The Architecture of Pilgrimage

A study on the Ziyara Bogal and charismatic authority in the Tijaniyya
Abstract

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Pilgrimage plays an important role in many religious traditions. Indeed, one of the five pillars of Islam is the *Hajj* – the pilgrimage to Mecca that every Muslim is expected to perform at least once in their life. But this isn’t the only ritual of its kind present in Islam. Indeed, a common practice in Sufism is the *Ziyara* – a pilgrimage or visit to a saint or the tomb of a saint. This study aims to give a comprehensive overview of one of these pilgrimages – the *Ziyara Bogal* of the Tijaniyya Sufi order. Through observational methods and interviews, the present thesis will look at strategies of ritualization and charismatic authority, as well as the political implications of the pilgrimage in West African society. Extensive fieldwork was conducted in Senegal, The Gambia and in the diasporic community in Sweden both during the pilgrimage itself and several months before and after, and theories relating to the main themes (ritualization, charismatic authority) is used to analyze the material. As such, the study will map out multiple significant aspects of the ziyara and give an insight into how Islam is lived and practiced in the region.

Key words: Tijaniyya, Sufism, Senegal, The Gambia, Islam, Ziyara Bogal, Pilgrimage, Authenticity, Charisma, Ritualization, Authority, Sweden, Dhikr
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1. Introduction

1.1. Introduction

You can never see the sun too clearly in Bogal, Senegal. The sky is always covered in a blanket of clouds that obscure it slightly. It is always like this, the locals tell me, but I’m never given an explanation as to why. Something that is abundantly clear, however, is that this doesn’t stop the heat from entering the atmosphere. In this relatively small village, seemingly in the middle of nowhere in the Senegalese countryside, south of the Gambian border, it is 42 degrees Celsius. But despite the climate, the village is alive with sounds, smells and people who have traveled from all around the world to come here.

In the distance, you can hear the sound of singing, chanting. The words “La ilaha illallah” (There is no god but God) repeated over and over in a very melodic fashion. Sometimes you’ll hear the crowd change the words to be about “Bay Cherno” (“Father Cherno”) and how he brings the group together. Cherno, in this case, refers to the sheikh Cherno Abdulrahman Barry, a prominent figure and teacher in the Tijani Brotherhood. It is to his residence here in Bogal that all these people have come and are now gathered at. A huge crowd stands waiting outside the house, chanting the dhikr (remembrance of God) described above. It is a festive atmosphere; everyone is eagerly awaiting his emergence. When he does step outside the gates, he is accompanied by a group of security personnel and police that surround him like a circle. The crowd gets noticeably excited and aggressively starts approaching the sheikh, some almost throwing themselves at him. It becomes clear why he needs the security, as they are forced to push back the ecstatic group of people trying to shake his hand or just touch him. The singing continues, increasing in intensity and volume as he emerges. It is almost reminiscent of a rock star being greeted by adoring fans.

This is a common sight here in Bogal, especially during the Ziyara (pilgrimage) that takes place once a year and is attended by the Tijaniyya (also known as the Tijani Brotherhood), the largest (in number of adherents) in all of Senegal and The Gambia. Once a year, they gather in the village of Bogal to meet the sheikh Abdulrahman Barry – the spiritual leader of this specific branch of the brotherhood – and receive his blessings, or baraka. It is a hectic few days, filled with activities like the Friday prayer in the local
mosque, meeting the sheikh in person to give him gifts and politicians from all around the region coming to visit. This is an important event for the brotherhood and, some could argue, for the countries of Senegal and The Gambia in general. In Bogal during the Ziyara, one is met with scenes of chaos when the sheikh emerges from his compound, people almost passing out as a result of hearing his voice when praying and a strong sense of community and companionship among his followers.

Clearly, the ziyara has a significant impact on the lives of those belonging to the Tijaniyya and on the social and political environment in West Africa. Yet, very little is written or, indeed, known about it outside of the community itself. If we are to expand our understanding of Islam, Sufism and West African Sufism in particular, it is necessary to highlight areas such as this one and the effects it has on a larger scale.

1.2. Aim/Research Questions

The focus of this study will be the Ziyara Bogal, a pilgrimage carried out by a specific branch of the Tijaniyya that follow sheikh Cherno Abdulrahman Barry, and the different aspects of this pilgrimage.

Given the lack of previous literature on this event, the following pages will attempt to give a comprehensive overview and outline of the Ziyara Bogal and the context surrounding it. The aim of this thesis as such will be to map out strategies used by the the followers of Abdulrahman Barry (and himself) to create and establish charismatic authority, as described above, during the pilgrimage and the immediate periods before and after, and to what degree this affects the ritual and its implications.

Using ritual theory, specifically Catherine Bell’s concept of ritualization, as well as theories of charismatic authority by Weber and Werbner, the analysis will explore the ways in which this branch of the Tijaniyya creates and sustain ritual/sacred space, how the ritual/pilgrimage is framed and how the charismatic authority of the sheikh is strengthened and established, as well as how all these themes are related to each other.

Furthermore, I will attempt to contextualize these findings into a socio-political framework and explore these aspects of the Ziyara Bogal as well.

To accomplish this, I have chosen the following questions to guide the research:
1. What strategies of ritualization are used to establish and authenticate sacredness?

2. How is the charismatic authority of the sheikh established and sustained?

3. What are the social/political implications of the Ziyara?

1.1. Author’s notes

Before I go any further, I would like to mention a few people that helped make the present work possible. My warmest and most sincere thank you to Sait Mbaï, without whom my access to the field would have been much more limited. His enthusiasm and friendship, not to mention a major source of information, made the work enjoyable and interesting. Moreover, I am in great debt to the Dairatul chlamol Islam and all its members who welcomed me, initially a stranger and outsider, with open arms, showcasing an unprecedented level of hospitality and kindness as well as providing numerous interesting dinner-conversations.

I would also like to thank Cherno Abdulrahman Barry, who’s grace and humility was impossible even for me to ignore during my stay in Bogal, which is truly and beautiful and special place.

Lastly, I am significantly grateful to my supervisor Simon Sorgenfrei, who has provided guidance, inspiration and much needed criticism/feedback.

There are always ethical questions that arise when embarking on an academic project such as this one. Sometimes, it can be difficult to balance one's personal experiences, relationships and attachments with the analyzing academic integrity that is essential for a work of this sort. The experiences I have had while doing fieldwork have been overwhelmingly positive, and I have grown very fond of the individuals and contexts that it has entailed. I have been shown great hospitality and friendship in every situation along the way.

In this academic endeavor, the analysis of different strategies and behaviors should not be viewed as me "picking apart" or de-legitimizing the practices or beliefs of my informants, but simply as trying to highlight the ways in which their reality and religion is lived and experienced.

Indeed, the contents of a work like this can only convey a certain aspect of an experience or context that is, in reality, much broader and more complex in scope. Hopefully, it will be a useful source of information and knowledge.
2. Background

2.1. Sufism and its practices

The tradition known as Sufism, or *tasawwuf* in Arabic, is sometimes referred to, rather problematically, as Islamic mysticism. While there certainly are, and have been, aspects of Sufi philosophy and practice that might be termed mystical, this doesn’t quite paint the entire picture. Indeed, Sufism is a movement within Islam that stretches back to its very early years, and has throughout history taken on a lot of different forms (Ohlander, 2015: 53). There have been groups and individuals who have practiced complete asceticism and renunciation, as well as others that have been active members of social and political affairs, and everything in between. The problem with trying to define a tradition such as Sufism is that it rarely functions as a unified or solid category with a given set of ideals or practices. Historically, there is a rather significant difference between the Sufism of Al-Ghazali (d. 1111), who represented a more “sober” and scholarly aspect, and that of Mansour al-Hallaj (d. 922), who's expression is instead described as “ecstatic”, for example, and these kinds of distinctions will always be present.

None the less, Sufism is in general terms often described as a kind of “inner dimension of Islam”, with philosophies and practices that aim to find the “hidden meaning” behind things like the Qu’ran or other aspects of the Muslim faith and, ultimately, reach union with the divine in this current life (Ohlander, 2015: 56-57). However, modern scholarship is keen to point out that Sufism has indeed taken on many other forms throughout history as well, and that these descriptions are somewhat outdated and simplistic. None the less, the early movements associated with Sufism were often ascetic and extremely pious individuals who would sometimes seclude themselves, wear plain, simple clothing and focus intensely on ritual practice. It wasn’t until later periods, sometime around the turn of the first millennium that Sufism started to gain an organizational structure and begin to significantly affect society and culture in the Muslim lands. One of the most important figures in this transformation is the very famous al-Ghazali who attempted (and arguably succeeded) in reconciling the theological kalam-tradition (doctrinal theology) of Islam with Sufism, thus creating a kind of synthesis that helped in its widespread acceptance.

Moreover, it was during this period (from the 10th century onward) that adherents started
to organize themselves into different *tariqas* (orders), based on the teachings of specific *sheikhs* or teachers. Perhaps the most famous of these is the *Mevleviyya* founded by the revered Persian poet Jalal ad-din Rumi (1207-1273), a Sufi that has reached such fame today that even famous artist *Beyoncé* named her daughter after him.

More formalized philosophical systems were further developed that cemented much of what we today associate with Sufism. Examples of this include individuals like Abu Talib al-Makki (d. 996), Ali Hujwiri (d. 1077) and the aforementioned Al-Ghazali, who all wrote famous texts that helped systematize Sufi beliefs (Sorgenfrei, 2015: 180). Indeed, many of the ideas and practices established by these individuals still permeate Sufism today, including the Brotherhoods of West Africa.

The practices themselves can vary from place to place and from tariqa to tariqa, but there are a few that can be consider somewhat universal. One of these, of course, is the *dhikr*.

### 2.2. Dhikr and Sama

One of the most recognizable and universally practiced rituals in Sufism is something known as *dhikr*, meaning *remembrance* or, more practically, remembrance of the names of God (Sorgenfrei, 2015: 185). During dhikr, the names of God are recited through chanting or “singing”, often for long periods of time. Jonathan H. Shannon explains it as such:

Dhikr is the ritual invocation of God and divine authority and power by Muslims through the repetition of God’s names (asma’ allah al-husna), prayer, chant, and ritualized motions, including bodily movements and rhythmic breathing. (Shannon, 2018: 383)

Most Sufi tariqas practice some form of dhikr, although there are sometimes significant variations between them. Sessions also occur outside of the Sufi context, but this is not as common (Shannon, 2004: 381). While performing this ritual, participants are known to sometimes enter ecstatic states known as *wajd* where they are brought closer to God. Indeed, the ultimate goal of dhikr can be said to be *fana*, or annihilation of the lower self, and thus mystical union with the divine reality (referred to in Arabic as *al-Haqq*, one of the 99 names of God) through ecstatic experience.

Communal dhikr is usually held once a week and is led by a sheikh and the aesthetic aspects of the practice vary between tariqas. For example, the *Naqshbandiyya* is known for their “silent dhikr”, which includes no vocal chanting or singing, instead silently reciting
the words mentally. The *Qadiriyya*, who’s very physical form of dhikr is often shared in social media accompanied with modern dance music (as the practice appears like a form of dancing), is another example. Here, the words are chanted with increasing intensity and often includes bodily movements like running in circles. Moreover, there is the dhikr of the *Tijaniyya* which is very melodic and sounds quite like what many would call “singing”, or that of *Baye Fall* that sometimes uses percussion instruments. These are but a few examples of the different forms of dhikr that exist, but all share in that essential goal of forgetfulness and wajd.

Another practice that is often strongly connected to dhikr, albeit not nearly as common or universally accepted, is *sama* (meaning “listening” or “audition”). Definitions on the word are difficult and many varying ones exist, but it is usually associated with listening to music or poetry as a religious practice. Indeed, Jean During, quoted in Kenneth S. Avery’s book “The psychology of Early Sufi sama”, defines it as such:

Sama, which literally means ‘audition’, denotes, in the Sufi tradition, spiritual listening, and more particularly listening to music with the aim of reaching a state of grace or ecstasy, or more simply with the aim of meditating, of plunging into oneself, or as the Sufis say, to ‘nourish the soul’. It thus operates in a mystical concert, of spiritual listening to music and songs, in a more or less ritualized form (During, 1988: 13)

However, Avery himself argues that this is a rather narrow description and that sama includes more than just music as such. He writes:

…many of the auditory phenomena which gave rise to altered states are chance occurrences, such as street cries, songs or overheard speech. Even these everyday events can produce a profound psychological effect in the receptive listener (Avery, 2004: 5)

There is a difference between ritualized forms of sama and the kind that Avery is talking about. It becomes clear that dhikr and sama is somewhat interconnected. Both have similar characteristics in terms of their intention and can indeed be performed simultaneously.

Perhaps the most well-known form of sama is that practiced by the *Whirling Dervishes* of the *Mevliviyya*. Here, music plays an integral part of the ritual and is at the core of the practice in the tariqa. Moreover, there is the *Qawwali* music of the *Chishtiyya* order, made famous by Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, that gained a significant international following in the 1980-1990’s. Both these forms of music are strongly connected to the Sufi tradition and serve as an important form of religious practice.
One should point out that the practice of sama is in no way universal to all tariqas. Indeed, there are many who consider it inappropriate and do not practice it themselves. This is true of both other tariqas but also of other groups within the larger Islamic tradition. None the less, it serves as an important point in understanding the practices of Sufism and its connection to dhikr.

2.3. The Tijaniyya and the West African Sufi Brotherhoods

While you can find Sufism and its adherents all throughout the Arabic-speaking world, the spread of Sufism has also been very successful outside these regions. Many historians argue that the larger spread of Islam was significantly helped by Sufism, which presented a more accessible form of the religion that could adapt to local traditions and practices (DeGorge, 2006: 31). To this day, the Sufi tariqas and Brotherhoods (a later designation of tariqa, common in West Africa) have a prominent position in places like Central Asia and parts of Africa and often play a significant role in their social and political affairs. This is especially apparent in West African countries like Senegal and The Gambia. Indeed, estimates show that approximately 92% of the population in Senegal is Muslim, and 95% of those belong to one of the Sufi brotherhoods (Pew research center, 2002). The same is true of The Gambia, where over 95% of the population are Muslim (The World Factbook, CIA). The two largest brotherhoods in this region are the Tijaniyya and Mouridiyya, with smaller groups like the Qadiriyya and Layenes also being present (McLaughlin, 1997: 564).

The Tijaniyya brotherhood was founded by Ahmad b. al-Mukhtar al-Tijani (1735-1815), an Algerian man from a Berber family (although his disciples and certain sources insist he was a descendant of the prophet Muhammad and therefore also of Arab background) who wandered around the Muslim lands in search of mystical knowledge. Traveling to places like Mecca, Cairo and Fez he met with, and studied under several sheikhs and at one point joined three different tariqas: the Qadiriyya, the Nasiriyya and the Khalwatiyya (Abun-Nasr, 2007: 149). Eventually, Ahmad al-Tijani claims that the prophet Muhammad himself appeared to him while he was awake and ordered him to both start his own tariqa and officially end any affiliation with other orders. According to al-Tijani, this experience gave him a very privileged position among the walis (friends of God, or “saints”) as he had been given a message and instructions directly from the prophet, and indeed also rendered all his teachings infallible since they came directly from Muhammad. In fact, al-
Tijani even went so far as to call himself the *khatim al-awliya* (“Seal of the saints”) much like Muhammad is considered the *khatim al-anbiya* (“Seal of the prophets”), meaning he is the last and concluding wali in a long line of successors. Abun-Nasr explains it thus:

> Accordingly, his walaya comprised and superseded that of all other awliya in the same way that Muhammad’s prophethood comprised and superseded that of all other prophets. (Abun-Nasr, 2007: 152-153)

This kind of rhetoric is not completely unheard of in the history of Islam and Sufism. For example, the 13th century mystic Ibn al-Arabi described himself in similar ways. It did, however, along with his claims about the prophet appearing to him, cause some trouble for Ahmad al-Tijani. He received considerable criticism from some of his contemporaries who considered his ideas to be *bid'a* (innovation) and according to some reports, he was indeed forced to leave his homeland of Algeria due to oppression from the “Turks” (Abun-Nasr, 2007: 151). He thus decided to settle in Fez and, even though he wasn’t free from criticism here either, was successful in establishing his new tariqa there.

**Practice and teachings of the Tijaniyya**

The followers of the new tariqa Tijaniyya (which he also called *al-tariqa al-Muhammadia*, due to its direct connection with the prophet) were prohibited from associating with any other order. Furthermore, the order and its founder is characterized by a rejection of ascetic poverty as an inherent aspect of *Zuhd* (usually translated as “renunciation” or “asceticism”). Thus, al-Tijani was certainly no hermit that rejected wealth or worldly comforts and neither did he expect any less from his followers. Indeed, he states that in his encounter with the prophet Muhammad he was given the following message:

> Keep on this path, without withdrawing into seclusion, and without putting an end to interactions with other men, until you reach the station which is your due
> (Mbacké, 2005: 27)

In other words, wealth and possessions are not inherently a bad thing, as long as we don’t give these things any real value (Abun-Nasr, 2007: 154). This aspect of the tijani teachings may be part of the reason why it eventually grew so popular and indeed why it has played such a large part in West African society and politics.

Furthermore, when a person is initiated into the Tijaniyya, he/she is given several religious rules/rites to follow, aside from the standard five pillars of Islam. The three most central and universal of these are the *Wird*, *Wazifa* and *Hadra* (dhikr).
Wird

The Wird is a specific set of prayers that are required by the practitioner to be performed twice a day. These include reciting Astaghfirullah (I beg of forgiveness from God) 100 times, the Salat al-Fatih (Prayer of the Opening) 100 times and the proclamation of faith La ilaha illallah a further 100 times (Abun-Nasr, 2007: 154). In fact, the Salat al-Fatih is an especially common and popular prayer in the Tijaniyya that is often a central part of religious gatherings even today, and al-Tijani himself argued that reciting this prayer is equal to reciting the Qu’ran 6000 times (Abun-Nasr, 2007: 155). Following a similar argument made by Khadim Mbacké in his book “Sufism and Religious Brotherhoods in Senegal”, the prominence of this prayer makes it useful for me to cite a translated version of it below:

Salat al-Fatih:

O God, bless our lord Muhammad who opened what was sealed, who closed what came before, who caused Truth to triumph through truth; bless his family, according to its merit and the immense respect due it. (Mbacké, 2005: 29)

Wazifa

The wazifa is a similar ritual that is recited in the morning, and optionally also in the afternoon. According to Abun-Nasr, it consists of a different group of prayers: Astaghfirullah al-Azim al-lahdi la ilaha illah huwa al-Hayy al-Qayyum (I ask forgiveness of Allah, the Great, than whom there is no other god, the living and self-abiding) 30 times, again the Salat al-Fatih 50 times, La ilaha illallah 100 times and Jawharat al-Kamal (“The Jewel of Perfection”) 11 times (Abun-Nasr, 2007: 155). However, conversations with my informants have given me different answers. According to a key member of the group, the Wazifa is performed once a day and consists of reciting the word Astaghfirullah 30 times, the Salat al-Fatih 50 times, La ilaha illallah 100 times and Jawharat al-Kamal 12 times. He explained that this is universal for the Tijaniyya but that other tariqas have different Wazifas. Furthermore, reciting the Wazifa is only required if you have already taken the Wird.

Hadra
Lastly, Hadra is the communal dhikr held traditionally on Fridays, even though this date is sometimes changed in the diaspora to adapt to local customs. In the dhikr, the names of Allah are chanted/sung together, often in the form of la ilaha illallah but can include other phrases and words. The Tijani dhikr (especially in the West African regions) is often characterized by a strong melodic flavor not as common in many other tariqas and is structured in the form of “call and response” where one, or a few, members sing a phrase and the rest repeat it. According to Jamil M. Abun-Nasr:

Ahmad al-Tijani did not set fixed rules for this communal ceremony, and left it to his followers to perform it either according to the method of the Khalwatiyya or the customary practice of their lands. (Abun-Nasr, 2007: 155)

This could perhaps explain the melodic and locally inspired dhikr of the West African Tijaniyya.

**Spread to West Africa**

Even though Ahmad al-Tijani’s new brotherhood was successful in North Africa, it wasn’t until later that it reached the regions of Senegal and The Gambia. The first individual to establish its presence there was Al-Hajj Umar Tall (1794-1864) who, after performing the hajj (pilgrimage) to Mecca, was appointed “khalifa (representative) of tariqa Tijaniyya in Black Africa” by one of al-Tijani’s disciples (Mbacké, 2005: 31). He was thus tasked with spreading and leading the Tijaniyya in his homeland (Senegal) and, upon returning home to Futo Toro, embarked on a military campaign to fight the “pagan” population. These military ambitions failed but he was none the less rather successful at spreading the Tijani order in regions he was involved with, especially his home town of Futo Toro. The greatest opposition to him and the order at this time was the Qadiriyya, which was the largest tariqa up to that point. However, the Tijaniyya managed to eclipse its competition in the mid-late 1800’s and early 1900’s through several different sheikhs and teachers. The most significant and successful of these was Al-Hajj Malik Sy (1855-1922) (Mbacké, 2005: 35).

Al-Hajj Malik Sy travelled around the country during the French colonial period as a teacher of the Islamic sciences. He opened several Zawiyas (Islamic religious schools), one of which still stands in Dakar today. His teachings were characterized by a rather positive attitude toward the French rulers, and emphasized peaceful co-existence (Mbacké, 2005: 39-40). He eventually settled down permanently in the city Tivaouane, which is
still considered by some to be the capital of the Tijaniyya and a place of pilgrimage. Of course, not all Tijani sheikhs shared al-Hajj Malik Sy’s attitude toward the French, and on certain occasions even took up arms to fight them violently. The general opposition to the colonial rulers, many argue, is indeed one of the reasons so many people converted and joined Sufi Brotherhoods around this time. It was presented as the opposite to the French and seen as synonymous with the national and ethnic belonging, thus the perfect common identity to strengthen and use as opposition to the foreign rulers (Clark, 1999:154-155). Furthermore, some argue that the peace incorporated by the French, along with the roads and means of communication helped spread the religion as well (Clark, 1999: 154-155). Among the people that strongly fought the French, albeit peacefully, was Ahmadou Bamba Mbacké, who founded the Mouridiyya (second largest brotherhood in Senegal).

It should be pointed out that the role of the Marabouts (Religious teacher/sheikh) still play a major role in the social and political environment of Senegal and The Gambia. Many of them are thought to have a big impact on popular opinion about certain politicians or parties and thus wield a significant amount of power (Van Hoven, 2000: 226).

2.4. Senegambia

The two African nations of Senegal and The Gambia, together often referred to as “Senegambia” is located at the very western coast of Africa. Culturally, the two nations share many similarities, including its native ethnics groups and languages such as Wolof, Mandinka and Fular. However, the official language differs in both the countries – in The Gambia it is English, and in Senegal it is French. The reason for this difference goes back to colonial times, for major periods of time The Gambia was a British colony while Senegal was colonized by the French.

Indeed, colonialism plays a significant role in the modern history of these countries, and was an important part in the development of brotherhoods like the Tijaniyya and Mouridiyya as well as their current status in society.

Senegal came under control of the French in the late 19th century, which is also around the time that most of the population converted to Islam (Creevey, 1985: 716). As mentioned above, the Mourid brotherhood and its founder Ahmadou Bamba, rose to power by opposing the colonial power and serving as an opposing symbol of national and religious identity (Clark, 1999: 154-155). However, the relationship between the Mourids and the colonialists soon changed, as the successors of Ahmadou Bamba often worked closely with the govern-
ment. The Tijaniyya also rose to power around this same time and the marabouts associated with it used different approaches – some opposing the French while others working with them.

A result of the colonial period was that the traditional order and power-structure in the country had been altered and shaken. Lucy E. Creevey argues that the roles of the former chiefs were taken over by the colonial powers which gave the marabouts and brotherhoods an opportunity to carve out their own seat of power as intermediaries between the population and the ruling colonialists (Creevey, 1985: 716). Thus, in the new, revived social structure the Sufi brotherhoods were given a significant political role. The Marabouts would often encourage cooperation (although not all, as described above) with the rulers and generally wielded great power over the population, which made their relationship between the colonialists a decisive factor in keeping stability in the region.

Senegal gained its independence in 1960, first as part of the Mali Federation and later as a sovereign state. The Gambia followed in 1965. The two attempted to unite into a single nation for short period in the 1980’s through the Senegambia confederation (1982-1989) but are today still separate states (Clark; Forde & Gailey, 2018).

Today, Senegal is described as a semi-presidential, democratic republic while the The Gambia simply as a presidential republic. Both are considered secular states, but the religious brotherhoods still play, and has played, a significant role in its politics. Throughout the 20th century, the state attempted different forms of “non-religious”, secular policies but because of the large number of Muslims in the region, as well as the strong relationship between the population and the marabouts, it was mostly unsuccessful (Van Hoven, 2000: 226). Instead, as Van Hoven argues in “A nation turbaned? The construction of nationalist Muslim identities in Senegal”, Islam was given greater prominence in promoting national identities.

Since independence, the marabouts and Sufi brotherhoods have continued to be politically influential. Some have strongly opposed the sitting government and even created their own political parties (Van Hoven, 2000: 230), while others have functioned as support. An example of this is how during the elections in 1998, Abdoulaye Wade, one of the main opposition leaders, traveled to Touba to inform the chief marabout from the Mourid brotherhood of his resignation. In turn the “spiritual masters of Touba had given him their blessings so that he would obtain support and win the next elections” (Van Hoven, 2000: 231).

This kind of relationship can be observed on multiple occasions in the last century of Senegambian history and politics. The bonds between the marabouts and political leaders
are very strong, and their relationship is important for that of Islam and the state. In some ways, one could argue that the marabouts still hold the same position that they did during colonial times – as intermediaries between the population and the political leaders. As mentioned, the support from a religious leader can mean the difference between victory or defeat during an election. In other words, marabouts would serve as legitimization for the political leaders, and the state, in return, facilitated and protected the material interests of the marabouts (Van Hoven, 2000: 231). The two have been very much co-dependent on each other.

This will be explored further in the analysis. The extent to which this relationship is still prominent, and how the Ziyara Bogal and sheikh Abdulrahman Barry can serve as evidence for this can be valuable information in understanding the role of religion in contemporary Senegambia.

2.5. **Cherno Abdulrahman Barry and the Dairatul ehlamol Islam**

The West African tariqas, Tijaniyya included, are generally organized into local *da’iras*. A *da’ira* is a “local administrative organ of a tariqa” (Mbacké, 2005: 97) and becomes especially important and prominent for the diaspora in places like Europe, where affiliates who live in the same city, for instance, gather to form a da’ira in which they can perform their religious and cultural practices together.

In Sweden, there are several different branches and da’iras belonging to the Tijaniyya. The present project deals mainly with those connected with the sheikh Cherno Abdulrahman Barry, who resides in West Africa (The word “Cherno” is a title that, according to my informants, roughly translates to “The learned”). The group in Stockholm, in which most of the field work has been conducted, is led by Sait Mbai and goes under the name *Dairatul ehlamol Islam* (Sorgenfrei, 2016: 61). Formed in 1995, they meet every Saturday at the house or apartment of a member (or on special occasions in a public building) to perform dhikr together. In many cases, there is also an imam present that will preach, discussing everything from theology to questions of integration and ethical behavior. On occasion, special conferences will be held, for example when Abdulrahman Barry is visiting Sweden, in which hundreds of guests gather, often from different tariqas and groups.
Members are primarily from The Gambia or Senegal, but there are also some Swedish converts. There is close to an even number of male and female members, with the males holding most leader positions. However, during the weekly dhikr, male and female usually sit and sing together, with no clear separation between the sexes, although women are mostly responsible for preparing and serving the food.

The da'ira is concerned with religious practices like dhikr and du'a, but also with societal questions of integration and harmonious living. During my visits, I am told on numerous occasions that they consider it a very important aspect of their organization to promote the following of Swedish laws and customs. They want to be viewed as an Islam where it is "your duty as a Muslim to love your country" and that "takes care of everyone". During the Saturday meetings, these topics are often discussed alongside the prayers.

One leading figure, that is also a Swedish convert, is Abd al-Haq Kielan, who leads a smaller group in Eskilstuna and is connected to the da'ira. He visits Stockholm from time to time as well, especially during the larger conferences.

Furthermore, in Gothenburg there is another group that follow Abdulrahman Barry called Tijaniyya-Mutawaqilun, in which Jakob Domargård has a leading position. They consist mainly of Swedish converts that meet monthly to do dhikr (Sorgenfrei, 2016: 62).

![Dhikr in Stockholm](Photo taken by author)

### 2.6. Previous research and originality

In this background chapter, I have referenced some of the previous literature on the present subject. This includes some basic textbooks about Sufism that include shorter
chapters on the Tijaniyya, such as Jamil M. Abun-Nasr’s *Muslim communities of Grace: Sufi Brotherhoods in Islamic religious life*, and Khadim Mbacké’s *Sufism and Religious Brotherhoods in Senegal*, where the author tries to give a comprehensive overview of the larger tariqas present in Senegal: the Tijaniyya, Mouridiyya, Qadiriyya and Layenes. Basic information is given here – their formation, practice, social role – and despite some questionable aspects in the latter book (clear biases shines through on multiple occasions) it has been a good source of knowledge.

In general, however, I found that surprisingly little has been written about the Tijaniyya. It is often only mentioned in very short chapters in larger books on Sufism, if at all. Additionally, I could find no previous literature that specifically dealt with the Ziyara Bogal. Thus, some literature about other, similar, orders have proven useful to use comparatively. Especially those dealing with the closely related Mouridiyya and the Grand Magal Pilgrimage. Eva Evers Rosander’s book *Nyckeln till Paradiset* (The key to paradise) is one such book about women in the Mourid brotherhood and has been a good source of information about West African Sufism in general. Many of the points and themes in the book very much carry over to the Tijaniyya as well, and certain chapters deal specifically with pilgrimage (The *Grand Magal*) to the holy site of *Touba*, which offers clear parallels to the Ziyara Bogal that is the focus of this study.

Moreover, some articles dealing with the Grand Magal pilgrimage like “The Grand Magal in Touba: A Religious festival of the Mouride Brotherhood of Senegal” by Christian Coulon and “Pilgrimage through poetry: Sung Journeys Within the Murid Spiritual Diaspora” by Christine Thu Nhi Dang deals with some of the same subjects present in this thesis.

Other than this, much of what is explored in this thesis in uncharted ground. Given the lack of previous literature, there is a need for information on this subject and I hope this project will prove a useful source of knowledge on the Ziyara Bogal in particular, as well as the Tijaniyya, Sufism and Islam in general.
Cherno Abdulrahman Barry during a visit in Stockholm (Photo by author)

Map of the Senegambia region.

3. Method

In this chapter I will present the method and material of this thesis and give an overview of how it was gathered. I will moreover present some potential problems with the method and how I have addressed these.

3.1. The Material

The material gathered for this analysis is based on extensive fieldwork conducted between late summer 2017 – Spring 2018 in Senegal/The Gambia, Stockholm and Eskilstuna. I spent time with the Dairatul ehlamol Islam during their regular Saturday dhikr sessions, ate and spoke with them about mundane things as well as things directly relating to their practice. I also attended the Ziyara Bogal pilgrimage of 2018 which formed the center-piece of this analysis, as well as some other special occasions, such as conferences held during Abdulrahman Barry's visits to Sweden.

Furthermore, I visited the connected group in Eskilstuna, led by Abd al-Haqq Kielan, and was given an overview, albeit not as extensive, of this as well.

Two interviews were conducted with members of the core group in Stockholm, as well from the other branches mentioned above, but the analysis will mostly be based on field observations. The initial interviews took place around late summer 2017 and were more general in character (semi-structured), aimed at getting an overview of the da’ira, it's practices and views. A more in-depth and focused interview was conducted during winter 2017-2018 but the subject dealt mostly with questions of integration and music. Instead, many of the quotes used in the analysis are based on the many spontaneous conversations I recorded through notes during the Ziyara itself.

The observational fieldwork took on a similar structure, with the first number of visits aimed at getting a feel for the context and the group in a general sense. My focus was then gradually shifted to be more narrow and specific as time went on and culminated in the trip to Senegal and its aftermath.

During the process of this project, the aim and focus has gone through several changes. Originally, I wanted to look at the relationship between West African Sufism and music, but this proved too ambitious for a project of this size. The focus was then changed to be specifically about the da’ira in Stockholm and different aspects of integration, organiza-
tion and identity. It wasn’t until February (about a month before departing), when I was given the opportunity to join my informants on the ziyara, that it became obvious to me what this thesis should be about. Thus, the current project and its aim, as it stands right now, appeared quite late in the process, which has had some significant effects on the material. Much of what was gathered prior to the pilgrimage itself became relatively irrelevant, including the two major interviews that had been conducted. They had dealt primarily with questions of integration and, to some degree, music, and since the thesis (when given the opportunity) changed its focus to be about pilgrimage and charismatic authority, these interviews are now absent from the analysis. Instead, I use mainly material gathered in location in Senegambia – spontaneous conversations and observations. I made a decision to let the field guide me, rather than the other way around, and the direction of the thesis appeared as a result of this.

The negative implications of this sudden change are, for example, that I have not been able to feature my informants as much as I would have wanted, given that much of the fieldwork was conducted before the change. However, I do believe that, in a general sense, it has led to a more exciting and interesting thesis and that the material I was able to gather during the period in Senegambia (as well as the usable material from before) is sufficient for the present ambitions.

3.2. Participant observation and the qualitative method

The method I decided was best suited for the aims of this study is what is known as *participant observation*. Kathleen M. Dewalt and Billie R. Dewalt describes this method as such:

…participant observation is a method in which a researcher takes part in the daily activities, rituals, interactions, and events of a group of people as one of the means of learning the explicit and tacit of their life routines and their culture. (Dewalt & Dewalt, 2011: 1)

With this in mind, I did partake in the weekly meetings of the group of study, but did not spend every day in the context of this community. In other words, the method of Malinowski which often involves living with the group for extended periods of time (Dewalt & Dewalt, 2011: 3-4) was not attempted while in Sweden. This would have been impossible, as most of the informants or members of the da’ira live in Stockholm, which is my own place of residence, and are thus in many ways already part of the society and cul-
ture that I live in myself. Instead, I focused on spending time at specific community gatherings, such as Saturday dhikr sessions, conferences and ceremonies related to specific events (memorial services for example). My own participation in the activities was intentionally kept to a minimum. I would be there, talk to the people and eat the food but generally not engage in any of the activities themselves (du’a, salat etc.), except for a few instances where I have briefly joined a dhikr chant.

The fieldwork done in Senegal took on a more participatory nature, as I spend all my time with the informants and participated in the activities that took place in Bogal. This is more similar to the method described by Malinowski, even though it was for a much shorter period of time – only a few days. I had the intention to strongly participate in the activities in Bogal, to “become part of the group” for the duration of the pilgrimage. However, once there I realized that the keeping of field notes and different forms of documentation that took up most of my time made it very difficult to directly participate in things like the Friday prayer or evening Hadra. However, it was difficult not to participate as all aspects of the stay in Bogal is so infused with ritual behavior. Drinking coffee with my informants, eating dinner and breakfast, conversing and socializing and meeting the sheikh at his residence can all be seen as ways of participating in the pilgrimage itself.

During my observations, I recorded my findings, conversations, impressions and thoughts in field notes that I either tried to write as things were happening or, if I didn't get the chance, as soon afterward as I could. In Bogal I also had a camera with me, and recorded quite a lot of film-footage that can be useful for the study by having behavior, clothing and other aesthetic aspects documented visually.

I conducted and recorded two main interviews – one with Abd Al-Haqq Keilan in Eskilstuna and another with Muhammad - of the key members of the dai’ra in Stockholm. The structure of the former was very loose, talking generally about the Tijaniyya and the groups in Sweden. As this was in the early stages of fieldwork, I wasn’t sure yet what the focus of the study was going to be and therefore the questions were chosen to give me a general overview of the dai’ra and tariqa. The later interview, was more structured, dealing with questions of integration and, to some degree, music. The questions were more focused, but still allowed for extended conversation. Both of these interviews were recorded with an audio-recorder on my phone and transcribed afterwards. As mentioned above, the focus of my work at the time was more aimed at questions of integration and identity, which means that much of the interview is irrelevant for the analysis as it stands now. The bulk of the material used in the study are instead from spontaneous conversations that I
had with people while in Senegambia or in Stockholm. As I always had my notebook in hand, I would quickly write down quotes or interesting conversations I had with informants, allowing for direct quotes, rather than me having to paraphrase at a later time.

*Participant observation* is a kind of *qualitative* research method and thus tries to understand more deeply the nature of what is being studied, rather than reducing it to numbers or statistics (Dewalt & Dewalt, 2011: 2). The Qualitative method was chosen for this study specifically because it offers a more comprehensive method that considers the complexities of the situation. Charles C Ragin explains:

> Because of its emphases on in-depth knowledge and on the refinement and elaboration of images and concepts, qualitative research is especially appropriate for several of the central goals of social research. These include giving voice, interpreting historical or cultural significance, and advancing theory. (Ragin, 1994: 83)

I felt that this was best suited for a study of this kind, as a quantitative analysis, for example, wouldn’t allow me to present the nuances and in depth information that a qualitative study would.

### 3.3. Possible problems

There are, however, certain problems that can arise when utilizing these methods. One critique that has been put forth is that participant observation often only includes examples or aspects of a certain subject, and that generalizations are thus difficult to make (Spradley, 1997). In this case, for example, I have particularly studied a branch of the Tijaniyya in Sweden that also adhere to a sheikh (Abdulrahman Barry) that isn’t followed by most Tijanis anyway. I do recognize the small focus of my empirical material and will be careful when making larger generalizations about Sufism/Islam or West Africa. But I do believe that this material can be used in a larger context, and that it says something about these three subjects and their relationship. I feel confident enough that there is room for certain (albeit careful) generalizations that can be made about the Tijaniyya at large and, to some degree, West African Sufism based on the findings presented in this thesis. There is a level of overlap and similarity that this should not be a significant problem.

Another often cited issue is that of objectivity and bias on part of the researcher. As an observer, there will always be a level of interpretation that goes into analyzing material like this. I will elaborate on this further below, but generally try to address this problem
by being aware of the inevitable subjectivity that will present itself and try to, in certain cases, work with it, and in others, work around it.

3.4. My role as a researcher

When doing any kind of research like this, it is always important to consider one’s own background and biases and how they affect the material. I have no direct cultural connection to West Africa or the Tijaniyya. I was born into a Swedish, secularized family and thus automatically connected to the protestant Christianity that runs through its culture.

Furthermore, I would lie if I claimed that there isn’t a personal interest involved in the decision to write about Sufism and West African tariqas. For many years, I have been a fan of certain artists and musicians from the region, such as Youssou N’Dour and Baaba Maal and thus gravitated toward studying this based on my already existing interest. Furthermore, as I’ve studied Sufism, and during much of my field work, I have come to sympathize with some of the philosophies and ideas that are inherent in the material. In spite of this, however, I have attempted to keep as much of a critical distance as possible and to avoid any inclinations to “go native” as it were. I am a firm believer in the idea that complete objectivity is next to impossible, but that it should none the less be attempted as much as possible and at all costs.

Even though I have good relationships with my informants and they have to some degree become friends of mine, I abstain from spending time with them outside of the academic context, at least for the duration of this project.

3.5. Language

One of the biggest obstacles one can encounter when studying a culture different from your own is the issue of language. I am born and raised in Sweden and thus speak Swedish and English fluently. In addition to this, I know a little Arabic, with an emphasis on little. That is, I am familiar with the basic grammatical structures and have learned quite a few words and phrases through my studies of Islamic culture as well as some personal family ties.

The group that I have studied mainly use either Wolof – the most widely spoken language in Senegal and The Gambia – or Arabic during their ceremonies. In the case of the latter,
I have been able to pick out a few sentences or words here and there, but not nearly enough to understand an entire conversation or the context of a speech, for example. In cases where there has been a formal speech or preaching in any of these two languages, I have had to ask for someone to translate it for me. On a few occasions (especially during my early visits) some speeches would be held in Swedish or English for the sole reason that I should be able to understand them.

However, my informants, and most of the members of the group, speak Swedish fluently and thus having conversations or conducting interviews with them has not been a problem or ever required a translator.

Despite my lack of experience with some of the languages, I have been able to solve this issue in different ways, either by having the content translated for me or simply talking to members and asking questions in Swedish.

While I was in Bogal, Senegal, this problem became even more prominent, as most of the people in the village spoke only French and the native languages (Wolof, Fular or Mandinka) and communication became very difficult at times. My gatekeeper was able to translate for me at times, so when I needed information there was a solution. However, in more casual situations, this was one of the biggest difficulties that I faced while in the field.

3.6. Informants

Although this thesis is mainly based on observation, I have conducted a few interviews with my informants. Most of the ones used were more casual conversations I had with people while in Bogal and that I later wrote down in my notes. A few interviews were more formal and structured, and mostly conducted in the period before the ziyara. The analysis will make use of both types of interviews.

Although no one explicitly expressed any desire to be anonymous, I have chosen to give all of them fake names to protect their identities, except for Abdulrahman Barry himself, Abd al-Haqq and Sait. Even though I didn’t conduct formal interviews with some of these informants, I will list them here:

**Abd al-Haqq Kielan** – Male, late 70’s/early 80’s. Swedish convert and Imam in a mosque in Eskilstuna.

Seynabo – Middle-aged woman. Also originally from The Gambia and currently living in Stockholm, Sweden. Member of the Dairatul ehlamol Islam.

John – Man in his 30’s. Part of the diaspora community in Europe, lives in Bogal for a period during the ziyara.

Abdullah – Middle-aged man from Stockholm, originally from Morocco. Not a member of the Tijaniyya, but took part in the pilgrimage none the less.
4. Theory

In this chapter I will present the theoretical perspectives that the analysis is built upon. I will first give an overview of the theoretical perspective, followed by individual sections explaining each theory and how they relate.

4.1. Overview

This thesis deals primarily with the event Ziyara Bogal, which can be classified as a pilgrimage. The analysis of this event will primarily be based on and divided into three themes through which the Ziyara will be explored. These are:

- Ritual theory/Ritualization
- Charismatic authority
- Politics and society

These separate, yet inter-connected, perspectives will provide interesting results in themselves, but when combined lead to an even more significant and comprehensive overview of this yet unexplored subject.

Lastly, we will explore the political and social aspects of the Ziyara Bogal from a macro-perspective and try to come to some general conclusions using the results gathered through this framework.

The three theoretical perspectives, and how they will be applied in the analysis, will be further elaborated below.

1.1. Exploring Pilgrimage

The first aspect that will be explored is the framing of the pilgrimage itself.

Defining pilgrimage

Before we start any discussion on framing or pilgrimage theory, I should begin by discussing the word itself and how we can define it. In Pilgrimages Today, Tore Ahlbäck writes:

Basically, pilgrimage is a journey undertaken by individuals or a group to a place, which for the single individual or the individuals in the group is of great importance because of
something they have learnt and experienced in the culture and religion which they have grown up within… (Ahlbäck, 2010: 5)

The Ziyara Bogal is described by my informants as a “pilgrimage”, in other words, they consider it a pilgrimage themselves. As mentioned further above, Ziyara is a word usually meaning a “periodic and pious visit or pilgrimage to a marabout or holy place” (Rosander, 2011: 86-87) and is often synonymous with the word “pilgrimage”. Thus, we can define the Ziyara Bogal as a pilgrimage and base our framework on this.

**Framing**

Arguably, one of the most important aspects of a ritual or, in this case, a pilgrimage is something known as framing. Catherine Bell talks about it in *Ritual: Perspectives and dimensions* and describes it as an interpretive framework in which certain activities or behaviors are to be understood as unique and set apart from a mundane framework (Bell, 1997: 74). She uses this example:

> …framing enables one monkey to hit another and have it understood as an invitation to play, not fight. (Bell, 1997: 74)

In other words, through framing certain meanings are communicated about a situation that wouldn’t necessarily be apparent if the framework wasn’t there. This is closely related to the idea of ritualization, which will be further discussed below.

One interesting question that arises when considering the idea of framing in relation to pilgrimage is when the ritual begins and ends. Do preparations for the trip count as part of the pilgrimage according to framing or not? Indeed, preparations that are considered merely practical can also have spiritual aspects if placed within the framework of the ritual (Sorgenfrei, 2013: 280).

Thus, I will look at the practices and preparations of the Swedish da’ira before and after the actual trip to Bogal to find signs of framing and where the actual pilgrimage begins and ends. After this, I will consider the different strategies in which ritualization is used in Bogal.
1.2. Ritual & Ritualization

Ritual theory is a rather complex field, one filled with different ideas about what the word “ritual” means. For the purpose of this thesis, ritual theory will prove useful in analyzing ritualizing behavior and, in particular, the concept of “Ritualization”. This idea is explored by both Ronald L. Grimes and, especially, by Catherine Bell.

In her book *Ritual theory, ritual practice*, Bell writes that ritualization is a certain way of doing things that create a perception that the actions of behaviors and perceived as special and distinct (Bell, 1992: 220).

She mentions several techniques that can be applied for ritualization, such as formalization of speech, objects or clothes used exclusively in the ritual activities (in other words, wearing particular clothing, wearing certain accessories or speaking in a specific manner) as well as restricted space and a “special periodicity of the occurrence” (Bell, 1992: 204).

To elaborate, Grimes writes in his “Beginnings in Ritual studies” about the word “Ritualization”:

‘Ritualization’ is the term used by ethologists to designate the stylized, repeated gesturing and posturing of animals (Grimes, 1995: 41)

Seeing as humans fall into the category of “animal”, he explains it further by stating that these gestures and postures rarely have a practical function, instead being a way of communicating meaning or performance. This will be used to analyze the physical behavior of my informants and the pilgrims in Bogal and how that can be seen as a form of ritualization.

Moreover, Grimes talks about what he calls “sacred space” and how this can be generated and created. Using a fiesta in Santa Fe as an example, he describes how the most sacred space is the altar of the cathedral, specifically since it contains “La Conquistadora” or “Don Diego Varga’s conquering virgin” (Grimes, 1995: 23). However, when the statue is carried through the plaza in the city, sacred space is generated around her, turning an otherwise mundane location into a place for ritual and religious worship. This generating of sacred space during the Ziyara and in other Tijani rituals will be looked into and explored in the analysis as well.

With these understandings of the concept in mind, the material gathered during the Ziyara Bogal, and subsequent occasions before and after, will be analyzed to map the different ways in which ritualization occurs and why, primarily using the framework presented by Bell.
Specifically, I will analyze and explore the strategies through which a sense of profoundness or sacredness is created through means described above. This includes, among other things - clothing, decoration, ways of speaking, aesthetics and movements.

Furthermore, Bell speaks about the way ritualization is closely connected to the idea of power, and how the former often establishes and retain the latter in social organizations (Bell, 1992: 197).

This theme of ritualization as a way of establishing power will be applied to the thesis, in particular when exploring the relationship between the sheikh and his followers, and there will be a level of overlap between this and the third category relating to charisma. Moreover, the political aspects of the Ziyara Bogal as a mediating event between religion and politics will be explored with this framework in mind.

Lastly, the concept of “ritual density” is a central point in this thesis. It is described by Bell as “why some societies or historical periods have more ritual than others” (Bell, 1997: 171). As such, it is a way of looking at different grades of ritualization and ritualizing behavior, where the two can be more or less “thick”, “dense or, in Bell’s words – “more ritual”. In the analysis, I use this term in a slightly different way. I observed a fleeting scale of density during the pilgrimage, where it starts out as very loose and unclear but gets increasingly dense depending on the context. As will be shown, the levels of ritual density increase and decrease during the pilgrimage in different situations. In other words, I’ve used the term as described by Bell but also added another layer or aspect to it, as the material required it.

### 1.3. Charismatic authority

The third aspect that will be explored is the charismatic authority of the sheikh Abdulrahman Barry and how that authority is created, legitimized and sustained. The Ziyara Bogal's central point is indeed the sheikh himself, and the pilgrimage is arguably performed with him (and his home village) as the main destination.

In “Charismatic leaders in new religions” Catherine Wessinger writes that charisma can be defined as a characteristic attributed to an individual, place or object (by believers) that indicates, in the case of a leader, that he/she has access to a certain source of authority (Wessinger, 2012: 80).

But perhaps the most influential researcher to talk about charisma is Max Weber. In his “The theory of social and economic organization”, he suggested a model in which there are three
main types of authority – rational-legal authority, traditional authority and charismatic authority (Weber, 1964: 328). This thesis will look at the latter of these, trying to highlight the ways in which the charisma of the sheikh is created and sustained to legitimize his authority. Weber further explains the idea of charismatic authority as follows:

Charisma is a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities. These are such as are not accessible to the ordinary person, but are regarded as of divine origin or as exemplary, and on the basis of them the individual concerned is treated as a leader. (Weber, 1964: 358)

In other words, charisma is created by ascribing (consciously or unconsciously) a person certain extraordinary qualities that set him/her apart from ordinary people. This can be done through an array of different means, including him/her dressing or talking in a certain way and telling stories about the person's superhuman attributes.

He further argues that charismatic authority stands in stark contrast to the other forms of authority, and is legitimized in completely different ways. The only basis for the legitimacy of authority of this kind is personal charisma (as long as its proved), not through things like social standing or other common traditional form of legitimizing (Weber, 1964: 362). As such, charismatic authority is not established through the possession of material wealth or possession, but instead solely on the way he/she is set apart from ordinary people/his subjects.

However, Weber also argues that any such authority must eventually go through “routinization” if it is to survive. In other words, if a community of followers or an organization is to be established based around the charismatic leader permanently, it must eventually experience what he calls routinization. “It cannot remain stable” he writes, “but becomes either traditionalized or rationalized, or a combination of both” (Weber, 1964: 364). The reasons for this include the material interests and needs of a permanent community, which breaks the distinction between authority legitimized through possession and the “pure” form of charismatic authority were these aspects are irrelevant.

Many scholars disagree with this point, arguing that routinization is not inevitable or even necessary. For example, Pnina Werbner suggests that this model should be modified and that Sufi charisma in particular can be deeply embedded in time and place, or in other words, the social and political context that the charismatic individual finds himself, while at the same time being perceived as unique and having transcended time and place (Werbner, 2003: 282-283). This dualism places the charismatic authority both within specific cultural expectations
and at the same time expressing a “freedom” that exposes and opposes the institutionalized forms of authority, as expressed in Webers model. He both “fulfils the highest ideals of a society while at the same time appearing unique and beyond society” (Werbner, 2003: 284).

In her book “Pilgrims of Love”, Werbner writes the following:

...saintly veneration and charismatic formation must be understood in all their cultural and historical complexity. No single factor produces the effect of charisma of a living Sufi saint. It is conditional upon a receptive cultural environment and conventional expectations, and supported by bodily practices, narratives of unique individuality and, in the case of Sufi saints, a theory of transcendental connection to a distant God. (Werbner, 2003: 282)

This is especially relevant for the present study, as I will look at the narratives and bodily practices of the sheikh and those around him. The cultural expectations that help legitimize these narratives and the sheikh’s authority are very relevant and important. She points out that the strategies used to accomplish this legitimization include allegorical legends or tales told about the saint’s life, often with a “magical” quality, establishing his uniqueness. These stories are, at the same time, grounded in a global framework and history directly relating to Sufism as well as local discourses of power (Werbner, 2003: 286). However, another important aspect that helps the saint sustain this charisma is that these stories are “corroborated by live evidence” – certain behavior or practices performed by the saint, such as asceticism and “saintly generosity” (Werbner, 2003: 284).

Furthermore, the space and surroundings of the saint, according to Werbner, becomes infected with the charisma of the saint (Werbner, 2003: 283). Thus, the ground he walks on, space he finds himself in, or objects he comes into contact with, becomes infused with a form of sacredness.

1.4. Politics and society

The last part of the analysis will deal directly with the social and political implications of the Ziyara and will be based on theories of ritual as relating to identity/social cohesion, and political legitimization through religion. A more thorough exploration will be presented in tandem with the analysis itself, but a basic overview is given here.

Bell writes about the self and identity in relation to ritual and ritualization and will be looked at further in the analysis. Moreover, literature about the political aspects of Sufism
will be used, among them Paul L. Heck’s “Sufism Today: Heritage and tradition in the Global community”, to analyses the social implications of the Ziyara and the speeches made by sheikh Abdulrahman Barry.

By doing so, I hope to take what may appear to be rather abstract conclusions regarding ritualization and charismatic authority, and place them in a more practical and relevant social context. Things like the Ziyara Bogal does not happen in a vacuum, but is often strongly related to society and politics, and this is what I want to highlight with this section.
2. The Architecture of Pilgrimage

2.1. Preparing for pilgrimage

The event, among members of the group referred to as “Ziyara Bogal”, takes place once a year in the village of Bogal, Senegal. The first word of the name – Ziyara – is described as a periodic and pious visit or pilgrimage to a marabout or holy place (Rosander, 2011: 86-87). The second word – Bogal – is the name of the village to which this pilgrimage is performed.

Contrary to many other pilgrimage-destinations, like the Grand Magal of the Mouridiyya, Bogal does not contain any shrine connected to a wali or important figure. Rather, the village is the home (or rather; one of the homes) of Cherno Abdulrahman Barry, and as such he is the destination. In other words, the pilgrims do not visit the grave of a deceased Marabout but instead comes to meet and receive baraka from one who is still alive.

The annual dates of the ziyara is not related to any specific event and can vary from year to year. It is chosen by the sheikh and the community based on factors of convenience and in relation to other events such as the month of Ramadan. It usually takes place in March or April and is attended by Tijanis from all around the world. In 2018, the main event took place on Saturday, March 31, but people started arriving in the village as early as March 28.

Throughout the rest of the year, the da’ira in Stockholm meets once every Saturday to do dhikr. Usually, around 20 people attend – sometimes more, sometimes less. The presence of sheikh Abdulrahman Barry is apparent even here, as he is referred to in a number of ways. In all of the homes of the members (where the dhikr is held), there was at least one large poster of Barry in the living room, sometimes two. One could argue that the sheikh is, in many ways, at the very center of the group’s religious lives. He has given them the form and structure of the du’a (prayer) that is performed every Saturday, songs of praise are sung about him and pictures of him adorn coffee cups that can be bought to fund the da’ira (Field notes: July 22, 2017). Even during the dhikr chant itself, the words “La ilaha illallah” are sometimes changed to praises of the sheikh.

It is unclear exactly when the date of the ziyara in 2018 was decided, but the first time it ever comes up in discussion is early in February, when the dai’ra has a yearly board meeting (Field notes: February 2, 2018). Most of the active members attend this meeting – that is, the people that regularly also attend the Saturday dhikr – making it around 30 people, with about an even amount of men and women. During this meeting, several things are discussed, in-
cluding the economic situation of the organization and deciding who will host the dhikr on every Saturday for the rest of the year (usually new family each week). Furthermore, a central concern is, as mentioned, the Ziyara Bogal. By that time, the date was already set, so what is discussed at the meeting involve a fee that everyone has to pay at the end of the month to fund the trip, as well as the da’iras compound (shared house that they live in) in Bogal (Field notes: February 2, 2018). In terms of framing, one can argue that the pilgrimage, in a sense, starts here, with practical preparations that none the less has spiritual implications for the dai’ra as they mentally prepare. Framing has the ability to give meaning to certain things that wouldn't be apparent otherwise (Bell, 1997: 74), so an act that at other times would be seen as mundane is given another meaning by being placed within the frame. In other words, even though preparing for the trip isn’t necessarily imbued with religious meaning in a normal framework, the fact that the trip in this case is a pilgrimage gives it another dimension, which also dictates things like what kind of things are packed into the bags and how one prepares.

Framing also has the ability to denote the beginning and end of a ritual or ceremony, or give an indication as to the limits of the frame (Bell, 1997: 74). In this case, it is necessary to point out the difference between ritual, which is often considered a determined, structured action or performance, and ritualization, which can be defined as certain behaviors and means by which gives something a ritual significance (Bell, 1992: 220). The lines between ritual/not ritual or religion/not religion are always very fuzzy, which is why I'm applying a term known as ritual density (Bell, 1997: 171) to explain the process of going from a very “loose” kind of ritualization (frame) at this early stage, to a more “thick” stage where the ritual itself officially begins, as will be shown later. An initial sign of this early stage of framing could be the discussing of the ziyara during the meeting – indicating that the process of the pilgrimage at large has begun.

Over the coming weeks, the group prepares for the trip in a number of ways. Food, spices and kitchenware are packed into bags to be shipped to Senegambia with the pilgrims; much will be needed for their stay. Ceremonial clothing and prayer beads are among the items directly related to the nature of the trip. Arguably, this gives the preparing another weight based on the framing that takes place here. As described above, an otherwise mundane act is given greater weight through the communication of uniqueness within the frame (Bell, 1997: 160) and with the specific intention of performing the ziyara. I argue that there are different levels of this frame, as will be seen later. The initial period of preparation is intensified, its density it increased, further as one travels to The Gambia, for example.
Another example of this was that a week prior to traveling, Sait travels to Eskilstuna to meet Abd al-Haqq Kielan and a few other representatives from “Islamiska föreningen i Stockholm” (IFiS) who jointly compose a letter to sheikh Abdulrahman Barry, praising him and thanking him for his hospitality (Field notes: March 18, 2018). The letter is signed by Abd al-Haqq himself. Great care appears to be taken when composing this letter, signaled by the fact that it requires a meeting attended by multiple individuals who carefully choose the words used to address the sheikh.

**From Stockholm to Senegal**

Not everyone from the da’ira traveled to Senegambia for the ziyara. Out of the around 30 most active members, roughly half of them made the trip. Neither do they all travel together, but rather by family. Thus, when leaving Serrekunda (Largest city in The Gambia) by bus to travel into Senegal, Sait picked up members (as well as some natives) in different locations in the city before departing.

In the days leading up to the trip from the city of Serrekunda to Bogal, people prepare by gathering their food and other items to bring with them. On many occasions while in the buzzing center of the city, Sait runs into people he is acquainted with. He proceeds to ask them if they are going to Bogal and receives different answers - usually “insha’allah” (God willing). This indicates that the ziyara is an event very much present in the consciousness of the people in Serrekunda, even if Bogal is hours away.

The pilgrims from The Gambia travel by car (or bus), often in large groups, across the border and need to present a certificate once at the border control to show that the reason for their visit relates to a pilgrimage. When on the road between Serrekunda and Bogal, one could spot multiple large busses decorated with images of different marabouts and phrases like “Santa Yallah” and “Alhamdulillah” (Both words meaning essentially the same thing – “Praise be to God”, the former being in Wolof and the second in Arabic), all filled with people and seemingly traveling towards Bogal. Many also travel from around the globe, including the Swedish da’ira, but most of the time these individuals are originally from one of these two countries. All of these different individuals and groups, traveling from all around the world, have also (likely) gone through similar processes of framing – preparing, packing and so on. It should perhaps be pointed out that this doesn’t necessary have to be a conscious thing – again, the lines between what counts as religion or not religion, ritual or not ritual, are very fleeting, even for those taking part in the framing themselves.
Now, framing is part of the larger category of ritual studies and ritualization, which will be further explored below.

2.2. Creating the sacred – strategies of ritualization

The road between Serrekunda and Bogal takes a few hours, especially if you travel using an old, broken down bus, which was true in this case. A party of about ten people shared the bus, most of them from the da’ira in Stockholm. When we left early in the morning, Sait was wearing what could be called “casual” clothing – black tracksuit – but on the way, the bus stops and he runs off for a few minutes, only to come back in a white kaftan. Once back in the bus, he takes out a tasbih (Muslim prayer-beads) and starts praying (Field notes: March 30, 2018). There is a clear sign of the ritualization becoming more apparent and clear, as well as how it becomes more dense. This is an example of the different strategies and ways of doing things to make the occasion appear “special and distinct” (Bell, 1992: 220). Ritualization often does include wearing particular clothing to signal this transition into ritual (Bell, 1992: 204). The clothes in this case, changing from a track-suit to kaftan appears to be a case of the kind of ritualization Bell speaks about and relates directly to the fact that Sait was entering Bogal. In fact, this also connects to the idea of sacred space, spoken of by Grimes, where an object or (in this case) a location is imbued with sacredness, setting it apart from the mundane (Grimes, 1005: 23). This is exactly what Sait is doing in this case - the change in attire, perfectly placed while on the way to Bogal, signals a transition from the mundane to the sacred, from everyday life to religious life. I would argue that there are two aspects to this – firstly, Sait is responding to the already existing sacredness of Bogal established by the group previously (there is already an understanding that the place he is about to enter is special and set apart). Secondly, he is also participating in its sacralizing through this ritualizing behavior. In other words, he is both responding to, and creating sacred space at the same time.

I argue that it is here that the ritual frame discussed previously reaches its zenith, its final level of density. Preparing for the trip was the first stage, traveling to The Gambia and the further preparations there was the second, and lastly, as Sait changed his clothing while on the way to Bogal was the third and last. This is a sign that, for him, indicates that the ritual/ziyara has officially begun (Bell, 1997: 74) and that he is at that point stepping into the ritual space of the village.
**Ritualization in Bogal**

Further signs of ritualization such as this was clearly discernable throughout the few days I spent in Bogal.

Once there, the whole group shares a house, or compound, in the middle of the village. It is located south of the Gambian border in a remote region of Senegal. There is a main street filled with small shops selling water and food items, but the rest of the village is made up of compounds – stone houses closed off with barriers or fences – and small streets connecting them. A large number of people usually share a compound, many sleeping outside on mattresses, and people tend to come and go as they please. In the middle of the village, there is a large mosque decorated with light green colors – clearly Bogal’s centerpiece – and its call to prayer echoes throughout Bogal five times a day. There are a lot of people in the village during the pilgrimage, and the numbers only get higher as the day’s progress.

Throughout the days of the ziyara, people can visit the residence of sheikh Abdulrahman Barry and receive his blessings. His house (or compound) is one of the larger in the village, located next to the mosque (Field notes: March 30, 2018). When he is in his house, there are always people there wanting a chance to see him and present him with gifts. On Friday morning, we had the opportunity to visit the sheikh in his house (or “compound”). There were large groups of people both inside and outside, waiting for him to appear. The atmosphere in the room could be described as slightly tense - people mostly whispered when they spoke, and many were holding their tasbih, doing either wārid or wazifa (Field notes: March 30, 2018). In the house, everyone (as far as I observed) was wearing “ceremonial clothes”, except for the sheikh’s security personnel. Clothing, as discussed previously, is a convincing strategy to create ritual space and make an occasion appear special (Bell, 1992: 204). At one point, a person tried to sit down in a chair that was placed at the center of the room, but was quickly told (rather dramatically) that he couldn’t do that. This was the sheikh’s chair, and no one could sit there except him (Field notes: March 30, 2018). Clearly, judging from how people behaved in the room, this was a special place and situation. Once the sheikh finally came down the stairs, the room turned even more quiet, everyone stood up and wanted to greet him. Eventually, the pilgrims had the opportunity to sit down in front of him, give a gift (usually money) and pray with him.

The behavior of the people in the room, both before and after he arrived, indicates a level of sacredness that was applied to the location, but also, much like Sait's change in clothing, affirmed and sustained this sacredness at the same time. Judging from the different grades of ritualizing behavior in this instance, we can also theorize that not only does the room itself
contain a certain level of sacredness by being in the vicinity of the sheikh (and indeed his residence), but that another “layer” of sacredness was also added once he entered the room himself. We can relate this directly to theories of ritualized behavior and, again, sacred space. Just like Sait and his change in attire, most people were wearing “ceremonial clothing”, part of the technique used in ritualization (Bell, 1992: 204). Moreover, in this case we can also see ritualization in the form of behavior, as people in the room only whispered when they spoke, and would constantly sit with their tasbih, reciting prayers. In my informants, there was a clear change in behavior (as well as clothing) when they entered the residence of the sheikh (Field notes: March 30, 2018) – their speaking voice became significantly lower, for example. This is also one of the main strategies of ritualization (Bell, 1992: 204) – not only was clothing changed but also behavior and way of speaking. This, again, also indicates a level of sacred space, the residence of the sheikh adds another level of sacredness that wasn't present before. Here I want to borrow the term used by Bell that she calls ritual density (Bell, 1997: 171) and is defined as “why some societies or historical periods have more ritual than others” (Bell, 1997: 171). But in a more general sense, can be understood as the relationship between ritualizing aspects of society and other aspects of life. The term “more ritual” is the important part here, as we can see differing levels of ritualizing behavior in the example described above. The village of Bogal has a level of sacredness to it, as showcased by a previous example (as well as further ones below), but once entering the residence of the sheikh the density of ritualization increases. Furthermore, as the sheikh himself enters the room, there is yet another level of sacredness added, and as an extension, behaviors change yet again (the room turned completely quiet, except for the words exchanged in a whispering fashion between the sheikh and those around him). We can make out a kind of scale here, where different levels of sacredness and ritualizing behavior can be observed based on the context.

Indeed, much like Grimes theorizes, a form of sacred space is created at this location (house of the sheikh) (Grimes, 1995: 23). But as we can see, and will continue to explore below, the sheikh himself also appears to possess and be ascribed a form of sacredness. This sacredness is extended to the location that he finds himself in, in this case- the room, generating sacred space around him (Grimes, 1995: 23). It is important to point out that the level of sacredness that already existed in the house was likely the fact that it belonged to the sheikh, and that he was in the general area (upstairs in another room). This indicates that the sheikh himself has the ability, through his very presence, to turn “an otherwise mundane location into a place for ritual and religious worship Grimes, 1995: 23). This is also apparent in the
case of the chair that no one was allowed to sit in – being the sheikh’s chair, it had attained a level of sacredness by extension.

**Friday-prayer and Hadra**

Friday-prayer was held in the mosque. People travel from all around the area to join Abdurrahman Barry on Fridays, even at other times of the year. But during the Ziyara, the mosque is filled with even more people. So many, in fact, that a large group must pray outside its walls on the surrounding streets outside. It is very hot, and the fans hanging from the ceiling of the mosque doesn’t help much. After the salat prayer, led by an imam (not the sheikh), Abdurrahman Barry reads from the Qu’ran, preaches (through his mediating speaker that will be discussed further below) and is given gifts of money by people around him. This event will be explored further in the charisma-section, but in terms of ritualization the most significant aspect is probably the fact that when the sheikh arrives at the mosque, and has to travel to it from his compound, he is escorted by a group a security personnel, and surrounded on all sides by pilgrims singing “La ilaha illallah”; some trying desperately to touch him or get as close to him as possible. This is in order to receive some of the baraka that he possesses. The baraka can in this case be considered a form of sacredness, as described above, and what we are seeing here is the way the sheikh has an ability to generate sacred/ritual space to any location he travels (Grimes, 1995: 23). Once he is seated in the mosque, he is placed in a “carved out spot” (see attached image in charisma section), surrounded by people who often give him gifts of money. The fact that he is given a special place to sit, and the way people follow him and try to reach him indicate a form of behavioral ritualization that indicates that the sheikh himself is “special and distinct” (Bell, 1992: 220).

Lastly, on Friday evening, there is a communal Hadra performed in a tent set up in the middle of Bogal. People speak, recite the Qu’ran and do dhikr together and in the presence of the sheikh. Any time Barry travels from one location to another, chaos ensues and he requires escort and security personnel. This is usually the case, but especially so during the ziyara with the large number of people present. Aesthetically, there are similar signs of ritualization both here and in most of the events of the ziyara (including the “main event” described below). As in the sheikh’s residence, the vast majority of people in Bogal during the few days of the pilgrimage wore so-called “traditional” or “ceremonial” clothing (see attached picture below) (Field notes: March 30, 2018). Whether this was a deviation from their regular outfit was difficult to tell, except in the case of my informants from Sweden. In
them there was often a clear difference in how they presented themselves while in Bogal and, for example, in The Gambia before the trip. As mentioned above, Sait wore a kifftan instead of his regular tracksuit and others who regularly wore jeans and t-shirts also changed into ceremonial robes once in the village.

Hadra in Bogal (photo by author)

In the few cases I noted where people did wear (for lack of a better term) “regular” clothing, it was usually while in the house or at times during the day when there was no religious activity. However, during the different events such as Fiday prayer, Hadra or when meeting the sheikh, even these individuals changed into ceremonial garments (Field notes: March 30, 2018). In both these cases, whether people wore traditional clothing during the whole ziyara or just during the specific religious activities, we can see clear strategies of ritualization through aesthetic means (Bell, 1992: 204). The same subject is discussed at length above (the sheikh’s residence). Moreover, it was rare to see a person in the village that wasn’t either holding a tasbih or wearing one around their neck. A more thorough analysis of these aesthetic aspects was made above, and the same applies here. We can also see traces of the same kind of ritual density and intensity of framing, as those few individuals that didn't wear “ceremonial clothing” while in Bogal generally did so during special rituals like the Friday Hadra, indicating a scale where the density of ritualization increased during these events” (Bell, 1997: 171) as opposed to simply being in the village itself. Just like the framework of the ziyara allowed for different intensities between preparing for the trip and ultimately entering the village, this shows that there is another framework within the already existing one where the intensity is extended by rites such as the hadra or Friday-prayer.
Limits of sacred space

Saturday is the last day of the pilgrimage. People continue to visit the sheikh in his home but the day is otherwise free from particular activities. Instead, people socialize, eat and try their best to endure the heat. It isn't until later that night that the main event of the pilgrimage takes place. Here, politicians, military personnel and other high-ranking individuals all come to Bogal and gather in the same tent mentioned earlier. Dhikr is performed sporadically, speeches are held by different people but, most importantly, by the sheikh himself. He speaks to the guests and discusses ethical issues, something that will be explored further below. After this main event, people return to their compounds to eat and sleep. On Sunday morning, people start leaving Bogal, returning to their normal lives.

The village is constantly filled with life and sounds, people cooking food in their compounds and chatting, animals like goats and cows roam the streets freely, eating from the grass they can find on the ground. There is a strong sense of community here, and not much in terms of privacy. There are no restaurants or shops serving food as such, but each compound will often slaughter a cow and serve it with rice, at which point anyone can partake in the meal. Whether or not you live in the house or even know the people you are eating with doesn’t really matter. The pilgrims view this as one large community and that everyone is welcome to visit, eat or socialize at any point. During the ziyara, the large number of visitors in Bogal requires a kind of group effort to make it all work.

Many other signs throughout the pilgrimage suggest that this is a very special and sacred place to the Tijaniyya. For example, during the warmest hours on the Saturday I had a conversation with one of the pilgrims that were staying in the same house as us. To maintain his anonymity, I will call him John.

We discussed the nature of the ziyara and how people behave once they are in the village.

**John:** “People don’t smoke or drink here.”

**F:** “Not at all?”

**John:** “No, some people smoke but they go outside the village to do it.”

I also ask about music and whether people listen to, or play, music in the village. He answers that generally people try to avoid it since they “want to respect the wishes of the sheikh”, but that it happens sometimes.

**F:** “Do people start listening again once they leave the village?”
John: “A lot of times that’s true, yes. But there are different kinds of music. The new generation likes a different kind of music than the old one. Some like cultural music while others listen to Reggae and become criminals.”

F: “So there is an association between criminality and reggae music?”

John: “Yes, but not really criminals like in Europe. More that people adapt the culture and start smoking weed and such things. But then there are people who just listen because they like the vibes and still behave properly.”

This conversation tells us a few different things. In the case of smoking and drinking (alcohol), people avoid it while in Bogal and even leave the village if they can’t resist the urge for a cigarette. This can be seen as ritualizing in the sense that avoiding these certain activities (that are often seen as sinful) creates a feeling of uniqueness and that “these practices (in this case, the ziyara) are distinct and the associations that they engender are special” (Bell, 1992: 220) as Bell puts it. It relates to the exclusive behavior that she talks about – acting in a certain way during a ritual or event that differs in some ways from how one normally behaves and thus achieving that sense of distinctness (Bell, 1992: 220). Furthermore, the fact that some people leave the village to have a smoke indicates a separation between sacred (the limits of the village) and the mundane (Grimes, 1995: 23) and that one must leave the created sacred space to conduct this activity. Framing plays a big part here, as the framework in which the person finds himself determines the nature and meaning of the act itself (Bell, 1997: 74). By stepping outside the limits of the village, the person who wishes to smoke is also stepping outside the created frame of the ritual. Within the framework, in the sacred location of the village, the act of smoking considered inappropriate and disrespectful. But when he steps outside the frame, the act takes on a different nature and meaning, it is no longer part of the ritual space and therefore not considered inappropriate and disrespectful anymore. As Bell explains, this is a kind of framing that strongly indicates that “This is different, deliberate and significant – pay attention!” (Bell, 1997: 160), in this case referring to the city limits of Bogal. It distinguishes what in within the frame (the village and rituals therein) and that which is routine reality (Bell, 1997: 160).

In terms of music, which is sometimes seen as suspect by certain Muslim groups, the same general idea applies as well, but there seems to be a much more relaxed attitude towards it. In fact, one evening, as all the residents of Sait’s house were sitting outside socializing, there was music playing (albeit on low volume) from a speaker. It sounded like West African music, but the kind that includes drums, guitars and other stringed instruments.

Moreover, on the last day a *griot* (person who sing songs of praise, often accompanied by
an instrument) stopped by the house with a native stringed instrument and sang songs of praise to people (Field notes: April 1, 2018). So, while there is a general avoidance of music in the village during the Ziayara, for many of the same ritualizing reasons as smoking or drinking alcohol, it isn’t enforced as strictly and attitudes towards it are more relaxed.

**The sacredness of the sheikh**

The sacredness created around the sheikh has a great effect on his followers and the Ziyara itself. As mentioned, Barry is considered to have a direct connection to some level of the divine and that one can receive blessings or baraka just by being in his presence or touching him. Thus, he requires constant security that keeps the large crowds at bay as they try to get close to him. As will be further discussed in the following chapter about charisma, various different strategies are used to make the sheikh distinct and separated from ordinary men, creating a sacredness around him. As we saw in the example from his residence and in the large groups of people gathering around him wherever he goes, this sacredness extends, to some degree, to the location he finds himself in. As in Grimes example when the statue of the virgin is carried around the plaza in Santa Fe (Grimes, 1995: 23), otherwise mundane space is made sacred by the presence of the sheikh himself. Moreover, I was told that people had the chance to have their tasbih blessed by the sheikh, which would imbue the object itself with a level of sacredness/charisma, which relates to Werbner’s ideas about object becoming infected with the charisma of a saint (Werbner, 2003: 283).

The sheikh’s effect on his followers became especially apparent on the last day in Bogal. As a group of people came back to the house from the morning prayer, one of the women looked physically ill. She had to be escorted into a bedroom and laid down to rest. She later informed us that she had fallen into this state after hearing the sheikh pray. It was so powerful to her that, both physically and mentally, she appeared ill and her demeanor was completely changed (Field notes: March 31, 2018). I was also told that she had experienced this multiple times before, in similar contexts involving the sheikh. This, again, indicates his sacredness and shows that his followers think he has a direct contact with a divine source, in this case God, as described by Werbner (Werbner, 2003: 282). All this will be explored further in the charisma section.

Furthermore, Bell also argues that ritualization is a “strategy for the construction of certain types of power relationships effective within particular social organizations” (Bell, 1992: 197). The different forms of ritualization that I have showcased, particularly that related to
the sheikh, here can all be seen as strategies of establishing these kinds of power-relationships between the sheikh and his followers. Barry is, through different means, placed in a position of authority and reverence that separates him from ordinary people.

In this section I have explored the different strategies of ritualization used to create sacredness, including aesthetic means such as clothing, as well as behavior, framing and density. In the following section I will now look specifically at the sheikh and how the authority described above and charismatic authority is established and sustained.

2.3. “The water will heal all your illnesses” – establishing charisma

The great reverence for sheikh Abulrahman Barry that his followers have are clearly visible even before the pilgrimage itself starts. As I mentioned previously, there are usually posters or images of him adorning the living room of the members’ homes in Stockholm and on things like coffee cups (Field notes: July 22, 2017). He determines the du’a and the form of the Saturday dhikr sessions. In Bogal, a very memorable image from the ziyara took place after the Friday evening hadra, as everyone was leaving the temporary tent that was set up in the middle of Bogal. As he is on his way out, a young boy walks up to a poster of the sheikh, touches his image and then his own forehead with the same fingers (Field notes: March 30, 2018). Indicating that the very picture of Barry contains part of his baraka.

In general terms, the image of Barry is a common sight, both in the homes of his followers, but also sometimes on the windows of cars in The Gambia, as well as all over the city of Bogal. In Sait’s compound, there was yet again a large poster of Barry with the words “Nurullah Barry” (Nur Allah – Light of God). In fact, both him and the village itself was commonly referred to as “Nur Allah”, which shows that he has a status that transcends that of ordinary men and society (Werbner, 2003: 284) and, as Werbner puts it – a direct contact with God (Werbner, 2003: 282).

Stories and the ideal Sufi saint

There are many stories that are told about Barry and his deeds. During a dinner conversation in The Gambia, Sait explains how there is a very special well in Bogal.
Sait: “Before he was born (referring to the sheikh), they couldn’t get any water there. But afterwards, they could. He has very special powers.”

He further explains that Barry later blessed the well, giving the water itself almost miraculous effects:

Sait: “If you drink the water, it will cure all your illnesses, both physical and mental. (Laughs) It’s true!”

This is a perfect example of the “magical” allegories and legends told about saints that Werbner talks about and argues to be a key strategy in establishing charisma (Werbner, 2003: 286). It showcases the sheikhs access to almost supernatural qualities. (When I have asked questions regarding the sheikh’s life at other occasions, the answers tend to avoid any personal details but instead highlight his uniqueness and divine grace.)

But Werbner also states that this charisma can’t be sustained unless it is also corroborated by “live evidence” such as asceticism and saintly generosity. We can see clear evidence of this in Abdulrahman Barry as well. We are told on numerous occasions that the sheikh always receives gifts in the form of money from his visitors (Field notes: March 29, 2018). During the visit to the sheikh’s house in Bogal, everyone handed him money once they were given the chance to shake his hand and pray with him. However, we are told that all this money is used for charity. The sheikh runs a Qu’ran school that he must fund, and pays for the food, housing and families of his talibes (students), since they often have no jobs themselves (Field notes: March 29, 2018).

Another related incident occurred during one of my early visits to the da’ira in Stockholm. As I was talking to a woman (we’ll call her Seynabo) from the group, she explained that the sheikh had saved her from a very difficult situation.

Seynabo: “...yes, I have been homeless. (Pause) I was homeless, and then I met the sheikh (during his visit to Stockholm in November 2017) and told him about my problem. The next day, they called me and fixed an apartment”

What Seynabo is implying here (and it certainly seems the case) is that the sheikh had, after their meeting and either directly or indirectly, somehow managed to get her an apartment. Both of these are indications of the “saintly generosity” that Werbner talks about. By giving charity and helping people in need he is fulfilling the ideal of a self-denying Sufi saint who is generous and giving (Werbner, 2003: 290) and thus sustains his charismatic authority.
Furthermore, the ideal of asceticism and humility is also fulfilled in multiple ways. The clothing that the sheikh always wears – plain white robes – can be seen as a sign of humility (recall the early, ascetic Sufis wearing plain clothing). During my observations, I never saw Barry carry any expensive watches or other similar accessories, instead preferring simple clothing. Neither are there any clear indications of material wealth. As claimed by Sait, he gives away all the money he receives to different charities and the only possessions visible in his home, apart from furniture, were books.

The sheikh doesn’t outwardly show any direct interest in politics or worldly power, even if he clearly does wield some of that power, as will be discussed later. His main interest is, in his own words, to help his followers on the right path in life and to reach paradise (Field notes: November 25, 2017). Moreover, as I was given the opportunity to talk to him in person for a brief moment, he said the following:

**Barry:** “It is very good that you have made this long and difficult trip to come here, and that you have done so for the sake of Islam. Because if you had done it for my sake, I wouldn’t have deserved it.”

And:

**Barry:** “People come here to find God in me, but I always find God in them”

This shows that the sheikh is adamant to highlight his humility before others and the religion, thus living up to the ideal of a selfless Sufi saint/sheikh (Werbner, 2003: 284).

The sheikh lives in a so-called “compound” in Bogal. While most of the houses in the village could be described as rather “simple” (small, no air-condition, small amount of furniture), the sheikh’s residence stands out as being both bigger, containing multiple floors and large living rooms, and more decorated. There are carpets on the floor, multiple couches and chairs, a bookshelf filled with books like the Qur’an and even air-conditioning in some rooms (Field notes: March 30, 2018). The house, and the sheikh, requires constant security – there are guards and police officers present at all times. This security has to be increased even more during the ziyara, as there are more people present.
Sustaining the sheikh’s authority

When the sheikh leaves the compound to go to other locations, such as the mosque for Friday prayer or a large tent in the middle of the village set up specifically for the ziyara, he is accompanied by the guards and the car he travels in receives police escort as large groups of people flock around him and try to get close. This secrecy and behavior could be seen as another way of establishing authority and charisma – surrounding the sheikh with guards at all times gives him a feeling of being almost unreachable, and creating a form of sacred space around him (Grimes, 1995: 23).

Cherno Abdulrahman Barry (on the right) in the Mosque in Bogal (Photo by author)

During the different events, Barry is often seated in a central position. In most cases, he is placed on a heightened platform on a chair. There are exceptions to this, such as during the Friday prayer in the Mosque where he is seated on the floor, albeit in a space slightly secluded and carved out specifically for him (see attached photo above).

While the pilgrimage at large usually takes place during a few days, the big “main event” (often referred to by locals as simply “the ziyara”) occurs on the Saturday when politicians, military personnel and other high-ranking individuals from both Senegal and The Gambia come to Bogal to meet the sheikh. During the event (which takes place in the evening) these guests, the sheikh as well as all the pilgrims, gather in a large tent temporarily set up in the middle of the village. Hundreds, if not thousands of people sit on the ground facing a heightened platform where the important guests sit on chairs, with sheikh Abdulrahman Barry at the very center (Field notes: March 31, 2018). Even though the sun has set at this point, the heat still lingers in the air; workers walk around in the crowd handing out bags of cold water. Both women and men are present in the tent, but generally all women are placed
on the right side and the men on the left. Spontaneous dhikr-chanting pops up at different times and in different spots in the large crowd (Field notes: March 31, 2018). There are many cameras present, the event is broadcast on television across the country – it is obviously an important and profound event.

During the few hours, the event takes place, politicians hold speeches, the Qu’ran is recited, dhikr is performed and, most importantly, the sheikh himself holds a long speech aimed primarily at the special guests (politicians and high-ranking officials). Sait later summarized the contents of the speech:

Sait: “He told the politicians how to treat people, to be kind and just and to remember why they have power in the first place. They only have power because of the people, it is important to remember this in order to be a good leader.”

There are a few aspects that are especially interesting for the current analysis. The sheikh’s placement on a heightened platform while the pilgrims sit on the ground in front of him indicates his uniqueness and authority, as expressed by Weber and others (Weber, 1964: 358). Furthermore, he rarely speaks himself. In fact, Barry always has a person with him who sits on the ground at his feet with a microphone (Field notes: March 31, 2018 & November 25, 2017). When he speaks, he whispers to this man who then repeats (often paraphrasing) what the sheikh is saying, always beginning by proclaiming “The sheikh says…” before repeating the whispered words. But this isn’t unique for the ziyara. Indeed, this “speaker” is also present in the mosque (as can be seen in the image attached above) and in all other public events.

During the conference that was held in Stockholm in November 2017, the same pattern could be observed. Here, the sheikh was seated on a heightened platform in a finely decorated chair, with people sitting on the floor by his feet, also with microphones, paraphrasing what he whispered to them (Field notes: November 25, 2017). The only times the sheikh himself speaks is usually at the very end of the speeches, when he would pray and recite verses from the Qu’ran and during our visit to his residence when we were given the opportunity to speak with him directly, albeit briefly.

This can be seen as a clear example, again, of a strategy to sustain that charismatic authority. By not letting the sheikh himself speak, they are establishing that he is “set apart from ordinary men” (Weber, 1964: 358) and that he, in some ways, transcends the workings of everyday society and life. In a sense, this is arguably a way to make the sheikh himself sacred, as has been discussed in the “ritualization” chapter. By not letting him speak, a message
is conveyed that he is special (Bell, 1992: 220) and perhaps even that his very voice has a sacredness to it. As he speaks, God is speaking through him and therefore an extra mediating person is needed, maintaining the distance between the mundane and the sacred.

This sacredness of the sheikh and the power he has to sacralize his environment can be observed in other situations as well. For example, as mentioned above, people are given the opportunity to have objects, such as a tasbih, blessed by the sheikh when they meet him. This would imbue the beads themselves with a form of sacredness and as a result of his contact with them. As Werbner puts it:

The charisma of the saint infects his surroundings and any object with which he comes into contact. (Werbner, 2003: 283)

We have shown in this section the different strategies used to establish and sustain charismatic authority in the sheikh. Now we will move on to discuss the political and social outcomes of the pilgrimage and Barry’s authority.

2.4. The Politics of the Ziyara

One could argue that the social and political aspects of the Ziyara Bogal are numerous, considering that it is in many ways a social event that also has clear political implications. Furthermore, the political power and influence of the marabouts in the country is significant, which has some interesting implications. I consider there to be two main functions of the event at large that came across as significant:

1. Establishment or reaffirming of identities for both individuals and the group
2. Reaffirming the connection between Islam and society (including politics)

Both of these functions will be explored below in an attempt to lift the findings of this study from the level of abstraction to more concrete social functions.

Identity

When Leif Stenberg writes in “Politisk Sufism I Damaskus - en fredag vid sheikhens fötter” about the late grand Mufti of Syria, Ahmed Kuftaro, and his followers, he argues that Kuftaro’s words have a mobilizing function for individuals and strengthens their sense of
identity (Stenberg, 2001: 111). I would argue that the same can be said for Abdulrahman Barry and the Ziyara Bogal at large. Especially for those traveling from Sweden and other parts of the world, the pilgrimage serves as a way to reconnect with their cultural roots and with their religion as, in their words, “it is supposed to be lived”. During a dinner conversation, I asked one of my informants, here named Abdullah how it felt to be in Bogal.

Abdullah: “It feels very good. This is how we are supposed to live. This is real Islam.”

F: “What do you mean by real Islam? What is real Islam?”

Abdullah: “People live differently here. They are more religious than in Sweden. You see how many people are in the village? And yet there is no trouble, no fighting or anything. Everyone is nice to each other, helps, share food…”

Here, Abdullah is defining “real Islam” and “religiosity” as this way of behaving, treating each other well and living with a strong sense of community.

In an almost Durkheimian framework of society and religion, and much like Stenberg writes above, the sheikh Abdulrahman Barry, can serve as a symbol (by also being a mediating factor for Islam generally) under which the followers can unite and strengthen their group identity as well as individual identities within that group. Once a year, the pilgrim makes the journey to Bogal to perform the rituals and meet the sheikh and thus reaffirms their connection to that group, the religion and the sheikh himself.

Throughout the Ziyara, there are numerous strategies of ritualization used, as showcased earlier in the analysis. Wearing certain clothing, behaving in a certain way, decorating the room according to the desired mood all work to create a space infused with the spirit of the occasion. The process of “making ritual space” is an essential aspect of many pilgrimages, including those of the Tijaniyya or Mouridiyya, and works to strengthen identity for individuals within the group as well as for the group generally.

Indeed, Bell writes that:

The strategies of ritualization clearly generate forms of practice and empowerment capable of articulating an understanding of the personal self vis-à-vis community, however these might be understood. The results might well be seen in terms of the continuity between self and community… (Bell, 1992: 217)

And:

Some scholars, as noted earlier, have seen ritual as a mechanism for the integration of the individual and society… (Bell, 1992: 116)
Thus, the strategies used and presented here work to create a stronger sense of self-in-relation-to-community and the identity of the community itself. The societal aspects of this, especially relating to national and religious identity, becomes apparent in the political implications described below.

**Affirming Islam and politics**

Even though Senegal is a secular country as such, Islam, and in particular the Marabouts (like Barry) can wield significant power in its decision-making and identity. Historically, the support of a marabout has been able to determine whether or not a politician is elected, for example.

As discussed previously, the main event of the pilgrimage is that which takes place on Saturday night, when politicians and high-ranking officials travel from all around Senegal and The Gambia primarily to listen to the sheikh speak. His big speech on this night is as such aimed at these guests. The language used during this event is mainly Wolof, one of the native languages of West Africa and thus, since my understanding of it is insufficient, I had the contents of the speech summarized and explained to me afterwards. For example, in a quote also used in the charisma section, one of my informants told me the following:

**Sait:** “*He told the politicians how to treat people, to be kind and just and to remember why they have power in the first place. They only have power because of the people, it is important to remember this in order to be a good leader*”

In other words, it appears that at least a significant section of the message deals with ethics. The sheikh also, at multiple occasions, connects this directly to Islam, urging them to act as “good Muslims”. However, the contents themselves aren’t necessarily the most important aspect. The very nature of the event points to certain political and social functions dealing with the relationship between religion and politics in general.

In the book “Sufism Today: Heritage and tradition in the Global community”, Paul L. Heck writes that:

> The relevancy of religious leadership in Muslim society is predicated upon the ability to show that Islam is in fact guiding Muslim society (Heck, 2009: 15)

He further states that a Sufi leader has to keep a certain position regarding political affairs. If he is too closely engaged with the political powers, he can be viewed as too concerned with “worldly things”, often viewed as the opposite of Sufi ideal. At the same time, too much of a
distance to the workings of society can have negative effects as well and lead to, as Heck puts it:

   …a spiritual ghetto with a quasi-messianic agenda that…remains unintelligible to the world beyond the spiritually initiated (Heck, 2009: 15)

In other words, there must be a balance between these two modes of engagement. In the case of sheikh Abdulrahman Barry, he can be said to live up to this ideal. He appears to have no direct interest in political power – not holding any position and living an otherwise ascetic lifestyle, but through the Ziyara and particularly the event where he speaks to the high-ranking guests, he does wield a level of power and shows an engagement with the community and society.

Furthermore, as talked about in the first quote, the speeches made by the sheikh (as well as those by the politicians) can be viewed as a way to, as Heck put it, “show that Islam is in fact guiding Muslim society” (Heck, 2009: 15) and reaffirm the relationship between the two. In his examples, he talks about two religious leaders in Syria and that they often serve much of the same function.

The call to Islam is to be combined with the state, i.e. Islam is to guide the state, but cannot be neglected for the sake of the state

And:

   The spiritual is to act as ethical guide for the material (i.e. the political) (Heck, 2009: 27)

We can conclude that the Ziyara has this very function, especially considering the contents of the speech as retold to me, dealing mainly with ethical questions and connecting these with the religion. In Heck’s words, the point is a reconciliation between religion and modernity, understood primarily as the nation state. In our case, the relationship between the states of Senegal and The Gambia and its politics with Islam, as understood by Abdulrahman Barry and his followers, is reaffirmed and reconciled through the main event of the Ziyara Bogal.

The relationship between state and local religious leaders is complicated and has a long history. Throughout much of the 20th century, and after gaining independence, Marabouts and state leaders often worked closely together. As Ed Van Hoven puts it in “The nation turbaned? The construction of nationalist Muslim identities in Senegal”, the Marabouts provided leaders with religious legitimacy and, as a result, the state protected their material interests (Van Hoven, 2000: 231). While the political situation has significantly changed since then, and there is a clearer distinction between religious and political power, much of the same strategies remain, albeit not as openly displayed. Through the event described
above, the political leaders of the state are given legitimacy through visiting the sheikh and listening to his speeches. It can in many ways be considered a symbolic act that has practical implications for social and political life in West Africa.
1. Conclusions

With the analysis concluded, we have discovered quite a few things about the Ziyara Bogal relating to the questions presented initially. In the following chapter, I will list the research questions and try to answer them based on the findings presented in the analysis.

1. **What strategies of ritualization are used to establish and authenticate sacredness?**

   We have shown that ritualization is an important aspect of the Ziyara. This becomes evident by how most people wear “ceremonial” clothing while in the city (or, if not for the whole stay – during special rituals) and there being a clear distinction between how my informants dressed while in the “mundane” environment of The Gambia and how they dressed in Bogal. Furthermore, certain behaviors could be observed. For example, people avoid drinking alcohol or smoking cigarettes in Bogal, and those that do have to leave the village, stepping outside of the ritual frame as it were. This shows that the location is given a form of sacredness or character that sets it apart from the space outside its limits. We have also observed that there is differing levels of intensity where some aspects of the ziyara (such as being in the presence of the sheikh or during Friday-prayer) are “more ritual”, leading to even stronger ritualizing behavior in these contexts.

   Moreover, there is also a sacredness associated with the space in which sheikh Abdulrahman Barry finds himself. The behavior of people noticeably changed when he entered the room, and his security guards as well as the large groups of people that do anything in their power to get close to him can also be seen as a form of ritualization, creating a sense that the sheikh and his surroundings are special and transcends everyday life, and that he generates/spreads that sacredness to the space he occupies.

2. **How is the charismatic authority of the sheikh established and sustained?**

   As we have seen, Cherno Abdulrahman Barry plays a crucial role in the lives of his followers. His authority is established and sustained through a number of different means. Based on ideals of the Sufi saint, miraculous stories about his life are told and spread, and these stories are corroborated by an ascetic lifestyle and a “saintly
generosity”, as Werbner put it, by providing his talibes and the community with economic support.

Furthermore, posters containing his image can be found in the homes of most followers and sometimes on cars or the surfaces of buildings in West Africa. As indicated by the story about the young boy, the very image of the sheikh seems to be given a sacredness and that it contains some of his baraka.

We can also see that his authority is established and sustained by things like his placement during the ceremonies – usually on a heightened platform/chair – and that he rarely speaks himself, instead having someone with a microphone paraphrase him. This gives the impression that he is unique and “separated from ordinary men” (Weber, 1964: 358). The “unseen source” of his authority in this case is God, as he is thought to have a direct connection with the divine. This legitimates his charismatic authority and is expressed through the strategies mentioned above.

You could argue that there are three main aspects of charismatic authority at play here. First, he maintains this status himself through certain behavior and outer aesthetic means – heightened platform, not speaking himself and so on. Secondly, the murids and followers also sustain this authority through telling fantastical stories about his life. And thirdly, they both (through these strategies) place him within a tradition of the ideal Sufi saint.

3. What are the social/political implications of the Ziyara?

Lastly, I argued that that the social and political implications of Ziyara Bogal were twofold: Firstly, the sustainment of identity and social cohesion and secondly (and perhaps most significant), a reaffirming of the relationship between politics and religion (Islam). Relating to the former, we have shown that the forms of ritualization result in a kind of social integration and a strengthening of individual identities and the identity of the group.

The political implications are perhaps even more far-reaching. We have seen that the main event of the Ziyara – a kind of conference where the sheikh holds a speech to major political figures and people of power in West Africa – can act as a strong strategy to reaffirm the role of Islam in Senegambian society. Considering the long relationship between the two, especially with how powerful the marabouts have been politically for much of the 20th century, the event can be seen as a symbolic way to communicate that Islam (as understood by Barry and his followers) still acts as an ethical basis for society.
and politics. To some degree, it gives Abdulrahman Barry a certain amount of political power and authority, but even more importantly it is a way for the politicians to legitimize their leadership by establishing a connection to the sheikh and the ethical tenants of religion. In a way, you could say that religion and politics legitimize each other through the rituals of the pilgrimage.

The aim of this thesis has been to give a comprehensive overview of the Ziyara Bogal by highlighting the ways in which the Tijaniyya creates a sense of sacredness through ritual, what role the sheikh Abdulrahman Barry plays, how his authority is established and what impact all this have on the lives of his followers and the society they live in. Although generalizations should be avoided, you could say that much of what has been presented here and the conclusions that have been drawn can apply to many other cases and tariqas within Sufism. Surely, we have seen that this specific Ziyara certainly doesn’t exist in a vacuum, but that much of the interesting aspects are based on what can be called general Sufi ideals and practices, such as the ascetic lifestyle of the sheikh and miraculous stories told about him. I think it is safe to say that there is a level of overlap between many of the Sufi orders, and that these findings can be tested on them as well. It would certainly be interesting to see if similar things can be found in pilgrimages of the Mouridiyya for example, but that will have to be the subject of a future project. Another interesting subject for future investigation could be how the Tijaniyya functions as a trans-national network – that is, what are the function and implications of the relationship between diaspora Tijanis (like the Swedish da’ira) and the marabouts/society in Senegambia? Hopefully, this thesis has opened up for questions such as this one, and I look forward to studying it further.

Religion plays an important, and very direct, role in West African society. It may not be the Islam that many in the West are familiar with, but it has been such a major factor in the region that there is no way to escape its myriads of expressions once you are there. The Ziyara Bogal serves as a good example of how religion is lived in Senegal and The Gambia, and to what degree it affects society as a whole.
Glossary

**Al-Haqq** – One of the 99 names of God in Islam, translates to “The Truth” or “The Real”

**Baraka** – “Blessing” or “Grace”, a sacred presence of God that certain individuals (often marabouts and sheikhs) or objects can possess and transmit.

**Da’ira** – Local administrative organ of a larger Tariqa/Order

**Dhikr** - Practice of remembrance where the names of God are repeated

**Du’a** – Prayer (distinct from the more common *salat* prayer performed five times a day)

**Marabout** – Religious leader and teacher in West African Islam

**Mouridiyya** – (Mourid Brotherhood) Second largest tariqa in West Africa

**Murid** – Disciples of a Sufi sheikh or master

**Nur** – Arabic word meaning “light”

**Qawwali** – A form of devotional music popular in Central Asia

**Sama** – “Listening” or “Audition”, ritualistic music

**Sheikh** – Spiritual leader, often of several disciples or *murids* (see above)

**Talibe** – Student of a Marabout

**Tariqa** – “Order”, branches within Sufism often founded around a saint

**Tasawwuf** – Original Arabic word synonymous with Sufism

**Tasbih** – Muslim prayer beads

**Thawb** – Ankle-length traditional Arabic garment, often with long sleeves

**Tijaniyya** – (Tijani Brotherhood) Sufi tariqa with origins in North Africa. Largest in West Africa

**Wajd** – Ecstacy/State of bliss

**Wali/Awliya** – “Friends of God”, often described as Sufi *saints*

**Wolof** – Native language spoken in West Africa

**Zawiyah** – Islamic religious school

**Ziyara** – Visit (pilgrimage) to a shrine or Marabout, common practice in Sufism

**Zuhd** – An ascetic lifestyle
Bibliography


**Internet-sources**

