

Sufi practice in Khartoum and the role of the Shaykh.

Alfonso Salerno – Independent Researcher
alfonsosaleno@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Rosanders and Westerlund¹ refers to Sufism (*Tasawwuf*) as “African Islam”, contextualizing the large diffusion of Sufi practice all around sub-Saharan Africa and underlining an important point: despite referring to the same generic structure, different elements constitute the local nature of a Sufi community. Indeed, it’s possible to observe that Sufism has a strong presence in the African continent, from the examples of Sufi brotherhoods in Mali described by Amadou Hampatè Ba² to the description of Sufism in Somalia by Francesca Declich³ among the others. Being flanked by the more orthodox pressures coming from the Arabic Peninsula and integrating its practice with social structures already present in the sub-saharan Africa, today’s Sufism in the african continent doesn’t have a monolithic nature.

Since the 16th century, continuous and slow penetrations of Arabic merchants into Alodia’s kingdoms led to the fall of the Christian reigns. Sufism especially, managed to gain almost the totality of the population, due to its permeable nature and the usage made by Muslim *Ulema* to better adapt Islam to local populations, still bonded to the traditional religious nature of the region. After the *Wahabi* doctrine penetration in the area and the recent political development of the country, it seems difficult to recognize the presence of a traditional or animist component in today’s *Sufi Islam*.

The purpose of this article is to define and transmit to the reader the aspects of today’s Islamic identity of the Sudanese population with a particular focus on Khartoum’s region, to analyse the role of the master of 9 different *Turuq* in an urban context and how this influences the daily life of the citizens of the area. The materials here presented have been collected for my master’s degree dissertation in Diplomacy and International Cooperation, by the title “Il Sufismo in Sudan. Religione, società, tradizioni e pratiche curative nello Stato di Khartoum.”⁴ as a result of one month long field observation conducted from the 1st of August 2018 to the 31st of the same month. During this period, I was able to conduct a session of field research in Khartoum’s state and to engage with Sudanese local religious leaders, inhabitants of the area formally unbonded from the religious sphere and European and Sudanese NGO members, working in the health sector. The interviews collected will be cross-analysed during the course of the text to highlight any differences or points in common between the various interviewees. I have also decided to integrate the relation within religious area and medicine because of some reasons: due to a personal interest, having worked in a health facility aimed at delivering therapies to disabled people, having studied the bond within African traditional medicine and Islam during the course of my master’s degree and having noticed the discrepancy within the declarations of the various *Shaykh* and those of the local inhabitants not directly bounded to the sphere of influence of the *Turuq* regarding the relation with medicine and *Shaykh*.

Keywords: *Sufism, Tasawwuf, Shaykh, Khartoum, Sudan, Dhikr, traditional Medicine*

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¹ Westerlund D. e Rosander E. E., 1997 “*African Islam and Islam in Africa*”, London, Hurst & Company.

² See: Ba A. H., 2008, “*A spirit of tolerance. The inspiring life of Tierno Bokar*” USA, World Wisdom Books, and also Ba A. H., 1991, “*Amkoullel, l’enfant peul. Mémoires*” Paris, Actes Sud.

³ Declich F., 2000, “Sufi experience in rural Somali. A focus on Women” in *Social Anthropology*, 8, 3, European Association of Social Anthropologists.

⁴ discussed in December 2018 at the University of Trieste, Master’s Degree in Diplomacy and International Cooperation.

1. Methodology

The process of organization of the research started in Italy, during my last year of Master's degree, where I had the occasion to meet the Ambassador of Italy in Sudan Fabrizio Lobasso. Thanks to the help of his excellency, I obtained two contacts of local *Shaykhs* that gave me the possibility to visit 9 different *Turuq*⁵, to interview 8 different *Shaykhs* and 33 members of the various brotherhoods. During the second phase, I managed to interview 24 different subjects, for a total number of 65 persons interviewed.

The first one, *Shaykh* Seenan Alsamani Altayb, a representant of the *Samaniyya* Brotherhood. He accompanied me to visit the majority of *Turuq* of the *Samaniyya* according to his preference, introducing me to the *Turuq* he knew and he accepted, relying on his own network of acquaintances. This resulted also in the participation to many social occasions, like after prayers gathering in tents to consume tea, meals shared by the members of the *Turuqs* both during weekdays and, mainly, before and after Friday's celebrations.

The second one, *Shaykh* Eltayeb, a representant of *Qadiriyya*. He introduced me to only two *Turuq*, his own and the one his spiritual master, *Shaykh* Eltayib, based in the village of Umm Dabban. Thanks to him, I managed to also take part to events like the practice for the day of Eid al-Adha, the following celebrations and feast.

The documentation process was divided in two main phases: A first phase of qualitative research, where I engaged with local religious leaders of the *Turuq*, the *Shaykh*, in order to understand and map the single *Tariqa*, the doctrine, the practice and the objectives of the single group; a second phase of a quantitative nature conducted through group interviews. This practice was useful in order to understand the perception of the religious sphere of an individual not directly bonded to the area of influence of a *Tariqa* and to analyse the issues concerning healing practices, Jinn's presence, alternative figures to scientific medicine and the experiences of individuals with medical sciences. In this second phase, it was particularly useful for me to have availed myself of the help of facilitators who created a bridge between me and the interviewees, bypassing as much as possible the stigma and privacy of the individual in dealing with certain personal issues.

Also, while participating to religious moments like the practice of *Dhikr*, *Salat* and moments of socialization, participatory observation was also used to gather information, relying on the help of photos and video recording.

I decided to analyse the relation within religion and medicine as a case study in order to observe the thematic of health treatments from both the religious authorities and members of the society not directly related to the area of influence of the *Turuq*.

2. Description and practices of the *Turuq* in Khartoum's area

2.1. *Samaniyya*

Most of the subjects interviewed are part of the *Samaniyya* brotherhood. Founded by *Shaykh* Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Karim al-Samman during XVIII° century, the *Samaniyya* is a branch of the bigger *Tariqa* of *Khalawatiyya*.

⁵ Pl. *Tariqa*, sin. Arabic name of a Sufi Brotherhood, particular element of Islamic mysticism.

The first contact with the *Samaniyya* Brotherhood was through *Shaykh* Seenan Alsamani Altayb (from now on, referred to as *Shaykh* Seenan). Our first meeting took place in Ozone bar, a restaurant in Khartoum 2, city centre of Khartoum. The interview was held in Sudanese Arabic, with the help of a native Sudanese Arabic speaker that translated in English.

The main concern of the *Shaykh* about Sufism in Sudan was about the relation between religion and politics: «Sufi identity is strong in Sudan. We are about to create the first party for Sufi, called *Al Gaiun* Democratic Party. Sufism is the true *Islam* created by our Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon himself)»⁶. Despite my willingness to focus the interview on the doctrinal aspect of local Sufism, the *Shaykh* comes back many times on the political area, even inviting me «to meet a “Somalian high politician”, member of the Ministry for Presidential Affairs»⁷. This politician, according to the declarations of the *Shaykh*, is a Sufi, moved temporarily in Sudan to help the birth and the formation of *al Gaiun* party.

After taking the conversation back to the main topic, the declaration of the *Shaykh* about the bond between Islam in Sudan and traditional, animistic religions is that «there are no religions in Sudan except the true *Islam* taught by our prophet Muhammad (pbuh) nor those pagans will contaminate the true *Islam*. There is only one village, far west on the mountains, *Jabal al Miba*, where they still worship the sun or other idols, but nothing more».

In the following days, I was able to meet *Shaykh* Seenan various times and he guided me to visit various *Turuq*. Our meetings would always begin with the same topic, with the *Shaykh* asking me «what do you think about Sudan and about its government?».

The next day, I was introduced by *Shaykh* Seenan to the *Shaykh* al-Bashir, part of the *Samaniyya* brotherhood. Our meeting took place inside the *Masjid*⁸ of *Shaykh* al-Bashir, located in Bahri, Shambat area. The *Masjid* is surrounded by walls, inside it's possible to find the Mosque, the *Khalwa*, a hostel that is open for the *Murids* of the *Shaykh*, poor people or travellers. According to the declarations of one of the students of *Shaykh* Seenan⁹ «In Sudan, if you are poor and you cannot afford a place where to stay, a *Shaykh* will offer you a place to stay, without asking you anything, regardless of your belief»¹⁰. This is possible thanks to the profits generated by the crops harvested by the students of the *Shaykh* or by members of the *Tariqa*. According to various declarations collected during my visit at the *Masjid*, this activity is conducted on a voluntary basis. Believers, members of the *Tariqa* or *Murids*, decide to donate their time or money to the *Shaykh*.

The meetings took place inside the *Khalwa* of *Shaykh* al-Bashir. During the two days, it was never possible to meet the *Shaykh* alone, we were always accompanied by *Shaykh* Seenan and his Murid, some members of the *Tariqa* and some Murids of *Shaykh* al

⁶ Interview 1, *Shaykh* Seenan, 05/08/2018, Ozone bar, Khartoum 2, Khartoum.

⁷ Ibid, 05/08/2018.

⁸ Usually, the term *Masjid* identifies the place dedicated to the prayers for Muslims. In the area covered by my research, the term is used to identify the complex of structures that the members of a *Turuq* can use: a building dedicated to prayers, a *Khalwa*, bedrooms or a hostel, kitchens and common spaces dedicated to socialization or to study.

⁹ Interview 3, *Murid* accompanying Seenan, 06/08/2018, Bahri, Shambat, *Masjid Shaykh* al-Bashir.

¹⁰ Ibid, 06/08/2018.

Bashir. During the second meeting that took place the 10 of August, I had the opportunity to meet a “Doctor” of Quranic sciences at the University of Khartoum.

The interviews were conducted in Arabic with the translation in English by a native Arabic Sudanese speaker in the case of *Shaykh* al Bashir¹¹ and in English in the case of the Doctor¹², with no help needed from a translator.

The first concept they shared with me was the bond with the terrain: while I was greeted as a guest, having the possibility to seat on a couch, everyone else was seated on the ground, making sure that both of the palms of the hands were constantly on the ground. «We have been generated from the ground by Allah and to it we will have to return one day. Seating on the ground is a way to stay bonded to our origins»¹³. This practice can be observed only in this very specific *Tariqa*. *It was common*

The leading role of the Doctor or the *Shaykh* al Bashir is undermined by the figure of *Shaykh* Seenan only when I asked them about traditional pre-Islamic elements still present in today’s *Sufism*. While staying quiet during all the interview, *Shaykh* Seenan impose his vision regarding the presence of any kind of contamination by traditional elements in today’s *Sufism* in Sudan. *Shaykh* Seenan purposely blocks *Shaykh* al Bashir from answering the topic of the discussion proposed to the latter, stating firmly: «The wise people can recognize the right practices from the impious, like black magic or primitive religions that existed before the arrival of true Islam. Who contaminates *Tasawwuff* with elements like pagan rituals or weird mores is just a *Kufi*»¹⁴. No one else in the room was willing to add something to the statement of *Shaykh* Seenan. Surely, is interesting to analyse this statement in the optic of the ideological clash that *Sufism* in Sudan is facing against *Wahabism*. In many interviews, a usual topic coming from the respondents was the relation within *Sufi* and *Wahabi*. While some of these respondents were open to speak about the contamination of pre-Islamic elements in today’s local *Sufism*¹⁵ and recognize given presence in the practice, the position of *Shaykh* Seenan resembles the Islamist tendencies¹⁶ that aim to purify local Islam and find the “right practices”, maintaining a rigid approach to the thematic.

It appears that an external member of the Brotherhood is capable to impose his presence into the thoughts of other subjects even if they are, theoretically, on the same level.

After, thanks to the contact shared with the interns of the Italian Embassy, I had the opportunity to reach an Arabic-speaking teacher at a private center in Khartoum, Amarat district on 08/08/2018, to interview her and also to collect photo and video documentations provided by her. I came into contact with this informant through the interns of the Italian Embassy who carried out an Arabic language course at the center where the teacher works. It is linked to the brotherhood founded by *Shaykh* al-Burée today led by his grandfather, *Shaykh* Afatih. During the course of the interview no particular signs emerge of limits imposed on the woman in the dialogue of the topic; on the contrary, the informant is particularly open in talking about religious practice, in

¹¹ Interview 2, *Shaykh* al-Bashir, 06/08/2018, Bahri, Shambat, *Masjid Shaykh* al-Bashir.

¹² Interview 5, Doctor of Quranic sciences, 10/08/2018, Bahri, Shambat, *Masjid Shaykh* al-Bashir.

¹³ Interview 2, *Shaykh* al-Bashir, 06/08/2018, Bahri, Shambat, *Masjid Shaykh* al-Bashir.

¹⁴ “Non-believer”, the term indicates everything that is external to the Qur’anic Reality, while also being commonly used in offensive terms to identify those who do not practice Islam.

¹⁵ See declarations of *Shaykh* Eltayeb, paragraph 2.2.

¹⁶ Westerlund D. e Rosander E. E., 1997 “*African Islam and Islam in Africa*”, London, Hurst & Company.

bringing examples, descriptions and showing me the multimedia elements that will be forwarded to me later.

The *Tariqa* is based in the town of Azzariba (translated, the name of the city means “the Zoo”) and is initially founded by *Shaykh* Afatih, although the point of reference for the members of the *Tariqa* is called by the title of Great *Shaykh* Abdul Rahim al Burée, great-grandfather of the Teacher and father of Afatih. I am told that the brotherhood was founded by a *Shaykh* named Muhammad, but that he never played an important role in religious life as much as the Great *Shaykh* al Burée. The latter is also a teacher of Afatih, who is charged to move to Azzariba to teach the Quran to locals still linked to traditional religions. Before the arrival of *Shaykh* Afatih. Indeed, the town composed of a society organized according to a social scheme of a pastoral nature has as its only point of reference the zoo from which it takes its name. To date, despite the *Shaykh* at the head of *Tariqa* is Afatih, the believers linked to it refer almost exclusively to the figure of the by now deceased *Shaykh* al Burée.

To understand the particularity of the *Tariqa* of *Shaykh* al Burée it is necessary to retrace the detailed description of the typical day within the *Masjid* made by the Teacher: «We wake up with the first prayer open to all Muslims. After the first morning prayer, we proceed to perform the *Awrads Tariqa* (also called *Azkar*), a prayer reserved exclusively for the members of the *Tariqa*. Only the members of the *Tariqa* are admitted after receiving *Shaykh*’s permission. The prayer structure changes from *Tariqa* to *Tariqa*, and it lasts about half an hour. If you take part in the *Awrads* without the *Shaykh*’s permission, you risk suffering the consequences in illness, physical or mental. What unites all the *Awrads* is the centrality of the message of love towards Allah and men in general. Sufis are allowed to take part in the *Awrads* of other brotherhoods, on condition that they practice their own and have the authorization of their *Shaykh*. You are free to pray also with other members of other *Turuqs*, *Shaykh* usually allows that, or forbids you to relate to others, even if it is not very frequent to have common praying sessions; over time, many people have confused love for Allah with praising the *Shaykh*. After the *Azkar*, it’s time to visit the tomb of the great *Shaykh*, because he is the intermediary in paradise with whom to dialogue and have the possibility of having personal requests and messages conveyed directly to Allah through the spirit of the *Shaykh* who lives in the Garden of *Ma’ wa’*¹⁷. Someone prays, others read poems written by them in homage to the deceased *Shaykh*, others still ask for help in order to solve their problems. Later, the *Murids* begin to study divided by groups. In addition to the study of the Quran, the traditional Arabic and the *Fiqh*¹⁸ are also studied in this community. In the meantime, around 10 am, the *Murids* will rest after a few hours of study, have breakfast and wait for the second prayer of the day. The study resumes after the end of the second prayer until the third which marks the time to have lunch together. For this moment, like the others in which it is necessary to prepare large quantities of food, the *Shaykh* use the help of salaried workers who take care of the harvest or volunteers, usually women, who prepare meals, keep the place in order and take care of the *Masjid*. When lunch is over, everyone is free to return to their duties or their own private life, who can. Who is a guest of the *Shaykh* in the hostel, can stay with the teacher, work for him and help him. In fact, the *Masjid* hostel serves as a structure for the *murids* who, coming from far

¹⁷ Paradise garden, home of Allah and the dead.

¹⁸ Islamic law.

away, would not be able to attend their studies and to help the poor or needy. The *Shaykh* does not charge anyone for his hospitality»¹⁹.

From this description it is possible to notice the difference between the brotherhoods previously analysed and the one of *Shaykh* al Burée: first of all, the *Tariqa* presents an element of reference to the figure of a past *Shaykh*, idolized and elevated to Great *Shaykh*, still today at centre of the religious life of the *Tariqa* that revives its figure through the cult of his person through a daily visit to his tomb and the continuous reference to his figure as leader of the brotherhood. He is seen as a bridge of direct connection between mankind and God, a subject capable of facilitating his relationship with Allah. The elevation of the figure of al Burée to Great *Shaykh* does not limit the influence of his successors at the head of the brotherhood, who must be consulted in various aspects of daily life, helped in their daily practices by their disciples and guardians of some civil functions. For example, the teacher describes the procedure for joining a couple in marriage:

«First of all, it is necessary to consult the *Shaykh*; If you want to marry someone, if you already know who, if you want to know who would be better to marry, or if the marriage will go well, the master of the brotherhood will know how to clear up any doubt about it and bless the future couple. It is also possible to report to the *Shaykh* about choosing a spouse and simply asking him to bless the union. Once the union is approved by the *Shaykh*, he can give the couple different goods, such as bags with clothes, perfumes, animals or even contribute to the purchase and / or furnishing of the house, travel and so on. Such gifts should be spontaneously procured by the *Shaykh* for the couple; However, the master of the brotherhood usually receives gifts on other occasions, especially perfumes. If the gifts for the *Shaykh* accumulate in excess, he can redistribute them on special occasions, as in this case, giving a part to the newly married couple. The ceremony is very short; usually the father of the bride and groom go to the *Shaykh* to collect the certificate that seals the union. This procedure is a formality that does not require the presence of the bride. The spouse in the meantime will be dedicated to preparing for the actual celebrations. After having withdrawn the certificate in fact, we proceed to attend the *Aflah*, a musical moment in which the sound of drums accompanies an *Al Muddah*, a traditional Sufi singer, who sings the *Medih*²⁰. Following is the indoor lunch and the final party»²¹.

Also in this case it is possible to notice how the figure of the *Shaykh* represents a pivotal point in the life not only of the strictly religious community, but of anyone who lives near to it. To ask for advice or blessings from the *Shaykh* as a connection with the authority of God, the elderly and the wise is a common element in holistic societies that have lived and still inhabit the territory of sub-Saharan Africa.

Comparing the two *Turuqs*, it is possible to observe how the differences between them are marked, in the doctrine and in the daily practice. The *Shaykh* plays a more relevant role here, present in many aspects of daily life not only of the members of the *Tariqa*, but also of those who live their secular life through the influences of the brotherhood.

¹⁹ Interview 4, Arabic language Teacher, 08/08/2018, Amarat, Khartoum.

²⁰ Plur. Singular: *Matah*. Religious songs.

²¹ Interview 4, Arabic language Teacher, 08/08/2018, Amarat, Khartoum.

The next *Tariqa* I visited on 08/10/2018 is the *Samaniyya*, founded by *Shaykh* Hamed al-Nil in the 19th century. D.C., which carries out its activities within the necropolis of Omdurman, now managed by its descendants. During my observation of Friday prayers, it was possible to observe a unique expression of faith compared to the *Turuqs* previously observed. In fact, the main activity of the mosque is the Friday *Dhikr* in a special space in the centre of the necropolis where the *Darvish* reunite are part of the brotherhood of *Shaykh* al Nil. They are divided into two main categories: the Murid youths under the guidance of the *Shaykh* al Nil and the elders, appointed by the *Shaykh* himself. The elderly are easily recognized by their clothing, characterized by bright colours unlike the traditional white *Jellabiyya*, such as red, green or yellow. In fact, the colours, the motif or the patches they wear sewn on the dress are decided by the *Shaykh*, to indicate “the seniority” within the Sufism of the single *Darvish*, based on his own behaviour and his own devotion. Many *Darvish* carry around the neck and waist large *Sibah* hand-carved by themselves, sometimes well over one. The *Sibah* worn by the *Darvish* indicate their devotion in practice, as if to flaunt it and demonstrate it through their clothing; in fact, the more *Sibah* he wears, the more time he devotes to prayer during the day. Besides being a cult object, the *Sibah* is a means of livelihood for *Darvish*, since those built by hand by them are sold by the *Murid* youths in small makeshift stalls at the entrance to the necropolis. In the course of a telephone interview with a member of the *Tariqa* in question on 09/06/2018 I²² am told that «the green colour, the most widespread, represents the peace and calm of Sufism, red is the symbol of knowledge, yellow of devotion and the black of ecstasy. Other *Darvish* use leopard or *hadit* motifs printed on them as a sign of devotion. The patches instead recall the idea of poverty in which the first *Darvish* lived, going up to the figure of the Prophet Muhammad himself and of his wandering in poverty».

The reality of Omdurman’s *Darvish* is contained in a religious universe almost in itself from the rest of the *Turuq*; Asceticism is highlighted both from a spiritual and material point of view, with the practice of very dynamic *Dhikr* compared to those carried out by the other *Turuq* in the area, as characterized by episodes of visions and demonstrating one’s devotion through practice, one’s own body and one’s own clothes. Although with a certain regard for the subjectivity of the practice highlighted by the distinctive characters analysed above in the form of clothing, titles, colours or objects that somehow tend to emphasize a certain history linked to the individual person, the whole is not lacking in being subjected to control of the central authority of the *Shaykh*, who decides the titles to be assigned to each member of his own *Tariqa*, assigning them the colours to wear during the practice of *Dhikr* and during daily life, while requiring alms. These elements guarantee a strong respect of the *Darvish* within the local religious community, albeit in dissonance with the rest of the practices implemented by the other *Turuq*. This detachment is highlighted by the two *Turuq* I visited during the course of the same day, the *Samaniyya* of *Shaykh* Arwallah and the *Madiyya Drisia*²³, which stand firmly against the “practical” asceticism proposed by the beggars of Omdurman and test themselves in a more sober way practice of remembering the name of Allah.

The role of the *Shaykh* does not fall exclusively in the doctrinal and religious field, but in some cases influences the daily life of every man linked to the *Tariqa*, whether it is at the top or at the base of it. The *Tariqa* run by *Shaykh* Mukarra, with the Masjid in the

²² Telephone interview 1, member *Tariqa Shaykh* al Nil, 06/09/2018, Omdurman.

²³ See declarations paragraph 2.3.

district of al Remela founded by *Shaykh* Mukarra Muhammad Aton, father of the current *Shaykh* Mukarra, is part of this fird. The lineage of Mukarra's family is proudly traced back to the *Shaykh* al Mathaib, presented to me as «the first Sudanese *Shaykh*»²⁴. The area where the *Masjid* is located is characterized by its proximity to the shores of the White Nile, which guarantees fertile ground for the populations that live on the banks, although causing disruption due to floods in the period between August and September. Adjacent to the *Masjid*, in addition to the school where the murids of *Shaykh* Mukarra study, there is a private high school run by *Shaykh*'s family. This school, divided into male and female sections, represents a pivotal point in the life of the *Tariqa*. In fact, this *Tariqa* is more involved on the social rather than on the religious field, conveying the efforts of the adepts on assistance to the local community, especially in case of economic necessity or in the organization of social events; the *Tariqa* also plays an important role in community health care, but this will be discussed later in a dedicated section. The interview with the *Shaykh* is conducted in Sudanese Arabic, with the sons of the *Shaykh* translating into English. During the course of the interview and the visit to *Masjid*, the *Shaykh* speaks with great pride of the work done by him and his children in helping the community that revolves around the *Masjid*, especially through sport: «Last year I was a national swimming champion and my sons play soccer in what you call the B series. For the children in our neighbourhood we had a soccer field built nearby, so we can get them involved in *Masjid*'s life. When we don't pray, we play sports, we play football and sometimes we organize tournaments against other *Masjids*, to get to know each other and have fun together»²⁵.

While a Murid in the service of the *Shaykh* dressed in the uniform of the *Tariqa* composed by *Jellabiyya* and *Karraba*²⁶ brings tea and food for us, he continues the description of the activities carried out by the *Shaykh* and the brotherhood: «Many of our income we divert them to the *Masjid* to help people in what they need. If by chance a couple gets married, we try to give them a nice gift, we try to help them for the party or to have a home to live in. But all our income fails to fund everything»²⁷, the biggest source of revenue for *Masjid* lies in the private school adjacent to the mosque which, net of professors' salaries, uses the fees to keep young students of the *Khalwa*, the Quranic school. Deepening the background of the students living within the walls of the *Masjid*, the poverty of many of them is emphasized «They are our students of the *Khalwa*, our murids. Now here are just a few of the many, those who are missing are home to their families for *Eid* holidays, those you see here cannot return to their families. None of them pay a fee, we offer everything, offer food, lodge and teach them. Almost all the children here are orphans, if they don't have another place to go we welcome them. It happens that a child born from an unofficial relationship is abandoned. We often find him still in swaddling clothes in front of the entrance to the *Masjid*. They pass by here at night and leave him there, because they know that we will take care of him»²⁸. In that case, we cannot take care of him and entrust him to the government. As far as our

²⁴ Interview 8, *Shaykh* Mukarra, 22/08/2018, al Remela, Khartoum.

²⁵ Ibid, 22/08/2018.

²⁶ A leather belt used as a symbolic representation of the first *Shaykh*. According to the common local tradition, the first *Shaykhs*, in order to fight the hunger caused by their poor living conditions used to tie a belt around the stomach. The belt used by the *Murid* is composed by two bands of leather, one on the stomach and one crossing the chest, attached on the front right side of the belt, crossing the left shoulder and joined again on the right side.

²⁷ Ibid, 22/08/2018.

²⁸ During my observation, it was possible for me to come into contact exclusively with male children hosted at the Koranic school, observing the lack of facilities to accommodate girls.

students are concerned, if they are particularly worthy, after they finish studying the whole Quran we allow them to enter our school next door. That is our second school, there who wants to can enrol their children and, paying a fee, let them attend the courses and make them study. The fees that we collect from school enrolments go then to finance the expenses for the Quranic school»²⁹.

The community perspective transmitted by this *Tariqa* transcends the boundaries of religious practice, resulting in the daily life of each member not only of the confraternity, but also of the surrounding area. As a manifestation of up to now verbally described lifestyle modesty, I am accompanied to the home of one of the *Shaykh*'s sons, in the housing block adjacent to the *Masjid*; the house consists of a single large room in which there are three beds, a kitchenette, a bathroom and two sofas in a space of about twenty square meters, soberly furnished. Taking advantage of the visit at the home of the *Shaykh*'s sons, I have the opportunity to notice a tent city of a dozen homes in precarious conditions; they are the inhabitants of the area bordering on the banks of the White Nile that, due to the floods due to seasonal rains, are forced to live temporarily inside the football field built by the *Shaykh*, inside precarious structures built with wood, plastic sheeting and animal skins. Behind them is the embankment that contains the river waters, forming an almost stagnant water inlet that is used by displaced people as a dump, as a water source for the few cattle in their possession, as a water source for them and as a latrine. Asking the eldest son of the *Shaykh* for clarification on those people, he replies: «See brother, these people live like this for two months a year, with their submerged lands and their houses completely unusable. They are here temporarily, close to the mosque. Normally they live beyond the embankment you see behind their tents, but the white Nile has overflowed with recent rains and has flooded their territories. Obviously, we offered them hospitality and all the help we can»³⁰.

The community perspective expressed by the *Tariqa* of *Shaykh* Mukarra represents, among the various confraternities belonging to the *Samaniyya*, the one most closely related to the inhabitants of the surrounding area, transcending the religious formality characteristic of some *Turuq* and appropriating a humanitarian element deriving also and not only from the religious bond between *Shaykh* and inhabitants of the neighbourhood. In common with the other *Turuq* remains the figure of the *Shaykh* and his descendants, a reference point for anyone with a need; be it economic, spiritual or social.

The *Samaniyya* turned out to be, in light of my observations, the most widespread brotherhood in the Khartoumense territory, albeit creating a system of self-regulation and subjectivity of the practice and of objectives different from *Shaykh* to *Shaykh*, based on the area of settlement, the experience of the leader, to his goals and to the origin of his confreres.

²⁹ Ibid, 22/08/2018.

³⁰ Interview 9, eldest son *Shaykh* Mukarra, 22/08/2018, al Remela, Khartoum.

2.2. Qadiriyya

Founded by the Hanbali preacher Abd al-Qadir ibn abi Salih³¹, the Qadiriyya order originated from Hijaz and Asia-minor and was introduced in the area of Funj by Taj ad-din al-Bahari al-Baghdadi³².

Inside the *Qadiriyya* reside two of the *Shaykhs* I interviewed, *Shaykh* Eltayeb with his *Masjid* in the area of North Khartoum, district of al-Jerif and of *Shaykh* Eltayib, with his *Masjid* in the town of Umm Dabban, just off the side south east of Khartoum. Between the two there is a close relationship, since the former refers to the latter as his personal *Shaykh*.

The first one I will introduce is *Shaykh* Eltayeb, met on various occasions³³. He is a Sudanese citizen working often in the United States, the interviews will be conducted in English and he will also translate from Sudanese Arabic to English whenever he is with me. The particularity that distinguishes *Shaykh* Eltayeb as an exponent of *Qadiriyya* is the vision of Sufism which, in contrast to the *Turuq* of *Samaniyya*, reserves great importance to the study not only of the Islamic doctrine contained in the sacred books par excellence and in the *hadits*, but also in the study of philosophy in general, as: «Sufism has a unique particular, it allows you to know the world around you, to become a good Sufi you must study law, philosophy, you must be a philosopher yourself and base yourself on three cardinal principles of honesty, equality and, above all, generosity towards those in need. [...] The most important thing in Islam, more important than Islam itself, is respect for others and especially respect for religious freedoms. We are all children of God! To be a good Sufi, one must be open to culture, science, music, philosophy, etc. Speaking of science, what happens with the practice of *Dhikr* is exactly like when you play sports, you bring out your negative energies. This is why it is important to know as much as possible, because until you know life, love, community, then you have simply spent time in your body, you have not lived life itself! In fact, what happened with the Mahdi some time ago³⁴ was because he was incapable of knowing and understanding the Sufi philosophy»³⁵. Our first encounter is all about the interpretative line that sees Sufism not only as a religion, but also as a lifestyle open to dialogue and to relations with the space inside and outside the *Ummah*. This is a point of contrast to what Karrar writes about *Qadiriyya*. As a general essential point for *Qadiriyya*, Karrar underlines the seclusion of the *Murid* from the world “as if it didn’t exist at all”³⁶. For Karrar, the heart experience should be superior from the brain, due to the supposed superiority of the experiences lived through the first over the second. “In truth, hearts are calm at the memory of Allah (Qur 13-28)”. Giving a new perspective on the topic, *Shaykh* Eltayeb proposes a relation with what surrounds the *Murid* not only confined to the spiritual dimension of the heart, but omni comprehensive. Every kind of experience and openness to the surrounding world is welcomed in his vision of Sufi practice.

³¹ Trimmingham, J. S., “The sufi Orders in Islam”, Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1971.

³² Ibn Dayf Allah, “*Kitab al Tabaqat*”, 1753.

³³ The 15th, the 21st and the 24th of August 2018.

³⁴ Referring to the Mahadist War.

³⁵ Interview 10, *Shaykh* Eltayeb, 15/08/2018, Ozone Bar, Khartoum 2, Khartoum.

³⁶ Khadiga Karrar, T. 1975, *Aspects of Sufism in the Sudan*, Durham theses, Durham University.

A point of fundamental importance for Shaykh Eltayeb is also the relationship between Sufi and Wahabi, from which he firmly distances: «Let us not speak then about the negative influence that Wahhabism and the Saudis have had on Sudan. For example, in a biographical book written by Al Wahab's father and brother, they claim that Al Wahab was sick with autism, a bit like in the movie Rain man, did you see him not? this book was banned and requisitioned by the Saudis in order not to leak a defect of the founder of the movement. Wahabism was then exploited by the CIA and MI6 to counter the USSR in the Middle East. Now, considering the influence of Wahhabism, there is a risk that Sufism itself will result in a form of extremism, or that we risk following exclusively the whims of the Shaykh, since he is an authority among the community. What a good Shaykh should do, would be not to use the Tariqa for his own personal purposes, but to do good. The difference between us and the Wahhabis is that for us we must not try to convince people to follow Islam with violence, with fear as the Muslim Brotherhood, but you must first start to do good by yourself, to create a family that will go to fit into a respectable company. This is the pivotal point of the difference between Sufism and Wahhabism, if the Wahhabi organizational pyramid starts from the top (Al Wahab) and goes downwards, that Sufi starts from the bottom, from the whole society that creates its foundations and develops later upward. Now, bearing in mind what I just told you, I'll give you another example. One of the five pillars of Islam is *Hajj*, but if you go to do *Hajj* and your neighbour dies of hunger, then for Allah *Hajj* is not valid and he does not accept it. For *Wahabi* instead *Hajj* is an imposition, it must be done a priori. Everything that revolves around Sufism does not just create a religion, as Sufism is primarily a lifestyle, a philosophy, which says that, to fully know, you must know philosophy and be a philosopher yourself. In this perspective, I can say that Sudan is a Sufi country. [...] now I want to tell you another story told to me by a friend a few days ago: Some time ago here in Shambat there was a woman who sold wine to live and keep her children. Now you know that here you can't sell alcohol because of *Shariah*, but this woman went to ask for help from the *Shaykh* because the business wasn't going well. He listened to her story, took a sheet of paper, wrote words, folded the sheet over itself several times and said to the woman "take this home, don't read it, hide it in a place and forget about it". After doing this, woman's business returned to normal and indeed better than before. A decade later, the woman returned to the *Shaykh* saying that she could not sell wine again. The *Shaykh* then asked her to retrieve the sheet and bring it to him. After burning it, he told her, "Now that your children are grown and have become good men, you no longer need to sell wine to help them." But the important part of this story is that the Wahhabis had directly said "no" to her when she asked for their help. The meaning of this story is that Islamic laws are not meant to be followed to the letter, but they can and must be broken, if necessary, to pursue a higher good. Moreover, they were not created to oppress, but to help people and make the community live in harmony and health. In Sufism it is important to give, but above all to give food to the poor if it is possible. It is not to do charity, we do not like to use this word, because it would mean putting those who receive food in a lower position than those who give it. We must donate without asking anything in return, you must share what God has given you»³⁷.

In this excerpt of our conversation on day 15/08/2018 all the basic elements of Sufism previously analysed emerge, albeit with a marked propensity towards the philosophical element: the *Karamas* narrated as examples to follow and stories to inspire the individual

³⁷ Ibid, 15/08/2018.

practitioner, the *Shaykh* seen as a figure of experience capable of guiding you correctly on your journey towards the knowledge of God, the contaminations coming from other religions and cultures that are seen as a source of inspiration but, above all, the clash that is created between the currents emerges doctrinal linked to Wahhabi-style traditionalism³⁸ with the almost progressive nature of Sufism described to me by *Shaykh* Eltayeb who, through the statements he released, uses not only traditional means such as poetry, literature, subjective physical experience and *Karama*, but also new media like Youtube through the speeches of Hamza Yusuf³⁹, through films, documentaries and modern sources of information.

Also through *Shaykh* Eltayeb I had the opportunity to attend the celebrations for the day of *Eid al-Adha* at his *Masjid* located in Khartoum North, district of al-Jerif. The festivities started on the morning of the tenth day of the month of *Dhu l Hijja*, starting with the first morning *salat*, which sees the faithful gathered at the mosque for common prayer. After the prayer, the *Murids* get a vacation period of about ten days in which they can return to their family. During the visit of the *Masjid* of *Shaykh* Eltayeb on the occasion of the day of *Eid* I was able to visit the places dedicated to prayer, hospitality and social space. *Shaykh* Eltayeb proudly describes me his *Masjid* and the structures connected to it: starting from the internal square in front of the mosque, it was built with the structure dedicated to prayer in a decentralized position, to allow the huge square in front of anyone to be exploited, especially from «the children of the neighborhood. When darkness falls, some don't have electricity at home, can't study or risk being in the middle of the street to play. Here they can take advantage of the light of the *Masjid* throughout the night. I thought of this space for the community; The mosque is not the center of the *Masjid*, the community is»⁴⁰. The large square is not the only space made available to the neighbourhood, there is also a cistern that supplies water to *Shaykh* Eltayeb's private home and the houses that surround the *Masjid*, all for free, according to the *Shaykh*. Behind the mosque, separated by a wall, are the rooms dedicated to the *Murids*, a canopy with tables and chairs available to the *murids* and local homeless, in which to eat meals prepared from the kitchen connected to the shed called *Taquyya*, managed by the women in the community who voluntarily prepare meals. The care of the community is found in various aspects described by the *Shaykh*: First of all, at the beginning of the observation it was possible to observe men separated from women as usual, only that the latter come to find themselves in the shade through disposition of the *Shaykh*, while the men are in the square outside, under the sun; the preparation of meals takes place according to a very precise criterion, in which «the person who eats should be considered. If you are a homeless man who hasn't eaten in days, I can't give you food that is too liquid or too solid, you would feel sick. Then, when you're better, we can feed you all we can. You don't have to worry about how long you will stay with us, you can stay as long as you want and not pay a single pound, even if you are not a Muslim»⁴¹. The meal that is prepared inside the *Taquyya* is called *Asidah*, described as a tradition of *Qadiriyya* and designed specifically to be offered to local homeless people.

³⁸ This element has also emerged in the other *Turuq* I visited, but it has never been deepened or emphasized as much as with *Shaykh* Eltayeb, which identifies it as a key element of the identity of the *Tariqa* of the *Qadiriyya* led by *Shaykh* Eltayeb.

³⁹ American *Shaykh* and scholar, Hamza Yusuf is the co-founder of "Zaituna College", a Muslim university of liberal arts based in Berkeley, California.

⁴⁰ Interview 11, *Shaykh* Eltayeb, 21/08/2018, al-Jerif, Khartoum.

⁴¹ Ibid, 21/08/2018.

Then moving to the area in front of the *Masjid* there is also a hostel that the *Shaykh* makes available to any traveller or homeless who needs it, for as long as it needs.

The organization of the *Masjid* of *Shaykh* Eltayeb resumes in a reduced way that of his reference *Shaykh*, *Shaykh* Eltayib, which is described below.

The *Masjid* is located in the town of Umm Dabban, located on the south-eastern edge of the State of Khartoum. It was founded in the late nineteenth century. A.D. from *Shaykh* Wad Badur, an *Ansar* loyal to the Mahdi, who according to *Shaykh* Eltayeb declares he decides to found Umm Dabban's *Masjid* in order to provide food, create breeding, educate the local people, recall another from outside to repopulate the area and provide water building an artificial lake still in use today. Today, although the structure continues to be identified as "the *Masjid* of *Shaykh* Wad Badur", the head is *Shaykh* Eltayib, a former retired jurist «at the top of the Sudanese judicial system»⁴².

During his retirement, he devoted himself to the care of *Masjid* and his role as *Shaykh*, albeit maintaining a link with his past profession. In fact, he was involved in «directing the defence of the Noura Hussein process directly. He was very fond of the case, she is sixteen, she is still a child! I am sorry to give this image of our country, that of child marriage is not an absolutely common practice. The *Shaykh* was absolutely sure of the sentence in favour of the girl, she was forced into that situation, even if now who knows what psychological trauma she may have suffered. Through the influence of *Shaykh* Eltayib we are trying to get her to get psychological support from the Government. With the arrival of Eid he then decided to give away about three hundred sheep to the poor of Umm Dabban who otherwise could not afford them»⁴³.

Asking for explanations on the expenditure faced by the *Shaykh* for the management of the *Masjid* and to buy a similar amount of cattle⁴⁴, *Shaykh* Eltayeb answers me that *Shaykh* Eltayib devolves his salary and his personal savings entirely to *Masjid*.

Once reached the locality of Umm Dabban, we enter the main road that marks the last kilometre towards the *Masjid*; this road is commonly called the "Road of Hope" «because the people who come here from different parts of Sudan to ask for help from the *Shaykh* go along this last stretch of road seeing the Minarets in the distance, feeling strong emotions, with hope in their bodies. I can't even imagine the intensity of the moment»⁴⁵. The exterior of the *Masjid* is surrounded by the residences of the *Murids*, or rows of rooms of 50 mt² inside which live a dozen of *Murids* each. The side at the end of the road of hope that leads to the main entrance is reserved for men, while the diametrically opposite side is occupied by women; According to what emerged during an interview with a group of professors from the University of Khartoum met at the

⁴² Ibid, 21/08/2018.

⁴³ Ibid, 21/08/2018.

⁴⁴ Monitoring sheep prices resold in the week before Eid, I was able to see a starting from 500 SDPs per head. This figure has progressively increased on a daily basis with the approaching feast of sacrifice, reaching almost 2000 SDP, making it prohibitively expensive to buy an animal from the population with a low monthly income. According to the data analysed by the U.S. Department of State, The minimum monthly salary for public sector workers is 425 SDP (\$ 53) and it is estimated that 46% of citizens lived below the poverty line of 12 SDPs (\$ 1.50) per day in 2017. Most public sector employees received salaries below the poverty line. BUREAU OF DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND LABOR, 2017 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices Report, April 20, 2018. <https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/2017/af/277051.htm>

⁴⁵ Ibid, 21/08/2018.

Masjid of *Shaykh* Eltayib⁴⁶, about 2,000 students from the areas around Khartoum and beyond, with around five hundred of them from Darfur and three hundred coming from South Sudan, would stay inside the *Masjid*. *Shaykh* Eltayeb is keen to specify that these students «are welcomed by the *Shaykh* if they request it, but the *Shaykh* himself tries to have them entrusted to his guardianship especially if they are orphaned children or have been enrolled as child soldiers, thanks to his influence on the Government. He does not limit himself to welcoming only Muslims, but also Christians and has also bought them suitable books to study like everyone else»⁴⁷.

Inside the circle formed by the *Murid*'s residences there is the Mosque, exactly at the entrance, connected to an internal area characterized by a large square with a small masonry canopy in the centre, a sand brazier that serves as a base to raise a bonfire from the ground and the *Shaykh*'s tombs. The square, separated into two areas by a masonry wall, welcomes the believers in two very specific moments of the practice: one part, free from any construction, serves for the practice of *Dhikr*, while the other serves for the moments of study. In fact the brazier, called "fire of the Quran", takes up the tradition of the first *Shaykhs* who exploited the bonfire to study the Quran in the evening, in the absence of lighting; today this tradition is maintained, symbolically lighting the bonfire every day during the evening study which is guaranteed by an electric lighting system. Between the mosque, the aforementioned square and the residences of the *Murids* there is the *Shaykh*'s *Khalwa*, soberly furnished with a bed and a bedside table, with a door that connects the room to a large living room where the members of the *Tariqa* are used to meet together to socialize.

The day inside the *Masjid* is spent between the study of the Quran and the preparation of meals; in the evening, between the fourth and fifth *Salat*, the Quran fire is lit to allow students to gather and report to the *Shaykh* what they have studied. In this task the *Shaykh* is helped by a team of group leaders called *Muggaddam*, who are given twenty *Murids* each. They pass among the students questioning them about the passage of the Quran studied during the day and deliver three dates as a reward if they have learned well what assigned to them, or a sheet of paper if they have studied badly. The students then quickly pass by the *Shaykh* to greet him and to receive his compliments or the indication to what to study for the next day. The fifth prayer of Friday, is spent around the fire to listen to the reading of Sufi poems.

Thus observing the doctrinal particularities proposed by the *Qadiriyya* it is possible to notice a link with many of the previously analysed brotherhoods, albeit with a propensity towards philosophical practice. In fact, it is possible to recognize in the practice observed by the two *Shaykhs* a consideration of the *Kamaras* more accentuated as an instrument of inspiration towards the right practice, as well as an opening to the relations with the community that resides in the vicinity of the *Masjid*. Other brotherhoods previously analysed showed this openness towards the community also understood as aid and sustenance, like the *Masjid* managed by *Shaykh* Mukarra; The *Qadiriyya* instead is not limited exclusively to the link with the material, intended as economic support, as donations especially of food, but tries to propose a link with the spirituality devoted to the knowledge of more sources, to the construction of a general culture that ranges from philosophy to filmography, internal and external to Islamic sciences. Wishing to cite a

⁴⁶ Interview 13, Group of professors from Khartoum's University, *Masjid Shaykh* Eltayib, Umm Dabban, 24/08/2018.

⁴⁷ Interview 10, *Shaykh* Eltayeb, 15/08/2018, Ozone Bar, Khartoum 2, Khartoum.

statement by *Shaykh* Eltayeb precisely on this subject, with reference to *Shaykh* Mukarra: «Yes, they are very good at what they do, to help the population, to do good, but they do not study, they are not philosophers, a requirement important for being a Sufi»⁴⁸. This element of openness towards a universal knowledge can lead to developing good relationships with practitioners of other religions, even if it risks damaging relationships within the current itself, criticizing those who desist from practicing a doctrine similar to their own.

2.3. Madiyya Drisia

The *Tariqa* of the *Madiyya Drisia* represents a black swan in the panorama of the *Turuq* I observed, with only a representation on the Khartoumense territory. The main aspects that distinguish the *Madiyya Drisia* from the other *Turuqs* of the area are: **a)** their extremely organized management of the *Tariqa* **b)** the image of themselves that they want to transmit to the external observers **c)** the relations entertained at international level with more *Turuq* and religious bodies. The headquarters of the *Tariqa* takes place at the private residence of the *Shaykh*, Dr. Muhamad al Asshana, with the outer space dedicated to prayer and the interior reserved for the actual members of the *Tariqa* for all the activities parallel to the practice itself. A separation is first drawn between the *Murid* of the brotherhood, here called *Akhwan*, and the actual confreres. The former are in fact separated from the latter at all times, during study, prayer and even by traditional moments dedicated to socialization in the immediate post-prayer; while the confreres can access the internal rooms to sip tea and discuss among themselves, the *Akhwan* are made to wait outside, composted sitting and dressed all in the same way. In order to fully understand the figure of the *Tariqa*, I believe it is appropriate to transcribe in full the dialogue I carried on with the representatives of the confraternity, moving some extract of it in a later paragraph that speaks about *Dhikr*.

The first aspect that distinguishes *Tariqa* is that it has created a highly hierarchical organization, with the presence of various figures within it, in fact I conducted my interview with the secretary of the *Shaykh* at the head of the *Tariqa* and with the clerk at international relations. The two basically prevented me from having a direct dialogue with the *Shaykh*, thus acting as a filter between me and the *Tariqa*.

At the beginning, I ask to describe the *Tariqa*, the *Shaykh*, all that concerns the life that revolves around the brotherhood.

Secretary: «The *Shaykh* is Dr. Muhamad Al Asshana, our *Tariqa* is based on the idea of making a common group, of helping each other. We call our Murids “Akhwan”, which means Brother. When they ask to join our association no one is rejected, but not all of them are accepted. Many things must be considered, such as the relationship with other members, their seriousness, their faith, their job».

M: «Could you describe to me, during a typical week, the religious practice that are conducted?»

S: «I don't think it's interesting for you! There are many more interesting things to know about our association, why are you interested in this topic?»

⁴⁸ Interview 12, *Shaykh* Eltayeb, 24/08/2018, *Masjid Shaykh* Eltayib, Umm Dabban.

I then explain the purpose of my research without going too much into detail, valuing the anthropological doctrinal aspect of the local community that I would like to analyse.

S: «Listen, it does not seem to me to be very useful for your research to know how we pray, maybe you could talk about how our association has excellent links and relations with religious communities around the world and Catholic communities in Europe, relations that we have with the other offices of our *Tariqa* in the world. You come from Italy, you are a Christian right? Here in my opinion this could already be a better topic for your research! After I will let you talk to that man who will be able to give you more information on this subject, he is our international relations officer» pointing me to another man in the room with whom I would have talked a little later.

S: «Can I ask you about Italy, what job do you do there?»

I: «I am a university student, I still do not have a fixed salary»

S: «Oh, and how did you cover the expenses to come up here? Who financed you?»

I: «No one, I did a part-time job while following lectures to pay for my expenses»

Noticing his distinctly different expression and his attempt to take the reins of the discussion, I decided to change the language used, asking the same questions in different terms;

I: «Your professional relationship manager has the duty to maintain relations with stakeholders or local actors, including the international perspective mentioned above?»

S: «Yes, he represents our association outside the walls of this house, with the *Imams*, with the other *Shaykhs*, with the foreign ambassadors. Formally and practically, he is our ambassador».

Among the details that particularly captured my attention, the most interesting one is the image that the association, as defined by the Secretary, wants to give of itself. Although maintaining a bond with the basis of the Sufi doctrine shared by the other *turuqs*, it actually seeks particular characteristics in its members, not allowing those who are unable to meet the established standards, including the profession they perform, to join the *Tariqa*. In fact, it seems that more than a brotherhood that aims to bring together a group of practitioners in function of a common faith under the guidance of a *Shaykh*, or a doctor in this specific case, it is like an organization that uses the previously described elements to create opportunities for meetings, contacts and useful information among the most selected members of the *Tariqa*. The professional element, which transcends the doctrinal aspect, seems to have set aside the religious nature itself, which sees a practice carried on in a sober way, compared to the others, analysed, as well as a preference of a secular title like that of Doctor Graduate instead of *Shaykh* in reference to the head of the *Tariqa*. Pointing the attention in particular on the profession performed by the individual candidate, or by the external elements that refer to it, affirm the associative dimension of the *Tariqa*, outlining it more as an elitist reality than an interpersonal network that exploits religious practice in order to create the glue needed to bring the group together.

Talking to the previously presented Ambassador of the *Tariqa* by the Secretary of the *Shaykh*, he is basically confirmed as I said before by the secretary, adding a declaration

of participation of the brotherhood abroad and with the highest authorities with which he comes into contact, understood as other Turuq or figures as Ambassadors and representatives of International Organizations. He especially emphasizes their ideological intolerance towards the Wahabites, firmly distancing them and focusing on their own *Tariqa* as open to religious dialogue and, above all, to the excellent social and professional relations they have with Europe. At the time of leaving the room where we held the interviews and in which the members of the association use to meet, I was placed at the end of the group that neatly placed at the exit, led by the doctor and *Shaykh* Seenan, anticipated by the photographer who place in front of the door to take the best shots.

3. Sufi spirituality and *Naafs*

“If my servants ask you about me; behold, I am near (Qur. 2: 182).

I am closer to him than his own vein in the neck (Qur. 50:15).

The signs are in the earth and in yourself for those who have true faith. Don’t you see them? (Qur. 51: 20-21). “

The term Sufism (Tasawwuf or Sufiyya as locally pronounced) probably derives from the *suf*, a rough woollen garment that sufi observants used to wear from the moment they begin their journey to divine knowledge. Sufism is identified as a mystical ascetic movement belonging to Sunni Islam, emerged on the scene of Islamic practice as a movement in its own already in the early period of the Abbasid era. What distinguishes the Sufi current from other more or less orthodox expressions of Islam is the search through the idea of paths, of the journey of God’s nature. This research is characterized by a strong subjective element. Fundamental is the divine uniqueness intended not as the presence of one God but as the presence of God in every single thing; Everything that exists, from men to animals, from heaven to plants, is nothing other than a reflection of the existence of God as well as of its uniqueness. All is Allah and Allah is in everything. This consideration of earthly space does not lack a certain pantheistic attribute, criticized since the dawn of the first Sufism to the present day.

Defining Sufism is not a simple thing; The Persian author Ghalal al-Din Rumi (1207-1273) in his poem “*Masnawi*” exposes the parable of the elephant that the Hindus decide to take to a dark room to display it but, not being able to see it, they merely imagine its forms through their tactile experience: some touching it on the proboscis say that it resembles a water pipe, others touching a leg that looks like a pillar, some touching the ears give the animal the shape of a folding fan and others still resting their hands on the back give it the exact shape of a throne⁴⁹. The parable carried out by the famous Sufi poet gives us a description of the reality of the Sufi world quite truthfully, specifying that tracing a single universal image shared by all practitioners is almost impossible. As for the Hindus with the elephant, the direct experience of the individual Sufi practitioner and his relationship with the world shapes his knowledge, making its objective nature secondary. Certainly, in the Hindu case, a lantern in the room would be a good way to ensure accurate observation and common perception of the animal. In Sufism we can compare the figure of the lantern to the “master”, to the guide, to the one who was able to observe directly the divine figure present inside and outside the world perceived by all and who is able to guide you towards it: the Shaykh.

⁴⁹ G. D. Rumi, *Masnawi*, 1273.

Bearing in mind therefore the variability of the nature of Sufism, it is necessary to analyse the largely shared doctrinal components, in order to further relate them to the practice observed in the State of Khartoum; first of all the idea of the Path. The term *Tariqa* formally used to indicate the brotherhood to which the single *Shaikh* or *Murid* (the traveller, the pupil of the *Shaykh*) binds in order to reach the knowledge of Reality literally means “path”. Started by a saint who in almost all cases gives the name to the *Tariqa*, it is managed by the descendant of the founder who has the task of handing down his Baraka, or his blessing. This path of esoteric nature can and must be followed in order, through: a) the crossing of actively acquired stages of spiritual purity and b) of emotional states.

The first of them are seven stages of elevation towards the divine figure acquired with time and constancy in actions, called Stages of *Naafs*, and according to the model proposed by Nicholson⁵⁰ are:

1) **Repentance**, *Tawbat*. The most important of all, the sinner begins his journey here. Recognizing his sinful past, he decides to start a new life, converting himself to the path towards a better life and towards God. The moment of conversion usually coincides with an experience that cannot be described by the common everyday logic that resides in dreams, visions, hearings or miracles. Conversion, however, is not irreversible, indeed it is possible that a man decided to follow the path towards God once again falls into sin, having to make amends again with the infinite divine mercy. In itself repentance can not only derive from a single direct experience of man, but can also identify an act of grace coming directly from God for man, not therefore as the result of voluntary conversion. Here begins his journey, to be accomplished through the complete reliance on the figure of the *Shaykh*, of the master. 2) **Abstinence**, from sin. 3) **Renunciation** of the earthly world. 4) **Poverty**. 5) **Patience**. 6) **Trust in God**, or a state of complete abandonment to the divine will. 7) **Satisfaction** in knowing the perfect nature of God.

This path has to be facilitated through the guidance of a *Shaykh* (also called *Sheikh*, *Pir*, *Murshid*, Master, etc.) to whom the *Murid* decides to entrust his spiritual maturation. Like the lantern that makes us understand the nature of the elephant or the guide that leads the wayfarer to an unknown terrain, the *Shaykh* is the one who decides whether and possibly which path of divine knowledge the *Murid* can access, all based on his personal religious experience. Since the *Shaykh* has come to occupy the step of Satisfaction, the nature of his teachings, as well as his knowledge, is absolutely unquestionable: every word he speaks is law for his disciples.

Having observed the general spiritual doctrine of Sufism, the concept of *Naafs* is used here to underline doctrinal differences within the *Turuq* of the area of Khartoum.

As described by Karrar⁵¹, in the Sudanese *Samaniyya* the stages of *Naafs* are three, and are traversed by the *Murid* while performing *Dhikr*: 1) **al-Lawwamah**, the soul reproach the person for committing sins. 2) **al-Mulhamah**, the “inspired soul” guide the *Murid* to righteousness. 3) **al-Mutma’innah**, “The tranquil soul” has penetrated the veil and behaves in total righteousness, surrendering to Allah.

⁵⁰ Nicholson R. A., 2016, *Sufismo e Mistica Islamica*, Epub.

⁵¹ Khadiga Karrar, T. 1975, *Aspects of Sufism in the Sudan*, Durham theses, Durham University.

First, we will compare two members of the same *Tariqa*: the Doctor and *Shaykh* al-Bashir of the *Samaniyya* of Bahri, Shambat. One of the main topics they discussed was the representation of the spiritual stages of *Naafs*⁵². It is important to note that the two interviews were conducted in the same place but in two different days, without the relative presence of both of the respondents in each other session⁵³. Therefore, there was not the opportunity to create a direct confrontation within them regarding the topic.

According to the version proposed by the *Shaykh*, there are seven stages through which the soul of the believer can move, and they are: 1) ***Allammara***: Lowest stage possible. The behaviour of the person is wrong under any circumstance and is not able to behave in a good way, neither to recognize the evilness of his actions. This happens due to the influence of demons (id est *Jinn*) that controls the subject through mental and/or physical possession. 2) ***Allawama***: While perpetuating the same behaviour, the person is conscious of the actions he is committing. 3) ***Al Mullhima***: In this stage, the behaviour is inspired by the surrounding environment. The believer now starts to behave in a better way and to be inspired by *Karama*. Still, a balance within good and bad actions persist, creating an unstable level of spirituality. 4) ***Al Mutmaheinna***: “comfortable”, or the stage where most believers live. Still characterized by a certain part of bad actions committed, the general behaviour is oriented through good actions. 5) ***Al Ràdiyah***: “Satisfied”, the believer accepts everything that happens to him, without the passive nature of the previous stage. Due to his behaviour, the person living in this stage is rewarded with a sense of satisfaction. 6) ***Al Maediyah***: Similar to the previous stage, but characterized by a bigger sense of satisfaction. 7) ***Al Khàmila***: “Perfection”. Since the behaviour of the Believer is perfect, he feels a sensation similar to «seeing the world through Allah’s eyes»⁵⁴.

These stages can be experienced by anyone, with the *Shaykh* being almost exclusively in the *al Khàmila* stage. During the interview with the Doctor⁵⁵, however, the stages described before have been explained to me in a different way. The stages of *Naafs* are seven, and are: 1) ***Khabatha***: “Wicked”. The person living in this stage is suffering from a curse. *Shaytan* lives inside of him, making him live his own life and feeling his own feelings. 2) ***Allawama***: “Reproach”. Despite the continuous bad behaviour conducted by the person, the subject is conscious of his own actions and reproach himself as a consequence. 3) ***Al Mullhama***: “Inspired”. The believer now is inspired by the surrounding environment and he starts to behave in a better way. 4) ***Al Rhadia***: “Satisfied”. Thanks to the better behaviour perpetrated by the believer, he lives now in a stage of discreet satisfaction. 5) ***Al Mhardiyya***: “Satisfaction of Allah”. Allah is satisfied by the good behaviour of the believer. This is perceived by the believer himself. 6) ***Al Muthmainna***: “In peace and relaxed”. Thanks to the almost perfect actions perpetrated by the believer, he lives almost constantly in a stage of peace and tranquillity. 7) ***Al Khàmila***: “Perfection”. Stage of absolute perfection, unreachable by a human and reserved only to the Prophet Muhammad.

⁵² Path of transition of actively acquired stages of spiritual purity. Formally recognized as seven different stages (R. A. Nicholson, *Sufismo e Mistica Islamica*, Epub, 2016) the path will lead to the direct Knowledge of Allah. It is supposed to be acquired through the mediation of an experienced *Shaykh*.

⁵³ Due mainly to logistic reasons of the respondents.

⁵⁴ Interview 2, *Shaykh* al-Bashir, 06/08/2018, Bahri, Shambat, *Masjid Shaykh* al-Bashir.

⁵⁵ Interview 5, Doctor of Quranic sciences, 10/08/2018, Bahri, Shambat, *Masjid Shaykh* al-Bashir.

The main difference between the two versions, proposed by two different members of the same *Tariqa* is the level up to which a Believer can push himself to the direct knowledge of Allah. While the stage of *al Khamila* is open for everyone who truly behave in a right way according to *Shaykh* al Bashir, the Doctor thinks that this stage can be reached only by a *Shaykh*. This distinction, that can look superficial, underlines the variegated nature of *Sufi* practice. Forward in this article I will describe other observations collected during visits to other brotherhoods of the region on the topic of doctrine.

Despite some differences regarding the structure of *Naafs*, both the *Shaykh* and the doctor agrees that a fundamental element to progress through the spiritual stages is the *Dhikr*⁵⁶.

A contradiction to the structure of *Naafs* is brought also by the *Tariqa* of *Shaykh* al-Burée. 1) **Allammara**: “Order”, The behaviour of the believer is negative, because it is soul that orders the person to behave in this way. 2) **Allawamah**: “Reproach”, the believer recognize the wrong behaviour in a moment of lucidity and start to reproach himself. 3) **Al mutmainna**: “Relaxed”, a state of transition to positivity, in which one accepts passively everything that happens. Do not enjoy or suffer from anything. 4) **Anaarràdia**: “Accepted”, a stage marked by a great acceptance of the self. Comparable to *Al mutmainna*, but characterized by a slightly greater level of understanding and peace, with an active element that contributes to the acceptance of the self. I am told a story about it by the Teacher: «I know of a *Shaykh* who, while he was giving a lecture on patience and *Anaarràdia* to his *Murids*, was repeatedly stung by a scorpion in the leg. His pupils, having noticed the bleeding leg, warned the master, asking him why he did not suffer, or did nothing. His answer was that he did not perceive the physical suffering inflicted by the insect. Since he was giving a lecture on patience, he was actively giving an example to his students». In this case the *Shaykh* is in a stage of *Anaarràdia*. 5) **Anas al Marrdiyah**: A stage that guarantees a perception of Allah’s fierceness towards him, since the behaviour is that of a good Muslim. The bad actions on your part almost disappear, positive events start to happen more often and above all you can start helping other Muslims. 6) **Anas al Mulhima**: The behaviour is unexceptionable, there is the certainty of being loved by Allah and by people. However, speaking and bragging about one’s presence at this stage to someone would entail the risk of returning to the previous one.

The transition between the spiritual levels takes place progressively, passing from one stage to another exclusively thanks to daily actions and one’s own behaviour, not with the *Dhikr*.

⁵⁶ The local practice of *Dhikr* will be due to his complete heterogenous nature in the local context.

4. Dhikr

The term *Dhikr*, which has the meaning of “mention”, is present in the *Quran* as a necessity to remember God: “Oh you who believe, remember often the Name of Allah (Qur 33-41)” or “Remember therefore of Me and I will remember you, be grateful to Me and do not deny Me (Qur 2: 152) “and also” In truth, hearts are calm at the memory of Allah (Qur 13-28)”. Despite the fact that *Dhikr* is present in the whole Muslim world, *Sufis* attribute to its practice a fundamental importance, as a meditative tool aimed at favouring the abandonment of the self to facilitate the journey towards God, thanks to the total concentration of the soul on the single word aimed at remembering God. Not even being excluded from the variability that characterizes the *Sufi* identity, it changes from region to region, from one economic level to another, even between the various *Turuq*. The *Dhikr* can take various forms, it can be practiced in silence or it can be audible, recited in a low voice or with a strong and even sung voice, maintaining a certain corporeal immobility or being manifested through dance and episodes of self-flagellation, lived in solitude or in groups among the members of the same *Tariqa*. The practice of *Dhikr* is generally additional to the five daily prayers.

I have decided to analyse the *Dhikr* as a tool to compare the various *Turuq* reached by me, given the importance attributed to it and the variability it has in the local area. Observing the practice, it is important to note that there is not a fixed time for all the *Turuq* for the *Dhikr*, since every single *Tariqa* executes it depending on their schedule and doctrine.

According to Karrar, *Dhikr* is executed by the *Samaniyya* in general as an exercise of the single disciple and it “consists of five parts: 1) *al-Istighfar* (asking for forgiveness) 2) *as-Salat ‘ala ‘n-nabi* (calling down blessings upon the Prophet) 3) *Tahlil: La illa illa Allah* (there is no god but God) 4) *Ya Allah* (oh God) 5) *Ya Huwa* (oh He). Each of these parts divides into three sections, major, intermediate and minor according to the aspiration of the disciple. These three sections indicate the number of times he disciple might repeat the formulas of *Dhikr*”⁵⁷.

Starting the analysis of the documentation with the *Tariqa* of *Shaykh* al-Bashir, the practice of *Dhikr* is executed to facilitate the positive transition from one stage of *Naafs* to the other.

According to the declarations of the Doctor of the *Tariqa* led by the *Shaykh* al Bashir:

«*Dhikr* is practiced by every Muslim in the world, but there is not an universal *Dhikr* for everyone. Also, you cannot be always sure that Allah will accept your *Dhikr* except for one, which is: “*Allahumma salli ala saydna Muhamed*” (oh Allah give your blessing and peace to Muhamed). *Dhikr* has to be executed every day before every prayer, but most importantly in the morning. The sunrise is the best moment to ask for Allah’s forgiveness and to have your prayers accepted by him. Usually, the *Dhikr* has to be executed alone, but also in group if someone agrees. To pray, you use the *Sibah*⁵⁸, called also rosary by Christians; it works the same way, and it’s useful to count. Remember that you have to execute the *Dhikr* as fast as you can! The recitation begins with

⁵⁷ Khadiga Karrar, T. 1975, *Aspects of Sufism in the Sudan*, Durham theses, Durham University.

⁵⁸ Known also as *Tasbeeh*, *Misbaha* or many other names around the Islamic word, it is a chain of beads used to pray in the Muslim world. The number of beads can vary.

Astaghfirullah repeated one hundred times, then *Bismillahi al rahamni al Rahim* repeated one hundred times, after *Astaghfir Allah* (asking for forgiveness to Allah) repeated one hundred times, then *Allahumma salli ala saydna Muhamed* repeated one hundred times, after *la illaha illa Allah Muhamed rasoohillah* repeated one hundred times, after *Ya Allah* (oh Allah) repeated one hundred times and *Ya Huwa* (I mean He (Allah) who is calling me) repeated one hundred times. The *Dhikr* has to be closed with *Allahumma salli ala saydna Mohamed* repeated two times. If you recite it with the right cadence it will last almost three minutes»⁵⁹. The *Sibah* used by the member of this *Tariqa* is handcrafted by the member of the brotherhood and contains one hundred beads.

It is possible to observe that there are some similarities in the content with proposed by Karrar but a fundamental difference with the execution of it. While the first one refers to it as a variable scheme that the *Murid* can execute freely upon his willingness, the Doctor's description stands within a fixed number of repetitions, unique for all the members of the *Tariqa*, affiliate or *Murids*, physically manifested in the number of beads that compose the *Sibah* used to count *Dhikr*.

Talking with a *Murid* of the *Tariqa* of *Shaykh* al Bashir, the image proposed of the brotherhood appear less formal⁶⁰ and the attention is more focused on the emotional aspect of the practice. The following interview is conducted completely in English. The *Murid* in question tells me to work independently during the day and to spend time at *Masjid* exclusively for the activities concerning the spiritual sphere. During the interview emerges the scheme of daily and weekly practice carried out by the *Tariqa*: every day the five Salat anticipated by the *Dhikr* as described by the Doctor are carried out, on Friday the sura 18 "Al Kahf" is read by the *Shaykh*. The practice of *Dhikr* is not intended here as a special occasion to be reserved for moments of high spirituality as during Friday, but as an integral part of daily practice, comparable to the daily recitation of the Christian rosary. The mystic element is more marked when the *Murid* describes the feelings he has during the practice: «It's not something I can explain, it's bigger than me! While you practice the *Dhikr* you can't feel your body, like if you were completely abandoned to Allah's will»⁶¹. The Doctor of Quranic sciences describes the feelings in a more sober way, stating that «during the practice of *Dhikr* you feel relaxed and in a status of peace»⁶².

The tendency to the mystical element, although present in all the interviewees of the *Tariqa* of *Shaykh* al-Bashir, seems to be more present in the *murids* than in the men of greater knowledge of the Quranic scriptures. The experience at the *Tariqa* of *Shaykh* al Bashir can be summarized as an observation of a *Tariqa* linked mainly to the common practice and to the study of the Quran while maintaining a certain sobriety in the practice.

This sobriety is not found in the Brotherhood *Shaykh* al Burée, that conduct a *Dhikr* intended not only as a religious moment but also as an occasion of socialization. In this case, he *Dhikr* takes the name of *Annouba* (Great Drum), the traditional Sudanese drums, as the recitation is accompanied by the sound of percussions and the singing of an al

⁵⁹ Interview 5, Doctor of Quranic sciences, 10/08/2018, Bahri, Shambat, *Masjid Shaykh* al-Bashir.

⁶⁰ Interview 6, *Murid Shaykh* al Bashir, 10/08/2018, Bahri, Shambat, *Masjid Shaykh* al Bashir.

⁶¹ Ibid, 10/08/2018.

⁶² Interview 5, Doctor of Quranic sciences, 10/08/2018, Bahri, Shambat, *Masjid Shaykh* al Bashir.

Muddah, a singer hired by the *Tariqa* on the occasion of *Dhikr* with the task of guiding the *Dhikr*, singing the praises to Allah, reciting excerpts from the *Sunna* and poems written by the *Shaykh* and *Sufi* poets. The moment of *Dhikr* is introduced to me as a spiritual moment, but also as an occasion of the highest social importance; in fact, according to the words of the Teacher, it is «a moment of celebration and fun for all of us»⁶³. Carried out after the third prayer of the day, it lasts from two to three hours and is performed exclusively by men belonging to the confraternity as it is seen as an expression of masculinity and virility. In the square in front of the Mosque of *Azzariba* men strictly dressed in white *Jellabiyya* form a large perimeter along the entire inner wall, inside the *Shaykh* leads a group of people composed of two *Darvish* who flank him left and right dressed in a green *Jellabiyya* with red profiles, followed by *Muddah* and *Murids*. While they proceed slowly within the circle with an upright posture and open arms, the faithful who make up the circle follow the chant holding a slightly tilted forward position, hands apart and side by side, arms repeating a cyclic movement like a hit the torso at the level of the sternum alternated by rows of men holding hands. In the middle of the group, children who imitate the behaviour of adults walk freely. Women are allowed to recreate the *Dhikr* in a separate location from the male ones, although without receiving the religious benefits deriving from it. Being therefore seen as a religious occasion linked to the social and community sphere, the practice of *Dhikr* on this occasion seems to transcend the exclusive religiosity seen in the previous brotherhood of *Shaykh* al Bashir. All this does not exclude ties with mystical experiences; On the occasion of the *Annouba* it may happen that some practitioners may fall, faint, stagger or feel weak, all because «you are not yet strong enough to endure high levels of spirituality, as you find yourself in a still low *Naafs* stadium. If you are a normal person, you can stand all this»⁶⁴.

Comparing it to the *Dhikr* put in place by the group of elderly *Darvish* of the *Tariqa* of *Shaykh* al-Nil in Omdurman, it's possible to observe some common elements of the prayer that follows a very precise scheme although chaotic at first glance. It starts at dawn time, between the *Salat al-Asr* and the *Salat al-Maghrib*. After the third prayer of the day and while waiting for the beginning of the *Dhikr*, the faithful go to the tombs of the *Shaykhs* to honour their remains, trying to recover some sand considered sacred from inside the sarcophagus closed in a cell of iron bars. The *Dhikr* is put into practice as a tool through which to enter a state of trance aimed at establishing a direct bond between God and man, «the feeling you feel is as if you are flying towards heaven»⁶⁵. The *Dhikr* is initiated by the elders, who at the time of the arrival of the lineage of Hamed al Nil begin to make two turns within the circle that came to form. After two rounds, while the faithful around the circle move as usual, the *Darvish* separate and begin to practice their *Dhikr*. Some rotates, some jumps, some stays still and «absorbs the energy and peace that wafts in the air»⁶⁶ or who joins other *Darvish* to continue to turn inside the circle.

Coordination is maintained through the rhythm of drums played by some *Muddahs* accompanying the singing of an elderly *Darvish*; the circle of faithful is composed of young *Darvish* and faithful from various *Turuqs*. According to the statements of *Shaykh*

⁶³ Ibid, 08/08/2018.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 08/08/2018.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 06/09/2018.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 06/09/2018.

Sinan, the faithful and *Darvish* present every Friday at the *Dhikr* at the necropolis of Omdurman come from various parts of the world, creating a unique event of its kind and unrelated to certain mechanics typical of other *Turuq* closed to relationships and practices with other Sufis. During the practice I observed, a lot happens even around the perimeter delimited by the faithful. During the acting, a faithful young man involved in the repetitive movement practically identical to the *Tariqa* of *Shaykh* al Burée previously analysed⁶⁷, collapses to the ground, under the eyes of all. No one comes to the aid of the young, as it is believed that he is benefiting from a vision due to *Dhikr*.

At the same time, other *Darvish* pass among the crowd to ask for alms, while some others try their hand at very scenic practices and movements. In particular, two subjects caught my attention: the first is a *Darvish* dressed in a black *Jellabiyya*, who wanders around the necropolis with a large number of *Sibah* covering his head in full, preventing him from seeing what is found of forehead, proving to be in a very pronounced ascetic state, with the gaze lost in the void, the arms that move in coordination with the sound of the *Annouba* and the voice that repeats disconnected phrases from those recited by the singer who guides the *Dhikr* through the loudspeakers; the second strikes me for its clothing, unique among all the *Darvish* present, composed of a *Jellabiyya* of Leopard skin decorated with long thin strips of leather, shell necklaces, small bells and a leather bandolier wrapped around the right arm, the all completed with a wooden rifle painted in green and black.

After the participatory observation, me and *Shaykh* Seenan moved a few hundred meters away from the necropolis to visit the *Tariqa* of *Shaykh* Arwallah based in Bahri, district of Shambat, to observe the salat al Maghrib and the *Dhikr*. The *Tariqa* was founded by *Shaykh* Amadou al Taiba, father of the current *Shaykh* Arwallah. During my brief visit that coincide with the fifth prayer of Friday 08/10/2018, I am introduced to the *Tariqa* by the son of the current *Shaykh*, introduced to me by *Shaykh* Sinan once I reached the places where the *Tariqa* is used to meet.

The practice of *Dhikr* is performed in a decidedly sober manner compared to the previously analysed context. Not only are the names of God remembered, but space is given to stories of the *Shaykhs* at the head of the *Tariqa* and to poems written by the *Shaykh* himself. The element of continuity between this and the other *Turuq* is the presence of the *Muddah*, external singer to the *Tariqa*, who has the task of directing the *Dhikr* flanked by the *Shaykh* seated at his side inside a room used to house the members of the *Tariqa*. The peculiarity of the ceremony is to see its practitioners not sitting on the ground but on normal chairs, dedicated exclusively to listening to the recitation of the *Muddah* performing *Madih*, the set of stories, memories of Allah and recitations of poems written by the master of the brotherhood. All this is supported by the continuous work of a group of waiters dedicated to constantly supplying the faithful gathered in with water and coffee before stopping for the fifth and last prayer of the day. This *Tariqa* shows signs of formality not present in previous *Turuqs*, given the identical white *Jellabiyya* for all, with the exception of the *Muddah* dressed in informal clothes, and the

⁶⁷ In the case of Omdurman's *Darvish*, observable practices vary due to the greater variety of believers. From the joined hands and palms facing the sternum that strike the chest to the rhythm of the *Muddah* drums to people who hold up sticks in their hands by waving them in the air, from those who jump on the spot raising their arms to the sky to those who like *Darvish* engage in a completely subjective practice.

sobriety of the religious experience entwined with a celebration also belonging to a certain social dimension, in which the figure of the *Shaykh* plays the role of pivot.

Moving on the practice of *Dhikr* observed in Umm Dabban at the *Masjid* of *Shaykh* Eltayib of the *Qadiriyya*, it's possible to observe some similarities with the previous *Turuq* observed. Between the third and fourth *Salat*, the *Dhikr* comes to life inside the square enclosed by the mosque and the tombs of the *Shaykhs*. As in other previously analysed examples, the ceremony involves the *Madeh* who have the task of accompanying the ceremony with the sound of the *Annouba*. A circle is drawn in the centre of the square, to mark the area in which the *Madeh* and the participants can take an active part in the prayer, being circumscribed by the faithful who gather on the external perimeter in observation. The internal group follows a counter-clockwise movement forming a line that runs along the radius with increasing speed in sync with the rhythm and volume dictated by the *Madeh*. The topics dealt with do not exclusively concern wanting to remember the name of Allah, but also include examples from the life of the Prophet, poems and stories with a religious background to use as inspiration. Also in this case, the *Dhikr* is performed exclusively by men as it represents an expression of virility, women merely observe from the opposite side of the mosque, a space reserved for male observers, in the vicinity of the *Shaykh* tombs in the company of children who are free to run throughout the yard and even take part in the *Dhikr* itself.

Compared to the Sufi experience in rural Somalia, women tend to be excluded by the practice of *Dhikr* in the area of Khartoum while they represent an important asset in religious Somali practice. For example, women part of the *Qadiriyya* hold a certain level of leadership in religious and social rituals as well, becoming a vehicle of transmission of religious practice from generation to generation or when they move to the husband's village after the marriage, in the case of Gosha women⁶⁸.

The last *Tariqa* that I had the chance to observe during the practice of *Dhikr* was the *Madiyya Drisia*, led by *Shaykh* al-Asshana. It is important to underline the fact that I was only able to speak with the secretary of the *Shaykh* and, in the initial phase of the interview, he was sceptical on answering on my questions regarding religious practice, trying to evade them and speak about the international image of the *Tariqa*. What follows is the only concepts he was willing to share with me regarding the practice of *Dhikr*.

I: «Can the relationships with other associations also admit religious practice in common?»

S: «Of course»

Me: «In this perspective, how does the *Tariqa* behave? Do you adopt a common prayer routine?»

S: «You can pray together, but everyone with their own *Dhikr*»

I: «Can you give me an example of the practice of the *Dhikr*?»

Secretary: «For example, our *Dhikr* which is recited by all members of the association on Fridays even when we are together with other members of other *Turuq*, then Al

⁶⁸ Declich F., 2000, "Sufi experience in rural Somali. A focus on Women" in *Social Anthropology*, 8, 3, European Association of Social Anthropologists.

Asshana⁶⁹ creates a personal *Dhikr* for each one of us, according to our needs and on what he says is better for us, to recite alone in the moments of the day indicated by him»

I: «Can you describe your common *Dhikr*?»

S: «We do it between the fourth and the fifth prayer, we read the sura Yasin four times, then we read four times the prayers dictated by Sayyed Ahmad ab Drisia, accompanied by a *Madeh*»⁷⁰.

The soberly performance of the *Dhikr* holds true to the general image of the *Tariqa*, focused on the external image they propose to the community rather than the internal spiritual life of the brotherhood.

The widely shared practice of the use of drums during *Dhikr* practice in Khartoum's state doesn't hold true in other larger Sufi communities of east Africa, like the communities in the southern part of Juba river in Somalia do not integrate any kind of dance performance neither the use of tambourine during *Dhikr*⁷¹.

5. Miracles

Literally translated with "Generosity", *Karama* are events of supernatural kind apparently not understandable by mankind. Typical of Sufi doctrine, *Karama* are usually experienced by *Shaykhs*.

Despite the fact that early *Shaykhs* refused to associate themselves with *Karama*⁷², in the Kitab al-tabaqat it's unquestionable that is common thing for the *Shaykhs* to be considered capable of performing "miracles" as proof of their consequent unquestionable closeness to God⁷³: from *Karama* which resume the heavenly journey faced by the prophet to *Karama* that make the *Shaykh* capable of dialoguing with animals and even being able to fly, without the important role they play as healers in case of mental illness. *Karama* therefore have a double purpose in the Sudanese Sufi culture: they are needed by the *Shaykh* to support his authority over the community and by the believers to support their faith⁷⁴.

Among the proposed doctrine there is no lack of *Karama*, introduced to me by the *Shaykh* as «gifts granted by God to those who behave impeccably. The gift of miracles allows you to achieve anything only if you truly believe it»⁷⁵. As mentioned by *Shaykh* al-Bashir, having the opportunity to witness or receive *Karama* is not granted to anyone, but these gifts can be obtained thanks to the good practices of faith and the goodness of one's actions.

Despite a strong feeling of openness shown towards what lies outside the *Ummah*, there are also typical features of the Sufi world such as *Karamas* and the intervention of the *Shaykhs*. According to *Shaykh* Eltayeb «the Sufi philosophy, despite the large numbers

⁶⁹ The *Shaykh* of the *Tariqa*.

⁷⁰ Interview 7, Secretary *Shaykh* al Asshana, 10/08/2018 *Tariqa* Madiyya Drisia, Khartoum.

⁷¹ Declich F., 2000, "Sufi experience in rural Somali. A focus on Women" in *Social Anthropology*, 8, 3, European Association of Social Anthropologists.

⁷² Trimmingham, J. S., 1971, "*The sufi Orders in Islam*" Oxford at the Clarendon Press.

⁷³ Ibn Dayf Allah, 1753, "*Kitab al Tabaqat*".

⁷⁴ M. Mahmoud, "*Sufism and Islamism in the Sudan*", in D. Westerlund e E. E. Rosander, "*African Islam and Islam in Africa*", Londra, Hurst & Company, 1997, 162-190.

⁷⁵ Interview 2, *Shaykh* al Bashir, 06/08/2018, Bahri, Shambat, *Masjid Shaykh* al Bashir.

gained in recent years, is not easy to understand and certainly you can never understand it with your own mind, because there are some great mysteries that can never be known»⁷⁶. This declaration actually introduces the predominance of the leader of the confraternity, understood as a guide capable of leading you with conscience into the inexplicable mysteries. I am also introduced to recent *Karama* examples to support the thesis of the relationship between mysticism and Sufism expounded by the *Shaykh*, for example:

«All that is inexplicable, mysterious, is part of Sufism. I can tell you a story, that if you look at it from a rational perspective it won't convince you at all, but I can swear to you that it really happened. A dear friend of mine, the now defunct *Shaykh* Abdall Rahim Jaddall, one evening two years ago went to a town a couple of hours drive from Khartoum. He met a friend of him, a boy who lived there and asked for a favour, to bring a bag with about 20,000 SDPs to his brother in Khartoum on his return. The *Shaykh* Abdall Rahim Jaddall repeatedly refused to do this task, he did not want to take the responsibility of having to carry all that money for such a long journey, but in the end he gave up. Ten minutes after his departure, the boy who sent the money to his brother called the brother to warn him of the courier's arrival within a couple of hours, but he was greeted with the reply "*Shaykh* Abdall Rahim Jaddall has just arrived, he has already handed me the money". Incredulous, the first brother emphasized the impossibility of the thing but, at the insistence of the recipient brother, asked to be able to talk to the *Shaykh* on the phone. To his great surprise, *Shaykh* Jaddall replied that he said he did not know how he had managed to get to Khartoum so quickly, that he could not remember the trip, but that he had succeeded. Even today I can't explain myself this thing, but I can swear to you on what is dearest to me that really happened»⁷⁷. Or again «do you know why sometimes you have the feeling of seeing things that you had already seen in the past? A *deja vu*. This happens because your soul occupies a space much greater than that occupied by the body, even if your body is its prison. It may happen that your soul, being able to temporarily get out of your body, can anticipate your material sensations by living them before you, remembering them and making them notice when you actually experience them»⁷⁸.

6. Medicine

The information I am going to provide below comes from three groups of interviews within which 24 informants were heard in addition to the members directly connected to the Sufi brotherhoods. The twenty-four informants have a professional background that ranges from the university-level educational sector to trade, from the medical profession to unemployment, with the presence of university students as well. The choice to interview subjects external to the *Turuqs* was fundamental in order to obtain a perspective external to that conveyed by the masters of the brotherhoods.

The first group interview was held at the "University of Khartoum". On 28/08/2018, I am introduced to the group by the professor of Italian language who holds the chair of Italian Language and Culture, known through the Italian Embassy; the group is composed of 6 professors with an average age of 29 with a 53-year-old informant, two women and four men, coming from the departments of physics, engineering and

⁷⁶ Ibid, 15/08/2018.

⁷⁷ Ibid, 15/08/2018.

⁷⁸ Ibid, 15/08/2018.

languages; no particular taboos emerge from both women and men when talking about the topic.

The second group interview took place at the headquarters of “CIC-Comboni Italian College” on 29/08/2018, again introduced by the aforementioned Italian language professor who occupies the professorships of Italian for beginners and intermediate students. The group with which I relate was composed of 10 informants, students of level B2, the age ranges from 25 to 45 years. The professional background of the interviewees ranged from the medical sector to the university student, including several professors from the Comboni language center. Within the group there were 2 women and 8 men. In this case, the two women never spoke directly with me, nor did they used the Italian language, the language used for the group interview; The two women spoke very little, always addressing the men of the group and using Arabic as a language, without ever crossing my gaze directly and letting men play the role of mediators.

The third group of interviews held on 30/08/2018 was selected from the staff of volunteer physiotherapists who work at the “OVCI” headquarters – “Voluntary Organism for International Cooperation” in Omdurman which operates in the rehabilitation sector of patients suffering from disabilities in developmental age. The group is composed of a total of 8 female informants, all volunteer physiotherapists, of which 6 are Sudanese and 2 are Italian. The presence of Italian volunteers was fundamental for the conduct of interviews to facilitate dialogue between me and the local staff; Some of the therapists, in fact, despite being professionals in the field, never speak directly to me when they want to bring examples or tell their own testimony, but they often refer to Italian volunteers who then work to refer me to what has been said.

The *Shaykhs* play a fundamental role in organizing the daily life of a believer, constituting for this latter a point of reference not only moral but also economic. The economic power of some *Shaykhs* allows them to help the faithful who decide to turn to them in case of need. Healing practices are not exempt from this sphere of influence.

Henkesh⁷⁹ documented the *zar*⁸⁰ healing procedure in southern Egypt and central Sudan, giving us an insight on the figure of the *Shaykh* conducting healing sessions: depending on the necessities and the finances of the patient, the procedure can last from one day to be repeated annually up to one week, involving a certain quantity of animals to be sacrificed and professional musicians to hire. Also, contacting spirits and showing supernatural attributes is common for *Shaikh* that old long healing procedures. Particularly rooted in Sudan, Boddy tracks similarities within the practice of *zar-bori* in northern Sudan and *Bori* cult in Nigeria, while recognizing some similar practice to the *Qadiriyya*. These cults involve the presence of a *Jinn* that resides inside the sick person's body and that manifest certain kind of symptoms and causes sufferance to the hosting subject. Eventually, possession trance can occur with the progression and the strengthening of the relation within host and *zar*⁸¹.

⁷⁹ Henkesh, Y., 2016, *Trance dancing with the Jinn: the ancient art of contacting spirits through ecstatic dance*, Llewellyn Publications.

⁸⁰ Moments of contact within the visible human world and the invisible spirit's world, where humans can enter in direct contact with *Jinn*, *Shaytan* or spirits in general that possess a human.

⁸¹ Boddy J., 1989, *Wombs and alien spirits: women, men and the Zar cult in Northern Sudan*, USA, The University of Wisconsin Press.

Retracing the previous doctrinal analysis of the *Shaykhs* in the urban area of Khartoum, I will now describe the relationship they have with medicine and healing practices, as well as their relation with scientific medicine.

All the *Turuq* share common practices regarding the approach to care through the intercession of the religious leader. In the meantime, it is possible to ask the *Shaykh* to pray for oneself in order to cure an illness or for others. All the *Shaykhs* who have been interviewed do not require a form of payment for their services even though it is common to thank them by bringing gifts such as perfumes, food, animals or, in some cases, money; all based on the patient's possibilities. However, in all three group interviews with subjects unrelated to the confraternities, the certainty of *Shaykh's* payment emerges. In fact, above all, the third group of physiotherapists states that the *Shaykhs* are paid regularly for their practices and that they are themselves always in demand for payment.

Among the practices used by the *Shaykh* for the cure prevail those that see the Quran itself as a diagnostic and therapeutic tool for the identification of a disease or a cure, whether temporary or permanent.

Regarding the *Tariqa* of *Shaykh* al-Bashir of Shambat visited on 06/08/2018, the possibility of receiving treatment at the *Masjid* is introduced to me by the *Shaykh* himself. Such care respects a very precise scheme which is described below: a) the *Shaykh* requires the patient to first address the doctor and return to the *Shaykh* only in case of failure to heal. The time the patient has to wait before returning from the *Shaykh* varies according to the extent of the illness, from a minimum of three days to a few weeks. b) after the treatment proposed by the doctor does not seem to have an effect on the patient, the *Shaykh* begins his therapy, diagnosing the type of illness or disease that afflicts the patient and then deciding on the therapy.

For example, the recitation of the Quran is used by *Shaykh* al Bashir to diagnose the type of disease that afflicts the patient; The Quranic surah No. 2 *al Baqara* is read by the patient. If during the recitation the patient feels tired, fatigued, falls asleep or faints, it is confirmed that the patient is not in a perfect state of health. The *Shaykh*, after having diagnosed the type of problem that afflicts the patient, decides the therapeutic plan to use, for example:

- 1) If after reciting the surah *al Baqara* we have the confirmation of having received an evil eye from someone, then we must strive to recite the same surah daily for a prime number of days. However, the cure in question will take effect only if the patient shows that he firmly believes in the solution proposed by the *Shaykh*, placing all his faith in the work of the master. If there is even the slightest doubt on the part of the patient, the treatment may have no effect.
- 2) If you feel you are in a depressive state, sad or strangely exhausted, you must recite the surah n° 12 Yusuf.
- 3) In some cases of physical illness, the *Shaykh* can prescribe such a cure: the *Shaykh* writes certain verses of the Quran about medicine with an ink made of various herbs on a sheet of paper. This sheet is then dipped in a glass of water to make the words dissolve in the water. The patient must therefore drink everything. This method of care was taken as an example by all respondents, except for members of Madiyya Drisia.

It is possible to find the same healing practices even in areas distant from the *Masjid* of *Shaykh* al Bashir, such as at the *Masjid* of *Shaykh* al Burée of Azzariba⁸². Although the practices described to me by the informant I met on 08/08/2017 correspond largely to those observed at all the other *Masjids*, there are differences both in the management of care by the *Shaykh* and in the curative practice itself.

The *Shaykh's* treatment always begins after the alleged failure of a doctor's prescribed therapy. The *Shaykh* determines the time in which the patient can access his care based on the extent of the illness, asking to wait a minimum of three days up to a few weeks. The failure of scientific medicine therefore entails the beginning of treatment at the leader of the religious brotherhood. This underlines how the disease is not always perceived as an effect of a biological cause that leads the patient to develop symptoms of an illness. The cause of the disease in some cases is attributed to a religious element, especially in cases of mental illness. In fact, mental illness is treated as a form of possession by *Shaytan*, which is therefore expelled from the body and spirit of the possessed through healing practices of a religious nature. The cures that have been described to me as the main ones used by the *Shaykh* are basically two:

- 1) **Al Baqarah.** Favourite method for the treatment of mental illness. Although it is called the second quranic surah, the practice differs considerably from that previously described by *Shaykh* al Bashir which consists in reciting the homonymous surah. On a square sheet of paper, the *Shaykh* writes a series of numbers in the upper right corner and words in the remaining space. The meaning, frequency, order and any other element determining the writing on the sheet depend exclusively on the type of illness and on the discretion of the teacher, unique in understanding its meaning. Once the writing is completed, the sheet must be folded back on itself and set on fire. The smoke is the cause of the discomfort that leaves the patient's body. The practice should be repeated twice a day, in the morning and in the evening, until the cure has taken place.
- 2) **Looh.** The name of the curative practice takes the name of the wooden tablet on which the murids are used to practice in the study and writing of the Quranic texts. The practice consists in writing extracts of the Quran on sheets of paper, which must then be immersed in water to dissolve the ink. The ink is made with the ashes of the wood used to cook a meal for the poor who received hospitality in the *Masjid*. The patient must therefore drink the water with the ink residues. The procedure is repeated twice a day, after the first and third prayer of the day for a number of days depending on the extent of the disease. Like previous practice, writing and Quranic verses are chosen at the discretion of the *Shaykh*.

If the cure chosen by the *Shaykh* does not have the expected effect on the person, it means that *Shaytan* got the better of the patient and his spiritual strength. As also supported by *Shaykh* al Bashir «care only works if one truly believes and only if one has complete trust in Allah»⁸³. In case of success of the treatment proposed by the master of the confraternity, the healed thank the *Shaykh* offering gifts based on their possibilities, usually money, goods, animals, perfumes or clothes. According to the declarations of the informant⁸⁴, the *Shaykh* never asks for compensation for treatment,

⁸² Interview 4, Arabic language Teacher, 08/08/2018, Amarat, Khartoum.

⁸³ Interview 2, *Shaykh* al Bashir, 06/08/2018, Bahri, Shambat, *Masjid Shaykh* al Bashir.

⁸⁴ Interview 4, Arabic language Teacher, 08/08/2018, Amarat, Khartoum.

but always accepts it. According to the interviewees of the second group on 29/08/2018, all *Shaykhs* on time instead require a fee, refusing to perform therapies.

Mental patients also have limitations in access to religious life and the social sphere of the community. They are kept in special facilities, where women look after them; the family can also access these facilities. People with disabilities are not admitted to practice *Dhikr* because they could be dangerous for those who practice: as they are *Shaytan* carriers, they may not be able to cope with the high spiritual levels that are reached during *Dhikr* and trigger a demon refusal who owns them; this would result in violent actions against other participants⁸⁵.

However, the practices used by the two Samaniyya brotherhoods of *Shaykh* al Bashir and the descendants of *Shaykh* al Burée are so widespread among practitioners in the Khartoum area, but not shared by all the *Shaykhs*. Two examples of this are *Shaykh* Mukarra of Samaniyya and *Shaykh* al Asshana of Madiyya Drisia.

Starting with the second, the transcript of the brief interview on the topic given to the Secretary of *Shaykh* Asshana describes the relationship between the *Tariqa* and medicine:

Me: «As for the social perspective of the Association, how does the *Shaykh* relate to the community that surrounds it? Can you help someone who turns to him in a difficult time?»

Secretary: «The *Shaykh* does not help anyone! It is God who helps people»

M: «I imagine this also applies to the relationship with medicine and disease, am I right?»

S: «Absolutely, we use the scientific method, Dr. al Asshana is a doctor and also a psychiatrist. Some believe in practices like drinking a glass of water with pieces of paper in it or going to a traditional doctor who does massages, but we don't. We turn to doctor al Asshana»⁸⁶.

The brief description of the *Tariqa* of Madia Drisia provided by its spokesperson leaves no room for further doubts on the subject. Since the leader of the brotherhood has achieved academic qualifications in medicine and psychiatry, he directs the members of the brotherhood towards the use of scientific medicine. Recalling also that among the requisites necessary to become a member of *Tariqa* there is a stable working place, it is not surprising that for members of Madia Drisia medical care is more accessible than other *Turuq* members.

Similarly, the *Tariqa* of *Shaykh* Mukarra prefers the scientific method and sees the *Shaykh* as a reference point for the community that has difficulty accessing treatment or buying medicine.

Here are the statements of *Shaykh* Mukarra's son:

«Our *Masjid* is a reference point for the area. When my grandfather arrived here, he gave electricity, running water and even a small hospital to the people of the

⁸⁵ Ibid, 08/08/2018

⁸⁶ Interview 7, Secretary of *Shaykh* al Asshana, 10/08/2018 *Tariqa* Madiyya Drisia, Khartoum.

neighbourhood. Even the two pharmacies in the area are owned by us, we built them just to help the locals. For example, if a person needs medicine, we can supply it for free. We can help you! See, people often turn to us to solve the problems that afflict them. If you need drugs, money or have a problem with your neighbour, the *Shaykh* can help you, so people trust us so much. They come first to the *Shaykh* because he knows everyone and with his help can help solve the problem. Even with the spouses, the *Shaykh* often helps them economically by giving them presents or paying for the wedding party»

Me: «Medical help also applies to mental illnesses?»

«Yes, my brother, we also support people suffering from mental illnesses. They come to us, the *Shaykh* tries to help them, he prays for them and tries to solve the problem, then he sends them to the doctor when his help doesn't work»⁸⁷.

The approach proposed by *Shaykh* Mukarra with regard to medicine does not depart from the organizational scheme of the other *Turuqs*. He in fact represents the point of contact between the inhabitants of the neighbourhood and access to medical care. The ownership of the only hospital and of the only local pharmacies in addition to the economic availability guarantee the *Shaykh* a prominent position within the company. What separates the *Tariqa* of *Shaykh* Mukarra from the other *Turuqs* is the bond that the leader of the brotherhood creates between scientific medicine and the people who turn to it in search of help. Apparently, traditional healing practices do not seem to be used.

Despite the discretion with which each individual *Shaykh* deals with the theme of the relationship with medicine, it is possible to observe a unique behaviour of the masters of the brotherhoods. The lack of medical personnel and adequate sector funding, social inequality and the poor state of the local economy are filled by the *Shaykh* who is placed at the top of the social organization as a holder of great economic and human power. To summarize the scheme observed at the various *Turuqs* previously analysed, it is possible to identify three common elements that the individual “patient” generally recognizes in approaching the treatments proposed by the *Shaykh*:

- a) The *Shaykh* is recognized as a subject of great influence, capable of providing solutions to both social and economic problems.
- b) Turning to the *Shaykh*, the “patient” obtains a solution. In the case of medicine, the proposed solutions are economic or practical. The first to afford otherwise economically prohibitive treatments, the second to exploit the knowledge of the *Shaykh* and cope with the disease by bypassing the health system directly.
- c) The solution proposed by the *Shaykh* ideologically guarantees a certainty both in terms of solving the problem and in terms of the individual's ability to access it.

The lack of economic availability of the individual patient, the lack of adequate and adequately spread medical facilities and the social pressure that in some cases concerns the person guarantee the identification of the *Shaykh* as a single point of reference within society. In addition to the above, the cause and nature of the “disease” must be considered. Being the cause of the disease, in some cases, identified in elements of a

⁸⁷ Interview 9, Eldest son of *Shaykh* Mukarra, 22/08/2018, al Remela, Khartoum.

supernatural nature, it is therefore necessary to turn to those who have the capacity to deal with these elements⁸⁸.

However, what has been described up to now contains only the perspective told by the official leaders of the Sufi *Turuqs*. The *Shaykhs* interviewed expressed a personal perspective in which traditional pre-Islamic elements or belonging to areas of Islamic theology are not considered⁸⁹. The three group interviews with members unrelated to the confraternities brought out a reality different from that depicted by local religious leaders.

The first common element that emerged from the interviews is the presence of the spiritual entities called *Jinn*.

Their presence in the local culture emerges in all three group interviews, involving in their description all the subjects listened to. Summarizing what emerged from the interviews, the *Jinn* present in the urban area of Khartoum respond to this description:

They are invisible to the eye and share the earthly space with men. They live in communities, especially in isolated places or in urban areas long abandoned, where human presence is little or nothing. The *Jinn* communities are organized according to a family scheme, with parents and children, who build families and descendants. Children usually inherit the characteristics and powers of their parents. The *Jinn* space is forbidden to men, if it invades, parents will try to protect their children, attacking humans and, in most cases, taking control of the person. The possession by a *Jinn* can therefore be a consequence of a human error in invading an earthly space inhabited by supernatural entities. The latter, as a defence mechanism towards the other members of the community, “attack” the invader, taking possession of his spirit.

There are different types of *Jinn*, each with different characteristics and preferences. Below, a list with a series of examples that were brought by the first two groups encountered, on 28/08/2018 and on 29/08/2018.

- *Azar*: “Red Devil”; so called because the person who carries it inside loves and wears the colour red. When the wearer sees this colour, he begins to behave in an unusual way, becoming aggressive or failing to control his own inhibitory brakes, since he fosters the *Azar* in him.

- *Rashak*: “the lover”; *Jinn* who loves women, only comes into contact with them, never with men.

- *Oum Sibià*: “the mother of children”; *Jinn* who decides to get in touch exclusively with beautiful young girls, remaining in a quiescent state and then creating problems during pregnancy, malaise, problems with the unborn child or, in the worst cases, abortion.

⁸⁸ For example, the description of the treatment of mental illnesses by the Shaykh proposed by the informant consulted on 08/08/2018. Shaytan takes possession of the body and spirit of the person, making it necessary for the Shaykh to intervene so that he can drive away the presence that creeps into the patient.

⁸⁹ For example, the statements of Shaykh Sinan on 08/05/2018 regarding the absence of traditional pre-Islamic elements, now confined to a single village or the statements of the same on 06/08/2018 which clearly reject cultural contaminations external to Islam.

- *Suc cu bus*: Jinn that takes on female appearance inside the thoughts of the exclusively male bearer, bringing them closer to their position and taking control of them.
- *Abu Lamba*: “Father of light”; Jinn who lives in the desert, during the night begins to emit a beautiful light of his own, forcing travellers or inhabitants of rural areas to follow him in the desert to make them lost.

The invasion of space dedicated to them or randomness is not the only way in which it is possible to get in touch with the Jinn; in fact, there is an earthly bond between men and the Jinn, which comes to life in the figure of the *Faqih*, men capable of dialoguing with the Jinn.

According to Islamic theology, a *Faqih* is a Muslim Sufi ascetic who made the decision to take a vow of poverty, giving up all personal relationships and property. A prevalent figure in the Middle East and South Asia, a *Faqih* must possess only the spiritual need of God. Unlike the *Darvish*, who are devoted to extreme poverty and the renunciation of material goods to achieve divine uniqueness, only the *Faqih* can boast the possession of supernatural and miraculous attributes.

Focusing on the figure of the *Faqih* in the area of sub-Saharan Africa, the contribution given by Bakheit M. Nur Mohammed describes the *Faqih* of the area of Jebel Marra, Darfur, as teachers who, being able to memorize the whole Quran, can help the students entrusted to their schools (*Soom*) in the study of religious writings. The *Faqih* described by Nur Mohammed also takes part in the local administrative life, being consulted in case of need for legal opinions on topics such as marriages, private relationships or division of inheritances. The *Faqih* therefore operates in a school that is part of a structure that also includes the presence of a mosque, accommodation for students, kitchens and living rooms for member’s meetings. This structure is self-sufficient thanks to the commitment of the inhabitants of the district who help the *Faqih* in managing the fields at the service of its *Soom* free of charge⁹⁰.

The figure of the *Faqih* of Jebel Marra described by Nur Mohammed should be directly compared, in my opinion, to the *Shaykh* observed in the territory of Khartoum. The terminology used indicates two opposing figures in the lifestyle and in the relationship with religion, both part of the Sufi current. These figures, however, in the Sudanese local context take different names while covering virtually identical roles. In this regard, I quote an informant interviewed in the group interview of 29/08/2018: «The *Faqih* has many names, the common one for Sudan is “*Ràki*” which means “wise”. In the rest of Sudan it can be called in many different ways, here in the north it is also called *Shaykh*. Many prefer not to be called *Faqih*, they consider it an offensive term». The terminological overlap therefore seems to be used in a conscious manner, recognizing the same figure in the *Faqih*, in the *Shaykh* or in *Ràki*. This result may have been achieved after years of cultural stratification, of interaction between the local culture and the figures proposed by Islamic theology. Bearing in mind also the declarations of *Shaykh* Eltayeb regarding the adaptability of Sufism to obtain consents⁹¹, it should not surprise any overlapping of the offices of *Faqih* and *Shaykh* carried out by the same

⁹⁰ Mohammed, B. M. N., 2017, *The Religious Men in Jebel Marra: The Process of Learning and the Performance of Islamic Rituals and Practices*, LIT Verlag Münster.

⁹¹ Interview 12, *Shaykh* Eltayeb, 24/08/2018, *Masjid Shaykh* Eltayib, Umm Dabban.

party in order to obtain consent, to self-legitimize his own figure or to be able to expand its influence by obtaining additional attributes; In this case, reference is made to the unique relationship he develops with the Jinns.

Thus continuing the profiling of the intermediary between men and Jinns, the first difference that emerges with the *Shaykh* is the possibility for both men and women to fill the role of *Faqih*. The profession, handed down from father to son, guarantees the division by sex of men and women. Once the profession has begun, the *Faqih* inserts the distinctive title in the name⁹².

In addition to being able to counter the *Jinn*, all the interviewees report examples of how the *Faqih* manage to convey these spirits to a specific person. One of the preferred methods for reaching the indicated person is to direct them through strictly personal objects such as clothes, to use hair strands to associate with the name of the victim or, in lack of this, the name of the victim's mother. Another method is to use coffee grounds. Particularly popular for Khartoum are the tea vendors, women who run small outdoor cafes in every corner of the street where it is possible to drink tea, coffee and socialize on the small stools around the furnace of the lady engaged in the preparation of drinks. According to the interviewees, this moment is the right moment in which to be the victim of a Jinn, as it would be conveyed by the *Faqih* through coffee grounds, exploiting them as a bridge. In fact, many of these "walking" cafes use a form of fragrant incense commonly known as *Bakhoor*; the usefulness of incense is to exploit its dense fragrant smoke to keep the Jinn away from their coffee grounds. In order for the *Faqih*'s work to be successful, he needs an element closely linked to the person to be able to cure (or curse), like a lock of hair, a suit already worn or, in case of lack of the latter, ask to know the name of the mother of the person and of the person himself. Success is practically guaranteed after at least two days of the *Faqih*'s work. Payment is not mandatory, but everyone "thanks" the *Faqih* through gifts such as objects, money or animals. All the interviewees state that this practice is also present for all the *Shaykhs*, who are thanked for their services through gifts, even by their own *murids* who are hosted for "free" in the *Masjid*; but that, in fact, would pay the hospitality of the *Shaykh* regularly. The statements of the *Shaykhs* released in the preceding paragraphs thus find a contrast in the perception of the local inhabitants of the state of Khartoum. In fact, while on several occasions those belonging to the *Turuq*'s sphere of direct influence declare that a) *Shaykh*'s help is guaranteed free of charge to anyone who needs it and b) those who receive help thank the *Shaykh* as he can and if he can; the statements made by the participants in the group interviews depict an opposite reality, in which the *Shaykh* is systematically demanding a payment in order to carry out its services.

Access to the cures offered by a *Faqih* depends on many factors, such as the economic availability, proximity to large urban centres, or the social pressure exerted on the individual. However, even in the urban area, it is possible to find examples of patients who prefer to turn to traditional curators rather than doctors. An informant belonging to the group consulted on 20/08/2018 decides to turn to a *Faqih* to treat a pain in the right knee joint, despite its origin from an urban area with different medical facilities available and with sufficient disposable income. He declares: «I had a strong pain in the right leg, at the height of the knee; so, I decided to go to the *Faqih* to be treated. I chose to address him before going to a doctor, because he still manages to cure you and it also costs less

⁹² For example, presenting himself as Ahmad Eltayib Faqih.

than a doctor and all the medicines. So, he took an iron rod, heated it on the fire and placed the tip of it on my leg, exactly where I felt pain, to allow the evil that was afflicting me to get out of my body. The *Faqih* said the problem was caused by a Jinn, who had slipped into my knee and had to use hot iron to puncture my skin to get it out. After a couple of days of treatment the pain has passed. Payment is not compulsory after therapy, sometimes this *Faqih* does not even accept it, but I have decided to thank him anyway by giving him something. The most common things that can be used to repay are money, various objects that can be useful for him or animals».

Another interviewee present at the same session adds the following to the previous statement: «The *Faqih* today needs to do business; he lives with these services he offers, so he tries to build his prestige within the community and asks for payments for his services. The *Faqih* finds it very easy to work in areas where scientific medicine has not yet arrived, relying on the faith and culture of the inhabitants, proposing themselves as intermediaries between Allah and man».

However, the figure of the *Faqih* is not the only one to which it is possible to turn to “the alternative” to the doctor or to the *Shaykh*. The interviewees take as an example the *Basir*, a traditional and herbalist doctor who uses techniques and tools for body-manipulation, phytotherapy and medical knowledge prior to the arrival of scientific medicine. As for the *Faqih*, a *Basir* can be both a man and a woman, thus dividing patients by sex. There are three characteristic elements of the *Basir*: a) the explicit lack of connection with the Islamic religious sphere, b) belonging to a family of *Basir* and c) the professionalism of the figure.

Since the religious element is not directly involved, the *Basir* explicitly manifests itself to carry out this practice by profession, requesting timely payment for the therapies and forming its own descendants to take its place. According to the examples given by all three interview groups, the practice of the apprentice *Basir* starts from early adolescence, in which the young curator joins the parent to learn the techniques to be used; the apprentice, before practicing the profession, experiments the techniques on a small domestic animal, usually a chicken or a sheep. Through practice he learns to use the tools of the trade, including herbs, essential oils, sticks, glass cups, knives and hammers; among these, also red-hot iron rods are used, as proposed by the *Faqih*. This element suggests the syncretic nature of the practice which sees the use of the last mentioned instrument; the *Basir*, while remaining officially detached from the religious sphere, uses a practice identical to that proposed by the *Faqih*, for the passage of “good practices” or for simple stratification of the theories, handed down over the years that recognize the presence of the Jinn as the cause of the disease and which are therefore treated accordingly.

Of particular help was the contribution provided by the volunteers of OVCI, who thanks to their professional connection with the topic managed to describe their reality and the difficulties they face in opposing traditional medical practices. It was particularly interesting to be able to observe the relationship between those proposing the treatment of a disease through a method of scientific origin that tends to separate the subject from the social sphere and who, in contrast, attributes to a disease “value and social meaning,

with moral, cultural and religious appurtenances”⁹³. In fact, the OVCI therapists confirm what was said by Zempleni, stressing that the cause of the development of a disability in childhood is due to mistakes made by parents, thus receiving God’s punishment through a “non-normal” child. Being the disability originated and imposed by a religious sphere it is perceived as difficult to cure, especially by men; the woman is seen as the only person responsible for the child’s condition, as it is her responsibility to give birth to a healthy child. According to the professional experience of the OVCI therapists, this dichotomy of the family scheme leads to having a father detached from the disability condition of the offspring, a woman morally marked as a risk taker and a third party, not considered in his humanity, represented by the child/daughter, who in all cases does not receive care of any kind, whether of traditional or scientific origin. The consequences of a disability do not remain confined within the parental couple but also influence the able-bodied offspring, especially the daughters born of the same mother who gave birth to a child not in perfect health; all the daughters will be identified as possible carriers of risk, thus risking that they will never be able to marry in marriage. From the statements gathered, there is a tendency not to treat the disability to avoid having to face the social dishonour that it entails. As in other cases in which the disability is treated with the constant presence of a stigma⁹⁴, in the absence of access to any type of care the disabled persons are confined within the domestic walls, kept in an isolated room so as not to make them perceive the presence from the outside, linked to the furniture through the use of chains. Contact with the family is also very limited, if not absent. The moments of meeting with other family members can be reduced at the time of the delivery of the meals or on the occasion of a possible visit by a *Basir*, a *Faqih* or a *Shaykh* to administer a therapy.

The approach of families to the range of treatments proposed depends on various factors: the education of the family unit, their economic availability, the personal motivation to face a disability or the ability to bypass the ideological walls imposed by the social sphere, proving to discern the physical sphere from the religious/moral sphere. However, some families decide to cross the boundary outlined by stigma and traditional medicine to address the scientific method, in this case represented by OVCI. The following statement by an OVCI worker clarifies this last point: «Several families come to us for treatments but, sometimes, some parents come to us simply because they have already tried them all and do not know what to do anymore. In some cases we are then chosen because we do not charge anything, but we are almost never the first on the list to be contacted. Families always turn first to a *Basir* or a *Shaykh*».

With the consent provided by the OVCI staff I report here some testimonies of professional experiences they have faced, inherent to the relationship between traditional medicine and scientific medicine:

- «A patient from a village near here who suffered from a mental illness was first treated by the *Shaykh* who tried to cure him with prayer, after four years he turned to OVCI. Not seeing any improvement over the past few days, he abandoned OVCI and returned to follow the care of the *Shaykh*».

⁹³ A. Zempleni, *Anciens et nouveaux usages sociaux de la maladie en Afrique*, Archives de Sciences Sociales des Religions, 1982.

⁹⁴ “Like a Death Sentence” Abuses against Persons with Mental Disabilities in Ghana, *Human Rights Watch*, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2012/10/02/death-sentence/abuses-against-persons-mental-disabilities-ghana> 02/10/2018.

- «A patient from Khartoum with facial paralysis, turns to us for help. According to the patient, the paralysis was due to a slap received from a Jinn. Previously, a treatment attempt was also made at a *Faqih*»
- «We have treated a quadriplegic patient, the parents also bring him to a neurologist for a certain period but, after a while, they leave the doctor to contact the *Faqih*. Currently we know that he is still being treated by the magician».
- «In many cases the parents take the children in care by us even if extremely wary of our work. Most of these after some time abandon OVCI to go to a *Basir*. They can hardly overcome the sphere of distrust towards us».
- «We are treating a child with a neuro- degenerative disease; before contacting us, the parents brought him to a *Basir*. The traditional doctor used the rod technique of red-hot iron, resting it on the back of the patient, from the bottom to the neck, to be repeated more sessions. Such treatment would serve to drive away “the bad” that causes the onset of symptoms».
- «During our professional journey we are come into contact with different practices commonly used by traditional healers: some see the use of vacuum cups on the skin, others use a series of superficial cuts close together or bloodletting to get the Jinn out of the different parts of the body, hammers and sticks for bodily manipulation».

The examples above reveal several key points of particular interest: the first is the perception of scientific medicine as an “alternative” cure. The social sphere and the cultural element seem to be fundamental in deciding the approach of a subject towards any curative practice more than the economic element. In fact, although the treatments offered by OVCI are free for the beneficiaries of the therapies, in most cases the starting point and / or return point of the healing process lies in traditional curators, bringing the dimension of care through the scientific method to cover an exclusively “passing” role. In addition to this, the time devoted to scientific care seems to be no more than a short period of time, lasting a few days, while the trust given to the exponents of local medicine is granted a period of time that reaches even a few years. It is possible to observe how often the pivot on which the therapy rotates is the parental couple, which finds it difficult to accept the disability and which in some cases rejects its existence to the detriment of the conditions of treatment of the disabled, forced to live in degrading situations that can cause a worsening of the person’s psychophysical conditions.

It would be interesting, for the purpose of this work, to be able to identify a dividing line between the *Shaykhs*, the *Faqihs* and the *Basir*, building the profile of the activities in the alternative medical/health field for each individual professional figure encountered in this phase of the analysis. However, this is not possible.

According to what emerged from the group interviews, the observations in the field and the testimonies of the various participants in the research path described up to now, it is not possible for me to exempt myself from outlining a reality in which a level of syncretism has now been reached between the practices of Islamic origin and autochthonous figures such as to make separation between them difficult. Elements of Islamic “Jinnology” are found within the doctrine of traditional doctors, while references to curative practices commonly spread since the pre-Islamic period can be found in the now “corrupt” figure of the *Faqih*. All the main actors try to fill the hole

left by the State Health System, trying to obtain exclusive competence on certain types of practices, now handed down by generations of healers (spiritual and not) that have merged over time, creating a unique model of healing practices.

6.1. Common elements

The newly profiled *Turuq* allow us to outline some common traits in the practice and organization of the Sufi brotherhoods operating in the state of Khartoum. First of all, the figure of the *Shaykh* stands out. The guide that leads the *Murid* through the spiritual path towards the knowledge of the divine nature represents in fact not only a reference for its followers but it also identifies itself as the centre of the life of the neighbourhood or of the settlement in which *Masjid* goes to place. The examples of what we have just said are certainly the *Masjid* of *Shaykh* Mukarra of al Remela and the *Masjid* of *Shaykh* Eltayib of Umm Dabban, who through the funds they collect help the individual families in their area to meet the needs that may be required deal with, whether it is buying food, working, accessing treatment and services that are prohibitive in the case of marked poverty or, in the case shared by *Shaykh* Eltayib, in taking care of minors born of an extramarital affair under their own protection or victims of poverty. However, the limits and the requirements outlined by them do not coincide, maintaining the first distances from abandoned minors and offering refuge only to those who are victims of poverty and a practicing Muslim; instead the latter issue statements in which they show an openness to all minors in conditions of necessity, regardless of the conditions of origin. It should be borne in mind, however, that the environment of the two *Masjid* is radically different, starting from the capacity to host the *Murids* inside them with about twenty students at the Al Remela centre and almost a hundred times at the Umm Dabban *Masjid*.

The *Shaykh* is therefore seen as a figure to be trusted, to whom reference should be made not only with regard to religion, going to constitute a figure that turns out to possess great social power. In fact, given its seniority and its uncontested knowledge it becomes the right person to turn to in order to obtain a solution, materially or spiritually. Even after the death of the *Shaykh*, his figure is kept alive with specific commemorations, with daily or weekly visits to his tomb and with the memory of his teachings and practice. It is not possible, therefore, to exclude the practice of the cult of elders by the Sufi people of Khartoum. Typical of the African continent, the figure of the elderly understood as a spiritual, social and juridical guide is respected in various ways and by all the *Turuq*. First of all, the figure of the *Shaykh* emerges, an elder of the confraternity and a scholar consulted in case of need, respected in his knowledge of the world and praised even after death, through the memory of the deeds and the requests of the faithful to be sent directly to Heaven. This aspect is also emphasized by one of the professors of the University of Khartoum with whom I had the opportunity to dialogue on 08/24/2018, which states that «the first *Shaykhs* who arrived here wisely used the traditions of the place to convey people to the practice [...] another element is the figure of the elderly and the story telling in the moments before and after prayer. Sufism has played an important role for the community, it has succeeded in educating the local people, it has civilized them! For example, I'll tell you the story of a city east of Khartoum, before the coming of Islam the city was called "city of tits" for the two mountains that overlooked it. It is not that they decided to call it like that for fun, they were simply uneducated people and that was what for them most resembled the two mountains. Now, thanks to the arrival of Sufism, the city has changed its name and has

been called simply “city of mountains”. Much better, isn’t it? In any case, what Islam has done has been educating the people, without forcing them to change but using elements typical of their culture to lead them to follow the path proposed by Sufism»⁹⁵. The elder of the pre-Islamic communities becomes the *Shaykh* of the brotherhoods which still hold a form of authority over those areas where the government authority fails to be present.

Handing down the position of leader of the brotherhoods from father to son, a continuity is created within the *Tariqa* that leads to enhancing the family element, placing seniority among the merits necessary to fill the roles at the top of the *Turuq*. This figure exploits the element of the “story telling” in order to educate, set the example and correctly route the faithful by taking hold of elements typical of both the local culture and Sufi Islam itself. In itself, this element is not external to the nature of Islam (the *Hadiths* are an example), which together with the previously underlined experience and seniority matured by the *Shaykh* constitute an element of great importance within the practice. In fact, regarding the previous interviews, there are examples of *Kamara* recounted with great confidence by the leaders of the local brotherhoods; the main example is that of the interview held with *Shaykh* Eltayeb on 08/15/2018, having had the opportunity to listen to various examples of a mystic nature, apparently inexplicable, with the aim of obtaining a description of the practical nature and functioning of the Sufi doctrine. The use of life stories of the Prophet, the *Shaykh* or poems is also part of the practice of *Dhikr*, through the singing and accompaniment of *Madeh*, linking to the traditional nature of the teachings handed down orally, a typical element of the African continent. It was also possible to observe how on that occasion non-conventional examples emerged, traditionally external to the theological sphere in itself and attributable to a “mass” and international culture, namely cinema. The examples of films like “Rain man” or documentaries such as the “Wake up project - The divine Book”⁹⁶ show how the permeability shown on several occasions by Sufism does not fail to take inspiration from modern sources of information, exploiting in some cases even the social network as in the case of *Shaykh* Mukarra’s *Masjid*; the traditional form of education and entertainment of Sufi poetry is therefore flanked by modern cultural instruments.

Among the other elements that characterize the Sufi practice there are also the *Annouba*, the “great drums” that accompany the practice of *Dhikr* on most occasions. According to what was stated by the university professors with whom I was able to talk on 08/24/2018 at the Masjid of Umm Dabban, «The first *Shaykhs* who arrived here wisely used the traditions of the place to convey people to the practice. Among these practices we find the use of drums today, have you seen *Dhikr* a little while ago? Drums were widespread in this part of Africa among pre-Islamic tribes, as religious elements. Now they continue to be used as an integral part of the practice»⁹⁷. Today, this traditional element constitutes a fundamental part of the practice, resisting the pressures of Sunni “traditionalism” and Wahabi currents, the latter being constantly brought into direct confrontation with Sufi institutions in the Khartoumense state. The exception confirms the previously emphasized permeable profile of Islamic asceticism practiced in the territory of the Sudanese capital. This doctrine is easily linked to pre-Islamic traditions

⁹⁵ Interview 13, Group of professors from Khartoum’s University, *Masjid Shaykh* Eltayib, Umm Dabban, 24/08/2018.

⁹⁶ Received digitally by Shaykh Sinan’s interpreter at the latter’s suggestion dated 08/08/2018.

⁹⁷ Interview 13, Group of professors from Khartoum’s University, *Masjid Shaykh* Eltayib, Umm Dabban, 24/08/2018.

in order to seek consensus within the population, proposing ideologically attractive elements in order to create a religious integration between the before and after.

However, this common trait characterized by trying to adapt to the local dimension expressed by the inhabitants of the area has led to the diversification of the *Turuq*, creating various types of them in order to seek greater consensus. The differences that exist today between them and that sometimes constitute fertile ground for mutual criticism and possible doctrinal conflicts, may not be the result of a randomness, but of a natural consequence of previously planned events. This concept is summarized by *Shaykh* Eltayeb below: «Basically, there are two types of *Turuq*, a *Tariqa* with a hierarchy, well organized, with a dress code for all members, with well-defined tasks and a less organized *Tariqa*, with a certain freedom to manage the confreres, clothing and roles. This difference is not accidental, but serves to involve as many people as possible. Some like order and discipline, others a little more freedom. In this way it is possible to potentially involve the majority of the faithful»⁹⁸. These discrepancies, differences of thought, goals or interpretation lead to try to enhance the practice promoted by the *Turuq* of belonging by the individual practitioner, maintaining more or less peaceful relations with the neighbouring brotherhoods. For example, continuing the statement just quoted and resuming the interview on 08/15/2018 in which the *Shaykh* states that «some truly believe in Sufism as a lifestyle, others use Sufism for their own purposes and all this sad because you are acting selfish, do not help those around you but only yourself»⁹⁹. On 24/08/2018 this concept is taken up by *Shaykh* Eltayeb, during a discussion on the other *Turuq* we visited: «Remember when I told you that some faithful tend to use Sufism? Here, I was referring to *Shaykh* Seenan. He uses Sufism to get to know as many people as possible, to build a social network; not to help but for his personal interest. Be careful with him, he collaborates with the Government and he is one who is paid to write reports on the people he knows. I mean, don't worry, if you go out with him and he's your friend, nothing happens to you»¹⁰⁰. A few days after these statements I was contacted by *Shaykh* Seenan, who proceeded to cancel the commitments undertaken together because he became aware of contacts with other practitioners, outside his sphere of knowledge or with whom, perhaps, he does not have a good relationship, given the previous statements of *Shaykh* Eltayeb.

Another element common to all the *Turuq* and, more generally, to all the community of Khartoum's state, is the importance given to socialization. As far as the religious sphere is concerned, all the occasions that involve an interaction between the faithful take place in special spaces, that is the common rooms built inside the *Masjid*. These spaces are furnished with armchairs, sofas or chairs placed along the profile of the room and facing inwards, so as to give the possibility to those present to communicate easily, while shared meals are traditionally served accompanied by tea, coffee or infusion of karkadè. During my observation, it was possible to notice that in these spaces we only notice the presence of men, while women are busy preparing meals. During Friday prayers it is possible to watch these socializing moments in temporary tents erected along roadsides. Even private homes, especially those in the historic center of Omdurman, are not exempt from the enhancement of the social sphere: more than one family unit lives in a house built according to the traditional scheme, the spaces are divided among the common

⁹⁸ Interview 12, *Shaykh* Eltayeb, 24/08/2018, *Masjid Shaykh* Eltayib, Umm Dabban.

⁹⁹ Interview 12, *Shaykh* Eltayeb, 24/08/2018, *Masjid Shaykh* Eltayib, Umm Dabban.

¹⁰⁰ Interview 12, *Shaykh* Eltayeb, 24/08/2018, *Masjid Shaykh* Eltayib, Umm Dabban.

ones, dedicated to daily activities such as the dining room, the kitchen and the internal courtyard in which to pray and the private spaces, which are the responsibility of each single family. All activities related to daily spaces are carried out in common.

In daily life activities it is also possible to witness contradictory episodes with religious doctrine, commonly put into practice also by members of the brotherhoods and by the *Shaykhs* themselves. A clear example is the consumption of *Sharbot*, also known as *Araqi*, or a traditional distillate obtained from the fermentation of Dates, yeast and sugar¹⁰¹. Although the law provides for flogging for consumption, transport, possession, sale, purchase or distillation of alcohol¹⁰², the consumption of high-alcohol drinks is socially granted if linked to tradition. During the day of Eid for example, having spent it with *Shaykh* Eltayeb at his home, it was possible for me to take part in the celebrations and at the end of the traditional lunch based on sacrificed sheep, *Sharbot* was prepared by the *Shaykh's* wife, consumed in pinte and also accompanied by Marisa, a fermented millet-based alcoholic beverage. An interesting detail about it emerges during the post lunch time, while i talk with the *Shaykh* and his family, sitting in the living room; I am asked by the family of the *Shaykh* to describe Italy and the region where I attend university when, while describing the winery of “Collio”, the brother-in-law of the *Shaykh* comments «must be a beautiful place, but if we should ever visit it, we could never drink alcohol, we are Muslims»; so the question naturally arises, «How come you drink *Sharbot* then? Isn't it considered an alcoholic drink?» receiving as an answer, always from the brother-in-law «The *Sharbot*? No, this is not alcohol, it is called date wine but it is simply date juice, with a little sugar» while sipping the *Sharbot* served to all the guests. The transgression of the rules in this case does not seem to be perceived as a real violation. The traditional element is therefore strong enough to override the *Sharia* and the dictates of Islamic culture, since the perception of the drink as a simple “date juice” in itself does not meet the limits imposed by the Quranic culture and law. Also, Al-Shibli refers to an episode where the prophet uses date wine to wash himself before the prayer calling it «good fruit mixed with pure water»¹⁰³.

In the analysis elaborated so far, features commonly shared by all the local confraternities emerge, both regarding the doctrine and the putting into practice of the teachings and directives of the *Shaykh*. All the *Turuqs* try to detach themselves firmly from the practitioners of the Wahabi current, introducing the topic almost spontaneously within the interviews. The perception of the theme that emerges in this case is of a form of prejudice on the part of the representatives of the brotherhoods which, having to relate to a European and being such representatives aware of the media coverage that radical movements have achieved in recent years, tend to anticipate the thinking of the interlocutor. Therefore, it becomes fundamental for them to underline to an external observer the detachment they want to take from the Wahabi, both for the ideological differences that separate the Sufis from the followers of Al Wahhab, and for the image they want to give to the eyes of the foreign interlocutor.

¹⁰¹ The border line within a fizzy drink and a strong alcoholic drink is thin, and usually depends from how much time is dedicated to the drink to sit to ferment. Although, the public opinion is split between who refuse to considerate it as an alcoholic beverage in any case and who considers and accepts that it could contain a certain percentage of alcohol.

¹⁰² C. Fluehr-Lobban, *Islamic Law and Society in the Sudan*, Routledge Library Edition- *Islam*, volume 13, Routledge, 2013, pg 281.

¹⁰³ Al-Shibli B. D., *Akam al-murjan fi ahkam al-jjan*, Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiya.

Conclusions

The elements collected during this period of observation are a tile in the mosaic that is the Sufi practice in the State of Khartoum. Despite continuing my research process for materials to add to the topic hereby presented, some conclusions can be drafted.

Sufism practiced within the state of Khartoum is deeply inserted into the local culture. Taking up the quote from *Shaykh* Eltayeb, he declares: «There are *Turuq* of two types, more or less organized [...] which thus manage to involve the greatest number of possible faithful»¹⁰⁴. If one wanted to compare the local religious scene to a tree, the roots would certainly be represented by Sufi Islam, to then reach the trunk represented by the figure of the *Shaykh* from which the *Turuq*, the branches, appears each with its own dimension, with a own appearance and with features that make it unique from the others. The uniqueness allows to be able to find the faithful Sufi in every single member of society, who decides to turn to the *Tariqa* who best meets his requirements or his vision of the practice. Society is shaped by religious practice; it exploits the community aspect of the proposed doctrine to create social ties between Khartoum's citizens, and exploits the "universal" figure of the *Shaykh* to face the deficiencies of the political and administrative sphere to which the citizens must face, finding in the masters of the *Turuq* a guide not only religious, but competent in all aspects of daily life.

Even if connected by the same roots, the single *Shaykh* decide to keep the relations that they prefer with the rest of the community, using tools as doctrine, economic power, background of the affiliates, social connections and also the use of both traditional or scientific medicine techniques in order to legitimise more the figure of the single *Shaykh*. Khartoum's inhabitants have with medicine, understood more as a comparison with the spiritual forces that inhabit the region and not as a method of contrasting physical symptoms. Poverty, culture and religious doctrine constitute fertile ground for the authority of the *Shaykh*, the *Faqih* or *Basir*, three ideologically different figures who find themselves synchronously united in a single cultural paradigm, stratified by centuries of teachings, beliefs and practices that represent today the unique dimension of Khartoum's Sufism.

Analysing the doctrine, the main point that emerged from the interviews was the level of openness with what is external to the *Tariqa*: some of the *Shaykh* open the practice to the past and the present, recognizing the influences that the local form of Sufism faced during time and use new sources of information and communication to expand their doctrine, practicing the African Islam discussed at the beginning of the document; others, rely more on an imposition of a "right way" of practicing Sufism, inserting elements of a more orthodox Islam in the Sufi doctrine, limiting the ascetism episodes or completely denying part of them.

The two main *Shaykh* interviewed by me during this month are a clear example of this dichotomy, namely *Shaykh* Eltayeb of the *Qadiriyya* and *Shaykh* Seenan of the

¹⁰⁴ Interview 12, *Shaykh* Eltayeb, 24/08/2018, *Masjid Shaykh* Eltayib, Umm Dabban.

Samaniyya. Episodes of doctrinal clashes emerged many times during the period of observation, both¹⁰⁵ direct and indirect¹⁰⁶.

Another aspect that manages to both unify and split all of the *Turuq* is the practice of *Dhikr*. According to the interviews, the observations and the declarations of all the religious subject reached, despite all sharing the same final purpose, reaching a closer knowledge of Allah, the *Dhikr* practiced in all the *Turuq* had points of difference from the rest. From *Turuq* practicing a more contained form of prayer¹⁰⁷ to those manifesting various examples of kinetic trance, involving also elements like history and poems of the *Shaykh*.

The conclusion drafted by this period of observation is that, based on the elements collected, the common components of Sufi doctrine shared by all the *Turuq* are also inserted in a paradigm where a syncretism of features makes almost impossible to find a *Tariqa* equal to the other in the urban area of Khartoum.

Interview list

Interview 1, *Shaykh* Seenan, 05/08/2018, Ozone bar, Khartoum 2, Khartoum.

Interview 2, *Shaykh* al Bashir, 06/08/2018, Bahri, Shambat, *Masjid Shaykh* al Bashir.

Interview 3, *Murid* accompanying Seenan, 06/08/2018, Bahri, Shambat, *Masjid Shaykh* al Bashir.

Interview 4, Arabic language Teacher, 08/08/2018, Amarat, Khartoum.

Interview 5, Doctor of Quranic sciences, 10/08/2018, Bahri, Shambat, *Masjid Shaykh* al Bashir.

Interview 6, *Murid Shaykh* al Bashir, 10/08/2018, Bahri, Shambat, *Masjid Shaykh* al Bashir.

Interview 7, Secretary of *Shaykh* al Asshana, 10/08/2018 *Tariqa* Madiyya Drisia, Khartoum.

Interview 8, *Shaykh* Mukarra, 22/08/2018, al Remela, Khartoum.

Interview 9, Eldest son of *Shaykh* Mukarra, 22/08/2018, al Remela, Khartoum.

Interview 10, *Shaykh* Eltayeb, 15/08/2018, Ozone Bar, Khartoum 2, Khartoum.

Interview 11, *Shaykh* Eltayeb, 21/08/2018, al-Jerif, Khartoum.

Interview 12, *Shaykh* Eltayeb, 24/08/2018, *Masjid Shaykh* Eltayib, Umm Dabban.

Interview 13, Group of professors from Khartoum's University, *Masjid Shaykh* Eltayib, Umm Dabban, 24/08/2018.

Telephone interview 1, member *Tariqa Shaykh* al Nil, 06/09/2018, Omdurman.

¹⁰⁵ Interview 12, *Shaykh* Eltayeb, 24/08/2018, *Masjid Shaykh* Eltayib, Umm Dabban.

¹⁰⁶ Interview 1, *Shaykh* Seenan, 05/08/2018, Ozone bar, Khartoum 2, Khartoum.

¹⁰⁷ Interview 5, Doctor of Quranic sciences, 10/08/2018, Bahri, Shambat, *Masjid Shaykh* al Bashir.

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1. Darvish in Omdurman's cemetery



2. Darvish coordinating the Dhikr, Omdurman



3. Darvish in Omdurman, note the Jellabyia patched with pieces of cloth



4. Darvish with similarities to the Leopard Skin chief. To the right, the same Darvish is carrying his wooden rifle.



5. Darvish in Omdurman and circle of observants during the Dhikr



6. Darvish in an ascetic state during the Dhikr, Omdurman



7. Believer passed out during the practice of Dhikr



8. Kitchen of the Masjid of Shaykh Eltayeb, with the woman that is preparing food for the community during the day of Eid



9. Mosque of Shaykh Eltayeb, Khartoum



10. Mosque of Umm Dabban



11. Masjid of Shaykh Eltayeb as seen from the "Road of Hope", Umm Dabban



12. The cellars where the Murids of the Shaykh Eltayib live, Umm Dabban

13. The cellars where the Murids of the Shaykh Eltayib live, Umm Dabban





14. Main square inside the Masjid, with the tomb of the previous Shaykh, Umm Dabban

*15. Same square as in fig. 14.
After the Dhikr, the fire of the Quran is lit and the Murids gathers to be evaluated by the Shaykh, Umm Dabban*





16. Observant waiting for the Dhikr to start, Umm Dabban



17. Muddah starting the Dhikr and observants in the external circle reciting, Umm Dabban.



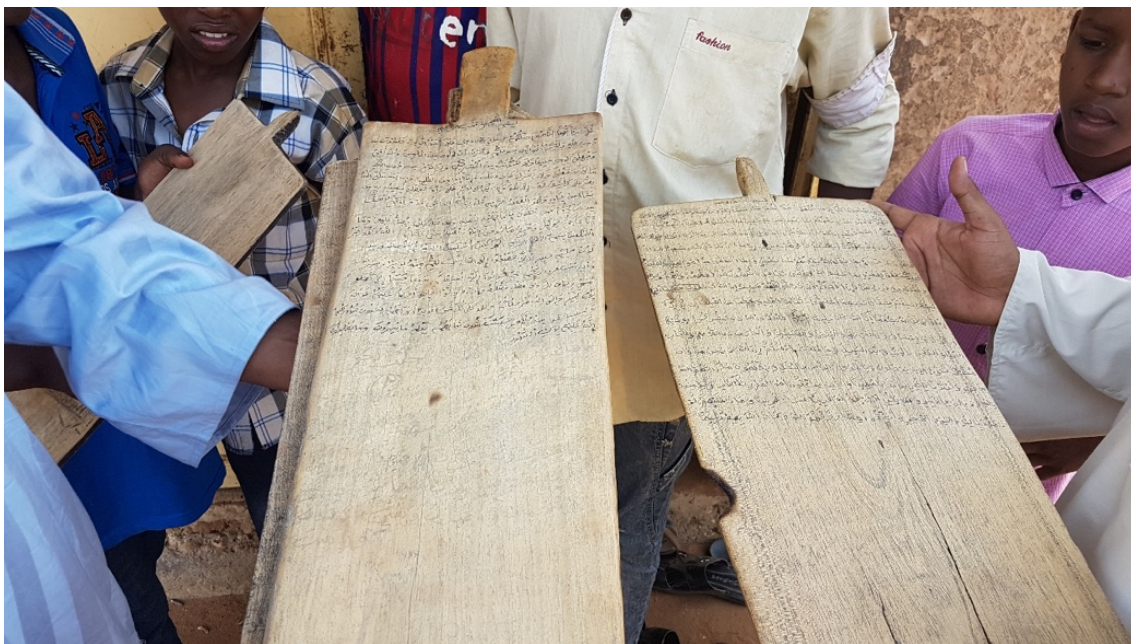
18. Dikhr at the final stages, with a mix of Muddah and observants circling together, Umm Dabban, Masjid of Shaykh Eltayib



19. Dhikr performed at the Masjid of Shaykh Arwallah (third from the right) with the Muddah on his right, Khartoum

20. Descendant of Shaykh al Nil (dressed in green) in his cellar, with his wives and other women, Omdurman





21. Murids of Shaykh Mukarra showing the tablets (Looh) that are used during the studies, Al Remela, Khartoum.



22. Results of the treatments of a Basir on a child with a neurodegenerative illness, Omdurman

SOMMARIO

Rosanders e Westerlund¹⁰⁸ si riferiscono al sufismo (Tasawwuf) come “Islam africano”, contestualizzando la grande diffusione della pratica sufi nell'Africa sub-sahariana e sottolineando un punto importante: nonostante si riferiscano alla stessa struttura generica, elementi diversi costituiscono la natura locale di una Comunità sufi. In effetti, è possibile osservare che il sufismo ha una forte presenza nel continente africano, dagli esempi di fratellanze sufi in Mali descritte da Amadou Hampatè Ba¹⁰⁹ alla descrizione del sufismo in Somalia di Francesca Declich¹¹⁰ tra gli altri. Affiancato dalle pressioni più ortodosse provenienti dalla penisola araba e dall'integrazione della sua pratica con le strutture sociali già presenti nell'Africa subsahariana, il sufismo di oggi nel continente africano non mostra affatto un'identità monolitica.

Dal XVI secolo, le continue e lente penetrazioni dei mercanti arabi nei regni di Alodia portarono alla caduta dei regni cristiani. Soprattutto il sufismo è riuscito a guadagnare quasi la totalità della popolazione, grazie alla sua natura permeabile e all'uso fatto dagli musulmani Ulema per adattare meglio l'Islam alle popolazioni locali, ancora legato alla tradizionale natura religiosa della regione. Dopo la penetrazione della dottrina wahabita nell'area e il recente sviluppo politico del paese, sembra difficile riconoscere la presenza di una componente tradizionale o animista nell'Islam sufi di oggi.

Lo scopo di questo articolo è quello di definire e trasmettere al lettore gli aspetti dell'odierna identità islamica della popolazione sudanese, con particolare attenzione alla regione di Khartoum, di analizzare il ruolo del maestro della confraternita in 9 diverse *Turuq* in un contesto urbano e come questo influenza la vita quotidiana dei cittadini della zona. I materiali qui presentati sono stati raccolti per la mia tesi di laurea magistrale in Diplomazia e cooperazione internazionale, con il titolo “Il Sufismo in Sudan. Religione, società, tradizioni e pratiche curative nello Stato di Khartoum”¹¹¹ a seguito di un'osservazione sul campo condotta dal 1° agosto 2018 al 31 dello stesso mese. Durante questo periodo, sono stato in grado di condurre una sessione di ricerca sul campo nello stato di Khartoum e di incontrare i leader religiosi locali sudanesi, gli abitanti dell'area formalmente non legati dalla sfera religiosa e i membri delle ONG europee e sudanesi, che lavorano nel settore sanitario. Le interviste raccolte verranno analizzate in maniera incrociata nel corso del teso per evidenziare le eventuali differenze o punti in comune tra i vari intervistati.

Ho anche deciso di integrare all'interno dell'articolo la relazione tra l'area religiosa e la medicina per alcuni motivi: a causa di un interesse personale, avendo lavorato in una struttura sanitaria volta a fornire terapie ai disabili, avendo studiato la relazione tra pratiche curative tradizionali africane e Islam durante il corso dei miei studi magistrali e avendo notato la discrepanza nelle dichiarazioni dei vari Shaykh e quelli degli abitanti locali non direttamente legati alla sfera di influenza delle *Turuq* riguardo al rapporto con la medicina e lo Shaykh.

¹⁰⁸ Westerlund D. e Rosander E. E., 1997 “*African Islam and Islam in Africa*”, London, Hurst & Company.

¹⁰⁹ Ba A. H., 2008, “*A spirit of tolerance. The inspiring life of Tierno Bokar*” USA, World Wisdom Books, e anche Ba A. H., 1991, “*Amkoullel, l'enfant peul. Mémoires*” Paris, Actes Sud.

¹¹⁰ Declich F., 2000, “Sufi experience in rural Somali. A focus on Women” in *Social Anthropology*, 8, 3, European Association of Social Anthropologists.

¹¹¹ Discussa nel Dicembre 2018 presso l'Università degli Studi di Trieste, Laurea magistrale in Diplomazia e Cooperazione allo Sviluppo.