

The Role of the General Public in Preparing Sufi Rituals in Algeria During the Ottoman Era

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Abstract

This study explores the phenomenon of Sufism, aiming to transcend the narrow religious and political framework within which many researchers have traditionally confined it, and to illuminate its broader social and spiritual contributions to Algerian life. Sufism can be seen as a state within a state, offering a comprehensive method and approach to life. Sufi orders were instrumental in resolving disputes and conflicts, not only between individuals and groups but also between clans and tribes. They also played a vital social role by offering shelter to travelers and the needy. Moreover, the Zawiyas served as educational institutions, helping to preserve the Arab-Islamic identity, thereby functioning as true social, cultural, political, and religious institutions in Algeria during the Ottoman era. The involvement of the general populace in Sufism further amplified its influence, as the common people actively participated in spiritual and social practices such as the Hadra, Waada, and Zarda, along with various other Sufi rituals and events. Recognizing the importance of this phenomenon, the Ottoman authorities made concerted efforts to secure the loyalty of the Sufi orders by supporting them and assisting in the construction of Zawiyas and fortified religious buildings, known as Ribats.

Keywords : Sufism, Social Role, Spiritual Contributions, Zawiyas, Ottoman Era, Algerian Identity, Conflict Resolution .

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I- Introduction :

Sufism has specific terminology expressed through particular words and phrases that carry distinct meanings. These terms are often understood only by those with a deep knowledge of Sufism. When a reader encounters a Sufi book or treatise, they may come across terms that they do not comprehend, leading to confusion and uncertainty, as they are unable to grasp the true essence of these meanings. This lack of understanding prevents them from reaching the correct interpretation that would allow them to fully appreciate the Sufi tradition.

Additionally, some people criticize the role of Zawiyas, believing that they are associated with superstition, ignorance, and the practice of rituals and innovations under the guise of religion, invoking noble lineage, miracles, and blessings. Scholars and historians have debated the true nature and origins of Sufism, yet there are indications that point to a deeper understanding of its concept and roots.

In this context, the role of the general public in Sufism cannot be overlooked. Zawiyas served as centers where people gathered, not only to practice spiritual rituals but also to strengthen social and cultural ties. The participation of the general public in Sufi rituals and celebrations was a means to reinforce collective identity and spread Sufi teachings across different segments of society.

1.1.Sufism in Language:

The term's origin is a topic of significant debate. Some argue that it derives from the word "wool" (صوف), referring to the hair on a sheep's skin, symbolizing the simplicity and ascetic lifestyle associated with early practitioners. This interpretation links the term to the humble clothing worn by these individuals ⁽¹⁾. The origin of this term has sparked considerable debate among scholars and historians. One prevalent theory suggests that it is derived from the Arabic word "صوف" (wool), which refers to the woolly hair found on a sheep's skin. This connection to wool is believed to symbolize the simple and ascetic lifestyle of early

practitioners who often wore garments made from coarse wool as a mark of their humility and detachment from worldly pleasures. The use of wool in their clothing was not just a practical choice but also a spiritual one, representing a rejection of luxury and a commitment to a life of piety and simplicity. This interpretation emphasizes the symbolic significance of wool in embodying the values and principles of the early ascetics, making the term deeply rooted in the tradition of simplicity and devotion⁽²⁾.

From this perspective, it is apparent that there is considerable debate regarding the origin of the term "Sufism." Some scholars argue that there is no conclusive linguistic evidence in Arabic to support the derivation of the word from its commonly believed roots, whether through analogy or etymology. Al-Qushayri Al-Naysaburi, a prominent scholar, echoed this sentiment, suggesting that the term "Sufi" (صوفي) became linked to a specific group or class of people over time. According to him, the term evolved to describe individuals who embodied certain spiritual practices, leading to the common usage of "a Sufi man" (صوفي) for an individual and "Sufis" (صوفية) as the plural form.

Al-Qushayri further clarified that those who follow this spiritual path are often referred to as "Mutasawwif," with the plural being "Mutasawwifah." This indicates that the term "Sufi" might function more as an honorary title or designation rather than a direct reference to specific practices or clothing, such as the wearing of wool. The analogy he draws compares the use of the term "Sufi" to how one might say "Taqqammaş" for someone who wears a shirt, emphasizing that being a Sufi does not necessarily hinge on the physical wearing of woollen garments. Instead, the term encompasses a broader spiritual identity that transcends mere external appearance.

This analysis highlights the complexity and nuance involved in understanding the origins and meanings of "Sufism." It underscores that while some may associate the term with particular outward practices or symbols, such as woollen garments, its true significance lies in the spiritual qualities and inner path followed by those identified as Sufis. Therefore, the debate over the term's origin is not just a linguistic or etymological issue but also reflects the diverse interpretations of

what it means to be a Sufi in the broader context of Islamic spirituality⁽³⁾

Another theory proposes that the word "Sufi" might originate from the concept of the "first row" in prayer, symbolizing those who are closest to God in their devotion. Alternatively, it could be derived from "al-Ṣuffah" (الصفة), a special area at the back of the Prophet Muhammad's mosque where the poor and destitute would gather and take refuge. These individuals, known for their piety and simplicity, were often seen as embodying the spiritual ideals that later became associated with Sufism. The connection to "al-Ṣuffah" emphasizes the humble origins of the Sufi tradition, highlighting a way of life that prioritizes spiritual closeness to God over material wealth or status. This interpretation reflects the values of simplicity, devotion, and a deep commitment to faith, which are central to the Sufi path. Whether tied to the idea of being in the front ranks of prayer or the association with the poor who sought refuge in the mosque, the term "Sufi" thus carries connotations of both spiritual aspiration and humility.⁽⁴⁾ Another perspective suggests that the term "Sufi" may have its roots in the Greek language, specifically from the word "Sophia," which translates to "divine wisdom," and "Sophos," meaning "love of wisdom." Proponents of this theory argue that Sufism, as a spiritual path, is fundamentally about the pursuit of divine knowledge and understanding, aligning closely with the concepts of wisdom and enlightenment found in Greek philosophy. This connection to "Sophia" emphasizes the intellectual and mystical aspects of Sufism, portraying it as a tradition that seeks not only spiritual purity but also a deeper, more profound comprehension of the divine. The idea that Sufism could be linked to Greek thought highlights the cross-cultural influences that may have shaped its development, suggesting that Sufism embodies a universal quest for wisdom that transcends cultural and linguistic boundaries. Whether or not this etymology is accurate, it reflects the broad and inclusive nature of Sufism, which embraces both the heart's yearning for divine love and the mind's search for profound understanding.⁽⁵⁾ Considering the various theories regarding the origin of the term, words like "Safi," "Safai," or "Safwi" are sometimes used. However, "Safawi" is often misunderstood and not widely

recognized in its intended sense. Due to this confusion, these interpretations are typically viewed as weak and lacking strong evidence. While these alternatives attempt to explain the term's origin, they do not hold up well against more established explanations, making them less credible in the broader context of understanding the term "Sufi." Consequently, such interpretations are generally not favored by scholars ⁽⁶⁾.

Roaim explained that Sufism is founded on three essential qualities: embracing poverty and recognizing one's neediness, attaining spiritual realization through selflessness and putting others before oneself, and abstaining from pursuing personal desires or making choices driven by self-interest. These principles emphasize a deep commitment to humility, altruism, and detachment from worldly concerns, reflecting the core values of the Sufi path. Through these practices, a Sufi seeks to transcend the ego, achieve inner purity, and align more closely with the divine will, ultimately leading to a more profound spiritual experience ⁽⁷⁾. Sufis are a community of ascetics and devout worshippers dedicated to subduing the body's desires and elevating the soul to achieve a deeper connection with God. Their spiritual practices, centered on self-discipline and inner purification, have led to the formation of various sects within Sufism. Each of these sects offers its own unique approach to the mystical path, but all share the common goal of transcending worldly concerns and attaining closeness to the divine. Through this process, Sufis seek to cultivate a profound spiritual awareness and alignment with the divine presence ⁽⁸⁾. Sufism has been described in various ways, each capturing different aspects of its spiritual essence. One interpretation sees Sufism as the process of abandoning every base characteristic and adopting every noble one. This view emphasizes the transformative journey of purifying one's character by replacing vices with virtues like honesty, compassion, and humility.

Another perspective defines Sufism as the practice of adhering to the etiquettes of the Sharia, both outwardly and inwardly. This approach highlights the importance of living in accordance with Islamic law, not just in external actions, but also in inner intentions, aiming to create harmony between one's outer conduct and inner faith.

Some have described Sufism as surrendering the self to God's will, accepting all aspects of life as part of the divine plan. This surrender involves trusting in God's wisdom and relinquishing personal desires and control, aligning oneself with God's will.

Additionally, Sufism is associated with embracing poverty and neediness as spiritual states, reflecting a deep dependence on God and detachment from worldly attachments. In this state, humility and altruism become central, with the Sufi prioritizing the needs of others over their own.

Finally, Sufism is seen as devotion in worship and striving for excellence in all religious practices, seeking the best and most pleasing actions to God. This pursuit involves constant self-improvement and a deep love for God, motivating the Sufi to attain higher spiritual awareness and closeness to the divine⁽⁹⁾.

When asked about Sufism, Al-Junayd offered a profound definition, stating that it is "to be with God without any attachment, to own nothing, and for nothing to own you." This interpretation emphasizes the complete detachment from worldly possessions and desires, focusing entirely on a deep, unencumbered connection with the divine. It reflects the essence of Sufism as a spiritual practice that seeks to transcend material concerns, allowing the individual to exist in a state of pure devotion to God.

Similarly, Abdul Qadir Al-Jilani provided another significant perspective on Sufism, describing it as "sincerity with the Truth and good conduct with the Creator." His definition underscores the importance of being truthful and honest in one's relationship with God, while also embodying virtuous behavior. Al-Jilani's view highlights that Sufism is not only about internal spiritual states but also about how one interacts with the world and others, reflecting God's attributes through one's conduct.

Together, these interpretations capture the core of Sufism as a path of spiritual purity, ethical living, and profound detachment from the material world, all in pursuit of a closer relationship with the divine⁽¹⁰⁾.

Ma'ruf al-Karkhi added that Sufism is to adhere to the realities and despair of what is in the hands of creatures. Due to these differing interpretations, Abu al-Fath al-Busti recited:

People debated about the Sufi and disagreed *** They thought it
derived from wool (Şūf)

I grant this name only to a youth *** Who is pure and thus
became known as a Sufi⁽¹¹⁾

From the discussion above, it is evident that Sufism is not a sectarian group like the Sunnis or Shiites, but rather a spiritual path that transcends rigid affiliations. Sufism represents a mystical approach to Islam that has permeated various cultures and societies over time. Unlike defined religious sects, Sufism is more of an inward journey, emphasizing the development of a deep personal connection with the divine.

Sufism is characterized by several key qualities that set it apart. These include a focus on seclusion, where practitioners withdraw from worldly distractions to deepen their spiritual awareness. Tranquility is another hallmark, as Sufis seek inner peace through contemplation and remembrance of God. Love for others is central to the Sufi way, promoting compassion and kindness as a means to reflect divine love in human interactions.

Purification of the heart and soul is a fundamental goal in Sufism, where the practitioner strives to cleanse themselves of negative traits such as envy, pride, and anger, replacing them with virtues like humility, patience, and forgiveness. Sincerity in worship is also crucial; Sufis aim to worship God not out of fear or desire for reward but purely out of love and devotion.

In essence, Sufism is a spiritual path that encourages followers to cultivate a deeper, more meaningful relationship with God. It focuses on the inner transformation of the individual, promoting values that elevate the soul and foster a sense of unity with the divine and with all of humanity⁽¹²⁾.

All definitions of Sufism highlight that it emerges from personal experiences, which naturally differ from one Sufi to another. This individuality is why Sufism has been divided into two distinct fields: knowledge and practice.

From the perspective of knowledge, Sufism is viewed as a science that focuses on the principles necessary for the righteousness of the heart and the refinement of the senses. This aspect of Sufism, often referred to as "behavior" or "conduct," involves a deep understanding of spiritual principles that guide the Sufi toward inner purity and ethical living.

On the other hand, the practice of Sufism is about translating this knowledge into daily life. It involves exercising caution in fulfilling religious commands, diligently avoiding prohibitions, and confining oneself to the essentials of permissible actions. This practical side of Sufism is deeply rooted in worship, where the Sufi seeks to perform every act with mindfulness and sincerity, ensuring that even the simplest actions are aligned with the divine will.

Together, these two fields of Sufism-knowledge and practice-complement each other, providing a comprehensive approach to the spiritual path. The knowledge aspect gives the Sufi the necessary understanding to navigate the complexities of spiritual life, while the practice ensures that this understanding is applied in a way that nurtures the soul and brings one closer to God. Thus, Sufism is a dynamic and deeply personal journey that integrates intellectual insight with devoted practice⁽¹³⁾.

Sufism is fundamentally grounded in two key qualities: uprightness with God and tranquility with creation. A person who maintains integrity in their relationship with God, enhances their conduct toward others, and treats them with patience and understanding can be regarded as a true Sufi.

Uprightness with God entails a deep commitment to sacrifice personal desires in favor of adhering to divine commands. It reflects a profound alignment with God's will, where the individual places their spiritual obligations above worldly inclinations. This quality emphasizes the importance of prioritizing divine guidance over personal ambition or comfort.

On the other hand, good conduct with people involves a compassionate and patient approach to interacting with others. It requires not imposing one's own desires or preferences on others but rather accommodating their wishes and needs, provided these do not conflict with religious or moral laws. This aspect of Sufism highlights the value of empathy, kindness, and respect in social interactions, promoting harmony and understanding within the community.

Together, these qualities create a balanced approach to spirituality that nurtures both the individual's relationship with God and their relationships with others. Sufism, therefore, encourages a life of inner purity and outer harmony, where

devotion to God is complemented by compassionate conduct toward fellow human beings. This holistic approach defines the Sufi path as one that integrates personal spiritual growth with positive social engagement⁽¹⁴⁾

I. 2. Development of Sufism :

In the early days of Islam, devout Muslims practiced asceticism without distinguishing themselves through unique attire or symbols, and they remained fully integrated into the broader community both in their words and deeds. However, by the late second century, a distinct group of ascetics, later known as Sufis, began to emerge. This group set themselves apart by adopting specific customs, etiquettes, and practices that were not commonly observed by the general Muslim population.

These early Sufis introduced new sayings, actions, and forms of worship that were previously unknown within the broader Islamic tradition. Their practices and spiritual focus created a distinct identity that differentiated them from the general public. As a result, they began to attract followers who were drawn to their unique approach to spirituality and their dedication to living a life of asceticism and devotion.

The influence of these early Sufis grew over time, as people were inspired by their teachings, conduct, and acts of worship. This led to the development of a distinct Sufi tradition within Islam, characterized by a deep emphasis on personal spirituality, mystical experiences, and a closer, more intimate relationship with God. The rise of Sufism marked a significant evolution in Islamic spiritual practices, offering an alternative path for those seeking a more profound and introspective religious experience⁽¹⁵⁾

Sufism initially began as a deeply personal and individual spiritual practice, focused on inner purification and devotion. Over time, however, it evolved into a more communal and organized way of life, becoming a collective obligation for its adherents. As Sufism developed, it moved beyond personal

practice to include the documentation of the sayings and teachings of revered Sufi sheikhs, as well as accounts of their spiritual journeys and the miracles attributed to them. This transformation marked the transition of Sufism from a private spiritual path to a more structured and communal movement.

Initially, the Sufi movement was led by intellectuals and religious scholars who adhered closely to the Prophetic tradition. Their approach was deeply rooted in Islamic teachings, emphasizing spiritual devotion and moral conduct. However, as Sufism grew in popularity, it gradually transformed into a broader movement that resonated with the general population. This shift saw the rise of practices such as visiting saints' shrines, offering gifts, and seeking blessings from these holy figures.

As a result, domes, Zawiyas (spiritual retreats), and Sufi orders began to proliferate, particularly in rural areas where official religious authority was less present. In these regions, Sufism provided spiritual guidance and a sense of community, filling the void left by the absence of formal religious institutions. Over time, Sufism became a widespread and collective behavior, deeply ingrained in the social and religious fabric of the Muslim world. Its influence extended beyond the spiritual realm, garnering the loyalty of the public and even attracting the attention and support of the authorities. This evolution of Sufism from an individual pursuit to a popular, collective movement reflects its enduring impact on Islamic culture and society.⁽¹⁶⁾

As these spiritual movements gained momentum, groups of disciples naturally formed around their respective sheikhs, seeking guidance, direction, and spiritual discipline. This close mentorship led to the establishment of various Sufi orders, such as the Qadiriyya, Shadhiliyya, and Ahmadiyya. Each order developed its own unique sources and methodologies, reflecting the teachings and practices of their founding sheikhs. Despite these differences, all the orders were unified in their overarching mission: to guide people along the spiritual path and lead them toward a deeper understanding and connection with the divine.

These orders emphasized moral and spiritual development, aiming to direct their followers toward righteousness and inner purification. Through this shared purpose, the Sufi orders played a vital role in shaping the spiritual landscape, offering a structured approach to personal and communal religious life. Their influence extended across regions, helping individuals navigate their spiritual journeys and fostering a sense of unity and purpose within the broader Muslim community⁽¹⁷⁾

The life of a Sufi disciple initially focused on receiving the teachings and recitations of the order while actively participating in rituals such as the Hadra, Sufi chanting, and recounting the miracles of saints. In earlier times, disciples were deeply committed to purifying their souls and acquiring religious knowledge, striving to align their inner lives with spiritual principles. However, as Sufism evolved, the practices within each order began to shift. The emphasis on spiritual purification and knowledge gradually gave way to more symbolic and communal expressions of devotion.

Over time, these Sufi groups started to adopt distinctive symbols, such as banners, to represent their unique identity. These banners, typically red or green, became a visible marker of each order, distinguishing one from another during gatherings and rituals. The adoption of these symbols marked a shift in focus from the internal, personal spiritual journey to a more outward expression of collective identity.

This evolution in practice reflects the broader changes within Sufism as it adapted to different cultural and social contexts. While the core principles of soul purification and spiritual knowledge remained important, the rituals and symbols associated with each order became central to the disciple's experience. These developments contributed to the rich diversity within Sufism, allowing each order to maintain its distinct traditions while continuing to emphasize the shared goals of spiritual growth and connection to the divine⁽¹⁸⁾

Despite the founders of Sufi orders claiming to follow the teachings of the Quran and the Prophet's tradition, they often introduced and propagated their own unique doctrines, which diverged significantly from the core principles of Islam. These teachings, while rooted in spiritual practice, sometimes strayed far from established religious guidelines, leading to interpretations and practices that were not always aligned with the original tenets of the faith. This deviation highlights the contrast between the intended adherence to religious foundations and the actual practices that evolved within some Sufi orders over time⁽¹⁹⁾

They manipulated the public, transforming Sufism into a tool for bribery, corruption, and the spread of religious innovations. This misuse led to Sufism becoming associated with charlatanism, dervish practices, and the veneration of graves. As a result, the original spiritual essence of Sufism was overshadowed by these corrupt practices. One historian observed that the religion of Algeria's Marabouts had deteriorated to the point where it resembled paganism. This degradation reflected how far Sufism had strayed from its true purpose, becoming entangled in superstitions and practices that were far removed from the core teachings of Islam, ultimately leading to a distorted perception of Sufism in the eyes of the public⁽²⁰⁾

The Ottoman era was marked by the widespread dissemination of Sufism, where knowledge, ignorance, and superstitions merged, dominating social life in an unprecedented manner. Since the 15th century, the general public embraced Sufism due to the services provided by Zawiyas to the community, the vernacular discourse, and the simplification of knowledge to attract followers. As a result, the geographical expansion of Sufism led to a decline in intellectual depth, causing intellectual and scientific stagnation in society⁽²¹⁾

It is evident from the above that Sufism in Algeria during the Ottoman era was an extension of the Islamic movements that emerged in the 10th century AH, initiated by prominent Sufis

The Sufi movement, whether at the level of the Islamic world or the Maghreb, flourished before the arrival of the Ottomans in Algeria ⁽²²⁾

I. 3. History of Sufism in Algeria:

Most historians believe that it is difficult to determine the exact beginning of Sufism in the Islamic Maghreb. They suggest that Sufism emerged with the Islamic conquests and gained its precise meaning with the spread of scientific journeys, the flourishing of trade, and the writing of literature. Sheikh Abdul Salam Al-Tunisi and Abu Madyan Al-Ghawthi were among the first to introduce Sufism in Algeria. Among the social factors that contributed to its spread were the prevalence of luxury and extravagance due to extreme wealth, and the decline of religious and moral values ⁽²³⁾

Sufism, or the Sufi orders, which were a general social and cultural phenomenon in Islamic society, preceded the Ottomans in Algeria. The ideas of Ibn Arabi had already spread in Algeria before the arrival of the Ottomans, in addition to the teachings of Sheikh Abdul Qadir Al-Jilani. Sufism flourished in Algeria thanks to the school of Abdul Rahman Al-Tha'alibi, Muhammad ibn Yusuf Al-Sanusi, Ahmad Zarrouq, and others ⁽²⁴⁾

No one can deny that the Quranic Zawiyas represent an important historical chapter in Algeria, given their significant role in spreading religious and cultural awareness in Algerian society. Zawiyas did not appear in Algeria until after the 11th century AD, and the oldest Zawiya established in Algeria is Sheikh Sa'ada's Zawiya near Tolga in the 13th century. Zawiyas then spread across the country ⁽²⁵⁾

According to the narration of Abu Madyan Shu'ayb, he says: "Our path was taken from Abu Ya'za, through his chain of transmission from Al-Junayd, from Sari Al-Saqati, from Habib Al-Ajami, from Al-Hasan Al-Basri, from Ali -may Allah be

pleased with them- from the Prophet, peace be upon him, from Gabriel, peace be upon him, from the Lord of the Worlds" (²⁶)

It is worth noting that Sufism in Algeria was a clear social phenomenon, and its influence was strong. This was aided by various factors, most notably the existence of Sufi institutions like Zawiyas and palaces in cities and rural areas, which performed all social, educational, and religious functions. These institutions also had a spiritual influence on individuals, affecting their behavior with everyone, including their closest relatives (²⁷)

One of the main functions of Zawiyas was to work towards social unity, a task to which the Sufi orders dedicated all their material and human resources. Their goal was to achieve unity among the diverse members of society, regardless of their dialects, languages, ranks, or positions. They sought to establish strong social relations aimed at eliminating social differences within society, bringing together the rich and the poor, scholars and the illiterate, placing them in one melting pot. Additionally, all Zawiyas across different regions united in efforts to mediate between conflicting parties. For instance, the Sharif Sidi Hamu Belhaj's family holds a prominent position among the Tuat families, both due to the status of the Sharifs among the Tuat people and the social role they played (²⁸)

As a result, Zawiyas became sanctuaries for locals seeking to resolve disputes. These institutions effectively functioned as judicial centers, handling both civil and criminal cases. The Sheikh, respected for his knowledge, social standing, and reputation for fairness and wisdom, would preside over these matters. Disputes were often settled through mutual agreement, compensation, or blood money in cases involving inheritance or crimes, with tribal intervention playing a role in instances of revenge. Beyond their judicial functions, Zawiyas also served as venues for wedding ceremonies, offering support for group marriages and strengthening communal bonds. Through these multifaceted roles, Zawiyas became central to both the spiritual

and social fabric of their communities, providing a space where justice, social support, and religious practices converged⁽²⁹⁾

The social tasks of the zawiyas include providing shelter and food for the poor and guests, and caring for widows, orphans, and travelers⁽³⁰⁾ Sufi zawiyas have continued to fulfill this role to this day in many regions, and this is not exclusive to Algerian zawiyas but applies to zawiyas in any part of the world, regardless of what they are called, as these zawiyas take care of these aspects This social function played a significant role in attracting a large number of people to Sufi orders, as they combined the provision of food and shelter with the practice of Sufi rituals that have a special appeal, turning those cared for into followers, whether they realized it or not⁽³¹⁾

Dr Abd al-Latif al-Shadhili pointed out the longstanding relationship between Sufism and social solidarity, stating that the process of feeding and sheltering represents a fundamental element of the Sufi system This system is based on mutual support, where every traveling Sufi can benefit from hospitality wherever they go This role is well-known and widespread; zawiyas welcome all kinds of people, even the mentally ill, to care for them or assign them various tasks of the zawiya, eventually making them followers of the order to which they belong⁽³²⁾

In addition to education, the zawiyas work on providing disciples and followers with religious rituals and litanies that grant them happiness in this world and the hereafter, where the student learns patience, asceticism, respect for people, moral refinement, and punctuality⁽³³⁾

Zawiyas rely on donations, endowments, zakat funds, and gifts offered by visitors seeking blessings from the shrine They are also allocated lands whose income goes to the zawiya, and these lands are often located around the zawiya and are worked

on by the zawiya's men These lands are considered protected areas that no one dares to encroach upon ⁽³⁴⁾

I. 4. The Impact of Zawiyas and Sufis on Social Life in Algeria:

Zawiyas were a vital center in Algerian society through their architecture, which included facilities that served the community and met its needs They contained places for Quran memorization and recitation, for performing prayers, which served as the zawiya mosque, as well as schools, guesthouses, rooms for student accommodation, facilities for receiving visitors and guests, and annexes for housing the zawiya's residents or those in charge of its operation Additionally, there were necessary facilities such as kitchens, stables, storage for supplies, mills for grinding grains, oil presses, and more ⁽³⁵⁾

Zawiyas played an important role in providing food for the poor and needy, offering food weekly on every Friday night and during special occasions Often, donors stipulated that part of their endowments be used by the zawiyas to feed the poor and distribute bread to them ⁽³⁶⁾ Zawiyas would also prepare couscous with meat annually to celebrate the Prophet's birthday or to resolve disputes between individuals or tribes, acting as arbiters in conflicts over power This contributed to enhancing social stability and security by quelling strife and civil wars and preventing bloodshed Feasts were also held to commemorate the birth or death of a righteous saint ⁽³⁷⁾

Zawiyas also played a role in distributing alms to the poor, varying between giving them direct money and providing food weekly or during special occasions Endowments played a significant role in funding zawiyas for charitable activities, which is why zawiyas allocated portions of their income for almsgiving Among the poor, it became common to request charity in the name of a righteous saint, appealing to people with such phrases ⁽³⁸⁾

Zawiyas also worked to revive occasions and engage in various activities, seizing the opportunity to engage in charitable

work, especially almsgiving and communal feeding. Significant funds were allocated for these celebrations, and cooking supplies were provided for the purpose of feeding. As for shelter, zawiyas took responsibility for addressing the housing crisis for the poor and homeless, constructing shelters that housed poor students and strangers in one part and gravediggers and visitors in another. Zawiyas were known as the "Guest House" and also called "House of Dignity" ⁽³⁹⁾

It cannot be denied that the institution of zawiyas played a role in preserving Islamic identity through the adoption of a unified method in all centers of learning, known as the method of the slate, pen, and inkpot, and by teaching mnemonic devices and memorizing texts to reinforce what they learned in various sciences and arts. One of the Shanqiti scholars expressed enthusiasm for the traditional method of the zawiyas by saying:

"O son, let your slate be your companion. The slate is superior to gold coins and wealth.

The essence for a Zawiya student is the slate; always without it, there is neither honor nor dignity. O my friend, dedicate your life without extending it. If you are stingy with it, you will be blamed, but if you spend it, it will be well-spent⁽⁴⁰⁾

During the Ottoman period, Algerian society was in need, with deteriorating conditions, and superstition spread among some who claimed to be Sufis. The spread of innovations and belief in superstitions, along with the dominance of certain Sufi orders, led to a reaction from a group of Muslim jurists and Sunni Salafi scholars who were pained by the current state, troubled by the social life, and disturbed by the prevalence of misguidance and the return to ignorance. These scholars were the early pioneers of the religious, moral, and social reform movement in the land of martyrs. People turned to Sufis and religious men for guidance, omens, and assistance, leading to the spread of many social beliefs⁽⁴¹⁾

Some believed that the heavens rejoiced and mourned for these righteous individuals. It was said that upon the death of a

saint, extraordinary events occurred, such as thunder and strong winds that darkened the sky, which they interpreted as the heavens mourning him. The miracles of saints were seen as akin to the miracles of prophets, as they claimed that they obtained these by following the path of the prophets⁽⁴²⁾

The general public also believed in the suspension of obligations for the saint, meaning that it was permissible for him to do what was forbidden and that he was exempt from all commands. This led to moral decay, and their actions were misunderstood by some people, leading them to engage in the worst behaviors and commit heinous acts, which were justified by others as being among the miracles. When these individuals went to the markets, people flocked to them, kissing their hands and feet⁽⁴³⁾

Sufism in the Maghreb developed during the 16th century, as large numbers of the general public and followers joined the *zawiyas* and focused on Sufism. The Sufi phenomenon began to attract different social classes and from various cultural levels, spreading widely within society⁽⁴⁴⁾

Among the positive aspects of the Sufi orders was the establishment of a sense of love, companionship, and camaraderie among the members of the same order, bringing together different social classes. The rich sat next to the poor, and the scholar next to the ignorant, in gatherings of knowledge and Sufi remembrance sessions. Their terms became widespread, with the larger *dhikr* known as (*Wird*), the companion called (*our brother*), the speaker known as (*the poor one*), and when one asked another for something, it was customary to begin the address with "Yes, my lord," while the head of the gathering was known as (*Muqaddam*). Some of these terms are still in use today, while others have faded away⁽⁴⁵⁾

Zawiyas in Islamic countries performed significant educational and religious functions, greatly contributing to the teaching, memorization, and study of the Quran. They played an essential role in educating the youth. The design and components

of these zawiyas provide a complete picture of the functions they served, which, although they varied from country to country, all shared the goals for which they were built ⁽⁴⁶⁾

Although Sufism in Algeria contributed to spreading religious teachings and preserving them through mosques and zawiyas, which became beacons of light throughout Algeria, such as the significant role played by the order whose sheikhs' struggle was an honorable model, remaining steadfast in their virtues and concerned with social and religious life, combining knowledge and action, and calling for the purification of Sufi orders from innovations and superstitions, some Sufi orders deviated from the correct path, thus contributing to the destruction of society rather than its building. Therefore, it can be said that Sufism, as an active phenomenon, needs to strike a balance between excess and negligence to be effective ⁽⁴⁷⁾

II- Results and discussion :

In conclusion, the most notable findings regarding the status of Sufism in Ottoman Algeria are:

- 01- Spiritual Independence: Sufis' status was rooted in their intrinsic qualities and the philosophy of humility and asceticism, not political influence
- 02- Community Service: Sufis were deeply involved in providing protection and essential services, such as supporting the needy, alleviating poverty, and offering shelter
- 03- Charitable Roles: Zawiyas functioned as charitable institutions, using endowments to support their work, particularly in the absence of state assistance
- 04- Education and Knowledge: Zawiyas played a key role in education, preserving religious and scientific knowledge, and establishing libraries within their communities
- 05- Reduction of Class Distinctions: Through their teachings and practices, Zawiyas worked to reduce social and class distinctions, promoting a sense of equality among followers
- 06- Islamic Brotherhood: Zawiyas fostered a deep sense of Islamic belonging and brotherhood, especially among the rural tribes of Algeria

07- Moral and Spiritual Guidance: Sufi sheikhs provided moral and spiritual direction, guiding individuals on the path to righteousness and spiritual growth⁽⁴⁸⁾

08- Judicial Functions: Zawiyas often acted as informal judicial bodies, helping resolve disputes within their communities based on fairness and wisdom

09- Social Stability: The presence of Zawiyas contributed to social stability, providing a moral framework that helped maintain order in rural areas

10- Cultural Preservation: Zawiyas played a significant role in preserving cultural traditions and Islamic practices in their regions

11- Economic Support: By managing endowments and donations, Zawiyas provided economic support to their communities, including funding for public works and social services

12- Spiritual Practices: Sufi orders emphasized spiritual practices such as meditation, chanting, and prayer, which were central to their way of life

13- Influence on Islamic Thought: Sufism influenced broader Islamic thought, contributing to theological discussions and the development of Islamic mysticism

14- Human Resource Development: Zawiyas cultivated individuals with strong moral character, good reputation, and loyalty to their community and nation

15- Legacy and Distinction: Despite the confusion between authentic Sufi practices and charlatanism, the true legacy of Sufism remains its profound impact on spiritual, social, and moral life in Islamic society

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