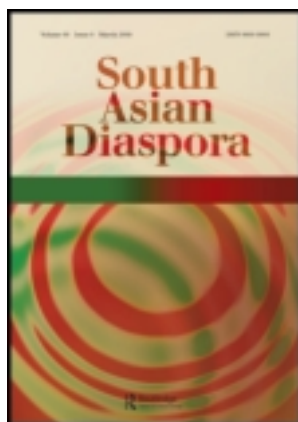


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### Transnational Sufism from below: charismatic counselling and the quest for well-being

Mikkel Rytter<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Department of Culture and Society, Aarhus University, Aarhus, Denmark

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## Transnational Sufism from below: charismatic counselling and the quest for well-being

Mikkel Rytter\*

*Department of Culture and Society, Aarhus University, Aarhus, Denmark*

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Pakistani migrants in Denmark have achieved a level of prosperity and social mobility that first-generation migrants could only dream of before they emigrated in the 1960s. However, their success has come at a price. Currently, migrant families are experiencing a period of radical social change, which challenges and alters their perception of well-being. In such a critical situation, they may turn towards Sufi shaykhs, located in Pakistan, for help and guidance. This article puts forward the concept of ‘transnational Sufism from below’ in order to explore how migrants pragmatically use religious counselling in dealing with the contingencies of everyday life. The quest for well-being is not only related to the pain and suffering of ‘the individual body’, but it is also related, to a large extent, to ‘the social body’ of family and kinship relations, and seems to outline a new kind of diffuse transnational engagement with the potential for reshaping diasporic identities and connections between Pakistan and Denmark.

**Keywords:** Sufism; Islam; transnationalism; migration; Pakistani migrants; Denmark

Over the last 40 years, Pakistani migrants in Denmark have been tremendously successful in terms of social and economic mobilities. The older generation has advanced from being unskilled factory workers to becoming self-employed businessmen and women. Meanwhile, their children have managed an unprecedented leap in upward mobility, as many have completed higher education and now aspire to become part of the Danish middle class. The Pakistanis constitute a successful migrant community: the promises of social and economic mobilities, intellectual development and human security, embedded in the grand narratives of migration and modernity (cf. Osella and Osella 2006), have, to a large extent, materialised. However, their success has also given rise to challenges. Currently, the structure and moral value of the family institution, highly treasured among many Pakistanis, are being replaced by alternative social formations that are supposedly more adequate to life in diaspora. The result is a ‘crisis of success’, where a gap is developing between the pioneer generation and their well-educated adult children, who were born and raised in Denmark and who simply have different ideas about what it means to *be* and to *do* family (cf. Carsten 2000). In this process, the horizon of well-being, understood as the ideal of ‘a happy extended family’ – the ultimate goal of migration itself – seems to dissolve and fade away. One

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\*Email: [mikkel.rytter@hum.au.dk](mailto:mikkel.rytter@hum.au.dk)

way for migrants to cope with this disruptive turbulence is by consulting a Sufi shaykh (a charismatic religious teacher and healer) in Pakistan to seek help and guidance. The way in which migrants utilise charismatic counselling in their quest for well-being outlines a kind of diffuse transnational engagement which has the potential to reshape diaspora identities and connections between Pakistan and Denmark.

Numerous recent studies of Sufism focus on the embodied charisma of a living shaykh (Werbner and Basu 1998), on religious festivals and the veneration of deceased saints at Sufi shrines (Curie 2006; Frembgén 2011), on the practical and emotional aspects of *zikr* (commemoration of God) gatherings (Lizzio 2007; Pinto 2010; Irwin 2011), and on the global reach and plasticity of contemporary Sufism (Werbner 2003; Malik and Hinnells 2006; Geaves, Dressler, and Klinkhammer 2009; Bubandt 2011; Stjernholm 2011; Mathiesen 2012). However, until now, little emphasis has been placed on what I call ‘transnational Sufism from below’, which focuses on the pivotal role that the charismatic shaykh located outside Europe may have on the life trajectories and organisation of everyday family life among migrants abroad. The concept builds on a distinction developed in migration studies between transnationalism ‘from above’ and ‘from below’ (Smith and Guarnizo 1998), the first of these referring to formal hegemonic phenomena (such as global economy, multinational corporations or international religious organisations) and the latter addressing how global processes affect power relations, cultural construction and social organisation at the level of the specific locality. In the context of Sufism, ‘transnationalism from below’ addresses the various religious practices, technologies and beliefs that South Asian migrants pragmatically engage with in order to reach specific goals. In contrast to much recent writing on global Sufism, I suggest inverting the figure–ground relationship and allowing the migrant family (and the way people pragmatically search for help and guidance in order to deal with idiosyncrasies of everyday life) to become the main figure or text. Accordingly, the organisation of the Sufi tariqa (path, order), the hagiography and genealogy of living or deceased shaykhs, and the more-or-less mystical rituals and experiences become the ground or context for understanding migrants’ ongoing quest for well-being. Approaching migrants’ religious beliefs, relations and practices ‘from below’ not only emphasises the more functional aspects of Sufism, but also enables a discussion of the socio-spatial dimensions of transnational social fields, stretched between Europe and South Asia.

From a different starting point, Ballard (2011) has suggested that we distinguish between two domains of religious life, which he calls *madri muzhub* and *padre muzhub*.<sup>1</sup> *Madri muzhub* is concerned with religious practices deployed in relation to domestic issues and family life, including child-rearing, gender relations, parental authority, maintaining good relations within the household and with the extended family, etc. *Madri muzhub* here refers to religious ideas and practices used to maintain, create and contest moral orders and notions of relatedness within local and transnational families. The private domain of *madri muzhub* stands in contrast to the more public domain of *padre muzhub*, which refers to institutionalised orthodoxy as performed in mosques, temples or churches. According to Ballard, *madri muzhub* serves functional purposes and has particular salience within migrant communities where members find themselves exposed to rapid and disturbing processes of social and environmental change (2011, 36–37). A focus on ‘transnational Sufism from below’ has much in common with *madri muzhub*: both are concerned with the way migrants attempt to utilise religious technologies and seek charismatic counselling in order to deal with the contingencies of life in the diaspora and hopefully change them for the better.

The material presented in this article is based partly on doctoral fieldwork among Pakistani migrant families in Denmark 2007–2008 (cf. Rytter 2013), as well as a post-doctoral project on Sufism and transnational spirituality in 2011–2012. First, the article elaborates on the current ‘crisis of success’, and how it affects notions of relatedness in migrant families. Then it discusses how the shaykh–murid relationship works in a transnational field. Finally, it looks at the instructive cases of how Noreen and Irfan deal with infertility, the controversial love marriage between Jamila and Naem, and Shazia’s growing suspicion of occult attacks perpetuated by her ex-husband and his family. These three cases facilitate a discussion of how Sufism from below can affect migrants’ everyday lives, as well as the constitution and dynamics of the transnational social field. All names in this article have been changed, in order to respect the anonymity and integrity of the interlocutors.

### The Pakistanis of Denmark

Pakistanis started coming to Denmark as ‘guest workers’ in the late 1960s. In 1973, the Danish Government banned further labour-related immigration, but Pakistanis kept coming to Denmark through family reunification. Today, approximately 25,000 people residing in greater Copenhagen have a family history related to Pakistan. Most of them originate from villages near Gujarat and Jhelum in rural Punjab.

With economic recession and increasing unemployment in the late 1970s and 1980s, many semi-skilled Pakistanis lost their jobs and became self-employed, running restaurants, travel agencies, groceries, corner shops (*kiosks*) or taxi firms (Hjarnø 2000). These businesses were run and financed with the help of *biraderi* networks (classificatory brotherhood), consisting in the Danish context of trusted friends, fellow villagers and members of the extended family. These prosperous occupational niches, along with investments in real estate, have made many families economically well-off. Over the years, criss-crossing life trajectories and family stories have resulted in a village-like community spread out over the geographical area of Copenhagen and its suburbs, where it is generally believed that ‘everyone knows everyone else’ (*alle kender alle*). An important aspect of community life is the ongoing circulation of gossip and mutual social control. The relative economic success of the Pakistanis has generated an agonistic dynamic in which every aspect of life can be – and usually is – turned into a competition (cf. Werbner 1990, xv). When the second generation entered the free Danish educational system in the 1980s and 1990s, school performance and educational achievements became yet another arena of competition. As a result, young Danish Pakistanis today distinguish themselves from other migrant groups by having an educational level that is almost equivalent to their average Danish peer group (cf. Rytter 2013, Chap. 2).

The settlement process and this successful upward social mobility challenge common notions of relatedness and what it implies to be a family. I give four brief examples:

(1) *Authority*. In the Pakistani villages where the majority of the elder migrants grew up, the right to make crucial decisions in relation to the public sphere was often a prerogative of the oldest male, while decisions in relation to the domestic sphere were managed by the senior woman of the family. In Denmark, however, seniority does not automatically lead to a privileged position. Many older Pakistanis today have left, or are about to leave, the labour market. Some live on welfare benefits or pensions due to unemployment or early retirement because of severe health problems such as

diabetes, rheumatism or high blood pressure. Many elders – especially women who took care of the household and raised the children – are not fluent in Danish and often have to rely on their children as translators, which undermines their authority.

(2) *Gender*. Traditional gender roles are challenged by the upcoming generation. Danish Pakistani women often prefer to have a career rather than become housewives dedicated solely to taking care of their husbands, children and parents-in-law. Members of the younger generation themselves attended day-care institutions (*vuggestuer/børnehaver*), public schools (*folkeskoler*) and higher educational institutions, and joined sport clubs or political and religious associations (*foreninger*). These institutions provided young people with numerous possibilities to interact with members of the opposite sex outside the protected domestic sphere and controlling gaze of family members. Currently, Pakistani families must re-negotiate gender roles and decide to what extent and in which situations they will observe *purdah*, the code of gender segregation that dominates in the rural areas from which the families originate.

(3) *Marriage and divorce*. Regardless of age, Danish Pakistanis seem to agree that the institution of marriage is going through a radical and rather disturbing change. On the one hand, immigration policies make it very difficult for young Danish Pakistanis to get family reunification with spouses from Pakistan. A common solution is to move to the Swedish city of Malmö, approximately 30 min from Copenhagen, where, as Danish citizens, they can use European Union regulation to achieve family reunification with their Pakistani spouses. In this respect, legal measures are breaking families up (Rytter 2012b). On the other hand, many Danish Pakistanis choose to marry spouses met in Denmark. The current trend of local *love marriages* jeopardises the interests of the parents and the extended transnational family (Rytter 2012a). Finally, the growing number of divorces is seen as disturbing. The most recent figures on divorce date from 1999 and show that 6–7% of Pakistanis in Denmark aged 30–34 are divorced (Schmidt and Jakobsen 2000, 132). However, interlocutors explain that current divorce numbers are much higher than they were 10 years ago. Today, it is not uncommon to file for divorce if a marriage fails to meet individual expectations. The growing number of divorces is often interpreted within the migrant community as an indication of the upcoming generation becoming Danish.

(4) *Old age*. Many older Pakistanis are concerned about their old age and whether or not their offspring will take care of them in retirement (Mian 2007). In the virilocal household, it is traditionally the duty and obligation of sons and in-married wives to live with and take care of ageing parents, but many parents do not have living accommodation of sufficient size for their sons and daughters-in-law to live with them. Others have to accept that their sons and daughters-in-laws simply do not want to live with them, but prefer to have their own place. The available figures suggest that only 15% of Pakistanis in Denmark actually live in households consisting of a married couple and one of the partner's parents (Schmidt 2002, 66).<sup>2</sup>

These four tendencies – authority, gender, marriage and ageing – contribute to the experience of a family institution that has started to fall apart. The changes are generally represented as a loss, but they also open up a range of possibilities where new configurations of relatedness, identity and belonging can start to take shape. One way to cope with the current crisis is by consulting a *shaykh* in Pakistan, to ask for help and guidance and to seek redemption from the afflictions of everyday life. Before presenting the three cases, I elaborate on the significance of religious teachers and charismatic healers in South Asian Islam, and on how other studies have described the *shaykh–murid* relationship in the Pakistani diaspora.

### Transnational shaykh–murid relationships

The dominant versions of Islam in the part of rural Punjab from which the majority of the migrants originate can be categorised as Barelwi – just as is the case among Mirpuris in Britain (cf. Geaves 1996). The Barelwi tradition takes its name from the founder of Bareilly in Uttar Pradesh, Ahmad Raza Khan (1856–1921). It is described as the most local and contextual of the various contemporary expressions of Islam in South Asia, and is famous for defending the legitimacy of the popular world of saints and shrines, where devotees come to seek help from shaykh or pir<sup>3</sup> as intercessors between themselves and God (Lewis 1994, 40; Farah 2012).

A murid's relationship with his or her shaykh is very special. The shaykh is a charismatic religious figure gifted with *baraka* (a blessing), an exemplary person who has gained religious insight through a pious lifestyle, sometimes through learning, and always through lineage. The shaykh derives both *baraka* and legitimacy from his place in a spiritual genealogy that goes back to the Prophet Muhammad. In this respect, he embodies charisma, and is blessed with the capacity to change and order nature as well as human society (Werbner and Basu 1998, 6). Murids (followers), on the other hand, are ordinary people who are still to some extent driven by ignorance, desires and physical needs. Without proper guidance from a shaykh, they will be lost on the path towards God. A murid is a disciple, and has been described as 'a lover who seeks intimacy with his shaykh and with God' (Werbner 2003, 7). Due to his lineage, lifestyle and wisdom, a shaykh becomes a channel for divine insight. A living shaykh who attracts a sufficient following can develop an institutional framework where his spiritual authority is unquestionable (Mills 1998, 35).

Though the shaykh–murid relationship can be emotionally strong and last a lifetime, it can also be rather more pragmatic. Werbner notes that in the absence of their own shaykh to whom they have sworn allegiance, murids happily attend the festivals of other saints, even from different Sufi tariqas (2006, 127). A study of the transnational Naqshbandi Haqqaniyya suggests a model of the shaykh–murid relationship that can account for differing degrees of intensity and engagement: (1) the inner circle of committed murids who consistently take part in meetings for zikr and are regularly in contact with the shaykh through his local *khalifa* (deputy); (2) a much larger circle who attend tariqa functions on special occasions, such as religious festivals (3) and finally, a more diffuse circle consisting of all those who see the particular shaykh as a spiritual model or guide, yet without taking part in any collective activity of the order (Nielsen, Draper, and Yemelianova 2006, 111).

According to Werbner, it is a distinctive feature of Sufi orders that 'all cult leaders engage in faith healing and amulet writing, and this is clearly a key source of income and new recruits' (2006, 130). In another passage, Werbner elaborates on this statement:

Healing is an integral feature of all Sufi orders, crucial to the redemptive economy of the lodge. The saint, dead or alive, is regarded as a healer, he is able to see and command invisible spiritual beings, fiery *jinn*s, and other dark malevolent influences. He can penetrate people's minds and hearts and diagnose their ailments and suffering. His spiritual power and divine light and blessing permeate his surroundings and all those who come in proximity to him. (2003, 27–8)

Murids rely on the help and insights provided by the shaykh, which result from his intimate relationship with God. Studying the religious activities at a shrine in Tamil Nadu, Saheb describes how:

Supplicants visit the shrine in search of help for a variety of afflictions: physical illness, mental disturbances, and a range of personal problems, from a sense of disgust with life to the suffering and hardship of poverty. Supplicants seek cures for barrenness and infertility, success in examinations or job promotions, and victory in civil and criminal court cases. It is believed that the saint's intercessory prayers can bring success in love and, indeed, can damage the property and life of rivals in love; they can solve material conflict and bring about the return home of a lost child, or the reform of a wayward husband or son. (1998, 72)

In this way, a shaykh offers a variety of religious remedies and technologies. In addition to being the central figure in the *zikh* gatherings, he may also provide protective *tawiz* (amulets) or *dam* (whereby his exhalation of breath often directed at a glass of water serves to transfer his *baraka*), or he may offer various *wazifa* (prayers) which can supposedly solve a variety of problems.

The Pakistani community in Denmark is very small compared to migrant communities in (for instance) Britain, and there are only a few authorised shaykhs. Various self-appointed 'helpers' therefore make use of different more-or-less authorised religious remedies in order to help fellow Muslim migrants cope with various kinds of problems and afflictions. The helpers are men or women of all ages who, whether based on family affiliation, religious piety or mystical initiations during visits in Pakistan, claim to be gifted with the religious knowledge and sometimes the charisma to cure health problems or settle conflicts in the household or family network. The reputation of these 'helpers' is however contested in the migrant community; it is more accepted to consult a shaykh or pir in Britain, or some of the shaykhs who regularly arrive from the subcontinent to meet their murids in Denmark or to recruit new followers. Finally, when they visit Pakistan, many migrants will consult a living shaykh or visit shrines to ask for help and redemption.

The following section presents three examples of how, why and with what outcome migrants turn to charismatic counselling in order to deal with afflictions of everyday family life.

### Case 1: looking at women and infertility

Irfan, in his late 20s, was a biologist working at a large Danish company. In his spare time, he was actively involved in the local branch of the transnational organisation Minhaj ul-Quran, where his duties included giving public lectures on Islam and teaching children from local migrant families. Irfan was a devoted student of the Minhaj leader, Tahir ul-Qadri, whom he had met several times both in Pakistan and Denmark.<sup>4</sup> Tahir ul-Qadri, as his name suggests, is affiliated with the Qadiri spiritual lineage, passing through shaykh Abdul-Qadir Gilani (1077–1166).

The main challenge Irfan faced in becoming a pious Muslim was fighting his *nafs*, the lower part of his self. For some time, Irfan had a problem with 'looking at girls' (*kigge efter piger*), and especially with tuning in to the local TV channel Kanal København (Channel Copenhagen) which for years showed uncensored pornography after midnight. Irfan found it difficult to accept this 'habit', as it was against his religion to watch this kind of human activity. In confidence, he related the problem to his shaykh, who gave him practical advice: he should buy a TV magazine and draw a circle around all the erotic programmes he was tempted to watch. Then he should force himself to watch the following programme, whatever it was – a game show, a documentary or a TV shop. Irfan followed this advice, though he admitted that

several times he was tempted to go to bed, or even to switch over to the desired erotic programmes. However, he tamed the impulse, by reminding himself that ‘he could not cheat God’. Irfan was instructed to follow this technique of self-control for 40 days. And it worked. It actually helped him overcome the impure fantasies and concentrate on more important aspects of life.

Years previously, Irfan had married Noreen, a young woman from Pakistan. For five years, they tried to conceive a child. Noreen and Irfan took various medical tests, all of which confirmed that there were no physical problems or complications to hinder their getting pregnant: however, they were unable to conceive. Irfan requested help and advice from his shaykh and was given a *wazifa*, which meant that every day, after the five obligatory prayers, he and Noreen had to recite two of God’s 99 names out loud. There was no time limit to the *wazifa*: they should simply keep on repeating it until Noreen became pregnant. Within just a few months, it worked – Noreen became pregnant, and later gave birth to a baby girl.

### Case 2: the love marriage of Jamila and Naem

When I first met Naem in 2001, he was only 19. After a formal interview, he asked for my advice on the delicate question of marriage. Naem had met and fallen in love with Jamila, a young Danish Pakistani woman he had met at business school. However, not only was she four years older than him, but her family belonged to a different *zaat* (clan). Naem’s family were Gujar, while Jamila’s family were Malik. Naem knew it would be unacceptable for his parents to cross the boundary of *zaat* endogamy. He also knew that his parents had already selected a cousin in Pakistan (his father’s brother’s daughter) for him to marry. Naem wanted me to confirm that a marriage between him and Jamila was possible, despite their differences in age and family background.

The years went by, and Naem remained a bachelor. We lost contact, until we met by chance at a semi-public *zikr* group in the Idrisiyya silsila, where male Danish Pakistanis gather several times a week to do remembrance of God and to listen to recordings of edifying speeches by Shaykh Amin Bin Abdur Rehman, who is based in Multan, Pakistan.<sup>5</sup> When we went out for dinner afterwards, Naem announced that he had finally married Jamila – but it had not been easy. Despite Naem’s pleas and attempts to convince his parents, they declined to comply with his wishes and refused to make the traditional marriage proposal to Jamila’s family. Naem’s parents were certain that Jamila’s family would reject their proposal, a gesture that would make them lose face in the entire migrant community. In this period, characterised by numerous confrontations with his parents, Naem started attending *zikr* twice a week. A trusted friend who was already a murid took him along, as he apparently ‘had some wounds that needed to be healed’ (*havde sår der skulle heles*). Later, Jamila and Naem both joined the tariqa of Shaykh Amin; after their wedding, they spent several holidays at his lodge in Pakistan.

Since neither Naem nor Jamila had any luck persuading their respective parents of the *rishta* (marriage connection), the desperate couple sent an email to Shaykh Amin, explaining the situation and asking for help. In reply, one of his *khalifas* (deputies) explained that from a religious perspective there was nothing wrong with their getting married, and that their parents were wrong to put so much emphasis on *zaat* background. They also received a *wazifa* which they were instructed to read at home: this would make their parents think again about the marriage request, and in time arrange the connection between the two families.





keys to the staircase. One day, she found a box of food and toys for her son outside the entrance to her apartment. Shazia asked everyone on the staircase if they had left the box outside her door, but nobody had. This made her very nervous, and she contacted an elder woman, a trusted ‘auntie’ in the Pakistani neighbourhood. She advised her to throw away the box, food and toys immediately. Even so, more packages turned up on her doorstep. On one occasion, her son found one of the boxes. Shazia took it away and disposed of it in the refuse bin, instructing him never to touch or eat any delicacies he might find inside. According to Shazia, the most plausible explanation for all the packages was *kala jaddu* (sorcery).<sup>7</sup> She was convinced that the toys and food were a kind of love magic performed by her ex-husband and his family. She feared that if her son played with the toys or ate the food, he would stop loving her and start to love his father instead.

Shazia discussed the event with her mother in Pakistan, who in order to help consulted the local *pir*<sup>8</sup> of the Naqshbandi tariqa (2). He confirmed the suspicion – this was *kala jaddu*, initiated by the family of Shazia’s ex-husband – but he refrained from identifying the actual perpetrator of the sorcery.<sup>9</sup> The former in-laws’ motivation for using *kala jaddu* was obviously that after the divorce Shazia had gained custody of the child. Her ex-husband had tried to get custody of his son by legal means on numerous occasions, but without success.<sup>10</sup>

Now back in Denmark, Shazia decided to move away from her apartment in Frederiksværk and make a fresh start. In Copenhagen, Shazia was given a secret address by the municipality, so that her former in-laws could neither contact nor harass her. But because her ex-husband had remarried – marrying Shazia’s own cousin (3) – she knew it was just a matter of time before they met again.

After a while, Shazia started having nightmares. She was haunted in her dreams by her deceased aunt (4), her mother’s sister and the mother of her ex-husband’s new wife. Every night, her aunt appeared to her in her dreams and asked her forgiveness. Once again, Shazia’s mother consulted Pir Sahib, who advised her to comply with the request, otherwise the deceased aunt would keep visiting her. Shazia followed the advice, and it actually helped. Shazia learnt that her aunt came to her to do penance for a misdeed. She was the one who had initially attacked Shazia and her husband with *kala jaddu* in order to split them up, since Shazia’s ex-husband would then be free to marry her own daughter (Shazia’s cousin) after the divorce. The plan worked, and today her daughter has taken Shazia’s position and lives in Denmark with Shazia’s ex-husband.

After her death, the aunt apparently needed some kind of forgiveness for her evil deed, so she came to Shazia. To help Shazia get back on track, the aunt advised her in a dream to remarry (5), even suggesting an eligible bachelor from the village. Shazia followed the advice and married the young man: thus even after her death, her aunt had a big influence on her life.

### Transnational Sufism from below

The three cases cover a range of problems related to family life – infertility, love marriage, neglect of transnational relatives, divorce and suspicion of sorcery. Furthermore, the examples identify interesting aspects of (1) the shaykh–murid relationship, (2) the borders and boundaries of the transnational social field and (3) the migrant’s quest for well-being.

### ***The shaykh–murid relationship***

All three cases illustrate how migrants turn to charismatic religious authorities located in Pakistan when they face a crisis in the family. No problem seems too small or insignificant to be taken seriously by their shaykh. On the one hand, each case illustrates the intimacy and trust the murid feels towards her/his shaykh; but, on the other hand, the cases also seem to suggest that consulting a shaykh may be a consequence of pragmatic decisions. Noreen and Irfan consulted various medical experts before they turned to religious authorities, and the case of Naem and Jamila even suggests that the difficulties they faced in trying to make their parents accept their love marriage were decisive in their getting involved with the Idrisi tariqa in the first place. Shaykh Amin became both a means and an end in solving their common family problems.

The three cases deal with charismatic leaders and religious organisations on different scales: whereas Irfan and Noreen get advice from the famous leader of Minhaj ul-Quran, an organisation with branches in several countries outside Pakistan, Shazia relies on advice from the local pir of her village of origin, an institution used by her family for generations. A shaykh seems to be one among several experts who can be consulted in time of crisis, but the choice of charismatic healer may depend on various factors like religious orientation, family tradition or personal preferences. The cases furthermore show that old and young men and women seek help and guidance: the deciding factor may be a question of access to the particular shaykh, whether by means of personal meetings, email correspondence or via a trusted family member in Pakistan.

Several studies document migrants returning to their original homeland in search of charismatic counselling. Rozario (2009) describes a Bangladeshi couple in Britain looking for a diagnosis and a possible cure for their ill child.<sup>11</sup> In this search, there was no sharp dividing line between *daktari* (medical) and *upri* (supernatural) problems, and the family oscillated between various modes of explanation in their search for a diagnosis and possible treatment for their son. Likewise, in a study of rural migrants from Kulu (Anatolia, Turkey) who settled in a suburb of the Swedish capital, Stockholm, Sachs (1983) presents the case of a mother who on several occasions takes her ill son back to various *ocaks* (religious healers) in Turkey. The mother is convinced that the Swedish doctors are wrong and that a religious healer can neutralise the force of *nazar* (the evil eye) which she believes to be the real cause of her child's illness. There has also been discussion of how a shaykh may provide protection against malevolent non-human beings (*jinns*, *bhut*, *churail*), or help to revoke occult attacks in migrant communities (Werbner 2003; Rytter 2010, 2011, 2013; Ballard 2011). Such examples testify that a shaykh often reaches out to his murids around the world, and that blessings can be transmitted by modern technologies like recordings, television broadcasting, homepages and emails. Actually, the shaykhs discussed in all three cases are to be found on homepages, their religious virtues and piety praised by murids on various internet forums and their speeches, zikr gatherings and public appearances to be found on You Tube. In this respect, modern technology has become a means to circulate charisma worldwide (cf. Schmidt 2004; Mathiesen 2012).

### ***Borders and boundaries of the transnational social field***

It has been argued that the current global system is characterised by 'simultaneity' (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004). During the last 40 years, Pakistani migrants have been engaged in a transnational social field where practices such as travelling,

communication, arranged marriages, remittances or the erection of migrant houses on the family land have connected and re-connected migrants in Denmark with relatives and local places in Pakistan. However, these three cases suggest that the religious help and guidance that migrants request and receive from their shaykh also add transcendental qualities to the existing transnational social field (cf. Robbins 2009). Sufi cosmogony is anchored in the capacity of the shaykh to transcend both time and space. Physical distance is traversed in an instant when sending blessings or protection against occult attacks; the borders of nation-states, like corporeal bodies, are transgressed and longevity and even death are redefined when, for example, a shaykh gives his instructions in dreams, or when deceased shaykhs are said to be alive from the grave (Werbner 2003). These transcendental dimensions may connect people and places separated by time and space. Here, this is best illustrated by Shazia, who falls victim to sorcery performed in Pakistan and is haunted in her dreams by her deceased aunt.

However, these cases also suggest that migrants may, over time, develop new ways of relating to Pakistan. While Shazia (herself born and raised in Pakistan) relies on the family pir, Irfan, Naem and Jamila (who represent the upcoming generation, born and raised in Denmark) are affiliated with a Sufi tariqa spread out over Europe, the Middle East and North America, networks whose centre – the grand shaykh and his lodge – is located in Pakistan. In this respect, religious affiliation offers the upcoming generation new ways and possibilities of relating to Pakistan: rather than inalienable land, a family home or extended kinship networks (*biraderi*), these connections are based on a religious identity and brotherhood based on common love and affection for a charismatic shaykh. In this respect, the generation born and raised in Denmark have started to reinvent the homeland of their parents.

### ***Family life and the quest for well-being***

Pakistanis in Denmark have most likely always venerated shaykhs and visited shrines to ask for help and guidance.<sup>12</sup> Still, the current ‘crisis of success’ faced by numerous families may have increased this tendency. First of all, demographic developments among the migrant community mean that the pioneer generation are ageing and dying as the younger generation establish their own families, households and horizons for the future. As they become adults, these members of the younger generation grow into a family structure which includes numerous new obligations and responsibilities towards spouses, children, parents and in-laws. At the same time, they are also confronted with numerous problems, concerns and conflicts related to their new position in the family structure – as suggested both by the case of Shazia, who was divorced, and that of Naem and Jamila, who married without their parents’ consent.

Bauman (2007) has suggested ‘liquid modernity’ as an adequate description of contemporary times in which formerly stable institutions, such as the family, seem to undergo radical transformations, dissolve or disappear. Likewise, Giddens suggests that late modernity is characterised, among other things, by a general ‘transformation of intimacy’ (1992), in which social relationships, including that of family and kinship, are being challenged and redefined. As discussed at the beginning of this article, experience of and concerns about family upheaval are salient among Pakistani migrants in Denmark. However, in contrast to this disturbing development, the institution of the shaykh stands out as a pillar of timeless wisdom: his embodied charisma and healing powers are based on his connections and genealogical relationship to the

Prophet Muhammad and, ultimately, to the divine, which gives him the capacity to cultivate, order and tame wilderness (Werbner and Basu 1998, 15) – a wilderness that in this case presents itself in the guise of a changing family institution in the flux of contemporary Danish society. As charismatic counselling is recognised and accepted in South Asian Islam as a part of the cultural repertoire of migrants, it becomes an obvious response to turbulent times and future uncertainties.

### Conclusion: prospects for future research

This article suggests that migrant afflictions are located not only in the pain and suffering of the ‘individual body’, but that they are also related to a large extent to the ‘social body’ of family and kinship relations, something that is currently undergoing a process of redefinition. The grand narratives of migration and modernity are not redeeming their promises (cf. Osella and Osella 2006); the well-being of individuals and families is not following automatically from upward mobility, material belongings and economic security. Perhaps this is why, after 40 years in Denmark, Pakistani migrants continue to rely on religious advice and technologies provided by charismatic Islamic healers.

By focusing on the everyday life of ordinary Pakistani migrant families in Denmark, this article outlines a research agenda in which we begin to pay more attention to the domestic domain of *madri muzhub* (Ballard 2011) and study how religious ideas and practices, including Sufism, are used by migrants in order to deal with various kinds of afflictions of everyday life in diaspora. Many, though not all, migrants tend to rely on religious technologies of redemption found in the South Asian Barelwi tradition. Studying how migrants engage in ‘transnational Sufism from below’ and make practical use of shaykhs in Pakistan is not to devalue the latter’s charisma or to denigrate the long-lasting relationship of love and devotion that some murids have with their shaykh; it is rather to suggest a research agenda that examines the variety of religious practices and technologies that migrants around the world may turn to in their common quest for well-being. All in all, it seems promising to explore ‘from below’ how the three interwoven concepts of *family*, *religion* and *migration* constitute a matrix out of which transnational dynamics and diasporic identities, affiliations and belonging may start to take form.

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### Notes

1. These concepts combine the Latin distinction between gendered authority for *padre* and *madri* as father and mother figures, with the concept of *muzhub* which has an Arabic origin best translated as *sect*. *Madri* and *padre muzhub* are best understood as opposite ends of a spectrum (Ballard 2011, 51).
2. A widely used alternative is that parents and adult children attempt to live close to one another and share meals, perhaps even money, even though they live in separate households. This has been called ‘families with open doors’ (*familier med åbne døre*) (Schmidt 2002, 66).

3. I use both concepts, shaykh and pir. The term shaykh is a pan-Islamic term, associated with a religious figure who gains legitimacy by being initiated into a tariqa and by having extensive knowledge of Islam. By contrast, the term pir is mainly South Asian and tends to be associated with the power to perform miracles and provide technologies to counter all kinds of afflictions.
4. Tahir ul-Qadri is not a traditional shaykh, but more of a religious scholar. However, the way he is being idolised in the Minhaj-organisation gives him the same charismatic qualities as a more traditional shaykh. Formerly based in Lahore, he is currently living in Toronto. In March 2013, Tahir ul-Qadri staged a protest march against the Pakistani Government before the general election. For information on Minhaj ul-Quran, see Geaves (2006), Schmidt (2007) and Morgahi (2011).
5. Before Shaykh Muhammad Amin Bin Abdul Rehman came to Pakistan, he lived in Madina, Saudi Arabia, where he served as imam for decades. He came to Pakistan in the late 1980s and lived in Karachi, before settling in the mid-1990s in Multan. The Idri-siyya silsila originated from Northern Africa and the Middle East.
6. The numbers in the text refer to the relationships outlined in Figure 1.
7. For discussions of *kala jaddu*, see Shaw (2000), Werbner (2003) and Rytter (2010, 2011).
8. Shazia referred to him as Pir Sahib, so in this case I will use the term pir rather than shaykh. I cannot give the full name of Pir Sahib, as this would jeopardise Shazia's anonymity.
9. Probably Pir Sahib was well aware that the ex-husband's family was living in the same village as Shazia's mother.
10. Mehdi (2008) makes the explicit connection between law and sorcery. Based on a study of Pakistani Muslims in Denmark, she argues that supernatural means (including magic and sorcery) are used to affect the outcomes of family disputes in court.
11. The child suffered from a genetic disorder known as the Cockayne syndrome.
12. I write *most likely*, because we have no studies from the Danish context that can verify this assumption.

### Notes on contributor

Mikkel Rytter is Associate Professor at Department of Culture and Society at Aarhus University, where he is part of the research programme on 'Sufism and Transnational Spirituality' ([www.sufism.au.dk](http://www.sufism.au.dk)). His recent publications include *Family Upheaval: Generation, Mobility and Relatedness among Pakistani Migrants in Denmark* (Berghahn, 2013), *Migration, Family and the Welfare State: Integrating Migrants and Refugees in Scandinavia* (eds.) K. F. Olwig, B. R. Larsen and M. Rytter (Routledge, 2012) and *Mobile Bodies, Mobile Souls: Family, Religion and Migration in a Global World* (eds.) M. Rytter and K. F. Olwig (Aarhus University Press, 2011). He is head of CESAU – Centre of Sociological Studies, Aarhus University ([www.cesau.au.dk](http://www.cesau.au.dk)).

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