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Abstract This research paper explores the social dimension of Sufism and the Sufi orders in the Western Beylik of Algeria, emphasizing their historical evolution, sociological functions, and institutional significance within the Ottoman period. Adopting an interdisciplinary historical-sociological methodology, the study examines how Sufi institutions (zawiyas) transcended spiritual boundaries to become key social agents shaping community cohesion, education, conflict resolution, and political mediation. The research situates Sufism within the broader Ottoman administrative and cultural framework, revealing how religious brotherhoods—such as the Qadiriyya, Shadhiliyya, and Tijaniyya—contributed to the formation of a dynamic social order characterized by moral solidarity and localized governance. The paper argues that Sufism served both as a stabilizing moral authority and as a medium for negotiating between state and society. The Ottoman administration's pragmatic support for Sufi institutions—through endowments, privileges, and alliances—allowed them to function as semi-autonomous social systems that transmitted religious knowledge, preserved local traditions, and maintained social balance. However, the study also highlights the ambivalent consequences of this relationship: certain Sufi orders, through excessive veneration of charismatic leaders and isolation from rational inquiry, contributed to intellectual stagnation and dependency on ritual authority. By critically analyzing archival sources, travel accounts, and local historiography, this research underscores that Sufi orders were not merely mystical movements but integral sociopolitical actors within the Western Beylik's urban and rural structures. Their legacy persists in the moral imagination and communal practices of Algerian society. The findings deepen our understanding of how religious networks can function as instruments of both cultural continuity and social transformation.	
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Introduction:

Sufism and the Sufi orders represented one of the most significant religious and social phenomena in Ottoman Algeria, particularly in the Western Beylik, where zawiya played a central role in the daily life of society. Their presence extended beyond the purely spiritual dimension to become genuine social institutions that fulfilled multiple functions: the dissemination of religious education, the promotion of solidarity and mutual aid, mediation in resolving conflicts, and the consolidation of social and political stability.

The incorporation of Algeria into the Ottoman Empire provided a favorable environment for the expansion of Sufi orders and their active participation in various spheres of life. This was partly due to the Ottomans' own inclination toward Sufism—especially the Bektashi order—and partly because the Ottoman authorities employed Sufism as a means of securing order, stability, and legitimacy within Algerian society, as well as mobilizing defense against external threats. In addition, the Sufi orders played an influential educational and cultural role, emerging as institutions and elites that contributed to the organization and cohesion of Algerian society.

Nevertheless, these functions were not without their limitations. Certain orders became characterized by insularity and an overreliance on charismatic leadership, while others contributed—directly or indirectly—to the narrowing of intellectual pursuits, as rational sciences gave way to a stronger emphasis on spiritual practice.

Against this backdrop, the present study seeks to explore the social dimension of Sufism and the Sufi orders in the Western Beylik of Algeria by addressing the following central question: **In what ways did Sufism and the Sufi orders shape the social structure of the Western Beylik during the Ottoman period, and how did their roles and functions manifest themselves, both positively and negatively?** This question generates a series of sub-questions:

- What historical conditions facilitated the emergence and expansion of Sufism and the Sufi orders in the Western Beylik?
- What were the principal social functions performed by these orders within society?
- How did these functions affect the social and political fabric, whether positively or negatively?

1. The Western Beylik: Geography and History

The term *Beylik* is an old Turkish word originally borrowed by the Turks from the Mongols and Seljuks. It was used as a title for high-ranking officials and commanders entrusted with administering provinces, often referred to as “ministers of the exterior.” In the Algerian context, however, the *Beylik* represented a political, administrative, economic, and even ideological system adopted by the Ottomans to accommodate the local mentality. At the head of each *Beylik* stood a *Bey*—a general administrator responsible for the affairs of the designated territory—who

remained under the authority of the central government in Algiers, yet enjoyed a certain degree of autonomy in managing its resources¹.

Following the settlement of the Barbarossa brothers in Algiers, efforts were made to extend Ottoman authority into the country's interior, bringing it under the empire's banner. The vast geographical space necessitated the division of Algeria into provinces to facilitate governance and resource management. The western regions attracted early attention, particularly with the strategic control of Cherchell, located near Algiers². This expansion continued with Aruj's campaign against Ténès and its ruler, Hamida al-Abdi, paving the way for deeper Ottoman penetration into western Algeria, ultimately reaching Tlemcen³.

The emergence of the *Beylik* as a political and administrative division dates back to the first half of the 16th century, during the rule of Hassan Pasha, the son of Khayr al-Din, who governed between 1540 and 1552. To facilitate governance, Algeria was divided into four *Beyliks*. The first capital of the Western Beylik was Mazouna, designated in 1563⁴, with Abu Khadija becoming the first *Bey* of the region⁵.

Geographically, the Western Beylik extended from the borders of Morocco in the west, along the Moulouya River, to the frontiers of the *Beylik* of Titteri and Dar al-Sultan in the east. Scholars differ regarding its precise eastern limits: some considered them to be the city of Miliana and the Chelif River⁶, while al-Hajj al-Sharif al-Zuhar mentioned that the authority of the Bey of Oran stretched as far as Bouhluane and into the Titteri district⁷. To the north, the territory reached the Mediterranean coast, and to the south it extended into the Sahara—referred to by Thomas Shaw as the “Land of Jarid.” At its maximum extent, the Beylik measured roughly 80 leagues from east to west and 25 leagues from north to south⁸. The southern boundaries, however, remained fluid and often depended on the campaigns conducted by successive *Bey*s. One of the most significant delineations of its borders was provided by Aramburu, who emphasized topographical features, placing its limits between the Chelif River in the east and the Moulouya in the west⁹.

What most distinguished the political system of the Western Beylik was its inherently military character. This stemmed from several factors: the strained relations with the Moroccan dynasties, particularly the Saadians and later the Alaouites, where the Beylik functioned as a bulwark against expansionist ambitions; the Spanish occupation of Oran and Mers el-Kébir between 1505 and 1792; as well as repeated uprisings led either by local tribes or Sufi orders, most notably the Darqawiyya and the Tijaniyya. These circumstances contributed to the shifting of the Beylik's capitals, from Mazouna to Mostaganem, Mascara, and eventually Oran, following its liberation¹⁰.

¹ Kawān, F. (2019, April). *Al-muṣṭalahāt al-idāriyya al-‘Uthmāniyya fī al-Jazā’ir: al-Bāshā, al-Danūsh, al-Baylik ka-namūdhiy* [Ottoman administrative terminology in Algeria: Pasha, Danūsh, Beylik as examples]. *Majallat Madārāt Tārīkhiyya*, 132–133.

² Abbād, Š. (2012). *Al-Jazā’ir khilāl al-ḥukm al-Turkī* [Algeria under Ottoman rule]. Algiers: Dār Hūma. P. 46

³ Haedo, Fray Diego. (2012). *Tārīkh mulūk al-Jazā’ir* [History of the Kings of Algiers] (Trans. Abū Lu’ayy al-A’lā ‘Abd al-‘Azīz). Algiers: Dār al-Hudā. P. 33

⁴ awālīsh, F. (1994). *Al-ḥayāt al-ḥaḍariyya fī Baylik al-Gharb al-Jazā’ir khilāl al-qarn al-thāmin ‘ashar* [Urban life in the Western Beylik of Algeria during the 18th century] (Master's thesis). University of Algiers, Algeria. P. 16

⁵ Ibn ‘Abd al-Qādir, Muslim. (1974). *Anīs al-gharīb wa-l-musāfir* [The companion of the stranger and traveler] (Trans. R. Bounar). Algiers: Al-Sharika al-Waṭaniyya li-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzī‘. P. 16

⁶ Bin Šaḥrāwī, K. (2013). *Anḍā‘ al-nīf fī Baylik al-Gharb al-Jazā’ir ākhir al-‘ahd al-‘Uthmānī* [Rural conditions in the Western Beylik of Algeria in the late Ottoman period] (Doctoral dissertation). University of Oran, Algeria. P. 21

⁷ al-Zahhār, A. al-Sharīf. (1994). *Mudhakirāt al-ḥājī Aḥmad al-Sharīf al-Zahhār naqīb ashraf al-Jazā’ir* [Memoirs of al-Hājī Aḥmad al-Sharīf al-Zahhār, leader of the Ashraf of Algiers]. Algiers: Al-Sharika al-Waṭaniyya li-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzī‘. P. 47

⁸ Shaw, T. (1830). *Journey through the Regency of Algiers: Or a geographical, physical, and philological description of this state*. Paris: Matlin, Publisher. P. 216

⁹ Don Joseph Aramburu. (1978). *Oran and Western Algeria in the 18th Century*. Algiers: National Library. P. 09

¹⁰ Bin Šaḥrāwī, K. (2018). *Baylik al-Gharb al-Jazā’ir fī al-Majalla al-Ifriqiyya* [The Western Beylik of Algeria in the Revue Africaine]. Algiers: Dār al-Mujaddid. P. 05

2. Sufism and Sufi Orders in the Western Beylik.

A close examination of the history of the Western Beylik reveals the pervasive presence of Sufism, expressed both through individual practices rooted in popular religiosity and through the institutional structures of organized Sufi orders. Within this framework, a number of influential orders became particularly active, shaping the religious and cultural landscape while also reinforcing social cohesion and contributing to political stability. The following section outlines the most prominent among them¹.

2.1 The Qādiriyya :

The Qādiriyya order is among the most venerable Sufi brotherhoods in the Western Beylik. It traces its spiritual lineage to Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī, buried in Baghdad, and was introduced into North Africa through Shaykh Abū Madyan Shu‘ayb, buried in Tlemcen, who played a pivotal role in consolidating its foundations in the Maghrib.

The Qādiriyya emerged as one of the most widely disseminated Sufi orders in the Western Beylik, a fact evidenced by the proliferation of its lodges (zāwiyas) across towns and villages, as well as the numerous shrines and sanctuaries attributed to its figures and adherents. Its influence, however, extended beyond the strictly religious domain to encompass broader cultural and social dimensions. The order occupied a prominent place in the popular imagination, reflected in oral traditions such as poetry, proverbs, and folklore, thereby cementing its enduring presence in the collective memory of the region².

2.2 The Yūsufiyya:

This order traces its lineage to Shaykh Aḥmad b. Yūsuf al-Milyānī and is regarded as one of the direct branches of the Shādhiliyya, forming part of its spiritual chain while sharing many of its doctrinal and practical features. Its teachings spread widely across the Beylik of the West, owing in large part to the spiritual authority of its founder and his privileged relationship with the Ottoman authorities. The order established a strong presence in regions such as Qal‘at Banī Rāshid and Tlemcen, as well as in the vicinity of the Shaykh’s mausoleum at Miliana, which remained an important center of attraction for disciples. It is noteworthy that a number of Sufi orders active in the Beylik of the West derived their spiritual isnād directly from Shaykh Aḥmad b. Yūsuf, a fact that underscores the depth of his influence on the Sufi landscape of the region³.

2.3 The Ṭayyibiyya:

The Ṭayyibiyya order originated in Wazzān, in Morocco, founded by Shaykh ‘Abd Allāh al-Sharīf (d. 1089/1678) after a period of study and spiritual wandering. The order soon became renowned for its ascetic ethos and its service to the poor, reportedly feeding thousands of people daily. Its influence expanded under his sons and descendants, particularly during the leadership of Shaykh al-Ṭayyib (1127–1181/1715–1768), when the order reached its zenith and became widely known as the “Ṭayyibiyya.” Through an extensive network of branches and deputies, its presence extended into both Morocco and Ottoman Algeria. Rooted in the Shādhiliyya tradition, it

¹ Haddou, Hamza. *Sufism and Sufi Orders in the “Western Beylik” through the Revue Africaine: An Analytical and Statistical Study*. Afāq Fikriyya Journal, vol. 11, no. 01, 2023, pp. 335–352.

² Saadallah, A. al-Q. (1998). *Tārīkh al-Jazā’ir al-thaqāfi* [Cultural history of Algeria] (Vol.1). Beirut, Lebanon: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī. P P 520-522

³ Najmi, Abdallah. *Sufism and Innovation in Morocco: The ‘Akāḳiza Order (16th–17th centuries)*. 1st ed., Publications of the Faculty of Arts and Humanities, Rabat, al-Najah al-Jadida Press, Casablanca, 2000. P P 45-110

emphasized the invocation of blessings upon the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ as the core of its devotional practice, with a daily litany of 1,124 repetitions, which gave the order a distinct spiritual character. In the Beylik of the West, the Ṭayyibiyya emerged as one of the most powerful and influential Sufi orders, owing to its wide spread among cohesive tribal groups, particularly the Dawā'ir and the Zamāla, which reinforced its social and religious standing in the region¹.

2.4 the Sheikhiyya :

the Sheikhiyya, attributed to Shaykh 'Abd al-Qādir al-Samāhī, represents a derivative branch of the Shādhiliyya order, with which it shares both the spiritual chain of transmission (silsila) and the devotional practices, including litanies and invocations. Its influence was predominantly established in the southern part of the Beylik of the West, where it rose to prominence as one of the leading Sufi orders, largely owing to its strategic presence along major caravan trade routes. Furthermore, the order maintained amicable and cooperative relations with the Ottoman authorities in Algeria, a factor that contributed to its consolidation and regional significance².

2.5 The 'Isāwiyya:

The 'Isāwiyya, attributed to Shaykh al-Hādī b. 'Isā, was introduced into the Beylik of the West through the channels of pilgrimage and trade. The order spread extensively in the city of Tlemcen and among the tribes of Walahsa, where a dedicated zāwiya was established. The 'Isāwiyya became particularly renowned for its seasonal festivities, which assumed a distinctly folkloric character, thereby granting the order a notable social and cultural presence alongside its spiritual dimension³.

2.6 The Darqāwiyya:

The Darqāwiyya order is attributed to Shaykh Mawlāy al-'Arabī al-Darqāwī, who established its central zāwiya at Būbarīh in the Banī Zarwāl region of Morocco. Owing to geographic proximity and sustained interactions, its spiritual influence extended into the Beylik of the West. Among its most prominent figures in Algeria was al-Sharīf al-Darqāwī, who led his renowned uprising in

the Beylik of the West—an insurrection that profoundly shook the foundations of Ottoman authority in the country⁴.

2.7 The Tijāniyya

The Tijāniyya order is attributed to Shaykh Sīdī Aḥmad al-Tijānī, who established it following a profound spiritual journey during which he adhered to several Sufi paths before articulating his own distinct approach. Central to the order's doctrine is the belief of its founder that he received the spiritual chain of transmission directly from the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be upon him). The Tijāniyya spread widely across Algeria, with a particularly strong presence in the Beylik of the West, where it emerged as one of the most influential Sufi orders. In the late

¹ Ṣalāḥ Mu'ayyad al-'Uqbī. *Sufi Orders and Zawāyā in Algeria: Their History and Activities*. Beirut: Dār al-Burāq, 2002.

² Khalīfa ibn 'Amāra. *Al-Shaykhiyya between Religion and Politics*. In *Spiritual Values and the National Vision in the Shaykhiyya Order*, Algiers: Publications of the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Endowments, 2011, p. 43.

³ Bel'arbi, 'Abd al-Qādir. *The Historical Development of the 'Isāwiyya Order and Its Expansion in Ottoman Algeria*. Master's Thesis, University of Sidi Bel Abbès, 2014/2015, pp. 77–80.

⁴ Ghrīṣī, Būziyān. *Kanz al-Asār fī Ma'nāqib Mawlānā al-'Arabī al-Darqāwī*. Edited by Nūr al-Dīn Māhī, 1st ed., Dār al-Sāda al-Mālikiyya, Algiers, 2022, P P 10-25

Ottoman period, the order became associated with a notable uprising against Ottoman authority, an event that left a significant imprint on both the religious and political landscape of the region¹.

2.8 The Ziyāniyya and Karkaziyya

The Ziyāniyya and Karkaziyya are both branches of the Shādhiliyya mother order, sharing many of its spiritual teachings, particularly the chain of transmission, doctrines, and certain litanies and invocations. A further point of similarity lies in the close historical periods during which their founders and leading shaykhs emerged: the Ziyāniyya was founded by Shaykh Muḥammad b. Abī Ziyān, while the Karkaziyya was established by Shaykh Aḥmad b. Mūsā. Their influence became concentrated in the region of al-Saoura and the southern part of the Beylik of the West. Moreover, commercial routes and pilgrimage paths played a decisive role in extending their reach across the wider territories of the Beylik of the West².

3. The Positive Social Roles of Sufism and Sufi Orders in the Beylik of the West

3.1 The Offering of Food:

The Beylik of the West witnessed numerous historical instances in which Sufi orders assumed the responsibility of providing food, particularly during times of political turmoil and warfare, as well as in the wake of natural disasters such as earthquakes, famine, and locust invasions. In fulfilling this social and humanitarian role, these orders relied on their economic resources—most notably religious endowments (awqāf) and agricultural lands—which were allocated to finance such charitable activities.

In this context, Shaykh Aḥmad b. Yūsuf al-Milyānī, founder of the Yūsufiyya order, personally undertook the role of supervising food provision. Al-Ḥasan al-Wazzān estimated the number of disciples permanently residing in the zāwiya at more than 500, all of whom benefited from both nourishment and lodging. The shaykh's capacity to sustain such services was reinforced by his considerable economic resources, which included cultivated fields, flocks numbering around 10,000 sheep, 1,000 cattle, and 500 horses. This initiative acquires particular significance when considered against the backdrop of the prevailing conditions of the period, marked by the hardships of daily life and the prevalence of political tensions—chief among them the Ottoman-Spanish and Ottoman-Zayyānid conflicts—which cast profound shadows over the social realities of the time³.

In the context of resistance against Spanish occupation, Sīdī Muḥammad b. 'Alī al-Majājī transformed his zāwiya into a provisioning center for the mujāhidīn, supplying them with food and essential goods. Abū al-Ḥasan al-Sharīf relates that, while on his way to the battlefield at the coastal stronghold of Tenes, he and his companions passed by the Majājī zāwiya, where its shaykh provided them with thirty varieties of food, including loaves, honey, and butter⁴.

Similarly, the followers of the Shaykhiyya order engaged in the practice of food provision after their master, 'Abd al-Qādir b. Muḥammad, abandoned a life of seclusion and turned to public engagement. This transition was made in response to the counsel of his uncle, Aḥmad al-Majdhūb, who visited him during his solitary retreat in the desert and reminded him: *"Feeding those in need is better than worship in isolation from people."* From that point onward, the offering of food became a central element in the Shaykhiyya's relationship with society, regarded as

¹ Miftāḥ, 'Abd al-Bāqī. *Adwā' 'alā al-Shaykh 'Abd al-Qādir al-Tijānī wa-Intishār Ṭarīqatihi*. Dār Mūfam li-l-Nashr, Algiers, 2015.

² Moussaoui, Majdoub. *Religious Institutions in Southwestern Algeria during the 10th-11th Centuries AH / 16th-17th Centuries CE: Zawiyas as a Model - A Historical Study*. Doctoral Thesis in Modern History, University of Abou Bekr Belkaid, Tlemcen, 2015-2016. P P 50-116

³ al-Ḥasan al-Wazzān (Leo Africanus). *Waṣf Illīqiyā*. Translated by Muḥammad Hajjī and Muḥammad al-Akhḍar. Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1983. P 29

⁴ Najmī, op. cit., p. 120

both an act of devotion to God and an expression of Islamic teachings that emphasize hospitality and almsgiving. This practice found particular expression in the order's seasonal festivities, with its funding derived largely from donations and gifts made to its *zāwiyas*¹.

Historical examples further underscore this role. The founder of the order dedicated eighteen camels to accompany commercial caravans laden with provisions from distant regions, while also endowing two water-powered mills for grinding wheat and barley to sustain visitors to the *zāwiyas*. It is recorded that he once offered hospitality to nearly four hundred horsemen from the Arab East on a cold and dark night. This generosity is corroborated by Ibn 'Ābid al-Fāsī in his travel account, where, while residing in the Shaykhiyya *zāwiya*, he remarked: "*I dwelt there in the best of circumstances, together with the students of knowledge and the poor.*"

A parallel ethos characterized the Ziyāniyya order, whose shaykhs observed a principle of offering food according to the rank and status of their guests: fattened sheep were reserved for those arriving from distant lands, while refined and delicate foods were served to state officials and members of the *ashraf*. Remarkably, the wife of Shaykh Muḥammad b. Abī Ziyān herself undertook the service of the *zāwiya*, personally attending to its needs².

3.2 The Provision of Traditional Medical Services

Sufi orders in the Beylik of the West contributed to the fields of health and social services on two principal levels. The first consisted of the direct involvement of their shaykhs and disciples in providing such services, as many of them possessed expertise in herbal medicine and *ṭibb taqlīdī* (traditional medicine). Among these were Ibn Maryam, author of *Fath al-Jalīl fī Adwiyat al-'Alī*; Aḥmad b. al-Sharīf, who composed a commentary on prophetic medicine entitled *al-Mann wa-l-Salwā fī Taḥqīq Ḥadīth Lā 'Adwā*; and Ibn 'Azūz al-Tilimsānī, author of *Dhahāb al-Kusūf wa-l-Zulma fī 'Ilm al-Ṭibb wa-l-Ṭabī'a wa-l-Ḥikma*³.

In the same vein, other scholars combined medicine with Sufism, such as Ibn Sulaymān al-Jazūlī, author of *Ka'bat al-Ṭā'ifn*, who composed a didactic poem in *rajaz* verse on legal and medical measures. He also cited Muḥammad al-Sanūsī in his commentary on the hadith concerning the stomach, and incorporated accounts from some of his contemporaries regarding magical practices employed in healing. Likewise, Abū al-Qāsim Sa'd Allāh notes that his contemporary, Abū Rās al-Nāṣirī, preserved a manuscript entitled *Mā Warā' al-Wā'ūn fī Akhbār al-Ṭā'ūn* ("Beyond the Pestilence: Reports on the Plague").

Along the same trajectory, Sīdī Muḥammad b. Abī Ziyān, the founder of the Ziyāniyya order, became renowned for his multiple roles in treating illnesses. He was often sought for curing infertility through supplication, and sources recount that a paralyzed man, brought to him in unbearable pain, was healed after the shaykh recited Qur'ānic verses over him and breathed upon him. Another account relates that a mute boy was restored to speech through his intercession. Similar healing powers, attributed to miraculous charisma (*karāmāt*), are also found in the hagiography of the founder of the Yūsufiyya order⁴.

The second level of involvement lay in the establishment of dedicated spaces within Sufi institutions to provide various medical services common to the period. These institutions—*zāwiyas*, shrines, and retreats—became known

¹ Khalīfa ibn 'Amāra .op. cit., p 24

² Moussaoui, Majdoub. , op. cit., p131-115

³ Saadallah, op. cit., p. 433

⁴ Moussaoui, Majdoub. , op. cit., p 163

for specializing in the treatment of certain ailments. Pilgrimages to the tombs of saints and recourse to their baraka for healing illnesses and epidemics thus became widespread practices in the region¹.

3.3 The Enforcement of Order in the Absence of Central State Authority

The Beylik of the West was characterized by recurrent disturbances and tensions that emerged at different junctures—whether due to the weakness of the beylik's authority, during transitional phases, or amid wars with external powers and internal uprisings. In such contexts, Sufi orders functioned as a substitute authority, compensating for the absence of the state by mobilizing their available instruments of influence, most notably their spiritual and moral authority.

This quasi-political role became particularly visible in the early sixteenth century, in the wake of the decline of Zayyanid power, which had been reduced to Tlemcen and a handful of nearby coastal strongholds. Within this fragile political landscape, Aḥmad b. Yūsuf al-Milyānī managed to impose order across regions under the sway of his Sufi order by suppressing tribes engaged in banditry and enforcing oversight over areas notorious for such practices. His interventions contributed to the establishment of a relative degree of security and stability². Similarly, Sufi orders established in the Saharan domains relied on their spiritual influence to guarantee security and sustain social order in the absence of effective political authority³.

3.4 Settlement of Local Disputes

Local conflicts represented some of the gravest threats to the cohesion of societies, often arising from competition over resources, rivalries for influence and leadership, or the absence of a strong central authority capable of regulating all parties. The danger inherent in such disputes lay in their capacity to dismantle the traditional bonds that safeguarded communal unity and solidarity. If not contained through fair and peaceful mechanisms, these conflicts could escalate into violence and widespread disorder, sufficient to paralyze economic activity and undermine public security.

an essential role in containing such disputes and preventing their escalation. 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. 'Abd Allāh al-Ya'qūbī, for instance, engaged in mediating reconciliation between individuals and tribes. Ibn Maryam recounts that he brokered peace among the Banū Ṭalḥa tribes and fulfilled a similar function in the region of Trāra, drawing upon both his spiritual charisma and his respected position within the community⁴.

Aḥmad b. Yūsuf al-Milyānī likewise intervened in the conflict between the Hawwāra tribes and the Hilālī tribes, the latter notorious for raiding their neighbors. He employed multiple strategies to address such disputes, whether through negotiation and peaceful settlement or, when necessary, through the use of force to repel raids and restore order among rival factions⁵.

Sufi orders also lent their support to just causes in the context of local disputes. A notable example is that of Shaykh Sīdī Aḥmad Qaddār, founder of the renowned zāwiya in the plain of Mina, who championed the cause of the Andalusian refugees arriving on Algerian shores after the fall of Granada. In the year 1018/1609, when

¹ Qandūz, 'Abd al-Qādir. *Al-Tibb wa-al-Awḍā' al-Ṣiḥḥiyya bi-l-Jazā'ir khilāl al-'Ahd al-Faransī 1914-1930* [Medicine and Health Conditions in Algeria during the French Period, 1914-1930]. PhD diss., University of Sidi Bel Abbès, 2016/2017, p. 120.

² Najmi, op. cit., p.96-94

³ Moussaoui, Majdoub. , op. cit., p166

⁴ Ibn Maryam al-Tilimsānī. *Al-Bustān fī Dhikr al-Awliyā' wa-al-'Ulamā' bi-Tilimsān*. Edited by Muḥammad b. Abī Shanab. Al-Maṭba'a al-Tha'ālibiyya, Algiers, 1908.

⁵ Najmi, op. cit., p 95

members of the Hubra tribe assaulted these exiles, Sīdī Muḥammad Qaddār appealed to Ḥammīda al-‘Abd, emir of the Suwayd tribe, to come to the aid of these Muslim newcomers¹.

The Shaykhiyya order, for its part, consistently strove to defend the oppressed and uphold justice. Its zāwiya functioned as a tribunal for Muslims and a refuge for litigants, where disputes were resolved through reconciliation and tolerance. The shaykh himself assumed the role of arbiter, whose judgment was universally respected. A similar function can be discerned in the zāwiya of the Ziyāniyya order, whose shaykhs devoted the days of the week—save for Friday—to adjudicating major cases brought before them².

4. "The Adverse Aspects of Sufism and Sufi Orders in the Western Beylik"

4.1 The Practice of Magical Rituals

Although the essence of Sufism lies in asceticism, which leads to purification and spiritual refinement, we nonetheless observe certain practices that emerged on the margins of Sufi orders. Some disciples and shaykhs conflated the legitimate recitation of litanies and supplications with popular and magical rituals that bore no connection to authentic Sufism.

To understand the origins of the relationship between Sufi orders and the practice of magic, it is necessary to return to the earliest foundations of these movements, which began as ascetic endeavors aimed at self-purification within the framework of the Qur’an and the Sunnah. With the incorporation of Greek and Persian philosophical ideas into the Sufi tradition, some masters came to tolerate such practices. This development coincided with the general state of scientific decline in the Muslim world, which facilitated the spread of practices such as the use of amulets, charms, talismans, and numerical tables within the treatments prescribed by Sufi shaykhs³.

Although historical references confirming the presence of these practices in the activities of Sufi orders in the Western Beylik are scarce, certain narratives and travel accounts do point to the infiltration of magical practices within Sufi circles. Among these is the account of al-Ḥasan al-Wazzān, who relates that during his stay with Shaykh Aḥmad b. Yūsuf al-Milīānī, the latter showed him books dealing with magic and alchemy, asserting that magic constituted a branch of knowledge. Another reference comes from al-Sharīf al-Zahhār in his description of the Tījāni revolt, where he states: *“They brought forth his sword along with certain talismans he carried, inscribed with various numerical tables—one of which I personally saw drawn in the form of a sword written in saffron ink.”* This testimony is further corroborated by indications in the order’s own treatises, which advocate the use of talismans, incantations, and occult formulas⁴.

4.2 The Practice of Dance and Music in Sufi Ritual Gatherings

Among the most prominent features associated with Sufis during these ritual gatherings is the use of music and dance within the ḥaḍra ceremony. Music, in their view, serves as an instrument for expressing inner purity, while dance symbolizes the yearning for God. These practices typically begin with the invocation of God’s name and the

¹ Aḥmad Ibn Saḥnūn al-Rāshidī. *Al-Thaḡhr al-Jumūnī fī Ibtisām al-Thaḡhr al-Wahrānī*. Edited by al-Mahdī al-Bū‘Abdlī. 1st ed. ‘Ālam al-Ma‘rifa li-al-Nashr wa-al-Tawzī‘, Algiers, 2013. P 31

² Moussaoui, Majdoub, . op. cit. 167

³ A Group of Researchers. *Magic, Astrology, and Divination among the Sufis Based on Their Books, Litanies, and Invocations*. 1st ed., 2022, pp. 5-7.

⁴ al-Sharīf al-Zahhār, op. cit., p. 160.

chanting of litanies specific to each order, and culminate in unusual physical expressions. The dancing may take either an individual or collective form, performed according to an established rhythm and order¹.

In the Western Beylik, the followers of the Darqāwiyya became particularly renowned for their engagement in such ritual dancing. In this context, al-Mazārī notes: *“Then they rise to perform ecstatic dancing and movement after consuming copious amounts of food, until they are overcome with sweat and exhaustion”*.²

4.3 The Proliferation of Shrines and Mausolea

A striking feature of the Western Beylik was the widespread presence of Sufi shrines and mausolea, to the extent that scarcely a town or village was without numerous domed structures and sacred sites. This phenomenon was particularly reinforced by the strong support of the political authorities, who venerated these Sufi institutions and refrained from violating their sanctity, as well as by the prevailing communal mindset³, which held that individuals living in proximity to these sites were protected by the spiritual aura associated with them.

The purposes behind the establishment of such shrines and sacred monuments varied. Some were dedicated to well-known saints whose names and lives were remembered; others were attributed to anonymous or foreign saints; still others were linked symbolically to trees, such as the shrine of Sīdī Būzabūja, associated with an olive tree near the tomb of Sīdī Abū Madyan Shu‘ayb. In certain cases, shrines were dedicated to animals once connected with renowned Sufi figures, such as the mule of Aḥmad b. Yūsuf al-Milānī and the lion of Aḥmad b. ‘Awda.

The abundance of such shrines and Sufi monuments intensified popular attachment to them, elevating them into major spiritual and social centers. They were believed to possess extraordinary powers and to mediate miraculous interventions, to the point that people came to rely upon them for everyday needs—protection, healing, and refuge in times of political unrest and turmoil. Yet this same phenomenon fostered the spread of superstition, mendicancy, and deviant beliefs.

Among the negative practices associated with these sites was their transformation into avenues for material gain and easy wealth. Their administration, the reception of visitors, and the provision of services were overseen by groups of custodians and appointed stewards. In consequence, the shrines became lucrative sources of income, drawing substantial revenues from offerings, sacrifices, and the steady influx of visitors⁴.

4.4 The Claim to Sainthood (Walāya)

Given the prominent status enjoyed by Sufi orders within the society of the Beylik of the West—especially after having acquired numerous privileges across various domains—many individuals sought to claim **walāya** (sainthood), aspiring thereby to secure the material and symbolic benefits associated with it. Despite the relative scarcity of historical examples of such practices in comparison with those reported in the Beylik of the East, Ibn al-Ṣā’im al-Jazūlī observes in this regard: *“In this latter part of the eleventh century [seventeenth century CE], we found nothing but scorpions and vipers, people of discord and dispute, and we were afflicted by the elevation of the ignorant rabble who favored the ways of evil and innovation.”*

¹ E. Dermenghem and L. L. Barrès, *Essay on the Ḥaḍra of the Aïssaoua in Algeria*, *Revue Africaine*, vol. 95, 1951, pp. 289–314.

² al-Aghā b. ‘Ūda al-Mazārī, *The Rise of Sa’d al-Su’ūd in the History of Oran, Algeria, Spain, and France until the End of the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Yahyā Bou’zīz, vol. 1, 1st ed., Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1990, p. 300.

³ Devoulx, A. “The Abduction of a Pasha in Algiers by the Kabyles,” *Revue Africaine*, 1869, p. 462.

⁴ Edmond Doutté, *The Saints: Writings on Maghrebi Islam during the 19th Century*. Translated by Muhammad Naji bin ‘Umar, Afrique Orient, Morocco, 2014, p. 77.

Perhaps the most significant figure to shed light on these practices was ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Fakkūn, in his treatise *Manšūr al-hadāyā fī kašf man idda‘ā al-‘ilm wa-l-walāya* (“The Manifest Gifts in Exposing Those Who Claim Knowledge and Sainthood”). In this work, he identifies a considerable number of impostors and opportunists, revealing how centers of learning (zāwiyas) had, in some instances, degenerated into venues for financial exploitation and manipulation. This, in turn, led to the dilution of their followers and their immersion in excessive folkloric practices, effectively obstructing the path toward any genuine religious renewal¹.

Conclusion:

This study has demonstrated that Sufism and the Sufi orders in the Western Beylik of Algeria during the Ottoman era were far more than spiritual or devotional expressions; they operated as influential social institutions that shaped the organization and orientation of society. They contributed to religious education, promoted solidarity and social cohesion, mediated disputes, and fostered political and social stability, while also participating in the defense of the country against external threats.

At the same time, their impact was not without ambivalence. The expansion of certain orders entrenched hierarchical dependence on their shaykhs and, in some cases, weakened the vitality of intellectual life by prioritizing the spiritual over the rational sciences. The social imprint of Sufism thus reveals a dual character: it combined constructive functions that sustained social balance with restrictive tendencies that influenced intellectual and cultural dynamism.

In conclusion, examining the social dimension of Sufism in the Western Beylik offers valuable insights into the interplay between religion and society in Ottoman Algeria. It highlights the role of zawiyas and Sufi orders as collective actors whose influence extended beyond ritual devotion into the making of social and political equilibrium. Furthermore, it opens avenues for comparative research with other Algerian regions, in order to capture both the specificities and broader transformations of the Sufi phenomenon across varying historical contexts.

Ethical Considerations

This study was conducted in full compliance with academic ethical standards. All historical and sociological data were analyzed using verified scholarly sources. The authors confirm that no human or animal participants were involved, and no sensitive personal data were collected. The research adheres to the ethical principles outlined by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) for historical and sociological studies.

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¹ al-Mukashshar, Nūr al-Dīn. *Sainthood in Sufi Heritage: A Study of Theoretical and Functional Roles*. 1st ed., Moninoun Without Borders for Publishing and Distribution, Beirut, 2018. P103

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest related to the publication of this research paper. Both authors contributed equally to the conception, development, and final approval of the manuscript.

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