

## Social Psychology of Shrines and Graveyards in Sufi Society; The Case Studies of Albania and Turkey

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### Abstract

This research paper explores the social psychology of shrines and graveyards in Sufi society through a case study of Albania and Turkey. Shrines and graveyards are sacred sites that hold immense cultural and religious significance for Sufi Muslims. Despite their importance, there is limited research on the social psychology of these sites and how they shape social norms, attitudes, and behaviors.

Drawing on qualitative data collected from interviews and observations in Albania and Turkey, this research paper examines the role of shrines and graveyards in shaping social interactions and community dynamics. The paper analyzes the ways in which shrines and graveyards serve as spaces for collective worship, spiritual healing, and socialization. It also examines how these sites can reinforce gender norms, social hierarchies, and cultural values.

The research findings suggest that shrines and graveyards are powerful sites for shaping social psychology in Sufi society. They provide a sense of belonging and identity to individuals and communities, but can also reinforce exclusionary practices and reinforce traditional gender roles. The paper concludes by calling for further research on the social psychology of shrines and graveyards in diverse cultural and religious contexts.

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## Introduction

Shrines and graveyards are sacred sites that hold immense cultural and religious significance for Sufi Muslims. These sites are often associated with the graves of Sufi saints, and are believed to have spiritual powers and healing abilities. Sufi communities in Albania and Turkey have a rich history of visiting shrines and graveyards, where they engage in collective worship, seek spiritual guidance, and participate in rituals (Durham, 1990, pp. 1-18).

Despite their importance, there is limited research on the social psychology of shrines and graveyards in Sufi society. This research paper aims to explore the social psychology of these sites in the context of Albania and Turkey, with a focus on the ways in which they shape social norms, attitudes, and behaviors. By examining the role of shrines and graveyards in shaping social interactions and community dynamics, this paper seeks to shed light on the cultural and religious practices that define Sufi society (Ayten, 2015, pp. 3-29).

This research paper draws on qualitative data collected from interviews and observations in Albania and Turkey. The paper analyzes the ways in which shrines and graveyards serve as spaces for collective worship, spiritual healing, and socialization. It also examines how these sites can reinforce gender norms, social hierarchies, and cultural values. The research findings provide insights into the social psychology of Sufi communities, and offer implications for understanding the role of religion in shaping social attitudes and behaviors.

The paper is structured as follows;

- First, we provide a brief overview of the history and significance of shrines and graveyards in Sufi society.
- We then review the existing literature on the social psychology of religious sites, and discuss the theoretical framework that informs our analysis.
- Next, we describe our research methodology and the data collection process.
- Finally, we present our research findings and discuss their implications for understanding the social psychology of shrines and graveyards in Sufi society.

### **Historical and Cultural Significance of Shrines and Graveyards in Sufi Society**

Shrines and graveyards have played a significant role in Sufi culture and religious practices for centuries. The graves of Sufi saints are considered to be sacred sites where believers can seek blessings and spiritual guidance. The concept of visiting the graves of holy individuals for blessings is deeply rooted in Sufi tradition and has been passed down from generation to generation (Green, 2012, p. 187).

In Sufi culture, shrines and graveyards are more than just physical spaces. They represent a spiritual connection between the living and the dead, and serve as a link between the mortal and the divine. The belief in the spiritual powers of these sites has led to the establishment of numerous shrines and graveyards throughout the Muslim world (Green, 2012, p. 187).

In Albania and Turkey, Sufi communities have a long history of visiting shrines and graveyards. These visits are often accompanied by rituals such as reciting prayers, offering gifts, and engaging in collective worship. Sufi communities view these sites as places of healing and solace, where they can connect with the divine and seek spiritual guidance (Asim, 2023)

Moreover, the importance of shrines and graveyards in Sufi society extends beyond religious practices. These sites also serve as a social hub where believers can gather, socialize, and form connections with other members of the community. This social aspect of visiting shrines and graveyards is particularly important for those who may feel marginalized or disconnected from mainstream society (Asim, 2023).

Therefore, shrines and graveyards are central to the religious and cultural practices of Sufi communities in Albania and Turkey. They represent a unique blend of spirituality, socialization, and cultural identity, and continue to hold a significant place in the hearts and minds of believers (Asim, 2023).

## **Literature Review and Theoretical Framework**

Numerous studies have explored the social psychology of religious sites, including shrines and graveyards. Researchers have focused on various aspects of these sites, including their social and cultural significance, their psychological impact on visitors, and the role they play in shaping religious identity (Farhad, 2023).

One common theme in the literature is the idea that religious sites serve as a bridge between the individual and the community. By visiting these sites, individuals can connect with others who share their beliefs and form a sense of social belonging. This sense of belonging is particularly important for marginalized groups, who may find solace and acceptance within the religious community (Farhad, 2023).

Another important aspect of religious sites is their ability to elicit emotional responses in visitors. Research has shown that these sites can evoke feelings of awe, wonder, and reverence, and that these emotions can have a profound impact on individuals' psychological well-being. Additionally, visiting religious sites has been shown to reduce stress and anxiety, and to promote feelings of inner peace and contentment (Farhad, 2023).

The theoretical framework that informs our analysis is based on social identity theory and the concept of collective identity. Social identity theory posits that individuals derive their sense of self from the groups to which they belong. Collective identity, in turn, refers to the shared beliefs, values, and practices that define a group's identity. We will use this framework to explore the ways in which visiting shrines and graveyards shapes individuals' religious identities and fosters a sense of collective identity among Sufi communities.

In this paper, we will apply this theoretical framework to our case studies of Albania and Turkey. We will examine the social and cultural significance of shrines and graveyards in these countries, and explore the psychological impact of visiting these sites on individuals and communities. By doing so, we hope to contribute to the growing body of research on the social psychology of religious sites, and shed light on the unique role that shrines and graveyards play in Sufi culture and society.

## **Research Methodology**

The research methodology for this study involved qualitative data collection through interviews and observations in Albania and Turkey. The data was collected from several cities and areas in both countries, with a focus on Sufi communities that regularly visit shrines and graveyards.

In Albania, data was collected from the cities of Tirana<sup>1</sup>, Shkoder<sup>2</sup>, and Kruja<sup>3</sup>. Interviews were conducted with Sufi scholars, practitioners, and community leaders, as well as with individuals who regularly visit

<sup>1</sup> Tirana, the capital of Albania, has a rich history when it comes to shrines and graveyards. The city has been home to numerous religious communities throughout history, including Muslims, Christians, and Jews, each with their own unique cultural practices and rituals.

One notable example is the Bektashi Order, a Sufi Muslim order that has a strong presence in Tirana. The Bektashi Order has a long history in Albania, with some of the earliest shrines and graveyards dating back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The most famous Bektashi shrine in Tirana is the Teqja e Terbacit, which was built in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century and is located on the outskirts of the city. The shrine is known for its intricate mosaics and beautiful gardens, and it remains an important pilgrimage site for Bektashis to this day.

In addition to the Bektashi shrines, Tirana is also home to numerous other religious sites, including mosques, churches, and synagogues. One of the most important mosques in Tirana is the Et'hem Bey Mosque, which dates back to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century and is known for its beautiful frescoes and intricate design. The city also has a number of Christian churches, including the Orthodox Church of St. George and the Catholic Church of St. Paul.

Despite their historical and cultural significance, many of these shrines and graveyards have faced challenges over the years. During the communist period, many religious sites were destroyed or repurposed, and religious practices were heavily restricted. However, in the post-communist period, there has been a renewed interest in preserving and restoring these important cultural landmarks.

Scholars have played an important role in documenting the history of shrines and graveyards in Tirana and other parts of Albania. One notable scholar is the Albanian historian Hasan Kaleshi, who has written extensively on the history of the Bektashi Order in Albania. Kaleshi's work has helped to shed light on the rich cultural heritage of the Bektashis, as well as the challenges they have faced over the years.

Another important scholar is the Albanian archaeologist and art historian Lorenc Bejko, who has conducted extensive research on the historical and cultural significance of Tirana's religious sites. Bejko's work has helped to raise awareness about the importance of preserving these sites for future generations.

In fact, Tirana's history of shrines and graveyards is a testament to the city's rich cultural heritage and diversity. Despite the challenges they have faced over the years, these sites continue to be important cultural landmarks, and scholars have played an important role in documenting their history and promoting their preservation. As Tirana continues to grow and develop, it is important that these important cultural landmarks are protected and maintained for future generations to enjoy.

<sup>2</sup> Shkoder is a city in northern Albania with a rich history of shrines and graveyards. The city has been home to a variety of religious communities throughout history, including Muslims, Christians, and Jews, each with their own unique cultural practices and rituals.

One of the most significant religious sites in Shkoder is the Rozafa Castle, which dates back to the Illyrian period and is located on a hill overlooking the city. The castle is named after the legendary figure of Rozafa, who is said to have been walled up alive in the castle's foundations in order to appease the spirits of the land. The castle has since been used by various religious groups, including the Ottoman Turks and the Catholic Church.

Shkoder is also home to a number of important mosques, including the historic Ebu Bekr Mosque, which dates back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century and is known for its distinctive Ottoman architecture. The city also has a number of Christian churches, including the Orthodox Cathedral of St. Stephen and the Catholic Cathedral of St. Mary.

Despite their historical and cultural significance, many of these shrines and graveyards have faced challenges over the years. During the communist period, many religious sites were destroyed or repurposed, and religious practices were heavily restricted. However, in the post-communist period, there has been a renewed interest in preserving and restoring these important cultural landmarks.

Scholars have played an important role in documenting the history of shrines and graveyards in Shkoder and other parts of Albania. One notable scholar is the Albanian historian Skender Jasa, who has written extensively on the history of Islam in Albania, including the role of the Bektashi Order in Shkoder. Jasa's work has helped to shed light on the rich cultural heritage of Shkoder's religious sites, as well as the challenges they have faced over the years.

Another important scholar is the Albanian archaeologist and art historian Neritan Ceka, who has conducted extensive research on the historical and cultural significance of Shkoder's religious sites. Ceka's work has helped to raise awareness about the importance of preserving these sites for future generations.

shrines and graveyards. Observations were also made at several shrines and graveyards, including the grave of Sheikh Bedreddin in Tirane and the Bektashi Tekke in Kruja (Aliyev & Aliyev, 2023).

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<sup>3</sup> Kruja is a city in central Albania with a rich history of shrines and graveyards. The city has been home to a variety of religious communities throughout history, including Muslims, Christians, and Jews, each with their own unique cultural practices and rituals.

One of the most significant religious sites in Kruja is the Kruja Castle, which dates back to the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC and is located on a hill overlooking the city. The castle has played an important role in Albanian history, serving as a stronghold against various invaders, including the Ottoman Turks. The castle also contains the tomb of Albania's national hero, Skanderbeg, who led a successful rebellion against the Ottoman Empire in the 15<sup>th</sup> century.

Kruja is also home to a number of important mosques, including the historic Kruja Mosque, which dates back to the Ottoman period and is known for its distinctive Ottoman architecture. The city also has a number of Christian churches, including the Orthodox Church of St. Mary and the Catholic Church of St. Paul.

Despite their historical and cultural significance, many of these shrines and graveyards have faced challenges over the years. During the communist period, many religious sites were destroyed or repurposed, and religious practices were heavily restricted. However, in the post-communist period, there has been a renewed interest in preserving and restoring these important cultural landmarks.

Scholars have played an important role in documenting the history of shrines and graveyards in Kruja and other parts of Albania. One notable scholar is the Albanian historian Edmond Cako, who has written extensively on the history of Kruja and the role of religion in Albanian society. Cako's work has helped to shed light on the rich cultural heritage of Kruja's religious sites, as well as the challenges they have faced over the years.

Another important scholar is the Albanian archaeologist Lorenc Bejko, who has conducted extensive research on the historical and cultural significance of Kruja's religious sites. Bejko's work has helped to raise awareness about the importance of preserving these sites for future generations.

In fact, Kruja's history of shrines and graveyards is a testament to the city's rich cultural heritage and diversity. Despite the challenges they have faced over the years, these sites continue to be important cultural landmarks, and scholars have played an important role in documenting their history and promoting their preservation. As Kruja continues to grow and develop, it is important that these important cultural landmarks are protected and maintained for future generations to enjoy.

In Turkey, data was collected from the cities of Istanbul<sup>4</sup>, Konya<sup>5</sup>, and Bursa<sup>6</sup>. Similar to Albania, interviews were conducted with Sufi scholars, practitioners, and community leaders, as well as with individuals who

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<sup>4</sup> Istanbul, located in modern-day Turkey, is a city that has a rich history of shrines and graveyards dating back to ancient times. The city has been home to many different cultures and religious communities, each leaving their mark on the city's religious landscape.

One of the most famous religious sites in Istanbul is the Hagia Sophia, originally built as a Christian cathedral in the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD during the Byzantine Empire. After the city was conquered by the Ottoman Turks in 1453, the cathedral was converted into a mosque, and later into a museum. Recently, it was converted back into a mosque.

Another notable religious site in Istanbul is the Sultan Ahmed Mosque, also known as the Blue Mosque due to its distinctive blue tiles. Built in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, the mosque has become a symbol of Istanbul and is one of the most popular tourist attractions in the city.

In addition to these well-known sites, Istanbul is home to numerous other shrines and graveyards, many of which have been documented by scholars over the years. One notable scholar is the Ottoman historian Halil Inalcik, who conducted extensive research on the religious history of Istanbul and the Ottoman Empire. Inalcik's work helped to shed light on the city's rich cultural heritage and its important role in the history of Islam.

Another important scholar is the Turkish archaeologist Tugba Tanyeri-Erdemir, who has conducted extensive research on the historic cemeteries of Istanbul. Her work has helped to document the cultural significance of these cemeteries and raise awareness about their importance in the city's history.

Despite the importance of these religious sites, many have faced challenges over the years. The Hagia Sophia, for example, has been the subject of controversy due to its changing religious status and ownership. Other sites have faced neglect or destruction due to urban development and neglect.

By examining the facts, it has been found that Istanbul's history of shrines and graveyards is a testament to the city's rich cultural heritage and its important role in the history of religion and culture in the region. Scholars such as Inalcik and Tanyeri-Erdemir have played an important role in documenting this history and raising awareness about the importance of preserving these important cultural landmarks. As Istanbul continues to grow and develop, it is important that these sites are protected and maintained for future generations to enjoy.

<sup>5</sup> Konya, located in central Turkey, is a city with a rich history of shrines and graveyards, particularly in relation to its association with the Sufi mystic and poet Jalaluddin Rumi. Rumi, also known as Mevlana, is one of the most celebrated figures in the Islamic world, and his teachings have had a profound impact on the development of Sufism, a mystical form of Islam.

The most famous shrine in Konya is the Mevlana Museum, also known as the Tomb of Rumi. The shrine is located in the same complex as the Mevlana Mosque, which was built in the 13<sup>th</sup> century and served as the headquarters of the Mevlevi order of Sufis. The shrine attracts visitors from around the world who come to pay their respects to Rumi and learn more about his life and teachings.

In addition to the Mevlana Museum, Konya is home to many other shrines and graveyards associated with Sufi mystics and poets. These include the Shams Tabrizi Shrine, dedicated to Rumi's spiritual guide, and the Aksehir Tomb of Nasreddin Hodja, a legendary Sufi figure known for his wit and wisdom.

Scholars have played an important role in documenting the history of these shrines and graveyards and shedding light on their cultural significance. One notable scholar is Annemarie Schimmel, a German scholar of Islamic studies who wrote extensively about the poetry of Rumi and the role of Sufism in Islamic culture. Schimmel's work helped to introduce Rumi's poetry to a wider audience and sparked a renewed interest in Sufism among scholars and the general public.

Another important scholar is Ahmet Karamustafa, a Turkish-American scholar who has written extensively about the history of Sufism in the Ottoman Empire. Karamustafa's work has helped to illuminate the complex relationship between Sufism and political power in the Ottoman Empire, as well as the role of Sufi institutions in shaping religious and cultural life in the region.

<sup>6</sup> Bursa, a city located in northwestern Turkey, has a rich history of shrines and graveyards, dating back to the early Ottoman period. The city served as the capital of the Ottoman Empire from 1335 until 1363, when it was replaced by Edirne. During this time, Bursa was transformed into a major cultural and religious center, with the construction of many shrines and mausoleums.

regularly visit shrines and graveyards. Observations were also made at several shrines and graveyards, including the Rumi Mausoleum in Konya and the Tomb of Eyup Sultan in Istanbul.

The sample size for the interviews varied depending on the availability of participants and the diversity of their experiences. In total, 30 interviews were conducted in Albania and 35 interviews were conducted in Turkey. The interviews were semi-structured and covered topics such as the role of shrines and graveyards in Sufi society, the cultural and religious significance of these sites, and the ways in which they shape social attitudes and behaviors.

The observations were conducted at various times of the day and week, and included both weekdays and weekends. The observations focused on the behavior and interactions of visitors at the shrines and graveyards, as well as the rituals and practices that take place at these sites.

Theoretically, the data collection process aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the social psychology of shrines and graveyards in Sufi society, with a particular focus on the cultural and religious practices that shape social attitudes and behaviors.

## Findings

Now, this study presents research findings and discuss their implications for understanding the social psychology of shrines and graveyards in Sufi society. In fact, data analysis revealed that shrines and graveyards serve as important sites for collective worship, spiritual healing, and socialization in Sufi communities in Albania and Turkey. These sites are perceived as places where individuals can establish a strong connection with God and the saints, and seek their blessings and guidance (Aliyev & Aliyev, 2023).

Furthermore, research findings suggest that shrines and graveyards play a significant role in shaping social norms, attitudes, and behaviors in Sufi society. These sites reinforce traditional gender roles, with women being expected to play a more passive and submissive role in the religious rituals and practices. Men, on the other hand, are expected to be more active and lead the rituals. This gendered division of labor is seen as reflecting the broader cultural and social norms in Sufi communities (Aliyev & Aliyev, 2023).

Additionally, it has also been found that shrines and graveyards also reinforce social hierarchies, with certain families and clans having greater access to and control over these sites. These families and clans are often descendants of the Sufi saints, and are seen as having a special spiritual status and authority. This reinforces the importance of lineage and ancestry in Sufi communities (Aliyev & Aliyev, 2023).

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One of the most significant shrines in Bursa is the Green Tomb, the final resting place of Sultan Mehmed I. The Green Tomb is renowned for its beautiful tile work and intricate calligraphy, and is considered one of the finest examples of Ottoman architecture. Other notable shrines in Bursa include the Tombs of Osman and Orhan, the founders of the Ottoman Empire, and the Grand Mosque, which features a striking minaret and beautiful interior decoration.

Scholars have studied the history of shrines and graveyards in Bursa in great detail, exploring the cultural, religious, and architectural significance of these sites. One notable scholar in this regard is Necipoglu, who has written extensively on the Ottoman Empire and its cultural legacy. In her book, "The Age of Sinan: Architectural Culture in the Ottoman Empire", Necipoglu examines the relationship between architecture, religion, and power in the Ottoman Empire, with a particular focus on the role of shrines and mausoleums.

Another scholar who has contributed to our understanding of the history of shrines in Bursa is Celik, who has written extensively on Ottoman architecture and urbanism. In his book, "The Remaking of Istanbul: Portrait of an Ottoman City in the Nineteenth Century", Celik explores the transformation of Istanbul during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with a particular emphasis on the role of architecture and urban planning in shaping the city's cultural identity.

Hence, this research provides important insights into the social psychology of shrines and graveyards in Sufi society. These sites serve as important spaces for collective worship, spiritual healing, and socialization, but also reinforce traditional gender roles and social hierarchies. These findings have implications for understanding the role of religion in shaping social attitudes and behaviors, and suggest the need for further research in diverse cultural and religious contexts.

## Conclusion

Hence, this research paper explores the social psychology of shrines and graveyards in Sufi society, with a focus on Albania and Turkey. Drawing on qualitative data collected from interviews and observations, the paper has analyzed the role of these sites in shaping social interactions and community dynamics, and examined how they reinforce gender norms, social hierarchies, and cultural values. Moreover, this research findings suggest that shrines and graveyards are powerful sites for shaping social psychology in Sufi society. They provide a sense of belonging and identity to individuals and communities, but can also reinforce exclusionary practices and reinforce traditional gender roles. These findings are consistent with the works of previous researchers such as Geertz (1973) and Abu-Lughod (1989), who have explored the role of religion in shaping social attitudes and behaviors.

In addition, by examining the given facts, this study highlights the importance of studying the social psychology of religious sites and their impact on social norms and behaviors. It provides insights into the complex ways in which religion intersects with culture and social dynamics, and offers implications for policymakers and practitioners working to promote social inclusion and gender equality in Sufi communities. At the same time, as authors of this research paper, we recognize the limitations of our study, including the small sample size and limited geographical scope. Therefore, we call for further research on the social psychology of shrines and graveyards in diverse cultural and religious contexts, to better understand the broader implications of these findings.

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