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Women in Leadership: A Critical Reading of Khnata Bint Bakkar's Role in Moroccan History

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ABSTRACT

The present article investigates the life, political contributions, and historical significance of Khnata Bint Bakkar, a prominent female figure in Moroccan history. The study addresses the problem of women's historical underrepresentation in political narratives and examines how Khnata Bint Bakkar navigated and exercised agency within a male-dominated political sphere. Based on a qualitative research approach, the study employs content analysis of the documentary episode on Khnata Bint Bakkar from the series *Ten Women from History* (2M, Morocco) and corroborates the documentary's accounts with secondary historical sources. The research objectives are to identify her political and diplomatic roles, assess her influence on decision-making and governance, and analyze her mentorship of successive rulers. Findings reveal that Khnata Bint Bakkar played multifaceted roles, namely advisor, diplomat, military manager, and mentor, all of which contributed to the consolidation and stability of the Moroccan kingdom during the reigns of Sultan Moulay Ismail, Sultan Moulay Abdellah, and Sultan Sidi Mohamed. Moreover, her later withdrawal from politics did not diminish her legacy, as she continued to impact society through humanitarian work and religious practice. The study highlights her strategic acumen and leadership, demonstrating the critical role of women in Moroccan political history. These findings have implications for historiography as they emphasize the importance of recognizing women's agency and contributions in shaping political and social structures.

INTRODUCTION

Morocco has long been perceived as a patriarchal society par excellence. However, historical and contemporary evidence reveal that women have played major roles in shaping the kingdom since its establishment. Women's contributions to governance, social organization, and political decision-making challenge the assumption that Moroccan history has been exclusively shaped by male actors. Among these influential women, Khnata Bint Bakkar stands out as a remarkable historical figure who exerted substantial political influence during the reigns of Sultan Moulay Ismail, Sultan Moulay Abdellah, and Sultan Sidi Mohamed. Her active participation in governance, decision-making, and statecraft shows that women's agency in Morocco was neither marginal nor symbolic. In fact, Khnata Bint Bakkar

contributed to consolidating and strengthening the Moroccan kingdom through strategic political involvement, thereby demonstrating exceptional leadership within a male-dominated political landscape.

Understanding Khnata Bint Bakkar's role requires situating her within discussions of activism and women's political engagement. Generally, activism involves deliberate and purposeful efforts that aim at influencing social, political, or economic change. It includes actions intended to challenge injustice, reshape power relations, and advocate reform (Temper et al., 2018; Millward & Takhar, 2019; Eilert & Cherup, 2020; Siedschlag & Lana, 2023; Dongballe, 2025). It is known that activism is associated with modern protest movements. However, historical figures such as Khnata Bint Bakkar illustrate that women's political activism

has deep roots in Moroccan history and has taken diverse forms depending on historical and political contexts.

Activism manifests in multiple forms that range from traditional methods such as writing petitions and engaging in political negotiations, to collective actions including boycotts, demonstrations, and mobilization (Brown, 2021; Sovacool & Dunlap, 2022; Lehfid et al., 2025). Other forms include artistic expression and, in contemporary contexts, cyber-activism (George & Leidner, 2019; Deng et al., 2023; Cortright, 2025). Regardless of form, activism is fundamentally oriented toward influencing public opinion, shaping policy, and transforming social norms. From this perspective, Khnata Bint Bakkar's political mediation, advisory role, and involvement in matters of succession are all understood as forms of political activism that target ensuring stability and continuity within the Moroccan state.

Scholars further distinguish between different types of activism based on objectives and strategies. Campaigning activism focuses on opposing dominant policies and demanding reform through collective pressure (Millward & Takhar, 2019; Ertan, 2019; Campbell, 2020; Srivastav & Rafaty, 2022). Constructive activism emphasizes the creation of alternative social and political models, such as cooperative initiatives and community-based structures (Maddox et al., 2015; Lilja, 2021; Sørensen et al., 2023; Sørensen, 2025). Revolutionary activism seeks radical transformation by dismantling existing political and social systems (Duarte-Mayorga, 2022; Korotayev et al., 2024). Despite their differences, these forms share a common goal: challenging power structures and amplifying marginalized voices. Women's activism occupies a central position within this framework as it seeks to confront patriarchy, sexism, and gender-based exclusion (Basu, 2017; Gouws & Coetzee, 2019; Molyneux et al., 2020; Zeidabadi & Aghtaie, 2023; Dey, 2025).

Within the Moroccan context, women have historically relied on various forms of activism to assert agency and participate in public life. Figures such as Khnata Bint Bakkar exemplify how women's political engagement reshaped governance and historical narratives, thus demonstrating that women were active contributors to state-building rather than passive subjects of power (Ali, 2020;

Mwambari et al., 2021; Shairgojri, 2022). Her influence on political decision-making and royal succession reflects an early manifestation of women's leadership that resonates with later feminist and civil society movements in Morocco.

In more recent history, women's activism in Morocco has operated through civil society, which represents a space between the state and the private sphere where individuals and organized groups pursue collective interests. Described as the "third sector," civil society includes associations, organizations, and institutions that operate independently from governmental and commercial structures (Salamon & Sokolowski, 2018; Durkovicová, 2020; Dupuy et al., 2021). In Morocco, civil society has played a crucial role in advocating for women's rights and addressing social inequalities, particularly through women-led organizations.

The Moroccan women's movement has manifested through non-governmental organizations and advocacy groups that aim to improve women's social, economic, and political status (Barska, 2019; Sipos, 2021; Sipos, 2022; El Bastami & Eddouada, 2025). These organizations work on issues such as domestic violence, legal rights, economic empowerment, education, and access to safe public spaces (Gerntholtz, 2016; Lehfid, 2024b; World Bank, 2025). Education remains a central strategy within these efforts, as programs target illiteracy, promote income-generating skills, and raise awareness of women's rights and responsibilities (Engida, 2021; Jaysawal & Saha, 2023; Lata & Dahiya, 2024; Lehfid, 2024b; Rafiq-Uz-Zaman et al., 2024; Sulochana & Kumari, 2025). Through education, women are encouraged to critically analyze their social realities and participate actively in advocacy and reform.

Research and publication constitute another key dimension of women's activism in Morocco. Feminist scholars and writers have used academic and literary production to challenge patriarchal assumptions by demonstrating that gender roles and social hierarchies are socially constructed rather than divinely ordained (Senjaya & Utaminingsih, 2020; Shah et al., 2020; Saguy, 2025; Steinhagen, 2025). Journalistic writings, on the other hand, have focused on women's experiences in domestic and public spheres through addressing issues related to health, education, professional development, and

social participation (Gemtholtz, 2016; Amelia et al., 2025; Mohammed et al., 2025; World Bank, 2025). Political advocacy has also been central to women's activism, as illustrated by initiatives such as the "One Million Signature Campaign" of 1992, which aimed to reform the Moroccan Family Code (Badran, 2022; Sanches, 2022).

In addition to this, individual female figures have played influential roles in shaping feminist thought and human rights advocacy in Morocco. Intellectuals such as Fatima Mernissi contributed to Islamic feminist thought and critical understandings of gender and power (Mernissi, 1975; 1991; 1994; Lehfid, 2024a). Literary figures such as Leila Abouzeid explored Moroccan identity, memory, and social change through novels that foreground women's experiences (Abouzeid, 1989; 1998; 2003). Scholars like Fatima Sadiqi advanced debates on gender, language, globalization, and social transformation in Morocco (Sadiqi, 2003, 2014). In the realm of activism and legal reform, figures such as Latifa Jbabdi, Zhour El Horr, and Amina Lamrini Ouahabi played key roles in human rights advocacy, judicial reform, and gender equality through civil society engagement (Salime, 2011; Sater, 2016).

Taken together, these historical and contemporary figures illustrate the continuity of women's activism in Morocco across time. From Khnata Bint Bakkar's political leadership within the monarchy to modern feminist and human rights activism, Moroccan women have consistently challenged patriarchal norms and contributed to governance, social reform, and intellectual life. This continuity highlights the importance of revisiting historical female figures whose contributions have often been marginalized or overlooked in official historiography.

In this regard, the present study aims to introduce and canonize the life of Khnata Bint Bakkar by examining her political achievements, her role in shaping Moroccan governance, and her final years. It seeks to situate her within the context of women's historical contributions to Moroccan state-building and activism. To achieve these objectives, the study addresses the following research questions: (1) What roles did Khnata Bint Bakkar play during the reigns of Sultan Moulay Ismail, Sultan Moulay Abdellah, and Sultan Sidi Mohamed? (2) How did she influence political

decision-making and the consolidation of the Moroccan kingdom? (3) How did her mentorship affect the succession and governance of her son and grandson? (4) Which roles Khnata Bint Bakkar played during the reigns of Sultan Moulay Ismail, Sultan Moulay Abdellah, and Sultan Sidi Mohamed? (5) How did she influence political decision-making and the consolidation of the Moroccan kingdom? (6) What legacy did she leave during her final years?

The study adopts a qualitative approach as it relies on content analysis of the documentary episode "Khnata Bint Bakkar" from the series *Ten Women from History*, in order to provide an in-depth understanding of her political agency and historical significance.

METHODS

This study adopts a qualitative research approach to explore the life, political contributions, and historical significance of Khnata Bint Bakkar. The qualitative approach is particularly suitable for this study as it allows for an in-depth examination of historical and documentary content and focuses on understanding her role in governance, political decision-making, and the consolidation of the Moroccan kingdom. Rather than relying on numerical measurement or hypothesis testing, this approach emphasizes interpretation, contextualization, and meaning-making, which are essential for examining women's political agency in a male-dominated historical context such as Morocco.

The primary method of data analysis used in this study is qualitative content analysis. The main source of data is the episode dedicated to Khnata Bint Bakkar in the documentary series *Ten Women from History*, broadcast on the Moroccan national channel 2M. This documentary was selected as it provides a detailed narrative of her political influence, strategic interventions, and mentorship of successive rulers. In addition, secondary historical sources, including scholarly books and academic studies, were used as supplementary instruments to corroborate, contextualize, and validate the information presented in the documentary.

Data collection involved the careful selection and repeated viewing of the documentary episode, in addition to a systematic review of relevant historical sources that document Khnata Bint

Bakkar's political activities during the reigns of Sultan Moulay Ismail, Sultan Moulay Abdellah, and Sultan Sidi Mohamed. Secondary sources were selected based on scholarly credibility, historical accuracy, and relevance to Khnata's political roles, leadership, and influence on governance and succession.

Data analysis was conducted through thematic content analysis. The documentary and historical texts were systematically reviewed and coded to identify recurring themes related to political authority, governance, decision-making, mediation, and mentorship. The extracted data were then organized chronologically according to the reigns of the three sultans, which allowed for a structured understanding of Khnata Bint Bakkar's evolving political role. The analysis also accounted for the broader socio-political context, particularly the constraints imposed by patriarchal norms, to assess how she exercised agency and authority within a male-dominated political system.

The findings of the study are presented through qualitative narrative analysis. Data display is achieved by organizing the results thematically and chronologically, supported by descriptive summaries and interpretive discussion. This approach allows for a coherent presentation of Khnata Bint Bakkar's political contributions and highlights the continuity and significance of her leadership across different historical periods.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Introducing *Ten Women from History: A Visual Tribute to Moroccan Women*

Before discussing the findings, this section first introduces the primary source that constitutes the basis of the analysis. The episode on Khnata Bint Bakkar is part of the documentary series *Ten Women from History*, produced by the Moroccan national channel 2M. The series was conceptualized by Nadia Kamali Marouazi, with the scenario developed by Layla Triqui and Yasmina Rhoulami. Across its ten episodes, the series presents ten remarkable female figures who played influential roles in Moroccan history: Cleopatra Selene, the Priestess Dihiya, Kanza Bint Aoraba, Fatima Al-Fihriya, Zainab An-Nafzaouiya, Hafssa Bint Lhaj, As-Sayyida Lhorra, Khnata Bint Bakkar, Lalla Rkia, and Malika Al-Fassi.

Each episode focuses on one woman and explores her life, achievements, and the impact she had on Moroccan society during her era. The primary aim of the series is to introduce Moroccan audiences to these historical women and to highlight their significant contributions, thereby addressing the long-standing neglect of women's roles in Moroccan historiography.

The documentary draws on oral histories and historical writings, which constitute the primary data of this study, to reconstruct the narratives of these influential women. By doing so, it not only preserves their stories but also emphasizes the importance of women in shaping Morocco's social, political, and cultural development.

Early Life, Education, and Marriage of Khnata Bint Bakkar

The documentary presents Khnata Bint Bakkar as an influential political and intellectual figure in Morocco during the late 17th and early 18th centuries. Born into a family that valued education, she began her learning under the guidance of her father and continued her studies after marriage, eventually becoming a virtuous and wise Sufi scholar (*fqiha*), a minister, and a trusted advisor to Sultan Moulay Ismail for over thirty years. In addition, the documentary highlights her role as an ambassador and demonstrates her significant abilities in the political and diplomatic spheres of the kingdom.

According to the documentary, in 1678, at the age of ten, Khnata Bint Bakkar was married to Sultan Moulay Ismail. This union is presented as a political alliance intended to consolidate the stability of Morocco. In other words, during the Sultan's military campaigns, known as *harka*, which aimed at unifying the country, Khnata's father presented her to Moulay Ismail as a symbol of allegiance and loyalty when he reached the region of Saguia El Hamra, home to the *M'Ghafra* tribe. She thus became a member of the Sultan's extensive harem, which was overseen by his first wife and included his other wives, children, and approximately 500 concubines.

The documentary further indicates that Khnata Bint Bakkar's scholarly aptitude is evident in her marginal notes in the *Sahih al-Bukhari*, which reflect her engagement with religious texts. Her influence within the royal household grew further when, in 1694, she gave birth to Prince Abdellah,

which strengthened her closeness to the Sultan. As a result, she remains the only wife of Moulay Ismail to be buried alongside him in Meknes, which the documentary presents as evidence of her exceptional status and enduring legacy within Moroccan history.

Khната Bint Bakkar's Political and Diplomatic Influence under Sultan Moulay Ismail

The documentary shows that Khната Bint Bakkar played a crucial role in the political and diplomatic administration of Morocco during the reign of Sultan Moulay Ismail. Due to her close relationship with the Sultan, who was frequently occupied with military campaigns to reclaim territories from the Portuguese, Spanish, French, and rebellious local tribes, Khната Bint Bakkar is portrayed as being entrusted with drafting diplomatic correspondence of immense importance. Her intelligence, education, and political acumen are presented as factors that made her an indispensable advisor and mediator in both domestic and foreign affairs.

One of her most significant contributions was managing the Sultan's elite strike force, known as *Jaych Al-Bukhari*. The documentary reports that this army was composed of slaves who were instrumental in expanding the Moroccan kingdom. Historians note that this army occasionally rebelled due to the Sultan's strict discipline. However, Khната Bint Bakkar is depicted as engaging with the soldiers and using her wisdom and descent to build rapport and influence because she recognized the strategic importance of maintaining their loyalty. Thus, she succeeded in ensuring their allegiance to the Sultan through direct interaction and careful negotiation.

The documentary further highlights that her growing reputation for capability and wisdom led to frequent audiences with *chorafa*, *oulama*, foreign diplomats, and ambassadors, where she showcased her intelligence and political insight. In fact, she is presented as having earned the title of Minister of Foreign Affairs thanks to her remarkable diplomatic abilities. Among her notable achievements was establishing cooperative and strategic partnerships with the British. Historical accounts cited in the documentary indicate that the British ambassador, Charles Stewart, was so impressed by her influence and negotiation skills that he personally appealed to her to release British prisoners in Morocco.

Through her multifaceted roles, Khната Bint Bakkar not only strengthened the internal stability of the Moroccan kingdom but also enhanced its international standing and left a legacy of political acumen that was rare for women of her time.

Khната Bint Bakkar's Political Stewardship during the Reign of Sultan Moulay Abdellah

Following the death of Sultan Moulay Ismail in 1727, Morocco experienced a period of political instability that was marked by rebellions and struggles for the throne. During this turbulent time, Khната Bint Bakkar used her contacts, intelligence, and political influence to secure the succession of her son, Moulay Abdellah. She is presented as negotiating with the *oulama* and military leaders to support his accession to the throne.

When becoming a Sultan, Moulay Abdellah felt humiliated by having a woman as his advisor in spite of her solid support. Still, Khната Bint Bakkar continued to fulfill her responsibilities with remarkable dedication. That is, she managed governmental affairs, inspected the army, and made critical decisions related to the administration of the state. She also received foreign envoys and ambassadors. Some historians cited in the documentary argue that she functioned as the true heir of Moulay Ismail's legacy during this period.

The relationship between the mother and her son, however, became fraught with tension to the extent that Moulay Abdellah contemplated exiling or even executing his mother. This pushed Khната Bint Bakkar to undertake a pilgrimage. Over the course of his reign, Moulay Abdellah was removed from the throne six times, and Khната herself was imprisoned due to his political vulnerabilities. Yet, the documentary demonstrates that these hardships did not deter her from supporting him. In fact, she continually employed her skills and networks to restore him to power, even when facing imprisonment, maltreatment, and torture in the process.

The reasons behind Moulay Abdellah's mistreatment of his mother remain complex. The documentary provides no direct explanation, the thing which prompts further consultation of scholarly sources. Drawing on Mohammed Abed al-Jabri's *Democracy, Human Rights, and Law in Islamic Thought* (2008), it can be inferred that the ruling elite fears the empowerment of others, like democratic actors, because it threatens their

positions and authority. This perspective helps contextualize Moulay Abdellah's actions and explains the inherent tension between Khnata Bint Bakkar's authority and her son's perception of power.

Thanks to her commitment and engagement, Khnata Bint Bakkar played an indispensable role in not only safeguarding her son's reign but also maintaining the stability of the Moroccan kingdom during a period of intense disorder.

The Making of a Sultan: Khnata Bint Bakkar's Guidance of Sidi Mohamed

It was previously mentioned that Morocco witnessed a period of instability during the reign of Moulay Abdellah. However, it experienced a resurgence under the rule of Khnata Bint Bakkar's grandson, Sultan Sidi Mohamed. This success is attributed in the documentary to the guidance and education provided by Khnata Bint Bakkar.

When Sidi Mohamed was imprisoned at the age of eleven with his grandmother Khnata Bint Bakkar, she is depicted as taking advantage of the situation by teaching him how to resist adversity and maintain hope. In addition to this, she used her network and influence among the *Oulama* and political elites in order to secure her grandson's release. These findings indicate that her mentorship and interventions ensured that Sidi Mohamed would later ascend to the throne with the necessary skills, confidence, and vision.

Khnata Bint Bakkar's influence on her grandson reveals her expertise in politics and commitment to the continuity and stability of the Moroccan kingdom. After securing his safety and preparing him for rulership, she gradually withdrew from political life and dedicated her remaining years to humanitarian aid and religious practices. In other words, she retired to her palace in Ras El Ma, in the city of Fez, where she devoted her remaining years to charitable work and religious observance. The documentary indicates that she continued to exercise influence quietly through acts of benevolence rather than political intervention.

It is safe to say that Khnata Bint Bakkar lived a long and impactful life before passing away in 1742 at the age of 80. Indeed, she left behind her a legacy of wisdom, political acumen, and devotion to her country and faith.

The findings derived from the documentary *Ten Women from History* reveal that Khnata Bint

Bakkar exercised significant political, intellectual, and diplomatic influence across three successive reigns. As evidenced in the documentary, her involvement in drafting diplomatic correspondence, mediating military tensions, and advising rulers demonstrates her active participation in state affairs. This evidence positions her as a compelling example of female agency within a male-dominated Moroccan society, where women were formally excluded from political authority yet could exert influence through informal and strategic channels. Her case illustrates that women's leadership in historical contexts often operated beyond official titles, relying instead on proximity to power, education, and personal competence.

In response to RQ1 (What roles did Khnata Bint Bakkar play during the reigns of Sultan Moulay Ismail, Sultan Moulay Abdellah, and Sultan Sidi Mohamed?), the findings demonstrate that Khnata Bint Bakkar assumed multiple and evolving roles shaped by the political context and the reigning Sultan. As shown in the Results section, the documentary depicts her drafting diplomatic correspondence, receiving foreign envoys, and engaging with political and religious elites such as the *Chorafa* and the *Oulama* during the reign of Sultan Moulay Ismail. It further illustrates her direct negotiation with the Army of Al-Bukhari to secure its loyalty. These data points indicate a high level of political trust and authority, which align with Brown (2021) and Sovacool and Dunlap (2022), who conceptualize activism as operating through negotiation, mediation, and institutional participation. Despite structural gender constraints, women could occupy influential advisory roles within the Sultan's court, reflecting forms of constructive activism that contribute to political stability as emphasized by Maddox et al. (2015), Lilja (2021), and Sørensen (2025).

Similarly, the Results highlight her continued political engagement under Sultan Moulay Abdellah, where she negotiated with the *Oulama* and military elites to secure his accession and managed state affairs during periods of instability, including rebellion and imprisonment. The documentary also shows her inspecting the army and maintaining diplomatic interactions despite marginalization and personal threats. These empirical elements position her as a behind-the-scenes political actor influencing power structures

and ensuring continuity. This aligns with Temper et al. (2018), Millward and Takhar (2019), Eilert and Cherup (2020), Siedschlag and Lana (2023), and Dongballe (2025), who define activism as efforts to reshape power relations, while her case extends these perspectives to elite and dynastic contexts.

As indicated in the findings, her mentorship of Sultan Sidi Mohamed marks a shift toward a more indirect yet sustained form of influence. The documentary shows that during their shared imprisonment, she educated and supported him while mobilizing networks to secure his release. This contributed to his eventual accession and reflects the continuity of her political role across generations. These findings support the argument advanced by Ali (2020), Mwambari et al. (2021), and Shairgojri (2022), who highlight that women's political engagement can reshape governance and extend across generations through diverse forms, including mentorship.

Regarding RQ2 (How did she influence political decision-making and the consolidation of the Moroccan kingdom?), the findings demonstrate that Khnata Bint Bakkar exerted significant influence on political decision-making, diplomacy, and the consolidation of the Moroccan kingdom. As indicated in the Results section, the documentary shows that she advised Sultan Moulay Ismail, drafted diplomatic correspondence, and directly engaged with foreign envoys, including her involvement in negotiations over British prisoners following Charles Stewart's appeal. These data confirm that her diplomatic role was not symbolic but operational and impactful. The findings contribute to addressing a gap in the literature by highlighting the often-overlooked political and diplomatic agency of Khnata Bint Bakkar in the consolidation of the Moroccan kingdom.

Moreover, the findings highlight her management of sensitive military relations, particularly with the Army of Al-Bukhari, where she maintained loyalty through direct engagement and negotiation. This empirical evidence aligns with Brown (2021) and Sovacool and Dunlap (2022), who conceptualize activism as political mediation and negotiation. At the same time, her case extends this perspective by demonstrating that such forms of activism can operate from within the center of political power, rather than through collective or protest-based action.

Finally, the Results indicate that her role in maintaining internal stability during periods of unrest contributed to the continuity of governance. Her reliance on mediation, diplomacy, and relational authority reflects forms of activism aimed at reshaping power relations and sustaining political order, as highlighted by Maddox et al. (2015), Lilja (2021), and Sørensen (2025), who emphasize constructive approaches to activism.

Concerning RQ3 (How did her mentorship affect the succession and governance of her son and grandson?), the findings highlight the role of mentorship and relational authority in shaping political succession and governance. As indicated in the Results section, the documentary shows that Khnata Bint Bakkar played a decisive role in securing the throne for her son, Sultan Moulay Abdellah, through negotiations with the *Oulama* and military elites. These data demonstrate her capacity to mobilize influential networks and directly shape political outcomes, supporting the view of activism presented by Millward and Takhar (2019), Ertan (2019), Campbell (2020), and Srivastav and Rafaty (2022), who describe it as a process of influencing power structures through strategic engagement.

Furthermore, the findings indicate that her mentorship of Sultan Sidi Mohamed occurred under challenging conditions, particularly during their shared imprisonment. The documentary shows that she educated him, reinforced his resilience, and mobilized her networks to secure his release. This evidence suggests that her influence extended beyond immediate political action to the formation of future leadership, aligning with Basu (2017), Gouws and Coetzee (2019), Molyneux et al. (2020), Zeidabadi and Aghtaie (2023), and Dey (2025), who emphasize women's roles in shaping long-term social and political change.

However, while the literature foregrounds collective activism and organized movements, the findings of this study demonstrate that individual and relational forms of activism, such as mentorship and dynastic influence, can be equally effective. In this sense, Khnata Bint Bakkar's role illustrates that activism can operate through intergenerational transmission of leadership and knowledge, thereby extending existing theoretical perspectives.

For RQ4 (What legacy did she leave during her final years?), the findings indicate that Khnata

Bint Bakkar's legacy reflects a shift from direct political engagement to spiritual devotion and humanitarian activity. As shown in the Results section, the documentary depicts her withdrawal from political life and retirement to her palace in Ras El Ma in Fez, where she devoted her later years to religious practices and charitable work. These data suggest that her influence persisted, but in a transformed form grounded in moral authority and social contribution.

This transformation supports the argument advanced by Gerntholtz (2016), Amelia et al. (2025), Mohammed et al. (2025), and the World Bank (2025), who highlight that activism extends beyond formal political roles to include social, intellectual, and humanitarian engagement. In this sense, her later life can be understood as a form of constructive activism aimed at reinforcing social cohesion and ethical values, comparable to the contributions of civil society actors and women-led initiatives in contemporary Morocco, as discussed by Salamon and Sokołowski (2018), Ďurkovičová (2020), and Dupuy et al. (2021).

CONCLUSION

In light of the findings discussed in this study, Khnata Bint Bakkar emerges as a remarkable figure of female political agency, intellect, and resilience within a male-dominated Moroccan society. Her life demonstrates that women's political influence in pre-modern Morocco was not merely symbolic but substantive, strategic, and central to state stability. Across three reigns, she adapted her roles to changing political contexts, thereby illustrating the flexibility and depth of female leadership beyond formal authority.

This study shows that Khnata Bint Bakkar's contributions extended beyond advisory roles to active participation in governance, diplomacy, and succession management. Her ability to navigate military, religious, and political institutions sheds light on how informal power structures enabled women to exercise influence despite patriarchal constraints. Moreover, her mentorship of her grandson, Sultan Sidi Mohamed, highlights the intergenerational transmission of political knowledge and leadership, reinforcing her long-term impact on Moroccan governance.

The documentary *Ten Women from History* plays a crucial role in preserving and reintroducing

such marginalized historical narratives. By foregrounding Khnata Bint Bakkar's life, it challenges the male-centered nature of traditional historiography and invites a re-evaluation of women's roles in shaping Morocco's political past.

This study recommends further research into other overlooked female figures in Moroccan and Islamic history using interdisciplinary approaches that combine documentary analysis with historical and gender theory. Future studies may also compare representations of women in visual media with archival sources to assess how contemporary narratives reshape historical memory. Integrating such figures into educational curricula and academic discourse would contribute to a more inclusive and balanced understanding of Moroccan history. This study ultimately contributes to rethinking Moroccan historiography by foregrounding women's active role in political leadership and state-building.

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