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## Moroccan Preacher Said to Have Met With 9/11 Plotters

*Mohammed Fizazi now appears linked to participants in three major terrorist attacks.*

**July 06, 2005** | Terry McDermott | Times Staff Writer

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TANGIER, Morocco — A Moroccan preacher imprisoned here for inspiring deadly bombings in Casablanca and implicated in the Madrid train bombings last year also had significant contact in Hamburg with leaders of the Sept. 11 attacks, say members of a Muslim congregation in Germany.

The preacher, Mohammed Fizazi, frequently gave sermons at Hamburg's Al Quds mosque while three of the hijack pilots were living in the city, attending Al Quds and becoming more involved in radical Islam.

Fizazi initiated several private meetings with the future pilots, says Fath Franzmathes, a member of the Al Quds congregation who later assisted German law enforcement. A second member of the congregation, who spoke on the condition that he not be identified, confirmed that there had been frequent contact between the future hijackers and Fizazi.

It is not clear how much influence Fizazi had on the Sept. 11 hijackers, but he appears to be the first person linked to participants in three of the biggest terrorist assaults of recent years: the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks on the U.S.; the Casablanca attacks of May 2003 that killed 45 people; and the Madrid attacks in March 2004 that killed 191 people.

Fizazi traveled extensively throughout Europe and the Arab world in the years prior to 2001. He often preached to Moroccans abroad at the behest of the Moroccan government.

His travels help illuminate a world of Islamic preachers, generally not well known in the West, whose fiery words help provide a justification for religious extremism. And the case illustrates how even moderate Arab governments, like that of Morocco, can become entangled with the radicals they are trying to control.

Mohamed Atta, Ramzi Binalshibh and others in a small group that formed around them in Hamburg were well known within the Al Quds mosque, Franzmathes said. Atta piloted the airplane that struck the north tower of the World Trade Center. Binalshibh sought to join the plot as a pilot, but was denied a U.S. visa and became an important logistics operative for the plot.

Their group included Marwan Al-Shehhi, the pilot of the plane that struck the World Trade Center's south tower, and Ziad Samir Jarrah, the pilot of the plane that crashed in Pennsylvania before it could reach its target -- the U.S. Capitol building. Hani Hanjour, the pilot of the plane that hit the Pentagon, was not part of the Hamburg group.

Fizazi's presence in Hamburg was already known, but not his direct contact with the Sept. 11 hijackers, a group that stood apart from the largely working-class congregation. The hijackers were university students who were leading classes in Islam for other Al Quds members.

Franzmathes said the Moroccan preacher sought meetings with them because he was impressed with

their rigorous intellectual approach to Islam.

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Morocco, so close to Europe you can see it across the Strait of Gibraltar, is among the most cosmopolitan and westernized of Africa's Muslim states. Tangier, the country's great northern metropolis, is the most westernized city in the country. French and Spanish are spoken as commonly as Arabic; many people speak all three.

It seems an unlikely place for radical Islam to flourish. South of the city center, the richer precincts form a kind of exotic Hollywood Hills. Villas are screened from public view by elaborate hedges and gardens. Their residents are Moroccan film stars, politicians and emigres from Spain or France who have come to take advantage of cheap real estate and ocean views.

But Fizazi's neighborhood, like many in what is emerging as the new Morocco, is home to a newly urban, dense and largely impoverished population.

By 2001, Fizazi, for more than a decade, had been identified as a preacher with radical views. For several years in the 1990s, though imam of a Saudi-financed mosque in Tangier, he had been barred from preaching by the Moroccan government. He was later allowed to resume preaching both at home and abroad.

Family members said in interviews that the government frequently paid for his travel.

Fizazi, who has two wives and 11 children, earned approximately \$400 per month as an instructor of French language and literature at a small teachers college in Tangier. He went abroad nearly every break he had from his teaching duties, said Abdelhalim Fizazi, his son, and the elder Fizazi's wife, Assia Jabari.

Fizazi visited almost three dozen countries, his family said, and could not have afforded the travel without government assistance.

Moroccan officials, speaking on the condition that they not be identified, acknowledged that their government had encouraged Fizazi's travels and that it routinely paid local clerics to preach to Moroccans abroad. They denied, however, that the government had paid Fizazi.

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