



Redefined Identity: The *Qadiri Būdshīshi Tariqa*'s 'Re-Branding' Journey towards Greater Visibility of *Sufi* Women

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Abstract

Following Morocco's substantive revamp of the religious field, after the 2003 Casablanca terrorist attacks, and the dilemma arising from the burgeoning extremist religious groups, the need to reinforce a new religious vision was ineluctable. The vision, as has been advanced by the Moroccan state, was predicated upon the incorporation of *Sufism*, a crucial constituent of Morocco's religious fabric. In fact, the concepts of 'branding' and 're-branding', as underexplored themes in *Sufi* studies, have oftentimes remained a contested issue within intellectualized debates and academic circles. Therefore, this study departs from the assumption that in order to be in alignment with the state's vision, the *Būdshīshi Brotherhood* has fostered a range of image-enhancing strategies. The current study examines a set of *Sufi* discourses and practices promoted by the brotherhood to create a new current that is more appealing to the public, to the state, and to the global taste. Importantly, the study explores gendered practices and modalities whereby the brotherhood has been able to bring *Sufi* women center-stage and give rise to their visibility. This study is based on qualitative data gathered through in-depth interviews conducted with female disciples of the brotherhood, and enriched through the researcher's first-hand experience with *Sufi* women of *Būdshīshiyya* and a survey

questionnaire, so as to discuss the intricacies of what I term ‘the re-branding turn’, which feeds into a new *Sufi* culture.

Keywords: The *Būdshīshi* brotherhood, re-branding, *Sufi* women, women’s visibility.

0. Introduction

Knowing the cultivated interest of the Moroccan state in *Sufism* and the implicit involvement of the *Qadiriyya Sufi* order in politics, it is essential to examine how this has affected the experiences of women within the *Sufi* community. Specifically, I am interested in understanding how the political involvement has influenced the position of women in the order, and whether it has led to changes in their social, cultural, or religious roles. I also seek to explore how the *Būdshīshiyya Sufi* order navigates its relationship with the state, and whether this has implications for the way women are treated and perceived within the *Sufi* community.

The *Būdshīshiyya Sufi* order’s use of branding provides an intriguing prism through which to examine the complex relationships between politics, religion, and gender. Consideration must be given to the way the order’s modernizing strategy, intended to make the *Būdshīshiyya* more approachable and pertinent to modern audiences, has unintentionally influenced the experiences of female disciples within the organization. Even while the primary goal may be to increase the order’s visibility, it is crucial to consider whether this branding initiative has changed how women are viewed in society and culture.

The intricate interplay between politics, religion, and gender dynamics can be better understood by examining how political activity has influenced the lives of female disciples. We can explore the ways in which the *Būdshīshiyya*’s public image has changed by framing the debate in terms of branding. We can also look at how this can affect women’s empowerment and inclusivity inside the order. By delving into these questions, I hope to shed light on the complex interplay between politics, religion, and gender dynamics within the *Būdshīshiyya Sufi* order, and possibly contribute to more equitable and inclusive practices within the community.

In fact, the support of the Moroccan state for *Sufism* and the *Qadiriyya Būdshīshiyya Sufi* order can provide the order with increased visibility, legitimacy, and resources to the community. On the one hand, the political involvement provides *Sufi* women with more opportunities to participate in public events, engage with the wider community, and potentially challenge patriarchal norms and power dynamics within the order. The *Qadiriyya Būdshīshiyya Sufi* order is reciprocating through its attempts to conform to the state's objectives by focusing on educated women and conveying the idea that it is appealing to the educated elite of the country, despite professing to have a diverse following. This dynamic may be creating a new iteration of *Sufism* that is exclusionary towards certain women.¹

The state's choice of *Būdshīshiyya* stems not only from its anticolonial history in struggles against French colonial forces, but also from the fact that it wields "national tradition" to endorse its 'Moroccanness'. (Bekkaoui & Larémond, 2011; Spadola & Catanzaro, 2020, p. 82) In terms of broader geopolitics, *Būdshīshiyya* has often played a significant role in shaping the political and social landscape of Morocco. The second major intention behind the state's promotion of *Būdshīshiyya* lies in the order's support of the monarchy. The order has a long history in Morocco, has had close ties to the ruling elites since the medieval period, and has been involved in various state-sponsored religious and cultural events.

While the interest in *Sufism* is not new, the socio-cultural shift in religiosity that the world has witnessed has been brought center-stage as a result of the upsurge of the New Age religiosity. (Finnegan, 1992) As Finnegan advocates, *New Age* religiosity is a movement that emerged in the West, and which sparked recurrent questions pertaining to "the meaning of life in this cosmos" (1992, p. 352) This new version of religiosity manifests in the belief in personal growth and development as well as spiritual therapeutic practices. Although the term 'New Age' may sound ambiguous, it is nowadays used to indicate the versatile nature of *Sufism*: "spiritual practice, intellectual discipline, literary tradition, and social institution" (Heck, 2006, p. 253) That being

¹ I will be using the shortened term '*Būdshīshiyya*' throughout the paper to indicate the *Qadiri Boudshishi Sufi Order*.

said, *Sufism* has become a trend, a lifestyle, and an ideology that is two-pronged, namely delegitimizing violent extremism and engaging the social life. (Carette & King, 2005; Sutcliffe, 2006; Spadola & Catanzaro, 2020).

Modernizing a traditional institution like the *Būdshīshiyya* in Morocco, while upholding its foundational principles and practices, poses significant complexities. Nonetheless, the *Būdshīshiyya* has shown efforts to incorporate contemporary ideas and adapt to the evolving landscape without delving into the specifics of its internal decision making. Similarly, from a standpoint encompassing politics, *Sufism*, and the state's growing interest in redefining the religious landscape in Morocco, a specific argument emerges. Recognizing the male-dominated nature of the *Būdshīshiyya* as a social institution, the dilemma revolved around effectively transitioning this long-standing traditional institution into a modernized entity that remains attuned to local and global developments.

A paramount approach fostered by the *Būdshīshiyya* is to promote gender equality and inclusiveness within the institution. While the *Būdshīshiyya* has been a male-dominated institution, efforts have been made to create more opportunities for women to participate in leadership roles and decision-making processes. This has involved the establishment of women-only branches or sub-groups within the institution, as well as the inclusion of women in training programs and educational initiatives. This implies that selectively attracting only the female educated elite within a *Sufi* order could have various implications for people's perceptions of the *Sufi* tradition and the underlying premises. For instance, it may lead to perceptions of exclusivity within the *Sufi* community, potentially alienating those outside the educated elite and affecting the broader understanding and accessibility of *Sufi* practices. Such a concentration of a specific demographic within the order may influence public perceptions of *Sufism*, potentially reinforcing stereotypes or misconceptions about the tradition. Therefore, the decision to primarily attract the female educated elite carries implications that extend beyond the internal dynamics of the *Sufi* order.

The *Būdshīshiyya* through its progressive modernization efforts, has primarily sought to attract educated women with a strong spiritual inclination, aiming to enhance representation and diversity. This approach acknowledges the intersectionality of gender and class, as it targets women who possess both educational privilege and a profound spiritual inclination. In contrast, the *Qadiriyya*'s exclusive focus on attracting the female educated elite results in a narrower scope that neglects the broader social and cultural fabric of the community, and potentially undermines diversity by limiting participation to a specific segment of society.

Foregrounding the relation between the state's interest in *Sufism* and the *Būdshīshiyya* front-line policy of modernization, the *Būdshīshiyya* has judged it necessary to cultivate a modern vision that is contingent on fostering image-enhancing strategies; such strategies are meant to rebrand the *Būdshīshiyya* into a more modern and woman-friendly *Sufi* institution. The questions that this paper tries to answer are the following: How have women of *Būdshīshiyya* been able to gain ground in the *Tariqa* because of the state's instrumentalization of *Sufism*? Have the strategies the *Būdshīshiyya* has adopted and the institutionalization of *Sufism* and its mainstreaming in the Moroccan political culture been paramount to generating more visibility to *Būdshīshi* women? And does the state's instrumentalization of *Sufism* wholly explain the visibility (and the experiences) of women *Tariqa* members?

However, in certain historical and cultural contexts, the state's promotion and engagement with *Sufism* have exhibited patterns of exclusion that disproportionately affected women's participation and representation within *Sufi* institutions. By studying female disciples within *Sufism*, we can gain insights into the complex interplay of gender and class interests, which intersect with the state's utilization of *Sufism*. This examination allows us to examine how power dynamics, shaped by both gender and class, influence the state's co-optation of *Sufi* practices and the implications for women's roles and agency within this context. One could make the argument that by targeting educated women, there is a failure to acknowledge the importance of diversity, resulting in an exclusionary approach. However, this approach of exclusion may have benefited only those who are educated, as they have

achieved leadership positions and actively participated in spiritual and intellectual endeavors.

However, the *Qadiriyya*'s exclusive focus on the female educated elite can be seen as limiting and not reflective of the broader social and cultural spectrum of the female community. This approach may perpetuate class distinctions and disregard other marginalized groups who may not fit the *Qadiriyya*'s narrow definition of "elite". Therefore, it can be argued that the *Qadiriyya*'s exclusive approach undermines diversity and reinforces traditional power structures, namely preexisting class and gender differences that conflict with the fundamental message of *Sufism*, which is intended to be inclusive and welcoming to people of all backgrounds and social classes.

1. Review of the Literature

Remarkably little scholarly attention has been directed toward the subject of rebranding *Sufi* orders and its implications for *Sufi* women. While a compendium of studies has extensively explored the intricate phenomenon of rebranding and revamping within religious spheres, each contributing a unique thread to the fabric of understanding, the distinctive experiences and impacts on *Sufi* women remain notably absent from the scholarly discourse. These investigations, marked by their depth and diversity, unveil the complexities and motivations that underpin the strategies of religious communities in reshaping and rebranding their identities, yet the intersectionality of gender within this transformative process calls for a more focused examination.

A foundational study on 'rebranding' religious orders has revealed that the impactful changes brought about by Observant reforms in the extended fifteenth century had profound effects on revitalizing monastic communities, a significance that is not fully recognized in contemporary scholarly discourse. (Roest & Uphoff, 2016) Contrary to the belief that this era marked a decline in monastic influence, it actually witnessed a considerable dynamism, manifested through the establishment of new institutions and a profound contemplation among order members about their religious identity. (Roest & Uphoff, 2016) The Observant reforms in the fifteenth century not only revitalized

monastic communities but also challenged the prevailing notion of a decline in monasticism during that period, highlighting a dynamic era marked by new foundations and introspective considerations of religious identity among order members.

This observation underscores the fluidity and interconnectedness within the Observant movement, particularly among women within religious orders. The tendency of Observant women to align themselves more closely with reformers from different orders, as well as like-minded secular clerics, suggests that the pursuit of reform and shared ideals could override strict institutional boundaries. (Roest & Uphoff, 2016) It highlights a nuanced aspect of religious identity where individuals, motivated by a commitment to reform, found common ground and collaboration beyond the confines of their specific religious orders, challenging conventional notions of identity solely tied to one's religious institution. The practice of re-branding or re-reforming religious orders is not a novel concept but rather a longstanding tradition rooted in various religions and spanning across centuries, highlighting "devotional renewal initiatives" and "an increase in critical reflection". (Roest & Uphoff, 2016, p. 3)

In *Religion, Identity and Change*, Felix Wilfred (2017) notes that, in certain critical situations, religious identity becomes pronounced and intensified, aiming to achieve specific objectives. Sociologists refer to this phenomenon of identity emphasis as 'salience,' highlighting its connection to the strategic reshaping of religious communities. The pivotal role of emotions, as Wilfred opines, in the process of identity salience, particularly underscores its significance within religious contexts. This observation underscores the strategic nature of accentuating religious identity, especially in critical circumstances. The term "salience" captures this intentional emphasis on identity, a process often driven by emotional factors. This insight sheds light on the complex dynamics involved when religious communities undertake transformative strategies to reshape their identity. (Wilfred, 2017)

While the existing literature on 'branding' pertains primarily to business and entrepreneurial activities, this research borrows the terms

‘branding’ and ‘rebranding’ from the advertising realm; both terms find anchorage in the spiritual world as a new current manifesting in the political culture of Morocco and, by extension, in the *Būdshīshi* brotherhood. The nomenclature ‘branding’ has become a primordial element of the “cultural and economic landscape”, while in fact it has also impacted such fields as politics and the political life of social institutions, in an attempt to exert influence. (Cayla & Arnould, 2008, p. 86) Thinking of social institutions -like *Sufi* orders- as brands is “a form of communication” that is meant to vehicle a specific image. (Cayla and Arnould, 2008, p. 86) This image can go further to actually determine what consumers the institution targets and whether this ‘branding’ responds to their needs and convictions. More importantly, we need to dissect the components of ‘branding’ of *Būdshīshiyya* and explore its historical evolution as well as its social context.² While women’s experiences may be an important part of the *Sufi* tradition, it is not accurate to say that they brand the *Sufi* order itself. Rather, their contributions and experiences should be acknowledged and valued as part of the broader history and legacy of *Sufism*. The choice of branding of a *Sufi* order is typically associated with the teachings and practices of its founder or lineage, as well as the historical and cultural context in which it emerged. The modernizing approach of *Būdshīshiyya* has certainly had an impact on their public image, as it has made them more accessible and relevant to contemporary audiences; yet, its female disciples have indirectly gained benefit from it.

The choice stems from the fact that the state has judged the brotherhood as one capable of preserving its spiritual heritage, in a time that a large number of *Sufi* orders have witnessed radical overhauls. (Robinson, 2005) The *Būdshīshi Sufi* order, and unlike its contenders, rose to fame thanks to its “co-opted submissive attitude towards the Moroccan monarchy” that manifests in public marches in favor of the monarchy and public positions towards politics. (Bouasria, 2015, p. 20) This interplay of *Sufi* institutions and the monarchy has triggered a new kind of competition on the monopoly of the ‘*Sufi* symbolic capital’ and the maintenance of a long-standing tradition. Thus, the *Būdshīshi Sufi* order

² The *Būdshīshi Sufi* order achieved prominence in Morocco after the King had appointed one of its preeminent members, Ahmed Taoufiq, as the minister of Islamic affairs. (Bouasria, 2011, p. 423)

remains a potent spiritual force, which helped increase its following in North Africa and western Muslim diaspora, with a dynamism finding roots in its religious adaptation to social and political demands. (Hmimnat, 2018)

Far more remarkably is the foothold that the brotherhood has tried to fossilize to dominate the spiritual landscape in Morocco, following the monarchy's revival of *Sufism* and the promotion of a reform agenda of the religious institution. (Fakir, 2021) Often missing from these insights is the cultural and political perspectives of 'branding' and how they are sometimes nurtured to advance political agendas and institutional expectations. (Schroeder, 2009) While recent scholarship has focused on the cultural aspect of brands, acknowledging their significance in society and sketching psychological and managerial viewpoints about them, the current paper primarily explores the pseudo-political revamping strategies the brotherhood has resorted to so as to promote a new current of spirituality in the purview of the state's political agenda and its "spiritual security" plan. (Hmimnat, 2018)

Within this perspective, brands have become such an integral part of the cultural and political landscape, and so they, as Schroeder (2009) puts it, 'may pre-empt cultural' (p. 123). puts it, "may pre-empt cultural spheres of religion, politics, and myth, as they generally promote an ideology linked to political and theological models that equate consumption with happiness". In fact, from a cultural standpoint, brands carry a communicative value because they function with a consumerist approach to attract a large number of consumers. See also Faurholt Csaba and Bengtsson (2006) Significantly, the *Būdshīshi* brotherhood has created a brand that appeals to the taste of the public and that keeps up the pace with the local and global trends. The religious-cum political 'turn' that the Moroccan state has seen has pushed the *Tariqa* to start a new chapter in the track of change, appearing in different leadership styles and roles.

Constituting the political elite of the Moroccan state, the officials of the *Qadiri Būdshīshi* brotherhood have benefitted from the close relationship with the state to achieve "their personal political ends", "through what Shah and Qazi (2022) call "elite instrumentalism" (p. 3). Further, this calls for our attention the fact that 'elite instrumentalism' uses a system of beliefs, ideas, symbols, and sometimes institutions to

vehicle their agenda and attain brand positioning. (Shah & Qazi, 2022) In the same vein, in the process of rebranding and image-enhancing, the brotherhood has fostered a plethora of strategies, which have proved beneficial for the female discipleship of the *Tariqa*.

Usually, religious orders embark on transformative strategies or rebranding initiatives driven by a confluence of motives, weaving a complex tapestry of adaptation and renewal. Motivated by a desire to resonate with contemporary values, attract a diverse membership, and respond to internal challenges, these endeavors transcend traditional boundaries. In the face of declining influence or crises, rebranding becomes a strategic response, offering a pathway to revitalization and relevance. Interfaith dialogue, globalization, and the need for positive outreach contribute to the evolving identity of religious orders.

2. Methodology

2.1. Research design

The research design for this study on the *Qadiriyya Būdshīshiyya Sufi* order employed a qualitative approach to delve into the nuanced experiences, beliefs, and practices of *Sufi* women across diverse social classes within the community. The primary method utilized was in-depth interviews, guided by a carefully constructed interview guide. This qualitative design allowed for a detailed exploration of the opinions and attitudes of *Sufi* women within the *Qadiriyya Būdshīshiyya* order.

2.2. Participants

The participants in this qualitative study were purposefully selected *Sufi* women affiliated with the *Qadiriyya Būdshīshiyya Sufi* order. The sample deliberately included women from various social classes within the community to ensure a rich and diverse representation. The study focused on two distinct groups: *Sufi* women with access to formal education and those from lower socio-economic backgrounds who did not have such opportunities. This intentional selection aimed at capturing a broad spectrum of perspectives and experiences within the female *Sufi* community.

2.3. Sampling

The research employed a purposive sampling strategy to carefully select participants from the *Qadiriyya Būdshīshiyya* community. A deliberate and thoughtful approach was taken to ensure the inclusion of Sufi women from diverse social classes within the community. The study focused on two distinct groups: *Sufi* women with access to formal education and those from lower socio-economic backgrounds who did not have such opportunities. This purposeful sampling aimed at capturing a broad spectrum of perspectives and experiences within the female Sufi community. The inclusion criteria were based on the richness of individual narratives and the potential for in-depth exploration of opinions and attitudes. The research exclusively relied on open-ended interview questions, providing participants with the freedom to express their thoughts, beliefs, and experiences in a comprehensive and nuanced manner.

2.4. Data analysis method

Given the qualitative nature of the study and the focus on opinions and attitudes rather than numerical data, the data analysis involved a thematic analysis approach. Open-ended survey responses and interview transcripts were systematically analyzed to identify recurring themes, patterns, and variations in the experiences and perspectives of the participants. This qualitative analysis allowed for an in-depth exploration of the intricacies within the female Sufi community, offering a nuanced understanding of the social and cultural dynamics at play within the *Qadiriyya Būdshīshiyya* order.

2.5. Confidentiality

Moreover, this study was inspired by my own first-hand experiences with these women, who I had the opportunity to interact with during my fieldwork. This allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of *Sufi* women in the *Qadiriyya* order and helped inform the design of my study. Specifically, I drew inspiration from a variety of sources that informed my research on the *Būdshīshiyya* community. One such source was a social-networking website that the *Būdshīshiyya* uses as a communication platform. It is important to note that I was granted explicit permission by these women to be part of the group and

conduct my observations. While I am unable to disclose specific details or discussions due to the confidentiality and ethical considerations surrounding the research, this material provided valuable insights into the ways in which community members engage with one another and exchange information. Although not directly analyzed in this study, the available material has the potential to contribute to a nuanced analysis of gender and class dynamics within the *Tariqa*, given its relevance to the participants' experiences.

3. Results

In light of the transformative strategies employed by the *Būdshīshi Sufi Order* to rebrand its image and the limited scholarly attention directed toward the subject, it is insightful to draw parallels with studies that have explored rebranding within religious contexts. Roest and Uphoff's (2016) foundational study on the Observant reforms in the fifteenth century sheds light on the profound effects of revitalizing monastic communities, challenging conventional notions of decline. Similarly, the *Būdshīshiyya*'s efforts to reconceptualize spirituality and female mysticism reflect a strategic reshaping of religious identity, emphasizing the fluidity and interconnectedness within the *Sufi* tradition.

Felix Wilfred's (2017) exploration of religious identity and change is particularly relevant in understanding the intentional emphasis on identity, or "salience," within religious communities. The *Būdshīshiyya*'s emphasis on the role of women and the national dialogue initiated by the Sheikh align with the strategic nature of accentuating religious identity, especially in critical circumstances. This resonates with Wilfred's insights into the pivotal role of emotions in the process of identity salience, underscoring the complex dynamics involved when religious communities, such as the *Būdshīshiyya*, undertake transformative strategies to reshape their identity. Moreover, the appropriation of the term 'branding' from the advertising realm, as explored by Cayla and Arnould (2008), adds depth to the discussion. Considering *Sufi* orders as brands in the cultural and economic landscape, the *Būdshīshiyya*'s rebranding efforts are akin to a form of

communication aimed at conveying a specific image. This conceptualization allows us to dissect the components of the *Būdshīshiyya*'s branding and explore its historical evolution and social context. Acknowledging that women's experiences are integral to the *Sufi* tradition, it is crucial to recognize their contributions as part of the broader history and legacy of *Sufism*, even if they may not explicitly brand the *Sufi* order itself.

The insights from these studies provide a valuable comparative framework, illustrating that the modernizing approach of the *Būdshīshiyya* has not only impacted their public image but has also indirectly benefited their female disciples in navigating contemporary societal expectations. To push the discussion further in the direction of how the brotherhood has rebranded its image, it is appropriate to postulate that the *Būdshīshi Sufi Order* has exponentially earned a key role in Moroccan society, in an attempt to carve a steadfast foothold among other competing *Sufi* orders. The order has endorsed its position through the rebranding of its image, grasped through diverse methodological tools. Just as a company undertakes a change in its corporate image, the *Būdshīshi* order has gone as far as to suggest a reconceptualization of spirituality and female mysticism.

The age-old definition and perception of *Sufism* begs the question of opening space for a more modernity-enrobed form of spirituality, as incarnated in media platforms. Second, and on more recent grounds, the order has aimed the transformation of the cultural ground of Moroccans' perceptions of women in the *Sufi* arena through media to serve gender inclusivity in the *Būdshīshiyya*, and to reposition the order within an expanding globalized scope so as to appeal to the taste of the major international social, cultural, and racial strata. The rebranding efforts manifest in exploiting the popularity of a current trend that plays on the image of 'lineage' of the *Sheikh*. The lineage is attributable to the Prophet and constitutes an establishing method of the *Sufi Tariqa*. In this sense, it is customary to hear or read accounts tracing the *Sheikh*'s descent to Prophet Mohammed to endorse his legitimacy and empower his position. (Hammoudi, 1997, as cited in Jahfa, 2010) In the same vein of thought, this ideology-driven strategy of influencing the

public's perception of the order has channeled impulsions to serve a community thirsty for change.

The strife to refashion the order's image taps into a campaign that foregrounds the collective behavior of disciples. The order has run a campaign in all the *zawiyas* nation-wide to emphasize profound good manners and conduct practices that proliferate an enhanced image revamp in conformity with the presumed acts.³ By this account, the *Sheikh* stipulated, through words channeled by *Imqedma* that adepts bring their children to the *zawiya* until they acquire a proper conduct sketch that is in accordance with the order's fundamental line of thought.⁴ On a more profound level, *Būdshīshi* women have been tasked with the potential of establishing a better relationship with occasional visitors coming to the *zawiya* from time to time, and to lure followers to the *Tariqa*⁵. In a weekly gathering, *Imqedma* recounted that the *Sheikh* punctuated the role women play in "recreating a new version of order". From a purely functional point of view, the *Sheikh*, understanding the shortcomings of having a one-episodic thinking, through the presence of male followers, -in addition to obscuring a large female following-, initiated a national dialogue about the presence of women in public. He broadened the parochial perspective about *Sufi* women of *Būdshīshiyya*, and highlighted the need to educate a new generation of disciples in order to recognize the public presence of women as the norm.

It is true that the changing perspective about women stems from the awareness of the actual presence of women within the sphere of *Sufism* in Morocco. Below, I explore the visions of some respondents to the survey about the role of women in the *Tariqa* and the image it channels about its female adepts:

³ *Zawiya* is a saintly sphere, sometimes the saint's sanctuary, or the *Sufi* lodge where mystical rituals take place.

⁴ *Imqedma* is the leading woman of the weekly gatherings of female disciples. She oversees "the communal activities". (Haitami, 2014; Bekkaoui, 2011)

⁵ In *Sufism*, a *Tariqa* is a spiritual path or order that provides guidance and teachings for its adherents to follow in their pursuit of divine knowledge and closeness to God. (Sedgwick, 2000)

Respondent 1: “I think they are less educated because they are easy to be spiritually influenced”.

Respondent 2: “Young credulous women and easily dissuaded”.

Respondent 3: “Chaste and decent”.

Respondent 6: “Respectful as their male compatriots”.

Respondent 8: “They are there to act as being impactors and open-minded”

Respondent 9: “educated and open-minded”.

Tellingly, most perceptions discounted the presence of *Būdshīshīyyat* in public space, which is perhaps emblematic of a ubiquitous trend that relates women’s space to a private sphere. Such perspectives lead us back to think that women’s spiritual agency is even more overlooked in the heavily polarized debates. Clearly, fifty out of two hundred respondents rehearsed a circulating ideological trend that views *Sufi* women as conformists to standards of propriety and morality, while in fact, this is not the only aspect of spirituality.

Likewise, the immediate interest of *Tariqa* has negated this often-restrictive category, and, instead, proposed women occupying media portrayals, marketing women’s writings and activities to buttress the *Būdshīshi* institution. A glimpse at *Markaz al-Jounaid* (an internet-based center for research on *Sufism*) reveals a growing body of women’s writing providing female models of pious type to be emulated, and exhuming narratives of the past *Sufi* women. This wins over the rate of *Sufi* women appearing in print media, encourages them to publish their personal experiences, and “publish theological treatises or grand narratives of providential history”. (Brekus, 2012, p. 482) Female writing represents an academic rigor constitutive of their involvement in the rebranding strategy alongside *Būdshīshi* male disciples. These comprehensive accounts of writings by *Būdshīshīyyat* contribute to the structure of the order and substantiate large breadth of scholarship about the *Tariqa*.⁶ While these writings serve the corroboration of the order’s image, they obscure the fact that these *Sufi* women have meddled in the

⁶ *Būdshīshīyyat* is an appellation used to refer to the female disciples of the *Būdshīshi Tariqa*.

remedy of false binaries and have diametrically reversed the writings to their ends.

More importantly, there is a level of recognition among *Būdshāshi* managers that in order to secure the continuity of the institutional structure, and thus rebrand its image, the order should lure more urban elites, and hence improve its clientelist networks. *Sufi* elites constitute the order's cultural and symbolic capital. They are the ultimate marker of the order, since they mediate the relationship between the order, the public, and the state, and secure more power within the fledgling state. However, prioritizing clientelist networks over the core values of inclusivity and spirituality can lead to a loss of authenticity and credibility for the *Sufi* brotherhood. It may be seen as compromising its principles for material gains, which can erode trust among its existing members and the broader community.

In fact, reading the order's strategic recruitment of urban elites is not a mere consequence of interest. Rather, it is a result of an appropriation of the quality of the structure the whole organization is entangled in. The codification of recruiting more urban elites engenders a signification of the "organizational performance and success" they bring about, especially that they inspire more educated people to join the organization; thus, make the *Tariqa*'s fame expand. (Villegas, 2007, p. 48) In the same manner, attracting elites advances the globalization of the order, particularly that elite disciples share collective notions of satisfaction and the belief that the order subsumes credited figures. In this framework, I cite a British disciple whom I met in a monthly gathering, and who admitted that it was because of her educated Moroccan friend that she discovered the appealing spiritual experience at the *Tariqa*. Her testimony summarizes the significant position elites hold within the order when she says: "I was totally swamped by the material world I lived in, but thanks to Mona, an enthusiastic engineer who diligently explained what *Sufism* meant, I could in parallel revive my dead spirit and move into a more transcendent world". Note that in this excerpt, the phrase "diligently explained" oscillates between reference to a good command of the subject matter, good education, and intelligence into luring international disciples.

Additionally, the name *Qadiri* constitutes the confines within which the *Tariqa* attempts to frame its status. Being an extension to the Middle

East *Sufi* order, namely the *Qadiri* order, the founder of which is Abdelkader Jilani, the *Qadiri Būdshīshi* stresses the relation of the name to the Iraqi founder, Abdelkader, in a bid to receive acclaim and recognition. Most *Būdshīshis* in Morocco refer to themselves as being adepts of “the *Qadiri Būdshīshi Tariqa*” because the name fulfills a distinguishing function that is measured based on their positioning within the public discourse. There is a straightforward attempt at self-identity by a direct affiliation to the *Qadiri* order. In claiming to be an offshoot of a widespread order, the *Tariqa* actually attempts to curb unlimited competition among national and international *Sufi* orders over who lures the largest number of disciples, particularly that it experiences growth annually. (Chih, 2012)

On the other hand, and at a different level, the *Tariqa* has called for a rewrite of stereotypes involving the recruitment of young Moroccan *Sufis* as they have the possibility of keeping up in an exponential world. A study, conducted by Bekkaoui and Larémont, reveals that “the percentage of female youth who are attracted to *Sufi* orders is higher than that for males”. (as cited in El Haitami, 2014, p. 202) Recent studies endorse the contribution of *Būdshīshiyat*, in particular, to the ongoing reconstruction of the image of *Tariqa*. (El Haitami, 2014; Hebbouch, 2019)

Clearly, the *Būdshīshiyya*’s approach, and while progressive in some aspects, has a potential flaw when it comes to promoting inclusivity and diversity within their community. By primarily focusing on attracting educated women with a strong spiritual inclination, they inadvertently limit participation to a specific segment of society. This exclusivity may lead to an underrepresentation of individuals from various social backgrounds, thereby undermining the true richness of diversity that could be present within the community. While the *Būdshīshiyya* aims to enhance representation and diversity, their emphasis on attracting a specific demographic of educated women might inadvertently create a less diverse and more homogenous community.

The *Būdshīshi Sufi Order*’s transformative journey toward rebranding its image involves a multifaceted approach, drawing parallels with studies exploring rebranding within religious contexts. Much like the Observant reforms of the fifteenth century, the *Būdshīshiyya*

strategically reshapes its religious identity, challenging conventional notions. This intentional emphasis on identity, or “salience,” within religious communities, as explored by Felix Wilfred, finds resonance in the *Būdshīshiyya*’s emphasis on the role of women and the initiation of a national dialogue by the *Sheikh*. The appropriation of the term 'branding' from the advertising realm adds depth to the discussion, framing *Sufi* orders as brands in the cultural and economic landscape. In this context, the *Būdshīshiyya*’s rebranding efforts are akin to a form of communication, aiming to convey a specific image and position itself within a broader historical and social context.

The rebranding efforts of the *Būdshīshi Sufi Order* extend beyond a mere image makeover. The order has strategically endorsed its position in Moroccan society by reconceptualizing spirituality and female mysticism. In line with contemporary trends, the order taps into media platforms to transform cultural perceptions of *Sufi* women. This concerted effort is not only aimed at appealing to the Moroccan audience but also at positioning the order within an expanding globalized scope. The utilization of the popular trend around the ‘lineage’ of the *Sheikh* exemplifies how the order leverages tradition to infuse modernity into its narrative.

The transformative campaign of the *Būdshīshiyya* delves into the collective behavior of disciples, emphasizing the importance of profound good manners and conduct practices. The *Sheikh*’s directives, channeled through *Imqedma*, underscore the role of adepts in bringing their children to the *zawiya* to instill a conduct aligned with the order’s fundamental beliefs. Furthermore, *Būdshīshi* women play a crucial role in establishing connections with occasional visitors, thereby contributing to the rebranding efforts and recreating a new version of the order. The initiation of a national dialogue about the presence of women in public spaces reflects a conscious effort to broaden perspectives and recognize the public role of *Sufi* women as the norm.

Amid the rebranding initiatives, the survey responses reflect diverse perceptions of the role of women within the *Tariqa*. While some respondents associated *Sufi* women with being spiritually influenced

and easily dissuaded, others described them as chaste, decent, and open-minded. These varying perspectives highlight the complexity of women's spiritual agency within *Sufism*, challenging stereotypes and emphasizing the need for a nuanced understanding of their multifaceted roles.

A noteworthy facet of the *Būdshīshiyya*'s rebranding strategy is the active engagement of female disciples in writing and media portrayal. Female disciples contribute to the order's image through publications, presenting models of piety and resurrecting narratives of past *Sufi* women. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that these contributions also challenge binary perceptions, offering a more comprehensive understanding of the diverse roles played by *Sufi* women within the order.

While the *Būdshīshiyya* strives for a modern and inclusive image, there is a discernible tension regarding the prioritization of clientelist networks and the recruitment of urban elites. The strategic recruitment of educated elites is seen as instrumental in expanding the *Tariqa*'s fame and globalizing its reach. However, this strategy raises concerns about potentially compromising the core values of inclusivity and spirituality, possibly eroding authenticity and credibility. The use of the name '*Qadiri Būdshīshi*' reflects an attempt to establish a distinct identity within the larger *Sufi* landscape. By aligning with the *Qadiri* order and emphasizing its affiliation with the Iraqi founder, Abdelkader Jilani, the *Būdshīshiyya* seeks acclaim and recognition. This framing strategically positions the order within the public discourse, curbing competition among *Sufi* orders and emphasizing its rootedness in tradition.

The *Būdshīshiyya*'s call for a rewrite of stereotypes involving the recruitment of young Moroccan *Sufis* underscores a commitment to adaptability in an exponentially changing world. Recent studies endorse the significant contribution of *Būdshīshiyyat* to the ongoing reconstruction of the *Tariqa*'s image, particularly among female youth. However, the progressive approach has a potential flaw, potentially

limiting participation to a specific demographic and hindering the true richness of diversity within the community.

To sum up, the themes that emerge from the *Būdshīshi Sufi Order*'s rebranding efforts encapsulate a complex interplay of tradition and modernity, gender dynamics, collective behavior, and strategic positioning within a globalized context. These multifaceted themes underscore the intricate and evolving nature of the *Būdshīshiyya*'s engagement with its identity, image, and societal role.

4. Conclusion

Analyzing the experiences of female disciples within *Sufism* offers valuable insights into the intricate interplay between gender and class interests, which intersect with the state's utilization of *Sufism* for political purposes. Through this examination, we can better understand how power dynamics, influenced by both gender and class, shape the state's co-optation of *Sufi* practices and its implications on women's roles and agency in this context. Throughout history, women have held significant roles within *Sufi* orders, assuming roles as disciples and leaders despite some orders' patriarchal nature. One could argue that the exclusive targeting of educated women fails to recognize the importance of diversity, leading to an exclusionary approach. However, it is noteworthy that this approach of exclusion may have benefitted those who are educated, enabling them to attain leadership positions and actively engage in spiritual and intellectual pursuits.

To a great extent, we cannot afford to ignore that media has played a role in increasing the *Tariqa*'s online presence and turning the virtual world into strategic advantage. Of course, the grounding principle to accrue this status is through targeting an urban elite and recruiting educated men and women. The purpose is to create a new spiritual trend and cultural identity through status reversal rather than keeping to a stagnant discipleship. The subtleties of these image-enhancement strategies have the implications of promoting the brotherhood's visibility and perceptions about it. Suffice it to say that there have been several factors that have further enhanced public attention towards *Sufi* women. The *Sufi* ritual practice and women's involvement in the movement have enriched their spiritual experience and crowned their

visibility among other female members of the *Sufi* community. The female voice in the *Būdshīshi* spiritual experience has superseded the devotional practices and *Sufi* rituals. Narratives of female *Sufi* disciples of the *Būdshīshi* brotherhood, as enriched through an in-depth study of *Sufi* women of the *Qadiri* community, unlock anecdotes and experiences, which have but revived the contribution of women to the *Būdshīshi* enterprise.

However, in certain historical and cultural contexts, the state's endorsement of *Sufism* has led to exclusionary practices that disproportionately affected women's participation in *Sufi* communities. Studying female *Sufi* disciples offers insights into the interplay of gender and class interests intersecting with the state's political use of *Sufism*. This examination reveals how power dynamics, influenced by gender and class, impact the state's co-optation of *Sufi* practices and its implications for women's roles and agency. Yet, targeting educated women may result in an exclusionary approach, benefitting only a specific segment. Notwithstanding that it is essential to acknowledge that despite its efforts to challenge these norms, the *Qadiriyya's* approach may not necessarily foster greater inclusion. While it may be breaking down some gender barriers, its selectivity in targeting only educated women suggests that it may still be exclusive in its practices.

Therefore, while it challenges patriarchal structures within its sphere, the scope of its overall inclusivity remains subject to scrutiny and could be further expanded to truly encompass a more diverse representation of women and their experiences. The *Qadiriyya's* exclusive focus on the educated elite among women may limit its inclusivity and fail to represent the broader social and cultural diversity within the female community. This approach could perpetuate class distinctions, disregarding other marginalized groups and undermining the inclusive nature of *Sufism's* fundamental message, which embraces people of all backgrounds and social classes.

The *Qadiriyya's* adoption of a rebranding strategy indicates a shift from a traditional outlook to a modern politically-active approach aiming to establish a robust brand identity. This rebranding has been beneficial for women, as it recognizes and elevates their experiences within the

Sufi tradition. While women's experiences are essential to the *Sufi* tradition, it is important to understand that they do not solely define the entire *Sufi* order. Rather, their contributions and experiences should be acknowledged and valued as essential components of the broader history and legacy of *Sufism*.

The premise that "elite instrumentalism" employs beliefs, ideas, symbols, and institutions to achieve its agenda (Shah & Qazi, 2022) draws focus to the fact that the *Qadiriyya*'s process of rebranding and image-enhancing has employed various strategies that have demonstrated benefits for the female discipleship within the *Tariqa*. Nevertheless, it is crucial to acknowledge that in this context, *Sufi* women of the *Qadiriyya* have been entangled within the dynamics of this strategic elitism, where their experiences and roles may have been influenced and shaped to fit the broader agenda of the brotherhood.

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