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## **TEKKIAS, TARIKATS AND SHEIKS OF NIŠ ROMAS\***

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### **Jemka Has Risen<sup>1</sup>**

Jemka has risen, mother, early in the morning  
Jemka has risen, mother, early in the morning  
Early in the morning, mother, she cleans the yard  
Early in the morning, mother, she cleans the yard

She cleans the yard, mother, she wants to run away  
She cleans the yard, mother, she wants to run away  
She wants to run away, mother, through the downtown  
She wants to run away, mother, all the way to the tekkia

### **Introduction**

One of us has, in the analysis done in a recent study (Đorđević, 2005a:193:212) dealing with the religious-confessional being of the national minorities in Serbia and confirming absolute supremacy of Sunna over Shiism in some of them, written that the elements of Shiite Islam can only be found in the dervish orders mostly located in Kosovo and Metohija. When it comes to the state of Serbia without this province, the inflow of this branch of Islam goes through “Roma” tekkias, tarikats and sheiks dispersed all over the territory from Niš to the far South of Serbia “which” as we have carefully stated in those days, “has to be determined more precisely.”

The religious-confessional being of the Romas is much varied. In Serbia the greatest number is of Orthodox Romas followed by Muslims while it appears that very soon the Protestants will exceed the Roma Roman Catholic in number. In Southeast Serbia, as well as in Niš as its center, comparing to the rest of the state, there are many Roma members of Islam. More precisely, there are many Roma Muslims by origin who, however, hardly remember that their elders were active members of the Islam community. Yet, there are such Romas, indeed an impressive minority, who have remained loyal to “the tradition of their fathers and forefathers.” Among them are dervishes who are, surely, the most interesting party from the sociological perspective. That is why we here present a documentary view of two Roma tekkias in Niš. One of them is located in the settlement named Cattle Square and it belongs to the tarikat of the Kadiri headed by the sheik Muharem Ljatif; the other one is in the city district known as Beogradmala and it gathers together dervishes from the order of Rifa’iyyah headed by the sheik Slobodan Emini.

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\* Prepared within the project *Culture of Peace, Identities, and Interethnic Relations in Serbia and the Balkans in the Eurointegration Process* (149014D), implemented at the Faculty of Philosophy Niš, and financed by the Ministry of Science and Environmental Protection of the Serbian Government.

<sup>1</sup> From the anthology entitled *Traditional Roma Songs from the Region of Niš* (Mustafić, 1998).

## ROMA SHEIKS: TWO INTERVIEWS

### *Slobodan Emini, Roma Sheik of the Rifa'iyyah Order*<sup>2</sup>

**A great number of people of Niš, Non-Romas as well as Romas themselves, living in the Beogradmala, on Cattle Square or in the Red Star city district do not know anything about tekias or dervishes in their neighborhood, do they? Or, have they only heard of you?**

That's true. There are people who know nothing about our existence. We are in Ovčepoljska Street number 30 in Niš. We are having, on March 21, one of our holidays which is named *sultan elvuz*, birthday of Haziti Ali. We, dervishes, celebrate it solemnly. On that day we perform a ceremony entitled "The Death of the Dervish." Guests are all those who want to come, the local people, as well as all others who wish to do so. Look, together with us is a sheik from the Prizren tekia, Sadik Arapi, a Turk by origin; he has been my guest for several days. He is 64 and speaks several foreign languages; in addition to Albanian and Turkish, also German, Roma... And my late father, Halil Emini, is also from Kosovska Mitrovica. In Kosovo there are many more tekias. The best known is the one in Prizren but there are also many in Đakovica, Kosovska Mitrovica, Orahovac.

### **Are you a sheik, too?**

Yes, I am a sheik. Since 1997. As I have told you, my family originally comes from Kosovska Mitrovica. My father's sheik was Baba Šaban. He died some time in the sixties in the past century while the new sheik of my father became Sadik Arapi, present here. I was promoted to a sheik by my father who was just a dervish but in the presence of another three sheiks, one of them being Sadik Arapi before whom I had previously passed all the exams.

### **Are there different dervish orders?**

Yes, there are the Rifa'iyyah and the Kadiri orders. I am a priest of both the orders. More exactly, I have become a sheik in the order of Rifa'iyyah while as a dervish I was in the order of Kadiri. My sheik was then the sheik Enver from Kosovska Mitrovica. If I am in the position to, if I have the knowledge and feel capable of, I can become a sheik of Rifa'iyyah, of Kadiri, of Hagia, of Sherbendia, of Bedevia, of Halvetia, of Sinanya... there are 12 orders, all in all.

### **Could you be a sheik to the Bektashis, too?**

Yes, I could. Our sheik is from the order of Rifa'iyyah and Hagia.

### **Since we see no other premises, are we to assume that this one is a tekia?**

Yes, this is a tekia. This is our classroom in which we, dervishes, carry out our rituals which are called *evrad* and *sherid*. Every Friday evening, at six, we perform *zhikr*, a ritual for glorifying the name of Alah. On Monday we completed a ten-day fast known as *Ashura* and this week we have been celebrating, having guests.

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<sup>2</sup> Interview took place on February 1 2007 in the Rifa'iyyah tekia in Niš, located in the Beogradmala city district.

**Is your tekkiya part of some wider Rifa'iyyah organization; do you have a statute, a list of members?**

Yes, we are an organization. The Islam tarikat community in Prizren still exists, established as early as in the former Yugoslavia. My father was there, took his exams, was with sheik Džamajlija, guided by sheik Riza Bajrami. So, my father passed his exam before the dervish-nakip, he is some sort of the sheik deputy.

**Is the Prizren tarikat community still publishing its journal?**

Yes, they are issuing their Bulletin, in Albanian and Turkish, as far as I know. They used to do it in Serbian but they do not do it any more. In Roma, either, they don't publish it.

**You do your rituals in Roma language?**

When we celebrate *Mawlid*, this is Mohammed's birthday, we pray in Roma; recently there has been the Qur'an published in Roma, translated by Muharem Serbezovski; one local friend of mine has got it as a gift.

**Do you have any problems with the Islam Community in Niš?**

No, none whatsoever. I have been, till recently, Vice President of the Islam Community in the Niš mosque. The two of us were khojas, imams and practiced sharia law. But I cannot physically manage to be there any longer and to do tarikat duties at the same time, to attend funerals, weddings, Mawlids, and the like. More recently we have had here another *dzemat* (local office) so that other people are appointed to that office while I have retired.

**What kind of organization is in the tekkiya?**

I am now a sheik; before being promoted into a sheik, I was *shezade*, sheik's son. After my father's death, I inherited him here, in the tekkiya. There are six brothers of us altogether and only I am a sheik; all the others are *shezade*. In addition to them, there are also flag-bearers, breadmakers, shoemakers, sacrifice-givers, tea-makers; these are all dervishes who have obtained their title and this even from the sheik personally. They are obliged to do concrete tasks in the tekkiya, to bear flags, prepare tea, etc. All of them, however, cannot come up before the sheik in the tekkiya unless adequately dressed, that is, unless they are dressed in the *ajdarije* or garb. On the day when we are celebrating the sultan *evluz*, we make a big *zhikr* and use needles for piercing. The sheik chooses in advance four dervishes who are to dance and pierce themselves with needles. On that day there is the main rehearsal at which it is defined precisely how and where the dervishes should pierce themselves. I must emphasize that, without the sheik's approval, the piercing ritual must not start; when he gives a sign, then they start, to their own heart's desire, to pierce different parts of their bodies. Likewise, piercing must not stop without the sheik's order being heard first. If some careless dervish wounds himself, then the sheik makes a *dova* (a prayer) and stops bleeding. However, this happens very rarely since on that day we feel especially strong, we give the best of ourselves, on that day, we are *teslimi*, that is, giving over ourselves to God. On that day there is a lot of singing and all the nicest attributes of God are mentioned.

**Who is allowed to attend the ritual?**

Everyone can. Romas and Serbs can, Muslims can as well as Orthodox and Roman Catholics, all who feel, on that day, the will to attend it; everyone can watch it while respecting the rules of behavior in the tekkiya. I necessarily, on that day,

choose special people who have to be at service to the guests; if someone cannot be standing, he is provided with a chair to sit down; if someone feels sick, he may leave and return again...

**What did you say the date was?**

That is, in Alah's name, on March 21.

**Can we come and take photos?**

You are free to come, watch, take photos, record.

**How many active members are there in the tekka?**

There are my own dervishes that I have myself promoted, seven of them while many of them are also in Germany and Italy. There are also older dervishes promoted by my father while he was alive. Altogether, there are about 35-40 of us. On celebrations, especially on Friday when we are giving *zhikr*, there may be even more of us; I invite my neighbors, cousins, friends... They are not dervishes nor are they in the tarikat but they attend prayers.

**This is your house, isn't it?**

Yes.

**And you have turned it into a tekka?**

No, I haven't. It goes like this: the tekka has been at this place for some time. First there used to be a shack here which we turned into an earthen house (*chatmara*) and decorated it and equipped it nicely. Yet, during one visit Sheik Riza Bajrami from Kosovska Mitrovica to the Mawlid in Niš we accompanied him. Very soon my brother called us to return home immediately for he noticed a flame burning here.

**Did someone set a fire?**

No, it just happened, on its own.

**Did you interpret it as some special sign?**

No. Only after the fire did we tear down the remains and erected a new building, the way it looks today. In this we were helped by all people, dervishes, cousins, friends, neighbors....

**The dervishes who come to the tekka are largely Romas? Do some other Muslims come?**

People come because of different problems, different diseases and family troubles. They bring a gift, they bring candles, they bring a towel but they also pay. People give money but there is no price set in advance; people give as much as they are willing to give. I have photos of the people who came here, to see me, for different reasons and who are thankful for my helping them.

**Do you give them anything?**

We are *dovadzije* or praying people, people who pray to Alah; we can cure with mere water. Only the day before yesterday there was a woman doctor from Niš to see me, she is thankful for the help she has received from my hands and from Alah.



**How old are your dervishes?**

Well, my son is still small; I have two sons, of four and six years of age. I have twelve-year old dervishes and those of 65 or maybe even 70. But mostly they are young people. I have opened another tekkia, in the Belgrade settlement of Kotež, in the neighborhood of the singer Džej Ramadanovski. There I have not prepared a sheik but there are dervishes who I have produced. But, in Belgrade, there are other sheiks, these are my friends and companions, older people.

**Please, tell us, honestly, how are you received by other Romas who are not Muslims but, instead, let's say Orthodox, Adventists or Jehova's Witness?**

We have no problems with anyone; I am on friendly terms with all of them. At one funeral I met one who is in the Roman Catholic Church; I invited him to come to me, to the tekkia; I was with him on August 15 when the Ascension of the Holy Mother of God is celebrated and when the Romas go to their church on a mass scale. They call her Mary while we call her Mehrema, Mother of Jesus. We talked, we asked each other about our health, children and the like. I also met one from St. Panteleimon's Church; I was in his premises in the Church. Neither with my neighbors do I have any problems.

**So far as we know, there is another Roma tekkia in Niš?**

Yes, there is. They are Kadiri while we are Rifa'iyyah tekkia. But this one is the oldest. My father was a dervish first, then sheik, that is why our tekkia is the oldest. From our tekkia there came many people who had completely mastered the proper religious behavior, unlike from the others. I now have a prepared dervish who is ready to talk with a sheik at any moment.

**It means there are more tekkias?**

Yes. This one is the Rifa'iyyah one. But, from this tekkia of ours another tekkia is produced, not far from here in Moravska Street. The other tekkia is Kadiri and there is another sheik there. He came after my father. His name is Muharem.

**Are you a competition to each other?**

No. We are good to each other. He also has *zhikr* on Thursdays and Sundays; so we also go to him. His wife died and his daughter got married in Montenegro so that he is over there more than he is here. I think he has also established a tekkia there.

**Do you think he will receive us and talk to us?**

This I do not know; that's his good will; I do not object to it. But if I meet him by chance, I will tell him to receive you.

**You have always been a Muslim; you have come from Kosovo?**

I was born in Niš in 1976. My father came from the city of Kosovska Mitrovica. We have been living in Niš for thirty years. My father used to work in the Jastrebac Pump Factory; he got retired and received his pensions. My mother is still alive and she is an old *sheikana*. Sheik's wife gives religious instructions to women.

**Do women have an access to the tekkia?**

Yes, they do but they have to be properly dressed. And they have the right to enter only at the time of the *zhikr*, that is, prayer on Fridays.

**So, the role of women is to teach other women?**

Yes. My dervish's wife is called *dervishanka*. She can be in the tarikah. She can drink this *sherbet* (what we call the sherbet-giving of the dervish) and to enter the tarikah. That is why every sheik must have two tarikahs. Two or more. What does it mean? If I have given *sherbet* to the dervish Rifa'iyyah, then his wife, too, wants to become a *dervishanka* and to drink the same sherbet; thus, they become brother and sister and, in the future, they must not have relations like husband and wife. That is why the educated sheik gives to the dervish the Rifa'iyyah sherbet while to the *dervishanka* he gives the Kadiri sherbet so that they could preserve their marriage. There are some who give the same sherbet to the husband and wife.

**Well, you have been here for so long; your father opened up a tekkia long ago. Would you mind if some other orders appeared around you?**

No, it would be no problem. I don't know how to explain this to you but I am not obliged to give it to my child. Who deserves, he will get it. I have a brother born in 1952. Older people say, "Who is under a pear tree, he is the one who eats the pear." I have been with my father since my earliest childhood....

**Well, we are more referring to some newcomers from other places, those who would come to your neighborhood now and decide to open up another tekkia. You would not mind it?**

Well, no, I do not mind it. Let him come from Skopje, from Belgrade, let him come from where he wants to come, I cannot do anything about it. Let him buy a house here or an estate, let him start setting up a tekkia; I am the first who will come to help him and to aid him financially.

**We see you have small children. When they start going to school, you will make no problems?**

God give us good health, my children will go to school regularly. When they complete elementary school, I will have them enrolled in the madrasah; if they want it, they will go to the theological faculty, too. I would like best to enroll my children in the madrasah in the Sandzak. I have recently been, that is two weeks ago, in Novi Pazar and sat with Mevlud Dudić in his office, this was a visit by the dzemat of Niš. These were negotiations about the integration of the whole Islam Community in Serbia in one single body and headed by one single reis. I had tea with him; he gave me the Qur'an with his own signature; they also gave us some other books.

**What do you think, who will be a new reis?**

Well, let me see.... The new president of the Niš mosque is my uncle and he attended the final negotiations early that week. I have heard this is to be the elder son of Hamdija Jusufspahić, Muhamed Jusufspahić, if they all agree. If not, then the reis from Sarajevo will remain. He knows "how to play the game," while someone new will have to learn the rules first...

**Is it familiar to you that in Niš there are remains of an older tekkia? If you knew Neša Arsić, keeper of Zajda Badža who died in the meantime, he told us that there used to be an older tekkia...**

Here, let's me tell you. There is another tekkia in Niš. They are all active but not for something we are doing here. To these tekkias you may go to pray for good health, for happiness, to light up candles, to bring some gift and they are all down

there in the Jewish cemetery. It happened long ago; people have heard that, well, something happened in those places; people have been going to them for a long time but all this is not by the rules; there are no sheiks there. Usually the tekkias are in the houses; these places are very clean. I have been there, I have visited them but they always need someone to care about them, to clean them, to aerate them... As for some other older tekkias, I do not know.

**Do you have a job?**

I used to deal in trade, only occasionally. Now I have stopped since I cannot make it to all places, to funerals, to dirges...

**In a week, are there any developments in the tekkias every single day?**

I am every day in the tekkia, I constantly have duties to Alah. Our sheik has given us the right to do our *night ibadem*, at night, one or two hours after midnight, we do bowing or *sabah*; we have five daily bowings or *namaz*. On Friday is *zhikr*; every dervish must be properly dressed, must have done his *avdes* or Muslim religious washing. If I am not here, then every dervish is obliged to give *selam*, to come to this place where I am sitting now, to do his prayers and then to go back to his place.

**Are dervishes obliged to come to the tekkia every day?**

My house is open all day long. I may have guests and the guests may come any time they want. The dervish may come alone or with his wife but we do not have to go to the tekkia; we can enter my house which is right here, next to it, to sit, to socialize, to eat and talk... We know exactly how we behave when we are friends and how we behave when we are in the tekkia. In this room I am the elder for them and they do as I tell them, what I tell them. They do not have to show up on weekdays but on Fridays they have to turn up. With me, the following is the order: if the dervish cannot appear, for some reason, on a Friday evening, he is obliged to announce it and ask permission from me since I, as a sheik, must know what is going on with him. One more thing: when the dervishes come to the tekkia, they must tell it to their family, wife or parents. Therefore, he is not going some place to drink alcohol, to gamble while saying he has visited the tekkia. Also, the one who decides to drink sherbet from me and become a dervish, he is obliged to come with his wife so that she can, before the camera and everyone else, allow him publicly to do so. If he is under age, then his parents have to do it. Hence, one accepts faith with his own will and with permission, not by coercion.

***Muharem Ljatifi, Roma Sheik of the Kadiri Order***<sup>3</sup>

**We know you have been a sheik for quite some time; since when exactly?**

I have been a sheik since 1997. While attending the first class of the elementary school I started going to the tekkia, long ago, in 1972; in those days I had the status of *mihib* or disciple. My teacher was Sheik Tafa Mustafa from Kosovska Mitrovica; later on I married his daughter. In 1986 I became a dervish while I was promoted, in 1997, to sheik by Sheik Šeriza Bajrami who was also from Kosovska Mitrovica. Previously I had passed an exam before Sheik Harasani Hatijah from Đakovica. This tekkia has been since 1964 and it belongs to the tarikat Kadiri order. Before that, there had been no dervishes; it all started with Šeriz Bajrami. He, to-

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<sup>3</sup> Conversation took place on April 14 2007 in the Kadiri tekkia of Niš, located at Cattle Square

gether with Tafa Mustafa, worked in the mosque of Niš; then this place was sharia. Since in the mahala there were many old people who, in time, found ever more difficult to go to the mosque, they decided to open up, here, in the mahala, a tarikat shrine.

**Is your tekkia a member of some community of dervish orders?**

Yes, of the one in Kosovska Mitrovica. However, I seldom go there; most often I am here where I have properly registered the tekkia in the local community "Đuka Dinić." As you can see, the tekkia is in the house whose owner I am, also, and everything is registered with the city authorities. For a while I thought I could find some other location for building a new object but I realized it was too complicated so I gave it up.

**What are the relations of your tekkia with the Islam community?**

We have no problems; neither have we ever had any. We also practice five *namaz* or bowings, we practice *avdez*, we can freely sit with khodjas and talk to them. I personally know the mufti of Belgrade Jusufspahić, while with the mufti of Sandjak, Zukorlić, I have no relations whatsoever. I actively participated in the activities of the mosque of Niš up to 1998 when my first wife died; after that, I withdrew.

**Do you have any active members in the tekkia?**

I had them till two years ago, about 50 people when most of them moved away to Germany as asylum-seekers. I also have a shrine in Belgrade with approximately sixty believers, as well as in Podgorica with about 120 members. Here, however, today I almost have no believers, especially since I remarried again, three years ago, to a woman quite younger than me.

**Do you have or prepare any assistant?**

My son should be in future my deputy but he does not want to get active yet, says he is still too young. I have some disciples who are yet to take an exam with me but for this the presence of some other sheiks from Mitrovica is needed. We do not consume alcohol at all; we practice *avdez* and *namaz*; we make *ashram* in the evening and in the morning and so on.

**Do you regularly hold *zhikr* in the tekkia?**

Yes, regularly, twice a week, on Thursdays and Sundays, between five and seven in the afternoon. The second most important ritual is *namaz* with a lot of praying. The *namaz* is preceded by bowing; then we give *Mawlid*, followed by *zhikrulaj* which usually lasts for three or three hours and a half. Special *zhikrulaj* we do on the month of Moharram, after Kurban Bayrami, preceded by three-week fasting and praying; for ten days we are dressed in black and we cry. No music, no television; only God's word and talks about Prophet Mohammed, Ali and other significant religious figures. When these ten days of strict fasting and praying are over, we usually buy a lamb and prepare a solemn dinner, invite guests and celebrate. Another special *zhikrulaj* is done on every March, 21; the prayer is read and attended by as many people as possible; and, together with other sheiks, depending on how they feel, these people socialize for three or four hours. For instance, this year, I had two guests from Skopje and Đakovica; from Niš, there came my wife's brother and another man, both of them sheiks, too. This exchange of visits happens between March 21 and 25 every year.

**Are only Romas members of your tekkias in Niš, Belgrade and Podgorica? How old are they?**

No, there are other Muslims here, most of all Albanians and Shiptars but there are also Orthodox people, believe me. There are not many Montenegro Muslims. The reason for this is that I know many languages, in addition to Roma and Serbian, I also speak Arabian, Turkish, Shiptarian and German. The youngest members are 10 or 12 years old; the oldest are 60 and 70.

**How are you received by other Romas in this *mahala*, no matter if they are Muslims or Orthodox? Are there any Roma Protestants and how do they treat you?**

I am very well received; after all, I have been living here for as many as forty years. People come here; I go to their places. To tell you something honestly, neither Orthodox nor Muslims are the best of the believers, here, in my region. Let's say, true Muslims do not eat pork while here there are Romas who do it. As far as I know, No Protestant Romas are there in our *mahala* for the time being while personally I would not mind their coming here.

**Do you visit other tekkias, not only Kadiri?**

I have been to the Helvetis, Bektashi, Rifa'iyyah, Sinanya and some more; I have also attended churches; I go everywhere where I feel people are good but where they are not, I do not go. Till 1997 we had in our tekkia the possibility to pierce ourselves. If, in piercing, blood appears, it means it is not honest and the other way round. However, piercing is an honor which has to be achieved; it is achieved only by those who truly deserve it; it is usually organized in three or four years. When we visit other tekkias, we inevitably ask to talk to the elders since our order is the oldest and we have to be respected before all others even though they may be, considering their age only, older than us.

**What did you do before you became a sheik?**

In the beginning I only adhered to the Muslim faith. I was born in Gnjilane but I lived in Istok, in the vicinity of Peć. When I came to Niš in 1968 to do my military service, I met my first wife here and got married. I had previously kept a tin-smith's shop in Istok and together with my six brothers we also kept a shop in Klina. We have always been Muslims as long as we can remember. My ancestors were, nevertheless, long-lived people: my grandfather lived till the age of 130 while my father till he was 122. Today I live only on the role of sheik. People come to look for salvation or because they expect some benefit; I relieve them of witchcraft, I make *zjafet* (special prayer) for the house. We also make *zhikrulaj* in a new house but only if the host wants it voluntarily. I used to work for six years in Austria so that now I am considering the possibility of submitting my requirement for pension since I am getting close to sixty-five. As for schooling, I have only two classes of elementary school but I do not see it as a great shortcoming. For my professed honesty God has endowed me with this power and this knowledge but I would like to tell you that I had to, before taking my exam, learn seventy and two thousand questions....

**What are your relations with other tekkias in Niš?**

With the tekkia of Dane Emini I have personally very good relations; we greet each other when we meet in the street but I do not enter his tekkia. The main reason for this is that they pierce themselves every fifteen days and the *zhikrulaj* they make because of that it is not pleasing to us. They are not much liked by other

Muslim leaders, either, since they somehow put it that they are larger than God himself which is not true; we are only servants of God. At large gatherings, they pierce their children and make a spectacle of it which I do not like and that is why we do not exchange visits with them, except on great holidays though even then we first announce our visit and ask there would be no other people to disturb us. You know, even according to the Islam doctrine, it is a sin for man to *nakadi* or disfigure himself so that our order does not imply piercing at all; I say, maybe once a year or less than that and even then only for those who have deserved it. I have personally denied piercing to myself, but I do not prevent others from doing it if they want it so. Here, you see, on the walls there are lined-up all these needles for piercing but I do not use them. In all this, hygiene is well taken care of but, God forbids, something may happen, and in a second man can die; all in all, this is a great risk.

**How do you estimate your chances for enlarging your membership here in Niš?**

To tell you truly, when I am here, I feel like a sick man. That is why I more often in Podgorica where my daughter got married; I have other believers there and care about their education since they will put the blame on me if they are not fully ready for the exams they will take tomorrow. Otherwise my neighbors are good people; I have no problem with them but they are simply not interested in joining some faith, entering a church, or a mosque or this. They are unbelieving people; they do as they can and they only come to me when something terrible happens to them so they ask for help but, most often, it is too late for any kind of help. My duty is to accept to come, if they call me and not by force, to the funeral; I most often go to poor people and I enable them to make their wish come true even when they have no money to pay for it though my wife's brother Demir Toska, for instance, has a fee set in advance for his services, charging hundred euros or more for a prayer. In Niš there are four tekkias but none of them is, except for mine, registered. The second one is Dane's in Beogradmala while in the neighborhood of his there is a tekkia of my wife's brother Demir Toska of the Kadiri order and another of Rifa'iyah order headed by Osman Biga, which was once supported by the father of Dane Emini... In the vicinity of my tekkia, there is an object which I have opened up but this attempt has not succeeded; people gather together sometimes there but this place is not furnished at all. On principle, I think that the tekkia will not open any more; it is more likely that they will close down those already existing. I have, all in all, sixteen grandchildren by my daughter and by my son and I am aware this is a small space which will not satisfy all the needs of the faithful; moreover, I have more interested people among the young, namely those who are now between eight and twelve years of age. That is why I have planned to buy an estate and build a genuine big tekkia that would gather together a great number of faithful and that would be in the sharia instead of the tarikat since I am sticking to the basic principles of faith and this is the most important thing. There is an instructed disciple of mine from Podgorica who is now living in Germany and there he gathers together about 120 believers, not only Romas... And I would also like one of my descendents to become a sheik in the future.

**What does it really mean when you say that the tekkia is not official?**

For someone to be an official sheik, this has to be confirmed by many other sheiks from the Kadiri order. My teacher first instructed my wife's brother Demir Toska and then me; this has been confirmed by other sheiks as well and that is why he is as official as I am. Dane Emini, however, was proclaimed only by his father who was truly a sheik but not in the presence and with the approval of other sheiks. This

is the same case as with Osman Bigo who possibly has one more tekkia in Kraljevo or Kragujevac, I am not sure. I have even heard a story how Dane's father did it because he owed some money to Osman and, unable to pay off his debt, he promoted him to the title of sheik, in return. I have, for instance, prepared the documentation to proclaim my son as a sheik and if something happens to me unexpectedly, God forbids, he will be able to take over this position. But, until he gets approval from other sheiks, he will not be a true one. And this, just as I have described to you using my example, is preceded by taking a serious exam. And everyone who passes the exam for sheik gets a flag on which there are prayers of all the twelve tarikats written on as on mine here in the corner. I repeat, I have nothing against any of them; I greet everyone in the street.

### Conclusion

If we have (Đorđević, 2007), while taking only a secondary interest in Islam, allowed ourselves to reproach our outstanding Islamologists for failing to make us more exhaustively familiar with everyday Islam on the territory of Serbia,<sup>4</sup> (of which one of those criticized, Darko Tanasković, has been aware of it even earlier),<sup>5</sup> then it seems decent that we should try a little to do something about it. While dealing with Roma topics, we have, on several occasions, studied "Islam here and now" among the Serbian Muslim Romas (Đorđević and Todorović, 1999; Đorđević, 2001; Đorđević and Todorović, 2001; Đorđević and Todorović, 2002; Đorđević, 2003; Đorđević, 2005b; Todorović, 2005). And thus, starting from the cemeteries, through the culture of death and cult places, we have come to the tekkias, tarikat and sheiks of Niš Romas all the time keeping in mind an idea obtained from Petko Hristov, a well-known Bulgarian ethnologist, about the process that is rapidly going on in his country, about "Tsiganization" of their numerous tekkias,<sup>6</sup> as well as an observation made by Ružica Cacanaska, sociologist of religion from Sofia, that there is an increasing number of Roma Muslims among Macedonian dervishes.<sup>7</sup> There are also indications that many Jemkas, from Niš to Leskovac, from Vranje to Preševo, like the one in a beautiful and old Roma song from Niš, want "to run away, mother, all the way to the tekkia." To confirm this, it is indispensable to undertake a special research project.

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<sup>4</sup> "It's a true wonder that the least known and least explored are *domestic Islam* and *Islam population*, from Kosovo and so-called Valley of Preševo through the Sandzak and Belgrade to Novi Sad and Subotica, unlike quite considerable coverage of "faraway" Islam in Iran or Afghanistan or Arabian Peninsula (Two scientists exploring Islam are most often present in our public, namely Dr Darko Tanasković, Professor of the Faculty of Philology, and Dr Miroljub Jeftić, Professor of the Faculty of Political Sciences, Belgrade. To both of them, as fellow colleague, we address the following remark: they have not made us familiar with empirical Islam on the local territory.)" (Đorđević, 2007:17)"

<sup>5</sup> As we are informed by Ljiljana Čolić (1995:10): "The statement made just now (of Darko Tanasković's, author's note) that Islam is at issue obliges us here and now to undertake new research projects for the sake of better learning and understanding the activities of the dervish orders on our territory in order to be able to objectively estimate their power and influence."

<sup>6</sup> Said in a personal conversation with D. B. Đorđević in Sofia in October 2006

<sup>7</sup> Said in the conversation with D. B. Đorđević and D. Todorović in Skopje, in February 2007

**QUESTIONNAIRE**  
**ROMA SHEIKS FROM NIŠ**  
**D. B. Đorđević 2007**

1. We know you have been a sheik for a long time. Since when exactly?
2. Who has promoted you into a sheik?
3. What is the name of your tarikat?
4. Is your tarikat a member of some community of dervish orders?
5. What are your relations with the Islam Community, with Effendi Jusufspahić, mufti of Belgrade or Muamer Zukorlić?
6. Why is the relationship such as it is?
7. How many “believers” or active members do you have?
8. Do you have assistants?
9. Is the tekkia in a private house or not?
10. Do you regularly do *zhikr*?
11. What else do your rituals comprise?
12. What is the main ritual and when is it?
13. Are active members in the tekkia only Romas or do you have other Muslims as well?
14. What is age structure of dervishes and all those who come to the tekkia regularly: are they young, middle-aged or old?
15. How are you received by other Romas: Muslims, Orthodox, Protestants?
16. Do you visit other tekkias as well?
17. What did you used to be? What are you now?
18. Has your family always been Muslim?
19. What are you by education?
20. How do you see other tekkias in Niš; are there any?



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PHOTOGRAPHIES



Ph. 1 Rifa'iyyah Tekkia, Belgrade Quarter, Niš, 2007.



Ph. 2. Slobodan Emni, Roma Sheik of the Rifa'iyyah Order, Belgrade Quarter, Niš, 2007.



Ph. 3. Inner Outlook of the Rifa'iyyah Tekkia, Belgrade Quarter, Niš, 2007.



Ph. 4 Muharem Ljatifi, Roma Sheik of the Kadiri Order, Cattle Square, Niš, 2007.



Ph. 5 Inner Outlook of the Kadiri Tekkia, Cattle Square, Niš, 2007.



Ph. 6 Inner Outlook of the Kadiri Tekkia, Cattle Square, Niš, 2007.