Moroccan female religious agents: old practices and new perspectives, by Aziza Ouguir, Leiden and Boston, Brill, 2020, 167pp., €88.00 (Hardback), ISBN: 978-90-04-42989-5.

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Moroccan Female Religious Agents brings to light the cases of a number of Moroccan female saints that despite their relevance have been ignored by the academe. The second part of the book discusses how different groups of women in today's Morocco approach these saints of the past. By doing so, Ouguir tries to evaluate whether these historical Sufi personalities have left a legacy and have an impact in today's female religious observance of Islam and on feminist discourse and practice in Moroccan society. The author seeks to combine data-gathering techniques from anthropology and history, as she uses both written and oral sources. One of the most significant values of *Moroccan Female Religious Agents* is that most of the texts she uses - mostly hagiographies, but also texts on genealogy (*sulāla*) and biographies - are manuscripts that have not been insofar published in edited form, helping us approach cases of female saints hitherto ignored. For the section dealing with Morocco today the author conducted interviews with a variety of women between the years 2009 and 2011: shrine visitors, participants in *musim* festivals, *murshidāt* (religious guides and preachers), *wa'idāt* ('volunteer' religious advisors) and feminist activists, from secular and Islamic organizations. The scope of the sample of interviewees is impressively diverse in terms of religious identity and ideology as well as with regards to the social background of the respondents – i.e. from the north and the south, urban and rural, lower and upper classes, Berber and Arab.

The first chapter introduces the work and explains the thematic unfolding of the book. The second chapter exposes the theoretical frame. Although it contains interesting lines of thought from some of the most important authors in the field, it lacks awareness of the most recent academic ideas and debates. The third chapter is in my view one of the most valuables. In there, Oughir scrutinizes the life and deeds of a number of female saints, focusing extensively on three: 'Azīza al-Saksawiyya, 'Ā'isha al-Idrīsiyya and, Fāṭima Muḥdūz, who lived in the 14th, the 16th and the 19th centuries respectively. The two first were Berbers from the south and the third Arab from the north. Through her assessment of these historical cases, Oughir makes us realize how diverse female Sufi experiences has been over time. She discusses instances of *majdhūbāt* (women whose alleged insanity was attributed to their closeness to the divine), healers, others who performed miracles alive and/or after death, disciples of great masters who may have attended and/or studied in gender-mixed gatherings, those who abandoned everything or that renounced a family life in order to devout their lives to God and others that practiced Sufism in the privacy of their homes while fulfilling household duties.

Chapter four assesses the legacy of these saints in today's Moroccan society, and looks at the reception of these examples by a number of 'female religious agents' in diverse contexts. It contains a precious section about shrines in which the role the female caretakers (*muqqadamāt*) play in the daily running of these religious sites is discussed with reference to the case-study of a shrine in the northern town of Shafshawān. The chapter then moves away from the Sufi field to elaborate on what do *murshidāt* and *wa'idāt* think about these saintly figures. Chapter five explores how Moroccan feminists (secular and religious) relate to the legacy of these female saints. In a first part of the chapter, an introduction to feminist trends in Morocco and to the movements explored in the research is presented, to then move onto the analysis of the different views feminist have on the saints.

Overall, the book, based on Oughir's 2013 doctoral thesis at the University of Amsterdam, is an important contribution to the field of Moroccan Sufism and on gendered experiences of Islam. The part that studies female Sufi personalities of the past is in my view the most precious, as it sheds light into interesting cases and highlights the dearth of scholarship in this area; one cannot but hope that works like this will motivate further research about female involvement in Sufism. However, the second part of the book seems at a times, loosely related to the first. After all, and with the major exception of shrine visitors, these Sufi personalities were not central (neither marginal, only mostly nonexistent) to the religious and/or gendered identities of the interviewees, they only reflect on them when asked. Nevertheless, there are a number of remarkable conclusions from this part too, namely, the Islamists' ambivalent position that positively values some of the components of the saints' legacy (such as their pursue of religious knowledge) yet is critical of the performance of miracles and of saintly intercession; and, that of secularists, that see in the saints inspiring forms of resisting patriarchy from a religious position, although they believe sexism should be at best fought from within a secular frame. Equally of interest is the argument (shared by Oughir) that suggests there is a historical 'connection' between the saints and the interviewees, perceiving them all as part of a broad trend of antipatriarchal struggle that spans throughout time. Although the historical validity of this thesis may in scholarly terms be questionable, it brings out an interesting insight on the usages of history in the building of today's gender and religious identities in Moroccan society. *Moroccan female religious agents* is a valuable contribution that combines historical and anthropological techniques in the analysis of female Sufi saints and their legacy today and helps us know more about this fascinating yet largely neglected area of study.