Female religious agents in Morocco: Old practices and new perspectives

Ouguir, A.

Publication date
2013

Document Version
Final published version

Link to publication

Citation for published version (APA):

General rights
It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

Disclaimer/Complaints regulations
If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: https://uba.uva.nl/en/contact, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.
Female Religious Agents in Morocco:
Old Practices and New Perspectives

Aziza Ouguir
Female Religious Agents in Morocco: Old Practices and New Perspectives

ACADEMISCH PROEFSCHRIFT

ter verkrijging van de graad van doctor aan de Universiteit van Amsterdam

op gezag van de Rector Magnificus prof. dr. D.C. van den Boom

ten overstaan van een door het college voor promoties ingestelde commissie,

in het openbaar te verdedigen in de Aula der Universiteit

op vrijdag 29 november 2013 te 11.00 uur

door Aziza Ouguir geboren te Talouine, Marokko
Promotores: Prof. dr. mr. R. Peters
Prof. dr. F. Sadiqi

Co-promotor: Dr. K.V.Q. Vintges

Overige leden: Dr. E.A.C. Bartels
Prof. dr. M. Ennaji
Dr. M.M. Leezenberg
Prof. dr. A.C.A.E. Moors
Prof. dr. G.A. Wiegers

Faculteit der Geesteswetenschappen
# Table of contents

Acknowledgements ........................................................................................................ 4
Preface ............................................................................................................................ 6
Notes on Transliteration ................................................................................................. 7

## Chapter One: Introduction ......................................................................................... 9
1-1 General Framework .................................................................................................. 9
1-2 Sources ..................................................................................................................... 10
1-2.1 Hagiography ........................................................................................................ 11
1-2.2 Fieldwork ............................................................................................................. 12
1-3 Scientific Research on Muslim Female Saints: A Review ........................................ 16
1-4 Clarification of Concepts and Terminology ............................................................... 19
1-4.1 Sufism .................................................................................................................. 19
1-4.2 Baraka .................................................................................................................. 23
1-4.3 Rituals ................................................................................................................... 25
1-4.4 Embodiment, Agency, Empowerment and Patriarchy ........................................... 27
1-5 Organization of the Thesis ....................................................................................... 35

## Chapter Two: Female Voices In Sufism ..................................................................... 37
2-1 The Sufi Path to God ............................................................................................... 37
2-2 Ribāṭ, Zāwiya and ṭṭarīqa ....................................................................................... 45
2-3 Sufism in Relation to Gender .................................................................................... 46
2-4 Women’s Mysticism in Islamic History ................................................................... 52
2-5 Conclusion ............................................................................................................... 54

## Chapter Three: Sufism and Hagiography in Morrocan Context ............................. 56
3-1 Moroccan Geography and History: A Brief Overview .............................................. 56
3-2 Moroccan Sufism .................................................................................................... 60
3-2.1 Approaches to Moroccan Sufism ......................................................................... 63
3-2.1.1 Orthodox versus Popular Sufism ..................................................................... 63
3-2.1.2 Sharifism and Maraboutism ........................................................................... 67
3-2.1.3 Sainthood and Baraka ..................................................................................... 69
3-2.1.4 Gender ............................................................................................................. 70
3-3 Islamic and Moroccan Hagiography ...................................................................... 71
3-3.1 Islamic Hagiography ........................................................................................... 71
3-3.2 Moroccan Hagiography ....................................................................................... 74
3-3.2.1 Diversity and Hierarchy of Moroccan Sainthood .............................................. 77
3-3.2.2 Authenticity .................................................................................................... 82
3-4 Conclusion ............................................................................................................... 84

## Chapter Four: Moroccan Female Sainthood ............................................................... 85
4-1 The Construction of Sainthood ............................................................................... 85
4-1.1 Piety ..................................................................................................................... 86
4-1.1.1 Initiation .......................................................................................................... 86
4-1.1.2 Piety in the Domestic Sphere .......................................................................... 88
4-1.1.3 The Body and Sacredness .............................................................................. 90
4-1.1.4 Crying ............................................................................................................. 92
1.1.5-4 The Disturbing Marriage ................................................................. 94
4-1.2 Learnedness and the Quest for Knowledge ........................................... 97
4-1.3 Miracles .......................................................................................... 100
4-1.4 Al-Jadhb ......................................................................................... 102
4-1.5 Social and Political Roles ................................................................. 105
4-1.6 Ordinary Sainthood .......................................................................... 107
4-2 Women Saints’ Types of Agency ........................................................... 110
4-2.1 Ethical Self-formation ....................................................................... 110
4-2.2 Equality Effects and Egalitarian Effects .............................................. 111
4-2.3 Ethical Freedom Practices ................................................................. 114
4-3 Women Saints and Sufis ...................................................................... 116
4-3.1 `Aṭīza al-Saksāwiyya (14th century) .................................................. 117
4-3.1.1 Ethical Self-Techniques ................................................................. 119
4-3.1.2 Ethical Self-formation as a Freedom Practice .................................. 120
4-3.2 `Āyisha al-Idrīsiya (16th century) ......................................................... 125
4-3.2.1 Ethical Self-techniques ................................................................. 127
4-3.2.2 Ethical Self-formation as a Freedom Practice ................................. 129
4-3.3 Fāṭima Muhdīz (19th century) ............................................................ 130
4-3.3.1 Ethical Self-techniques ................................................................. 132
4-3.3.2 Ethical Self-formation as a Freedom Practice ................................. 133
4-4 Conclusion.......................................................................................... 134

Chapter Five: Moroccan Women’s Reception of Historical Women Saints .......... 138
5-1 Women Saints Veneration..................................................................... 138
5-1.1 Religious Spaces and Women's Preferences ...................................... 138
5-1.1.1 Shrines: General Features .............................................................. 140
5-1.2 Similarities and Differences between the Female Saints’ Shrines and Veneration ... 142
5-1.3 Rituals .............................................................................................. 143
5-2 Women in Shrines Today ..................................................................... 145
5-2.1 Female Functionaries at Shrines ......................................................... 145
5-2.2 Women Venerators of Female Saints ................................................. 150
5-3 Spiritual Development and Empowerment through Saints’ Rituals .......... 154
5-3.1 Empowerment by Association with Saints ......................................... 158
5-3.1.1 Holy Female Founders .................................................................. 159
5-3.1.2 Women Saints as Empowering Role Models ................................. 161
5-4 Mutual Empowerment ........................................................................ 163
5-5 Contemporary Women Preachers ....................................................... 165
5-5.1 Official Feminization of the Religious Practice .................................... 166
5-6 Female Religious Guides’ Activism and Education ............................... 171
5-7 Achievement of Religious Agency ....................................................... 172
5-8 Suppression of Women as non-Islamic ................................................. 175
5-9 Modern Female Preachers and Women Saints ..................................... 176
5-9.1 Women Saints as Role Models for Women Preachers and Religious Guides .... 177
5-10 Cultivating Feminist Consciousness ................................................... 178
5-11 Attendants of Murshidāt .................................................................... 182
5-11.1 Women Attendants’ Reception of Murshidāts .................................... 182
5-11.2 New Ways of Life of Educated Women ............................................ 185
5-12 Conclusion.......................................................................................... 189

Chapter Six: Moroccan Feminist Activists’ Reception of Historical Women Saints..... 191
6-1 History of Moroccan Feminism ................................................................. 191
6-1.1 The Beginning of the Women’s Movement ........................................ 192
6-1.2 The Feminist Movement in Post-Independent Morocco ......................... 193
6-1.3 Legal Reforms .................................................................................. 194
6-2 Islamist Women Associations ............................................................... 196
6-2.1 Al-‘Adl wa al-Iḥsān ........................................................................... 199
6-2.2 Al-‘Adāla wa al-Tanmiya (Justice and Development: PJD) .................... 201
6-2.3 Muntadā al-Zahrā’ li-l-Mar‘a al-Maghribiya ................................... 203
6-2.4 Similarities and Differences ................................................................ 205
6-3 Moroccan Activists on Exemplary Women in Islamic History ............... 209
6-4 Activists’ Reception of Moroccan Women Saints as Sources of Empowerment .... 213
6-4.1 Ethnic Identities ............................................................................... 216
6-4.2 Spirituality and Knowledge .................................................................. 217
6-4.3 Transgressing Patriarchal Limits .......................................................... 219
6-5 Islamist Feminism ................................................................................ 223
6-6 Conclusion ........................................................................................... 226

General Conclusion .................................................................................... 228
Bibliography .............................................................................................. 237
Appendix ..................................................................................................... 251
Summaries (Dutch and English) ................................................................. 262
Acknowledgements

This research has been made possible thanks to a grant of the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research. First and foremost, my thanks and gratitude go to my supervisors, Professor Fāṭima Sadiqi and Professor Ruud Peters, for their invaluable advice, insightful comments on the subject of this thesis and scholarly supervision. My thanks are also due to Dr. Karen Vintges for her pertinent supervision, advice, help and support. I deeply thank her for her friendship as well as her generous hospitality over the years. I would also like to express my deepest gratitude to Dr. Margaret Rausch for her encouragement and help. I am also grateful to Dr. Mariette Van Beek, Dr. Marjo Buitelaar and Dr. Edien Bartels for their advice. I would like to thank the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research for making this research possible. Many thanks also to the Universiteit van Amsterdam, especially to the staff members of the Faculty of Humanities and the Department of Philosophy; and to the Faculty of Letters and Human Sciences Dhar Mehraz Fes for support and help during the years of my research. I am thankful to Dr. Jan Hoogland, who is the director of the Dutch Institute in Morocco, and to its coordinator Cynthia Plette for their assistance and encouragement.

I am also thankful to many family members and friends for their help and support throughout my work on this thesis. I would as well like to thank my parents who taught me how to read and write and for whose souls I ask God for mercy and blessings. I am indebted to my husband Aḥmad Alami, for many fruitful discussions on the various issues and themes of my thesis and for accompanying me during my fieldwork in the mountains of Morocco. His love and support have nourished this research. I would also like to thank my daughters Sara and Hajar for their love and their continuous prayers to God to help me to successfully complete my research. I am grateful as well to my sisters, Ouguir Fāṭima, Ouguir Samira, Ouguir Houda, and my brothers, Ouguir Ḥasan, Ouguir Hammadi, Ouguir Mustapha and Ouguir Hicham. I also want to thank my cousin, Ouguir ʿAlī and my brothers-in-law, El-Omri Mustapha, Lafdaoui Omar and Ouissa Muḥamed. I am grateful to my sisters-in-law, Qrifā Fāṭima and Ahmmad Salwa. I also want to thank my nieces, El-Omri Mariam, El-Omri ʿĀyisha, El-Omri Hiba, Ouguir Ranya, Ouguir Zayneb and Lafdaoui Fatine, and my nephews, Lafdaoui Hamza, Ouissa Sma’il, Ouissa Ilyas, Ouguir Zaid and Ouguir Mahdi. I want to thank my friends, Asmaa Bouslman, Malika Houcha, Rachid Touhtouh, Rose Admiral, Taib Kabir and his family and many others. Finally, I am deeply indebted to all people who offered me continuous encouragement, support, love and patience throughout the years I spent on this
work.
Preface

My encounter with my first interviewee whom I met in the shrine of Lalla ‘Āyisha al-Baḥriya, a shrine on the outskirts of Azmour, and her words about women’s abilities to achieve selfhood left an enduring impression on me. Her advanced age rendered her wise and knowledgeable, but her knowledge emanated not from any kind of formal education, as she is illiterate, but from her extensive experience with the practicalities of life. “Look!” she said to me, pointing to the grave of Lalla ‘Āyisha al-Baḥriya. “These are the lovers of God… and the lovers of people.” She chose these words because she felt my strong desire for knowledge about the woman saint. “But Lalla ‘Āyisha is a woman,” I began in response. She interrupted me before I could finish, explaining, “… I am a woman and you are a woman too. But Lalla ‘Āyisha was also just another woman.”

My assumptions about approaching the study of women saints were changed by this old woman’s words of wisdom. Our conversation in the shrine inspired me to rethink my research questions. It helped clarify the issues I would examine in this thesis, issues regarding the paths undertaken by women Sufis to cultivate saintly personalities and the challenges that these paths posed to the conventional gender norms. It became clear to me that I would have to consider the way women saints undergo self-formation and what made them different from conventional women. Furthermore, it aroused my curiosity about the reception of their legacy, particularly among contemporary Moroccan women in general and among today’s Moroccan women activists.

This thesis examines the way women’s agency in the religious sphere violates conventional cultural norms and the way their agency is portrayed in the discourses of Moroccan women. My analysis of archival material and fieldwork data suggests that women saints as moral exemplars impacted and continue to impact society. I invite the reader to reflect on women Sufi saints and on the undefinable historical importance of their development of counter-cultural social and religious personalities. The stories of these historical female exemplars impel us to rethink the relationship between women and Islam.
Notes on Transliteration

The system of transliteration I use in this thesis is IJMES (International Journal for Middle Eastern Studies).

## Consonants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Arabic</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>Arabic</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ء</td>
<td>Z</td>
<td>ء</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ُ</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>س</td>
<td>ق</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ُ</td>
<td>ب</td>
<td>ش</td>
<td>ك</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ُ</td>
<td>ت</td>
<td>ص</td>
<td>ل</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ُ</td>
<td>ج</td>
<td>ض</td>
<td>م</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ُ</td>
<td>ح</td>
<td>ط</td>
<td>ن</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ُ</td>
<td>خ</td>
<td>ظ</td>
<td>ه</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ُ</td>
<td>ذ</td>
<td>ع</td>
<td>و</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ُ</td>
<td>ر</td>
<td>غ</td>
<td>ي</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Vowels

### Long

1 or ‘

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Arabic</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ُ</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>َ</td>
<td>ū</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ِ</td>
<td>ī</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Doubled
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>iyy (final form i)</th>
<th>uww (final form ū)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Diphthongs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>au or aw</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Short

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>a</th>
<th>u</th>
<th>i</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
Chapter One: Introduction

1-1 General Framework

While I was walking down the narrow streets of the old medina of Rabat searching for female saints, I found myself in front of the old shrine of Sid al-‘Aydi. There was a long queue of people waiting by the door. Impelled by curiosity, I asked one of the women standing in the queue about the saint. She said: “Yes! This is the shrine of Sīdī al-‘Aydi, but most of people come to see his daughter Lalla Shrifā al-‘Aydiya”. When I took another look at the queue, I realized that the women greatly outnumbered the men. Each was waiting for her turn to consult the woman saint to articulate her desires and needs. My turn finally arrived and I found myself sitting in front of Lalla Shrifā. She was wearing a white and green jellaba. Her white hair and wrinkled face gave me the impression that her age exceeded one hundred years. I asked her to tell me the story of her sainthood, but she refused. She said: “God gave me this baraka, and I have to keep it secret”. I begged her again to provide at least some details, but there was no response.

My meeting with Lalla Shrifā sparked my interest in visiting other living women saints to investigate the ways they achieved sainthood. I was told that although women saints still exist, it is very hard to talk to them and they refuse any interviews or discussion of their sainthood. My research therefore concentrates on female Sufi saints of the past. They have been present throughout much of the history in several regions of North Africa and the Middle East since the advent of Islam. The cupola, or domed shrines dedicated to them still stand erect and are visible in various urban and rural locations throughout Morocco as proof of their existence and importance to the surrounding communities.

In spite of their existence and importance in Moroccan history little is known about these women saints. Their lives, practices, and contributions to their local communities are rarely studied by scholars, as will be discussed below. My thesis concerns these women’s construction of sainthood within the context of Islam as a religion, and of Sufism as the mystical dimension of that religion. It discusses the role of these female religious agents in Morocco’s past and present in the context of the current broader discourses on Moroccan women and feminism. Within that context it specifically addresses the questions of how
these historical female saints developed themselves and of how they are received by contemporary Moroccan women.

The broad argument I make in this thesis is that Moroccan women saints gained access to authority and agency and therefore deserve to be integrated in the feminist scholarship and discourse. To present and document this argument I explore a number of questions.

The first set of questions, which focus on the historical women saints’ construction and their access to sainthood, includes the following. How did women who were active in the historical religious realm become saints? What techniques did the women saints employ to reach the highest levels of piety and sainthood? Did their high-level of piety and sainthood enable them to gain access to power and authority? Did their achievement of sainthood emanate from personal decisions and individual choices or from conventional norms? Did their religious personalities impose a challenge to the dominant order?

To explore the legacy of the historical women saints I pose the following questions. How do the women who venerate them receive these historical women saints? Do they consider historical women saints to be role models? On what level do the women venerators appreciate them? Do they follow their techniques to acquire access to and exercise religious agency? If so, does this agency enable them to pursue religious self-formation in ways that are unrestricted by conventional norms? Finally, how do Moroccan women feminist activists today, and murshidāt (preachers and spiritual guides), receive these historical women saints in their discourses?

The remainder of this chapter is divided into four sections. In section two, I describe the sources and fieldwork on which I base my research. In section three, I discuss the scholarly literature on my topic of research. In the fourth section, I elucidate the conceptual background for the thesis. In the fifth and final section, I present the organization of the thesis.

1-2 Sources

The present study draws its data from a variety of sources, both written and oral. Besides the archives of Sufi literature, the Qur’an, Hadith, and stories of the Prophet, I consulted manuscripts belonging to a variety of genres, including genealogy (sulalāt), hagiography (manāqib), biography and autobiography (tarājim), and travel literature (raḥalāt ḥijāz). Genealogies such as Salwat al-anfās by al-Kattānī (20th century), and raḥalāt al-ḥijāz, such as Nashr al-Mathānī by Muḥammad Ṭayyib al-Qādirī (18th century), are also referred to in the
literature as hagiographies. All of these genres are categorized under the general heading of Kutub al-Tarājim wa al-Manāqib (hagiographic and genealogical books). Moroccan hagiographical literature encompasses biographies of saints, family genealogy, pilgrims’ manuals, and local traditions. Oral narratives constitute the final genre of primary sources I relied on to research the lives and religious experiences of historical women saints.

My research on the legacy and reception of the historical women saints by Moroccan women today relies on oral sources of a different kind. Interviews, both formal and informal, form my qualitative database for investigating their legacy and reception, in particular the attitudes of women venerators and feminist women activists towards historical women saints. The formal and informal interviews are designed to uncover the ways the venerators and activists receive women saints by investigating their attitudes towards religious women in history and the significance they assign to them in their discourses. More specifically, I interviewed fifty women venerators to collect life stories on saints, twenty murshidāt and wa’īzāt, fifty women attendants of their mosque lectures and lessons, and ten Islamist feminist activists.

1-2.1 Hagiography

Hagiographic texts are important sources of historical information on religion in pre-modern Moroccan society. The word “hagiography” has a Greek origin. It is derived from the word “hagio,” which means “holy person” or “saint” and the word “graphy,” which means “writing”.¹ Thus, hagiography signifies writing about holy people or saints. Hagiography constitutes a historical genre, consisting of pious religious scholars and saintly persons’ biographies and accounts of their contributions to the religious life and scholarly endeavors in their communities. It is often written by scholarly saints, who themselves were venerated. My research on Moroccan saintly women’s life stories started with an examination of hagiographic records. To collect hagiographic stories on Moroccan women saints, I consulted different libraries.² Most of the hagiographic texts are original, unedited manuscripts, devoid of a table of content or index. They are recorded in a traditional Arabic style, which is hard to read nowadays. In some manuscripts, the names of women saints were mentioned in passing within the life stories of men saints. Individual detailed life stories focusing exclusively on women saints were rare. In other hagiographic compilations, which were edited, I found

¹ Coon 1986, xvi
² See the Appendix
entries exclusively on men saints. When I came across detailed life stories of women saints, they were devoid of references to historical background. To contextualize their lives it was therefore necessary to read studies of Moroccan history. I initially studied hagiographies, biographies, and genealogies, but later focused primarily on edited and unedited hagiographic manuscripts.

I consulted not only life stories of women saints but also life stories of male saints in order to compare and discuss the differences and similarities between male and female saints. I specifically focused on women saints who undertook a life dedicated to piety and spiritual advancement. I include majdhūbat whose mental capacities were consumed by an attraction to God as well as faqīḥāt (religious jurists) and ʿālimāt (religious scholars), who transformed themselves spiritually and intellectually, achieving a high religious status that resulted in their access to and exercise of authority and power.

The number of women saints whose names are mentioned in hagiographic records is impressive, as is clear from the relatively long list in the Appendix. From this list I selected three women saints for an extensive analysis, namely Lalla ʿAzīza al-Saksāwiyya (14th century), Lalla ʿĀyisha al-Idrīsiyya (16th century), and Lalla Fāṭima Muhdūz (19th century). Their selection was based on interesting and unusual details in their life stories, and on the fact that their entries are more detailed than those of other women saints. The relative abundance of details enabled me to undertake a more in-depth study of their lives, and in particular the different self-techniques they used to transform themselves and to reinvent themselves as saintly personalities. Moreover, these three women saints belonged to different social classes and ethnic groups and they acquired diverse religious statuses and roles. ʿAzīza and Fāṭima originated from Southwestern Moroccan Berber tribes, whereas ʿĀyisha is a Northern Arab woman saint, adding a comparative dimension to this study.

### 1-2.2 Fieldwork

I supplemented the data that I extracted from the narratives I found in written hagiographies by collecting the narratives of lives of the women saints that are still transmitted orally today. The most effective way to collect these oral stories is to visit the shrines of the saints, where the pilgrims exchange them among themselves. Some hagiographers’ entries on saints mention the location of their tombs. Finding the exact location of the women saints’ shrines was sometimes not without difficulties. When I was in Qaṣr al-Ḳabīr, a city in the Northwest of Morocco, I asked the taxi driver to take me to ʿĀyisha al-Idrīsiyya’s shrine in the old
Medina. He told me that there were many women saints called ʿĀyisha in Bāb Sebta (Port Ceuta), which obliged me to visit them all. Another problem I encountered was that the shrines of some women saints were destroyed and their oral life stories lost, which means that only their names are known by the people in their regions of origin. Those whose shrines still exist enjoy great popularity, particularly thanks to their descendants, who take care of their shrines.

An advantage that I had in conducting this research was my childhood experience of visiting shrines. I still remember my mother taking me with her to visit her favorite saint, Mūlāy Driss in Mekness. As a child, I was more interested in playing with the other children in the courtyard of the shrine than in visiting the saint and attending the women’s rituals. During my fieldwork on Moroccan saintly women and the rituals around their lives in their sanctuaries, I attempted to recall my childhood experiences. I found that I had not forgotten all the rituals that my mother had taught me. Some of them were still engrained in my mind. For example, she always advised me to tie a rag to objects belonging to the shrine. I did everything she told me to do without knowing the significance of the ritual. My focus, as I mentioned earlier, was on playing rather than learning. My research prompted me to ask my family, friends and acquaintances for stories about women saints, the rituals surrounding them, and their significance.

The fieldwork for this study was carried out between June 2009 and September 2010. The first period, in June and July 2009, encompassed a preliminary study of the saints and their cults in Sīdī ʿAllāl al-Baḥrāwi, a village located adjacent to Rabat city, in which I currently live. My first goal was to get an idea of how people in my village think about their saint, Sīdī ʿAllāl al-Baḥrāwi. Subsequently, I visited the saint’s shrine on the outskirts of the village. When I arrived there, I found young girls and boys playing and riding their bikes in the shrine’s courtyard. The shrine was empty except for a young man sleeping in a corner of the shrine. One of the young girls entered the shrine, took some matches from her pocket, lit some candles, and put them on the saint’s sarcophagus. The girl told me that people came each Friday afternoon to visit the saint.

Next, I went to the medina of Salé, which is referred to in the historical sources as city of saints. Salé has several important shrines. I visited the shrines of the men saints Sīdī bin ʿAshīr and Sīdī bin Ḥassūn in search of women saints. According to the venerators I met, there were a few women saints but their shrines were destroyed. The only famous women

---

3 The village is named after a male saint, Sīdī ʿAllāl al-Baḥrāwi. It is about 20 km to the east of Rabat.
saints of Salé are Lalla `Āyisha and Lalla Mammas bint `Alī. These holy women had shrines in the old Medina, but they are now completely in ruins. My initial fieldwork on men saints was beneficial, as it provided me with preliminary knowledge about saints’ life stories and the importance of the cult of saints in Moroccans’ lives.

My second period of fieldwork took place in January 2010 in `Azīza al-Saksāwiyya’s village in the High Atlas Mountains. It is situated about 30 km to the east of Imintanūt (south of Marrakech). After spending one week with my host family, I returned home to review and assess my findings. My first visit was very fruitful, as it helped me to prepare for additional visits to `Azīza’s shrine. I returned to the High Atlas in March 2010 and spent the entire week of the moussem there. The moussem gave me the opportunity to meet a lot of pilgrims and to observe and discuss their rituals and religious actions with them.

My third fieldwork phase, from June 2010 until September 2010, in the south and in the north of Morocco, involved research on two other women saints I had selected to study. At the end of June I went to the Sūs region of southwestern Morocco to orient myself to the women saints’ shrines in that region. I went to several towns, namely Tiznīt and Shtuka ait Baha. I visited several shrines, but especially the shrine of Fāṭima al-Hilāliyya in Shtuka ait Baha, and Fāṭima Muḥdūz in Tiznīt. In each location, I spent one week studying women venerator’s rituals. I returned to Sūs in July 2010 to visit other women saints’ shrines. Subsequently, I changed my focus to the city of Qaṣr al-Kabīr in the north. There, I spent the last week of August and the last two weeks of September 2010. In the same period I also visited another city in that region, Shafshāwun, to study `Āyisha al-Idrīsiyya’s life story. From my fieldwork on these three saintly women, I noticed that they are all very well known. Many people in Shafshāwun and Qaṣr al-Kabīr still speak about `Āyisha, and many people in the Imintanūt and Tiznit still admire Lalla `Azīza and Lalla Fāṭima. I was able to acquire access to the people who venerate these women saints since I have relatives who live close to their shrines and who were willing to put me in contact with people who visit them.

Through my fieldwork, I was able to gather information from conversations and discussions with women and men visiting the shrines. Through this qualitative research, I gained an understanding of the pilgrims’ impetus for visiting the shrines and their sense of the significance of the rituals they perform there. This method of data collection was advantageous, as it enabled me to observe pilgrims and venerated performing rituals, expressing themselves, and behaving in a spontaneous and uninhibited manner. I documented my research data either in the presence of my informants or afterwards.

Apart from interviews I undertook participant observation. During most of the time I
spent in the shrines, I observed women performing their religious rituals. I attended women’s religious gatherings, listened to their utterances, and observed their actions. This greatly expanded my understanding of the meaning of my informants’ religious practices. I became involved with the venerators to the extent that they were willing to assist me in acquiring the information that I needed. I interviewed several women venerators in the shrines and approached people in the villages to ask them to tell me the stories about their women saints.

One subsequent fieldwork phase entailed conducting interviews with murshidāt who held lessons in mosques, in Rabat and Salé, and some of the women who regularly attend their mosque lessons. Murshidāt are women religious guides and mosque preachers. During my conversations with some venerators in Lalla ‘Āyisha’s shrine I learned that they also attend the mosque lessons held by these murshidāt. It was their recommendation and encouragement to attend the mosque that awakened my interest in murshidāt and my decision to contact and eventually interview some of them and some of their women attendants.

During the month of Ramadan, July/August 2010, I contacted the mosques Masjid ‘A’dam and Masjid al-Sunna in Rabat and Masjid al-Quds in Salé. I spoke to the murshidāt of these mosques and attended at Friday afternoon their religious courses and sermons held by them in all three locations. My intention was to employ the same research methods as previously, but I found the research situation to be very different. Unlike the venerators and pilgrims, the murshidāt understood my academic interest and that my aim was to carry out research. They appreciated my research and were willing to cooperate and assist me. They accepted to be interviewed, and they allowed me to attend their lessons. I developed some personal relationships with the murshidāt of these mosques. This facilitated my fieldwork, since they introduced me to other murshidāt. Nonetheless, several murshidāt refused to talk to me unless I showed them a Ministry of Religious Affairs permit to conduct the research. Obtaining a permit however necessitates complex procedures and time. This prompted me to work with those murshidāt who would work with me without a permit. The Majlis ‘Ilmī (The Scientific Religious Council) in Rabat helped me to contact wā’iẓāt, women preachers who organize their sermons and lessons. Some of them accepted to provide me with all the information I needed. In total I was able to meet and speak with twenty murshidāt and wā’iẓāt.

Some of the women preachers I interviewed turned out to be activists in Islamists feminist associations. They paved the way for me to contact their associations and conduct my fieldwork there. Thus, during the final phase of my research, I was able to interview some Islamist and secular feminist women activists.
The secular women feminists I interviewed were members of the Democratic Association of Moroccan Women (ADFM) and the Association for Feminine Action (UAF). The Islamist associations I studied were the Justice and Development Party (PJD), Justice and Spirituality (‘Adl wa al-Iḥsān) and the Zahrā’ Forum (Muntadā Zahrā’). I worked with the feminist associations between September and December of 2011, both in Rabat and Salé.

1-3 Scientific Research on Muslim Female Saints: A Review

Scholarly research on Muslim female saints is still rare. Most researchers have focused primarily on whether or not the women saints’ modes of behaviour and the rituals concerning their veneration either contradict or conform to the dominant order. This approach started with a number of Moroccan researchers who studied historical female mysticism and historical women’s mystical lives.

Moroccan feminist Fatima Mernissi (1977) interprets male and female saints as ideal models who refuse to submit to local traditional norms. Instead they construct saintly personalities that contradict conventional understandings of masculinity and femininity. Ultimately saints’ personalities do not threaten the dominant, patriarchal order, according to Mernissi. Their role, she argues, coincides with that of a psychiatrist who offers his or her services to people in an effort to find ways to deal with the hardships of their daily lives.4

In contrast, Daisy Dwyer (1978) studied Moroccan saints in Taroudant and focuses, on women venerators’ religious rituals that display women’s ability to make their own decisions, independently of their dominant husbandss.5 Likewise, Willy Jansen, in her book Women Without Men (1987), discusses Algerian women’s religious actions in relation to the societal order, and signals their marginalization and oppression in the dominant society. She argues that women’s exclusion from orthodox public religion pushes them into popular religion.6 Algerian women, Jansen argues, in fact failed to affect the dominant stratified society.7 Edien Bartels (1993) studies the phenomenon of saints’ veneration in Tunisia. She investigates the significance of saints for Tunisian women and whether their veneration reveals a protest against patriarchy. Bartels concludes that Tunisian women’s veneration of saints has a double face, enabling both their conformity and non-conformity to the patriarchal

4 Mernissi 1977, 112
5 Dwyer 1978, 583
6 Jansen 1987, 9
7 Ibid.
order.\textsuperscript{8} Margaret Rausch (2004) studies Ishelḥīn Moroccan women’s religious gatherings in shrines in Tiznīt in the Southwest of Morocco. She demonstrates that these Berber women create their own forms of religious expressions, which incorporate their ethno-linguistic identity and spirituality.\textsuperscript{9} Furthermore, Sossie Andezian (1995), who studied Algerian women’s religious rituals, underscored the controversial relations between women and religion.\textsuperscript{10} What links all of these researchers is the fact that they have chosen fieldwork as the ground upon which to study the significance of women’s religious practices as a means of understanding and reconstituting women’s positions in their communities.

Another group of researchers are those who focus on the study of historical documents in their approaches to historical women’s religious practices. Moroccan historians such as Ferḥat and Triki (1986), Hamam (1998), Maḥmah (1978), and Qaṭṭān (1998), study hagiographic and historical records to highlight female religious personalities of the past. Most of these researchers attest that women’s absence in recorded history is due to men’s monopolization of written history and to male writers’ desires to mainly document male saints and Sufis.\textsuperscript{11} According to them, women who were marginalized in written history found in oral tradition a refuge for the survival of their religious life stories. These historians call for the re-reading of history from a gender perspective as a means to rediscover historical female saints and the rituals celebrated around their lives, and thus to contribute to knowledge about the meaning of historical and modern women’s religious performances.

The literature reviewed above interprets the relationship between women and religion from two different but simultaneously overlapping approaches. On the one hand, the analyses are couched in a social historical framework that relies on available written primary sources and historical and historiographical methodologies, which are sometimes informed by anthropological and sociological approaches, as is the case with Ibn Khaldūn Salḥī (2009), Ferḥat and Triki (1986), Hamām (1998), Maḥmah (1978), Qattān (1998) and Zouanat (2009). On the other hand, they draw on data from fieldwork interviews and observation, approaching the phenomenon of women’s religious actions from a sociological and anthropological point of view and relying on oral primary sources and fieldwork methodologies, as is the case with Andezian (1995), Bartels (1993), Mernissi (1977), Rausch (2004) and Torab (1996). Obviously, the latter approach dominates given the spectacular emergence of social sciences in the second half of the last century. It advocates for the use of

\textsuperscript{8} Bartels 1993, 114
\textsuperscript{9} Rausch 2004, 221
\textsuperscript{10} Andezian 1995, 2
\textsuperscript{11} Chodkiewicz 1993, 103
fieldwork in an extensive way and emphasizes the importance of reconsidering Moroccan women’s spirituality and piety from the perspective of local participants. The one lacking variation in these two approaches is a combination of both written and oral sources that could highlight historical and contemporary instances of women’s religious participation and serve to fill the gap in the scholarly literature on Moroccan women’s religious practices. The present study will do exactly this.

Another point I would like to raise is the fact that the researchers referred to above understand women’s religious actions in different ways. The earlier feminist researchers such as Bartels (1993), Dwyer (1978), Mernissi (1977) and others focus on women’s religious actions that contradict patriarchy. However, they fail to envision them in terms of their direct or indirect endeavours to construct religious personalities, which are characterized by the women’s independence and by challenge that it poses to dominant patriarchal social patterns. More recently, however, feminist scholars such as Buitelaar (1993), Mahmood (2005), Moors (2004), Rausch (2004) and Sadiqi (2008) have, on the basis of fieldwork, begun to develop a more nuanced approach to women’s participation in the religious sphere, namely one that explores the ways women’s religious practices serve to construct a particular personhood. Furthermore, this approach addresses the question as to whether or not their religious practices enable them to challenge the traditional religious ideologies and dominant social patterns.

Amri (1999), Ferḥat (1995), Kugle (2007) and van Beek (2002), and who combined data from archival research on Muslim women saints of the Maghreb and fieldwork in their works, discuss both the way women saint constructed saintly personalities, and whether or not their lives challenge the religious orthodox patriarchal order. Similarly, the Moroccan anthropologist Abū Barik Rahal (2010), who also bases his study of Moroccan women’s construction of sainthood both on written and oral hagiographic sources, analyzes their construction of sainthood and discusses that it constitutes a challenge to the dominant system, with the latter serving as the explanation for its enduring importance among their pilgrims and followers, in his view. In line with these studies, I will explore other cases of historical Moroccan women saints and the way they constructed sainthood. In contrast to other researchers, however, I will analyze these women saints’ legacies and contributions within the context of contemporary discussions on women and religion. More specifically, my study focuses on the way contemporary women venerators of the women saints, as well as Islamist and secularist feminist activists, receive these legacies and contributions, and the way they understand the religious agency of these historical women saints. Finally, this thesis explores
the question of whether or not one can speak of a continuity of female religious agents in Moroccan history.

1-4 Clarification of Concepts and Terminology

Some main concepts of my thesis are more fully discussed in this section.

1-4.1 Sufism

The first concept that needs clarification is the concept of Sufism. In Chapter Two, I will examine the basic principles of this tradition in more depth. Here I will only briefly discuss some main characteristics of Sufism.

Although Sufism is often defined simply as Islamic mysticism, its accurate definition is multi-faceted. It is derived from the Arabic root “ṣṣūf” meaning wool, and it is related to the woolen cloaks worn by early ascetic and dervishes as a sign of their renunciation of the material world.12 Another theory suggests that Sufism originated from the word “ṣṣafa” (purity) or “ṣṣafw” (best), thus related to the purity of the Sufis and dervishes, and the spiritual advancement that accompanies it.13 Others define Sufism in terms of the annihilation (fanā’) of the Sufi’s ego in order to become a knower of God (‘ārif bi Allāh), to achieve ever more intimate proximity to God, and, ultimately, to attain Divine union.14 These different definitions show that Sufism has been understood and experienced in different ways in different locations and historical moments.

There are many larger or smaller methods for pursuing spirit advancement, or paths for advancing toward God, which are commonly referred to in English as Sufi orders, whose sub-orders and branches have expanded over the centuries throughout the world, including the US and Europe. One example is the Mevlevi Sufi order, which was inspired by and founded in honor of Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad Rūmī (13th century) after his death in Konya, Turkey. It was Rumi’s revolving technique for composing his world renowned poetry that the central whirling ritual is believed to be based on. Originating in Bukhara in Central Asia, the Naqshabandi Sufi order, which is named after its founder Bahā’ al-Dīn Naqshaband (14th century) is widespread in South Asia, Turkey, London, and Chicago. The Qadiri Sufi order, founded by ‘Abd al-Qādir Jīlānī (12th century), native of the Iranian province of Mazandaran,

---

12 al-Tādīlī 1997, 34
13 Ibid.
14 Ibid.
has many branches, sub-branches, and offshoots worldwide, including the Qādiriyya-Būtshīshiyya in Morocco.

Moreover, two levels of Sufism are notoriously distinguished: orthodox and popular. The former is associated with the “official” or “formal” dimension of Islam and is based on the foundational sources of Islam: the Qur’an and the Sunna. As for popular Sufism, it is also based on the Qur’an and Sunna but includes additional beliefs and practices that orthodox ‘ulama (religious scholars) consider non-Islamic. Orthodox Sufism strictly conforms to the tenets of Islam and stresses Islamic law (fiqh) and the social relations and practices of religion. It is also articulated by ‘ulama. Sufism as an Islamic dimension is concerned with Islam’s psychological side. The ‘ulama focused on the external practice of religion and the worship of God, strictly following the regulations of the Islamic law, in the hope that the Muslim’s external physical activities compel the inner soul to be regulated and that its practice of religion thus becomes ameliorated. The Sufis go directly to the inner soul, which they consider separate from the mind and independent of the body and its external practices. Sufism, as Ibn Khaldūn states, is a personal relationship between God and the individual soul, and each human soul, as mentioned earlier, is free to choose its own way to worship God and to establish a direct relationship with Him.

Orthodox and popular Sufism are two variations of Sufism developed in response to the cultures in which they emerged. Sufism is practiced differently: each individual has his/her own personal way to live piously and spiritually. Sufism focuses on individual emotional and psychological experiences and intellectual understandings. These vary and can even be radically different from one individual to another within the same Sufi community, and from one Sufi community to another within the same cultural region or country. The variations and differences in terminology, beliefs and rituals result from the individual’s interpretations of Sufi doctrine and practice that are colored by local cultural and linguistic specificities. In this sense, popular Sufism can be seen simply as a further adaption to these specificities.

Popular Sufism derives from, and adds additional beliefs and rituals to, orthodox Sufism, which often entails an exaggeration or expansion of the orthodox Sufi doctrine and practice. One belief that was and is common to some Sufi orders and central to popular Sufism is the ability of some humans to achieve saintly status or sainthood, which led to the development of corresponding practices related to saint veneration. Popular Sufism emerges from the fact that people in local contexts are neither trained in the religious sciences, nor

15 My explanation in this paragraph is based on Ibn Khaldūn 1960.
have they received adequate religious instruction. They create practices that are often connected to the life stories of local pious figures or saints and that are therefore very much embedded in local contexts and linked to historical events, which are fictitious or factual, but partially transformed through exaggeration.

Where Sufism is merely reduced to saint veneration such as worship of holy spaces and the performance of rituals within shrines, it falls short of taking into account that Sufism focuses on direct personal worship of God and entails moral and ethical self-formation. The ‘ulamā strongly disapprove of popular Sufi beliefs and rituals because they are not based on the tenets of orthodox Islam. The people who perform them display a lack of knowledge of or respect for these tenets, as they do not act in accordance with them.16 The centrality of saints and saint veneration provides the justification for popular Sufism’s characterization as idolatrous. In Chapter three the relation between popular and orthodox Sufism will be discussed more fully in the Moroccan context.

The variety of definitions of Sufism as mentioned, offers a variety of designations for a Sufi. The central figure of Sufism is the friend of God (walī Allāh) that I use here interchangeably with the term saint. Walī emanates from the root w-l-y, meaning to be near and the one who is near is a friend, and walī Allāh is therefore translated as a friend of God.17 Walī Allāh is also referred to in Moroccan Arabic as “siyyid.” This term means “lord” or “master,” as well as possessor. Moroccans use the word mulay when addressing a walī Allāh. The term “lalla” is used to address a female saint. Other terms include näšik (devotee), which refers to someone who devotes himself or herself to excellent qualities; the worshiper (‘ābid) is someone who continuously worships God, the ascetic (zāhid) is someone who renounces the material world and its pleasures; the gnostic (‘ārif bi Allāh) is someone who becomes recognizant of Divine realities (ḥaqā’iq); the pious (wāri‘) is someone who has attained an advanced level in the development of his/her piety; the adherent (mutamassik) is someone who is attached to the Islamic guidelines for belief and practice; the aspirant or disciple (murīd) is the one who undertakes discipleship with a Sufi order; the sālik is the wayfarer or traveler on the path to God, and finally the ecstatic (majdhūb) is someone whose mental capacities are affected by his/her intense attraction to and sense of intimacy with God.18

The term majdhūb emanates from the Arabic root jadhb, which means “to draw out or pull out.” A majdhūb is

16 Shrif 1975
17 See Encyclopedia of Islam, vol 11. 109
18 Zarrūq 1992; Skali 2007
one whose spirit has been drawn forcibly to God and whose reason is thus under strain, or completely broken, or expelled from its proper place. The result is a social behavior that seems “mad” or “irrational”, and we can think of [him or her] as divinely distracted.\(^\text{19}\)

A majdhūb’s behavior is excused and exempt from punishment. All of these Sufi figures belong to the same circle of believers who seek the truth. They use their own methods, which conform to their own nature, to be with God. Thus, there are different paths that the Sufis follow to journey toward closeness to God, to pursue Divine union, to achieve sainthood, and to create saintly personalities.

Overall, sainthood is hierarchical. Geofroy (2010) distinguishes between the great sanctity (al-Walāya al-Kubrā) and the minor sanctity (al-Walāya al-Ṣṣughrā).\(^\text{20}\) The former is reserved for the spiritual intellectual elite, and the latter encompasses ordinary faithful Sufis.\(^\text{21}\) More importantly, the level of sanctity can be explained by the degree of faith and baraka. Accordingly, those Sufis or holy men and women who possess the highest degree of faith are called the pegs (awtād), meaning those who maintain shari’a on earth. They gain from God this strong baraka because they have great faith in and devotion to God, and because they are very active, pious, and diligently practicing Sufis. Their strong exertion (mujāhada) endows them with strong baraka, which advances them as spiritual guides for other disciples (murīd). The heralds (nuqabā’) and the pole (quṭb) are spiritual masters who have succeeded, on the one hand, in attaining direct mystical knowledge of the Divine and in maintaining shari’a on earth, on the other hand.\(^\text{22}\)

A friend of God, or saint, is recognized by a number of characteristics. First and foremost, a saint is a reminder of the Divine. Saints are channels through which virtue and sacredness are revealed. They propagate Islamic virtues, moral conduct, and good social relations. They are known by their mystical choice to follow the Sufi path to spiritual advancement, and their engagement and intense exertion at the different stages along that path to reach Divine proximity and ultimately union with God.\(^\text{23}\) Thus, Saints are sacred persons to whom people, belonging to different social statuses, show respect and admiration, and who are thought of as holders of sacredness.

\(^{19}\) Kugle 2007, 109. See also Encyclopaedia of Islam, vol. 5, 100
\(^{20}\) Ibid.
\(^{21}\) Ibid.
\(^{22}\) Cornell 1998, 3
\(^{23}\) Toufiq 1997
1-4.2 Baraka

The concept baraka, already mentioned above, is usually understood as a Divine gift or blessing that God bestows on those among His people who pursue advancement along the path, i.e. the journey to God. It is often equated with a beneficent force of Divine origin, which causes superabundance in the physical sphere and prosperity and happiness in the psychic order. The latter show, however, that baraka is more than a spiritual force as such. Rather, it is a force that saints can possess during their lifetimes or after their deaths, that makes them outstanding in social life. Baraka has been a topic of debate among scholars for centuries. Most Western anthropologists who have studied Moroccan Islam portray baraka in terms of a Divine favor. They stress its religious dimension rather than its social one. Interestingly, anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1968), by contrast, stresses the social importance of baraka. He writes:

> Literally baraka means blessing, in the sense of divine favor. But spreading out from that nuclear meaning, specifying and delimiting it, it encloses a whole range of linked ideas, material prosperity, physical well-being, bodily satisfaction, completion luck, plenitude, and, the aspects most stressed by Western writers anxious to force it into a pigeonhole with mana, or magical power. In broadest terms, baraka is not, as it has often been represented, a paraphysical force, a kind of spiritual electricity- a view which, though not entirely without basis, simplifies it beyond recognition. Like the notion of the exemplary center, it is a conception of the mode in which the divine reaches into the world.

Thus Geertz presents baraka not in terms of ‘spiritual electricity’ but in terms of a personal experience, a force of character and of social and moral power. Baraka, in Geertz’ view, is a force that some saints possess to greater extent than other saints.

In this thesis, baraka is considered a symbol of power. A saint achieves sainthood and develops a saintly personality not only to gain baraka from the Divine as a gift for his or her mujāhada but also to prove his or her abilities to achieve a religious personality. Therefore, a saint is in a position to activate his or her spiritual capital (baraka) through specific actions and social interactions, which enables him or her to impose his or her viewpoint and

---

24 See Encyclopaedia of Islam, vol. 3, 1032
25 Ibid.
26 Geertz 1968, 44
27 Sabour 1993
dominance. Baraka, as we will see, is an independent force that endows its possessor with power and competence to serve people and to impose his or her authority on others.

Baraka is also recognized in objects and in daily life behavior. Agricultural people consider cereals to be endowed with baraka. The latter causes the cereals to be miraculously multiplied. Some springs, rocks, trees, caves and other objects are considered sacred places, and their endowment with baraka that ensures people’s regular visitation. Baraka is also a word used in daily life speech to ward off the evil eye and as a way of expressing thanks and greetings. Vincent Crapanzano (19781) contends that:

baraka [is] holiness, blessing, good fortune, or a miraculous force that emanates from holy men and places. Bread is a recurrent symbol for baraka. Baraka can be either inherited or achieved.

Here, Crapanzano specifies the properties of baraka and qualifies it as Divine grace that can be either inherited through saintly lineage or achieved through piety. It is this last category of baraka that concerns me in this research, as I intend to show that women mystics who engaged in pious deeds became saintly figures who were endowed with baraka.

Baraka enables Sufi saints to perform a karāma (a wonder). In his work entitled al-Tashawwuf, al-Tādīlī defines karāma as an act that is contrary to custom performed by someone whose religion is sound. In other words, karāma, in al-Tādīlī’s view, is fi’l khāriq lil ‘āda (a paranormal act which appears at the hands of a saint who is obedient to God). The saint is able to perform extraordinary acts such as foretelling the future, walking on water, flying in the air, and interfering with the laws of nature. A karāma is presented as proof of the saint’s sanctity. Saints’ wonders are to be distinguished from miracles performed by prophets, which are referred to as mu’jizāt (sing: mu’jiza). Prophets’ mu’izāt are manifest phenomena. They are accorded to prophets as proof of their prophecy and as proof of the Divine origin of their message and mission. In contrast, saints’ wonders must not be known but rather concealed.

Saint veneration is an aspect, facet, or dimension of popular Sufism that centres on the saints’ baraka. Moroccans believe in the divine blessing (baraka) that a Sufi saint

28 Westermarck 1926
29 Ibid.
30 Encyclopædia of Islam, vol. 3, 1032
31 Crapanzano 19781, 237
32 al-Tādīlī 1997, 54
33 Ibid.
34 Ibid.
possesses. They perform ziyāra (visitation rituals) to the shrines of holy men and women to acquire some of his/her baraka, and to invoke him/her as a paradigmatic intercessor who can ask God to fulfil the venerators’ desires and wishes. Pilgrims seek the baraka that God bestows on the saints. They acquire some of the saint’s baraka through the performance of different rituals such as an animal sacrifice and the recitation of devotional prayers. Baraka and the performance of wonders are the most important criteria for a holy man or woman to be considered a saint in Morocco. The data I gathered show that Moroccan pilgrims consider only people with baraka and wonders to be saints. This means that saints have to display baraka and wonders to prove their sainthood.

A saint’s sainthood is believed to enable him or her to play the role of mediator between the Divine and the people. The saint’s achievement of sainthood also gives him or her the power to become an intercessor among people. People consult saints to fulfill their needs and resolve their crises. They seek out the saints as intercessors with God on their behalf to answer their prayers, fulfill their wishes, and alleviate the hardships of their lives. For this, people forge strong relationships with saints (either alive or dead). A saint’s tomb remains a sacred place for people, and houses daily rituals performed by pilgrims to express their strong loyalty and attachment to their favorite saints.

1-4.3 Rituals

A further concept on which I base my research is the concept of ‘ritual’, which in itself constitutes another topic of debate among researchers. According to Sadiqi (2003), rituals “are the sum of actions and utterances that characterizes meaningful cultural events.” Rituals are understood as the remnants of past actions and moral performances. They are performed through the repetition of utterances and actions that have different meanings, messages, and ideologies. They convey moral messages that are transmitted from one generation to another, underscoring their continuity and stability. They combine historical and contemporary meaning from social performances. Rituals are thus to be understood as a way to bridge the gap between the classical and contemporary meanings of actions. They combine the historical and the current meaning of practices.

In contrast, Caroline Humphrey (1994) and Azam Torab (2007) offer a different

\[35\] As will be discussed below
\[36\] Westermarck 1926; Reysoo 1991
\[37\] Sadiqi 2003, 54
\[38\] Ibid.
interpretation of rituals. According to Humphrey, rituals can be defined not as a distinct category of events and actions but also as a form of communication. In other words, rituals are not only a script or a book regulating practices and actions and directing the way practices should be performed, but also a form of practice that interprets a particular event and ideology. According to Torab, ritual activity is the means whereby the person negotiates, redefines, or constructs new interpretations of a particular action. Rituals are techniques to express the individual’s inner desires and one’s own ideologies. Thus, ritual is a way to negotiate the relationship between the self, society, and the transcendent. Turner (1984) also advocates a performative approach to rituals. He presents rituals not as symbols with particular meanings, but as actions that involve the individual’s abilities to express their inner feelings and attitudes towards a particular social phenomenon. This thesis follows this performative approach to rituals as an activity.

From a similar performative perspective, Judith Butler (1990) famously argues that gender is not an essence but a repetition of performative acts, and through this contingent repetition shifts in meaning can take place, that involve dominant gender practices and behavior. Combining both performative approaches, one regarding rituals the other regarding gender, I will examine the ways religious women construct gender through their performance of, or behavior during, religious rituals, within a context where gendered cultural norms are strongly emphasized. This combinatory performative approach will be applied to the rituals performed by Moroccan women saints and their women devotees, whose rituals display their religious agency. Seen as practices and performances whereby they negotiate, redefine and construct new gender perspectives, women devotees’ rituals can ultimately be seen as actions that offer new gendered perspectives. The significance here is that the new gender perspectives are products of religious ritual activity rather than its cause. The question that arises is: how do women reorient themselves and particularly their bodies, which have been trained to perform, according cultural norms, to develop and perform rituals that negotiate their inner intents and desires in a way that contradicts the local norms? This question leads us to the discussion of the concepts of embodiment and agency, as well as of other theoretical concepts such as patriarchy and empowerment.

---

39 Humphrey 1994, 64
40 Torab 2007, 4
1-4.4 Embodiment, Agency, Empowerment and Patriarchy

‘Embodiment’ is another important topic of debate among scholars. Strathern (1996) defines embodiment as a way to embrace local knowledge and as a way to construct personhood. Mary Douglass (1970) and Marcel Mauss (1934) study the concept of the human body in the context of religious systems of meaning. They stress the importance of “bodily techniques” in becoming a human being in a particular society, in constructing religious personhood, and in achieving communication with God. Mauss articulates his perspective as follows:

I perceive that at the bottom of all our mystical states there are body techniques which we have not studied (...). I think that there are necessarily biological means of entering into communion with God.

In this passage, Mauss is concerned with the technique that the body undertakes to become part of a social and spiritual environment. The body in its abilities to acquire habits is prompted by a social context. Douglass acknowledges Mauss’ approach to the body as an entity that learns social norms. Every particular action, according to Douglass, is pregnant with social learning. She even presents the body as a metaphor for the social order. The body is modified by social categories through which a particular view of society is sustained. Therefore, embodiment involves the body not as a material object, but as a concatenation of action, affecting and affected by cultures. The body is, then, both a pre-condition for social action and a product of social and cultural contexts.

Such a concept of embodiment offers an understanding of the way the body is constructed and the way it reinforces social norms. It also provides activist researchers with the means to criticize the social patterns and norms that are judged to be oppressive. From this perspective, researchers in the field of gender studies are able to discuss, from a critical point of view, whether the body is or is not, in a certain case, the locus of a critique on patriarchal and oppressive gender relations.

Another theoretical perspective regarding embodiment is that of French philosopher Michel Foucault who analyzes at length how power practices mold and shape the body, through what he calls a ‘microphysics’ of power. He analyzes how power and knowledge in

---

41 Strathen 1996, 198
42 Mauss 1979, 122
43 Ibid.
44 Ibid.
45 Kugle 2007, 13
the West have been intermingled since 1800, culminating in power practices through which human bodies are ‘disciplined’ and ‘normalized’.\textsuperscript{46} He aims to show how all human bodies since then have been molded and standardized according to norms set by the human sciences, which determine what constitutes the normal subject, but also abnormal subjects. Especially his theories on the disciplining of bodies are widely used by feminist researchers who analyze how the female body is a locus of these power practices, as it is adapted to standards of how the normal female body should be and what it should look like.

Butler (1990) is the most prominent feminist researcher who uses Foucault’s theories in this respect, arguing that one’s gender is always an embodied product of power relations and practices. As mentioned above, she discusses the possibility of change through her concept of performativity: one’s gender results from a series of performative bodily acts, the repetition of which can amount to openings and shifts in dominant patterns of gender behavior.

Here a concept of ‘agency’ comes to the fore that is nowadays often used in feminist theory: the concept of agency as opposition to oppressive gender patterns, that itself is embodied in the oppressive discourses through which it is constructed. Many anthropologists are also taking up this concept nowadays, in their studies on non-Western cultures and religions. Anthropologist and former student of Butler, Saba Mahmood, has elaborated a concept of agency in this context, criticizing Butler and taking up Foucault’s theories in the process. Mahmood (2005) bases her study of an Egyptian women’s mosque movement on especially on Foucault’s final works on ethics. Her work has recently become very influential where it concerns theoretical discussions on feminism, women and Islam, this being the reason why it is discussed here more at length.

Interestingly, Mahmood criticizes Western feminists for imposing their concepts of individual freedom and autonomy at the global level, i.e. for seeking to rescue women in non-Western countries through global emancipatory projects. But the Egyptian women of the mosque movement do not seek autonomy and freedom, Mahmood contends. They are however agents and they should be respected and treated as such. In constructing her concept of agency, Mahmood applies Foucault’s ethical theory. Before investigating Mahmood’s specific application of Foucault’s theory, I will briefly elucidate Foucault’s thoughts on ethics as ethical self-formation.

\textsuperscript{46} Foucault 1977
In his final works, especially those written after 1980, he contends that in all societies we find so-called “self-techniques,” which he described as:

techniques which permit individuals to perform, by their own means, a certain number of operations on their bodies, on their own souls, on their own thoughts, on their own conduct, and this in such a way that they transform themselves, modify themselves, and reach a certain state of perfection, of happiness, of purity, of supernatural power, and so on.47

These self-techniques are to be found in every moral system, which as such, consist of a set of moral codes or prescriptive rules on the one hand, and of vocabularies that constitute the ethical relationship of the self to the self on the other hand. Through the latter, individuals constitute themselves as an ethical subject which acts and behaves in accordance with the codes or the rules of the moral system at hand, with embodiment playing an important role in that constitution. This ethical relationship of the self to the self always has four dimensions, according to Foucault. First, an element that he calls the ethical substance, i.e. the answer to the question what should be cultivated or transformed through the techniques. Second, a dimension of assujetissement, i.e. the answer to the question why the cultivation or ethical self-transformation is necessary. Third, the self-techniques that are to be used, i.e. the answer to the question how this continuous process of ethical self-formation has to be undertaken, and finally, the telos: to what purpose should it be undertaken?48

In a further elaboration of these concepts Foucault studied Greek and Roman antiquity, where he found ethical vocabularies that were designed to cultivate ethical self-improvement. In his view, these ancient ethical vocabularies that involved self-practices were characterized by a relative independence from moral rules or moral codes. The adherents to various philosophical schools and religious groups in antiquity, where ethical self-formation practices were implemented, were invited through relatively independent ethical vocabularies to cultivate a personal ‘ethos’ or ethical life. He therefore coins the term ethical ‘freedom practices’ to refer to this ancient understanding of ethics. He contends that the principle of this relatively autonomous ethical self-formation is inherently critical of domination in the sense that the practices contain their own normative dimension. In this way, ethical freedom

47 Foucault 2007, 154
48 Foucault 1997a, 263; Vintges 2004
practices implicitly or explicitly work on the limits of social forms of domination of whatever kind.\textsuperscript{49}

Thus, Foucault asserts, on the one hand, that practical ethical self-formation techniques, which entail an ethical relationship of the self to the self, are to be found in many moral systems; and he offered analytical tools for studying various dimensions of ethical self-formation within specific moral systems. On the other hand, he made it clear in several ways that his preference lies with ethical self-practices which are relatively autonomous from moral rules, such as was the case, in his view, in ancient times. Moreover, he pointed to several strands of Islam and Buddhism to argue that this was also the case in other moral systems, and not merely in the ancient Greek and Roman ones.\textsuperscript{50}

Through his concept of ‘freedom practices’, Foucault emphasizes that individuals can activate their abilities to practice techniques of their own choice that enable them to create their own free state of being, through the availability of vocabularies that offers the tools for such choices. The ethical formation of the self in such a context is undertaken by free choice, and this free management of the self consists of a conscious, continuous practicing of certain preferred ethical self-techniques, within the context of a specific chosen life project.

Looking at Mahmood’s application of Foucault’s approach to ethics in her book \textit{Politics of Piety} (2005), we find that she avoids the concept of freedom practices altogether, and merely draws on Foucault’s ideas on ethical self-formation.\textsuperscript{51} Her book investigates the desires, motives, aspirations, and commitments of Egyptian women affiliated with a mosque piety movement in Cairo. The movement emerged when women with varying levels of formal and informal training began to organize meetings in the mosque, Islam’s male dominated religious ritual space, to offer sermons and lessons on a variety of religious matters. Based on qualitative interviews with some of the women of this religious movement, Mahmood examines their approaches to different dilemmas and struggles that Muslim women in general and Egyptian women in particular are facing today.

Mahmood applies Foucault’s approach in analyzing the ethical self-formation of these women through self-techniques, which are aimed at a certain telos, on behalf of certain values, and working on a certain ethical substance. I will only focus here on the dimension of ethical self-techniques, which are used by these women and which Mahmood discusses at length. In her analysis, Mahmood especially examines the self-techniques for cultivating

\textsuperscript{49} Foucault 1997b  
\textsuperscript{50} Vintges 2004  
\textsuperscript{51} Vintges 2012
patience (ṣṣabr) and for veiling, and the way the body is involved in the ethical self-formation of these women.

Mahmood shows that her respondents are engaged in self-techniques, which involve their individual agency. They are consciously training their bodies to embrace new attitudes and dispositions related to shyness and patience and cultural practices such as veiling. For example, Nadia, one of Mahmood’s respondents, when asked whether or not it was hard to remain unmarried in a place where marriage is important for women, says: “you have to have a very strong personality for all of this to not affect you because you are not married”. 

When Mahmood asked her what she means by “strong”, Nadia replies:

> You must be patient in the face of difficulty, trust in God, and accept the fact that this is what He has called as your fate; if you complain about it all the time, then you are denying that it is only God who has the wisdom to know why we live in the conditions we do and not humans.

In another instance, Mahmood asks Nadia about her marital life and about being able to achieve the state of patience (ṣṣabr). Nadia says to Mahmood:

> Oh Saba, you don’t learn to become patient or trust in God just when you face difficulties…. You practice the virtue of patience because it is a good deed, regardless of your situation: whether your life is difficult or happy. In fact practicing patience in the face of happiness is even more difficult.

From this quote it is clear that ṣṣabr, which is considered a moral virtue in Muslim culture and in Islam, has to be cultivated by being exercised and practiced until the body embodies these practices and starts practicing them naturally and spontaneously. 

Amal, another respondent, contends:

> I used to think that even though shyness [al-ḥayā’] was required of us by God, if I acted shyly, I would be hypocritical [nifāq] because I didn’t actually feel it inside of me. Then one day, in reading verse twenty-five in Surat al-Qaṣaṣ(…) I realized t-hat al- ḥayā’ was among the good deeds (…) and given my natural lack of it I had to make or create it first. I realized that

---

52 Mahmood 2005, 170
53 Ibid.
54 Ibid.
55 Ibid., 156
making it in yourself is not hypocrisy, and that eventually your inside learns to have al-ḥayā’ too.\textsuperscript{56}

With regard to veiling, Mahmood signals the same principle; it is an ethical self-technique in the context of women’s ethical self-formation. Mahmood thus demonstrates that veiling is not simply a form of submission to a patriarchal order, a symbol of women’s Islamic identity, or a practice that emanates from natural feelings of shyness or modesty. Rather, veiling, as Mahmood puts it, is connected to the practicing of shyness. Veiling here is taken as a practice that trains the body to acquire it. The body is the instrument through which cultural norms are cultivated. One of Mahmood’s respondents says:

It is just like the veil [ḥijāb]. In the beginning when you wear it, you’re embarrassed (…) and don’t want to wear it because people say that you look older and unattractive, that you won’t get married, and will never find a husband. But you must wear the veil, first because it is God’s command (…), and, with time, your inside learns to feel shy without the veil, and if you were to take it off your entire being feels uncomfortable (…) about it.\textsuperscript{57}

What Mahmood is demonstrating here is that veiling, shyness, and ṣṣabr exemplify Egyptian Muslim women’s embodied agency, within the limits of the dominant moral system. She stresses the instrumentality of the body by referring to the pianist who engaged in practices to achieve the mastery of playing the musical instrument. The pianist shows submission and subordination in which he/she trains her/his body according to the rules of the master to acquire the skills needed. The pianist here submits herself/himself to a process in which she/he trains her body and emotions to achieve a certain self-formation.

Likewise Egyptian women’s agency is achieved through “repeated bodily acts” and by training one’s memory, desire, and intellect to behave according to the established standard of conduct. The pious practices of the Egyptian Muslim women she studied exemplify their internalization of the rules of the concrete patriarchal patterns, in which they are embedded. In this sense, Mahmood presents agency as the capacity to act within the constraints of the local patriarchal culture. The movement participants she observed are active agents, who do not challenge the patriarchal order, but whose actions instead conform to the male dominant system. Mahmood concludes that the concept of agency does not

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid.
involve the notion of freedom, meaning free action in opposing domination, as is the case with Butler and others. People can also actively inhabit dominant norms, as agents, that is. Feminists should stop wanting all women to be free from domination. Women can choose as agents to conform to their subordinate position. Muslim women should not be approached from the perspective of individual freedom, which is a Western concept according to Mahmood.

According to Dutch scholar Karen Vintges (2012), Mahmood reads Foucault selectively with regard to the concept of ethical self-formation, completely overlooking Foucault’s preference for ‘ethical freedom practices’, i.e. his normative perspective. More specifically, Mahmood dismisses his articulation of this concept of individual freedom as a cross-cultural alternative for the dominant Western ways of life, which he sees as effects of disciplining power practices.

It is this perspective of Foucault that informs my research. I look at women’s religious agency in the past and present of Morocco and pose the following questions. Do we deal here with the type of agency i.e. of ethical self-formation Mahmood describes in her study? Do the religious women as agents merely conform to the dominant moral system, or do we find here agents that transgress dominant patriarchal patterns by opposing patterns of domination? Do we thus deal here with ethical self-formation in the sense of ‘freedom practices’? Do the historical women saints work on the limits of their moral system when they undertake to develop their piety and spirituality and to cultivate moral selfhood? Similarly, I question whether their venerators do this, as well as the feminists I interviewed.

In my research I make use of three other concepts: empowerment, patriarchy and equality effects. ‘Empowerment’ refers to the expansion of one’s ability to make independent decisions and individual choices, and to exercise this ability to achieve desired outcomes. Naila Kabeer (1999) defines empowerment as follows:

Empowerment… refers to the expansion in people’s ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them. Changes in the ability to exercise choice can be thought of in terms of changes in three inter-related dimensions which make up choice: resources, which form the conditions under which choices are made; agency, which is at the heart of the process by which choices are made; and achievements, which are the outcome of choices. 58

58 Kabeer 1999, 19
Thus, the quote stresses the expansion of people’s abilities to achieve certain ends. I have investigated whether Moroccan women saints, who lived in a patriarchal religious environment that denied them access to orthodox religious leadership roles, by attaining sainthood, chose courses of action that empowered them. The same applies to their women devotees and to women feminist activists. I have investigated whether they find empowerment in the religious role models of Moroccan women saints.

Another key concept then is the one of ‘patriarchy’, meaning literally “rule of the fathers”. Feminist theoreticians have argued that from the beginning of history women have always been dominated and oppressed by men, that is, men have always been the first sex, women the second.\(^{59}\) As Caroline Pateman explains, the patriarchal construction of the difference between masculinity and femininity is the political difference between freedom and subjection.\(^{60}\) Muslim feminist theoretician Asma Barlas (2004) uses the concept throughout her work, defining it as:

> a form of rule by the father that derived its legitimacy from representation of God as father and of the father/husband as sovereign over wives and children.\(^{61}\)

However, patriarchy has recently become a contested concept among many other feminist theoreticians, since it is seen as too general, indicating the overall domination between the sexes, that is, of women’s oppression.\(^{62}\) Nevertheless, I think it is important. We can use the concept as a tool rather than an overall theory of history to analyze concrete historical social patterns of domination of women that have made it impossible for many women to have control over their lives and to act independently and in accordance with their individual desires and choices. I have investigated whether the women saints, their women devotees, and women feminist activists are empowered in a way that enables them to challenge patriarchal norms and patterns through their actions.

Finally I make use of another concept, which I consider important in the exploration of the meaning of Moroccan religious practices, namely the concept ‘equality effects,’ as developed by the Dutch historian Siep Stuurman (2004). According to Stuurman, a history of equality can be written that focuses on ‘equality-effects’ in discourses and texts that express notions and thoughts of equality without necessarily using the term or addressing the concept

---

59 Beauvoir 1949  
60 Pateman 1988, 207  
61 Barlas 2004, 4  
62 Tickner 2001
of equality as such. Referring to a concept used by Wittgenstein, Stuurman argues that there are ‘family resemblances’ between equality discourses and concepts in different languages and historical contexts. Equality can be expressed in a rational Enlightenment discourse, but also in mythical or religious discourses. “We can recognize affinities and parallels (…). Stories may suggest similarity and equality without any explicit reference to them”.

Stuurman adds that there is a difference between equality effects and egalitarianism.

(I)t is useful to distinguish between equality and egalitarianism. Egalitarianism denotes the conscious pursuit of some specific variety of equality, while discourses and concepts of equality refer to specific senses in which persons are deemed equal in particular respects. The relation between equality and egalitarianism is one of potentiality: concepts of equality are not necessary egalitarian. On the other hand it is obvious that ideas of equality can easily spill over into egalitarian discourses’, which hold that when things are alike they should ‘receive similar treatment’.  

Combining Stuurman’s perspective with Foucault’s approach to ethical self-formation, I assume that it is not only possible to bring about equality effects and egalitarian effects through texts and stories in different historical contexts but also through life practices as well. I will investigate whether concepts that underlie norms and effects of gender equality are expressed in life stories as well as in the embodied practices of Moroccan Muslim women in past and present.

1-5 Organization of the Thesis

In the six chapters that follow I will discuss and present my research as follows. In Chapter Two, the basic principles of Sufism are explored more in depth, in particular in relation to the theme of gender. The third chapter elucidates the characteristic features of Moroccan Sufism and Moroccan hagiography. The fourth chapter examines Moroccan women and men saints’ construction of sainthood, through an analysis of their self-techniques. It also discusses three famous Moroccan women saints, investigating their agency and empowerment as they are

---

63 Ibid., 24-25
64 Ibid., 26
65 See Vintges 2007
articulated in history and oral tradition. The fifth chapter studies the way women pilgrims and devotees receive historical women saints’ agency and empowerment. I study the different rituals that pilgrims perform in the women saints’ shrines and their meanings. I analyze the ways Moroccan women devotees today benefit from their women saints’ agency and become agents and empowered women. I also discuss the extent to which women preachers and religious guides receive women saints as role models and as a source of empowerment. The sixth chapter investigates the way Moroccan Islamist and secularist activists receive historical women saints and incorporate them into their discourses. I will assess whether or not feminist activists in Morocco today perceive historical women saints as a source of inspiration for their own agency and empowerment. The final chapter constitutes the general conclusion of the thesis.
Chapter Two: Female Voices In Sufism

In order to discuss female Moroccan sainthood in Chapter Four, I first will explore some contexts. In this chapter, I will discuss Sufism more in depth, and go into its relation to gender. In chapter three, I will focus on the Moroccan characteristics of these issues, as well as on Moroccan hagiography.

Sufism, as was already indicated in Chapter One, has many strands. I concentrate therefore on what is the basis of all these strands, namely the basic principles of Sufism, as formulated by al-Ghazālī. 66 As a background for our study on women saints’ construction of sainthood, I discuss the several stages of the spiritual path as discussed by this religious scholar. I will also briefly discuss the spaces of ribāṭ, zāwiya and ṭṭariqa, stressing the relationship between them.

According to several authors there is gender neutrality in Sufism. To discuss this theme we will go into the works of some Sufi scholars of the past. We will also go into the broader movement of Islamic mysticism, to which Sufism belongs, and its rootedness in the sources of Islam, especially in the Qur’an. Authors like Leila Āḥmad, Amīna Wadud and Asma Barlas, have argued that the core of the Qur’an is its ethical Spirit, such as it is taken up in Islamic mysticism. Moreover, they have argued that the Spirit of the Qur’an is gender neutral or even egalitarian in character. Against this background, I discuss some examples of women mystics in Islamic history, in the concluding section of the chapter.

2-1 The Sufi Path to God

Sufism as a mystical dimension of Islam, has many strands, as I already discussed in Chapter One. Here I limit myself to the basis of Sufism, as formulated by Imām al-Ghazālī, the renowned 11th-century Persian scholar of religion, philosophy and Sufism and author of Iḥyā’ Ulūm al-Dīn (Reviving the Religious Sciences). After many years of employment at the famous College in Baghdad, he abandoned teaching the religious and legal sciences and dedicated the rest of his life to Sufism. Most Sufi scholars of the Islamic world include al-Ghazālī’s work in their teachings and religious courses. His book, Iḥya’ Ulūm al-Dīn, deals with mu`āmalāt (social acts that regulate relations among humans) and `ibādāt (spirituals acts that regulate relations between God and the believer). In other words, this book provides detailed teachings and instructions on spiritual acts and social interactions. In what follows I

66 al-Ghazālī (no date)
base myself mainly on this book and on Schimmel’s explanation of it in her *Mystical dimension of Islam* (1976).

In his chapter on mysticism, al-Ghazālī explains the meaning of Sufism, its principles and rules. According to him, there are different views and guidelines that were agreed upon by many Sufi scholars but criticized by others in the quest of spirituality. Al-Ghazālī stressed the importance of the human heart as a source of one’s spiritual illumination. The heart plays the role of its holder’s guide. This role, however, al-Ghazālī writes, emanates from ma’rifa (knowledge); the type of ma’rifa that al-Ghazālī stresses is knowledge of al-Anbiyā’ wa al-Awliyā’ (the knowledge of the prophets and Saints or friends of God) and ma’rifat ‘ulamā’ and ḥukamā’ (the knowledge of religious scholars and jurists). These two types of knowledge are important in the fulfillment of spiritual illumination because jurisprudence is acquired through one’s senses; Sufism emanates from one’s inner heart and prevails in the universal world. Thus, the purification of the heart and its tranquility emanates first from Islamic law, and then flourishes and gains a spiritual illumination from the inner knowledge of Islamic religion. If a Sufi, in al-Ghazālī’s view, wants to be a gnostic (‘ārif bi-Allah), he must combine the outer and inner knowledge of Shari’a.

The attainment of exoteric and esoteric knowledge of Shari’a and of Sufism necessitates cultivating and embodying a number of qualities. These qualities, according to al-Ghazālī, encompass repentance (tawba), patience (ṣṣabr), gratitude (shukr), renunciation (zuhd), fear (khishya), hope (rajā’), contentment (riḍā), reliance on God (tawakkul) and love (ḥubb). These qualities pave the way for the Sufi to achieve spiritual illumination. Thus, the Sufi undertakes a number of procedures on his path to God. What exactly are the stages that the individual experiences while becoming pious and attaining sainthood?

From al-Ghazālī’s approaches to mysticism, one understands that a Muslim mystic is required to undertake a “way” to reach God, in other words to become a wayfarer. The wayfarer (sālik), the individual who follows the path, engages in journeying toward God. On his way to God, he is exposed to different stages that he has to experience before reaching the final station of finally meeting God. But before the mystic enters the path to God and experiences the different stages and states of the spiritual path, he has to embrace the guidelines of the Islamic law. The conditions for entering the path of Sufism comprise three important elements, which are Shari’a, ṭṭarīqa and ḥaqīqa. The Shari’a refers to the Islamic law and its guidelines that a mystic must learn and follow faithfully. The ṭṭarīqa (the path) on which the Sufi walks emanates from Shari’a. The wayfarer proceeds from one stage to another by performing strict regimens of behavior and maintain challenging daily schedules.
until he reaches God’s closeness. Finally, ḥaqīqa is the truth that the mystic experiences in the final and enduring stage of his path. Schimmel refers to the Prophet’s explanation of this tripartite way to God in the following words: “the Sharī`a are my words [aqwālī], the ṭṭarīqa [a’mālī], and ḥaqīqa are my interior states ['aḥwālī].” Ṣharī`a, ṭṭarīqa and ḥaqīqa thus are interdependent and essential to the achievement of God’s proximity.

This tripartite way to God guides the wayfarer’s experiences on his path through different stages/stations [maqām = station] and states [ḥāl = state]. According to Schimmel, the state is God’s gift that God bestows on his mystic without an exertion of efforts. Whereas, the station is in particular the final and enduring stage on the path to God that requires very long and hard efforts to achieve. Thus, the stations are achieved through the performance of acts and efforts, but the states are bestowed as gifts of grace on mystics.

On his path to God the wayfarer, who is also referred to as disciple or adept (murīd), needs a guide, known as a shaykh or murshid (spiritual master) to guide him through the different stages of the Sufi path. The disciple must diligently follow the guide’s instructions in order to reach proximity to and union with the Divine. The spiritual master offers the necessary advice to train the murīd and enable him to undertake the required exercises and perform the requisite practices on the path to God. He teaches adepts the way to become pious and even saintly. He tests the adept’s desire by treating him sometimes very harshly. Schimmel says:

The newcomer was sometimes made to wait for days at the sheikh’s door, and sometimes as a first test was treated very rudely. Usually three years of service were required before the adept could be formally accepted in a master’s group—one year in the service of the people, one in the service of God, and one in watching over his own heart.

The shaykh’s aim is to test whether the murid can endure the challenges of the path.

The relationship between the shaykh and the murid is characterized by three important elements. The khirqa (mantle of initiation) constitutes the first mark of the murid’s relationship to the shaykh. It is offered to the disciple as a token of his successful entry into

---

67 Schimmel 1975, 99
68 Ibid.
69 Ibid.
70 Ibid.
71 Jellab 1995; see also Hammoudi 1997
72 Schimmel, 1975, 101
the Sufi lifestyle and progress toward piety. It is bestowed on the murīd if the master feels that he is worthy of permission to proceed on the path. It indicates the murīd’s mastery of piety and spirituality and his success in renouncing worldliness and material desires. It is a gift that is offered by the guide to the disciple commemorating his spiritual progress.\(^\text{73}\)

It is enhanced by the second aspect of their relationship, which is ṣuḥba (company or companionship). The disciple establishes a strong relationship of love, trust and respect with the guide. The shaykh guides the disciple’s piety on the righteous path and helps him to reach the higher stages of spirituality and to give birth to a strong pious personality. This is made possible through the shaykh’s continuous and constant monitoring of the disciple’s expressions of piety, particularly during periods when the disciple is assigned to meditate on the Divine.

The disciple is expected to undertake a retreat during which he confines himself for at least forty days to a dark room or ribāṭ, or another isolated space, in order to contemplate God. During this period the shaykh observes the disciple’s actions, performances, visions and dreams. The disciple must maintain a strong attachment to his guide. This attachment enables him to undertake transformations that are not otherwise possible. In seclusion, the disciple undergoes changes at the emotional level. He trains his emotions to renounce the material worlds and seek spirituality.\(^\text{74}\) The disciple spends years serving his master and learning from him all the guidelines for achieving sainthood. Education is another aspect of the shaykh’s relationship with the disciple. The education process starts with reciting and memorizing chapters of the Qur’ān. It also includes the study of fiqh and other Islamic sciences.\(^\text{75}\) Thus, the role of the spiritual master is to initiate, guide and educate the disciple.

Compared to the usual understanding based on the works of al-Ghazālī, the mystical path, which is described as a ladder that a sālik climbs to reach Divine proximity is sometimes envisioned in other ways. One way is referred to as al-Jadhb (Divine attraction), and the person pursuing it\(^\text{76}\) is called majdhūb or “the attracted one,” according to Schimmel. The majdhūb feels attracted to God and so lost in union with Him that he behaves in ways that contradict conventional norms.\(^\text{77}\) The majdhūb has no spiritual guide, but instead is guided by God. Other mystics also engage in the Sufi path without a guide or a formal initiation. They take the spirits of dead saints and spiritual masters as guides on their path. They believe that

\(^{73}\) Skali 2007, 47; Dialmy 2008; Schimmel 1975, 102
\(^{74}\) Skali 2007, 48; Dialmy 2008, 259-60; Schimmel 1975, 105
\(^{75}\) Ibid.
\(^{76}\) See the introductory chapter
\(^{77}\) Kugle 2007
the spirits of their favorite saints are still alive and able to orient actively their followers and admirers. Similarly the angel al-Khiḍr, who oriented the Prophets’ Divine missions guides some mystics and Sufis. Many saints such as Ibn ‘Arabi, were guided by al-Khiḍr and they received their khirqa from him. Hence, the mystical path includes different strategies to follow to reach Divine union.

What exactly are the stages and stations that the wayfarer undertakes on the path to God? What are the properties of each stage and the conditions required from the mystic to experience the stages of the spiritual path, and how does the wayfarer endeavor to attain them?

Repentance (tawba) is the first stage of the path that the mystic experiences. Tawba means to turn away from sins. It also means to regret something done in the past. It is a feeling that is suddenly arisen inside the individual to give up the one’s actions one considers to be sinful. This feeling emerges inside one’s inner being through different events, be it a listening to a Quranic recitation, having a vision, attending a religious lecture or meeting a saintly person, or simply fear of being punished. Repentance makes the Muslim reconsider his actions and deeds. Al-Ghazālī defines tawba in terms of turning away from committing sins. Tawba is the beginning of the sālik’s path, thus the first step of the murid. It is a regret for all the wrong deeds that the individual committed and from which one seeks to free himself. The murīd is obliged to express his tawba through the performance of different actions.

Another stage of the Sufi path is zuhd (asceticism). The latter is understood as the renunciation of worldliness. That is, the ascetic gives up the world and its material pleasures and all that distracts the heart materially. The ascetics usually confine themselves in isolated spaces (rooms, caves) where they train themselves to hard Sufi life and non material pleasures. Their zuhd is clear in their renunciation of worldliness and all what contradicts the Islamic law. For this reason, they sometimes are found serving people and fighting injustice and ill behaviors of people who do not respect the doctrines of the Shari‘a. The ascetic here is striving to guide himself and other people to the way of the Truth, salvation and

---

78 See Quran Sūra 8
79 Schimmel 1975, 106
80 Ibn Manẓūr (no date)
81 Ibid.
82 al-Ghazālī (no date), vol. 3, 3
83 Ibid.
84 Ibid.
85 Ibid.
86 Schimmel 1975, 113
redemption. He continuously struggles against his and other people’s worldly ambitions that blind Man from reaching the ḥaqīqa (the true reality, also known as fana’ or self-annihilation or absorption). This is an essential stage in the murīd’s endeavors to train and educate his nafs (self) to see the light. The Qur’an classifies the self invaded by material desires and egoistic tendencies as al-Nafs al-Ammāra bi al-Sū’ (the self/soul that incites to evil). It is the negative self that ignores the Divine part that God offers it and becomes blind towards God. For the protection of the Divine aspect of the Sufi’s inner side, the Sufi indulges himself in the education of his spiritual self and changes the evil self into al-Nafs al-Lawwāma (blaming soul) and strive to achieve al-Nafs al-Muṭma’inna (the peaceful soul). Nafs struggles against the material desires and evil temptations to reach the stage of illumination and full knowledge of God.

In a next stage, the mystic starts to guide his heart as its needs to be directed only to God. In his chapter on the heart, al-Ghazālī refers to the importance of the training of the heart which he calls the centre of the individual spiritual orientation so as to keep its pure divine image. This training of the self rescues it from dissident inclinations and preserves its spiritual illumination. In this stage the mystic engages in active worship of God.

Another stage of the path is patience (ṣṣabr) and gratitude. Patience is defined in terms of the mystic’s efforts to stand by the afflictions and the hardships of the path and to accept God’s will either good or bad. He bears all what goes against his material needs for the sake of God’s closeness. The mystic’s ṣṣabr promotes him to receive God’s gift, divine grace for which the mystic has to express thanks and gratitude (shukr). This does not mean that the mystic expresses gratitude to God only when he is rewarded a gift from the Divine. Rather, the mystic has always to thank God whether his wishes, desires and needs are fulfilled or not. This means that the mystic has to be in a state of happiness and joy and makes his heart happy despite the bitter conditions it experiences. This is what is called (riḍa), meaning “the joy of the heart in the bitterness of the Divine decree.” Despite the hard conditions of the mystic’s life, the mystic has to show satisfaction and gratitude to the Lord. Thus, the Sufi here becomes a lover whose love for God is not made for a reward but for God Himself.

In Sufism, love constitutes an important component in the mystic’s relationship with

---

87 al-Ghazālī (no date), vol. 3, 6
88 Qur’an Sura 12, 53
89 Qur’an Sura 75, 2
90 al-Ghazālī (no date), vol. 4, 3
91 Ibn Manẓūr (no date)
92 Schimmel 1975, 125
93 Ibid., 131
94 Ibid., 126
God. Schimmel refers to the Prophet’s emphasis on the importance of love (maḥaba) in the establishment of the relationship with God, in the following prayer: “O God, give me love Thee, and love of those who love Thee, and love of what makes me approach Thy love, and make Thy love dear to me than cool water.”95 The love of God is very important for the mystic because it enables him to become more obedient to the Beloved’s rules and orders. Love, then, enables the mystic to deeply contemplate His beloved and His greatness.

The mystic’s love for God is expressed by different terminologies according to the degree of the mystic’s feelings for the Divine. The gnostic (al-ʿārif bi Allāh) is the advanced mystic who achieves the knowledge of God and intimacy with Him. This shows that the mystic has to know God first before he loves Him. Knowledge here precedes love and passion. Mystics get so involved with God that a strong intimate relationship with Him is founded. This deep love relation makes the mystic feel God’s company in his loneliness.96

This closeness is displayed by the term qurb, meaning proximity. To attain this, the mystic also engages in the performance of farāʾiḍ (the punctual performance of Quranic instructions) and nawāfil (supererogative and additional performances of worship).97 At this stage, the mystic sees God alone in all that he contemplates and at the same time he feels a total and ecstatic sense of His presence and proximity.98

Self-annihilation constitutes another stage of the Sufi path. Fanāʾ means annihilation or absorption in God. It also signifies the annihilation of the attributes of human nature and their transformation into Divine attributes.99 The mystic engages in mysticism and diligence on his path to reach Divine union and annihilate himself. In the state of annihilation, the mystic is completely immersed in the contemplation of the attributes of God and is oblivious to his own self. Annihilation enables the Sufi to become united with the Divine.100

On the Sufi path, one can distinguish several types of embodiment. Before the Muslim engages in the path, he has a sensual and procreative body. It is a body that is totally submitted to al-Nafs al-Ammāra bi al-Sū’ that guides the body to worldliness. At this stage the sexual function of the body is highly stressed. To free the body from material orientation, it chooses to practice some religious rituals. But the body needs to go further to listen to the blames of al-Nafs al-Lawwāma (the blaming soul) to achieve al-Nafs al-Muṭma’innā (the peaceful soul). The latter imposes on the Muslim body to renounce worldliness and to

95 Schimmel 1975, 131
96 Ibid., 133; Dialmy 2008; Skali 2007
97 Schimmel 1975, 132-33
98 Ibid.
99 Ibid, 132
100 Dialmy 2008
reconsider his inner spiritual desires and to assure the success of the soul over the body. At this stage, the Muslim decides to become a Sufi who is determined to commit himself to the path not only of purification, but of meeting the Divine. Then the body ignores its sexual identity and becomes to be known by another new identity, which is Divine love.\textsuperscript{101}

This taming of the self is achieved through the performance of rituals and/or self-techniques. Mystics have chosen fasting as a way to inhibit the evil soul and reach God. Sufis fast days and days, training themselves to resist hunger, as a way to approach God’s piety and religious merits.\textsuperscript{102} Sleeplessness is another self-technique that the mystic performs to be with God. He spends the night worshipping the Divine, expressing his desire for God by weeping and crying, thus seeking God’s revelation and God’s enlightenment.\textsuperscript{103} Most of the mystics consider hunger and lack of sleep as important means to achieve spiritual progress.

Another important ritual is prayer (ṣalāt), which constitutes one of the five pillars of Islam. The Muslim performs five prayers per day in addition to other optional prayers. Praying has an important role in one’s piety and spirituality. It is seen as the key to paradise because it guides one’s actions and performances. It offers the mystic the opportunity to live God’s closeness and proximity. It is a form of ascension to God (mi’rāj).\textsuperscript{104} Hagiographical literature is filled with stories about Sufis and mystics indulging in ritual praying. Through prayer and dhikr the mystic feels as if he is in a direct contact with the Divine and His sacred universe.\textsuperscript{105}

Dhikr (the remembrance of God) is another ritual of Sufism. It is highly stressed in the Qur’an. It is a technique which consists of remembering and praising God and the Prophet either silently or loudly. Dhikr is an important means through which the mystic reaches God and lives His closeness. Dhikr’s sessions are highly appreciated in different zāwiyas where the shaykhs compose different collections of religious texts or formulae called “wird” to recite in their gatherings with the murīds. In the performance of the dhikr ritual, the devotees repeat the names of God and the Prophets until they collapse in a state of trance.

These different rituals are highly approved by orthodox as well as popular Sufism. The latter also includes other rituals that are related to the local culture. Al-ḥadra is also a dhikr ritual that is performed loudly. It is a loud dhikr which brings a larger group into a state of asceticism. The rhythmical repetition of the names of God, the Prophet and saints

\begin{thebibliography}{10}
\bibitem{Dialmy 2008} Dialmy 2008, 261
\bibitem{Schimmel 1975a} Schimmel 1975, 117. See also al-Ghazālī (no date), vol. 3, 3
\bibitem{Schimmel 1975b} Schimmel 1975, 117
\bibitem{Ibid} Ibid, 148
\bibitem{Ibid} Ibid.
\end{thebibliography}
brings about state of trance. It is usually performed within gatherings of people either in zāwiyas, shrines or other spaces.

2-2 Ribāṭ, Zāwiya and ṭṭarīqa

Saints built ribāṭ, or spaces designated, on the one hand, for prayer and the worship of God, and for preparing pious people for holy war against the enemies of Islam on the other hand.106 Sufis and saints founded, in the course of time, “ribāṭ” which came to be called a zāwiya. This word emanates from the root “zawā” meaning to gather in a corner to pray.107

Zāwiya, then, is a word used in North Africa to indicate a religious centre where Sufis meet to live their religious rituals. In other parts in the world such as the Middle East, we find other words for zāwiya like “Khānqā”.108 Zāwiya is religious hospice or religious centre founded by a spiritual master to disseminate Islam, to mediate personal conflicts, to help the poor and to bestow baraka on the followers of the saint.

Lalla Aziza’s zawiya in the Atlas Morocco

There is a relationship between zāwiya and ṭṭarīqa. zāwiya belongs officially to a particular ṭṭarīqa. Saints’ followers, murīds and admirers organized Sufi communities called ṭṭarīqa. The latter has two meanings. It is both a “way” to live a religion and piety, and it is also an organization.109 ṭṭarīqa is the organizational institution where the saint or the spiritual

106 Miftāḥ 1981, 26
107 Ibid., 31
108 Schimmel 1975
109 Kugle 2007, 6
109 Vikor 2000
master educates his murids and disciples. A ṭṭarīqa also involves the perpetuation of the founder’s method of practicing mysticism and religious knowledge, and is therefore often named after its founder. It is a Sufi lineage which transmits the mystical knowledge of the saints through a chain of saints to other followers and murīds, who seek a state of holiness and religious uprightness. It is also a space where the founder of the ṭṭarīqa is venerated after his death.

The veneration of saints which takes the form of continuous visits to the saint’s shrine, the organization of festivals are other examples of popular rituals that the pilgrims perform in the hope of receiving the holy grace from dead saints. These popular rituals involve a dynamic interaction between orthodox textual religion and local cultural practices.

After having explored these general characteristics of Sufism, I now will discuss Sufism in its relation to gender.

Zāwiya al-Isāwiyya in Meknes

2-3 Sufism in Relation to Gender

From the grammar in our discussion above of the Sufi path to the Divine, it may seem that only men were addressed as subjects of piety. However, we have also seen that the Sufi disciple has to abstain from any sexual dimension, which is a first indication that we are dealing here with an ideal of gender neutrality.

The religious scholar Ibn ‘Arabi (the 12th century) made it very clear that women are included in the practice of Sufism. He explicitly states that women can reach the highest

---

110 Kugle 2007
111 As will be further discussed in the next chapters.
stages of Sufism. Ibn ‘Arabi thus believes in women’s abilities to achieve a strong piety and to become a gnostic and part of ’abdāl, the highest stage of sainthood and mysticism. According to him all the positions in Sufism, including those of Quṭb and ’Awtād, are accessible to women. Ibn ‘Arabi’s elucidation of Sufism as a space where gender equality is highly visible is clear in the passage of his book where he describes the different types of sainthood that he derives from the Qur’an (Sura al-aḥzāb). He continuously includes women as part of religious courses and practices. He says: “In each of these categories which we are speaking of there are men and women… there is no spiritual qualification conferred on men which is denied to women.”112 Some other names in this respect are Ibn Taymiya (14th century) who met a Sufi woman called Ummu Zaynab Fāṭima bint `Abbās al-Baghdādiyya whom he introduces in his work not only as a spiritual leader of the ribāṭ al-Baghdādiyya but also as a jurist (faqīha) and muftiya (preacher). He explicitly approves of her performing sermons and of her religious leadership.113 ’Abd Raḥmān Sulamī (10th century) and Farīd al-dīn `Aṭṭār (12th century) are other religious scholars who stress women’s role in Sufism.114 Al-Tādilī, one of the Moroccan spiritual masters of the 12th century, and al-Jazūli, another Moroccan spiritual master from the 16th century, both include women as Sufis, and believe in women’s ability to achieve the highest stages of piety.

The Sufi scholar Ibn ‘Arabi who believed that the Qur’anic virtues are accessible to both men and women, consistently adds the phrase min al-Rijāl wa al-Nisā’ (including men and women) in his discussion of all saintly categories. Other Sufi spiritual masters like al-`Aţţār, ibn Taymiya and Sulamī (1999) coined words and expressions such as “rijāl” (actors) to refer to concrete men and women as actors of Sufism and religion. Al-Tādilī is continuously repeating the expression “he or she was among the people of religious learning and practice” (kāna/ [kāna- t] min ahl al-‘ilm wa al-‘amal).115 Thus, these scholarly Sufis included Sufi women in their compilations. They eliminated gender in their discussion of spiritual perfection. In as far as these male Sufis and spiritual masters refer to the Qur’anic discourse for their including of women, and their belief that the Qur’anic, virtues are accessible to both men and women, they are implicitly understanding the Qur’an, as egalitarian in character.

113 Shaikh 2009
114 ‘Aţţār 1966
115 al-Tādilī 1997, 22
Sa‘diya Shaikh (2009) argues that these male Sufis created symbolic language to implicitly criticize the “dominant patriarchal concepts of gender within Muslim legacy.”\textsuperscript{116} According to her, the Sufis are conscious of the dominant fiqh that marginalized the Qur’anic gender justice. The Sufis’ advocation of equal spiritual capacities suggests that they were implicitly criticizing communities where such equality was not approved. Shaikh contends:

The Sufi narratives discussed are not dense theoretical treatises on gender. Nevertheless, they are sophisticated articulations of Sufi principles in ways that interrogate gender-based constructs at a foundational level. They assertively challenge gender-biased formulations on the nature of self and submission in Islam.\textsuperscript{117}

Thus, contemporary scholars like Shaikh also contend that there is no distinction between men and women in the practice of Sufism. We focus here on these voices that are quite prominent in this area of research today. Shaikh (2009) states that patriarchy and patriarchal discourses, which existed in different societies, were responsible for many limitations placed on women’s practice of religion. However, Shaikh argues, Sufi doctrine and practices were more open to women since they focus on the individual’s inner state and not on his/her physical side.\textsuperscript{118} They endow the inner side, with great significance. Shaikh writes:

The diminished significance of gender identity on the path is related to the great priority Sufism accords to the individual’s inner state. In some cases, Sufi practices have subverted traditional patriarchal religious anthropology in ways that might provide contemporary Muslims with creative sources to expand the paradigm for gender justice in their societies.\textsuperscript{119}

Sufi practices, in Shaikh’s opinion, have served as a means to subvert the patriarchal ideologies existing in the dominant discourses of traditional societies, as these Sufi practices incorporate gender justice and equality. Shaikh notes a number of reasons why Sufism is gender egalitarian:

First, there is a full recognition of the equal agency, ability, and value of men and women who alike can realize the ultimate goals of their religion. Secondly,
the varying dynamics of personality and psychology, the “greater jihād” against the al-nafs al-ammāra, and the discipline necessary for the purification of the heart, are all ungendered and apply equally to men and women. Thirdly, on the path of submission to God, a human being should be wary of all claims of social superiority, including those based on gender difference. These claims are seen to be potential traps set by the al-nafs al-ammāra, able to lead a person to spiritual destruction. Fourthly, in relation to gender, ontological equality informs social equality. 120

Shaikh’s argument regarding the ideals of Sufism and its relation to gender equality is primarily based on Ibn ‘Arabi’s views. She underscores his conception of Sufi women as heroines of spirituality and chivalry. Ibn ‘Arabi, Shaikh asserts, blames fuqaha (religious jurists) for interpreting Sufism and Islam in androcentric and patriarchal ways, stressing women’s subordination and marginalization and making these processes appear intrinsic to Islam.121

Another scholar, the Moroccan sociologist Abdessamad Dialmy,122 likewise argues that Sufism constitutes a space where gender difference is substantially disregarded. He elucidates that the Sufi body’s physicality melts while the Sufi is navigating in the realm of spirituality. The Sufi body becomes free and emancipated from its gendered physical difference and sexual procreative functions. Thus, sexual and physical differences have no significance in the Sufi tradition. Dialmy writes:

Les deux premiers stades représentent une illustration de la différence sexuelle, un moment d’opposition entre le féminin et le masculin, tandis que [le dernier stade] est l’espace où l’homme et la femme soufis se dépassent au point de ne plus pouvoir se définir par le sexe. À [ce] stade, la différence sexuelle n’a aucune pertinence, et le Soufisme se pose ici comme une théorie Islamique de l’égalité des sexes. 123

Schimmel as well, in her book The Mystical Dimension of Islam, contends that Sufism includes men and women. She refers to a number of women who played a role in Sufism in 120

121 Shaikh draws on Rita Gross’ book, Buddhism after Patriarchy (1993). Gross calls for a feminist revalorization of the history of Buddhism to uncover the Buddhist female voices, which androcentric culture concealed. To do so, Gross calls on scholars to return to the past, to explore historical Buddhist ‘feminist’ ideals that empowered rather than disempowered women.
122 Dialmy 2008, 259-61
123 Ibid.
the second appendix of her book. Kugle, in his work *Sufis and Saints’ Bodies* (2007), explicitly argues that many male Sufis do not take into account, neither on a principle nor on a practical level, gender as stressed in the doctrine of fiqh, since they consider gender as not important.

According to these scholars, gender neutrality is a basic presumption of Sufism. To further discuss the relation of Sufism and gender, we have to take into account that Sufism is part of a broader movement of Islamic mysticism, which finds its basis in readings of the Qur’an that emphasize its spiritual core. Interestingly, several contemporary authors have once more emphasized this spiritual side of Islam, such as to be found in the ethical message of the Qur’an, discussing it in terms of gender equality like the Sufi masters implicitly did long before them. I will briefly go into their arguments so as to more fully sketch the Islamic contexts of female mystics in general and of women Sufis in particular. In what follows I will discuss the works of Leila Aḥmed (1992), Amīna Wadud (1993) and Asma Barlas (2002), who all emphasize the spiritual message of the Qur’an in its egalitarian dimensions.

In her influential book *Qur’an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman’s Perspective* (1993) Wadud studies the Qur’an from a gender perspective. She explores the way woman’s position is portrayed in the Qur’an. The Qur’an according to Wadud, does not justify any oppression of women. Wadud discusses different themes. She argues that God in the creation of humankind does not distinguish between man and woman. The Qur’an presents both men and women as created from the same nafs. The Qur’an does not make any difference in this respect between men and women, unlike Bible which says that Eve was created from Adam’s rib. Wadud also discusses some examples of women mentioned in the Qur’an, such as Maryam, which highlight Muslim women’s active and exemplary role in Islamic society. She also explores the Qur’an’s portrayal of man and woman in regard to the hereafter. The Qur’an addresses the position of the individual in the hereafter not in terms of gender but in terms of the individual’s actions and faith. The only distinction the Qur’an makes is on the basis of taqwa (piety) of the person. As Wadud argues the Qur’an explicitly addresses men and women to participate in the practice of religion. God says:

Lo! men who surrender unto Allah, and women who surrender, and men who believe and women who believe, and men who obey and women who obey, and men who speak the truth and women who speak the truth, and men who persevere (in righteousness) and

---

124 Shaikh 2009, 18
women who persevere, and men who are humble and women who are humble, and men who give alms and women who give alms, and men who fast and women who fast, and men who guard their modesty and women who guard (their modesty), and men who remember Allah much and women who remember - Allah hath prepared for them forgiveness and a vast reward.\textsuperscript{125}

God says again:

\begin{quote}
Whoever does righteousness, be it male or female and he is a believer, then indeed We will definitely recompense them their reward, according to the fairest of whatever they were doing.\textsuperscript{126}
\end{quote}

These Qur’anic verses show that the practice of religion is available to men and women. The Qur’an refers to Muslimāt and Muslimūn (Muslim men and Muslim women), Mu’mināt and Mu’minūn (the faithful men and faithful women). No restriction has been placed on women to acquire religious knowledge and to perform religious roles. Thus Wadud stresses that her egalitarian reading of the Qur’an does justice to the real spirit of the Qur’an. Men’s leadership and women’s obedience are not Islamic but cultural constructs. Muslim women’s oppression and backwardness is due to patriarchal interpretations of the original sources of Islam, especially the Qur’an, in the centuries following the death of the Prophet. Women since then are discriminated, and not considered as being on the same level as male believers. Islam since then, Wadud argues, is used as an instrument to restrict woman’s function in society and to make her inferior to her male counterpart. Thus, a rereading of the Qur’an, preferably by women themselves, is also important in fighting patriarchy.

Likewise Barlas, in her book Believing Women in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur’an (2002), studies the way equality is displayed in the Qur’an. Throughout her study, Barlas argues that the Qur’an does not present men as superior to women. Rather, the Qur’an stresses that man and woman are equal because they are both created from a single self (nafs). The Qur’an distinguishes between people only, on the basis of praxis, which means faith and the practice of Qur’anic instructions. The Qur’an is not patriarchal in character and does not approve the implementation of any patriarchal rule on earth.

Aḥmed in her book Women and Gender in Islam (1992) argues in similar ways. The original ethical message of the Qur’an is egalitarian in character, in contrast to what has been

\textsuperscript{125} Quran Sūra al-Ahzāb, 34
\textsuperscript{126} Quran Sūra al-Nahl, 96
made of it in later centuries. Aḥmed too contends that women’s subordination stems not from Islam but from patriarchal local cultures.

These new voices of believing Muslim women, who argue for a reinterpretation of the Qur’an as a book in which women are seen as equals, have inspired many Muslim women today to turn to the Qur’an and start reading the texts themselves. A precise evaluation of their arguments exceeds the scope of my research. However, from their arguments we can conclude that gender egalitarianism is not external to Islam. The works mentioned argue for intrinsic gender equality in the heart of Islam, like some Sufi scholars implied in their works.

2-4 Women’s Mysticism in Islamic History

Wadud discusses several stories in the Qur’an on women who, as she argues, are presented as great examples of piety. Regarding the story of Maryam, we can add to Wadud’s findings that in the Sufi literature, Maryam is taken as a symbol of the mystic’s love and strong attachment to God who becomes pregnant with the Divine light. Another woman mentioned in the Qur’an is Asiya, Pharao’s wife, who prayed God to save her from Pharao’s injustice and build her a house in paradise close to the Divine: in this respect she can be considered a mystic woman. In Sura 12 of the Qur’an, another woman comes forward, who is referred to as the maid of the governor of Egypt (imra’at ‘aziz miṣr). This woman fell in love with the Prophet, Joseph. Her love for him was a symbol for God. Her strong love for God made her lose her mind and walk on the streets in search of her beloved. Her story has become a symbol of the soul which engages in the Sufi path of poverty and love. Schimmel (1975) includes her in her list of female mystics because this woman totally devoted herself to the Divine. Schimmel 1975; Cornell 1998

The authors above discussed the Qur’an’s egalitarianism, and did not go into the Hadith at length, nor will I, since this is a topic that exceeds the limits of my studies even further. I will only limit myself to a brief mentioning of several references in the Hadith to women experiencing mysticism during the Prophet’s life. In this context, I mention the Prophet Mohammad’s saying to Khadija that the angel Gabriel (Jibrīl) sent her his greetings and promised her a house in paradise. In the Sufi literature, Khadija is the first woman who experienced the mystical state that the Prophet lived during the first stages of the

127 Schimmel 1975; Cornell 1998
128 Schimmel 1975, 434
129 Khadija is the first wife of the Prophet.
130 al-‘Abbādī 2004, 2
Islamic Divine revelations. It is she who sustained and comforted the Prophet when he first met the angel Jibrîl. She lived with the Prophet at the time of his first mystical states, and she was the first woman who practiced religion with the Prophet and remained by his side. Being the first faithful woman to the Prophet’s Divine mission, Khadîja was promised a place in Paradise, as well as Fâţîma (the Prophet Mohammad’s daughter). Khadîja, then, is often seen as the pioneer of female sacredness and as the first who opened the door for other Muslim women to enter the world of piety and sacredness.

Likewise, the Prophet’s daughter Fâţîma became one of the greatest pious women in the Islamic world. She was the only daughter of the Prophet and the only woman who inherited the Prophet’s sacredness, as comes forward from the following ḥadîth: “Fâţîma is part of me, whoever makes her angry makes me angry too.” In another ḥadîth, the Prophet said to Fâţîma when he found her ill because she found nothing to eat: “Oh daughter! Don’t you want to be the lady of all women?” She said: “Oh father, what about Maryam, the daughter of ‘Imrân?” The Prophet replied: “She was the lady of her time, and you are the lady of your time”. Āyisha was also a spiritual woman who was involved in the Prophet’s Divine revelations: she is reported to have seen the Prophet in the company of the angel, Jibrîl (Gabriel). These exemplary pious women were heroines of stories that both written and oral archives contain. They show that the fundamental texts of Islam record the lives of men as well as of women whose piety lifted them to a heightened position.

Finally we will have a look at the role of some women mystics in the history of Islam. Islamic history is pregnant with instances of women who played a role in their societies. It is full of instances of women’s scholarship and religious agency. There are also women who engaged in the Sufi path and reached the highest stages of piety and spirituality and gained power and authority. I will refer below to some examples.

Islamic history contains a number of other Sufi women who marked the Sufi world through their strong piety and religious knowledge, such as Fâţîma of Nishapur, and Fâţîma of Cordova who succeeded in becoming Islamic leaders who participated in the education of renowned male Sufis. This is the case of Fâţîma of Cordova whose strong piety and sainthood is reported to have bestowed youthfulness on her despite her old age. Her strong spirituality is

---

131 Ibid.
132 Kahhâla 1982
133 al-Bâni 1988, 338
134 al-Bukhârî wa Muslim 2007, vol. 3, 1361
135 Ibid.
136 Skali 2007, 130
137 See Chapter Four.
said to have endowed her with a Divine beauty. Ibn ‘Arabi acknowledged that her divine beauty oriented his spirituality and made him perceive the Divine through the medium of a woman. She used to tell him: “I am your spiritual mother and the light of your bodily mother”.[138] Her strong piety pushed Ibn ‘Arabi to consider the strategy to become a gnostic and to be in the right path to God. Fāṭima of Cordova thus was Ibn ‘Arabi’s Shaykh, who taught him how to become close the Divine.[139] Schimmel concludes that women for Ibn ‘Arabi, reveal “the secret of the compassionate God”.[140]

Bayazid Bestami (8th century), a known spiritual master, also refers to a saintly woman whom he encountered in the desert and whom he considered as his spiritual master. It is true that in his entry, Bestami’s hagiographer did not give a detailed description of the role this woman played in the Bestami’s spirituality, but one understands from his approval of her as his spiritual guide who guided his piety and spirituality that she masters him.[141]

In modern times some women carry on what their pious and spiritual mothers started throughout Islamic religious history. They are genuine religious agents as will be shown in following chapters. Modernity and education allow women to have more access not only to Sufism but also to orthodox Islam. This point is going to be discussed in Chapter Five and Six of this thesis.

2-5 Conclusion

This chapter discussed various views of Islamic mysticism from a gender perspective, one of them being that Sufism as articulated in the primary sources is gender neutral. Sufism is a spiritual dimension that combines the outer and the inner aspects of Islamic religion. Sufism’s emphasis is on the heart, and the purification of the heart cannot be achieved without the knowledge of Islamic law. Sufism, as it is presented in the primary texts, stresses the inner side of the Sufi’s personality rather than his/her gender, and includes women as well as men. Similarly, we have seen several discussions of the Qur’anic message from a gender perspective from which we can conclude that Sufism reflects the heart of Islam, in as far as it invites the Sufis whether males or females to achieve the spiritual aspiration that enables them to be with the Divine.

Moreover, women’s religious participation is highly visible in Sufism in comparison

---

[139] Ibid.
[140] Schimmel 1975, 243
[141] Helminsky 2003, xxi
to that in orthodox Islam. Sufism also encompasses what is referred to as popular religion that opened its door for women who were marginalized by orthodox religious institutions. It enhanced women to express their religious desires and to construct religious personhood.\footnote{Ferhat 2001; Zouanat 2009} In the next chapter we will focus on Moroccan Sufism. How did women construct Sufi personalities in this context? Did they follow the guidelines of Sufism discussed in this chapter to construct sainthood?
Chapter Three: Sufism and Hagiography in Moroccan Context

To further contextualize Moroccan female sainthood, this chapter focuses on Moroccan Sufism and hagiography. Its first section goes into Moroccan culture and identity, discussing Moroccan Islam in relation to Moroccan geography and history. The second section deals with Moroccan Sufism and the way it is approached by different scholars. The final section focuses on the genre of hagiography amidst other genres, and on the characteristics of Moroccan hagiography in particular.

3-1 Moroccan Geography and History: A Brief Overview

A short presentation of Morocco’s geography is relevant to the understanding of the country’s history. Morocco is located in the westernmost part of North Africa and is characterized by ecological diversity. Encompassing 446,000 square kilometers, it is bordered by the Mediterranean Sea to the north and the Atlantic Ocean to the west, and shares borders with Algeria to the east and Mauritania to the south. The whole geographical space of Morocco is composed of three major ecological zones: mountains, plains and desert (Sahara). The mountains include the Rif Mountains in the north and the Atlas mountains stretching centrally from Fez to Marrakech.¹⁴³

Morocco’s diverse ecology explains the country’s economically productive and unproductive zones. The richest agricultural lands are located in the plains in the northwest region, which used to be referred to as “le Maroc utile” (useful Morocco) by the French colonialists. It is also called “blad al-Makhzen” (a place to store treasure but also, and most importantly “the land of law enforcement”).¹⁴⁴ It lies between the Rif and Atlas Mountains, and has been an important gathering place for a great number of Moroccan population groups. The economically unproductive zone refers to the non-agricultural areas including the mountains and desert. It is called “blad siba” (lands of dissidence) because it remained autonomous, independent and non-submissive to the central authority for hundreds of

¹⁴³ al-Nāṣirī 1954
¹⁴⁴ Eickelman 1981, 16
Hence, the geography of Morocco is characterized by diversity, which has played an important role in the accommodation of the different Arab and Berber tribes.

\[145\] Gellner 1969, 1
The first inhabitants of Morocco were Berbers. They called themselves “Imazighen” (free men) and were also called “Amazigh” (Berbers). They were the earliest people to inhabit North Africa and have remained the main population of Morocco. Moroccan Berbers are classified into three groups: the Zenata, the Ṣanhaja and the Muṣmuda. The Zenata are the Rif Berbers living in the North, the Ṣanhaja are Imazighen inhabiting the High Atlas Mountains and the Muṣmuda are Ishelḥīn Berbers located in the Anti-Atlas Mountains and on the South-western coastal plains. A long series of invading peoples, ending with the Arabs and French drove the Berbers into the mountains where they took refuge from the successive invading enemies. Both mountain chains served as a shelter for a particular group of Berbers: the Rif Berbers settled in Rif Mountains; Imazighen in central High Atlas Mountains and Ishelḥīn in the Anti-Atlas Mountains. The Berbers led a dissident and politically autonomous life. The central authority failed to put them under its control, and they remained autonomous and independent until the colonial period.

The Berbers’ language is Tamazight. It has three different varieties: tarīfīt, tamazīght and tashlḥīt. Tarīfīt dialect is spoken by Berbers inhabiting the Rif Mountains in the North; Tamazīght is spoken by Imazīghen in the Middle Atlas and part of the High Atlas. Finally, Tashlḥīt is the dialect of Ishelḥīn in the High Atlas and Anti-Atlas region. The Berber language is a branch of Hamito-Semitic language family spoken in North and East African countries. It resisted dominance by the languages of its conquerors including, Coptic Punic, Latin, Arabic and French.

Another contributor to Morocco’s identity is Islam. The seventh century is marked by the invasion of Arabs who brought Islam to Morocco. The Muslim ‘Uqba ibn Nāfi‘ and his companions converted the Berbers to Islam. By the seventh century, Islam was the official religion of Morocco, and Malikism was its school of jurisprudence. The king’s designation as amīr al-Mu‘minīn (the commander of the faithful) and sharīf legitimizes Moroccan Islamic monarchy today. However, Berbers were not “converted” in a simple way. There was resistance and then a largely voluntary adoption of Islam on the part of Berbers. The subsequent spread of Islam in the region was mainly the work of Berbers. Morocco was completely Islamized by the end of the 12th century but until now it is not completely Arabized.

146 ‘Amazīgh’ is the right word but I use the word “Berber” because it has no negative connotations in English.
147 Hoffman 1967, 21-22
148 Charrad 2001, 10
149 Sadiqi 2001, 65; Ennaji 2007
150 Sadiqi 2003, 40
The Berber urban elites were the first to adopt Islam. They were the ones who enthroned the first Arab Sultan (Idrīs I) and married him to a Berber woman (Kenza). The urban spaces became the centres of formal Islam and witnessed the intrusion of Arabic language, which became the official language of the new Islamized cities. The propagation of Islam and Arabic language in urban spaces was promoted by the Idrisids (172-304 H), the first Moroccan sharifian Muslim Arab dynasty. This dynasty was supported only by some of the rural Berber tribes.

The Arabization and Islamization of Morocco had been enhanced by the different dynasties that ruled Morocco in the course of its history. Each dynasty had contributed to the propagation of Islam in Morocco. The six dynasties, Idrisids (172 AH-787/304 AH -990), Almorāvīds (434 AH-1042/557 AH-1185), Almohads (485H- 1126 CE/595 H-1226 CE), Merinids (614 H-1217 CE/869 H-1465 CE), Sa‘adiyīns (916A H-1525 CE/1021 H-1603 CE) and ‘Alawites (1664 CE to present), ruled in the name of Islam. They propagated Islam and constructed a number of Qur’anic schools and religious centers in urban and rural spaces.

Morocco experienced two major waves of Islamization. The first wave was initiated by the Arab conquerors. The Sharifian Idrisids dynasty initiated an effective Islamization of urban Berbers. The Idrisids themselves are of two branches: the local Berbers who became Muslim, and the fewer Arabs. The Idrisid kings were Shurfa meaning that they were descendants of the Prophet. The Berber Idirsids also claim the same status of “Shurfas,” and many of them still live in Sefrou and Fez. The propagation of Islam in Morocco was subsequently promoted by the Sa‘adi and ‘Alawite Sharifian dynasties.

The second wave of Moroccan Islamization was introduced by Muslim Berbers. The different Berber dynasties ruled Morocco: the Almoravids and the Almohads. These dynasties contributed considerably to the conversion of the remaining Berber tribes to Islam. The religious and spiritual masters of the Almoravids and the Almohad dynasties disseminated Islam among the dissident Berber tribes. During the reign of the Merinids dynasty, Islam was spread to remote rural locations. Many Qur’anic schools were constructed and many religious educational missions were launched under the patronage of Sufi and spiritual masters.

---

151 Ibid.
152 Ibid.
153 Ben Rochd 2007, 19
154 Ibid.
155 One of the great masters of the Almohads and Merinide periods was Abū Meddyān Chu’ayb al-ḥusayn (1126-1198). His order was perpetuated by his disciple Abdessalam ben Machich whose murīd, the Shaykh abū al-Hassan Shādīf, the founder of the Shādīliya order.
Islam entered Morocco and was spread in urban centres, but it was Sufism that played an important role in the proliferation of Islam both in urban, and more importantly in rural areas.\textsuperscript{156} The dissemination of Islamic religion was put under the patronage of Sufi scholars and Sufi political leaders during these three Berber dynasties.\textsuperscript{157} Amidst this massive Islamization of Morocco, what are Moroccan Sufism’s properties?

### 3-2 Moroccan Sufism

Malikism, the Islamic school of jurisprudence (madhab) of the North African countries, as founded by Mālik bin Anas (8\textsuperscript{th} century), underlines the importance of Sufism. *Qawā`id al-Taṣawwuf* (the Rules of Sufism) by Aḥmad Zarrūq (1992) is the most important source of Maliki jurisprudence, which still informs jurisprudence in Morocco.

Aḥmad Zarrūq (14\textsuperscript{th} century) was one of the Sufi leaders of Fes, Marinid Morocco. At the al-Qarawyyīn in Fez, the most prominent Islamic educational institution in Morocco, he studied the Qur’an, the Sunna of the Prophet, and most importantly, the principles of jurisprudence (uṣūl al-Fiqh). During his studies, he became acquainted with Taṣawwuf. His grandmother, Umm al-Banīn, was a faqīha and played an important role in the development of his Sufī orientation.\textsuperscript{158} Zarrūq developed a critical approach to Sufism. He introduced the ideology of “uṣūli Sufism” that displayed the fusion of Sufism with the Sharī`a (jurisprudence). He sought the fusion of legal and saintly discourses within Sufism.

Zarrūq’s reformist approach to Sufism and his critical teachings were negatively received by one of his contemporaries, the Sufi scholar Ibn ‘Ajība. He criticized Zarrūq’s approach and considered it as a constraint to the saints’ authority.\textsuperscript{159} However, Zarrūq’s approach is widely accepted by his pupils who propagated it in Morocco and the Middle East.

His book clarifies for Muslims the instructions of Sharī`a and the Prophet’s religious performances and utterances. Zarrūq, stresses the importance of the Shari`a in the Sufi literature. His book *Qawā`id al-Taṣawwuf* elucidates 216 principles of Sufism. It is a compilation of instructions for teaching students the principles of mainstream Sufism. The content of *Qawā`id al-Taṣawwuf* demonstrates that Zarrūq studied religious science; he became a jurist and placed his legal and literary skills at the service of Sufism. He asserts that

\textsuperscript{156} Cornell 1998
\textsuperscript{157} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{158} Ben Abdallah 2001, 164
\textsuperscript{159} Kugle 2005, 195
the jurist who wants to become a Sufi has to consider Shari’a and Sufism. He coined the word “ğâlim şûfî” (Sufi jurist) meaning a Sufi who unites the juridical and spiritual competences. Zarrûq’s theory of Sufism combines the outer knowledge of Islamic law (al-‘Ilm al-ţâhir) and the inner knowledge of Sufism (al-‘Ilm al-Bāţîn).

Furthermore, Zarrûq explains that the conditions of discipleship can be summarized in the following points. The first condition is the testing of the spiritual guides, so as for them to prove that they possess adequate religious knowledge of the Qur’an and Sunna as foundational sources. Second, testing their knowledge of the instructions of Shari’a is important. Third, the disciples should study books and treatises on religious orientations. Fourth, the disciples should consider the Prophet as their own spiritual guide so as to follow their spiritual path successfully. Finally, the killing of the ego and of one’s physical identity is important before embarking on the Sufi journey. According to Zarrûq, the disciple has to exert his or her efforts (mujâhâda) to renounce the material world and purify his/her heart before entering the Sufi path. Thus clarifying the necessary conditions of entering into discipleship, Zarrûq invites people to challenge the authority of spiritual masters who do not respect the education of people in the Sufi path.

In his theory of Sufism, Zarrûq stresses the combination of the knowledge of the Qur’an and Sunna and Sufism. For him, one must be trained as a jurist first, and then he/she can become a Sufi. In his twenty-sixth principle, Zarrûq writes that anyone who does not develop legal and juristic reasoning is unqualified to be a Sufi. Sufis cannot practice Sufism independently of jurisprudence. So the jurist and Sufi are present in the same person, “jurist saint”. This combination is characteristic for the Maliki School. Mâlik bin Anas writes:

He who practices taṣawwuf without learning sacred law corrupts his faith, while he who learns sacred law without practicing taṣawwuf corrupts himself. Only he who combines the two proves true.\(^\text{160}\)

This stance is also acknowledged by another Sufi jurist, al-Tâdîlî\(^\text{161}\), who required the combination of knowledge of the religious and legal sciences in the search for God. Thus, Zarrûq and other Maliki scholars base their perception of Sufism on the basic principles of Islam (Qur’an and Sunna). In as far as Zarrûq is talking about Sufism in general, there is no

---

\(^{160}\) Zarrûq 1992

\(^{161}\) al-Tâdîlî 1997
tension with the work of al-Ghazali on Sufism as discussed in chapter 2. Thus, Moroccan Sufism is a Sunni Sufism that is based on Sharī`a.

Moroccan Sufism is different from the Middle Eastern one, which focuses on philosophy and disregards social reality.162 Moroccan Sufism shows an important interest in dealing with people’s social matters and crises. Some scholars present Sufism in Morocco as a human phenomenon that emanates from a society that is in crisis.163 However, Sufism has not come as a consequence of the different socio-political crises that Morocco witnessed in history. The proof for this conclusion is that Sufism did not disappear once the socio-political crises were solved. Instead, Sufism remains one of the important historical and cultural bases of Moroccan civilization. Socio-political crises enhance the growth of Sufism. If this were not so, how can we explain the presence of saints particularly in peaceful times? Indeed, Sufism exists in various historical periods.

Saints played spiritual, religious, social and political roles that show the saints’ and Sufis’ engagement in society. Some Sufis propagated Islam and Sunni Sufism in spaces that Islam did not reach. They also organized meetings to teach people about their religion. They encouraged Muslims to participate in Jihād against the enemy, or the Berber tribes to defend themselves against central authority,164 organized trips to ḥijāz (pilgrimage trips), safeguarded commercial activities and maintained social security among the tribes and central authority.165

It is these saints’ roles that make Sufism in Morocco a crucial civilizational and historical component, developed as it was in Muslim Spain in the heyday of Muslim ‘ulama, The importance of the saints’ role has been substantiated by different scholars’ such as Al-Bādisī (14th century) who said that in Morocco there were ṣulahā’, ‘ulamā and fuqahā’.166 ṣulahā’ were saints, ‘ulamā were scholars and fuqahā’ were religious preachers. These people all had a Sufi background and authority in their communities.167 The enormous number of saints, jurists and Sufis resulted in Morocco being labelled “arḍ al-Awliyā’” (the land of saints).168 Hence, Sunni Sufism across Moroccan history was transformed into a symbolic authority as a result of Sufis’ and saints’ interrelationship with society. Consequently, zāwiyas and ribāṭs acquired an importance that should be dealt with in any historical, social, cultural, economic and political study of Morocco.

162 Ibid.
163 al-Shādīlī 1989, 315-316
164 Bellaire 1921
165 al-Nāšīrī 1954, vol. 7, 45 and vol. 8, 76-78. See also Hajjī 2008, vol. 7, 2396-2397
166 al-Bādisī 1982, 73
167 Cornell 1998
Ṭṭarīqa played important religious, economic and socio-political roles in Moroccan history. Members of ṭṭarīqas participated in the fighting against the Iberians and French colonialists during Morocco’s struggle for independence; they also offered help to the poor, sheltered the homeless and instructed the murīd. They played a crucial role in the alleviation of oppression, discrimination and social injustice caused by the colonialists. In modern Morocco most of ṭṭarīqas have lost their power and ceased to play the roles they used to. Their role has become limited to the practice of religion and spirituality especially on particular occasions such as in the sacred month (Ramadan) and the Prophet’s birthday (Mouloud). Most of the disciples and followers of Moroccan ṭṭarīqas gather on these occasions to live their piety and spirituality, propagate Islamic teachings and organize meetings to discuss relevant issues.

3-2.1 Approaches to Moroccan Sufism

Anthropologists who studied Islam and Sufism in Morocco have often made a sharp distinction between orthodox and popular Sufism in Morocco. Several issues are noteworthy in this respect.

3-2.1.1 Orthodox versus Popular Sufism

Most anthropological studies on Moroccan Islam equate orthodox Sufism with the religion of the Qur’an and Sunna, as embraced primarily by the intellectual urban elite, and popular Sufism with the religion of the rural population, especially Berbers. In his study, La Religion Musulman en Berbérie, Bel (1938), defines popular Sufism in terms of a fusion of Islam and Berbers’ local cultural beliefs and practices, including belief in the forces of good and evil, magical forces and saint veneration of saints. The spread of popular Sufism in rural Berber Morocco is due, in Bel’s view, to Sufi scholars who propagated Islam by adapting it to the belief system of the Berber population. He also argues that the socio-political situation of medieval Morocco enabled the spread of Sufism among Berbers: the weakening of the central authority, the Iberian conquest of the Atlantic and Mediterranean coasts, and the growth of religious orders impelled Moroccans to seek security under the patronage of the Sufi spiritual leaders.169 Bel writes:

169 al-Jazūlī, the leader of the religious brotherhood a-Jazūliya, used to have thousands of disciples and followers.
Sans doute faut-il attribuer ce repli de l’Islam sur lui-même a partir du XVI siècle, à la vague de fanatisme suscitée par les attaques et les conquêtes des chrétiens sur les côtes de la Berbérie. C’est depuis lors que se substitua à l’Islam intellectuel et relativement libéral du moyen âge, un mysticisme populaire, sans grandeur. Désormais les confréries mystiques et les marabouts répandirent parmi les lettrés et les ruraux une religion, réduite à quelques obligations culturelles, à la portée de tous, et entièrement orientée contre l’étranger, le mécréant, comme nous l’exposerons…

Bettina Dennerlein (2002), scholar in Islamic and gender studies,\textsuperscript{171} criticizes the “xenophobic and parochial character” of Bel’s work on Moroccan Sufism. She suggests that Moroccan saints and holy people have a power and authority that Bel fails to study. In his conclusion, Bel states that Berber religiosity is mainly based on pagan and magical beliefs. This conclusion is influenced, Dennerlein concludes, by a political goal: colonialism. Such an understanding of Moroccan cultural beliefs facilitated the propagation of French colonial dominance over the whole territory of Morocco. Bel writes:

Pour gouverner et administrer les indigènes de ce pays… pour exercer sur eux une tutelle avisée, il y a un intérêt primordial à bien connaître leurs croyances et leurs mœurs. Leur mentalité est avant tout une mentalité de croyants.\textsuperscript{172}

In this quote Bel seeks to illuminate Moroccan cultural beliefs for governmental reasons. For Bel these cultural beliefs involve a reduction of the grandeur of Islam. In his study Islam Observed (1968) Geertz also stresses the tension between orthodox and popular Sufism. He defines popular Sufism as “the classical religious style” of pre-modern Morocco. He demonstrates that Moroccan religion is characterized throughout by cultural beliefs, including saint veneration. Geertz writes that

Islam in Barbary was and to a fair extent still is – basically the Islam of saint worship and moral severity, magical power and aggressive piety.\textsuperscript{173}

\textsuperscript{170} Bel 1938, 17
\textsuperscript{171} Dennerlein 2002, 131
\textsuperscript{172} Bel 1938, 9
\textsuperscript{173} Geertz 1968, 15
Geertz on the other hand defines orthodox Sufism, which he calls scripturalism, as the religion of the Qur’an, Sunna and fiqh. He refers to it as the religion of the ‘ulama who continuously preached against popular practices of Islamic religion.

The tension between orthodox and popular Sufism is also emphasized by Dale Eickelman (1981) and Gellner (1969). Eickelman, an American anthropologist, underscores the tension between the two aspects of Moroccan Sufism in his study of practices in a pilgrimage centre of the Sharqawa Sufi order in post-independence Morocco. He writes:

Throughout the nineteenth century and earlier, the difference between the maraboutic synthesis and the formal, ‘orthodox’ teaching of Islam was recognized by religious scholars. As previously mentioned, foreign observers of Morocco in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries reported interviews with marabouts and religious scholars who sharply distinguished between maraboutism and the formal tenets of Islam.¹⁷⁴

In his *Saints of Atlas* (1969), Gellner, a scholar of social anthropology, studies the relationship between sanctity and politics in rural agro-pastoralist Iḥnṣal tribes. In his research on Iḥnṣal tribes in pre-colonial period, Gellner attempts to answer a series of questions, the most important of which is: How is order maintained in Iḥnṣal Berber tribes? The answer to this question, Gellner writes, is that the order is maintained in Iḥnṣalen tribalism because the latter have a segmentary character and a saintly lineage. Iḥnṣalen saints consider themselves to be shurafla’, which means that they are descendents of the Prophet. This authorized them to perform a number of functions: mediations of conflicts, arbitration, and organization of the elections. Iḥnṣalen saints control the collective sermon activities and run various affairs of the different sub-segmentary groupings.¹⁷⁵ Therefore, saintly arbitrator roles and segmentary structures constitute the primary means for maintaining order within Iḥnṣal pre-colonial tribes. Through popular Islam, Gellner argues, the social cohesion of the Berber tribes in Morocco is guaranteed. He contends that “the town constitutes a society which needs and produces a doctor [AO: religious scholar] whilst the tribe needs and produces the saint.”¹⁷⁶

Gellner thus also distinguishes between two aspects of Islam: orthodox and popular. According to Gellner orthodox Islam is characterized by:

---

¹⁷⁴ Eickelman 1981, 60
¹⁷⁵ Gellner 1969, 54-5
¹⁷⁶ Ibid.
scripture and literacy, puritanism … and strict monotheism, minimalization of hierarchy and spiritual equality, abstention from ritual excess, a tendency toward moderation and society, a stress on rules rather than emotion.177

On the other hand, popular Islam consists of:

Personalization of religion and anthropology, ritual indulges proliferation of images and symbols of the sacred, religious pluralism, local incarnations of the sacred, hierarchy and mediation.178

Other researchers have critically reflected on Gellner’s segmentary theory. According to Tozy (2007), Gellner traces the different roles and religious practices that saints perform to the maintenance of order within segmentary groupings, but fails to consider their relationship to the local tribesmen’s daily religious practices and performance.179

Dennerlein (2002) also criticizes Gellner’s approach of pre-colonial Morocco. According to her, Gellner does not refer to maraboutism as the local form of religion. Gellner discusses the popular and orthodox aspects of Islam only in terms of the contrast existing between the doctor (i.e. the religious scholar) and the saint.180 Dennerlein instead describes orthodox and popular Islam as two aspects that characterize any Muslim society, and argues that Gellner fails to consider maraboutism as a key aspect of Moroccan Islam.181

Interestingly, both Cornell (1998) and Munson (1993) explicitly criticize the assumption that there is a clear division between orthodox and popular Sufism. According to Munson, there is no sharp tension between popular and orthodox Sufism. He adds that the anthropologists who have studied Moroccan Sufism have neglected the study of history, and therefore fail to recognize that the twentieth century division between orthodox and popular Sufism did not exist in the past.182 Munson also argues that, although literate and illiterate Moroccans belong to different social strata and interpret religion differently, they perform similar religious rituals even when they are affiliated with different religious orders and

177 Ibid., 7
178 Ibid.
179 Tozy 2007, 24. Interestingly Moroccan anthropologist Abdallah Hammoudi also discusses some primary aspects of Gellner’s segmentary theory in his article “Segmentary Social Stratification, Political Power and Sciences and the Humanities” (1996). Hammoudi argues that Gellner’s theory, which recognizes the egalitarian aspect and lack of social stratification of segmentary tribes, is not applicable to Atlas Mountains tribes particularly the Ait ‘Atta tribes. The latter exhibited a social stratification, which had an influence on political order.
180 Dennerlein 2002, 133
181 Ibid.
182 Munson 1993, 84
saints.\textsuperscript{183} In Munson’s opinion, anthropologists have disregarded the study of rituals, which were more intertwined with orthodox religious rituals in the past than in the present.\textsuperscript{184}

In addressing the question of the tension between popular and orthodox Sufism, Cornell (1998) stresses the relevance of hagiography and history. He adds that in history there existed a narrow relationship between the two strands of Sufism, rather than a sharp distinction. The veneration of saints, in Cornell’s view, was not only characteristic of popular Sufism but also of orthodox Sufism.\textsuperscript{185} In line with Cornell and Munson, I found from studying women’s different religious rituals that orthodox and popular Sufism were more homogeneous in history.

Throughout my research in zāwiya al-Butchīchiyya, for example, I noticed while Sufism entails an acceptance of the foundational texts, beliefs and practices of orthodox Islam, it also includes additional beliefs and practices that Sufis believe are derived from and not in contradiction with the foundational texts. Dhikr, for example, derives from the command found in the Qur’an to remember or mention God. Early Sufis turned this command into a ritual that is performed individually and communally. They also formalized a path (or method-\textsuperscript{186}ṭṭarīqa to follow)\textsuperscript{186} to transform the individual in ways that enable him to cultivate character traits and attributes that the Qur’an describes as necessary to be a pious Muslim. Sufis developed the idea that individuals need a guide to become pious Muslims. In other words, individuals need spiritual leaders that have reached a level of advancement that shows them the way to do the same. These guides, who are venerated as saints, are recognized as having acquired special abilities or powers, some of which exceed normal human capabilities, such as communication with disciples through dreams and the transmission of baraka. From my own experience and research I thus found that popular and orthodox Sufism are intermingled until this very day.

Other issues that need to be addressed in this context are the relationship between popular Sufism and maraboutism, the role of the saint and baraka.

\textbf{3-2.1.2 Sharifism and Maraboutism}

In most of the anthropological studies mentioning sharifism it is defined as the belief that the descendents of the Prophet have a special place as religious and political leaders. These

\textsuperscript{183} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{184} Tapper and Tapper 1987
\textsuperscript{185} Cornell 1998, 95
\textsuperscript{186} This point will be discussed below.
descendents of the Prophet are called “shurafā’” (singular: sharīf; in Moroccan vernacular shrīf, plur. shurfa), which means the noble. Sharifism came to Morocco in the eighth century. The first Sharifian dynasty that ruled the region is the Idrisid dynasty. Moroccans had chosen Mūlāy Idris as their sultan. They relied on Idrīs’ descent from the Prophet Mohammad for his legitimacy. Sharifism rises and falls in Morocco’s past. Its decline in some historical eras was due to the Berbers tribes’ choice to rule the country. But Sharifism emerged again when some saints and holy masters claimed to be Shurfa. Sharifism also revived during periods of dissatisfaction with existing leadership.

Maraboutism is another factor in the development and spread of sharifism. Berber Sufis showed a great respect and adherence to the Arab shurfa, descendents of Mohammad, and aspired to be like them, taking them as models. They gained prestige when they headed zāwiyas and forged alliances with other marabouts. The latter’s acquaintances with shurfa promoted them to assume shurfa qualities. Moroccans did not distinguish between a sharīf and a holy man because both were seen as bearers of Divine blessing.

Geertz (1968) contends that “popular saint worship, Sufis doctrine …and the Sharifian principle all flowed together, like a swelling stream, into a simple pre-cut spiritual channel: maraboutism”. Thus, the shurfa’s alliance with the marabouts to serve God and the people displays that sharifism and maraboutism ended as one.

According to Bel (1938), maraboutism refers to the local expression of Islam in Morocco in particular and North Africa in general. He adds that maraboutism is a fusion of different forms of local Berber practices of religion and Islam. It is a mixture of Islam and local Berber traditional culture. Geertz also stresses that maraboutism is a local cultural expression of Islamic religion of the pre-colonial Morocco, which, in his opinion, is based on the belief that marabouts are “attached, bound, tied –perhaps the best word is shackled –to God”. Gellner (1969) also stresses maraboutism as the cultural specific form of religion in Morocco. From these definitions of maraboutism, we can conclude that maraboutism, like popular Sufism, is based on the precepts of orthodox Islam and on the traditional local forms of Berber pre-Islamic religion. But who is the marabout? Is he like a saint? The next subsection deals with this question.

---

187 Bel 1938, 381
188 Ibid.
189 Ibid.
190 Geertz 1968, 45
191 Terasse 1949, 149
192 Bel 1938, 370
193 Geertz 1968, 43
3-2.1.3 Sainthood and Baraka

Bel (1938) considers the Sufi saint to be the central figure of Sufism. According to this author, the Sufi saint is called “l’homme fetish,” meaning a holy man who has a magical force called baraka. The marabout is derived from the Arabic root marbūṭ, which means the Sufi who is tied for prayers. This word is used to refer to holy people, saints and Sufis in Moroccan context.

As we saw before, Geertz (1968) defines Sufism as the belief that holy men or marabouts are attached and bound to God.\textsuperscript{194} The proof of the bond between the holy man and God is baraka, which Geertz rightly presents as an “endowment – a talent and a capacity of a social ability - of particular individuals.”\textsuperscript{195} As we already saw in Chapter One, baraka, according to Geertz, is an important criterion in defining the status of saints and a sharif. It is charisma, a spiritual power and a divine blessing. Saints are conceived by their followers as having the power and ability to transmit this divine blessing they got from God to the world. In his \textit{Islam Observed} (1968) Geertz says:

\begin{quote}
Marabouts have baraka in the way men have strength, courage, dignity, skill, beauty, or intelligence. Like these, though it is not the same as these, not even of all of them put together, it is a gift which some men have in greater degree than others, and which a few, marabouts, have in superlative degree. The problem is to decide who (not only among ... the living but also among the dead) has it, how much, and how to benefit from it.\textsuperscript{196}
\end{quote}

Here Geertz stresses that baraka is perceived as a divine gift that has different manifestations. He also defines baraka as a means through which the divine reaches into this world and as an inherited endowment. However, in Morocco people often consider baraka as an achievement, not only as an inherited force. Geertz overlooks in his study how this divine blessing is perceived as reached and achieved by men and women themselves.

In this thesis, I would like to study baraka as a constructed historical dynamic force instead of an inherited endowment. I will explore here the ideas of society about having and acquiring baraka. Geertz also argues that the amount of baraka differs from one saint to another. In my thesis, I will show the opposite: namely, that the amount of baraka is not

\textsuperscript{194} Ibid., 43
\textsuperscript{195} Ibid., 44
\textsuperscript{196} Ibid.
important but that it is the quality of the baraka that is seen as crucial. It is a dynamic force within the context of orthodox and popular Sufism that empowers saints, be they men or women, to gain power and authority.

3-2.1.4 Gender

Most of the anthropological studies mentioned above don’t discuss the issue of gender explicitly. Eickelman (1981) does mention women’s participation in his study of the Sharqawa order in Bujād, without, however, discussing or interpreting the meaning of their participation. Similarly, Crapanzano (1979) mentions that women participate in Hamadsha ritual practices as well. But Crapanzano does not study the reasons for their participation as he did with male participants. As Hopkins (1976) put it:

In his analysis of the origin of the inflictions of Hamadsha adepts, Crapanzano has emphasized masculine problems; women, too, are Hamadsha, and so it would be instructive to complete this analysis of the psycho-analytic reasons for male trance and cures with a parallel analysis of the reasons why women are drawn to the Hamadsha.\(^{197}\)

Moroccan feminine mysticism is, as I will demonstrate in what follows, visibly highlighted in written hagiography. However, many scholars have disregarded the ways in which women engaged in Sufism and created saintly personalities that impacted their communities socially and politically, thus overlooking women’s actual agency and fulfilment in the religious space. Notable exceptions are, however, Kugle (2007), Schimmel (1975) and Smith (1935) which were already discussed before. The latter included a number of Moroccan women saints, in his study on the meaning of saints and their bodies in Islamic mysticism. He analyzed their sainthood and the way they engaged their bodies to express their piety and sainthood as a challenge to the patriarchal order. Similarly, the Moroccan anthropologist abū Barik (2010) also studies feminine sainthood in Morocco and discusses the techniques women saints follow to reach sainthood and how Sufism helped women to live their piety and spirituality freely. In what follows we will see how especially Moroccan hagiography presents women saints.

\(^{197}\) Hopkins 1976, 142
3-3 Islamic and Moroccan Hagiography

This section discusses some main characteristic of Islamic hagiography and of Moroccan hagiography in particular.

3-3.1 Islamic Hagiography

Before we focus on Moroccan hagiography we will elaborate a bit more on the main characteristics of hagiography amidst other laudatory genres.

As we already saw in Chapter One, hagiography literally means writing about holy people. It is a historical discourse on virtuous and religious individuals, which includes stories on their lives, compiled from written and oral recollections. Hagiography thus compiles memories of religious people aiming to the survival of their moral legacies. Hagiographers precede their entries on saints and Sufis in a traditional manner with a short introduction. In it the compiler mentions his name, offers praise to God and asks for the bestowal blessing upon the Prophet. They also explain the reasons for writing their compilations and their intentions behind narrating the saints’ life stories. They open each entry with the chain of reliable reporters, isnād, by which the information has been transmitted, as well as with the name of the saint’s geographical origin. They also give basic information on this place and its significance within his/her family and local community. After that, hagiographers recount the way the saint is chosen to do the will of God.

Other laudatory genres are Manāqib, defined by lexical scientists in terms of akhlāq (virtues) and qualities. Manāqib valorize traits of character and behavior. Their purpose is not only to record the temporal details in the biography of the person’s actions but also to evaluate the virtues of the individual. Manāqib celebrate the qualities, virtues, talents and good deeds of a particular person. They are biographies that have a laudatory character and that praise the traits of an individual or a group of individuals.

In the first centuries of Islam, there were other literary forms which, like manāqib, served a laudatory function. Tarjama served primarily as a biography\textsuperscript{198} and ta’rīf constituted another neutral literary form of the presentation of an individual.\textsuperscript{199} Likewise, akhbār is another genre that served to compile historical anecdotes on people and ethnic and social

\textsuperscript{198} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{199} Ibid.
groups. Finally, faḍā’il (virtues) is a genre similar to manāqib. All these genres have a common denominator: to celebrate the Prophet’s Companions’ virtues.

Sīra is an additional form that includes manāqib materials. It is a traditional biography of the Prophet that emerged with the growth of the Islamic empire, characterized by a new socio-political context where multiculturalism flourished. To preserve the Prophet’s cultural heritage, Muslims engaged in compiling the Prophet’s life stories and those of His Companions. They composed the Prophet’s biography to preserve it for the subsequent generations and to perpetuate the essential foundations of Islamic identity. The pioneers of sīra were ‘Urwa ibn Zubayr (8th century), Ibn ‘Uthmān (8th century) and Sharhabīl bin Sa’d (8th century). These scholars constitute the first generation of Muslims who were interested in writing about Islam. The compilations of sīra on the Prophet were written down by Abū Muḥammad Abd al-Mālik Ibn Hishām (9th century). The latter collected Ibn ‘Ishāq’s works, the genealogy of the Prophet and His divine revelations. Another important example of sīra is Sīra al-Ḥanbaliyya. Sīra remained a fundamental reference of Islamic history.

Another genre of Islamic literature that competed with manāqib are biographical dictionaries. The latter appeared in the mid-seventh and at the beginning of eighth century. Muslim biographers committed themselves to the writing of the Prophet’s life as well as that of the Prophet’s Companions by relying on the Hadith and the oral transmissions. As mentioned earlier, the growth of the Islamic umma and the expansion of Islam in various remote areas required further efforts in the gathering of other Prophetic sayings and behavior that Muslims sought to emulate. Muslims began to search for the Prophet’s detailed utterances and deeds from the transmitters of the Prophet’s tradition. Likewise, Muslim biographers recorded the lives of the imams or founders of the schools of Islamic jurisprudence and other important religious figures. These biographies not only validated manāqib, which recount virtues and traits of the Prophet and His Companions but also their life stories. Hence, these biographies developed into hagiography.

Hagiography in the Muslim context is rooted in the Islamic tradition. The Qur’an contains hagiographical material in as far as it contains stories of human beings known for their exceptional characters, traits and actions. The prophets Adam, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muḥammad are mentioned, and there are stories of pious and spiritual women like Eve and Maryam bintu ‘Imrān. The Hadith is an additional source of stories about the Prophet.

---

200 Ibid.
201 al-Buṭi 1993, 7
202 Encyclopédie de L’Islam, vol. VI, 54
Muḥammad. It is a compilation of the Prophet’s deeds and Sayings recorded orally by His Companions during and after the Prophet’s lifetime. The Prophet’s Companions also transmitted stories about the Prophet. Many tales celebrate the Prophet’s acts and sayings from the time of His birth, during His infancy and childhood, as well as along His adult life when He received divine revelations and founded the Islamic religion. The transmitters of Hadith usually prefaced a quote or story with an isnād or a chain of previous transmitters, that is, the people who heard from someone else and could authorize the veracity of the sayings. Isnād stretched all the way back to the Prophet and His Companions. Some of them included or even originated with the Prophet’s wives and other women who knew Him.203

Faithful Companions such as Abū Bakr and ‘Umar experienced the company of the Prophet and miraculous events which took place in His lifetime such as His receipt of Divine visions, performance of wondrous deeds, interpretation of dreams, prediction of future events and communication with animals. Their accounts bear witness to these events. Their companionship with the Prophet impelled them to become compilers of this sacred tradition. The Prophet’s Companions were engaged in this compilation process not only to better understand the Qur’ān, but also to find solutions to their contemporary crises and to preserve their Islamic identity, which began to be lived out in a competitive social and political environment.204 Thus, the Companions’ stories on the Prophet constituted an important model for the subsequent biographers and hagiographers who sought to record religious people’s life stories.

The rise of written hagiography was enhanced by the development of Sufism and the spread of religious centers in the Islamic world. In the eleventh century, Islamic hagiography presented the lives of saintly people who were engaged in the world of Sufism and sainthood. Several spiritual masters appeared and various Sufi orders developed. The death of these highly respected spiritual masters impelled their disciples and followers to develop hagiographical and biographical anthologies and to dedicate them to their audience. Among these hagiographical texts which presented the life stories of Sufis are al-Tabaqāt al-Sūfiya (Sufi Generations) by Sulamī (11th century) and Tadhkirat al-Awliyā’ (Remembrance of God’s Friends) by Farīd al-Dīn ‘Aṭār (13th century). These works are compilations about saints and Sufis who were known by their strong spirituality and charismatic deeds.205

---

203 John 1944, 3
204 Ibid.
205 Encyclopédie de L’Islam, vol. VI, 333
As we will see in what follows, this as well is the main characteristic of Moroccan hagiography.

3-3.2 Moroccan Hagiography

In Morocco, a variety of developments spawned the emergence of hagiographical writing. According to Halima Ferhat (1986), it is very difficult to locate its birth exactly because thousands of Moroccan hagiographies still languish in manuscript form and only very few are edited and published. It is often assumed, however, that Moroccan hagiography originated in the eleventh century and flourished in the twelfth century when Morocco witnessed the expansion of Sufism. The increasing number of marabouts in urban and rural twelfth-century Morocco characterizes many regions. This proliferation of Sufi orders and zāwiyas favored the emergence of hagiographical texts and historical records of spiritual masters and holy people. Their leaders engaged in writing entries on their faithful saints and Sufis. The sharifian dynasties also played a role in documentation in the form of hagiographical works. Almoravids and Almohads dynasties were led by Sufis and saintly kings such as Yūsuf ibn Tāchafīn and Ibn Tumart. Each of these patron saints authorized the production of hagiographical manuscripts, family documentations and biographical dictionaries to preserve their saintly life stories.

Moroccan hagiographers followed the model of Eastern hagiographers such as that of Sulamī, abi Nuʿaym al-Aṣfahānī (11th century) and al-Qushayrī (11th century). The Moroccan hagiographer Ibn al-Zayyāt al-Tādīlī (13th century) composed his compilations following the

\[196\] Ferhat and Triki 1986, 18
\[197\] Ibid.
model of Abū Nuʿaym al-Asfahānī (11th century)’s *Hilyat al-Awliyāʾ wa ṭabaqāt al-Asfiyāʾ* (The Ornament of the Saints and the Generations of the Pure). This work constitutes a storehouse of information on the utterances and deeds of the pious. Like Eastern hagiographers, Moroccan hagiographers compiled their narratives on saints by drawing on professional narrators, other scholars, predecessors and family members. Thus, the main sources used by Moroccan hagiographers in composing their surveys were scholars and people of confidence whom they considered to be authentic sources of information on Moroccan saints.

Most of Moroccan hagiographical entries have a similar structure, compared to each other and to hagiographies from the other regions. In addition, the general texture of Moroccan hagiography includes a variety of devices such as lengthy narratives about the saint’s miracles, passages describing the saint’s physicality, personality and piety. The entries usually end with the death of the spiritual hero. Hence, Moroccan hagiography has a chronological texture.

Moroccan hagiographers’ purposes for compiling saints’ life stories are the moral and ethical messages that they contain. Saints’ entries served to guide religious education and spiritual orientation. Hagiographers intended through their exposition of saintly figures to strengthen the moral character of their communities to which saints belonged. The description of the lives and characters of religious people buried in different parts of Morocco served, as al-Kattānī puts it, the pedagogical aim of erecting models of ethical conduct. Saints’ educational messages still find expression in the religious performances of the current generation. Moroccan saintly moral messages deriving from saints’ life stories impel people to respect the saints’ conduct. Hagiographers and their followers cherished their favorite saints’ spiritual and social status. Consequently, the devotees of the saints inherited their saints’ religious and social actions, practices and attitudes, and they sought to emulate them. This practice turned out to be part of the daily rituals that they still celebrate in the saints’ sanctuaries to this day. Sometimes the people transformed their saints’ ethics into rituals underpinning the survival of saints’ hagiographical reference.

Furthermore, Moroccan hagiographies preserve the collective knowledge of an entire society. They constitute a window through which one can see the life stories of individual saints’ and the local values and norms they embody. Hagiography is a tool through which one

---

208 al-Asfahani 1932, vol. 10, 38
209 al-Kattani 1900, vol. 1, 16
210 Heffernan 1988, 15-16
can acquire knowledge about the religious collective consciousness and the general worldview of the period in which the saint lived.\textsuperscript{211} In other word, saints reflect the religious ways of life of their contemporary community, and, through their entries, hagiographers indirectly made reference to the saints’ historical environment and to the impact of the local historical events on their pious lives.\textsuperscript{212}

The first hagiographic literature that appeared in Morocco includes the following: the hagiographic dictionary and important cultural relic \textit{al-Minhaj al-Wadih fī Karāmāt Abī Muḥammad al-Šāliḥ} (14\textsuperscript{th} century), which was unfortunately lost;\textsuperscript{213} the hagiography \textit{Al-Tashawwuf ilā Rijāl al-Taṣawwuf} (Insight into The Tradition Bearers of Sufism) by the Sufi-Jurist Ibn Zayyāt al-Tādišō (12\textsuperscript{th} century), which constitutes the primary source on Moroccan men and women saints, and one of the important compilations I consulted. \textit{Al-Tashawwuf} is a source for the first generation of Moroccan saints and the early phase of Moroccan sainthood and its development. It contains 279 hagiographic notices devoted to the Sufis and saints’ of Southwestern Morocco during the Almoravids and Almohad periods, which it claims were passed down from oral sources. Al-Tādišō records the lives of the saints he encountered during his life or heard about. The book on the whole focuses primarily on the saints and Sufis belonging to the almorāvīd and Almohad dynasties. \textit{Al-Tashawwuf} remains a key reference for future scholars of hagiography.

Huwat abī Rabī` Sulaymān (13\textsuperscript{th} century) is a hagiographer who wrote on Fasi saints, based on oral stories only. Another hagiographic work, from the fourteenth century, is \textit{Uns al-Faqīr wa ʿizz al-Ḥaqīr} by Aḥmad ibn al-Azīz al-Quṣṭānṭini who is known by the name of ibn Qunfudh. It is a hagiographical compilation of saints and Sufis belonging to the fourteenth century Maghrebin countries. Ibn Qunfudh wrote his hagiographic work during his journey across Maghrebi countries to describe the phenomenon of sanctity and to compile the entries of saints and Sufis who were disciples of the axial saint Abū Midyān al-Ghawth.

Another hagiography is \textit{Dawḥat al-Nāshir}, written by the Sufi-jurist ibn ʿAskar al-Shifshāwunī (16\textsuperscript{th} century). It deals with the lives of the Northern Moroccan saints and Sufis.

Other Moroccan hagiographers are Muḥammad al-Huḍaykī (18\textsuperscript{th} century), and Mukhtār al-Sūsī (20\textsuperscript{th} century). Al-Huḍaykī is one of the great Sufi scholars of the Sūs region. His \textit{ṭabaqāt} is a compilation of hagiographic entries on 813 Sūsi Sufis. Al-Sūsī accounts mostly on al-Huḍaykī for his compilation on Sufi saints of the Sūs region.

\textsuperscript{211} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{212} Ferhat and Triki 1986, 18
\textsuperscript{213} al-Tādišō 1997, 31
Another hagiography is the one of Ja‘far al-Kattānī (20th century). In his *Kitāb Salwat al-Nafās*, al-Kattānī devotes more than 1,100 pages in his three volumes to present extensive data on Fes, its holy people and religious scholars. Al-Kattānī compiled entries on the great saints of Fes by borrowing narratives from other hagiographers such as Huwat abī Rabī` Sulaymān (13th century) and historical narrators of stories on residents of Fes. He arranged his compilations according to the location of the saints portrayed. He started with the saints whose tombs are located in the center of the urban space before proceeding toward the city’s outskirts.

All these hagiographic works rely on al-Tādilī’s *al-Tashawwuf* for their entries on awliyā’ Allāh living before the 13th century. Therefore, his work is prominent in the following section, where we go into the main characteristics of Moroccan hagiography.

3-3.2.1 Diversity and Hierarchy of Moroccan Sainthood

In what follows I will take a closer look at the content of the main Moroccan hagiographies, specifically the ones of al-Tādilī and Ja‘far al-Kattānī. Moroccan hagiographers interestingly record a diversity of religious styles and modes of religious authority in their compilations. In *al-Tashawwuf*, al-Tādilī refers to different types of religious figures, ‘ulamā’ (religious scholars), Sufis, saints and pious individuals, as well as people who followed the path of
blame, known as the Malamatiya (‘malama’ = to blame) meaning people who never cease to blame themselves in front of God, and those characterized as majdhūb, or possessed by religious fervor. He seems to aspire to completeness rather than to a strict division and opposition between literate and illiterate saints or between orthodox and popular religious people.

As a hagiographer, al-Tādilī is interested in Sufi ‘amal (religious practice) and ‘ilm (religious knowledge). Al-Tādilī writes: “In this book I refrain from dealing with the sciences…. [I have confined] myself instead to providing information about rijāl (the actors).” Al-Tādilī thus included in his compilation jurists (fuqahā’), ascetics (zāhid), pious believers (‘ābid) and the like. He is concerned with all Sufis whose religious practices promoted them to be friends of God. This is clear in his continuous reference to particular terms in his description of saints. For example, he repeated in each entry the expression “he or she was among the people of religious learning and practice” (kāna/ [kānat] min ahl al-‘ilm wa al-‘amal). This statement signifies the combination of legal sciences with the manifest pious practice and virtuous conduct associated with the Sufi way of life, particularly asceticism, zuhd. Thus, al-Tādilī stressed the importance in using this expression to define the way individuals constructed sainthood.

Al-Kattānī adopts al-Tādilī’s definition of sainthood in his work. His compilation likewise includes biographies of scholars and virtuous figures, ‘ulama’ and Sufi ascetics and majādhīb (Sing: majdhūb). Like al-Tādilī, al-Kattānī seems to aspire to completeness and inclusiveness rather than exclusiveness or establishing a strict division between literate and illiterate, between orthodox and popular saints. Al-Kattānī clearly promotes non-oppositional relations between orthodox and popular saints. In his Salwa, al-Kattānī presents life stories on saints that he derives from written hagiographies and oral sources. He classifies the saints’ entries according to their lineage, starting with the shurfa i.e. the descendants of the Prophet, followed by scholarly saints and finally by holy people.

Abdellah Laroui (1997) describes al-Kattānī’s organizational structure as follows: the shurfa are placed at the top of the list, classified according to the purity of their genealogy and the miracles ascribed to their lineage. They are followed by the learned and knowledgeable saints such as the ‘ulama’. The latter are followed by the more or less illiterate awliyā’ and majādhīb. But this ranking of saints, in the opinion of al-Kattānī, is non-oppositional,

215 al-Tādilī 1997, 22
216 Cornell 1998, 273
217 Laroui 1997, 109
meaning there is no tension between orthodox and popular saints. In spite of their different
genealogies, degree of sainthood and scholarly education, Fassi saints shared a power and
authority that put them in harmonious relationships and that entailed cooperation among them.
Al-Kattānī’s saints provide insight into the construction of religious authority. Al-Kattānī
maintains that orthodox saints, such as ‘ulamaā’, and popular saints, such as majādhīb,
constitute forms of religious power and authority that do not exist in opposition in late
nineteenth century and beginning of twentieth century. Each saint, whether literate or
illiterate, has a sacred power that impacted people on different spiritual levels. Al-Kattānī thus
draws on different religious styles and sheds light on their authoritative status and emotional
appeal.

Moroccan hagiographers as al-Tādilī and al-Kattānī thus approve of the
complementarity of fiqh and Sufism in the construction of saintly personalities. Al-Tādilī
refers to a number of Sufis and jurists who stressed the importance of ‘amal alongside ‘ilm in
achieving sainthood. An example from al-Tādilī’s is the Sufi Abd al-Azīz al-Tūnisī, who
constructs himself as a celebrated Maliki jurist who taught jurisprudence to the Maṣmuda
Berber people of the High Atlas in a ribāṭ in 'Aghmāt. In the course of his religious teaching,
he found out that those of his students who became jurists started to exercise authority over
people. He said:

I disapprove of teaching fiqh fearing that you would attain worldliness (dunyā) with it, but you have lost the
knowledge of right and wrong (al-ḥalāl wa al-ḥarām).²¹⁸

As a consequence, Tūnisī stopped teaching jurisprudence because it was a way of gaining
worldly, and not other worldly, benefits. He decided to consecrate the rest of his life to Sufism
in his ribāṭ.²¹⁹

By depicting sainthood through descriptions of their ‘ilm and ‘amal and other
practices, Moroccan hagiographers highlight the traits, characters, virtues and practices that
made saints into friends of God. They reveal that many saints chose to be not only jurists and
orthodox religious figures, but also Sufis, two distinct, but interconnected professional
branches and spiritual pathways, which complemented each other in the construction of their
sainthood personalities as well as impacted the communities.

²¹⁸ Ibid., 34
²¹⁹ Ibid.
In the description of saints, hagiographers employ a variety of terms. In al-Tashawwuf, words like kabīr al-sha’n (great importance) and kāna min ‘ahl al-afārād fī waqtihi (he was among the peerless of his time)²²⁰ are widely used in the description of saints. Women saints also are described using these expressions. Muniya Bint Maymūn al-Dukkālī (12th century) was presented as one of the elite (kānat min ahli al-Afrād).²²¹ In addition, she was described as being among the miracle workers (aṣḥāb karāmāt).²²²

We can conclude that another indication of Moroccan hagiography’s inclusive and non-oppositional account of forms of spirituality, sainthood and authority, is its inclusion of women. Both al-Tādilī and al-Kattānī include them as spiritual exemplars and authority figures. They refer to a number of women saints, Sufis, ascetics and majdhūbāt (feminine plural of majdhūb). They recognize women’s abilities to create their own specific religious style and include stories on their lives. Women are considered to be among the rijāl, meaning ideals of sainthood, exemplaries of spirituality and models of moral selfhood. Thus, in their compilations these Moroccan hagiographers consider gender a neutral dimension.

Al-Tādilī’s recollection of saints living in the south of Morocco focuses on axial saints, both men and women. The latter achieved spiritual status and authority through knowledge or piety, which impressed the great axial Sufi jurist al-Tādilī, as well as other hagiographers who offer them a space in their scholarly writings.

Al-Kattānī’s compilation of the great saints of Fes includes fifty Fasī women saints and holy women who belong to elite families, but also to lower social classes. In spite of their lower class origin, these exemplary women were part of the elite, in the opinion of al-Kattānī, because they achieved saintly personhood.

Finally, it is noteworthy that Moroccan hagiography presents male and female saints’ entries differently, in that the women saints are presented with more details on their family relations and marriage than male saints. The main hagiographic sources of this study all are similar in this respect. A brief look at two of these can illustrate this different approach of male and female saints.

In salwat al-Anfās, al-Kattānī without exception describes women saints, Sufis and majdhūbāt in terms of their family situation. He presents them, next to their being saintly scholars, and great mystics, as married women, wives, mothers and as relatives in large families, which are usually headed by male saints and Sufis. For example, the great Sufi

²²⁰ Ibid., 135
²²¹ Ibid., 316
²²² Ibid.
ʻĀicha bint Shaqrūn al-Fakhār (17th century) is described as the daughter of the male saint Sidi Shaqrūn al-Fakhār (16th century) and as the wife of the male saint, Ahmed ibn ʻAbdullah al-Ma'n. She is also presented as the mother of the female Sufis: Ruqayya bint Muhammad ben ʻAbdullah al-Ma'n (17th century), ʻĀicha bint Muhammad ben ʻAbdullah al-Ma'n (17th century) and Sayyida Safiya bint Sidi Muhammad ben ʻAbdullah al-Ma'n (17th century). Furthermore, al-Kattānī presents ʻĀicha’s three daughters as sisters, wives and mothers who were very faithful to their husbands, families and relatives. Another example is Al-Kattānī’s record of the life of another Fassi woman saint called Faṭīma, who is presented without any surname, merely as the wife of the axial male saint Muhammad al-Qādirī.

In contrast, al-Kattānī never describes male saints and Sufis in terms of family relations and marital situations but only in terms of their public activities. He presents them not as husbands, fathers and brothers, but rather as performers of public miracles, and in terms of their public relationships to other great male saints and Sufis. The male saints are only described as jurists, teachers, scholarly saints and Sufis. Examples are the many male saints in Fes, such as Sidi Shaqrūn al-Fakhār whose family status and marital situation is absent in his entry. Al-Kattānī also describes Sidi Shaqrūn al-Fakhār’s high educational level, deep knowledge of religion, spiritual practices and scholarly talents. He stresses his preaching and teaching people both in Fes and other Moroccan regions.223

Likewise, al-Tādilī gives a list of male saints’ entries describing only their, scholarly knowledge and public miracles that highlight their public status in their communities. In his al-Tashawuf, al-Tādilī never refers to these male saints’ family situation. An example is Mohamed Abdsalām al-Tunusī, whose entry describes his deep public piety, spirituality and miracles, all of which impressed his people and presented him as an axial saint. Al-Tādilī makes no reference to his family situation. He focuses only on the saint’s pious public activities.224 In his reference to women saints, al-Tādilī presents some of his women saints as married women and mothers. For example, he presents the woman saint Muniya as the daughter of a man called Mimūn al-Dukālī. He called her Muniyya bint Mimūn al-Dukālī. In her entry, al-Tādilī also presents her as a mother.

This pattern of describing male and female saints differently mirrors the patriarchal nature of Moroccan society. Hagiographers were influenced by their patriarchal environment in describing women saints and Sufis in terms of their family relations, because that is the

---

223 al-Katānī 2004
224 al-Tādilī 1997, 110
way women in general are defined in the Moroccan patriarchal order.\textsuperscript{225} In this respect, Kugle 2007 distills from the hagiographer’s different approach of male and female saints that they wanted to show that these women could not have achieved sainthood without the assistance of their male relatives. But in what follows, we will see that the hagiographers in no way belittle the women saints, presenting them instead as excellent Sufi’s and saints. Their introduction in terms of family relations seems to only mirror the conventions in a Moroccan environment.\textsuperscript{226}

### 3-3.2.2 Authenticity

Moroccan hagiography originates according to its authors from authentic oral and written sources. Al-Tādīlī, for example, claims to rely on narrators who were known for their truthfulness and uprightness. He mentions his father as the primary source of data for many of his prominent saints.\textsuperscript{227} He also writes on contemporary saints and Sufis with whom he shared saintly lineage, family relations and strong friendships. Hagiographers’ personal proximity lies at the basis of their belief in the authenticity and veracity of what they wrote about the saints, their miracles and extraordinary actions.

Nevertheless, the authenticity and veracity of hagiographies constitutes a major source of debate, in particular due to their legendary nature. Many entries include actions that call into question their authenticity, such as walking on water, talking to wild animals and flying in the air. This might mean that hagiographers’ strong attachment and deep relationship to saints made it possible for them to believe in all that was said about them whether real or unreal.\textsuperscript{228} Cornell (1998) acknowledges the difficulty of distinguishing in a precise way whether hagiographic narratives were based on fact or fiction. He adds that pre-modern Moroccans believed in their saints’ narratives because both saints and their followers “lived in a sacred cosmos in which the transcendent, not the material, represented their reality.”\textsuperscript{229} What is important to Cornell is that, whatever our modern and postmodern assumptions on hagiography may be, hagiographies remained true to the saint’s subjects’ cultural space and time. This requires “that we acknowledge the Walī Allāh as both a transmitter of spirituality and an agent of the miraculous”.\textsuperscript{230} Rather than being concerned about the veracity and authenticity of hagiographies, Cornell thus concentrates on their presentation of saints as

---

\textsuperscript{225} Sadiqi Forthcoming
\textsuperscript{226} Kugle 2007, 115
\textsuperscript{227} al-Tādīlī 1997, 20
\textsuperscript{228} Zeggaf 1991
\textsuperscript{229} Cornell 1998, xlv
\textsuperscript{230} Ibid.
agents of miracles. Dennerlein (2002) and Kugle (2007) also discuss the nature and use of hagiography in this respect. In spite of the fact that the authenticity of the stories about saints is questionable and cannot be verified, hagiography remains an important source, according to these authors, because it reveals so much about the way people understood and constructed sainthood. Hagiography in Morocco, too, has recently come to be perceived as a source of materials that reflects important features of societies within which they were composed.²³¹

The hagiographers - believing in all the dimensions of their saints’ sainthood - reveal material from different historical era’s concerning the abilities, character traits, attitudes, personality types and other features, such as they felt characterized exemplary religious people.

Since historians marginalized women in their writings, I hardly found anything on religious women in history in non-hagiographic historical records. Stories on women are rare. As we have seen in the previous chapter, there are several stories on women in the Qur’an and Hadith. Furthermore, we only find some records in biographical dictionaries²³² on women of piety and sainthood.

The historian Mahmah (1978) discusses feminine Sufism and cases of historical women saints in the last section of his book. He stresses the fact that the form of Sufism practiced by Moroccan women is Sunni Sufism. They sought Divine closeness without neglecting earthly ties. He advises the readers to consult the Moroccan hagiographical literature for more details on women saints. In many cases, hagiographies constitute the primary sources on which historical, biographical and genealogical accounts rely in their presentation of women saints. I thus relied on hagiographic records more than historical and biographic literature, because the former contain rich material in comparison to other sources. In all the sources, women saints are rare in comparison to male saints, but their stories are more detailed in hagiography. Histories, biographies and genealogies include the names of saints but have limited details of their lives. Thus, hagiography is the main source on women’s religious roles in history.

My aim here is to investigate the ways female saints are portrayed as subjects of hagiography. I am not concerned with determining whether hagiographic stories are factual or fictional. What concerns me is the ideal laboratory hagiography offers for analyzing the character and the phenomenon of sainthood. Accordingly, I have drawn on hagiographies and

²³¹ Toufiq 1997
²³² Kaḥḥāla 1982
oral traditions as the major sources for my next chapter on female Moroccan saints and the way they reached sainthood.

To collect hagiographic stories on Moroccan women saints, I consulted different libraries, such as the library of al-Qarawiyyin University in Fes, and the Bibliothèque National de Rabat, which is the most important repository of Moroccan hagiography. This repository, which is called Qism al-Tarājim wa al-Manāqib, includes very early historical manuscripts on Moroccan sainthood. When I consulted this collection, I was faced with nearly thousands hagiographic works, all non-edited manuscripts. I consulted several librarians who are specialists in the study of hagiography, to guide my research. I was given a list of hagiographic works in which female saints and Sufis are mentioned.

3-4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I went into Moroccan Sufism’s particularities. In this respect, I addressed orthodox Sufism, which is strictly based on the Qur’an and Sunna, and popular Sufism, which is also based on these sources but as well includes local practices and ideologies. These practices of popular Sufism concern the celebration of Sufis and saints. I discussed the main properties of Moroccan hagiography as one of the primary sources on Moroccan male and female saints. From these narratives: how did Moroccan women saints reach sainthood? What are the techniques they followed to become saints?
Chapter Four: Moroccan Female Sainthood

The first section of this chapter consists of a presentation of exemplary female and male saints in the Moroccan context, through a discussion of the various self-techniques they applied, which are discussed in separate sub-sections. Several types of saints are coming to the fore throughout this discussion, such as ṣaliḥ, faqīh, majdhūb. As will be seen, women are to be found among all of these. An extensive list of all the female saints mentioned in Moroccan hagiography is included in the Appendix.

From this first section we get an impression of how female saints, as narrated, lived and achieved sainthood next to their male counterparts. Both men and women come forward from the narratives as creating sainthood through their application of self-techniques, most of which come forward as gender neutral. The self-techniques the women use turn out to be basically the same as men’s, with some minor exceptions. The second section of this chapter inventories how, from the narratives, the women saints transgressed the social limits that were imposed on them, and refused the patriarchal patterns that they were supposed to embody. The third section of this chapter furthermore illustrates this transgression, by focusing on the lives of three notable women saints: ʿAzīza al-Saksāwiyya, ʿĀyisha al-Idrīsiya and Fāṭima Muḥdūz.

4-1 The Construction of Sainthood

As was already discussed in Chapter One, the performing of miracles and the possession of baraka are the important criteria for a religious person to be considered as a saint. As further indicated in Chapter One, my research focuses only on female saints who have a Muslim background. From what we saw in Chapter Two, Sufism is gender neutral and does not make any distinctions between men and women in as far as both can enter the Sufi path and acquire sainthood. From the written hagiographies and oral stories in Moroccan contexts we indeed find that there are basically no differences between men and women where it concerns the main self-techniques that they undertook in order to become saints. This will become clear in the following sub-sections, which discuss exemplary cases of saints, male and female, with a focus on women saints. To elaborate on their position as not being different from the one of their male counterparts, sometimes non-Moroccan female saints are highlighted. This is then indicated in the text.
4-1.1 Piety

Some main self-techniques used by Sufis, as we have already seen in the previous chapter, are the practicing of piety, acquiring learnedness, the performing of miracles, and practicing jadhb (Divine attraction), as will be discussed respectively. The practicing of piety begins with some first steps of initiation into the Sufi path.

4-1.1.1 Initiation

As we already saw in Chapter Two, one of the most important actions a Sufi performs in the beginning of her initiation into the process of developing piety and spirituality is repentance (tawba), a word that describes the person’s desire to change his or her life. Tawba signifies not only turning away from sin and worldliness, but it also conveys a person’s total transformation of selfhood.233 As comes forward from hagiography, Sufi women, like men, experienced an internal desire to radically change their material existence and to lead a pious life. In Moroccan hagiography, we find many narratives of women and men undergoing an initiation into the mystical life.

One enlightening example of this initiation is found in al-Tādilī’s hagiographic entry of the female saint ‘Umayya bint Yaghrūsin (12th century), one of the greatest spiritual masters of Aghmāt. One day when she visited ‘Abd al-Salām al-Tūnisī (12th century), she found people waiting in front of his door. They all wanted him to pray to God for them. When her turn arrived, she asked him to pray to God for her as well. She said to him: “Oh Saint! Please pray to God for me”. He replied: “God has forgiven you”. She left him and went to her house where she took off all her clothing and put on a coarse woolen garment. She confined herself in retreat in a cave, where she led a lonely mystical life until she died.234 ‘Umayya entered in a Sufi life, leaving behind worldliness to pursue piety and spirituality, exactly like her male counterparts did, recall, for example Abū Zakariyā ibn Yughān al-Šanḥājī (12th century).

Like ‘Umayya, the male saint al-Šanḥajī expressed a strong desire to become initiated into the mystical life. He was one of 'umarā' (the princes) of the Şanḥaja, who was impressed with the wali Allāh, ‘Abd al-Salām al-Tūnisī and wished to become one of his murīds. He thus willingly submitted to his masters’ instructions. Al-Tūnisī said to Şanḥajī:

233 See Ibn Manzūr (no date)
234 al-Tādilī 1997, 112
Climb the mountain beyond the walls of Tlemcen, gather a pile of wood, and carry it on your back into the castle square where all the members of the Şanhāja ruling elite will watch you.\textsuperscript{235}

Şanhajī followed his orders immediately. Tunusī was so pleased with his murīd’s behavior that he named him: “malik al-Zuhd” (the king of asceticism). When al-Tūnisī died, Şanhajī left Tlemcen for the desert where he lived in complete solitude.\textsuperscript{236}

Adherence to a ribāṭ or ahl al-Ribāṭ as a step of initiation is equally referred to in hagiographic literature with regard to men and women. In \textit{al-Tashawwuf}, al-Tādilī refers to the ribāṭ Shākir.\textsuperscript{237} He contends that many awliyā’ Allāh gathered sporadically in ribāṭ Shākir to instruct murīds. Women Sufis also visited ribāṭ to learn about and undertake the stages of initiation. One of these women Sufis is the famous Berber woman Muniyya bint Maymūn al-Dukkālī (12th century). She was a şāliha (saint) who continually came from Marrakech to visit and participate in the religious activities of ribāṭ Shākir. She met Ibrāhīm Azadī al-Baṣtī (12th century) in ribāṭ and said to him: “I have never seen a place like this before, and I wish you were here.”\textsuperscript{238} He confirmed Muniyya’s presence and participation in ribāṭ Shākir, saying: “I saw Muniyya in ribāṭ Shākir, I guided her prayer and that of other murīds, and then I went away.”\textsuperscript{239}

\textbf{Sufi women in a zāwiya}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{235} Ibid., 123-24
\textsuperscript{236} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{237} Ribāṭ Shākir was built in the 10th century by the Muslim Shākir in the region of Marrakech to propagate Islam among Maşmuda Berbers.
\textsuperscript{238} al-Tādilī 1997, 316. Sometimes the expressions are not easy to understand from the Arab. This is the translation that I found most apt.
\textsuperscript{239} Ibid.
\end{flushleft}
As narrated, Muniyya recorded with amazement the presence of large numbers of Sufi women in the gatherings in ribāṭ. She said: “One thousand women saints visited ribāṭ Shākir this year.” Moroccon women’s strong desire to become religious and Sufis, impelled them to seek spiritual guidance offered by Sufi orders. They participated in religious meetings and ritual gatherings to learn about, and undertake, the stages of initiation and piety. Women, like men, adhered to ribāṭ to undergo initiation and to develop their spirituality, but there were others who preferred to remain in their private spaces to experience initiation.

![A Sufi woman](image)

### 4-1.1.2 Piety in the Domestic Sphere

According to Abū Barik (2010), there are some women saints, such as Fassi women saints, who preferred to live their piety within their private families and close to their Sufi family members. Abū Barik calls these women saints ordinary saints. As mentioned earlier, the Sufi path and lifestyle is inward-looking by nature. These Sufi women perhaps considered the interior nature of the soul and the process of spiritual introspection to be at their best in the domestic sphere. From the stories on them, Sufi women asserted that the home is a place where piety and spirituality could best be experienced, as the distractions of worldly existence are left outside. Al-Tādilī describes Fāṭima al-Andalusiyya (12th century) confining herself to her home where she performed daily and nightly prayers and remembrance (dhikr).

---

240 Ibid.
241 Abū Barik 2010, 146
She refused to go out and join her Sufi male counterparts, such as Muḥammad Aḥmad al-Zanāṭi (12th century) who invited her to experience with him spirituality outside home.

The non-Moroccan hagiographer Sulamī (10th century) refers to a female saint from Persia, Umm Aḥmad, and to her son, the Sufi ʿAbd Allāh bin Khafīf, both of whom spent the laylat al-Qadr (the 27th night of Ramadan) in prayer, but she remained in her home while her son prayed in the mosque. Once they finished their prayers, they learned that they both had experienced the same practice internally and externally, and both realized that the internal practice of piety is as fruitful as the male’s external mystical practice.\(^{242}\)

Women’s desire for piety in the domestic sphere might be explained in terms of women’s refusal of public spirituality. The latter held the potential for haughtiness, which was frequently observed among Sufi males. Such a public way of practicing piety appeared perhaps undesirable to women, being an occasion for displaying arrogance, which was detrimental to the mystical and spiritual life. The female Sufi saint Rabīʿa of Baṣra (8th century) rebuked a male Sufi for his public preaching because it revealed his penchant for worldliness.

An example is the Moroccan woman saint Muʾmina al-Tilimsāniyya (14th century), who according to her hagiographer, Ibn Qunfudh (14 th century), lived out her piety alone, inside her home in the old Medina of Fes.\(^{243}\) She refused invitations from her male Sufis to experience public piety with them because, according to her, it displayed their haughtiness and arrogance.\(^{244}\) Al-Tādilī also refers to some women saints who spent their lives in caves and isolated spaces living privately their piety and spirituality.

Sufi women’s piety in the domestic sphere might be evaluated in terms of social limits and gendered constraints and seen as following the dictates of the conventional norms that underscored woman’s presence within private spaces, in contrast to the male’s presence in public spaces. However, these accounts should not be taken as recommendations about the appropriate location of women’s practice of piety, but as admonitions to other men who might discount women’s spiritual endeavors and achievements merely because they are not undertaken in public spaces. Sufi women’s indoor piety namely did not hinder them in their agency as Sufis. Women’s domestic piety was believed to be rewarded with the same ajr (religious merit) as that of men’s public piety, as is clear from the story on Umm Aḥmad above, and from many other hagiographic stories which place them on the same level as men.

\(^{242}\) al-Sulāmī 1993  
\(^{243}\) Ibn Qunfudh 1965, 80  
\(^{244}\) Ibid.
The active nature of women’s participation comes forward from their engagement in strategies to construct piety. One of these strategies was restricting the body to the spiritual demands of the soul (nafs).

### 4-1.1.3 The Body and Sacredness

In hagiographic and oral narratives, the Sufi body is subjected to certain rules and conditions for developing piety and spirituality. As discussed before, the renunciation of worldliness constitutes the primary condition that Sufis seek to attain. Men and women Sufis are described as similarly purifying their bodies and constraining their emotions and desires against material desires. They are also presented as training their bodies to adapt to the hard ways of life that they chose to endure, in order to cultivate a pious personality. Through asceticism, prayer, remembrance, fasting, nightly invocations and austerity both men and women became pious. Through mujāhada (self-denial), women’s bodies, like men’s, became inhibited and damaged. An example is given by al-Tādilī when he describes Muniyya bint Maymūn al-Dukkālī. He explained that through self-denial, her body became so thin that her skin stuck to her bones, writing: “When I visited her [Muniyya], she was old, and through mujāhād, she became black and her skin stuck to her bones.”

The non-Moroccan hagiographer Sulāmi also refers to a Sufi woman called Mu‘āda bint Abdallāh al-‘Adawīyya (9th century) who had chosen to perform nightly prayers instead of sleeping. She overcame, Sulami writes, her body’s desire to sleep by walking around the house. She said:

> Oh soul! Eternal sleeping is ahead of you. If I were to die, your repose in the grave would be a long one, whether it is sorrowful or happy.

She remained that way until daylight. Mu’nisa al-Ṣūfiyya was an ascetic from Baṣra (9th century), with rough hair. Muḥammad ibn Ya‘qūb bin Yūsuf (9th century) commented on her hair, asking her: “Is it out fear of God or love for Him?” She replied: “I learned how to endure sufferings.” Their bodies became the means for achieving God’s closeness, and signs of their successful embodiment of piety and spirituality.

---

245 al-Tādilī 1997, 316
246 al-Sulāmī 1993, 88
247 Ibid., 133
In other instances, men and women Sufis forced their bodies to submit to their needs and to their hard spiritual life. Many descriptions present concrete Sufi women as performing daily and nightly prayers and dhikr. Both their emotions and physical organs are engaged in an eternal servitude and remembrance of God. Their bodies experience an endless invocation of the Divine. Al-Kattānī describes a Sufi woman’s spirituality as follows: “She invokes God continuously. When she sleeps, her veins continue invoking and remembering God.”

This reminds me of a Sufi woman I met in one of the shrines of the women saints I selected to study. I saw her sleeping next to the woman saint’s grave, but her fingers kept moving. When she woke up, I asked her why she moved her fingers while she was sleeping. She replied: “It is my body which continues remembering the names of God I started reciting before I fell in sleep.” The body here reflects the woman’s piety and continues performing dhikr and invocation on her behalf after she has lost consciousness either through sleeping or fainting (ighmā’). Thus, the body submits to the power of the pious soul during its spiritual journeys to reach the supernatural world.

In similar ways, hagiography provides references to male Sufis who trained their souls and bodies to construct pious personalities. They used asceticism, prayers, fasting and austerity to purify their bodies from worldliness. They were in continuous struggle against the evil dimension of their souls. Al-Kattānī describes a Sufi who quarrels every night with a woman whom he had beaten severely. His neighbors heard him shouting at her and biting her. Later on, the neighbors discovered that the Sufi man was celibate and that he spent the entire night rebuking the evil dimension of his soul for its penchant for worldliness. Al-Tādīlī also refers to a number of Moroccan male saints who train their bodies to achieve taqwā. He describes the Sufi Abū Muḥammad Abdallāh al-Malījī (12th century) who was so austere that his body became like a thin burning stick (jismu-hu ka al-sufūd al-muḥtariq) and his skin stuck to his bones. Thus, men and women Sufis in similar ways use their bodies as a means to get close to God. There are others who even destroy their physical properties to achieve spiritual illumination. This is true for the majdhūb, the holy madman who is attracted to God, such that the Divine attraction destroys his mental abilities.

Women saints, like their male counterparts, not only ignored their physical needs, but as well chose other ways to destroy the physical properties of their bodies. Women and men saints experienced biological crises, which empowered them to put an end to their

248 al-Kattānī 1900, 319
249 A woman venerator, interviews, July 2010
250 Ferhat 2000, 547. See also Dialmy 2008
251 al-Tādīlī 1997, 145
conventional roles. These physiological crises are jadhb (Divine attraction / destruction) and foolishness or insanity (junūn), which made Sufis behave freely and without social constraints, as will be dealt with in a separate section below.

Hagiography contains examples of Sufi women and men whose strong desire for God ever impelled them to put their bodies to death, with the destruction of its life as the ultimate stage of their annihilation in the Divine. Sufi women and men saw death as a way to free themselves from the body, which they sometimes considered not a means to reach God but as a burden that prevented them from reaching God, and that they have to get rid of to be with God. In life stories, many women saints prepared their graves when they felt their death was near. Nufisa, a Sufi woman, would continuously read the Qur’an inside the grave she prepared for herself.

Thus, for the sake of God’s closeness, we equally see women saints inflicting harm on their bodies through praying, fasting and starving. They even longed for death as the ultimate desire to deliver themselves from their sinful bodies, which hindered them from meeting with God and imprisoned their spirituality.

In dealing with their bodies, women saints often undertook double efforts. They believed that the female body is the center of fitna (temptation) and sexual attraction. Like men they constrained its material, sexual and sensual properties, but on top of that most, though not all, of them found it necessary to also veil their bodies. Thus, Sufi women trained their bodies- or even destroyed them-in order to devote themselves to spirituality and piety.

### 4-1.1.4 Crying

Crying constitutes another self-technique of the Sufi’s achievement of God’s closeness. It emanates from an inner state that reflects the Sufi’s internal feelings while addressing God, such as love, shame, fear and even passion. During the Sufi’s journey to the Divine, his / her eyes did not stop shedding tears. In Islam, crying and weeping are highly respected as behavior which expresses one’s taqwā (piety) and khushū’ (submissiveness). Many Prophets were described in the Qur’an as crying while asking for God’s mercy and salvation, such as the prophet Abū Shu‘ayb whose eyes did not stop crying until they lost the capacity for sight.

---

252 Geoffroy 1998, 127
253 Ibid.
254 Sura al-Mā’ida, 83
Moroccan friends of God also expressed their desire for God by crying. Abū Abdallāh Muḥammad al-Barāḍī‘ī (12th century) feared Allah, and his eyes never stopped crying. Abū Shu‘ayb Ṣanhājī (d. 561H) also was a Sufi whose eyes dropped tears heavily like heavy raindrops. Abū ‘Alī al-Sharīṣī (12th century) was another saint who had an alternative name, which was “Bakkāy,” meaning “one who cries a lot.” Women also used crying as an utterance to express their desire for God and for His salvation. Ibn Qunfudh makes reference to an unanimous pious woman who never stopped weeping such that her eyes were stricken by blindness. He adds that one day the Sufi Abū Ḥasan bin Yūnus al-Ṣanhājī (13th century), visited this pious woman in her cave. After she welcomed him, he started to weep so heavily that he fell dead on the ground. Al-Hudaykī (18th century) refers to Ḥawwā’ bint Aḥmad al-Hudaykī (18th century) a very pious woman saint who was always shedding tears to express her fear of God.

In non-Moroccan context, Ghufayra al-‘Ābida from Basra (8th century) wept so much that her eyes lost the ability to see. Sha‘wāna (9th century) is another Sufi who always cried and made others cry too. Sha‘wāna wept until we feared that she would become blind. So we asked her:

Why are you afraid by God? [She replied:] Becoming blind in this world from weeping is more desirable to me than becoming blind by Hell-fire in the hereafter.

Men and women Sufis cry not only out of their desire for God but also out of fear for His punishment in the afterlife. Abū Yahya Abū Bakr ibn Fakhīr ābidī (12th century) was described as crying and continuously slapping his cheeks (laṭm al-khudūd) as signs of his repentance for his dreadful sins and of his fear of God. The spiritual master Ḥasan ben Yūsuf al-Ṣanhājī always cried in his lectures and made his murīds and attendants cry too. When Ibn Qunfudh saw his crying, he said to al-Ṣanhājī’s disciples: “This man will die from crying.” Although crying afflicts the body by causing Sufis to be stricken by blindness,

---

255 al-Tādīlī 1997, 278
256 Ibid., 188
257 Ibid.
258 Ibn Qunfudh 1965, 115
259 al-Hudaykī 2006, 173
260 al-Jawzī 1985, vol. 4, 33-34
261 Ibid.
262 al-Tādīlī 1997, 175
263 Ibn Qunfudh 1965, 115
Sufi men and women used crying as a performance to construct piety and to express publicly their strong spirituality, all for the sake of God.

The standard cultural interpretations of weeping, which portray women’s crying positively and men’s tears negatively, are not applicable to Sufis. The cultural interpretation of women’s public crying is an accepted practice because it is culturally related to their gender, like other forms of excessive emotional expression, while men’s crying is seen as a negative action as it displays their weakness, and is not relevant in the mystical space. The Sufi women and men discussed above found in shedding tears and crying a remedy for their spiritual crises. Crying is widely used both by men and women Sufis. Both men and women became moved and spontaneously expressed their feelings and emotions through tears.

Women crying while supplicating God

4-1.1.5 The Disturbing Marriage

The Sufi, on his/her Sufi path, engages in celibacy and avoids marriage to preserve himself/herself exclusively for God. Marriage in Islam is important because it has many advantages such as the preservation of chastity, procreation, and the growth of Muslim umma (world community). But marriage is not praiseworthy in Sufism. It is a worldly life that hinders the spiritual life. Al-Tādīlī mentions a number of male saints who preferred celibacy to marriage. He also refers to anonymous male and female saints who led celibate lives so as to

264 Buffault 1986
265 See al-Bukhārī wa Muslim 2007, 1066
266 al-Şahrurdi 1999, 340
live their spirituality freely. He also mentions married male saints who divorced their wives and abandoned their families to live the Sufi path, such as Abū Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Jazūlī and Mālik ibn Dīnār (12th century). Many though not all Sufi men consider women a possible source of temptation that must be avoided. Women who embody the dominant patriarchal norms and patterns, such as matrimony, are understood as a part of that worldliness that Sufi males found necessary to eliminate. Did women also consider marriage an obstacle to their spirituality? Did they interpret their male partner’s company as a source of worldliness?

Celibacy also characterized other women and men saints. In al-Tashawwuf, al-Tādilī, as I mentioned earlier, refers to a number of women saints who chose celibacy over marriage. Ibn Qunfudh also included in his compilation the life story of the urban woman saint Muʿmina al-Tilimsāniyya (14th century), who was already mentioned in the section above on domestic piety. According to her hagiographer, ibn Qunfudh, Muʿmina was a very pious woman. He lived near her in Fes, and observed her daily expressions of piety and spirituality. Muʿmina’s spirituality attracted the attentions of orthodox religious scholars such as Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Maqarī, one of the great Sufi-jurists of Fes and Sharf Abū al-Qāṣi al-Sharīf al-Tilimsānī (14th century). Throughout her life, she rejected the presence of the Sufis and spiritual masters who came to her door seeking her friendship and love. Instead, she chose to remain a lonely female axial saint and faithful to her Lord. Thus, Muʿmina al-Tilimsāniyya preferred to remain a solitary publicly recognized Sufi saintly figure.

Another example, in a non-Moroccan context, is Rabīʿa al-Azūdiyya (10th century) from Basra, who was proposed to by her Sufi companion Muḥammad of Basra (10th century). When he entered her house, she said:

Oh lustful one! What did you see in me that aroused your desire? Why don’t you ask a lustful person like yourself to marry you? From the hagiographies, Sufi women consider men to be seekers of sexuality and persons who soil the purity of their bodies (mudnis li-ṭahāratihā). As we already saw, al-Tādilī refers to some anonymous virgin saints who spent their lives in caves worshippers God. These
Sufi women found in their celibacy a refuge for living their spirituality peacefully. This, however, does not mean that marriage constituted an obstacle for all women to achieve piety and spirituality.

There are exceptions. Some married women successfully developed not only their own piety but also that of their partners. This is the case with the two women saints, Fāṭima Muḥadūz and ʿĀyisha al-Idrīsiyya, whom I have selected and will discussed in the final section of this chapter.

Ibn Qunfudh mentions in his compilation a pious woman saint whom he met in Azmour and who guided the piety and spirituality of her husband, Shaykh ʿAbd al-Wāḥid al-Ṣanḥājī (13th century). Her followers said to her hagiographer that, thanks to her, her husband ʿAbd al-Wāḥid became a spiritual master. The rural Moroccan Sufi woman, ʿĀyisha bint Sāliḥ bin Masʿūd (19th century) developed a strong piety and sainthood that impressed her husband Muḥammad bin Masʿūd (19th century), one of the greatest spiritual masters of the Sūs region. Mukhtār al-Sūsī (1960) says that her husband built her a shrine.

Rabīʿa bint Ismaʿīl (9th century), a Sufi woman from Syria, rebuked her husband Aḥmad bin ʿAlī al-Hawārī (9th century) for disturbing her khalwa (retreat). He said:

> Once I called for Rabīʿa, and she did not answer. After an hour had passed, she answered me: “What prevented me from answering you was that my heart was filled with happiness from God most High. For this reason, I could not answer you.”

Another woman saint in non-Moroccan context, Fāṭima bint Muḥammad Ḥajāfiyya (10th century), a married woman saint from Nishapur, was always advising her husband, Abū al-Abbās al-Dinnawrī (10th century), while he was speaking on God’s intimacy. She said to him:

> How fluent is your description of that which you lack! If you experienced what you described or witnessed what you speak of, you would be mute.

Another female worshipper in this context was doing her nightly vigils and prayers while her husband was sleeping. She rebuked him for his laziness and for his lack of worship of

---

272 Ibn Qunfudh 1965, 131
273 al-Sūsī 1960, 152
274 al-Sulāmī 1993, 140
275 Ibid., 180
These examples demonstrate that a married woman was able to live her piety in the company of her husband. Matrimonial relations enabled her to live her spirituality and to guide that of her partner. Women, whether married or unmarried, succeeded in living their piety and playing the role of the spiritual master in guiding their male counterparts’ spirituality.

We have seen thus far that women, like men, lived their piety through the performance of a set of self-techniques. They engaged in initiation and in annihilation of the body through crying, starving and praying. They often chose celibacy to live their spirituality. They trained their feelings and bodies to reach God and to construct piety and sainthood. Women and men used similar self-techniques while searching the friendship of God. In this sense, the practice of Sufism and the construction of sainthood come forward as gender neutral. Both men and women are free to follow the path of Sufism and articulate the same practices to reach God. In addition, the quest for knowledge is another self-technique employed by both men and women to achieve saintly personalities, as will be discussed next.

4-1.2 Learnedness and the Quest for Knowledge

Sufi women, like their male counterparts, marked their personalities within orthodoxy through the quest for knowledge. They engaged in fighting their illiteracy and in learning different sciences. Narratives are pregnant with examples of women mystics who were interested in education and learning. There are some who founded educational centers and built schools and universities from their own money. This is the case of Fāṭima al-Fihrīyya (8th century) who built in Fes al-Qarawiyyīn the first mosque and religious educational center in North Africa. Zaynab al-Nafẓāwīyya (12th century) also built many schools in Morocco and in the Mashreq to teach women about Islam and the Islamic sciences. These women were knowledgeable and wanted others to be so as well. Not only were women knowledgeable, their level of knowledge also impacted their male counterparts.

Moroccan history is also pregnant with examples of women who reached the highest stages of mysticism and Islamic knowledge. Besides the women saints I discussed earlier, there is also the woman saint, Sa’īda al-Tīfīliyya (12th century). According to her hagiographer Abū al-‘Abbās bin Ibrāhīm (12th century) she lived in the Almohad period. She studied the Qur’an, hadith and other Islamic sciences. Her desire to propagate her knowledge

---

276 al-Jawzī 1985, 40
277 al-Ṭāzī 1992, 24. See also ben Khaldūn 2009
to students and other people enhanced her to become “nāsikha” (copier of books). Her sister also was very knowledgeable and very happy to copy books.

Al-Tādilī contends that his friend and spiritual master Abī al-Mahdī (12th century) met a woman saint in a cave in the Atlas Mountains. She trained him in the Islamic sciences that he did not know. Mukhtar al-Sūsī’s mother, Ruqayya al-’Adūzī (19th century) was another woman saint who always held the board on which she wrote Qur’an verses to learn by heart. Wherever she went she held her board showing people her strong desire to learn the Divine text. Women were able to achieve an educational level that enabled them to be instructors of religion and the Islamic sciences for others. They succeeded in creating strong knowledgeable personalities that greatly impressed male Sufis to submit to their status.

Another example is again that of Mu’mina, as told by her hagiographer Ibn Qunfudh. Her quest for religious knowledge enhanced her status as a female axial saint (quṭb al-Aqṭāb). She was a disciple of Abū Madyan al-Ghūt (13th century), one of the greatest spiritual masters of the Maghreb. Her axial status attracted her contemporary Sufis such as ibn Qunfudh and Šālihi Abū al-Ḥasan, who became her students and devotees; Šālihi Abū al-Ḥasan, for example, wrote on her slate (lawḥ) and brought it to her. Ibn Qunfudh studied religion under her guidance. The Sufi scholar Sharīf Abū al-Qāsim al-Šarīf al-Tilimsānī, whom Mu’mina refused as a student and devotee, sought to benefit from her knowledge and spiritual aptitude. All of these Sufi scholars sought to be her disciples and benefactors of her knowledge and religious expertise. Hence, Mu’mina impressed male orthodox spiritual masters who appreciated her guidance.

Another example of a woman who achieved the sanctity of sainthood through the acquisition of knowledge is the woman Sufi Lalla Maḥilla (12th century). According to Janbūbī, who grounded his research on Sufis in Morocco on written records, Maḥilla dedicated her life to the quest for religious knowledge and the study of the Islamic sciences. Her strong desire for learning impelled her to reject marriage. She spent entire nights reciting the Qur’an and the names of God. Her nightly and daily prayers convinced her father that she was possessed by an evil spirit. He urged her to marry as a remedy, but she rejected the marriage he arranged for her. He consulted with al-Qāḍī ‘Ayāḍ, one of the greatest seven spiritual masters of Marrakech, about Maḥilla’s behavior. Al-Qāḍī ‘Ayāḍ understood her desire and asked one of his students to train her in religion and the Islamic sciences. Maḥilla

278 al-Tādilī 1997, 266
279 al-Sūsī 1960, 39
280 Ibid.
281 Janbūbī 2008, 172
soon acquired the status of a scholar knowledgeable on the Qur’an, Sunna and the Islamic sciences as well as that of a saint. Her reputation spread throughout Marrakech and many people admired her expertise and status. She spent the rest of her life as a religious scholar and instructor of religion. Her shrine was erected beside al-Qaḍī ʿAyāḍ’s and still enjoys considerable popularity.\textsuperscript{282} Therefore, like Muʿmina, Maḥilla created a saintly personality through the pursuit of knowledge and education.

In a non-Moroccan context, we find Fāṭima al-Nisabūriyya (8\textsuperscript{th} century), one of the pious, ascetic and knowledgeable women of Nisabūr. Al- Başrī sought her advice on doctrinal matters. He said:

\begin{quote}
There was no other woman like her at this time (…). In all of my life, I have only seen one true man and one true woman. The woman was Fāṭima of Nishapur. Whenever I informed her about one of the stages of spirituality, she would take the news as if she had experienced it herself.\textsuperscript{283}
\end{quote}

Dhu al-Nūn al-Miṣrī also said:

\begin{quote}
I have never seen anyone more excellent than a woman I saw in Mecca who is called Fāṭima of Nishpur. She would converse wonderfully on matters pertaining to the meaning of the Qur’an …. She is a saint … .She is also my teacher (ʿustādhī).\textsuperscript{284}
\end{quote}

Muḥi al-Dīn ibn ʿArabī was a disciple of another female spiritual master called Fāṭima bint al-Mutanā. She was his teacher and spiritual guide. Ibn ʿArabī served her like a murīd serves his shaykh. He learned from her the Islamic sciences and Sufi secrets.\textsuperscript{285} Women saints’ relationship with their disciples was, however, different from that between the male spiritual masters and their disciples. The male shaykh usually exercised a cold, strict authority towards his murīds.\textsuperscript{286} He was rarely observed behaving like a father who should bestow his affection and love on his children (followers). And if he employed a fatherly care towards his students, it was just to impose his power and authority.\textsuperscript{287} The male spiritual masters’ care was cold and not as intense as the one of female spiritual masters. Women saints had a

\begin{footnotes}
\item \textsuperscript{282} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{283} al-Sulāmī 1993, 144
\item \textsuperscript{284} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{285} Ibn ʿArabi 1985, vol. 2, 364-65
\item \textsuperscript{286} Hammoudi 1980
\item \textsuperscript{287} Abū Barik 2010, 110
\end{footnotes}
religious authority, which was full of motherhood and motherly affection and care. We already saw that Ibn ʿArabī described his spiritual master Fāṭima bint al-Mutanā as his mother. Whenever she wanted to call him, she used the following words: waladī qurrat ʿaynī (my son, my sweetheart). Fāṭima as a spiritual master founded a relationship with Ibn ʿArabī, which was based primarily on love more than on the authority, which is found intensively in the shaykh’s relationship with his murīds.

We can concur, however, from all examples mentioned above, that for women, like for men, knowledge and education opened the door to become saintly and knowledgeable persons.

4-1.3 Miracles

As mentioned earlier, the Sufi engaged in the Sufi path until he/she reached God’s closeness, which endowed him/her with Divine grace, enabling him/her to perform miracles (karamāt), i.e., extraordinary actions that an ordinary Muslim cannot perform. From the hagiographies, women were also able to perform different kinds of miracles that advanced their saintly personalities. Healing constituted one of the important karamāt that Moroccan women performed widely. In one hagiographic narrative, Muḥammad Abdallāh ibn ʿAbd al-Mālik al-Bayyānī (12th century) went to visit Abū Yaʿzā (12th century), one of the greatest saints of Moroccan religious history, to be cured from blindness. Abū Yaʿzā said to him: “Go to Fulāna” and asked her to spit in your eyes.” Abū Yaʿzā, who himself was a very powerful healer, thus advised the ill Sufi ʿAbd al-Mālik al-Bayyānī to request the holy woman Fulāna al-Andalusiya’s divine grace to regain his sight. This means that Abū Yaʿzā believed in Fulāna’s miracles, which were more powerful than his own. For this reason, he advised al-Bayyānī to visit her and to benefit from her Divine grace.

Besides healing, there are other miracles that women performed, such as reading the future, flying in the air and walking on water and others. Fāṭima al-Hilāliya was described teleporting to Arabia to do her prayers in Mecca and saving persons in difficult situations. Thus, women are portrayed as using miracles as a means to prove their sainthood. As we saw before, Rabīʿa of Baṣra surpassed her male counterparts in performing miracles.

---

288 Ibn ʿArabī 1988, 365
289 See the preceding section.
290 al-Tādīlī uses the name Fulāna as the proper name of a woman saint.
291 al-Tādīlī 1997, 237
292 al-Hudaykī 2006, 474-75
The Moroccan saint Muniya bint Maymūn al-Dukkālī, whom we have already met, was a woman whose miracles prevailed even after her death. One day the spiritual master visited her grave and said

I visited Muniya’s grave… I saw a vapor like a stick of light coming out of her grave and it invaded the light of the sun.  

This light symbolizes the spiritual power of a woman saint that displayed the power of her spirituality and her miraculous abilities. Women saints were pictured as being able to perform miracles that exceeded that of their male counterparts.

Another woman saint from the Sūs who played the role of a Sufi shaykh is Tin Slāmt (a Berber word meaning “the peaceful”). Tin Slāmt was another spiritual master with miraculous skills. As a woman saint of the 12th century, Tin Slāmt was one of the fourteen women saints of the Maṣmūda region, many of whom were able to fly or be transported over long distances. In his discussion with other saintly figures on the topic of Moroccan saints who had the miraculous ability to fly, Shaykh Abū Ya`zān ben Wibdān al-Ilānī al-Qadār (19th century) said that “In Maṣmūda region there were twenty males saints and fourteen women saints who could fly or have themselves transported.” Shaykh Abū Ya`zān referred to Tin Slāmt as being among these women, which meant that they had achieved the highest spiritual level like their male counterparts. Her great saintliness enabled her to be the spiritual master of her male saint counterparts. Shaykh Abū Bakr al-Huwayrī admired her spiritual skills and status as a saint bearing the miraculous ability of flight. He said: “I served Tin Slāmt for eight years” because “I want to know how saints fly.” She responded: “Ask God’s forgiveness, and do a lot of fasting”. Abū Bakr al-Huwayrī was not the only saint who sought her instruction and blessing. Shaykh Sajmāt also admired her and came to visit her from time to time. Her devotee, Abū Bakr al-Huwayrī, saw him in her tent conversing with her. Shaykh Sajmāt said to him: “You have chosen the right shaykh”. Tin Slāmt was a saintly master whose spiritual knowledge caused her to be surrounded by male and female saints and disciples. Thus, spiritual leadership is not limited to males but also belongs to women.

293 al-Tādīlī 1997, 317
294 al-Sūsī 1960
295 Maṣmūda region is actually called Dukkala (the Moroccan central western region).
296 al-Sūsī 1960
297 Ibid.
298 Ibid.
4-1.4 Al-Jadhb

Al-Jadhb is mad mysticism that Sufis sometimes chose as a medium for becoming saints. In Moroccan hagiography there are many stories of women and men who were stricken by al-jadhb. These are called majdhūbs (mad men) and majnūnāt or majdhūbāt (mad women). They were considered to be in this state because God attracted their minds and hearts to Himself, and they longed for Him in such a way that it caused their mental destruction.

Al-Kattānī presents a number of majdhūbāt in Fes such as Ṣafīya Lubāda (19th century), whom we have already met. She was called Lubāda because she fabricated lubbād (traditional woolen carpets used for praying). She was very pious, and spent entire nights weaving carpets and remembering the Divine until she was attracted to God and stricken by mental infirmity. As a majdhūba, she left her family and roamed the streets of the medina of Fes. When she went deeply into ecstasy, she took off all her clothes and started to foretell future events. 299

Another majdhūba of Fes was Fāṭima bint Khāwa (18th century). She was a Sufi who would sit on the threshold of a public gate in the old medina of Fes called Bāb al-Maḥrūq (the burned door). She put many multi-colored scarves on her head carrying all her stuff with her. 300 Her sister Amīna, who was known by Mannāna al-Bastyūniya (18th century) was an absent minded woman saint. She was frequently dressing in a long rug (qashāba). She used speech and sign language. When she met people, she asked them a number of questions such as: Where are you coming from? And where are you going? She meant by these questions: “I was nothing, I came from nothingness, and your mother is the earth.” 301 Some people understood her words but others did not.

Drowing from her hagiographic story, Amīna bint al-Qāḍī (19th century), was also a mad woman saint. According to her hagiographer al-Kattānī, Amīna hailed from the prestigious Ibn al-Qāḍī family of jurists and scholars from the city of Meknes. The family moved to Fes to take up official positions in the royal palace. Her father was a judge as his forefathers had been. His daughter rejected the urban respectability of her juridical family, preferring to wander the streets and perform miracles. She fell into trance, gave reports on unseen matters and rebuked wrongdoers. 302 Amīna was an admirer of Ḥalī al-Ṣanḥājī, a majdhub in Fes. She divorced her husband and took care of Ḥalī al-Ṣanḥājī, proudly roaming...

299 al-Kattānī 1900, vol. 2, 10
300 Ibid., 192
301 Ibid., 308-09
302 al-Kattānī 1900
the streets of the old medina of Fes with him. She wandered through the market places with this mad man whom she lovingly offered a bowl of olive oil as a token of admiration, since this holy man was fond of drinking olive oil. Her family once locked her in a room and restrained her with chains to prevent her from roaming the streets. When she saw ʿAlī al-Ṣanḥājī standing in the middle of the house saying to her: “O Amīna,” she answered: “Yes my lord”. The chains suddenly fell from her, and she left the room and walked out of the house with him while her family watched, unable to stop them. When their attempts to change her unconventional habits failed, her family decided to leave her alone.303

From a non-Moroccan context, there is the story of Maryam al-Baṣriya from Baṣra (11th century). She was one of the majdhūbāt whose deep love for the Divine destroyed her mental abilities. Whenever she participated in lectures on Divine love, she went into ecstasy. Her spleen ruptured and she eventually died.304 Another case in this context is the example of Dakkāra, a female invoker from Baghdad. Abū Hafṣ ʿUmar ibn Maṃṣūr describes her as a mad woman (majnūna):

One day Dakkāra saw me holding a piece of fallūja (kind of sweets or cookies) in my hand and said to me: What do you have? I reply: “Fallūja.” She said again: “I am embarrassed to be regarded disapprovingly by God most high… . Shall I explain to you how to make real fallūja so that you may go home and make it if you are able to do so?” “Certainly,” I said; she said: “Take the sugar of the Divine gift, the starch of purity, the water of modesty, the butter of self-awareness and the saffron of recompense, and strain them in the sieves of fear and hope. Then, place under the mixture a tripod of sorrow, suspend the sauce pots of grief, seal it with the lid of contemplation, light beneath it the five pots of griefs, and spread it out over caution until it is touched by the fragrant breeze of the night vigil. When you take a bite of it, you will become one of the wise and will be liberated from vain fantasies of the night vigil.305

These words from Dakkāra seem to be full of wisdom, which is another indication that the majdhūbs are not mad in the normal sense, i.e. mentally ill.

303 Ibid.
304 al-Sulāmī 1993, 85
305 Ibid.
Oral tradition is another source on the Moroccan female majdhub. Oral stories also convey accounts of Moroccan women and men known for their mad holiness. In the field, I met a majdhūba sitting in the shrine of Lalla Maymūna in the North of Morocco. She wore tattered clothes and many strings of beads around her neck and hands. I was told that she used the string of beads to recite the names of God. When she fell into trance, she started rebuking people. She roamed the streets with her unkempt hair uncovered. My respondents said that she was stricken with an intense attraction to God at an early age. Her holy madness made her distribute all that she owned to people. She liked to be with male majdhubs. One of these male mad saints whom she liked to be with was Mūlāy Ḥafīẓ al-Majdhūb. His age exceeded seventy. He had a thin, black body, and preferred to wear white jellabas. He was married and had children, but he never stayed with his family. He was always traveling. His words were not understandable. I saw him put his saliva on his admirers’ heads. He also distributed money to the poor. People said that Mūlāy Ḥafīẓ al-Majdhūb was attracted to God in his early years. His brother told me:

When Mūlāy Ḥafīẓ was a child, my mother bit him. The following day, my mother’s hand was paralyzed. She visited many doctors and many fuqahā’ hoping that her hand would be healed but in vain. One day, a faqīh told her that if she wanted her hand to be cured, she had to ask Mūlāy Ḥafīd’s pardon. If not, her hand would remain paralyzed for the rest of her life. Indeed, my mother asked Mūlāy Ḥafīẓ to forgive her, and she promised never to bite him again. Thus, my mother’s hand was healed. From that day on people considered Mūlāy Ḥafīẓ a saint.³⁰⁶

Thus oral stories also have both men and women coming forward as living jadhb. Both experience God’s attraction that causes them mental destruction, but also sainthood.

Furthermore, women and men are attracted by a madness that endowed them with sacredness that impacted their environment. Their irrational behavior bestowed sacredness upon them, which enabled them to be highly admired and greatly respected by people. Their relationship with the sacred world shed a positive light on their foolishness and madness. For this reason non-conventional behavior, such as public nudity, public rebuke, and other actions performed by saints were accepted by the local population. This ill behavior did not lead to the women’s punishment. Ṣafiyya Lubāda, as we have seen, deserted her family and

³⁰⁶ Hashim, interviews, July 2010
her private space to roam the streets of Fes. She rebuked people but no one tried to stop or blame her. Similarly, Mūlāy Ḥafīẓ al-Majdhūb exposed his madness; he left his family behind and chose to live his life freely. His incomprehensible language was highly respected by the people. Thus, despite their madness, female and male majdhubs’ sacredness made their unconventional behavior highly appreciated in their environment.

Furthermore, the majdhūbs present a new picture of Fes, the city of spirituality and orthodox religious. Fes is described in history as the city of ‘ulamā. It is believed to be the center of orthodox religious and Islamic sciences in North Africa. It is also believed that popular religion left no traces in Fes. However, the presence of majdhūbs and majdhūbāt in Fes shows the opposite, namely that this urban space was not only the location of institutionalized orthodoxy but also of popular religious practitioners. The city belonged not only to the orthodox ‘ulama but also to popular saints and mad holy people, who left their mark on its religious spaces. The majdhūbs and majdhūbāt decorate Fes with their shrines, which still enjoy great veneration.

4-1.5 Social and Political Roles

The majdhūb’s sacredness was highly evident from their attitude to the political corruption of their times. As we saw, Ṣafiyya Lubāda rebuked corrupt people. This concerned not only common people in the street, but the ruling elites as well. When she fell into trance, she would run to al-Qarawiyyin mosque, stand next to its door and start shouting: “Yā ‘ulamā! Yā żalama (oh! religious scholars! oh! unjust!).” According to al-Kattānī, Ṣafiyya meant that the members of the ruling elite of that time were unjust orthodox religious scholars.

Likewise, the male saint Abū Rawayin (16th century), who was a majdhūb from Meknes, rebuked the wealthy and political elite for their greed and injustice. He was described by his hagiographer as openly criticizing the governors’ greed and haughtiness. He would ask the rich to give him money to give to the poor. He said to `Abd al-Wāḥid al-`Arūsī (16th century): “Quick buy from me your future and you won’t come to ruin!” If the rebuked person did not give him the money, Abū Rawayin would say: “You are cut off” or “You are killed”, and shortly thereafter that would happen. In another story, Abū Rawayin went to the town of Qaṣr Katāma and climbed the minaret of the central mosque. From there he

307 al-Kattānī 1900, vol. 2,10
308 Ben Mansour 2006
309 Ibn ‘Askar 2003, 75
commanded the governor `Abd al-Wāḥid: “Buy your power from me or you’ll be removed from your position of leadership within a year.”  

Al-`Arūsī’s family did not believe in the power of Abū Rawayin’s utterances and refused to respond to his demands. The following day al-`Arūsī’s family was coerced to leave the country. Abū Rawayin also rebuked the royal elite. When the Sa`diyin rulers conquered Meknes and turned to assault Fes, Abū Rawayin went to the Sa`diyin leader Muḥammad al-Shaykh al-Mahdī and said to him: “Purchase Fes… from me for five dinars.” Shaykh al-Mahdī refused to respond to Abū Rawayin’s demand, and Abū Rawayin said to him: “Then you won’t take Fes this year.”  

Indeed, the Sultan failed to conquer Fes, which impelled the Sultan’s son, ‘Abd al-Qādir, to interfere and pay Abū Rawayin. In fact, the Sultan conquered Fes in 1549. It is sacredness that empowers either male or female majdhūbs to impose their power on the common people and the elite and to command them to submit to their demands. Thus, madness, which is flavored with sacredness, is highly appreciated and respected by people belonging to different social and political status.

As we will see from the final section of this chapter `Azīza al-Saksāwiyya is another example of this opposing of the political elite. This will be discussed at length. In addition, the woman saint Mu’mina al-Tilimsāniyya, whom we already met before, resisted the political elite of her time by refusing to participate in the orthodox male Sufis’ meetings. She rejected invitations from Ibn Qunfudh and Abū ʿAbd Allah al-Maqrī, one of the great Sufi jurists of Fes. She also refused to meet some of the greatest religious scholars of Fes, such as the famous Sufi scholar Sharīf Abū al-Qāsim al-Sharīf al-Tilimsānī. She said to Ibn Qunfudh: “I don’t want to meet any sharīf.” She refused to meet them because of their corrupt and unjust political relation with the Marinid rulers whose power and authority had caused the deterioration of society as a result of their controversial relations over the success of Abi `Inān al-Marinī’s reign. The urban woman saint Mu’mina did not submit to her contemporary political Sufi masters because of their injustice and corruption.

Similarly, Amīna bint al-Qādī (19th century), rebuked the power of the political elite of her time. Her political role was clear in her resistance to the unjust political elite. In the market places, in the company of other majādhīb, she rebuked the ill political system of the Marinid dynasty. Amīna’s political role was also clear from her participation in jihād against the Iberians (Spanish) and against their invasion of Moroccan port cities. One day, al-Kattānī

310 Ibid.
311 Ibid.
312 Ibid.
313 The death of abi `Inān al-Marinī was in 1358. See Mahmah 1998, 97
contends, she found herself awake in bed covered with miraculous wounds as if she had been participating in jihād. She was symbolizing the injured Moroccans who participated in fighting the Europeans. She was symbolically called to arms in the male dominated public spaces of Fes. Her wounded body showed how women displayed resistance to the Iberians. This woman saint thus participated in the struggle for the country’s independence.

Examples of Moroccan female saints who were political and social leaders are again ʿAzīza al-Saksāwiyya, as will be clarified in the last section and Khadija al-Tamgdushtiya (19th century). According to her hagriographer, Al-Sūsī, Khadija was a leader of her tribe. She headed a war against another tribe.

Other pious women who played political roles are Zaynab al-Nafzāwiya (12th century). She is a holy woman and the wife of Yūsuf ibn Tashāfīn, the Sultan of Almoravids. She helped the sultan in ruling his country. Suhāba al-Rahmāniyya (16th century) was the grandmother of ʿAbd Mālik al-Saʿdi, a sultan of Saʿdiyyin. She was a holy woman who played the role of an ambassador. Khnata bint Bakār (17th century) was a Sufi woman, who was the wife of Mūlāy Ismāʿīl, the sultan of Alawiyin. She also helped her husband in ruling the country and securing peace in most of the Moroccan territories.

### 4-1.6 Ordinary Sainthood

We do, however, find in the literature a number of other women whose spirituality and sainthood did not empower them to reach Divine distraction and who remained faithful to the spiritual performances that conventional norms advocate. These women chose to live their sainthood within their private spaces and among their family members. Such is the case with the woman saint Sayyida ʿĀyisha Bint Shaqrūn al-Fakhār (19th century), who is presented by al-Kattānī as a worshipper, invoker, ascetic, charitable and self-denying woman. She was the daughter of Shaykh Sīdī Muḥammad Shaqrūn al-Fakhār (19th century) and the wife of the Shaykh Sīdī Muḥammad bin ʿAbd Allāh (19th century). Al-Kattānī said of her, “she loved her father … and her husband.” She served them like a murīd serves his shaykh. When her husband called her in the night, she came to him, lit the lamp and provided him with anything.
he wanted. She prayed the dawn prayer with him. Her piety was so strong that her husband said of her: “She was among those women who deserved to be venerated.”

Her daughters, Ruqayya and `Āyisha and her sisters, Amīna, Fāṭima and Ṣafiyya, were described as pious women who were always in the company of their male Sufi relative saints, such as their grandfather Muḥammad bin ʿAbd Allāh al-Muʿīn and their father, Abū al-Ḥasan ʿAlī Bin Muḥammad al-Mughana. In a non-Moroccan context, we already saw how Sulāmī described Umm Aḥmad Bint Abī ʿUthmān al-Ḥīrī (10th century) as a mother who was very pious and faithful to the education of her son Shaykh Aḥmad. He said that she confined herself to their home for more than fifty years. These women preferred to live their piety and to study religion with their relatives and within their private domestic spaces.

Female, domestic saints are wives, mothers, sisters and daughters. Sayyida ʿĀyisha, as referred to above, presented the ideal wife who behaved conform the conventional norms. She was an example of a wife who was devoted to the service of her husband and of a mother who took care of her daughters. The latter followed the model of their mother, serving their male Sufi relatives within their house. These women considered their homes to be a kingdom for their piety and a realm for the construction of their sainthood, which they refused to make public.

Another type of ordinary sainthood is that which is achieved through inheritance. In the field, I met a fifty year old woman healer called Mannāna. She specialized in curing ill children for more than twenty years. According to her story, Mannāna was an orphan. When her mother died, her grandmother, a woman saint and healer, accepted to be in charge of her. Mannāna started to serve her grandmother and to learn from her the way she cured ill children. She said that learning her grandmother’s utterances and deeds is not sufficient to become a woman healer. She added that when her grandmother was on her deathbed, she ordered her to swallow her blessed saliva. Mannāna thus told me that she gained sainthood through inheritance and through serving others. This does not mean that Mannāna is passive and did not construct a saintly personality. Mannāna said that her grandmother transmitted her sainthood to her, but she added that the grandmother placed certain conditions for her on it. She said:

Before I swallowed my grandmother’s blessed saliva, she ordered me to respect certain shurūṭ (conditions).

---

319 al-Kattānī 1900, 330
320 al-Sulāmī 1993, 218
321 Mannāna Muqqaddama, interviews, June 2010
These shurūṭ are: to be always physically clean and pure, always perform the ablution ritual, perform prayers on time, particularly the dawn prayer and recite the names of God at least one thousand times a day.\textsuperscript{322}

Mannāna found herself confronted with specific instructions so as to have a valid sainthood. She was obliged to train her body through self-techniques (performance of ablution, prayer on time, dhikr ritual…) until it performed these practices spontaneously and unconsciously. She added that during the first days of her sainthood, she had difficulty fulfilling the requirements her grandmother placed on her:

\begin{quote}
In the beginning, I had difficulty (…). But I like to cure ill children. I have been practicing healing for more than twenty years now. It has become normal and habitual.\textsuperscript{323}
\end{quote}

Women thus inherited sainthood but under certain conditions. Mannāna had to develop a pious personality, which she succeeded in doing through the application of self-practices. Although women sometimes inherited sainthood from their predecessors, they should not be seen as passive. As discussed earlier, domestic women saints stand in contrast to the majdhubāt, who displayed an outer spirituality. Unlike domestic women saints, the majdhubāt chose to be servants to the public, through which they gained public recognition.

In conclusion, from the narratives, we see more women saints than men practicing their piety in the domestic sphere – which does not hinder them to be agents in the sense of active constructors of their sainthood – but we as well find female saints that chose more public roles. Another difference we came across from the narratives is the role of the female spiritual master as more lovingly than the one of the male master. But apart from these minor differences we can conclude that men and women saints use the same self-techniques.

The stories discussed show both men and women taking piety and mysticism as realms where they could achieve sainthood. Both expressed their deep devotion to God through similar means such as crying, weeping, loneliness and renunciation of worldliness. Both chose learnedness and the pursuit of knowledge and orthodox religious education to become faqīhāt. Like male religious scholars, women attained an orthodox education that enabled them to

\textsuperscript{322} Mannāna Muqaddama, Interviews, June 2010
\textsuperscript{323} Mannāna Muqaddama, Interviews, June 2010
become saints, as we can conclude from the small hints of the hagiographers confirming their acquisition of knowledge.

In addition, women and men both developed the ability to perform miracles as an outer sign of their constructed saintly personalities. Finally, jadhdb is experienced by both male and female saints, who as mad holy people had been attracted to God and publicly performed their holy madness. The construction of sainthood comes forward from these stories as basically gender-neutral. From the above, which types of agency do we come across among these women?

4-2 Women Saints' Types of Agency

What kind of agency did the self-techniques of Moroccan female saints, as inventoried and discussed in the previous section, come down to in the context of the social patterns in which they lived? The next section discusses the various types of agency which these women saints, from the narratives, display.

4-2.1 Ethical Self-formation

As we saw from the previous section, the female saints were applying basically the same self-techniques as their male counterparts. Drawing from our discussion in Chapter One of the concepts of Saba Mahmood - following Michel Foucault - we conceive of these self-practices as the means through which these saints tried to achieve an ethical ‘telos’, which was piety at
the level of sainthood. Their work on themselves, i.e. their applying of all kinds of self-techniques, thus took place in the context of a project of ethical-spiritual self-formation. (Interestingly Foucault uses the term ‘spiritual’ in the context of antiquity’s ethical self-practices, to indicate that not only the mind is involved, but body, heart and soul as well.) They trained their bodies as well as their souls, these being the ethical substance of their ethical spiritual self-formation (see chapter one). They did so on behalf of (their veneration for) God, which is another characteristic of their project of ethical self-formation (see Chapter One). It is this type of agency that we find among Sufi saints, be they male or female. It is the discourse of Sufism which enabled the women to develop their own spirituality and realize themselves as saintly personalities.

Moroccan orthodox religious spaces in the past hardly offered any opportunities and means for women to live their piety and religiosity. They marginalized women. For this reason, women sought a space where they as persons could live their religion. Sufism became a means by which they satisfied their religious needs and developed spiritual skills and abilities. The hagiographic narratives demonstrate the extent to which women forged personal religious paths, and defined their religious selves.

4-2.2 Equality Effects and Egalitarian Effects

The female saints used similar self-techniques as their male counterparts. Their ways of life as narrated in the discourses on them, thus entail equality effects, which sometimes even spill over into egalitarian effects. The gender-neutral self-techniques we found often implied the breaking of conventional rules and values. The hagiographic accounts about women saints are pregnant with instances of their non-conventional behavior. Their choice for mysticism as a strategy to live their piety and to construct saintly personalities differed in many ways from the standards that their local traditional culture imposed on them. These women entered the Sufi path to become other -and more- than their cultural socialization wanted them to be. As we have seen, there are some women who chose to achieve this purpose in the domestic sphere, through their relationship with their Sufi relatives, remaining under their instruction and supervision. Their sainthood did not have a public dimension, but they nonetheless remained challengers to the social construction of femininity.

Another strategy women employed in constructing saintly personalities was spiritual marriage with a saintly male figure, which consequently entailed rejecting conventional marital relations. Fāṭima al-Andalusiya left behind her family in al-Andalus and came to
Morocco to meet her spiritual master Abū al-Madyan al-Ghawth. Likewise, `Āyisha al-Baḥriyya came from the Mashreq in search of the shaykh, Mūlāy Būshīb (Abū Shu‘ayb) (12th century) to study Sufism with him. These women saints and pious figures challenged the conventional rules of their society and followed their spiritual male guides, whom they considered to be exemplary models.

Another way of breaking the conventions was through jadhūb. Women and men who were attracted to God were able to give up their gender roles. The examples of male and female majdhūbs described above such as Ṣafiyya Lubāda, Amīna bint Khawā, Abū Rawayin and Mūlāy Ḥāfiẓ al-Majdhūb, show how they left their families and rejected conventional roles so as to freely live their saintly personalities and spirituality.

Lalla Mannāna’s family convinced her to marry. When she gave birth to her first child, she was afflicted by jadhūb. Eventually, she left home to roam in the medina. Her family brought her doctors hoping she could be healed, but her madness had no cure. Thus, the family took care of her child and left Mannāna to live her Divine destruction freely.

As we have seen Amīna al-Majdhūba also openly rejected conventional roles. Amīna abandoned her family and the conventional marriage her family had arranged for her. Her jadhūb empowered her to roam the streets freely and to be in the company of her spiritual master, `Alī al-Ṣanhājī al-Majdhūb. She married herself spiritually to the man she had chosen.

---

324 al-Tādīlī 1997, 319
325 Janbūbī 2008, 93
326 al-Kattānī 1900, vol. 2, 330
for herself and spent all of her time with him. Her jadhb empowered her to challenge her family and conventional norms, freeing herself for her mad saintly existence.

Sufi women also explicitly destroyed the beauty of their bodies, compelling them to non-material desires and needs. Their strong devotion to and affection for God made them disregard the beauty and health of their body parts, rather, they became so thin and weak that they attracted pity and disapproval instead of admiration and love. This was another way of breaking with the social standards for women, as was the outspoken refusal of many female saints of conventional marriages. Sufi women’s deep passion for God made them refuse proposals for conventional marriages from their male counterparts. As we saw, among other examples, Rabī‘a of Basra outspokenly refused to marry the male Sufi Ḥasan al-Baṣrī.

Al-Tādîlî also refers in his compilation to a number of Sufi women who had chosen celibacy over marriage. The celibate young anonymous woman he met in one of the caves of the Atlas Mountains is an example of a Sufi woman who succeeded in forging her own way of life. These women saints thus consciously showed their desire to live a form of piety of their own making, rather than that of their local environment.

Intellectual forthrightness constitutes another way through which women achieved independence. In the literature, there are cases of women who had access to orthodox education. Amīna al-Zubādiyya learned the Qur’an and reading and writing. She spent her life writing copies of the Qur’an and distributing them to people. 327 Fāṭima of Nishapur was called ustādh. Dhū Nūn al-Miṣrī acknowledged her high educational level and considered her his teacher (‘ustādhī). As a great religious scholar, Dhū al-Nūn was impressed by Fāṭima’s knowledge and accepted to call her “my teacher.”328 This means that women proved themselves capable of acquiring an orthodox education, which was thought to be limited only to males and to have impacted only their male counterparts.

Where these women saints come forward as breaking the conventions for women of their time, behaving and developing themselves in ways similar to their male counterparts, we can conclude that their (narrated) ways of life entail equality effects. They convey that women and men are equal, without using the notion as such. And when we hear Rabī‘a of Basra (8th century) rejecting a marriage proposal she received, by saying ‘God can give me all you offer and even double it... So farewell’ 329 it is hard not to conclude for egalitarian effects as well.

328 al-Sulāmī 1993, 144
329 Smith 1984, 11
4-2.3 Ethical Freedom Practices

We have seen that the ethical self-techniques applied women saints are (mostly) similar to the ones of male saints. This conveys equality effects, as I argued above. Moreover, in the context of the patriarchal patterns in which they lived we can conclude that their ethical self-practices, [i.e. their applying of ethical self-techniques in the context of ethical self-formation], can be called freedom practices. Ethical freedom practices, as we saw in Chapter One, invent positive ethical ways of life which implicitly or explicitly oppose domination. From what we have seen above we can conclude that Moroccan female saints invented alternative - publicly visible - ethical ways of life for women, alternative to the dominant patterns that is: they worked on the limits of the patriarchal patterns they lived in.

Many Sufi women took advantage of the flexibility of Sufism to free themselves from societal constraints. Through the vocabulary of Sufism, they challenged the dominant orthodox religious system and cultivated an independent and personal spirituality. It is in that sense that we can speak in terms of freedom practices. The example of Rabi’a of Baṣra (8th century), who devised her own mystical way, encouraged other women to create their own personal spiritual paths as well.

Women’s independence is evident not only in their choice to lead a mystical life but also in the definition of the type of relationship with God that they chose to establish. Sufi women such as Ṣafiyya al-Lubāda and Amīna al-Bustyūnia loved God so intensely that they chose to roam the streets expressing publicly their sense of intimate proximity to Him, as discussed above. The power of this feeling of proximity empowered them to reject their conventional roles (wives, mothers, and daughters) and to live a mystical life.

Women’s decision to live a personal mystical life of piety and solitude, contradicted the norms of their local environment. Fāṭima al-Andalusiyya, Mūlāy Ḥāfiẓ al-Majdhūb, Abū Rawayin and others proved themselves able to re-orient their religiosity and to cultivate their piety in their own way. They sought and acquired the power to reject the religious style of their local space and to refuse to be led by conventional conservative and traditional norms and values. Thus, Sufi women had the power to forge their own spiritual life, moreover, as a result, they were able to gain and exercise power, thus constructing a way of life as women that was an alternative to the dominant patterns for them.

From the narratives, women saints who engaged in the Sufi path and worked hard to meet God, were rewarded for their strong piety and hard spiritual work by God, who bestowed them with baraka. The latter is a sacred force that enabled them to meet the
hardships of their lives. They easily got God’s answers to their calls and prayers, and they helped people to solve their problems, thus evolving into spiritual leaders. Baraka empowered women saints to exercise power over others.

Their religious leadership is also clear in other respects. Şafiyya al-Majdhūba freed herself from her family’s control and faced the ‘ulamā’ of al-Qarawiyyīn mosque, openly criticizing their injustice and corruption. As we saw above, many people gathered around her seeking her Divine blessing. Rabī’a al-‘Adawiyya of Baṣra (717-801) is an important heroine of Islamic mysticism. A former slave she became one of the founders of Sufism. She is well known for her instruction to people that God had to be loved for His own sake and not out of fear of hell.330

Rabī’a of Baṣra again, is another women saint who had religious authority and power. While traveling to Mecca to make pilgrimage ritual to Mecca, she was delayed so the Ka’ba (the holy shrine in Mecca) rose up and went out to meet her. Seeing this, Rabī’a said: “What have I to do with the house, it is the Lord of the house I am seeking”. When İbrāhīm ibn Adam, Rabī’a’s contemporary male Sufi, traveled to Mecca to perform ritual pilgrimage, he found the Ka’ba was not in its place. He was told that the Ka’ba went to meet a woman. İbrāhīm ibn Adam felt defeated when he saw the Ka’ba approaching in the company of Rabī’a.331 Women saints’ spiritual expertise and baraka empowered them to impose their strong saintly personalities on their contemporaries.

Women saints’ power and authority is recorded in oral and written sources. Through attaining strong saintly personalities they had – and still have - an impact on people. It was this impact that inspired hagiographers to preserve their life stories. As we already saw in the previous section, they not only developed into spiritual leaders, but into political and social leaders as well. We saw how they became leaders of their tribes among others. And in this respect, it is also noteworthy that many tribes are named after them, such as the Lalla ‘Azīza tribe in the Atlas, the Lalla Mimūna (Maymūna) tribe in the Northwest, and the Lalla Ta’lat tribe in the Southwest. Others are the Lalla Zayna tribe in the southwest of Morocco and Lalla Luqaya tribe in Shafshāwun city in northern Morocco.

Equality, and even egalitarian effects of their ways of life as spiritual and political and social leaders once more come to the fore, to such a degree that we can affirm Leila Ahmed’s conclusion - based on Rabī’a of Basra’s independent and powerful way of life - that ‘the beliefs on which feminism rests are an endemic part of Islamic civilization (just as they are an

330 Smith 1984, 98-99
331 Smith 1984, 140
endemic part of Western civilization before the development of the political idiom of democracy). From the above we can conclude that Ahmed’s conclusion is applicable in Moroccan context as well.

In what follows, I will study the life stories of three selected women saints and once more evaluate the types of agency they display, in line with my classification of the female saints’ types of agency above.

4-3 Women Saints and Sufis

In this section, I focus on the life stories of three women saints, namely ‘Azīza al-Saksāwiyya, ʿĀyisha al-Idrīsiya and Fāṭima Muḥḍūz. Each one of them represents different groups of female saints. ʿĀyicha al-Idrīssiya represents the female saints of the north of Morocco. She is an example of Moroccan-Arab, urban, married women saints who engaged in Sufi life and constructed a pious and saintly personality. She also represents North Moroccan-Arab female saints whose conventional roles as wives and mothers did not confine them to the domestic sphere, but who instead actively developed a public spiritual personality.

Lalla ʿAzīza al-Saksāwiya represents the rural Berber women saints of the Atlas. She is an example of Berber women saints who renounce marriage, fertility and family life, and challenge the hardships of rural life, so as to seek piety and achieve the knowledge of God. She is also a representative of Moroccan saintly women who played political roles and marked history with their legacy.

Finally, Faṭima Muḥḍūz represents southwestern rural Moroccan women saints and Sufis, in particular female majdhūbat and rural married women of this region. She exemplifies women who refused to stick to their conventional roles, such as wifehood and motherhood, through becoming a majdhūba, leaving behind their children, husband and family to live their piety and spirituality. Al-Kattānī refers to a number of majdhūbāt and other women saints of Fes who in this way refused submission to the family order and to the domestic roles that patriarchy imposed on them.

The selection of the three women saints is also based on the detailedness of their hagiographic and oral life stories. In comparison with other entries of female saints theirs are more detailed. The relative abundance of details enabled a more in-depth discussion of their lives, in particular in terms of the different self-techniques they used to transform themselves into saintly personalities.

Ahmed 1989, 144
4-3.1 `Azīza al-Saksāwiyya (14th century)

The primary hagiographic story of `Azīza al-Saksāwiyya is the one found in the hagiographic work entitled *Uns al-Faqīr Waʿīzz al-Haqīr* (The Intimacy of the Sufi and the Greatness of the Denigrated) by the Sufi jurist `Abd al-ʿAzīz ibn al-Khaṭīb who is known by the name of ibn Qunfudh (14th century). As we saw before this hagiographic record is a compilation of saints, Sufis and holy people belonging to Morocco and other Maghrebian countries. It includes only saints who were disciples of the axial saint, Abū Median al-Ghut. Ibn Qunfudh collected his entries from other hagiographic records such as *al-Tashawwuf* and from narrators. He also recorded life stories of the saints he met and lived with. One of these saints was Lalla `Azīza Al-Saksāwiyya whom he met in the Atlas.

Ibn Qunfudh contends that he heard of her in al-Qarawiyyin University in Fes, before he met her in High Atlas. He then records that he travelled to the Saksāwa tribes in the Atlas and met `Azīza there:

I heard of her in al-Qarawiyyīn mosque…. I saw Lalla `Azīza on a mountain called Qihra (free). She blessed me with her Divine grace. I stood with her, and I studied with her. Then, she left me to meet her tribes’ men and women. I saw her putting a veil on her head before she got out to meet her people. She delivered a lecture to men and women who were always around her. She was eloquent in speech and in preaching. Abū ʿĀmir al-Ḥanṭāṭī, the governor of Marrakech who headed an army of six thousand soldiers, had, arrived planning to conquer the al-Saksāwa tribes. He was advancing with his armies, but Lalla `Azīza stopped him and engaged with him in a long conversation. When he finished his conversation with her, he came to me and said: “Oh! Faqīh! What a surprise? This woman is a wonderful person. She answers me before I ask her anything. She knows in advance what I have in my mind. She knows my ideas and my thinking. I have never seen a person like her. I find myself unable to reject her demands. Indeed, her arguments are so pertinent and convincing that I decide to leave the Saksāwa tribe in peace.”

---

333 Ibn Qunfudh 1965, 86
Oral literature constitutes an important additional source on `Azīza’s life story. Her living descendants whom I encountered in her shrine still chant her story to her pilgrims. Her descendants reported the following story:

Lalla `Azīza was born in the Saksāwa tribe and grew up in a Sufi family. From childhood, `Azīza learned God’s words, commands and rules. She also worked as a shepherd for her family, guiding her into the mountains where she prayed to God and lived peacefully in retreat. The Sufi girl was continuously scolded by her father for leading the goats to mountain slopes where there was no grass. One day her father followed her to the mountains and found her praying to God. He shouted at her because she did not guide the goats to the banks of the river where grass was in abundant. “Father,” Lalla `Azīza said “Look at what your goats are eating.” The father turned to his goats and found their mouths full of herbs. From that time on her father and the whole tribe believed that Lalla `Azīza was a “tagurramt,” a woman saint” sent to them by God.

The narrator stopped for a while, then carried on reciting the story:

It is said that one day, Lalla `Azīza was alone with her goats in the mountains and a young man who wanted to marry her followed her. The young man wanted to kidnap her, but she suddenly disappeared in front of his eyes. The Sultan of Marrakech also heard about her sainthood and invited her to live in his castle. There, Lalla `Azīza continued to study religion and the Islamic sciences. People said that she even traveled to Tlemcen to study in Abū Madyan’s zāwiya, and when she came back to Marrakech, her sainthood had grown and was propagated. The Sultan proposed marriage to her, but she refused his proposal, so the Sultan threw her in jail and ordered her jail guardian to offer her a poisonous food, but she refused to eat. Since Lalla `Azīza finally could not stand the hunger, she decided to eat the poisonous food. She said: “In the name of God I will eat it, and for the sake of God I will die.” It is also said that the Sultan ordered his servants to build her two shrines, one in her native tribal territory and the other in Marrakech. 334

Both the oral and written stories thus provide some details about `Azīza’s mystical development and experiences.

334 Mohamed, interviews, June 2010
4-3.1.1 Ethical Self-Techniques

As the narratives show, 'Azīza undertook different self-techniques to become a saint. She comes forward as overwhelmed by a desire for spirituality since early age. She is presented as a Sufi girl who lived in a Sufi family, but who desires to be in retreat. This is clear from her insistence to be alone with her cattle in the mountainous areas, where she enjoyed God and His universe. Her strong desire for spirituality and piety is also clear from the resisting of her father’s orders. She followed her desire for retreat, and did not respond to her father’s commands but remained alone in the mountains. 'Azīza comes forward as striving to develop her own piety, taking the mountain as a space where she could live in the company of the Divine.

Another aspect of 'Azīza’s piety was her ability to perform miracles. From the stories, 'Azīza developed miraculous skills since her childhood. They tell that she made her goats healthy, and their mouth full of herbs and grace. Her father and his tribesmen were surprised because they wondered how the goats became so healthy though they were always in mountainous spaces where there was no grass. They wondered how the Sufi girl succeeded to perform this miracle. From the oral stories it is her strong piety to God that empowered her to be unlike the other shepherds whose goats were thin and unhealthy.

Miracles related to shepherding and the protections of the cattle indicate the importance of this woman saint, since in rural society shepherding and the protection of the cattle constitute the most important source of income. For rural people this woman saints’ miracles and karāma are very powerful, since they meet the hardships of their rural lives. 'Azīza’s miracles allowed her to successfully fulfill the role of shepherd and to support her family economically. Her extraordinary skills made the whole tribe consider her a saint who performed miracles and deserved to be worshipped.

The stories above also describe 'Azīza’s rejection of conventional marriages, thus using celibacy as a self-technique to develop her sainthood. She is presented in the stories as a beautiful Sufi girl who was sought for marriage. Many tribesmen proposed to her, but she refused them all. She was able to live the life of a married woman, but she did not want to. She was even asked for marriage by the Sultan and rejected him as well. Her refusal of marriage displays that her heart was so occupied by God that she had no free space to love a man. 'Azīza refused conventional marriages because she was totally devoted to the Divine and did not want to be controlled by dominant matrimonial relations.

335 See above.
Another equally important self-technique was ‘Azīza’s pursuit of knowledge to achieve sainthood, and her embarking on the path of religious studies. Her overwhelming desire for religion impelled her to leave her family home, which was located in rural Saksāwa tribal territories, so as to move to Marrakech to study religion. She even traveled to Tlemcen in Algeria to study Sufism in Abū Madyan’s zāwiya. There she became one of his disciples. Once back in Marrakech, her religious reputation spread and people gathered around her to listen to her sermons and lectures.\(^{336}\) This shows that ‘Azīza refused to remain an ordinary Sufi woman. Instead, she chose to satisfy an overwhelming desire to learn about Islam and Sufism. Her quest for knowledge empowered her to leave her family and her tribe and to become a preacher and a lecturer, enabling her to maintain followers and disciples who benefitted from her knowledge. Her hagiographer, ibn Qunfudh, acknowledges her scholarly status, having already heard of her in al-Qarawiyyīn University. Her religious knowledge gained her great fame and a positive reputation that seemingly reached orthodox religious centers like al-Qarawiyīn. He also confirms his respect for her status as a knowledgeable and capable teacher, by personally studying with her and seeking to learn from her (see the hagiographic story above). This shows that she was a scholar whose knowledge impressed male Sufi jurists like Ibn Qunfudh. His recognition of her as being superior to him in intellectual and spiritual respect, enhanced ‘Azīza’s reputation as a scholar and saint, and contributed to making her sainthood and religious expertise more widely known and publicly visible and accessible.

By means of all self-techniques mentioned, ‘Azīza undertook a lifelong project of ethical self-formation. In what follows we will see that her ethical self-formation did exceed the limits of the patriarchal patterns that were imposed on her and that she succeeded not only in transgressing them but in developing alternative ways of life as a woman in society.

4-3.1.2 Ethical Self-formation as a Freedom Practice

We have concluded that through their ethical self-practices, Moroccan female saints developed alternative ways of life for women, in working on the limits of patriarchal, oppressive patterns and practices. The life stories of the three saints I selected show exactly this.

First of all, ‘Azīza’s life stories stressed women’s abilities to achieve a Sufi self-formation that resists the dominant order. Like other women saints, ‘Azīza refused women’s

\(^{336}\) Venerators, interviews, June 2010
submissiveness to the dominant conventional norms. Her stories above show how she created a pious personality and how she believed in her abilities to achieve a personal pious life. The stories show that her desire to become a Sufi personality increased since her childhood and developed in the course of her life. Since her childhood, 'Azīza wanted to improve her spiritual status, and she was determined to live the different stages of Sufism and be involved in training herself to reach an advanced stage of piety above the ordinary one. She engaged in retreat, dhikr and the recitation of the Qur’an, as well as charitable actions (see the story in the above section).

Her endeavors to live the hard Sufi path are visible in her success in reaching proximity and God’s union. Her proximity and axial sainthood did not prevent her from serving people. Rather, her saintly personality empowered her to be close to her people and serve their needs. 'Azīza’s new personality made her very aware of her people’s problems, and she decided to use her knowledge, piety and service. Her stories portray her as a knowledgeable woman who delivered her knowledge and education to her tribesmen and as a political leader who sought people’s help, sustenance, justice and peace for her community.

'Azīza’s saintly status and image, which resulted from the way she reached sainthood, empowered her to have and exercise public power. Her saintly personality permitted her to have an impact on the common people as on the elite. Both showed her great respect and admiration. This is clear from the admiration and respect evident in Ibn Qunfudh’s descriptions of her being surrounded by the men and women of her tribe (see the story above). ’Azīza succeeded in achieving a form of popular sainthood that extended into the countryside and urban centers. The power of her sainthood enabled her to play the role of the political leader of her tribe. Her method for dealing with her tribesmen and women when they encountered crises and problems demonstrated her skills in the political arena. She made her tribe a center of refuge, security and reconciliation. She took on the role of the arbiter saint who not only defends tribal territory against the maghzen, but also among tribes in a context where the central authority wielded no authority and where controversial relations over water, lands and animals prevailed.337

Although women were denied political rights and access to decision-making procedures and positions, 'Azīza constituted an exception. She proved to the dominant society her abilities to be a political leader, which was particularly notable in a rural context, where women’s rights and life conditions were significantly disregarded in comparison to those of women in the urban centers. She was the exact opposite of those women saints who

337 Hammoudi 1974, vxx
confined themselves to caves and private spaces and of those male saints who in vain tried to attain public power. 'Azīza achieved a mode of orthodox sainthood that empowered her to become a powerful public political and social leader.

To understand 'Azīza’s political empowerment, we need to place her story in its historical context, i.e., from the end of the 13th century till the end of the 14th century. 'Azīza lived during the last years of the Marinid dynasty. In this era, the Saksāwa tribes were like most other Berber tribes in dissidence (sība). Confrontations between dissident tribes and the central authority were increasing. The Marinid central authority in Marrakech was in its decaying years. It entered into controversial relations with the Watāsiyyīn. The dissident tribal territories became a space of refuge for the poor, homeless and refugees. People who fled from the makhzen turned not only to dissident tribes but also to zāwiyas for security. The Iberians (the Spanish) had also started to conquer the coastal regions and port cities. Under these conditions, the Watāsid dynasty had defeated the Marinid’s weak political system and conquered Fes which turned the capital of its new dynasty.

From her hagiographic record, 'Azīza was engaged in jihād against the political leaders, not against the Iberians but against the central authority (al-Maghzen) and against its plan to place the Saksāwa tribes under its control. As a leader of her tribe, 'Azīza challenged Muḥammad al-Ḥanṭāṭi, the governor of Marrakech, and his plan to put the Saksāwa tribe under his control (see the story above). 'Azīza defended the autonomy of her tribe. She acted on behalf of her tribesmen and tribeswomen to eliminate the threat to their stability and autonomy. With her rhetorical speech she inhibited al-Ḥanṭāṭi’s power and its political intentions. Her miraculous religious rhetoric impelled this man of great authority to submit to her demands, change his plans and leave the Saksāwa tribes in peace. Although Ibn Qunfudh did not transmit exactly what 'Azīza said to al-Ḥanṭāṭi, it is possible to assume that she called for a respecting of God’s instructions to embrace love, peace, respect and mutual assistance among Muslims, and that she instructed the governor that respect for life was essential. She likely performed the role of a preacher who spoke out against violence, war and destruction. 'Azīza’s success in influencing the powerful elite with her strong spiritual image, and convincing them to withdraw from their destructive plans, emanated from the saintly power that she had developed and that empowered her to defeat her enemies.

Another instance where 'Azīza’s political power was displayed was in her resistance to the Sultan’s injustice. The story above shows that the Sultan was impressed by

338 al-Naṣīrī 1954, 40-50
339 Saksāwa tribes remained for two centuries in dissidence. See al-Naṣīrī 1954
ʿAzīza’s sainthood and therefore invited her to his palace. But the growth of her sainthood and its popularity made the Sultan fear her and later on imprison her. This sheds light on the traditional and controversial relations between the political corpus and religious people, which were current in 14th-century Morocco. It also reveals the oppositional relations between, on the one hand the Sufis and saints, whose power emanated from their Divine grace and impelled people in pre-colonial Morocco to respect them, and, on the other hand, the political rulers who had begun to lose their legitimacy. The Sultan failed to realize that ʿAzīza’s popularity was due to her developed saintly personality that appealed for justice, love, peace and non-violence. Her resistance to the Sultan shows that a rural Berber woman from the mountains could counteract the power of the political system. She indirectly instructed the Sultan and taught him moral lessons, such as the way to gain God’s love and people’s admiration and support. The Sultan’s failure to follow Lalla ʿAzīza’s example resulted in his use of violence against her, which entailed her imprisonment and death.

ʿAzīza’s resistance to the Sultan is exemplified in her choice to die rather than to submit to his wishes. The Sultan tried to make her eat poisonous food. She first resisted him by refusing to eat the poisonous food, but she later resisted him by choosing death rather than living a life of humiliation, injustice and oppression and by imposing on the Sultan the way he should bury her sacred body. The Sultan’s decision to build her two shrines, one in Marrakech and the other in her tribe, demonstrates the power of her saintly personality, which retained its great power even after her death. Having two shrines dedicated to her shows the power of the sainthood ʿAzīza developed which survived her death and remained an eternal force among not only the elite but the common people as well.

ʿAzīza’s ethical spiritual self-formation thus involved not only that she changed herself religiously, but she went on changing herself socially and politically as well. Her highly religious knowledge empowered her to access the political sphere. From her hagiographic and oral life stories, ʿAzīza was selected by her dissident tribesmen as the leader of the Saksāwa tribes so as to settle her people’s conflicts and attend to their needs. She proved to the public that women were able to reach a political leadership that women in modern Morocco are denied. ʿAzīza achieved a political self that impressed her male followers who showed her respect and submission. Her hagiographer, ibn Qunfudh, witnesses how she managed to successfully preserve her tribes’ freedom against the Marinid government that sought to put the Saksāwa tribes under its control.

Her free ethical self-formation entails not only her remarkable self-transformation into a political and social leader, but also her development as a religious scholar through her
quest for orthodox religious science. ʿAzīza belongs to a Sufī lineage. The latter marked the history of her region Saksāwa by knowledge and the status of highly scholarly ʿulamāʾ and Sufi jurists. She lived in an orthodox religious space that was dominated by men and which ignored women. Through Sufism, she, as a woman, succeeded following the path of knowledge and achieving an orthodox religious education that used to be assigned only to males. ʿAzīza’s example is but one among others, as we saw in the preceding chapter, of highly educated women in Marinid Morocco who had chosen education as a tool to change themselves. ʿAzīza was impressed by her scholarly religious environment and engaged in the search for knowledge. As her story shows, she wanted to change herself, following the model of murīds traveling from one space to another for the search of education and religion. She achieved the status of ʿālima through her continual traveling to Marrakech and searching ‘ilm (science) from highly scholarly ʿulamāʾ such as Abū Madyan al-Ghawth and others. She succeeded in transforming into herself to a Sufī and knowledgeable and highly educated woman. She represents the Sunni Sufism in Morocco that stresses the embrace of Shari’a’s and Sufism. She combines sciences and Sufism in a manner Zarrūq stresses as crucial for the formation of a Sufī personality.

Being brought up in a Sufī family, ʿAzīza was able, to develop her own spiritual path, contra what was expected from her. Sufism enabled her to develop a free style of spirituality that, working on the limits of the dominant patriarchal patterns, culminated in an alternative way of life for a woman. In other words, we can conclude that she was able to develop an ethical self-formation in terms of an ethical freedom practice.

From these descriptions of the self-techniques that ʿAzīza followed to achieve sainthood, she is not different from male counterparts, such as her master Abū Madyan al-Ghawth (12th century). His strong desire for religious knowledge likewise impelled him to leave his family and go to Marrakech and later to Fes. From the brief description of Abū Madyan’s life story, we learn that ʿAzīza and Abū Madyan underwent similar experiences. Both were employed as servants and shepherds by their families, both experienced an overwhelming desire for religious knowledge, which suddenly arose inside them, and both left their families to study and teach about Islam and Sufism. Another point of commonality shared by Abū Madyan and ʿAzīza is that they both relinquished their gender when they

340 al-Manūnī 1979
341 See the preceding chapter
342 According to al-Ṭādīlī 1997, Abū Madyan was an important contributor to the development of Sufism in the Maghreb. He was an axial saint, and his doctrine of Sufism spread across North Africa. He was born in Ceuta (Spain). He was an orphan and his cruel brothers forced him to serve as a shepherd for their cattle.
entered the Sufi path. Their life stories portray them as having given up the traditional male and female social roles. In order to devote themselves to the contemplation of God, ‘Azīza refused to marry and become a housewife and mother, and Abū Madyan avoided the conventional roles of husband and father. Both of them also founded zāwiyas to train murīds and feeding the poor, sheltering the homeless and rebuking the unjust was of great personal significance to them personally. Thus ‘Azīza was equally experiencing and constructing sainthood as men in her time.

4-3.2 ʿĀyisha al-Idrīsiya (16th century)

One century after the death of ‘Azīza, another interesting woman saint appeared, as is recorded by her son, the hagiographer Ibn ‘Askar al-Shafshāwunī, one of the greatest Sufi jurists of the 16th century. He wrote a compilation, of biographies of Moroccan saints and Sufis of the North, entitled Dawḥat al-Nāshir. Based on oral and written sources, his hagiography includes entries only on the male saints he encountered, lived with or heard about. In Dawḥat al-Nāshir, Ibn ‘Askar, however, also writes on his mother ʿĀyisha:

Among their numbers is the female saint my mother ʿĀyisha bint Aḥmad bin Ṭālib. She was a ṣaliḥa of Sharifian descent. She was always consistent in nightly prayer and dhikr. In her zāwiya in Shafshāwun, she preached to people and recited the Qur’an to them. She fed the poor. She learnt the Sufi path from the great spiritual masters such as Abū al-Baqā’ al-Ghazwānī, Sīdī Muḥammad al-Habdī, Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ḥājj al-Ghazwānī and others. Shaykh al-Ghazwānī said to me that he used to put his hands on Lalla ʿĀyisha’s head, when she was still a child and said: “This young girl will have a great importance (sha’n ‘ażîm).” Lalla ʿĀyisha also cured ill people. She put her saliva on the pained part of the patient’s body, and it soon became healed.

She used to be a woman with good ethics and baraka. Her intercession is much desired by people. Many people asked her to interfere on their behalf to God to achieve their needs. They also asked her to secure them. Through her, God guided people to the right path. My father told me that when he and his friend were kept by the enemies in Tangier and put in a jail under the ground, they lost hope to ever be free again. They spent
ten days in the jail. My father suddenly said that he heard the voices of my mother and of her friend, Umm Raysūnī, saying to him: “never mind, God will soon release your and your friend’s imprisonment.” After a while, my father said, the jail keeper came to them and opened the door of the jail and ordered them to leave. The commander of the jail asked them to return to their country because they were free. When my father returned home, he told his story to my mother. She answered him: “I met shaykh Abū Muḥammad al-Ghazwāni in a dream and told him about your situation and he said to me: go with Umm Raysūnī, to your husband and get him out’. I got up and I called him from my place of prayer and God answered my praying”.

I had a misunderstanding with Muḥammad bin Rashīd, the governor of the north of Morocco. The Sultan al-Ghālib bi Allāh Abū Muḥammad al-Shafshāwunī appointed me as a jurist and preacher in Qaṣr Katāma. My mother Lalla `Āyisha refused to move with me to Qaṣr Katāma, and she decided to remain in her own zāwiya in Shafshāwun. From time to time I travel to Shafshāwun to visit my mother. Since I was busy I sent just my servant to visit her and meet her needs. Ibn Rashīd was envious and thought the messenger I sent to lalla `Āyisha was a spy. So he went to Lalla `Āyisha and said to her: “Either you cut your relations with your son or you follow him to Qaṣr Katāma.” Lalla `Āyisha answered “God does not allow the breaking of relations among relatives. So I am going to leave Shafshāwun once and for all.” Ibn Rashīd regretted his wrong deed, and he asked her pardon and to remain in her zāwiya. But Lalla `Āyisha refused. Ibn Rashīd said: “We have caused ourselves a serious offense. We hope for God’s forgiveness”. When the Sultan al-Ghālib bi Allāh heard about ibn Rashīd’s wrong deeds towards lalla `Āyisha and other people, he ordered his army to put him in jail. Ibn Rashīd fled to the Middle East, where he was killed and ripped into pieces.343

In spite of her hagiographic story and her name and reputation, `Āyisha’s life story is forgotten in most regions of Morocco. However, she still enjoys great fame in Qaṣr al-Kabīr and Shafshāwun cities. She also has an alternative name, which is Lalla al-`Āliya meaning “the highest”. During my fieldwork, I asked her devotees, who sitting near the chamber that houses her tomb, about her alternative name. They explained it by saying

343 Ibn ‘Askar 2003, 30-3
that she was once very pious. According to the imam of the mosque nearby, it was because “she was ‘Āliya fi dīn,” meaning she had a high level of piety and religion.

While I was leaving the mosque where her shrine is located, I heard a child screaming. I rushed to the door, and I found a forty year old woman holding a sick child whose age did not exceed three years. The woman ran to the closed door of Lalla al-‘Ālya’s sanctuary, dropped on her knees and put her sick child against the wall of the shrine. Both the mother and the child were weeping, supplicating God and the holy Lalla ‘Āyisha to save the child’s life. All the female visitors did this to find favor with Lalla ‘Āyisha and secure her assistance. Later on I understood that ‘Āyisha al-Idrīsiya was a woman healer. Ghita, a sixty years old woman and a seller of clothes in one of the shops attached to the mosque, says: “Lalla ‘Āyisha is a šaliḥa and a woman healer. This is what I know about her.” Most of the people I interviewed reported that they knew nothing about this woman saint’s life except that she was a pious woman healer.

‘Āyisha’s shrine was closed more than seven years ago. However, her venerators keep performing their ziyāra rituals outside the mosque to be more precise, they are usually found sitting in front of the mosque’s door, with all their attributes, shops etcetera.

During one of my routine visits to her closed shrine, one of the rituals being celebrated there attracted my attention. The pilgrims took their seats near the closed door of the shrine where they proceeded to place a variety of foods including bread, olive, tea, and couscous. One of the women started to distribute the food to all the people sitting near the shrine. The women took some of this food back home to their families. Through these rituals, they sought to distribute their women saint’s baraka, the implication being that this woman saint still has an impact on her venerators who try to assure, through their rituals, the continuity and survival of their relationship with their beloved woman saint.

4-3.2.1 Ethical Self-techniques

The story of ‘Āyisha informs us of the way she constructed a pious personality. ‘Āyisha’s sharifian origin cultivated the seeds of sainthood in her, enabling her to become pious and spiritual. Her sharifian origin made her and her family part of the elite who were highly respected in the hierarchal society they lived in. Her piety emanated from her childhood. Her father’s Sufi shaykh ‘ujāl al-Ghazwānī, predicted her future sainthood during her early

344 Fatima, interviews, September 2010
345 A detailed study of women’s rituals within the shrines of women saints will be given in the next chapter.
childhood. He read in her eyes her ability to construct sainthood, which she developed during the course of her life as her story shows. Her piety, as described in the story, included the self-techniques of continuous performing of nightly prayers, dhikr and reading the Qur’an. Furthermore, she made her zāwiya a space for leading a pious existence with other women, as well as a center for offering social services to the needy. Her charitable acts such as feeding the poor, helping the needy, healing the sick, and curing the injured also marked her sainthood.

‘Āyisha was surrounded in her zāwiya by people who sought her blessing and advice. Al-Ghazwānī visited her to glean some of her baraka, and advised his murīds to visit her to benefit from her baraka too. Her sainthood impressed orthodox shaykhs such as ‘Ujāl al-Ghazwānī’s son, Shaykh Muḥammad al-Ghazwānī. Her piety empowered her to successfully carry out the role of wife and mother, faithfully serving her husband and family. She brought up her son and supervised his education until he became one of the important official orthodox jurists of Morocco during the Sa’diyīn dynasty. She proved herself to be a dedicated servant of her family and devotees in her zāwiya, successfully compromising between private and public responsibilities. This is evident from her desire to remain in her zāwiya and not to move to al-Qaṣr al-Kabīr to live a prestigious life with her son. Her devotion to God and to the service of the people was so strong that she decided to remain a servant of the devotees in her zāwiya (see the story).

Another aspect of ‘Āyisha’s sainthood was her political role as opponent of Ibn Rashīd’s unjust political system, as we saw in the story above. ‘Āyisha lived in the 16th century during the reign of Sa’diyīn dynasty. The country was under the threat of Iberian colonial rule, which had begun to wield power on the coasts. Its port cities, which were invaded by the Christian missionaries, became the site of confrontations between the central authority and dissident Berber tribes. Under these conditions, Moroccans turned to marabouts and holy persons for refuge and help.346 ‘Āyisha had a zāwiya where she treated the injured, fed the hungry, offered shelter to the homeless and taught murīds. Her charitable and spiritual personality enabled her to gain the respect of the Sultan al-Ghalib bi Allah, who rewarded her son with a highly official status, and who chose her site against the unjust governor Ibn Rachid.

Furthermore, ‘Āyisha served as a mujāhida, according to her hagiographer. She did not participate in battles, but took part in the jihād by treating and healing the injured. She would put her blessed saliva on the injured body parts of the mujāhidīn and their wounds

346 al-Nāṣirī 1954
would soon heal. She also cured the ill and rescued prisoners who had been captured by the Iberians. For example, her husband was captured and imprisoned by the Iberians, while participating in the jihād against them. After ten days of imprisonment, he told his friend, who was in prison with him, that ‘Āyisha would rescue them. He had heard her calling to him, telling him that he and his friend would be soon free. Soon thereafter, a guard appeared and the chains suddenly fell from their ankles. From that moment on, ‘Āyisha’s community was convinced that she was a real saint. She not only fought the enemy, but she also saved many Muslims from death.

‘Āyisha’s political role also took the form of resistance to the political elite, which was headed by Ibn Rashīd. This was clear in her reaction to Ibn Rashīd, the governor of the north of Morocco. Here ‘Āyisha had a strong attachment to her zāwiya and to her people. She refused to live with her son because she wanted to be close to her followers and to serve the mujāhidīn. She sacrificed her son’s company for the welfare of her zāwiya and people. As a consequence, she faced the governor with great courage. She taught him an ethical lesson that stressed the importance of the respect of social bonds, norms and Sharī‘a instructions. The power of her threat was clear when Ibn Rashīd felt coerced to regret his wrong deeds towards her and her son and went to her zāwiya asking her pardon. From the story above we see that he nevertheless died, which can be caused by ‘Āyisha’s baraka which she bestowed on him in a negative way.

‘Āyisha’s stories show how ‘Āyisha undertook a lifelong ethical self-formation. This process is clear in her strong desire to become pious and in the tools she employed to achieve a pious self. She benefited from her Sufi family, which helped her to become spiritual. But the story describes her continuously practicing self-techniques such as retreat, dhikr, recitation of the Qur’an, fasting and praying rituals to develop her faith in God. Here ‘Āyisha engaged in the Sufi path to improve her ordinary religious self and she reached an advanced status of piety that empowered her to play important roles, including education, preaching and teaching.

4-3.2.2 Ethical Self-formation as a Freedom Practice

347 Ibn ‘Askar 2003, 30
348 Ibid.
349 Ibid.
`Āyisha stands for literate mothers who played important social roles. She represents the mothers who educate themselves to fight their illiteracy. Her strong desire to learn about religion is clear in her continuous attendance of her fathers’ Sufi friends’ lectures and in her interest in listening to their sermons. Like `Azīza, `Āyisha took education as a tool to change her ordinary personality. `Āyisha represents the educated mother who can give her son, Ibn ʿAskar the hagiographer of her entry, an important education. This probably helped him to become an important jurist of his time. She most likely transmitted to him her knowledge and what she learned.

In her zāwiya, she was always preaching to men and women and was transmitting her knowledge to them. She did not want mothers to remain illiterate. Rather, she wanted them to revolt against their confinement in domestic private spaces where she thought they remained illiterate and passive. `Āyisha is the symbol of literate mothers whose literacy and knowledge are important for themselves as well as for the education of their children, so as to help them to become good educated citizens. `Āyisha changed herself and wanted people to change themselves as well.

Another example of `Āyisha’s self-formation is clear from her attitude towards the political elites. In her hagiographic story, `Āyisha revolted against the corrupt political regime of her time. Her transformation into a very strong pious woman empowered her to become conscious of the political events that Morocco witnessed at that time. She was criticizing the corrupt and unjust political elite. She empowered herself in a way that she was able to raise her voice and publicly ask for justice, and to have nationalist feelings to participate in fighting the colonisors, the Iberians.

`Āyisha’s story shows her conformity and non-conformity to the patriarchal norms. She accepted marriage and procreation. Yet she subverted these norms through her revolt against women’s confinement in domestic spaces without education and knowledge, as well as through her reactions against an unjust political system. Her strong pious, knowledgeable self demonstrate her challenge to gender divisions showings that women of sainthood are able to transgress the patriarchal order. `Āyisha al-Idrīsiya’s life displayed her power and challenge to the dominant order, and, as such, it can count as an ethical freedom practice.

4-3.3 Fāṭima Muhdūz (19th century)

The hagiographer of Fāṭima Muhdūz is Mukhtār al-Ṣūsī who wrote a compilation of Moroccan rural saints of the Sūs region, southwestern Morocco, entitled Afwāh al-Rijāl. He
gathered their life stories from oral and written sources, such as al-Hudaykī (2006) and others. The compilation is composed of male and female saints’ entries. One of the Susi women saints mentioned in his compilation is Fāṭima Muḥdūz. Her hagiographicaher said:

Fāṭima was a rural Sufi woman from Tīznīt. She heard the spiritual master Šīdī Sa’īd Sūsī al-Ma’ādrī discussing the actions an individual must undertake to become a saint one day during his visit to her husband. “Good intention (niyya ḥasana), faithfulness, confidence and self-denial”, Šīdī Sa’īd said al-Ma’ādrī said, “are the conditions of sainthood.” Fāṭima Muḥdūz heard him explaining these conditions to her husband and said: “I decide to become a saint (...) If my husband fails to be a saint, I will succeed to be so.” She said again: “I get up from my place (...) I know I am still menstruating, but I forget about the husband, children, and the world.”

The following day, Fāṭima confined herself within a room for a number of days. She refused to talk, eat or even feed the child she had just given birth to. Her husband was worried about her and about the child who needed his mother’s breast milk. He brought her many fuqahā’ to cure her, but her illness appeared to be incurable. To save the child, the father brought him a murḍi’a (a wet nurse). But Fāṭima remained in this condition until Šīdī Sa’īd al-Ma’ādrī visited her husband again. The latter told him about the situation, and Šīdī Sa’īdi al-Ma’ādrī entered her room to examine her. After many months of silence, she started to talk to him about her strong desire to become a saint. After he had left her room, he advised her husband to leave her on her own. She would soon recover he said and left the house.

Lalla Fāṭima’s venerators still preserve her life story. Most of the venerators report what follows:

Our female saint Lalla Fāṭima is our “tagurramt.” She was a pious and holy woman. She was also a shepherd and her goats were always in a healthy state even in time of drought. She lost her parents in her early years of her life. When her piety and sanctity were

350 al-Sūsī 1963, 56-59
351 Ibid.
352 Ibid.
353 Tagurramt is a Berber word, meaning a woman who has a great importance and high status.
spread among tribes, people started to respect her. The great male saints of Sūs such as Sīdī Ḍārnāmī, Sīdī bin Ya’qūb, Sīdī Sīdī and Mūlāy bin Ibrāhīm came to visit Lalla Fāṭima in her house. She also visited them and other saints in zāwiya Ilīgh to do dhikr and give her baraka to people.

4-3.3.1 Ethical Self-techniques

Fāṭima undertook different self-techniques to become a saint. Her story described above gives us an insight into the way Fāṭima constructed her saintly personality in an environment that was purely patriarchal. As we have seen, she was directly interested in the conditions of sainthood that Shaykh Sīdī Saʿīd al-Maʿādrī explained to her husband. She was at that moment an ordinary housewife and mother who was faithful to her conventional responsibilities toward her home, husband and family. Like any other woman in the traditional society in which she lived she eavesdropped on her husband’s conversation with his guest. Her husband to whom the discourse on the construction of sainthood was addressed did not take the shaykh’s speech into consideration. The shaykh’s discourse was formulated in gender neutral terms he did not exclusively or explicitly address males. Fāṭima was listening to his discourse and took it upon her.

At the outset of her Sufi path, Fāṭima, as the story above shows, experienced psychological turmoil and anxiety. The visit of Shaykh Sīdī Saʿīd al-Maʿādrī to her home and her overhearing his discourse about the construction of sainthood coincided with her menstrual period. It was the blood that prevented her from purifying herself and performing her religious rituals. She therefore found herself in a situation of humiliation from which she could deliver herself only through the performance of dhikr. Since menstruation kept her from performing prayer and fasting rituals, she recited God’s names until she saw the light. Peace and tranquility came over her, and her body stopped bleeding. Thus she entered, and began to experience, the Sufi path.

One of the important features of her new spiritual life and its impact was the change in her ordinary daily life. She stopped being an ordinary woman who took care of her husband, children and home. Instead, she became a transformed woman who insisted on the fulfillment of her spiritual desire, neglecting her domestic duties and conventional roles. The spiritual illumination that she began to experience distanced her from her family and the child she had just given birth to (see the story above). Fāṭima had reached an advanced stage
of spirituality and involvement with God, which requires renouncing worldliness and conventional roles, including motherhood and domestic responsibilities. Fāṭima’s new spirituality was interpreted by her family in terms of junūn (foolishness) and not in terms of spiritual illumination.

Her inner spirituality was understood only by Sufis. It is a hidden and a lonely spirituality that mystics experience. It required the expertise of a Sufi shaykh who easily understood that Fāṭima was on the path to the Divine and had begun to experience spiritual illumination. He was the source of her confidence, and she finally accepted to talk to him after refusing to talk for a long time. The shaykh was the one who detected her distress, which could be cured only by the fulfillment of her spiritual desire (see the story above).

Fāṭima’s illness and physical hardships, which were the first states that the Sufi body experienced, have meanings. Physical crises such as illnesses show the transition of the body from one state to another. Fāṭima left behind her ordinary life, and in her process of self-transformation and ethical self-formation, she experienced a transitional state at the physical and psychological level. Her ill body enabled her to live the transitional life a Sufi experiences between the material and the spiritual worlds. It empowered her to contact the spiritual world. Weakness and illnesses enable the body to have a special position, in as far as visitation, consultation and healing rituals are undertaken. Fāṭima experienced these situations, which demonstrated that her illness was psychological, not physical.

Fāṭima Muhdū’z’s life story encompasses all the aspects that relate to women’s mysticism and their conscious construction of sainthood. The most important aspects of her mysticism included her success in achieving spiritual illumination and sainthood and in fulfilling the instruction of sainthood that her husband failed to undertake. She proved herself able to create a saintly personality that not only impacted not only her familial environment but also her venerators who continue to offer her appreciation and respect.

4-3.3.2 Ethical Self-formation as a Freedom Practice

Fāṭima Muhdū’z’s story describes a process of ethical self-formation and self-transformation that challenges patriarchy. Though she was an ordinary woman faithful to her conventional roles, she refused to remain passive. She wanted to achieve a new self-formation by her engagement in Sufism where men and women are able to develop new religious personalities. Her self-transformation into a Sufi personality involved a work on the limits of the patriarchal patterns she lived in. She created a religious way of life according to her own choices. As a
Muslime woman, she wanted to develop her faith and become a strong pious woman. This desire of piety empowered her to revolt against gendered rules, confining herself in retreat and remembering God until she reached the spiritual light. Her male counterparts in the Sūs region were impressed by her religious personhood and religious leadership, and they gave her a space in their memories.

4-4 Conclusion

The selected women saints, `Azīza, Āyisha and Fāṭima, succeeded in creating an ethical way of life through the various self-techniques that the discourse of Sufism offered them. These women who belonged to different Moroccan historical eras undertook techniques such as jadhb and the quest for knowledge so as to become ethical spiritual subjects. `Azīza, Āyisha, Fāṭima Muhduz and other majdhubāt lived in spaces that were even more patriarchal than the contemporary Moroccan environment. In spite of this, these women succeeded to transform themselves and to achieve ethical personalities that challenged the patriarchal conventional norms.

Their self-techniques helped these women not only to be close to God but also to make their closeness to God public and at the service of His people. Women saints were, as Cornell (1998) puts it, expressions of the “Mohammadan paradigm,” which takes the Prophet as a model, encompassing the spiritual, social and political spheres. They were active persons who displayed great integration in the socio-political spaces of their times. They created ethical personalities, which played a role not only in religion but also in socio-political contexts. This conclusion acknowledges Cornell’s definition of walāya and wilāya. Women saints employed the outward aspect of their inner spiritual relationship with God (wilāya) and made it public (wilāya). Women’s inner spirituality gained them power that empowered them to become public saints and to exercise their authority in the social space. Moroccan women saints are empowered to perform miracles, empowered to communicate with God, empowered to help the weak or oppressed, empowered to act en behalf of others, empowered to mediate the course of destiny and empowered to affect the behavior of other holders of power.

354 Cornell 1998, 233; see also Schimmel 1975
355 Ibid., 177
We can conclude moreover, that the life stories on the women saints discussed in this chapter entail equality effects - in the sense that the women come across as equally worthy and capable as men. As argued before, their ways of life can also be qualified as ethical freedom practices.

Other Moroccan researchers who studied women’s mystical lives in history, mostly focused on the question whether these women’s religious actions created modes of behaviour that contradicted or conformed to the dominant order. As we have seen before, Moroccan feminist Fatima Mernissi (1977) interprets female saints as ideal persons who refused to submit to local traditional norms, and who constructed saintly personalities that contradict the conventional understandings of masculinity and femininity. According to Mernissi, the female saints’ personalities do not challenge the dominant order. Their role remains that of a therapist who offers her services to people for them to cope with the formal power structure.  

Mernissi argues that women’s deep attachment to, and involvement with, saints in North Africa is linked to their dissatisfaction with existing society, this being the reason why more women visit saints than men do. Women seek the saint’s help to find solutions to their problems. Mernissi considers the saints’ sanctuaries the permitted space where women’s rebellion against oppressive gender relations and social injustices occurs. Yet, the existing patriarchal order as such is not threatened by these manifestations. Mernissi writes:

Women invest all of their efforts and energies in trying to get a supernatural force to influence the oppressive structure on their behalf.

The saint’s supernatural force fails to change the dominant structure of society.

The saint in the sanctuary plays the role of psychiatrist in the capitalist society, channelling discontent into the therapeutic processes, and thus depriving it of its potential to combat the formal power structure.

Mernissi’s argument concerning women saints’ and women venerators’ inability to change the dominant social order, does not take into account their concrete roles in history that were already challenging the patriarchal system, in as far as they entered the religious space and performed religious roles that used to be for men only. From a more thick description of the

356 Mernissi 1977, 112
357 Ibid.
358 Ibid.
359 Ibid.
lives of concrete women saints next to a discussion of the issue in a general way - the
challenging agency of these women would come more to the fore.

Another study on Moroccan women and religion, dealing especially with the
Moroccan female saint Lalla ‘Awish and her veneration, is van Beek (2002). The aim of this
study on is to uncover women’s presence within Islamic mysticism. Van Beek signals a
scarcity of sources on women saints, since most researchers on Moroccan sainthood have
focussed only on male orthodox saints. Van Beek focuses not only on written but also on oral
sources on Lalla ‘Awish in order to highlight the female presence within Islamic mysticism
and the significance of women’s religious practices.

Van Beek analyzes the mystical symbols mentioned in the legends as well as in the
rituals on Lalla ‘Awish. On this basis she describes Lalla ‘Awish’s piety merely in terms of a
tool to achieve the Divine unity. Van Beek thus does not take into account the hardship of
this woman to change herself into a saintly personality and the struggles she had to engage in
to do so.

A more outspoken contribution to the discussion on women’s religious agency is
Bartels (1993), which investigates the significance of saints for Tunisian women. Bartels
focuses on the question whether these women, through their veneration of saints, protest
against their subordinate position in society. She seeks to demonstrate that this is the case, and
discusses whether that protest is a threat to the existing order.

Both the saints and their venerators play active roles in Bartels’ opinion: saints transmit
divine blessing (baraka) to their troubled venerators. Female and male venerators perform
certain religious rituals to get the saint’s baraka. Bartels also discusses some parallels that
exist between saints and women. Where the saint, as Bartels puts it, is the center of the whole
tribe or even the whole region, women are the centres of their families. The saint helps the
venerators to cope with their troubles, women likewise satisfy their husbands’, childrens’ and
relatives’ needs. Bartels further contends that sexual equity is visible in the space of sainthood
in as far as sexual difference is not a criterion for sainthood.

Bartels argues for the double face that saints have. She contends that saints are rebels as
well as upholders of the existing order in which men are dominant. Women saints as well as
women venerators protest against the patriarchal order and affirm at the same time the
patriarchal system to which they are bound. They are, as Bartels puts it, ‘loyal towards both the

---

360 Ibid., 203
361 Ibid.
362 Bartels 1993, 101
363 Ibid.
dominated and the dominant. From her fieldwork on Tunisian women’s rituals and their symbolism, she concludes that saints are double face, however, she does not explore the lives of the saints themselves. Bartels’ thus focuses on the rituals of saint venerations but does not provide a thick description of the lives of the saints themselves.

By contrast, my thesis draws on the approach of Mahmood (2005; 2001) by discussing the agency of Moroccan women saints, namely through studying the self-techniques that they followed to change themselves into saints. I build on Mahmood’s new approach of religious women as agents who practice ethical self-formation (see Chapter One). As such my study sheds new light on female saints as active agents, and on their impact on their communities. They come forward as agents who gained power and authority that challenged patriarchy and transgressed the conventional norms of gender ideologies. The impact of their agency is also visible in the venerators’ worship of these women saints. These saints’ lives have a considerable psychological impact on women today who consider them as role models, as will be discussed in the next chapter.

364 Ibid., 114
Chapter Five: Moroccan Women’s Reception of Historical Women Saints

My research explores the various ways women exercise agency in the religious sphere in Morocco's past and present. In the preceding chapter I discussed the exemplary lives of female saints. In this chapter I explore the impact these devoted women have on contemporary Moroccan women. For that purpose the focus will be on four types of contemporary Moroccan female religious agents: the functionaries at female saints' sanctuaries; the women who visit and venerate female saints; contemporary women preachers and the women who attend the preachers’ instructional sessions. I research the active ways these women transform themselves to achieve a new level of moral selfhood - i.e., their ethical self-formation - and the role of their holy predecessors in this process.

This chapter is made up of two sections. In the first section I will discuss the different female agents, custodians and visitors, and the various rituals performed within women saints’ shrines. How do the women concerned judge the ways in which female saints and saint veneration impact their lives? The second section will explore contemporary women preachers (wā’izāt) and spiritual guides (murshidāt) and their religious and social roles inside and outside mosques. I will pay particular attention to the way they receive women saints as historical female preachers. The chapter concludes with an investigation of women attendants’ reception of these women preachers.

5-1 Women Saints Veneration

5-1.1 Religious Spaces and Women's Preferences

In Morocco both the mosque and the shrine are public religious spaces. In each one of them a particular set of prayers and religious practices take place. While the mosque visitors try to focus on a direct relation with the Divine, in the shrine the visitor can establish an extra, indirect relation with God through the saint. This view is stressed by the social scientist Valery Hoffman (1995):
The mosque merely directs prayer toward the spiritual center, [whereas] the shrine contains its own spiritual center and the saint, [as an indirect] link to heaven.363

Sossie Andezian (1997) considers the shrine to be an area where religion is practiced through different performances:

The sanctuary not only contains the religious memory of the religion, it is also a symbol of liberty. It is a space where love for God and for the saint is expressed with words, songs and ecstatic dancing.366

This quote underscores the central role of the shrine in the achievement of a private and liberal relationship with the Divine. In the shrine the relation is more personal and tangible than in the mosque. The holder of Divine grace is present, the pilgrims have access to the saint,367 and, if necessary, the functionaries of the shrines (muqaddamāt and others) help them to enhance and improve this relation. Moreover, stories and legends about the saint's karāmāt (miracles) can be heard. These accounts can not be found in written historical sources, but are part of the local oral history. The shrines' functionaries and venerators have preserved them for generations and perpetuate the rituals that they inherit from their ancestors.

Timzgid Ufala (Mosque Above) in Sūs region

365 Hoffman 1995, 104
366 Andezian 1997, 211
367 Gibb 1997, 30
Women employ both the mosque and the shrine to experience their spirituality, renew their piety and construct religious personalities. However, Moroccan women are marginalized in the mosques. They are given small spaces for their prayers and religious activities. They are not permitted to view the imām while listening to his prayers and sermons. They have access to the imām’s speech only through a loudspeaker. They also feel constraint in mosques, finding themselves obliged to follow the instructions for attending masjid (mosque). Especially in the past, they weren't supposed to do more than to pray and leave. Today, their number still remains small in comparison to that of their male counterparts. In the countryside this discrepancy is even stronger.

Although this situation is slowly changing, as we will see in what follows, their marginalization in the mosques has forced women to turn to the shrine to live out their religiosity. Moroccan women’s relationship to shrines of both male and female saints is very strong. Because of the specific character of these shrines, they feel more at ease.

A mosque

5-1.1.1 Shrines: General Features

The shrines of male and female saints in Morocco have similar characteristics. They consist of saints' graves that are located in the center of the sanctuaries. Over the grave of the saint

---

368 Mazumdar and Mazumdar 2002, 165-78. See also the next section.
369 Mernissi 1977; Tapper 1990
370 Ibid.
there is a darbūz (sarcophagus), which is covered by a green cloth. There is a cupola supported by white walls and decorated by Qur’an verses and large candles. On the floor of each shrine, there are multicolored carpets, sheepskins and pillows for pilgrims and devotees to rest on. The shrines consist of several rooms, including public kitchens filled with utensils for pilgrims to use in ritual. Most shrines are attached to mosques.

A mosque shrine

The sanctuaries of holy men or women are surrounded by different objects that have a role in their sacredness. In the courtyard you often find large fig trees, which have tattered pieces of cloth tied to their branches, exemplifying votive rituals performed by devotees. There are also shops where people can buy items such as bread, sugar, tea, oil, sweetly scented incense sticks for ritual burning, tasbih’s (strings of beads; rosaries) and other necessary items for the performance of ziyāra (visitation) rituals.

Some saints’ shrines are attached to traditional religious schools. The gender of the saint is no hindrance, as the example of Ta’lat’s shrine shows, but only male (Sufi) disciples and students are allowed to study the Qur’an and fiqh there. The schools offer preliminary training for lower level positions and preparation for more advanced study of the Qur’an and other Islamic sciences at the Qarawiyyīn University in Fes.
The research here focuses on the shrines of the three selected female saints that were discussed in the preceding chapter- `Azīza, `Āyisha and Fāṭima, for the following reasons. They are all popular and have quite a number of venerated, whereas other women saints’ shrines are rarely visited by women or men. Moreover, the custodians and/or the numerous venerators of the selected women saints were willing to give me a chance to observe different rituals and religious practices. Next to the similarities, differences exist between the shrines and veneration of the women saints concerned.

The shrines of the three saints are all simple, but `Azīza’s shrine is considerably larger. Having living blood relations is an important point of difference between the selected three female saints. Women saints in the Sūs region of southwestern Morocco like `Azīza Al-Saksāwiyya and Fāṭima al-Hilāliyya have descendants, who uphold a strong relationship with them. This relationship impels the descendents to actively take care of the shrines and to organize a moussem (annual festival) in honor of their women saints. By contrast, women saints in the North have no known descendants organizing annual festivities; they have even recently started to witness a reduction in the number of visitors to their shrines. This is the actual case of the woman saint `Āyisha. No one observes her sanctuary. Clearly, different dynamics are surrounding saints in the North and South.
The explanation for the recession in saint veneration activities in the North is orthodox religious education, which has started to gain popularity among educated Moroccans there. Orthodox Moroccans consider religious hierarchy and the veneration of saints to be un-Islamic practices. By propagating their views, they have started to weaken the relationship between saints and their devotees. This, however, does not mean that people in the North have ceased to venerate saints altogether. It is true that Āyisha ‘al-Idrīsiya’s shrine was closed, and the rituals celebrated around her were reduced. But many who stopped partaking in saint veneration still feel esteem, respect and love for their female saints, as we will see from what follows.

In the South, the situation is completely different. Orthodoxy has much less influence on the people. Southwestern Berber women saints still enjoy a great popularity. They are part and parcel of their religio-cultural and ethno-linguistic background. Saints venerators believe that these female saints, who are friends of God, are able to offer assistance to people in need. They are intermediaries between the believers and God and also have curative powers themselves. In their pursuit of healing, pilgrims also find moral assistance and refuge at a sanctuary. How does this work in practice?

5-1.3 Rituals

A visit to a sanctuary is called a ziyāra. Pilgrims undertake daily, weekly, monthly and annual visits to saints' shrines. People’s visits to saints are primarily enhanced by the power of baraka. As discussed in previous chapters, baraka in Morocco is the quality of sacred grace and salvation that saints possess and are able to transmit to others. It is a force that endows women and men with capacities to meet their daily troubles and to protect themselves against misfortunes such as evil eye, bad luck, illnesses and accidents. Regular visits and various rituals aim at a strong relationship with the saints to enhance the achievement of this sacred supernatural force that they incarnate. Moroccan women actively participate in these rituals. In shrines more than in mosques, their religious agency becomes highly visible. This is especially the case on Fridays, l-yum l-mbarek (the blessed day), when hundreds of women visit saints' tombs, and the number of females far exceeds that of males.

In all the shrines I visited, the women performed similar rituals, including trance rituals, dhikr-rituals (repetitive recital of mystical poetic phrases), sacrifice rituals, marriage and fertility rituals, next to the celebration of mainstream religious activities. Venerators are
free to choose the ways to pay respect to their women saints are equally free to perform the rituals they need.

Researchers interpret the rituals of ziyāra related to saints as therapy that cures physical and psychological conflicts. Trance is a special cure that is called ḥāḍra in the Moroccan native dialect. This Arabic word emanates from the root ḥ-ḍ-r meaning “to be present.” ḥāḍra, then, is a religious expressive performance for seeking the Divine presence. The participants submit to the rules of the rituals and put their physical bodies at stake. They cry, scream, devour their energy, and faint, hoping to meet the spirit of their women saints. The women believe that they are possessed by the spirit of the woman saint or by other supernatural beings. Therefore, the trance is a way to live the spiritual world, to glean some of its divine grace and to be cured from different illnesses.

371 Mernissi 1977; Crapanzano 1981
372 Crapanzano 1981, 7
Besides women’s acts and deeds, women’s utterances in the trance are equally important. Women in the North and in the South chant religious ritual texts in their gatherings in the shrines. The texts reveal women’s Sufi orientation by their expression of disinterest in the material world and the wholehearted devotion and love for God, the Prophet and the community of holy men and women. The significance and impact of positive relations between relatives and members of the whole society is also emphasized in women’s poetic texts. Altogether the songs express their desire for spirituality and good social relationships.

Shafshawuni women practicing ḥadra ritual

5-2 Women in Shrines Today

The women I will discuss in this section are women functionaries at shrines and women venerators.

5-2.1 Female Functionaries at Shrines

Not only women saints but also female functionaries at shrines are important to fulfill the needs of pilgrims. They are muqaddamāt (custodians), ḥeḍḍārāt (pious and/or Sufi women in charge of trance dances) and healers. All functionaries display women’s leadership and mediation in rituals and the centrality of women’s active religious agency.
Muqaddamāt

The muqaddamāt are crucial. Whether or not they are descendants of their women saints’ and heirs of their baraka, they are all empowered to behave as the overall leaders of most of the shrines' activities, as the guides of the venerators’ rituals and worship, and the teachers of women. They help women in crises and satisfy their needs. They serve God and people by respecting the instructions of religion. The muqaddama Rqiya\textsuperscript{373} confirms that she does indeed play a wide range of religious and social roles:

The venerators are always asking me to lead the gathering, prayers and other rituals. Most women ask me for baraka that I inherited from my great grandmother Lalla `Azīza. They also ask me to resolve their conflictual relations either with husbands, children or other people. I spend the whole day in the shrine solving people’s problems.\textsuperscript{374}

Muqaddama Raḥma adds:

When I swallowed my grandmother’s blessed saliva, my life changed. I became more pious than before, and I started to assign all my time to people’s needs. I knew I became a holder of a Divine grace, and it was this Divine grace that enabled me to learn by heart the Qur’an and to teach it to people. Women are always around me, some of them ask for my baraka, others want me to offer them solutions to their problems.\textsuperscript{375}

I saw Zayna, another muqaddama of Lalla ’Azīza, in action when a family brought a ram as an offering. In southwestern Morocco pilgrims offer sacrifices during their visits to saints. The sacrificing of an animal was referred to locally as al-ma’rūf. Before the slaughtering of the ram started, the muqaddama painted the ram’s head with henna and its eyes with kohl. These acts, in the opinion of the muqaddama, increased the amount of baraka and ajr (religious merit) obtained by the sacrifice. As she explained, this embellishment and the healthy state of the ram or any other sacrificed animal are necessary for the veneration of saints. According to her, the spirit of the saint will be very pleased and satisfied and her blessings will be bestowed in great amounts on the supplicants. In short, the moqadamat’s doings were supposed to generate more powerful effects for the pilgrims.

\textsuperscript{373} I have used pseudonyms to avoid recognition.
\textsuperscript{374} Rqiya, interviews, February 2010
\textsuperscript{375} Raḥma, interviews, February 2010
In other instances, I observed pilgrims whose financial situation did not allow them to offer a ram as a sacrifice. Instead, they sacrificed a chicken. The old male descendants were the ones who slaughtered the sacrificed animal. When the ram was still bleeding to death, I saw the muqaddama take a bowl and filled it with this blood. She then asked the family that offered the animal to sprinkle their hands with some of this blood and to expose the rest to the sun until it became dry. She advised them to put the dry blood in a piece of cloth and use it as an amulet against evil eye. The descendants cut the right shoulder of the sacrificed animal and offered it to the family that brought the animal to the woman saint. Then they cut the rest of the ram into pieces and distributed them to people in the shrine or attendants at the celebration of the sacrifice. Some of the people cooked the offered meat and ate it. Others had chosen to take their portions of meat to their relatives.

When simpler items are brought in, it is the muqaddama who takes care of their distribution. I saw the muqaddama of Lalla Fāṭima serving couscous to men and women in the shrine. In many ways she plays the role of an intermediary. She said:

This couscous is an offering from a young man living abroad. Whenever he feels he has worries, he sends me the money to organize a ritual meal on his behalf in honor of our holy woman. He asks me to perform this offering to our holy woman in his place and perform his prayers.376

Other women in the sanctuary asked the muqaddama to say a prayer for relatives who are absent. One of these women says: “I come here for my sister who lives in France.” The woman gave the muqaddama her offerings such as a large green cloth as a cover for the grave, and other items like bread, date, tea, and milk. She asked the muqaddama to pray for her sister and transmit her wish.

376 Muqaddama, interviews, February 2010
Fqirat

Fqīra (plural: fqrāt) just refer to be very pious female pilgrims, but inside shrines the term may also refer to the Sufi women who lead the trance dance and prayer rituals. They may also be called ḥeḍḍārāt, after the 'ḥadra', the name of the trance dance, as for example, in the shrine of Lalla Ṭaẓīzā:

Both in the north and the south of Morocco trance attendance was much larger on Friday than other days. On Friday women living near and far went to shrines or zāwiya's to participate in the ḥaḍra. The room where these trance dances were held was so crowded with women that no empty space was left to stretch out one’s legs. It started in the early hours of the afternoon and lasted until sunset prayer. The muqaddama, as the leader of ḥeḍḍārāt (the women who perform the trance), ordered women to prepare musical instruments such as bindīr's (circular frame drums with skinned covered surface), drum and ta’rīja's (small tambourines). Each used a particular instrument while waiting for their muqaddama to open the session. The muqaddama started with the recitation of Sūrat al-Fātīha and some Qur’an verses. Afterwards, she began to drum and chant poetic texts. Some women used the musical instruments, and others chose to clap their hands. When the rhythm of the chanting quickened, women got up, formed a circle and started moving up and down. A middle aged woman whom I called Nejma got in the center of the circle of women and started to jump up and down. I was told that she was in the trance. Her
helper held her jellaba from the back to break her fall. The other women carried on their chanting and ecstatic dancing. Nejma was left in a corner to have a rest. No one paid attention to her anymore. Women carried on repeating their poetic verses ‘Allah ḥayy’ (God is alive) following the new rhythm of chanting. Other women collapsed and sank to the floor too. Their stretched bodies occupied the whole space. Suddenly, one of these women rose and said: “I like to participate in hadra because I feel well in my being and health”. Once the trance was finished, a sweet tea with mint was served with a piece of bread.

* * *

In Lalla ʾAzīza's sanctuary, Zayna is the leader of the fqrāt, a widow, like most of her fellow chanters. I saw her sitting on a sheepskin close to the grave, reciting from the Qur’an. After she performed her prayers in the shrine, she got up and went to a room adjacent to the room of the grave. The room was large. It was furnished with carpets and sheepskins. Its white walls were decorated near the ceiling. Her seat was marked by a white blanket, a pillow and a low table. The other fqrāt sat on the carpet leaning against pillow lining the walls with scarves on but their malḥāf dropped around their shoulders. Zayna opened the session with the recitation of the Qur’an and the praising of the Prophet. In Tashlḥit dialect Zayna and the other fqrāt chanted poetic texts.377 When the mu’azzin called for the afternoon prayer, Zayna ordered women present in the shrine to place themselves in lines to perform a collective prayer. After ṣalāt (obligatory prayer), a woman entered the room accompanied by her son, who was holding lit incense sticks. The fragrance pervaded the whole space. The mother and her son dropped to their knees in front of Zayna to pray for her ill son. Zayna performed a supplication and gave a piece of sugar to the son to eat. I was told that the piece of sugar contains a lot of baraka. At sunset, Zayna prepared to leave the shrine. Before doing so, she gathered up all the donations she had collected during the day and distributed them to the poor fqrāt. She also gave some money to the keeper of the shrine. He said to her “Allah yerḥam al-wālidīn.”378

377 The gatherings of women within shrines to chant poetic texts are called Agraw. These poetic texts treat different religious issues, as will be discussed below. For more details see also Rausch (2004).
378 Allah yerḥam al-Wālidīn means “May God have mercy on the parents”: a way of saying thank you in Moroccan dialect.
Healers

Mediation roles may also be played by female healers. Rqiya, a descendant of Lalla Fāṭima and a healer at her sanctuary, explained that in order to cure ill venerators she bestows her holy foremother’s baraka on them. She does so by spitting, like all saints and their heirs used to do:

Rqiya asked two women holding a paralyzed old man to put him on the ground. Rqiya put her right hand on the man’s paralyzed legs. Then, she started reading an incantation over him. This performance in the Moroccan context is called “kat’azam ‘alih” (reciting Quranic verses over him). That is, the woman healer started to recite bismi Allah al-Raḥmān al-Raḥīm (in the name of Allah, the merciful, the compassionate). Then, Rqiya recited several Qur'anic chapters and supplicated God and the Prophet. Once she finished the incantation, she spit on the paralyzed parts of the ill man murmuring the following words: Allah huwa al-Shāfī (God is the healer) three times. She sprinkled the patient’s legs with tar (qatrān). Then, she took a nail (mismār), put it on the patient’s ill body parts for a while and threw it. This is a symbolic gesture meaning extracting bad omen and getting rid of the illness. 379

Women venerators practicing healing rituals

5-2.2 Women Venerators of Female Saints

379 Rqiya, interviews, April 2010
Women venerators of female saints cover a wide range of categories: young and old, illiterate and literate, sick and healthy. Most of them are in the midst of an emotional or social crisis; many have failed to meet the requirements of the conventional roles. For instance, marriage plays an important role in Moroccan culture. It is a religious and social duty that enables men and women to be labeled real adults and mature Muslims. Marriage is especially important to women. It brings them status. Unmarried women, whose independent lives are not accepted, occupy a third-rate position at the social ladder of Moroccan society. However, the same applies to married, but barren, women. Women in Morocco always consider themselves primarily to be the cause of failures of fertility and reproduction, whereas men always regard themselves as fertile. Married women may also have problems with their co-wives and their husbands’ families. Many women fear divorce because divorced women become subjected to negative designations. The position of women who are left behind is also a precarious one.

All these women's problems and inabilities to live up to the cultural norms urge them to search for spiritual comfort, peace of mind, and relief from daily life pressures. Many rural, illiterate women with no financial means find in the veneration of women saints a budget solution to their health problems. The women visitors in the sanctuaries explained in concrete terms that they come in pursuit of Divine blessing and favors such as a good marriage partner, conception of a male child, and a safe delivery.

Other temporal wishes may include a cure from an illness, a good harvest, success in studies, employment, finding lost relatives, and passing an exam. Of course, there are also
women who have no problems. These women simply seek to live out their spirituality. In addition to the earlier mentioned examples, the daily routines in the sanctuaries of Ta’lat and Fāṭima provide an insight in the endeavours of women venerators to achieve all these purposes:

My host Raḥma, a fifty year-old woman, and her daughter Fadma were always talking about their tagurrramt381 and about the day of the visit to her shrine. Raḥma said: “Friday is the day of visit to our tagurrramt.” With a string of beads in her hand, she turned to me and said: “Do you want to go to Lalla Ta’lat this afternoon?” My host’s neighbors shared Raḥma’s opinion and we all agreed to make a collective ziyāra to Lalla Ta’lat. Raḥma’s painted her eyes black with kohl (antimony) and her teeth brownish with siwāk (walnut twigs) and put on a malḥaf (traditional cloth for covering the entire body). Raḥma took an empty basket and put some loaves of bread, a box of sugar, some tea, oil, dates, incense sticks, and a bottle of rosewater in it. Once we arrived at the shrine, Raḥma and her daughter went directly to the darbūz and kissed its four corners. While they were circumbulating the darbūz, they recited the first chapter of the Qur’an, Sūrat al-Fātiha (The Opening). I also heard them praising the Prophet and performing their prayers (du’a’s). The following prayer supported Raḥma’s desire to find a partner for her thirty year old daughter: “Hope in God, hope in the Prophet, hope in the woman saint. Please! God, help my daughter to get married.” Once Raḥma and Fadma had finished their prayers, Fadma cut a piece of cloth from her malḥaf and tied it to the window of the shrine. She said: “I make an oath to the holy woman to answer my prayer.” She then took a bottle of rosewater from her basket and sprinkled it on the grave as well as on [the] women sitting in the shrine and on the outstretched bodies of other sleeping women. Raḥma asked me to sprinkle my hands and my face with rosewater to gain the woman saint’s blessing. She turned to her daughter and asked her to take some of the earth from the grave because she believed it contains a lot of baraka (blessing). Many girls and women were also seeking to implore Lalla Ta’lat’s baraka by bathing in the holy water of her well hoping to end their life of celibacy and to fulfill other purposes and

---

380 Men who also take parts in the rituals, as well are primarily concerned with finding solutions to their social and psychological problems of sexuality, fertility, masculinity and other crises. In fact their stress hinders them in the performance of the typical male roles. See Crapanzano 1981, 9

381 A Berber word meaning “a woman saint”.
wishes. Zayna, the muqaddama of the shrine and the leader of the fqīrāt (devotees) smiled and led Fadma to the bathroom at the back of the shrine. The bathroom consists of a room with only a curtain in the door opening. A suffocating smell of incense hit the newcomers. The smoke permeated the whole space so that the bodies of women were like ghosts. In a corner of the bathroom, there were undergarments abandoned by women, as a symbolic gesture, which signifies leaving behind “tab’a” (bad omen). Raḥma’s daughter had a bath with the blessed water from the well; she put on new clothes, lit candles and left the bathroom. Once back in the shrine, Zayna was surrounded by fqīrāt chanting, repeating the following words: Subḥāna Allāh al-‘azīm (Glory be to God the Sublime One). Raḥma and her daughter started chanting with Zayna and other fqīrāt. Once they finished their chanting, they hurried out of the shrine hoping to reach their home before dark.  

* * * * * *

An anonymous woman venerator says:

I always came to the shrine and asked Lalla Fāṭima to help me to get married. One day, while I was sleeping in the shrine, I dreamt of an old man offering me new shoes. When I told the muqaddama of what I had dreamt of, she said to me that being offered new shoes meant that I would soon get married. In fact, one week after the dream, a teacher asked me for marriage. It is now more than ten years that I have been married to this teacher. It is for this reason that I always visit my woman saint.  

* * *

Rabḥa is thirty-five years old. She got married to her husband ten years ago. She is barren. “I come here [to the shrine]” Rabḥa says, “to ask Lalla Fāṭima to find me a solution. You see, sister, I am an ordinary woman. Who am I to prevail upon Allah? The woman saint is close to Allah and through the holy woman saint I bring my problems before Him. I have already visited a faqīh. He recited an incantation over me. He prepared some olive oil mixed with his saliva for me to sprinkle on my womb for three days. He also made me a ta΄wīdh (amulet) for conceiving children. He instructed me to dissolve it in water and to drink a little of the water each day for seven days in succession. It has now been two
years since I did what the faqīh told me, but I have seen no change. Finally, I decided to visit Lalla Fāṭima hoping to find a solution for my case. I killed a chicken and spent three days in her shrine.

Orthodox rituals equally take place around saints’ tombs. Most of the women within the shrines perform the ritual prayer (ṣalat). There are women who had chosen to perform prayers of either two, four or even more raka‘āt (sing: rak‘a, prostration). Its meaning differs from that in the ordinary mosque since women consider the shrine a holy place where the ajr (religious merit) of prayer ritual is doubled. I also observed women fasting and breaking their fast in the sanctuaries. They all chose to celebrate their ifṭār close to their favorite women saints. One of the fāqīrāt (very pious women) said: “We always gather here to do our prayers, fasting, and reading of the Qur’an. Each Friday we cook couscous and offer it to poor people.”

The religious rituals that these women, both in the North or in the South, perform nowadays are similar to those described by earlier researchers such as Edward Westermack (1926), Fenneke Reysso (1977), and Kelly Pemberton (2004).

5-3 Spiritual Development and Empowerment through Saints’ Rituals

Mernissi (1978) and Bartels (1994) stress the functional goal of women’s visits to the shrines. They conclude that Moroccan women’s religious rituals around women saints only serve practical goals. However, from my research I found that women venerators gain more from their strong attachment to pious women, namely spiritual development.

While venerators of women saints visit shrine to strengthen themselves to cope with daily life issues, they also use the cults for spiritual self-development. They may learn a lot from the functionaries in the shrines, who in many cases experienced a period of growth and learning themselves. Raḥma relates:

When I swallowed my grandmother’s blessed saliva, my life changed. I became more pious than before, and I started to assign all my time to people’s needs. I knew I became a holder of a Divine grace, and it was this Divine grace that enabled me to learn by heart the Qur’an and to teach it to people.

384 Ibid.
385 Ibid.
386 Raḥma, interviews, April 2010
The baraka that Raḥma passively inherited from her saintly foremother empowered her and made her feel responsible to actively search for more knowledge and to have other women profit from it.

A woman in trance

Fāṭima, the muqaddama of `Azīza’s shrine, offers another powerful example for women venerators. During my fieldwork in that shrine, I forged a deep friendship with the fifty-year-old Fāṭima. The latter had completed secondary education, was married and had two children. During my continuous encounters with her in the shrine, I came to know that Fāṭima has been the muqaddama for more than twenty years. She had visited the saint from an early age:

I have started visiting Lalla `Azīza in my childhood. I used to go with my mother to her shrine each Friday. Each time I visited her tomb, I met other women. We chanted the dhikr and prayed together. My mother taught me how to venerate Lalla `Azīza. After her death I carried on learning the cult of saints and participated in its ritual practices until I became a muqaddama of the shrine. I cannot separate myself from the shrine and from guiding people’s religious practices because these kinds of works render a lot of ajr, I am primarily seeking a good afterlife. I am now accustomed to being present everyday in the shrine. When I don’t come to the shrine, I do not feel well.387

387 Fatima, interviews, April 2010
She appeared to be very experienced in the art of saint veneration. She also called herself an expert in the teaching of the cult of saints and in the teaching of religion. Like all muqaddamāt, she headed women’s religious circles in the shrines and guided women’s rituals. Due to her strong religious personality she appeared to be a woman with power and authority. How had she achieved that status?

In the field I saw Fāṭima focused on the notion of good intention (niyya) as the primary condition of saint veneration. I heard her advising a woman to venerate ‘Azīza’s shrine with good intention. She says: “diri niyya temshi b-ḥajt-ek maqḍiyya”388 “Maintain positive intention and your request will be accomplished.” Here niyya is a standard of saint veneration and the achievement of a desired religious life-style and a strong spiritual personality. The muqaddama insisted on its consistent embrace. Her conversation proceeded as follows:

The good intention is important not only while visiting ṣalihīn but also in our daily contacts with people. Without niyya one can not get what one wants. God also insists on one’s positive niyya. If I act without niyya, I will be a hypocrite because I don’t feel it inside of me, and my visit to the shrine contradicts my inner intention and my natural feelings.389

The muqaddama encourages women venerators to cultivate niyya in themselves while venerating their woman saint. In fact, Niyya is more important than anything else in the construction of pious selfhood. That is why the women feel free to express their love to God in the way they want: by words, songs or ecstatic dancing.390 They take liberties that can't be taken within mosques and that also meet resistance from orthodox Muslims. Saint veneration is important issue in the debate among Moroccan believers, men and women alike, especially in the North. Many women venerators are fully aware of that. Still, they adhere to their choice to participate in saint veneration. It is a practice that reasonates with their inner feelings by allowing them to develop spirituality on a personal level. Fāṭima firmly stated:

The Islamists come to the shrine to warn women against saint veneration. They want to close the shrine. I don’t care about their preaching. These people don’t have niyya ḥasana (good intention). I won’t do what the ikhwān (the Islamists) say and leave the shrine and the

---

388 Ibid.
389 Ibid.
390 Andezian 1997, 211
veneration of saints. 391

Rqiya, an old woman sitting near us, interrupted our conversation to say:

My relationship with Lalla ’Azīza is very old. I have been venerating Lalla ’Azīza for about twenty years now. Each time I visit her, I put on new clothes and make myself very beautiful. In the past there were a lot of visitors to her shrine. These people used to have niyya. But people now have lost niyya (…). Of course it is al-Madrasa (schools), which makes people stop visiting saints. These people are hypocrites because some of them still have a desire to be with saints and to visit them (…). Look at me, although I went to school to learn how to write and how to read, I did not let the school affect my relationship with Lalla ’Azīza. Each Saturday I visit her shrine and stay the whole afternoon in her shrine. I cannot spend the week without visiting our tamghart. 392

Caroline Humphrey (1994) calls this process “ritual commitment.” 393 In this case, it means that women created for themselves a strategy to preserve their relationship with women saints and saint veneration. Given the backgrounds of women saints, they also commit to their cultural heritage and to their ethnic identity. For example, all the rituals I observed in the South are performed in Berber language. During the religious gathering in women saints’ shrines, they chant poetic dhikr-texts in the local Tashlḥit. There are even some rituals such as, such as the tying of rugs to windows and trees, that still exist and that date back to the pre-Islamic period. In the north of Morocco, women use their native Arabic dialect in the performance of their rituals. Women chant poetic texts that they composed themselves or that they inherited from their Andalusian forefathers. Women in contemporary Morocco seek self-expression in rituals they see as fit for themselves. They defend their popular religion.

391 Fatima, interviews, April 2010
392 Ibid.
393 Humphrey 1994, 88
This shows that although women’s religious actions have been interpreted as passive and marginalized performances, women are active religious persons, constituting their own religious voices. However, as we will see in what follows, the female venerated opposition to Islamists and Islamism does not mean that they have a negative attitude towards orthodox Islamic education as such.

**5-3.1 Empowerment by Association with Saints**

Both in the north and the south of Morocco, pilgrims are keen to hold close personal relationships with their favorite women saints, but many like to go one step further. They want their families to get involved, too. Women may buy small gifts from shops close the shrines to offer them to the relatives left at home. Their goal is not only to transmit the saints’ baraka to their family members, but also to encourage them to establish independent relationships with their favorite women saints. In this way their own bond with the sacred shrines grows even tighter, while the number of venerated of their women saints increases. Venerated as I will discuss below derive empowerment from saint veneration because it inspires them to actively change themselves, and take their life into their own hands, so as to become a servant to God and people.

Not surprisingly, these women devotees are eager to learn about the lives and deeds of their women saints. They are observed spending the whole day within their shrines. More importantly, the association with a widely respected female saint gains devoted women respect in their environment. Their overall status is enhanced with the perfection of their religious and social personalities. No one can deny the achievements of great women saints.
and the benefits to learn from them. This is especially the case when these saints are also considered as the foremothers of their families or founders of their tribes.

![The venerators of Lalla Aziza al-Saksawiyya](image)

### 5-3.1.1 Holy Female Founders

In Morocco, saints were the usual founders of patrilineal and patrilocal society. They passed on sainthood to their descendants. The extended saintly families came to have clans, which developed into tribes. The latter increasingly displayed their blood relationship to their saintly ancestor, and not without result. There were even tribes that associated with a saint figure who was not really their biological forefather or ancestor, as we saw in the preceding chapter. The continuous relationship with neighboring saintly clans made them followers to their saints. The male saint here is the hub, the center of segmented tribalism. Interestingly, in the field, foremothers of saintly families proved not to be uncommon with many women consider themselves as their proud descendants.

Most of the saints’ venerators acknowledged that both male and female saints could become founders of saintly families and that both had followed the same strategies to be the head of a lineage. Some venerators interpreted a woman saint as a foremother of their lineage in terms of the baraka or Divine grace that God bestows on her. Khadija, an illiterate female venerator, simply stated that baraka makes people venerate saints (either women or men) and remain attached to them as the forefathers and foremothers of their tribes and saintly

---

394 See Gellner 1969
families. Other venerators interpreted the way a woman became a founder of a saintly family in terms of her continuous struggles to have a great piety and faith in God. These efforts resulted in her being admired by God and offered sainthood, and consequently, in becoming the foremother of tribes. An old female venerator, whom I called Bamou says:

Lalla Fāṭima had niyya (intention) to become pious. She devoted the rest of her life to God and ignored the dunyā (material life) … the dunyā is deceitful. It makes one lose one’s faith in God. But Lalla Fāṭima chose to be with God, who made her a saint.

Bamou referred to niyya as a driving force for cultivating strong piety. According to her, Fāṭima al-Hilāliyya had the intention to become a saint, and she engaged in piety and in the marginalization of material life. Another devoted female venerator of Fāṭima al-Hilāliyya stressed the role of piety in making a woman saint into the founder of tribes. This old woman contended:

Our tagurramt used to be a great tafqirt. She prayed to God day and night. I remember my grandmother telling me that Fāṭima was very patient. Her husband was very cruel to her. He brought a second wife into the house, and he did not give her a share of the houswork. She did all the housework with her mouth shut. She never complained. In the night she threaded wool garments and her heart was reciting the names of God.” The female venerator stopped for a while and continued: “It is her ṣṣabr which made her have all of these”. She was saying this and referring to the cupola and the venerators.

Here, ṣṣabr is not just a personal feature or characteristic but a self-technique that women saints actively used in facing the hardships of life and in the fulfillment of a highly mystical life: ṣṣabr does not mean passiveness because it has an explicit and positive goal. Fāṭima al-Hilāliyya embodied the practice of patience to become a saint. Her patience, as the old female venerator puts it, gained her a shrine where pilgrims have venerated her until today. It urged people to affiliate with her sacred lineage. More than thirty tribes claimed to be the descendants of Fāṭima al-Hilāliyya. Similarly, a great number of rural tribes and clans still

395 Bamou, interviews, April 2010.
396 Ibid.
397 Tafqīrī is a Berber word meaning “a very pious woman.” It is the equivalent of the Arabic faqīra.
398 A woman venerator, interviews, April 2010
venerate ’Azīza al-Saksāwiyya as the foremother of their saintly family.\textsuperscript{399} This shows that gender is not taken into consideration in the veneration and the affiliation to historical saints.

Holy women brought strength to families, clans and tribes. Whole villages are named after them. It is not surprising that in the south of Morocco women saints like Fāṭima and ’Azīza are called by the Berber word tamghart, meaning “leader or greatest.”\textsuperscript{400} “She is the greatest in spirituality and piety and all the people here are strongly attached to our tamghart,” a woman venerator of Fāṭima explained.\textsuperscript{401}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{image.png}
\caption{A woman venerator}
\end{figure}

\textbf{5-3.1.2 Women Saints as Empowering Role Models}

Most venerators in the north and the south of Morocco stressed that the women discussed in the preceding chapter are qudwa's (examples) in religion and piety. Whoever takes these women saints as role models gains their strength and empowerment.\textsuperscript{402} Others added that they perceive them as such because they succeeded to achieve a level of piety which was even stronger than that of male saints. With the achievement of a stronger baraka these exemplary women were able to impress both females and males.\textsuperscript{403} A woman venerator of Lalla Fāṭima says:

\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{399}] Ibid.
\item[\textsuperscript{400}] By contrast, small domestic women saints who had not served their society in a similar way did not receive such honorific titles. This hierarchy of sainthood applies to men, too.
\item[\textsuperscript{401}] Rqiya, interviews, April 2010
\item[\textsuperscript{402}] Ibid.
\item[\textsuperscript{403}] Ibid.
\end{itemize}
I have already visited Mūlāy Abū Ya`qūb, Mūlāy Ibrāhīm and other male saints, but I prefer Lalla Fāṭima because she has a strong baraka, and she answered all my prayers. I prayed for her to bestow her blessing on my unmarried daughter, and my daughter got married. I also prayed for her to cure my ill husband, and he was cured. It is her strong baraka that makes her highly venerated and respected.  

The shaykh of zāwiya al-Ṣiddīqiyya described Āyisha as his favorite woman saint. She played such a big role in his spiritual growth that he considers her to be his spiritual mother:

One night I saw her in a vision. She told me to stop visiting the male saint Sīdī Brāhīm who is the grand-forefather of my saintly family. From that time I had this vision, I decided to be her follower.

Here the shaykh who usually performed weekly visits to his forefather Sīdī Ibrāhīm whose tomb is close to Lalla ʿĀyisha's decided to develop a strong relationship with her. Lalla ʿĀyisha gave birth to his desire of spirituality and made him become more pious than before. He says:

This vision doubled my interest in piety. I began to read a lot about saintly women and men and to visit their shrines. The Islamists of our city called me al-Qubūrī (an addict to grave visits) because of my continuous visits to saints’ tombs. However, what they don't understand is that my visits to saints don't mean that I am seeking their baraka, but that I am seeking their example. Lalla ʿĀyisha makes me believe in women's abilities to become saints. A woman is like a man. She can reach the stage of iḥsān.

Women saints do not only show that women can achieve the highest states of learning and spirituality, but that they may also choose the lives they want in order to get there. Many venerators appreciated the way women saints lived their piety and sanctity, Raḥma says: “Lalla ʿAzīza refused marriage and dedicated her life to God. She decided to remain unmarried in order to better worship God and to devote herself to Him.” The imam of the mosque where ʿĀyisha al-Idrīsiyya’s tomb is located contended that ʿĀyisha was highly

---

404 A venerator, interviews, April 2010
405 Ibid.
406 Ibid.
knowledgeable and advanced in religion, and if one wanted to become like her one had to work hard.\textsuperscript{407}

More importantly, venerators actively put forward women saints as role models. They do so in various ways. The shaykh of the zāwiya al-Ṣiddiqiya mentioned above says:

\begin{center}
In the zāwiya I give my murīd's a weekly course on Moroccan saintly figures including women. I explain them the saints’ life stories that I found in hagiographical books. My aim in this course is to take these saintly people as examples to imitate.\textsuperscript{408}
\end{center}

The shaykh did not only strive to familiarize his disciples with Moroccan saints and Sufis, but he also taught them that women were able to become saints with miraculous deeds and to render themselves public religious figures. He propagated that they are worthy examples to be followed by everyone.\textsuperscript{409}

Many women venerators who praise women saints' religious lives in their songs actually follow her path of piety. Devotees of Lalla Fāṭima prayed and fasted over long periods of time. They also distributed food and gave charity to poor people because, as some older ladies put it, Fāṭima also used to do so during her lifetime.\textsuperscript{410} Their visits to women saints shrines didn't have therapeutic purposes, they just aimed at improving themselves by creating a moral personhood, in other words, an ethical self-formation.

And that was exactly why most of the venerators interpreted their relationship with women saints as a form of empowerment. The ṣūkrāt I met in the shrines of the women saints I studied regularly contended that their frequent visits to women saints empowered them to think of their piety and the way to perfect their religion and spirituality to achieve their women saints’ perfect spiritual and social status.

\section*{5-4 Mutual Empowerment}

Fact is that venerators do not only gain power from women saints, but that they themselves also invest power in these holy women. Venerators seek help and empowerment from their saintly women to overcome their hardships and crises. They seek these women’s sacred blessing as a counterforce to gender injustice and discrimination. But these women

\textsuperscript{407} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{408} Shaykh, interviews, July 2010  
\textsuperscript{409} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{410} Ibid.
venerators also empower these historical women saints. This is evident from their continuous visits to their tombs, the rituals that they perform within shrines and the chanting of stories about their lives. One might notice here that venerators unconsciously revive the memory of these historical women saints and keep their legacy alive within their contemporary modern environment. They indirectly offer them a space to remain alive and present in their modern life. They give them the status they feel the women saints deserve. They empower them to empower them. This conclusion is similar to that of Jansen, Hermkens and Notermans (2009), who also acknowledge the accidental relationship of empowerment existing between women saints and venerators.\footnote{Jansen, Hermkens and Notermans 2009, 8}
5-5 Contemporary Women Preachers

At one instant during my fieldwork in the shrines, I heard the women venerated discussing a religious course that they attended in one of the mosques in the old medina of Qaṣr al-Kabīr. My curiosity was raised so I asked them why they followed these courses. A forty-year-old venerator, whom I called Khadīja, told me she had heard about instructional courses by women preachers from friends and more particularly from Moroccan TV channel al-Sādisa.

Khadīja has a primary level of education and decided to undertake an extra strategy to educate herself. She is not satisfied with the shrine and its traditional religious cults alone, so she also started frequenting the orthodox religious institution of the mosque. Khadīja and other women venerated believe in saint veneration and in orthodox Islamic education at the same time. For them, visiting saints and visiting mosques are both important strategies that help them to construct a stronger religious personality and to gain God’s forgiveness (ajr). Khadīja contends:

What we learn in the course in the mosque helps us to pray to God directly, while in the shrine we pray to God through Lalla Ṭāyiṣa al-Idrīsiya. What are we in front of Lalla Ṭāyiṣa? Of course we are nothing! Lalla Ṭāyiṣa is a friend of God, and we pray to her to pray God on our behalf.412

Khadīja admired Şafiyya, the woman preacher in the mosque: “I like Şafiyya’s way of teaching the Qur’an and the Hadith. I regularly attend her lessons”. Her views on Şafiyya prompted me to do further research on murshidāt and voluntary women preachers and highlight their active religious agency and the way they achieved a religious personhood.
5-5.1 Official Feminization of the Religious Practice

Over the last decades, Moroccan society has undergone a radical transformation within the religious sphere. The growth of urbanity and education has prompted ruptures with the traditional life styles and conduct rules. In response, Morocco worked to combine the traditional and the modern in all walks of life including religion and gender.

The state has contributed enormously to changes in religious gender roles. Some of these changes were initiated and realized under the reign of the current king, Mohammad VI. Moroccan women who had fought to achieve the highest level of education, succeeded in gaining approval for their employment in different fields of society. Among these fields are politics and religion. The latter stopped to be an exclusively male domain on the official level due to Morocco’s reform project to democratize the institution of religious authority. The main objectives of the reforms were first to modernize the religious sphere; second, to make the transmission of religious knowledge national, and, finally, to promote the state’s new perspective on the management of religion.

One of the most remarkable moves introduced by King Mohammad VI and the Moroccan authorities was to incorporate women’s religious knowledge and authority in the public national network of religious affairs. Women became members in the High Council of

---

413 Sadiqi 2008
414 Ibid.
415 Ibid. See also Rausch 2011
‘ulamā’ and set out delivering religious lectures during al-Durūs al-Hasaniyya organized by the Ministry of Religious Endowments and Islamic Affairs during the month of Ramadan.

From 2005 onwards, the Ministry of Religious Affairs has started an annual program in which fifty women are trained in religious matters. The graduates, called murshidāt or “religious guides” receive a training that consists of Islamic courses in the Qur’an, Hadith, fiqh, Muslim history, and courses in social sciences, humanities, law, technology and foreign languages. The combination of Islamic and modern courses is important for them, because their job is not only to transmit Islamic knowledge by preaching and education but also to serve women, offering them help for their social and personal problems. To be accepted by the state as a religious guide, the applicant has to be under forty years of age, hold a Bachelor’s degree in Islamic studies, Arabic language or literature.

Murshidāt are still to be distinguished from murshids, the male counterparts of murshidāt. The murshidāt whom I interviewed said that the only difference between them and their male counterparts is the Qur’anic recitation as a condition for admission to the program. The male religious guides are supposed to recite the entire Quranic text; whereas the female religious guides are supposed to memorize just half of the holy book. Yet another difference between the female and male religious guides is the kind of works and activities they perform. Both are trained to work as preachers and guides in religious and public institutions throughout Morocco. However, the murshid plays the role of “imam” and can lead prayers while murshidāt are not allowed to do so, at least not in formal public settings, like mosques. By consequence, the male murshids have more steady jobs in mosques or institutions because they are temporarily asked to replace the imams and lead prayers and deliver sermons. The murshidāt who are denied this role of leading prayers serve as religious guides in a more scattered range of mosques, youth houses, hospitals and prisons. Finally, the roles of the murshidāt are given more priority than those of the murshids. This priority is clear in the Ministry's decision to make women religious guides very visible. Their work is more highlighted in the media.

Murshids can play the role of imams, but imams are not necessarily murshids. The imam's job needs less education.
Some female preachers write articles on Islamic issues and publish them in monthly religious magazines, such as *al-Tadhkira* and *al-Tabshīra* that are affiliated with the Ministry of Islamic Affairs, under whose auspices they work. Others present a daily religious program or weekly courses on the radio or on TV for the network al-Sādisa. In addition women preachers answer women’s text messages or phone calls to give fatwa’s (legal advices). One female preacher says:

I can’t turn off my mobile phone. People call me a lot asking me about different religious matters and social problems… Some of them ask me about the perfect way to perform ṣalāt for example, or about the ones who deserve to be given alms (ṣadaqa). Others ask about their conflict with their children and many other issues.

They may also make use of the internet and send their sermon texts by mail to their followers. Moreover, the Ministry organizes trips for female religious guides outside Morocco to serve Moroccans living abroad and offer them religious knowledge.

Besides the murshidāt, other highly educated women appear in the official religious realm, albeit without being paid. These expert volunteers are called wā’izat. They have varied backgrounds and educational experiences. They are not required to undertake the murshidāt's long training program. Nevertheless it is also expected from them to learn half of

---

417 Wa‘iża, interviews, October 2011
the Qur’an and to present a lecture as parts of the evaluation process. As soon as they are admitted, they are offered spaces in mosques to preach and serve women and men.

Graduated Murshidāt

Due to the reforms, much has changed in the Moroccan religious sphere since 2005. The mosques, which used to assign a small space to women for worshipping God, have started to open more doors to women and to provide them with prayer rooms to exercise and learn religious knowledge. In my fieldwork, I observed murshidāt instructing women and men in the large, in the central space of the mosque and in other public institutions such as universities, hospitals and schools. However, what is striking here is that it is the women preachers who took the initiative to extend their religious activism to other audiences beyond mosque attendants. Nezha, an active woman preacher who consciously developed an independent life style that is not dictated by traditions, was the ultimate campaigner. As a murshida, she not only accounts on her official training, she also uses her own personal development in her preaching. She says:

I always participate in meetings in the administrative center (mandūbiyya). I frequently proposed to the director that I and other sisters (akhawāt) offer our courses in schools, hospitals, prisons, orphanages and other institutions. I told him that we have to think of people who can not come to the mosque and listen to

418 Dwyer 1978; Mernissi 1978; Tapper 1990
419 Mandūbiya is an administration affiliated to the Ministry of Islamic Affairs.
When I met the director of the mandūbiyya, I asked him about Nezha’s proposals. He confirmed her demands. In fact, Nezha’s proposals were officially accepted. Indeed, Nezha and other female preachers and religious guides got permission to expand their religious activities to other institutions. Their strong desire to proliferate religious knowledge and to help a large number of people impelled them to exert great energy and effort. The success of their activism greatly exceeded that of their male preacher counterparts. Nezha explained:

Female preachers and religious guides work better than male religious guides and male preachers. Our activism has yielded positive results. All the students, prisoners, orphans and patients admired our preaching and friendship. They told me that they liked our way of teaching and our way of advising them in dealing with their social crises.

Nezha stopped for a while and then continued:

If I compare my work with that of the imam, I can say that I work harder and better than him.

When I asked her in what way she says:

If you notice the imam’s work, you will find that his work is limited only to the mosque. He leads the daily five prayers, and he rarely presents a religious course to the mosque attendants. I have never seen him engaging in activities in other places.

Here Nezha was fully aware of her important role. Though her religious activity was not led by traditions, she still achieves recognition among large audiences. Her notoriety and authority far exceeded that of the imam. The same applies to her preaching sisters.

Consequently, women preachers in Morocco enjoy more egalitarian educational and employment conditions than their female colleagues in Egypt. Their position can’t be equated to that of the Egyptian women preachers in their mosque movement as described by Mahmood (2005), either. The latter just operate within the (largely traditional) women

---

420 Murshida, interviews, July 2011
421 Ibid.
section of the mosque and their opportunities to get public attention are minimal since they have no access to the media. Since they never preach for a mixed audience, their recognition by men is limited. In contrast, by entering spaces and practices previously closed for women, Moroccan female religious agents transgress the traditional limits imposed on women.

5-6 Female Religious Guides’ Activism and Education

Nowadays, the institutions of murshidāt and wāʿizāt are well-known in Morocco and finding several women religious guides proved to be rather easy, although not all of them wanted to talk to me.\textsuperscript{422} I already mentioned activist Nezha. In the mosques of Rabat and Salé, I became acquainted with two other women preachers whom, I will call Naʿīma and Amīna. Naʿīma is married and has children. She worked as a university teacher in the Faculty of Letters and Human Sciences in Rabat. She taught Islamic studies for more than thirty years. When she retired, she dedicated herself to giving religious lectures in mosques.

In one of the mosques of the old medina of Rabat, I found Naʿīma sitting on the minbar (the imam’s pulpit). She was preparing to deliver a lecture on the rules of Qur’anic recitation. Both men and women were sitting on the carpet facing Naʿīma, listening attentively to her dars (lesson). Through a loudspeaker, she opened her religion lesson by reminding the attendants of the last lesson. Then she started to explain other new rules of Qur’anic recitation. “Today’s dars,” Naʿīma explains, “is on the way to pronounce the letter al-Hamza while reciting the Qur’an.” According to Naʿīma, the pronunciation of al-Hamza depends on the context in which it occurs. She adds that the pronunciation of this letter is called iẓhār, meaning “to make its pronunciation heard”. Its non-pronunciation is called iḍghām. Naʿīma based her course on Nāfiʿ a Moroccan religious scholar.\textsuperscript{423} Before she closed her session, she asked one of the male attendants and one of the female attendants to recite some Qur’an verses applying the rules she had just explained. Her aim was to see to what extent her attendants had understood her lecture. The next time I went to the mosque, I found Naʿīma speaking about other rules of Qur’anic recitation. There was also a cameraman filming her delivering her lesson. I was told that the Ministry of Islamic Affairs wanted to present Naʿīma’s lectures on the Moroccan religious TV channel al-Sādisa so that the Moroccan public could benefit from her religious courses.

\textsuperscript{422} Up till now however, the vast majority of women preachers has worked mainly in urban areas. In the countryside they are more sparse, and hardly touch the influence of zāwiya’s.

\textsuperscript{423} See al-Marghani 2007
It was in Masjid Badr in Rabat that I met Amīna, who gave weekly lessons in this mosque. Amīna was fifty years old, married and had two children. One Friday I found women sitting on the carpet in the room assigned to women in the mosque waiting for the arrival of Amīna. When Amīna arrived, she went directly to sit on her armchair, and women were sitting shoulder-to-shoulder facing Amīna. Her religious discourse in the mosque was different from that of Na`īma. In the course of four Fridays, Amīna gave lectures on good fasting during Ramadan. She instructed women on the importance of Ramadan in the life of a Muslim. She explained to women that the embrace of the virtues: patience, help, love, faithfulness and others was very important in the sacred month of Ramadan in ensuring God’s acceptance of one’s fasting. She also advised women to do a lot of praying and reading of the Qur’ān since the performance of these duties and good deeds during Ramadan is greatly rewarded `ajr. Ajr in Ramadan, Amīna explained, is doubled. She continued advising women to do their ṣalat (prayers) on time, to feed the poor and fasting people, and to remember God. At another meeting, Amīna recites some Qur’ānic verses and explains their contents to women. According to Amīna her performances help women to understand Islam and to improve their worship of God.

5-7 Achievement of Religious Agency

Morocco's reforms did indeed enhance the position of female religious agents, but still women needed qualifications in order to be admitted to these positions. How did the murshidāt and the wā`iẓāt get this far? An upbringing in a devoted family proved not to be decisive. The women preachers I interviewed, including Na`īma and Amīna, came from families with very divergent religious backgrounds. Some of them belong to families who are widely known for their piety and religion. Others come from ordinary religious families.

Na`īma, for example, belongs to a Sufi family. She says: “I was brought up in a Sufi family. When I was still young, I would spend my free time with my grandmother in her chamber reciting the Qur’an and chanting dhikr’s”.

424 In fact, Na`īma’s grandmother had cultivated the seeds of piety in Na`īma. In contrast, Amīna belongs to a family with an ordinary religious background. According to her, her family is wealthy and involved in business. Her family members, Amīna contended, were not religious, meaning not totally devoted to religion. They led a modern life in which religion is not the main purpose. Her father, Amīna said, was very liberal and against the strict application of Islamic instruction

424 Na`īma, interviews, September 2011
and guidelines. He did not want her to put on the veil and to preach in mosques. Nevertheless, she resisted him, and she became an active preacher. Amīna added that her husband had become pious only after marrying her. Hence, these Moroccan women, either belonging to religious or non-religious families, succeeded in becoming active religious agents and women preachers.

The Qur’an

More importantly, Amīna's and Naʿīma's religiosity and piety emanated primarily from their own education. These wāʿiḍāt have religious relatives, but neither of them is associated with a specific religious figure or was guided by a religious master, either male or female. Naʿīma added, “Although my grandmother is very pious and guided my religious education, I personally developed a desire to be pious and to become a highly educated religious person.” Similarly, Amīna confirmed her own choice in becoming religious and practicing her religion. She contended, “My family is not religious. My desire for religion impelled me to rely on myself to be a preacher.” They developed themselves into religious agents who forged their own path, seeking different strategies to acquire religious knowledge and to participate in the women's preaching program.

Most of the women preachers I interviewed considered education to be the primary and most important tool for becoming active in institutions of religion. Most of them hold university degrees. Naʿīma received a PhD in the Shariʿa in 1984 from the Faculty of the Shariʿa in Fes. Her higher degree in religion qualified her to teach the Shariʿa in the Faculty of Letters and Human Sciences in Rabat. Ṣafiya, another female preacher, received her PhD in fiqh in 2004 from the Faculty of Letters and Human Sciences in Rabat. She currently
works as a muftiya (legal expert) in al-Majlis al-‘Ilmi in Rabat. The last female preacher I interviewed, Nezha, received her BA in 2005 in Islamic studies from the Faculty of Letters and Human Sciences of Salé. She is now working as a murshida in one of the mosques of Salé. Certainly, all of these female preachers hold degrees in religious matters, which prepared them to become actors in public religious spaces more easily.

However, other female preachers have degrees in non-religious matters and followed a parallel religious education in training program outside the university, in religious centers. Amīna, for example, studied medicine. She received her PhD in 1982 from the Faculty of Medicine in Rabat. She says:

> When I got my baccalaureate degree, I went to the university to study medicine. But whenever I had some free time, I went to the Dār al-Qur’an-institute to study Qur’an recitation. When I finished my academic studies, I devoted all my time to the study of Islam. I regularly attended the religious meetings and participated in Islamic debates. I learned a lot from these religious meetings. I was very interested in preaching, and I thought that preaching was available to anyone with only a modest amount of knowledge of religion. However, when I became a preacher, I discovered that preaching necessitates an university level of religious education. Thus, I decided to enroll in the Faculty of Letters and Human Sciences to follow Islamic studies. I succeeded in obtaining a BA but I noticed that even a BA was not enough preparation for preaching in religious institutions. I decided, then, to carry on by undertaking post-graduate studies in Islamic affairs to attain the necessary level of expertise.

Whatever their circumstances, the women preachers Amīna and Na‘īma shared similar perspectives, goals and self-techniques. According to them, the more knowledge a female preacher has, the more self-confident she will become. Knowledge transformed their lives, it gave them access to leadership and authority. They, like other women, benefit from this transformative education.

The women preachers also emphasize the importance of their non-Islamic knowledge and modern university education in serving people and gaining their respect. At the same time, the women kept extra focus on continuous research of the Qur’an and Sunna, the

---

425 Also thanks to the reforms of 2005 women can now become muftiya’s.

426 Amīna, interviews, September 2011
primary sources of Islam, to perfect their own religiosity as well as that of their attendants. Rachida, another religious guide, says; “The more I read about Islam, the better I do my prayers and become a good Muslim”.

Na’ima, the shaykha of Majlis al-‘ilmi in Rabat, contended that women preachers train themselves to seek religious knowledge until the habit of seeking becomes internalized. Na’ima says: “I personally couldn’t spend an entire day without doing some kind of research. I am accustomed to doing that”.

Religious guides and religious preachers as participants in a national conference on ‘Alimāts, wa‘iẓāts and murshidāt organized in 2009 in Skhirat/Rabat

5-8 Suppression of Women as non-Islamic

Importantly, acquiring religious and social knowledge makes the women preacher and murshidāt able to distinguish between what is Islamic and non-Islamic. According to women preachers and religious guides it is the strong attachment to the local customary laws that hamper men and women in employing the right Islamic discourses in their daily lives. Rachida, the murshida, again contends: “It is this mixture of Islam and local customs that causes our misunderstanding of the right Islamic instructions”.

Women preachers’ knowledge also impels them to redefine women’s status in Islam. Their continuous study of the Qur’an and Sunna constitutes an important strategy for the reconsideration of women’s current oppressed position. Knowledgeable women preachers

---

427 Ibid.
428 Na’ima, interviews, September 2011
429 Rachida, interviews, September 2011
become able to state in front of their audiences in mosques and on television that the fiqh is misogynistic and the primary cause of women’s discrimination. Most of them condemn the fiqh as the patriarchal interpretation of Islam. Mālika, the preacher, says: “Women’s situation gets worse because of the fiqh which privileges man and discriminates against women”. Rashīda again says: “It is good to know the rights that Islam gave to women in order to correct wrong views and the limitations imposed on women”. Thus, women’s advanced religious education empowers them to redefine women's roles.

A woman preacher

5-9 Modern Female Preachers and Women Saints.

Although murshidāt and wāʾizāt appear to be a new phenomenon in Morocco, modern women religious preachers have many common points with the historical women saints I discussed in the preceding chapter, such as several of their self-techniques. Unlike the women saints they are not divinely ordained but their religious and social activities are similar. Women saints and modern women religious guides and preachers all brought about change. They did not want to stick to the conventional norms and gendered local values. They had a strong desire to achieve vast religious knowledge in order to become powerful women. ʿAzīza al-Saksāwiyya, Muʾmina al-Tilimsāniyya and Maḥilla were all faqīḥāt (sing: faqīha), scholars of jurisprudence. They all studied the Qur’an, Hadith, fiqh and other Islamic topics under the guidance of axial saints and jurists. Their religious knowledge is probably

430 Ibid.
431 Ibid.
the most important factor in their self-presentation in their environments. They become more qualified to play social and religious roles that help them to gain respect and assert authority.  

Like the exemplary women saints, murshidāt and wā`izāt use their Islamic knowledge to serve people by teaching, preaching and offering help and sustenance. Here, they are making their religious agency known to the public. Although historical women saints’ societal roles were limited – they could not practice their religion in mosques, and they were not allowed to take part in institutionalized religious activities and although they were not highlighted in written history, there are some exceptions of women saints who clearly stepped out, as we have seen in the preceding chapter.

Lalla ṬAzīza al-Saksāwiyya studied religion and propagated it among men and women of her tribe. Her hagiographer, Ibn Qunfudh, describes her delivering a sermon to men and women. Also, Ibn `Asqar tells how his mother Lalla ṬĀyīsha was teaching the Qur’an and dhikr to women in her zāwiya. The woman saint Lalla Maḥilla, who studied the fiqh under the famous Sufi jurist al-Qāḍī ʿIyād, gave women Islamic courses, too. Although modern murshidāt and wā`izat like Amīna and Na`īma do deliver their religious sermons in a much wider range of public religious spaces, alongside men and to large and mixed audiences, in general it is safe to state that their religious activism is clearly rooted in Moroccan history. Consequently, most women preachers regard women saints as role models.

5-9.1 Women Saints as Role Models for Women Preachers and Religious Guides

Most of the twenty contemporary voluntary women preachers I interviewed acknowledged the exemplary status of women saints. They told me for example that they were fond of the Berber woman saint ṬAzīza al-Saksāwiyya and fully aware of the challenges she had encountered in her family and her community in order to become who she wanted to be: a religious scholar, and a saint who performs miracles and who is a political leader of her tribe. The preachers admired her abilities to defend her Saksāwa tribe against enemies and secure

432 Still it is discutable to what extent a woman’s sermon, course or fatwa holds ground if compared to similar utterings by a male colleague. Since meetings of the Religious Council are not open to the public, it is also difficult to judge whether or not the voices of ʿālimāt are marginalized in that official religious institution. Whatever the current situation, the female religious functionaries are surely backed up by the Moroccan authorities.

433 Instead they have to live their religion and organize gatherings in private houses and zāwiyas.
its sovereignty. The woman preacher Nūra especially admired 'Azīza’s way of becoming a highly visible religious and socio-political active figure. She approved of her celibacy, which she chose in order to become a religious actor. She contended that 'Azīza should be taken as a role model by women, who refuse conventional marriage in order to devote their lives to their religious cause.⁴³⁴

Other women preacher interviewees also expressed their approval of the reception of women saints as role models.⁴³⁵ However, they were not always able to justify their answers in detail. Unlike Nūra, Khadīja was not familiar with Moroccan religious history, and responded as follows:

I believe in women saints and in their religious status (...) As for the woman saint 'Azīza al-Saksāwiyya (...) I am sorry I don’t know of her (...). On the whole, historical women saints can be considered examples for women since they managed to achieve great piety.⁴³⁶

Other female preachers I interviewed agreed with Khadīja’s response. They asserted that, although they were not familiar with all of Moroccan feminine religious history, and had little knowledge of women saints’ life stories, the saints could serve as models in the achievement of a real religious personality. The mere fact that these religious women had succeeded in becoming well-known saints sufficed for them. Nūra stated explicitly: “We must follow the path that these historical women saints followed to become saints and emulate their religious lifestyles.”⁴³⁷

5-10 Cultivating Feminist Consciousness

Given their extensive knowledge of women's rights in Islam and the examples of strong saintly women in Morocco's past, women preachers and religious guides feel confident to cultivate feminist consciousness in their attendants’ minds. As religious agents they consciously work to plant the seeds of gender equality in men and women. Conventional ideologies that present women as passive individuals are challenged by all means.

On one occasion during my fieldwork, Şafīyya assigned a session to explain to women the Qur’an verse that stresses gender equality. She says: “God creates us, men and

---

⁴³⁴ Nūra, interviews, October 2011
⁴³⁵ Ibid.
⁴³⁶ Ibid.
⁴³⁷ Ibid.
women, from the same soul. This means that women and men are equals.” One of her attendants sitting on the carpet asked:

If men and women are equals, why are we treated differently? I notice males are more privileged than females, and women are accustomed to this unjust treatment.  

Another woman asserted: “It is foolish to identify a woman as equal to a man.” Ṣafiyya responded to her by explaining that gender injustice does not find its roots in the Qur’an but in earlier cultural traditions, which privileged masculinity and discriminated against femininity. She adds:

We are brought up in traditions that marginalize females, and we come to behave unconsciously in accordance with these dominant customs until our daily practice of gender injustice becomes a habit.  

It is clear that Ṣafiyya is engaged in changing repressive ideologies inherent to the local patriarchal system. She wanted to correct her attendants’ views, which marginalize women’s social position. More importantly she wants women to understand that gender equality was divinely ordained. Ṣafiyya contends:

My task is to educate women and to sensitize them to their rights in Islam. I wanted women to be conscious of gender equality and to apply it particularly in the education of their children, the future generation.  

Ṣafiyya is striving to make women conscious of their rights within Islam and to create new mentalities and a new generation with a new and non-dominant ideological perspective. Mothers should no longer treat their children differently by privileging boys.

Munā, another woman preacher, is doing the same. She always keeps delivering stories on the role of women in the history of Islam. On Morocco's National Women's Day (the eight of October) she delivered a sermon entitled 'The status of women before and after Islam'. Part of it went as follows:

---

438 Ibid.
439 Ibid.
440 Ibid.
Al-Salām `alay-kum. Today I am going to talk about women before and after Islam. What I mean by before Islam is the period known as al-Jāhiliya (days of ignorance) in which the Arabs did not have messengers among them and were devoid of any religious guidance. In most cases women’s situation in this time was awful. Women of this period lived under critical conditions. They were hated for their femininity. This is clear in people’s hate of new born girls. The Arabs used to bury their female infants alive because they hated them and thereby they left them dying under the earth. God says in Sūrat al-Nal 58-59: “and when news of the birth of a female child was brought to any of them, his face would become dark and filled with grief. He hides himself from the people, because of the evil that he has been informed of. Shall he keep her with dishonor or bury her in the earth? Certainly, evil is their decision.” Allah again says in Sūrat al-Takwīr 8-9: “And when the female child who was buried in the ground will be questioned – for what sin was she killed?” A baby girl who was buried alive was called a maw‘ūda. What is worse is that if the girl was spared from being buried alive, she found herself living a life of degradation. She was not allowed to inherit any portion of her relatives’ properties. It was only men who had the right of inheritance. Women’s situation got worst particularly when they were considered as part of their husbands’ estate, just as their money would be distributed in inheritance. Women used to live awkward situation in polygamous marriages where injustice and discrimination were highly observed. Women lived in these conditions for centuries.

But when Islam came, it alleviated women’s oppressed lives. It returned to women their honor and self-esteem. God says: “O mankind, indeed We created you from the same soul.”441 So, Allah says that man and woman are equals and both equal partners and are rewarded and punished for actions performed. Allah says again: “Whoever does good deeds, whether male or female, while he or she is a true believer, to him We will give a good life and We shall pay them certainly a reward in proportion to the best of what they used to do.”442 Allah says again: “So that Allah may punish the male and female hypocrites and the male and female

---

441 Quran Sūra al-Hujurāt, 13
442 Quran Sūra al-Nahl, 97
polytheists.’ God also stresses women’s right in inheritance and forbids the consideration of women as a possession to be inherited from her dead husband’s estate. God says: “O you who believe, you are forbidden to inherit women against their will.” These are very few examples of how Islam privileges women and gave them rights. The time does not allow me to mention also the rights and the emancipation God gave women.

Women’s situation today is awful. Women lost the rights Islam gave them and come to live again the dreadful life they lived in al-Jāhiliya period. There are enemies who deprived women of their rights and their honor. These enemies are non-believers who do not want to achieve the development of their societies. They confine women to their private spaces and houses and prevented them from their rights to education. These people consider women as cheap commodities exhibiting themselves to those people of lustful inclinations. These people forget the messages of God towards women and ignore women’s abilities and capacities to prove themselves as real and effective agents. Women today in the Muslim world are distracted from their duties in the home and in outside work. We Muslim today violate God’s instructions and put women in critical situations. In the end, I would like to say that it is our neglect of our religion and its instructions that make Muslims privilege males and discriminate against women. We want to regain the first years of Islam during which women like the Prophet’s wife ʿĀyisha, and His companion’s wife, Umm Salama, who enjoyed emancipation and proved themselves to be active agents like males. We want to revive these examples of women.

I advise you dear sisters and brothers to return to our religion that privileges both men and women. I advise you to respect the Islamic instructions of the Qur’an and Sunna, and I advice to think of education. Without women’s educations we cannot implement God’s instructions and thereby we cannot achieve progress and development. I insist on education because our religion insists on ʿilm and its achievement. Thank God we come to observe among us numerous highly educated women, but we still need more.

---

443 Qur’an Sūra al-Aḥzāb, 73
444 Ibid.
In her sermon, Munā didn't only mention notorious women who lived in the Prophet's time. She also pointed to a number of Moroccan women saints and Sufis such as Zaynab al-Nafzāwiya and ‘Azīza al-Saksāwiyya. For Munā gender equality and social justice are rooted in Islam, and history cannot deny the examples of Muslim women who achieved powerful personalities which impacted their communities. The rarity of such exemplary women in today's Muslim world is, according to her, entirely due to Muslims’ neglect of their religion and their lack of respect for God’s instructions, particularly those related to women.

It was already stated that women preachers considered education crucial for their own development and the advancement of women's positions in general. According to them, illiteracy is women's main enemy in the Muslim world since they suffer the most from this backwardness. It results in conservatism, a denial of their rights and downright oppression since men and women don't quite get the true messages of the Qur’an and Sunna. That's why Munā strongly encourages women to educate themselves, to return to their cultural heritage and to understand for themselves that rights Islam gives to women. Education means empowerment. It makes women question the local patriarchal traditional system and social injustice. Many attendants agreed that the murshidāt and wā’īzāt already do this, and very successfully, too.

5-11 Attendants of Murshidāt

During my fieldwork in the mosques of Rabat and Salé, I became friends with two women whom I will call Itto and Nūra. The former is fifty, the latter thirty five years old. Itto has a secondary level of education, whereas Nūra has a BA in law. Both are unmarried and work as employees in the administration. They are eager to learn more about Islam and they work hard to develop religious perfection. The main purpose of their endeavors is to ensure a happy hereafter. They want to do what is best for their own personal growth and welfare.

5-11.1 Women Attendants’ Reception of Murshidāts

In their search for religious knowledge both Itto and Nūra have experienced a wide range of instructors: male Islamic authorities like imams and women professors who teach religion in

---

445 In many instances women preachers also relate how the Prophet helped his women in the household and was looking after the children.
schools and other religious institutions. Yet nowadays they are loyal attendants of murshidāt. One of their favorites is Amīna. They are very outspoken about why they prefer her to the traditional teachers. Itto says: “I like Amīna’s style of preaching. It is relaxed, whereas, that of the imam is frightening.”

Nūra elaborates:

Amīna is different from professors of religion in schools who teach only religious issues. Amīna instead speaks about the daily problems that are of concern to every Moroccan woman and man. She also deals with how to become more self-confident, how to plan objectives in life and how to keep harmonious relationships with others. I also prefer Amīna’s preaching to that of male preachers because she speaks directly to us. Male preachers speak to us only through a loudspeaker. We feel close to her and free to tell her about our crises.

Other women attendants whom I spoke to admired the women preachers’ style for similar reasons.

What’s more, they were also particularly interested in the women preachers as persons, including their style of behavior and private life. Attendants even developed relations of friendship with their women preachers. Mobile phones and internet greatly

---

446 Nūra, interviews, October 2011
447 Ibid.
enhanced the strengthening of their mutual bonds. Women told me that these bonds helped them to learn how women preachers achieved their careers. For that reason Nūra was very happy to learn about her friend Nezha's lifestory. Nezha herself contends:

When I was a child, I used to read a lot of religious stories, and I wondered how I could become a remarkable person. I studied religion at the university, and once I finished my studies and got my BA, I committed myself to religious preaching and similar activities. I sent an application to the Ministry of Religious Affairs (Awqāf) to work as a preacher in mosques. Once accepted, I preached in mosques, and participated in debates and conferences. I delivered lectures in Dār al-Qur‘ān institute, too. My aim in life is to be an active person (insān fā`ila), to call for what is good, for people to remember me after my death.448

Nūra admired Nezha’s ability to work from sunrise to sunset, setting aside most of her time for her listeners and their problems.449 Other interviewees highly esteemed her determination in becoming not only a simple female preacher but also a public personality. More importantly, the women attendants considered the women preachers to be contemporary role models.

A female religious scholar delivering a lecture in a mosque

448 Nezha, interviews, October 2011
449 Ibid.
5-11.2 New Ways of Life of Educated Women

Many of the followers of women preachers feel personally connected to them. Obviously, they have much in common. Not only do they all like to increase their religious knowledge, but they also want to improve the position of women. Many challenge the patriarchal system by choosing an independent life of their own, much like my friends Itto and Nūra who preferred to remain celibates.

Nūra’s and Itto’s ages exceeded the average of marriage. Nonetheless, they talked about marriage, a common subject for women in Moroccan culture, without shame or hesitation. Both women were clearly not against marriage as such, but refused to marry a man just for the sake of marriage. By reference to their friends, they were both too familiar with the outcomes of such opportune decisions. After marriage many of them were no longer allowed to study or to work, and they were forced to stay at home. Some of them even endured physical abuse.

Nūra openly referred to a man who had asked her hand in marriage. He was sixty years old, already married and with children. Nūra is against polygamous marriages because they have negative effects, so she had felt no need to consult anyone and simply declined him.
I cannot marry a man I don’t like. For the rest, I feel pity for men who failed to see my personality and perfect qualities. These men must have failings that blinded their eyes to approach me for marriage. Really, I feel pity for him and not for me.

Itto shared Nūra's view:

Look at me… I did not marry because I didn’t find the suitable husband. I have chosen to live a celibate life instead of living a hard marital life. As you see I am happy with my life.  

Indeed, many Moroccan women employees, doctors and other highly educated women have chosen this path of freedom and individual life and they like it. When I asked them about their celibacy, the first expression I heard repeatedly was: “silibatair u-bi-khīr”, I am celibate and good. Jamīla is thirty-six years old, and the manager of a private company. She says:

I left my parents’ house at an early age and I discovered for the first time the right meaning of the word “independence.” I became independent from my parent’s authority because I hated their routine questions: Where have you been? Where are you going?… Their continuous questioning had made me stricken by madness. I refused relationships with men when I got my material and psychological independence and I claimed in a high voice that I am against any kind of relationships because I know well that I am unable to assume any husband’s and children’s responsibilities. I have chosen this lifestyle in which I feel good and at ease. You know good men are rare nowadays. And if you have a chance to meet someone, you can be sure that most of the time he will impose an awful life on you, and that doesn’t meet my ambitions. So as not to fall into this awful situation I follow the popular proverb which says: nebqa ‘azba w-la zwāj al-qahra (I prefer to remain celibate than leading an oppressed marriage).

Maryam, an engineer, asserts:

---

450 Ibid.
451 Ibid.
My age has exceeded forty years, and I am still living alone. To engage in a relationship is not easy for me. I have always nurtured the dream of finishing my studies and taking up a job. I don’t regret my lifestyle. My work is part of my success. It is true that I sometimes feel lonely, and I did search a man who respects me and with whom I can share my loneliness, but I didn’t find him. I am a woman who refuses marriage with men who don’t show respect for women. As you know most of men are known by their authority and lack of respect. I don’t want to be like those women who accept to marry any man just for the sake of being married and spent black days with their cruel husbands. My choice is very difficult to justify in an environment where marriage is sacred and highly advocated. I heard people saying to me: “al-bayra” (spinster). But I don’t care about what people say because I am convinced that I am created to be emancipated.452

Yusrā, a teacher, is another woman I interviewed on her choice of celibacy. She says:

My age is thirty-eight and I am still single. Celibacy for me is a choice that I am proud of. I refuse engagement with men, and I don’t need them. I tested all types of men, and I found that they all want to put women under their control. I hate domination and constraints, and I love freedom and emancipation. My life, thank God, is better than that of married women because I do whatever I want and nobody is waiting for me to cook for him, wash his clothes and serve him.453

As I mentioned before, women attendants did take a great interest in the personal life of their befriended women preachers. Nezha was a special favorite of Nūra. According to her, Nezha refused marriage and devoted her life to her religious cause. Nezha herself acknowledged:

I want to marry but I don’t find the man I want. I have chosen celibacy rather than living an oppressive marriage.454

She was by no means the only unmarried murshida. Here, the rightfulness of Nūra's (and other women's) own choices in life were confirmed by a women with considerable Islamic knowledge who despite their unmarried status had gained respect and authority.

452 Ibid.
453 Ibid.
454 Ibid.
In general, marriage and having children prove are no longer the only ways for a woman to achieve status. Itto states:

Even my friends who live a hard marital life don’t make you feel bad that you are not married. They advise you not to marry any man who is not a good match for you. Their recognition is crucial.\textsuperscript{455}

Nūra adds:

You know … things have changed. Being married or unmarried does not count anymore. It is sufficient for a woman to be a highly educated person with a good job. Everyone around her will respect her.\textsuperscript{456}

In more limited circles divorced women who ended their marriages with harsh, unjust men, regardless of what people said, ended up gaining respect for their strong personalities. Their divorce highlights their self-confidence, self-emancipation, and self-esteem. Itto is proud of her divorced friend:

My friend has the courage to face her difficulties. She refused to remain silent in front of hardships. She chose to free herself. She also refused to be patient in front of difficulties… It is true that patience is a virtue that God highly appreciates. But you know that patience has limits. ‘li-ṣbar ‘ala liḍru shiṭān gharu’ (the one who is patient in front of sufferings is deceived by Satan).\textsuperscript{457}

In this way Itto and Nūra and the others seem to embody a cautious trend of highly educated Moroccan women who are starting to have a new lifestyle according to their personal choices. They use celibacy as a self-technique, choosing it over marriage, particularly in a space where marriage is highly desired. Most of them disapproved of the patriarchal ideologies that reside in the family. The personal lives of women mosque preachers clearly have an empowering impact on them as do the female saints whom they present as role models in their talks.

\textsuperscript{455} Itto, interviews, October 2011
\textsuperscript{456} Nūra, interviews, October 2011
\textsuperscript{457} Itto, interviews, October 2011
5-12 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed four types of female religious agents in Morocco. There are the women venerators, who still preserve a strong relationship to women saints through the rituals they perform around their graves. They do not only visit the shrines to receive empowering baraka to solve daily-life issues, but also for spiritual reasons. Devotees regard women saints as role models to be imitated to achieve religious authority and power. The female functionaries at the shrines surely embody these goals in practice. In fact, contemporary women and historical women saints have a relationship of active mutual empowerment. We concluded that, like the female saints, the women venerators are after the creation of a moral personhood, in other words, an ethical self-formation.

In order to gain more religious knowledge, some women venerators have also started to frequent the courses of Morocco's modern women preachers. These highly educated women have struggled and succeeded to achieve an active orthodox religious agency. Their knowledge empowered them to engage in religious and social activism and to question the status of women with reference to Islamic history. Women preachers are eager to point out to their audiences that equality between men and women is rooted in Islam itself. For them, literacy and education are required in understanding women's rights in the way they are meant by the Qur'an and the Sunna. Women attendants in mosques consider female preachers as role models. In case these preachers have chosen a life of celibacy and learning they may gain even more respect. Highly educated women highly esteem them and feel recognition for their own celibacy and independent life styles that many of them prefer for themselves.

Moroccan women’s religious agency thus seems to contradict that of Mahmood’s respondents. Moroccan women within both the historical and the contemporary religious space display strong desires and commitments to shape themselves in a way that does not necessarily conform to the politics of the local culture. Their agency displays their desires to re-shape the religious sphere that was (once) reserved exclusively for males. They also aspire to render themselves active agents within private and public religious institutions.

Similarly, contrary to Mahmood’s respondents, they seem to break with the stereotypical views on Moroccan women as obligated to marry: in Nūra's and Itto's discourse, both attendants of mosque lessons referred to patience (ṣṣabr) in a manner totally different to that of Mahmood’s respondents. According to the latter, ṣṣabr “is to preserve patience in the
face of difficulty without complaint.”

Mahmood’s Egyptian women cultivated patience to endure their terrible marital status. In contrast, these Moroccan women attendants refused women’s practice of patience because it keeps them stuck in negative situations.

In the next chapter, I will discuss the arena of secular and Islamist women movements in Morocco. What is the attitude of women activists in these movements towards the historical and contemporary women religious agents we came across thus far?

458 Mahmood 2001, 220
459 Ibid.
Chapter Six: Moroccan Feminist Activists’ Reception of Historical Women Saints

Do historical women saints arouse the interest of activists in Morocco’s current women movements? This chapter discusses this question, and it consists of five sections. In the first section, I will give a brief historical review of Moroccan feminism emphasizing its evolution in the pre-independence and post-independence periods. The second section will focus on current women organisations in Morocco, especially on three Islamist organisations – al-‘Adl wa al-Iḥsān, al-‘Adāla wa al-Tanmiya and Muntadā al-Zahrā’ - and their different objectives, strategies and activities. This section questions whether these Islamist organisations can be seen as part of the Moroccan feminist movement. The third section will discuss the way the selected Moroccan Islamist associations draw on exemplary women in Islamic history so as to underpin their debate on women’s rights. A fourth section, focuses on Moroccan Islamist feminists’ reception of historical women saints. Some secular feminists are interviewed as well, but mainly the Islamist activists’ points of view come to the fore, because of their embeddedness in Islam. Here I will conclude that they receive historical women saints as means of empowerment and as role models. In a final section, draw from my interviews so as to evaluate whether the three Islamist associations do belong to Moroccan feminism.

6-1 History of Moroccan Feminism

Moroccan feminism today is a compilation of several elements; basically; it is the encounter of indigenous Moroccan culture and civilization with Western culture. It is linked to the nationalist movement, processes of modernization and development, as well as to Morocco’s cultural heritage, thus involving tensions between secular and religious tendencies. The birth of the feminist movement dates back to the late fifties after the independence. However, gender inequality had already been acknowledged by nationalist organizations during colonial times. My discussion of Moroccan feminism therefore entails a brief investigation of the historical context in which women organizations and feminist thought emerged and developed.

---

460 Sadiqi 2003, 20
6-1.1 The Beginning of the Women’s Movement

In Morocco, the origins of the women’s movement were closely linked to the rise of nationalism. Since women participated in the nationalist movement against French imperialism, they soon moved beyond traditional gender roles. They attended schools with men and broke out of their seclusion to participate in associations and political parties. These female nationalists, like Mālika al-Fāsī resisted the colonizer and at the same time challenged the traditional values and ideas that oppressed women. The nationalists “advocated the liberation of women in the name of Islam’s triumph, not in the name of any genuine modern global ideology.” They sought equality between the sexes and women’s emancipation while simultaneously referring to their Arab Muslim identity.

Through contact with the West via colonization, as well as education and the pioneering discussions by Arab intellectuals on women’s issues, Moroccan nationalists opposed the subordinated position of women in society. They were influenced by the Egyptians Rifā‘a Rāfī‘ al-Tahtāwī, who claimed that women should have access to education in his *The Honest Guide for Education of girls and boys* (1873); Qāsim Amīn, who insisted on women’s liberation in his famous work, *The Liberation of Women* (1992); and Hudā al-Sha’rāwī, author of *The Harem Years: The Memoirs of an Egyptian Feminist* (1987), who famously removed her veil, in 1923, upon her return from an international women’s conference in Paris, and who fought for women’s right to vote.

Moroccan nationalists asked for the liberation of women and their participation in different domains. Women’s liberation was further emphasized during the 1940’s with the emergence of three separate women associations headed by nationalists. These three associations were La Commission des Femmes (1940), L’Union des Femmes du Maroc (1944), and Sisters of Purity (1944). Wether liberal or more conservative, they all based their ideology on social reform, directed against so-called superstition, including the non-orthodox cults surrounding holy men and women and other traditions.

The first demand of the nationalists was the education of girls. In the 1930’s, ‘Allāl al-Fāsī and other nationalists had already stressed the necessity of educating girls, considering it an effective tool to fight ignorance within society. They urged parents to send their girls to schools, but the majority refused out of fear that their girls would be influenced by Western values. Consequently, girls’ schools, which focused on Arabic, Islam and nationalism, were

---

461 Mernissi 1987, 8
462 ‘Allāl al-Fāsī is a nationalist and the founder of the political party, al-Istiqlāl.
created. Ibn Jallūn (1948) sheds light on the history of some women who were given the opportunity to study in the West, usually in France, in order to make them active members in their own society.\(^\text{463}\)

The intellectuals’ efforts effectively contributed to the progress of female education during colonialism despite the barriers that limited it. It was not affected by the conservative claim that depicted educated women as immoral.\(^\text{464}\) With Morocco’s independence in 1956, many girls started to go to school.\(^\text{465}\) Women also gained access to work. A few years later, they won the right to vote in the first parliamentary election in 1962. Some women’s welfare organizations were led by nationalist women who had been active in the earlier women organizations.\(^\text{466}\)

6-1.2 The Feminist Movement in Post-Independent Morocco

During the decades after the independence many women, who were members of associations created by men, increasingly felt marginalized. This experience made a number of these women become members of separate associations where the interest of women was taken up. Some of the associations that emerged in the 1980’s were the Democratic Association of Moroccan Women (ADFM), the Union for Women’s Action (UAF) and the Moroccan Association for Women’s Rights (AMDF).

These new women associations were representatives of secular feminism, a “modern trend, which seeks to improve the situation of women by adopting the Western style without discarding Moroccan religious culture.”\(^\text{467}\) Their major demands were the achievement of parity (al-Munāṣafa) in all the domains of society and the elimination of sexual harrassment and violence against women.

Secular feminism in Morocco soon got a religious counterpart. Islamist women organisations emerged in the late 1980’s and the beginning of 1990’s. Although the Islamist women organisations likewise emphasized women’s and girls’ education, they put primary focus on the protection of the family, which is “society in miniature.” Their aim was the improvement of women’s conditions within the scope of Islamic principles. Like the secular

\(^{463}\) Ibn jallūn 1948, 165
\(^{464}\) Daoud 1999, 225
\(^{465}\) Mouaid 2000, 181
\(^{466}\) Benadada 1999
\(^{467}\) Sadiqi 2003, 195
feminists, they asked for changes in the Mudawwana, the personal status code, as codified in 1957.

6-1.3 Legal Reforms

Just before Morocco’s independence, the nationalist leader ‘Allāl al-Fāsī had criticized the family law and proposed its reform in order to strengthen the position of women inside and outside the home.\(^{468}\) However, his reform suggestions were not taken into account in the 1957 codification of the Mudawwana.

The Mudawwana, based on Malikite rite, treated women throughout their lives as inferior entities. It obliged wives to unconditionally submit to and respect their husbands and their close relatives; it permitted polygamy, gave the right of divorce pre-dominantly to men and implied that the sexes were complementary rather than equal. The Mudawwana, instead of solving problems, inevitably contributed to the creation of extra conflicts and tensions.\(^{469}\) It described the personal status code as “a code that…dutifully respects the seventh century Shari ‘a.” Mernissi (1987), however, asserts that the Mudawwana is a transposition of Al-Muwaṭṭa’ - a book about law written by the founder of the Malikite Law School Anas ibn Mālik - and the earlier Moroccan Code de Statue Personnel.\(^{470}\)

After many years of debate to change this personal status code in favor of women, the late King Hasan II created a committee of religious scholars and judges, which was marked by the absence of women.\(^{471}\) In 1993, he announced new reforms, which included some changes for women. Feminist associations and activists were, however, unsatisfied since they argued that it still left women in subordinate positions. The 1993 Mudawwana did not bring any essential changes concerning, for instance, polygamy and divorce.

By the ascent of Muḥammad VI to the throne in 1999, the demand for changing some articles of the Mudawwana re-emerged. The National Plan of Action, a plan that was introduced by the Ministry of Social and Economic Affairs to enhance women’s development, was launched in March 2000. It seemed to split Moroccan society between, on the one hand, adherers of international feminist views, and those of Islamic perspectives on the other hand. Secular feminists, including Saïd Sa’di, Latifa Jbabdi and Amīna Lamrini, supported the Plan

\(^{468}\) Among the reforms, ‘Allāl al-Fāsī proposed a complete abolition of polygamy and the institution of a Wali, the guardian or the tutor

\(^{469}\) Mernissi 1987, 12

\(^{470}\) Ibid., 24

\(^{471}\) Sadiqi 2003, 28
of Action, so as to bring in line the Mudawwana with international conventions. Islamist activists such as Aḥmad Raysūnī, Bāssima al-Ḥaqqāwī and Jamīla Muṣallī refused the Plan of Action, arguing that it had no Islamic reference. Two years later, the King appointed a committee in which three women participated. Soon after, in 2004, the Mudawwana was reformed on the basis of Shari’a as well as on the universal human rights declarations.

The new reforms are briefly summarized in the following points. The two spouses are responsible for the household. They have similar rights and obligations. The minimal age of marriage is eighteen years old. A woman can marry herself with or without a tutor. Polygamy is restricted. The principle of divorce should be conducted by judicial supervision, and a woman has the right to ask for a divorce. Women have the right of custody. The minimum age for children, both girls and boys, to choose a custodian is the age of fifteen. A woman can transmit her citizenship to her children.472

Thanks to these reforms, the Moroccan woman has become the most legally emancipated woman in the Arab world.473 When Muḥammad VI became king, women’s political situation was marked by several other changes. For decades after independence, women had never held key political positions. Still, in June 1990 the Minister of Islamic Affairs had declared on TV that women could not assume political responsibilities in Morocco, which provoked the rage of feminist associations and human rights organizations.474 In 2000, apart from instigating the Plan of Action, King Muḥammad VI appointed a female royal advisor; a woman as the head the National Office of Oil Research and Exploitation; a female secretary of state and a woman as head of the National Office of Tourism. In the elections of September 2002, thirty women were elected in parliament. Recently their numbers have increased: more than fifty women are members of Parliament due to the ‘national list’ of women candidates that was recently instigated by the government so as to ensure the presence of women in parliament. In what follows I focus on Morocco’s current women organizations.

472 For more details on the new reforms, see Harrak 2009
473 For many Moroccan activists the Mudawwana has not reached its perfect state though. The same applies to other codes of law. For example, Moroccan feminists have called for changes to criminal laws, including a statute that lets a rapist avoid punishment if he marries his victim, the so called law article 475. At the end of 2012 the Ministry of Justice promised to make the demanded changes.
474 Daoud 1999, 320
6-2 Islamist Women Associations

Morocco’s current women organizations know two main strands: secular one and an Islamic one. The latter mainly consists of Islamist women organisations with Islamism being the political strand of Islam, which presumes that Islam should not only guide personal life, but social and political life as well.

The liberal feminist movement calls for gender equality, social justice, and the elimination of unequal power relations between the two sexes. It advocates universal human rights, and is enhanced by the state, political parties and civil society. However, Moroccan liberal feminism, as we will see below also integrates elements from Islamic culture, like Mernissi did from the beginning.

The Islamist women organizations advocate the return to the Shari`a in their debate on women’s rights. They call for the study of Islam to improve women’s position. Their aims are gender equity and social justice grounded in an Islamic framework. For that purpose they advocate a true understanding of the Qur’an and Hadith to free Islamic religion from patriarchal ideologies and misunderstandings.

Dialmy (no date) discusses to what extent feminism and Islam are reconciled in current Moroccan women organizations. He distinguishes between two major strands in this respect, namely between, Islamic feminism and Islamist points of views regarding women’s position. (By the way, the term Islamic feminism was coined by the feminist theoreticians Margot Badran (2007) and Ziba Mir Hosseini (2004)). According to Dialmy, Islamic feminists advocate women’s rights within the context of Islam. It stresses the use of Ijtihād to achieve gender equality and the equal rights of men and women. Islamism on the other hand is a movement which stresses that men and women are not equal but different by nature: they use the notions of complementarity and equity instead of equality. The biological and natural differences between men and women make them play different roles and have different rights. Dialmy contends that Islamists do not reinterpret the Qur’an from a modern social perspective. As we have seen in Chapter Two, the latter is exactly the aim of authors such as Aḥmad (1989), Wadūd (1992) and Barlas (2004), who argue that so as to do justice to the ‘egalitarian ethical Spirit’ of the Qur’an, social change should be taken into consideration, which necessitates a revision of Islamic law.

---

475 Sadiqi 2003, 32
476 Dialmy (no date)
The Islamists argue that the correct application of women’s rights as specified in the Quranic text suffices for women to be respected and guarantees them a just treatment, which corresponds with their interests. Dialmy (n.d.) sums up where the Islamists consider equal rights between women and men not applicable: namely where it concerns inheritance, polygamy, tutorship in marriage, as well as the right to marry a non-Muslim.

Dialmy distinguishes between three strands of Islamisms in Morocco. The first is radical Islamism which emerged in the 1990s, and which has a fierce hatred against the independent woman and against women’s participation in public life. The second is a “semi-integrated” Islamism, such as is the association "Justice and Charity" (al-ʾAdl wa ʾIḥsān), with its women section (al-Qiṭā’ al-Nisāʾ), which considers gender injustice due to people’s distance from the sources of the Islam the Qurʾan and Sunna. It calls for an equitable society, where men’s and women’s roles are complementary. “L’Islamisme intégré” constitutes the third aspect of Moroccan political Islam, such as represented by the PJD, The Justice and Development Party. According to Dialmy, however, all three strands are antifeminist due to their emphasis on complementarity and equity instead of equality, which he characterizes as “l’anti-feminisme de l’Islamisme.” He contends that:

l’islamisme ne peut pas etre féministe dans la mesure
ou il refuse l’égalité des sexes et lui substitue la notion
d’équité. Pour l’islam politique, la différence
biologique induit la différence des droits.477

Only an Islamic perspective that aspires for gender equality, based on ijtihād and a reinterpretation of the Qurʾanic text from a modern social approach, can reconcile Islam and feminism. For this, Dialmy proposes that feminism must be the point of departure and arrival, the primary reference and ultimate objective.

Departing from the above presumptions and much to my surprise, my research on the different Islamist associations on their reception of female saints included other findings. From my fieldwork on three Islamist women associations in Morocco, I came to other conclusions than Dialmy’s; namely, that Islamism in Morocco is a movement that contains modern voices, to the extent that the Islamist women organisations can be considered part of the feminist movement in Morocco. Danish researcher Julie Pruzan-Jorgensen (2010), supports my findings in her study of Moroccan Islamists feminist associations, albeit tentatively. She asks

477 Ibid.
what precisely is the impact of the new Islamist women’s activism in Morocco? Is it simply a new way of religiously sanctioning female submission, or does it profoundly challenge existing gender roles and offer new egalitarian visions? It is difficult to comprehend fully and thus categorize the significance of these different actors with respect to women’s rights and empowerment more generally, as these aspirations fall in between, or may be rather beyond the liberal/secular vs. Islamist divide.478

Another researcher, Zakia Salime, points in her study Between Feminism and Islam: Human Rights and Sharia Law in Morocco (2011) to “some arenas where the feminist and the Islamist women's movement are now overlapping”.479 In what follows these issues will come to the fore, through my discussion– based on my interviews with female Moroccan Islamists- of three Islamist women associatons and their views on women in Islamic history in general and women saints in particular.

The informants I have selected and interviewed are representatives of their Islamist organizations. Five out of these ten Islamist activists are the official spokespersons of their associations. The latter are Nadia Yāssīne, the leader of the women’s section of the association ‘Adl wa al-Ihsān; Bāsima al-Ḥaqqāwī, head of the PJD women’s organization as well as of ORWA (Organization of Renewal of Women’s Awareness), and member of the government as head of the Ministry of Family and Women’s Issues; Jamila Muṣalī, the leader of Wi’am Association and a member of PJD and of Muntadā Zahrā’ (Forum al-Zahrā’); Butayna al-Qarurī, the president of Muntadā Zahrā’; Khadīja Muḥīd is the leader of Hīḍn Association.

The other Islamist activists I interviewed are Azīza al-Baqqalī, a member of Parliament and a member of both Muntadā Zahrā’ and ORWA; Raja Naji Mekkaoui, a representative of Karama Association, one of the associations affiliated to Muntadā Zahrā’; Soumaya ben Khalidun, the ex-president of Muntadā Zahrā’ and a member of PJD and Muntadā Zahrā’; Malika Bou’nānī, a member of Muntadā; and finally Na’ima Oughanīm, a representative of ‘Adl wa al-Ihsān. I have also chosen these activists because they are highly educated and active in academia as well as in politics.

478 Pruzan-Jorgensen 2010, 18
479 Salime 2011, xxx
It took some time, and many phone calls, to actually interview these ten Islamist activists. All the informants support the programs and written manifests of their organizations. I did not come across significant differences between their answers to the questions I posed them and the written documents and published papers on women’s and family issues of their associations, as discussed below.

In the following section we will have a look at the Islamist associations that constitute the mouthpiece of the Islamist movement in Morocco. These are al-‘Adl wa al-Iḥsān (Justice and Spirituality), al-‘Adāla wa-l-Tanmiya (Justice and Development, PJD), which both have political orientations and the non-political Islamist association Muntadā al-Zahrā’. Most of the Islamist women affiliated with these Islamist associations enjoy high levels of education, and most of them have a PhD-degree in Islamic or non-Islamic sciences. Some of them are also members of political parties and of Parliament. The female Islamist activists who gained a seat in Parliament were not elected on regular terms, but were elected through the national list mentioned before.

6-2.1 Al-‘Adl wa al-Iḥsān

Al-‘Adl wa al-Iḥsān constitutes the largest Islamist jamā’a in Morocco. Founded in 1983 by the late `Abd al-Salām Yāssīne, a charismatic leader and member of the Būtshīshī Sufi order before his politicization, it is a Sufi-inspired organization. As an Islamist party, al-‘Adl wa al-Iḥsān practices grassroots politics in a large network of charities and associations spread across Morocco and Europe as well as at the level of Morocco’s civil society. The party also seeks to promote concrete social changes. It rejects the monarchy and strives towards a republican political system. Therefore it is not approved of by the Moroccan authorities. Contrary to the legalist Justice and Development Party, al-‘Adl wa al-Iḥsān it thus has not been allowed to transform itself into an official political party, nor partake part in Moroccan government.

Al-‘Adl wa al-Iḥsān’s women’s section constitutes an energetic force within the jamā’a since its founding in the beginning. It has been headed by Nadia Yāssīne, holder of a BA in political sciences and daughter of `Abd al-Salām Yāssīne. The number of women affiliated with al-‘Adl wa al-Iḥsān exceeds 30% of all activists affiliated with the three

---

480 Sufi influences are still felt in this orthodox Islamist movement, for example in the recitation of wīrd’s, religious poetic texts remembering God, thus resembling the mystical dhikr.

481 An activist from al-‘Adl wa al-Iḥsān, interviews, September 2011
associations. The women members have different levels of education, including BAs, MAs, and PhDs in a variety of fields.

Although the women’s section is given priority on the agenda of al-ʽAdl wa al-Iḥsān, most of these women have played a symbolic role in its overall organization. In addition to their activism in the association, they hold regular employment positions. Among them are medical doctors, scientists, university teachers and government employees. Most of them are married, but some are single. Thus, many combine marriage and motherhood with participation in activism and in society as a whole.482

Al-ʽAdl wa al-Iḥsān’s women’s section pursues several objectives. The education of women constitutes the major one. The Islamists teach illiterate women not only to read and write, but they also teach them religion and Islamic studies. Al ʽAdl wa al-Iḥsān views women as the core of familial and societal development. According to most of its activists, ignorant mothers produce ignorant children, and ignorant children become ignorant adults and citizens. In this way, society remains underdeveloped.483 The association also seeks the fulfillment of justice for women, be they victims of violence, the unemployed, economically underprivileged or the uneducated. An activist in al-Jamā’a explains:

To achieve a successful education for women, justice is needed. A hungry woman cannot hear our preaching. Thus, a hungry, poor, and illiterate woman cannot respond to our preaching and religious education.484

The Islamists of al-ʽAdl wa al-Iḥsān also seek the re-education of women and their empowerment through a raising of their consciousness. In my interview with Nadia Yāssīne, she emphasized that most women have remained confined within poverty, ignorance and illiteracy, knowing nothing about the rights that Islam has given them. Male dominance, Yāssīne continued, takes women’s ignorance and illiteracy as a means to enhance women’s oppression and discrimination. For this reason, it is necessary to inform and educate women so that they can become conscious of their situation and of the rights that patriarchy has denied them.485

The women’s section undertakes different strategies to reach the objectives stated above. A practical approach is helping women in crises, particularly illiterate and poor

482 Ibid.
483 Ibid.
484 Ibid.
485 Ibid.
women, through education projects and financial support. Despite its poor budget, al-‘Adl wa al-Iḥsān, with the assistance of charitable members, finances women’s microprojects, such as wool production, baking and others. An activist says: “Our association is like an ambulance that we use in times of crisis to rescue people and satisfy their needs.”486 Another strategy of al-‘Adl wa al-Iḥsān is to outspokenly criticize different issues concerning Moroccan women’s daily lives, particularly those related to social injustice (such as sex segregation, women’s illiteracy and unemployment). Their aim is to make women conscious of what is going on around them and to sensitize them about the rights that Islam originally bestowed upon them, so as to help them become literate women with economic independence.487

Most of the activists in al-‘Adl wa al-Iḥsān reject Maliki fiqh (jurisprudence). They don’t want to go back to it and refuse to take it into consideration in their debates on the woman question. According to them, Maliki fiqh is the primary cause of Moroccan women’s backwardness, marginalization and oppression. Na‘īma, an activist in al-‘Adl wa al-Iḥsān, says:

> Al-fiqh al-Maliki is a traditional fiqh. It puts constraints on women because it failed to take into account women’s point of view in the composition of its texts. Thus, we have come to have a masculine and patriarchal fiqh, which does not reflect the real rights that Islam bestowed on women.488

Nādiya Yāssīne considered the Maliki law, on which the old family law code was based, a masculine law. The rights that Islam gave to women are trampled due to the patriarchal interpretation of the foundational texts of Islam. Early marriage, which Māliki fiqh advocated, is a clear example of such a violation of Islamic and human rights.489 The activists of al-‘Adl wa al-Iḥsān also showed a negative reaction to polygamy and divorce that the old Personal Code of Status advocate; they stress that polygamy and divorce of the old family law do not respect the Islamic instructions on polygamy and divorce. Thus, the Islamists contend that al-Fiqh al-Māliki hinders Moroccan women’s emancipation.

### 6.2.2 Al-‘Adāla wa al-Tanmiya (Justice and Development: PJD)

---

486 Ibid.
487 Ibid.
488 Ibid.
489 Ibid.
The PJD was founded in the 1990s out of concern for Morocco’s Islamic identity, which became increasingly criticized in the current global era. The Islamist activists of the PJD observed that Western styles of life, which to them are in many ways contradictory to Islam, had started to invade Moroccan families negatively affecting them. According to PJD, Morocco’s own cultural heritage and identity were severely under pressure.

At the same time, PJD female members began to worry about the oppressive and discriminatory situation facing women. In their opinion, Moroccan women’s contemporary situation was characterized by illiteracy, poverty and ignorance. As a consequence, the PJD women’s association engaged in activism to defend women’s rights in a way that preserves their Islamic identity, while simultaneously being open to global discourses and development.490

The PJD women’s section is composed of women with high levels of education, including BAs, MAs, and PhDs in different fields. Its agenda deals with women and family issues. The Qur’an and the Sunna constitute the major foundational sources in their debate on women’s issues and the gender question. PJD Islamists rely on their own reading of the Qur’an and Hadith, using ijtihād (independent judgement) for the implementation of women’s rights as described in these sources. Moreover, they explicitly acknowledge the importance of women’s participation and input in ijtihād. They appreciate al-Majlis al-‘ilmī al-A’lā, which comes to include ‘ālimāt (female religious scholars) as participants in the process of ijtihād and in the implementation of Qur’an and Sunna on women’s issues.491

Most of the PJD activists that I interviewed stressed other sources in dealing with women’s questions, such as human rights, that in their opinion conform to Islam. They are thus open to external sources besides the primary sources of Shari`a. 492

The PJD association participated in the foundation of the national Moroccan family committee, which opposed the Plan of Action, out of concern for the Moroccan family. It, however, also participated in different conferences and meetings both at the national and international level to promote women’s rights, and in the debate over the old Code of Personal Status and the New Family Code, the Mudawwana. The PJD is very interested in women’s political roles. Female PJD members of Parliament founded a special women section for themselves, which primarily seeks to encourage and empower them to participate in politics and in various political decision making processes.493 In connection with these

490 Ibid.
491 Ibid.
492 For more details on the relationship between Islamic law and human rights see Peters 1999.
493 Ibid.
aims, PJD members wrote a book entitled *al-Mar'a wa al-Mushāraka al-Siyāsiyya* (Woman and Political Participation).

PJD members also teach illiterate women. They continuously offer courses to fight illiteracy, which are highly appreciated among Moroccan women. In addition to reading, writing and simple math, they teach them different kinds of crafts that can enable them to market their labor and achieve economic independence.

**6-2.3 Muntadā al-Zahrā’ li-l-Mar'a al-Maghribiya**

Muntadā al-Zahrā’ is a network of Islamist women associations. It was founded in 2002 by a number of highly educated Islamist women. Some of them hold PhDs in different areas, and others hold BAs in Islamic and other fields. Some of them are members of Parliament, although the network itself is not related to a political party. Others work as medical doctors, university teachers, administrative employees and in other professions. Muntadā is made up of thirty-five associations, which are scattered in different Moroccan regions. There is the association al-Karāma in Tangier, 'Umm al-Banīn in Rashīdiyya, Khumaysa in Meknes and others. Moroccan urban and rural areas have established associations of the Muntadā network to benefit from its agendas. The members I interviewed rely on the sources of Islam, but also refer to universal human rights to underpin their agenda’s.

Muntadā was founded for a variety of reasons. The members I interviewed, express their concern about women being victims of oppression, discrimination and ignorance, and about the deterioration of the Moroccan family, which they see as the effect from changes inherent to modern life and the new global era. Ignorant, illiterate and poor mothers are unable to defend their own rights or those of their family members. They cannot direct their own lives or those of their children.494

For this reason, Muntadā has engaged in different strategies to achieve a range of purposes. The activists of Muntadā have offered courses to women to combat illiteracy. They have also provided religious lessons to women to teach them about Islam and the rights Islam bestowed on them. Muntadā members stress the importance of teaching women different crafts and professions such as embroidery, baking and other marketable skills. It also offers financial assistance to women affiliated with their network to found economic projects and establish small businesses, or to look for work, with the goal of making them financially independent. Khadīja, a woman who benefited from Muntadā’s financial support, said:

494 An activist from Muntadā Zahra’, interviews, November 2011
Thanks to Muntadā, I learned how to read and write. I also learned the Qur’an by heart. Thanks also to Muntadā, I learned the skills of baking different kinds of bread and cookies… I founded my own project and now I have my own store where I bake and sell bread and cookies.\(^{495}\)

Muntadā thus promotes women’s social, religious and economic independence and empowerment.

In addition, Muntadā has devised the strategy of ṣulḥ (reconciliation) in order to support women’s judicial cases. It mediates between married couples in conflict so as to achieve reconciliation instead of divorce. According to interviewees, Muntadā receives a great number of couples contemplating divorce. Many oppressed women contact Muntadā for support and help. Reconciliation is also employed to rescue victims of domestic violence. Muntadā’s preference for this strategy stems from the desire to perpetuate and proliferate healthy family lifestyles. An activist from Muntadā said:

One day a woman came to me crying and shouting. She asked for help in getting a divorce from her violent husband. After we had begun the legal procedures, she came back and asked me to stop the process because she wanted to return to her husband and her children… We invited her husband to our office, listened to him as we had listened to her, and we reconciled them. We also followed their situation after the reconciliation to ensure the success of our efforts and the continuous safety and well-being of the woman.\(^{496}\)

Mālika, an activist in Muntadā, said: “We save 70% of the couples we work with from divorce.”\(^{497}\) According to Mālika, ṣulḥ is strongly advocated by the Qur’an.\(^{498}\) For this reason, they stress this strategy before offering assistance with divorce.\(^{499}\) The Qur'anic method of reconciliation seeks to preserve women’s rights as well as the family institution which, in the view of the Muntadā members, constitutes society in miniature. Muntadā’s success in saving many families from divorce has come to the attention of the Ministry of Islamic Affairs, which started sending Muntadā all the applications it receives from women.

\(^{495}\) Ibid.
\(^{496}\) Ibid.
\(^{497}\) Ibid.
\(^{498}\) Ibid.
\(^{499}\) Ibid.
seeking a divorce.\footnote{500}{Ibid.} Muntadā’s role has become more important than that of official judicial institutions, as far as it concerns the avoidance of divorce, which engenders dreadful social consequences such as poverty, delinquency and unemployment. Muntadā activists feel that they have found in reconciliation not only a way to develop the reputation of the activism of their network, but also a means to fight the deterioration of society.

Another activity of Muntadā is youth and teenagers’ education. The association continuously offers courses to male and female teens to instruct them on religion, and to give them a space where they can talk about private problems and crises. Raḥma, an activist in Muntadā said:

I organize meetings with adolescents and youths to discuss their private problems. Sometimes I meet them in their schools or in youth houses to hear them talk about the problems they are suffering from. Many issues are related to drugs, sex, and Internet. My aim is to create a relationship with them and teach them how to build a useful relationship, for example, with the Internet, and how to deal with drugs and sex.\footnote{501}{Ibid.}

Muntadā thus functions as a therapeutic and educational center where youths can become informed adults, and women can master their lives more successfully.

6-2.4 Similarities and Differences

Today’s Moroccan Islamists associations constitute a heterogeneous group, with different views. Da‘wa wa al-Ttablīgh (Preaching and Propagation) is a Salafi movement that was founded in 1975.\footnote{502}{Tozy 2008, 277-298} It is more radical than ‘Adl wa al-Iḥsān towards women’s issues, in as far as this organization bases its preaching on the Qur’an, Sunna and the book: \emph{Riyāḍ al-Ṣṣāliḥīn}\footnote{503}{\emph{Riyāḍ al-Ṣṣāliḥīn} by Shafi‘ī scholar Aby Zakariyya Yahya al-Nnawawī is a collection of aḥādīth.} by the Imām al-Nnawawī. It propagates the original Qur’anic rules and religious instructions for men and women in urban and remote rural spaces. This movement has no official journal nor a published program, nor any manuscripts.

Both Da‘wa wa al-Ttablīgh and ‘Adl wa al-Iḥsān are radical Islamist organisations, whereas, the Islamists of PJD, ORWA, al-Hiḍn Association and Muntadā Zahrā’ are
moderate. The Islamists of Daʻwa wa al-Ttablīgh refuse the use of ijtihād, meaning the exertion of conscientious and diligent effort in reinterpreting the primary sources of Islam.\footnote{An Islamist, Interviews, December}

In contrast, ‘Adl wa al-Iḥsān, PJD, ORWA, al-Hiḍn and Muntada Zahra’ do advocate the use of ijtihād where it concerns women’s and family rights. They consider the Qur’an and Sunna as the primary sources on family and women’s issues. However, they contend that the Islamic law that regulates women’s and family’s social status, is to be constantly reinterpreted so that Islamic law adapts itself to new social developments. Apart from Da’wa wa al-Ttablīgh, ‘Adl wa al-Iḥsān, PJD, ORWA, al-Hiḍn and Muntadā Zahra’ all Islamist organizations stress, on the one hand, the importance of preserving Islamic sources in dealing with women’s and family issues, and on the other hand the necessity of using ijtihād. On this basis they share a number of guiding principles and programs. The principle cause of women’s oppression to them is not Islam but the patriarchal interpretation of Islam.

The PJD published an article entitled “bayān ḥawla mashrū’ khuṭṭa idmāj al-Mar’a fī al-Ttanmiyya” (1999) (a report on a national plan for integrating women into development) in which its activists stress the importance of using ijtihād in dealing with women’s and family’s situations.\footnote{Ibid.} For instance the issues of polygamy, repudiation and tutorship, in the views of the Islamists are to be reformed and are to be put under strict judicial control. The Islamists show satisfaction with these changes that are highly advocated by the new Moudawana because they conform to the Islamic law and preserve women’s and family’s rights.\footnote{Mufīd 2005, 18-19}

Rajaa Naji Mekkaoui, an ‘alima and a member of Karama Association that is affiliated to the platform Muntadā Zahra’, states in her article, ‘munţalaqāt al-Ttaḥdīt wa al-Ttajdīd: fī ’ayu Sha’n?’ (2005) that the law regulating family issues has to be changed, while taking the sacredness of the family into consideration.

The Islamists of ‘Adl wa al-Iḥsān state that the fiqh has to be changed. In her article La Jurisprudence musulmane est machiste’ (2003) Nadia Yāssīne argues that it is necessary to re-interpret the fiqh, which entails a masculine and patriarchal interpretation of Islamic religion, through the process of ijtihād. She stresses the inclusion of women as participants in this process so that women enjoy equal rights as men. In another article entitled ‘Ishrāk al-Mar’a fī al-Ijtihād shaṟṭ fī al-Taghyyīr wa al-Binā’ (2012) (Women’s participation in al-Ijtihād is a condition in change and building society), Yāssīne repeats that there is no ijtihād without women’s participation.\footnote{Yāssīne 2012}
Naji Mekkaoui also argues, in her article mentioned above, for a continuous change of family law, and for the necessity to adapt it to new social developments while at the same time preserving the Islamic heritage of Morocco.

Aziza al-Baqqālī, an activist of ORWA and Muntadā Forum and a member of Parliament, argues in her article entitled ‘mas‘ūliyāt al-Ddawla fī ḥimāyat ḥuqūq al-Ṭţif,’ (the responsibility of the state in the protection of the child’s rights) (2005) that the old Mudawana discriminated not only against women but against their children as well. She emphasizes that through ijtihād new amendments to the Mudawana should be implemented that preserve Moroccan’s Islamic background and the importance of the family as a social institution and as a space where the rights of its members (father, mother and children) are guaranteed.

In her article ‘mudawanat al-‘usra: ‘ayyu jadīd?,’ (2005) (The family code: what is new?) the leader of al-Ḥiḍn Association, Mufīd, stresses the importance of changing the family law through the use of collective scientific ijtihād that includes the views of expert jurists, religious scholars, social scientists, activists and researchers. Major issues in this respect are violence against women, sexual violence and early marriages.

The Islamists of Muntadā Zahra’ seek to highlight the rights Islam gave to women and Islam’s positive image of women. They engage in the construction of women associations and activism to educate and empower women and families. In the book Dawr al-Mar’a al-‘arabiya fī al-Tanmiya al-Mustdāma (2010) (Arab woman’s role in continuous development) the activists and researchers of Muntadā discuss the necessity of creating a program to enhance women’s education and integration in society. They seek to eliminate women’s illiteracy so that women can fully participate.

In Şawt al-Muntadā, a magazine of the Islamist association Muntadā Zahra’, Butayna al-Qarūrī refers to the progress of its activities. In her article, ‘Shabakatu al-Muntadā ta‘rifu taḥassunan naw’iyyan wa kамиyyان,’ (2011) al-Qarūrī contends that Muntadā consists of fifty-four associations. She argues that Muntadā constantly works to improve Moroccan women’s situation, in particular where it concerns the issues of violence against women and their early marriage. Muntadā Forum organizes national and international conferences and meetings to discuss Moroccan women’s positions.

Naji Mekkaoui is a legal scholar and the first woman who presented a religious course in Durus al-Hassaniya.

Aziza al-Baqqālī 2005, 129
Mufīd 2005, 17
See Muntadā Zahra’ 2011
Apart from Da‘wa wa al-Tablīgh, all other Islamist organizations thus argue in favor of women’s rights and full participation in society. In their programs, they emphasize that women should have a role in all domains, so not only in the private sphere but also in public life, in politics and in decision-making processes.

Yāssīne argues: ‘our jama’a encourages women’s participation in political life. We actually have women as members of our majlis al-Shūra (council) and as political decision makers.’ She stresses the importance of women’s education and participation in public life in fighting women’s marginalization.513 In Tanwīr al-Mu‘mināt (1996) her father, ‘Abd al-Salām Yāssīne, discusses the necessity of women’s religious and modern education and public participation.514 The book also presents procedures for women’s education, and advice for women to emancipate themselves from the slavery that they lived for centuries, so as to be able to work for God and society.515

In mushāraka al-Siyāsiyya li al-Mar’a bayna al-Wāqi’ wa al-Ma‘mūl, (2011) (Woman’s political participation: between reality and expectation) Muşalī discusses the procedures that women should follow to become active participants in public and political life. The obstacles that hinder Moroccan women’s political participation are patriarchal culture and political corruption. Muşalī proposes several steps towards the integration of women into Moroccan society: first, the revision of social norms, second, the consolidation of democracy and the foundation of citizenship, and finally the strengthening of the legal system of the state in favor of women.516

In sum, only the radical Islamist organization Da‘wa wa al-Tablīgh refuses ijtihād, concerning family issues and the improvement of women’s positions. The radical organization ‘Adl wa al-Iḥsān, next to the other, moderate, Islamists, does underline the necessity of ijtihād to improve women’s positions. However, ‘Adl wa al-Iḥsān is a more radical Islamist organization, in that it refuses to take into account the Universal Declarations of Human Rights.

Besides addressing Islam, the Islamist activists I interviewed also attend the international norms and regulations on women’s issues, in particular the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Not all of the Islamist organizations I interviewed approve of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in toto. Da‘wa wa al-Tablīgh and ‘Adl wa al-Iḥsān in particular oppose the use of universal values. In

513 Yāssīne 2012
514 Yāssīne 1996
515 Ibid.
516 Muşalī 2011, 3-4
contrast, the Islamist organizations PJD, ORWA, al-Hiḍn Association and Muntada stress that it is possible to reconcile their Islamic approach with the international conventions.

As such Morocco and other Arab Muslim countries have put forward certain reservations regarding CEDAW. Article Nine, which deals with the transmission of nationality to children, and Article Sixteen, which concerns the equality of men and women in the marital relationship, are considered to be in contradiction with Islamic religion. However, in 2003 on the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights Moroccan king Mohammed the Sixth, however, announced that Morocco retracted its reservations on CEDAW. ‘Our reservations,’ the monarch said, ‘have become obsolete due to the advanced legislation that has been adopted by our country.’ The king’s announcement had an impact on society, and stimulated the improvement of women’s rights.

Activists of non-governmental organizations and women’s organizations welcomed this progress. In contrast, all the Islamists associations mentioned above are worried about this elimination of reservations, particularly concerning article Sixteen because, in their view, it contradicts Islamic religion.

They argue that the total equality between men and women in terms of tamāṭul (symmetry) that is propagated by CEDAW, is not approved by the Sharī’a. These Islamists advocate another kind of equality. Whereas they consider the roles of men and women similar in the public sphere, they conceive of their roles as complementary in the private sphere. Equity instead of equality is the norm here, meaning fairness and justice. Naji Mekkaoui and Mufīd both stress that women and men should live in harmony, cooperation and intimacy, and that no hierarchy or domination should exist in the family. Moroccan Islamists thus differ in their appreciation of the international conventions of human rights. The Ulama likewise stress that their attitude towards the reservations won’t be changed.

### 6-3 Moroccan Activists on Exemplary Women in Islamic History

Another source the three Islamist associations rely on to underpin women’s rights, is the study of Islamic history, so as to uncover the major roles women played in the past.

---

517 Touahri 2008
518 Ibid.
519 Burqiyya 2005, 65
520 Naji Mekkaoui 2005, 56; Mufīd 2005, 23
521 Touahri 2008
In the colonial era, it was the pioneers of the new Salafist movement - not to be equated with current fundamentalist Salafism - `Allāl al-Fāsī and Ḥasan al-Wazzānī, who appealed for the consideration of women who played outstanding roles in history to support their advocation of women’s rights.⁵²² For example, they invited Moroccans and Muslims in general to take the Prophet’s wives as exemplary models. Al-Wazzānī writes:

The Prophet’s wives were exemplary models for Muslim women. Hafṣa and Umm Kalthūm were writers, and `Āyisha’s position in knowledge is known.⁵²³

Likewise, al-Fāsī refers to the Prophet’s wife `Āyisha as the greatest and most important example of a woman who played a crucial role in the history of the Muslim umma. He also points to Umm al-Dardā’, who was a muftiya (deliverer of formal legal opinions, fatwa’s) in the mosque, and to the fact that the Umayyad sultan, Sulaymān, regularly attended her religion courses. Al-Fāsī also mentions Nafīsa, the knowledgeable woman, whose knowledge impressed Imām al-Shāfi‘i and inspired him to continually attend her religious lectures and to become one of her faithful disciples.⁵²⁵

Akhawāt al-Şaf ā, which, as we saw, was one of the women associations of the 1940s, evoked Islamic history to underpin women’s right to education and employment. The association explicitly referred to women who played important roles in Islamic history, such as in the companionship of the Prophet.

During the last decade, Islamist activists in the field of women’s issues increasingly refer to important Muslim women in history. They rely on Muslim scholars who wrote on these women, such as Abdallāh Ḥalīm Abū Shuqqā, whose book Taḥrīr al-Mar’a fī ‘Aṣr al-Risāla (Women’s Emancipation in the Era of the Revelation) deals with social life in the Prophet’s time. In this work women come forward as playing important social, economic and political roles. They are thus presented as exemplary models for women today.⁵²⁶

From my interviews with the members of the three Islamist associations mentioned above, I found that they equally emphasize the significant roles women played in Islamic history. A female activist from al-‘Adl wa al-Iḥsān argues:

---

⁵²² See the section above
⁵²³ al-Wazzānī 1987
⁵²⁴ The leader of the Shāfi‘i school
⁵²⁵ al-Fāsī 2008, 254
⁵²⁶ Abū Chuqqā 1999
In the pre-Islamic era, female infants were buried alive and female adults were sold in the nakhāsa (slave trade market). They remained victims of slavery, male oppression and dominance for hundreds of years until the coming of Islam. Islam rescued women and moved them from a state of weakness to a state of power. Islam offered women a place next to men in every domain of life. Our Prophet offered a place to women next to him in the mosque (…). The mosque at that time was not only a space of ‘ibāda (worship) but a kind of parliament where the political and social affairs of the whole Muslim umma were discussed and preserved. Umm Salam, for example, was one of the Prophet’s companions. She always participated in the Prophet’s meetings and was consulted on war matters. ‘Āyisha, the Prophet’s second wife, was a muftiya and political advisor for the entire umma. There is a long list of women who played a role in Islamic history. The heroic roles of women are very significant. They impressed the Prophet’s companions, such as ‘Umar, who said: “We used to consider women nothing”. But women, thanks to Islam, showed the opposite. Thanks to Muhammad’s teachings, we started to have useful women able to participate in the ruling of the whole umma.527

Clearly, the activist didn't want to stop her story there. She had mentioned the advanced position of women in the Islamic past to contrast it with their present situation. She bent her head for a while, then she raised her eyes and continued:

One might ask where these exemplary women are? What happened to them? And what makes women today unlike these historical women? We need to go back to history to understand what’s going on with women today (…) It is of course the change of the political system from shūrā (consultation) to authoritarian models that worsened women’s situation.528

I interrupted her and asked her what she considered to be the relationship between the dominant political system and the oppressive elements in women’s situation. She replied:

The relationship is that women were forced by authoritarian men to be confined within their private

527 An activist from al-‘Adl wa al-Iḥsān, interviews, September 2011
528 Ibid.
spaces so as not to be exposed to the public eye and to the greed of people in power. Women here remained prisoners within their homes. They were prevented from attending schools and mosques to study and participate in the social and political Muslim umma affairs… what was worse is that women became victims of illiteracy, ignorance and poverty. They no longer lived the rights Islam gave them. They remained in this awful situation for years and years until Western colonialism arrived. This was the ṯāmma al-Kubrā (big disaster). Western ideologies which call for a total freedom that transgresses the limits set by Islamic religion. Women became torn between Western emancipation ideologies and oppressive Maliki instruction. There are women who are impressed by Western ideologies and forget about their religion, and there are others who remained under the oppression of dominant Māliki fiqh (…). To rescue women, we need to reread the Qur’an and the Sunna, and we need to reconsider Islamic history.  

In order to make this strong comparison between the past and the present, the activist from al-ʿAdl wa al-Īḥsān had to know about Islamic history and about the development of women’s positions through time. Historical references make them understand how women became dominated by men, and enable them to argue that Islam doesn't give any justification for legal and social domination.

Islamist referees do not only refer to women’s role in Arabic and Islamic history in general, they also refer to Moroccan women as discussed by, among others, Ṭallāl al-Fāsī, who in the 1950s had equally pointed to women who played important roles in Moroccan history such as Fāṭima al-Fihriyya, the founder of al-Qarawīyyīn University, and Zaynab al-Nafzāwiyya, the wife of Sultan Idrīs, who played a role in her husband’s political system. PJD member al-ʿUthmānī, who took an interest in Morocco’s female cultural heritage, stresses in his writings that the Islamic perception of women, which is based on the Qur’an and the Sunna, derives from three important principles: equality, emancipation and participation. These principles, in the opinion of al-ʿUthmānī, are distinctly displayed by historical Moroccan women.

Muṣalī, a present day PJD Islamist activist, explicitly appreciates both Arab and Moroccan researchers’ writings on women in history, and their desire to understand the
significance of women’s historical roles so as to underpin women’s rights. All the historical women concerned refused to be confined to their private spaces, freed themselves from the chains of the patriarchal system and succeeded in creating public personalities.

Female saints hold a more ambiguous position. Although they are part of Moroccan religious history, there is the overall rejection of saint veneration by Islamists. The question then arises as to how Islamist feminists receive Morocco’s female saints. (How) do they interpret these devote women's roles in terms of empowerment? Do they use these women as role models?

6-4 Activists’ Reception of Moroccan Women Saints as Sources of Empowerment

For reasons explained above, this section mainly concerns the Islamists’ reception of Moroccan women saints. I will only occasionally refer to some of my interviews with secular feminists.

Although the Islamist interviewees disapprove of saint veneration because it is not permissible in orthodox Islam, from my interviews it turns out that they approve of the use of Moroccan history and women saints as original sources to inform their debate on women’s rights. Many of the Islamist activists I interviewed have a limited knowledge of Moroccan female saints. As one of them explained:

There is a rarity of women in written history. It is man who thinks that religion is his own space and not that of women. Man considers women’s religious role secondary and of no importance. In reality, there aren’t a lot of references on women saints.532

I will therefore focus on a more limited group of activists who do have an extensive knowledge of Moroccan women saints. One of them is al-Ḥaqqāwī. She said:

Women saints who attained spiritual and political leadership are a marjiʿiyya (reference), that emanates from Islamic and Moroccan ethnic backgrounds. These historical women make us consider Moroccan cultural and historical heritage as a further source in our debate on women today.533

---

532 An Islamist activist, interviews, October 2011
533 al-Ḥaqqāwī, interviews, October 2011
She acknowledged the importance of understanding the historical roles of women saints. Modern women should employ this understanding to face the future and to build strong personalities. Otherwise, the status of women will remain underdeveloped.\textsuperscript{534}

However, the relationship between the Islamist activists and women saints is in no way created by pilgrimages since Islamist activists refuse to visit saints’ shrines. Some of them said that they did frequent sacred tombs in their childhood. They would go with their mothers and grandmothers to spend the day in the vicinity of their favorite women saints. It is their orthodox religious education that stopped them from following the example of their female family members.\textsuperscript{535}

The Islamists’ understanding of baraka, thus, is different from that of the saint venerators we met in the previous chapter. The latter visit women saints and establish a very close relationship with them to gain some of the women saints’ baraka. In this way they hope to find answers to their wishes, solutions for the problems and the hardships of modern daily life. Baraka is considered the core impetus of the pilgrims’ visits and the rituals they perform within shrines. The Islamists, however, do not believe in women saints as holders of baraka in the sense of blessing power. They reject the pilgrims’ understanding of baraka, which defines it as a force for curing the ill, sheltering the homeless, facilitating girls’ marriages and other therapeutic services. The Islamists offer another understanding of baraka. Al-Ḥaqqāwī argues:

The baraka of a saint is the knowledge (maʿrifa) and wisdom (ḥikma) that women saints succeeded in acquiring (…). The baraka of a woman saint also encompasses her ability to acquire knowledge that enables her to attain decision making positions.\textsuperscript{536}

Al-Ḥaqqāwī defines baraka not in terms of a divine force that fulfills a particular wish, but rather in terms of the wisdom and knowledge a woman saint succeeds in acquiring and that she possesses on. Also, al-Ḥaqqāwī refers to baraka as the abilities and capacities that a woman saint develops to reach fame, power and authority. According to her, baraka, in the sense that pilgrims attribute to it, cannot help a saint (male or female) attain power. The proof is that there are many saints with so-called strong baraka who fail to reach decision-making

\textsuperscript{534} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{535} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{536} Ibid.
positions. Thus, al-Ḥaqqāwī acknowledges that baraka is the ability to acquire knowledge and wisdom that enable its holder to impact the public order. Thus, baraka as knowledge and wisdom is highly appreciated in the Islamist feminists’ discourses.

Related to the popular notion of baraka is saintly intercession. The Islamist activists have a negative attitude toward such intercession. They disapprove of pilgrims who treat the women saints they visit as intermediaries between them and the Divine. They also disagree with the different rituals pilgrims celebrate around saints, in the hope of meeting the saints’ spirits to fulfill their wishes and answer their prayers. The only permitted intercession a believer may consider is the Prophet's. In general, Islam is based on direct worship of God without intercession or mediation.537

However, despite the rejection of intercession by female (or male) saints, and saint veneration as such, Islamist activists respect the saintly female personalities themselves. Most of the activists argue that a feeling of admiration and even of love towards women saints started to rise inside of them when they learned of the stories about their lives and about the heroic role these women played in the past. Although the activists did not visit the saints' shrines to bond directly with them, they felt an emotional bond with them from a distance.

The impact women saints have on Moroccan Islamist activists becomes clear when they describe their relationship with women in history as strong and mutual. Al-‘Adl wa al-Ḥsān-activists refer in their discourses to women saints in history as their sisters. They establish a relation of sisterhood with the women saints because they share religious doctrinal ties with them and because they will encounter them in the hereafter.538 Na‘ima, an activist in the Spirituality and Justice Association, contends: “We refer to the life stories on women saints and historical women so as to establish an emotional bond with them (rābiṭa ḥamīmiyya).” In her opinion, the role played by these women in history should be remembered and be present in their daily lives.

Most of the Islamists I interviewed employ a number of terms to designate women saints as role models. These terms are: fakhr (honor), qudwā (model), mathal (example) and the Berber word tamghārt, meaning “leader” or “greatest”. The activists used this terminology in their discourses to express their pride, respect and admiration vis-à-vis these historical women saints and their achievement of saintly personalities. When asked about her knowledge of `Azīza al-Saksāwīyya, one respondent said:

537 Ibid.
538 Ibid.
Well! She is a pride and a model. Let’s say a reference. I am interested in the conditions of her life and in the things she did, and what she avoided and what she mastered to achieve her strong personality.  

Most of the interviewees confirmed that they receive historical women saints as great inspirators of empowerment. This empowerment is characterized by a taking up of several different self-techniques of the female saints, or elements of their examples, which the interviewees integrate in their own self-techniques and ethical self-formation.

**6-4.1 Ethnic Identities**

Islamist activists value Moroccan local cultural heritage with the exception of the ritual of saint veneration. Muntadā Berber Islamists even name their associations after the Berber women saints who belong to their Berber tribes and regions, such as Lalla Zaynab. Likewise, Arab Islamist activists choose names of Arab women saints who are buried in the urban and rural locations of Morocco, for their associations, schools, youth houses and other institutions, such as Khumaysa, Umm al-Banîn. The life stories of female saints inspire activists to revive the cultural heritage as an element of their ethical values, albeit without disregarding modernity. Al-Ḥaqqāwī again says:

I am attached to my Berber origin and to my Islamic country. You might see me always wearing a jellaba (Moroccan traditional garment). But at the same time I am interested in all that is modern. I studied foreign languages, I participate in international conferences, and I have a lot of foreign friends…Thus, I can describe myself not only aşîla (traditional, authentic) but also as ḥadāthiyâ (modern).

Interestingly, the reappreciation of local cultures doesn't create tensions in the Moroccan Islamist activists' debates on women saints as constituents of their ethnic background. Although their ethnicity is recognized by them, most of the Islamists treat women saints from different ethnicities in a similar manner. According to them, women saints, whether Berber or Arab, are all Muslims and are to be appreciated regardless of their different origins. What is

---

539 Summaya ben Khaldun, interviews, October 2011
540 al-Ḥaqqāwī, Interviews, October 2011
essential to them is the way these historical women achieved sainthood and ethical personalities that marked history. Al-Ḥaqqāwī contends:

What is important is not the Berber or Arab origin of a person, but the fact that these historical women saints independently sought and acquired the knowledge and wisdom that empowered them to experience the public space and to be highly respected and honored by people belonging to different ethnic groups.  

Thus al-Ḥaqqāwī acknowledges that women saints bridged cultural boundaries and ethnic specificities, and, as such, can empower Islamist feminists today. According to the interviewees, women saints have indeed taught them to appreciate their Moroccan ethnicity and their Islamic background in building their ethical personalities, or ethical self-formation.

6-4.2 Spirituality and Knowledge

The activists are interested in some of the spiritual aspects of historical women’s sainthood. They value women saints’ abilities to achieve strong piety and the spirituality that enabled them to reach God’s closeness. Attaining Divine proximity is not an easy task, al-Ḥaqqāwī asserts. She calls the women saints educators of piety and religion. Women saints were spiritual masters who taught Sufis how to reach the Divine and to become models of women engaged in mysticism so as to achieve pious personalities.

The feminist activists do, however, appreciate women saints’ style of achieving great social and knowledgeable personalities more than their strictly pious efforts. Their self-techniques of attaining greatness through education are the most important reasons why activists consider women saints role models.

Some of the activists assert that these women saints’ knowledge and education empowered them to become more interested in education. Al-Ḥaqqāwī says:

Lalla ʿAzīza al-Saksāwiyya’s life story is very important to study because it shows how women become educated, wise and knowledgeable. Her education empowers me to think more of my postgraduate studies. I got my master degree in psychiatric sciences, and I am now working on my PhD on the

541 al-Ḥaqqāwī, Interviews, October 2011
The activists also refer other women to knowledgeable and educated women saints so as to empower them to educate themselves and become knowledgeable too. They are conscious of the phenomenon of illiteracy, which is still high particularly among women (40% of illiterate women in urban spaces and around 60% in rural areas).\textsuperscript{543} For this reason, feminist activists keep stressing in their discourses the education historical women achieved. They even discuss how many women in history postponed or even challenged traditional early marriages for the sake of the achievement of educated and knowledgeable personalities. In this way Mālika, an activist of Muntadā, said that she succeeded to convince illiterate mothers to attend her courses. She taught them how to read and write and also how to educate their children and orient their lives. Another activist from UAF also explained illiterate women how their education could help them cultivate the seeds of education and knowledge in themselves and in their children’s minds.\textsuperscript{544}

Being conscious of the importance of women saints’ education, the activists became persuaded by their studies of women in history that more examples of historical women had to be researched and presented in educational centers. The revival of historical women’s biographies and life stories is one of these strategies. The Justice and Spirituality Association includes in its agendas the study of forgotten historical female figures. Its members founded a school affiliated with their association called Akhawāt al-Ākhira (Sisters of the Hereafter) where women are continuously studying the archives and oral tradition on women in history.

Similarly, Farīda Zumurrud, an activist and a ‘ālima (a female religious scholar) in the high ‘ulama council in Rabat, founded the cultural center Iḥyā’ al-Turāth wal-l-Mar’a (Revival of the Heritage and the Woman) in 2010 in Rabat for research on Moroccan women in history. According to Zumurrud, the activist researchers, volunteers and students, in the center are engaged in collecting biographies and life stories mentioned in written history.\textsuperscript{545} Another way the Islamist activists have chosen to keep historical women saints present in the activists’ daily lives is the propagation of their biographies on the Internet. The Akhawāt al-Ākhira does this so, and Zumurrud's center is said to soon follow their example so that all people can benefit from the gathered study materials.

\textsuperscript{542} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{543} Sadiqi 2008, 13
\textsuperscript{544} Mālika, interviews, November 2011
\textsuperscript{545} Zumurrud, interviews, October 2011
The Islamist feminists also spread information on female saints and other important women in Islamic history via national and international meetings and conferences. Actually, the activists I interviewed continually organize round table meetings and conferences to which they invite specialists in the field to discuss the meaning of women in religious and social history. Seminar titles like 'Ishrāqāt khālida (Eternal lightness) and Nisā’ khālidāt (Eternal women) often highlight the historical women as exemplars.

The Akhawāt al-Ākhira-school organizes monthly meetings in which they discuss life stories of women known for their sainthood and piety. The aim of their discussions is, as leader Nādiya Yāssīne puts it, to understand the way these historical women created saintly personalities and lived in a context that enabled them to attain sainthood. The example of educated historical women saints also encourages women to carry on their higher studies, as is supported by the Akhawāt al-Ākhira school, giving them the opportunity to follow courses in different Islamic sciences. It trained female students and guides their higher studies. Until now it has produced until now one hundred ‘ālimāt. All trained women take gender perspectives into consideration.

6-4.3 Transgressing Patriarchal Limits

Islamist activists contend that it was exactly their self-transformation into knowledgeable, spiritual leaders that empowered female saints to challenge the conventional roles that oppress women. From my interviews, the Islamists’ positive feelings toward female saints were fed because these historical women created personalities that transgressed the patriarchal order. This was also the case for secular feminists that I interviewed. An activist from ADFM said:

Historical women saints followed the way of piety and Sufism to resist their conventional patriarchal rules and to uncover women’s abilities to become not only pious, but also educated, knowledgeable and effective.

Khadija, another liberal activist of the ADFM added that education empowers women to make their voices heard and to change the patriarchal rules and the gender division of labor.

An activist from UAF asserted:

---

546 Ibid.
547 An activist from ADFM, interviews, December 2011
548 Khadija, interviews, December 2011
what I admire in these women saints is that they had chosen piety to achieve personalities that serve their environment and resist the dominant system.\textsuperscript{549}

In their opinion, these historical women used Sufism as a technique to resist their local patriarchal ideologies that privileged men and discriminated women. Secular feminists thus take on board Morocco’s cultural heritage to underpin their feminist struggle for women’s rights.

Most of the Islamist activists also said that they wanted to propagate women saints’ historical role because it constituted a challenge to the dominant system not only of their time but of any other historical era. They admired the way Moroccan female saints were able to play a role in the private as well as in the public sphere serving as spiritual, social and sometimes even political leaders. One of the activists said: “I insist on education because it will empower women to impose themselves not only in the private space but the public one as well.”\textsuperscript{550}

Historical Muslim women have shown that women and men should equally participate in all domains of life. The Islamist activists turn out to experience a sense of continuity in relation to them, especially where it concerns these social and political roles especially. Sumāyya Ben Khaldūn argued:

\begin{quote}
Sainthood is shared among all the Muslims. Each person is able to become a saint. We as activists follow these historical women saints. Let’s say we are successors to them in their spiritual, political and social roles. We follow the way these women saints achieved their saintly personalities and we seek to develop them as well. Thus, I see there is no qaṭī’a (cut) with the past.\textsuperscript{551}
\end{quote}

Ben Khaldūn asserts that modern activists can be viewed as successors to the women saints in that they are continuing their social activities. In fact, all activists stressed that activism and voluntary work have their roots in history. Her PJD colleague activist Muşalî explains that it started with the Jamā’a and Zāwiya, Dar al-Faqīrāt, Dār al-Ma’alima and Dār al-Ḍamāna.\textsuperscript{552}

These names cover different religious traditional houses of charity some of which still exist. The Islamist activists consider these religious and social houses as forms of civil society and

\textsuperscript{549} Secular activist, interviews, December 2011
\textsuperscript{550} Islamist activist, interviews, December 2011
\textsuperscript{551} Sumayya ben Khaldūn, interviews, October 2011
\textsuperscript{552} Muşalî, interviews, October 2011
voluntary associations of equals in which the participants (women saints, Sufis and other women) were united by common goals, namely, teaching the Qur’an, education of the Murids, feeding the poor and sheltering the refugees and the homeless. Women at times of crisis were offered help and trained to learn different kinds of crafts. These women saints and Sufis, in the opinion of Ben Khaldūn, could be considered as the pioneers of activism.

We can conclude that Islamist activists are inspired by women saints especially the self-techniques involved in their development into socially and politically active women. The Islamist activists emphasize women saints’ social role in the public sphere as a strategy to impact other women to be participants in voluntary associations. Activists organize meetings in which they sensitize other women of the important role historical women played in their times. As a collective group, the Islamist activists seek to influence other women to participate in activism and voluntary associations. The Islamist activist Muṣalī argues this necessity:

> Although we have female members in Parliament, different medical doctors, university teachers and other employees, we find that women’s presence in voluntary work is very rare. We actually have fifty thousand associations in Morocco among which we have only one thousand women as participants in these associations. This number is of course very weak in comparison to the current Moroccan population. Thus, we are in need of these historical female activists, I mean here women in history, to empower contemporary women to participate in voluntary activism.  

An activist from ADFM affirms:

> Women’s participation in civil society and voluntary activism is still weak in Morocco. We have very highly educated women, but they refuse to contribute to social activism.  

Moroccan activists make reference to exemplary women in history, hoping to impact women to participate in social activism and in the development of today’s society. Historical examples should show the way to a modern follow-up. Islamist feminists thus want women

---

553 Ibid.
554 Activist, interviews, December 2011
to become much more active in public life and society, much like the female saints and other Muslim women in history and like they themselves.

But how does this relate to their views on gender equity and complementarity as normative ideals, instead of as equality? During my interviews I explicitly asked for their opinion on these issues. As we saw before, the Islamists’ ideas about complementary roles for the sexes are based on the conviction that men and women are different by nature. They argue that women’s hormonal constitution and bodily roles as mothers predispose them to certain emotions and, therefore, to certain preferences in terms of types of work. These are connected to a natural tendency to be passive and in need to be protected by men, who, as a result of their own hormonal constitution, tend to be physically stronger and more aggressive and inclined to take on the role of protecting women.

But from my interviews, I found that most of them stress their approval of gender equality in the public sphere and limit complementarity to the private sphere. Al-Ḥaqqāwī said: “We believe in gender complementarity in the private sphere, but in the public sphere we believe in strict gender equality and parity.” They argue that, in spite of their natural constitution and dispositions, women are able to realize what they need and want in various situations. They can work toward, insist on, and even fight for the right to fulfill these needs and wants. Some of them see no contradiction between women’s natural dispositions and the desire to pursue higher education and employment in a variety of areas and at multiple levels. Some believe that holding high-level positions is not incompatible with their natural constitution and dispositions provided they are also able to incorporate their roles as wives and mothers into the lives and lifestyles that such positions demand them to lead.

They don't see a contradiction or incompatibility between being passive and protected in the private sphere and being assertive and strong in the public sphere at the same time. Sāmiya, an Islamist who works as a physical doctor, argued: “I am proud of taking care of my husband, children and the whole family… and I am also proud of my duties in the hospital.” Being assertive and strong has an impact on the way they think and act in general, and enables them to live according to a gendered division in the home, and simultaneously stand up for their rights in the public sphere.

One respondent argued that the perspective of complementarity entails that it is up to women themselves to decide if they want to remain in the private sphere. Women should have

555 al-Ḥaqqāwī, interviews, October 2011
556 Islamist activist, interviews, November 2011
the choice to go out and enter the public sphere. Their responsibilities at home sometimes demand sacrifices, but it’s the other way around as well.

In some cases, some of the men are taking on new responsibilities in the private sphere. They are doing things that they weren’t doing before. Some of the efforts of the Islamist activists thus are leading to changes in the attitudes and actions of the men in their lives. Sāmiya says again: “When I came back home, I found my children and my husband having done at least half of the housework”. This shows that the Islamists see themselves as promoting change in both the private and public sphere, even though they would reject a principal elimination of gender-based rules and practices. It is therefore difficult to speak in terms of a strict complementarity between the sexes. The Islamist women I talked to are seeking change in the private and the public sphere, and aim to gain access to the latter through education, activism and employment, so as to eliminate oppression and attain equality. In other words, they are seeking to have more say, more control, more power over the conditions of their lives, making them, in that sense, similar to secular feminists.

6-5 Islamist Feminism

In this section I will evaluate from my interviews with members of the three Islamist women associations -which were basically about the role of female saints- whether the Islamists activists do or do not belong to Moroccan feminism. In what follows I will sum up what I have found as the main characteristics of their outlooks.

The first principle stressed by the Islamists I talked to is gender equality. It is seen as inherent to Islam, as is clear from the Qur’anic verse that articulates that man and woman are created from the same soul, and from the Prophet’s ḥadith which states that al-Nisā’ shaqā’iq al-Rijāl (women are siblings of men). Both references support the idea that men and women’s equality is al-Asl (the origin or basis) of Islamic law.\(^{557}\) Researcher, psychiatrist and ex-president of the PJD al-‘Utmānī, also declares that gender equality is inherent to Islam. Islamists define equality between man and woman in terms of having similar rights and similar opportunities in all domains of life.\(^ {558}\)

\(^{557}\) al-‘Utmānī 1998, 13

A second principle the Islamists stress is emancipation. According to the PJD, women should be emancipated, and emancipation, according to PJD members, means that women are free in their choices, not dependent.559

Complementarity constitutes the third principle of their discourses. i.e. the idea that a man complements a woman, and a woman complements a man.560 Islamist activists are keenly aware that the idea that men and women need to complement each other in order to create harmony and cooperation within the family arouses suspicion among secularists. That is why many of them assert that the idea simply refers to physics, the biological and emotional differences between the sexes, and accordingly, a possible preference of women for motherhood and certain types of work. They stress that it does not refers to diverging gender roles outside the home that may limit women's choices for education, work and activism. In short: a woman should be able to choose what she wants. In that sense Islamists are definitely demanding changes, outside and inside the home.

The fourth principle that the Islamists are greatly concerned with is the family. The latter, in the Islamists' opinion, constitutes the primary basis around which women’s issues revolve. Family dynamics gets emphasis in Islamist agendas, because, as we saw, the family is seen as society in miniature. Most of the Islamists advocate the cultivation of gender equality in the education of children, the future generation. This necessitates, in the opinion of the Islamists, the re-education of mothers and the advancement of their roles.561 For them, the prioritization of mothers logically follows from their non-existent or poor education, which is not beneficial to the upbringing of children in which they nevertheless play a major role. This does not mean that fathers should not play a larger role in their offspring's education. On the contrary, Islamists believe they should.

A fifth point of interest for Islamists is the relationship between ijtihād (reinterpretation of the Islamic sources), modernity and modernization. They define modernity in terms of the quest for progress, development and renewal in all areas of life, with ijtihād being the key element in the transition to a new phase; one, in which human beings can fulfill their aspirations, and justice and equality can prevail. The Islamists’ reinterpretations concerning gender relations take social change into consideration. To them, ijtihād can facilitate a revolution in tradition and conservative thinking, which has so far negatively impacted the understanding of religion vis-à-vis women’s rights.562

559 Muşalı 2011, 285
560 Ibid, 286
561 Ibid, 287
562 Ibid., 288-89
The last principle emphasized by the Islamists’ discourses is women’s participation in politics and public life. They believe that both men and women have to be present in public life. The feminization of the public religious sphere is inherent. The Islamists all assert that the public religious sphere, which is often conceived of as a masculine space, has come to be increasingly marked by a feminine presence. An important aspect of Islamist feminists’ struggle is the public recognition of women’s right to full participation in this sphere.

From my interviews, the Islamist activists are impressed by the women saints' strong and ethical personalities, and by their abilities to challenge male domination. They esteem historical women saints as role models and are determined to follow these historical women’s footsteps by carrying on their religious, social and political activities, which they take up in the context of their own ethical self-formation. Out of principle, they do not visit the female saints' graves, but they do ensure the continuing presence of these historical women saints in modern life by accumulating accounts of their lives, and by using their names for their institutions and schools. The revival of women saints’ stories supports their agendas as they empower women to educate themselves and to reach high and respectable positions in society. They also remind Moroccans that women are not obliged to submit to the customary system that seeks to disempower them and render them inactive.

The interviewed activists use historical women saints in different ways to show how pious women of history are inspiring to them. Most of the Islamists activists include the study of women saints and Sufis in their programs. As mentioned above, ‘Adl wa al-Iḥsān shows a great interest in women saints and their roles in history and keeps studying the archives in search for women saints and their life stories.

Yāssīne states that her women section organizes courses in which women saints’ lives are continuously discussed. The PJD and Muntadā Zahrā’ organize seminars and meetings under the motto of a particular woman saint or any woman who played an important role in history. In addition, the Muntadā organize meetings with the names of women saints and invite scholars and researchers to present papers on women in history. Muşalī refers in her published thesis to ‘Akhawāt Ṣafā as the first feminist association in Morocco. This association, in her opinion, is founded by Sufi women who were considered as the pioneers of feminist movement in Morocco. Mufīd organizes academic meetings on historical women. She invites specialists in history to discuss family issues, in particular historical women who

563 Yāssīne, interviews, December 2011
564 Muşalī 2010
played a role in maintaining the survival of the institutions of the family and society. Muqri’ al-Idrissī abū Zīd, a PJD researcher and a religious scholar, presents a paper in one of the meetings organized by al-Hiḍn Association about the Sufi woman Zaynab al-Nafzāwiya’s life, services and roles during the Almoravīds’ dynasty. Butayna al-Qarūrī also headed seminars organized for the revival of women in history like saints, Sufis and other exemplary women so as to correct the stereotypes around women today. In the magazine of her association, Muntadā Zahrah’, She contends that this is the reason why she organizes annual meetings about women saints and women who played a role in history. In one of her papers she explains that women saints and Sufis constitute a role model that we, modern women, should be proud of and should take up. Yāssīne also keeps referring to her father’s book, tanwīr al-Mu’mīnāt, in her discussion on the Prophet’s wives and the prophet’s female companions who played a role in history. Moroccan Islamists actively use women saints and Sufis as inspiring role models.

Like these Islamist women organizations, the liberal feminist movement as well accounts on historical women and history as important references to underpin their fight against patriarchy and for women’s rights, as was discussed before. Both Moroccan Islamist and secularist activists receive historical women saints as a source of empowerment from which they gain power and in which they invest power.

What struck me from my research, was that, whereas Islamist women’s organizations are often described as traditional and conservative with regard to women’s issues, I more or less found the opposite to be the case.

Moroccan Islamist associations’ discourses and practices seek the political, social and economic empowerment of women to such a degree that they, in my view, can be called Islamist feminist organizations. As such, they belong to Moroccan women’s ethical freedom practices, which underpin women’s empowerment and women’s rights in a critique of women’s oppression.

6-6 Conclusion

565 Mufīd 2009, 7-9
566 Abū Zīd al-Idrīsī 2011, 19-28
567 Muntadā Zahrah’ 2012
568 al-Qarūrī 2011, 4
569 Muntadā Zahrah’ 2012
570 Yāssīne 1996
Islamist activists base their struggle for the improvement of women’s positions on different sources. They count on the primary sources of Islam, the Qur’an and Sunna and on their own interpretation of these sources. They strongly believe that Mālikī jurisprudence’s definition of women’s status is a patriarchal interpretation of Islam and the primary cause of Moroccan women’s oppression and discrimination. More importantly, Islamist associations also make reference to Islamic history and to Moroccan local cultural heritage in their debate on women’s issues. They continually organize meetings to discuss Muslim and Moroccan women and the role they played in history, such as female saints, and the way these historical women created themselves as ethical personalities and role models.

Finally, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights constitutes another source that Moroccan Islamist feminists count on for their discourses on women’s issues. They strongly believe that humanism advocated by human rights discourses is part of Islam. This additional adoption of universal human rights may be considered remarkable. However Fāṭima Sadiqi states in a forthcoming book that what Morocco is witnessing at the present is the secularization of Islamist feminism and the Islamization of liberal feminism. Moroccan Islamist feminism and secular feminism have similar objectives: to fight patriarchy at all levels of society and personal life. Islamist feminism is thus part of Moroccan feminism, which, as such, is poly-vocal one.
General Conclusion

The results of my research challenge the conventional image of passive Moroccan Muslim women and the depiction of women as victims of patriarchal religious ideologies. Instead, my thesis draws an alternative discourse that presents women, whether in the past or in the present, as active religious agents whose religious agency displays their active engagement in creating, re-defining, re-interpreting and transforming their religious roles both in private and public spheres.

Cupolas and shrines of female saints still stand throughout the Maghreb, especially Morocco. Little is known about these female saints. Practically the only sources on them are hagiographies and oral stories. From these sources, my thesis discusses these women’s construction of sainthood through inventorying the self-techniques they used in this context. My research thus approaches them as agents, discussing the way they actively sought sainthood, and at the same time did transgressed or failed to transgress the social limits that were imposed on them. It does so in the context of current discourses on Moroccan women and feminism, specifically by researching how the narratives of these female saints are received by Moroccan women today, (especially by their venerators), by women preachers and their attendants, and by feminist activists. My thesis questions whether there is a continuity in Moroccan female spiritual agency throughout history, which can inspire Muslim women today and others in defying the negative images of them sketched above.

Chapter One gives a first indication of my hagiographic sources, and describes my fieldwork throughout several regions in Morocco. It discusses the scholarly research on Moroccan female saints thus far, and indicates the researches on which I build. Some important concepts of my thesis are discussed in this chapter; one of them being Sufism’s main characteristics, especially in its popular version. The concept of baraka is also discussed and defined. Thirdly, my understanding of rituals in this thesis comes to the fore, namely as performative acts. Following this, I discuss a few theoretical approaches that related to the concepts of embodiment, agency, empowerment and patriarchy. Embodiment refers to the fact that the body is modified by social categories and thus lives – embodies – its social and spiritual environment. Theoretical debates about agency, such as they currently take place among anthropologists, often refer to the works of Judith Butler, Michel Foucault and – recently – Saba Mahmood. Like Mahmood’s study, this thesis builds on the final Foucault’s ethics and the conceptual tools it presents, such as ‘ethical self-formation’ and ‘ethical self-techniques,’ both of which refer to embodied ethical ways of life. But unlike Mahmood’s
work, this thesis also employs Foucault’s ethical concept of ‘freedom practices,’ which Mahmood totally obliterated. Freedom practices are ethical self-practices that involve ethical self-formation, and which create new ethical ways of life in opposition to existing forms of domination. The concept of empowerment is defined as the expansion of people’s ability to achieve certain ends, and the concept of patriarchy is taken up as a conceptual tool to analyze concrete historical social patterns of domination of women. Finally, the chapter introduces the concepts ‘equality effects,’ and ‘egalitarian effects’ such as developed in the work of the Dutch historian Siep Stuurman. Discourses and texts – and we add: ways of life and life stories – can express notions and thoughts of equality and egalitarianism, without any explicit reference to these terms.

In Chapter Two, the tradition of Sufism is discussed in more depth, especially in relation to gender. It explores the basic principles of Sufism as formulated by al Ghazali, which form the basis of orthodox as well as of popular Sufism, with the latter being additionally characterized by the practice of saint veneration. The ribāt is discussed as the space where this veneration of saints takes place. Sufism’s relation to gender is discussed primarily in relation to the works of some Sufi scholars of the past, which make it explicit that women are included in Sufism, in as far as they can reach the highest ranks of spirituality and sainthood just like men do. Sufism’s relation to gender is further discussed by approaching Sufism as a strand of Islamic mysticism that finds its basis in the Qur’an. Several contemporary Muslim authors argue that the spiritual side of Islam, such as can be found in the Qur’an, is egalitarian in character. These works thus argue for intrinsic gender equality at the heart of Islam, much like the Sufi scholars who came long before them. Against this background I finally discuss some examples of female Sufi mystics, such as Rabī’a al-`Adawiyya, and Fāṭima of Cordova, who, from the narratives, come forward as living their lives on equal footing with their male counterparts.

Chapter Three focuses on Sufism and hagiography in the Moroccan context. Here, I briefly discuss Moroccan geography and history in the context of its Islamization, in which proliferation of Sufism has been crucial. Moroccan Sufism is then discussed, as different from the Middle Eastern versions, in that it focuses more on social reality, dealing with people’s social matters and crises. The Moroccan Sufi saint is engaged in society: saints in Morocco played spiritual, religious, social and political roles. The approaches of Moroccan Sufism from some important anthropological studies are discussed in several respects. Contrary to these studies it is argued that there is some continuity instead of a sharp distinction between Moroccan orthodox and popular Sufism, given that in many instances since the latter also
involves an acceptance of the foundational texts, beliefs and practices of orthodox Islam. Here so as to underscore some similarities and overlapping points between popular and orthodox Sufism in the Moroccan context, I discuss Sharifism and maraboutism, as well as sainthood and Baraka. The chapter closes with a discussion on Islamic and Moroccan hagiography. It follows up on Chapter One’s first discussion of hagiography in that it focuses on its main characteristics amidst other laudatory genres. Moroccan hagiography is then discussed as being basically similar to Islamic hagiography, though with an additional emphasis by way of lengthy narratives on the saints’ miracles, personality and piety. Several Moroccan hagiographies are discussed in chronological order. In a further elaboration the diverse content of Moroccan hagiography is discussed. Many types of saints come to the fore in Moroccan hagiography, as is clear from their inclusion of women saints. The authentic character of these hagiographies is a topic of debate among scholars. We follow Cornell (1998), Kugle (2007) and others who argue that the hagiographers remained true to the saints’ cultural space and time, and reveal how people understood sainthood. The chapter ends with a brief survey of the Moroccan hagiographies that were consulted for the inventorying of Moroccan female saints in history, such as presented at length in the Appendix.

Chapter Four focuses on Moroccan female sainthood. It discusses the stories of female and male saints belonging to Morocco so as to explore the ways these saints achieved a friendship with God, which turned out to be mostly similar in character. Only some examples of non-Moroccan female saints are included, where they elucidate that female saints’ positions and strategies were not different from those of their male counterparts. Life stories found both in the archives and oral literature show that these saints employed self-techniques that empowered them to become saints. Some of the main self-techniques used by male and female Sufi are the practicing of piety, acquiring learnedness, the performing of miracles, practicing jadhb (Divine attraction), the taking up of social and political roles, or the practicing of ‘ordinary sainthood’ in the context of the family. The practicing of piety itself also contains a set of self-techniques such as searching initiation, practicing domestic piety, creating a sacred body, crying and the refusal of marriage.

The self-technique of searching for knowledge was seen as crucial to reach God’s closeness. Women like men developed themselves into knowledgeable personalities. Moroccan history includes exemplary women who achieved orthodox religious education and reached high decision-making positions. Life stories show how women and men saints are able to perform miracles to publicly display their sainthood. Al-Jadhb was another self-technique used by men and women to become friends of God. Both women and men found
themselves attracted to the Divine and endowed with a Divine grace. Taking up social and political goals, or choosing for ordinary sainthood instead, were self-techniques of female and male saints alike. The stories studied thus show that the self-techniques that men and women employed for their ethical self-formation, namely to achieve sainthood, are mostly similar. Some minor exceptions are that some more female saints than males practiced indoor piety, and that female saints are more lovingly towards their disciples. However, in their description of the similar self-techniques of male and female saints, the narratives convey equality and egalitarian effects. In the context of the patriarchal patterns the women saints lived in their self-practices – i.e., their ethical self-formation through applying certain ethical self-techniques – come forward as ethical freedom practices: they created new ethical ways of life for women that were in opposition to forms of domination. Their transgression of patriarchal patterns is furthermore illustrated by a discussion of the lives of three interesting and notable women saints: Lalla `Azīza al-Saksāwiyya, Lalla `Āyisha al-Idrīsiya and Fāṭima Muhdūz. These exemplary women saints cultivated personalities in a way that gained them power and authority. They impacted their communities with their personalities and marked history with their legacy.

Chapter Five discusses the way historical women saints are received by Moroccan women today. I document the impact historical women saints have on a variety of contemporary women, including the venerators of women saints, women attending mosque lessons and murshidāt. The chapter shows how these contemporary religious women transform themselves to become religious agents, like their holy predecessors. Women visit shrines and mosques to live their piety and spirituality. In mosques women live a direct relationship with God. But in shrines, women live an indirect relation to God through the saint. In the shrines, women perform different rituals to express their piety and their strong veneration to their women saints. The rituals celebrated within shrines include, trance rituals, dhikr-rituals, sacrifice rituals, marriage and fertility rituals, besides the celebration of mainstream religious feasts. Within the shrines, venerators are free to choose the kind of ritual and the ways to express their love and respect to their women saints. There are also functionaries of the shrines, including muqaddamāt, women healers and faqīrāt, who play important active roles. These women display women’s leadership in the shrines in their centrality in leading rituals and in their overall religious agency.

Women venerators use women saints’ shrines as a self-technique not only for baraka, so as to find solutions for the hardships of their modern lives, but also to develop their spirituality and construct a pious personality. Both northern and southern Moroccan women
found in their women saints a source of empowerment for a new ethical self-formation. They defined women saints as their role models and moral exemplars. Some of them started to search for religious knowledge by attending mosque lessons headed by murshidāt and wa‘īdāt. As such, Moroccan women show an interest in seeking orthodox education so as to become active religious agents.

Both the murshidāt and women attendants integrate women saints in their discourses as empowering role models so as to change themselves into religious agents. Murshidāt’ religious knowledge empowers them to engage in activism and to question women’s status in contemporary society. They refer to the rights that Islam gave women, and they question cases where these rights are violated, such as oppressive marriages and other dominant conventional norms. The conclusions of Mahmood (2005) on the Egyptian mosque women movement do not apply to the Moroccan context. Moroccan women venerators, women attendants and murshidāt, by using various self-techniques - in which women saints of the past do play a certain role create religious personalities, in ways that involve a transgression of patriarchal patterns, thus making their self-practices count as ethical freedom practices.

The sixth chapter of the thesis deals with the way activists in current Moroccan women’s movements receive women saints in their discourses. It focuses on Islamist activists’ attitude towards historically exemplary women and their legacy. Both Islamic and secular strands of Moroccan women’s organizations show a positive attitude towards women saints. They consider women saints as role models who – among other exemplary women in Islamic history - occupy an important place in their agendas and discourses. They consider women saints as women whose self-formation challenged their patriarchal communities. The chapter starts with a brief historical review of the Moroccan feminist movement which draws its historical development from the colonial until the modern era. From my interviews with Islamist activists it turns out that the Islamist associations, al-‘Adl wa al-Iḥsān, al-‘Adāla wa al-Tanmiya and Muntadā al-Zahrā’, have similar strategies, objectives and activities. In contrast to some researchers’ writings that describe Islamist women activists as being conservative and traditional towards women issues – my interviews show that these activists, like their secular counterparts seek political, social and economic empowerment of women and equality with men. Islamist feminism’s discourse on men and women’s equity, instead of equality, involves the private sphere only, and even there they are also after egalitarianism. This egalitarianism is clear from the strategies Islamist associations employ to underpin women’s empowerment and women’s rights. They base their struggle for women’s crises on different sources. They account on the primary sources of Islam, the Qur’an and Sunna and
on their own interpretation of these sources. They strongly believe that the Maliki jurisprudence definition of women’s status is a patriarchal interpretation of Islam and the primary cause of Moroccan women’s oppression and discrimination. More importantly, Islamist associations also refer in their debate on women’s issues to Islamic history and to Moroccan local cultural heritage. They continually organize meetings to discuss the position of Muslim and Moroccan women, while referring to exemplary women in history and the way they developed themselves into great ethical personalities.

Finally, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights constitutes another source that Moroccan Islamist activists account on their discourses on women issues. They strongly believe that the humanism advocated by human rights discourses is part of Islam. The female Islamist activists thus come across as feminists, fighting patriarchy as secular feminists do. The Islamist activists reject saint veneration but do admire and respect the women saints as a source of empowerment that enables them to engage in activism, education and learning. Women saints thus are used in the discourses of Moroccan feminists, secular and Islamist, as a source of empowerment in the context of their own self-techniques and their striving for ethical self-formation.

From the material studied and explored in the chapters above, the overall conclusion can be that in spite of the obvious contextual differences, there is continuity in the presence of female religious agency in Moroccan history. Moroccan women saints of the past – in the context of Sufism – applied a set of self-techniques to define construct and create a saintly personality that at the same time challenged male domination. Likewise, contemporary Moroccan women, especially feminist Islamist and secular activists, develop religious agency in ways that challenge dominant patriarchal patterns. Their reception of women saints, amidst other exemplary women in Islamic history, turns out to play a role as a source of empowerment. Moroccan women’s religious agency displays a continuity as well, in as far as the women saints of the past continue to exert agency through the women who venerate them. The main continuity that we found, however, is that we find ethical freedom practices among Moroccan women of the past and the present: new ethical ways of life for women, in opposition to domination. Moroccan women throughout history, have created new practices or revised or transformed existing ones, in order to achieve a wide range of goals, many of which have been directly or indirectly linked to a felt need to make a difference, to achieve a new ethical self-formation, to express their views, to have a voice in their communities, to become leaders, teachers, scholars, and activists, to counteract and attempt to change the conditions of their own lives, of their communities, and of the society at large.
From the material studied and explored in the chapters above, the overall conclusion can be that in spite of the obvious contextual differences, there is continuity in the presence of female religious agency in Moroccan history. Moroccan women saints of the past – in the context of Sufism – applied a set of self-techniques to define construct and create a saintly personality that at the same time challenged male domination. Likewise, contemporary Moroccan women, especially feminist Islamist and secular activists, develop religious agency in ways that challenge dominant patriarchal patterns. Their reception of women saints, amidst other exemplary women in Islamic history, turns out to play a role as a source of empowerment. Moroccan women’s religious agency displays a continuity as well, in as far as the women saints of the past continue to exert agency through the women who venerate them. The main continuity that we found, however, is that we find ethical freedom practices among Moroccan women of the past and the present: new ethical ways of life for women, in opposition to domination. Moroccan women throughout history, have created new practices or revised or transformed existing ones, in order to achieve a wide range of goals, many of which have been directly or indirectly linked to a felt need to make a difference, to achieve a new ethical self-formation, to express their views, to have a voice in their communities, to become leaders, teachers, scholars, and activists, to counteract and attempt to change the conditions of their own lives, of their communities, and of the society at large.

Moroccan women religious agency that started with women saints in the past continues with Moroccan women today, as in the examples of venerators who make women saints of the past still present in contemporary Morocco; and with murshidāt, mosque women and activists who continue to develop their religious personalities and change them according to their understanding of the Islam.

Theoretically, I have based my research on Mahmood (2005) whose concept of agency- analogous to Foucault’s work on ethics– emphasizes women’s self-techniques in the construction of religious personalities in terms of an ethical self-formation. From my research we can conclude that Moroccan women, both as historical and as contemporary religious agents, similarly developed their religious personalities. However, contrary to Mahmood’s findings, which found that her respondents rejected personal freedom and wished to remain within the limits of the patriarchal patterns they live in, my research demonstrates that Moroccan women’s religious agency, whether in the past or in the present reveals their
individual choices and their own voices. The research reveals that Moroccan women’s agency
has challenged patriarchy and continues to do so.

I have dealt with Moroccan women’s religious roles as a sociopolitical phenomenon. I
have studied written and oral records on women who played a role in historical and
contemporary Morocco, and I have discussed the way these women achieved a religious
status in an environment that was purely masculine. The results of my research show that
historical women who were excluded from the practice of religious orthodoxy created for
themselves a space where they lived their piety and spirituality and achieved saintly
personalities. Popular Islam or popular Sufism opened its gates so as to let the marginalized to
live his/her piety and spirituality. Mysticism did not exclude women from the practice of
religion. Rather, it offered them a space to practice their religion. Sufism did not take gender
into consideration where it concerned the achievement of sainthood, but rather was and
continue to be gender neutral in this respect. There are some historical women who had the
chance to mark their presence in religious orthodoxy, but their number is small. In Moroccan
history Sufism was the only religious space for women to actively construct their religiosity.
But women’s education in this context empowered them to challenge the dominant politics
and to prove their religious active agency.

Contemporary female religious agents draw on historical women saints as saintly
personalities to support their struggle against women’s discrimination and male dominance.
Thus, history as such turns out to be a crucial source for women in their defense of women’s
rights. Historical Moroccan women’s religious agency thus has positive effects on modern
Moroccan society. Moroccan women today have come to believe that it is very important to
re-consider the past in dealing with women’s issues and women’s religious rights today.
History’s importance for the revising of contemporary women’s roles and positions
necessitates more research. An abundance of research still has to be done particularly on the
historical manuscripts that await editing and analysis. More study also needs to be done on the
contexts that enabled these historical women to become saints with miraculous abilities and
active religious and social agency.

What also emerges from my study of women saints and their reception by women
today is that gender equality and egalitarianism are highly stressed as a fundamental Islamic
principles. It turns out that Moroccan women, like men, desire to realize the ultimate goals of
religion and thus engage in a struggle to achieve God’s closeness. The women also express
that God disregards gender differences and favors equality, and that equality and
egalitarianism reside at the heart of Islamic religion.
From this other recommendations follow. Moroccan women’s education is crucial for the development of female personalities that are able to achieve a public and orthodox religious activity. Education must be highly encouraged particularly among women because it enables women to play a public religious role. More importantly, sensitizing women to the gender question particularly in religion is important so as not to repeat the mistakes of the past by interpreting Islam as a patriarchal religion, thereby inhibiting women’s abilities to become active and public religious agents. This can also be achieved when the Moroccan state continues to widen women’s rights and democratic dimensions regarding human development. This solution can become all the more effective when conservative mentalities that denigrate women’s religious participation are eliminated and an Islamic and democratic culture based on gender equality is widely recognized.

Moroccan history bears a historical feminine presence not only in the religious sphere but also in other domains of life that deserves to be highlighted. Historical records in the form of manuscripts bear the names of many women who marked history but whose lives remain unknown. These manuscripts need to be edited so as to uncover these women’s historical roles. The two components of the feminist movement -feminist writings that empower women as individuals and activism in feminist associations- should assign a great importance to Moroccan history and to women’s role in it, so as to support their advocacy for the feminization of the contemporary public religious sphere.

By understanding more of women’s role in Shari‘a and in history, future research will enhance women’s religious agency and insertion into the public religious spaces, particularly in the performance of imāma (the religious leadership), which conservative mentalities still consider to be an exclusively male authority.
Bibliography

Arabic Sources


French and English Sources


Available at the website: http://www.asmabarlas.com/TALKS/20040112_UToronto.pdf

Bartels, Edien. 1993. Eén dochter is beter dan duizend zonen (One daughter is better than a thousand sons). Utrecht: Van Arkel.


Available at the web site: http://clio.revues.org/1523.


Dwyer, Daisy Hilse. 1978. ‘Women, Sufism and Decision Making in Moroccan Islam’.


In: *Pour une histoire des femmes au maroc*. Kenitra: Publication de La Faculté des Lettres et des Sciences Humains, Kenitra n°4, 77-83.


Harrak, Fatima. 2009. ‘The History and Significance of the New Moroccan Family Law’. *Institute for the study of Islamic Thought in Africa. (ISITA)* 9-002. Available at the website:


Pemberton, Kelly. 2010. Women Mystics and Sufi Shrines in India. Colombia, SC: The University of South Carolina Press.


Appendix


Umm Hānī (8th century)

Umm Hānī was a woman of Sufism and asceticism. She read a lot the Qurʾān, and she was always remembering God.571

Zaynab al-Shatbiya (11th century)

Zaynab was the daughter of ʿĪbād ibn Sarḥān ibn Muslim ibn Saʿid Anas al-Maʿrīfī al-Shatbiya. She was one of the women saints. She was always engaged in fasting, dhikr and nightly vigils of prayer.572

Masʿuda bint Abī al-Ḥasan (11th century)

Masʿuda bint Abī al-Ḥasan was the daughter of Abī al-Ḥasan ben Aḥmad bin Khalaf bin Bādis. She was virtuous and pious.573

Umm Muḥammad al-Salāma (12th century)

Umm Muḥammad al-Salāma was originally from Dukkala, she was much respected and powerful woman within her community. Mūsā Bin ʿIsā said that he heard shaykh Abū Waʿzān (12th century) saying that among the Masmouda tribe there were twenty-seven saints among them fourteen women. Umm Al-salāma was among them574. Her servant Abū Bakr said: “I served al-Salāma eight years. Each day, she gives five portions of grains to the poor. One day I told her: I didn’t see what rijāl (ideal Sufis) had seen”. She answered me: “repent to God and fast”. I fast days. In one night

571 al-Tāzī 1993, 85
572 Ibid., 486
574 al-Tādīlī 1997, 387-88
she told me: “get and tell me how much left of the night”. I get up from my
place and went out to see how much is left from the night. Suddenly I saw
something flying in the air like a great ‘al-Ghurnūq (a white bird)’ that
landed on her tent. It is her nephew Abū Sajmāt (12th century) who said to
her: “I didn’t find who deserve to be your students except me”. She talked
to him for hours and then he left.

Umm ‘Aṣfūr Ti’azzat Bint Ḥusayn al-Hantīfī (12th century)
Umm ‘Aṣfūr Ti’azzat Bint Hussain al-Hantīfī was from ribāṭ Maloulussen.
She was among the greatest saints. I heard abd ’Azīz bin ’Abd Allah
saying: “Abū Sulaymān Maṣuṣī said: ‘Umm ‘Aṣfūr said to me: ‘I was
badly ill, and I saw Abū Bakr and `Umar bin al-Khaṭāb (the Prophet’s
companions) entered my chamber and made me sit. After that I was healed
and felt strong”.575

Umm Ma‘far (12th century)
Umm Ma‘far was a muqārī’a (Quranic reader). She was appointed herself a
reader of the Qur’an following the style of Warsh and Nafi’. 576

Umm al-‘Izz bint Hadīl (12th century)
Umm al-‘Izz bint Hadīl was the daughter of Aḥmad b-‘Alī ben Hadīl, one
of the Moroccan Sufi Shaykh. She was a very pious woman. She was
Umm Ma‘far’s student. Her attendance to Omm Ma‘far’s religious courses
helped her to be proficient in reading the Qur’an in the style of Warsh and
Nafi’. 577

Fāṭima bint ‘Atīq (12th century)
Fāṭima bint ‘Atīq was proficient in the recitation and the reading of the
Qur’an. She was also very charitable. She died in Marrakesh. 578

575 Ibid., 388
576 al-Marākushī 1965, 482
577 Ibid., 748
578 al-Marakushī 1965, vol. 2, 491
Sārā bint Aḥmad bin ʿUthmān al-Ḥalabatiyya (12th century)
She was a scholar of Sufism, hadith, poetry and fiqh. In Fez, Shaykh ʿAbd Allah bin ʿAlī bin Salamūn al-Kattānī was her student, and received from her the mantle of initiation into Sufism and ʿilm. She died and was buried in Marrakesh. ⁵⁷⁹

Zaynab al-Balsīniya (12th century)
ʿAbd al-Mālik presents Zaynab al-Balsīniya bint Muḥammad ibn al-Zahrī al-Andalusīya as a very pious woman. Her proficiency in piety and preaching promoted her to give courses to males. Her brother ʿAbū Bakr ibn Mahraz and Abū al-ḥusayn ibn Hdīl, one of the greatest Shuyukh, were her students. ⁵⁸⁰

Mannāna (12th century)
Mannāna was the daughter of the Walī Allāh Sīdī Muḥammad Kadda. She was the contemporary of Walī Allah Sīdī Mūsā al-Dukkālī, a saint of the old Medina of Salé city (12th Century). Mannāna was called as well by the name Mannāna ʿUhdāna. She was called ʿUhdāna because she had a certain charismatic grace which blessed children to be good and well educated. Her charity and piety were very significant. She had constructed the Qaṣba of the Sīdī Bin Mūsā al-Dukkālī’s zāwiya. ⁵⁸¹

Umm al-Yumin (13th century)
Umm al-Yumin was from banī Waryaghīl, a village in Rīfī North region. She was the daughter of a tribal leader. According to the Moroccan historian and hagiographer al-Bādisī, Umm al-Yumin was the mother of the sultan Abū Yūsuf al-Marīnī. He portrayed her as a ṣāliḥa in her own right. She was as well a disciple of the Rifian Sufī order founded by the Shaykh Abū ʿUthmān al-Waryāghlī. It was she who introduced the organization of three annual meetings in the Ribāṭ of bani Waryāghlī. ⁵⁸²

⁵⁷⁹ al-Kattānī 1990
⁵⁸⁰ al-Marākusī 1965, vol. 2, 486
⁵⁸¹ Venerator, interview, June 2011
⁵⁸² al-Bādisī 1993
Umm Sharīḥ (13th century)
Umm Sharīḥ studied the recitation of the Qur’an from her husband ʿAbd Allāh Sharīḥ. When Abū Bakr ʿiyāḍ bin Baqī was still a child, he learnt from her how to read and recite the Qur’an. He was proud of that, and he always reminded her son who became one of the greatest and proficient muqriʾīn of the Qur’an that his father and his mother taught him the reading of the Qur’an. 583

ʿĀyisha bint ibn ʿĀṣim (13th century)
ʿĀyisha bint ibn ʿĀṣim was the daughter of ʿAbd Allāh al-Andalusī. Al-Tāzī (1992: 92) spoke of her as one of the great Gnostic and Sufi women of her time. She performed charismatic miracles. 584

Fāṭima bint Ḥayūn Al-Ṣadafī (13th Century)
Fāṭima bint Ḥayūn Al-Ṣadafī was the daughter of the Shaykh Abū ʿAlī Ḥusayn ben Muḥammad bin Fira bin Ḥasūn al-Ṣadafī. She had lost her father at a very early age. She was brought up as a pious and Sufi woman. She was proficient in dhikr and Qur’anic recitation. 585

Umm Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Tilimsānī (14th century)
Umm Mohammad ibn Aḥmad al-Tilimsānī was one of the greatest Sufi and ascetic women of her time. She was the mother of Shaykh ʿAbdallāh al-Tilimsānī (14th century). She wrote a number of taqāyid (writings or wird). She displayed abilities to interpret visions and revelations. It was assumed that her interpretation of visions is similar to that of Muḥammad Ibn Sīrīn (7th century). 586

Ruqayya al-Yaʾqūbiyya (14th century)
Ruqayya al-Yaʾqūbiyya was a scholar (ʿālima) and a pious woman. Several male and female students learnt from her Malikism, tafsīr and Quranic courses. 587

583 al-Marākūshī 1965, 494
584 Ibid., 92
585 al-Marākūshī 1965, 489
586 The Imām Mohammad Ibn Sīrīn is one the greatest Muslim interpreters of visions in the Muslim World.
587 Ibid., 207
Umm al-Banīn (14th century)

Umm al-Banīn was the grandmother of Zarrūq, the greatest Shaykh of Moroccan Sufism. She was ṣāliḥa and ṣāliḥa. She was one of faqīḥāt who attended shaykh ʿAbduṣī’s religious courses.588

Umm Hānī bint Muḥammad al-ʿAbdūsī (14th century)

Umm Hanī bint Muḥammad al-ʿAbdūsī studied fiqh. Her brother shaykh Abd Allah al-Khaṭṭāb bin Mūsā was her teacher. Shaykh Zarrūq rendered that Umm Hānī was a great Shaykha and a saint of her time.589

Fāṭima al-ʿAbduṣiyya (14th century)

Fāṭima was the sister of the woman Umm Hanī, the woman saint I referred above. She was considered as the greatest ʿālimāt in legal and jurist affairs.590

Khadīja bint al-Hawāt (15th century)

Khadīja bint al-Hawāt was the daughter of the Shaykh ʿAbdallāh al-Shafshāwūnī and the aunt of the historian abī Sūlaymān al-Hawāt. She was a great preacher in zāwiya-t Abū Yūsuf Sīdī Yūsuf bin al-Ḥusayn al-Tādīlī which occurred in Ghumāra tribe. In 948H, she died.591

Maryam bint ʿAbbūd (15th century)

She was a pious woman.592

Sitt Fāṭima (15th century)

Sitt Fāṭima was one of the shaykhat and saints of Marrakesh during the Waṭṭasī dynasty. She was from Aghmāt and the daughter of Shaykh Sīdī ʿAmr. Since her childhood, an overwhelming desire for religion and knowledge rose inside of her and drove her to study the Qur’an,
hadith and fiqh. The proficient ‘ilm she had promoted her to teach men and women. At a certain age of her life, people of Aghmāt (High Atlas) started to show contempt towards her masculine dress. As a consequence, lalla Sitt Fāṭima moved to Ŭrika village (30km from Marrakesh) and settled there. There she gained people’s esteem and respect. She founded her own zāwiya where the poor were comforted and the students were well informed. In her zāwiya as well she met her tribe’s leader to discuss the tribe’s matters. When she died, she was buried in an important cemetery. A shrine was built on her tomb, and an annual meeting was organized for her. A dowar in Ourika is called after her name: Douar Sitt Fāṭima (seven kilometres away from Ŭrika Marrakech).

Umm Qāsim al-Ḥasnāwiya (16th century)
She was the mother of Umm Qāsim ibn al-Faqīh. She was a šaliḥa and a recitator of the Qur’an.

Tawnū Umm Aḥmad ibn Mūsā (16th century)
Lalla Tawnu was from Sūs region. She was one of the greatest pious women of the south of Morocco and the mother of the Shaykh Sīdī Aḥmad ‘Umūsa al-Tāzirwaltī (16th century). Her hagiographer described her as a lightening candle which enlightened scientific and scholarly families.

Amīna bint Abū al-‘Āfiya (16th century)
Amīna bint Abū al-‘Āfiya was one of the greatest saints of her time. She was the daughter of the famous scholar: Ibn al-Qāḍī Abū al-‘Abbās Aḥmad ibn ‘Alī ibn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Abū al-‘Āfiya al-Miknāsī. She was always in the company of her Shaykh Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī al-Ṣanhaji.

---

593 Venerator, Interviews, Jun 2011
595 al-Susī 1984
596 Ibid., 86
Umm Kalthūm al-Dar‘iya (16\textsuperscript{th} century)

Umm Kalthūm al-Dar‘iya was a great shaykha, preacher and mufassira of her time. Her proficient piety and devotion to Quranic studies gained her and her family popularity. She taught her nephew al-Imām Ḥasan al-Murād al-‘āsafī al-Maghribī al-Miṣrī.\textsuperscript{597}

-Mas‘ūda lūzkītiya (16\textsuperscript{th} century)

‘Abd al-‘Azīz bin ‘Abdallāh, in his Ma‘lampat al-Taṣawwuf, writes that Mas‘ūda lūzkītiya was known by the name lalla ‘Awda, meaning a female horse. She was born in 1530. Her father was a Shaykh Aḥmad ben Abd Allah al-lūzkīti al-Warzāzī Amīr (governor) Qaṣbat Tawrīrt (Moroccan eastern region). Her piety and knowledge urge people of her tribe to seek her advice and guidance. She was married to Shaykh al-Mahdī, king of Sa‘dī dynasty (1548). When her son Abū al-‘Abbās Aḥmad al-Manṣūr al-Dahbī succeeded his father, she was called Umm al-Sulṭān. Her fame was reinforced when the Sa‘diyin won the battle Wadī al-Makhāzin (1578). Lalla Mas‘ūda lūzkītiya used to be a source of advice for her son the Sultan Aḥmad al-Manṣūr al-Dahbī. She was as well very charitable towards the poor, the widows and the orphans. In 1586, she built a mosque, schools and dormitories in Marrakech.\textsuperscript{598}

Ruqayya bint Mu‘īn al-Andalusī (17\textsuperscript{th} Century)

Al-Kattānī states that she was also called Umm al-Ba‘īn. She was proficient scholar in piety, certainty and mysticism. Her contemporary male shaykhs and saints considered her the greatest Sufi shaykha of her time.\textsuperscript{599}

-Āyisha al-‘Adawiyya al-Miknāsiyya (17\textsuperscript{th} century)

‘Āyisha al-‘Adawiyya al-Miknāsiyya was a saint and a Sufi woman from Meknes city. She was deeply devoted to God. Her immense love

\textsuperscript{597} Ibid., 96
\textsuperscript{598} Ben Abdallah 2003, 165.
\textsuperscript{599} al-Kattānī 1990, vol. 2, 293
to the divine made her to be labelled Rabī’ā of her time. Miknāsi people deeply venerate her.600

Ta`izza bint Sulaymān al-Karāmikya (17th century)

Ta`izza bint Sulaymān al-Karāmikya was from Taddārt, a village in Sūs. She was the mother of the Moroccan great religious scholar Dāwūd bin `Alī bei Muḥammad al-Karāmī, the author of the book: al-Bishāra. People, in Taddārt village, continuously spoke of her piety and sainthood. Everyday Ta`izza fasted. Her son accounted that she was so devoted to faith and religion that she saw the prophet in her dreams, and he said to her: ‘be happy! You will be in Heaven as well as all the ones you love’. The prophet also gave her a sip of honey, which she found inside of her mouth each time she fasted. In the following morning, she went out and started preaching people to submit to the prophet’s instructions and retire from wrong deeds. She had karamāt. One of her karamāt was that she revealed to her son the date of her death.601

Fāṭima Trīda (17th century)

Her father was a great jurist. He thought her jurisprudence and law. She displayed a proficiency in fiqh and helped her father in the study of judicial cases. She was a ‘ālima.602

Amīna bint Sa’īd al-Ghumārī (18th century)

Amīna was a devoted, pious and ascetic woman. She was always silent. She submitted herself totally to the worshiping of God.603

Mammās bint ’Alī (18th century)

Mammās bint ’Alī was from Bennāra, a village in Sūs. She worked as a shepherd for her family. While she was alone in the mountains with her cattle, she got involved in meditation and dihkr (remembrance). Her deep love to God made her to be called as Rabī’a of her time. She was

600 al-Tāzī 1993, 93
601 al-Sūsī 1960
602 al-Tāzī 1993, 119
always engaged in fasting as well as in daily and nightly prayer.\textsuperscript{604} Mammās bint ‘Alī has karamāt. She sometimes resided in different Moroccan regions, often journeying from Sūs to different part of the world and back. She said that God gave her the control of the earth. In every part of the earth, she fed the poor, sustained the old and cured the sick. It was said that some people spent the night in the High Atlas Mountains. They were overwhelmed by freezing weather and great hunger. Suddenly, hot food was offered to them. In the morning, they followed the foot traces till they reached the saint’s house. She refused to talk to them. She said to her brother that these people were from Tlemcenn and asked him to go and assure them that their families were in a good situation. She died in 1706, and she is venerated till now by people.\textsuperscript{605}

Amīna bint al-Ṭayyib al-Ṣmīlī (18\textsuperscript{th} century)

Amīna was the daughter of Shaykh al-Ṭayyib bin Muḥammad al-Sharqī al-Ṣmīlī and the sister of the linguist scholar Abū Abdallāh Muḥammad ben al-Ṭayyib al-Shaqī al-Fāsī. She was brought up in environment of knowledge and piety. Her proficiency in Quranic studies promoted her to step up the pulpit to deliver public lectures. Her family forced her to marriage. According to al-Kattānī, her husband contended that her religious status hampered him to consume his marriage. She remained a divorced virgin woman till she died.\textsuperscript{606}

Amīna bint Muḥammad al-Ghilān (18\textsuperscript{th} century)

Amīna bint Muḥammad al-Ghilān was the daughter of faqīh Muḥammad al-Ghillān. She was originally from Tetuan city and was known as lalla Ghilana the greatest faqīha of her time.\textsuperscript{607}

\textsuperscript{604} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{605} al-Sūsī 1960, 82
\textsuperscript{606} al-Kattānī 1990, vol. 3, 82
\textsuperscript{607} Dāwūd 1659, 93
‘Ashwa bint Abū Nāfi‘ (18th Century)

Ashwa bint Abū Nāfi‘ was shaykh `Alī Abū Nāfi‘’s daughter. She used to attend her father’s religious courses including, fiqh, tawḥīd and sīra nabawiyya. She also studied preaching, and she started to be considered one of the greatest faqīhāt of her time.  

ˇĀyisha ˇAryānat al-Rās (bare head) (18th century)

ˇĀyisha ˇAryānat al-Rās was a saint with karamāt. She was called ˇAryānat al-Rās because she used to go out unveiled. The sultan Mūlāy ˇAbd Allāh al-ˇAlawī exiled her in a wild forest as a punishment for her disobedience. She never got married. Her sanctuary is still erected but ruined in old medina in Salé.  

Lalla Shamā (18th century)

In old Medina in Rabat near Mūlāy al-Makki mosque, the shrine of the unmarried woman saint lalla Shamā occurs. It is located in Dār al-Ḍamana. A huge qubba was built on her tomb, which is covered by a green cloth. She was a descendent of the Shaykh Sīdī Nāṣir Muḥammad Tihamī, and she lived under the reign of Sīdī Muḥammad bin ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-ˇAlawī. Her charisma urged people to venerate her and seek her baraka.  

Khādīja bint Aḥmad al-ˇHāmīdī (19th century)

In his book Riyāḍ al-Janna, Shaykh ˇAbd al-Hafīẓ al-Fāsī (19th century) renders the following account of Khādīja bint Aḥmad al-ˇHāmīdī. She was the daughter of Aḥmad ibn ‘Azūz al-ˇHāmīdī al-Fāsī and was proficient in Quranic recitation. Shaykh ˇAbd ˇAlī al-ˇHasan Janbūr said: “she taught me the methods of Qur’anic recitation, and she entitled me as shaykh”. Shaykh ˇAbd al-Hafīẓ al-Fāsī said that Khādīja was accounted to be one of the women who entitled men (aˇjaza-t ˇal-Riǰāl). She died in Fez in 1323H.  

---

609 Chikhaoui 1997, 36  
610 Amlīna, Interview, July 2011  
611 Kaḥḥāla 1982, 322
`Āyisha bent ibn Rāshid (19th century)

`Āyisha bent ibn Rāshid was one of the greatest faqīhāt of her time. She was licensed as a shaykha by great scholars.612

`Āyisha al-Mutawakkiya (19th century)

`Āyisha was the daughter of Ḥāj Mubārak bin Aḥmad Shaykh bin Aḥmad bin Ḥusayn al-Mutawakkī. Nothing was known of her only that she copied and re-wrote by her own hand the holy Qur’an and wrote at the back of the Qur’an her name and that of her father.613

Fāṭima bint Zwītin (19th century)

Fāṭima was the daughter of Shaykh al-Badawī bin Aḥmad who was known by the name Zwītin al-Fāsī. The historian Muḥammad bin `Alī al-Dukkālī said of her:” and I saw in al-Qarawiyyīn a part of the book ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī re-written in a perfect style, and the name Fāṭima bint al-Badawi was written at the back of this book. I asked the student who was holding this book who was Fāṭima. He answered that she was the daughter of Shaykh Aḥmad Zwītin, the owner of zāwiya Abū Buswiqa in Fes.614

Lalla Taja (19th century)

In his book Rites et secrets des marabouts a Casablanca, Mustapha Akhmiss records what follows. They said that in the late 19th century, there was a woman of piety, charity and chastity called Lalla Taja. She was very helpful and charitable particularly towards the poor and the orphans. Her house was a refuge and a shelter for abandoned children. When she died, she was buried near her house and a shrine was built on her tomb.615

612 Kānūn 1961, vol. 1, 202
613 al-Tāzī 1993, 120
614 Ibid.
615 Akhmiss 1984
Summaries (Dutch and English)

Summary in Dutch

Tegenover gangbare beelden van Marokkaanse moslimvrouwen als passieve slachtoffers van patriarchale religieuze ideologieën, toont mijn onderzoek een alternatief discours van Marokkaanse vrouwen, in verleden en heden, die hun rol in de private en publieke sfeer actief creëren, herdefiniëren, interpreteren en transformeren. Uit mijn onderzoek naar vrouwelijke heiligen in Marokko komen vormen van religieuze ‘agency’ onder vrouwen naar voren die hun continuïteit kennen tot de dag van vandaag, en die onder anderen - Moslimvrouwen kunnen inspireren om de negatieve beelden van hen zoals boven geschetst te weerleggen.

Heiligdommen van vrouwelijke heiligen zijn in de hele Maghreb te vinden, vooral in Marokko. Er is weinig bekend over de levens van deze vrouwelijke heiligen. De enige bronnen zijn hagiografieën en mondelinge verhalen. Op basis van deze bronnen, heb ik de technieken geïnventariseerd die deze vrouwelijke heiligen gebruikten om hun religieuze leven vorm te geven. Ik ben nagegaan hoe zij actief een levenswijze construeerden die als heilig werd en wordt gezien, en in hoeverre zij daarbij sociale beperkingen overschreden.

Mijn onderzoek is gesitueerd in de context van hedendaagse discoursen over Marokkaanse vrouwen en feminisme, speciaal waar het analyseert hoe de verhalen over deze vrouwelijke heiligen vandaag de dag worden gerecipieerd door Marokkaanse vrouwen, met name door de vereerders van vrouwelijke heiligen, door vrouwelijke predikers en hun volgelingen, en door activisten van islamitische vrouwenorganisaties.

Hoofdstuk 1 geeft een eerste indicatie van mijn hagiografische bronnen en beschrijft mijn veldwerk in Marokko. Het bespreekt eerder wetenschappelijk onderzoek over vrouwelijke heiligen in Marokko en de Maghreb en geeft aan op welke studies mijn onderzoek voortbouwt. Enkele belangrijke begrippen worden nader uitgewerkt, zoals het soefisme en dan vooral de volkse variant ervan. Ook het concept baraka (goddelijke


In hoofdstuk 2 wordt de traditie van het soefisme meer diepgaand besproken, vooral in relatie tot ‘gender’. Behandeld worden de fundamentele principes van het soefisme, zoals
geformuleerd door Al Ghazali, die zowel de basis vormen van het orthodoxe als ook van het volkssoefisme, met als specifiek kenmerk van het laatste de praktijk van heiligenverering. Ook wordt de *ribat* belicht, de ruimte waar de heiligenverering plaatsvindt. Uit de werken van sommige soefi geleerden uit het verleden komt expliciet naar voren dat vrouwen, net als mannen, de hoogste rangen van spiritualiteit en heiligheid kunnen bereiken.

De relatie soefisme en ‘gender’ komt verder aan bod in de behandeling van het soefisme als stroming van islamitische mystiek die zijn basis vindt in de Koran. Verschillende hedendaagse auteurs stellen dat de spirituele kant van de islam, zoals te vinden in de Koran, egalitair van karakter is. Zij beargumenteren op die gronden dat het uitgangspunt van intrinsieke gelijkheid van de seksen aanwezig is in het hart van de islam; een zienswijze die we impliciet ook aantroffen bij soefi geleerden uit het verleden. Tegen deze achtergrond bespreek ik tot slot een paar voorbeelden van vrouwelijke soefi’s zoals Rabia al-ʿAdawiyya en Fatima van Cordova, die uit de overlevering naar voren komen als mysticae die hun levens hebben geleid op gelijke voet met mannelijke heiligen.

Hoofdstuk 3 concentreert zich op het soefisme en de hagiografische traditie in Marokkaanse context. Ik bespreek eerst kort de geografie van Marokko en zijn geschiedenis van islamisering, waarin de verbreiding van het soefisme een cruciale rol speelde. Het Marokkaanse soefisme verschilt van varianten uit het Midden Oosten voor zover de sociale werkelijkheid een grotere rol speelt en er meer bekommernis wordt getoond voor sociale kwesties. De soefi heilige in Marokko is betrokken op de maatschappij: heiligen in Marokko spelen een spirituele, religieuze, sociale en politieke rol. In contrast met de benadering van het Marokkaanse soefisme in enkele belangrijke antropologische studies, waarin een scherp verschil wordt aangebracht tussen de Marokkaanse orthodoxie enerzijds en het volkssoefisme anderzijds, betoog ik dat er eerder sprake is van een continuïteit tussen beide stromingen. Het volkssoefisme wordt in veel gevallen gebaseerd op de fundamentele teksten, overtuigingen en
praktijken zoals die belangrijk zijn in de orthodoxe islam. Om een aantal gelijkenissen en overeenkomsten tussen volks- en orthodox soefisme in de Marokkaanse context naar voren te halen, bespreek ik sharifism (heiligen die als afstammeling van de profeet worden gezien) en maraboutism, en verwante begrippen als heiligheid en baraka. Marokkaanse hagiografie blijkt in principe gelijksoortig aan islamitische hagiografie van elders, maar bevat daarnaast omvangrijke verhalen met een nadruk op de wonderen, persoonlijkheid en vroomheid van de heilige. In Marokkaanse hagiografieën komen diverse soorten heiligen terug, zoals ook blijkt uit hun inclusie van vrouwelijke heiligen.

Het al dan niet authentieke karakter van heiligenlevens is een onderwerp van discussie onder wetenschappelijke onderzoekers. Ik volg Cornell (1998), Kugle (2007) en anderen die stellen dat de hagiografen trouw bleven aan hun culturele context, ruimte en tijd en onthullen hoe heiligheid in hun tijd werd begrepen. Het hoofdstuk eindigt met een kort overzicht van de Marokkaanse hagiografieën die werden geraadpleegd voor de inventarisatie van de Marokkaanse vrouwelijke heiligen in de geschiedenis, zoals gepresenteerd in de Appendix.

Hoofdstuk 4 richt zich op Marokkaanse vrouwelijke heiligenlevens. Het analyseert in eerste instantie de verhalen over vrouwelijke en mannelijke heiligen uit de Marokkaanse geschiedenis. Uit deze verhalen, zowel afkomstig uit de archieven als uit orale bronnen, komen een aantal zelf-technieken naar voren die heiligen gebruikten om hun religieuze leven vorm te geven. Tot de zelf-technieken die zowel mannelijke als vrouwelijke soefi’s gebruiken, behoren het beoefenen van vroomheid, het verwerven van geleerdheid, het verrichten van wonderen, het beoefenen van jadhb (Goddelijke attractie), het op zich nemen van sociale en politieke rollen en het beoefenen van ‘gewone heiligheid’ in de context van de familie. De beoefening van vroomheid bevat op zichzelf weer een reeks van zelf-technieken, zoals het zoeken naar initiati, het beoefenen van vroomheid binnenshuis, het creëren van een heilig lichaam, overvloedig huilen en het weigeren van het huwelijk.
De zelf-technieken van vrouwelijke en mannelijke heiligen blijken voor het merendeel overeenkomstig te zijn. Alleen het beoefenen van heiligheid binnenshuis en de liefdevolle verhouding tot de discipelen, werden vaker genoemd in het geval vrouwelijke heiligen. In hun beschrijvingen van de gelijksoortige zelf-technieken van mannelijke en vrouwelijke heiligen kennen de overgeleverde verhalen gelijkheids- en egaltaire effecten. Vrouwelijke heiligen in de geschiedenis van Marokko komen naar voren als levend op gelijke voet met mannen, waarbij sommigen ook hoge posities en leidersrollen vervulden die vergelijkbaar zijn met die van mannen. Gezien de context van patriarchale sociale patronen waarin zij leefden, komen de zelf-praktijken van vrouwelijke heiligen - hun ethische zelf-vorming door middel van het toepassen van bepaalde ethische zelf-technieken - naar voren als ethische vrijheidspraktijken. Zij behelsden nieuwe, ethische levenswijzen voor vrouwen, tegenover patronen van overheersing.

Deze transformatie van patriarchale patronen wordt geïllustreerd door een nadere bespreking van het leven van drie vrouwelijke heiligen die ieder exemplarisch zijn voor een bepaalde groep, namelijk Lalla `Aziza al- Saksāwiyya, Lalla ` ayisha al- Idrīsiyya en Fatima Muhdūz. Deze heiligen hebben grote invloed gehad op hun gemeenschap en hebben als religieuze actoren een historische erfenis nagelaten.

Hoofdstuk 5 behandelt de hedendaagse receptie van vrouwelijke heiligen in Marokko, met name door hun vrouwelijke vereerders, door vrouwen die moskeelessen volgen en door vrouwelijke predikers, de zogenaamde murshidāt. In moskeeën beleven vrouwen een directe relatie tot God, maar in de heiligdommen gebeurt dit indirect, via de heilige. In de heiligdommen voeren vrouwen verschillende rituelen uit om hun vroomheid te uiten en hun heilige te eren, zoals trance-rituelen, dhikr-rituelen (het aanroepen van de naam van God), offerrituelen en huwelijks- en vruchtbaarheidsrituelen. Binnen de heiligdommen kunnen vereerders vrijelijk kiezen door middel van welke rituelen en op welke manieren ze hun liefde
en respect voor hun vrouwelijke heiligen betuigen. De functionarissen van de heiligdommen, *muqaddamāt*, vrouwelijke genezers en *faqīrāt* spelen een belangrijke rol als religieuze leiders, onder meer bij de uitoefening van deze rituelen. Vrouwelijke vereerders bezoeken de heiligdommen niet alleen voor het verkrijgen van *baraka* om problemen van het moderne leven op te lossen, maar ook als zelf-techniek om hun spiritualiteit te vormen en een vrome persoonlijkheid te ontwikkelen. Zowel vrouwen uit het noorden als uit het zuiden van Marokko, vinden bij hun vrouwelijke heiligen een bron van empowerment en ervaren hen als hun rolmodel en moreel voorbeeld.

Vereerders streven soms naar het verwerven van orthodox religieuze kennis en volgen dan moskeelessen onder leiding van *murshidāt* en *waidāt* (vrouwen die een religieuze opleiding hebben genoten). Zowel de *murshidāt* als hun vrouwelijke toehoorders nemen vrouwelijke heiligen op in hun discours, als rolmodellen die vrouwen kunnen inspireren om zich als religieuze actor te vormen. De religieuze kennis van de *murshidāt* stelt deze predikers in staat om actief de status van de vrouw in de hedendaagse maatschappij te bevragen. Zij verwijzen naar de rechten die de islam aan vrouwen toebedeelde en stellen schending van deze rechten aan de orde, zoals in het geval van onderdrukkende huwelijken of van andere dominante conventionele normen.

De conclusies van Mahmood (2005) omtrent de Egyptische vrouwenmoskee-beweging blijken niet op te gaan voor de Marokkaanse context. Marokkaanse vrouwelijke vereerders, vrouwelijke toehoorders en hun predikers in de moskee, vormen zichzelf met behulp van diverse zelf-technieken - waarbij vrouwelijke heiligen uit het verleden een rol spelen - tot religieuze persoonlijkheden, op een manier die een transformatie van patriarchale patronen behelst. Zij doen hun zelf-praktijken gelden als ethische vrijheidspraktijken.

Hoofdstuk 6 van deze studie behandelt de receptie van vrouwelijke heiligen door Marokkaanse vrouwenorganisaties vandaag de dag. Het hoofdstuk begint met een kort
historisch overzicht van de Marokkaanse feministische beweging. Daarna wordt met name de houding besproken van islamistisch activisten jegens het erfgoed van Marokko’s historisch exemplarische vrouwen. Niet alleen vrouwenorganisaties van seculiere maar ook die van islamistische huize blijken vrouwelijke heiligen als rolmodellen te beschouwen die met hun zelf-vorming hun patriarchale gemeenschappen uitdaagden.

De islamistische organisaties ‘Adl wa al-Iḥsān, al-‘Adāla wa al-Tanmiya en Muntadā al-Zahrā’, kennen overeenkomstige strategieën, doelstellingen en activiteiten. In tegenstelling tot sommige onderzoeken die islamitische vrouwelijke activisten omschrijven als conservatief en traditioneel ingesteld ten aanzien van vrouwenzaken, komt uit mijn interviews met deze activisten naar voren dat zij net als de seculiere feministen, politieke, sociale en economische ‘empowerment’ van vrouwen nastreven in gelijkheid met mannen.

Hun discours benadrukt de ‘gelijkwaardigheid’ van mannen en vrouwen, in plaats van de gelijkheid. Het betreft hier echter alleen de private sfeer maar ook ten aanzien daarvan streven zij egalitaire verhoudingen na. Zij baseren hun strijd voor de ‘empowerment’ en rechten van vrouwen op de primaire bronnen van de islam, de Koran en de Soenna, en op hun eigen interpretatie daarvan. Zij zijn ervan overtuigd dat de definitie van de status van de vrouw afgeleid van de Maliki jurisprudentie (rechtsschool in islam) een patriarchale interpretatie vormt van de islam, die als zodanig een primaire oorzaak is van Marokkaanse vrouwenonderdrukking en discriminatie.

Islamistische activisten verwijzen voor hun visie op vrouwenzaken ook naar de geschiedenis van de islam en naar het Marokkaanse lokale culturele erfgoed. Zij refereren aan exemplarische vrouwen uit de Marokkaanse geschiedenis, uit de geschiedenis van de islam, en verwijzen naar de prestaties van deze vrouwen om zich te ontwikkelen tot grote ethische persoonlijkheden. De Universele Verklaring van de Rechten van de Mens vormt een andere bron waarnaar Marokkaanse islamistische activisten verwijzen in hun discours over
vrouwenzaken. Het humanisme waarop het vertoog van mensenrechten berust vormt hun inziens ook een onderdeel van de islam.

De vrouwelijke islamistische activisten kunnen gelden als feministen, die evenals seculier feministen patriarchale patronen bevechten. Islamistisch activisten verwerpen heiligenverering als zodanig, maar bewonderen en respecteren vrouwelijke heiligen als bron van empowerment, die vrouwen in het heden in staat stelt deel te nemen aan activisme, onderwijs en het vergaren van kennis. Vrouwelijke heiligen spelen een rol in het discours van Marokkaanse feministen, van seculiere en islamistische huize, als bron van empowerment.
Summary in English

The results of my research challenge the conventional image of passive Moroccan Muslim women and the depiction of women as victims of patriarchal religious ideologies. Instead, my thesis draws an alternative discourse that presents women, whether in the past or in the present, as religious agents, who are actively engaged in creating, re-defining, re-interpreting and transforming their religious roles both in the private and the public sphere.

Cupolas and shrines of female saints still stand throughout the Maghreb, especially Morocco. Little is known about these female saints. Practically the only sources on them are hagiographies and oral stories. From these sources, my thesis discusses these women’s construction of sainthood through inventorying the self-techniques they used in this context. My research thus approaches them as agents, analyzing the way they actively sought sainthood, and questioning whether they transgressed the social limits that were imposed on them. It does so in the context of current discourses on Moroccan women and feminism, specifically by researching how the narratives of these female saints are received by Moroccan women today, especially by their venerators, by women preachers and their attendants, and by activists of Islamic women’s organizations. My thesis questions whether there is a continuity in Moroccan female spiritual agency throughout history, that can inspire Muslim women today, and others, in defying the negative images of them sketched above.

Chapter One gives a first indication of my hagiographic sources, and describes my fieldwork throughout several regions in Morocco. It discusses the scholarly research on Moroccan female saints thus far, and indicates the researches on which I build. Some important concepts of the thesis are discussed, one of them being Sufism’s main characteristics, especially in its popular version. The concept of baraka is also discussed and defined. Thirdly, my understanding of rituals in this thesis comes to the fore, namely as performative acts. Following this, I discuss a few theoretical approaches that relate to the
concepts of embodiment, agency, empowerment and patriarchy. Embodiment refers to the fact that the body is modified by social categories and thus lives – embodies – its social and spiritual environment.

Theoretical debates about agency, such as they currently take place among anthropologists, often refer to the works of Judith Butler, Michel Foucault and Saba Mahmood. Like Mahmood’s study (2005), this thesis builds on the final Foucault’s ethics and the conceptual tools it presents, such as ‘ethical self-formation’ and ‘ethical self-techniques,’ both of which refer to embodied ethical ways of life. But unlike Mahmood’s work, this thesis also employs Foucault’s ethical concept of ‘freedom practices,’ which Mahmood totally obliterated. Freedom practices are ethical self-practices that involve ethical self-formation, and which create new ethical ways of life in opposition to existing forms of domination. The concept of empowerment is defined as the expansion of people’s ability to achieve certain ends, and the concept of patriarchy is taken up as a conceptual tool to analyze concrete historical social patterns of domination of women. Finally, the chapter introduces the concepts ‘equality effects,’ and ‘egalitarian effects’ such as developed in the work of the Dutch historian Siep Stuurman. Discourses and texts – and we add: ways of life and life stories – can express notions and thoughts of equality and egalitarianism, without any explicit reference to these terms.

In Chapter Two, the tradition of Sufism is discussed more in depth, especially in relation to gender. It explores the basic principles of Sufism as formulated by Al Ghazali, which form the basis of orthodox as well as of popular Sufism, with the latter being additionally characterized by the practice of saint veneration. The ribāt is discussed as the space where this veneration of saints takes place. Sufism’s relation to gender is discussed primarily in relation to the works of some Sufi scholars of the past, which make it explicit that women are included in Sufism, in as far as they can reach the highest ranks of spirituality and
sainthood just like men do. Sufism’s relation to gender is further discussed by approaching Sufism as a strand of Islamic mysticism that finds its basis in the Qur’an. Several contemporary Muslim authors argue that the spiritual side of Islam, such as can be found in the Qur’an, is egalitarian in character. These works thus argue for intrinsic gender equality at the heart of Islam, much like the Sufi scholars who came long before them. Against this background I finally discuss some examples of female Sufi mystics, such as Rabī’a al-ʿAdawiyya, and Fāṭima of Cordova, who, from the narratives, come forward as living their lives on equal footing with their male counterparts.

Chapter Three focuses on Sufism and hagiography in the Moroccan context. Here, I briefly discuss Moroccan geography and history in the context of its Islamization, in which proliferation of Sufism has been crucial. Moroccan Sufism is then discussed, as different from the Middle Eastern versions, in that it focuses more on social reality, dealing with people’s social matters and crises. The Moroccan Sufi saint is engaged in society: saints in Morocco played spiritual, religious, social and political roles. The approaches of Moroccan Sufism from some important anthropological studies are discussed in several respects. Contrary to these studies it is argued that there is some continuity instead of a sharp distinction between Moroccan orthodox and popular Sufism, given that in many instances the latter also involves an acceptance of the foundational texts, beliefs and practices of orthodox Islam. To underscore some similarities and overlapping points between popular and orthodox Sufism in the Moroccan context, I discuss sharifism and maraboutism, as well as sainthood and baraka.

Moroccan hagiography is then discussed as being basically similar to Islamic hagiography, though with an additional emphasis, by way of lengthy narratives, on the saints’ miracles, personality and piety. Many types of saints come to the fore in Moroccan hagiography, as is clear from their inclusion of women saints. The authentic character of these hagiographies is a topic of debate among scholars. We follow Cornell (1998), Kugle (2007)
and others who argue that the hagiographers remained true to the saints’ cultural space and time, and reveal how people understood sainthood. The chapter ends with a brief survey of the Moroccan hagiographies that were consulted for the inventorying of Moroccan female saints in history, such as presented at length in the Appendix.

Chapter Four focuses on Moroccan female sainthood. It analyzes the stories of female and male saints belonging to Morocco. Life stories found both in the archives and oral literature show that these saints employed self-techniques that empowered them to become saints. Some of the main self-techniques used by male and female Sufi are the practicing of piety, acquiring learnedness, the performing of miracles, practicing *jadhb* (Divine attraction), the taking up of social and political roles, or the practicing of ‘ordinary sainthood’ in the context of the family. The practicing of piety itself also contains a set of self-techniques such as searching initiation, practicing domestic piety, creating a sacred body, crying and the refusal of marriage.

The stories studied show that the self-techniques that men and women employed for their ethical self-formation, namely to achieve sainthood, are mostly similar. Some minor exceptions are that some more female saints than males practiced indoor piety, and that female saints are more lovingly towards their disciples. However, through their overall description of similar self-techniques of male and female saints, the narratives convey equality and egalitarian effects. From the narratives, Moroccan history includes women who achieved orthodox religious education and reached high decision-making positions, similar to men. In the context of the patriarchal patterns the women saints lived in, their self-practices – i.e., their ethical self-formation through applying certain ethical self-techniques – come forward as ethical freedom practices: they created new ethical ways of life for women that were in opposition to forms of domination.

Their transgression of patriarchal patterns is furthermore illustrated by a discussion of
the lives of three notable women saints: Lalla ʿAzīza al-Saksāwiyya, Lalla ʿĀyisha al-Idrīsiya and Fāṭima Muhdūz, each exemplary for a certain group of female saints. These women cultivated personalities in a way that gained them power and authority. They impacted their communities with their personalities and marked history with their legacy.

Chapter Five discusses the way historical women saints are received by Moroccan women today, such as the venerators of women saints, women attending mosque lessons and murshidāt (women preachers). In mosques women live a direct relationship with God. But in shrines, women live an indirect relation to God through the saint. In the shrines, women perform different rituals to express their piety and their strong veneration to their women saints, such as trance rituals, dhikr-rituals, sacrifice rituals, marriage and fertility rituals. Within the shrines, venerators are free to choose the kind of ritual and the ways to express their love and respect to their women saints. There are also functionaries of the shrines, including muqaddamāt, women healers and faqīrāt, who play important active roles, displaying leadership in leading rituals and in their overall religious agency.

Women venerators visit women saints’ shrines not only for baraka, so as to find solutions for the hardships of their modern lives, but also as a self-technique to develop their spirituality and construct a pious personality. Both northern and southern Moroccan women find in their women saints a source of empowerment, defining them as their role models and moral exemplars. Venerators sometimes search for orthodox religious knowledge by attending mosque lessons headed by murshidāt and waʿidāt, so as to become active religious agents. Both the murshidāt and women attendants integrate women saints in their discourses as empowering role models for women, to change themselves into religious agents.

Murshidāt’s religious knowledge empowers them to engage in activism and to question women’s status in contemporary society. They refer to the rights that Islam gave to women, and they question cases where these rights are violated, such as oppressive marriages.
and other dominant conventional norms. The conclusions of Mahmood (2005) on the Egyptian mosque women’s movement do not apply to the Moroccan context. Moroccan women venerators, *murshidāt* and their women attendants in the mosque, by using various self-techniques, in which women saints of the past do play a certain role, create religious personalities, in ways that involve a transgression of patriarchal patterns, thus making their self-practices count as ethical freedom practices.

Chapter Six of the thesis deals with the way activists in current Moroccan women’s organizations receive women saints in their discourses. The chapter starts with a brief historical review of the Moroccan feminist movement. It then focuses on the attitude of Islamist women activists towards historically exemplary women and their legacy. Both Islamic and secular Moroccan women’s organizations consider women saints as role models whose self-formation challenged their patriarchal communities. The Islamist associations, al-‘Adl wa al-Iḥsān, al-‘Adāla wa al-Tanmiya and Muntadā al-Zahrā’, have similar strategies, objectives and activities. In contrast to some researchers’ writings that describe Islamist women activists as being conservative and traditional towards women’s issues – my interviews show that these activists, like their secular counterparts, seek political, social and economic empowerment of women and equality with men.

Their discourse on men and women’s equity, instead of equality, involves the private sphere only, and even there they are also after egalitarianism. They base their struggle for women’s empowerment and rights on the primary sources of Islam, the Qur’an and Sunna, and on their own interpretation of these sources. They strongly believe that the Maliki jurisprudence definition of women’s status is a patriarchal interpretation of Islam and the primary cause of Moroccan women’s oppression and discrimination. Islamist women’s associations also refer in their debate on women’s issues to Islamic history and to Moroccan local cultural heritage. They discuss the position of Muslim and Moroccan women, referring
to exemplary women in history and the way they developed themselves into great ethical personalities. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights constitutes another source that Moroccan Islamist women activists refer to in their discourses on women’s issues. They strongly believe that the humanism advocated by human rights discourses is part of Islam.

The female Islamist activists thus come across as feminists, fighting patriarchy as secular feminists do. The Islamist activists reject saint veneration but do admire and respect the women saints as a source of empowerment for women that enables them to engage in activism, education and learning. Women saints are integrated in the discourses of Moroccan feminists, secular and Islamist, as a source of empowerment.