Religion and the politics of identity in Kosovo
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CHAPTER 4
Albanian Dervishes versus Bosnian Ulema
The Revival of Popular Sufism in Kosovo

In the West many people tend to regard the Muslim world as an undiversified and monolithic entity, an image that has been replicated for Islam in the Balkans as well. Although there is a vague notion of Bosnian Muslims being more ‘European’ than those in Turkey and the Middle East, the western view is still dominated by a general fear of Islam as a religion which threatens European and Christian civilisation. This fear is not exclusive to Western Europe: it has been strong in the Balkans as well, particularly in Serbia but also (to a lesser extent) in Croatia, where the image of the oriental ‘other’ has also been projected onto the ‘Byzantine’ Serbs (Bakić-Hayden & Hayden 1992). In this system of ‘nesting orientalisms’ the Serbian version has been most outspokenly Islamophobic and primarily directed against immediate neighbours: the Albanians in Kosovo and Muslims in Bosnia. In Serbia, open animosity towards these Muslims surfaced several years before the outbreak of the war, particularly after Milošević’s rise to power (1987). At that time the Serbian nationalist mass media started to depict them as fundamentalists who were embarking upon a Jihad against the Orthodox Serbs.

What I want to show in this chapter is that Balkan Islam is not a monolith, and that it encompasses, as in most other parts of the Muslim world, a broad variety of forms and expressions, which have given rise to internal conflicts and divisions (Poulton & Taji-Farouki 1997:2). In this chapter the focus will be on the division between dominant and orthodox (Sunni) Islam and popular Sufism in Yugoslavia during the 1970s and 1980s, which to some extent coincides with the ethnic and geographic divide between Albanians in Kosovo and Slav Muslims in Bosnia. In the middle of the 1980s my curiosity was raised by a text of Alexandre Popovic (1985), who wrote a short introduction on dervish orders in Yugoslavia. There he notes that although they have almost completely disappeared in the rest of South-eastern Europe, Yugoslavia forms a marked exception. Popovic: “…the Muslim mystic orders of this country have not only continued to exist, but
moreover seem to be characterised by a renewal that is very curious and at the very least unexpected. This is all the more so as these orders, after a difficult survival at the end of the nineteenth and the first half of the present century, tend to disappear from 1945 onwards” (1985:240).

Popovic observes the revival of popular Sufism in Kosovo, but does not provide an explanation, which I will try to do in this chapter. I will show that the phenomenon is not particularly linked to the rise of tension between Serbs and Albanians, a view which has been echoed in the Serbian nationalist press, but that another divide proves to be much more salient: that between the dervish orders in Kosovo, which recruit their membership primarily from the Albanian rural masses, and the Bosnian dominated official Islamic Community (based in Sarajevo). In the first place, the conflict between dervish leaders and the Islamic Community, as it became manifest in Yugoslavia in the 1970s and 1980s, is an example of the classic antagonism that exists between orthodox Islam and heterodox Sufi orders. This is all the more obvious since the conflict has been couched mainly in religious terms. Nevertheless, I believe that the antagonism has had an ethnic dimension as well: the revival of popular Sufism was largely confined to the Albanian inhabited areas of Yugoslavia (particularly Kosovo), and although at the beginning a small number of Bosnian sheikhs joined the Albanian sheikhs in their opposition to the Bosnian Muslim establishment, they soon pulled out, returning to the ranks of the Islamic Community. In my view, the vigorous polemics that developed between Albanian sheikhs and the representatives of the Muslim establishment can be seen in the light of the asymmetric relations which existed between Albanians and Bosnian Muslims, within the Islamic Community and society as a whole. It were those segments of the rural Albanian population that are socially and politically most deprived, in those areas of Kosovo that are most underdeveloped and peripheral, which have comprised the backbone of the dervish movement.

Although I will describe in some detail the way Serbian nationalist journalists and scientists have dealt with this subject, presenting dervish orders as the vanguard of Islamic fundamentalism and Albanian nationalism, I will concentrate on how I came to view it in the course of my fieldwork: not so much as an expression of ‘Albanian’ fundamentalism and anti-Serbanness, but rather as an example of a religious protest movement carried almost exclusively by Albanian Muslims, rebelling against the Islamic establishment. By using religious ecstasy, one of the most
powerful 'weapons of the weak' (Scott 1990:140-142), Albanian sheikhs and dervishes have tried to overcome their position as second-rank believers within the Islamic Community. Although the renewal of dervish orders in Kosovo has other causes as well (as I will show later), the growing ethnic division within the Islamic Community in Yugoslavia, between Bosnian Muslims and Muslim Albanians, seems to be one of its major components.

Albanian dervishes under attack by Serbian nationalism

Let me start my account with a description of the Sultani-Nevrus\(^1\) ritual of the Rufai dervishes in Prizren (based on my visit on 22 March 1989). The Sultani-Nevrus ritual, the trademark of the Rufia dervishes in Prizren, is a relatively violent ritual in which dervishes, in a state of trance, pierce their cheeks and throats with needles and swords. It is a highly theatrical performance, a demonstration of the 'true' faith, which takes place in the presence of a huge and excited audience. As an old dervish told me: “Through this ritual we show that our faith is strong and authentic. By piercing ourselves we repeat the miracles (keramet) that Hazreti Ali [Mohammed’s cousin and son-in-law, GD] once performed, proving that God is on our side. While we pierce, we do not bleed and we feel no pain because He is protecting us.”

The impact of this performance, in which about eighty dervishes participate, is indeed overwhelming. The monotonous sound and entrancing rhythm of the songs, which last for several hours, is also very much a physical experience for the audience. The dervishes, by moving their bodies to and fro on the accelerating pulse of the music, by singing and shouting loudly and breathing deeply to the rhythm of the music, slowly fall into a deep trance. After the sheikh perforates the cheeks of young and inexperienced dervishes, the climax of the ritual draws near when the sheikh and some older dervishes start to produce a deafening noise with cymbals and drums. Now it is the turn of a small number of religious virtuosos, four aged dervishes who ‘dance’ with long needles, throw their bodies onto the sharp ends, and finally pierce their throats and cheeks. They are surrounded by the other dervishes who watch this scene, moving their bodies and

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\(^{1}\) The term Sultani-Nevruz or Nevruz-Sultan is of Persian origin. It means 'New Day', i.e. the first day of spring (21 March) (Škaljić 1985:491).
holding needles—pierced through their cheeks—between their teeth. Finally, the sheikh takes a sword, passes it slowly between his lips and puts it with its edge on the bare stomach of an older dervish who is lying on the floor. After the sheikh mounts the sword, he repeats the same procedure with another dervish, but now the sword is placed on the dervish’s throat. A small child is put on top of it, with its feet on the edge of the sword, and is paraded around. Finally, the sheikh stabs his own cheek with a long sword.

In the second half of the 1980s, the seeming irrationality and violence of this ritual (which has always attracted attention in the media) reinforced the stereotypical image of Islam, and helped feed growing anti-Muslim sentiment in Serbia. Occasionally, these sentiments were directly targeted at dervishes, especially in the Serbian nationalist press where they were portrayed as Muslim fanatics, as fundamentalists, and as Albanian nationalist extremists at the same time. The best example is the writing of the political scientist Miroljub Jevtić, the most outspoken recent protagonist of Serbian Islamophobia. From the late 1980s he has popularised his ideas about Islam—in particular about the Muslim Albanians in Kosovo and the Slavic Muslims in Bosnia—through numerous articles and interviews in newspapers like Politika, Intervju, Svet etc. In his first book Savremeni džihad kao rat (Contemporary Jihad as War), published in 1989, he accused sheikhs and dervishes of condoning the continuous emigration of Serbs from Kosovo.

“(I)t is logical that many excesses and attacks on the Slavs would not have taken place if sheikhs and Muslim priests had protested against them. (...) In this sense, one can ask what sheikhs have done to stop the sale of Serbian property, in Đakovica where they are very strong and also elsewhere. All this becomes clearer when one knows that during the war [World War Two, GD] almost all the members of Muslim dervish brotherhoods in Yugoslavia collaborated with the Albanian separatist movement (Jevtić 1989:314).”

Similar points of view were given in a book called Tajne albanske mafije (Secrets of the Albanian Mafia), which can best be characterised as nationalist pulp, written by the journalist Dejan Lučić (1988). In one of the chapters, the author provides a short anthology of quotes about dervishes in Kosovo which according to the author reveal their political role. He claims that they are the main
storm troops of Muslim fundamentalism in Yugoslavia, and that they act with the tacit support of
the officials of the Islamic Community in Sarajevo. Jevtić, who is presented as a specialist on the
subject, is quoted extensively: among other things he claims that dervishes not only want a Great
Albania, but that they want to create a Balkan *Islamistan* uniting Albania and Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Apart from these two publications, the Serbian press produced an image of dervishes as
bloodthirsty fanatics, who kill in a fit of insanity, and follow the orders of their sheikhs blindly. In
one article a monk described a gruesome spectacle in the yard of the Ostrog monastery in which
dervishes killed a big ram, tied up to a big tree by its legs and hanging head down.

"The unlucky animal bleated helplessly. As if they were getting drunk on rancour, they started a
crazy ‘game’ with the knives which were glimmering in their hands. They moved away from the
suffering animal and started to aim at it from a distance. The blades went bluntly into the warm
body which curled up and trembled from pain. The blood was running down the womb and the
head of the increasingly exhausted animal. The bleating became less and less powerful, until it
faded away above a big puddle of blood" (Lučić 1988:94).³

Leading sheikhs from Kosovo denied any involvement in the events in Ostrog, and sent official
complaints to the newspaper and the authorities for religious affairs in Serbia, Montenegro and
Kosovo, but nothing was done.⁴ Apart from the Ostrog case Albanian dervishes were also
mentioned in connection to another ‘affair’, blown up in the well-known nationalist propagandist
fashion of the time: the so-called Prizren trial (Bulatović 1988). This political trial took place in the
1950s, and a number of Albanians were sentenced there for espionage for Albania’s *Sigurimi*. One
of the most influential sheikhs in Kosovo, Sheikh Muhjedin (from the Halveti lodge in Rahovec)
was a key witness during this trial, after he had been sentenced for similar offences in the so-called

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² In 1993 Jevtić published a second book, dealing with the war in Bosnia, *Od islamske deklaracije do verskog rata u
BiH* (‘From the Islamic declaration to religious war in Bosnia-Herzegovina’), and in 1995 he published a
compilation of his articles on Albanians, *Šiptari i Islam* (‘Albanians and Islam’). See also Mufaku (1993).

³ This passage is reprinted in Lučić’s book, with the following comment: “The massacring of animals in which a lot
of blood flows is meant TO FRIGHTEN THE MONTENEGRIN PEOPLE (sic.), which has not yet had as much
experience with Albanian expansionism as the people in Kosovo and Macedonia” (Lučić 1988:94)

‘sheikhs’ trial’. Both affairs threw an unfavourable light on the activities of the Albanian dervish orders in Kosovo. Apart from being branded as nationalists and as key figures in the political machinations of the 1940s and 1950s in Kosovo, dervishes were portrayed as religious fanatics and sheikhs as small potentates with enormous powers over their followers, reinforcing an image of Islam as irrational and totalitarian. Talking about the sheikhs, the Serbian journalist Liljana Bulatović wrote: “they are like small gods, everybody will defend their authority at all costs” (Bulatović 1988:41).

**Dervish orders in Kosovo**

After the communists took over power in Yugoslavia in 1945, it seemed inevitable that dervish orders should slowly disappear as in most other parts of the Balkans. At the end of World War Two, the communists launched a rigorous anti-religious campaign: freedom of religion was curtailed, the power of the churches was restricted, and religious leaders were appointed who were loyal to the regime. Priests opposing the new socialist order were sidelined or in some cases even physically liquidated (Ramet 1998). As far as the dervish orders are concerned, most of them were pushed underground: more than other religious communities they tend to resist outside control, because their religious leadership is based on the principle of hereditary saintly power.

Eventually, in the 1960s, Yugoslav policy towards the religious communities became much more liberal. Yet freedom of religion was still conditional, under a regime that remained essentially totalitarian in character. The churches were expected to pledge full loyalty to the communist authorities, who supervised their activities through the special Commissions for Religious Matters, existing on all levels of the administration. The Islamic Community, in particular, was co-opted by the Communist system, more than the Catholic and Serbian Orthodox Church: its close symbiosis with the regime was facilitated by Tito’s benevolent attitude towards the Muslim world as one of

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5 Recently, in July 1998, sheikh Muhjedin was murdered in his lodge most probably by the Serbian police (Amnesty International, *A Human Rights Crisis in Kosovo Province. Document Series B: Tragic events continue. #3 Orahovac, July-August 1998, AI Index: EUR 70/58/98, pp.4-6*)
the leaders of the Conference of Non-aligned States. The official Islamic Community was sometimes compared with a melon: green outside (the colour of Islam), but thoroughly red inside.

In 1952, the Islamic Community officially prohibited the work of dervish orders in Bosnia-Herzegovina (Hadžibajrić 1979:273; see also Glasnik Vrhovnog Islamskog Starješinstva 1952:199). As Sorabji has noted, “[w]hen the Zajednica [the Islamic Community, GD] realised that in such a [socialist, GD] state there was only so much religious authority to go round, they were anxious to have as much of it as possible (...) and to quell any potential competitors” (Sorabji 1989:163). The impact of this ban was severe. Most dervish lodges were closed down and handed over to the Islamic Community, as a result of which some continued their activities in private homes or in mosques. Even though the prohibition formally did not apply to Kosovo and Macedonia, the number of lodges there also declined rapidly, probably as a side-effect of the persecution and discrimination Albanians suffered in the 1950s. In those years, most lodges led a semi-clandestine existence. In 1962, the Islamic officials in Sarajevo tried to expand their ban on dervish orders to Kosovo and Macedonia, labelling them reactionary and “an obstacle to the development of a proper religious life in these areas...” (Glasnik Vrhovnog Islamskog Starješinstva 1962:186). However, this ban never seems to have been executed, presumably because the state authorities did not approve of such a measure. The regime thrived best on a policy of divide and rule, playing religious and ethnic communities off against one another.

During this period, many observers expected that dervish orders would cease to exist, as happened in most other Balkan states.6 However this was contradicted by an unexpected revival of the phenomenon in the 1970s. In 1974, Albanian sheikhs from Kosovo founded an association of dervish orders which has been headed since then by a Rufai sheikh from Prizren (sheikh Xhemali Shehu).7 Three years later, this Association of Dervish Orders was recognised as an independent religious community, despite major objections by the Islamic leaders in Sarajevo. They protested

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7 The association was called Lidhja e Rradhëve Dervishe Islame Alijje, three years later renamed as Bashkësia e Rradhëve Dervishe Islame Alijje, which henceforth will be referred to as the Community of Dervish Orders. In Serbo-Croat the organisation was first called Savez Islamskih Derviških Redova Alije and accordingly renamed Zajednica Islamskih Derviških Redova Alije. The first initiatives to create this association were taken in 1971.
vehemently against the creation of a second Muslim religious community in Yugoslavia, as well as against the publication of the dervish bulletin *Hu*. In spite of such opposition, this new Community of Dervish Orders recruited many fresh members, i.e. sheikhs as well as lower clergy and other religious functionaries.⁸ Within ten years (between 1974 and 1984), its membership grew from 32 members (representing a corresponding number of lodges) to 126 members in 1984. The increase was highest in 1980 when the association enrolled no less than 41 new members (*Buletin HU* 1984:12). In the early 1980s, the Community claimed to represent more than 50,000 dervishes, mainly concentrated in Kosovo (*Bilten HU* 1982/2:2).⁹ The Pristina sociologist Sladjana Djuric mentions that they now claim to have 100,000 followers in Kosovo alone (1997:123-124).

The Community recognises twelve ‘authentic’ orders of which nine were active before the start of the war in the former Yugoslavia (in Kosovo, Bosnia, and Macedonia): the Rufai, Kaderi, Halveti, Sadi, Bektashi, Nakshibendi, Sinani, Mevlevi and Shazili (*Buletin Hu* 1978/2:6). In 1986, when I did most of my fieldwork, most of these orders were not significant in terms of numbers of lodges and members. However, some orders (notably the Halveti, the Sadi, the Kaderi and the Rufai) had a large membership, with thousands of followers and a widely ramified network of lodges. The bulk of lodges is located in small towns and in a number of villages, whereas in Prishtina there is only one (Kaderi) lodge. In Prizren and Gjakova the concentration of lodges is much higher, especially in Gjakova. At the time of my research, the total number of lodges in Kosovo was approximately sixty (*Bilten HU* 1982/2:2-3). This situation has probably not changed substantially.¹⁰

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⁸ Not only sheikhs were invited to become member, but also *veqil*-s (deputies of a sheikh) and other functionaries of dervish lodges, like *rehber*-s (guides), *tyrbedar*-s (who take care of the graves) and *kafexhi*-s (who receive the guests and serve coffee and tea) (*Buletin HU* 1978/2:3).

⁹ With the help of Alexandre Popovic I have been able to collect an almost complete set of issues of the dervish bulletin *Hu* for the 1970s and 1980s, which was published both in Albanian and Serbo-Croat. *Buletin Hu* refers to the issue in Albanian, *Bilten Hu* to the one in Serbo-Croat.

¹⁰ On the basis of my research in 1986 I have compiled the following list. Halveti lodges can be found in: Prizren, Rahovac (Orahovac), Gjakova (Djakovica), Peja (Peć), Mitrovica, and the villages of Junik (near Gjakova), Damnjan (in the Has area at the border with Albania between Prizren and Gjakova), Lukinaj (Has), Rogovo (near
In Kosovo, the phenomenon is geographically not evenly divided. The density of lodges is much higher in the south-west, in the region bordering on Albania (which is best known under the Serbian name Metohija). This area is fertile, but underdeveloped and densely populated, and includes the towns Prizren, Rahovec (Orahovac), Peja (Peć) and Gjakova (Djakovica). It comprises one third of the province, while it contains up to three quarter of all lodges. Here, the vast majority of the rural population either belongs to or sympathises with one of the numerous lodges. Most of them recruit their following from the rural areas, among the poor and uneducated peasantry, although some of the most active lodges also attract young male students of rural background. Popovic seems to be right when he suggests that the centre of gravity of the phenomenon has been gradually shifting to the countryside (Popovic 1985:247).

In some rural areas, like Has (a mountainous area bordering on Albania), the influence of sheikhs has unmistakably grown at the expense of orthodox (Sunni) imams.

Among the traditional urban population of Kosovo — at least in Prizren where I did most of my research — their following has been almost negligible. Many townsman qualify the whole phenomenon as an anachronism which is typical for the backward and patriarchal way of life of Kosovo peasants. It was a common urban opinion that peasants were most receptive to the superstitious beliefs of these ‘sects’ and the strict discipline imposed by the sheikhs. However, in Gjakova and Rahovec, two small agricultural towns west of Prizren, the situation is quite different: most town inhabitants are members of a dervish lodge. Here, religious (and social) life is

Gjakova), and Hoça e Vogel (near Rahovec); Kaderi: Prizren, Gjakova, Rahovec, Peja, Prishtina, and the village of Lubizhda (Has); Rufai: Prizren, Gjakova, Rahovec, Mitrovica, Peja, and Gjilan (Gnjilane); Sadi: Gjakova, Prizren, Gjilan, and the villages of Bec, Doblibar, Crmjane, Duzhne (all near Gjakova); Shazeli: Gjakova; Nakshibendi: Gjakova, and the village of Planeja (Has); Bektashi: Gjakova; Melami: Prizren, and Rahovec; Sinani: Prizren. I visited some lodges myself (in 1986). For a very similar list, see Djuric (1997:124). Other lodges are located in Montenegro (Ulcinj, Podgorica) and West Macedonia (Skopje, Ohrid, Tetovo, and some other towns).

11 See also Kasumi, who states that the Rufai order recruits its followers predominantly from the poor layers of society (1988:66).

12 In 1979, the dean of the medrese in Prishtina expressed his concern about the developments in Has, where inhabitants had stopped inviting imams during Ramadan. Instead they now “see all their spiritual happiness as being in the hands of the sheikh” (Ahmeti 1979:284).
completely tied up with these orders, and religious authority is pre-eminently vested in the sheikhs. It is important to note that the phenomenon is ethnically exclusive, i.e. it is confined to Albanians. Turks and Slavic Muslims do almost not participate. Only among Gypsies do dervish orders seem to flourish: numerous Gypsy lodges seem to have been springing up in the poor and overpopulated Gypsy ghettos of the towns (Popovic 1985:245-246). Though similarities in (low) social-economic position of Albanian peasants and urban Gypsies may account for this, it is essentially a parallel development which has been neatly divided along ethnic lines. The Gypsy lodges are not part of the dervish movement. The Community of Dervish Orders represents the Albanian dervish orders alone.\(^\text{13}\)

In Bosnia, the heartland of Islam in former Yugoslavia, this renewal of popular Islamic mysticism has largely been absent. Although Bosnian Sufi orders have a long and rich history, in recent decades there was only a handful of active lodges left.\(^\text{14}\) Their position improved in 1977, after the Islamic Community agreed on a conditional re-opening of lodges, although the 1952 ban on dervish orders was never formally lifted (Hadžibajrić 1990). It is clear that these orders have lacked the widespread allegiance and popularity of their Kosovo counterparts, because of their orthodox and Sunnite character (Norris 1993:100-101). During the Ottoman period, their orthodoxy had been sharply looked upon by the Bosnian ulema and the authorities. Both tried to pursue a policy of protection and support for the orthodox orders, in order to prevent the spread of more unorthodox tarikats like the Bektashi. As Norris points out, Bosnian Sufism has been elitist, somewhat quietist, sober and subdued, which contrasts markedly with the ecstatic and violent forms of popular Sufism in Kosovo and Macedonia (1993:114). When all Bosnian lodges were closed in 1952, Bosnian sheikhs and dervishes never set up any organisation in defiance of the

\(^{13}\) In 1986, in Prizren, I visited two Gypsy lodges in the Terzi mahala, a Gypsy quarter not far from the Rufai lodge of sheikh Xhemali Shehu. Originally, both seem to be offshoots of the ‘Albanian’ lodge of which sheikh Xhemali Shehu is now the leader. They were founded some decades ago by former Gypsy dervishes of this lodge. At present, there are no formal ties, which indicates a breach along ethnic lines. Popovic observes a similar division between ‘Albanian’ and ‘Gypsy’ lodges for the Sinani (1991:109).

\(^{14}\) Sorabji mentions five: one Kaderi and four Nakshibendi (Sorabji 1989:165). For a detailed account of dervish orders in Bosnia see Čehajić (1986). See also Popovic (1994).
Islamic Community; the aim was to win back the right to exist through negotiation with the official Islamic Community (Sorabji 1989:163).

In the 1970s, the Bosnian lodges continued following a very prudent and non-confrontational policy towards the Islamic authorities in Sarajevo, even though they were now able to function more openly. They continued to recognise the authority of the Islamic Community as legitimate and tried to accommodate themselves to its rulings (Sorabji 1989:158). The Bosnian dervish orders also differ in other respects from those in Kosovo. The Bosnian sheikhs’ authority does not extend beyond religious matters, which is quite different from the situation in Kosovo (Sorabji 1989:166). Furthermore, as Sorabji states, “[u]nlke their Albanian counterparts, contemporary Bosnian dervishes do not appear to indulge in practices such as standing on sabres and piercing the cheek with needles (although certain evidence suggests that the practice continues in great secrecy and with low frequency in the countryside)” (Sorabji 1989:167-168).

Polemics between Kosovar sheikhs and the Islamic authorities

The conformist attitude of the Bosnian dervish orders has contrasted sharply with the recalcitrant stand of the Kosovo sheikhs, who have engaged in an open conflict with representatives of the Islamic Community. These differences came to light soon after the establishment of Association of Dervish Orders, especially when Muslim religious officials put strong pressure on the Bosnian sheikhs to abandon the movement, which they did. In return for their loyalty, the Islamic

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15 There is however, a recent current of Sufism which Sorabji labels New Mysticism. It is scripturalist and intellectualist in character and has been popular among young educated Bosnian Muslim since the 1980s. These New Mystics do not constitute a religious movement in the usual sense—they have no recognisable leaders or organisation—but are instead grouped around a number of charismatic leaders, “men who call themselves Sufis and who are deemed by their followers to be sheikhs”. Contrary to traditional mysticism, many of the sympathisers are female. Although the number of practising Mystics is probably not very high, they enjoy much esteem and respect among the Muslim population (Sorabji 1989:172-173).

16 Details on the establishment and subsequent development of the Association (later Community) of Dervish Orders can be found in Hadžibajrić (1979 & 1990), as well as in some articles and (anonymous) editorials in Bilen/Buletin Hu (1978/2:4-5, 1978/3:8-11, 1978/4:12-16, 1981/3-4:34-36 and in particular 1984/2 which contains the proceedings
Community allowed Bosnian lodges to function more or less normally again. The establishment of the *Tarikat Centar* in Sarajevo in 1977 almost completely brought to an end the work of the Community of Dervish Orders as far as the Bosnian lodges were concerned (Hadžibajrić 1979:276; Hadžibajrić 1990:22-23; *Bilten Hu* 1979/1:3-4). Except for one Rufai lodge in Sarajevo, which served Albanians from Kosovo working and living in Sarajevo, all other Bosnian sheikhs (most of them belonging to the Nakshibendi order) enrolled in the Tarikat Centar. Leading sheikhs in Kosovo regarded this as a serious attempt to weaken the position of their Community (*Bilten Hu* 1978:13-14).

Here I will concentrate on the polemics that evolved between Albanian sheikhs and Bosnian spokesmen of the Islamic Community, in which neither side took much trouble to mince its words. For the Sarajevan Islamic authorities, the founding of the Association of Dervish Orders in 1974 was an almost blasphemous act. They also protested against the publication of the bulletin *Hu*, and they considered taking legal measures to make the work of the Community of Dervish Orders impossible (*Glasnik Vrhovnog Islamskog Starješinstva* 1975:296). They launched fierce attacks in the Islamic religious press (in the journals *Glasnik Vrhovnog Islamskog Starješinstva* and *Preporod*) on what they called the “disgraceful primitivism and illiteracy” of the sheikhs, and the latter’s attempts “to disrupt the unity of the Islamic Community”.

An anonymous imam from a small town in Kosovo accused dervishes of drinking alcohol and public smoking during Ramadan, to demonstrate non-compliance with Islamic norms:

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“As soon as you become dervish, you are exempted from all basic Islamic obligations, such as praying, fasting, the zakat [alms tax GD], etc. The sheikh takes care of your life, in this earthly world as well as in the hereafter, because he is ‘omnipotent’. During Ramadan, there where we live, you can see dervishes walking around in broad daylight with cigarettes in their mouth, to show to everybody that they do not fast. But as if that is not sufficient to them, they mock believers who do fast, calling them Yazid-s. As far as fasting is concerned, up to this very day I have seen not one dervish in our mosques, neither during the daily prayers nor the Friday prayer" (S.R. 1979).

In March 1979, the Islamic Community organised a meeting to address the problem of dervish orders in Kosovo.\textsuperscript{18} Although the tone at this meeting was milder, the message was still unequivocal: in Yugoslavia, most dervish orders had drifted away from the original Sufi ideals, and the Islamic Community should do its best to bring them back on the right track. One of the contributors mentioned the major drawbacks of these orders, among other things: their separatist tendencies (reminiscent of the accusations that were launched against Albanians in general), the personality cult surrounding the sheikhs, their use of magical practices and superstitious beliefs, and the antagonism directed against the ulema (Salihspahić 1979). The director of the medresa (Muslim theological seminary) in Prishtina attacked the dervish-orders in a more direct way, voicing much of the same criticism as the above mentioned anonymous imam. In his eyes, the main responsibility for these religious transgressions was with the sheikhs, who he said were unskilled as most of them were appointed on the basis of hereditary principles. As they do not have the necessary professional qualifications, they tend to abuse their privileged position for personal gain (Ahmeti 1979:285).\textsuperscript{19}

The leaders of the Community of Dervish Orders reacted vigorously to these attacks. In the bulletin \textit{Hu} they published scathing comments on the \textit{Preporod} publications, blaming the authors for their arrogance and lack of self-control (\textit{Bilten Hu} 1978/3:1-4, 1978/4:12-16). The ban

\textsuperscript{18} For an account of this meeting see: \textit{Glasnik Vrhovnog Islamskog Starještvnà} (1979:198-200). Most of the contributions presented during this meeting were reprinted in \textit{Glasnik Vrhovnog Islamskog Starještvnà}, 1979, nr.3 (May-June).

\textsuperscript{19} As positive exceptions he mentioned the Kaderi-lodges in Prishtina and Mitrovica, as well as the Melami-lodge in Orahovac. To this list of ‘orthodox’ lodges one may add the Melami-lodge in Prizren. The Melami order, which has strong urban and intellectual characteristics, is not represented in the Community of Dervish Orders.
on dervish orders was called a crime of ‘genocidal’ dimensions (Bilten Hu 1978/2:5). Sheikh Xhemali Shehu justified the existence of the official dervish community by using the communist rhetoric of Brotherhood and Unity, making a reference to the rights of ethnic (instead of religious) communities under Yugoslav socialism:

“Thanks to the society in which we live, we share freedom and equal rights with all nations and nationalities in Socialist Yugoslavia. Islam can not be monopolised by thugs, it lives in the hearts of the true believers, where it smoulders, flares up, and breaks out, saying ‘this has been enough!’ , as we are doing. We will not tolerate terror or oppression anymore” (Bilten Hu, 1978/3:3).

In 1979, the polemics calmed down, probably after the intervention of the state authorities (see Buletin Hu 1979/4:3). It took five years before words of open criticism against the Islamic Community could be heard again. In December 1984, at the tenth anniversary of the Community of Dervish Orders, its leading sheikh Xhemali Shehu recalled the numerous problems with the Islamic Community, repeating that “[i]n Tito’s Yugoslavia, second-rank citizens do not exist, and we will not tolerate being treated like that” (Buletin Hu 1984/2:7).

**Shi’ite traditions among the Albanian dervish orders**

Although the open polemics quieted down, Albanian sheikhs continued to wage an implicit ideological war against the Muslim establishment. In defining their position vis-à-vis the Islamic Community, they claimed the esoteric (batini) knowledge of Sufi mysticism to be superior to the ‘cold’ and ‘formalist’ (zahiri) sciences of the ulema. One sheikh compared Islam to “an endless sea, an ocean. The representatives of the tarikat are in the true sense of the word divers who enter the depths of that ocean and know how to pull out precious stones (...).” Most other Muslims remain only at the surface of this religious ocean (Bilten Hu 1978/4:10-11).

The contrasts between Sufism and orthodox Islam are also spelled out on the level of Muslim ritual. For the sheikhs and dervishes the ordinary namaz (the daily Muslim prayer) has lost its original religious value. It has become a formality which lulls Muslims into an indolent sleep and makes them forget the Jihad (Bilten Hu, 1978/4:5). The original prayer of Mohammed and the
first adherents of Islam is not the namaz but the zikr, to which Muslims should give priority in order to achieve the highest degree of piety (Bilten Hu 1979/2:8).

Apart from pointing at the assets of Sufism, sheikhs and dervishes in Kosovo have made extensive use of ideas and symbols from the Shi’ite tradition within Islam. These Shi’ite tendencies have been noted earlier by several other authors, although most of them have done this in an unspecified and superficial way. Norris, in his book Islam in the Balkans (1993), makes a more sophisticated distinction between Shi’ite and non-Shi’ite Sufi orders. In his eyes, the Bektashi order is essentially Shi’ite, whereas other orders (the Mevlevi, Kaderi, Nakshibendi, Melami, Rufai and Tidjani) are not (Norris 1993:82-137). In my view, however, it is difficult to draw a clear line between Shi’ite and non-Shi’ite orders, although some are traditionally more Shi’ite than others (notably the Bektashi order). Most leading sheikhs in Kosovo (who adhere to different orders) have made use of Shi’ite doctrine and symbolism to express the idea (and felt reality) of a “suffering community of believers” (Gilsenan 1982:55), although they deny to be openly Shi’ites (Bilten Hu 1979/1:9).

In order to clarify this point, I need to elaborate on the connections between Sufism and Shi’i Islam in more general terms. Although Sufism is not intrinsically linked to the Shi’a tradition in Islam, there are important similarities. A main point of correspondence is the special devotion for Muhammed’s cousin and son-in-law Ali, and his son Husayn, who is the paramount martyr of Shi’ite Islam. Ali has always occupied almost as important a position in Sufism as in Shi’a Islam,

20 In a book dealing with the religious communities in Kosovo, the author states quite bluntly that “Shi’ites are known under the term dervishes” (Kasumi 1988:65). Also in a report of the Arab journalist Fahmi Huwaydi, who visited the province in 1981 and drew most of his information from officials of the Islamic Community, dervishes are portrayed without exception as Shi’ites (Norris 1990:47).

21 In the eyes of the Shi’ites, AH was the rightful successor to Muhammed, predestined to lead the Muslim community. However, after the Prophet’s death, the Umayyads (the clan from which Mohammed’s wife Aisha originated) successfully claimed the caliphate and blocked Ali’s accession to this position. They provided the first caliphs of Islam (leaders of the Muslim community of believers). In spite of Umayyad opposition, Ali was elected the fourth caliph, but soon after that he was removed and assassinated. Umayyad rule culminated in the reign of Yazid, who — in the eyes of the Shi’ites — symbolises the evil forces that corrupted Islam. Ali’s son Husayn started a revolt against Yazid’s rule (soon after his accession) in which Husayn and his followers were surrounded in the desert of Kerbelca. Since Husayn
which has caused several Sufi orders to evolve from Sunnism to Shi’ism (Momen 1985:96). Yet, Sufi orders have flourished most in areas dominated by Sunnites, where they have often been vehicles for pro-Shi’ite sentiments.

This (hi)story of revolt against Sunni tyranny has furnished Shi’i Islam with a powerful and emotional theme of resistance and martyrdom, which has repeatedly been used to frame discontent and opposition, as happened during the Islamic Revolution in Iran. Michael Fischer has called this the ‘Kerbela paradigm’, viewing the legend primarily as an ideological and rhetorical device which provides moral and political guidelines vis-à-vis Sunni understandings of Islam (Fischer 1980:21). 22 We should not forget, however, that Shi’ite Islam has been quietist for most of its history. In almost all parts of the Muslim world, Shi’is have constituted minorities, occasionally persecuted and at best tolerated. “For most of the first millennium of Islam, Shi’ism was the faith not of rebels and rulers, but of cautious minorities seeking ways to reconcile religious ideals with practical realities. (...) The strategies of accommodation developed by these Shi’is were far reaching, and even included the deliberate concealment of their true beliefs” (Kramer 1987:2). When political circumstances allowed, Shi’is often rebelled, but not necessarily. Shi’ite Islam has an extraordinary ambivalence, oscillating between extreme submission (and religious dissimulation, taqiyah) on the one hand and revolt on the other. “Those who wish to lead the Shi’i masses can, if the opposition seems overwhelmingly superior or it is expedient to do so, enjoin upon the Shi’is the patient endurance (...) of the Imams. And yet when the opportunity seems right, the Shi’i masses can be whipped up to the frenzy of revolution by appeal to the spirit of uprising (...) of Husayn” (Momen 1985:236). Fischer calls this use of the Kerbela myth to trigger revolutionary (political) action ‘Kerbela in the Active Mood’, illustrating this for the Islamic Revolution in Iran (1980:213).

refused to surrender, the troops of Yazid killed him and his followers (on the 10th of Muharram, 10 October 680). Husayn’s martyrdom at Kerbela became the founding legend of Shi’ism. Recollections of the legend of the Kerbela battle can be found in Momen (1985:28-31), Fischer (1980:13-27), and Ayoub (1978: 93-139).

22 In Fischer’s view the Kerbela paradigm entails: “(a) a story expandable to be all-inclusive of history, cosmology, and life’s problems; (b) a background contrast against which the story is given heightened perceptual value; in this case, primarily Sunni conceptions, but other religions at times serve the same function; and (c) ritual or physical drama to embody the story and maintain high levels of emotional investment (...).” (1980:27).
Also Shi'is outside Iran have applied the Kerbela legend to express opposition against orthodox Sunni Islam. The rise of the Albanian dervish movement in Kosovo provides a good example of this. The battle of Kerbela is a dominant theme in their religious writings. The bulk of texts in the bulletin Hu is devoted to the Shi’ite heroes Ali and Husayn. The Kerbela theme is also integrated in the ceremonial calendar. Instead of Ramadan, they observe Matem during the first ten days of the month of Muharrem. Then sheikhs and dervishes fast and meditate, secluded in their lodges; they commemorate Husayn’s martyrdom and the thirst he suffered in the desert of Kerbela by drinking no pure water, but only tea, coffee and other unsweetened drinks. In addition, they do not eat meat or any other food that contains animal fat (Bilten Hu, 1978/4:8). Sultani-Nevrus (the ‘New Day’), which is a seasonal feast held at the start of spring (22 March), has been interspersed with Shi’ite meanings as well. Sheikhs and dervishes in Kosovo consider the day to be both Ali’s birthday and the day when he became caliph.

What is most important for our discussion is that the Kerbela theme has been put to use to disqualify the representatives of the Islamic Community in Sarajevo as well as those in Kosovo. They are put on a par with the adversaries of Ali and the murderers of Husayn, and in the jargon of bulletin Hu, they are branded the Yazid-s of today (see footnote 21). According to sheikh Xhemali Shehu, the Muslims and ulema who are now mocking sheikhs and dervishes in Kosovo, do not differ very much from those who once organised the conspiracy against Husayn (Buletin Hu 1978/4:5-7).

The revival of Albanian dervish orders and its background

I now would like to wind up my description of particular events and religious controversies, in an attempt to explain the revival of these dervish orders in Kosovo. Firstly, it is important to note that

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23 In the period under consideration the bulletin Hu published at least two regular features about Ali: 1. Three hundred and three words spoken by Hazreti Ali ("Treqint e tri fjalë të thëna nga Hazreti Ali"), aphorisms allegedly written by Ali, and 2. What the Kuran tells us about Hazreti Ali ("Çka na thotë Kurani mbi Hazreti Aliun"). Husayn and the battle of Kerbela were the main topic of two other regular features: 1. "Xhylzari Hasenejn", a detailed narrative of the Husayn’s revolt against Yazid, culminating in the battle of Kerbela; and 2. "Mersije" - an elegy lamenting Husayn’s death.
this phenomenon does not stand on its own: in Turkey and other parts of the Muslim world Sufism has also demonstrated a remarkable resilience, refuting earlier expectations that Sufi orders — often seen as strongholds of conservatism and traditionalism — would disappear.\(^\text{24}\) The failure to acknowledge that ‘traditional’ forms of religion and ritual may still retain their vitality under modern and secularised conditions has been more general (Boissevain 1992:1).\(^\text{25}\) However, it is clear that both in the Muslim world and the West one sees a widespread reappraisal of tradition, ritual and religion, as a consequence of the process of globalisation. As Hutchinson has noted, in the United States and in Europe it has been intertwined with ethnic revivals and the rise of nationalism. According to Hutchinson, “Common to all these movements is a moral critique of the anomie of secular modernity, which has resulted in rising levels of divorce, crime, alcoholism, drug abuse, nervous disorders, social conflict and levels of inequality, and a demand for a revival of essential religious principles as a basis of individual morality and social organisation” (1994:65). It is not surprising to find this sort of motive in the statute of the Community of Dervish Orders: in article 4 it notes that, apart from the spiritual elevation and moral education of Muslims and the teaching of love, brotherhood and religious tolerance, one of its basic tasks is “the constant fight against alcoholism, murder, revenge, plunder, prostitution, theft, laziness and other vices” (Bilten Hu 1975). The moral corruption among the ulema is also considered one of the main modern vices against which sheikhs and dervishes need to fight: they are criticised for too closely collaborating with an infidel (socialist) regime. This is a very common theme among Muslim revivalists or fundamentalists (Hutchinson 1994:83).

I would like to highlight one particular social factor which might play a part in the renewed importance of dervish orders in Kosovo: the demographic boom and rural overpopulation which has excarabated tensions and aggravated conditions of rural poverty and existential and political

\(^{24}\) For a tentative but interesting account of this revival of Turkish Sufism — which has close historical links with Balkan Sufi orders — see Kafadar (1992). See also Eickelman (1989:284).

\(^{25}\) Most surprising is, according to Boissevain, Victor Turner’s apparent failure to note this trend despite his lifelong interest in ritual manifestations (Boissevain 1992:1).
insecurity. As Kosovo still has a predominantly agrarian economy, there is a huge pressure on the scarce agricultural land. Prices for land have increased steadily to a level that has been considerably higher than in the rest of former Yugoslavia. As the judicial means of regulating property and land sales have been ineffective, conflicts over land have been endemic, which has been reflected in the rising number of blood feuds: “Among the Albanians in Yugoslavia, the number of crimes committed in vendettas is not only on the decline but is even rising. Between 1964 and 1970, for instance, the circuit court in Prishtinë tried 320 cases involving blood feuds. There are such feuds in almost every one of the communes of the province of Kosovë, most of them in the remote villages...” (Marmullaku 1975:88).

As Karan has noted, most cases of homicide in Kosovo are the result of unresolved conflicts over land (1985:86). Cases of threats, forced selling of land and even violent annexation are no exception, while local administration has been unable to escape the influence of powerful clans. Sometimes, such conflicts have had an ethnic dimension, when rich and influential Albanian clans put pressure on Serbian peasants to sell their land, usually offering exorbitantly high prices.

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26 In 1984, the growth rate of Kosovo’s population was still 25.2 per 1,000 inhabitants per year. Compared to Yugoslav and European standards, this figure is extremely high. Since 1948, the total number of Albanians in Yugoslavia has almost tripled, and more than half of the Albanian population in Kosovo is under the age of twenty (Komunat e KSA të Kosovës më 1983 - Të dhëna statistikore, Prishtinë, 1984:32). Although Kosovo’s population density was just under the Yugoslav average at the beginning of this century, the area is now the most densely populated in the former Yugoslavia (Roux 1992:149).

27 Kosovo is the only area in the former Yugoslavia which has seen a rise in the absolute number of people employed in agriculture (Roux 1992:322).

28 In Serbia, it is widely claimed that the exodus of Serbs and Montenegrins from Kosovo in the 1970s and 1980s has been the result of these pressures — which is often seen as part of a more encompassing Albanian ‘master plan’ to cleanse Kosovo from Serbs. In my view, this problem has been taken out of its context and ‘ethnicized’ by Serbian nationalists. It is not at all a problem that exists only between Serbs and Albanians: among Albanians themselves conflicts over land have been more numerous and at least as vigorous.
Under such conditions of perpetual communal strife and internal dissension sheikhs have played a crucial role in settling disputes and pacifying and integrating rural society. This is confirmed by Popovic, who speaks of “the decisive role that may be played by the sheikh of Kosovo in the settlement of a vendetta” (1985:247). Also Djurić notes that sheikhs have taken up a leading role in solving these kind of conflicts, whereas Sunnite hoxha-s and Catholic priests rarely mediate. If dervishes of two different orders are involved in a conflict, both sheikhs work together to solve it (Djurić 1997:125-6 and 305-6). Historically it is especially the south-western part of the province, the areas around the towns of Prizren, Gjakova (Djakovica), Peja (Peć) where also most lodges are concentrated, which has had a special reputation of feuding (Baerlein 1922:55-56). The state authorities have never been capable of handling these conflicts effectively, and have them to be solved by sheikhs, who seem to have been quite successful. They have engaged in these activities with the knowledge and tacit support of the authorities (Bitten Hu 1978/4:12). In the last decade or so, the political relevance of these activities has increased: in bringing about reconciliation between feuding clans, they have helped to overcome internal conflicts and to create unity vis-à-vis the common enemy, the Serbs.

Apart from these social-economic and demographic factors, I would like to highlight the ethno-political dimensions of the dervish revival, which play a role in the background. In my view, sheikhs in Kosovo have tried to revive and institutionalise a version of Islam which was seen as less corrupted by Communism, and at the same time as more traditional ‘Albanian’ than the established Islam of Muslims in Bosnia and their collaborators in Kosovo. Through applying Shi’ite ideas and symbolism as well as stressing the communist ideals of the equality of nations and ethnic groups, Albanian sheikhs have evoked the image of an oppressed religious community of true believers who because of their profound ‘otherness’ —i.e. because they are implicitly stereotyped as ‘primitive’ and illiterate Albanians— have suffered extra humiliation

29 This is very similar to the role Bax has described for the Franciscans in Bosnia (Bax 1995).

30 In the past, however, Catholic priests played an important mediating role in the northern Albanian highlands (Black-Michaud 1980:91-103).

31 I do not know whether sheikhs played a role in the series of mass reconciliations in the early 1990s. It seems that the initiative came primarily from the urban intelligentsia.
and discrimination. Now they have entered upon a struggle against the official and corrupted Islamic establishment, in an attempt to overcome their position as second-rank believers within the Islamic Community.

This can be understood against the background of the traditional cultural gap that exists between those ‘westernised’ and relatively urbanised Muslim Slavs of Bosnia and the backward, predominantly rural and ‘oriental’ Muslim Albanians in Kosovo and Macedonia. In the past, even after Yugoslavia was created, Albanians and Bosnian Muslims stood somewhat apart from one another, divided by tradition, language and ethnic consciousness. This rift was excarabated by geographical distance: Bosnia and Kosovo were quite separate regions only connected through the Sandžak, a Muslim-dominated stretch of land on the border of Serbia and Montenegro. Like most other Balkan nations, Bosnian Muslims have looked down upon Albanians and their archaic and tribal way of life. In this century, this gap has widened, although they have been living in the same state. Contrary to the Albanians—who as non-Slavs in a South Slav state were treated as second-rank citizens— most Bosnian Muslims adopted a life style that is not very different from that of Roman-Catholic Croats or Orthodox Serbs. It is one of the many ironies of former Yugoslavia that before the start of the war Bosnian Muslims preferred a spouse of Serbian or Croatian background to an Albanian co-religionist from Kosovo (Canapa 1986:102-103,123). Among ordinary Bosnian Muslims anti-Albanian feelings have been widespread, which can be seen from the common accusations “that their Kosovan co-religionists (are) lazy, ungrateful, undisciplined and therefore somehow not properly Muslim” (Sorabji 1993:34).

On the religio-political level, relations between Albanian and Bosnian Muslims have clearly been asymmetrical: the Islamic Community was always dominated by Slavic Muslims from Bosnia. This was not only the result of the higher educational level of the Bosnian ulema (which ensured that Bosnia, unlike Kosovo, developed a class of Muslim intellectuals with a serious interest in Islam). It is indicative that, until the middle of the 1980s, Albanians did not have a translation of the Kuran in Albanian. It is also revealing that the highest position within the Islamic Community in Yugoslavia, that of the Reis-ul-ulema, was never held by an Albanian, although
Albanians comprised half of all Muslim believers in the former Yugoslavia. In 1987, most representatives within the Islamic Community refused to accept Albanian candidates for this position, because of the alleged attempts of Muslim Albanian priests to Albanianize the small minority of Muslim Slavs in Macedonia (Intervju, 6 November 1987, p.22). These anti-Albanian sentiments within the Islamic Community grew after the demonstrations in Kosovo in 1981, when Muslim officials openly dissociated themselves from the Albanian demands for a republic. This contributed to the estrangement of many Albanian Muslim believers: the Islamic Community in Kosovo (even though its officials were Albanians) seemed to enjoy little prestige among the population, and the influence of the medresa in Prishtina on intellectual life in the province was minimal (Meier 1984). Most Muslim Albanians, especially in the towns, are not great believers anyhow.

In the 1970s, the divide between Bosnians and Albanian Muslims was further reinforced by the fact that the Islamic (religious) authorities in Sarajevo claimed a leading role in the new nation of (Slavic) Muslims. In 1967, the nation of Bosnian Muslims was officially recognised by the state; now the term Muslim referred not only to a religious category (written with a small ‘m’: muslimani), but also to an ethnic category (written with a capital ‘M’: Muslimani) including

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32 Only the last Yugoslav Reis-ul-ulema, Selimoski, was not a Bosnian. He was a (Slav) Macedonian who had taken the trouble to learn Albanian. He was evicted from his post after the declaration of Bosnian independence (Noel Malcolm, personal communication).

33 This somehow puts the local antagonism between Kosovo sheikhs and Albanian representatives of the Islamic Community in Kosovo (see for instance Bilten Hu 1988-89:7-25), between ‘orthodox’ Islam and ‘heterodox’ Sufi orders, into a different perspective. The social prestige of a sheikh in rural areas, at least in some important parts of Kosovo (particularly Metohija), is much higher than that of the local hoxha (Muslim priest). Even more, the influence of sheikhs has been on the increase (see footnote 12). Their social position and role seems to be not unlike that of the Franciscans in Bosnia: as they are much more rooted in traditional rural society, they are also much more receptive to popular and ethnic sentiment, which has made them also more ‘Albanian’ and probably more nationalist than the official and ‘orthodox’ church structures. It is only since 1989 that the Islamic Community in Kosovo has adopted a more patriotic stance, and it is interesting to note that since then it has made attempts at conciliation with the Community of Dervish Orders (Bilten Hu 1988-89:12-15).
practising Muslims as well as atheists of Muslim origin. Nevertheless, as it was difficult to divide the two, the Islamic Community adopted more and more the role of the supreme guardian of this Muslim nation (leading to a religious revival as well). This meant that the interests of Albanian Muslims were bound to be neglected (see for instance Mojzes 1995:128).

Furthermore, the decentralising measures of the 1974 Yugoslav Constitution created new ethnic and religious divisions and facilitated their institutionalisation and formalisation: it strengthened not only the position of the Islamic Community but also that of the smaller nations and religious communities. With better opportunities for the Islamic Community to organise itself from the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s, this also triggered off similar reactions among other (rival) religious formations such as the dervish orders in Kosovo, which started to organise themselves on a regional basis. There are clear parallels here with the structural antagonism and intra-confessional dynamics between the diocesan ecclesiastic structures of the Roman Catholic church and the Catholic monastic orders (Bax 1987, 1995), and between official Judaism and the Hasidic sects (Meijers 1989).

As I have been trying to demonstrate, what is specific for the case of Kosovo dervishes is that these internal religious antagonisms have an ethnic dimension. Since the 1970s, when the Kosovo Albanians received political autonomy, there have been tendencies to emphasise ‘Albanianism’ in the field of religion. The dervish revival and official recognition of the Community of Dervish Orders is only one expression of this: in 1969, Albanian Catholics also obtained a form of autonomy within the diocese of Skopje, with the appointment of an Albanian suffragan bishop in Ferizaj (Uroševac). The rising number of Albanian priests put an end to the traditional predominance of (Kosovo) Croat priests. Here too one sees that ethnic divisions have grown more important, although more research is needed to see what forms these antagonisms took within the Catholic community in Kosovo.

In 1990, after the violent abolition of Kosovo’s autonomy, the Islamic Community gave up its reserved and condescending attitude towards the Albanians in Kosovo. As Sorabji writes: “After Serbia’s increasing self-assertion, particularly over Kosovo, Muslim understandings began to change. Where the Albanians were concerned, images of nobility under oppression began to replace those of idle ingratitude, as Kosovo came to stand less for a threat to Yugoslav unity, than a Serbian threat which might soon redirect itself towards Bosnia” (1993:34). Scenting the great
dangers that were about to threaten its own existence and that of the whole Muslim community in Bosnia, it openly sided with the Albanian opposition to Milošević. The process of the violent disintegration of Yugoslavia had started.