Crossing the Bosphorus: Connected histories of 'Other' Muslims in the post-imperial borderlands of Southeast Europe

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Abstract

Situated in the borderlands of Southeast Europe, this essay explores how enduring patterns of transregional circulation and cosmopolitan sensibility unfold in the lives of dervish brotherhoods in the post-Cold War present. Following recent debates on connected histories in post-colonial studies and historical anthropology, long-standing mobile and circulating societies, and reinvigorated interest in empire, this essay focuses ethnographically on how members of a dervish brotherhood in Bosnia-Herzegovina cultivate relations with places, collectivities, and practices that exist on different temporal, spatial and geopolitical scales. These connections are centered around three modes of articulation - sonic, graphic, and genealogical - through which the dervish disciples imagine and realize transregional relations. This essay begins and concludes with a meditation on the need for a dialogue between ethnography and transregional history in order to appreciate modes of identification and imagination that go beyond the essentialising forms of collective identity that, in the post-imperial epoch, have been dominated by political and methodological nationalism.

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Acknowledgement

At the end of the nineteenth century, a British diplomat residing in the port city of Salonica, Greece, recounted a long conversation with 'a senior Mevlevi *sheykh*, a man whose "shaggy yellow beard and golden spectacles made him look more like a German professor than a dancing dervish"'. As the conversation unfolded, 'the two men drank raki, discussed photography — local prejudices hindered him using his Kodak, the *sheykh* complained — and talked about the impact a new translation of the central Mevlevi text, the *Mesnevi*, had made in London' (Mazower 2004: 81). So reads Mark Mazower's tour de force treatise *Salonica, City of Ghosts: Christians, Muslims and Jews 1430 - 1950*, which portrays a vivid history of connectivity and interaction between the empires and polities intersecting on the shores of the Aegean. *Salonica* makes for breathtaking reading as it traces the cultural, economic, and political intertwinements of Byzantine, Hapsburg, Venetian, and Ottoman geopolitical realms over a span of five hundred years. The book serves as a useful reminder of how the experience of being on the edges of empire in Southeast Europe has shaped cosmopolitan sensibilities and transregional social identities, and thus a sense of being woven into global history. To what extent do these conditions exist only in the past? Socialist Yugoslavia's non-aligned internationalism, pioneered by Josip Broz Tito during the Cold War, the violent disintegration of Yugoslavia in the 1990s, and the current refugee crisis unfolding on the shores of the Aegean have brought the region into the orbit of international media and diplomatic attention, exposing its hidden histories, economies of mobility, and geopolitical alliances with the wider world. These historical and contemporary examples only accentuate the urgency of the call from Mark Mazower and other authors[1] for a more nuanced understanding of the post-Cold War dynamics unfolding along Europe's eastern frontiers.

I encountered the question or transregional connections in a different, rather unexpected historical moment and context. Over the past decade I have been conducting multi-sited ethnographic research on enduring and resurgent Islamic dervish (or Sufi) brotherhoods of various paths (*tarikat*)

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[1] For example Bayly 2007; Chari and Verdure 2009; Kwon 2010; Li 2015; Westad 2007

of teaching and conduct in Southeast Europe. My research has mainly focused on brotherhoods from the territories of the former socialist Yugoslavia, in particular from Bosnia-Herzegovina. These brotherhoods experienced tight surveillance and official bans during Communist rule because they were considered a threat to the nomenklatura (Bringa 1995: 217ff; Clayer 2012; Duijzings 2000: 106-131; Popović 1985; Trix 1994). Nowadays the dervish orders are thriving across post-communist Southeast Europe (Henig 2014; also Clayer 2003; Kołczyńska 2013). Following these dervishes throughout the region, I became increasingly aware of their burgeoning networks of interaction, mobility, and exchange – networks in which graphic objects, media, and people circulated widely. Moreover, during fieldwork I encountered enduring forms of historical imagination and cosmopolitan sensibilities that span the borders of states, nationalities, and languages. I soon realised that my ethnographic engagement with such historically sustained transregional social forms — recognised by some scholars as 'partial groupings'[2] — did not fit into the dominant modes of scholarship on religious identities in Southeast Europe in the past and present. These modes of scholarship, which have been oriented primarily toward the categories of political and methodological nationalism, are locked in a conventional geographical ordering of the nation-state and its borders. This poses a problem when engaging with mobile social actors and fluid transregional networks. Routes, to follow Keith Brown's argument, have historically mattered in Southeast Europe 'as much as, if not more than, roots' (2010: 819; also Brunnbauer 2011; Fawaz and Bayly 2002).

Moving the analytical focus from 'roots' towards 'routes', in this essay I follow in the footsteps of the dervish brotherhoods and their everyday concerns, practices, and imaginings, a movement epitomised in the phrase *miris Bosfora* (scent of Bosphorus), which is frequently uttered by my interlocutors when they describe the networks in which they dwell. By orienting my analysis in this way, I take the transregional and interconnected as points of departure. To document unfolding transregional dynamics of circulation in the post-Cold War era, I build on research that addresses

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[2] In this growing body of scholarship (e.g. Aslanian 2011; Ho 2006; Marsden 2016), 'partial groupings' refers to groups or networks of individuals who are geographically dispersed, connected across geopolitical divides and long distances yet nevertheless embedded in particular localities and formed in relationship to ongoing circulations and exchanges over time.

comparable historical forms of 'partial groupings' (Ho 2014; Marsden 2015). The methodological approach I follow, as Engseng Ho suggests, will enable us to discover 'veins of data that speak to connections with other regions, data that were not seen or were ignored earlier simply because we did not understand the mobile and circulatory processes that generated them in the first place, historically' (2014: 889). This echoes Sanjay Subrahmanyam's well-cited (1997: 762) invitation to explore 'connected histories', and what other authors have called *histoire croisée* (Werner and Zimmermann 2006). By focusing on the transregional and interconnected, my aim is to situate the contemporary dervish brotherhoods of post-socialist Southeast Europe in frameworks that are thick not only ethnographically but historically and transregionally as well.

In addressing this aim, I will engage with theoretical developments now occuring at the juncture of historical anthropology and global history, and with anthropological debates on local cosmopolitanism and frontiers (Ho 2002, 2006; Hopkins and Marsden 2011), empire (Bayly 2007; Ho 2004; Stoler 2013), global and connected histories (Subrahmanyam 1997; Werner and Zimmermann 2006), circular societies (Aslanian 2011), and the Imperial and Oceanic turns (Barkey 2008; Green 2014; Mikhail and Philliou 2012; Sheriff and Ho 2014). This body of scholarship, which has flourished among historians, pays attention to actors who have the capacity to mediate between multiple geographical, geopolitical, and cultural realms, notably traders and religious personnel (see especially Alavi 2015; Green 2015; Marsden 2015). Yet much anthropological scholarship of Southeast Europe focusing on the contemporary period still fails to recognise enduring transregional flows and the circulation of people, things, and ideas across the region and into the wider world (notable exceptions are Brown 2010; Brunnbauer 2011; Clayer 2011; Green 2013). My focus on transregional dervish networks thus brings empirical attention not only to the religious dynamics of Southeast Europe. It will also contribute to debates on wider post-Cold War transregional dynamics that are now unfolding around the world (cf. Bayly 2007; Chari and Verdery 2009; Kwon 2010; Van Schendel 2002).

Re-connecting histories in the Post-imperial Era

In his account of a global history of Sufism, Nile Green suggested that connectivity is key to understanding how Sufism has become a 'cultural technology of inter-regional connection and exchange' (2012: 12, 44). Indeed, throughout Ottoman history, the peripatetic conduct of dervishes played a significant role in connecting localities across the Empire, as did that of traders, diplomats, and soldiers (Clayer 2011; Euben 2006; Green 2012: 127; Krstić 2011). As messengers and proselytisers of Islam at the time of the Balkan conquest, or as frontier guards in the Janissary troops (as was the case of the Bektashi brotherhood), the dervishes moved with ease along the Empire's frontiers, where they often settled and carried on preaching and teaching, mediating the experience of the larger Ottoman ecumene *locally*.[3]

Peripatetic dervishes of the Ottoman era thus became an analogue of what Engseng Ho (2006) describes as local cosmopolitans in the context of Hadrami merchants, another example of a 'partial grouping' that originated in Yemen and settled along the shores of the Indian Ocean, from Mogadishu to Malaysia. Local cosmopolitans, Engseng Ho suggests, are persons and networks of persons 'who, while embedded in local relations, also maintain connections with distant places (...) [and] thus articulate a relation between geographical scales' (Ho 2006: 31). Although in subsequent centuries many sheikhs operating across the Balkans were recruited locally, their training and journeys continued in dervish lodges in other parts of the empire.[4] The sheikhs also maintained spiritual genealogical connections (*silsila*), which they traced back to the founders of the major Dervish/Sufi orders, thus ensuring the durability of genealogical links across geographical and temporal distances.

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[3] One of countless examples is the legendary 13th century dervish sheikh Sari Saltuk, who appeared in the Balkans even before the Ottoman conquest and who is believed to be buried in seven tombs across the Balkans, Black Sea coast, and Anatolia (Karamustafa 2009; Krstić 2011; Mičijević 2014; Norris 2006: 54-66). Another is Mollâ Abdullâh Ĭlâhî (+ 1490/91,) who brought the Naqshibandi tariqa to the Balkans. Born near Kütahya in Anatolia, he moved to the Zeyrek madrasa in Istanbul, then moved eastward to Korasan and Transoxania and to Bukhara and Samarqand, eventually settling in the town of Varda Yenicesi (Giannitsa) in northern Greece (Algar 1971: 169-170).

[4] This was the case for Sheikh Musa Muslihuddin (*1855 - +1917). As Mičijević (2009) documents, he was born in a village near Prizren in Kosovo, and soon after he left for to study in Istanbul where he became a Rifa'i dervish disciple and a sheikh under the tutelage of Sheikh Muhammad Dzemaluddin. Upon completing his training he was ordered to return to Đakovica in Kosovo. There he founded in the late 19th century a Rifa'i lodge that played a significant role in spreading and maintaining Rifa'i conduct and teaching across the Balkan region. The great majority of Rifa'i lodges in the Balkans today trace their chain of succession (*silsila*) to Sheikh Musa and the lodge in Đakovica.

It can therefore be argued that the empire, with its dense networks of interconnected dervish lodges across a vast Ottoman space, was to the peripatetic dervishes as the ocean was to the mobile Hadramis.[5]

The late phase of the Ottoman Empire brought about a number of bans and restrictions imposed on dervish brotherhoods mainly as a result of the *Tanzimat* reforms (Barnes 1992: 38-46; Clayer 2011; Silverstein 2009). The newly-formed secular Turkish state banned all dervish orders in 1925, and this ban officially continues up to the present day. Nonetheless, this does not mean that the dervish brotherhoods could not sustain their existence in urban (Raudvere 2002; Silverstein 2011) as well as rural Turkey (e.g. Hart 2013). A similar fate befell dervish brotherhoods across the Balkan peninsula after WWII, when the region came under the Soviet sphere of influence. Since 1945 the newly formed state-socialist governments, with their communist anti-religious ideologies, took various measures against religious life (cf. Hann 2006; Perica 2002). Positions taken against the dervish orders ranged from total atheism and thus systematic diminishing of the brotherhoods (Albania, Bulgaria) to various degrees of ban (Bosnia-Herzegovina) or surveillance (Kosovo, Macedonia). As a result, the historically-formed transregional dervish networks connecting the Balkans with Anatolia, the Middle East, and Central Asia were radically transformed not only after the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire, but even more so during the decades of the Cold War. They became semi-clandestine networks, or completely vanished in numerous cases, only to be revitalized at the end of the Cold War era (e.g. Clayer 2003, 2012; Henig 2014).

During my fieldwork, while documenting the life-histories of sheikhs whose careers spanned the Cold War and post-Cold War periods, I soon learned that connections across and beyond the territories of the former Yugoslavia had never fully dissolved among the dervish brotherhoods.[6] In

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[5] This line of argument is exemplified in Lâle Can's fascinating work (2012) in which she describes Central Asian Naqshbandi Sufis in *fin de siècle* Istanbul and their role in forging trans-imperial networks between the Ottoman Empire and Central Asian polities of the Russian Empire. Can shows how dervish lodges were important for Silk Road trading routes and for pilgrims to Mecca, and how this importance endured the changes in transportation technologies that came with expanding railways and the accessibility of steamships, not only for mobile subjects coming from Central Asia but also from the Balkans (cf. Fawaz and Bayly 2002; Gelvin and Green 2013).

[6] The Yugoslav communist leader Josip Broz Tito pursued from the 1950s onwards the diplomacy of a non-aligned state, which defined a specific position in international affairs during the Cold War (cf. Rubinstein 1970). Yugoslav citizens

their narratives, the sheikhs recounted their journeys (*zijaret*) to various parts of Yugoslavia, Turkey, Syria, and Egypt (see Figure 1).[7] In the late 1980s, with the weakening of oppressive anti-religious policies, the degree of transregional mobility within the dervish networks intensified considerably, and it fully reemerged across the entire region of the East Mediterranean in the post Cold-War era, when the bans were officially lifted. The brotherhoods have experienced a renaissance ever since. How do dervish sheikhs and their disciples make sense of these transregional connections and what identities do they cultivate within such networks?

<<insert Figure 1 – The well-known Qadiri sheikh Zakir from Bosnia-Herzegovina (on the left) receiving his *idžazet* (decree of sheikhood) from the Syrian sheikh Omer in Aleppo in 1986.

Author's archive>>

Enduring ecumene

The durability of imperial formations and their debris is increasingly recognized by historians as a complex arena of interaction, circulation, and exchange (Stoler 2013; also Green 2015). The long-standing infrastructures of transregional mobility and circulation among the dervish brotherhoods of the ex-Yugoslav territories extend far beyond the Balkan peninsula, a fact that attests to these arguments. Susan Bayly (2007) explored enduring fragments of interconnection in her work on a socialist transregional ecumene in Southeast Asia and its relation to (post)colonial and Cold War histories. Following Bayly, I suggest we understand the networks of dervish disciples and brotherhoods as a complex, long-lasting transregional ecumene of personal interactions, movement,

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had relative freedom to travel abroad (cf. Jansen 2009), compared with other socialist states, including other non-aligned states in the Middle East and Asia.

[7] These biographies of movement across the Cold War frontiers echo the recent work of historical anthropologists on the legacies and continuities of the Cold War (Bayly 2007, Marsden 2015; Kwon 2010: 31). They have not received much attention in post-Cold War Southeast European scholarship. Nevertheless, the most active dervish of socialist Yugoslavia was the Rifa'i sheikh, Džemal Šehu (Xhemali Shehu), who proliferated his *silsila* (chain of succession) as far as Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Canada, Croatia, Egypt, Greece, Kosovo, Macedonia, Turkey, and the U.S. (cf. Mičijević 2009; Perica 2002: 80).

and imaginings. Framed within a distinct body of 'shared, supralocal reference points and distinctive claims about the world', these historically-shaped imaginings constitute a set of 'broadly inclusive moral, emotional and even aesthetic dispositions' (Bayly 2007: 6, 9). The latter correspond, in the lifeworlds of dervish disciples, to affective, sonic, textual, and visual sensibilities.[8]

Focusing on the dervish brotherhoods' sustained forms of transregionalism enables us to critically rethink and reimagine Muslim lives, past and present, in Southeast Europe. Specifically, the dervish transregional ecumene unfolds in the life-histories of disciples and sheikhs, which are themselves built on material infrastructures and modes of interaction. The latter include lodges (*tekija* in Bosnian), shrines and mausoleums (*turbe*), dispositions of shared aesthetic practices and modes of conduct (*adab*), and the mediated circulation of spiritual genealogies (*silsila*), graphic objects (calligraphy, texts, documents, certificates), and sonic forms (songs and musical instruments).

As I have argued elsewhere (Henig 2014), today there are numerous lodges that originated in Ottoman times and have maintained continuity throughout the turbulent 20th century. Located mainly in Kosovo and Macedonia, they are frequently visited by dervishes from other parts of the Balkans as well as Turkey.[9] These lodges are considered central ones (*asitane*); they give off the aura of largely undisrupted continuity of the sheikh's spiritual genealogy (*silsila*) and his practico-moral conduct (*adab*), both of which can be traced back to the Ottoman era. The links between these central lodges and numerous nodes (*zavija*) are forged and maintained through individual and collective veneration (*zijaret*) of the lodges and multiple sanctuaries (*turbe*) built in their vicinity and associated with their founders and successors. Aside from the traffic of people and written and printed genealogies, there is a constant movement of cars travelling along the roads from one lodge to another between Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, Sandžak in

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[8] Although Bayly is careful to draw direct parallels between the socialist ecumene and imperial formations and their intertwinements with their (former) colonies, the juxtaposition of her argument with the legacies of the Ottoman empire in the lifeworlds of dervish disciples is a useful way to engage with diverse supralocal zones of interaction and imagination. It enables us to focus attention on the circulation and sharing of religious and political ideas, and on symbolic points of reference across large territorial and temporal scales (Bayly 2007: 46).

[9] The transregional networks of lodges I refer to here are organised non-nationally on the principles of specific paths of teaching and practice (in particular Halveti, Rifa'i, Qadiri). They differ from networks organised chiefly on a national or pan-national principle, such as the Albanian Bektashi case studied by Nathalie Clayer (2012: 195-199) or the Naqshibendi diasporic networks of Bosniaks studied by Catharina Raudvere and Aš Gaši (2009; also Raudvere 2009).

Serbia, Slovenia, and increasingly to the diaspora in Austria and Germany, their trunks filled with printed prayer manuals, devotional lyrics, other books in Albanian, Arabic, Bosnian, Persian, Turkish, but also German and English, along with amateur or semi-professional DVDs of ecstatic collective ritual prayers (*zikr*) recorded during important feasts and gatherings, MP3 recordings of songs of reverence (*ilahija*), calligraphic paintings or decorated cloths, large boxes of loose black Turkish tea, and dervish felt hats (*ćulah*) that are in high demand across the region (see Figure 2). These objects circulate between the lodges as gifts, knowledge manuals, and as items of daily use in the lodges. These material flows are not unidirectional, moving from central lodges to peripheral ones, but rather circulate in crisscross directions, responding to specific moments in the life course of the lodges, and to specific political and geopolitical circumstances (Henig 2014: 101; also Clayer 2011).

<<insert Figure 2 - Rifa'i dervishes watching a DVD of a collective *zikr* gathering from Kosovo. Author's photo>>

This unfolding dynamic brings me back to the question of how the connected histories of the dervish brotherhoods of post-socialist Southeast Europe can be ethnographically traced. To address this question, I will bring historically-traced modes of transregional connectivity into dialogue with a more grassroots ethnography of the post-Cold War present. In what follows, I explore how the enduring histories of movement and circulation are experienced among the Rifa'i dervishes of a central Bosnian provincial town. The dervish disciples I have lived with could hardly be characterised as highly mobile, deterritorialised, cosmopolitan subjects embedded in global transnational networks, a worldly spiritual profile that has been carefully explored in recent scholarship on Sufism (e.g. Bubandt 2009; Van Bruinessen and Day Howell 2007; Werbner 2003). Rather, the dervish networks discussed here are composed of local cosmopolitans who are aware of and maintain historical connections across large geographical and temporal scales, yet who value the local without

necessarily falling into national or pan-national modes of belonging (Ho 2006: 68-69).[10] The dervishes I have worked with partake in what could be described as the hidden and omitted histories of movement and circulation (Gidwani and Sivaramakrisnan 2003) that shape contemporary lifeworlds in the Balkans. Theirs is a local cosmopolitanism that connects and evolves across imperial and post-imperial, socialist and post-socialist, and Cold-War and post-Cold-war periods.

From Philadelphia via Tirana to the Bosnia highlands: The book arrived

This essay began with the story of a British diplomat discussing with a dervish sheikh an English translation of a Mesnevi book that appeared on the shelves of London bookstores at the end of the nineteenth century. The story resonates with the ethnographic material discussed here. In summer 2012 during my fieldwork with the dervish disciples of the Rifa'i path in a provincial town in Central Bosnia, an unexpected parcel arrived at the dervish lodge from the Albanian capital, Tirana. It was an ethnographic biography of the well-known Albanian sheikh of the Bektashi brotherhood, Baba Rexheb, recently written in English and published by an academic press in Philadelphia (Trix 2009).[11] The book was brought to the local Rifa'i sheikh, Azmir, by his friend, the late Senad Mičijević (d. 2013), who was also a sheikh and a historian of Balkan dervishes. At the time, Mičijević was working on his unfinished magnum opus on the Bektashi brotherhoods. The daughter of Sheikh Azmir, translated a number of excerpts from Trix's study into Bosnian, and later she translated the entire book (see Figure 3). Baba Rexheb's ethnographic biography subsequently sparked numerous debates among Rifa'i disciples as they drew analogies between their own experience of suppression

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[10] I do not wish to romanticise the complex entanglement of dervish brotherhoods with various political realms in the Balkans. Dervish brotherhoods have been politically involved in nation-building processes, resistance fights during WW II, and in national politics, in particular the Bektashis in Albania throughout the 20th century (Clayer 2005; Trix 2009).

[11] Baba Rexheb fled from Albania in 1944. He ended up in Detroit, where he built a world-renowned centre of Bektashism. Meanwhile, the Albanian communist regime initially suppressed Islam, and in 1967 its leader, Enver Hoxa, outlawed all religions. Unlike other dervish orders, the history of Bektashism in the Balkans and Anatolia has been well-documented (e.g. Birge 1937; Harmanș ah et al. 2014; Hasluck 1913/1914; Norris 2006; Trimingham 1971; Trix 2009).

and change and that of Rexheb's Albanian Bektashis and other dervish groups on both sides of the Bosphorus, and in the post-Ottoman world more broadly.

<<Insert Figure 3 - The original English version on the left, and its amateur Bosnian translation on the right. Author's photo >>

The historical analogies made by the Rifa'i dervishes relied heavily on several interconnected themes. Prominent among them were the centuries-long political and sectarian cleavages in the history of Islam and their role in marginalizing various paths of Sufism, or dervishood (*dervišluk*). In Southeast Europe, I was often told, this contest over defining and enacting an Islamic discursive tradition has affected Bektashi and Rifa'i teaching and conduct in particular. Both paths have been characterized by the dominant Sunni ulema as departing from 'established modes of piety' (Norris 2006: 61; also Ćehajić 1986). Such deviations as bodily mutilation in the case of Rifa'i ritual prayers, and reverence for the Imam Ali, have been repeatedly labeled as heterodox, un-Islamic, Shia or Ali-oriented, and thus outside the authorised Sunni Islamic tradition of discipline and practice (Clayer 2011).[12] However, as Tijana Krstić (2011) points out in her study of the early modern period, the Imam Ali was a hero for numerous Muslims in the Balkans, and in particular among Bektashi disciples. This long-lasting fascination with Ali, she writes, 'does not necessarily betray any Shi'a political loyalties' but rather suggests a specific Ali-centric interpretative community (2011: 59-60). For Rifa'i disciples, the arrival of Baba Rexheb's biography re-activated these old claims and concerns. It sparked debates about what being on the margins of dominant Islamic discursive traditions has meant in different historical epochs and what lessons can be drawn from this history for practical conduct in the post-communist, post Cold War present.

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[12] This perception originated in the late Ottoman period and subsequently passed into scholarly work largely uncontested (e.g. Hasluck 1929; Norris 2006; Popović 1985). Carl Ernst (2005: 191-192) traces this trend to the nineteenth century, when Orientalist scholars and Islamic reformists alike 'systematically attempted to exclude Sufism from [their] definition of Islam'.

Another interpretive theme provoked by the book was awareness of the centuries-long disruptive political history of the Balkans, and of the contested, ideologically-charged policies that have often led to the suppression of dervish brotherhoods irrespective of their paths of teaching and conduct. These policies marked the late Ottoman Empire, the post-Ottoman secularist era in Turkey, and the years of state socialism that dominated the second half of the twentieth century (Silverstein 2009; Trix 1994). The dervish lodges of the Rifa'i brotherhoods largely vanished from Bosnian territories with the withdrawal of the Ottoman Empire after the 1870s, and Rifa'i teaching and conduct nearly ceased to exist in the early years of suppressive Yugoslav socialism around the 1950s (Muftić 2008: 147-153). The story of Baba Rexheb, a leader who kept Bektashi teaching alive in faraway Michigan despite displacement and exile, thus sounded familiar and very appealing to the Bosnian Sheikh Azmir. He took it as an exemplary account of the hard work (*trud*) involved in forming and maintaining a dervish brotherhood in the hostile climate of Balkan political history, a field of contestation shaped by fascism, communist atheism, resurgent nationalism, and, of late, conservative Sunni models of orthodox belief and practice..

As we discussed these issues, Sheikh Azmir would often shift the topic of conversation to the deeper problem of history-making itself, explaining:

> 'We all need another history of Islam to be written about Alevis, Rifa'i, and
> Bektashi dervishes in Bosnia, the Balkans and Anatolia. However, not as a
> story of the Sunni Islam of the Ottomans. We dervishes have had difficulties
> for centuries with such arrangements and representations. Dervishes have been
> always on the margins'.

For Sheikh Azmir, 'telling another history of dervishes' is both an aspiration and an active pursuit. He has become an amateur historian by systematically collecting accounts of sheikhs who fled from communist Yugoslavia to Turkey, Syria, or Lebanon in the 1950s, several of whom he had met during

his recent visits to dervish lodges across Southeast Europe. Sheikh Azmir and his disciples have also founded a small local heritage trust that documents regional oral history and renovates local, dervish-related sacred sites (cf. Henig 2012). These activities enable the sheikh and his disciples to re-connect with a a transregional dervish ecumene that has been silenced, erased, or omitted from nationalised Islamic historiographies, but is very much a part of dervish historical consciousness. The arrival of Baba Rexheb's biography showed how expansive this ecumene has become, stretching from the Balkans to Detroit, and how rich and contested its historical associations still are. As such, it epitomised the 'routes' the Rifa'i dervishes and other Sufi orders are following in the post-socialist present.

(Re)Turning to the Bosphorus

Let me return to the historical analogies made by Sheikh Azmir, in which he suggests that the emergence of the Rifa'i brotherhood in a provincial central Bosnian town is not an entirely obvious development, even in a local historical context that is obviously Muslim. What he refers to is a narrative of otherness commonly shared by the Rifa'i disciples.[13] I have already noted that both the Bektashi and the Rifa'i brotherhoods were perceived across the region as challenging established modes of Islamic piety. Their unorthodox tendencies have been documented in the literature on dervish brotherhoods in socialist Southeast Europe, as have the rifts between numerous dervish brotherhoods and the Sunni ulema (Clayer 2011; Duijzings 2000: 106-131; Popović 1993; Sorabji 1989). Yet it was not the dominant Sunni Islamic tradition, now increasingly nationalised (cf. Bougarel 2003; Perica 2002), that Sheikh Azmir was referring to in his depiction of the post-socialist religious landscape. Instead, he alludes to differences between Sufi brotherhoods, to variations in what they teach and how they conduct themselves. Put differently, it is the dervish tradition itself that is now being challenged and contested across post-socialist Southeast Europe.

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[13] This stance is also reflected in Norris' claim that 'Bosnia was never a "Rifa'i country" and this brotherhood was very late in its arrival there' (2006: 77).

In the case of Bosnia-Herzegovina, the historically dominant dervish path is the Naqshibendi (Algar 1971; Aščerić-Todd 2015; Bringa 1995; Ćehajić 1986; Weismann 2007). Naqshibendi brotherhoods have the longest uninterrupted genealogical chain of successors (*silsila*) in Bosnia. Their genealogy can be traced back to Husejn Baba Zukić El-Bosnevi, who lived in the late 18th century (Algar op. cit.; Mičijević 2009). The Naqshibendi brotherhoods in the Bosnian territories have thus endured the vicissitudes of the past three centuries, persisting as most other dervish brotherhoods in Bosnia vanished or significantly diminished. The Naqshibendi order endured largely because of its close links to the national Islamic body that solidified during the socialist era and was maintained by its post-Yugoslav Bosnian successor, the Islamic Community of Bosnia-Herzegovina (*Islamska Zajednica Bosne i Hercegovine*) (cf. Bringa 1995: 220ff; Henig 2012: 758). The ban on dervish orders in Bosnia-Herzegovina issued by the Islamic Community in 1952 had severe effects on many brotherhoods, with the exception of the Naqshibendi, whose closeness to the Islamic Community protected them. Furthermore, I am often told that their conformity to Islamic Community standards of doctrine and practice effectively 'ulemised' the order.

The Bosnian ban, however, did not apply to other parts of Yugoslavia, including Kosovo and Macedonia, where 60% of active dervish lodges were located (Perica 2002: 79). Attempts to control the dervish brotherhoods in Kosovo resulted in the foundation of an association of dervish orders (*Zajednica Islamskih Derviških Redova Alijje*, or ZIDRA) led by Džemal Šehu (Xhemali Shehu), a Rifa'i sheikh from Prizern, Kosovo, a development that culminated in a split with the Islamic Community in 1974. Subsequently ZIDRA was recognised by the Yugoslav state's Federal Commission for Relations with Religious Communities as a religious (and multiethnic) minority (Perica 2002: 13-14). The extension of ZIDRA to Bosnia-Herzegovina was at the time rather limited. Nonetheless, in 1977 the Islamic Community officially re-opened some of the Bosnian dervish lodges, mainly the Naqshibendi ones. These were organised under the umbrella organisation *Tarikatski Centar* but were still under the control of the Islamic Community, whose goal was to keep ZIRDA at bay in Bosnia-Herzegovina (see Duijzings op. cit.). At the same time, as Duijzings

chronicles in detail (2000: 118ff), the Islamic Community became vocally critical of the teachings and practices of dervish brotherhoods from Kosovo and Macedonia, mainly the Rifa'i brotherhoods, for their 'blasphemous' and Shi'ite tendencies.[14] As a result, this dynamic positioned the Naqshibendi brotherhoods by and large on the side of the Islamic Community. Since the collapse of socialist Yugoslavia, after which the ban on dervishes was lifted, dervish brotherhoods have thrived. Yet new cleavages and alliances among them have emerged.

In Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Naqshibendi brotherhoods continued to cultivate good relations with official Islamic political bodies, more so than other dervish brotherhoods, and a Naqshibendi sheikh is now head of the renewed Tarikatski Centar. Furthermore, it is increasingly common to hear debates among dervish disciples, as well as public disputes, over the Naqshibendi *silsila* (chain of succession) and whether it is the only chain with uninterrupted continuity (Mičijević 1999). These debates have led to attempts to hegemonise the dervish tradition in Bosnia along Naqshibendi lines. Thus Sheikh Azmir's concerns about 'telling another history of dervishes' that would recognise alternative paths of teaching and practice, that would be more transregional and less parochial, should be understood in this unfolding dynamic. In short, Sheikh Azmir has become more interested, unlike his Naqshibendi counterparts, in exploring the 'routes' rather than cementing the 'roots' of the Rifa'i path of conduct.

The Rifa'i brotherhood led by Sheikh Azmir, as it exists today, is made up of the sheikh, about three dozen disciples, and another dozen sympathisers. Despite various attempts to form a clandestine Rifa'i circle of teaching and prayer (a *halka*) during the oppressive period of Yugoslav state socialism in Bosnia-Herzegovina, all organizational activities were doomed to fail. Any disciple inclined towards Rifa'i teaching had to search for it in Kosovo, Macedonia, or further afield, mainly in Egypt, Syria, Turkey, or Lebanon. The Rifa'i brotherhood could not rely on any of the local networks and infrastructure controlled by Naqshibendis. In 2009, Sheik Azmir's group aligned with a Rifa'i

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[14] These accusations were not unlike those discussed in Tijana Krstić's (2011) detailed depiction of Muslim lives in the early modern period (see previous section).

network headquartered in Southern Kosovo, with lodges scattered across Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, Northern Greece, and Turkey.

Although the story of the Bosnian Rifa'i brotherhood is not unique in the history of Sufism, little attention has been paid to the media that allow dervishes greater mobility in Southeast Europe today. In recent years, three modes of connection have become crucial: the sonic, graphic, and genealogical. Each corresponds to 'moral, emotional and even aesthetic dispositions' (Bayly 2007), and each allows Rifa'i disciples to enter and participate in transregional zones of interaction.

Sonic connectivity

There is a growing initiative among historians and anthropologists to engage with sound as a novel way of bringing sensorial, material, and aesthetic forms together in the social analysis of politics and religion (Erlmann 2004). Sound brings places, and places bring sound, into the dynamic process of identity construction, memory work, and the making of historical consciousness (Stokes 1997). The importance of music, in particular, has been amply illustrated by Rebecca Bryant (2005) and Martin Stokes (1992) in their studies of Turkish 'traditional folk music' in the era of state nationalism. In his rich ethnography of Muslim lives in Chitral, Northern Pakistan, Magnus Marsden (2007) discussed the significance of popular traditional musical performances (*ištok*) vis-à-vis the pervasive rise of Islamic reformism in Pakistan. Each of these shows that music is 'a way of experiencing history which embraces a number of contradictions but does little to seek to resolve them' (1997: 687). Music does this peculiar work across diverse temporal and geographical scales.

From the very outset of my fieldwork with Rifa'i disciples, I was drawn into debates about dervish conduct (*adab*) (Henig 2014: 103-104), and most of these disputes centered on the practice of music and its in/appropriateness to a pious Muslim life. The Rifa'i dervishes positioned music and musical instruments in relation to conservative Bosnian Islamic political bodies, and against the proselytising Islamic Salafi movements that periodically spread across the region, for whom music is considered un-Islamic. Music is a vital means by whichRifa'i dervishes built connections with their geographically distanced counterparts. They create, share, and exchange diverse sonic media on the

Internet and as portable objects on DVDs, CDs and USBs, all of which circulate among dervish lodges. A shared meal or glass of tea was also an opportunity to watch videos of other Rifa'i groups, mainly from Egypt, Kosovo, Syria and Turkey, or listen to MP3 songs of reverence downloaded or recorded by the disciples themselves on their phones, tablets, or laptops.

Safet, a dervish disciple in his late twenties whom I met in 2009, was a connoisseur of sonic media. Safet had studied at the prestigious Gazi Husrev-beg *medresa* in Sarajevo, and later pursued a university degree in economics, also in Sarajevo. During his medresa studies, he learned Arabic, English and Turkish. He also developed an interest in computers and social media, which led to a job in a mobile phone company. Since completing his medresa studies, Safet has developed a passion for music, and for *ilahije* (religious songs of reverence) in particular. Safet lives in a provincial town about a thirty-minute drive from his lodge and sheikh. He stays physically connected to his sheikh, comes to the lodge regularly for Friday evening *zikr* gatherings, for collective evening meals during the holy month of Ramadan, and whenever the lodge hosts foreign guests. Samet sometimes brings friends from his town to the lodge for festive events. With another disciple from his neighbourhood, Safet organises musical gatherings for Muslim friends, male and female alike, who are curious about his frequent journeys to the lodge, or occasional trips to Albania, Kosovo, Macedonia, and Turkey during the year.

Safet started visiting the lodge about six years ago, and I have observed his deep immersion in Sufi teaching, and his self-cultivation under the guidance of the sheikh. Safet has described to me his experiences of being a *murid* (a disciple) as a kind of burning passion, an emotional love that constantly pulses in his heart, that often gives him sleepless nights, or takes him on night journeys full of visions and lively dreams in which he communicates with his sheikh, with famous Sufi saints, and feels that he is in close co-presence with God, surrounded by sweet rhythms of divine music.

Safet feels and expresses the most intense divine moments while playing musical instruments, either during ecstatic collective prayers (*zikr*) or as he plays and sings songs of reverence (*ilahije*). His musical talent, which he believes to be a gift from Allah, has made him an indispensable member

of the orchestra in the lodge. Tirelessly playing musical instruments, a drum (*kudum*) in particular, has become Safet's personal means of cultivating his soul and taming his *nefs* (desires). 'Beating the drum,' Safet often told me, quoting his sheikh, 'is as if you were beating your heart. Sometimes you follow the rhythm, sometimes you don't, and you have to submit yourself regardless, but it's always so intense and you can feel it'.

When I returned to the lodge in 2012 and 2014, I witnessed Safet's remarkable progress, which mirrored several changes in the everyday rhythms of the lodge since its alignment with Kosovo in 2009. As part of his spiritual development guided by the sheikh, Safet has embarked on playing the *ney* (a rim-blown flute), whose sound, he explained to me, resembles 'the sound of the soul'. Playing the *ney* in the lodge's orchestra is for Safet another way to build sonic connections between his and other lodges where the *ney* is an indispensable part of ritual conduct, just as it was for numerous Ottoman dervish orders (see Hammarlund et al. 2005; Senay 2015).

Safet takes great care of his *ney*. He asked his mother to make a special case for it; he cleans it regularly; and he kisses and prays over the flute before and after playing it. He proudly tells the story of the flute: it was purchased in southeastern Turkey by his best friend's father, who made the Hajj pilgrimage by bus from Sarajevo to Mecca. Safet, when recounting the story of his *ney*, often compares this purchase to how similar instruments were obtained and circulated in the past. Moreover, since acquiring the flute, he has visited a number of lodges in Kosovo in order to improve his playing skills. He remembers by heart the names of all the great *ney* players who have played his *ney*, and the sheikhs who have touched the *ney* and given it their blessing (*bereket*). These gestures of care reflect Safet's profound awareness of the instrument's capacity to connect across geographical and temporal distances.

When I asked Safet about how he learned to play the *ney*, and where he got the texts of religious songs, or the sheets of music, Safet explained that most of his repertoire comes from disciples in Kosovo, Macedonia, and Turkey. He also learns new songs and rhythms from CDs and DVDs produced in lodges in Kosovo, Macedonia, Turkey, and Egypt, and which Safet, his sheikh,

and visitors have brought from abroad. The lodge now owns an extensive collection. Another reliable source of music is the Internet. With the sheikh's permission and guidance, Safet improves his skills by following Turkish online *ney* classes now available on Youtube and other websites.

Graphic connectivity

If music lies at the heart of imagining and mediating connections among Rifa'i dervishes across Southeast Europe and beyond, this is no less true for the graphic objects and texts that circulate among dervish lodges. The mass mediation of print culture has had a tremendous impact on political and religious authority across the world of Islam in the modern era. It has shaped national consciousness in particular (Green 2006; Messic 1993; Shryock 1998), and it has even influenced the devotional practices of Sufi disciples (e.g. Spadola 2014). Less attention has been paid, however, to the 'textual transmigrations' that allow mobile and partial communities to reproduce themselves as Muslim (Ho 2006: 117; Thum 2014). Textual transmigration refers here to the transregional circulation of texts, documents, and other graphic objects, and how they mediate relations between Rifa'i lodges across time and space. The interconnectedness of the lodges during the Ottoman era has been described by scholars and in local hagiographies, travelogues, and popular literature (Can 2012; Clayer 2011; Karatas 2014). But textual transmigration continues to unfold in the historical borderlands of the Islamic world today.[15]

The forms of textual transmigration linking the Rifa'i lodge in Central Bosnia to the transregional ecumene of the Rifa'i dervish brotherhood are manifold. Books, hagiographies, religious manuals, calligraphy, and other graphic objects such as *silsila* (genealogical chain of succession), certificates (*idžazet*) of deputyship (*hilafet*) granted by a dervish sheikh and written in Albanian, Arabic, Bosnian, Persian and Turkish (see Figure 4) -- all these graphic objects, displayed

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[15]A similar argument was recently made by Rebecca Gould (2015), who shows how Muslim legal systems found in remote Daghestani mountain villages were shaped by participation in transregional debates originating in Yemen. Individual travels and the circulation and translation of texts enabled these transregional discourses and practices of Islamic jurisprudence to emerge and cohere over centuries.

on the walls or used everyday by disciples, are indexical signs that the disciples belong both here and 'elsewhere', in the wider transregional ecumene of the Rifa'i brotherhood. As Engseng Ho observes, travelling texts are a common feature of mobile social groups (2006: 153). Among Rifa'i disciples, I can better explain textual transmigration by reference to two lives and two texts.

Sead, a disciple in his late thirties, lives in a village about an hour and a half's drive from the lodge. Unlike Safet, Sead received no formal religious training during his childhood in the socialist 1980s. The only Islamic practices he encountered as a child were the Feast of Sacrifice (*kurban bajram*) and Ramadan, both celebrated primarily within the sphere of the household. In the early 1990s, before the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina broke out, Sead attended a few local meetings of young Muslims, where he met a charismatic Rifa'i sheikh from the nearby town. He has followed this sheikh ever since.

Soon after Sead became a Rifa'i disciple, the sheikh discovered Sead's talent for calligraphy and helped him cultivate it. The sheikh gave him old Ottoman calligraphic manuals that he had himself collected and preserved in the lodge. Sead's years as a disciple in the lodge prepared him for university studies at the Islamic faculty in Sarajevo, where he eventually enrolled in the early 2000s. Sead did not finish his degree because he could not stand the fast pace of city life, which gave him constant headaches, and because his heart was burning for Aiša, his wife-to-be who lived in his home village. He decided to abandon his studies. Nonetheless, Sead continued his training in calligraphy. As he explained to me, leaving university gave him freedom and time to experiment with different calligraphic styles, most of which he encountered on the Internet, or as calligraphic objects that passed through the lodge, or during his visits to Kosovo and Macedonia. Whenever any of his dervish friends travels abroad, Sead asks them to bring back calligraphic materials, and he now he holds a great collection of calligraphic pieces from Algeria, Tunis, Egypt, Kosovo, Macedonia, Turkey, Syria, and Iran. His collection, which is displayed in his village house, is known and highly appreciated in neighbouring villages.

Thanks to two decades of artistic experimentation and hard, self-disciplined work, Sead has developed a distinct style that combines local aesthetic sensibilities, materials, and motives with transmigrating sources of inspiration that Sead and his friends have collected abroad, in print, on cloth, and on on DVDsand USB memory sticks. Semin's knowledge Islamic calligraphy, which he considers a practice of self-cultivation and a taming of worldly desire, is admired by villagers and disciples. His carvings, paintings, and small plastic garnishes decorate the walls of the lodge, local mosques, and village houses. The graphic objects Sead collects, creates, and circulates are imbued with the divine blessing (*berečet*) carried by the sacred words from the Qur'an or by texts written by his beloved Sufi pirs. Furthermore, these objects represent aesthetic sensibilities shared across spatial and temporal distances with other Rifa'i lodges, and thus they shape the imaginative horizons of Sead's fellow disciples.

The life story of Sead is closely intertwined with that of his best friend, Nedim, another Rifa'i disciple. Whereas Safet is a talented musician, and Sead is a skilled calligrapher, Nedim plays a vital role in the everyday life of the lodge by translating the various languages encountered there, in particular Bosnian, Arabic, and Persian. Nedim, also in his mid-thirties, was initially trained in Arabic in the lodge by the sheikh himself. He subsequently deepened his language skills while enrolled at the Islamic Faculty in Sarajevo, and while travelling and studying in Algeria, Egypt, Iran, and Turkey over a period of ten years. Time spent in Egypt was formative for Nedim's dervishood, as he visited a number of Rifa'i disciples, sheikhs, and lodges. Discovering the vibrant life of *Rifa'iluk* (Rifa'ihood) in Egypt enabled Nedim not only to build connections among local dervishes but also to gain access to fragments of texts written in Arabic by Ahmed ar-Rifa'i, the founder of the order, that could not be obtained in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Nedim, successful in his endeavours in Egypt, brought copies of several texts back to the Bosnian lodge. With the assistance of the sheikh and other disciples, Nedim translated the texts into Bosnian, and they were eventually printed as books, accompanied by Sead's calligraphy, and used by the sheikh and the disciples in their everyday

conduct. Since 2008, a number of the translated copies have migrated to allied lodges in Bosnia, Kosovo, and Macedonia during the journeys of the sheikh and his dervishes.

<< insert Figure 4 - Travelling genealogies of a Chisti brotherhood arriving from Turkey (the sheikh on the left) to Bosnia-Herzegovina (the sheikh on the right). Author's archive>>

The book translation was among other gifts in the trunk of the car that carried Sheikh Azmir, at the time sheikh-to-be, to the mother lodge in southern Kosovo in 2009 where he assumed the title of Rifa'i sheikh. The gift was well received, and its place in the trunk of the car was taken on the way back by such graphic objects as a printed *silsila* in Arabic and Albanian, accompanied by a printed certificate of sheikhhood (*idžazet*) in Albanian, and a Turkish text important for Rifa'i conduct, and thus identity — *usul* (a written manual of Rifa'i etiquette). The text of *usul* is considered secret, and it passes from the hands of one sheikh to another sheikh only. I have described elsewhere (Henig 2014: 104)[16] the ways in which the manual was translated and embedded in the everyday rhythms of the Bosnian lodge. Subsequently, the sheikh himself created a new document — a four-page brochure-like digest entitled 'Tekija's *Adab*: Elementary Rules of Conduct in the lodge', specifying the manners (*adab*) that any disciple should observe anywhere and at any time. This hybrid text migrated again when the sheikh distributed it to disciples who took it to their homes, thus extending the reach of the Rifa'i ecumene beyond the walls of the lodge and into the domestic spaces of the disciples and their families.

Genealogical connectivity

Engseng Ho (2006: 152ff) has persuasively shown how genealogical writing and thought serve to connect spatially dispersed and historically distant social groups. In the Indian Ocean case, the emergence and circulation of genealogical texts helped Hadrami diaspora communities persist

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[16] For a comparative example of the Bektashi brotherhood in Albania see Clayer 2012: 202-203.

over centuries despite the massive scale of their dispersal. In the case of the Rifa'i brotherhood, genealogical thinking helped the dervishes endure and resurface despite geopolitical turmoil and ideological bans imposed on them during the post-Ottoman era.

Genealogical modes of connectivity are closely intertwined with sonic and graphic modes. In Rifa'i lodges, songs of reverence (*ilahija*) sung by dervish disciples convey stories of links and relations between the prophet, Sufi saints, and local dervish figures who are considered 'friends of God' (*evlija*), such as Hajdar-dedo Karić (Henig 2012: 754-756), Yūnus Emre, Haci Bektas Veli, or Baki Shehu. Furthermore, genealogical chains of succession (*silsila*) are materialised in graphic objects (diplomas, certificates, or *idžazet*) that circulate together with persons across linguistic and nation-state borders, thickening historically-forged transregional connections in the present..

Indeed, the articulatory power of genealogy mattered greatly to Sheikh Azmir and his disciples as they attempted to restore severed chains of succession and continuity among Rifa'i networks in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

During my time in the Rifa'i lodge, I observed the genealogical imagination at work in various forms. On the walls of the lodge hang pictures, most of them painted by the disciple Sead, with motifs associated with the founder of the Rifa'i path (*tarikat*), Ahmed ar-Rifa'i. Sead painted a large picture of Ahmed ar-Rifa'i's tomb, which is now displayed prominently on the wall of *semahana* (the space where collective ritual *zikr* prayers take place). In the secluded spaces of the lodge there also appear pictures of Imam Ali, and of deceased Rifa'i sheikhs from Kosovo who belong to the same *silsila* as the Bosnian brotherhood, all brought by Sheikh Azmir from his trips. Several copies of *idžazet* (certificates of sheikhood) with the stamp and signature of the chief-sheikh from Kosovo have been framed and put on the walls of all rooms in which the sheikh receives guests. New *ilahija* songs of reverence, sung in Albanian, Bosnian, or Turkish, whose lyrics celebrate newly-forged linkages between the brotherhood, its mother lodge, and its sheikhs, are embedded in the ritual repertoire, after arriving as printed hymnbooks or digital media. Finally, during collective prayers the entire *silsila*

traced through the Kosovo sheikhs to the founder of the Rifa'i brotherhood and ultimately back to the family of the Prophet Muhammad (*Ehli bejt*), is now regularly chanted by the sheikh and the disciples as part of their devotional gatherings.

In order to understand how a discourse of *silsila* enabled the Rifa'i brotherhood to restore linkages of the Rifa'i path of teaching and conduct in Bosnia, we need go back in time again. As I have already argued, data on the history of the Rifa'i order in the Bosnian territories are extremely limited (see Ćehajić 1986; Muftić 2008; Strik 1988/89). The last recorded Rifa'i lodge was situated in Sarajevo, and it ceased to exist in 1902 when Sheikh Ibrahim ef. Kerić left for Istanbul. However, the performance of Rifa'i zikr prayers continued for another five decades in the old Mevlevi lodge at Bentbaša, Sarajevo. This was so because Sheikh Ruhija (d. 1925) of the Mevlevi lodge, and then his son, Fikrija Šehović, had a decree for conducting the Rifa'i zikr prayer once a year. Following the official ban on dervish brotherhoods in Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1952, and the demolition of the old Mevlevi lodge in 1957/58, the long-standing chain of Rifa'i teaching and conduct in Bosnia-Herzegovina was broken.

Another link that is important for understanding the genealogical imagination of Sheikh Azmir (see Figure 5) can be traced again to 1902, when Sheikh Musa Muslihuddin (d. 1917) from Đakovica, Kosovo, arrived in Sarajevo and formed a group (*zavija*) of disciples, which was led by a well-known local sheikh, Rizi-baba. However, the activity did not lead to the founding of an official lodge. After the legal ban in 1952, a few individuals continued to practice clandestinely, as some of the elder sheikhs and disciples suggested to me during interviews. This gap lasted until 1972, when Sheikh Džemal Šehu, based in Prizren, Kosovo, formed a group of disciples (*zavija*) in Sarajevo, led by the local sheikh, Mustafa Karkin, who was himself a nephew of Sheikh Rizi-baba. Since then, there have been several attempts by Kosovo Rifa'i sheikhs to proselytise in Bosnia-Herzegovina, but without any wider response.[17] Conversely, there have been several attempts by Bosnian dervishes to

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[17]This was partly due to the historically marginal status of Rifa'i teaching and conduct in Bosnian Islam. Ćehajić characterizes the Rifa'is as 'a heterodox order that had no chance of succeeding in Bosnia, where since Fatih [Sultan Mehmet II.] (1463) conservative ulema dominated together with the allied orders of Bayrami, Halveti, Mevlevi and Naqshibendi' (1986: 156; my translation).

connect with one of the older Rifa'i nodes in Kosovo, but they did not succeed in forming a functional brotherhood again, until Sheikh Azmir emerged (see Henig 2014).

<<insert Figure 5 - Rifa'i silsila connecting Bosnian and Kosovo lodges over the past hundred years. The round squares index Bosnian sheikhs and deputies. >>

What is important about this second link between the Rifa'i brotherhoods in Bosnia and Kosovo is the *silsila* itself (see Figure 5). By joining the chain of succession traced through the mother lodge in Orahovac, Kosovo, Sheikh Azmir and his disciples became connected to a significant, long-lasting Rifa'i branch headquartered in Đakovica, Kosovo, with additional links crossing the Bosphorus to other East Mediterranean nodes. Founded by Sheikh Musa Muslihuddin, who himself received training on the other side of the Bosphorus, in Istanbul, this branch has played a crucial role in spreading and maintaining Rifa'i conduct and teaching across the Balkan peninsula over the past hundred years. Moreover, this *silsila* has enabled Sheikh Azmir and his disciples to connect in multiple ways (see the Figure 5), to historically distant but known Rifa'i dervishes of the Bosnian node, including Rizi-baba, Mustafa Karkin and Osman Uškin, thus restoring a distinctive Rifa'i dervish tradition. This creative historical gesture, captured in Sheikh Azmir's often-pronounced words, 'I'm the vicegerent of the Orahovac lodge', brings me back to the sheikh's initial invitation to 'tell another history of dervishes' that would reflect their unique position within a transregional dervish ecumene.

Conclusion

The dynamics of religious identity in post-socialist Europe have been studied primarily in relation to the nation state (e.g. Elbasani and Roy 2015; Hann 2006). A shift in focus to the morphology and continuities of transregional social formations enables us, I suggest, to reconsider

the grassroots experience of remaking lives and livelihoods in the post-Cold War era. Rifa'i dervish disciples are a useful empirical reminder that Southeast Europe is now, and has long been,a crossroads.. The routes that intersect there bring together English diplomats and Dervish sheikhs, Kodak cameras and Arabic calligraphy; they carry translated Sufi texts from London bookstore to cosmopolitan Salonica and an English-language ethnography to a dervish lodge in a provincial town in the central Bosnian highlands.

Numerous anthropological studies have shown 'the constitutive role of national state borders in reorganising, shifting, intensifying, and creating identities' in Southeast Europe (Cowan 2008: 349; cf. Ballinger 2003; Green 2005; Jansen 2013). However, only a few, as Jane Cowan (ibid.) observes, have analysed 'the ways that the existing ethnographic corpus can be illuminated through analysing historical materials', such as 'a combination of written records of state agencies, civil-society organisations, and the press, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, various kinds of oral accounts, orally transmitted memories, family records, and nonliterary, material forms of evidence' (see also Bryant 2014). In this essay, I suggested that we go even a step further, tracing infrastructures of transregional circulation that connect Sufi lodges, venerated graves, and an ongoing flow of books, genealogies, graphic and sonic objects, and people. These structures are what Subrahmayan (1997) calls the 'fragile threads' that hold together geographically and temporarily dispersed 'partial communities' (Ho 2006, 2014).

Following this line of scholarship, I have explored the imaginative, moral, emotional and aesthetic dispositions that situate Rifa'i dervish disciples within a shared, supralocal ecology of relations, a sustained transregional dervish ecumene. Being attentive to such sensibilities and modes of imagination will help us appreciate the importance of dialogue between ethnography and transregional history, an intellectual exchange that can, in turn, energise our own analytical imagination and practice, whether it is focused on the post-Cold War borderlands of Southeast Europe, or elsewhere.

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