Embodying Asceticism: Masculinity, Manliness, and the Male Body in Muḥammad al-ʿArabī al-Darqāwī's *Majmūʿ Rasāʾil*

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Abstract

This study examines the logics of masculinity, manliness, and the corporeal male body in shaykh Muḥammad al-ʿArabī ibn Aḥmad al-Darqāwī al-Ḥasanī's (d. 1239/1823) *Majmūʿ Rasāʾil* ("Collection of Epistles"). It argues that al-Darqāwī's *Rasāʾil* constructed a prescriptive pious masculinity defined by mastery of the body and self, practical acts of ascetic devotion and humility, the hierarchical relationship between a Sufi master and his disciples, and the denigration of normative masculine virtues and behaviours. While al-Darqāwī instructed his followers to practice *tajrīd*, or divestment from the material world, and to eschew the habits of the men of *murūʾa*, this act did not seek to completely transcend the masculine body. Rather, his understanding of prescriptive pious masculinity was centred in embodied ascetic acts which created an analogous relationship between the physical act of purifying the corporeal body with the disciplining of the self (*nafs*). Mastering the body and the self, al-Darqāwī wrote, would lead to both growing near to God as well as, importantly, his Sufi followers' mastery over other men, their wives and children, and even the natural environment. Al-Darqāwī's *Rasāʾil* highlight the tension between Sufism as a spiritual and mystical path that seems to transcend gender hierarchies with its imbrication in epistemologies, ontologies, and cosmologies shaped by a masculine way of being in the world.

* This article could not have happened without the constructive feedback and edits of Cyrus Zargar, Scott Kugle, Devin Stewart, Rose Deighton, Faraz Alidina, and Abdurraouf Oueslati. Special thanks to Kecia Ali and Yasmine Flodin-Ali for their support and thoughtful insights throughout the development of this research and to Zahra Ayubi for her incisive scholarship and feminist mentorship.

Keywords

Sufism – Muḥammad al-ʿArabī al-Darqāwī – Morocco – masculinity – ascetic masculinity – embodiment – *ṭahāra* – *tajrīd* – *murūʿa* – gender ethics

الخلاصة

تبحث هذه الدراسة منطق الذكورة والرجولة والجسد الذكوري المادي في مجموع رسائل الشيخ محمد العربي بن أحمد الدرقاوي الحسني (ت. 1823/1239). ويطرح هذا المقال فرضية أن رسائل الدرقاوي قد صاغت تصورا معياريا للذكورة تقية (أي تسم بالتقوى) تحددها سيطرة المرء على الجسد والنفس، والممارسة العملية للزهد والتواضع، بالإضافة إلى العلاقة الهرمية بين الشيخ الصوفي ومريديه، والخط من قدر الفضائل والسلوكيات الذكورية المعيارية. فبينما كان الدرقاوي يدعو مريديه إلى ممارسة التجريد، أو التخلي عن العالم المادي، وتجنب عادات رجال المروءة، إلا أن هذه الدعوة لم تهدف إلى تجاوز الجسد الذكوري بالكلية. بل على العكس من ذلك، كان تصوره المعيارى للذكورة التقية متمركزا حول ممارسات تجسد التنسك الخالص وتخلق نوعا من التماهي بين التطهير المادي للجسد ورياضة النفس. ذلك أن سيطرة المرء على الجسد والنفس، وفق الدرقاوي، تؤدي إلى زيادة القرب من الله تعالى وفي الوقت ذاته إلى تفوق المريدن من المتصوفة على غيرهم من الرجال، وعلى زوجاتهم وأطفالهم، وحتى على البيئة الطبيعية. تسلط رسائل الدرقاوي الضوء على التوتر القائم داخل منظومة التصوف، من ناحية بوصفها طريقة روحية تبدو قادرة على تجاوز التراتبيات الهرمية الجندرية، ومن ناحية أخرى بتشريها للنظريات المعرفية والوجودية والكونية المحكومة بتصوّر ذكوري للعيش في هذا العالم.

الكلمات المفتاحية

التصوف – محمد العربي الدرقاوي – المغرب – الذكورة – الذكورة المتنسكة – التجسيد – الطهارة – التجريد – المروءة – الأخلاق الجندرية

1 Introduction

The self (*nafs*) is a powerful matter. It is the universe (*kawn*) in its entirety because it is a copy of that universe. Everything in the universe is the self and everything in the self is in the universe. He who masters his self, absolutely masters the universe around him, and he who is mastered by his self is absolutely mastered by the universe.

AL-DARQĀWĪ 1999, 84

In Letter 12 of his *Majmūʿ Rasāʾil* (“Collection of Epistles”),¹ the Sufi saint and founder of the Darqāwī order in Morocco, shaykh Muḥammad al-ʿArabī ibn Aḥmad al-Darqāwī al-Ḥasanī (d. 1239/1823), narrates a story about a group of tribesmen from the Tafilalt oasis traveling to Mecca on a pilgrimage in order to receive the *baraka* (blessings) of a ʿAlawī *sharīf*, a descendant of the son-in-law and cousin of the Prophet, ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib (d. 40/661), and his intercession in the drought plaguing their date palms. Once there, they ask the *sharīf* to send one of his sons back with them. The *sharīf* asks each of his sons in turn how he would treat a man of goodness and malice. Only the last, the youngest son, responds that he would treat a man with goodness regardless of how the man treats him. The Tafilalt tribesmen return to their home with the *sharīf*’s son, rain flows down, and the land flourishes. Al-Darqāwī concludes the anecdote by returning to the ideal definition of manliness and moral character embodied by both the *sharīf* and his son: “the way of one who has mastered his self (*milkiyyat al-naḥs*, literally “self-ownership”), the way of honour (*sharaf*), and the way of noble character (*khulq kabīr*)” (al-Darqāwī 1999, 85).

On the surface, this story recounts the foundation of the ʿAlawī dynasty in Morocco (Ilahiane 2004, 39–40). Yet, on a deeper level, it reveals the analogous relationship between the spiritual cleansing of the soul or self (*naḥs*) through ritual ablutions (*wuḍūʿ* and *ghusl*) and planting what is good within it: “The soul of the son of Adam is like the earth. If you do not plant there what is good, then what is corrupt will grow; but it will never remain bare. If it does not yield what is beautiful, then it will yield what is ugly” (al-Darqāwī 1999, 257). Within this tale, al-Darqāwī draws upon the common Sufi association of the earth (*al-arḍ*) with the self. Without the sincere goodness, honour, and masculine virtue of the *sharīf*, who is in command of his self, the dense, material earth is not able to produce what is good, instead bringing up only spoiled crops. Yet, when the physical presence of the virtuous *sharīf* comes into contact with the earth, or the self, the innate purity and lowliness of the water cleanses the land and it yields what is beautiful (al-Darqāwī 1999, 360; Murata 1992, 138). Thus,

1 At the time of his death in 1239/1823, the letters were collected by his disciples and distributed throughout the country. Beginning in 1318/1900, they were printed as lithographs. The Arabic edition continues to be republished and is widely in circulation, with the most recent critical edition published in 1999. They have been translated partially into English twice, with a full translated edition rendered by Aresmouk and Fitzgerald in 2018, in addition to several French translations (Burckhardt 1969, trans. Lings; Bewley 1981; Aresmouk and Fitzgerald 2018). The most recent English translation offers an important correction to the previous two and provides some historical context and insight into the shaykh’s spiritual teachings, yet it obfuscates the masculinist logic undergirding the shaykh’s teachings. For this reason, all Arabic translations, unless otherwise noted, were rendered by the author of this article based on the critical Arabic edition edited by Bārūd (1999).

within this analogy of the sowing of the land with the cleansing of the self and the flourishing of the spirit (*rūḥ*), al-Darqāwī interweaves the dynamic of mastery and its embodied masculine nature, reverberating in both the inner and outer bodies and reflecting the macrocosm of the universe (Cornell 2007, 259, 266–70). Just as the soul corresponds to the entirety of existence, mastery of the self and the masculine body results in mastery of all that is in the universe, albeit through God's will and blessings.

This study argues that al-Darqāwī's *Rasā'il* constructed a prescriptive Sufi masculinity defined by mastery of the body and the self; practical acts of ascetic devotion and humility; the hierarchical relationship between a Sufi master and his disciples; and the denigration of elite scholarly men, lowly men, and women. In order to achieve this ideal state of mastery of the body and the self, as well as the virtues and moral behaviour that accompany it, al-Darqāwī provides prescriptive instructions to his male followers throughout his *Rasā'il* in addition to the hagiographic tales he relates about pious men and Sufi saints and tales of warning he conveys about men who fail to live up to these ideal exemplars. However, while al-Darqāwī instructed his followers to practice divestment (*tajrīd*) and renunciation (*zuhd*) of certain aspects of the material world, his presentations of divestment and renunciation did not seek to transcend the body completely. Rather, his understanding of prescriptive pious masculinity was centred in embodied ascetic technologies that created an analogous relationship between the physical act of purifying the corporeal body with the disciplining of the self (Bourdieu 1977; Foucault [1988] 1997; Kugle 2007; Bashir 2011).

This tension between the complete transcendence of the body and the material world through divestment and the dynamic role of the masculine corporeal body in performing fundamental pietistic acts gestures to a broader tension between the exterior, juridical, and world-renouncing aspects of al-Darqāwī's Sufi way with his inclination toward immanent practices such as *samā'*, spiritual poverty, and servanthood. This, in turn, raises two key questions: First, in what ways do al-Darqāwī's teachings construct a particular form of Sufi masculinity built on the denigration and mastery of other men and women, yet also, conversely, reimagine the centrality of the corporeal body, critique the elite scholarly classes and restrictive juridical interpretations of Islamic law (*sharī'a*), and offer a more capacious understanding of men's and women's spiritual work? Secondly, how do we wrestle with this tension between Sufism as a spiritual and mystical path that seems to transcend gender and its location within epistemologies, ontologies, and cosmologies very much shaped by a masculine way of being in the world (Kugle 2007; Shaikh 2012; Ayubi 2019)? Or, in other words, in what ways are the possibilities for

reforming and reimagining the ethical, social, and spiritual potentials of his Sufi followers constrained by al-Darqāwī's restrictive conception of masculine supremacy?

That Sufism is gendered and that it relies on gendered performances, language, and epistemologies has been a subject of considerable study (Schimmel 1975; Malamud 1996; Cornell 1999, 2007, 2019; Murata 1992; Kugle 2007; Silvers 2010, 2014; Bashir 2011; Shaikh 2012; Mian 2019). However, while these works have critiqued the androcentric focus of Sufi texts and patriarchal constructions of women, masculinity itself has often been left untroubled.² In recent years, scholarship on masculinity and Islam has deconstructed the notion that there is one way of being a Muslim man or a singular ideal of Islamic masculinity (De Sonidy 2014), attending to the deeply embodied nature of masculinities in lived Muslim practice and the Islamic textual tradition while still critiquing the centrality of masculine logic to the discursive Islamic tradition (Ouzgane 2006; Khabeer 2016; Pierce 2016; Ayubi 2019). Drawing from critical masculinity studies, namely Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinities, these works, have illustrated the ways in which theories of masculine superiority, rationality, and mastery harm lower classes of men as well as other genders (1995, 2000, 2001). In this regard, Ayubi's work has been particularly crucial for illuminating the moments when normative constructions of masculinity, in her case the masculinity of the elite male virtue ethicists, fail not only other genders, but men as well (2019). This article builds on these important contributions, hoping to hold on to the logics of masculinity, manliness, and the male body in al-Darqāwī's Sufi way as well as the way in which his masculine logic undermines and constrains his teachings.

2 While an examination of the relationship of masculinities, sexualities, and erotic attachments is beyond the scope of this article, it should be noted that Scott Kugle, Amanullah De Sonidy, Sa'diyya Shaikh, and Ali Altaf Mian, among others, have highlighted both the potential for gender fluidity and the prevalence of same-sex desires within certain Sufi orders and textual traditions. However, as De Sonidy has also cautioned: "a fluid masculinity is hardly the aim of these mystics" (2014, 178). Divine love does not erase gendered social and material hierarchies, particularly when they extend to shape understandings of the metaphysical world (Ayubi 2019). Mian further demonstrates that, while the erotic attachments of same-sex desire may structure the homosocial Deobandī community and shape, through sublimation, the deep intimacy that intertwines the disciple with his master, bodily manifestations of same-sex desire and physical sexual acts are nonetheless often censured and condemned (2019, 115, 120, 136).

2 Al-Darqāwī, the *mujaddid*

As a self-styled *mujaddid*, or renewer of the age, shaykh Muḥammad al-ʿArabī al-Darqāwī's life spanned the cusp of modernity and witnessed shifts in the political and religious authority within the country (al-Kattānī [1898] 2004, 1:176; El Mansour 1990, 167; Agherrabi 2010).³ Born in the small Berber village of Banu Zerwal in the northern Rif Mountains, he travelled to Fez as a young man and met his master, Abū Ḥasan ʿAlī al-Jamal (d. 1193/1779), sometime during the year of 1183/1769 (al-Kattānī [1898] 2004, 1:191; Al-Darqāwī 1999, 396). Al-Darqāwī wrote frequently about the need to return to the true Shādhilī tradition, which he referred to as *barakat al-salaf* or the ways of the pious predecessors, including the people of the bench (*ahl al-ṣuffa*). He was particularly influenced by Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh al-Iskandarī's (d. 709/1309) elaboration of the Shādhilī order in addition to more contemporary Sufi influences within Morocco such as the "exterior" path of the Nāṣiriyya Sufi order and the "interior" path of al-Jamal's master, Muḥammad b. ʿAbdallāh Maʿn al-Andalusī (d. 1062/1652) and his *zāwiya* (Sufi lodge) in Fez (El Mansour 1990; Vimercati-Sanseverino 2014, Chapter 2).⁴

Al-Darqāwī's teachings emphasised following the Sunna and Islamic law, performing practical devotional acts, curbing human passions, and practicing

3 El Mansour gives his birth as 1150/1737 but Aresmouk and Fitzgerald place it as around 1153/1740 based on Būziyyān al-Muʿaskarī's (1271/1855) *Kanz al-Asrār fī Manāqib Mawlāy al-ʿArabī al-Darqāwī wa-baʿḍa Aṣḥābihi* ("The Treasure of Secrets on the Virtues of Mawlāy al-ʿArabī al-Darqāwī and Some of his Companions"). In 1822, al-Darqāwī was briefly imprisoned and his *zāwiya* in Tetouan closed by forces loyal to the ʿAlawī ruler Mawlāy Sulaymān (r. 1206–1238/1792–1822) (Abun-Nasr 1971, 245). Mawlāy Sulaymān's ire toward al-Darqāwī and the Darqāwiyya remains a matter of historical speculation. Some Moroccan scholars have suggested that al-Darqāwī's ascetic divestment and critique of religious scholars' occupation with worldly affairs (al-Darqāwī 1999, 101, 273, 292, 338, 341, 394) served to challenge both the scholars in Fez and the sultan's use of religious practice to justify political rule (al-Kattānī [1898] 2005; Abun-Nasr 1987; El Mansour 1990, 167–9). El Mansour further notes that al-Darqāwī's encouragement of *samāʿ* and other ecstatic practices as well as his implicit critique of the growing Wahhabī influences may have created a rift between his order and the Wahhabī-influenced Mawlāy Sulaymān (El Mansour 1990, 170; Heck, 2012; Aresmouk and Fitzgerald 2018). In addition to potential differences in religious practices, El Mansour points to the Fez Rebellion in 1236/1820 and the possibility that al-Darqāwī's order aligned with the city of Fez and surrounding Berber tribes in pledging allegiance to Mawlāy Sulaymān's nephew, Mawlāy Ibrahim.

4 The Nāṣiriyya were a branch of the Shādhilī that originated in southern Morocco in the late 16th-century (Bearman, etc. al 2004). For historical accounts of Moroccan Sufism and the relationship of Sufism and political power, see: Laroui 1977; Abun-Nasr 1987; Cornell 1998; Pennell 2000; Kugle 2006; Bazzaz 2008, 2010; Amster 2013; Maghraoui 2013; Wyrzten 2016.

self-humiliation as a means of detaching from the concerns of the everyday world. He also encouraged his followers to perform vocal *dhikr* (invocation) and *samāʿ*, which, for al-Darqāwī, consisted of listening to music or poetry that touched the heart, opening it to ecstatic states. Initially, al-Darqāwī's strict requirements for his followers to practice divestment of the working world and self-humiliation as well as his critiques of the elite jurists and scholars of Fez attracted followers primarily among the rural population and lower urban classes. In this sense, his Sufi way differed from those of other reformist orders within Morocco at the time, such as the Tijāniyya who enjoyed patronage from Mawlāy Sulaymān and the elite class, finding more commonalities with the Shādhilī-Jazūlī orders and their Sufi lineage which he sought to revive (El Mansour 1990, 167; 171). However, later in his life, he relaxed some of these requirements, enabling elite scholars such as Abū al-ʿAbbās Aḥmad ibn ʿAjība (d. 1224/1809) and Abū ʿAbdallāh Muḥammad al-Ḥarrāq (d. 1261/1845) to join. By the end of the 19th century, branches of his *ṭarīqa* had spread throughout Morocco and North Africa (Abun-Nasr 1987, 245; El Mansour 1990, 167). His collected letters lay out his path for the reformation and renewal of the Shādhilī Sufi way in Morocco, beginning with the behaviours and bodies of his Sufi male followers.

3 Mastering the Masculine Body: *Ṭahāra* and *Tajrīd*

While al-Darqāwī's instructions for the pietistic acts men should undertake and the virtues they should embody cover a wide range of topics, from how to recite the Darqāwiyya litany (*wird*) and invocation (*dhikr*) to instructions for performing *samāʿ* and the prayer of seeking guidance (*istikhāra*), the role of purification (*ṭahāra*) and divestment (*tajrīd*) are presented as the foundational pietistic practices men should perform: "You must give your actions a sound foundation since the building is not sound and does not exist without the foundation. There is no doubt that cleanliness [*wuḍūʿ*] and cleaning oneself of urine is a great foundation" (al-Darqāwī 1999, 387). His prescriptive instructions for these acts walk hand in hand with his call for his disciples to practice mastery of the self and body, abasement, and humiliation.

Purification, for al-Darqāwī, was an ongoing process concerned with expelling impure fluids and elements from the physical body as well as impure thoughts from the heart. While an obligatory fundamental step along the path, purification was not a process that could be completed and then discarded. Rather, it was necessary for men to continually attend to the state of their bodies and hearts: "It [prayer] is not valid without *wuḍūʿ*, purity of

the body (*ṭahārat al-jasad*), clothes (*ṭahārat al-malābis*), and place (*ṭahārat al-makān*), covering the private parts, and facing the qibla” (al-Darqāwī 1999, 372). Attending to this purification required a minute attention to the corporeal body and its functions:

He should also have his body always clean of filth, or more precisely, its impurity, the hair of the private parts and armpits, the nails of the hands and feet, and his clothes and place. He should leave whatever does not concern him and he should free himself of any traces of urine. He should persist until he is certain of it or his heart is at rest that his urine is completely removed. He should withdraw from following the senses and all habits and appetites. He should not think that unlikely or think it preposterous.

AL-DARQĀWĪ 1999, 69

This excerpt, one among many, illustrates the exacting attention to detail al-Darqāwī urges his followers to practice. Moreover, it points to the relationship between the never-ceasing process of withdrawing from the sensory world (*al-ḥiss*) and its demands and the safe-guarding of the self through such physical acts.

Purity (*ṭuhr*, *ṭahāra*, or *ṣafāʾ*) shares a mutually constitutive relationship with impurity (*najāsa* or *kudra*) that mirrors the duality of the spirit and the self: “As long as the self is impure (*mukaddira*), only the name ‘self’ is true for it. When its impurity goes, and it is described and becomes pure and jewel-essence, the name ‘spirit’ applies to it in truth” (al-Darqāwī 1999, 225). The process of washing the body with water, which carries connotations of lowliness and humility (al-Darqāwī 1999, 360; Murata 1992, 138), and making the physical body pure simultaneously washes the self of corrupting influences, humbling it, and polishing it until the luminous essence of the spirit is able to shine through it. The self, which al-Darqāwī compares to the earth, requires this cleansing so that it may be receptive to the good that is planted within it (al-Darqāwī 1999, 257). Thus, al-Darqāwī’s repeated refrain that a man should persist in performing *wuḍūʾ* and *ghusl* until, “he is certain of it or his heart is at rest that his urine is completely removed,” always also connotes the inner movements of the polishing of the self into the spirit (al-Darqāwī 1999, 69).

In informing his followers that they must undertake both purifications with the utmost sincerity and intention, al-Darqāwī stressed the dynamic hinging between and connecting the interior spirit with the exterior corporeal body. Rather than a state of purification moving from the inner to the outer—or the inverse, from the outer to the inner—purification emerges from the

intermixing of the interior and the exterior within which the corporeal masculine body plays a primary role. However, as the shaykh's repeated exhortations for his followers to perform the minor and major ritual ablutions and to purify their mind of gossip and ugly thoughts demonstrate, the self—nor the corrupting influences of impure thoughts, bodily acts, and fluids—is never fully transcended. While some pious men and Sufi saints may achieve a state of luminosity, he describes even these men as always attending to cleansing their body: "I read [the Qur'ān] with the learned man (*faqīh*), the teacher Sidi Abū al-Qāsim b. Muḥammad al-Zarwalī (d. 1229/1813). He was always in a state of cleanliness" (al-Darqāwī 1999, 245, 373).

Al-Darqāwī's exacting attention to the everyday acts of purifying the corporeal body intensifies within his prescriptive instructions for divestment or *tajrīd*. The verbal noun (*maṣḍar*) of the second form of the Arabic verb *jarada*, divestment or *tajrīd* can also be translated a "stripping," "disrobement," or "freeing," meaning to detach oneself from the monetary concerns of daily life, expensive clothes and rich foods, preoccupations with family matters—including wife and children—gossip, and, ultimately the desires of the ego (al-Darqāwī 1990, 230). Intentional divestment from the material world and its sensory distractions formed one of the central tenants of the Darqāwī way: "The way of *tajrīd* for those who follow it is like the red elixir (*iksīr al-aḥmar*) of the alchemists" (al-Darqāwī 1999, 226). The shaykh provided detailed, lengthy instructions for how his followers should divest, which stressed the intention behind divesting:

Divestment (*tajrīd*) encompasses four matters: flight from the world, flight from people, neglect of the body, and neglect of the stomach. For, the one who divests (*mutajarrīd*) does not concern himself with what other people are concerned with; rather, he neglects them. There is no doubt that, in sincerity (*ṣidq*), he might do things which appear disgusting to the people, such as eating radishes in the marketplace or turnips, herbs, kebabs, boiled chickpeas (*mālīḥ wa-malīḥ*), fried donuts (*sfinj*), roasted meats, sweet pastries, or carrots. The sincere one loves to be like this in the presence of the people of manliness (*murū'a*) so that they may look at him and despair of him. He does not eat like this if he is not around the people of *murū'a* or with the low people (*suqqāṭ*) like him so that these practices become easy on him. For, he does not love that this practice is easy upon him. Rather, he only loves to be like a dog or less than a dog. And, he loves to bare his head in front of some of the people of *murū'a* that we mentioned and others, like his relatives, companions, and his loved ones. He begs from the people like a man in desperate need

or in whatever way God wills. He takes large bits when he eats and opens his mouth a great deal when he does so. He wears a tunic inside out and when he sits, he extends his legs and separates them, and does not bring them together. He uncovers from near his backside but not from his backside, but leaves his private parts (*'awra*) covered in preservation of the *sharī'a* so that anyone who sees him knows he is sane. He is silent before anyone who overpowers him in the presence of whom he dislikes to be present [to such a scene]. He also wears an old prayer cap, tattered but clean. There is nothing the people of sincerity love more than ways by which they can appear lowly in the eyes of the people; such is their habit and such is their state: For there is no doubt that the states which we have mentioned are, for us, asceticism and for others are ill manners.

AL-DARQĀWĪ 1999, 143–144

For al-Darqāwī, practicing divestment was a measure of controlled abasement, moderate ascetic practices, and shunning the sartorial signs and behavioural practices of the “people of *murū'a*” or the people of manliness.⁵ His repeated refrain that the man who divests should do so in front of the “people of *murū'a*” offers an interesting critique of this concept and of the men who purport to it. Sachiko Murata notes that *murū'a* or manliness is a central virtue within Islamic ethics and Sufi texts, closely associated with the virtue of *futuwwa*, which signifies “generosity, liberality, and noble-heartedness” and is commonly translated as “chivalry.” *Murū'a*, which Murata, drawing from Lane, describes as manly virtue or moral goodness, connotes good manners when eating and speaking, abstinence from unlawful things, and “preserving the soul from filthy actions, and what disgraces in the estimation of men,” amongst other good habits and practices (1992, 266; Lane 1955, 2703, under *m-r-*, form 1). Yet, while sincerity and manliness, in addition to chivalry, generosity, and noble-heartedness, are normally associated as the virtues that “become established in the soul when it manifests the active qualities of the spirit” (Schimmel 1975, 108; Murata 1992, 266–7), here al-Darqāwī distinguishes between them, attributing sincerity,

5 While in his letters al-Darqāwī clearly indicates that the people of *murū'a* or the people of manliness refer to the jurists of Fez and elite scholars who take care with their clothing—yet perhaps not as close care with their heart—it is difficult to ascertain from a social and cultural history standpoint who these men might have been as well as to what extent his critique of their elite masculinity differed from established gender norms at the time. In part, this limitation resides from the nature of conducting a textual rather than a historical study. However, the greater difficulty lies in the lacunae of scholarship on the norms, discourses, practices, and embodiments of gender during this period in Morocco more broadly, with most modern histories of gender in the country beginning in the colonial period.

mentioned here as *ṣidq*, to the man who divests from the social performance of manliness (*murūʿa*).

In part, the performance of these lowly behaviours, such as eating without manners or baring one's head and body in front of important men, is meant to intensify the embodied feeling of lowness and humiliation that attacks the attractions and desires of the lower self for the sensory world. However, it also subtly critiques the socially performative aspect of *murūʿa*, illuminating the ways in which it is tied to the material appearance or desire for standing and rank rather than the embodiment and internalisation of true manliness, here represented in the figure of the *mutajarrid*. He makes this connection explicit in the final sentence of this letter, emphasising the practices he described represent ascetic acts or asceticism (*nask* or *nusk*) for him and the men in his order who follow the way of sincerity and divestment. Importantly, however, much like he subtly in this letter, and more explicitly in others, critiques men of superficial manliness (*murūʿa*), he also condemns followers who too eagerly perform extreme ascetic practices—going without food and sleep for long periods of time, refusing to interact with people or to marry—to such an extent that they are focused on the act rather than the intention (al-Darqāwī 1999, 271).

Thus, this abasement, self-humiliation, and stripping the body of finer clothes and rich foods did not represent feminine behaviour nor uncouth masculine comportment for the shaykh. Rather, this controlled abasement and measured asceticism signified a strong manliness and supremacy over the limbs and heart, one which critiqued the normative masculine values of the elite, scholarly men and jurists, and the ignorant men who followed them:

Tajrīd is to be in a state of ruination (*kharāb*). If the state of ruination caused by the world and its matters and desires does not appear in the limbs of a *faqīr*, then he is a small boy (*tifl*), not a mature man (*raḡul kabīr*). If the ruination manifests upon his limbs and he comes to rest in the state of ruination, he is among the great, grown men (*al-rijāl al-kibār*) and this is a sign of his maturity. Or, as we say, he has been made to grow near to his Lord (*rabb*). When the light (*nūr*) grows in the interior (*bāṭin*) of the [male] believer, it expels everything from it. When everything has been expelled, within his inner state, his Lord (*mawlāhu*) (may God be glorified and exalted) remains. Anyone who is like this is among the saints of God.

AL-DARQĀWĪ 1999, 230

Men who either did not practice *tajrīd* at all or who performed extreme ascetic behaviours without proper intention, sincerity, and knowledge (*maʿrifa*) of

God were not fully men. Here, al-Darqāwī presents a hierarchy of masculine piety and maturity that places achieving *tajrīd* or this state of vulnerable ruination as, paradoxically, the height of masculine strength, virtue, and power. Men who do not achieve this, such as the ones who practice extreme begging whom he addresses in Letter 146, “You have overdone this to an extreme because you have found in it a door to worldliness and a way to satisfy an extraordinary number of your desires, while before you would not have hoped to satisfy a single one” (al-Darqāwī 1999, 269), are not mature men in a spiritual, embodied sense. These critiques served to diminish those men who were not able to adequately divest or purify their mind and body, making specific attacks on their masculine virtue and connecting their spiritual state and outer comportment with their masculine performance.

Al-Darqāwī’s *Rasā’il* suggests that divestment, while concerned with the rejection of the corrupting influences and temptations of worldly affairs and the power of sensorial impressions, does not necessarily reject the physical body—or at the very least not the normative masculine body. His teachings emphasised the disciplining of desires for food, drink, sexual pleasures, gossip, and material wealth as well as success in scholarly pursuits and measured ascetic practices such as begging, wearing the patched cloak, and controlled fasting, but they did not articulate a complete transcendence of the corporeal masculine body:

Our master Sīdī ‘Alī said: “*Tajrīd* is divestment from the world sensorially [meaning physically] (*ḥissan*), not just spiritually (*al-ma’nā*). Divestment of the spiritual cannot be achieved without attaining physical divestment. If only spiritual detachment (*al-tajrīd al-ma’nawī*) were possible, it would be imperceptible, unnoticed, and have no effect on our judgment, nor hold any benefit until it manifested in the physical realm.”

AL-DARQĀWĪ 1999, 228

Shahzad Bashir has noted the dynamic yet paradoxical role of the body: “the body is seen as the ultimate source of most problems since its instinctive appetites restrict human beings from thinking beyond their immediate desires: on the other side, the body is a vital venue for theorisation and investigation because it enables human beings to transcend materiality” (Bashir 2011, 28). While Bashir’s study examined different traditions of Sufism located in Central Asia and Iran during the late medieval period (c. 1300–1500), namely the Nūrbakhshī, the Ḥurūfī, and the Naqshbandī Sufi orders, this same tension, and the paradoxical place of the corporeal body, is evident within al-Darqāwī’s discussions of purifying and stripping it. Purifying of the limbs, abstaining

from rich foods, wandering about in either patched clothes or barely any, declining nourishment and fasting—these ascetic acts can only be accomplished through technologies of the inner and outer physical body (Foucault [1988] 1997). Spiritual divestment, in al-Darqāwī's understanding of it, cannot begin without these movements of the limbs. While the interior and exterior movements, as noted above, interplay in the process of purification, with the ablutions of the body analogous to the cleansing and polishing of the self, al-Darqāwī stresses that purification must precede and be the fundamental state for spiritual divestment for his followers. Yet, at the very same time, the limbs and their desires and impurities incline to the lower self and the material, sensorial world, requiring the processes of purification. This suggests that the body, at least in al-Darqāwī's ontology of it, can never be fully transcended, yet it can be tamed, disciplined, and organised into a normatively masculine body.

4 Mastery of the Masculine Other

When my teacher [Sīdī 'Alī al-Jamal] saw my sincerity in the way (*ṭarīq*), he ordered me to break the habits of my self. He, may God be pleased with him, said to me: For as we come to possess the knowledge of the Truth (*al-ḥaqīqa*), likewise we come to possess its practices. I did not understand him. So, he grabbed my headcloth (*ḥā'ik*)⁶ with his noble hand and pulled it off my head, leaving it bare (*ʿuryān*), twisted it a lot and wound it around my neck, then said to me: "There, a good fit!"⁷ My self was frightened to such an extreme that death (*mawt*) would have been easier (*ahwan*) for me than to be seen in that state while he was looking at me, not speaking, until my soul almost died from the severe weight of that state upon it (*naḥs*).

AL-DARQĀWĪ 1999, 317

In this interaction between al-Darqāwī and his master, he experiences the humiliation of his masculine pride and propriety as symbolised by the removal

6 An outer garment made of a long piece of white woollen material, covering body and head. Bārūd cites in a footnote to the edited manuscript that a *ḥā'ik* is a garment (*ṭhawb*) made of wool that was worn by Moroccan women as well as used in the past by Moroccan man in the place of the *jillāba*. It resembled a *mulā'a* (full body wrap or cloak). Dozy also notes that the *ḥā'ik* was often worn by men in and around Fez at that time and its placement was indicative of diverse manners (1845, 150).

7 *Qiyās*, Bārūd states this phrase carries a particular meaning in Moroccan Arabic: "Whatever does not bring upon you an evil is verily [only] a good."

of his headcloth, his *ḥāʾik*. This sudden, physical act of unmasking by his shaykh paralysed and shamed him—he would rather die than let someone see him in that condition—with the shock reverberating between his inner self and outer body. The association of head coverings, whether a tattered prayer cap or a *ḥāʾik*, with normative notions of masculine pride and honour recalls al-Darqāwī's instructions for how to perform divestment and the benefits of baring the head in front of people of *murūʾa* (manliness) mentioned in Letter 65 (cited above): "The sincere one loves to be like this in the presence of the people of *murūʾa* so that they may look at him and despair of him. [...] he only loves to be like a dog or less than a dog. And, he loves to bare his head in front of some of the people of manliness that we mentioned and others, like his relatives, companions, and his loved ones" (al-Darqāwī 1999, 144). Because the headcloth is associated with elite scholarly men and other people of manliness, baring the head in front of such men indicates an explicit critique of the social and material status and false propriety wrapped up with it. This class critique is indicative of al-Darqāwī's message of bodily and societal reform, which viewed the inherited wealth, status, and book-knowledge of the scholars, jurists, and other elite men as signs of their ignorance and submission to the desires and appetites of their lower self or ego (al-Darqāwī 1999, 165–177). While his critique presents intriguing possibilities for dismantling the power dynamics and normative masculinity of the jurists who are "so severe, difficult, and narrow," with the people that they drive them away (al-Darqāwī 1999, 168), it also ties his ideals of pious masculinity to the denigration of these men's performance of normative masculinity. As al-Darqāwī demonstrates with his own bodily reaction immediately after this occurs, this means of humiliating the self and stripping it of the averse normative masculine virtues such as pride and false modesty is painful and disorientating, initially inciting shame in the man who walks the path of divestment: "I rose at that moment before the shaykh did—I had never left before him like this—and walked until I was hidden from him by the walls of the *zāwiya*. Then my self said to me: 'What is the meaning of this?' I could not find an answer for it except that I needed the *ḥāʾik* on my head like the people [as the people need it]. But I did not. Instead, I said to myself: 'The shaykh knows what this means.'" Thus, rather than succumb to this moment of worldly humiliation brought upon him by his master, tied to sartorial signs of normative masculine piety and propriety, al-Darqāwī does not put the headcloth back on his head. Rather, by the realisation of what his master taught him, he is able to turn to his self "red-eyed [with anger]," calming its desires and making it give in to him.

This anecdote, recounted twice in al-Darqāwī's *Rasāʾil*, is characteristic of al-Darqāwī's use of stories to provide an instructional moment for his own

disciples. Its depiction of the relationship between al-Darqāwī, at the time an early disciple on the path, and his master, Sīdī ‘Alī al-Jamal, provides his disciples with a model of the authority, respect, and control they should accede to their master—the disciple should become “like a dead person in the hands of the washer” (al-Darqāwī 1999, 402; see also Bashir 2013, 187, 190–201)—as well as insight into the types of acts and virtues necessary to endure in order to calm the desires of the self. In interweaving the depiction of his own humiliation and confrontation with the manly pride and honour associated with his receptivity to his master, this anecdote gestures to four important facets of ideal masculinity that his followers should adopt: 1) subservience and receptivity to the authority of the master; 2) the denigration of normative masculine virtues such as arrogance, pride, honour, rationality, and tyranny as well as, importantly, the pretension of *murū’a* without sincerity; 3) the breaking of normative masculine behaviours such as privileging outward appearance and propriety over inner sincerity as well as favouring scholarly knowledge (*‘ilm*) over gnosis (*ma’rifā*), accumulating material wealth, upholding *sharīfan* status, and upholding restrictive understandings of the *sharī’a*; and 4) the humiliation of elite scholarly men who practice such behaviours and embody such virtues as well as the ignorant and unlearned men who follow their lead without thought. Al-Darqāwī interweaves, anecdotes such as the one above concerning his own embodied progression along the path, and hagiographic accounts of pious exemplars, such as his master Sīdī ‘Alī al-Jamal, with tales of warning about the plight that befalls hypocritical or unintentional Sufi men (*faqīr*, *fuqarā’*), jurists, scholars, and ignorant men who follow them. Combined, these narratives further illuminate the moderate ascetic masculine ideals al-Darqāwī urges his Sufi followers to adopt as well as how these ideals relied on the denigration of unmanly virtue, behaviours, and men.

Al-Darqāwī’s descriptions of his master emphasise this use of unmanly behaviour as a foil to highlight the ways in which the Sufi saint joined the two poles of God’s attributes: “He [‘Alī al-Jamal] was, may God be pleased with him, magisterial (*jalālī*) in his outward appearance and beautiful (*jamālī*) in his inner state; abasement and servanthood in his outward and majesty and freedom in his interior.” Using a series of short, oppositional statements, Al-Darqāwī depicts how his master inhabited both an outwardly lower, abased physical state and an inwardly beautiful, high spiritual state. In associating ‘Alī al-Jamal’s servanthood and abasement with the magisterial attributes of God, rather than with God’s beautiful and receptive *jamālī* qualities, al-Darqāwī further stressed the “doing” of servanthood. Servanthood thus did not imply only openness and receptivity to God, but rather, the rigor, control, self-restraint, and mastery of disciplining the self and body through purification, debasing

and humiliating oneself or letting oneself be humiliated, such as when al-Jamal snatched his headcloth, and performing the ascetic practices of divestment. He further illuminates the ideal of Sīdī ‘Alī al-Jamal by juxtaposing his attributes with their disliked opposites: “And, how repulsive is the opposite, when one is outwardly majesty and freedom and inwardly abasement and servanthood, outwardly *Sunnī* [following the Sunna] and inwardly an innovator; outwardly lawful, inwardly forbidden, outwardly lordly, inwardly demonic, etc.?” (al-Darqāwī 1999, 177).⁸ While this use of oppositional language is a well-known rhetorical device within Sufi literature, often used as a foil of immanence to emphasise God’s transcendent qualities or to indicate that language about the mystical experience, at times, simply fails, these statements should not be understood to be merely related to a generic literary formula meant to highlight his master’s high spiritual state (Sells 1994). Rather, they are embedded within al-Darqāwī’s gendered belittlement of men who do not live up to his ideal conceptions of masculinity.

In addition to his critique of men who are not able to fully perform intentional, sincere divestment of the material world as “little boys” or not fully spiritually mature men, he ridicules Sufi disciples who gossip, laugh loudly in the mosque, or zealously perform outward acts as donkeys: “A *faqīr* who does not pay attention to what he says or does, who craves after what God has forbidden, and does not acknowledge his sins, is not a *faqīr*. He is a donkey (*ḥamīr*)!” (al-Darqāwī 1999, 302) and, concerning a man who talked too much and was not able to accept the truth of this: “The mill is turning, and now you are grinding the flour!” (al-Darqāwī 1999, 331). The use of this gendered metaphor to denigrate lower men as heedless, gossipy, and ignorant seems to derive from Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allāh’s *Kitāb al-Ḥikam* (“Book of Wisdoms”), which al-Darqāwī invokes in Letter 142:

Keep your aspirations high and your goals pure, for the Prophet (peace be upon him) said: Actions are according to intentions and for each will be what he intends, so that he whose migration is for God and God’s Messenger, his gain will be for the sake of God and God’s Messenger, and he whose migration is to gain something worldly or to marry a woman,

8 Within the edited text I consulted, there seems to have been a mistake in the transcription. In the text, it is “servanthood” (*‘ubūdīyya*) but this does not make any sense given the context and the list of opposite attributes it is included in. “Servanthood” is not the opposite of following the sunnah, and, moreover, it had been previously used. I consulted Aresmouk’s and Fitzgerald’s translation which collated four different versions of al-Darqāwī’s *Rasā’il*. They used the term “innovator,” derived from the Arabic root *bada’*, most likely *mubtadi’*, which seems to better fit this context (al-Darqāwī 2018, trans. Aresmouk and Fitzgerald, 111).

then his migration is for that to which he migrated. And, [Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allāh] also says: “Travel not from creature to creature, otherwise you will be like a donkey at the mill: roundabout he turns, his goal the same as his departure. Rather go from creatures to the Creator: Your Lord is the final end.”

AL-DARQĀWĪ 1999, 260; see also IBN ‘AṬĀ’ ALLĀH 1958, 112

Despite al-Darqāwī’s inversion of Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allāh’s *ḥikma* 42, placing the well-known prophetic *ḥadīth* of intention before that of Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allāh’s comparison of ignorant men to donkeys at the mill, turning round without any direction, the meaning remains unchanged.⁹ Rose Deighton, in her analysis of this *ḥikma*, notes that the parallel structure of this aphorism creates a gendered association of the donkey grinding at the mill with marrying a woman, intensifying the common trope of women as the material world (*dunyā*) in Sufi literature. She argues that *ḥikma* 42 constitutes a performance of Sufi masculinity connecting the transcendence of the masculine body and the elevation of the men as representative of rationality and spirituality with the simultaneous negation of women as immanent (Deighton 2020). While al-Darqāwī derives his Shādhili lineage and juridical Sufism through Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allāh, views him as a pious exemplar, and takes from the *Ḥikam* throughout his *Rasā’il*, as has been argued previously, he does not advocate for the same sort of complete transcendence of the masculine body as Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allāh. Moreover, as will be shown in the next section, he presents a paradoxical treatment of women in his *Rasā’il*: on the one hand, limited by their material and social status; on the other, possessing the potential for capacious forms of spirituality.

5 Sufi Women, between Material Limits and Spiritual Capacity

In Letter 152, al-Darqāwī offers a rare address on the subject of women’s piety or spiritual work.¹⁰ While this letter touches upon many of the central themes

9 While al-Darqāwī attributed this statement to Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allāh, Deighton traces this statement to a prophetic tradition cited by ‘Alī Hujwīrī (d. between 465/1073 and 469/1077) (al-Hujwīrī 2014, 11; Grunebaum 1955, 118). For a further discussion of this tradition and the gendered genealogy of donkeys in Sufi literature, see Deighton 2020.

10 Al-Darqāwī mentioned women in approximately seven letters. In each of these instances, he made a pointed reference to them either as the addressed subject or the object to be discussed by using specifically female pronouns (*hīya*, *anti*, *hunna*). While some secondary sources, such as the English translators of the most recent edition of al-Darqāwī’s *Rasā’il*, note that the third-person masculine pronoun *huwa* used throughout the letters should be read as one that speaks to both male and female disciples (Aresmouk and Fitzgerald 2018, 9), it is clear from the context and the content of the *Rasā’il* that this is

of his teachings, including the dynamic between outward acts of purification and inward acts of spiritual intention and sincerity, privileging intentional knowledge of God over ritualistic performance without knowledge, and practicing moderation, it also uses women's work to comment on the capacities of believers. In doing so, this letter further illuminates the gendered hierarchy and centring of masculinity at play within his instructions for pietistic acts, virtues, and behaviours of women as well as highlights tensions within al-Darqāwī's approach to women's piety and participation in his Sufi order. Hagiographic accounts provide glimpses into Moroccan women's participation in Sufi orders; in addition to reports of ecstatic female saints (*majdhūba*) such as the 16th-century sayyida Āmina bint Aḥmad ibn al-Qāḍī (see Kugle 2007), Cornell observes that the 16th-century Jazūlī shaykh 'Abdallāh al-Ghazwānī (d. 935/1528–9) inaugurated a wave of women's formal participation in Sufi orders (1998, 248–249). However, although women were able to participate in some of his practices and teachings—some may have even received permission (*ijāza*) to recite the Darqāwī *wird* or litany (al-Darqāwī 1999, 324–326)—they were nonetheless constrained to an ontological and social role beneath men in his order, regardless of their state of piety. This section examines al-Darqāwī's teachings for women, beginning first with an analysis of Letter 152 (translated in its entirety in Appendix A) before turning to situate this letter within his broader mentions of women throughout his *Rasā'il*.

Letter 152 opens with a brief discussion of the removal of the obligatory prayer from menstruating women and pregnant women who have been deemed unable to perform these pietistic acts due to their ritual state of impurity (see Q 2:222 and al-Bukhārī 2002, *Kitāb al-Ḥayḍ* [Book of Menstruation], 6:35, no. 301 and 327). However, al-Darqāwī did not remain on this subject, using the frame of women's ritual impurity to pose a rhetorical question highlighting the broader theological and ontological concerns of whom God deems able to perform obligatory and supererogatory pietistic acts: "Yet, how can it be withdrawn?" In presenting this question, al-Darqāwī reveals the intended focus of this letter: to consider what constitutes a worthy spiritual endeavour and how the capacity to perform pietistic acts is determined by one's spiritual,

not the case. In the rare instances that he addressed men and women at the same time, he would use masculine and feminine pronouns rather than the third-person masculine plural (*hum*), which could encompass multiple genders. Within his teachings, women were always signalled as the linguistic exception to the universal masculine norm and were more frequently talked about or used as a foil to "think with" than considered to be a part of the listening audience (de Beauvoir [1949] 1974; Irigaray [1974] 1985; Clark 1998; De Soudy 2014; Ayubi 2019, 61).

social, material, and, importantly, gendered ability. In answer to these implied concerns, al-Darqāwī turned to the example of women's duties and capacities.

He urged his male followers to inform women (*mā dhakartu laka mā dhakartu min amr al-niswa illā li-tukhbirhunna*) that they should not take on more they can bear nor perform tasks in excess of the spiritual duties they already undertake: "If women leave what does not concern them, undertake what God has made obligatory upon them, and only perform the supererogatory things they are deemed able to do, they will be happy—God willing—and not distressed or burdened." Rather, women should prioritise their household work and family duties: "they [women] grind [flour], sieve, plait, knead, season, bandage, untie, sweep, give water, gather firewood, spin, milk, go into labour, bear their children, and raise them." This extensive list of women's acts, written in the feminine third-person plural of the present tense, draws attention to the embodied labour women perform daily, which al-Darqāwī called "great deeds" (*a'māl kabīra*) and "celebrated spiritual endeavours" (*mujāhada shahīra*). Here, al-Darqāwī seems to make a connection between women's physical duties and spiritual acts, concluding that because of these occupations, women only need to perform the obligatory duties of the prayer, the fast [Ramaḍān], as well as give *zakāt* (almsgiving) for one who is in need and perform the pilgrimage to Mecca if they are able.

With these brief lines, al-Darqāwī presents a potentially expansive theological understanding of what constitutes a pious act, departing from the juridical Sufi approach characteristic of his Shādhilī lineage. He repeats this assertion more clearly in his instructions for his male followers to inform women:

My brother, in the same way I am only reminding you about what I have mentioned concerning women so that you may inform them. Most of them do not consider the work they do to be a pious act. But, I swear, it is among the greatest of acts. God wipes out evil deeds and elevates degrees through it. So, inform them [women] about it so they can carry it out whole-heartedly and so they will not resent it. It is very great from the perspective of God [Q 24:15].

AL-DARQĀWĪ 1999, 280–1

In emphasising that women should attend to the immediate matters that concern them, namely household duties and the work of raising children, al-Darqāwī raises them up to be among the greatest of acts in service to God. Al-Darqāwī's stress on the mundane rather than the miraculous expressions of female piety departs from the ways in which Sufi women are normally

exceptionalised within Sufi discourses and texts (Cornell 2007; El Haitami 2014). Even nuanced portrayals of female Sufi saints, such as those presented in the hagiographic compendium of saints buried in Fez composed by the famous Moroccan scholar and near-contemporary of al-Darqāwī, Muḥammad ibn Jaʿfar al-Kattānī's (d. 1927) *Salwat al-Anfās* ([1898] 2004), women are included only by means of their privileged familial status, excessive devotion, exceptional knowledge, or transcendent practices. In contrast, al-Darqāwī's instructions to women echo his teachings on the high state and virtue of servanthood throughout his *Rasāʾil*, which he spoke about at length in the letter immediately preceding this one (Letter 151): "What is obvious and not hidden to those whose inner vision God has opened and whose innermost beings God has illuminated is that servanthood is an honour to each who realises it, regardless of who he may be" (al-Darqāwī 1999, 279). Here, the laborious and mundane acts within the household seem to be connected with the acts of divestment and abasement that men take, both taming and disciplining the self. Within this discussion of women, al-Darqāwī seems to make an even more explicit connection between the mundane work of servanthood—here a woman's service to her family—and the high esteem it holds with God.

However, while al-Darqāwī's implicit inclusion of women's household work as a form of servanthood, and thus spiritual piety, seems to present a capacious understanding of what constitutes a pious act, he nonetheless also imparts a limited social and gendered capacity upon women. Whereas his discussion of men's servanthood focused on their performance of moderate ascetic practices of divesting from the working world and begging, among other acts, women's acts of servanthood were directly tied to their place in the home and their service to their husbands and families. Al-Darqāwī does not devote any of his letters to discussing the steps women must take to divest nor does he directly urge them to divest, an omission that is quite apparent given his repeated instructions for his male followers to perform *tajrīd* in the majority of his letters.

The paradoxical place of women and women's piety within al-Darqāwī's *Rasāʾil* is further emphasised in an anecdote al-Darqāwī recounts in Letter 187 when he was teaching in the old city in Fez (Fās al-Bālī). Fatigued from the heat of the summer, he suggested to his students that they move to the garden of the *zāwiya* (Sufi lodge) of Sīdī Abū ʿAbdallāh al-Aghṣāwī (d. 1017/1605) nearby. The garden was known for its pleasant breeze and many fountains with flowing water. However, the students responded that a pious woman was there among other women, indicating that it would not be possible for them to go as they could not sit in the garden while the women were also there. Al-Darqāwī

replied, saying: "The people of this neighbourhood will remove them from the *zāwiya*, her and the ones with her." The students again responded to the shaykh: no the women will not leave, and among the women, was a sister of a judge well-known for her piety in Fez. At this comment, al-Darqāwī remarked, "If she [pious woman] does not leave, she will be leaving for the cemetery," motioning toward the cemetery: "That was at sunrise, and it had come to pass that she [pious woman] had passed away at the same time without being ill and was buried" (al-Darqāwī 1999, 319–320).

Al-Darqāwī intimates within this letter that his right, and that of his male students, should supersede the rights of the pious women of Fez to sit in the *zāwiya*. When hearing that the women will not leave, he gestures to the cemetery and seems to either foretell or intimate the death of the pious woman leading the other women. Al-Darqāwī relates similar tales about his interactions with men as well as with children, recounting that he foretold, knew, or may have even caused the death of the individual. Often, as in this case, these deaths occurred after the shaykh was slighted in some small way or was on account of the lower spiritual, and thus, immature status of the other individual. It is not clear if his annoyance resulted from an implicit critique of the women's presence in the *zāwiya* itself, their occupation with additional practices beyond the ones listed in Letter 152, the pious woman, or simply because al-Darqāwī felt inconvenienced. Regardless of these motivations, his easy dismissal and annoyance at the women's presence in the *zāwiya* further highlights how al-Darqāwī situates women as materially and socially limited and lower than men irrespective of their level of spiritual piety.

These two letters illuminate a tension within al-Darqāwī's approach to women's spiritual piety that reflects a broader problematic within his Sufi way and his constitution of prescriptive Sufi masculinity. While his instructions to his Sufi followers seem to critique the social hierarchies of his 18th-century Moroccan world through his focus on *tajrīd*, intention, knowledge of God (*ma'rifa*) and his denigration of the pretensions of the jurists, scholars, and materially rich men, it nonetheless also replicates a hierarchy of Sufi masculinity that denigrates other men as well as restricts the social expression of women's piety. Al-Darqāwī's inscription of this gendered hierarchy within his *ṭarīqa*, which in part seems to derive from Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh's Shādhili lineage (Deighton 2020), circumscribes the possibilities presented by his capacious understanding of pietistic acts, his extension of the litany (*wird*) to women, his implicit class critique and privileging of servanthood, and his celebration of such immanent practices as *samā'*.

6 Conclusion

Al-Darqāwī, writing on the cusp of modernity and caught between the exterior, juridical, and world-renouncing aspects of the Shādhilī and the immanent, interior path of his master, Sīdī ‘Alī al-Jamal, constructed a conception of pious masculinity structured on a series of problematics that illuminates a deeper tension within Sufism itself: Sufism, with its attention to the body and to the spiritual capacity of each individual believer, carries the potential to wash away the material and social limits of gender, yet it is nonetheless mired within entrenched masculine epistemologies, ontologies, cosmologies, and hierarchies (Kugle 2007; Shaikh 2012; Ayubi 2019; Deighton 2020). On the one hand, al-Darqāwī, as a *mujaddid* (renewer of the age) and a *mutajarrid* (man who divests), called for a reform that aimed to dismantle hegemony of the severe and narrow rulings of the juridical and scholarly class over the bodies, hearts, and spirits of the general Moroccan public and critiqued the privileging of material wealth and inherited *sharīfan* status. On the other, he both claimed his own inherited *sharīfan* status as well as interwove central Mālikī juridical aspects in his teachings. Furthermore, he delivered these critiques through gendered denigrations against this elite scholarly and juridical class, mirroring his ideal masculinity with the attack and belittling of their normative masculine behaviours and virtues. He both centred immanent practices and the lowliness of servanthood and inscribed the process and virtue of mastery of the self, body, and others within his Sufi way. He upheld women’s spiritual capacity, appearing to present women’s household duties as technologies of the self that also carried the potential to purify the self, polishing it and letting the luminous light of the spirit shine through. Yet, in part influenced by his juridical foundations, he also could not look behind their ontologically gendered status as “women”: materially tied to the earth and socially limited. Al-Darqāwī, rather than hinging between the immanent and transcendent, joining them within his being and his teachings, seems to be caught within these poles: presenting potentials to reimagine ethical, social, and spiritual relations between men, women, and other genders while constraining their flourishing.

Appendix A

Letter 152

God, the almighty, has removed the obligatory prayer, which is among the obligations upon God’s worshippers, for the menstruating woman and the pregnant woman. Yet, how can it be withdrawn? If women leave what does not concern them, undertake

what God has made obligatory upon them, and only perform the supererogatory things they are deemed able to do, they will be happy—God willing—and not distressed or burdened. For indeed, they [women] grind [flour], sieve, plait, knead, season, bandage, untie, sweep, give water, gather firewood, spin, milk, go into labour, bear their children, and raise them. These are all great deeds (*a'māl kabīra*) and celebrated spiritual endeavours (*mujāhada shahīra*). Because of this, they only need [to perform] the prayer, the fast [Ramaḍān], and do what God has made obligatory like *zakāt* (charity) for the one who is in need or the *ḥajj* [Pilgrimage] for one who is able. Likewise, for men, if they are occupied by what concerns them and what concerns obedience to their Lord, we do not want them to take more than they can bear (*takalluf*). For, the Prophet (peace be upon him) said: “Neither I nor pious ones of my community practice *takalluf*.”¹¹ He said also: “Compassion (*rifq*) does not enter a heart except to adorn it.” Compassion persists for the one who has it, as you know.

Know that a human being [*al-insān*] only benefits with the work which he does by knowledge. As for the work which he does without knowledge, it does not benefit him. The master of our master, Sīdī al-ʿArabī ibn ʿAbdallāh, said to our master [Sīdī ʿAlī al-Jamal], may God be pleased with both of them: “This state of yours—and it was the state of divestment (*tajrīd*)—joins the manifest and the hidden for you. I only mention this to you so that you might benefit from it.” My brother, in the same way I am only reminding you about what I have mentioned concerning women so that you may inform them. Most of them do not consider the work they do [listed above] to be a pious act. But, I swear, it is among the greatest of acts. God wipes out evil deeds and elevates degrees through it. So, inform them [women] about it so they can carry it out whole-heartedly and so they will not resent it. It is very great from the perspective of God [Q 24:15].

As for anyone from your region who desires the litany [*wird*], I had permitted you to give it to them the last time you were here. Perfection belongs to God and upon God we rely.

You may give the unique name which is what most people of the *ṭarīqa* have, provided there is ritual purity of the body (*ṭahārat al-badan*), clothes, place, and the belly is free of forbidden things, and the tongue is free of lies, slander, and calumny. He should also leave forbidden and disliked things, and what does not concern him, whatever it may be (al-Darqāwī 1999, 279).

11 Lit: I and the pious ones of my community are free from *takalluf*. Al-ʿIrāqī (d. 806/1404) mentioned this *ḥadīth* in his *Takhrīj Ihyāʾ ʿUlūm al-Dīn* (“The Verification of the *Ḥadīths* of *Ihyāʾ ʿUlūm al-Dīn*”) or examination of the traditions used by al-Ghazālī in his *Ihyāʾ ʿUlūm al-Dīn* (“The Revival of the Religious Sciences”). He noted that its authenticity was in doubt and its *isnād* was weak (al-ʿIrāqī 1987, no. 2579). However, he also stated that al-Bukhārī (d. 256/870) included a tradition on the authority of Anas (d. 93/712) who took it on the authority of ʿUmar (r. 13–23/634–44) concerning the prohibition of *takalluf*.

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