

The Shaping Shaikh An Ethnographic Inquiry into the Role of the Shaikh in the Adaptation of
Naqshbandi Sufism in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Azdajic, Dejan

2018 Middlesex University PhD

ABSTRACT

This thesis is an ethnographic investigation of living Naqshbandi Sufi practitioners in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina. Its epistemology presumes that a nuanced understanding of Islam that recognises complex realities and contradictory perspectives requires an examination of its embodied form. As a result, this research project engaged in a localised analysis of Sufi Muslims by evaluating experiences and practices from their point of view. Following this strategy, two specific communities led by different Shaikhs were identified. Although each Shaikh claimed a shared Naqshbandi origin and was located in a similar traditional, cultural, linguistic and historic milieu, there were considerable manifest dissimilarities ranging from theology, ritual practices and levels of social involvement. In light of the historic evolution of the Shaikh's institutionally established authority in Sufism, this empirical contrast suggested that universal norms, theoretical constructs and traditional principles within a common Bosnian Naqshbandi framework were ultimately subservient to the Shaikh. This thesis argues that while operating within doctrinal continuity and a broadly defined, normative framework, each Shaikh remained free to engender legitimate adaptations that shaped the contours of religious belief and contextualised its application within a contemporary setting. Ultimately, his agency accounted for the notable diversity encountered in the field. The present study thereby underlines the inherent malleability of Sufism and advances the recognition of the Shaikh's cardinal importance. Primarily it adds to empirical studies of Islam through an ethnographic approach that focuses on the role of the Shaikh in Sufism in general and the Naqshbandi in particular.