Between two or three worlds: Reversion to Islam, *marocanité* and Western Sufism in the *tariqa* Budshishiyya

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Introduction

The religious identity of non-convert European Muslims is often an overlooked aspect within the study of Western Sufism. This chapter is an exploration of the religious identities of revert disciples of the Moroccan *wali* Hamza Budshish (d.2017), who typically are children and grandchildren of Moroccan migrants that are born and/or raised in Europe.¹ The study is based on anthropological work undertaken with female devotees (*faqirat*, sing. *faqira*) of the Qadiriyya Budshishiyya.

Most data has been gathered in multi-sited fieldwork between 2006 and 2012, although I have maintained contacts with few of the informants thereafter and their views have also been added here. Part of the results of the investigation into this Sufi order (*tariqa*) appeared in my doctoral thesis (Dominguez Diaz, 2010) and some more findings were added to the monograph I have published related to that study (Dominguez Diaz, 2015). The Budshishiyya follows a code of gender segregation that applies to both religious praxis and to the vast majority of its social events. Gatherings attended both by men and women are only permitted for public events, in which outsiders are also welcomed. I can only be certain that what is here stated, therefore, applies to women.

The study of this order is mainly a comparative perspective between different religious lifestyles existing in the *tariqa*. I always felt that a more detailed analysis of the revert strand was worth and is the

¹ The religious identities of the Budshishiyya's disciples defy categorisation. Labelling is often a sensitive issue, as noted by Grillo back in 1985. He realised that his respondents were always approached as 'migrants' by France's state officials, what made the relationship of these subjects with the state further problematic. I tend to consider the use of emic terms whenever possible, preferable. Female devotees of the Budshishiyya refer to each other with the terms 'sister' and 'faqira' and make no distinction between born Muslims (reverts or re-affiliated) and converts, yet I sometimes have to use these terms to make sense of the differences between the religious identities of these subgroups. Many devotees with Moroccan background dislike the terms 'second and third generations' because they see their Europeanness undermined. Some prefer the term 'Beur', one disciple even said that she likes being called 'Beurette' against the trend of solely identifying Muslims by their religion. Among the Beurettes of this order it is not uncommon to see a selective use of religion as a medium of assertion, sometimes emphasised, others downplayed, something also typical of Beur culture, in general (Eid, 2007). For further discussion on emic terminology among Budshishis, see Dominguez Diaz (2017).

central theme of this chapter. An interesting aspect of their religious identities, this writing suggests, is that they are breakaways from the approach to religion of their parents, who in no case are devotees of the order. Quite often, revert disciples of Hamza Budshish are critical of the religious culture they come from and see their adscription to the Budshishiyya as a departure, both from the lifestyles of the culturally Moroccan social milieus of their childhoods, as well as from the non-religious ethos they perceive in mainstream society. The current chapter tries to understand the approach to Islam of these revert devotees in a situated manner, by comparing them with the ways in which Islam is understood and experienced by other members of the same *tariqa*. In order to do so, it addresses, first, the growing international success of the *tariqa* Qadiriyya Budshishiyya; second, the resulting diversification of its discipleship; third, the features that define devotees belonging to 'hybrid' strands within the order; and, fourth, the distinctiveness of religious reversion as it manifests in this organization.

The growing success of the Qadiriyya Budshishiyya

The Sufi order Qadiriyya Budshishiyya is a *tariqa* of Moroccan origin that has expanded beyond its original *milieu* in the, mostly Berber, North-Eastern region of l'Oriental, by incorporating followers (*fuqara*, *sing. masc. faqir*) from the rest of the country and from abroad. From the mainly rural milieu that saw its inception, the *tariqa* first expanded to Morocco's urban centres, creating a notable following in places such as Casablanca, Rabat or Fes. Nevertheless, it has, a presence in most towns and cities, regardless of size, with groups of devotees located not only in big cities but throughout the entire territory of Morocco. The large following it has acquired, particularly since the beginning of the twenty-first century, has made of this order the (possibly) most widely followed *tariqa* in the country. This expansion has been made possible for the capacity of the Sufi Order to expand beyond its original Berber discipleship, attracting thereafter a numerous Arab following. Also important in accounting for its recent success, is the support it has received from the government since Morocco's official adoption of Sufism as a state-sponsored form of Islam (something it occurred following the 2003 terrorist attacks in Casablanca) and notably, after the appointment of a Budshishiyya devotee, Ahmad Tawfiq, as a Minister of *Habus* and Islamic Affairs in 2002.

The arrival of the order to Europe precedes its post-2000s success. In France, during the 1990s, few upper class Moroccans established a group in Paris together with Europeans. At approximately the same time, several small groups of Moroccan economic migrants created their own congregations across the country. Yet, despite its previous existence, the most notorious growth of the organization in Europe is related to the success of the *tariqa* in Morocco. Nowadays, the European branches cater for the spiritual needs of an unprecedented number of devotees, with stable groups in most French urban areas, as well

as in several Belgian, British, Dutch, Italian, Romanian, Spanish and Swiss ones. A similar prosperity has resulted in the appearance of groups in Asia, Africa and the Americas. The order has returned to Africa via Europe, with Senegalese and Malian devotees who had previously lived in France creating groups in Dakar and Bamako. There is also a substantial following in Canada and in the United States, and there seems to also be devotees in Brazil and Chile. Some disciples speak of the existence of *fuqara* in China, and I have met Muslims from the Gulf who were interested in starting a congregation in the Emirates. There seems to be few disciples in Indonesia too.²

The dynamics of the order's growth

The international success of the *tariqa* has been made possible by redefining the master-disciple relationship. Locals living in the neighbouring towns to the *tariqa*'s central lodge, placed in the North Eastern Moroccan village of *Madagh*, claim that attaining a close relationship with the central lodge (*zawiya*) had previously been a requisite to be a devotee; in those days everybody knew personally Hamza Budshish and his family. By contrast, today's *fuqara* have a relationship to the central *zawiya*, in most cases, remarkably feeble, yet, it is this relational loosening that has made possible having disciples in distant places. This lack of contact is not only authorised but legitimised in doctrinal terms. The Order nowadays does not consider the study of *'usul al-din* (Islamic sciences) a necessary condition of Hamza Budshish's discipleship. Instead, the goal is the pursuit of knowledge (*ma'rifa*), understood here to be of spiritual nature. *Ma'rifa* is for them to be achieved by love (*mahabba*) and not necessarily through intellectual study.³ Additionally, *mahabba* is not anymore the endless love emanated by the shaykh as an authenticating proof of his connection to Allah, but a sentiment Hamza Budshish has for those who follow

² The majority of disciples are quite young, most under thirty, at least a quarter of those are under twenty. Perhaps as a result of its youthfulness, commitment to the Order tends to be very strong but quite often short-lived: more than half of the devotees I have met conducting fieldwork have been in the Order for fewer than two years. Some of the groups I had visited in the past do no longer exist, whereas other new ones have been created. That means that any estimation of the number of disciples can only be an approximation. I still suggest we can approximately situate the size of the movement: in Morocco the number of disciples would be nearly 400,000, with around three quarters of this following being located in the north-eastern region (although adherence in other regions seems to be growing much faster) whereas in all the European countries together its discipleship would be between 500 and 1,000, with more than three-quarters being in France. I believe that discipleship in other regions of the globe is rather marginal, surely less than 100 people in each of the countries the Order is being represented.

³ It is nonetheless interesting to note that a significant number of devotees engage in the academic study of Islam, its implications have been discussed by Tozy; see, Mohammed Tozy. "L'Islam Entre le Contrôle de l'État et les Débordements de la Société Civile. Des Nouveaux Clercs aux Nouveaux Lieux de l'Expression Religieuse" in *Le Maroc Actuel. Une Modernisation au Miroir de la Tradition ?*, ed. Jean-Claude Santucci (Paris : Editions du CNRS, 1992), 410.

him. In this way, a connection between *faqir* and *wali* is recognized, symbolically regulating the notion of religious authority and of membership to the order.

One of the implications of this approach is that intellectual religious instruction, and the associated need of disciple and master of being together, is no longer required. Nonetheless, the lack of regular contact between the communities of devotees and the central lodge has a potential for the emergence of dissident religious identities within the Order. In order to avoid discrepancies, the *tariqa*'s religious authorities make sure that its stipulations are met by disciples by nominating delegates of their authority in the local groups, individuals with whom they maintain regular contact. Each group, thus, is led by a local *muqaddim/muqaddima*, a person who does have a close connection with *Madagh*; to them they report the ordinary developments within the group, and consult any concerns that come up from individuals.

In most countries the *tariqa* is made by a scattered geography of very small groups. That means that despite the impressive amount of territory it covers, the order does not have more than several thousand members, with the discipleship outside Morocco possibly accounting for less than few hundreds.⁴ This is because most of these congregations bring together between five and ten people, at most. According to the *tariqa*'s own rules, the minimum amount of people required to create a group is four, and in many places outside Morocco groups are small.⁵ In these congregations, disciples meet weekly to perform collective *dhikr*, a type of meeting known as *wazifa*.⁶

Meeting like-minded disciples and the stability of the organization

A significant achievement of the *tariqa* in its post-2000s expansion has been its capacity to attract followers from urban milieus, a noteworthy change in the mostly rural character that defined the order up to then. The increasing diversity - first ethnic, then, of class and finally of nationality - that has come to define the Budshishiyya has brought with it new challenges. In order to minimise disputes among devotees, the *tariqa* proposes nowadays an organisation based on the social affinity between members, small gatherings with few devotees of a similar social background. In Morocco, for example, the order has

⁴ A significant number of disciples have a relatively short-lived commitment to the organization, what gives the order a highly malleable structure, with groups being constantly created and disappearing. Although life-long commitment is becoming increasingly more normal, it is still not a majority's choice.

⁵ There was even a case in which a man and a woman who were a couple and lived far from all the existing groups asked the central authorities to hold ritual sessions, which implied having a mixed gender gathering of only two people. Considering the exceptional circumstances of the case, it is said, Hamza Būdshīsh allowed the gatherings to be performed.

⁶ Among the varied Būdshīshiyya rituals, the key one is the collective weekly *dhikr* performance known as *wazifa*. Although, technically speaking, *wazifa* only refers to the part of this ritual dedicated to the invocation of 'Allah's qualities, most of the members use the term to refer to the entire *dhikr* sessions performed in groups.

an almost corporate character, with many groups being organised along professional lines (e.g. groups of doctors, of Islamic studies' students, of civil servants, and so forth).⁷ In Europe, there are groups that maintain a similar professional profile (e.g. a group mainly made by nurses) but overall issues of class, origin, religious background and age tend to be more important. In some countries, for example in France, there are groups that congregate in the poorer areas of *banlieue*, and others that do so in middle class neighbourhoods. Similarly, converts tend not to be on the same group than first generation Moroccan migrants, and old women tend not to regularly meet the younger devotees, who are the vast majority of disciples. In the Budshishiyya, the actual interaction between devotees from different backgrounds is significantly limited. This is something the Budshishiyya shares with some though not all the orders of a variegated reaching. In some other groups of a miscellaneous following, the structure shows signs of division,⁸ yet in others, a unified organisation is maintained.⁹ In the latter (e.g. the Sudanese Burhaniyya in Germany), division seems to be absent, with heterogeneous (and thus, larger) gatherings that prevail and do not seem to have posed a challenge to the long-term stability of the *tariqa*.

⁷ The corporate structure of the order is something it shares with a number of NRMs. See for example, the similarities with the study of Japanese corporatism in religious groups in: Louella Matsunaga, "Spiritual Companies, Corporate Religions: Japanese Companies and Japanese New Religious Movements at Home and Abroad" in *Japanese New Religions: In Global Perspective*, ed. Peter B. Clarke (Richmond: Curzon, 2000), 35-73.

⁸ For example, in the Naqshbandi movement set up by Wahab Siddiqi (d.1994) in the United Kingdom, a new generation of leaders have established a twofold organization, in which a more traditionally oriented grouping keeps being organized around the original 'mosque', whilst existing alongside a new 'college' that cater for the needs of the younger generations; see Ron Geaves, "Continuity and Transformation in a Naqshbandi Tariqa in Britain: The Changing Relationship Between Mazar (Shrine) and Dar-al-Ulum (Seminary) Revisited" in *Sufism Today: Heritage and Tradition in the Global Community*, eds. Catherina Raudvere and Leif Stenberg, (London: IB Tauris, 2009), 65-82. Another example is that of the British Haqqaniyya, for which Atay has described the existence of ethnically homogeneous groups meeting separately (Turkish, South-Asian and British); see Tayfun Atay, "Naqshbandi Sufis in a Western Setting" (PhD diss., SOAS, University of London, 1994). However, it is worth noticing that "a degree of ethnic division does not exclude ethnic mixing in the same *ṭarīqa* structure"; see Simon Stjernholm, "What Is the Naqshbandi-Haqqani *tariqa*? Notes on Developments and a Critique of Typologies" in *Sufism in Britain*, eds. Theodore Gabriel and Ron Geaves (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 202.

⁹ In Germany, for instance, the order of Sudanese origin Burhāniyya brings together in weekly meetings devotees of German and North African origin who have managed to create long-lasting, closed-knitted communities with a remarkable degree of concord; see Søren C. Lassen, "Strategies for Concord: the Transformation of the Tariqa Burhaniya in the European Environment" in *Sufism Today: Heritage and Tradition in the Global Community*, eds. Catherina Raudvere and Leif Stenberg, (London: IB Tauris, 2009), 189-208.

Increasing religious diversity

As a result of the order's exponential growth, the diversity of religious styles has also diversified. Accordingly, the *tariqa* today has an interesting mixture of followers; from the point of view of their religious trajectories, *fuqara* can be, (1) 'non-affiliated Muslims', who belong and participate in a culture of Sufi rituals but do not pledge exclusive loyalty to the Budshishiyya. They are typically followers from Morocco's rural or semi-rural areas that participate in Sufi gatherings with other Moroccans, not necessarily members of specific orders, let alone the Budshishiyya. Migration seems, in this order, to trigger institutionalisation. When devotees move to Europe, they begin to attend regular Budshishiyya's weekly gatherings and develop a more formal and exclusive link with the organisation. They create congregations of 'first generation' Moroccan migrants. This type of group are generally referred as 'transplants' in the literature of Western Sufi Movements,¹⁰ because they are communities deemed as having re-rooted without significantly changing, thus maintaining the features of the original culture in the Muslim world. To a certain extent, the Budshishiyya questions the notion of transplant because, even if these communities are not culturally mixed, the groups as such did not exist in the original milieu. For example, these congregations of Budshishiyya's devotees have a more rigidly defined understanding of affiliation than what it is common in rural contexts in Morocco, regions where people participate in the events of different Sufi orders, often indistinctively.

There are also in this *tariqa*, (2) 'convert Muslims', who I define as devotees who were not born Muslim; before joining the order, Budshishiyya's converts could have been either religious or non-religious; some come from a trajectory of 'spiritual seeking' having been in other groups before, whereas others begin in the Budshishiyya this personal quest. Albeit the Budshishiyya demands of them undertaking the *shahada* (Islamic rite of conversion), it is not a *sine qua non* requirement, but one non-Muslim people interested in Sufism are asked to fulfil once they become truly convinced of becoming Muslim. This is why in some cases converts in the order are in a liminal stage between 'being' and 'not being' Muslims and, quite typically, may not like to consider themselves neither of the two. The *tariqa*

¹⁰ Marcia Hermansen, "Literary Productions of Western Sufi Movements" in *Sufism in the West*, eds. John Hinnells and Jamal Malik (London: Routledge, 2006), 29.

accepts this *status quo* as it sees is as temporary, but may put pressure on them to become Muslim after a while, because they are of the belief that being a Muslim is mandatory to the practice of Sufism.¹¹

In this order, there are also (3) 'revert Muslims', those who were born Muslim but did not practice nor believed in the tenets of Islam for a period of their lives, 'returning' to Islam after a significant phase of religious disengagement. Whereas converts who come from non-religious backgrounds often self-define themselves in this phase as agnostics and/or atheists, reverts commonly refrain from using these terms. Instead, some use the label 'cultural Muslim', to describe the period in which albeit being born to Muslim (or, again 'cultural Muslim') parents, they did not share the core beliefs of Islam, yet kept identifying with the lingering 'cultural' aspects of the religion (e.g. celebration of major Muslim holidays). Finally, the order has a large number of (4) 're-affiliated Muslims', those who have left one denomination or sect to join this organization, always within the confines of Islam. Some re-affiliated devotees have been raised by traditional Sufi parents from other traditions, some belonged to orders but not all. In some cases, they had joined other Islamic, yet not necessarily Sufi groups before joining this *tariqa* or, more often, identified for a while with the ideology of a particular preacher, without having for that reason been part of any established religious organisation. They are more commonly based either in Morocco, or in the UK and gather believers, in the second case, from a South Asian ancestry.

Budshishiyya's hybrid groups

In following the order's typical approach of establishing groups of likeminded individuals, the Budshishiyya often has several coexisting groups in the same place that gather separately and do not mix regularly. In Europe, binaries are typical because although one identifies several types of followers, only first generation Moroccan migrants meet apart from the rest. Thus, a group made by first-generation Moroccan migrants with a more 'traditional' understanding on Islam often exists alongside an 'hybrid' one,¹² that brings together converts and reverts Muslims. The two groups, as expressed before, rarely meet. I would hereafter concentrate in the features of hybrid congregations. A scrutiny of the three categories that made up the hybrid strand reveals a number of similarities between them, something that helps us to better understand why they do gather together. Thence, if conversion is to be defined as an

¹¹ From that point of view, and although the religious identities of individuals may sometimes indicate otherwise, the Būdshīshiyya is an 'Islamic' order, and neither a 'quasi-Islamic' or 'non-Islamic' one, if we are to describe it according to Godlas' typology; see, Alan Godlas "Sufism, the West and Modernity" in <http://islam.uga.edu/sufismwest.html>, last retrieved on the 7th September 2016.

¹² Hermansen, "Literary Productions", 28.

act that involves “not just adopting a set of ideas but also converting to and from an embodied worldview and identity [to another]”,¹³ then we should infer that religious reversion and re-affiliation (at least, as they occur in the Budshishiyya) can be often deemed as forms of religious conversion, as Gilliat-Ray argues when discussing religious conversion and reversion.¹⁴ Also in line with this argument we can note that what I present as separate categories is sometimes perceived as a single type, presumably because of the number of features these types often share. Thence, Farhadian and Rambo’s definition of religious conversion includes what is called re-affiliation above, as for them, converts are not only those that change from one tradition to another, but also from one group to another within the same religion.¹⁵

Religion as a choice

One of the ways in which converts, reverts and re-affiliated Muslims are similar is on considering religion a matter of personal choice. *Faqirat* from the three categories typically understand being a Budshishiyya’s devotee as resulting from the exercise of their free will. This view sharply contrasts with a culturally based perspective, commonly held, for example, among rural followers, and, in particular, among those that live in the vicinity of the central lodge. The latter, are majority among the attendees in the festival that congregates more people at the *zawiya* in *Madagh*, the celebration of the Prophet Muhammad’s birthday, the Mawlid.¹⁶ Locals understand *walaya* (i.e. Godly granted authority) in a non-exclusionary way, viz., their devoutness to Hamza Budshish is experienced as part of a wider culture of saintly devotion and visitation. These disciples, for example, peregrinate to the tombs and lodges of other Moroccan saints, and join *dhikr* sessions in settings not related to the Budshishiyya. In fact, they do not have a specific sense of belonging, or of formal membership, to the *tariqa*. Whereas many reverts, re-affiliated and convert Muslims speak about the order as a kind of religious ‘organization’, these other devotees never speak of a group, concentrating solely, instead, on the saint-disciple

¹³ Rebecca Sachs Norris. “Converting to What? Embodied Culture and the Adoption of New Beliefs” in *The Anthropology of Religious Conversion*, eds. Andrew Buckser and Stephen D. Glazier (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003), 171.

¹⁴ Sophie Gilliat-Ray. “Rediscovering Islam. A Muslim Journey of Faith” in *Religious Conversion. Contemporary Practices and Controversies*, eds. Christopher Lamb and M. Darrol Bryant (London: Cassell, 1999), 315-332.

¹⁵ Charles E. Farhadian and Lewis R. Rambo. “Converting: Stages of Religious Change” in *Religious Conversion. Contemporary Practices and Controversies*, eds. Christopher Lamb and M. Darrol Bryant (London: Cassell, 1999), 23.

¹⁶ The Mawlid which occurs during the third month of the Islamic calendar brings an increasing amount of people in the central lodge. Back in 2006, the event congregated around 5,000 attendees; today, it is estimated that gathers around 100,000.

relationship and on the figure of the *wali*, whilst dismissing institutional aspects. A local *faqira* explained to me that the Budshishiyya actually was seen by her as Hamza Budshish and his *silsila* (the chain of authority that traces the genealogy of a Sufi Order back to the Prophet), and the term *tariqa* was used by her interchangeably with *zawiya*, the physical space indwelled by the *wali* and his ancestors.

This perception sharply contrasts with the one commonly held among *faqirat* of the urban groups, both in Morocco and in Europe. In there, revert, re-affiliated and convert disciples approach the order in a more institutionalized manner. The *tariqa* is for them not only a *wali* and his *silsila*, but, additionally a body of *fuqara*, who gather weekly in groups, each of these communities led by a 'caretaker' (*muqaddim/muqaddima*). In addition, reverts, converts and re-affiliated devotees see the Budshishiyya as having a distinct identity with features it does not share with other Sufi groups. This institutionalized approach is experienced as imbuing with a religious identity, and making them distinct from other Sufis and Muslims. They are more aware also of the official line the order adopts politically. They perceive the Budshishiyya as one of the many existing possibilities in an increasingly diverse market of religious choices.¹⁷ We could argue that there is, in this attitude, a certain degree of similarities with New Age believers; the "pick-and-mix"¹⁸ and "*à la carte*"¹⁹ approach to religion can be identified in both, yet, one may also argue that is not exclusive of them but a characteristic of "a larger field of modern religious experimentation."²⁰ As in the New Age realm, *faqirat* elaborate religious meanings in ways that are ultimately personal, related to their tastes and experiences. Nevertheless, I would argue that two main aspects differentiate them from New Agers: (a) the degree of eclecticism, as in the case of Budshishiyya's *faqirat* the main reference is Islam, with occasional references to Christianity. Here we see differences between converts, reverts and re-affiliated within this *tariqa*. It is commoner to find references to other religions made by converts than by the rest; whereas among New Agers sources can be much more diverse

¹⁷ This is something first noticed by Haenni and Voix in their study of the most affluent groups of Moroccan devotees, and one of the reasons why they categorized them as New Age Muslims; see Patrick Haenni and Raphael Voix. "God by all Means... Eclectic Faith and Sufi Resurgence Among the Moroccan Bourgeoisie", in *Sufism and the "Modern" in Islam*, eds. Martin van Bruinessen and Julia Day Howell, (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007), 241-256.

¹⁸ Malcolm Hamilton. "An Analysis of the Festival for Mind-Body-Spirit, London." in *Beyond New Age: Exploring Alternative Spirituality* eds. Marion Bowman and Steven Sutcliffe, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), 188-200.

¹⁹ Adam Possamai. "Alternative Spiritualities and the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism", *Culture and Religion* 4.1 (2003): 31-45.

²⁰ Marion Bowman and Steven Sutcliffe. "Introduction" in *Beyond New Age: Exploring Alternative Spirituality* eds. Marion Bowman and Steven Sutcliffe, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), 1.

and perhaps more relevant. And (b) Budshishiyya's strong institutional character contrasts with the demonization of religious institutions *vis-à-vis* a sacralisation of the self that often characterises New Age. Convert and reverts, in particular, create their own individual religious identity, yet they also maintain a clear sense of affiliation to a religious organisation. The religious styles of re-affiliated devotees tend to be overall more homogeneous, less eclectic.

Eclecticism and social discontent

Many converts, reverts and re-affiliated members are young and, by large, insignificantly rely on the discourse of traditional religious authorities. Instead they draw from a multiplicity of sources to reflect on what it means to them to be a Muslim. Engaging in this kind of reflection has been associated with increased levels of education.²¹ They see Islam in a more fragmentary manner, as composed by different 'types' to one of which they adhere. In many cases, they have stumbled upon the Budshishiyya after experiencing a variety of religious choices, in the case of re-affiliated Muslims, Islamic ones, and in the rest of cases, often Islamic with few exceptions. They understand religious identity as a result of choice, not background. They disagree with the religious lifestyles of their parents, no matter whether their parents are/were Muslims or not. Thus, for them, becoming part of the Budshishiyya is an exercise of personal freedom, albeit bringing about restrictions – as the Budshishiyya is, in Schleßmann's words, a traditional, *shari'a*-compliant brotherhood.²² Conforming to these rules, however, is experienced as liberating. Restrictions on mating, diet or dress is considered as a result of one's choice and not as a concealment of, individual liberties. In this sense they are similar to many non-Budshishi, especially youth, Muslims in Europe and elsewhere.

Another salient feature one may note among reverts and converts is a significant disagreement with societal norms and social discontent, and, in particular, a negative relation with societal pressures to 'fit in'. Central to the moral cosmogony promoted by the Budshishiyya is the notion of *ihsan* (behavioural excellence), considered to be one of the most important religious virtues of the good Muslim. Suspension of judgement is a key element pertaining to *ihsan*. As a result, one observes in several cases that *faqirat* by joining the Budshishiyya see themselves as becoming part of a utopian community where they will not be judged. In this community, fellow *faqirat* are referred to as 'sisters' and the group is frequently seen as a 'family'. This is a feature this type of devotee within the order Budshishiyya shares with many New

²¹ Dale F Eickelman and James P. Piscatori. *Muslim Politics*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 39.

²² Ludwig Schleßmann. *Sufismus in Deutschland: Deutsche auf dem Weg des Mystischen Islam*, (Köln: Böhlau, 2003), 23ff.

Religious Movements (or NRMs). Proclaiming a divide based on moral criteria between members and outsiders, NRMs often call themselves ‘families’, and speak about its members by using a family vocabulary.²³ NRMs often convey a utopian view of the family, one that often contrasts with their own real-life family experiences. In this idealised view, the ‘family’ is a network of individuals who support each other in an uninterested, altruistic and non-judgemental way. This is, however, uncommon among re-affiliated disciples, especially in Morocco, where the Budshishiyya is becoming the flag of an Islam deemed by the monarchy and its closed attachés as ‘quasi-official’, thence, in Morocco, becoming part of the organization is a pro-establishment move and they do not see themselves as an isolated minority, rather as representing the mainstream of ‘Moroccan Islam’. By contrast, reverts and re-affiliated enter communities that perceive themselves as more exclusive, a feature also observed in other Sufi groups,²⁴ and one that often excludes outsiders from the possibility of friendship or marriage. At the same time that links to the outside weaken, the feeling of belonging to the religious community becomes stronger. Thus, by joining the brotherhood, people are sometimes *de facto* replacing a mainstream family by a religious family, something typical of NRMs.²⁵

On conservatism

Re-affiliated Muslims tend to be socially more conservative than their revert and convert counterparts, especially with regards to their attitude towards *shari’a*. They are less prone to challenge the order’s adherence to the Mālikī school law. Revert and converts, on their side, are typically more reluctant to embrace *shari’a* to a full extent. However, there are also exceptions and some Budshishiyya’s converts evidence a full adherence to Islamic law and their views, and more importantly, lifestyle, are shocking to other devotees in their degree of social conservatism. Similarly, certain religious aspects more typical of conservative devotees are sometimes fully embraced by followers with an otherwise less conservative approach, for example with regards to religious charisma. Although convert and revert Muslims tend to be amongst those for whom charisma is less important and tend to be less centred in the figure of Hamza Budshish, some among them demonstrate the emanation of the charismatic relationship with the *wali* to

²³ David G. Bromley, Anson D. Shupe, Jr., Donna L. Oliver. “Perfect families: Visions of the Future in a New Religious Movement” in *Cults and the Family*, eds. Florence Whiteman Kaslow and Marvin B. Sussman (New York: Haworth Press, 1982), 119-130.

²⁴ See, for example, Prina Werbner, *Pilgrims of Love: The Anthropology of a Global Sufi Cult*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003.

²⁵ A replacement mechanism evidenced in other studies. See, for instance, David Riches. “The Charismatic Family: the Family of Love and the British Middle Class”, *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 16/4 (2010): 778-796.

a full extent, a degree of saintly devotion equitable to what is common among disciples in the rural areas of Northern Morocco. These European reverts and converts will have their mobile phones loaded with videos of Budshishiyya gatherings and a profuse collection of pictures of the saint, images with which they also decorate their homes. Among them, many are strong believers in the miraculous and extramundane powers of the *wali*. Some declare having had visions, a *faqira* has affirmed she has been cured by him, yet another one has declared that she found his partner thanks to the *wali's* intercession.

Beur culture and Budshishiyya's reversion to Islam

Budshishiyya's revert disciples share a series of common traits, yet, the study of religious reversion in the group poses a series of challenges. It is because, as a form of 'identity', it provides a vehicle through which reverts both express the ways by which they recognise themselves within the larger community of *faqirat* (and in particular, how they see themselves reflected in the lifestyles and views of other reverts), whilst at the same time, define their distinctiveness as individuals within the group. The acquiring of religious identity establishes a relationship between disciple and group that involves both blending and standing out, and this is why for understanding reversion we must pay attention not only to both processes but at the ways in which they interplay. Thus, religious identity manifests itself as the result of social, collective phenomena, individually embodied and interpreted; it comprises *at once* claims of total identification and accomplishing individuation.²⁶

Behind the concrete life stories, recurring social forms are identifiable, which can be more methodically analysed. Among the social aspects that help us get a picture of Budshishiyya's religious reversion are their connection to the Moroccan diaspora. Reversion is significantly related to individuals living in societies in which Islam is a minority religion. The phase of religious disbelief undergone by reverts before entering the order would be atypical in a Muslim society like Morocco, a country that a recent study on atheism considered amongst the twenty most God-believing in the World.²⁷ Moroccans would rarely define themselves as non-believing.²⁸

²⁶ Steedman in [what does it mean?] Anne Sofie Roald. "Who Are the Muslims? Questions of Identity, Gender and Culture" in *Gender, Religion and Diversity: Cross-Cultural Perspectives*, eds. Ursula King and Tina Beattie. (London: Continuum, 2005), 179-189.

²⁷ Smith in [what does it mean?] Phil Zuckerman, "Atheism and Societal Health" in *The Oxford Handbook of Atheism*, eds. Stephen Sebastian Bullivant and Michael Ruse. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 500.

²⁸ Although I once met a Moroccan *faqira* that felt comfortable defining her former phase of religious disengagement as marked by "a belief in the non-existence of God", she had lived in France for many years, a country where she still

It is significant that reversion seems also unusual among members of British groups. Although the growth of this *tariqa* in Europe is significantly connected to the Moroccan diaspora, the order in Britain has no substantial North African presence.²⁹ Instead, the British Budshishiyya is largely comprised of converts and re-affiliated Muslims, descendants of South Asian migrants.

The difference one observes between the British and the French case³⁰ is that acquiring a critical distance from the religious aspects of Muslim culture is something more common among Beurs and Beurettes (European descendants of North Africans), than it is among British Muslims of South Asian origin, who more often reformulate in religious terms their new identities.³¹ And, whereas Muslim diasporas fairly normally have turned Islam into an all-encompassing ethnoreligious category that comprises not only religious but also social, cultural and political aspects, what seems distinctive of Beurs is that, unlike other groups, a significant part of them detached this identity from a religious content. Despite maintaining a positive sense of affiliation to Muslim culture, Beurs, particularly in the 1990s, often abandoned the religious beliefs of their parents.³²

Soon after 9/11, Beurs still behaved in a manner that sometimes brought them closer to secularised circles, than to Islam. Whereas in other Muslim communities the early 2000s saw the flourishing of the Islamic revival, with their most socially conservative lines acquiring particular force, some Beurettes that would later end up in the Budshishiyya were, by that time, either irreligious or experimenting with a variety of spiritual pathways. The Islamic revival in a more significant scale and with its most visible manifestation only reached these groups in a later stage, representing the phase of 'return' to Islam in the process of

has friends and family and visits regularly. In fact, this sort of religious scepticism in Morocco is not only atypical but largely considered a taboo.

²⁹ I have analysed the distinctiveness of the British branches in previous works in more detail, see: Marta Dominguez Diaz "The One or the Many? Transnational Sufism and Locality in the British Būdshīshiyya", in *Sufism in Britain*, eds. Theodore Gabriel and Ron Geaves (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 111-136; and, Marta Dominguez Diaz "Performance, Belonging and Identity: Ritual Variations in the British Qādiriyya", *Religion, State & Society*, 39/2–3 (2011): 229 – 245.

³⁰ Moroccan culture is not the only existing background among revert Muslims in the Būdshīshiyya, although it is, by far, the numerically most significant. There are also children and grandchildren of migrants who came from other parts of the world. For example, I have met two sisters, whose Muslim families came from French-speaking Mauritius. I have also met a young (raised Muslim) lady that used to live in Singapore and works now in Europe. Although these are interesting cases, they are few in number, and its study falls beyond the scope of this paper.

³¹ However, people who purportedly leave Islam exist in the UK and are increasingly becoming more vocal, with groups such as the Council of ex-Muslims in Britain (<http://ex-muslim.org.uk/>) gradually gaining more force.

³² See for example Jocelyne Cesari's study on the community in France, entitled *Etre musulman en France: associations, militants et mosquées*. (Paris: Karthala, 1994).

reversion. Still, those that reverted by becoming disciples of Hamza Budshish, would still retain certain features of a secularised approach to Islam that have traditionally been associated with converts; for example, Cesari observes in converts that entering Sufi groups is (not?) a

result of a search [...] not necessarily accompanied by orthodox religious practice. Instead, it has more to do with the adoption of a certain philosophy, lifestyle, or way to better know oneself. Followers emphasize the idea of inner change and virtues such as self-control, courage, and wisdom as the means of reaching divine knowledge.³³

The 'return' to Islam of reverts, thus, often is, arguably, not a return, but a reaching of new ports, as they seldom associate the Budshishiyya with the 'traditional Islam' of their relatives. Quite often, they seem to be prouder of the modern adaptability of the *tariqa* than of its alleged traditional basis. This makes sense, because despite the ghettoization experienced by Beurs, their European upbringing often situates them, closer to the religious lifestyles of converts - reason why they often form Budshishiyya *dhikr* groups together with them. However, creating long lasting friendships is sometimes more difficult. Converts and reverts come from different realities; they tend to know little about the social background of each other, particularly converts of reverts. Belonging to the cultural majority, converts' knowledge of Beur culture and of the experiences that are part of growing up as offspring of Maghrebi parents in Europe are frequently minimal. As a result, the best friends of Budshishiyya's revert *faqirat* tend to be other Beurette devotees and not converts.

The sharing of a Beur legacy often is sufficient to consolidate friendship, despite the sometimes marked ideological and lifestyles differences existing among them. In those terms, they can be very different from one another, challenging stereotypes. This diversity is, for example, evident in the ways they approach marital relations and sex. There are young *faqirat* whose interest in getting married is strong, and look forward to find a partner, preferably within the order, with a similar view to theirs, especially on marriage and religion. Yet, there is a number of other revert devotees who think it is unlikely they will ever marry and have a much more liberal approach to the subject. For some, it is important not to have sexual relations that Islam consider unlawful (*zina'*) whereas for others it is acceptable to have multiple short-lived relations and even casual sexual encounters outside the umbrella of marriage.

Their ideological differences are overcome by their friendship, unlikely to have occurred in other circumstances. A religiously endorsed utopian view of relations based in love and on suspending

³³ Jocelyne Cesari. *When Islam and Democracy Meet: Muslims in Europe and in the United States*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 51-52.

judgement of others, a shared ethnic background and their affiliation to an organisation that enhances a sense of group and purpose bigger than oneself, all help to explain the success of this *tariqa* in Moroccan diaspora communities, not only among the Beurs of France, but also in places like Holland, Switzerland or Canada. By doing so, devotees seem to reach a stable compromise between the situatedness brought about by individual agency and social circumstances, and the attempt to transcend this situatedness with a religious mechanism. This tension defines the identity of the brotherhood. The Budshishiyya, with its Sufi symbolic repertoire of universalist motifs combined with a culturally Moroccan anchorage, understands this tension between nourishing oneself whilst escaping from one's social and cultural constraints as a widely common feature of modern societies, providing its followers with 'philosophical' tools to deal with this seeming oxymoron on a daily basis.

The reverts' homeland is in Europe

Despite the fact that Beur background is one of the most salient buttresses of identity within this group of Hamza Budshish's disciples, differences are not only apparent in their ideologies and the individual life choices each of these devotees make; their North African background is also extremely varied, shaping thus diversely, individual experiences of family and ancestral homeland. A significant number of families are from the Northern areas of Morocco, both from the Berber dominated North Eastern part of the country where the central *zawiya* is based (and from where most of its devotees are still coming from), as well as from the mainly Arab North Western region, which holds bigger towns than the east. Other revert devotees have family ties in the bigger Moroccan metropolises, for instance Rabat and Casablanca, relatives that sometimes are themselves internal migrants who originally came from Morocco's rural areas.

The families of revert members may all be Moroccan but are very diverse, as evidenced both in family structures and lifestyle. Some preserve traditional patterns such as young females moving in with their husbands and raising their own family whilst living with the male's extended family. These relatives, devotees have suggested, find difficult to accept when young people leave their parents' home before getting married. There are other families in which there are young couples, especially in urban areas that choose to move away from the extended family and raise their children in nuclear units. Devotees say that despite being less traditional, they keep being highly critical of non-marital co-habitation and singlehood, something common among revert disciples in Europe. This contrast is also reflected in ideological terms. A *faqira* has explained that some of the younger members of her family who have married and moved

away from their parents' home are not necessarily more liberal than the previous generations; on the contrary, she sees them as being "even more conservative [than their parents]". Another one, has spoken about what she considered were fears to change of her Moroccan family, and related conflicts stemming from them being "against anything not done according to the Moroccan tradition". Despite the differences that exist among the different Moroccan families, they all still seem to be much more conservative than reverts, who were for the most part born and raised in Europe.

Families are also diverse in their approaches to Islam. Some reverts speak of growing up in households in which traditional Moroccan Islam was the norm, and so their upbringing had a lot to do with Sufi culture. In one of these cases, a parent was pleased with the religious choice made by her daughter, "my mum was very happy when she knew I do *dhikr* every week, and that I went to Madagh to celebrate the *Mawlid*". Intergenerational discrepancies that existed between them before joining the order, however, did not disappear when she became a Budshish's disciple. For example, speaking about her family, she has recalled that they believe a woman shall not go anywhere without the consent of his father or husband and should marry who she is told to marry. The *faqira* also remembered that they were upset when she decided not to date the person they considered adequate for her.

Although she honours her parents' Sufi religiosity, she thought they lack religious literacy, that there were things the parents believed Islam teaches yet she considers it does not. The Budshishiyya is to her an approach to Islam that celebrates the religious heritage of Moroccan Sufism, yet one that has been lucid enough to reread this tradition in light of the modern circumstances of an increasingly global and highly diverse Muslim audience. For her, her parents' generation represent an Islam "anchored in the past" whilst the brotherhood proposes, an Islam "adapted to the needs of modern Muslims". This view, often perceived as characteristic of 'Western' Muslims, is also quite common in urban milieus of the Muslim world. What we see in the Budshishiyya resonates with, for example, what Howell's sees among young Indonesians:

In the towns and cities, there is also avid experimentation with new institutional forms designed to engage cosmopolitan Muslims, estranged from the social milieu of traditional Sufism, with Sufi learning and practice.³⁴

In some other households, Islam was connected to the identity of the grandparents and it was questioned by the parents. A girl argues that Islam was contested within her family, but something

³⁴ Julia Day Howell, "Sufism and the Indonesian Islamic Revival", *Journal of Asian Studies*, 60/3 (2001):703.

different occurred outside the home. She recalls how his religiously sceptic father would defend Muslims and Muslim identity in front of non-Muslims. Another revert says that her father only complied with the norms of Islam in front of his own parents, not to upset them. He, however, “drinks and smokes and dismisses Islamic teachings as soon as he is back in Europe”. Reverts raised by parents sceptics of Islam were often exposed to *marocanité*’s ‘cultural aspects’, but living in a context with fewer Beur meant to a *faqira* that she always felt forced to switch on and off from Moroccan codes.

In relation to this it is worth mentioning the existing differences among Beur devotees in terms of class. Some of the families of reverts are of lower social origin and came to Europe to work as unskilled workers. Their children grew up in *banlieues*, and as explained to me by one of them, they had little contact with French, ‘white’ children – that is without a migrant background. They tend to be more conservative and for example, more accepting of arranged couples. Others, by contrast, are the children of people who came to Europe in their youth to study or to work as professionals, and these children experienced a more privileged upbringing, with more participation in ‘mainstream’ culture. Within this group, more cosmopolitan minded, there were also some supporters of the political left that ended up in exile. They, in particular, found refuge in France during the years of worst repression under King Hassan II’s rule between 1961 and 1999. They tend to be less religious and more liberal in their views.

Conclusion: national idealisations, transnational disillusion

The picture that results from bringing together several of reverts’ trajectories is kaleidoscopic. It enunciates a variety of experiences that give fruit to different styles of reflection and ways of consorting with Islam. If all these styles are to belong to a single organisation, then, this organisation has to develop an approach to identity able to give conformity to the religious voices each of them create, a variety of meanings devotees attribute to their experiences of the world around them. These styles of reflection are individually framed and in constant change. The Budshishiyya, thus, has to create a web of symbols and a religious language less rigidly defined, with less fixed structures, something that can be interpreted differently by different individuals. This is sometimes difficult, because different people think the order conveys different meanings. It is common, therefore, that reverts’ understanding of the values promoted by the *tariqa* change the day they go to Morocco and see the brotherhood as it operates, there, in its original cultural setting.

I met a group of reverts in *Madagh*, on the occasion of the *Mawlid*. The event can be very crowded and in the words of disciples from Europe, is “intense”, “chaotic”, “life-changing” and, “fun and at the same time difficult”. The celebration brings to the region many people, and it is also a big occasion for

incentivizing the local economy. A big *moussem*³⁵ is set up outside the *zawiya*, everything can be found in there, from lingerie to food, even toilet paper and bottled water for Europeans. Some Europeans relish the chance to leave the *zawiya* and get lost within the crowds; in there, they are anonymous. And some also, who back in Europe are regular smokers, take this opportunity to light the cigarette they could not smoke in long hours of *dhikr* performance. But northern Morocco is one of the most conservative regions of the country, and women smoking are looked at pejoratively. A group of young reverts were advised by the order to refrain from smoking, but, instead of blindly obeying to what they were being told, one of them argued that, she was “not going to be told how to behave and how not”, whilst adding “Islam is on the inside, it does not matter if I am a woman and I smoke or not”.

Another group commented on street harassment. Whereas most converts arrive in groups to airports and the order sometimes even organizes for taxi drivers to go and pick them up, minimizing thus, the contact between them and local populations, many reverts know well Morocco, speak the language, have visited the country many times before, so they come in small groups, “we came by ourselves”, as one of them told me. But unlike many others that try to dress observing certain norms of Muslim etiquette, in order to go unnoticed, revert *faqirat* sometimes dress the same way they would back home: one wore make-up, another a brightly coloured hair. Although their style is often admired by other European devotees, that understand it as a sign of the order’s openness to accommodate diverse people, they were not as welcomed when in Morocco, because they did not conform to the local codes of dress and behaviour. One of them, has told me that when she speaks *dārija* (Moroccan Arabic), she is whistled by strangers. Another revert has affirmed that she was confronted by a local outside the *zawiya*, who told her that she should behave in a more Islamic way. The *faqira* argued that the man knew little about the *Budshishiyya*; according to her, this order is a departure from the constraining social codes she would perceive at home.

At the end, most reverts seem to be largely uncritical of the brotherhood, something I did not see among converts. Instead, the positive value they attribute to the weekly meetings with other devotees and to the practice of *dhikr* do often override any negative aspects. The power of *dhikr*, defined as something that “helps [devotees] make sense of things”, as “structuring”, and as an energy that is “freeing, and at the same time ordering” is frequently considered one of the most powerful aspects of being a

³⁵ A *moussem* is a religious festivity typical of Berber societies that implies, at the same time, visitation to a *walī* or to his tomb (*ziyāra*) with the occurrence of a market. The relevance of its mercantile dimension is that it is endorsed with religious sacredness.

disciple of Hamza Budshish. Besides, they recognize the value of a community that is welcoming different people, regardless of ethnicity and class. One devotee underlined the power *dhikr* had on her feeling welcomed by a group that gave her the right to express freely her identity, aware, perhaps, of how difficult it is to scape stereotyping views on what is to be a woman, Muslim and European:

[In the Budshishiyya] I only feel that I have the right to be [who I am]. I have the right to be French and be a Muslim and not to be taken as if something is wrong with me. I have the right to be part of a Moroccan family, a Muslim and not to be the conservative woman they expect me to be. In here, I can be who I want to be, be single if I want to be single, marry whoever I want if I want to marry and still be fully free to live my life, my Islam, my *iman* [faith] and my *ihsan* [moral excellence], responsibly but in freedom.

Acceptance, thence, seems to be key, as I have argued throughout the paper, to understand the reasons why revert *faqirat* join the order. Belonging to the order is binding and bonding. They feel at the same time unique and with the right to express their difference yet, also with the possibility of creating a family of likeminded peers. This combination of being different-being the same is also relevant in assessing the mechanisms of meaning-making they elaborate by becoming disciples of the Moroccan *wali*. Revert disciples of Hamza Budshish represent religious identities that do not sit easily with stereotyped views of female European Muslim identity. In practical terms, this means they are frequently asked to convey to the expectations many have on them, for what they often feel judged. These disobliging criticisms come from a threefold front, from 'mainstream' society, from Morocco, via their relatives, and from within Europe's Moroccan communities. In this chapter, I argue that this brotherhood brings about a relief to this discourteous situation, as becoming a disciple brings, to revert Muslims, as a result, acceptance, hospitality and kindness. The order has a series of clear and distinctive prescriptions that want disciples to follow. However, it instils them in a persuasive manner, and, when devotees resist adopting them, it adopts a *laissez-faire* leadership in which *faqirat* are the ultimate source indecision-making. This flexibility articulated through a language and ideology that is fundamentally religious, is paramount in understanding why Budshishiyya's Beur youngsters choose to become part of this organization, and not of any other. There is a sense of idealization that shall also be considered; when the order adopts an attitude towards Islam they do not feel identified with, they commonly blame individuals and not the organization for what they choose to approach as a mishap. By doing so, they establish a unique relation with the Sufi order. The success, thus, is mutual, as the brotherhood is permissive with them, they are permissive with the *tariqa*.

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