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Female religious agents in Morocco: Old practices and new perspectives

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Publication date
2013

Citation for published version (APA):
Ouguir, A. (2013). *Female religious agents in Morocco: Old practices and new perspectives*. [Thesis, fully internal, Universiteit van Amsterdam].

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-ʿAydi. 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-ʿAydi, but most of people come to see his daughter Lalla Shrifa al-ʿAydiya". 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 Shrifa. 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 Shrifa 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'iẓāt, 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

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[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 faqīhāt (religious jurists) and ‘ālimāt (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 `Azīza al-Saksāwiyya (14th century), Lalla `Āyisha al-Idrīsiya (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. `Azīza and Fāṭima originated from Southwestern Moroccan Berber tribes, whereas `Āyisha 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-Kabīr, a city in the Northwest of Morocco, I asked the taxi driver to take me to `Āyisha al-Idrīsiya's shrine in the old

Medina. He told me that there were many women saints called `Āyisha 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 `Allāl al-Baḥrāwi,[3] 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 `Allāl 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 `Ashīr 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

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[3]   The village is named after a male saint, Sīdī `Allāl 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 Muhdūz 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-Idrīsiya'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 venerators 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'ḍam 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

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[4]   Mernissi 1977, 112
[5]   Dwyer 1978, 583
[6]   Jansen 1987, 9
[7]   Ibid.

order.[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.[9] Furthermore, Sossie Andezian (1995), who studied Algerian women's religious rituals, underscored the controversial relations between women and religion.[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.[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), Mahmāh (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

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8   Bartels 1993, 114
9   Rausch 2004, 221
10 Andezian 1995, 2
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 Raḥal (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 Muḥammed 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,

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[12] al-Tādilī 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.[15] 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

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[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. Wali 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 nāsik (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

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[16]   Shrīṭ 1975
[17]   See *Encyclopeadia 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.[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).[20] The former is reserved for the spiritual intellectual elite, and the latter encompasses ordinary faithful Sufis.[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.[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.[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.

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[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 beneficient force of Divine origin, which causes superabundance in the physical sphere and prosperity and happiness in the psychic order.[24] 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.[25] 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.[26]

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.[27] 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

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[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.[28] 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.[29] 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.[30] 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.[31]

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-Tādilī defines karāma as an act that is contrary to custom performed by someone whose religion is sound.[32] In other words, karāma, in al-Tādilī's view, is fi'l khāriq lil 'āda (a paranormal act which appears at the hands of a saint who is obedient to God).[33] 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.[34]

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

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[28]   Westermarck 1926
[29]   Ibid.
[30]   *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, vol. 3, 1032
[31]   Crapanzano 19781, 237
[32]   al-Tādilī 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.[35] 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.[36] 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."[37] 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.[38] 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

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[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.[39] 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.[40] 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.

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[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.[41] 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.[42]

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.[43] 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.[44] 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.[45] 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

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[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'.[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.

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[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 *wha*t 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

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[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.[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.[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 *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.[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

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[49] Foucault 1997b
[50] Vintges 2004
[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".[52] 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.[53]

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.[54]

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.[55] 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

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[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.[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.[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

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[56] Ibid.
[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]

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[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

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[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".[63]

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'.[64]

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.[65] 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

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[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.