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Sufi Practices and Urban Spaces: Everyday Experiences of Sheikh Ken'ân Rifâî (1867-1950) in the Late Ottoman Istanbul

Sufi Pratikleri ve Şehir Mekânları: Geç Dönem Osmanlı İstanbul'unda Şeyh Ken'an Rifâî'nin (1867-1950) Gündelik Yaşam Pratikleri

Abstract: This historical study investigates the methods and approaches utilized by Ken'ân Rifâî (1867-1950) to manage the social demands and complexities of Late Ottoman society by concentrating on his various roles as a Sufi sheikh and bureaucrat within the perceived conflicted urban spaces of office and the conventional sufi lodge institution through the everyday life studies perspectives. Examining his daily routines and practices in Istanbul during the Second Constitutional Era (1908-1918), this research accentuates his nuanced synthesis, mirrored his selective adoption amidst the confluence of Western and conventional components. The main objective of our inquiry is to explore how Rifâî has effectively integrated administrative ethos and Sufi principles within the involved socio-spatial setting of the early 20th-century Ottoman capital. As focal points of spiritual and cultural activity, his Sufi lodge (*Ummu Ken'ân dergâhı*) and his mansion (*konak*) depict his endeavors to reconcile sufi customs with contemporary developments and thus have served as a microcosm of broader social changes in urban life. By delving into the ordinary moments of Rifâî's life, we see a man who adeptly navigated his era's challenges, integrating traditional wisdom with modern pragmatism while utilizing everyday practices to negotiate his position within a rapidly changing society.

Key Words: Late Ottoman, Ottoman Modernization, Dual Cultural Orientation, Sufism, Ken'ân Rifâî, Ummu Ken'ân Lodge, Everday life studies

Öz: Bu çalışma, Ken'ân Rifâî'nin (1867-1950) geç Osmanlı toplumunda karşılaştığı ikili baskıları ve zorlukları nasıl aştığını, özellikle İkinci Meşrutiyet Dönemi'nde (1908-1918) Sufi lider, bürokrat ve eğitimci olarak üstlendiği çok yönlü rolleri bağlamında incelemektedir. Rifâî'nin İstanbul'daki günlük pratiklerini ele alarak, geleneksel Sufi değerlerini modern yaklaşımlarla nasıl sentezlediğini ve Batı'dan ve geleneksel unsurlardan seçici olarak nasıl faydalandığını ortaya koymaktadır. Çalışma; birincil kaynaklar, el yazmaları, arşiv belgeleri ve müritlerinin hatıralarını kullanarak, Rifâî'nin farklı alanlarda nasıl yönettiğini ve Sufi öğretileri ile bürokratik ettiği günlük yaşamında nasıl uyum içinde uyguladığını anlamayı sağlamaktadır. Rifâî'nin İstanbul'un çeşitli mahalleleri ve sosyokültürel alanlarındaki etkileşimleri, geleneksel bilgeliği modern pragmatizmle nasıl bütünleştirdiğini göstermektedir. Bu da bireylerin daha geniş sosyopolitik bağlamda günlük pratikleri birer taktik manevra olarak kullanmalarını örneklemektedir. Bu kaynakların titizlikle analiz edilmesiyle, Rifâî'nin Ummü Ken'ân Sufi Dergâhı ve İstanbul'un kentsel ortamındaki etkileşimlerinin, manevi ve seküler alanların sürekli olarak etkileşim ve karşılıklı etkileşim içinde olduğu bir yaşam felsefesini nasıl somutlaştırdığı incelenmektedir. Rifâî'nin, zamanının hızlı toplumsal dönüşümleri arasında topluluk duygusunu ve uyumu nasıl teşvik ettiğini vurgulayan bu çalışma, manevi uygulamalar ile kentsel yaşam arasındaki dinamik etkileşimi anlamamızda önemli bir rol oynamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Geç Osmanlı, Osmanlı Modernleşmesi, Tasavvuf, Ken'ân Rifâî, İstanbul, Ummü Ken'ân Dergâhı, Gündelik hayat çalışmaları

Introduction

This study aims to examine the approaches and methods Ken'ân Rifâî (1867-1950) employed to navigate the dichotomies and tensions of late Ottoman society, focusing on his roles as a Sufi leader, bureaucrat, and educator during the Second Constitutional Period (1908-1918). By focusing on Rifâî's daily practices in late Ottoman Istanbul during the Second

Constitutional Period (1908-1918), this study seeks to shed light on the complex process of synthesis between traditional and modern modalities and the way in which his process of selective adoption was generated.¹ The Ottoman Empire's nuanced relationship with modernization was underscored during this period of cultural and institutional duality, which presented a challenging contrast to the conventional narratives of the transition from tradition to modernity that have dominated historiography.² Westernization was not just a matter of importation; instead, it was a complex process of negotiation in which Western ideas, manners, and institutions were selectively adopted and evolved into different forms set in different contexts- in other words, Ottomanized.³ This synthesis, neither wholly organic nor entirely orchestrated, represented the Empire's distinctive path toward modernity at the *fin de siècle* Istanbul.⁴

The transformative currents in urban life during this period affecting Ken'ân Rifâî's life were a reality for the many inhabitants- including the ulema, bureaucrats, intellectuals, and locals, of the imperial capital, where each party had its unique responses and selective adoptions to the evolving paradigms. Throughout this process of change, the juxtaposition of conflicting elements often manifested as evident divergences within urban settings.⁵ The perceived conflict, especially within the Sufi community and also among the clerks, between wearing a *fez* and *turban*, between the modern institutions and the *tekke/medrese*, between official duties and their religious positions generated a constant discussion of the appropriate way to engage with this emerging duality in the Ottoman public domain.⁶ Within this fabric, which required modifying re-positioning, some navigated towards full-fledged Westernization, others adhered steadfastly to Islamic tradition, while specific individuals provided more nuanced responses capable of reconciling these tensions.⁷ While this study consciously employs the concepts of "nuance" and "reconciliation" to argue that no inherent conflict exists between seemingly binary terms, it also acknowledges that the categories mentioned, which appear to steadfastly adhere to one pole, are far more complex and nuanced than they initially seem and warrant further scrutiny.

¹ The Late Ottoman period (Selim III's reign to the end of World War I) marked a complex interplay of Western influences with Ottoman traditions and by selective adoption contributing to a unique Ottoman modernity. For more information, see: Şükrü Hanioglu, *A Brief History of the Late Ottoman Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 1-4; Ebru Boyar and Kate Fleet, *A Social History of Ottoman Istanbul* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 271-331.

² Emrence attest three main waves in writing late Ottoman historiography, which are modernization approaches, macro models and post-structural agendas. Please see: Cem Emrence, "Three Waves of Late Ottoman Historiography, 1950-2007", *Middle East Studies Association Bulletin* 41/2 (2007): 138-139.

³ Hanioglu, *A Brief History*, 4.

⁴ Notably, this era was characterized by deliberate efforts to create a unique Ottoman modernity that blended foreign and indigenous elements, into a coherent and distinctive synthesis. Please see: Avner Wishnitzer, *Reading Clocks Alla Turca: Time and Society in the Late Ottoman Empire* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015), 188; Emrence, "Three Waves of Late Ottoman Historiography", 140.

⁵ For the heightened discussion and adaptation of the ulema during the transformative process of the 19th Century Ottoman Empire, please see Amit Bein, *Ottoman Ulema, Turkish Republic: Agents of Change and Guardians of Tradition* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 35-51.

⁶ İsmail Kara, "Turban and Fez: Ulema as Opposition", *Late Ottoman Society: The Intellectual Legacy*, ed. Elisabeth Özdalga (London: Routledge&Curzon, 2005), 163-202.

⁷ Edhem Eldem, "Istanbul: From Imperial to Peripheralized Capital", *The Ottoman City Between East and West: Aleppo, Izmir and Istanbul*, eds. Edhem Eldem, Daniel Goffman and Bruce Masters (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 201-201. There have been certain studies that challenge the compartmentalization of Sufi individuals as in opposition to modern, scientific, and progressive ideals. Please see: Amit Bein, "A Young Turk Islamic Intellectual Filibeli Ahmed Hilmi and The Diverse Intellectual Legacies of the Late Ottoman Empire", *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 39 (2007): 607-625.

In the existing literature, interpretations of how Ken'ân Rifâî managed the conflicting domains in his daily life often depict him as an outwardly modern and Westernized figure.⁸ However, in navigating these realms, Rifâî drew upon a dual cultural orientation, shaped by his traditional Sufi education and modern secular training. This gentleman (*Beyefendi*), embodying the titles of Bey—arising from his esteemed lineage and significant administrative roles—and Efendi—due to his revered spiritual leadership—navigates the intricate urban landscape of the city through his dual capacities. Born into a noble family in Plovdiv, Ken'ân Rifâî's early life was marked by a Western education at the Galatasaray Imperial Lyceum (*Sultanî*)⁹ following the Russian-Ottoman war (1877-78), a period rife with transformation and turmoil. His civil service across the Ottoman realms, including the Balkans and the sacred city of Medina. His educational foundation, juxtaposed with his rigorous Sufi training and authorization (*icâzet*) in the Rifâîyye and Kâdiriyye orders, appears to have provided him with a unique perspective. These qualifications would enable him to be recognized as a Sufi sheikh within the Ottoman Assembly of Sheiks (*Meclis-i Meşâyih*) underscore his ability to navigate and integrate the often-disparate worlds of bureaucratic governance and spiritual leadership.¹⁰

Synthesizing novel and traditional elements within the socio-cultural landscape of late Ottoman modernization, Ken'ân Rifâî seems to have fostered a reconciliatory manner between his dual roles as a sheikh and an administrator within the perceived conflicting realms of the city—a the legacy of which extends to this day.¹¹ While the bureaucratic and educational arenas epitomized the state ideal of modernization, the Sufi realm was often perceived as a territory out of time, despite efforts to control it. Indeed, he reserved the ethos of living as an Istanbulite and consciousness of etiquettes as well as the essential creeds of Sufi tradition, which were decisive in forming his quotidian life within Late Ottoman Istanbul. Contrary to the bureaucrats who were consigned to their offices in Bâbîlî and the Sufi devotees (*dervish*) confined to the cloister of their tekkes (*sufi lodge*), Rifâî conducted in both realms—a manner that challenged the perceived notion of Sufi detachment of in the face of development in society. Having assumed critical responsibilities within each domain, he found himself in a position where he had to maintain their functions and make resolutions of cerebral and mundane conflicts.¹² It suggests that his endeavors established him as an efficient arbitrator, illustrating the confluence and

⁸ İsmail Parmaksızoğlu, "Rifâî, Ken'ân", *Türk Ansiklopedisi*, Ankara: Milli Eğitim Basımevi, 1978, C. 27, s. 322; İsmail Kara, *Cumhuriyet Türkiye'sinde Bir Mesele Olarak İslâm*, İstanbul: Dergâh Yay., 2017.

⁹ Adnan Şişman, *Galatasaray Mekteb-i Sultânî'sinin Kuruluşu ve İlk Eğitim Yılları, 1868 – 1871* (İstanbul: Edebiyat Fakültesi Yayınevi, 1989); François Georgeon, "La Formation des élites à la fin de l'Empire ottoman: Le cas de Galatasaray", *Revue du Monde Musulman et de la Méditerranée* 72 (1994): 15-25.

¹⁰ For studies delineating the life and work of Ken'ân Rifâî, please see: Mustafa Tahrallı, "Ken'ân Rifâî", *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi* (Ankara: TDV Yay., 2022), 25/254-255; Arzu Eylül Yalçınkaya, *Ken'ân Rifâî: Hayatı, Eserleri, Tasavvuf Anlayışı* (İstanbul: Nefes Yay., 2021).

¹¹ The adherers of Rifâî strived to institutionalize his Sufi thought through opening university chairs in his name, which materialized The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Kenan Rifai Chair in 2009 (<https://turkkad.org/hizmet/north-carolina-universitesi-unc-kenan-rifai-islam-arastirmalari-kursusu/>) and at Kyoto University Kenan Rifai Center for Sufi Studies in 2016 (http://kias.sakura.ne.jp/krcss_ku/en/). Also Institute for Sufi Studies at Uskudar University is an important arena, unique in its ethos to disseminate academic Sufi studies. (<https://tasavvuf.uskudar.edu.tr/>); F. Cangüzel Güner Zülfişkar, "Türkiyedeki Tasavvuf Çalışmaları Metodolojisinde Yeni Ufuk Arayışları", *TAED*, 1/1 (2022), 153-159.

¹² Especially in the latter half of the 19th century, dervishes became increasingly involved in the daily matters engaged with the necessities of the new era, such as establishing families, finding jobs, and becoming more engaged with mundane matters. See Ahmet Yusuf Yüksek, "Sufi and the Sufi Lodges in Istanbul in the Late Nineteenth Century: A Socio-Spatial Analysis", *Journal of Urban History* 49/ 4 (2021): 16.

intersection of Sufi spirituality and modern-day urban existence demands a more comprehensive scholarly examination.¹³

Ken'ân Rifâî's nuanced approach can only be revealed through a close study of his everyday experiences in the urban sphere. Analyzing Rifâî's daily practices through the lenses of everyday life studies, we can discern how his actions reflected a strategic and reconciliatory manner to his social environment. This framework paws the way for understanding how Rifâî's everyday activities were both shaped by and shaped the urban milieu of late Ottoman Istanbul which illustrates the intersection of the spiritual and the mundane. To this end, the units of analysis encompass his daily routines within his neighborhood (*mahalle*), his household, and his Sufi lodge. Whereas Rifâî's Sufi thought and intellectual sources require further exploration, this research primarily focuses on the observable and behavioral aspects of his practices.¹⁴

Placing the Sufi Community on the Map of Everyday Studies

Despite common perceptions of Sufi groups as stagnant and detached from societal changes during Ottoman modernization, recent studies have contested this view.¹⁵ However, there remains a gap in understanding the individual experiences of Sufi figures, especially those who held dual roles in administration and spirituality, amidst the evolving dynamics of Istanbul during the Second Constitutional Era (1908-1918).¹⁶ Sufis merit scrutiny as figures molded by these transformations, simultaneously serving as participants whose implications and responses contribute to the narrative of this period. Their daily lives offer valuable insights into urban experiences, with their extensive written works providing rich sources for exploring everyday life, emotions, and ideas.¹⁷ This study aims to address the gap by examining the interplay between urban interactions and Sufi practices, focusing on Ken'ân Rifâî's experiences in early 20th-century Istanbul, seeking to shed light on Rifâî's selective adoption within the changing urban landscape through the utilization of available sources including primary sources such as manuscripts, archival records, and disciples' narratives, and his discourses.¹⁸

Studies of everyday life meticulously explore individual routines and interactions within particular spatial contexts that expose the underlying dynamics in engaging with socio-political

¹³ Cumhurbaşkanlığı Devlet Arşivleri Başkanlığı Osmanlı Arşivi (BOA), Dahiliye Kalemî (DH.SAİDd.), Dosya No: 72, Gömlek Nu: 405, Tarih: DH.SAİDd.,72.405.

¹⁴ Rifâî, in navigating these realms, drew his mental and spiritual strength from his dual cultural orientation. He indeed did not act in a vacuum, and there were similar figures who also were influential Sufi figures (if not a sheik) and simultaneously balanced their official duties. Tahir Olgun (d. 1951) was a Sufi publisher and worked at the Bâb-ı Seraskerî, whereas Ahmed Avni Konuk (d. 1938) was a Mevlevî dervish and licensed Mesnevihan. Increased instances and comparative studies can contextualize these data. Please see: For Konuk: Savaş Şafak Barkçin, *Ahmed Avni Konuk Görünmeyen Umman* (İstanbul: Klasik Yay., 2011), 16. For Tahir Olgun: Atilla Şentürk, *Tâhirü'l-Mevlevî Hayatı ve Eserleri* (İstanbul: Nehir Yay., 1991), 6; To see how Olgun managed to serve for various state demartments in the Second Constitutional Era see. Tâhirü'l-Mevlevî, *Matbuat Âlemindeki Hayatım: İstiklâl Mahkemesi Hatıraları* (İstanbul: Büyüyen Ay Yay., 2021), 23.

¹⁵ Melis Hafez, *Inventing Laziness: The Culture of Productivity in Late Ottoman Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 30; Please see the following studies: Carter Findley, "Social Dimensions of Dervish Life as Seen in the Memoirs of Aşçı Dede İbrahim Halil", *The Dervish Lodge: Architecture, Art, and Sufism in Ottoman Turkey*, ed. Raymond Lifchez (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 129-43; Yüksek, "Sufi and the Sufi Lodges", 1-30.

¹⁶ Mustafa Kara, "İkinci Meşrutiyet Devrinde Dervişlerin Sosyal ve Kültürel Etkinlikleri", *Osmanlı Toplumunda Tasavvuf ve Sufiler*, ed. Ahmet Yaşar Ocak (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2014), 740.

¹⁷ Terzioğlu points out the rich primary material produced by the Ottoman Sufi community; however, states that this material has been very descriptively studied within the current historiography. Please see: Derin Terzioğlu, "Tarihi İnsanlı Yazmak", *Cogito* 29 (2001): 294.

¹⁸ Sâmiha Ayverdi, Nezihe Araz, Safiye Erol, Sofi Huri, *Ken'ân Rifâî ve Yirminci Asrın Işığında Müslümanlık* (İstanbul: Kubbealtı Neşriyatı, 2003); Ken'ân Rifâî, *Sohbetler* (İstanbul: Cenân Vakfı Yay., 2002),

realities.¹⁹ The significant transformations within 19th-century Ottoman urban landscapes introduced tensions that reflect the transitional experiences of city dwellers, who require continual engagement amid contrasting realities.²⁰ Despite daily activities mainly constituting repetitions and routines, when everyday life is studied in dialogue with the broader context, it is clear how the inhabitants actively shape and are being shaped by historical dynamics.²¹ Reconstructions of everyday experiences demonstrate how people navigate and influence their historical context beyond mere survival or routine occurrences. Everyday experiences reveal the way in which individuals actively influence the historical context. Studying Rifâî's daily practices, especially from the framework of Certeau's "practice of everyday life," unveils the subtle manner he employed in his reciprocal relationship with his social environment.²² This approach shed light on Rifâî's actions not only as mere routines but as strategic responses to the urban milieu of late Ottoman Istanbul, offering a glimpse into the Sufi experience within the city. Pierre Bourdieu's notion of "habitus" is also important in discussing how Rifâî's interactions within the urban arena were a form of resistance and adaptation to the modernizing pressures of the time, uncovering how he constructs the social world he inhabits. Thus, Rifâî's life will be studied in the way he actively was in dialogue with his socio-historical context in the way to examine how he in the production and reproduction of urban space amidst the everchanging dynamics of the late 19th century Ottoman capital.²³

In order to explore the complex layers of Ken'ân Rifâî's daily routines, it is essential to place his experiences within the broader context of socio-cultural studies.²⁴ The meticulous portrayal of Said Bey's (d. 1928) daily routines in Istanbul by Paul Dumont and Eldem's detailed study of the everyday practices of Mehmed Cemal Bey²⁵ in through his accounting book, provides valuable insights into the lives of urban inhabitants.²⁶ These narratives reveal the intricate blend of continuity and change and illuminates the nuances of class dynamics and societal transformations of the period. Furthermore, Findley's exploration of Sufi Aşçı Dede's (d. 1910) role as a state official during the Tanzimat era, and Yüksek's analysis of figures like Mehmed Şevket Dede (d. 1883) and Aşçı Dede, underscore the active dialogue maintained by Sufi figures with the evolving dynamics of the 19th century. These studies collectively

¹⁹ Deniz Çalış-Kural, "The Storehouse of Ottoman Landscape Tradition: Gardens and City Spaces as Barzakh", *Sehregiz, Urban Rituals and Deviant Sufi Mysticism in Ottoman Istanbul* (London: Routledge, 2016), 229.

²⁰ Paolo Girardelli, "Architecture, Identity and Liminality: On the Use and Meaning of Catholic Spaces in Late Ottoman Istanbul", *Muqarnas* 22 (2005): 233-264; Hilal A. Uğurlu, "Perform Your Prayers in Mosques! Changing Spatial and Political Relations in Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Istanbul", *The Friday Mosque in the City: Liminality, Ritual, and Politics*, eds. A. Hilal Uğurlu and Suzan Yalman (Bristol: Intellect, 2020), 221-249.

²¹ Alf Lüdtke, "Introduction: What is the History of Everyday Life and Who are Its Practitioner", *The History of Everyday Life: Reconstructing Historical Experiences and Ways of Life*, ed. Alf Lüdtke (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 5-6.

²² Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 6-19.

²³ Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 72-87; 159-240.

²⁴ Hand Medick, "Missionaries in the Rowboat?: Ethnological ways of Knowing as A Challenge to Social History", *The History of Everyday Life: Reconstructing Historical Experiences and Ways of Life*, ed. Alf Lüdtke (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 54; Geoff Eley, "Labor History, Social History, *Alltagsgeschichte*: Experience, Culture, and the Politics of the Everyday—a New Direction for German Social History?", *Journal of Modern History* 61 (1989): 297.

²⁵ BOA: DH. SAİDd.2.180.

²⁶ Edhem Eldem, "An Exercise in Ottoman Sartorial Micro-History: The Many Breeches, Shoes, and Fezzes of Mehmed Cemal Bey, 1855-1864", *Fashioning the Self in Transcultural Settings: The Uses and Significance of Dress in Self-Narratives*, eds. Cladia Ulbrich and Richard Wittmann (Würzburg: Ergon Würzburg in Kommission, 2015), 93-116; Paul Dumont, "Said Bey: The Everyday Life of an Istanbul Townsman at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century", *The Modern Middle East*, eds. Albert Hourani, Philip Khoury, Mary C. Wilson (New York: I.B.Tauris, 2004), 271-288.

contribute to a deeper understanding of the everyday practices that shape urban life, offering a panorama of experiences that reflect the broader socio-historical context of their time.²⁷

***Fin de siècle* Istanbul: Changing Dynamics, Contesting Urbanities**

During the late 19th century, Istanbul underwent significant urban transformations driven by the Ottoman Empire's modernization efforts. The period saw a duality in institutional arrangements, with traditional structures coexisting alongside new administrative and state offices.²⁸ This dichotomy was further accentuated by an influx of Western products, social norms, and intellectual currents that reshaped Istanbul's public sphere.²⁹ The spatial reorganization and burgeoning public sphere reflected the Empire's dual ambition: to modernize its image on the international stage and navigate the complexities of cultural and economic integration within its borders. In the epilogue of Peyami Safa's renowned novel *Fatih-Harbiye*, Istanbul's westernization is depicted as a patchwork, with districts like Galata and Pera fully embracing Western influences, while historic areas like Fatih remain bastions of tradition—highlighting the city's cultural and architectural dichotomy.³⁰ These transformations also mirrored shifts in lifestyles, with changing consumption habits, the emergence of middle-class working principles, and a lively intellectual environment.³¹ Especially during the Hamidian Era (1876-1909), a balanced approach to Westernization prioritized selective adoption over wholesale adaptation, challenging simplistic narratives of linear progression and prompting a reevaluation of the Ottoman modernization narrative to acknowledge a more complex interplay of reform, resistance, and adoption.³² Thus, Istanbul's evolving urban dynamics during this era exemplified the broader socio-cultural shifts within the Ottoman Empire as it grappled with modernity.³³

This complex co-existence of traditional and modern influences created tension and an arena for constant negotiation in terms of identity and reform policies of the empire. The novel urban ordering of the late 19th century involved implementing modern institutions, reforming administrative organization, and exerting tighter governance over city inhabitants, facilitating the establishment of a centralized state system characterized by codification, systematization, and control.³⁴ The highly vibrant environment of transformation did not leave the Sufi community untouched. The sufi lodges (*tekke*) were also brought under the control of the central bureaucracy. The duty of the sheikh, which was traditionally passed down through marriage and caliphate, came under the direct control of the Assembly of Sheiks, or *Meclis-i Meşâyih* (*est.*

²⁷ Yüksek, "Sufi and the Sufi Lodges", 16; Findley, "Social Dimensions of Dervish Life", 129-143.

²⁸ Zeynep Çelik, *The Remaking of Istanbul: Portrait of Ottoman City in the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), xv; Noyan Dinçkal, "Arenas of Experimentation: Modernizing Istanbul in the Late Ottoman Empire", *Urban Machinery: Inside Modern European Cities*, eds. Mikael Hard and Thomas Misa (Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2008), 49.

²⁹ Çelik, *The Remaking of Istanbul*, 43; Ceylan İrem Gencer and Işıl Çokuğraş, "Regulation of Urban Space in the Ottoman State: The Case of Istanbul (1820-1900)", *Megaron* 11/1 (2016): 1-14; Avner Wishnitzer, "Eyes in The Dark: Nightlife and Visual Regimes in Late Ottoman Istanbul", *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 37/2 (2017): 245-261.

³⁰ Peyami Safa, *Fatih-Harbiye* (İstanbul: Ötüken Neşriyat, 1995), 1-3.

³¹ Avner Wishnitzer, "Our Time: On the Durability of the Alaturka Hour System in the Late Ottoman Empire", *International Journal of Turkish Studies* 16/1 (2010): 58.

³² Emrence, "Three Waves of Late Ottoman Historiography", 137-151.

³³ Dinçkal, "Arenas of Experimentation", 49.

³⁴ The urban space was under constant surveillance during the reign of Abdulhamid II (1876-1909), a characteristic of a strengthening modern and centralized state apparatus. Please see: Merih Erol, "Surveillance, Urban Governance and Legitimacy in Late Ottoman Istanbul: Spying on Music and Entertainment During the Hamidian Regime (1876-1908)", *Urban History*, 40/4 (2013): 706-725.

1866)— a modern institution emerged as part of the state's centralization policies.³⁵ A series of instructions were published as a regulation requirement which resulted in outlining various aspects of the dervish lodges.³⁶ These instructions covered a range of matters, including the training and appointment of sheiks and dervishes and the inspection and of these institutions.³⁷

Amidst the transformative dynamics that penetrate all facets of an individual whose life encompasses the arenas of Sufism, bureaucracy, and the city life, Ken'ân Rifâî's life accommodated these novel aspects of urban experience which deeply interwoven with vibrant Sufi communities and bureaucratic circles within Istanbul's fabric. Rifâî's Istanbul, centered around the Fatih district, embodies the city's historical and cultural essence, where his traditional Ottoman house, adjacent Sufi lodge, and the path to Darrüşşafaka School nestle within the oldest quarter, reflective of a nexus of Ottoman culture and commerce.³⁸ The Sufi life in Fatih, characterized by over three hundred tekkes, influenced both individual and social life, with dervishes balancing mundane duties across various vocations by day and spiritual commitments by night.³⁹ Beyond Fatih, Rifâî's interaction with Istanbul extended to dynamic locales like *Bâbiâli* and the transforming regions of Galata and Pera, the latter of which were mostly associated with leisure activities such as theatre or cinema.⁴⁰ Ken'ân's adept navigation through Istanbul's diverse neighborhoods and socio-cultural spheres⁴¹ and his dual capacity to engage with and influence the evolving dynamics of a city at the crossroads of continuity and change—revealing his idiosyncratic ways of synthesis and selective adoption— will be explored in detail through his everyday experiences.

Ken'ân Bey Efendi in Early 20th Century Istanbul: Establishing a Sufi Household

Following his diverse appointments within the Ministry of Education (*Maârif Nezâreti*) across the Ottoman Empire for fifteen years, Ken'ân Bey turned to Istanbul in 1904 and settled this time for the rest of his life.⁴² During his extensive career across various Ottoman provinces, from the Balkans to Medina, Rifâî served as both a teacher and an education manager. His roles enabled him to act as an agent and executor of the Hamidian educational reforms since 1889. As a high-ranking bureaucrat in the late Ottoman Empire, Rifâî's multilingual proficiency and extensive regional administrative experience profoundly influenced his commitment to fostering Ottoman unity and interests through educational reforms. Upon his return to Istanbul, Rifâî was appointed to several key positions in educational committees and as an educational inspector, he became increasingly involved in the implementations of educational reforms.

During this period sources portray Ken'ân Rifâî as a mature man in his forties deeply imbedded in civil service. Rifâî's intellectual engagement during the Second Constitutional Era

³⁵ Brian Silverstein, "Sufism and Governmentality in the Late Ottoman Empire", *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 29/2 (2009): 182.

³⁶ Umut Azak, *Islam and Secularism in Turkey* (London: I.B. TAURIS, 2010), 7.

³⁷ BOA.İ.MVL.563.25320.

³⁸ While Fatih has come to represent the 'traditional' and 'stagnant' part of the changing city, recent literature present the changing dynamics of the Fatih area, challenging this perception. Please see: Gözde Çelik, "Tanzimat Döneminde Tarihi Yarımada: Tercihler, Yaklaşımlar, Görünümler", *Türkiye Araştırmaları Literatür Dergisi* 8/16 (2010): 227-258.

³⁹ İsmail Büyükseçgin, "İstanbul Tarihi Yarımada'da Osmanlı Dönemi Yerleşimi", *Art-Sanat* 15 (2021): 61-92.

⁴⁰ Luca Orlandi and Velika Ivkowska, "From Galata to Pera: Shifting Borders in Ottoman Society (1543-1923)", *The Dialectics of Urban and Architectural Boundaries in the Middle East and the Mediterranean*, eds. Suzan Girginkaya Akdağ and Mine Dinçer et. al. (London: Springer, 2021), 86-94.

⁴¹ Rifâî presents his diverse experiences and his spiritual reflection on the alafranga elements prevalent in the Ottoman Istanbulite's social life: Ken'ân Rifâî, *Ebu'l-Alemeyn Seyyid Ahmed Er-Rifâî* (İstanbul: Cenân Eğitim, Kültür ve Sağlık Neşriyatı, 2008), 259-261.

⁴² For his services during these years please refer to the following archival documents: BOA: DH.SAİD.72.405; BOA: MF.MKT.842.23; BOA: MF.MKT. 905.49.

reflects the nuanced complexity of the Late Ottoman discourse. His immersion in both Eastern and Western traditions allowed him to critically examine pivotal concepts like progress, freedom, and civilization, revealing a deep understanding of their implications within the Islamic discourse alongside the perspectives from western sources.⁴³ As a figure who is in active dialogue with these divergent currents, Ken'ân Rifâî emerged as a bridging figure harmonizing these divergent currents. His approach appears to have blended the reverence for tradition with an openness to contemporary thought thus created a unique synthesis reflective of his dual influences. This synthesis was encapsulated in his mansion (konak), which is located in the heart of intra-muros Istanbul, in close proximity to Hırka-i Şerif Mosque, a sanctuary in the Fatih district that houses the revered cardigan of Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h). The mosque's spiritual texture and name have been infused into the neighborhood.⁴⁴

Within this configuration, his residence emerged a critical center of cultural and educational exchange mirroring the twofold functions of the konaks of that time: preserving and conveying the Ottoman values as well as imbued with the spirit of late Ottoman modernization.⁴⁵ Having some teaching positions in the old city, Rifâî also started to deliver private spiritual discourses in the *selamlık* section of his konak—designated for male gatherings welcoming an eclectic array of individuals, from high-ranking officials and scholars to artists and religious luminaries.⁴⁶ The inclusion of people from diverse ethno-religious backgrounds further accentuated the mansion's role as a gathering space for the intellectual figures of the late Ottoman era which enabled diverse ideas and perspectives to converge under the roof of Sufi thought and practice. Between 1904 and 1908, these gatherings, acted as a crucible for Kenan Rifâî's spiritual authority, which matured and discovered its essence amid the growing scrutiny from Hamidian inspectors as a result of the mounting number of his followers.⁴⁷ The pressures and heightened surveillance oversight of the government compelled him to make this decision to launch his own tekke—even though he did not have initial intention to build one. This move can be interpreted as a strategy to legitimize his spiritual gatherings under state suspicion and a step into his formal role as a Rifâî Sheikh,⁴⁸ This transformation converted the konak into a tekke-konak, a 19th-century architectural synthesis of Sufi Lodge and mansion. The creation of the lodge and his official sheikdom were products of their socio-political milieu which would position Rifâî and his tekke-konak as a center in the post-Hamidian era producing cultural narratives through everyday practices and interactions.

Urban Elegance: Ken'ân Rifâî's Adjunct Tekke-Konak and the Aesthetics of Late Ottoman Living

Rifâî's mansion, alongside its adjoining Sufi lodge, epitomizes the architectural and cultural synthesis of late 19th-century Ottoman society which blended traditional and Western influences within its three-story wooden structure.⁴⁹ The ground floor, designated for receptions, and the upper floors, detailed with a fusion of Ottoman and contemporary furnishings—such as

⁴³ Yalçınkaya, *Ken'ân Rifâî*, 251-263.

⁴⁴ For more information on *hırka-ı şerif*: Mustafa Sabri Küçükaşçı, "İstanbul'daki Mukaddes Emanetler", *Antik Çağ'dan XXI. Yüzyıla Büyük İstanbul Tarihi: Din*, ed. Coşkun Yılmaz (İstanbul: TDV Yay., 2015), 407-409.

⁴⁵ Ken'ân Rifâî's father, Hacı Hasan Bey, purchased this property after coming to Istanbul following the Bulgarian uprising that broke out in Filibe in 1876. Please see: Samiha Ayverdi, *Dost* (İstanbul: Kubbealtı Neşriyat, 2017), 18. For more information on the Konak's place in the late Ottoman intellectual milieu: Mustafa Ülger, "19. Yüzyıl Osmanlı Fikir Hayatında Konakların Yeri", *İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 13/1 (2008): 197-206.

⁴⁶ Yalçınkaya, *Ken'ân Rifâî*, 144-56.

⁴⁷ Demirci, "Ümmü Ken'ân Dergâhı", 12.

⁴⁸ Aydın Yüksel, "Ümmü Ken'ân Tekkesi", *Dünden Bugüne İstanbul Ansiklopedisi* (İstanbul: Kültür Bakanlığı ve Tarih Vakfı Ortak Yayını, 1994), 7/111-112.

⁴⁹ n.d., "Ümmü Ken'ân Tekkesi", *Kültür Envanteri*, 3 Kasım 2022, <https://kulturenvanteri.com/yer/?p=7531>.

sofas, ottomans, and armchairs—demonstrate a sophisticated integration of styles, where every artifact, from gilded mirrors to embroidered pillows bearing mystical aphorisms, narrates a rich confluence of Eastern and Western aesthetics.

This configuration epitomizes an exemplary model of familial life, particularly for individuals occupying elevated social positions. Examination of Rifâî's domestic arrangements reveals a familial structure characterized by extended kinship ties, inclusive of his mother and first spiritual influence, Hatice Cenân Hanım (d. 1919), his four spouses, offspring, and domestic attendants. With an approximate twenty-person capacity, comprising immediate and extended family members alongside occasional guests, the mansion emerges as a bustling center for both social and spiritual engagements. Notably, individuals such as Server Hilmi Bey (d. 1930), close confidants or disciples, are also integrated into this familial framework. Rifâî assumes the role of the household provider, while the wives and staff undertake responsibilities associated with its upkeep. The order was very much like a typical *konak* type family which incorporated several generations and the extended members.⁵⁰ The meticulous organization observed within the *konak*, characterized by systematic arrangement and adherence to a budgetary framework, underscores the disciplined and methodical lifestyle maintained by Rifâî and his household.⁵¹

Reflecting on Rifâî's polygamous marriage reveals it as a reflection of a patriarchal framework where marriage often serves as an economic institution.⁵² Though Rifâî's unions were traditionally orchestrated with his mother Cenân Hanım's involvement, suggesting a conventional approach, they contrast with the rising trend of love marriages without parental control.⁵³ His family structure placed the senior wife in charge of domestic management, while his mother, maintained a role surpassing his in both influence and esteem. This dynamic within the Rifâî's mansion (*konak*) underscores a shift from traditional gender roles, recognizing the significant role of women in family and spiritual matters, as vividly described in his memoirs.⁵⁴ The customs in his residence appears to have retained a traditional essence, juxtaposed with elements of lifestyle that have a more contemporary orientation, particularly evident in communal dining practices, which are characterized by a distinctly Western ambience. The presence of modern furnishings such as sofas, armchairs, and a spacious dining table where family members gather for meals underscores a prevailing *alafranga* influence in terms of design and lifestyle choices.

During the Tanzimat period, the reorganization of society's way of life according to Western models was primarily symbolized through the objects used in everyday life.⁵⁵ Initially starting in the palace, this transformation gradually manifested in the mansions of the pashas and neighborhood houses.⁵⁶ The duality that emerged between Eastern and Western concepts

⁵⁰ Alan Duben, "Household Formation in Late Ottoman Istanbul", *International Journal Middle Eastern Studies* 22 (1990): 421.

⁵¹ Being orderly is also one of the important virtues emphasized by the intellectuals of the era concerning themselves with the deteriorating conditions of the Empire: Einar Wigen, "The Education of Ottoman Man and the Practice of Orderliness", *Civilizing Emotions: Concepts in Nineteenth Century Asia and Europe*, eds. Pernau, Margrit and Helge Jordheim (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 106-125.

⁵² Cem Behar, "Polygyny in Istanbul", *Middle Eastern Studies* 27 (1991): 477-486.

⁵³ İlber Ortaylı, "Türk Osmanlı Aile Yapısı", *Perşembe Konferansları 16* (Ankara: Rekabet Kurumu, 2001), 32.

⁵⁴ Samiha Ayverdi, "Sohbetler", *Ken'ân Rifâî ve Yirminci Asrın Işığında Müslümanlık* (İstanbul: Kubbealtı Neşriyatı, 2003), 551.

⁵⁵ Deniz Kılınçoğlu, *Economics and Capitalism in the Ottoman Empire* (London: Routledge, 2015), 165.

⁵⁶ Özge Şahin, "Teraziye Eşya ile Dengelemek: Ahmet Midhat'ın Romanlarında Eşya", *Monograf Edebiyat Eleştirisi Dergisi* 14 (2020): 8.

expanded from the public sphere into household objects, where decoration became a way of presenting identity.⁵⁷ In this period, houses became symbols of social status and economic standing.⁵⁸ In this transformation of the interior in accordance with the westernizing socio-cultural currents at the time, armchairs and sofas, coffee tables, stools, and side tables have become integral components of salon spaces, giving rise to the concept of furniture sets within these areas. The shift from low-seated sedirs to high-backed chairs has also influenced the design of residential facades, leading to the increased prominence of elevated window parapet walls.⁵⁹

In mansion, there appears to have employed a clear prioritization of the central tenets of the Sufi path over the materialistic aspects of everyday life. New objects and concepts, especially if influenced by Western sources, were only assumed, or used according to their ability to serve one's journey to become a good Muslim or dervish. The ultimate goal of this journey is the awareness of the Truth and unity with the Divine (*el-Hakk*), which is observable in all aspects of Rifâi's life, from his utilization of private room to his interactions in the mansion and the lodge. In Rifai's view, the true worth of any innovation or object lay in its potential to facilitate spiritual growth and self-realization, fundamental principles in Sufism. The adjacent Ummu Ken'ân Lodge, accessible through a passage from his mansion, is a testament to the architectural proximity to the worldly and spiritual realms Rifâi inhabits. metaphorically speaking, almost all times these two realms were blurred, and they were both experienced simultaneously. Architectural elements and ritual practices coalesce to form a space that is both deeply Ottoman in spirit and reflective of a broader cultural dialogue. This synthesis within the lodge and the mansion embodies the concept that space is produced through social practices and interactions and highlights Rifâi's role as a bridge between diverse worlds, which showcases how everyday life practices navigate and negotiate the complexities of modernity and tradition.⁶⁰

The management of Rifâi's household was facilitated by multiple spiritual and cultural aspects, illustrating Lefebvre's concept of the of the "production of space"— an everyday life studies aspect that examines how spaces are not merely physical locations but are actively produced through social practices and interactions. It also highlights how space is created and shaped by societal values and practical applications. When looking into the interior design of Rifai's konak in this vein, while novel components particularly utilized in the day-to-day functioning of the konak, we come to see that there were constant strategies to preserve and ensure the continuity of traditional and spiritual values.⁶¹ This attitude reflected a selective adoption in favor of the ethos that prevailed in the Sufi spaces of Istanbul for centuries. The inhabitants of the mansion were expected to adhere to a list of social etiquettes and Sufi customs even in their daily routines and mundane activities. The conventional everyday practices of leaving rooms and operating household items with phrases that imbue daily actions with spiritual significance can be seen such good illustration of his balanced approach in utilizing the material elements in the common spaces of the mansion. The environment, governed by rules such as respecting time and prohibiting gossip, alongside Sufi customs like walking backward out of rooms and poetically interacting with everyday objects, reinforces this cultural synthesis.

⁵⁷ Şahin, "Teraziye Eşya ile Dengelemek", 10; Boyar and Fleet, *A Social History of Ottoman Istanbul*, 285.

⁵⁸ Orhun Polat, "The Analysis of the Changes in the Interior Design of Houses Due to the Westernization Movements in the 19th century in the Ottoman Empire", *Advances in Social Sciences Research Journal* 5/12 (2018): 209.

⁵⁹ Deniz Demirarslan, "Osmanlı'da Modernleşme/Batılılaşma Sürecinin İç Mekân Donanımına Etkileri", *İnsan ve Toplum Bilimleri Dergisi* 45 (2007): 54.

⁶⁰ Gürbüz Ertürk, "Ümmü Ken'ân Dergâhı", *The Door of Grace (Rahmet Kapısı): International Kenan Rifai Symposium* (Istanbul: Nefes Yay., 2017), 153-159.

⁶¹ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, Trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991),

Portrait of an Istanbulite Sufi-Bureaucrat Figure's Morning Routine

Looking at Rifâî's morning routine, as presented in his sohbet memoirs, proves how his various roles shaped household dynamics and how spiritual and religious practices were integrated into their household life. Sheikh Ken'ân spends the early hours of the morning in his private room. Following the morning prayer, he engages in contemplation and creative work such as translation and writing. He is a productive figure, resembling the intellectuals of the era in his amalgamation of various roles and intellectual pursuits. His room stands apart from the rest of the house in terms of aesthetics and orderliness. It has a more traditional setting, adorned with elements representing his inner world, and with items gathered from various spiritual places he has visited, such as a model of the Kabe. In the pictures taken in his room, he is often wearing his Sufi garment,— *sikke* and the long gown.

In Rifâî's private chamber, amidst traditional *sedir* couches and a bookshelf reflecting his diverse interests, one encounters books that exemplify tekke culture alongside ones influenced by Western education. The presence of a violin case standing before his bookshelf, along with a ney (*reed flute*) left ready to be played at any moment, signifies his musical inclination. It is from this synthesis that we can effortlessly discern the essence of this multifaceted individual. His book, *İlâhiyât-ı Ken'ân*, containing thirty-four hymns composed by Rifâî himself, demonstrates a fusion of religious lyrics with musical song forms.⁶² The diverse contents of his bookshelves, as noted in his memoirs, span various subjects and languages, including books on Philosophy,⁶³ French books including Camille Flammarion's (d. 1925) *La Fin du Monde* (1894),⁶⁴ which Rifâî also translated into Turkish, his works such as *40 Derste Arapça* (a guide for conversational Arabic/1901) is a testament to his proficiency in Arabic; *Muktezâ-yı Hayât* (1891),⁶⁵ symbolizing his interest in life sciences and his work *Rehber-i Sâlikîn* (1909)⁶⁶ offers a spiritual guide for dervishes, following with *Tuhfe-i Ken'ân* (1911)⁶⁷ are works prepared simultaneously with the opening of his tekke. Moreover, his translations of hadith collections and stories from Celâleddîn Rûmî's (d. 1273) *Mesnevî* into French—the lingua franca among intellectuals of the time—exemplify the characteristics of a Tanzimat bureaucrat. By rendering religious-traditional content into the language of civilization and progress, he aims to bridge diverse cultural realms cultivated throughout his life. His engagement with poetry, music, and literature further highlights him as an intellectual figure of the era. This eclectic mix within his study room epitomizes Ottoman Istanbul's cosmopolitan milieu nurtured by the milieu, highlighting the interplay between traditional and Western influences.

⁶² For some examples that reflect his musical manner see. Ken'ân Rifâî, *İlâhiyât-ı Ken'ân, Notalarıyla Bestelenmiş İlâhiler*, ed. Yusuf Ömürlü (İstanbul: Cenân Eğitim, Kültür ve Sağlık Vakfı Neşriyatı, 2013), 30-36.

⁶³ An intellectual interest acquired possibly during his time at Mekteb-i Sultani: Hasan Sabri Çeliktas, "Mekteb-i Sultani Müfredatındaki Ulûm-ı Diniye Derslerinin Niteliği", *Sahn-ı Semân'dan Dârülfünûn'a Osmanlı'da İlim ve Fikir Dünyası XIX. Yüzyıl*, ed. Ahmet Hamdi Furat (İstanbul: Zeytinburnu Belediyesi Kültür Yay., 2021), 146.

⁶⁴ Rifâî's translation of Camille Flammarion's (1925) *La Fin du Monde* into Turkish as *Dünyanın İnkılâbı*—which critiques modernist perspectives—illustrates his engagement with contemporary intellectual currents, viewing Flammarion, a French astronomer and writer, as a scientist who reconciles the physical with the metaphysical, rather than as a mere positivist. For more information please see: Rifâî, *Sohbetler*, 2. Also translated to English: Camille Flammarion, *Omega: The Last Days of the World* (Winnped: Bison Books, 1999).

⁶⁵ While at Balıkesir Karesi High School, Rifâî prepared *Muktezâ-yı Hayât*, a book that combines French translations on life issues like air, water, soil, plants, food, and animal nutrition, to fill educational gaps at the secondary level. Ken'ân Rifâî, *Muktezâ-yı Hayât* (İstanbul: Karabet Matbaası, 1308).

⁶⁶ This work, written by Ken'ân Rifâî for Turkish-speaking seekers, explains Sufi concepts and manners as a spiritual guide. Abdülhalim Ken'ân, *Rehber-i Sâlikîn* (İstanbul, n.p., 1909); Ken'ân Rifâî, *Rehber-i Sâlikîn*, ed. Mustafa Tahralı (İstanbul: Cenân Eğitim ve Kültür Vakfı Neşriyatı, 2019).

⁶⁷ Published by Ken'ân Rifâî after appointment as a Sheik at the Ummu Ken'ân Sufi Lodge. The book includes some of his hymns, translations of Hadits of Prophet Muhammad (p.u.h.), and the translation of Imam Busiri's (d. 695/1296?) Arabic poem, *Kaside-i Burde*, into verse.

Following his private studies, Ken'ân Rifâî joins his family in the living room of their wooden konak. In this intimate space, they engage in sohbet about life, Sufism, and daily matters. These gatherings epitomize the intersection of spiritual discourse and everyday routines.⁶⁸ Within the family, where the women are highly influential, mornings are characterized by a traditional Mansion breakfast—a time for conversation, addressing household needs with his wife, and informing about the requirements of those in need. In this setting, Rifâî emerges as a patriarchal figure who resolves issues with solutions rooted in the tradition of positive perception of events, delegates tasks, and secures finances. The changing socio-economic conditions seems to have met with reconciliatory approaches that fostered harmony within the family. With Hatice Cenân Hanım still alive, it appears that matters concerning the tekke are managed with his beloved mother, while internal mansion affairs are handled with the senior wife. Existing memoirs almost always represent has the teacher figure, even though he has many different roles, such as the house's husband, father, or grandfather. He is usually noted as reading the newspapers, looking out the window and contemplating, and then turning to his family and conveying his family the wisdom that he extracted from the newspaper story or something that he saw from the window. After reading a newspaper one day, he takes off his reading glasses, saying: "There should be glasses in one's eyes that allow seeing both the world, the external, the form, and the meaning, and seeing the meaning should not prevent seeing the form."⁶⁹ This excerpt show that Rifâî addresses both tekke and civil life issues through the lens of Sufism, continuing his role as a mediator in the mansion with moderate solutions. The notion of God as the ultimate power permeates both religious and mundane activities, making every gathering, from morning tea to breakfast, a venue for spiritual practice.

A Sufi Sheik in the Civil Service: Daily Routines and Style

Working habits and work opportunities drastically changed during the mid-19th century. As part of the economic and modern state development, there was an urge to raise qualified men who were trained in novel educational institutions and could become functional parts of the centralizing bureaucracy.⁷⁰ During this period, well-educated individuals in these institutions found themselves working as civil servants within the Ottoman bureaucracy, many of whom came from affluent urban backgrounds. They possessed skill and a strong command of Ottoman Turkish, as well as the classical Islamic languages of Arabic and Persian and proficiency in French, which served as the diplomatic language of that era, was also highly valued and often facilitated their advancement within the bureaucracy.⁷¹ An important constituent element of the bureaucracy in the post-Tanzimat period were the intellectual bureaucrats, Rifâî resembled this figure who had a mindset that favored the state, acted as an intermediary, and embodied a bureaucratic mentality.⁷²

One of the markers of the bureaucratic reform was the thousands of men bustling the streets of Istanbul with clothing that signified their social position. By the year 1900, the fashion

⁶⁸ This anecdote illustrates the necessity of a balanced perspective, where one must view both the material world and the spiritual realm simultaneously, much like using glasses that allow for both near and far vision. Please see: Rifâî, *Sohbetler*, 299-300.

⁶⁹ Ayverdi, *Yirminci Asrın Işığında Müslümanlık*, 220.

⁷⁰ Kadir Yıldırım and Levent Şahin, "Osmanlı'dan Günümüze Mesleki Eğitimin Gelişimi", *Çalışma ve Toplum* (2015): 81; Levent Odabaşı, "Osmanlı İktisadi Modernleşmesinde Liberal Tezler", *Adnan Menderes Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi* 4 (2014): 76-86.

⁷¹ Syed Tanvir Wasti, "A Distinguished and Loyal Ottoman Civil Servant: Hüseyin Nâzım Pasha", *Middle Eastern Studies* 49 (2013): 365.

⁷² Ömer Aytaç, "Memurluk Zihniyeti ve Memuriyen Toplum: Prens Sabahattin'in Görüşleri Işığında bir Çözümleme", *Dokuz Eylül Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi* 8 (2006): 16; Ömer Çaha and Lutfullah Karaman, "Civil Society in the Ottoman Empire", *Journal of Economic and Social Research* 8 (2006): 73.

landscape in Istanbul had undergone significant changes compared to the early nineteenth century. The gradual shift from traditional clothing to European-style garments, which had been occurring over the past four or five decades, experienced a notable acceleration in the last thirty years of the century.⁷³ The clothing constituted of a redingote or *istanbulin*, accompanied with a fez and trousers.⁷⁴ The question of whether a Sufi Sheik can walk the streets wearing an *istanbulin* reflects the significance of clothing as a personal and public expression of social identity. Unlike other cultural markers, costume is a readily adaptable social statement with significant communicative value. Sufis, clothing held particular significance, with specific styles of gowns and turbans worn by adherents of individual tariqas.⁷⁵ The decision to adopt Western clothing was a matter of discussion and dispute among Sufis at the time, reflecting broader debates about tradition, modernity, and cultural identity.⁷⁶

For Rifâî, as a descendant of a prominent family closely tied to state tradition, wearing the required attire in accordance with the necessities of the day posed no challenge. His background might have made it harder for him to reconcile with the traditional Sufi garment, which he exclusively wore within the household or in his tekke. Demonstrating a procedural mindset, Rifâî meticulously adheres to established protocols for every situation, recognizing attire as intrinsic to the task's nature, varying with time, task, and duty, thus embracing the principle of evolving norms. Throughout his life, his fashion choices and elegance have been a subject of interest, with commentators often highlighting aspects of his attire and accessories. Notably, during his tenure as an Ottoman official, he seems to have adopted clothing akin to the uniform worn by high-ranking officials, aligning with the state-prescribed attire delineated in The First Ottoman Constitution of 1876 (*Kanun-i Esâsî*).⁷⁷ His sartorial decisions consistently reflected adherence to state guidelines across different eras.

Following the requirements of a suitable garment, following his morning routine, Rifâî would depart for his headmaster position in Darrüşşafaka High School in the Fatih district.⁷⁸ In bureaucracy, his commitment to duty, evident through his capacity, experience, and positions held, reflects a family ethos he embraced, dedicating his time and attention to tasks with meticulous care beyond mere obligation. While being duty-oriented is a familial trait, his adoption of modern methods, incorporating Tanzimat-era innovations (*usûl-i cedîd*) into education while preserving Ottoman cultural values, is notable. His educational philosophy, merging Sufi principles with secular learning—especially evident in his inclusion of Sufi texts in French classes—speaks to a holistic vision of education. This approach, aimed at fostering

⁷³ Nancy Micklewright, "Late-Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Wedding Costumes as Indicators of Social Change", *Muqarnas* 6 (1989): 161.

⁷⁴ Charlotte Jirousek, "The Transition to Mass Fashion System Dress in the Later Ottoman Empire", *Consumption Studies and the History of the Ottoman Empire, 1550-1922*, ed. Donald Quartet (New York: State University of New York Press, 2000), 208; Findley, *Ottoman Civil Officialdom*, 213.

⁷⁵ Ramazan Muslu, "Türk Tasavvuf Kültüründe Tarikat Kıyafetleri ve Sembolik Anlamları", *EKEV Akademi Dergisi* 12/36 (2008): 43-66.

⁷⁶ Kara, "Turban and Fez", 163-202.

⁷⁷ Emine Koca, "XVIII. ve XIX. Yüzyıl Erkek Modası", *Türk-İslam Medeniyeti Akademik Araştırmalar Dergisi* 7 (2009): 63-81.

⁷⁸ Darüşşafaka was opened in 1865, with only two classes, Literacy and Mathematics (Elifbâ ve Hesap), and had among its first teachers famous intellectuals such as Namık Kemal (d. 1888). Later on Darüşşafaka's curriculum was made the same with Galatasaray Imperial Lycee. In 1908, Ken'ân Bey became headmaster of Darüşşafaka School with a salary of 200 kuruş. See Aynur Soydan, "Darüşşafaka Tarihinden Kesitler", *Yakın Dönem Türkiye Araştırmaları* 1/3 (2013): 249-256.

both linguistic proficiency and a deeper understanding of Islamic ethics and spirituality, underscores the symbiosis between material progress and spiritual growth.⁷⁹

Contradictory to the many critiques among the intellectuals directed at the civil officials for not working efficiently and just killing time while exploiting the benefits of state positions, As the number of offices grew and the number of employees, especially in the urban centers, excelled, the popularity and attraction to work for state offices also increased. The matter of the civil officials who are only trying to benefit from these positions and not do proper work became a matter of satire widely mentioned in the novels of the late Ottoman era. The literary type of *alafranga* dandy, who wants to appear Westernized but only has a shallow understanding of this concept, is a widely used figure in the novels of the late 19th century.⁸⁰ This figure is applied in the wide criticism the writers held against the state officials, which only hold these positions to exploit the state without doing any substantial work.⁸¹ The *dandy* type often appears as an ignorant individual who imitates the outer appearance of a European gentleman symbolizing an unproportioned adoption of European styles and behaviors at the expense of cultural authenticity.⁸² Kenan Rifâî's perspective aligns with this critique, as he equates the dandy with a man who forgets the divine orchestration of all events, in a way that underscores the need for a synthesis respecting cultural heritage while engaging with modern influences.⁸³

In contrast, Ken'ân Rifâî's disciplined life as a Sufi sheikh and exemplary performance as a civil servant illustrate a strategic navigation of these realms.⁸⁴ This duality invites us to consider whether his discipline stems from modern, progressive values or from a deep, strenuous spiritual journey. Rifâî's existence, deeply rooted in Sufi ethos, is marked by a meticulous balance between his professional and spiritual duties. This balance embodies the concept of "making do" within the constraints of everyday life,⁸⁵ where his daily practices both fashioned and were designed by the urban milieu of late Ottoman Istanbul. Rifâî's tenure as the director of Dârüşşafaka exemplifies this equilibrium. During his post, he appears to have prioritized his school duties, except on the lodge's dhikr days. As his work schedule normalized, he devoted more time to the lodge, reflecting a fluid interplay between two realms in the city.⁸⁶ This interplay highlights how ordinary actions can hold profound significance while contributing to a larger narrative of urban setting. By delving into the ordinary moments of Rifâî's life, we see a man who adeptly navigated his era's challenges, integrating traditional wisdom with modern pragmatism while utilizing everyday practices to negotiate his position within a rapidly changing society. His approach exemplifies the concept of everyday practices as devices (*tactic*) used by individuals to navigate and subtly transform their environments.⁸⁷

Back From Work: On the streets of Istanbul

⁷⁹ His authorship of *Mukteza-yı Hayât* further embodies his belief in education's role in nurturing the soul alongside the intellect, advocating for a comprehensive development that harmonizes technological advancements with spiritual insight.

⁸⁰ Nurdan Gürbilek, "Dandies and Originals: Authenticity, Belatedness, and the Turkish Novel", *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 102/2 (2003): 600.

⁸¹ Ahmet Midhat Efendi, *Dünyaya İkinci Geliş Yahut İstanbul'da Neler Olmuş; Felatun Bey ile Rakım Efendi; Hüseyin Fellah*, ed. Kâzım Yetiş, (Ankara: Türk Dil Kurumu Yay., 2000), 130.

⁸² The dandy figure who is prevalently criticized in Turkish novel, is a character who unquestionably adopts western manner at the expense of his authentic features: Gürbilek, "Dandies and Originals", 599-628.

⁸³ Ken'ân Rifâî, *Mesnevî Şerhi Notları*, III/25'a.

⁸⁴ Findley, *Ottoman Civil Officialdom*, 231.

⁸⁵ Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 47-56.

⁸⁶ Yalçınkaya, *Kenân Rifâî*,

⁸⁷ Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 16, 27, 51.

Ken'ân Rifâî's journey home after a day at school presents a dynamics interaction with the bustling life of Fatih's streets, illustrating his deeply intertwined presence within the urban landscape of late Ottoman Istanbul. Whether strolling through the lively streets of Fatih, riding the tramway, or occasionally being driven by his son, his transition from the educational realm to the domestic sphere is more than just a physical journey—it's an extension of his ongoing engagement with the city's diverse layers.⁸⁸ Along the way, he frequents shops and bazaars, clad in his official office attire with a fez atop his head, adorned with an *Istanbulin*, and attends to his daily errands. Referred to mostly as Ken'ân *Bey* or Ken'ân *Beyefendi* by residents, he garners respect from local government officials and sheiks alike.⁸⁹ The general public and craftsmen recognize Rifâî according to their professional affiliations and interests. However, because he does not frequent the marketplace or religious settings in the garb of a sheik, it is the respect commanded by his official attire that predominates in these environments.

The microcosmos of the family in the Ottoman Empire is the *mahalle* (neighborhood), often segregated according to religion.⁹⁰ The neighborhood has social cohesion, and according to Ortaylı, *mahalle* equates to the community.⁹¹ This community is one of the most important elements which shape the life around the family and allows the formulation of certain communal traditions and customs.⁹² The population of Istanbul mostly led localized lives, and therefore, within Istanbul, local identities and solidarities formed at the neighborhood and district levels.⁹³ Usually, the members of the neighborhood know one another and are aware of the happiness and adversities the families face.

Reflecting the localized culture of Istanbul, Ken'ân Rifâî's daily routine in the Fatih district exemplifies his engagement with the city's dynamic social structure. Certeau, in his seminal work, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, describes the city as “a space of enunciation,” where the movements and actions of individuals—like walking—transform urban spaces into personalized, lived experiences. particularly the chapter “Walking in the City,” where he elaborates on how the physical act of walking through a city exemplifies the ways in which people create their own spaces within the urban landscape.⁹⁴ Similarly, from the Ministry of Education at Çemberlitaş to his mansion in the Hırka-i Şerif neighborhood, his daily passage through the streets involves more than simple navigation; it represents a performance of social identity deeply embedded in the city's cultural fabric. As he stops to perform his prayers at key religious landmarks like the Şehzade Mosque or the Fatih Mosque, these rituals underline his integration into the public religious life, reinforcing his status within both the bureaucratic and religious fields. Rifâî's interactions along this route—from listening to sermons and engaging with the congregation to addressing the needs of his community members—act as daily reaffirmations of his social wealth and authority. These encounters are not merely social; they are strategic, aligning with Bourdieu's concept of “habitus” where his practices and dispositions are shaped by and shape the social structures around him.⁹⁵ By taking special interest in those from his circle, engaging in discussions within the mosque courtyard, and adhering to the

⁸⁸ Rifâî, *Sohbetler*, 373.

⁸⁹ Ayverdi, *Yirminci Asrın Işığında Müslümanlık*, 396.

⁹⁰ Yunus Uğur, “Mapping Ottoman Cities: Socio-Spatial Definitions and Groupings (1450-1700)”, *Journal of Early Modern Cultural Studies* 18/3 (2018): 16-65.

⁹¹ Ortaylı, “Türk Osmanlı Aile Yapısı”, 32.

⁹² Ortaylı, “Türk Osmanlı Aile Yapısı”, 32.

⁹³ Cem Behar, *A Neighborhood in Ottoman Istanbul: Fruit Vendor and Civil Servants in the Kasap İlyas Mahalle* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2003), 1.

⁹⁴ Michel De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Trans. Steven Rendall, California: University of California Press, 1984, 91-99.

⁹⁵ Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. 72-87.

etiquette prescribed by his dual role as a bureaucrat and Sufi sheikh, Rifâî navigates and subtly influences the power dynamics of his neighborhood.⁹⁶

Rifâî's daily engagements, characterized by visits to local artisans and pauses at the Hırka-ı Şerif Mosque, exemplify his deep integration into the social fabric of Fatih.⁹⁷ These interactions are not merely routine; they are manifestations of his habitus, reflecting a lifestyle deeply rooted in Sufi principles that dictate his public and private acts. As he navigates the bazaar for household necessities and stops for prayers—as detailed above—Rifâî employs his social capital, engaging with colleagues and neighbors in ways that reinforce his status within the community and within the broader social field of Ottoman Istanbul. These encounters, particularly his daily interactions, exemplify how Rifâî's Sufi teachings subtly weave into the fabric of everyday life, elevating routine moments into opportunities for communal reflection and spiritual growth. During a visit to an engraver's shop, his simple question about a seal inscribed with Allah's name organically leads to a deeper conversation on *ihsân*—the Sufi concept of seeing and being seen by the Divine.⁹⁸ This exchange not only fosters a shared spiritual understanding but also cements his role as a contributor to the community's collective consciousness, rather than an authoritative figure imposing doctrine. In this setting, his teachings on *ihsân* resonate not through formal assertion but through lived example and shared experiences. This dialogue exemplifies how Rifâî's approach nurtures an environment where spiritual discussions naturally emerge from the interactions of daily life. By engaging in such non-dominant exchanges, he enhances communal ties and affirms his commitment to a spiritual life that is integrated with, not isolated from, the societal rhythms of urban Istanbul.

Ken'ân Rifâî's daily journey home was interwoven with a series of rich social and intellectual encounters, reflecting the dynamic urban life of Istanbul. His discussions with influential figures such as Elmalılı Hamdi Yazır (d. 1942) and Bâbânzâde Ahmed Naim (d. 1934), during strolls through Fatih's vibrant streets, illustrate his active participation in shaping Ottoman intellectual discourse. These informal discussions often revolved around profound subjects like Sufi metaphysics and theology, showcasing how Rifâî's interactions transcended mere academic exchanges and were embedded in the everyday life of the city. For instance, his public defense of traditional madrasa education—asserting that “everything lies within scholarship (*Ne varsa mollalıkta vardır*)”—was not just an academic stance but a declaration made within the community spaces that resonated deeply across societal divisions. This statement, crafted amidst the backdrop of rising modernist critiques, reflected Rifâî's commitment to preserving Islamic educational traditions within the changing socio-political landscape. Moreover, Rifâî's engagements were not confined to intellectual debates but extended into the daily lives of the community. His dialogue in public settings, such as mosques and local bazaars, often bridged generational and social gaps while bringing traditional Sufi wisdom into contemporary discussions. Despite lacking formal professional ties with figures like Elmalılı, Rifâî's neighborhood gatherings facilitated continuous dialogues that underscored the significance of communal spaces in perpetuating intellectual traditions. This blend of the personal and public in Rifâî's interactions emphasized the microhistorical significance of his role as a mediator who employed everyday interactions to foster a deeper understanding and preservation of the Ottoman legacy.⁹⁹

Kenan Rifâî's everyday practices within the streets of Istanbul exemplify where the city becomes a canvas for the ordinary yet significant activities that define urban existence. Rifâî's

⁹⁶ Rifâî, *Sohbetler*,

⁹⁷ Rifâî, *Sohbetler*, 62, 373.

⁹⁸ Rifâî, *Sohbetler*, 553, 129, 263.

⁹⁹ Rifâî, “Sohbetler”, 563-564.

interactions in his community, particularly at religious sites and in the vibrant marketplaces, serve as tactical maneuvers in the larger strategic framework of societal norms and religious observance. His mediation during a conflict among young locals, resolving tensions through an invitation to iftar, transforms a potentially volatile situation into an opportunity for communal integration and social repair, the idea of using everyday occurrences as opportunities to renegotiate social order. Rather than imposing sanctions or direct admonitions on those breaking fasting rules during Ramadan, Rifâî adopts a subtle approach that respects individual autonomy—a key element in aforementioned concept. This methodology reflects a tactful engagement with the ‘other,’ where Rifâî’s actions are less about control and more about guiding through example, fostering a self-regulated moral landscape that aligns with the community’s diverse beliefs and practices. In his daily exchanges, Rifâî’s multilingual interactions not only cross linguistic boundaries but also weave a fabric of relational threads throughout his neighborhood. His ability to engage with the Albanian halva seller or the Greek fisherman in their own languages demonstrates a form of “walking rhetoric,” that navigates and creates relationships within the micro-geographies of Fatih.¹⁰⁰ These engagements are not merely communicative acts but are strategies that enhance the relational dynamics within urban spaces, asserting Rifâî’s role as a cultural mediator who bridges disparate cultural spheres. Moreover, Rifâî’s response to the community voices he hears upon entering his home—whether it’s the street vendor’s cries or a neighbor’s greeting—illustrates the concept of the “speech act” in public spaces.¹⁰¹ Each interaction, even the seemingly passive act of listening, is part of a larger discourse that Rifâî actively shapes and is shaped by and reflects his deep engagement with the everyday theatricality of street life.¹⁰²

Tekke Life at the Ümmü Ken'ân Sufi Lodge: Spiritual Engagement and Sufi Gatherings

The inauguration of the Ümmü Ken'ân Dergâh by Ken'ân Rifâî, at the urging of his mother, Hatice Cenân Hanım—who is also a first spiritual influence on him—marked more than a familial tribute; it signified the intertwining of personal devotion and broader socio-political currents.¹⁰³ The Dergâh was opened to the public on August 21, 1908, with a ceremony and ritual following Rifâî’s official registration as a Sufi sheik at the Assembly of the Sheikhs (*Meclis-i Meşâyih*).¹⁰⁴ While the establishment of the tekke occurred as a consequence of the controls during the last months of the Hamidian period, its establishment coincided with the early days of the Second Constitutional Era (1908), described as a period of liberty (*hürriyet*).¹⁰⁵ During the transition from the Hamidian autocracy to a period celebrated for freedom, profoundly impacted the structural and operational dynamics of Sufi lodges.

The Ümmü Ken'ân Dergâh emerged during a time when the Ottoman state intensified its bureaucratic centralization, exerting control over religious and educational institutions. This

¹⁰⁰ Rifâî, *Sohbetler*, 129, 265, 269; Rifâî, “Sohbetler”, 48, 127, 466, 540.

¹⁰¹ Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 20-21.

¹⁰² Samiha Ayverdi, Nezihe Araz, “Ahlak Anlayışı”, *Ken'ân Rifâî ve 20. Asrın Işığında Müslümanlık*, İstanbul: Kubbealtı Neşriyatı, 2000, s. 180.

¹⁰³ Ken'ân Rifâî is referred to as “Ümmü Ken'ân Dergâh-ı Şerîfi Postnişini Reşâdetli Şeyh Seyyid Ken'ân Efendi” at Meclis-i Meşâyih records. Please see: MMA.1761.8a; Yüksel, “Ümmü Ken'ân Tekkesi”, 111-112.

¹⁰⁴ Archival documents dating back to a mere five months prior to Ken'ân Rifâî's commencement of his tenure at Darüşşafaka highlight a transformation in his societal roles. Alongside his bureaucratic honorific of 'Bey', these records recognize his spiritual status as the Sheik of the Rifâî Sui order. Please see: BOA: MF.MKT.1052/66.

¹⁰⁵ The Young Turk Revolution inaugurated a new era of leadership, overthrowing Abdulhamid II (1876-1908) and initiating the Second Constitutional Era. For more information: Hanioglu, *A Brief History*, 150-157; Erik Jan Zürcher, “The Young Turk Revolution: Comparisons and Connections”, *Middle Eastern Studies* 55/4 (2019): 481-498; Fatma Müge Göçek, “What is the Meaning of the 1908 Young Turk Revolution? A Critical Historical Assessment in 2008”, *İ. Ü Siyasal Bilgiler Dergisi* 38 (2008): 179-211.

control had extended to the financial and administrative autonomy of Sufi lodges since the declaration of Tanzimat edict (1839), positioning them as integral components within the state's apparatus.¹⁰⁶ The expansion of education and the increasing demand for government positions among Muslim men during these periods led to attempts to control the finances and resources of tekkes. Consequently, dervishes from tekkes began to occupy increasingly significant positions within the state apparatus that resulted in a change in the social standing of the members of the Sufi community and a change in the lodge demographics.¹⁰⁷ Later in the Second Constitutional Era, figures like Rifâî, who navigated these regulated landscapes, began to redefine the role of dervishes from secluded spiritual practitioners to active participants in the public and political spheres of Istanbul. This shift not only altered the demographic character of the lodge but also its function within the urban fabric while transforming it from a purely religious institution into a cultural hub that responded to and reflected the changing dictates of Ottoman modernization.

The establishment of the Ummu Ken'ân Lodge marked a pivotal moment in Rifâî's public life which offers a glimpse into his daily existence. Despite assuming the role of tekke leadership, Rifâî did not abandon his professional career, continuing his full-time duties such as directorship and inspection. In this regard, the leadership of the tekke added another layer to his urban experience. Thus, his transition from the mansion to the tekke in the evenings provides insight into the colorful spiritual world, shedding light on the nocturnal life of Sufis—an essential yet invisible part of the city's dynamics. His evening transitions from his mansion to the tekke unveiled the vibrant spiritual life of Sufis, a crucial yet often overlooked aspect of the city's nighttime dynamics. Rifâî's foundation for this role was well-laid; having undergone traditional Sufi training (*seyrüsülûk*) and lived an ascetic life under the mentorship of Sheikh Edhem from Plovdiv (d. 1893) from the Kadiriyye Sufi order, he later joined the Rifâiyye tradition under the guidance of Sheikh Hamza er-Rifâî (d. 1946) from Medina. From him, Rifâî received the icazet, authorizing him to act as a Sufi sheikh after having registered to the Assembly.¹⁰⁸

Ken'ân Rifâî's interpretation of Sufism exemplifies how traditional spiritual practices intersect with the everyday realities of contemporary life, as viewed through the lens of everyday life studies. Rifâî's adaptation of Sufism is not just a preservation of ancient rituals but a dynamic engagement with the social and cultural milieu of his time. By day, his role as a civil servant involves implementing modern educational tools and curricula, while by night, within the walls of his lodge, he transitions into the role of a Sufi sheikh, embodying the centuries-old traditions of Ottoman Sufi culture. In this dual capacity, he navigates the complex social fields of modern Istanbul, where he applies both classical and Anatolian Sufi teachings to guide his disciples through their spiritual states. Rifâî's teachings, deeply rooted in the works of Sufi luminaries like Necmeddin Kübra (d. 1221), Yunus Emre (d. 1320), Muhyiddîn Ibn al-Arabi (d.

¹⁰⁶ Regulations included the elimination of cradle sheiks, strict control over pious foundations and a series of requirements to become a registered Sheik. Thierry Zarcone, "Saykh Succession in Turkish Şufi Lineages (19th and 20th Centuries): Conflicts, Reforms and Transmission of Spiritual Enlightenment", *Asian and African Area Studies* 7/1 (2007): 26; Silverstein, "Sufism and Governmentality", 171-185.

¹⁰⁷ Additionally, a series of regulatory processes had to be followed in order to open a Sufi lodge and become a registered sheikh. Carter Findley argues that state officials in the emerging civil service constitute a "social group" comprised of individuals from various social strata, including the ulema, military, and intellectuals following the Tanzimat period (1838-1875). For more info: Findley, *Ottoman Civil Officialdom*, 11; Findley, "Social Dimensions of Dervish Life", 129-43; Following studies focus on Sufi figures who were influential in arenas exceeding these positions as Sufi figures: Barkçın, *Ahmed Ayni Konuk*, 16; Atilla Şentürk, *Tâhirü'l-Mevlevî Hayatı ve Eserleri* (İstanbul: Nehir Yay., 1991), 6; Bein, "A Young Turk", 607-625; Fahri Maden, "Şehitlik Dergahı'nda Yenilikçi, Modern ve Bilge bir Bektaşî Babası Nafi Baba (1835-1912)", *Edeb Erkan* 3 (2023): 1-70; Silverstein, "Sufism and Governmentality", 171-185.

¹⁰⁸ Rifâî, *Seyyid Ahmed*, 259-261.

1240) and Niyâzî-i Mısırî, as well as Rumi's *Mesnevî*, are enacted within the lodge, which becomes a critical nexus for intellectual and spiritual exchange.¹⁰⁹ This practice situates the lodge as a vibrant arena for engaging with Islamic thought, where spiritual and intellectual pursuits intersect with everyday life.¹¹⁰

Rifâî's approach to Sufism is marked by a realistic adaptation to the socio-cultural changes of his era, particularly the transformations introduced during the early days of the Second Constitutional Era. His engagement reflects a practical understanding of Sufism that resonates with the contemporary challenges faced by his followers, many of whom occupy roles in the rapidly modernizing fabric of the Empire. The lodge, under Rifâî's guidance, thus serves not only as a space of spiritual retreat but also as a forum for addressing and integrating the modern and the traditional, the sacred and the civic. The everyday practices at the lodge—ranging from the recitation of classical texts to the performance of Sufi music and poetry—illustrate how Rifâî uses these cultural forms to foster a deeper spiritual connection among his followers. These practices also reflect his broader pedagogical strategy, which is to live a life reflective of Sufism's core principles of divine love and service to the community, thereby ensuring that his teachings are not merely theoretical but deeply embedded in the practical realities of daily life. This integration of Sufi practices into the everyday serves as a powerful demonstration of how traditional spiritual values can inform and enrich modern urban life, making the Ümmü Ken'ân Sufi Lodge a microcosm of the larger dynamics at play in early 20th-century Istanbul.

Sheikh Ken'ân's Sufi lodge, a three-story building primarily funded through his personal resources, served as a crucial nexus where the public and private realms intertwined. The lodge facilitated a spectrum of interactions, from informal social meetings on its lower floors to the more sacrosanct Sufi rituals conducted upstairs.¹¹¹ Within the mansion's selamlık—the private quarter—Ken'ân's space emerged as a focal point for vibrant intellectual and spiritual exchanges, a constructed bridge linking the lodge to his residence symbolized the seamless integration of his daily and spiritual existences.¹¹² This architectural unity between his living quarters and the tekke underscored the holistic integration of his life's roles, hosting gatherings that spanned religious, spiritual, and literary discussions. Operated under the careful scheduling of Rifâî's mother, Hatice Cenân, to avoid conflicts with other lodges, the Dergâh buzzed with activity, particularly on Wednesdays and Fridays.¹¹³

Every Wednesday evening, adorned in traditional sheikh attire, Sheikh Rifâî enters the Sufi lodge for the evening prayers, his appearance echoing a classical sheikh persona. Escorted by two potential successors, his passage through the selamlık of his mansion—receiving salutations from attending dervishes—marks a ritualistic transition from the secular to the sacred. On the dais, his recitations from Rûmî's *Mesnevî*, a foundational text in Sufi literature, and his leading of the dhikr blend conventional Sufi practices with personal charisma, thereby

¹⁰⁹ Hatice Dilek Güldütuna, Nazlı Kayahan, "The Concept of the Goodly Life (Hayât Tayyiba) in the Works of Kenan Rifâî", *Journal of Islamic and Muslim Studies*, Indiana University Press, 7/ 2 (2022), 50-82.

¹¹⁰ Yalçınkaya, *Ken'ân Rifâî*, 285-300.

¹¹¹ Mustafa Kara, *Din-Hayat Sanat Açısından Tekkeler ve Zaviyeler* (İstanbul: Dergâh Yay., 2013), 49-51.

¹¹² Among the visitors were, one of the most known musicians of the period, İzzettin Hümâyi Elçioğlu (d. 1950), Şeyhülislam Haydarizade İbrahim Efendi (d. 1933), Celalettin Ökten who later established the İmam Hatip Schools, Hattat Aziz Efendi (d. 1934), Anatomy Professor Nurettin Ali Berkol (d. 1955) who later became the member of the Parliament, and Deputy Patriarch of the Chaldean Catholic Church Abid Efendi and the son of Imam Şamil. After the ceremony usually these guests and Ken'ân Rifâî gathered in the area of Selamlık, which is part of a large Muslim house reserved for men, to drink coffee and discuss political and intellectual matters. Ayverdi, *Yirminci Asrın Işığında Müslümanlık*, 83-85.

¹¹³ M. Şefik Korkusuz, *İstanbul Tekkeleri ve Postnişinleri* (İstanbul: IQ Kültür Sanat Yayıncılık, 2016), 561-562.

reinforcing his spiritual authority and the lodge's role as a spiritual and cultural nexus.¹¹⁴ The integration of music within the ceremony—specifically through the ney, and the whirling dervishes during the ceremonies not only honor Sufi traditions but also actively engage the community in a shared spiritual experience. On Fridays, the ritual intensifies with Rifâi leading the *semâhâne*—a ceremony where chants honoring Prophet Muhammad set the stage for another profound recitation of the *Mesnevî* and subsequent dhikr.¹¹⁵ The dhikr, guided by the *Evrâd-ı Şerîf*—a compilation by Rifâi that incorporates various Qur'anic verses, the 99 names of Allah, and prophetic blessings—symbolizes a codified cultural script that participants internalize which reflecting the structured yet responsive nature of Sufi practice within the lodge's communal space.¹¹⁶

On nights marked by religious significance, such as *kandils* (*holy nights*) the Ümmü Ken'ân Dergah assumes a more animated role within the community which hosted extended spiritual gatherings that continue until midnight.¹¹⁷ During these times, the *zâkir* might recite *Mevlid*—the biography of the Prophet by Süleyman Çelebi (d. 1422). On Ashura day, recognized on the tenth of Muharram—the first month of the Islamic calendar, the community prepares a traditional dish, *ashura*, in historic pots while reciting verses of unity (*tevhid*) and elegies (*mersiyes*).¹¹⁸ The atmosphere during Ramadan is notably vibrant, with the dergah hosting *terâvih* prayers and sessions after *iftar* where Sheikh Rifâi, speaks for about an hour, accompanied by coffee served by Şakir Dede. Post-Bayram Fridays also see daylong rituals, integral to the dergah's routine.¹¹⁹ These ceremonies, like all others at the lodge, rely solely on Rifâi's funding since no external financial support is received. During these gatherings, the Sheikh ensures that those in need are not only welcomed but also leave with some monetary help, which seems to have created a space where spiritual sustenance and social welfare converge—a glimpse into the daily reality of community life within the Sufi lodge.¹²⁰ His role as a Sufi leader and household head reflects the between spiritual and mundane realms. This mutual relation underscores the lodge's function as a space where tradition is continuously recreated and adapted while serving as a pivotal agency in the post-Hamidian era.

As we draw our analysis to a close, it's important to acknowledge the additional dimensions of Rifâi's Sufi lodge and his engagement with Istanbul's urban layers, which merit further exploration. Notably, the lodge, named after his mother, embodies her spiritual influence. Rifâi's inclusive gatherings challenged societal norms and highlighted the roles of female intellectuals like Samiha Ayverdi (d. 1993) and Safiye Erol (d. 1964).¹²¹ Wednesdays at the Dergah, marked by Sufi ceremonies, saw Rifâi interacting with visitors from diverse ethno-religious backgrounds. These engagements showcased his deep integration into the neighborhood. Though these themes are briefly touched upon here, they invite deeper investigation into Rifâi's profound impact on his community.

¹¹⁴ Hatice Dilek Güldütuna, Tunay Çetin, “Tasavvufta Sembolizme Tipik Bir Örnek: Ken'ân Rifâi'nin Rifâi Mihrâbı Tasviri”. *Eskişehir Osmangazi Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 9/2 (Eylül 2022), 1276-1307.

¹¹⁵ Mehmet Şemseddin Ulusoy, *Niyazi-i Musri'nin İzinde Bir Ömür Seyahat: Dildâr-ı Şemsî* (İstanbul: Dergâh Yay., 2010), 173-174.

¹¹⁶ Yalçinkaya, *Ken'ân Rifâi*, 136.

¹¹⁷ Kâzım Büyükaksoy, *Ken'ân Rifâi'den Mesnevî Hatıraları*, ed. Arzu Eylül Yalçinkaya (İstanbul: Nefes Yayınevi, 2013), 147-149.

¹¹⁸ Among the special rituals for these nights are practices like *burhan çıkarmak* (producing evidence) and *gül yalamak* (kissing the rose), as per Rifâiyya tradition. For more information: Mustafa Tahralı, “Rifâiyye”, *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi* (İstanbul: TDV Yay., 2008), 35/99-103.

¹¹⁹ Rifâi, *Sohbetler*, 483, 500.

¹²⁰ Yalçinkaya, Arzu Eylül. “Son Dönem Osmanlı Şeyhlerinden Kenân Rifâi: Hayatı, Eserleri ve Tasavvuf Anlayışı”. *Şirnak Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 11/24 (2020), 98-128; Yalçinkaya, *Ken'ân Rifâi*, 100-105.

¹²¹ Yalçinkaya, *Ken'ân Rifâi*, 167-177.

Conclusion

Ken'ân Rifâî (d. 1950) is a complex figure that has dual faces of bureaucratic character and Sufi master. The article's primary objective is to examine the relationship between urban life and Sufi practices shown in Ken'an's life, behavior, and attitude. It reconstructs the life of Ken'ân Rifâî during the Second Constitutional Period (1908-1918), and convincingly illustrates the ways in which he bridges the gap between tradition and modernity, with a specific focus on his literary works and the changing atmosphere of late Ottoman Istanbul. By focusing on Rifâî's daily practices in late Ottoman Istanbul, this study aimed to explore Ken'ân Rifâî's everyday life based on primary sources from an urban spatial perspective and considered elements of socio-cultural history with respect to the Sufi master's position within his milieu. Ken'ân's adept navigation through Istanbul's diverse neighborhoods and socio-cultural spheres and his dual capacity to engage with and influence the evolving dynamics of a city at the crossroads of continuity and change—reveals his idiosyncratic ways of selective adoption. Significant findings of the study indicate that the everyday adoptions and attitudes of the Sufi master reflect his multifaceted and multi-layered persona regarding his background that merged mysticism with bureaucratic and professional endeavors. His engagement with the city and its inhabitants through a variety of Sufi practices—including educational initiatives, spiritual discussions, or the act of navigating the urban landscape—reveals a multifaceted character who utilized his spiritual authority to cultivate a sense of community and adaptability. His interaction with Istanbulite from all areas of life is indicative of his comprehensive emphasis on the concept of Unity (*tevhid*), which has broader implications for his daily life. The lodge itself, a locus of spiritual and social activity, stood as a microcosm of the broader societal changes, reflecting Rifâî's efforts to harmonize Sufi traditions with modern urban life. This space was not only a sanctuary for spiritual reflection but also a stage for the negotiation of new social identities and the revitalization of traditional values in response to the pressures of modernity. By examining the mundane moments of Rifâî's life, we observe a man who skillfully managed the challenges of his era, combining traditional wisdom with contemporary practicalities and utilizing everyday practices to negotiate his position within a rapidly changing society.

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