
Crafting Sociability in Female Spiritual Practices: The Case of *Boutchichiyyat*

Sarah Hebbouch

Abstract

Research on *sufism* and female spirituality has centered on framing narratives of *sufi* women within individualized practices, constructing thereby *sufi* women as mere individual and assisting players in historical accounts of more famous male scholars. In recent years, academic interest has geared towards the investigation of *sufi* women's collective and ritualistic performance within structured *sufi* circles. Henceforth, this paper explores ways in which the gathering of *sufi* women of *Boutchichiyya*, a Morocco-based *sufi* order, in a *zawiya* mediates not only ritual performances but also promotes the rehearsal of sociability and social relations. The point is made that within a horizon that is viewed as a nexus where the ritualistic performance is what matters in a *zawiya*, *sufi* women's gathering is characterized by a sense of community, and interconnections between spiritual, social capital and socialization. In this 'pri-blic' (private and public) space, namely the *zawiya*, *sufi* women of *Boutchichiyya* enjoy privacy and communal life. Knowing that the *zawiya* is a segregated space, since men and women disciples perform rituals separately, one might surmise that the spatial division sparks gender inequality. However, this spatial segregation is an ideal of emancipation, which subsumes a spatial segregation of rituals, and constructs a realm of privacy, intimacy, and fervent ambiance women aspire to. This paper builds on findings of a qualitative ethnographic research, in which the researcher assumed a participant-observer role to generate a more focused discussion on whether the gender division of space highlights women's spirituality or undermines it. More precisely, this paper approaches the interactive relationship, which engages women's *sufi* experience with prevalent spatial politics in Moroccan society. In such a space where women come to learn and imbibe spiritual knowledge, social relationships are important assets for women's spiritual, social, and personal growth.

Keywords: sociability, *sufi* women, *Boutchichiyya*, *zawiya*, spatial division

Introduction

Zawiya, Sufism, and Female Spirituality: What Implications?

Female spirituality remains a cause of disagreement between those who uphold the fundamentalist character of Islam and deny any feminine aspect to spirituality, and those who snub the possibility of gendering the *sufi* experience. (Cornell, 1998) Gendered spirituality can be considered as the dynamic of cultural, spiritual, and social roles both men and women play towards fulfilling a unanimous goal, which is that of having an ongoing endeavor to grow in their relationship with the Divine. The focus, throughout this study, is to highlight the subtle potential of female spirituality with a unique reference to women's spiritual and social performance. The exclusion of men's performative acts in this study is justified by a number of methodological boundaries. As a female, I have access neither to the realm of *Boutchichi* male gatherings, nor to any male *sufi* space in other *zawiyas*.

A *zawiya*, an edifice where *sufi* rituals take place, generates a conceptual ambiguity. There is a temporal and spatial division in the *zawiya* into a double space and time; one space is devoted for women while the second is for men. The two spaces remain distinct in terms of timing. When women's gathering is finished, women leave, and men's performance starts. It is not legitimate for a woman to violate men's privacy, since the *sufi* experience represents an ethical scheme laden with moral values.

The choice of the *Qadiri Boutchichi sufi order* can be justified by the fact that it embodies all the distinct forms of what a *Tariqa* or *sufi* order is supposed to imply. The order has been developed into a *sufi* organization and has cultivated practices in a way that makes law and *sufism* compatible to each other. The *Boutchichiya* remains the creation of a moderate asceticism, which "allows the *sufi* to seek God sincerely while remaining involved with his society". (Babou, 2003: 313) A number of features common to the majority of Moroccan *sufi* orders irrespective of their degree of conservatism relate to

the rejection of “extreme mysticism” of the ascetics, who shun social life and place spiritual perfection over formal worship”. (ibid). The final project of most Moroccan *sufi* orders, including *Boutchichiya*, is to endorse a *Sufi* ideology that is called by scholars “minimalist *Sufism*”, which differs greatly in depth and breadth from orthodox rituals and forms of worship.¹

The choice of the *Boutchichiya*, as a case study, stems from the fact that it is the only *Tariqa*, whose spiritual figure is still alive. It, therefore, mirrors the full vision of a complete *sufi* order. In a *sufi* circle, the presence of a living master or *sheikh* is paramount in the life of disciples who are “bound to teachers by ties of respect and affection”. (Malamud, 1994: 432)

More importantly, the significance of this study is predicated upon the premise that contemporary literature and research has neglected Moroccan women’s position in spirituality. A historical study of women’s spirituality attests to the religious and social peculiarities, which prevailed in society, at large. *Sufi* women were not necessarily relegated to the domestic sphere nor were they immensely debarred from religion. Rather, the religious division of labor sparked by fundamentalist Islamic discourse made women’s religious practices more concealed and informal. The fulfillment of women’s performance of everyday spirituality happened outside formal spheres of worship, orthodox, and rigid Islamic practices, as incarnated in the mosque. (Cruise O’Brien and Coulon, 1989)

Adherence to *Sufi* orders and *zawiyas* mediated the institutionalization of the notion of an organized struggle. The once marginalized group (*Sufis*) believed that spirituality could re-orient religion to a more gender sensitive exegesis of the religious texts, and more tolerance to women’s presence in a secluded area in order to engage in a mystical practice. Because of their limited sphere of action, they have battled both “the male-dominated Muslim territory and the mainstream secular culture”. (Galín, 2007: 114)

Sufi women have had it that in order to escape the reality reproducing the prevalent spatial division, they have been required “to carry out their spiritual activities away from the public gaze”. (ibid) In the words of three female *Boutchichi* informants on the spiritual division of rituals, they claim that disciples belonging to this order are undergoing a new mobility and public visibility. This has led to increased potential for empowerment in relation to women’s attitudes, and has altered perceptions, since women, Galín, citing Raudvere, opines, have been able “to get past the public/private dichotomy working against them”. (ibid)

Female Spirituality between Empowerment and Sociability

A close investigation around the concept of empowerment is liable to unravel an ambiguity surrounding the ideology behind it. This was in fact a concept that came from within the feminist movement, but often lacked “a clear definition and consistent usage”. (Bordat et al, 2011: 91) Therefore, the most flagrant definition of empowerment in relation to *Sufi* women is the tendency to embody a grassroot-level mobilization that accounts for a social change and the dynamics of *sufi* women’s roles.

Boutchichi women tend to converge in the advocacy of a spiritual experience that has become a new constructed form of public of private sociability, but it remains impossible to dismiss the religious-cum-spiritual character of women’s spiritual experience. A close examination and observation of *Boutchichi* women inside and outside the *zawiya* reveals that spirituality is more than a religious experience. Rather, it is a panoply of distinct social features, which embody a sociability model. But, what are the social ramifications of female spirituality within the *Qadiri Boutchichi* order?

The word “sociability” displays often the relative disposition to be sociable with somebody, which originates from the works of the Russian social anarchist, Peter Kropotkin. (as cited in Gillespie Cook, 2015) The word, indeed, brings a whole body of connotations; it indicates the ability to be in love with the company of others while it implies as well the propensity to chase social contact with others. Sociability highlights a set of prerequisites for the maintenance of a social group. What characterizes these social groups is social drive, attachment to one another, friendship, affiliative drive, sensation seeking, social support, social interaction, and sociotropy.

The intention behind such lexicalization is to convey a particular point of view about a given social group. It carries an ideological significance that contributes to the understanding of the workings, happenings, and mental generation of a social group. However, at a deeper level, the interpretation of social drive, attachment, and sociotropy, respectively generates psychological implications on the part of adherents to a particular social group. While sociability, sociotropy-

¹ See Fernand Dumont, *La Pensée religieuse de Amadou Bamba*, (as cited in Babou, 2003 : 313).

person's tendency to place great value on relationships over individual independence that will leave them susceptible to depression because of a loss of a relationship-, and social drive can help fathom the mutual attachment among adherents of a particular social group, they could themselves be strategically sources of depression and frustration to these members.

In the realm of disciples and *sufi* orders, sociability is an idealized version of social activity and "may strengthen the community of the order and so assist in *sufis'* practices. Sometimes, sociability may become the main feature of an order". (Sedgwick, 2003: 59) The first remark we can make about this passage pertains to the significance of the social capital among the community of disciples. The main principle governing relationships in a *sufi* order is the communal life. This communal aspect of *sufi* orders becomes more apparent in cities, where "such social *sufi* orders may blend into each other to produce a sort of general *sufi* milieu inhabited by people who may not even follow a particular *sheikh*, but who attend a variety of *dhikrs* and *mawlids*, listen to chants and music, meet friends, talk, and drink tea". (ibid)

Boutchichi women have outlined a social reform; -not in a literal meaning of the word-, that has reconstructed the realm of the *Tariqa*, in general, and the world of the *zawiya*, in particular. This social reform regulates relationships and guidelines governing members of the *Tariqa*. Nonetheless, they remain tied to the spiritual idea of the order, which seeks to homogenise the spiritual experience among disciples, and allows its accessibility to all social strata. This articulated model of a new form of *sufi* sociability, as manifested in *Boutchichiya*, serves to explain the social aspect of religiosity. *Boutchichiyya* delineates a detailed roadmap towards establishing a social-cum-faith- based order.

The main social and religious activities are carried out inside a *zawiya*, where the *Boutchichiyyat's* social and religious outline manifests. The *zawiya* constitutes a residue of pure sociability, because it is where female disciples feel they need to belong. For female spirituals, the *zawiya* promotes privacy and represents "real world" networks in an enmeshed world of *zawiya*.¹ The words 'social and sociability' are accentuated since the lexicalization serves to convey a certain worldview. The two terms have an ideological significance that derives from the debate of whether or not *sufism* disengages social life. *Sufism* or spirituality was a marginal social phenomenon in Moroccan society for a number of reasons. The first pertains to the unorthodox activities *sufi* orders were defamed for. The second major reason is on par with the negative representation spirituality was associated with because of harboring women. (Derrazi, 2015) In addition to the fact that *sufism* was confined "to the literary and poetic realms". (Golestaeli, 2014: 1)

Indeed, *Sufism* has sought to establish the underlying foundations for the social well-being of its followers. This spiritual institution's primary role was not to help the needy or the homeless only, but to deflect society as a whole into a more balanced ethical, spiritual, and psychological welfare. The reason why spiritual institutions are called orders or *Tariqas* pertains to the establishment of a societal organization characterized by complete conformity to the standards and requirements of a *sufi* order. This is how a forty-two year old informant describes her experience with the *Boutchichiyya*:

I was diagnosed with an ear infection, and was urged by the doctor to proceed with a surgery, which I could not afford because I lacked sufficient healthcare insurance. It was hard for me to pay for the medical services. *Lfaqirat* knew about my financial situation, and so they urged each other to collect money for my surgery. I cannot describe my feelings when I found out about their emotional and financial support. I was only hoping that they would keep me in their supplications. It is such a blessing to have people in your life, who worry about your healthcare, and who would proceed with your billing regulations only because they love you. (Interview, December 2017)

In this testimony, there is a representation of the community of female *Sufis* as one entity, and the way religious sociability spurs a feeling of sympathy and affiliation. The spiritual experience provides women with one of the unique opportunities to enter into rapport with other co-sisters, expand the network of relationships, and strengthen bonds of solidarity among each other. However, *Sufi* women's strategic solidarity and communion is a result of the cultural capital they acquired through 'praxis' and through being socialized within a particular social group, which creates thereby a sense of sociability and solidarity, and group position. In his reflection on the concept of practice, Ortner (2006: 129) as cited in (Kupari, 2016: 10) foregrounds the importance of practice in "human activity which simultaneously constructs both individuals as social being and the social world that surrounds them". It is through such performances as solidarity that individuals "internalize cultural symbols and meanings". (ibid) Through this reading, what makes the process of influencing the spiritual experience and the exposure to its impact is routinization, which in parallel, becomes social reproduction. The experience within a *Sufi* order is impacted by principles of the sacred that female disciples share. There is, indeed, a unanimous agreement among

female disciples about certain forms of cultural capital and the physical embodiment of these symbolic dispositions. The shared cultural capital is a major source of social equality among disciples.

More importantly, what is specific to women's experience in a *sufi* order is the definition they bring to themselves "as keepers of traditional values who wish to live like the pioneers of Islam". (As cited in Galin, 2007: 113) Within the *sufi* tradition, women do participate in the gender-segregated rituals and enjoy the accordance of leadership roles. It is noteworthy that in such rituals, women are more likely to enjoy the comfort of their privacy. In the case of *Boutchichi* women, interviews have unraveled women's satisfaction with the rituals' segregation as many of them envision the woman-only gathering as an encounter in a festive atmosphere of conviviality and love. One of the informants confessed her impression with the fact that in the *zawiya*, which lay people would consider 'a space of seclusion', "we feel happy to have a space for our own, where we can meet, perform our *dhikr*, converse, and debate. We would not have been at ease, had the *dhikr* been comingled".

The *Boutchichi Tariqa* remains distinct by virtue of its potential, which spatially and temporally differentiates women and men's rituals. The inherent tradition in most *sufi* orders is the gender division of rituals. Research informants recognized the segregation as a common practice that does not relegate any gender to any peripheral position. Rather, it is a tactic to escape constraints levelled from men against them. The practice of division puts essentially less control and regulations on women's mobility inside the *zawiya*. The argument comes to confirm suspicions about *Boutchichi* women's attitude towards the patriarchal system. It also elucidates whether or not patriarchal interpretations to religion have been restrictive to them.

Actually, none of the women interviewed for the research, irrespective of their 'educational or career background' have converged in the advocacy of being resistant to a patriarchal system. A female disciple I have addressed the issue with claims that once in the *Tariqa*, and inside the *zawiya*, gender conflicts and segregation fade away:

We are all one community, and one body whose main objective is to bear and respect each other in order to fulfill the reason we are here, which is the love of Divine. I have never thought of spatial division as a suppressing idea, but as a slot for our privacy. If men were with us, we would not have felt at ease.

In the course of this research, *Boutchichi* women have often rebuffed the possibility of sharing rituals with men out of fear that their privacy might be violated. Interestingly, there is a common denominator that links *Boutchichi* men and women; both of them agree to the premise of keeping the tradition intact; that is, not allowing the violation of the ethical regulations of the *Tariqa*.

Furthermore, within the order, the majority are educated, with the exception of a few illiterate women. Illiterate women belonging to the *Boutchichiyya* are mostly old women, who did not have the chance to attend schools. However, the majority is educated with a minimum degree of literacy. Women I interviewed think that it is increasingly evident for girls to be educated because through education, women can redirect society to a healthier life. "With a degree in pockets and open-minded views, everybody will respect me. If you are illiterate, people will look down upon you, derogate you, and consider you an outcast", explains a female disciple. She adds in amusement:

Imagine, "ya lalla" (referring to me as Lalla), if I am illiterate. I will be unable to debate ideas with educated people, would not handle difficult situations where I have to show my academic skills". She laughs and says, "Sidi [referring to the *sheikh*] asked us to learn and educate our children because he knows the value of education, and knows very well that being an educated woman, one can change the world surrounding her".

This narrative, among others, mirrors the intersection of a number of debates around the themes of education, women, and marginality. The objective here is not only that of discussing women's spiritual experience within the *Tariqa* as a display of a culture of sociability, not merely as a site for the production of narratives around the community life and spirituality, but also as a social arena with some interesting cultural and social dimensions. Women of the *Boutchichiyya* embrace a critical perception about the significance of education in women's life. This awareness is further reinforced by Margaret Malamud's sensibility when she notes that *sufi* orders "developed ways of defining and transmitting spiritual knowledge", which has been channeled through education. (1994: 428) This helps understand the heterogeneity surrounding the community of *Boutchichi* women, who embody different forms of social and cultural realities, different modes of binarization, and different narratives, but remain overall in unison.

In fact, there has been an important evolution in Moroccan women's perceptions of and attitudes toward spirituality. Medieval and pre-protectorate hagiographies depict the *sufi* experience as being restricted to a particular social category and a specific age. Nowadays, *sufi* orders in general, and, the *Boutchichiyya*, in particular encompasses a large spectrum of young educated and mostly working women within a context of previously scant number of women. In essence, age in Moroccan culture is a denominator of certain activities and an epitome for several stereotypical continuities. Young and old women spend, in their own capacity within the order and inside the *zawiya*, much or sporadic time with the desire to alter their suboptimal realities through an "episodic celebration" within a structure of a *sufi* order. (ibid) The *zawiya* is a pilgrimage place for literate, highly educated, as well as uneducated women.

Importantly, the archeology of *sufi* women's educational background is largely heterogeneous. *Boutchichi* women, based on field observations, have a panoply of academic backgrounds. The vast majority consists of an educated elite occupying different positions, and are, thus, concomitant with the order's philosophy. This educated category represents a diverse group of positions. Their occupational status may vary from engineers, doctors, teachers, to state officials. They are usually young disciples. On the other hand, the elderly of *Tariqa* constitutes the illiterate minority.

Besides the fact that these women encroach on this space with distinct educational and academic backgrounds, quite a large number of them have been pulled over to the order through a rippling effect of the family network. Many women I have interviewed claimed that their families influenced their attraction to the *Tariqa*, revealing that they discovered mysticism through their relatives and parents. Between family and spirituality, the *sufi* experience is marked by a politics of the family's role. An informant, whose parents constituted the major influence in her spiritual life, claims that being part of the *Tariqa* increased disciples' community and 'emotional harmony':

I am very thankful to my parents who played a crucial role in bringing the order to my life as well as to my siblings'. Since childhood, I witnessed the happenings inside the *zawiya*, the evolution of the love of *Tariqa* inside my parents' mind and mine. When the children spent a considerable time in the neighborhood's streets, I was cherishing moments inside the *zawiya*. The *zawiya* was a playground, a school, and people inside it were my family. We grew up discovering the hidden treasureability (*kenz Imakhfiy*) of the *zawiya* and the *Tariqa*, which is that of *Tarbiyya* (education). My family educated me, and so did the *Tariqa*.

The unequivocal relation between family and the *Tariqa* also reflects the social role they both underline in the socialization and education of children. Sociability inside the *zawiya*, and, thus the order, allows the establishment of a cohesive meridian life, and the support of its adherents in fulfilling their learning goals. More importantly, *Tariqa* is construed in this context as a complementary centre of learning that teaches perseverance, self-respect, and tolerance, and it is a harbor for cooperative ventures among *murids*. The discursive pattern circulating in *Boutchichiyya's* discourse emphasizes the significance of *Tarbiyya* (education) in the life of disciples.

***Tarbiyya* as a Social Pattern in Female *Boutchichiyya's* Spiritual Growth**

Tarbiyya or education is a spiritual life guide, and the ultimate goal any disciple should aspire to reach. *Tarbiyya* is germane to a roadmap of social, cultural, and ethical responsibilities disciples should comply with. *Tarbiyya* is a spiritual training any disciple undergoes to develop knowledge about the psychology of the enemy, which is *nafs* (inner self). In essence, *nafs* is the human's inner self that lures people in favor of their lustful desires and earthly pleasures. *Tarbiyya*, as I have managed to perceive from my informants, is to take pleasure in the skirmishing with one's enemy: the *nafs*. *Tarbiyya* is when a disciple starts learning the tricks and traps of escaping the arduous experience of being a victim of one's *nafs*. When a disciple acquiesces to their *nafs*, good training and proper education respond to crises; thus, every situation becomes a religious situation or a learning situation.

It is necessary to delineate *Tarbiyya* as a blueprint; it is a concept rehearsed within the *zawiya* and, a recurrent discursive leitmotif of the order. When a novice disciple joins the order, it is important to remind him or her of the ultimate goal of the order, which is that of the integration of *Tarbiyya* in the functioning of the *sufi* path. The concept of *Tarbiyya* remains ambiguous by virtue of its broad sense, but it is another facet of socialization. In addition to that, the order "dedicates an entire division to supervise and conduct *Tarbiyya* activities, called *Qism al-Tarbiyya*, or the socialization department". (Al-Anani, 2016: 84) This gives one a clear-cut vision about how the socialization process is undertaken within the order. Inside the *Tariqa*, there are organizational units that collaborate with each other to contribute to the spirit of the community; hence,

the major role here is to move forward and put the vehicle in gear because the more disciples progress, the more they recognize the genius of their life.

The *Tariqa* is committed to a societal and religious reform that seeks to repudiate the aftermaths of westernization and the degeneration of morals and values in today's society. *Tarbiyya* reflects the vision of the *Tariqa's* *sheikh*, Sidi Jamal *Qadiri Boutchichi* and his predecessors, and mirrors his laudable goal to achieve a higher station (مرتبة) of *al ihssane* (spirituality) in the *murid's* journey, which is "marked by a profound knowledge of God".¹ (Flah, 2016: 2)

The *Tariqa* offers an alternative self-learning opportunity for the *sufi* community through the medium of *Tarbiyya*. *Tarbiyya* is outlined in the writings of disciples, is embodied in the manifesto posted on the *Tariqa's* website, in the argumentative discourse of the order, in the lectures of *mqedmin* and *mqedmat*, and is present in the literal use of language. The passage below is a translated excerpt from a lecture I attended in a *zawiya* in Casablanca: "We must wake up, altogether, dear *faqirat*, follow the premises of our *Tariqa* and our spiritual fathers [referring to the *Sheikh* and his late father]. You cannot find *Tarbiyya* in the manuals, but you can only acquire it through learning from the deeds and sayings of the *sheikh*". (November 2017, Casablanca) The use of "must" is a call to reinvigorate the practices of spiritual training. In this sense, *Tarbiyya* is ascribed to the discursive instruction, which is present either in a direct relationship between the *sheikh* and disciple, and through the initiation process that *murids* undergo once they start attending gatherings in the *zawiya*.²

The use of the word "we must" indicates a moral obligation and a tendency towards collaboration among female disciples. The argument here is to shift the direction of disciples towards the performance of spirituality and spiritual training through the acquisition of experiential knowledge from its direct source, which is the discursive instruction and verbalization canalized through the *Tariqa's* ideological and discursive forms. A close investigation of the passage unravels that this kind of discourse aims at making *Boutchichi* disciples acquire *Tarbiyya* neither from *sufi* manuals and texts, nor from academic literature, and sources but from praxis or first-hand experience of spirituality. It is necessary at this point to place this concept (*Tarbiyya*) and other concepts (*mahabba*, purification, *nafs*) within an appropriate framework that comes at the junction of several *discussions* relating to the *Tariqa's* blueprint of education. The *Tariqa's* framework is a style life option and a pattern of life that accounts for the plurality of the *Tariqa's* social and religious fabric, and aims at responding to the needs of the *Sufi*. Such a strategy "can always determine where a disciple is in the journey through the various stages of the mystical path". (ibid: 70)

My observations of the weekly gatherings attest to the fact that women, who occupy societal functions, continue their journey in the *Tariqa* as learners as well. The premise foundations have it that the first teacher of human kind is a mother. It is no wonder to find that women are involved in the *Sufi* experience more than in any area life. They often serve as canals of information to their children and surrounding. Additionally, they assure the continuity of a *Tariqa*, because they are enmeshed in a web of give and take (teaching and learning). If a woman learns the value of spirituality and education, she is likely to contribute to a better re-conceptualization of the enterprise of *Sufism*.

Within the *zawiya*, where most learning takes place, women expose the potential inquiries they have to the attendees, with a usual hope to find answers, which they do. I was a witness to a telling incident in one of the gatherings, where a mother, who is also a disciple, shouted at her daughter who was playing with cushions in the corner of the *zawiya*. When *Imqedma* finished her sermon, she turned to the woman and told her, "please, never shout at your daughter. She is *bnt triq* [the daughter of *Tariqa*] and we are all responsible for educating our children. *Tarbiyya* is to make her love the *Jam'e* (gathering) and not despise it". What was interesting in this incident is how *Tarbiyya* of children, which is a private concern, can be an issue of contention among the community of *sufi* women. *Imqedma* knew that the success of *al jama'* depended in part on the strengthening of the values among women. The word "*bnt triq*" signifies the collective concern of women belonging to the *Boutchichiyya* about the education of their children. By mending a parenting deficiency, *Imqedma* was also instructing the woman on how to behave inside the *zawiya*. Within the *Tariqa*, every disciple is involved in the *Tarbiyya* of other *murids*,

¹ I recall here the concept of *al ihssane*, translated into spirituality, which is reminiscent of *al-Adl Wal Ihsan* (Justice and Spirituality Group), a semi legal Islamist Group that has been rallying against the monarchy and Moroccan politics. The concept of *Al Ihssane* was utilized by the *Jamaa* to "preserve [its founders] supremacy as a spiritual leader". (Tozy, 1999 cited in Flah, 2016: 2)

² Seesemann (2011: 70) notes that *Tarbiyya* does not relate to the discursive instruction. He notes that "the locus of spiritual training is the master-disciple relationship, not the public or semipublic arena of *Sufi* writings or sermons... [only] [a]ccomplished masters are able to recognize these experiences when they occur".

because the female *murid's* *Tarbiyya* is perceived to be contributive and denotative of the collective identity of the order, and to the spirit of community.

Within the order, there is a deliberate obliteration of the binary of educated and uneducated, and hence, the avoidance of such issues as social positions and academic attainment is due to the religious borderlines of *Tariqa*, which are flexible enough to encompass people hailing from different social and cultural backgrounds. Therefore, it is the ethical, religious, and spiritual identity of the disciple, which is empowered within *Boutchichiyya* and *the zawiya*. The interpretation allows distinct disciples to reconstruct otherwise a new identity irrespective of their former identity markers. The image of a new identity is likened to a doctrine of rebirth associated with repentance in Islamic theology. From an Islamic perspective, a misbeliever is encouraged to repent from the wrong deeds, and, thus, acquire a new identity, as embodied in the rebirth theory, and cultivate an opportunity to experience a true life as outlined in traditional Islamic belief.

While the *Sufi* experience has been reserved in scope and action for the male community, more women have conquered *Boutchichiyya* as a pattern of life because *Tariqa* is open to women's visibility. A striking observation of women's experience inside the *zawiya* reveals a tendency among *Sufi* women to annex mentally the *zawiya* space with the mental construction of home. A female disciple describes the dominant traits of women's experience once they affiliate with *Boutchichiyya* as follows:

While men congregate in the *zawiya* for *dhikr*, our experience differs greatly from theirs. As in my case, I had no other place to learn and practice my spirituality. The *Triq* (referring to the order) was my shelter. It is an experience full of love and a strong desire to meet our beloved sisters. I was spiritually empty, but being part of a whole helped me fill that void inside me.

The testimony depicts the aural change that women have experienced during the ritual of initiation and instruction. It displays the aspects of collectivity, harmony, and *mahabba*. Within the premises of *Tariqa*, women experience indulgence in the love of their co-disciples, through "a participatory ritual to which every [*faqira*] is invited to take part". (Graiouid, 2011: 70) Women's experience within the order remains distinct by virtue of the potential to participate actively in the social and religious life. They go to the *zawiya* to learn about the rituals, and take part in the *dhikr* session, while at the same time engaging in discussions and socializing with other *faqirat*. Therefore, the point is made that the communal aspect is what characterizes women's encounter. Hence, the *zawiya*, as a marginal space is reterritorialized as a fervent hub of spirituality and sociability. It is a space that is fraught with aspirations, symbols, love, sociability, *Tarbiyya*, and communion.

References

- [1] Al-Anani, Khalid. (2016). *Inside the Muslim Brotherhood: Religion, Identity, and Politics*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- [2] Babou, C. (2003). *Educating the Murid: Theory and Practices of Education in Amadu Bamba's Thought*. *Journal of Religion In Africa*, 33(3), 310-327. Retrieved from www.jstor.org/stable/1581852 Derrazi, H. (2015). تمثيلات و ملامح لنساء عالمات و صالحات (Tamathulat wa malamih' li nisa' a'limat wa salihat) ("Representations and Aspects of Female Scholars and Virtuous Women". In: B. Rouyan, M. Bouanani, M. El Ghayeb and A. Belfaïda, eds., *Moroccan Sufism: A source of Illumination and Communication*, First Edition. Kénitra: Publications of Faculty of Arts and Humanities-Kénitra, pp.217-240.
- [3] Cornell, V. J. (1998). *Realm of the saint: Power and authority in Moroccan Sufism*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- [4] Cruise O'Brien, D. and Coulon, C. (1989). *Charisma and Brotherhood in African Islam*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- [5] Flah, Loubna. (2016). *The Discourse of Jama'at Al Adl Wal Ihsan (Justice and Spirituality Group) on the Concept of Democracy*. Dubai: *International Journal of Linguistics*. Retrieved from <https://semanticsarchive.net/Archive/.../FlahDubai2016.pdf>
- [6] Galin, Mùgé. (2007). *The Book and the Roses: Sufi Women, Visibility, and Zikir in Contemporary Istanbul*. [Review of the Book, by Catharina Raudvere]. *Journal Of Middle East Women's Studies*, 3(2), 112-115. Retrieved from https://books.google.co.ma/books/about/The_book_and_the_roses.html?id=yqclAQAAIAAJ&redir_esc=y

- [7] Gillespie Cook. et al. (2015). Sociability, Social Capital, and Community Development: A Public Health Perspective. Springer, in *International Perspectives on Social Policy, Administration, and Practice*. Retrieved from
- [8] <https://www.springer.com/gp/book/9783319114835>
- [9] Graioud, S. (2011). *Communication and Everyday Performance : Public Space and the Public Sphere in Morocco*. University Mohammed V, Faculty of Letters and Human Sciences Publications.
- [10] Kupari, Helena. (2016). *Lifelong Religion as Habitus: Religious Practice among Displaced Karelian Orthodox Women in Finland*. London: Brill Academic Pub.
- [11] Malamud, Margaret. (1994). Sufi Organizations and Structures of Authority in Medieval Nishapur. *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 26(03), pp.427-442. Retrieved from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/163697>
- [12] Mark, Sedgwick. (2003). *Sufism: The Essentials*. Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press. Retrieved from: https://books.google.co.ma/books/about/Sufism_the_essentials.html?id=XY_ZAAAAMAJ&redir_esc=y