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Tariqa Islam: Layers of Authentication

Hassan Marzouqi | June 2013

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Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies

PO Box 10277

Street No. 826, Zone 66

Doha, Qatar

Tel.: +974 44199777 | Fax: +974 44831651

www.dohainstitute.org

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Introduction

Sufism, in its contemporary expression within the Sufi Orders is without doubt substantially different to the theosophical Sufism created by the masters of Islamic mysticism. Perhaps the major transformation in Sufi thought is represented by the beginnings of its institutionalization when Sufism became a collection of rituals made up of the regular ceremonial liturgical recitations of *dhikr*¹ and devotional prayer (*wird*) held at the *zawiya*². Once the *zawiya* became the sole socio-cultural institution for the expression of Sufism, a new cultural coloring took shape in the Islamic cultural field. This gained its independence from philosophical Sufism on the one hand and from orthodox religion on the other. It swept the domains of folk culture in some of the Islamic lands, particularly in the Arab Maghreb, representing a very significant change to folk religion there and, even, a fundamental component of its identity.³

In this study attempts will be made to probe the epistemological, symbolic and sociological conditions that made this kind of cultural expression of religion both an "independent Islam" and, at the same time, one in close contact with orthodox Islam. In addition to the political and historical conditions of interest to historians, attempts will be made to excavate the structural conditions that make the Tariqa⁴ an autonomous social body within Arab Islamic society by dwelling on the epistemological and anthropological conditions that have allowed tariqa Islam to continuously reproduce itself.

In order to address this question, efforts will be made to test the thesis that tariqa Islam is a religious discourse parallel to other religious discourses, and that tariqa

¹ *Dhikr*, meaning remembering, In Islamic devotional practice, represents the ways of reminding oneself of God. In Sufi devotions, the term is used both for the regular activity of remembrance and for the litanies and prayers involved in the acts of remembering. Dhikr may be an act of individual devotion, but the term usually refers to collective devotions whose specific formulas and prayers are defined by the devotional path or tariqah that identifies the group. Each Sufi brotherhood has its own distinctive poems and prayers for the regular dhikr meetings of the order and the personal devotions of its members.

² *Zawiya* is a Sufi place of worship and a location where the five daily prayers are said, litanies of the Sufi order are recited, offerings are brought, food and sanctuary may be sought, and social activities requiring religious blessing are conducted.

³ Issa, *Islamic Governance and Society*, p. 18; Berque, *L'Intérieur du Maghreb*, p. 543.

⁴ Tariqa or *tariqah*; refers in English to the *way, road or path* and is the term used for an order or school of Sufism . Associated with Tariqa is the mystical teaching and the set of spiritual practices and rituals that are performed within this order, with the ultimate aim of seeking *ḥaqīqah* "ultimate truth".

culture has a symbolic structure of similar depth to many other cultural products. The *zawiya*, as a social body and in its organization, might also be similar to social bodies that it coexists with in the same “social universe”.

This thesis leads us to deal with five key topics that combine the levels on the basis of which the Sufi Order authenticates itself: Epistemology: the Sufi theory of knowledge and its structure of analogical reasoning; Tariqa rituals and their particularity; The jurisprudence (*fiqh*) of the Tariqa and institutionalization of relations between individuals; anthropology and the symbolic structure of the tariqa world; sociology and the structure of the tariqa field.

The corpus of material that shall be worked from is texts from the tradition of the Sunni Sufi orders, the North African in particular. The study also relies on observations of the contemporary Qasimiya, Isma’iliya and Muhammadiya Orders in Redeyef in south-west Tunisia.

The Structure of Tariqa Reason

The section on “The Gnostic Mode of Knowledge” in Mohammed Abed al-Jabri’s *The Structure of Arab Reason* is considered one of the major efforts toward the study of the “epistemology of Islamic mysticism”. In it he examined the structures of knowledge that underlie Sufi discourse and deconstructed the world view it presents and the mechanisms of its operation.⁵ Overall, the analogical mode that governs “interpretive reason” and its branches of knowledge to a great extent also governs mystical reasoning. However the mechanics of analogy in interpretative discourse (language, dialectical theology, commentary) differ to its mechanics in mystical reasoning. It might be that this epistemological commonality (the use of analogy) between the two discourses induced al-Jabri to reduce the two forms of reason to binary oppositions that are no different in their logic but do differ in their sources of authority. So, for example, the opposition word/meaning in interpretative reason has its counterpart in the exoteric/esoteric dualism; the truth/metaphor pair of rhetoric or the theological divide between commentary and interpretation are paralleled by the opposition between Sharia and Reality (*al-haqiqa*) in mystical discourse. This is because there is no difference in the domain of knowledge for the two forms of reason. While interpretive reason works with textually based knowledge and its potential to direct thought,

⁵ Al-Jabri, *The Structure of Arab Reason*, Chapter IV.

mystical reason works with inner-experiential (*dhawqi*) knowledge and its potential to direct experience to be inner-experiential.

In addition, the methodological and analytical starting point for al-Jabri's structuralist project, which was an intellectual breakthrough to begin with, relied on a Foucauldian understanding of epistemology. Al-Jabri introduced this to modern Arab philosophical discourse and it became a North African analytical school that dominated much research in the 1980s. However al-Jabri and his school were soon subject to critique, especially with the spread of multidisciplinary studies.

Yet despite the importance of excavating the structure of reason, what this study tries to demonstrate here is that the continuity of ideas within a group does not just go back to the dynamics of the ideas themselves, whatever the strengths of the epistemological mode they are founded upon. Ideas must have minds to carry them and a social organization that accepts them and finds in them answers to its social and existential problems. Hence, one notices, that tariqa Islam, in its popular form represents the stage of the institutionalization of theosophical Sufism and delimitation of its epistemological boundaries, and, in the construction of its religious discourse, it rests upon the same analogical reasoning that secures interpretive reason and mystical reason. This form of reason, as shall be seen, enabled tariqa discourse to be in harmony with the structure of Arab Islamic culture. While outwardly this discourse might appear different, it identifies with the deep structure of Islamic thought. The structure of analogy in tariqa discourse can be observed on at least three levels: belief, ritual and precepts.

Tariqa and Sharia

In its understanding of religion, tariqa discourse is predicated on the Sufi heritage on the one hand and on major religious texts (Qur'an, Hadith collections) on the other. The Sufi heritage in the various stages of its historical forms persistently manifests the intellectual particularity of tariqa Islam. This is mystical and inner-experiential which differentiates it from other discourses within the Islamic space, in particular orthodox Islam which has jurisprudential and dialectical theological foundations that set its conceptual and institutional horizon in the sphere of Sharia and the canonical texts.

This is an outward differentiation between two discourses. Tariqa discourse and the orthodox (jurisprudential) discourse share, as we have indicated the use of analogical reason (*qiyas*). This formulates tariqa discourse and provides its authenticity as much

as it underpins the structure of Islamic interpretive reason (theological and jurisprudential). This commonality may be observed in the following points:

a. Establishing authenticity textually

Chapter one of al-Suhrawardi's (d. 588AH/1192AD) *Kitab Aawarif al-Ma'arif*, entitled "Concerning the origins of the Sufi sciences", begins with his interpretation of certain words in the Hadith of the Prophet so as to make them refer to the Tariqa, as he does with the following Hadith: "The Prophet said, 'The example of guidance and knowledge with which Allah has sent me is like abundant rain falling on the earth, some of which was fertile soil that absorbed rain water and brought forth vegetation and grass in abundance. And another portion of it was receptive (*akhkhadhat*) and held the rain water and Allah benefited the people with it [...].'" Al-Suhrawardi comments, "The souls of the ascetic scholars of the Sufis and the Sheikhs were purified and their hearts became serene and were allotted extra benefit as they became receptive (*akhkhadhat*)."⁶

In another Hadith: "When the verse 'that receptive ears might remember it' [69:12] was revealed, God's Prophet said to Ali: 'I asked God, may He be glorified and exalted, to make them your ears, Ali [...].'" After enumerating the specializations and virtues of the Islamic sciences, al-Suhrawardi offers an interpretation for the phrase "receptive ears": "The valleys of the hearts of the scholars of exegesis, prophetic tradition and jurisprudence flowed [with knowledge] according to each one's capacity; and the valleys of the hearts of the Sufis among the ascetic scholars who hold fast to the truths of *taqwa* (devotion to God) flowed [with knowledge] according to each one's capacity."⁷

After the specialization of the Sufis is defined—as an esoteric (*batini*) science—by giving a mystical (*Sufi*) interpretation of some Qur'anic verses, the author appears embarrassed of his genealogy of Sufism: he has been unable to find the word "*Suffi*" in the Qur'an. At the end of the chapter he states:

"Know that every noble state that we ascribe to Sufism in this book should be taken as the state of the *one who draws close* [to God] (*al-muqarrib*). The mystic (*al-Sufi*) is meant by the term the '*one who draws close*'; the Qur'an does not use the word *Sufi*. [...] This designation for those who

⁶ Al-Suhrawardi, *Knowers of the Knowledge*, p.11.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p.13.

draw close is not known throughout the Islamic lands from East to West. It is however known to adepts. Many indeed are those who draw close in the Maghreb [note he starts with the Maghreb], the Turkic lands and Transoxania, but they are not called Sufis. This is because they do not wear the clothing of the Sufis. [...] The Sufi Sheikhs whose names appear in the *Tabaqat* [*al-Sufiyah*, "The ranks of the Sufis"] and other books were all on the Path (*tariq*) of those who draw close."⁸

Al-Suhrawardi finds himself obliged to apply interpretive effort to the text and the terminology. This is because the various sciences of the Sharia—and in fact all branches of Islamic culture—can only be legitimized by means of a canonical text, which then provides justification for terminological autonomy. Note in the text above how the author reconciles the exoteric sciences and Sufism. The function of this reconciliation is to unify in a common origin according to an analogically authenticating interpretive turn.

This example of establishing authenticity is not related only to the religious content, since Islamic religious content does not differ from the tenets fixed in the creed of the group to which the Tariqa belongs. In the exposition of the Tariqa creed given, for example, by Abd al-Wahhab al-Sha'rani (d. 828AH/1424AD)⁹ in his *Al-Anwar al-Qudsiya fi Maarifat Qawa'id al-Sufiyah* (The sacred lights: knowledge of the principles of Sufism), there is no divergence from the Sunni Ash'arite creed when it comes to the divine unity, prophecy, the afterlife and in matters concerning the nature of the divine essence (*dhat*) and attributes (*sifat*).¹⁰ This is well known, because the difference with the Sufis does not generally concern the tenets of the faith (which fall under the rubric of belief). This is because Sufism establishes a way to know religious Reality (*haqiqah*), which is a 'tasted' (*dhawqi*, or directly internally-experienced) reality. This tradition of the Tariqa began with the founding of what is known as Sunni Sufism. So at a relatively early period, one finds Abu Bakr al-Kalabadhi (d. 380AH/990AD) making an organic linkage between the words of the Sufis and the Sunni doctrine in various topics. He

⁸ Ibid., p.18

⁹ Al-Suhrawardi and al-Sharani are used here because they are among the main sources of authority for rooting the origins of the Sufi order used by the sheikhs of the Tariqas until today.

¹⁰ Al-Sharani, *The Sacred Lights*, p. 20-26.

makes no mention of any disagreement with the Sunni creed and then for every topic he adds the kind of knowledge they specialize in.¹¹

b. The chain of authority

The chain of authority (*sanad*) is one of the constituent bases for every Sufi Order since it joins the Sheikh (spiritual leader) of the moment to the lineage of sheikhs who passed the Tariqa on to him and from whom he received it. Every Sheikh who lacks this clear transmission of authority from the Sheikh prior to him, by command or witnesses, is a dubious Sheikh. Sheikh Isma'il al-Hadifi, the Sheikh of the Isma'iliya Order in Tozeur in the south of Tunisia, states: "To become the imam in this respect is only for one who has been granted permission in unambiguous fashion by his Sheikh to guide and direct people and spread the Order, and where there is no distortion in the permission inherited from authority to authority all the way back to the Messenger of God."¹²

In the same book, his interlocutor (Sheikh Munawwar al-Midani, the son of Sheikh al-Midani, himself the teacher of Sheikh Isma'il al-Hadifi who initially granted him permission to spread the Tariqa of Sheikh al-Midani, which is called the Mada'iniya) records al-Hadifi as saying: "The chain of authority of the Tariqa: our Imam, Lord, Master and Teacher, Sheikh Isma'il ibn 'Uthman al-Hadifi, may God be pleased with him and please him [...] from his Sheikh, Sidi Muhammad al-Midani al-Qasibi al-Madyuni from Sidi Ahmad al-'Alawi [there follows a chain of transmission where one notes the well-known Sidi Ahmad Zaruq, Ibn Ata al-Skandari, Abu al-Abbas al-Mursi, Abu al-Hassan al-Shadhli, Abd al-Salam ibn Mashish] all the way to Sidi al-Hassan al-Sabt from Ali ibn Abi Talib, may God bless his countenance, from the Lord of Existence, Sea of Generosity, Light of Vision, our Master, Muhammad."¹³ The Qasimiya Order begins its chain of authority with Sidi Abi al-Qasim al-Belkhayri (may God sanctify his mystery) from Sidi Isma'il al-Hadifi [...] all the way to the Prophet.

On the basis of these examples one can make a number of observations concerning the chain of transmission:

¹¹ Al-Kalabadhi collected the sayings of the Sunni Sufis on a variety of subjects and he does not point to any divergence with the Sunni Asharite creed during his explanation of the specialist knowledge of the Sufis. See Al-Kalabadhi, *Knowledge of the Doctrine*, .

¹² Al-Hadifi, *Gifts of the Merciful*, p.197.

¹³ Ibid., p.20.

To start with, the Tariqa relied upon a firmly-rooted principle in Arab Islamic culture in all its doctrinal shades and epistemological offshoots, for instance the principle of a chain of transmission. The Tariqa is derived analogically from the solid nucleus of religious thought, which is to attach the content of the hadith (Prophetic tradition) to its chain of authority and to verify this chain of transmission, since any break in it weakens the hadith, or falsifies it. Similarly, for the Tariqa, any break in its chain of transmission threatens it with being totally discredited.¹⁴

Secondly, ancestry and genealogical connection to the Prophet and his family represents an important religious source for the prominence of any political or social body in the history of Arab Islamic civilization. It is also an essential characteristic in the foundation of the Sufi Orders and the phenomenon of sainthood, and for political bodies in the Arab Maghreb as well. For this reason, Sufis frequently ascribe their sciences to some of the companions of the Prophet, and to Ali ibn Abi Talib in particular, while others ascribe them to the Prophet. With regard to this Order [the Tijaniya], it is to be noted that it takes its chain of transmission back to Hassan and does not mention Hussain. Perhaps this is because the symbolism of Hussain in the Islamic collective memory is deemed "Shiite property" in a way that is uncontested in the Sunni collective memory. Add to this the fact that Hassan has a peaceful character, or at least this is how the collective Sunni *memory* perceives it; or Hassan, one might say, was non-belligerent with the Bani Ummaya in comparison with Hussain and his history; or such is the way these two personalities have been stenciled in the Islamic political collective memory. The chain of transmission connects to the tranquil branch among the Prophet's grandchildren, and the least active in the Arab collective memory.

Third, the structure of the chain of transmission adopted by the Tariqa creates a channel for esoteric Sufi knowledge akin to the channel of Sharia that connected back to the founders (*salaḥ*) by means of transmitters and the chain of transmission. This channel differs in its content, which is inner-experiential (*dhawqi*) and esoteric, from the exoteric content of the Sharia, but they are in agreement over the channel for cultural communication in the Islamic field, especially seeing that the chain of transmission is a distinctly Arab Islamic feature.

¹⁴ "The *murid* must know the chain of transmission of his Sheikh which links him to the Prophet, since several imams have stated that the concern with genealogy is one of the features of this umma. [...] It is the essence of this matter and everything else branches out from it. One who lacks a chain of transmission in the Tariqa is called to prove its truth." See Al-Tijani *The Divine Opening*, p.36.

The foundational texts and the principle of the chain of transmission are the two foundations for investigative endeavor and for creating authenticity in Arab Islamic thought. Tariqa Islam attempted, by means of an analogy of mind, to draw the structure of the Tariqa and its origins close to Sharia. They thus share the same manner for the circulation of religious knowledge, even if they differ as to the content of this knowledge.

Sufi Ritual

The people of the Tariqa are naturally no different to other Muslims when it comes to worship. They do however have other religious behaviors and practices that distinguish them from other Muslims. These fall under the category of the *dhikr* and are not stipulated in the texts of official Islam. *Dhikr* is the collective term for Tariqa rituals and Tariqa followers made it their specialism when they imparted it with all kinds of performance, offshoots, times and behavioral forms. Al-Sha'rani even gives the *dhikr* of the Sufis precedence over prayer (*salat*) itself at certain times. "The best devotion (*wird*) of the *murid* (disciple or aspirant) is the *dhikr*. This is because prayer, although exalted, is not permitted at certain times when *dhikr* is permitted. In contrast, the praise (*dhikr*) of God is never prevented under any circumstances."¹⁵ This shows that *dhikr* was considered the original worship in Islam. The Sufis' return to origins gives them the legitimacy to authenticate all their derived rituals.

In view of the importance of the *dhikr* for the Orders, the Sheikh needs to distinguish himself from his predecessors by adding some of his own forms of *dhikr* while remaining true to the inherited forms. His forms of *dhikr* differ to previous forms. He will have taken them from a sacred, divine source by means of inspiration or from the Prophet by means of dreams or vision.¹⁶ When one considers the performance, times and conditions of the *dhikr*, one notes that the people of the Tariqa have adopted forms of worship that parallel the forms of orthodox religion. Using them, they mark out and organize a different religious body. This is because rituals are an important cultural practice which helps unify any religious group. In the second part of this study symbolic dimensions and how they contribute to the formation of the tariqa *collective memory will* be analyzed.

¹⁵ Al-Sharani, vol. 1, p. 163.

¹⁶ Ibid., p.86; the *dhikr* ordained by Sheikh al-Katani for his *murids* was given to him by the Prophet (PBUH) in a vision.

What is of concern here, however, is the presence of analogical reason (*qiyas*) in the foundation of rituals and how they rest on the same conditions as the rituals of orthodox religion. The Tijaniya Order is here taken as an example, and the structure of analogy is traced in at least three points: the kinds of ritual, their set times and their manner of performance.

a. Kinds of ritual

The *murid* performs various kinds of worship at the *zawiya* (the house of worship for the Tariqa). Some are shared with all Muslims, such as the prescribed and supererogatory prayer, night devotion or reading the Qur'an. Others are particular to the people of the Tariqa, the most important of which are:

The *wird* (orison, or prayer):¹⁷ a collection of selected Qur'anic verses and devotions to God (*adhkar*, sing. *dhikr*) which the Sheikh commands his *murid* to observe at fixed times. The *murid* takes his prayers from the Sheikh or from the *muqaddam* (assistant) deputized by the Sheikh for this purpose. Each Order has its prayers. These differ with regard to the language used (in the praises to the Prophet, Qur'anic verses, invocations of the divine unity and petitionary prayer) but share the same meaning and are all compulsory. The *prayer* comes to the Sheikh from the Prophet after he attains the status of sainthood (*wilaya*) and becomes a Sufi master (*qutb*) and Sheikh. It is the spiritual message that the Sheikh takes on. Every Order thus has its own prayers.

As the author of *Al-Fath al-Rabbani fi Shurut al-Tariqa al-Ahmadiya* (The divine opening: the conditions of the Ahmadiya [Tijaniya] Order) puts it: "[Condition] Twenty: It is not permitted to give a *wird* without correct permission. Our Master, may God be satisfied with him, [Sheikh Tijani] stated, 'The people of unveiling, mentioned matters that if someone does one of them and does not repent for it, that person will come to a bad end' (God forbid). These matters include falsely claiming to be a saint or a sheikh, which means giving out the *wird* without permission."¹⁸ The followers of the Order draw an analogy between the *wird* given to the Sheikh from God or His Prophet and the divine revelation (*wahy*) revealed to the Prophet. One who lies about the Sheikh is to be judged as one who lies about the Prophet.

¹⁷ Al-Tijani, p. 79.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 40.

Accepting the prayer (*wird*) represents actual affiliation to the Order, and it is said once daily. Just as an analogy was drawn between the prayer and prophecy, in terms of the divine or prophetic source, an analogy is also made between its performance and the text of the Qur'an. The same author gives a proof: "In [the Hadith collection of] al-Bukhari, Anas is asked how the Messenger of God would recite. He replied it was as a *wird*."

Performing petitionary prayer or *wird* badly, means a person will not obtain the reward and spiritual benefit, just like the case of making a grammatical mistake when reciting the Qur'an. "There is a tradition that someone petitioned God in prayer for sixty years and his request was not answered. This man asked a mystic (*'arif*) about this and repeated his prayer for him. The prayer was grammatically incorrect and he corrected it for him. He then prayed with it and the prayer was immediately answered."¹⁹ There are also issues of saying prayer aloud in the presence of the group and in private, and questions about clothing and decency of dress when reciting *dhikr*. All these formal matters of rendition are a copy of the rituals of the prescribed prayers. Once again we are presented with the drawing of analogy with the rituals stipulated in the orthodox Islam of the jurists on the level of forms of worship.

The *wazifa* is a collection of prayers, each of which has its own name, and which for the Tijaniya is formed of the *Salat al-Fatih*, the *Jawharat al-Kamal* and others. It is performed twice daily, "once in the morning and once in the evening, and it is treated like the *wird*."²⁰

The *haylala* [literally, the repetition of the phrase *la ilaha illallah*, there is no God but God] is known as the Friday *haylala*, where this invocation is repeated one thousand times without omission. This is a weekly ritual and it has its counterpart in other Orders. Each Tariqa has what is known as a gathering. This weekly gathering for *dhikr* is called *'amara* by the Isma'iliya and Qasimiya Orders and it takes place twice a week (Friday night and Monday night). The *haylala* is one of the ritual characteristics of tariqa Islam. Every Order has its own weekly ritual performed collectively. Usually it is of a celebratory character with a specific rhythm. It ends with what followers of the Order call intoxication (a transcending of consciousness). The *murid* observes its harmonious movement of the body and voice.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 43.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 50.

The *adhkar* are prayers that the *murid* is not obliged to perform at a particular time or a particular number of times. They are voluntary and not commanded. In terms of official forms of worship, they correspond to the approved or supererogatory forms.

b. Organization of rituals

Sufi order rituals are subject to strict rules of performance.²¹ They are organized in terms of when, where and number as follows:

Temporal organization: there are daily rituals such as the ordinary *adhkar*, the *wird* and the *wazifa*. There are weekly rituals such as the Friday *haylala* for the Tijaniya Order and the *'amara* for the Isma'iliya and Qasimiya Orders. There are also annual occasions. Many Orders, including the Qasimiya, celebrate the annual Moulid al-Nabi, the birthday of the Prophet (It is well known that this occasion is not one of the official religious celebrations in Islam, and that there are even doctrines which forbid it, such as the Salafi-Wahhabi school which views it as a heretical innovation.) It provides an occasion to visit the Sheikh and the mother *zawiya*. It may be included among the pilgrimage rituals of the Tariqa.

This temporal arrangement of tariqa rituals follows the same model of temporal organization as orthodox worship with its daily, weekly (Friday), and annual forms. This temporal organization provides an important entryway in the second part of the study towards understanding the tariqa collective memory. We hold that in terms of the structure of religious time there is congruence between tariqa Islam and orthodox Islam. Both adopt a cyclical temporality as the religious conception of time.²²

Spatial organization: the *zawiya* is considered the purest place to hold the *dhikr*, and the Sufi Orders have fixed prayers that the *murids* recite when gathered together at the *zawiya*. Al-Sha'rani states: "It has been arranged in the *zawiya* that they say every day before the morning prayer forty times [...]."²³ Among other conditions are facing the qibla, which is important for the *dhikr*, and "this condition should be enforced, and the honorable companions of the Sheikh would make sure of this as if it were a condition of

²¹ "... Someone who is part of the Tariqa at the time of the *wird* must say it, even at the end of the time needed for it." Ibid., p. 51.

²² Eliade: *Le Sacré et le Profane*, and *Le Mythe de L'éternel Retour*.

²³ Al-Sharani, *Al-Anwar al-Qudsiya*.

it being correctly performed."²⁴ The space where the *wazifa* is performed must, for some Orders, be large enough to contain six people besides the leader.

c. Appearance and manner of performance

Taking the Path assumes a complete change for the *murid* in his observation of those things that distinguish the Path from other forms of religious expression, starting with a change in appearance. Al-Sha`rani states: "When he enters the covenant of the Path of the people, he must change the appearance of his clothing that does not conform to the clothing of the mendicant." These general conditions for entering the Order become more defined and restrictive when it comes to ritual. The most important of these conditions are as follows:

Purity: "Purification from an unclean state, either with water or sand, according to the legal rules for prayer; [...] purity from filth on the body, on clothing or in the place, according to the rules set out for prayer; [...] covering of the indecent parts of the body as defined for prayer in the Law."²⁵

Calm and silence: "Because the mores of the people of the *hadra*²⁶ (*divine presence*) include refraining from speaking, one who is not silent is considered to have behaved improperly."²⁷

Reverence and submission: [the *murid*] sits "to recite the *wird* with propriety and submission. [...] Among the conditions [the third for the Tijaniya] is the visualization of the Sheikh, may God be pleased with him, when he recites the *wirds* and the invocation of his support. In the *Jawahir* it is stated that among the conditions of the *wird*, for one able to do so, is the visualization of our Master, may God be pleased with him, as if he were sitting between his hands."

²⁴ Al-Tijani, p. 41.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 47. "The second [condition]: cleansing from filth on the body, clothing or place [...] Al-Ramah in the *Tuhfat al-ikhwan* states: the *dhikr* has rules that must be observed: being completely clean of dirt and filth."

²⁶ *Hadra* (lit. presence) is a collective ritual performed by Sufi orders. It is often held on Thursday evenings after the night prayer, on Fridays after Jum`a prayer or on Sunday evenings, and can also be celebrated on special Islamic festivals and at rites of passage.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 41. "The fourth [condition]: No talking other than in a whisper. Exceptions are made for responding to one's parents and the wife to her husband. [...] He ought not to speak if he knows that he can gesture, and if not he may talk only a little. If he says more than this, his *wird* is void."

As for the manner of performance, it is equally similar to the manner of performance of the prescribed prayers and forms of worship. *Dhikr* imposes conditions on the body: "Sitting to recite the *wird* with propriety and submission by putting the palms on the thighs, closing the eyes and hanging the head on the chest. [...] The best way of sitting is like for prayer, or kneeling or squatting."²⁸

Since the *wird* is the essence of the rituals of the Order, it has conditions and strict modalities that resemble the modalities of prayer and its conditions in view of it being the basis of orthodox forms of worship. The members of the Order trace the origin of these practices by means of hadiths that deal with the performance of the prescribed prayer. For example, the chanting of the *wird* is set in an analogical relationship with the chanting of the Qur'an: "There is to be no haste in its recitation nor is any mistake to be made." Al-Bukhari records a tradition from Qatada: "Anas was asked how the Messenger of God would recite. He replied it was as a *wird*."²⁹ The essence is the *wird* and the Qur'an derivative. The establishing of authenticity for these rituals proceeds on the basis that they are a religious duty for the *murid* and those who belong to the Order, and not others, and this is by analogy with the behavior of the early Muslims (*salaf*). Al-Tijani states: "Sidi al-Mukhtar al-Kunti [in *Al-Kawkab al-Waqqad*] says to the effect that the *wirds* of the *salaf* are just as the obligatory religious duties, covenants and vows in terms of obligation, and they must be observed like an obligatory religious duty".³⁰ The Exalted One says: 'And be true to God's covenant when you make a covenant ...' [Qur'an 16:91].

The Jurisprudence of the Sufi Order and its Precepts

By the jurisprudence (*fiqh*) of the Tariqa one is alluding to the precepts and laws that the Sheikh imposes on his *murids* and which are only obligatory to those on the Path. They are special precepts that regulate the Sufi group and differentiate it from others and designated by the term *fiqh*, because—as will become apparent—its formulation and obligation are like that of the orthodox system of jurisprudence. This is despite antagonism between the jurisprudent (*al-faqih* as representative of Sharia) and Sufism having characterized the Islamic tradition, and the ramifications of this continue until

²⁸ Ibid., p. 41.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 43. In another example, al-Tijani gives a hadith on covering the indecent parts of the body to ground the third condition for reciting the *wird*, which is covering these parts. Ibid., p. 47.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 46.

today.³¹ One can observe at least three levels of these rulings: those concerning affiliation, those concerning underpinnings and those concerning forms of worship.

a. The Sheikh is the origin of affiliation

Since the Sheikh is the fountainhead for the Sufi Orders, belief in the Sheikh is a key principle for membership. These words have been transmitted from al-Sha'rani: "It is an odious thing for a murid to belong to any doctrine other than his Sheikh. He may only emulate his Sheikh."³² This is because the Sheikh is the one who joins him to the world of Reality (*al-haqiqa*), and this status is the true circle of belief in the Order and he should not descend beneath it. "If the mendicant deviates from the level of the Reality to the cheapness (*rukhs*) of the Sharia, he has abrogated his covenant with God the Exalted."³³

Tariqa Islam establishes its own precepts that regulate the principle of affiliation to the Order. These provisions are only obligatory to those who belong to the tariqa field. The central axis of the rulings is the concept of the Sheikh, around which the other rulings pivot. For this reason the Tariqa controls the function and rank of the Sheikh. Here the important structural ideological principle of analogy becomes apparent. The concept of the Sheikh is given its authenticity on the basis of the concept of the Prophet, and the institution of the Sheikh is founded on analogy with prophecy. This is well known in the Sufi context generally. "Just as the world does not exist between two gods, nor can a person be enjoined by two Prophets, nor the wife be shared between a pair of husbands, equally the *murid* cannot be between two Sheikhs."³⁴ The literature of the Tariqa is expansive in emphasizing the precepts related to the Sheikhs and considers adherence to them the basis for affiliation.³⁵ Two levels of precepts dealing with membership can be observed: those concerning belief and those concerning non-belief:

³¹ This antagonism has perhaps reached its peak today in what can be observed in the first action undertaken by the radical Sunni Islamist movements when prevailing conditions permit. They destroy the tombs of the saints on the pretext that this is heretical innovation and outside the provisions of the Sharia. This has happened in Libya, Mali, and in some regions in Tunisia and Egypt.

³² Al-Sharani, vol. 1, p. 62.

³³ "[...] Abu Yazid al-Bustami, may God be pleased with him, would say: 'One who does not have a single teacher is a polytheist of the Tariqa, and the Sheikh of the polytheist is Satan.'" See Ibid., p. 64.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 64.

³⁵ In the rules of behavior for the Qasimiya Order, there are more than 60 articles related to the sheikh. The sheikh of the Muhammadiya Order, Abd al-Hafiz Tababi has set down 150 articles, almost all of which are connected to the sheikh directly or indirectly.

Belief in only one Sheikh: al-Bustami states: "Someone who does not have only one teacher is equivalent to a polytheist (*mushrik*) for the Order. The sheikh of the polytheist is Satan." It is not allowed to believe in more than one Sheikh. Belief in the Sheikh entails obedience to him and to all those who represent him, such as the *muqaddam*. Sheikh al-Tijani states: "You must obey the *muqaddam*, who provides the *wird*, in whatever he enjoins for the good, forbids as wrong or arbitrates between you." The *murid* must, "love whom his Sheikh loves and hate whom his Sheikh hates." All the provisions related to visiting the Sheikh, his banquets and seeking advice in matters of everyday life, however personal or marginal, derive from this.³⁶ Sheikh Isma'il al-Hadifi said concerning the *murid*: "He follows a Sheikh who has [mystic] knowledge of the paths and who protects him on his Path from dangers. He invokes God when he sees him and the Sheikh transports him to his Master."³⁷

Precepts on lack of belief: these start with not criticizing. Condition sixteen of the Tijaniya Order: "[No one] shall criticize the Sheikh, may God be pleased with him, in any of his words or deeds. This is because if the *murid* criticizes his Sheikh, it brings him to perdition and leads him to be expelled from the folk of his party." As we have seen, the *murid* is not allowed to be in contact with any Sheikh other than his own. Doing so is one of the main grounds for abrogating his affiliation and putting him outside the Order. All the Sheikhs of the Path draw attention to this, and Sheikh al-Tijani forbids his *murids* from visiting other saints, the living and the dead.³⁸ Being in contact with another Sheikh is considered a very significant proscription in the precepts on affiliation. It causes the ending of membership and destroys the link between the *murid* and his Sheikh and with the community of the Order and annuls belief in the Sheikh.

This is because the rank of Sheikh is the highest rank in the Sufi Order and is a substitution for prophecy in prayer to God. On this analogy, the legal rulings of the Order are constructed. Al-Sha'rani summarizes the matter: "When a person enters the Tariqa of the people and goes deeply into it, God, the Exalted and Almighty, grants him there the power to deduce rulings comparable to the exoteric divine rulings as

³⁶ In the course of fieldwork on the Qasimiya Order, I spoke with a group of the educated elite in the town whose intellectual attitudes and philosophical and cultural frames of reference were contemporary. They suddenly became *murids* of Sheikh Abi al-Qasim, sheikh of the Qasimiya Order. One of them sold his valuable library which contained works by the major Arab intellectuals (Hussain Marwa, al-Jabri, Arkoun, Ali Harb, and others) because the sheikh visited his house and indicated that he should sell it.

³⁷ Al-Hadifi, p. 39.

³⁸ Al-Tijani, p. 23.

equivalent. The Tariqa deduces what is obligatory and what disapproved (*makruh*).³⁹ We note that the terminological references (deduction, disapproved, obligatory etc.) come from the terminology of *fiqh* relied on in the Sharia. In fact, al-Sha'rani goes to an extreme in giving precedence to the rulings and commands of the Sheikh over other rulings. This is because, "if the Sheikh has sent the *murid* on a task, and on the way he passes a mosque at the time for prayer, he should not stop to join the congregation, but continue his task for his Sheikh and then pray." This is an analogy drawn with an order of the Prophet to a group of his companions when he sent them on a task: "Not one of you shall pray until [you reach] Bani Qurayza."⁴⁰ As can be noted, the rules of the Tariqa override even the rules of prayer, a pillar of the religion. The word of the Sheikh takes precedence over the word of the jurisprudent (*faqih*). The Tariqa takes precedence over the Sharia for those attached to it. Its legal rulings are parallel to the rulings of orthodox religion on the basis of multiple levels of analogy.⁴¹

The purpose of the emphasis on provisions about membership is to establish the concept of the Sheikh doctrinally, symbolically and sociologically. All other rulings derive from this belief in the Sheikh within the group of the Sufi Order. This is by analogy with prophecy. The creed of prophecy required one to believe that the Prophet brought rulings backed by divine inspiration which the Muslim must obey. The legitimacy of obedience, and its proof, derive from belief in the Prophet and submission to his rulings while not deviating to follow anyone else. Tariqa reason has produced many sayings that are relevant in this context, such as: "One without a Sheikh has Satan as his Sheikh; One who dies without knowing the Sheikh of his age dies a death from the days of ignorance; One who has no Sheikh is a foundling."⁴²

A close reading of the provisions relating to membership of the Order, particularly in the Maghreb tradition, reveals that a large portion of this tradition is a hagiographical tradition. It deals with the virtues of the Sheikhs and the rules of their Orders and records their doings and miracles in a literary discourse that mixes the legendary with

³⁹ Al-Sharani, p. 12.

⁴⁰ Al-Sharani, vol. 2, p. 88.

⁴¹ Al-Sharani states: "Know, may God have mercy upon you, that the true Sufi is exactly a *faqih* who acts according to his knowledge. God caused him to inherit his knowledge to peruse the intricacies and mysteries of the Sharia until one of them becomes a *mujtahid* in the Path and the mysteries, as is the case for the imams who strive in the branches of the Sharia. This is why they instituted laws in the Tariqa, obligations, proscriptions, mandated things and despised things." See Abu al-Muwahib Abd al-Wahhab ibn Ahmad al-Sha'rani, *Emeralds and Gemstones*, p. 341.

⁴² Al-Tayyib, *The Islam of the Sufis*, p. 133.

the historical, and religious elements with psychological, sociological and anthropological elements. This might be an excellent entryway to a history of mentalities in the Maghreb.⁴³

From the above one notes that both systems are united on a fixed basis of belonging. This is an epistemological, ideological, institutional basis (upon which is built the institution of the *zawiya*). As soon as someone is recognized as a Sheikh, by means of a chain of authority, followers and miracles, the remainder of the fundamentals and rulings are established. In fact, the designation of the Sufi Orders by the names of their Sheikhs is one of the distinguishing features of many Tariqas in the Maghreb.⁴⁴

b. Precepts of tariqa rituals

The people of the Path give their rituals the same treatment as the acts of worship prescribed by the religion. They have defined provisions and rules for their performance in the best way to make them acceptable [to God]. To construct these provisions, they rely on the same logic as applies in Sharia since they start by authenticating the merit of these rituals and then define their creedal functions. It is then possible for them to surround ritual with performance strictures and rules to be followed. If there should be a contradiction between these and major principles of *fiqh*, they will harmonize between the two precepts.

The merit of the rituals: The *Salat al-Fatih* in the Tajiniya Order has equivalent merit to reading the whole Qur'an six thousand times. A person who takes the *wird* and sticks to it until death, "shall enter Paradise without being called to account and without punishment, he himself, his father, his wives and children, provided they are all free of having criticized [the Sheikh]."⁴⁵ There is no merit without belief in the Sheikh and his merit.

⁴³ Lutfi Issa is considered one of the particular specialists in the study of the *manaqib* (miraculous deeds). See for example: Lutfi Issa, "The Maghreb of the Sufis"; *The Book of the Journey, Introduction to the Maghreb Mentality*; and *Accounts of the Miraculous Tales*.

⁴⁴ In the city of Redeyef in the Tunisian south, in the Qasimiya Order, the Tariqa was known by the name of Sheikh Abi al-Qasim who succeeded Sheikh Ismail after his death in 1994. It was called the Ismailiyya Order and followed of the Madaniyya Order named after its sheikh, Muhammad al-Qusaybi al-Madyuni, who in turn belonged to the Alawiyya Order in the name of Sheikh Ahmad al-Alawi al-Mustaghanami. Whenever a sheikh became independent with a Tariqa, either by a passing on of authority, or the death of the sheikh who had educated him, the nascent Tariqa would take on the name of the new sheikh.

⁴⁵ Al-Tijani, p. 70.

Personal and detailed provisions: Once the primary source has been established, upon which the remaining principles are constructed, it is possible to create detailed provisions. There are three conditions for the Tijaniya concerning the individual and seven obligatory ones for the *wird*. Someone who does not fulfill the twenty-one conditions which he enumerates is not one of the folk of the Tijaniya Order, that is not a full, permanent member. Once again there is reliance upon the terminology of *fiqh*.

Among these provisions are those dealing with saying the *wird* too early or too late. "The morning *wird* can be advanced in the night after the night time daily prayer (Isha Prayer) for a period of time sufficient to recite five sub-parts (*hizb*) of the Qur'an." It is absolutely forbidden to abandon the *wird* owing to its importance. It is the practical condition for membership after the condition of belief in the Sheikh. So if he forgets it, he must make up for it. With respect to the Friday *dhikr*, the *haylala*, "if its set time elapses, it is not performed, contrary to the *wird* and the *wazifa* which may always be performed. The sick and the menstrual and post-partum woman are allowed to choose whether to perform it or not. [...] It is recommended that menstruating woman do not perform it as it is known she is not required to pray during her menses."⁴⁶

These examples taken from the Tijaniya Order (and all the Tariqas follow the same logic in their rules)⁴⁷ show the operation of analogy with the Sharia in the creation of the detailed rules from the authenticating words of the Sheikh. Because of this we find the Tijaniya *murid* author of *Al-Fath al-Rabbani* considering the sayings of his Sheikh and explaining them. If he finds a contradiction with the major principles of the Sharia he resorts to harmonization. This is another characteristic of jurisprudential thought which the rulings of the Sufi Order use analogically.

c. Harmonization of rulings

It seems that the accumulation of ritual and tariqa practices has produced divergences and differences of opinion between and within the Orders. Finding the correct decision always relies in the first place on tariqa discourse, which is the discourse of the founding Sheikh. Over the course of time, this becomes an area for interpretation and disagreement. When there is a contradiction between this text and the latest developments in the history of the *zawiya*, or with the discourse of orthodox religion,

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 82.

⁴⁷ This was noted with the three Orders we worked on in Redeyef: the Isma'iliya, the Qasimiya and the Muhammadiya.

then tariqa discourse strives to harmonize by giving an interpretation that combines the disparate.

The Sheikh of the Tijaniya does not permit the recitation of *Jawharat al-Kamal* after performing the ritual ablution with sand (dry ablution). "On its own it(dry ablution) does not bring a reward." It must be coupled with performing the ritual ablution with water. His opponents denied this because he had elevated it above the prescribed prayer itself (orthodox religion). His *murid* explains the reason: "To this it was answered that the condition of making purification with water does not imply its superiority over what was stated by his opponents. No it is a matter of worship and *Jawharat al-Kamal* may comprise a mystery that can only be obtained following purification with water."⁴⁸

The *murid* justifies other conditions imposed by the Sheikh for the performance of *dhikr*, such as laying down a white garment or the creation of a space big enough for six people, which would be able to contain the Prophet, the four caliphs and the Sheikh with them.⁴⁹ He also accounts for the differences in the movements of the *dhikr* for the *haylala* found in various regions: "Knowledge and competence [in this] is only to be found with the people in built-up places, such as the people of Fes and the like. Others, such as the desert people have put this condition aside, which is their right, indeed only the people in built-up places must observe it. It is blessed to follow the style of the people of Fes [where Sheikh al-Tijani lived]."⁵⁰

The process of harmonization and balancing that arises from differences of opinion over some issues in tariqa Islam is a result of the evolution of the Tariqa within its historical and institutional setting and different material conditions from those of the days of the founding generation (the founding Sheikh). Harmonization operates between the official, founding discourse of the Sheikh and the imperatives of the moment or of the Sharia. This harmonizing form of reason is one of the basic strategies of jurisprudential reason to overcome current difficulties and make the discourse work. Harmonization of rulings and between fixed principles and pressing developments is also one of the intellectual steps that contributes to the continuation of religious discourse in general. Having noted the existence of the same harmonizing form of reason in both tariqa and orthodox Islam, one can once again see that this discourse could never have continued within the Islamic space unless it had based itself on the solid core of Islamic

⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 13-14.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 91.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 86.

epistemology and its structure of ideas. At this core is *fiqh* with its analogical reason and its possibilities for harmonization.

After this rapid review of the structure of tariqa reason, the following can be concluded: Tariqa Islam would not have ensured the conditions for its epistemological survival in the Arab Islamic space without having imitated the structure of jurisprudential reason which is based on analogical reason as a collective principle of knowledge that holds sway over the discourse of orthodox Islam. Furthermore, the part (the discourse of the group) in order to continue within the whole (the discourse of the community of faith) must share a deep structure with it. It is of lesser importance that it should differ with it in outward content. In case of contradiction, there is harmonization. Analogy from the theoretical roots is necessary to establish the branches (authenticating sainthood over prophecy and *dhikr* over prayer; it is then easy to establish the requirements of tariqa religious ritual in terms of purity, and how to carry out harmonization). As to harmonization, it concerns the branches so as not to make the distancing from the structural commonality apparent.

Tariqa Islam ends where theoretical Sufism began. The theoretical formation of Sufism began with the historical knowledge conflict with jurisprudential thought and analogical reason. It took off towards mystical reason which does not draw analogies from fundamentals but rather touches upon the reality of these fundamentals. At this point it became an individualist Sufism, a highly individual personal experience. Speculative Sufism came to an end in the eleventh century AH⁵¹ when it matured into a Path (*tariqa*) and a social body carried by groups of people who took it forward in history. It established legitimacy for itself, and for the rituals that it authenticated on the jurisprudential model of analogy (*qiyas*). In the case of the Maghreb, it took its own path in terms of becoming Islamic, and in fact spreading "Malikite Sunni Islam in the Maghreb and broadening the support base for its rulings among most inhabitants of these regions."⁵²

The structure of tariqa reason, based on drawing analogy from the fundamental, inaugurates an epistemological reconciliation with orthodox Islam and an epistemological confinement of the oppositional and "excitable" speculative Sufism. This knowledge reconciliation with the jurists (*fiqh* reason) was accompanied by political reconciliation with a political rule backed by the experts in Islamic jurisprudence

⁵¹ Al-Tayyib, p. 95 ff.

⁵² Issa, "Maghreb al-mutasawwifa," p. 12.

fuqaha.⁵³ The paradigm for this is the Maghreb which features considerable harmony between the ruler and the *faqih*.⁵⁴ This understanding of tariqa reason may lead to the deep political⁵⁵ and intellectual conditions for the burgeoning of the Tariqa in this region, taking it beyond historical and social conditions.

The Structure of the Tariqa *Imaginaire*

This study aims to delve into the symbolic depths upon which tariqa discourse relies. Having defined the structure of tariqa reason, this study will attempt to examine the structure of the tariqa world. By tariqa world one alludes to the conceptions of the “people of the Path” of time, space, the self and the other, that is, their view of the world. This view continues to produce a religious discourse parallel to other such discourses. Do the clear variations in the content of tariqa religious discourse compared with other such discourses mean that there is a difference in the structure of the *imaginaire* which supports each discourse? Or are we dealing with an Islamic *imaginaire* with a deep symbolic structure that expresses itself in various religious discourses?

By the *imaginaire* one is here specifically referring to the stock of images, symbols and myths stored in the individual or collective memory of a given culture.⁵⁶ This *imaginaire* comprises the representations of the world that have been laid down in a culture. These symbols and archetypes direct attitudes for individuals and groups. One could say they direct discourse and in consequence direct reason. This means that there is no contradiction between the *imaginaire* and reason in human culture, “just as talking about the *imaginaire* in no way implies dissatisfaction with reality and overlooking it. This is because the symbols of the *imaginaire*⁵⁷ have extraordinary power to permeate reality, to a degree that makes it a material force causing highly significant effects on people as a result of its attraction.”⁵⁸

The *imaginaire* has a structure and operating mechanisms just as does reason. The mechanism of reason is discourse and language: the mechanism of the *imaginaire* is the image which is obscured behind linguistic discourse and the structure of

⁵³ Al-Amiri, *Saint and Society*, p. 490.

⁵⁴ Issa, “Maghreb al-mutasawwifa,” p. 506.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 526.

⁵⁶ Chebel, *L’Imaginaire Arabo-Musulman*, p. 329.

⁵⁷ The Arabic word *mikhyal* is used as a translation for the term *imaginaire* because it expresses instrumentality, or a mechanism for producing and digesting images and symbols.

⁵⁸ Afaya, *The Imagined West*, p. 32.

consciousness. The concept of the image represented a central key for anthropologists in their understanding of culture.⁵⁹ Gilbert Durand employed this concept to deconstruct the anthropological structures governing culture in general. He held that the *imaginaire* was made up of visible images that we see, use and represent in our behavior (clothing, appearance etc.). These are an expression of symbols whose meaning we agree upon and which we circulate on the basis of this meaning. These symbols are organized in archetypes. (These are the fixed symbolic patterns of a culture at a particular historical period. For example the archetype of the Muslim is having a beard and wearing a turban, while the image of the Native American has archetypes embedded in American culture). These archetypes are arranged within a mythological order which in its turn responds to three schemata of the mind: ascent, descent (or depth and latency) and cyclical rhythmic.⁶⁰

Durand holds that human beings represent the world in two ways: a direct way, in which the sign is arbitrary (the level of language) and its role is deictic to express the world as it is; and a way in which unseen things are represented by means of the visualization of images. At this point the relationship [between image and world] is metaphorical and refers to a reality that is difficult to present.⁶¹

In this study attempts will be made to elicit the features of the *imaginaire* expressed by tariqa discourse which can be narrowed down to three significant and notable points. The first point is related to the pattern of ascent in the structure of the linguistic discourse; the second point is the circularity of the organization of time and space; and the third point is related to the cyclicity of ritual discourse.

The symbolism of ascent

The functional correspondence between Sheikh and Prophet at the level of religious discourse does not mean correspondence of the symbolic order governing the two images, nor the manner in which they are present in the Arab Islamic *imaginaire*. The Prophet is linked to Heaven through the bringing down of the revelation by means of the angel Gabriel. This religious understanding makes the direction of divine illumination from up above to down below. Every image signifying descent is packed into the

⁵⁹ Eliade, *Images and Symbols*.

⁶⁰ Durand, *Les Structures Anthropologiques de L'imaginaire*, p. 438. This concept is applied to images of resurrection in Arab Islamic culture. See Marzougi, "The Image of the Resurrection," Chapter 3.

⁶¹ Afaya, "Symbols and the Imagination: The example of Gilbert Durand", p. 100.

religious text. The semantic range of descent is apparent in images of darkness, emptiness, excavation and all the archetypes concerning interiority. The relationship of the sacred to the profane in the image of the divinely inspired Prophet is one of descent and penetration which is apparent in the direction from above to below.

This directionality is inverted in the image of the Sheikh and his relationship with the sacred. Although he shares the images and symbolism of light, ascent and leadership with the Prophet, the governing directionality in the symbolic order taken on by the Sheikh in tariqa consciousness runs from down below to up above. The Sheikh begins where the Prophet ends by returning to the origin up above which governs the directionality of the symbols to it and from it.

This symbolic inversion of the directions leading from and towards the sacred explains the outward and fundamental religious discourse of Sufi Islam in general and Tariqa Islam in particular. This form of Islam always theorizes from within the belief system, where the highest or most elevated circle is that of *ihsan* (benevolence, or mystical perfection). The level of *ihsan* is that which begins where faith ends to enter into the elevated levels of Reality and *ihsan*.⁶² The fulcrum of control and leadership in this realm belongs to the saint or Sheikh. Just as the fulcrum in Islam (i.e. Sharia) has been monopolized by the jurist (*faqih*), and that of faith and belief has been monopolized by the speculative theologian (*mutakallim*), so the Sufi has the monopoly on *ihsan* and gnosis. "The person who has the veil removed from this kind of knowledge will be given understanding in the unseen—highest—world until he observes the King of the Universe after having been *reformed*, then *educated*, then *refined*, then *cleansed*, then *purified*, then *perfumed*, then *made generous*, then *protected*. He

⁶² It states in a hadith narrated by al-Bukhari and Muslim: "[...] He said, 'Muhammad, tell me about Islam.' Muhammad replied, 'Islam means that you declare that there is no God but God and that Muhammad is the Messenger of God, that you pray, give alms, fast Ramadan and perform the pilgrimage if you are able.' He said, 'You are right.' We were amazed that he asked and said he was right! Then he said, 'Tell me about faith.' He [Muhammad] said, 'It means that you believe in God, His angels, His books, His messengers, the day of judgment and predestination, for good or bad.' He said, 'You are right.' ... He [the man] said, 'Tell me about *ihsan*.' He said, 'It means that you worship God as if you see Him, and even if you have not seen Him, He sees you.'" This hadith is viewed as one of the founding proofs of tariqa discourse.

becomes one of God's saints and appropriate for the highest assembly of the saints between His hands."⁶³

This ascending direction in the definition of the saint (the Sheikh) appears on three discursive levels: direct linguistic signification of the word "highest"; the structure of the discourse based on the semantic progression in the verbs used and its rhythm moving to a crescendo; the structure of image of progressive cleanliness and purity. Here one is confronted with a tool or mechanism that begins with being reformed. Then cleansing, purification, perfuming and protection (being hung with amulets) to end between the hands of the King of the Universe. The symbolism of ascent can be understood from the following oppositions.

The primary opposition between Saint and Prophet: al-Jurjani defines a prophet as "someone who receives a revelation by means of an angel or receives inspiration in his heart or has a true prophetic dream. [Muhammad] was favored with a special revelation that exceeds the revelation of prophecy because he was the one to whom Gabriel brought down the Book from God."⁶⁴ We note the symbolism of the direction from up above to down below through direct signification (revelation, mission, passing on) or indirect signification (inspiration, angel Gabriel).

He also defines sainthood (*wilaya*) as [being the status of]: "one who knows God and His attributes as far as is possible, is diligent in matters of obedience, shuns matters of disobedience, and avoids immersion in pleasures and desires. The word '*wilaya*' derives from the idea of nearness (*waly*) which is closeness [to God] (*qurb*). It is a tight closeness arising from being freed [from slavery] or from binding allegiance"⁶⁵ The reverse orientation to that of the Prophet is apparent first from the negative definition, where immersion and absorption refer to the lower direction, whose opposite is ascent and being set free. Secondly, by the allusive definition by means of the word "*qurb*" this is connected with the sacred. These definitions refer to these two symbolic orders that are the opposites of each other in terms of direction and correspond to each other in terms of symbolic content (purity, limpidity, light).

⁶³ Al-Tirmidhi, *The Book of the Seal of the Saints*, p. 22. The same verbs are repeated by al-Tirmidhi on p. 25 where he goes on to say, "He achieves the sainthood of God through these ten qualities, and his rank moves to the King of the Universe and he is between His hands and whispers to Him face to face."

⁶⁴ al-Jurjani, *Definitions*, p. 249.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 266.

The secondary opposition between two worlds: this is widespread in religious discourse in general and Sufi tariqa discourse in particular. Sheikh al-Marsafi states: "The *murid* will not be given any understanding of the [divine] gifts if he has any material thing in his mind. For the opening of understanding is only for one who has seen the Truth, may He be exalted, in his heart and leaves behind all else."⁶⁶ This opposition occurs between two levels: lower and upper. The lower is linked with the symbolism of darkness and the grave and all that Durand terms the mythic nocturnal order. The upper pattern is linked with the symbolism of light, the sword and leadership, and all that Durand terms the diurnal order.

The symbolism of the center

Symbols of ascent are a fixed feature of religious discourse. In the sacred world one must start from a central point or pole. This may be either a charismatic personality such as the Sheikh in the Tariqa or a sacred place such as the *zawiya*, which represents a spatial center where the sense of sacredness is concentrated in the midst of profane surroundings. Al-Marsafi states: "One who sits with the mendicants of the *zawiya* and is distracted by a worldly matter, stops the course and corrupts the weak mendicants of the *zawiya*. He has sinned and must leave the *zawiya*."⁶⁷ Al-Sha'rani states: "The *zawiya* was made for worship and to direct the mind away from desires. One who sits in the entrance of the *zawiya* is no different to one sitting in the market."⁶⁸ The *zawiya* is the pinnacle of the sacred, counterpoised with profane places (the market) which belong to everyday time which holds no sacred signification. The entrance of the *zawiya* divides between two existential spaces: a fundamentally real space and a fake space.

The temporal center, or the point where time condenses, in the symbolic structure of the Tariqa is represented by the moment of *dhikr*. This is a moment outside of history—it is not part of physical time. It is characterized by a symbolic fullness in its linkage with the meaning of the sacred. "If the *murid* praises his Lord with full conviction, the stages of the Path are rolled into one in an instant."⁶⁹ This centrality of charisma (the Sheikh), of space (the *zawiya*) and of time (the moment of the *dhikr*) is the center of the symbolism of ascent which organizes the structure of the tariqa *imaginaire*.

⁶⁶ Al-Sharani, vol. 1, p. 86.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 83.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 84.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 88.

The symbolism of ascent from a center is an ancient symbolism in religions and found in all cultures. Mircea Eliade writes, "We can go even further than this and say that it is possible to prove that the symbolism of the *axis mundi* was known in the past by members of the most ancient cultures. Chief among these are the ancient peoples of the Arctic and Latin America."⁷⁰ Eliade mentions similar attitudes to those we observe in the world of the Tariqa, but in other cultures far-removed from it historically and geographically. This shows that the tariqa *imaginaire* acquires its force from a reliance on symbolic orders solidly situated in human culture, because the symbolism of the center represents a structural matter in human culture. Similarly the issue of the sacred center represents a fundamental idea in the religious and mythological tradition.⁷¹

The Tariqa's reliance on the symbolism of ascent and the symbolism of the center in its founding discourse on the one hand, and in its organization of the [social] space on the other, is perhaps what makes it an autonomous religious expression. However, in its deep structure it relies on the solid structures of the religious *imaginaire*. The first thing one observes in the symbolism of the center is the designations for the Sheikh such as *qutb* (axis or pole): the axis is the Sheikh around whom the world of the Tariqa revolves. The *zawiya* of the Sheikh is also subject to the concept of centrality and linked to the expansion of the circles of the sacred for those who believe in the sacredness of the place and its signifying and symbolic density. The place of seclusion of the Sheikh represents a center for the *murid*. Hence the manners of the *zawiya* are insistent that no one enter the Sheikh's place of seclusion without permission. The house of gathering (the house where the rituals of Sufi *dhikr* and *hadra* take place) becomes a second circle of sanctity, followed by the *zawiya* and then the city where it is located. We note that visitors to Sheikh Abi al-Qasim al-Belkhyari, Sheikh of the Qasimiya Order in Redeyef, remove their shoes in the streets of the city and go barefoot as they are in the city of the Sheikh. They also take a handful of dust and some water from the *zawiya* back to their hometowns.

The symbolism of the center is linked to the Sheikh and his presence in space and time because his presence represents the absence of all [other] presences. His centrality provides the circle [of *dhikr*] or the *zawiya* or the reach of time with their transcendent, sacred significations. This signification invokes the signification of purity because the area around the center is a pure place and time is a pure and fundamental time. The

⁷⁰ Eliade, p. 60 ff.

⁷¹ Eliade, *Traité d'Histoire des Religions*, p. 145.

moment of the *dhikr* transcends time, it is the moment of true and authentic existence because it is linked with the sacred and its presence in the place. The spatial designations in the *zawiya* may also allude to the symbolism of the presence of the sacred in the space, such as the house of gathering or the *hadra*.

The symbolic force to the meaning of the center in the world of the Tariqa is represented in it being the starting point for the ascent towards the upper world and transcendence of the profane realm. Al-Sha'rani states: "Know that the *murid* ought not interrupt the *dhikr* session before he removes himself from the world. One who breaks off before this removal is as though he has not praised God at all in terms of the reward which is *ascent*."⁷² To cleanse the profane space we must bring the sacred down into it. The sacred comes into profane space to inaugurate a new, real moment. The *murid* invites his Sheikh and brethren to perform *dhikr* in his house to mark some social event (marriage, building a new house, circumcision, some success) or to bless and purify the place and link the historical context with the sacred context. In other words, bringing the sacred down into history, as Mohammed Arkoun has put it.

Another stringently observed custom of the Tariqa might be that "the *murid* does not go on a journey, or get married, or do any significant action unless he has the permission of his Sheikh. Also he does not walk in front of him nor alongside him unless it is dark, when he walks in front to protect him from any calamity."⁷³

In this way, the symbolism of ascent helps to achieve a symbolic ordering between earth and heaven in the representation of the world in the tariqa field. The symbolism of the center achieves the symbolic ordering of the terrestrial realm by defining the locations and times of the sacred and excluding the times and spaces of the profane. It inserts sacred time into history by displacing this center from the context of theoretical and intellectual religious discourse into the context of daily behavior (manners of the *zawiya*, manners of the *dhikr* session, time of the *dhikr*). This circularity in looking at time and space is consolidated in a cyclical pattern which is made deeper by the various rituals of the Tariqa, in part or in whole, in comparison with the rituals of the orthodox religion.

⁷² Al-Sharani, vol. 1, p.87.

⁷³ Al-Tijani, p. 31.

The cyclical pattern

This study has highlighted that the ritual discourse particular to the people of the Path exists in parallel with or independently of orthodox ritual discourse and how tariqa reason operates and organizes these rites. The following section goes beyond the religious-jurisprudential dimension of authenticity to look into the structure and logic of symbolic authenticity. That is the elucidation of how the tariqa *imaginaire* operates to produce a ritual discourse that meets with acceptance and establishes "jurisprudence", since the rationality of jurisprudence as represented in analogical reason must have the support of a symbolic structure. This structure governs the religious *imaginaire* in general and that of Islam in particular. Among the features of this symbolic structure is the cyclical organization of rituals. That is the fixing of set times which pull together the strands of religious time for the *murid* and make his time revolve to the rhythm of those set times. This cycle is distributed as follows:

A daily cycle, such as the *wird* which was mentioned for the Tijaniya Order.

A weekly cycle for the Tijaniya Order of holding the Friday *haylala*, or the similar *'amara* for the Qasimiya Order on Friday night and Monday night.⁷⁴

An annual cycle for the Qasimiya Order and many others. The celebration of Moulid al-Nabi is a periodic opportunity for the *murid* to make pilgrimage to the Sheikh.

This cycle of ritual in the tariqa field is the same as the orthodox ritual cycle (prescribed prayer, Friday observance, and the orthodox holidays). The cyclical ritual sequence in tariqa discourse becomes an important means for the symbolic authentication of tariqa Islam when its symbolic structure is akin to the solid structures of the religious *imaginaire* (periodic daily, weekly and annual celebrations). No religious ritual has any significance if it is not cyclical.

The content of the cyclical ritual has the function of filling the time of the *murid* with tariqa religious meaning, that is, eclipsing the general religious meaning of religious time. This is achieved by the addition of the concept of the Sheikh, as conciliator of time, the one who brings it out of chaos and confusion and who regulates its flow. For this reason, the moments of the *dhikr*, which transcend the temporality of history are,

⁷⁴ *Al-amara*, the collective *dhikr* held by the Qasimiya Order has become part of the life of the city as the voices of the *dhikr* spread into the area around the *zawiya* and the peripheries of the city, where it is periodically heard in many neighborhoods.

as we have seen, contingent upon the visualization of the image of the Sheikh. Cyclicity is also apparent in the rhythmic movements in the performance of the *dhikr*. The Sheikh recites the invocations (*adhkar*) in repetitive fashion (repetition of the petition for forgiveness one hundred times and so on). This is where cyclicity intersects with circularity in the structure of the *dhikr*, in terms of, at the least, the following:

The *dhikr* circle where the group takes on a circular shape in many Tariqas, and at times semi-circular. The Sheikh stands in the middle of the circle. The cyclical and the circular appear in the group *dhikr* circle, such as the *haylala* for the Tijania Order or the *'amara* for the Qasimiya. In the latter, the *murids* are standing and led by the Sheikh and they face towards him. Sometimes, he is in the middle (if the numbers are small), but mostly he stands at the front facing towards them (the opposite to the stance of the imam at prayer). He starts directing the swaying and rising of the bodies. The pace and volume of the voices gradually rises to a peak. The words start with *la illaha ill-allah* and at the end of the *'amara* become just the repetition of a single sound: aah, aah, aah. In this way the *dhikr* circle embodies the adherence of the group to the circular and cyclical pattern in sound and movement.

The *sibha* (prayer beads)⁷⁵ forms a means to perform *dhikr*. It also has a circular shape, and the movement of the beads proceeds cyclically. It starts with the mosque (a mosque-shaped bead on the thread) which is where the counting starts and ends. Every thirty-third bead has the form of a small dome which may be felt with the fingers. This reminds the participant in the *dhikr* that he has reached one third of the round. Once all the beads have been cycled through for counting the petition for forgiveness, a new cycle of the *dhikr* begins with invocations of the unity or praises upon the Prophet, as determined by the Sheikh. The movement of the *dhikr* continues in this cycle, marked off with the beads of the prayer bead, always returning to the origin, the starting point, over and over for every prayer bead. The prayer bead expresses the individual's embodiment of the cyclical and circular patterns.

The structure of the circle (of group *dhikr*) is reflected in the structure of the *sibha* (of individual *dhikr*). While the Sheikh is present at the group *dhikr* in body and soul, at

⁷⁵ *Sibha* is the tool of the *dhikr*, but the word also means to repeat one hundred times. The sheikh instructs his murid to say two *sibhas* of *la illaha ill-allah* and a *sibha* of the prayer for forgiveness, meaning two hundred and one hundred beads, or times, respectively. It actualizes the signification of the cyclical.

individual *dhikr* he is visualized by the *murid*. Similarly the tiny mosque on the prayer bead, which stands out from the other beads, is akin to the Sheikh standing out from the other *murids*. The sound begins with him and returns to him in a cyclical motion that follows his voice. The circularity of the space is intersected by the cyclical movement within the symbolic world of the Tariqa. This intersection is characteristic of the religious *imaginaire* in general. Here one reaches another aspect of the authentication of tariqa discourse. Now we are dealing with the basis for the symbolic authentication of a tariqa *imaginaire* which is independent in how it expresses itself (particular rituals, charisma, spaces, tales). Nevertheless, it conforms at the core with the religious *imaginaire* (symbolism of the center, cyclicity and circularity).

After this rapid identification of the features of the tariqa *imaginaire*, one can contend that tariqa discourse respects the major structures of the religious *imaginaire* while diversifying its ritual discourse as an expression of these structures in another form with another set of symbols unique to it. Yet, in its deep signification, it conforms to the depth of the religious vision. It respects its symbolic basis just as it respects the solid basis of religious-jurisprudential reason which is the territory of *qiyas*. These two conditions do not provide a convincing answer to the question of authentication and its levels, because they fail to explain why this discourse has continued in some areas (Islamic North Africa for example) rather than others despite the necessary intellectual and symbolic conditions being found in all parts of the Islamic world. Here, one must look to the sociological conditions that justify the continuation of the discourse, that is a shift from the synchronic study of tariqa discourse to the diachronic study of the understanding of the social component of this discourse. It follows that having examined tariqa discourse and then the tariqa world, this analysis shall shift to its social field.

Tariqa Society

Students of religion attempted to apply the methodology of structuralism, which had proved highly effective for understanding language, folklore and literature. Because religion is a symbolic artifact just like language and folklore, and a social institution just like others, structuralist approaches could be applied to religions. The structuralist paradigm considers religion as a cultural system founded upon a set of relations which connect its elements. It is not these elements which give the system its value, but the relationships between them which create the system. So, as a first stage, it is necessary to deconstruct these relationships in order to understand the internal structure of this

system. This is the stage of synchronic study, which is followed by the stage of diachronic study, that is, examining the system in its historical context.

In this study the intellectual system and symbolic structure that form tariqa discourse have been deconstructed. Brief attempts will now be made to examine the social conditions that have contributed to the continuation of this discourse. If tariqa discourse authenticates itself intellectually by means of analogy (*qiyas*) and symbolically by means of the cyclical *imaginaire*, how does it authenticate itself socially?

Attempts to answer this question will be made through a consideration of how the Tariqa is established in society on three levels connected to how the tariqa body operates within society. One can summarize these three levels as: disposition, organization and contestation, which are the concepts around which all social bodies are organized.

Disposition

When considering the texts where the Sheikhs of the Tariqas talk about the history of a particular Tariqa or more generally about the history of Sufism, one notes deliberate insistence on revealing its marginal position and the emphasis on this being a historical feature of this social body. From their self-definition one can derive three possibilities for historical authentication:

a. The chain of transmission

When it comes to the tariqa chain of transmission, which provides authentication for the Sheikh, it should be noted that all of them go back to Hassan, then his father 'Ali ibn Abi Talib, up to the Prophet.⁷⁶

This historical authentication for the Sheikhs of the Tariqas and the saints has the religious function of extending the sacred from the original source of the sacred which is the Prophet. However, this genealogy equally has a historical political signification. Historically, Ali has represented the voice of the opposition, the poor and the ascetic in the Arab Islamic *imaginaire*. From Ali emerged two branches opposed to the orthodox system. One branch is "revolutionary" and confrontational and is represented by Hussain, whose entire symbolism has been appropriated by the Shia. Throughout their long history, the Shia have solidified the symbolism of Hussain, and they continue to

⁷⁶ Al-Jilani, "The Divine Opening and the Flood of Mercy", p. 3.

make use of it in times of war and peace until today. Then there is the “non-belligerent” line represented by the symbol of Hassan and his historical political stance towards the Ummayyid state. This line was used by the Sufi wave to authenticate itself. One finds all the chains of transmission of the Tariqas go back to Hassan as against Hussain, or that the Sheikhs are descendants of Hassan on either the paternal or maternal side. Sheikh ‘Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani is a descendant of Hassan ibn ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib.⁷⁷ Similarly the Sheikh of the Tijaniya Order is descended from Hassan.⁷⁸

From this idea of transmission and descent from the Alawite Hassan we may conclude the following:

The chain of transmission is ascribed to family and tribal genealogy since ancestry structurally represents social origin in the foundation of the individual and the group in Arab society, which acquire status that derives from their extension back in history. By virtue of this extension into the past and the resultant connection with the sacred and the mythological origin, comes into being the extension into the future. So, the connection with Hassan, either through the chain of transmission of the Tariqa and its saints or through the Sheikh being a blood relative of Hassan, is a connection with the center of the sacred. This sacred genealogy is transformed into intellectual and religious authenticity. The matter is the same for the Shia (in the symbol of Hussain) and the Sufis (in the symbol of Hassan) since they share the historical authentication of their social forms by descent from the Prophet and the authentication of their sources of knowledge which are viewed as metaphysical, hidden forms of knowledge that are inherited by the imams or the saints.⁷⁹

Hassan represents the peaceful line in the history of opposition to Ummayyid authority. Because of his historical and political position, and his allegiance to Muawiya, Hassan became the symbol of non-belligerence and non-confrontation, contrary to his brother Hussain. The mythic portrait acquired by the personality of Hassan in the Islamic *imaginaire* (the Shia especially) is consistent with the course of reclusion and non-participation in politics, and the proclaimed political resignation found in Sufi and tariqa discourse. While the Shia appropriated the symbolism of Hussain, making it into a political discourse of faith which they applied in history, tariqa Islam applied the

⁷⁷ In the *Futuh al-Ghayb* of Sidi, Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani, the editor, notes that his genealogy goes back to Hassan on his father’s side and to Husain on his mother’s. Al-Jilani, “Conquests of the Unseen”, p. 187.

⁷⁸ See al-Tijani, p. 104.

⁷⁹ Al-Jabri, “Chapter on Gnosis”.

example of Hassan. The followers of Hussain turned history into revolution and struggle, while the followers of Hassan turned history into non-belligerence and reconciliation, from the time of the Arab Islamic state to colonialism to the modern nation state. The Sufi Orders made their peace with the ruling governments. They were conscious of the imbalance of power between them and the ruling political centers,⁸⁰ and rarely rose up against them. They even helped the colonizers enter in some countries and gave their blessings to dictatorship (the coup in Sudan at the time of Jafaar al-Nemeiri).

Whatever the symbolic significance of this origination, the return to the origin, by chain of transmission or descent, to Hassan is the return to a marginal tradition in the history of orthodox Islam, particularly Sunni Islam, because he represents the original branch in Shiite Islam. At many periods, Shiite Islam represented orthodox discourse (the Buyids, the Fatimids, contemporary Iran), but Hassan has a marginal presence. So one can deduce that the marginal position of tariqa Islam is manifest in this reliance on the margins of Islamic historical symbols. This tendency is a translation in hindsight that constructs socio-political positions that express a social body that will continue as a site for staking claims and recruitment.

b. Sufism and the People of Safa

Tariqa discourse in the context of its search for a historical identity for this social body tried to extend the Tariqa back into early Islam (the period of the Prophet and the rightly-guided Caliphs) which is formative for all types of Islamic discourse in the context of returning to the inaugural moment in the history of the group.⁸¹ So it searched in the margins of society for that symbolic moment which transcended history on the conscious level.

The Sufis claimed descent from the people of Safa to give an etymology for the term Sufism and to provide an etymology for society and morality. The people of Safa were the poor who "lived in the mosque at the time of the Prophet." They did not have tribes or families to take them in and protect them. They were situated at the margins of social action "and were about four hundred men who did not have residencies in Medina nor kin. They gathered at the mosque like a gathering of Sufis, in the past and present in the *zawiya* and in the *rabat* (association). They did not live from agriculture,

⁸⁰ Issa, "Maghreb al-Mutasawwifa," p. 566.

⁸¹ Mircea Eliade, *Le Mythe de L'éternel Retour, Archétypes et Répétition*.

husbandry or trade. They collected wood and crushed kernels in the daytime, and at night occupied themselves with worship, learning and reciting the Qur'an."⁸²

The marginal situation of this social group would subsequently lead its ascetic discourse to end up as a speculative Sufi discourse and then a tariqa discourse organized in the form of social blocks situated in the midst of the socioeconomic surroundings. In reclusion, it continued to be organized by its religious, ascetic discourse, and the marginality of the group in society was consistent with its theoretical marginality in orthodox Islamic discourse.

Sufi theorizing remained marginal to the formulation of the prevalent Islamic discourse. It was an elite discourse, even in its tariqa form, despite the Tariqa's characteristic openness to the masses in some regions. It is said: "They had a faction in Khurasan who lived in caves and who did not live in towns and cities. They were called *shakfatiya* in Kurasan, because *shakfat* is the word for cave. The people of Greater Syria call them *saw'iya*. [...] The name Sufi includes all the various groups under these names. This name was not found at the time of the Prophet, and it is said it is from the time of those who came after."⁸³

At its beginning, as is well known, Sufism was a silent protest movement against the society whose margins it had chosen to express its protest. This movement rooted itself in this margin, took comfort from it and constructed upon it a discourse and understanding of religion and life. They took advantage of isolation. "They made themselves *zawiyas* to meet in at times, and went their own way at others, like the people of al-Safa. [...] On this basis they developed their fields of knowledge and their frames of reference and produced their terminology which indicates meanings they understand and which expresses the situations they come across. The successors took this from the forerunners, until this became the whole story in every age."⁸⁴ The marginality of the social situation enabled this group throughout its history to be formed as a socio-cultural body with its discourse, structure of ideas and its disposition. It gained itself a foothold within a changing society. This body could not operate outside marginal positions. For if it stepped beyond them, it would lose its equilibrium in the social structure and expose itself to attack. It remained safe as long as it operated there, far removed from the official center, in a peaceful relationship to it.

⁸² Al-Suhrawardi, p. 62.

⁸³ Ibid., p.63.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p.64.

c. The geopolitical position

The marginality of the symbolic political genealogy as represented by Hassan, and the marginality of the social and historical position of the people of the Path, control their geographical distribution in the Islamic world. The Sufi Orders did not spread in the major centers of religious and political decision making (Baghdad, Damascus or Cordoba). We find an absence of this phenomenon in the Arabian Peninsula and the Hejaz until now. This is because this region represented historically the seat of orthodox Islam, in addition to the sway of the Hanbalite school in the region, especially in its Wahhabite version, which totally excludes this discourse and does not permit the existence of Orders or *zawiyās*, and may even declare members of the Orders to be apostates.

The Sufi Orders spread in the regions surrounding the political and religious center, that is they took a position in the geographic margins with other social bodies opposed to the center. They spread with the Shiite wave in the east of the Islamic world as well as the west. Since this Shiite wave always represented an openly oppositional margin in revolt against the political and religious center, exploiting the line of Hussain and its symbolism, tariqa Islam remained quietist and represented the line of "avoidance" and not opposition. Perhaps the best evidence for this is the Islamic west which represented a geographical margin for the practice of political and religious opposition from the Ummayid period until the Fatimids. During which time tariqa Islam established itself in this margin, which was highly suited for its continuity.

It seems that the significance of reclusion in tariqa Islam, as a principle of belief and behavior, is in harmony with the reclusion of this social body. Throughout its history, it has chosen the margins of state and society. This reveals this group's vision of the geopolitical domain. It chooses the site of its autonomy, consciously or unconsciously, in the margins. This is apparent, as we have seen, in the attitude of the discourse, in the group's historical position and also in the location of the *zawiya*. Most of the *zawiyās* we have seen are in ordinary neighborhoods not connected to the city center. The *zawiya* of Sidi Abu al-Hassan al-Shadhli in Tunis is located at the edge of the old city, whereas the Zaytouna Mosque, the symbolic representation of orthodox Islam, is in the center of the city. Similarly, the *zawiyās* in the south of Tunisia are to be found on the margins of the cities and in their poorest neighborhoods. In Redeyef there are three *zawiyās*: the Qasimiya, the Isma'iliya and the Muhammadiya. All of them are far from the center of the city in marginal working-class neighborhoods.

Next, one notes that the choice of the symbolic, charismatic margin (Hassan), the historical and social margin, the geopolitical margin (the Maghreb for example) and the local margin (poor neighborhoods) represents, sociologically, a sound choice for social authentication throughout the history of tariqa Islam. In such fashion, it provides an important example of historical survival strategies for one cultural group by means of symbolic and epistemological contact with the center and, on the basis of historical and geopolitical facts, sociological rejection of the center.

The Structure of the Tariqa Field

Pierre Bourdieu's theory of the field (Fr. *champs*) is part of his overarching theory of sociological research based on the concept of domination. He views society as a space for difference that conceals in the background power relations which are internalized by individuals. He sees that the principle of social organization is based upon the existence of relationships between the dominant and the dominated that vary according to the sources of domination and the strategies of social agencies.⁸⁵ It follows that the field is no more than a part of the social world governed by its own rules which are the rules of a particular domain such as the press, academic or literary fields. All of these represent microcosms. The field is thus a space for domination and contestation between individuals in order to occupy powerful positions within the field.⁸⁶

The field, then is a socio-cultural space shared by individuals who understand its rules and specificities and know how to act within in. A politician cannot find a position within the field of medicine unless he is proficient in the rules of the field of medicine, and the cleric cannot dominate the field of politics unless he is proficient in the rules of the game for the political field.

Based on this definition of the field, one sees that the Sufi Order has some resonance with this concept and its elements. It is a socio-cultural field that contains the rules for the game that runs it, manages the relationships of the individuals within it, and drives the strategies of contestation and the internal and external chances that the field offers its members. Because the Tariqa is a social field to which belong individuals and social agencies, they accept its rules and concepts. All those who belong to a social field have a certain status within it which is subject either to development and advance within the hierarchy of relationships within the field or exclusion from the game of the field in its

⁸⁵ Cabin, "Dans les coulisses," p. 24.

⁸⁶ "Petit Vocabulaire Bourdieusien," p. 108.

entirety and in consequence the loss of individual and group chances. The study will here attempt to understand “the rules of the Tariqa game” inside the *zawiya* through observations of the three *zawiyas*.

At the level of this research, it will be sufficient to focus on the rules of the tariqa field⁸⁷ which is viewed as independent of other religious and social fields, since the *murid* belongs voluntarily to the Tariqa, practices rituals, follows social codes and creates a kind of relationship that, as shall be seen, differ from the other religious fields of society. These features consolidates the autonomy of the tariqa field within the “social universe”⁸⁸ for it to acquire a foothold on the mobile terrain of society. The Qasimiya Order is a case in point, for it takes its place within the society of Redeyef and has its reflection throughout the country as well. We can summarize the principles of the game within the tariqa field under three headings:

a. Esoteric knowledge

Although tariqa Islam is part of religious thought in general, it differs from this in its conception of religious knowledge and its sources, in its theory of the exegesis of the canonical texts and also in its rituals and organization within the group, as we have seen. If it is correct to apply the theory of the field, we can say that the Sufi Order is a socio-religious field that belongs to the field of religion in general.⁸⁹

The first thing that differentiates the people of the Path from other Muslims is that they are the recipients of esoteric knowledge which is the essence of religious truth. It follows that they are on the true path of religion because they go beyond exoteric understanding and belief to reach true belief. Religious knowledge, here, is not concerned with dialectic and proof but is an inner-experiential knowledge based upon acquiring the forms of sensibility opened up by the Sheikh with his mystical knowledge

⁸⁷ This is because Bourdieu’s theory of the field includes a number of other factors, which could be the subject of a separate study. This is a trial at applying the theory of the field to the Sufi Order, so we suffice with the concept of the “rules of the game”.

⁸⁸ Bourdieu, *Propos sur le champ politique*, p. 52.

⁸⁹ The religious field has its own specifics compared with other fields in society (political, economic etc.) though it also produces smaller fields that belong to it and which are part of the field of society. These construct a vision of religion and consider themselves to be religion (the field of *fiqh*, religious political parties, the Sufi Orders). Although these sub-fields maintain the general principles of the religious field in how they are organized and their textual legitimacy, they create their own internal rules. Belonging to a Sufi Order and advancement within it differs from belonging to a school of *fiqh* or a religious party because the particular dependencies within each field are different.

of the workings of the Path of Reality. All these features must be accepted, believed and defended by the murid. Then he must take on board this first stipulation of the tariqa game, and when he is proficient in it, he can advance within this field. For this reason, the measure of “accomplishment” within the Tariqa and advancement to higher status (the position of *muqaddam* for example which is the deputy of the Sheikh in one of the subsidiary *zawiyās*) are subject to how proficient one is in the theory of esoteric knowledge.

What is of significance in this summary of the difference between the Path and orthodox religion is the social meanings of this difference and of the specifics that regulate the game of reason. These significations are as follows:

External sociological significance: that is outside the field and in its relations with other fields. Esoteric knowledge is epistemologically dependent on religious truth, but, sociologically, this dependence is translated into an autonomous social body with an ideological religious disposition which it can use for contesting within society. It achieves this by adopting the idea that it is in possession of exclusive religious truth, thus pulling the carpet out from under the institution of orthodox religion which confines the truth within the discourse of authority. Bourdieu sees this sort of contestation as something fundamental to the history of the field. Those who reject the dominant authority in the religious field usually accuse it of having strayed from the original principles of the field and say that they have come to correct matters by escaping this dominance. The theory of esoteric knowledge considers the orthodox understanding that dominates the religious field to have strayed from the esoteric and spiritual truth of the religious message and that the Sheikh of the Tariqa and his followers are those correcting the Path. Perhaps this designation, “Path”, in itself is a good indicator of the concept of correction within the religious field.

Internal sociological signification: The *murid's* adoption of esoteric action implies a belief in an esoteric line of knowledge which is viewed as the most correct Path, one that leads to salvation and that differs from others within the religious field. This belief reinforces the social bond within the group and reproduces social relationships, giving them new signification.⁹⁰ For this reason, ties of marriage between the members of the tariqa group are frequent on the basis of belonging to the Tariqa and belief in the tariqa

⁹⁰ Durkheim speaks of the importance of rituals for the solidification of social relationships, noting that religious beliefs are ultimately social statements that essentially take on their cultural religious meaning through ritual. See Durkheim, *Les formes élémentaires*, p. 605.

creed. One also notes that acts of social solidarity within the Tariqa are always linked by the actors to esoteric concepts and the ritual of the *hadra*. Whenever the *murids* are about to initiate one of their brothers into the Tariqa (which is a social behavior well established in the city on the basis of tribal relations, with paternal cousins appointing each other)⁹¹ they mark the completion of the appointment by holding the *hadra* ritual (whose religious signification is being present in the hands of the Prophet and the divine essence). The *hadra* is a collective form of behavior that provides the group with social signification that makes them act as a body independent of others. From here, the concept of exoteric knowledge exchanges a system of kinship which governs the social system (tribal, blood kinship) with a system of kinship based upon belonging to the Tariqa. All social behavior (solidarity, marriage, economic benefit) is shifted from the tribal space to the tariqa space.⁹²

Esoteric knowledge, as stated by the members and sheikhs of the Tariqas, is acquired by great effort and advancement so that the *murid* attains status within the Tariqa. This effort to receive knowledge creates inner competition between *murids* to win tariqa challenges. It also creates groups in competition with each other and subsidiary *zawiyas* competing to show their assiduousness in their devotions and activities so as to obtain prestige and closeness to the Sheikh. The concept of Sufi levels of initiation is nothing more than the reproduction of the social hierarchy for classifying individuals. Within the *zawiya* one finds an elite class of those close to the Sheikh who hold a sufficient portion of esoteric knowledge to acquire this prestige. We also find an active class—the *zawiya* houses young people interested in media, those interested in the economy of the *zawiya* and others in defense and service, while some are the emissaries of the Sheikh to the regions. There are ordinary *murids* who do not belong to these functionary circles. Belonging to these circles is considered a major prize and it creates competition and directs relationships within the *zawiya* on the basis of mastery of the significant

⁹¹ *Tawiza* is one of the traditions known in Redeyef. In this tradition, cousins help each other build a house, particularly the roof, and women contribute to the teasing of wool or the preparation of annual food supplies in exchange for a feast where there must be a blood sacrifice (of a sheep or the like). The Sufi Order in Redeyef has maintained this tradition, but has linked it to *baraka* (divine beneficence) and the centrality of the sacred (for more information on this, please refer to the section on constructing the tariqa *imaginaire*).

⁹² In Redeyef, the tribe plays a major role in forming political, social, and economic bonds. Tribe members make good use of the tribe's businessmen, politicians, and figures of influence. For example, there was a doctor who was not from the city and did not belong to a tribe; as soon as he joined the Qasimiya Order, all the *murids* of the Tariqa started to use his clinic. Conversely, there are doctors native to the city whose patients come entirely from their tribe. There are, however, exceptions to this general rule as professional competence and success played a major role.

rules of the game. This means mastery of the vocabulary and behaviors which have esoteric significance. The Sheikh, who may be considered the heart of the whole tariqa game, defines this esoteric significance.

b. The Sheikh: pivot of the game

In the discussion of the structure of tariqa reason, this study gives considerable attention to the epistemological and organizational role of the Sheikh for he is considered the condition for the whole existence of the Tariqa. This epistemologically-necessary condition is also necessary for the existence of the social body. The Sheikh, who supervises teachings in the *zawiya* and from whom issues all knowledge, orders and decisions, is the pivot of the tariqa field. The central position of the Sheikh and his occupation of the position of sainthood is the highest tariqa aspiration for actors ascending the initial ranks of tariqa status, the *muqaddams* (the deputy of the Sheikh in the subsidiary *zawiyas*).

The Sheikh determines the whole game of the field and controls it as long as the *murids* follow him without any schism.⁹³ He directs competition and contestation for what is at stake in the tariqa, which, as we have seen in the preceding paragraph, is governed by the principle of esoteric knowledge. Thus, on the social level, the relationship with the Sheikh is not simply that of a seeker of knowledge with his Sheikh, but that of a follower with his leader. It is an ideological relationship on the pattern of party, doctrine or denomination. Hence the *murid* must defend his Sheikh, and in fact, the acquisition of tariqa rewards within the *zawiya* and advancement in rank on the Sufi scale depend on the extent to which he follows the Sheikh and defends him outside the tariqa field, that is outside the *zawiya*. This aspect perhaps strengthens group cohesion and makes the group a cohesive block within society.⁹⁴

The centrality of the Sheikh is also the central law for one tariqa group to contest with another tariqa group for domination over the tariqa field and its monopolization on the basis of the Sheikh's monopolization of Sufi truth. This has been a founding principle since the very beginnings of the foundation of the Sufi group. Al-Qushayri states: "It is

⁹³ This is similar to what happened with the Qasimiya Order when Sheikh Abi al-Qasim was in control of his Tariqa and his followers until Sheikh Abd al-Hafiz Tababi split in 2002 and founded the Muhammadiya Order. Some of the Qasimiya *murids* left and joined the nascent Tariqa.

⁹⁴ Some Sheikhs have forbidden their murids from visiting the tombs of saints. See al-Tijani, p. 23.

a foul thing for the *murid* to belong to any doctrine other than his Sheikh. He must only imitate his Sheikh."⁹⁵

Hence the Sheikh can be considered to be the center of the game, and the horizon that surrounds and controls the game. He has the necessary charisma for the group to gather around him and step into history by unifying its group identity within an individual identity where all other identities dissolve. This principle does not just concern the Tariqa, but is related to many other social bodies such as political parties, doctrines and denominations. Here, the study of the Tariqa comes within the category of the overall study of how groups form within a single society.⁹⁶

Both the principle of esoteric knowledge and the belief in the Sheikh demonstrate that the tariqa field has rules that must be perfected (there are other principles connected with the material investment of symbolic gains which are embodied in the rituals and in celebrations, banquets, volunteering and gifts). This game takes an epistemological dimension which is represented in metaphysical knowledge. This wells up from the Sheikh who facilitates the path of the *murid* towards it. Its acquisition acts as a filter within the Tariqa between status and dependency.

This epistemological form takes on an ideological creedal form represented in the defence of the symbol of organization within the field which is the Sheikh. These operations take on various ritual forms that manifest the symbolic and sociological independence of the group as against others. Nevertheless, is this adherence to the rules of the game and the principle of organization alone sufficient to engage in contestation within the tariqa field and for it to achieve differentiation and autonomy as an independent field? Bourdieu speaks of the necessity of owning symbolic capital that conforms to the disposition of each field to enable the acquisition of a position within it. For this reason, we shall move on to a significant and essential component of the tariqa field that we call "tariqa capital".

Tariqa Capital

The field in society is a space where contesting parties competing over the stakes produced by that field struggle to acquire dominance and take and develop positions to continue the relations of dominance. This being the case, every individual proficient in

⁹⁵ Al-Sharani, vol. 1, p. 62.

⁹⁶ Al-Sayyid, *Understandings of the group in Islam*.

the game of the field must own symbolic or material capital that enables him to preserve his stock within the context of contestation and improve his position within the field. Bourdieu holds that every field creates its own symbolic capital through contestations between the actors and institutions involved in it. Within the field, sets of customs, behaviors and experiences accumulate that differentiate it from others. This imposes a distribution of qualifications particular to the form of contestation in order for the actor to fit into the field he is part of. It is not possible to transfer the capital of one field to another different one.⁹⁷ Some fields might be similar, but they still preserve the particularity of their own symbolic capital.

The symbolic capital acquired by a doctor in the medical field and the strategies that define his position and dependencies has been acquired through his accumulation of successful experiences of curing the sick. He acquires symbolic capital with the sick based on his training in the first place, and then his successful practice and the system of social relationships that he has developed through his professional practice. All these elements and qualifications make this successful doctor improve his position within the medical field (his clinic may expand, or he may be qualified to take on a position in the ministry etc.,). However, this symbolic (and also material) capital acquired by the doctor will not necessarily be of any use when he enters the field of art or politics. This is because the dependencies for the artist and the strategies of contestation within the artistic field are different. If he succeeds in the political field, it will not be because he relied on his experience in the medical field, but because he is proficient at the game of the political field and has acquired its symbolic capital.

On the basis of this understanding of this important component of the field, we can deduce the essential elements of what can be termed "tariqa capital". The tariqa field, as has been indicated, just like other fields, pushes those parts of it to divide up symbolic capital whose value is known to those who belong to the field. It may have no value outside this field. The *murid* who is proficient in the teachings of the Tariqa and dedicates himself to obeying his Sheikh and defending him, who makes financial sacrifices and gives up his time, forms for himself with respect to the other *murids* an important store of capital. They estimate its values in the context of the struggle to occupy a position within the Tariqa. This *murid* may become a *muqaddam* or deputy *muqaddam*. This capital is symbolic material to be invested within the tariqa field.

⁹⁷ Bourdieu, "Quelques Propriétés du Champ," p. 114.

The observations of examples of *murids* in the *zawiya* of the Qasimiya Order revealed an inversion in the scales of social status within the *zawiya*, that is an alteration in the value of the symbolic capital of some socially active personalities. One notes here the presence of political figures, people active in society and the wealthy, and even some celebrities (such as a former goal keeper for the Tunisian national team who is famous in sports circles). All of these people possess capital (symbolic or material) in their respective fields (medicine, business, sport). But as soon as they enter the *zawiya*, they lose virtually all that capital. As was noted in the *zawiya* of the Qasimiya, the day laborer and the poor and socially marginalized become owners of capital and have a share in the *zawiya* because they have spent a long period serving the Sheikh and applying all the teachings of the Tariqa. The doctor or businessman or other such figure is subject to the orders of the *muqaddam* who may have no material, political, intellectual, sporting or other capital.

In the tariqa field, those dominant outside the field are transformed into the dominated, while those dominated outside are transformed to gain the status of relative dominance. For this reason, there is a single form of address used in the *zawiya*, *sidi* (sir), and other titles used outside the *zawiya* are done away with. It is a space to reproduce another social hierarchy based upon different standards imposed by the tariqa field.

The importance of tariqa capital is apparent at times of conflict within the tariqa group over the status of being the Sheikh, which is considered the highest status in the tariqa field. This happened within the Isma'iliya Order after the death of Sheikh Isma'il in 1994. Conflict erupted between Sheikh Muhammad ibn 'Umar and Sheikh Abi al-Qasim al-Belkhayri over the succession to Sheikh Isma'il. At that point the criteria relied upon were not social, political or material criteria. The tariqa field operates according to the particularities of tariqa capital. This led to the birth of the Qasimiya Order, while Sheikh Muhammad ibn 'Umar maintained the Isma'iliya Order as a *muqaddam* within it and not as Sheikh. The same mobilization of tariqa capital occurred in 2002 when Sheikh Abd al-Hafiz split from the Qasimiya Order. This young Sheikh, devout since childhood and educated (a graduate of the college of Sharia) relied on practical and intellectual symbolic capital recognized by all. He used this capital to cast doubts over the qualification of his Sheikh, Abi al-Qasim (who is illiterate and has no educational qualifications on the testimony of his own followers). Abd al-Hafiz claimed the rank of Sheikh for himself. He was followed by an elite group of younger members and founded the Muhammadiya Order.

The Tariqa has succeeded in regulating the structure of its field, fixed the rules of its game and reproduced social contestation and a social hierarchy in a new form that opens the domain to the poor and marginalized to regain a symbolic stock in compensation for the lack in their social lot in a society going through painful sociological transformations. The Sufi concept of ranks (*maqamat*—the levels the Sufi reaches in his inner-experiential journey towards metaphysical Reality) reproduces the concept of social class. Those who have failed to advance in the strata of society are given another chance for advancement by the *zawiya*.

Conclusion

In this study attempts have been made answer a fundamental question: what has led the Tariqas to flourish in the Maghreb (and even worldwide) over the last two decades, especially in Tunisia, which we believed had taken strides on the path to modernity and was able to go beyond some of the traditional structures. Tunisian Bourguibian political discourse and the nation-state have worked to consolidate the idea of a break with the traditional model of culture since the closure of Zaytouna University at the dawn of independence. This study has attempted to solve this problem by deconstructing the tariqa body from within. This study pertains that its analysis of the four levels of authentication (epistemology, jurisprudence, *imaginaire* and field) has revealed the power of this social body that carries a religious culture to exploit all it can to live, communicate and offer a service to a part of society that finds in it what it is looking for. It applied analogical reason on the epistemological level to found its own system of jurisprudence. Then, it relied on the structure of the religious *imaginaire* common to human cultures (the cyclical and circular pattern, and patterns of ascent) to construct its vision of the world which it fleshed out in a way not lacking in internal order. Then, in order to be a stable body, it formed a field on the same logic as the fields of society so as to maintain itself in a changeable society. In all of this, it provided its followers with a faithful leader through the centrality of the inspired Sheikh who fulfills the symbolic functions demanded by individuals in their daily struggle to survive. The Sheikh is spiritual doctor, father, prophet, teacher, leader, protector and sustainer, something unmatched by other political leaderships. In a certain fashion this was an escape from a despotic leader to a dominant leader at the least possible cost in terms of conflict.

This study still requires work on the historical course of these elements, the starting points of authentication and the extent to which they can survive or disappear

according to the buffeting of the historical transformations around them. Whatever the outcome reached in this study, the continuity of the tariqa body, as an agency and acted upon, of the same ancient epistemology, its classical functions and its acceptance by the people in flight from a society they had created, represents a cause for a coming crisis or the result of a chronic crisis, or both together.

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