against elitism, priesthood and authoritarianism, which have characterized Arab-Islamic history.

## 5. Conclusion

In *The Fetishists*, *Ibrāhīm al-Kōnī* (1992) has been able to exemplify not only the moral, philosophical and mythical aspects of the Sahara people but also their religious and *Ṣūfī* tendencies with prominent existentialism. He fuses between what is realistic and what is legendary and between what is true and what is ideal or utopian. Wow is the legendary oasis promised by God to his righteous creatures. *Al-Kōnī* makes it like a dream in the midst of that arid world. In other words, he lets it be the anticipated redemption amidst that ultimate aridness and spiritual emptiness. Its setting, characters and plot spin around the perception of the unity of beings, a central *Ṣūfī* motif. In the same manner as *Ṣūfī* practitioner, *al-Kōnī* believes that man, animal and inanimate are united before God. Since the real world of modernity is dominated by evil powers, oppression, injustice, and severe disruption of the unity of beings, *Ṣūfī* ideas constitute an escape from time, history and life into a dream-like world in an empty, isolated desert. Differently stated, these *Ṣūfī* ideas can be suitable responses to injustice, political transgression, insanity and irrationality. They can create “an escape from time, history and mortality” and be a rebellious factor to oppose “heavy-handed bureaucratic modernization and fundamentalist religion” (Al-Marsafy, 2012: p. 162, 52).

## Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

## References

Abdollah, N. (2016). Suhrawardi: A Philosopher Who Must Be Re-Known! *Journal of History Culture and Art Research*, 5, 686-694. <https://doi.org/10.7596/taksad.v5i4.638>

- Ahmad, I. A. (2012). Trans by Mohamed Fouad Aresmouk and Michael Abdurrahman Fitzgerald. In *The Book of Ascension to the Essential Truths of Sūfism: (Mīraj al-tashawwuf ila haqā'iq al-tasawwuf) A Lexicon of Sūfic Terminology*. Amsterdam: Fons Vitae.
- Al-Marri, A. R. (2016) *Ibrāhīm al-Kōnī in a Dialogue: Writing Mechanisms, Tips in Expression, Artistic and Narrative Production*. <http://www.saqya.com>
- Al-Marsafy, Z. (2012). *Sufism in the Contemporary Arabic Novel*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh Studies in Modern Arabic Literature.
- Butterworth, C. E., & Mahdi, M. (1992). *The Political Aspects of Islamic Philosophy*. Oxford: Harvard Center for Middle Eastern Studies Publishers.
- Encyclopaedia Britannica (n.d.). *Aḥmad Mūsā*. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Ahmad-Musa>
- Farīd al-Dīn, A. (c. 1230). (2009). *Farīd al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār's Memorial of God's Friends: Lives and Sayings of Sufis*. Translated with an Introduction by Paul Losensky. New York, NY: Paulist Press.
- Hanks, P. (2003). *Dictionary of American Family Names*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ibrāhīm, A.-K. (1992). *The Fetishists*. Limassol, Cyprus: Classic House Buildings Office No 4: 9. All citations from the novel are translated by the author. Henceforth, all references will be cited in the texts.
- James, F., & Robert, F. (1997). *Essential Sufism*. New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers Inc.
- Khan, P. Z. I. (2016). Persian and Indian Visions of the living Earth. In V.-L. Llewellyn (Ed.), *Spiritual Ecology: The Cry of the Earth*. Point Reyes: Golden Šūfi Center.
- Orsini, F., & Katherine Butler, S. (2015). *Telling and Texts: Music, Literature, and Performance in North India*. Cambridge: Open Book Publishers. <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0062>
- Qualey, M. L. (2019) *The Conflicts of Ibn Khaldun, the Philosophies of Ibn Tufail, and the Hegelian Mystical Dialects*. <https://en.qantara.de/content/book-review-ibrahim-al-koni%CA%B9s-the-fetishists-in-triccate-patterns-of-the-mind>
- Rodrigues, A. (2018). *Islam and Symbolism*. [https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Portals/7/military-review/Archives/English/Military\\_Review\\_20080630\\_art017.pdf](https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Portals/7/military-review/Archives/English/Military_Review_20080630_art017.pdf)
- Smith, M. (2010). *Rabī'a The Mystic and Her Fellow-Saints in Islam*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511710797>
- Zagar, C. A. (2013). Water. In A. M. John (Ed.), *Islamic Images and Ideas: Essays on Sacred Symbolism* (112-113). Jefferson, NC: McFarland.