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# Bektashism in Albania: Political history of a Religious Movement

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ALBERT DOJA

*"Member of the Academy of Sciences"*

BEKTASHISM  
IN ALBANIA

POLITICAL HISTORY OF  
A RELIGIOUS MOVEMENT



Tirana, 2008

Albert Doja

BEKTASHISM IN ALBANIA:

POLITICAL HISTORY OF A RELIGIOUS MOVEMENT

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## ABSTRACT

Heterodox mystics and heretics of any kind become sometimes dangerous and other times reliable, depending on political situations, as was the case with the Bektashis. The system of beliefs and practices related to Bektashism seems to have corresponded to a kind of liberation theology, whereas the structure of Bektashi groups corresponded more or less to the type of religious organization conventionally known as charismatic groups. It becomes understandable therefore that their spiritual tendency could at times connect with and meet social, cultural and national perspectives. In turn, when members of the previously persecuted religious minority will acquire a degree of religious and political respectability within society at large, the doctrines of heterodoxy and liberation theology fade into the background. In the end, the heirs of the heterodox promoters of spiritual reform and social movement turn into followers and faithful defenders of a legitimate authority. They become the spokespeople for an institutionalized orthodoxy whose support is sought by the political regime.

*Keywords: Heterodoxy; Mysticism; Sufism; Bektashi; Albanian.*

## INTRODUCTION

Religious studies specialized in Bektashism, being largely the domain of either Orientalists or religious scholars, remain stuck somewhere between ethnocentrism, empiricism, historicism and literalism, and thereby have brought little distinctively anthropological and sociological analysis to bear successfully on the practical realities and political ideologies of religious projects. They tend to be affected by what Roland Barthes called the "virus of essence",<sup>1</sup> very much orientated towards a folklorist paradigm of *Reliktforschung*,<sup>2</sup> concerned with a search for the remainders of ancient times. The main interest of such unanalytical approach, which often piles up uncritically all kinds of trite evidence, seems only to be in correcting either the mistakes of Western specialists or the presumptions of local scholars on one or another point of details.

This is clearly visible in recent years with the spate of books published in Turkish and in Western languages about Bektashism and Alevism, many of them by Bektashis or sympathizers of Bektashism, for which an approach will remain comprehensible and legitimate as long as it reproduces an apologetic discourse or it aims at revealing the essence of the origins of Bektashism. Some may offer new interpretations and

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<sup>1</sup> (Barthes 1993 [1957])

<sup>2</sup> (Bausinger 1993)

political slants, which could provide material for lively debate, but their insufficiency rises from overshadowing the properly political dimensions of the phenomenon, followed by a two-fold naturalization.

To begin with, the Bektashis are usually taken for a granted community once and for all. After umpteen "preliminary" accounts of studies regarding Bektashism,<sup>3</sup> suggestions for further research are still advocated on the single account of the mutual influences between the everlasting Bektashi and the different religions present in Anatolia or in the Balkans and their development in the course of times. A supposed substratum of folk religion, the highly syncretistic character or the exclusive heterodox nature of Bektashism are unquestionably assumed as continuous reactions to centuries of foreign dominance and antagonistic outside influences, leading to an immutable inertness and preservation of archaic features deemed to characterize cultural and religious life. So it is that most of specialist studies are intended to nothing more than "convey a reasonable general impression that most Bektashis could accept".<sup>4</sup>

Moreover, many works regard Bektashism as self-explanatory, expressing 'academically' what the Bektashis themselves claim 'religiously'. They are always declared victims par excellence, systematically oppressed by political or religious authoritarian regimes. On the other hand, they are constantly made out the best preservers of both local cultural and universal moral values.

If Islamic brotherhoods have always occupied an important place in the social, economic, and political life from the old

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<sup>3</sup>(Kressing 2002)

<sup>4</sup>(Norton 2001)

Ottoman Empire to modern Turkey, throughout Turkish history, the Bektashi have never failed to claim their foundations as exclusive centres of culture and education. In the way, the Bektashis and other dervishes have come to be seen as the providers of many things. They converted nomads from shamanism to Islam, extended social and emotional support to new converts, particularly the Janissaries, provided food and shelter to travellers, proposed concrete saints for popular piety to focus on, and at the end of the nineteenth century, constituted a source of support to the Young Turks and Turkish nationalism. Many painstaking efforts have been made to show that certain Bektashis "could provide a source of legitimation against an established government" or even "prove the existence of a civil society in the Ottoman Empire".<sup>5</sup>

In present days, in most situations, the Bektashis, defined against Sunni Islam, set themselves forth as essentially modern and democrat, overall defenders of human rights and gender equality. Tolerance, love, and respect for all men and women created in God's image and in whom God manifests himself, regardless of race, religion, or nation, as well as hatred of hypocrisy and inner religion of the heart, help for those in need, kindness, honesty, solidarity, equality, fraternity, freedom, democracy, and the like, all are frequent messages that Bektashis seek to convey as unique humanistic traits of their ideology.

Certain scholars on Bektashism have given their support to or reproduced these essentializing identity and ideological discourses without questioning them. At first, the relative benevolence of Western scholarship towards the Bektashis is partly explained, as I argued elsewhere,<sup>6</sup> by the tendency of some

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<sup>5</sup>(Faroqhi 1995)

<sup>6</sup>(Doja 2004a)



scholars like Frances Trix "going native",<sup>7</sup> or even by the sympathy the Bektashis themselves may inspire because of their politically correct character. The Bektashis answer especially well to certain academic or political as well as cosmopolitan or nationalist expectations, to the point of their claims being largely considered, if not progressive, at least legitimate. Moreover, the example of Bektashis seems to pertinently illustrate the meeting of Western academic projections with the political interests of a religious movement, a shortcoming denounced with accuracy by Elise Massicard in the case of Alevism in contemporary Turkey.<sup>8</sup> Western academia has often reproduced the Bektashi historical vulgate, making of its protagonists successively the promoters of the nation, the allies of secularity or the spearheads of democracy, perhaps for the same political or ideological reasons than their fellow Bektashis.

Consequently, we must reverse the question and precisely get rid of that apologetic vision of the origin and essence on which many are so enthusiast, in order to be able to explain why at a given time the community of a religious identity becomes a relevant medium for spiritual, cultural, social, or political mobilization. What the Bektashis hold for their identity and their history must be treated as a discursive ideological construction, for we can reveal their possible situational relevance or their sociological and political determinants. To build a relatively autonomous analysis of Bektashi discourses, it is necessary to study the context that produces such ritualized discourses and practices, to convert the interpretations of the actors into data to be interpreted, and to incorporate in the

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<sup>7</sup>(Trix 1993)

<sup>8</sup>(Massicard 2005)

subject of study their attempts to organize a memory and their strategies to balance or reverse power relationships. Against most available research on Bektashism, it is time to move from the historical account of the dervish units and their symbolic practices towards the analysis of the political and sociological dynamics of their production and reproduction: Far from politicizing and ethnicizing Bektashi issues, a critical and analytical approach must reveal and de-essentialize the hidden ideological undercurrents of discourses mobilizing around religious identity and political projects.

A different picture may result, indeed, from the basic assumption that different types of social organisation and ways of thinking are compatible with the political establishment to varying degrees and react to it in different ways. Within the social sciences, Max Weber already made the difference in worldly success between the Catholic and the Protestant worldview central to his *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*,<sup>9</sup> whereas anthropology has been constantly interested in the ways that social organisations might be compared, emphasizing that the investigation of living phenomena are absolutely reliant upon comparing and establishing the differences between relevant groups.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>(Weber 2002 [1905])

<sup>10</sup>A few exceptions apart, only texts written in a dervish milieu contain information about holy men and their doings, and these texts were written not for historical but religious purposes. However, in recent studies by contemporary Turkish scholars, such as the thorough commentaries on the Vilayet-Name of Hadji Bektash or the comprehensive study of pre-Islamic motifs in Bektashi legend (Golpinarli 1958; Ocak 1983), a narrative or group of stories will be followed in their passage through different literatures, while the researcher tries to reconstruct the political reasons, in the broadest sense, why the narrative was put together in one fashion in a given context and in quite a different manner somewhere else. Rediscovering an old experience meaning that many apparently non-political acts have a political dimension, authors attempting these kinds of analyses are no

Eventually for many, as I argued elsewhere,<sup>11</sup> there are perhaps the modern views of the nation-state and all of its institutionalized mythologies that have confused, erased, desecrated and demolished our understanding of the local definitions and categories of group identity, as articulated in everyday life. Whereas history is regarded as a technique that makes it possible to reveal the origin, and thus the very meaning of the real definition and the true nature of Bektashism, beyond this meaning, what is finally at issue is the comprehension of Bektashism into the nation and into the categories of negotiation and declaration of identity and otherness. In these conditions, many supposedly well established facts concerning historical developments of Bektashi doctrine and organization have to be severely contested and questioned, as resulting from the deliberate use of myths for political, ideological and religious purposes.

A series of historical incidents like the sudden appearance and rapid spread of the Bektashi group of dervishes during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, their transformation into a powerful Sufi order during Ottoman times, and the developments to which Bektashism has been subjected in late Ottoman period as well as in independent Albania and in modern Turkey, still remain issues that require an explanation. One of the main reasons that a thorough critical analysis using ex-

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longer concerned with the concrete details of dervish life, but with the great debates of the time, such as the tension between orthodox and heterodox world views or between the mystics and holy men who have accepted integration within mainstream Muslim society and the mystic who refused such an accommodation. This novel type of elaboration is very attractive, particularly given the ordinarily pedestrian proceedings of many Ottoman historians. Yet the danger of arbitrarily attributing to fifteenth-century writers of dervish legends, motivations which stem indirectly from late twentieth-century concerns is not to be minimized.

<sup>11</sup>(Doja 2004b, 2005)

planatory insight from investigation in historical anthropology and sociology may prove to be important is to combine the study of Bektashism at once as a creed within Islam, as a kind of liberation theology, as a quasi-political movement and partner suited to national movements, and as an ideological power base to reassert political authority. This means that the discussion must deal with the main groups within society in a coherent analytical framework in terms of ideology, organization, government and opposition, something that is often omitted in discussions of Ottoman society.

I do not seek here to reassess the arguments over the available Bektashi material, nor am I able to treat in anything but the most superficial way the fascinating but complex world of Ottoman history. I do believe, however, that we are immensely in need for a comprehensive analytical model to understand the meaning and purpose of such a coherent ideology subsumed under the rubric of religion, a model that must explain indeed a great deal of the diverse religious paths that I believe are characteristic of the modern world today. To this aim, this article, taking the development of Bektashism in Albania as a working example, is part of a larger critical and explanatory analysis aimed at revealing that the variations in the course of Bektashism's history probably best exemplify such a transformational model involving many of its complex theological, ideological, cultural, social, and political aspects.

Without being necessarily concerned with genealogy, my position is anthropological, i.e. seeking by a comparative approach to benefit from the discontinuity between the distinct historical vicissitudes of Bektashism for discovering typological homologies which would attest they are different realizations of a similar pattern and make it possible to discover a structure of common fundamental constraints to a spiritual

tendency to meet social, cultural, national, and political perspectives. The search for this common background thus does not erase the differences and their distinctiveness, to the location of which aims an anthropologically informed approach to history, since it is their reality that only makes it possible to elucidate the homologies.

Heterodox religious movements and the institution of new forms of religion, as in the case of mystical orders of Islam like the Bektashis, are decisive for understanding the history of religions in Southeast European area. This in turn could bring forth insights for understanding the current situation in which group identities are being negotiated and redefined. While mystics do not partake in, or directly express class struggle, their heterodoxy, over and beyond the intensity and power of their beliefs or the radical character of their opposition to the established religion, did always and still necessarily does crystallize political, social and cultural discontent which is, in turn, very often either ethnicized along nationalist lines or politicized along power forces or both.

The point is not only that religion as a cultural symbolic system uses political and other resources that show a power base. More importantly, religion, in its own field, has rather a symbolic structure, which, as Bourdieu put it,<sup>12</sup> reproduces the distribution of resources and power from the non-symbolic mundane field in a transformed form. To better appreciate this we must arguably begin by attempting to comprehend the underlying significance of the structures of religious representation and mediation, and the implication of their change in support of either cultural orderings or order-questioning projects in human society.

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<sup>12</sup> (Bourdieu 1971)

## BACKGROUND

The origin of the Bektashi order of dervishes belongs to the many Sufi movements of Islam that developed in the Middle East from the eleventh and twelfth centuries onwards.<sup>13</sup> At this time a number of missionary precursors, known as the Saints of Khorassan, infiltrated Anatolia where they paved the way to the dervish groups like the Bektashis. The name of the order is derived from the legendary founder Hadji Bektash, even though, as in many other cases concerning Sufi hagiography, Hadji Bektash was not the actual founder of the order but a patron saint chosen at a later date. He is himself supposed to have come originally from Khorassan in north-east Iran and lived in Anatolia in the second half of the thirteenth century.<sup>14</sup> The description of his *Vilayet-Name* corresponds to that of the typical wandering dervishes known as Iranian Kalenders or Anatolian Abdals in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.<sup>15</sup> The dervishes who followed him are called Abdal and from the very start, he is called 'leader' (*Pir*) of Anatolian Abdals.

Apparently Bektashism must have started during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries as a mixture of shamanism

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<sup>13</sup> (Karamustafa 1994)

<sup>14</sup>(Melikoff 1998)

<sup>15</sup> (Ocak 1995)

inherited from the Turkic tribes of Khorassan, mixed with popular beliefs in such a way as to appeal to villagers and the lower class of the Anatolian population. In the region of origin, Bektashism must have mingled with local beliefs, and it is not surprising that besides different Sufi doctrines and practices, many religious traditions may have contributed to the development and appearance of Bektashism, including ancient Turkic elements preserving pre-Islamic and non-Islamic beliefs and customs originating in shamanism, Buddhism, Manichaeism, Christianity and antique religions.<sup>16</sup> In Anatolia, and later in the Balkans, Bektashism encountered further Neoplatonist, Christian and Nestorian influences. Being receptive to many elements of these religions, the Bektashis also incorporated anthropomorphic and cabalistic doctrines of letter and number symbolism that can be traced to Hurufism,<sup>17</sup> combined with an extremist Shiite credo that linked devotion to the divinity of Ali with beliefs in anthropomorphism, the manifestation of God in human form, reincarnation and metempsychosis.<sup>18</sup>

Such a considerable number of doctrines and practices of heterogeneous origins has led to heated disputes between specialists over the prevalence of one or another influence and finally to claim that the Bektashi Order did not have a well defined theology, that it could accommodate much local influence, and that its fundamental character is an all-encompassing syncretism.<sup>19</sup> Many authors have regarded Bektashism as an external layer over pre-Islamic, Christian

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<sup>16</sup>(Birge 1937 [1994])

<sup>17</sup>(Melikoff 1992: 163–174; Popovic & Veinstein 1995: 39–53)

<sup>18</sup>(Melikoff 2001: 97–120)

<sup>19</sup>(Melikoff 1992; Popovic & Veinstein 1995)

or other beliefs.<sup>20</sup> In Turkish scholarship, however, from the very start Western studies were severely criticized for having attributed the specificities of Bektashism to Christian traditions,<sup>21</sup> and Turkish nationalists and folklorists have insisted on the Turkish origins of Bektashism. Still, a prevailing syncretism between ancient, pre-Islamic Turkic, and Islamic elements in Bektashi lore is argued again on the account of the encounter of pre-Islamic Turks with 'high religions' in Central Asia and the position of the Bektashis at

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<sup>20</sup>In the last decades of the Ottoman Empire, early European scholars more particularly found in Bektashism a worship that they linked to crypto-Christian traditions surviving in Anatolia, which would also explain the special missionary interest in their regard (Kieser 2001). Some perceived parallels, among others, to the Christian Trinity and the Twelve Disciples or between Christian devotion to the Virgin Mary and Bektashi devotion to Fatima, wife of Ali and daughter of Mohammed, have led many commentators to presume that these features were taken from Christianity and simply given an Islamic superficial veneer. Such syncretism is further claimed to have made Bektashism acceptable to many non-Muslims who would have found the austere teachings of Sunni orthodoxy unattractive.

In this opinion, most authors are still tempted to think that Bektashism turned into a refuge for many Christians and that the syncretistic forms of sectarian Islam became an appropriate bridge for the transition from Christianity to Islam.

The many traits of Christianity that had been incorporated into Bektashism and other Sufi groups are supposed to have contributed significantly to the shaping of popular Islamic beliefs, thus facilitating the conversion to Islam of the Christian populations in Anatolia and the Balkans, which are assumed to have been previously only superficially Christianized. In Eastern Europe, for instance, other than some Albanian, Bosnian, and Bulgarian groups, all remained generally faithful to Eastern Christian Orthodoxy, but those who did convert to Islam under the Ottoman Empire chose the Bektashi interpretation of Islam.

One of the general tenets of Bulgarian scholarship, in particular, has maintained for long the Bogomil hypothesis (see Gramatikova 2001), which associated the Bektashi ethnically with the Bulgarian component and religiously with the Christian Bogomil heresy, thus presenting them as descendants of either Old Bulgarians or Islamicized Christians.

<sup>21</sup>(Koprulu 1926)



the crossroads of different cultures, while the question of shamanic remainders is henceforth claimed to be far less important than usually assumed.<sup>22</sup> This official version, still current, is taken over willy-nilly by many Western specialists without questioning its actual relevance.

Another general claim is that the Bektashis preserved many traits of oppositional movements and heretic groups, and shaped them into a synthesis during times of a mutual penetration of Turkic and Byzantine cultural traits. There is clear evidence for the participation of Hadji Bektash himself and his adherents in the Turcoman uprisings against Seljuk rule in 1239-1240, the so-called Babaî revolt.<sup>23</sup> However, there remains probably very little resemblance between the Turkic beliefs of Hadji Bektash's time in thirteenth century and those that formed the heterodox but sophisticated doctrines at the turn of sixteenth century when the Bektashis were organized as an established Order of dervishes.

While the complexities of the Bektashi past may never be known precisely, it appears agreed by specialist historians that they were often tribal or nomadic communities who inhabited that uneasy geographical region between the central power of the Ottomans, on the one hand, and the gradually more orthodox Safavid Iran on the other. While they were exposed to many different currents of Islamic thought, one of the most effective was a form of revolutionary mystical leadership espoused by Iranian Shiism, which earned for Kizilbash-Bektashism to be characterized after this period by a distinctive Shiite character. This brought the Kizilbash into violent conflict with the Ottoman state, itself ever more inclined towards Sunnism.<sup>24</sup> It

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<sup>22</sup>(Ocak 1983)

<sup>23</sup>(Koprulu 1993 [1922]: 76-77)

<sup>24</sup>(Kehl-Bodrogi 1988: 42-47)

resulted too in widespread, brutal massacres and forced conversion, a persecution that reached its peak during the time of Sultan Selim I (1512-1520). As a result of mass deportations of this time from Anatolia into the European provinces, the Kizilbash and other heretics integrated into the Bektashi order must have laid ground for the presence of Shiite and heterodox elements in southeast Europe.

Parallel to the tumultuous Kizilbash developments in early sixteenth century, under the explicit patronage of the Ottoman Sultan Bayezid II (1481-1512), a reforming trend was introduced with the appointment of Balim Sultan (1473-1516) at the headship of the order of Bektashis. Formerly leader of an important Bektashi foundation in Dimetoka near Edirne in Thrace, he took up his post at the Bektashi headquarters of Hacibektash Village in Anatolia around the year 1501, taking firm control and introducing a large degree of uniformity, which earned him to be revered as the Order's second founding saint. Shortly thereafter, the Bektashis astonishingly established themselves as one of the most influential dervish orders during the Ottoman period from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Primarily colonizing dervishes in charge of Turkicization and Islamicization of countries conquered by the first Ottoman sultans,<sup>25</sup> not only were the Bektashis an instrument of the Ottoman propaganda in these countries, but they enjoyed a certain political importance in the Ottoman Empire, and even imposed themselves on some weak or mystic sultans, especially when they were closely connected with the Janissary troops, the instrument of Ottoman military power. It is considered that the Bektashis constantly encouraged and dominated the Janissaries

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<sup>25</sup>(Melikoff 1992: 115-137)

by traditionally providing their religious guides. This elective affinity is somehow attributed to both the supposed Christian substratum of Bektashism and to the widespread and long-lasting Ottoman practice of conscripting Christian youths into the Janissary Corps. To what degree, however, the rise of the Bektashi order can be attributed to its links with the Janissaries is a matter still open for investigation, as disputation rages among specialists about the role of Bektashis in the formation of Janissaries as an elite army.

When after repeated revolts and rebellions the Janissary troops were finally dismissed in 1826 with resisting forces being massacred, this meant that also the Bektashis were subject to state suppression and had to move to the margins of the Empire. A hundred years later, in the modern Turkey after World War I, the Bektashi Order was again subject to state prosecution until 1925 when it was officially abolished altogether with the other dervish orders in the newly founded Turkish Republic. These trials and tribulations allowed Bektashism to develop again a non-conformist and antinomian stance to the point of being often depicted, despite its deep mystical roots, as a progressive current within Islam, close to Westernizing and modernizing trends.

In a very broad generalization, it has been argued a "historical bipartition" between the Bektashis who were traditionally urbanized and educated and the Alevis who lived in villages, the former having spread in the Balkans and the latter remaining in the Anatolian countryside.<sup>26</sup> Bektashism is therefore often considered as a kind of 'purified' Islam, what an older generation of social anthropologists might have termed

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<sup>26</sup>(Melikoff 2001: 37-44)

the 'great tradition' of the urban and organized Bektashi Order against the 'little tradition' of the rural and less-educated Alevi or Kizilbash. To show, however, that modern Alevi and Bektashi groups have much more in common than they have differences, the Alevis themselves will often talk about 'Alevi-Bektashi' creed, culture, or traditions.

In the persecution climate during Ottoman-Safavid wars in sixteenth century, the isolated Kizilbash-Alevis in rural Anatolia developed traditions, practices, and doctrines that by the early seventeenth century marked them as closed, autonomous religious communities, opposed to all forms of external religion.<sup>27</sup> Alevism used to be and to some extent still continues to be a social stigma in contemporary Turkey, and many Alevis have attempted to hide their backgrounds once they had moved to large cities.

The relationship with the Sunni majority remains one of mutual suspicion and prejudice, dating back to the Ottoman period. Sunnis have accused Alevis of heresy, heterodoxy, rebellion, betrayal and immorality. Alevis, on the other hand, view themselves as the true preservers of authentic Turkish culture, religion, and language. More importantly, Alevism is claimed to adapt to modernity because it is supposed to be flexible and tolerant, out of a natural sense of equality and justice. It is much more suitable for it includes traits supposedly suppressed by Sunnism, which would thereby not be true Islam but an aberration that opposes free and independent thought by its strict legalism, seen as reactionary, bigoted, fanatic, intolerant, domineering, and antidemocratic.

More importantly, in the last three decades we witnessed in contemporary Turkey what came to be known as an Alevi cul-

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<sup>27</sup>(Kehl-Bodrogi 1988: 38 -47)

tural revival, leading to issues of Bektashi or Alevi heterodoxy being heatedly politicized and ethnicized.<sup>28</sup> Spearheaded by the new, educated Alevi elite, Alevi cultural associations are established, foundations and trusts organized, old Bektashi convents reopened, saints' tombs rebuilt, rituals restored and re-invented. The overall revival places emphasis on Alevism as a cultural and religious heritage in an effort to reconstruct Alevi culture, community, and identity, but also to articulate Alevi collective interests towards the modern state and demand equality with the Sunni majority. In an ongoing process of negotiation due to the participation of leaders representing different traditions and trends, many intellectuals made contributions towards a systematization of Alevi belief and a flood of new books and journals reflects the efforts to reinvent Alevism.

Certain actors interpret Alevism as the specifically Turkish form of Islam, that is, the 'true' Islam rid of Arab influences. Alevism, according to them, is a Turkish-Anatolian religion combining Islam with elements of Turkish culture. An ethnic dimension is often emphasized, making Alevism a support for Turkish identity or assimilating it to a Kurdish authentic phenomenon. More generally, this view sees Alevism as the authentic expression of an Anatolian culture and civilization, and in contrast to a specific Turkish nationalism sets up an Anatolian cultural mosaic, which includes many other groups allied with the Alevis against Ottoman oppression.

While many remained Kemalist and hoped that the state would officially legitimize the Bektashi order, the new generation showed a strong tendency to think of Alevism as a political opposition rather than a religious tradition. Partly due to

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<sup>28</sup>(Kehl-Bodrogi 1992; Vorhoff 1995; Shankland 2003; Massicard 2005)

the severe repression of the left and partly as a response to the imposition of a conservative brand of Sunni Islam by the state, the young generation joined extreme leftist parties. Working for a radical restructuring of society, they viewed all 'reactionary' elements which tried to assimilate them into mainstream Sunni life as enemies, reinterpreting both historical opposition to Sunnism in terms of class struggle and Alevism in socialist and Marxist idiom that seemed to have an affinity to Bektashi ideals of equality and traditions of revolt and opposition to the state.<sup>29</sup> They viewed their religion as a positive political and social revolutionary ideology fighting against oppression and evil on behalf of the poor and marginalized sectors of society. They thus defined Alevism in the tradition of democracy or as a culture of rebellion, based on the Kizilbash revolts under Ottoman Empire or on the massive Alevi engagement to the left in contemporary Turkey. Considering that Ali was the defender of the poor and oppressed, and that Hassan and Hussein were the first martyrs in the cause of the dispossessed, they presented Alevism as having always led the fight for liberation against all tyranny, while reactionary Sunnism served the rich and powerful dominant elites.

Still, most Alevis follow the Kemalist secularist ideology and as Alevism becomes more secular, the conception of God becomes almost entirely internalized and conflated with the person in worldly life.<sup>30</sup> Thus, the Sufi cry of ecstasy conflating God and the self, regarded as the pinnacle of profound understanding and conveyed often through a mass of complicated symbolism and secret doctrine, becomes completely routinized, a casual but assertive claim to place the individual and their

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<sup>29</sup>(Vorhoff 1995)

<sup>30</sup>(Shankland 2003)

desires at the centre of the universe. This shift can lead to a profoundly peaceful humanism, and frequently does. It may also lead to a notable phenomenon whereby individuals, or sometimes whole Alevi associations, may interpret Alevism as an international culture. They stress only the liberal and humanistic values of Alevism as a world-view, downplaying its religious connotations. In this case they would deny that Alevism is Islamic, and claim the origins lie in pre-Islamic religious systems, stressing their links to similar groups, all assumed to be fragments of the original community. For these people, being a Alevi is widened to something that is common to all humanity, not restricted to a chosen group of believers within a wider creed, and in effect, not even to do with religion.

On the other side, from later developments of Bektashism under Ottoman Empire it became obvious that Albania often served as a kind of exile for the adherents of the Bektashi order, and there is general agreement that after their noticeable presence in the second half of seventeenth century, Bektashism gradually became more and more deeply rooted in Albania during the end of nineteenth century. Besides the fact that the Bektashis in Albania were spared the suppression that the order had to face in Anatolia and other core areas of the Ottoman Empire after 1826, another reason may be the specific Albanian religious climate,<sup>31</sup> on which account the establishment of Bektashism in Albania has deserved special attention as a religion that is supposed to have incorporated so many archaic traits and developed in Albania an independent character which serves as another paradigmatic example for forces of cultural inertness and political resistance.<sup>32</sup> Because of the concordance to its pantheistic and unorthodox character, it is generally assumed that the

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<sup>31</sup>(see Doja 2000b)

<sup>32</sup>(Kressing 2002)

acceptance of Bektashism in Albania was largely facilitated by the fact that Bektashi syncretism already combined pre-Islamic and Shiite elements with Christian elements.

When Bektashism established itself in Albania, the argument goes that these beliefs must have been quickly replaced by Albanian popular traditions. Arguably Bektashism came to be perceived as the purest expression of Albanian religiosity and the conservatory of Albanian traditions, to the point of being considered as the only truly national religion, and it is no surprise if Bektashis might have played an important role in the national awakening of Albania in the second half of the nineteenth century. Specialists speak of the 'solidification' of a properly Albanian Bektashism in the western confines of Ottoman Empire, with elements of Albanian nationalism being integrated into Bektashi doctrine, especially in the southern parts of the country where most of the Bektashi lodges were situated.<sup>33</sup>

Whether religious politics was instrumental in mobilizing ideological myths or actual action, on the eve of the Albanian independence, the Bektashis were numerically important and politically influential, and Albanian Bektashi dervishes were frequently found in convents outside their own country. Many high Bektashi dignitaries, including sometimes even the supreme leader of the central institution, are often thought to be of Albanian origin. When Turkey decreed the definitive abolition of all mystic orders in 1925, the Bektashi general headquarters once again took refuge in Albania. At any case it became quite clear that a decisive national Albanian character of the order was further fostered in the course of the twentieth century, when Bektashism became officially recognized by the Albanian state as the fourth legal denominational congregation of the country.

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<sup>33</sup>(Popovic & Veinstein 1996: 470)



## FROM LIBERATION THEOLOGY TO HIERARCHICAL SURRENDER

The Bektashis were one of the many bands of believers seeking to achieve the goal of most Sufis, that is, mystic union with God. When mystical union with God was not quite the goal sought, it was the cult of the miracle-working saints, living or dead, through worship of their tombs, which prevailed in the religious fervour of these heretic and heterodox groupings of dervish religiosity. In these conditions, the intensity of religious life prevailed over its extension, and salvation became a personal affair rather than a relationship with some grace-dispensing agency. Participation in the spiritual community comforted the individual need to oppose or transcend society, raising one temporarily into timeless supernatural experience. Heterodox or heretic movements and mystical orders like Bektashism embodied in themselves the whole *mysterium fascinans* of the age, the revealed, esoteric, mystical, and emotional religion. Their function was to mediate the inner aspect of religious experience.

Regarding their organization, broadly speaking and aside from the peculiarities that may be accounted for by the political and economic systems of the countries in which they spread, the initial structures specific to their communities are suggestive of the early Christian groups of the first centuries, as related in the Acts of Apostles and the Epistles of St Paul. Earlier

Sufi and Bektashi groups had been linked by enthusiasm, common devotions, and methods of spiritual discipline, with the aim of stripping the soul and eliminating self to attain vision of divine reality. They were therefore integrated by spirit and aim rather than by any formal organization, and were in fact very loose organizations, more or less anarchical, closed, and secret groups or circles of initiates who showed no interest in sharing any collective discipline or dogma. At early stages of Sufi movements until about the thirteenth century, the master is not mentioned at all,<sup>34</sup> even though the respect for the spiritual freedom of each member necessitated regulations for the common life. The idea of a spiritual community was formed in such groups as a basis for their common life, and the master remained essentially a guide in spiritual matters, but not an autocrat of a convent, allegedly acting as an intermediary between believers and God.

Hadji Bektash himself, for instance, carried out a life of a wandering hermit during most of his life and he did not seem to have been a prominent character in religious matters. He did not even seek to found any order or to have disciples during his life.<sup>35</sup> He remained the eponym of an order he did not found himself, and was quite unconscious of the impact he was going to have, his success being achieved after him and in spite of him. Although Bektashism had spread over a wide area and gained many adherents, it is considered that "before 1500 both the order and its teachings developed in a random fashion". In addition, specialists are led to consider that "this vagueness of belief was paralleled by lack of uniformity in their organization", even though they normally attribute this character

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<sup>34</sup>(Trimingham 1971 [1998]: 167)

<sup>35</sup>(Melikoff 1998)

to the supposed Bektashi all-encompassing syncretism and "readiness to incorporate a wide range of beliefs and practices, which made it difficult to define precisely what the order stood for".<sup>36</sup>

My position, following innovative approaches within the field regarding early Sufism in the eleventh and twelfth centuries,<sup>37</sup> is rather to consider Bektashism first as a reaction against the external rationalization of religion in law and systematic theology. Essentially, like other early Sufi groupings, in its earlier developments during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, Bektashism corresponded to the sphere of religious experience which developed from common experience of both spiritual knowledge and suffering, while running parallel and often in opposition to the orthodox institution and the mainstream of Islamic consciousness derived from prophetic revelation.

Making deliberate use of altered states of consciousness, such as ecstatic dance (*sema*) and recitation (*zikr*), which are still a common feature of Bektashi practices, Bektashism must have aimed first at spiritual freedom whereby human intrinsic and intuitive spiritual senses could be allowed full scope, over and against instituted religion as based on authority and legalistic morality. It must have been an assertion of a person's right to pursue a life of contemplation, seeking contact with the ultimate source of being and reality. In reaction to the expression of religion as a communitarian matter, Bektashism was a subjective expression of personal religion, directed at an individual and direct experience of the presence of God. Finding inspiration in interpretations revealing the 'inner meaning' behind the literal sense of sacred texts, the craving for spiritual satisfac-

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<sup>36</sup>(Norton 2001: 171)

<sup>37</sup>(Trimingham 1971 [1998]; Karamustafa 1994)

tion led these early Sufi Bektashis into a non-conformist religious experience where there was no room for a clear-cut separation between humans and the divinity.

Legalistic orthodox religion fulfilled a social far more than a spiritual function and had little to offer to human spiritual needs, being not concerned with the exercise of a pastoral office and having neither the means nor the agencies for emotional outlet and few for free intercession. In Sunnism, like other formal religious prescriptions, the commandments and rules regarding disciplinary practices, such as praying, fasting, forbidden food and other austerities belong to the Law which the followers are forced to obey by complying with formalities and dogmas. In Bektashism, like other early dervish groups, the initial dogged individualism was reinforced by initiation into a claimed higher degree of knowledge and awareness, for a follower no longer to be bound by the formalistic austere demands and prohibitions of the Islamic faith comprehended within the orthodox, codified, and systematic theology such as propounded by the legalist Sunni dogma.

The claim of having learned and understood the essence and core of religion led Bektashis to personal interpretations of the doctrines and traditions. Claiming to be enlightened enough to follow the Way by obeying the voice of conscience they could thereby proceed alone by carrying out the religious commandment with a tendency to reduce salvation and rebirth to a purely internal operation, to the point of denying the need for rituals. They actually rejected any external display or collective worship for their religion, thus repudiating especially the external forms of Islam and its five pillars. For Bektashis, worship is a secret affair, peculiar to initiates who are that inner purity and sincerity are more important than outward ablution and ritual. They firmly believe that it is essential not to unveil the secret,

that they are responsible before God and not before their other fellow humans, that sin involves doing things surreptitiously rather than in public, and so on. The premise that underlies the distinctive character of the Bektashis is the purification of the human heart and spirit which is the fundamental purpose of all religious rites. They claim that this purified state is attainable without following either the Sunni or the Shiite forms of worship.

Not surprisingly, therefore, the Bektashis will systematically be criticized for both their fanaticism and liberalism, insofar as their heterodoxy resided in the non-observance of canonical rituals. They do not practice at set times the five daily prayers (*namaz*) or the ritual ablutions (*abdes*), nor do they observe the fast of Ramadan or believe in the necessity of the pilgrimage to Mecca. They interpret the Koran in an esoteric, allegoric, and symbolic rather than literal manner and appeal to Koranic authority rather less than do most other dervish groups. Appropriate verses are read at weddings and funerals, but otherwise they are happier to listen to the verses of their poets conveying their own responses to the sacred texts. On a more formal level, they are criticized for their tolerance of alcoholic beverages and the presence of women during ceremonies, as well as for indulging in orgies or sexual licenses and of all the slanders to which eccentrics of all sorts had been subjected during the centuries.<sup>38</sup>

In the face of economic, social and ideological upheaval, the most radical mystics have always adopted attitudes cultivating distance not simply from legalist religion but from mainstream society as well. Their watchword was the desire to be outsider in a world claimed to be corrupt and led astray by

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<sup>38</sup>(Müller 1967)

bad guides. Mystics of this sort were not simply opponents of the ruling classes, they were intent on going against social norms as well. Alternatively, whenever faced with drastic social change, people will systematically turn from the possibility of a transcendental, orthodox God towards an internalized sense of spiritual self that is far less reliant upon the formalized inculcation within the framework of traditional religious ritual than that exemplified by the legalist Sunni Islam. This is, of course, an extremely abrupt summary of a particular inclination that appears to have been active within the Bektashis, emphasized especially in the course of history at each time when they have been subjected to political state oppression.

This must have happened specifically in the early times of Bektashism in thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, during the Ottoman-Safavid wars in the first half of sixteenth century, after the suppression of Janissary troops in the first half of nineteenth century, or after the abolition of dervish orders in the first half of twentieth century.<sup>39</sup> It is this emphasis that has made it possible for the Bektashis to achieve a close sense of identity successively with the Young Turk movement, with the Albanian national awakening in the second half of nineteenth century or with the early Turkish nationalism in the first quarter of twentieth century. The same emphasis must have also interacted with more recent nationalist ideals and left-wing 'progressive' political philosophy that are even more unstable, as has been often the case with the Alevi revival in contemporary Turkey, or with the 'democratic' processes of post-communist transformations in contemporary Albania.

Among groups which possess a radicalized interpretation of the social world, one that relies upon, and feeds off, the com-

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<sup>39</sup>(Doja 2006)

munist ideal of the inherently illegitimate state, this emphasis may become less a route to toleration than one of hardened bitterness as to the perceived lack of respect that is paid to the person in modern society. Indeed, if a group or organisation both lose faith in the state and respect for divine authority, they may turn more easily to imposing their ritual practice and anti-authoritarian motifs into the service of a revolutionary ideology. Viewed in this light, the religious experience of the Bektashis presented conceivable characteristics of a liberation theology, while the structure of their groups corresponded more or less to the type of religious organization conventionally known as charismatic groups.

## ORGANIZATIONAL TRANSFORMATIONS

One of the functions of religion as a cultural system is to serve as a mediating representation between powerless earthly creatures and an all-powerful God located in heaven. Mediation would make it possible for the heavenly divinity to intercede on behalf of humans on earth. The assumption here is that different covenantal structures of divine mediation must correspond to specific stages in the development of Bektashism and Sufism. The following assumption is that it is possible to gain a different meaning if a mediating hierarchy is to be found in the conceptualization of the divinity or in the organization of the worldly human society.

Clearly, if there are mediators between humans and God, such as the Sufi and Bektashi master (*murshid*), for instance, or a priest or sacrificer, they act as representatives of the secular congregation and place themselves on a higher plane than the latter but in a position of inferiority with respect to the deity. However, the mediational structure may also be of another type, and claim to be the negation of hierarchy of any sort. In this model, the initiative must be entirely in the hands of the divinity, which may manifest itself in a number of hierarchized emanations but without any mediation, by dispensing the gifts of its grace on the faithful, with believers receiving direct, immediate inspiration. Charisma, divine grace, and spiritual



knowledge touch them without the help of any intermediary, and is in no way affected by the more or less effectiveness of any ritual or specific expertise, performed or controlled by a mediating priest or master.

Following a structural hypothesis suggested by Edmund Leach,<sup>40</sup> I have argued elsewhere that a crucial factor for understanding the communication between humans and God lies in the fact that the conceptualization of a hierarchical model of religious mediation corresponds to the dogma of orthodox faiths, while the conceptualization of a model in which all hierarchies are denied, in its real embodiments, is closely linked to millenarian and mystical beliefs and to the development of heresies and heterodoxies,<sup>41</sup> such as those related to Bektashism. The former model may well support an established, hierarchical power, whereas the latter corresponds to an oppressed or deprived minority, seeking justification of its revolt against the established authorities.

According to this model, the establishment of a political hierarchy within society goes hand-in-hand with the introjection of a unified conception of divinity, that is, a pure monotheism within the theological system. On the other hand, a manifest hierarchical conception of the divinity goes along with egalitarian politics in human society. The conception of a relational equality, derived from the idea that people are equal in their relations with the divinity, is effectively present alongside an ideology of substantial egalitarianism among human beings.

This brings us to the main assumption regarding the character of Bektashism. Insofar as the master is perceived as "God himself in a different guise", the system of beliefs and practices

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<sup>40</sup> (Leach 1972)

<sup>41</sup> (Doja 2000a)

related to Bektashism would be a liberation theology, which makes it possible to meet social, cultural and national perspectives. In turn, when the master will be perceived as a kind of priest, "intermediary between a disciple and God", Bektashism would be an orthodox ideology aiming at the establishment of political hierarchy in society.

At any case, it is through the elect, thanks to the contacts and concrete ties created and maintained with them through the mediation of spiritual knowledge (*marifet*), that seekers and followers formed and strengthened the bonds that attached them to the body of their religion, while at the same time they acquired merits and edified themselves. However, for the masters of the Bektashi Way, like in early Sufism, the mystical tendency becomes highly dangerous as an individual experience, since there can be mystic Ways, the Sufi argument goes, to other gods than God. Hence the necessity of guidance under an experienced director was insisted on. In order to go through the Gateways of spiritual growth and to experience the divine Reality and ultimate Truth (*hakikat*) and penetrate to their inner significance, one needs a guide, a spiritual master (*murshid*),<sup>42</sup> who had himself already reached the perfection stage of the 'perfect human being' (*insan-i kamil*),<sup>43</sup> and is thereby entitled to great veneration.<sup>44</sup>

The normal relationship of a disciple to his or her master has often been described as a spiritual sonship, but the relationship implied by these terms in different stages of development came to be entirely different. On the account of Bektashi beginnings in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries and dur-

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<sup>42</sup>(Birge 1937 [1994]: 102-103)

<sup>43</sup>(Birge 1937 [1994]: 96-97)

<sup>44</sup>(Norris 1993: 97)

ing subsequent times of persecution, it is generally assumed that the continual guidance of individual disciples has made the masters appear quite naturally as the medium between God and humans. However, the overriding importance of the system of master–disciple relationship, which became the very foundation of the Sufi orders, implies a shift in morality. The institutionalization of the master–disciple hierarchy brought forth the organization of what cannot be properly organized, that is, personal mystical life and individual creative freedom, which are now fettered and subjected to conformity and collective experience. I believe this process must correspond to the radical change that took place in Bektashi environment after the organization of the order in sixteenth century, which may also be discerned each time after recovering from periods of persecution. In times of consolidation of the order, subjection to the arbitrary will of the perfects turned the follower into a spiritual slave, and not of God, but of a human being, albeit one of God's elect.<sup>45</sup>

For Bektashis, obedience must be total and unquestioning, for failure to obey the master is a failure to keep the oath sworn at initiation. It is certainly not accidental therefore that in the literature it is over and over again reported that one or another unworthy and unscrupulous master will be tempted to exploit his power for personal advantage. Specialists may notice the fact, but they simplistically qualify that when such abuse occurred it was condemned by the Bektashis themselves and outsiders alike.<sup>46</sup> This trend is considered as an occasional aberration from the generally assumed humanistic characteristics of Bektashism, much the same as individual corruption is often

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<sup>45</sup>(Doja 2003)

<sup>46</sup>(Norton 2001: 173)

assumed to have destroyed the 'progressive' role of one or another Bektashi convent, which on occasion turned into a hot-bed of conspiracy.<sup>47</sup>

Religious scholars normally outline three successive stages of development in Sufism, going asceticism (*zuhd*) to mysticism (*tasavvuf*) and then to corporatism (*tarikāt*). Trimmingham characterized these three stages, respectively, as the individual's surrendering to God, their surrendering to a rule, and finally their surrendering to a person.<sup>48</sup> In the first stage, the master and his circle of pupils were frequently itinerant, having minimum regulations for living a common life, leading to the formation of undifferentiated, unspecialized lodges and convents. Methods of contemplation and exercises for the inducement of ecstasy were individualistic and communal. In the second stage, the transmission of a doctrine, a rule and method corresponded to new types of collectivistic methods for inducing ecstasy. Deriving from professed illuminates, the development of continuative teaching schools of mysticism (*silsila-tarikāt*) disciplined the mystical spirit within organized Sufism and made it conform to the standards of tradition and legalism. In the third stage, the introduction and transmission of allegiance toward the doctrine and the rule formed new foundations for numerous 'corporations' or 'orders', whose practices were fully incorporated with the saint veneration cult.

Essentially, as in early Sufism, a change took place with the development of *collegium pietatis* into a *collegium initiati* whose members ascribed themselves to their initiator and his spiritual ancestry, and were prepared to follow his Way and transmit it to future generations. The leading master even ceased to teach

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<sup>47</sup>(Shankland 2003)

<sup>48</sup>(Trimingham 1971 [1998]: 102-104)

directly, and delegated authority both to teach and initiate to representatives (*halife*). A special cult therefore surrounded the master, associated with the power thought to emanate from the saint founder of the order. He became the spiritual heir of the founder, whose qualities and powers become inherent in him upon his succession. The Bektashi life of recollection and meditation now became increasingly associated with a line of ascription, which bestowed the order, its formulae and symbols, as emanating from the master and guiding all disciples along his Way in his name, while the new aura emanated from the master as a protégé (*wali*) of God probably came to imply the belief in his role as a mediator and as an intercessory with God.

The theological rationalization of the necessary relationship between master and disciple was articulated through the historical aspect of the divine hierarchical chain (*silsila*), an idea which was available already in the very theological conceptions of Sufism. On first sight, as Trix showed, divine and historical chains connecting the master to God may be seen as a device to legitimize the place of the master cosmologically.<sup>49</sup> Yet, given the excessive proliferation of Orders and their ramifications in almost any local setting,<sup>50</sup> there is good reason to believe that the primary concern of the founders and leaders of an order's branch, while seeking to gain personal ascendancy and protect themselves against accusations of doctrinal irregularities,<sup>51</sup> was that of demonstrating their orthodoxy by showing how their teachings followed those of some famous theologian whose orthodoxy was acknowledged by all. They could

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<sup>49</sup> (Trix 1993: 103)

<sup>50</sup>As it can be shown in Albanian context (Halimi 2000: 76)

<sup>51</sup>As for instance in the case of the Sanusi (Evans-Pritchard 1949: 3)

then use the authority of this master and all intermediary and transmissive links right back to the Caliphs and the Imams for their teaching and practice. Thus, the *silsila* became a means to assert the new doctrinal orthodoxy of the order. As new ideas were fostered on eminent Sufis of the past in order to make these ideas respectable, the *silsila* provided a doctrinal as well as a power line leading to the ultimate source of religion.

This process became clearly visible in the history of Bektashism with the advent of Balim Sultan at the headship of the Order in the early sixteenth century. Out of diverse heritages and heterodox tendencies, the nebulous group of Bektashi dervishes gradually developed into an ecclesiastic institution with a highly organized and centralized hierarchy. All available accounts in the literature clearly show that this process was fostered under the specific conditions of Ottoman patronage during the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, especially after the order became linked to the powerful military body of the Janissaries.<sup>52</sup> A similar process was once again reiterated in Independent Albania in twentieth century when Bektashism enjoyed official state recognition.

In these times the organizational system of the Bektashi Order was increasingly replaced by another one, more sophisticated and much more institutional, ecclesiastical and hierarchical. Of course, even in the heydays of Bektashism, the distinction between masters and disciples was maintained, but the subordination of the former to the latter was emphasized. In addition, both categories simply became the last two ranks of a larger hierarchy containing a number of other additional grades, so that the system of two classes was replaced by a much more complex one. The hierarchically lower level, the class of ordi-

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<sup>52</sup>(Doja 2006)

nary people and potential followers was categorized as adepts (*muhibs*). The immediately superior class included the elect (*eren* or *të mbërrimët*), righteous and truly initiated. They may become dervishes and later 'fathers' (*baba*), religious leaders hierarchically recognized. They must be officially ordained by the 'grandfathers' (*dede* or *gjysh*) to whom they pay allegiance. The organization as a whole was now headed by a single leader, the Arch-grandfather (*grand-dede* or *kryegjysh*), who is supported by the leading figures of 'grandfathers' known as his caliphs (*halife*).

Even though in contrast with the ulema there were no class distinctions among dervish groups, Bektashi leaders formed an instituted religious class. The officials of the order approached the role of a clergy class similar to that in Sunni Islam or Iranian Shiism, and the Bektashi institutions provided a parochial village religion, with a system of hierarchically affiliated lodges in Anatolia and the Balkans, which in many respects was equivalent to the diocesan church system. Centralization was pushed to the extreme, as the Arch-grandfather, legitimate heir and terrestrial representative of God, came to act as the supreme pontiff of the holy religion of the Order. High priest and master of the masters, Grandfather of all Fathers and Grandfathers, he embodied all of the spiritual power and was supposed to lead and govern his followers by ensuring that the dogmas were maintained and transmitted properly, discipline and tradition were respected, and orthodoxy was upheld.

In this way, the Bektashi order developed its final forms of organization and spiritual practices. Innovations were fully integrated and their spirit and aims were stereotyped. No further development was possible and new revelations of mystical insight that could mark a new point of departure in either doctrine or practice were precluded. The authoritarian prin-

ciple had become the chief feature of the organization, along with the veneration of the master, the supreme inheritor of the divine mystical wisdom, and subjection to his authority was unconditioned. The organization was hierarchical, imposing uniformity, and instituting an elaborate initiation ceremony, non-hereditary offices and disciplinary practices, such as celibacy and other austerities for adepts.

Thus, the development of Bektashism appears to be a perfect illustration of the different phases that all religions experience in their evolution, which corresponds to what Joachim Wach has called the threefold expression of the experience of the sacred.<sup>53</sup> First of all, doctrinal elaboration, based on prophetism, gradually fashions revelation into an oral message, which receives a written codification, becoming a theology and a dogma. Next, the worship shapes behaviour into a liturgy, rites, a protocol, whose performance is usually entrusted to ministers of the cult who become its guardians and make sure the rules are not overstepped. Last, in reaction to the anarchist tendencies of frenetic movements or ataraxy, organizational measures are taken by the creation of a hierarchy determining roles, classing believers, and controlling the tradition. Its task is to coordinate and subordinate, canonize and censure, balancing the measures of tradition and innovation, and presiding over the relations between the religious body and its environment. At this point, a religious institution – the “Church” – is established. It takes its place within a religious society by means of which human society asserts both its convictions and its doubts.

With these necessary changes, Bektashi religion, rather than seen as an individual life path, must be regarded as the collec-

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<sup>53</sup> (Wach 1958)



tive subservience to a road, as a religious order headed by authoritarian leadership. Bektashism, henceforth viewed as a revealed religion whose doctrines are literally true, becomes a system of thought which also claims legal authority. The different elements on which this power is based consist of acceptance of the inherent superiority of the Bektashi leaders, the ratification of their decisions at collective rituals, and the inculcation of a sense of appropriate behaviour encapsulated within a necessary moral philosophy. The programme as a whole is supported more immediately through a rich corpus of ritual, narrative, poetry, music, and myth.

A different path is being taken by Alevi revival in contemporary Turkey, which can be argued here as a counter-example. Traditional Alevism was based in closed rural communities and consisted of local, largely orally transmitted traditions, while the new Alevism is based in modern urban associations and is experiencing a rapid process of rationalization and scripturalization. This allowed a redistribution of the knowledge capital to the extent of witnessing the appearance of a new body of exegetes, comparable to a clergy, that is, to use Weberian terms, a group holding the monopoly on the manipulation of the visions of the world. Indeed, knowledge is not only a symbolic capital but represents a prime essential resource, absolutely sacralized by all identity and political actors of Alevism. However, in the course of movement no consensus emerged among actors and entrepreneurs who are even aware of their dissension on the origin and the very nature of Alevism. If all are in search of a relevant knowledge, the accounts are so contradictory that they often do not know which to believe. There are so many competing conceptions of what Alevism is or should be that the validity of knowledge can always be called in question. Instead of leading to the unifica-

tion of the movement, the knowledge contributes thereby to the dispersion of interpretations and the multiplication of conflicts.

The persistence of debates and the not-attribution of a fixed meaning of Alevism cannot so much be explained by its syncretistic character, but rather because the knowledge is not yet naturalized and objectified. It can be argued that this state of affairs is due above all to the fact that during the movement no major actor has yet emerged, likely to impose a single interpretation of Alevism in politically relevant categories. This is due to both the configuration of actors and the absence of institutions making it possible to objectify a source of knowledge acceptable and accepted by all. Finally, while seeking to organize themselves for their own protection and survival by building up a religious-cultural association, in the process the Alevis have not yet established a hierarchy of their own, claiming a 'true' faith with its own infallible dogmas and doctrines.

One of the cornerstones of political anthropology is that ideology supports the existing power relations within the social community. Indeed, religious leaders are validated in many ways both by the overall Bektashi cosmology and by the myths which Bektashi masters themselves teach. Yet, both sociological conceptions of the role of religious faith, orthodoxy and liberation, are not, by any means, mutually exclusive or essentially contradictory. There are not two kinds of behaviour set once and forever, nor is there a merely "routinization" in a Weberian sense,<sup>54</sup> but rather a process of dialectic change and transformation. As political conditions change and the organization of religious structures undergo a number of transformations, the final assumption is that the essential differences

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<sup>54</sup>(Weber 1978 [1922]: 246-254)

between hierarchical and unified types of theology, acting as mediating cultural systems of representation between humans and God, must change and adapt accordingly.

If the character of Bektashism and all Sufi groupings of Islam showed first a cultural system corresponding to the model of religious mediation in which all hierarchies were denied, when the members of the previously persecuted religious minority did already acquire a degree of religious and political respectability within society at large, the subjective and millenarian doctrines of heterodoxy and liberation theology fade into the background. In the end, the chances are that the heirs of mystics and the heterodox promoters of spiritual reform and social movement will turn into followers and faithful defenders of a legitimate authority. They will become the spokespeople for an institutionalized orthodoxy whose support will be sought by the political regime.

The transition from innovation to conservatism in theological conceptions and organizational structures, and the subsequent renewal of innovation, in support of either liberating social and national movements or the re-establishment of a new political power in society, takes on different forms and tones, forming a complex process requiring detailed historical and political analysis of the cultural values and social entities involved. Instrumental transformations of this kind are clearly evidenced by the development of Bektashism down its history, depending on different political contexts and the course of events, as I showed in the classic Ottoman period, in the reformed Ottoman system or in Modern Turkey.<sup>55</sup> Less known are perhaps the transformations amongst the Bektashis in Albania from independent to post-communist times.

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<sup>55</sup> (Doja 2006)

## INSTRUMENTAL POLITICS

The origin of the Bektashis in Albania remains still obscure. Reliable evidence indicates that their emergence cannot be dated earlier than the turn of seventeenth century,<sup>56</sup> which is also consistent with the rather late Islamicization of the Albanian population. Many painstaking efforts and fanciful claims, however, mostly grounded in legend and hagiography, have tried to push back their origin in Albania, thus backing Bektashi claims of their presence even far before the appearance of the Ottomans in Balkans.<sup>57</sup> It is likely that the Bektashis were present in Kruja, central Albania, in the last decades of sixteenth century. However, if they were not exclusively related to the soldiers of the local Ottoman garrison, it is unlikely they might have had any significant impact on a local population not yet Islamicized or at least with an "Islam only feebly represented at this early date".<sup>58</sup>

At any case, besides Sunni Islam, mystical forms of Islam spread in the country, and many of them must have been adherents of the order of Bektashis. Particularly in the special conditions of repression after 1826, if the Janissary army and the Bektashi Order were to be formally abolished, the abolition

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<sup>56</sup>(Kissling 1962; Stadtmüller 1971)

<sup>57</sup>(Clayer 1990, 2002)

<sup>58</sup>(Kiel 1995)

could only be effective in Istanbul and the provinces where the central Ottoman administration had a direct authority and power. As the Albanians remained outside of these territories and the Ottoman authority was insignificant in the Albanian area during this period, the Bektashi continued to live undisturbed in Albania, in a far better and more secure position than their fellows in Turkey.

Another reason may be the fact that in Albania, in several instances religion has played a unique role compared to the rest of Europe. Not only was Albania, like Bosnia, one of the only European states with a majority converted to Islam, but Albania is also known as the only country worldwide where atheism was declared a compulsory state doctrine in 1967. Still, the resulting prosecution of all religious congregations and the oppression of religious activities is not the only remarkable fact about religious life in Albania.

Generally, in Southeast Europe and elsewhere ethnicity is closely linked to the adherence to a specific religion. Unlike any other nations in Southeast Europe, Albanians traditionally did not adhere to a single faith. Among Albanians, as an exception from the rule, four different confessions prevailed: Catholicism mostly in the north, Orthodoxy mostly in the south, Sunni Islam mostly in the central and eastern parts of the Albanian inhabited areas, and Bektashism mostly in the south. Such a situation must go thereby somehow toward contesting the fixed adherence to one specific type of religion. Due to missionary efforts by Western and Middle Eastern congregations alike, even nowadays loyalty to one specific religion in Albania is fluid and might be divided. It is, for example, not uncommon that a contemporary Albanian might declare him- or herself to be a 'Protestant Muslim' if he or she has converted to one of the several Protestant congregations being engaged in

missionary work in the country.

Islam did not seem to be very deeply rooted in Albania until the nineteenth century and it is usually assumed that this was also the case with Christianity some centuries earlier, which of course must have facilitated conversion to Islam. In addition, there is general agreement about the fact that religion in Albania tends to be syncretistic. Many traits of Christianity survived among Muslim converts in form of the so called Crypto-Christianity. It is little surprising that a typical feature of the 'religious landscape' in Albania seems to have been the people called *laramanë*, literally 'spotted' or 'coloured', referring to the fact that many Albanians adhered to more than one confession at the same time.<sup>59</sup> In relation to this somewhat divertive and fluid character of religions, Albanians are often depicted as showing remarkable superficial religious feelings. Not only people's faith changed according to political opportunism, but religious services turned into recreational events for small talk and gossip rather than serious worship.

Albanians have never strictly adhered to many religious duties and practices. Prohibition of alcohol was never observed by Albanian Muslims, daily prayer (*namaz*) was ignored and ritual fasting (*ramadan*) hardly observed. Of course, they kept the Koran in their house, helped the poor, performed the rituals for the dead, and went on pilgrimage to visit the tombs of Muslim holy men. There are numerous accounts of Christians and Muslims visiting the sacred sites of each others' congregation. If we judge by the *ex voto* on the walls of shrines, a Christian custom also adopted by Muslims, miracles are deeply believed. Not only are these practices still observed today, but

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<sup>59</sup> (Skendi 1967 [1980]; Malcolm 2001)

some religious celebrations are becoming festive occasions for each Albanian family. No Muslim family would miss the *bajram* meal or fail to sacrifice a lamb, which is very similar to the way people celebrate Christmas in the West and in Albania alike. People in modern-day Albania attend religious ceremonies regardless of which faith they belong to, as a form of social gathering. However, it cannot simplistically be assumed that a common religious substratum exists for all four religions in Albania, something promoted by local and western scholars alike, and that a typical Albanian form of religiosity developed.

Religious conversion and politics, as I showed elsewhere,<sup>60</sup> normally related to a collective history, which embraced social and cultural communities, or more precisely, members of a family, a lineage, a village or a larger group. An individual converts to Islam or to Christianity because he or she belongs to a social network. Conversion and religious belonging or affiliations are therefore part of a process of socialization through the pursuit of a collective identity. Collective representations and beliefs, ritual practices and ceremonies are considered part of the official religion – Christianity or Islam accordingly – of a given local community or social network, regardless of whether a particular cultural trait does or does not form part of the world religion in question. They are categorized collectively not as religious traits of an established world system but as ‘an ancestral legacy of traditions and customs’. Belonging to a religion means belonging to a social group.

In the case of religious differences, a shift exists between the actual social organization and the discourses that the actors themselves may have on society and social behaviours. This shift may be considerable, insofar as at the level of local com-

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<sup>60</sup> (Doja 2000b)

munity there is no question of official associations, in the Weberian sense of groups formed in order to achieve certain objectives,<sup>61</sup> but rather of informal communities, which rest on the simple feeling that people being part of them consciously share a common religious affiliation. Their content and their boundaries can vary according to the point of view retained. Thus, listening to the discourses of most Christians and Muslims, one can have sometimes the impression of a total rupture between them. On the other hand, empirical observations at the level of any local community reveal between Christians and Muslims not only a perfect inclusive community of language, of course, but also a very broad inclusive community of modes of existence and of cultural behaviours.

Although the individual may share group prejudices towards other religious groups, the essential group values are defined by a system of kinship and alliance, of solidarity and hostility, of status and social position, which I considered elsewhere as being common to all Albanians.<sup>62</sup> Being Muslim or Christian is based on the particular family, kinship, territorial, or social group, which by tradition relates to religious 'belonging' or adherence. It is not based on a specific belief system, religious conviction or ritual practice. Rather, it is grounded in the social culture. Religion is a conformity, which is transmitted throughout the community.

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<sup>61</sup> (Weber 1978 [1922])

<sup>62</sup> (Doja 1999a)



## NATIONALIST PROJECTS AND INTELLECTUAL SPECULATIONS

Bektashi institutions were mostly situated outside of the Albanian towns, which made it possible for the order to maintain its rural character with most of Albanian dervishes having their roots in the local peasantry. It can be said, however, that in Albania Bektashism arrived at its highpoint in striking similarity with its Ottoman and Modern Turkish heydays. Already during Ottoman period, Bektashis in Albania and in southern parts of former Yugoslavia benefited from political hegemony and many Christian sanctuaries fell into their hands. The growth of Bektashism in Albania seems to have profited especially under the political patronage of Ali Pasha of Tepelena, the powerful quasi-independent governor of Yoannina from 1788 to 1822, who had entered into dispute with Ottoman central authority in order to gain recognition for an autonomous administrative entity.

Following the example set by his contemporary and fellow-countryman Mehmed-Ali Pasha in Egypt, Ali Pasha had gained considerable success in establishing and strengthening a local administration that had recognized his authority in Thessaly and in southern and central Albania, where he ruled with a degree of complete independence. In this context, Bektashi leaders must have developed close links with the secessionist efforts of Ali Pasha,

and they actually benefited of new opportunities for the order to enlarge its following considerably, to such an extent as Ali Pasha is considered to be "responsible for the propagation of Bektashism", because of the support he gave to its propagandists.<sup>63</sup>

The emphasis on the relationship between the Bektashis and Ali Pasha is clearly related to political considerations. Ali Pasha embraced and supported Bektashism because of its growing ideological and organisational potential in being instrumental for backing his own general policy. Bektashi dervishes are said to have served him as diplomatic agents, and he used their organization and religious doctrine to win popular support and occupy new territories, to increase his power, widen his political influence, and consolidate his independence from the central Ottoman authorities. By embracing Bektashism and giving his support to the spread of the order which called for Shiite revenge against Sunni powers, he was able to engage in a conflict, both political and religious, against Ottoman dominance.

Modern area specialists, however, notice but do not explain the facts, while others, who suddenly seem to be interested in analytical approach, undoubtedly imbued with the general development of a theoretical and ideological interest in nationalism which has put instrumental ethnicity far in the forefront, may go on as to quite misunderstand the politics of religion. A case in point is Nathalie Clayer with her "myth of Ali Pasha and the Bektashis" where she tends to deny the historical evidence and claims that the political-religious connection of Ali Pasha and the Bektashis is only a myth created much more lately and perpetuated in the enthusiastic intellectual circles of Albanian Bektashi and nationalist leaders, relayed by the tra-

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<sup>63</sup> (Hasluck 1929 [Istanbul: Isis, 2000]: 428-442)

dition of western scholarship.<sup>64</sup>

Many myths were clearly aimed at forming an Albanian national identity associated to the Bektashi religious identity according to Bektashi politics. Yet, what is lacking here is a further analytical imagination to see that such myths and the ideology they convey do not contradict by any means the historical evidence of real politics. The point is certainly not that of other authors who naively claim that Bektashi allegiance could not make the ruthless Ali Pasha an exemplar of the order's purported virtues.<sup>65</sup> On the contrary, as it once happened at the time of first Ottomans in fifteenth century, again with Ali Pasha in Albania at the turn of nineteenth century, real politics and ideological myths seem both to be transformations of the same instrumental pattern of religious politics.

Ali Pasha is indeed said to have spread the Bektashi "heresy" among the Albanian Muslims with the aim of dividing Albanians from Turks and creating the first national Albanian state. Clearly, Bektashism is never boldly claimed as the potential power to create an independent "Albanian identity" and an independent "Albanian State", but the impact of a figure like Ali Pasha is due to the fact that he could more concretely embody a "local resistance against central authority" through his polity and the large autonomy which he managed to acquire. The historically grounded position of the Bektashis in contesting the central Sunni authorities, as a religious group professing a heterodox Islam, naturally opposed them to the Sunni-based policy of the Ottoman authority. Subsequently, it seemed natural to transform this religious opposition into a

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<sup>64</sup>In: (In: Schwandner-Sievers & Fischer 2002: 127–133) Reprint in her own collection: (Reprint in her own collection: Clayer 2002: 151–158)

<sup>65</sup>(Norton 2001: 190)

cultural-religious opposition and later to a political-religious opposition.

Indeed, after the defeat of Ali Pasha in 1822, followed a few years later in 1826 by the persecution of the Bektashi order in the whole Ottoman Empire, a ruthless purge of the Bektashis was undertaken, in Albania as elsewhere, which might have compelled them to find themselves in opposition. Henceforth, they will embark on a prolonged resistance to Ottoman power. Later again, during the difficult history of assertion of the Albanian national identity in the late nineteenth century, a great number of Albanian Muslims, despite their "divided loyalty",<sup>66</sup> often firmly expressed the will to sever links with the Ottoman Empire.<sup>67</sup>

In this context, the political position of the Bektashis is particularly revealing. In discourses related to religious revival, be it confraternal or otherwise, one recurrently finds nationalist motives, which better illustrate the necessity of considering such a powerful mobilizing force in the role that religious leaders claim they play in this field.

The Bektashi's traditionally difficult relationships with the religious and political Ottoman authorities certainly contributed to their choice of anti-Turk and nationalist stance,<sup>68</sup> but this went along with a reinforcement of liberation heterodoxy characteristic of their system of beliefs and practices. It is certainly not surprising that it was Naim Frashëri – the well-known Albanian poet and activist of national movement in the nineteenth century, who was striving to establish a unified written Albanian language and glorify the Albanian past in a litera-

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<sup>66</sup> (Skendi 1967: 469-470)

<sup>67</sup> (Bartl 1968)

<sup>68</sup> (Morozzo della Rocca 1990)

ture of his own – that explained and to some extent founded, in his *Bektashi Pages* (1896),<sup>69</sup> the novel theological and practical principles of Bektashism and the organizational rules governing its functioning.

The matter is especially interesting for its entire freedom from any fanaticism, dogmatism and mystification, and its insistence on ethics.<sup>70</sup> Under the direct influence of Naim Frashëri's intellectual speculations, the development of Albanian Bektashism showed, much more than any other Sufi order or other Bektashis elsewhere, that esoteric knowledge was not a privilege exclusive to a particular genealogical lineage but acquired by spiritual progression, thanks to a divine grace freely and directly bestowed, in close relationship with the expression of Albanian national sentiments and the inculcation of patriotism as the highest of virtues.

In the context of Bektashism and Shiite Islam, a founding value is attributed to the drama of Karbala, where the Imam Hussein, son of Ali and grandson of Muhammad, was killed in *ad* 680. Bektashis, like all Shiite Muslims (Ayoub 1978), put great emphasis on keeping alive the memory of this tragic event through epic poetry, plays, processions, commemorative services and other mnemonic devices. The rituals of commemoration of Hussein's martyrdom, the use of very direct language and imagery, the re-enactment of suffering, and the constant repetition of ideas serve as a basis for identity and cohesion of the community (Norris 1993: 171-174).

Naim Frashëri also retells the saga of Shiism in a monumental, long epic poem in twenty-five cantos entitled *Qerbelaja* (first published in 1898). By relating to this seemingly religious but

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<sup>69</sup> (Jokl 1926)

<sup>70</sup> (Xholi 1998)

political confrontation, Naim Frashëri, following a long-standing tradition of Eastern literature and philosophy, tried to realise and promote his enlightened and humanist liberating ideas. He praised the justice of the Imam as the standard-bearer and champion of liberation against the injustice of the tyrant and usurper adversaries, while declaring as an inexorable principle the conclusion that in the battle between justice and injustice, liberation and tyranny, the final outcome shows justice and liberation victorious. More than a retelling of historical events, *Qerbelaja* is a moralistic and intellectual record, it is a reformulation and promulgation of humanist morality and principles, an appeal for moral purity and perfection, for humankind to be able to enjoy earthly life and confront its reversal (cf. Xholi 1998).

Nevertheless, in actualizing the events, the formulation of these notions and the goal of these visions have to be considered with what all Naim Frashëri's poetic and moral speculations normally lead: the Battle of Karbala is thought of as the Albanian fight against Ottoman power and that, in their battle, the Albanians would win since justice was on their side. In the last canto of his opus, Frashëri suddenly forget the drama of Karbala and keeps talking about Albanian national issues only, propagation of language, learning and education, need of union, gentleness and fraternity for Albanians. You even may sense that all twenty-four previous cantos are only written for bringing about in the last one: the Albanians and the Albanian question. For Frashëri, the meaning of the battle becomes as much human salvation as national liberation.

Actually, his Bektashi epic has to be judged in the context of another monumental epic, the *History of Skanderbeg*, in which Frashëri narrates the exploits, successes and failures of the Al-

banian national hero against the Ottoman invaders. This work is held to be his most famous and greatest poetic aspiration, a supreme attempt by the poet to project his idealism, patriotism and sense of Albanian cultural continuity back into a past age when for twenty-four years the Albanians had fought under the Skanderbeg's leadership to defend their liberty. Even though both *Qerbelaja* and the *History of Skanderbeg* were published the same year and were written on the same style, the former grounded on Muslim mythology and Eastern mysticism, the latter on Classic mythology and Christian symbolism, it is only the latter epic that became the poem of Albanian national pride. The martyrs of Karbala, quite contrary to historical evidence and Eastern tradition, owe much to the heroism of the romantic era, including Frashëri's own poetic portray of Skanderbeg (Norris 1993:182).

Naim Frashëri was one of the most eminent thinkers and leading figure of Albanian Bektashism, Albanian romanticism and the Albanian national movement. In the formulation and argumentation of nationalist ideology, Frashëri made use of both religious and realist, pantheist and gnostic conceptions, coming from both Eastern and Western traditions. Among other things, he openly suggested and theorized the reconciliation of religion with the idea of the nation.

Yet, even though in his oeuvre and inspiration an important place is taken by religion, its dogma, terminology, and conceptual devices, even though he continually addressed to God as the divine, supernatural power in explaining everything related to human being and life, Frashëri's rationale was of humanist and nationalist interest. In his worldview, religious conceptions have not a special role independent of his rationalist, humanist and nationalist ideology. He writes very often

about and takes any opportunity of mentioning God, but very freely and even giving the divine a role in the liberating movement and national education of Albanians. The martyrs of Karbala, quite contrary to historical evidence and Eastern tradition, owe much to the heroism of the romantic era, including Frashëri's own poetic portray of Skanderbeg (Norris 1993: 182). While in *Qerbelaja*, events and characters gain moral verisimilitude in the way that beliefs of good and evil are transmitted by Shiite and Bektashi oral tradition, by their means Frashëri give shape to the system of values which constitute the core of all his poetic and intellectual oeuvre. Cloaking the discourse in religious dress Frashëri aimed to promote his nationalist ideas, and elements of the divine were not necessarily religious convictions but very often used as metaphors of worldly and national values, merely religious wordings but easily acceptable to the masses.

Some specialists in the area, probably limited by the narrow contours of the very object of their studies, hastily and uncritically presents the construction of the Albanian nation as an offspring emanating exclusively from Bektashism. It is not the case here to redeploy the history and a-religious character of Albanian nationalism (Doja 1999b; 1999c; 2000c) nor the politics of religions and religious shifting in the reconstruction of identities in multi-religious Albania (Doja 2000b), but this view is definitely an exaggeration, and frankly aberrant. When Nathalie Clayer (2002: 135), for instance, wonders in a "naturally legitimate" way why particular links existed between Bektashism and Albanian nationalism, – more exactly, "why this brotherhood offered nationalists a privileged framework in the Albanian society of the time" and "why there were no other structures able to help the nationalist movement", –



this is a clear statement that could not stem from someone having even a minimal knowledge of the Albanian situation. It seems that specialists in the area are apparently more worried to justify a somewhat essential relationship to their own supposed distinct object of study rather than to understand what a religious movement could be and how it could be analyzed and explained in sociological or any terms. All of this, in spite of a particularly energetic zeal in accumulating masses of documentary information on Muslim brotherhoods in Albania (Clayer 1990) or throughout Southeast Europe (Clayer 1994).

Similarly, I believe it is an exaggeration to argue, as Duijzings (2000: 167) does, that Naim Frashëri's attempt has been to bridge the religious divide of Albanians by proposing to turn Bektashism into an all-encompassing national religion for all Albanians.<sup>71</sup> Earlier accounts in the literature have suggested that Naim Frashëri's attempts were aimed simply at giving the Bektashis a somehow Albanian character,<sup>72</sup> but this view seems to stem from an uncritical reliance on eclectic compilations of literary histories (Elsie 1995; e.g. Mann 1955) found throughout Duijzings's book.

As a matter of fact, this belief seems simply impossible and even quite absurd to those with a minimal knowledge of Albanian context. The Bektashis, in spite of their concentration in Albania, were a small minority quite marginalized within Albanian society, especially before the spread of national movement. Naim Frashëri was certainly not blind to this fact. The relationship of religion and national ideas in Frashëri's conceptions has been very often uncritically investigated by scholars camped on both sides of either religious (Qazimi 1996) or

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<sup>71</sup> (Duijzings 2000: 157-175)

<sup>72</sup> (Stadtmüller 1971)

nationalist (Xholi 1998) lines. There is reason to believe, however, that Naim Frashëri didn't intend so much to provide Albanians with a unique religion, but rather to make nationalist ideas successfully acceptable to Albanians of whatever religious affiliation.

The problem, however, is not so much whether this has been, as Duijzings argues, a failed attempt to bridge the religious divide between Albanians by promoting a secular national cause that incorporates some heterodox Bektashi elements within it. In the last two chapters of his book, Duijzings attempted a comparative textual analysis of what he asserts are Albanian and Serbian examples of how religious symbolisms infiltrate "national" imaginations, arguing that Albanian nationalists at one time might have attempted to infuse their cause with religious elements largely drawn from Bektashism.

As I showed elsewhere in full details (Doja 2004b, 2005), taking Naim Frashëri's epic reproduction of the Battle of Karbala and situating it on comparative grounds with such a state and church-produced body of literature that recreates and embellishes the Kosovo Battle mythology in Serbia, as Duijzings (2000: 157-202) does, is in itself a problematic issue in methodological and analytical terms. Duijzings finds both have much in common: each have been portrayed through epic song and folk verse, both record a lost battle in which righteous forces were overcome by evil ones, and the main hero was sacrificed, leading to the necessity for followers to accept suffering as a step to redemption and a revolt against tyranny. Overall, Duijzings believes both lent similar weight to the growth of Albanian and Serbian nationalisms respectively during the nineteenth century.

Still, as some of his reviewers note, excepting the partly reli-

gious nature of both myths, they cannot be compared, either in terms of content or their elaboration and diffusion. Duijzings recognizes the lack of a deeply rooted cultural tradition for the failure of Naim Frashëri's epic to become a political symbol in Albanian nationalism. By contrast, what has made the Kosovo Battle myth so extremely powerful is its making rooted in folklorism and the church culture of Serbian nationalism. Duijzings (2000: 176-202) has correctly understood it this way as suggested in his chapter on the Serbian folk-epic of Kosovo. The Serbian Kosovo myth and epic poetry grew out of a long elaboration of oral and church traditions; their religious content was closely tied to the culture harboured by the Orthodox Church, a powerful institution always influential in Serbian nationalist ideology. Although the Kosovo myth was created in Serbia and never resonated in Kosovo itself, throughout the twentieth century it provided for Serbs a set of roles with which to sort out into proper categories ambiguous or overlapping identities in Kosovo.

Elements of Serbian nationalist discourse have been central in rituals of national regeneration throughout the life-time of former Yugoslavia, but they were present especially in Serbia during the 1980s. After the downfall of communism and federalism in Yugoslavia, the Serbian Orthodox Church revitalized nationalism by organizing two sets of 'national' rituals: mass baptisms of Serbs and Montenegrins in Kosovo and during 1988-1989 the 'procession' of the alleged remnants of Prince Lazar through Serb-populated villages and monasteries from Croatia and Bosnia to Kosovo where they were eventually re-interred after a funeral ceremony of re-consecration. The relics of Lazar were paraded around the province of Kosovo as a reminder of the killing of the Christ-Prince and as a territorial

claim. The return of the 'heroic' prince to the place where the Serbs had been defeated by the Turks and where Lazar lost his life was represented as the completion of a full circle, as a 'new beginning' and 'rebirth' of the Serbian symbolic community, the 'heavenly kingdom' of Serbia. Both rituals functioned to reinstitute and preserve the symbolic order by means of a symbolic confirmation of the will of Serbian nation to restore and reclaim its 'dignity' and 'rights' that, according to Serb nationalists, had been undermined by successive conquerors of the area as well as by former Yugoslavia (see Salecl 1994). The mass baptisms of Serbs in Kosovo and the return of Prince Lazar's relics to Kosovo constituted meaning-creating and nation-instituting rituals. The former were effectively pilgrimages whereas the latter had an effect somewhat similar to those that Turner (1974) associates with pilgrimage. Unlike pilgrimages, however, in this case it was not travelling to, or coexistence at, a given sacred or administrative centre that constituted the main meaning-creating experience. It was the route of the procession that demarcated the 'territories of the Serbian nation' and brought together Serbs from Serbia proper and those areas within different republics and provinces of former Yugoslavia. An important aspect of both types of ritual is their emphasis on 'cultural regeneration'. However, the centrality of Lazar's bones in the latter ritual affirms the cultural/spiritual as well as physical/biological endurance of the national community, for in the Christian-Orthodox tradition relics of saintly figures have spiritual value. This coexistence of the material and the spiritual, of biological and cultural continuity, has been common in Serbian nationalist discourse. Thus, relations between church, state, and nationalism were enormously strengthened. Even the military murderers were transformed into he-

roes through epic songs, a process aptly labelled as 'gusle laundering' (Duijzings 2000: 199), while Serb militiamen involved in the atrocities wore patches depicting the battle of Kosovo and received medals with the name of Milosh Obilic, the main hero of the Kosovo Battle.<sup>73</sup>

The tendency to equate Serbian and Albanian nationalisms is not only unjustified but is actually a dangerous ambush in which Serbian nationalist agitators are still trying to entrap public and scholarly opinions. In fact, the political instrumentality of the Serbian myths of the Battle of Kosovo is not exactly commensurable with Naim Frashëri's *Qerbelaja*, but rather with other types of political folklorism and pseudo-culturalist projects, serving either chauvinistically or ideologically charged nationalisms. Examples of this sort could be found, for instance, in the communist propaganda of Eastern and Central Europe when cultural and folkloric traditions have been instrumental for justifying and magnifying the 'authentic' foundations of

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<sup>73</sup> In this connection, it is the revival of historical memories that creates and revives supposedly fixed patterns of behaviour, not the other way around, as it is sometimes supposed. For instance, the Serbian claim to be defending an ungrateful Christian Europe from a Muslim onslaught, although parallel to the Serbs' posturing in the nineteenth century, when the myth of Kosovo in something like its present form was actually created, is linked to the contemporary nationalist revival and to the manipulation of the Kosovo myth specifically.

Until recently, Serbian historiography recorded that the battle had been a Serbian and Christian victory over Muslim Turks. It is only since 1968 that the construal of the battle as a great Serbian defeat has gained essentially unanimous assent among Serbs. Nevertheless, it might be ironical for the Serbian nationalist mythology that Milosh Kopilic, the grand hero who challenged and killed the Ottoman Sultan in the Battle was, if not Albanian, certainly not a Serb, according to most realistic scholarship reviewed in Malcolm (1998: 58-80). Yet this puzzle should inform local scholars more about the transformational quality of mythical thought than about historical facts used for nationalist ideologies.

the political and ideological regime, as I have shown elsewhere for the case of communist Albania (Doja 1998). Other anthropologists have suggested a similar argument (e.g. Gossiaux 1995). Another parallel with the Serbian Kosovo mythologies can be found in Hitler's propaganda campaign of 1930s and early 1940s when German *Volkskunde* traditions have been instrumental in promoting the sinisterly notorious Nazi ideology. But to compare Frashëri's national ideology to Serbian nationalism, as Duijzings does, is like comparing Herder's romanticism to Hitler's National Socialism!

While the Battle of Kosovo was instrumental for Serbian nationalism as the mythologizing and embellishment of a local, historical and factual reality, Naim Frashëri uses the drama of Karbala as a local and historical metaphor of a mythic and ethical worldview. In this sense, the relational parallel between Albanian and Serbian national ideology, if any, seems to be in difference instead of similarity. There are two different, opposed conceptualizations that give way, after instrumental transformations, to a number of single utterances, which share some similar details in style and content but are irrelevant for any relational comparison. When you compare such single utterances then, you do not compare them on a superficial, linear one-to-one basis, but only with respect to their relative setting in the whole field of constructed nationalisms, and their relative difference or similarity with all other relevant actual occurrences within the same field. Both types of transformations are variants of the same pattern, but there are differences in the form and content of their conceptualization of prerequisites and outcomes.

What is lacking here is the analytical and anthropological insight to understand that the poetic and intellectual speculations of Naim Frashëri, which retell the saga of Shiism as the

religion of victims of persecution, are relevant because they have been instrumental in shaping theological ideas with gnostic and dualist conceptions. Even though specialists of the literature can argue that "Bektashi texts in general are relatively silent on points of social ethics" (DeJong 1989: 10), anthropologists, after Clifford Geertz (1973), know very well how from the idea of suffering dualist conceptions and liberating theologies develop. This is explicitly articulated in Naim Frashëri's *Qerbelaja* as similar Christian hierarchical symbols are in his *History of Skanderbeg*. The evil exists from the origins, having its own cosmological and anthropological consistency of which no explanation is attempted, but a strong assertion is given without any margin of ambiguity:

The good and the evil, God and the devil, the heaven and hell, and all other things that exist are not other but human. So the ancient sages have said, all have been clearly separated from the origin; you can take the part that you wish, you can choose either the Imam Hussein or Yezid and Muaviye; one get you the salvation, and the other the perdition. (*Qerbelaja* XIII, 448-459, my translation).

In the drama of Karbala, the imam endures a divinization process that fulfils, so to speak, a function of "encouragement" of the liberation fight, of escape from the evil and the world in which it is inscribed. And this is because the *mysterium iniquitatis* that renders the world and the worldly life "repugnant" (*Qerbelaja* XIV, 27) is unassailably at the forefront. The power of God therefore endures an obvious limitation, justifying a suspicion of either impotence or malice. Would it be possible and therefore necessary to interpret this "malicious God" as the second god of dualist print (Guidetti 1998)? In Bektashi conceptions the world is clearly separated into good and evil,

as humankind is divided into the oppressed and the oppressors. Satan is held to be actually incarnated, for Bektashis, in the person of Yezid, the enemy of Ali, and in his offspring. It is not difficult therefore to assume a painful fight of liberation of the spirit from the worldly imprisonment, which is exactly for what "strikes the heart of the gnosis" (Bianchi 1983: 15).



## LIBERATION IDEOLOGY AND ETHNICIZED RELIGION

It is my contention therefore that it is this dualist character together with pantheist conceptions that might have reasonably made it possible for the Bektashi religion to join with Albanian national ideology. Indeed, it would be necessary to argue this link, especially by the analysis of the organizational and theological character of Bektashism as a mystical, heterodox order throughout its historical transformations. Only to the extent of the articulation of contest and liberation ideologies with the hierarchization of covenantal structures of divine mediation, can we understand not only the special "failed" relation of Bektashi religion to Albanian nationalism through Naim Frashëri's poem *Qerbelaja*, but also the difficulty in explaining why Albanian nationalism generally lacked strong religious attachments.

Already in early sixteenth century and probably in much the same vein, the ideological basis of the Iranian dynasty exposed to the hostility of Ottoman power was rooted in the political promotion of mystic extremist Shiism and messianic Turkic beliefs drawn from those Kizilbash elements which would subsequently become the essential constituent parts of Bektashism,<sup>74</sup> and to which Frashëri's speculations were grounded.

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<sup>74</sup> (Doja 2006)

In matters of theological doctrine, he even rejected the authority of Koran, the sacred book of Islam. Pantheism in Bektashism is also acknowledged and even furthered by Naim Frashëri (see Shuteriqi 1982; Qosja 1986), although the application of this term is anathema to many Sufis. In a number of works, surpassing pantheist conceptions evolved in mainstream Bektashism, he stressed in unusual way that the book of Bektashis is their faith in the Universe, and especially in human beings, since the true faith is written nowhere, not on any book either, but rather is in their heart. Furthermore, the absence of any fanaticism and dogmatism are characteristic features of Naim Frashëri's Bektashism (see Xholi 1998).

Naim Frashëri's argument of the Universe as the lively representation of God was another way of stating materialist and realist principles, in particular with his conception of an infinite soul unified with nature and waiting for special conditions to materialize itself into the infinite variety of things of the world (*Shkëndijë e diellit ndaj manushaqes*). Frashëri brought about with his oeuvre a new conception of the divine, in sharp contrast with orthodox Koranic Islam and much more heretical than heterodox Bektashism. Even though relying in Bektashi conceptions that locate the letters of Revelation and the signs of Zodiac in Man (Birge 1937 [1994]: 282), his teaching does not cast Man, however, as a microcosm reflecting the macrocosm, but rather presents the cosmos as a projection of Man. For Naim Frashëri, the real believer should know that God is not in the heavens, but inside the human heart: "I was looking everywhere to find God, the great God of Truth; it was inside me, myself I had it inside" (*Lulet e Verës*).

By taking God from heaven down to earth, the divine, included and unified in nature, has no power other than to materialize itself into the infinite variety of things of the world,

and hence to become available to knowing. God is not any more a secret power far away from the human world, but a power that shows itself at any moment, and that human beings can see and know, approach and reach (*Parajsa dhe fjalë fluturake*). God is identified with humans as well as with that divinely created environment that manifests God's own nature. The ancient heritage of Islamic esoteric knowledge (*al-batin*) is forcibly re-expressed in Frashëri's conviction that one may know the nature of divinity within one's own being, body, and especially beauty of visage. The features of human being are the mirror of divinity: "When God first sought to show his face, he made mankind his dwelling place. One who knows one's inward mind, knows that God is the mankind" (*Njeriu*).

Everybody's human life is therefore an individualization of the natural infinite soul, while death is the individual part going back to its primary source – "Light going back to Light" (*Qerbelaja VI, 65*) – for it becomes a regeneration of natural life. In Frashëri's conception of immortality there is no heaven and hell, divine damnation and reward, but simply a worldly life with human being on its centre, where heaven and hell are all together, always in permanent and uninterrupted renewing, transformation and regeneration (*Lulet e Verës; Qerbelaja XI*). In an unusual development of heterodox Bektashi conceptions, for Frashëri, metempsychosis and life after death is neither promise of recompense nor threat of condemnation but it simply guaranties the transmission of human and national values from the past to the future.

The distinct conceptions of the divine and its attributes according to separate religions, emphasized by differing rituals and institutions, brought near divisions among Albanians. In contrast, Naim Frashëri claimed that true Muslims do not necessarily need a mosque and that Arabic and Persian, the lan-

guages of the Prophet or the Imams, though especially intended for religious practice, are not convenient for Albanians. "With pray and ritual you cannot find God, neither with Lent nor blessing, as do who don't know. And you priests and dervishes forget church and mosque, for church and mosque cannot be but where God really is" (*Lulet e Verës*). His heretical teachings excluded any ritual or institution, aiming to the political intention of eliminating all dividing elements. God cannot be that of separate religions but that of pantheism, included and unified as it is into Nature and Universe.

In Naim Frashëri's poems, in particular, Sufi mysticism is blended with a nature pantheism centred on Albanian homeland: the defiant peaks of the Albanian mountains express the will of people; they point upwards to the skies and ultimately to heaven and divinity. Frashëri's pantheism was an original theological conception especially elaborated with an exemplary conviction within the social conditions of Albanian national movement.<sup>75</sup> In his verse the Albanian homeland became part of the divine scheme. Yet, his non-sectarian, interfaith, and national appeal is not only a personal characteristic of his own and his fellow nationalists, but is also expressed in typically gnostic and heterodox terms (Norris 1993: 164-165). His heretical and pantheist conceptions, close to the universal pantheism of Spinoza, the romanticism of Goethe and Schiller and

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<sup>75</sup> In his Bektashi Pages, he wrote: "The Bektashis are brothers and one soul... They love other Moslems and Christians as their own soul... But most of all they love their Motherland and their fellow countrymen, for this is the best of all things". According to him, the role of Bektashi dignitaries should be guided, henceforth, only by nationalism. They are not only guides on the path leading to God: "May they work together with the foremost citizens and with the elders for the salvation of Albanian language and Albanian people, for knowledge and culture of the nation and fatherland, and for all progress and well-being".

the rationalism of Voltaire, were aimed to provide the theoretical foundation of Albanian national movement. Even though often formulated in Bektashi and Sufi terms, Frashëri's pantheism was strengthened in its social content and intentional tendency, as an expression of contest in opposition to Sunni orthodoxy and its Ottoman stronghold and, hence, as an ideological argument in promoting the liberating and emancipatory ideas of Albanian national movement.

Naim Frashëri was not a unique leader, but the quality of his verse together with his other nationalist and educational activities placed him at the forefront of the avant-garde of Albanian national movement. He became defender of Bektashism not merely because of any personal special link or conviction but by means of Bektashism he could better proclaim his contest credo in opposition to Ottoman occupation. As long as the Ottoman political power coincided in ideological level to Islamic religion, all deviation from dogmatic and orthodox Islam was assumed to take on a political meaning of opposition. By the same token, by voluntarily putting forward and even downrightly developing this very character, he aimed to bring Bektashism closer to his own theory of nationalism.

To this extent, Albanian nationalism and the construction of the Albanian nation could not be by any means an offspring emanating exclusively from Bektashism, as some specialists in the area, probably limited by the narrow contours of the very object of their studies, have hastily and uncritically claimed.<sup>76</sup> Of course, Abdyl Frashëri, elder brother of the poet and prominent leading member of the League of Prizren (1878-1881) which was the crucial episode toward Albanian independence, belonged to the Bektashis. It is also a generally held opinion

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<sup>76</sup> (Clayer 2002: 103-135)

that the Bektashis played a significant role in the movement of 'national awakening' (*Rilindja*) in Albania from 1878 onwards. Actually, a great number of Bektashi leaders, in spite of a short-lived alliance with the Young Turks, firmly adopted nationalist ideas.

This might be, however, another instance of the instrumental myths surrounding the Bektashis, for it is well known from other sources that most of the Bektashi foundations in Albania were established at the turn of the twentieth century, when a renaissance of the order took place rather as a result of the national movement. It is above all since the last decade of nineteenth century that the Bektashis actually started to be very active in the development of both cultural and national movement in south and central Albania, which must have paved the way for their extraordinarily popularity in Albania and the subsequent introduction of elements of nationalist ideology into their religious doctrine.

It seems reasonable therefore to consider that it is the new Albanian Bektashism that might have become the offspring of Albanian national movement, especially after the influential elaboration of its heretical doctrines instilled by Naim Frashëri, much in the same way as Kizilbash ideology once became the instrument of Safavid policy against Ottoman power in early sixteenth century. In turn, like the later development of Kizilbash-Alevi politics in Turkey, Bektashism in Albania has been often idealized as one of embodiments of the Albanian *Volksgeist*, which Bektashi leaders must have exploited later in a deliberate instrumental politics to make Bektashi ideas attractive among non-Bektashis who could swell the ranks of the Order while contributing to the creation of an autonomous and, later, independent or even communist Albania.

That is why the continuous emphasis on the historical con-

nection of the Bektashis with Ali Pasha proved to be still instrumentally effective, for the large autonomy that he gained, or the prefiguration of a first Albanian national State that he was supposed to have founded, corresponded to the aims or ideals of the Bektashi leaders at the time of the Albanian national mobilization. Much more, in the process of creating a national history from the viewpoint of the Bektashis, Ali Pasha came to be considered as the second hero of the nation, after Skanderbeg, while both came to be presented as belonging to the Bektashi order. Having been educated in the Sultan's court, Skanderbeg was related to the Janissary corps and therefore supposed to have been a Bektashi. One of the prominent Albanian Bektashi leaders, Baba Ali Tomorri in his *History of the Bektashis*,<sup>77</sup> makes the fight of Skanderbeg a part of the first struggle of the Bektashis against the Ottoman Sultans.

Such myths, like those forged earlier by Bektashi ideology in relation to Ottoman polity,<sup>78</sup> were all the more instrumental as the proto-national character generally attributed to both Skanderbeg's and Ali Pasha's polities, and the necessity to stress the former's Christian character or to diminish the latter's Muslim character, corresponded to the strong denigration of Islam in the laicizing framework of the independent Albanian state, while the image of the Bektashis remained a liberal and nationalist one. It is perhaps for the same reason that, later, both King Zog and Enver Hoxha will be sometimes believed to be of Bektashi origin.<sup>79</sup> In such a way, like their former fellows in Ottoman Empire, the Bektashis will reassert their contribution to the construction of the Albanian nation and anticipate political benefit.

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<sup>77</sup> (Turabiu 1929)

<sup>78</sup> (Doja 2006)

<sup>79</sup> (Norton 2001: 194; Clayer 2002: 155-156)

## POLITICAL PROJECTS AND RELIGIOUS SPECULATION

It was under the political patronage of independent Albania, however, that Bektashism, recognized by the highest governmental authorities as an established denomination, came to be a nationally and internationally structured ecclesiastic institution. The Bektashi leader was granted an ex-officio seat in the legislative National Assembly in 1914 and they had an institutionally recognized representative in the highest function of the State. The High Council of the Regency of independent Albania was composed of four rather than three members, representing each of the country's denominations: Sunni Muslims, Orthodox Christians, Catholics, and Bektashis. In this way, Albanian Bektashis ceased to be considered as conventional adherents of Islam and were regarded, rather, as an independent religious congregation.

This political evolution of Bektashism in Albania was run parallel with another development in matters of organization. After the independence of Albania in 1912, ties with the Bektashi world centre in Anatolia, and the order's hierarchy in Turkey were slowly cut down. Another reason was the general dismissal of mystic orders in modern Turkey and their definitive abolition in 1925. Recognized by the new Albanian State as one of the accepted religions of the country, the Bektashis continued their activities independently in Albania in confor-



mity to a printed set of regulations. It is hardly surprising that from that time onwards the Albanian Bektashis took steps to establish in Tirana the order's world centre. Finally, with the initiative of the order's head Salih Niyazi Dede, in his capacity of Arch-grandfather and supreme pontiff of all the Bektashis, the seat of the Order, formerly in the central *tekke* at Hacibekdash Village in Anatolia, was actually transferred in a purpose-built head-lodge in Tirana, the capital of Albania.

Already the Bektashis obeyed to a rigorous and severe rank of hierarchy more than any other Sufi Order, and the whole system of lodges was hierarchically ranked in relation to each other,<sup>80</sup> which militated to increasingly concentrate rich endowment of estates. Because of the explicit political circumstances in the reality of independent Albania, the organization of the Order became increasingly structured, improving its methods of recruitment of followers and the appointment of its hierarchy, especially in matters of celibacy and non-hereditary offices. Albanian Bektashism actually adopted a hierarchical organization in which the rank held by a member was graded and his status conformed to his seniority and the proportion and degree of his commitment and loyalty.

As specialists show through abundant documentary evidence,<sup>81</sup> the hierarchical pattern of the organizational structure of Bektashism in Albania reached a very peculiar expression not only in terminological, local terms, but also in a more sophisticated and clear-cut ecclesiastical as well as political hierarchy, which perhaps surpassed limits observed in Ottoman context. Between 1921 and 1950 the Albanian Bektashis organized five congresses to accomplish the change of an Ot-

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<sup>80</sup> (Halimi 2000)

<sup>81</sup> (Popovic 1986; Clayer 1990: 47-67)

toman dervish order towards a religious congregation of the new Albanian Nation. According to the 1950 statute of Albanian Bektashis, the order must also serve as an umbrella organization for other Sufi communities in the country.

Certainly, this final stage of the hierarchical and centralized organization coincided not only with the establishment of religious and political power but also with tightening of state control over religious matters. Actually, not only in 1930 the Arch-grandfather was appointed to his position by the newly crowned King of Albania and the Bektashi statutes were regularly approved by the Albanian government, but the political regime sought every time the support of instituted Bektashism as that of other religious denominations, and even took the initiative of imposing and controlling their doctrinal orthodoxy and hierarchical organization. All kind of intimidations were used to this end, and it is by no means a mere coincidence that every time that a new regime came to power in Albania the highest level of Bektashi hierarchy suffered internal cabinet reshuffles, even leading to repeatedly mysterious murders.

The Bektashis claim, for instance, that Arch-grandfather Salih Niyazi Dede was murdered in 1941 by the Italian fascist regime of occupation because he didn't accept collaboration. Later, after the advent of the communists in power, while the statute of 1945 showed clear opposition against Communist leadership, internal strife within the Bektashis escalated in March 1947 when Arch-grandfather Abaz Hilmi Dede shot dead killing his two assistants Baba Faja Martaneshi and Fejzo Dervishi. Because they were loyal towards the Communist regime, it is believed they had demanded the order to collaborate more closely with the communists while accusing the Arch-grandfather of being a reactionary. Not surprisingly current Bektashi leaders will again present a different version which

must fit better to modern structuring tendencies of the order. According to Baba "Mondi" from the Arch-grandfather's See in Tirana, Baba Faja Martaneshi was killed because he had violated the rules of the Bektashi order by being married and having a son (sic!).<sup>82</sup> This version is of course questioned by others who claim that Baba Faja Martaneshi died under very suspicious circumstances, with Enver Hoxha himself being suspected to have ordered his assassination.<sup>83</sup> After this incident, however, the Arch-grandfather was forced to commit suicide, and repression against non-loyal Bektashi members started. The order was totally put under government control with Ahmed Myftar Dede, a loyal follower of Communist doctrines, appointed as Arch-grandfather and staying in office until 1958.<sup>84</sup>

In fact, apart from the dangers of religious leaders revolting against established authority, which could only be successful under special conditions, there is always the possibility of their direct intervention in state affairs. Consequently the political authorities, well aware of their potentialities rooted as they are in the lives of the masses, often seek to control, regulate, and conciliate them rather than to suppress them. The Albanian communist regime, like the Ottoman government in the past and not unlike the energetic Ali Pasha in his time, was able to deal with almost all religious groups by playing off the more influential against each other.

Finally, with the increasing power of communist ideology in Albania, all religions were rendered purely and simply un-

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<sup>82</sup> (Kressing 2002: 79)

<sup>83</sup> (Hysi 2003)

<sup>84</sup> Much more recently, in the time of post-communist transition, it was the head of the Orthodox Church that was expelled with a deportation order while the head of the Islamic Association has been murdered again in what some believe was an assassination by the fundamentalist faction to gain control of the direction of Islam in Albania.

necessary, and were abolished in 1967. In turn, these trials and tribulations created new conditions for Albanian Bektashism to become once again the religion of victims of persecution. The Bektashis in Egypt and Turkey, constituting a clandestine movement, declared their independence from the Albanian world centre and elected in 1949 Ahmed Sirri Baba as head of the order in the tekke of Cairo. Likewise in Michigan where Frances Trix also found her master,<sup>85</sup> Baba Rexhebi founded the Bektashi tekke of Detroit in 1954. But once again after the downfall of communism in Albania, Bektashism re-emerged in its full great pomp in the 1990. They held their first formal assembly in June the same year and established the new Arch-grandfather Haxhi Dede Reshat Bardhi in their former 'holy see' in Tirana, renovated with financial aid from Bektashi compatriots abroad. Its formal reopening was attended by Mother Theresa – another staunch orthodox of Albanian stock – and other distinguished guests. Also, rather than "mildly amusing" in view of the anti-Bektashi stance of orthodox Muslims,<sup>86</sup> it is by no means accidental that this reopening was hailed by the staunch Sunni press in Turkey as a triumph for Islam.

However, the Bektashis are still trying to redefine themselves politically in the limited space left to them by Sunni Muslims. Their main aspiration is to maintain public recognition of their Order as 'the fourth religion' in Albania, that is, as a traditional denomination with official status in the State. For this purpose they developed a close relationship with the newly formed government of President Berisha's democratic party (1992-1997), taking part in his political campaigns, despite the vagaries of political changes when the coming to power of so-

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<sup>85</sup> (Trix 1993)

<sup>86</sup>(Norton 2001: 199)

cialist opposition's government (1997-2005) might have made their policy temporarily counterproductive.

More importantly, it is increasingly becoming clearer that the version of Bektashism which is being developed in post-communist Albania, rather than reject the links with Iran that were formerly part of Bektashi history, welcomes them, and has forged links with the modern Iranian state. Iranians, like Saudi Arabians, came in Albania after the fall of Communism in the 1990s with impressive budget and are now the most active of Islamic missionaries who have succeeded in rallying a number of intellectuals, especially of the older generation. Not surprisingly, they are more successful in recruiting members of the former Communist Party than independent intellectuals. Apparently those who had put their faith in Communism feel a great vacuum of power opportunities when the ideology was discredited. Indeed, not only they are more open to look for another ideology to replace the old one, but they are also motivated by more worldly reasons such as large salaries paid by Iran and other Muslim countries and many business opportunities with foreign investors. In turn, Muslim propagandists have succeeded in creating somehow a nucleus of Albanian Muslims sharing their strict view of orthodox Islam, which remains nevertheless a partial success limited to some urban settings only, for the bulk of rural population is quite resistant to this version of Islam.

Although Bektashis are not orthodox Shiites, Iran is very active in supporting them. A good example of promoting Iranian political and diplomatic objectives is the creation of the influential Saadi Shirazi Foundation. While in practice the foundation is part of the Iranian Embassy and is believed to be a cover for the Iranian secret services, the official purpose is to promote Persian culture and Islamic values. The single aim of

the impressive translation and publication programmes and other research and cultural activities is to link Muslims in Albania to Iran. Under the pretext of reviving 'the great Islamic culture that Albania has inherited', Iranians finance all sorts of historical and sociological research aimed at demonstrating that Albania is part of the Islamic world. In a way, this policy helps to revive the particular Ottoman and Oriental legacy in Albania. Cultural production of this kind is mostly ideological, however, aimed among other things at showing that Albanian nationalism and Islam are not contradictory insofar as the nationalist ideology is believed to be grounded in the Bektashi and other tolerant traditions of progressivist Islam.

Currently, the Albanian Bektashis have an ambiguous status which places them somewhere in the middle between the three official religions and the other religious minorities. Similar to the Sunni Muslims, the Orthodox Christians and the Catholics, the state recognizes their existence *de facto*. Their spiritual leader participates in all state ceremonies, and recently the Nevruz holiday on March 22 was declared to be an official holiday, because it coincides with the Day of Democracy. They have, however, no right to have their own representative in the State Secretariat of religions and all their activities are placed under the supervision of the Sunni Association.

## TOWARD ORTHODOX IDEOLOGY

From almost all documentary accounts the important fact can be shown that Bektashi conceptions, particularly at the critical periods of Kizilbash movements in Ottoman Anatolia and Alevi movements in Modern Turkey or national movement in Albania, appear extremely heterodox and heretical. In addition, many discursive interactions in Bektashi narratives, poetry, and adages show a coherence of linkages progressing from the outer to inward, that is, as Frances Trix pointed out,<sup>87</sup> from a more Sunni or orthodox Islam to the decidedly mystic Sufi conceptions, apparently because Sufism or Islamic mysticism could only progress from the outer Sunni form to an inner Sufi meaning. The Bektashi world of discourse can be seen then as a legitimizing strategy in which a later relationship not sanctioned by Orthodox Islam, seeks legitimacy by being related to one of the basic relationships of Islam. Actually, Sunni Islam is often considered to be a cloak covering the essential Shiite and pantheistic character of the Bektashi faith, and the general opinion assumes that the Bektashis entirely neglected the religious performances required by the Sharia.<sup>88</sup> However, my assumption is that the part Sunni Islam played in Bektashi

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<sup>87</sup>(Trix 1993: 33-34)

<sup>88</sup>When the Bektashis do affirm, for example, the importance of Sunni injunction to rituals, they understand true rituals (namaz) not as mere superficial practice but rather esoteric symbols of justice and goodness, giving emphasis to sincerity of faith and not to the religion's outward observances.

life and thought is more important than it appears.

The fact that the Bektashis were rarely attacked on grounds of doctrine or innovations is directly related to their association with the Janissaries and the Ottoman authority. In its Ottoman heydays, maintaining a strong central organization, Bektashism even claimed to be a Sunni order,<sup>89</sup> in spite of its very unorthodox and Shi'ite tendencies. No wonder thereby that the officials of the order clearly handed over their loyalty to the Sunna of the Prophet as a necessary stage in their code of discipline. More importantly, as generally within institutional Sufism, from the moment the religious Bektashis leaders felt the need to support their statements with prophetic sayings, they also felt it necessary to express conformity with the Sharia, the revealed Law of orthodox Islam, which coincided with their growing conformity to the legal establishment.

As a result, the mystical content of the order weakened. In fact, every time the order approached the establishment of orthodox political powers, whether in Ottoman as in Modern Turkey or in independent Albania, its hierarchical and cen-

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They believe that salvation exists in emulating such perfect models as Ali, Hadjī Bektash, and other saints. Everyone must seek 'purity of heart' and self-awareness, but piety is measured by lifestyle and not by ritual. Their 'three conditions' of speech, action and moral containment (eline diline beline) are a succinct statement of an overall orientation that implies very strongly that it is through continual striving for perfection in worldly moral conduct that divine approval will ensue.

Again they take true fast of Ramadan not as exempt of material food but rather a spiritual cleaning of heart from the evil, as they take true pilgrimage not a physical journey to Mecca but rather a spiritual journey to the heart. In the same way, the order of describing the hierarchical chains in which the Bektashi conception of divinity is structured parallels again the outer to inward paradigms from the more general Sufi to the more particular Bektashi.

<sup>89</sup>(Trimingham 1971 [1998]: 80; Norris 1993: 89)



tralized organization also corresponded to a doctrinal radicalism. It is by no means accidental that the sources emphasize over and over again that a certain eminent Bektashi took the Sharia seriously, proving that as long as the desire for power of the orthodox postulates its own position as absolute, the educational attitudes of the Bektashis will necessarily follow suit. Order leaders vied with one another in demonstrating their loyalty and subservience to legalistic Islam, and in the process Bektashism were emptied of its essential elements and left with the empty husks of mystical terminology, disciplines, and exercises.

To illustrate, from Albanian Bektashis there are known two seventeenth-century manuscripts written in Turkish, in which it is interesting to notice how the language, in contrast with both earlier and later manuals, is unusually wrapped in the flowery Sunni orthodox vocabulary, often ambiguous, but appearing sometimes as a forced disguise to all outward appearances of Sunni orthodoxy.<sup>90</sup> More importantly, it can be showed that in these texts there is an effort to comply with the dogma of orthodox Sunni Islam even in respect to features of a categorically Sufi and Shiite nature. I believe the explanation of this attitude is to be found in the context of a more hierarchical development of the Bektashi internal organization, in connection with the historical and political conditions of Albania in the period of the texts' composition. In seventeenth century, as political power in the Ottoman world was overwhelmingly in the hands of orthodox Muslims, Sunni images were the grounds of legitimacy.

In these conditions, Bektashi leaders were seeking to subject the mystical element to Islamic standards, to make mysticism

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<sup>90</sup>(Guidetti 1998: 264)

innocuous by tolerating much of its outer aspects and forms in return for submission. They increasingly strived in reprimanding several colorations of mysticism and fanaticism, trying to bring followers back to more respect for fundamental Islamic rules. Up to the present day, there are many who vigorously reject criticism that the Order and its doctrines are against the beliefs of Islam and that otherwise Bektashi dervishes would only make prejudice to Islam, hiving themselves off from the genuine Islamic teachings.

Religious scholars warn, in particular, against the belief in the incarnation of God in human form, the transcendental annulment in God, and the cult mysticism mistaking the master for God. They try to defend Bektashism from all accusations of heterodoxy or liberalism and consider it identical with the normal understandings of legalist Sunni Islam, stressing its missionary role and transmissory links militating against doctrinal deviations of any kind.

A frequent point of friction, as with the case of other dervish sects of extremist Shiite inclinations,<sup>91</sup> are the beliefs of reincarnation (*tenasuh*), the idea of the transmigration of souls which implied a belief in transformation and the multiplicity of forms, and the credo of emanation which eventually becomes 'manifestation' of God in human form (*tecelli*). Specialists may notice that the theory of emanation and belief in reincarnation are not uniform and not an important theme in Bektashi teaching, and that according to groups and periods, one or another of the strands predominates.<sup>92</sup> There is general agreement on the conditions in which the animistic belief in the transmigration of souls came about in Turkic mystical and heterodox

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<sup>91</sup>(Moosa 1988)

<sup>92</sup>(Norton 2001: 177-178; Zarcone 2005: 40)

circles, as it is on the character of Alevi-Bektashi groups in which these beliefs became firmly rooted. There is no attempt, however, to understand why in practice some other individuals or groups do not accept or clearly deny such beliefs.

While marginal heterodox and nonconformist influences are admitted, I believe it is the most conservatory trend in the development of Bektashism that claims that these opinions make an amalgam between moderate Bektashi and extreme Shiite views, in order to protect Bektashi religious identity from such distortions that would make it appear hostile to the founder of Islam and to Islam altogether. Actually, in the course of argument, Bektashism is said to have been “misused and misunderstood by destabilizing forces and currents hostile to Islam society during nineteenth century”, which eventually did cause its disgrace in 1826.<sup>93</sup> Authoritative assertions come thereby to claim that the Bektashi religious system, as a doctrine and practice, “is closely connected with the internal development of Islam as a religion” and that its “indisputable ideological and philosophical basis is Islam”. Insofar as it adheres to the two basic Islamic postulates – faith in the unity of Allah and the messenger mission of Muhammad – “we cannot consider its history and philosophy in isolation from Islam”.<sup>94</sup>

After all, indeed, “the Order that had enjoyed the full support of Ottoman power cannot be thought outside the fundamental values of Islam”.<sup>95</sup> That is why, in Bektashi circles, Hadji Bektash is increasingly presented as a good Muslim, respectful of the prescripts of Islam, and according to a late tradition, even as a descendant of the Prophet.<sup>96</sup> Especially in the period

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<sup>93</sup>(Izeti 2001: 53-55)

<sup>94</sup>(Gramatikova 2001: 600)

<sup>95</sup>(Izeti 2001: 55)

<sup>96</sup> (Melikoff 2001: 121-133)

of independent Albania, representatives of the hierarchy of Albanian Bektashi clergy reacted against assertions that often tended to consider the order of Bektashis as a doctrine of strong heterodoxy, diverging from orthodox Sunni Islam much more than other Muslim orders. Not surprisingly, they kept up a certain appearance of respect for the law of Sharia, drawing on the traditional tenets that the spiritual way of *tarikāt* must necessarily go through the legal gate of the *shariat*.

The simple traditional Bektashi discussion of the *Sheriat* gateway to religious knowledge takes therefore on a different meaning. Traditionally the Bektashis have built into their religion such flexibility that it is quite acceptable for them to follow the precepts of Sunni Islam when they find it expedient to do so. Such a dual orientation is not just a practical solution to external religious pressure. It also provides a way for the particular and preferred interpretation of Bektashism as an established religion to be linked to the wider body of orthodox history and theology that they regard as being characteristic of Islam. Furthermore, this is more important than it might sound, because it denotes very clearly the way for individuals, or groups, to explore such orthodox practice, not just "if they feel such inclination" in Shankland's characterization,<sup>97</sup> but essentially when they see the opportunity for gaining authority and political benefit in doing so.

Birge, for example, witnessed that several evenings as he sat in the guest-room of the head of the Bektashi Order in Albania, he saw outside the window a dervish stepping on to the veranda and giving the evening call to prayer. When, in surprise, he asked the reason for this he was told that this was the *shariat* part.<sup>98</sup> Still today a certain faction of Alevi writers in

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<sup>97</sup>(Shankland 2003: 86)

<sup>98</sup>(Birge 1937 [1994]: 107)

Turkey will often quote individual Koranic verses as an appeal for authority to support their view on a given topic or to justify a certain Alevi religious tradition, a trend which is becoming increasingly typical for Sufi scholars in their struggle for legitimacy.<sup>99</sup>

Within this type of development a new reverence for the Prophet is also associated, which not merely brought him into the category of wonder-workers at the popular level, but also led to the doctrine of the pre-existence of Mohammad before creation and to the popular equivalent of the belief in the Spirit of Mohammad as the Logos, guardian, and preserver of the universe. The celebration of the Prophet's birthday seems, at least in part, to have been already a compensation for the suppression of Ali demonstrations after the destruction of Shiite regimes.<sup>100</sup>

In Bektashism as in certain other dervish orders, the cult of Ali, carried to an extreme, was a major cause of friction. The cult of Ali in the dervish orders was exaggerated to a degree intolerable to the orthodox mind, especially since in extreme cases it culminated in his deification, or in any case, in a veneration detrimental to that of the Prophet. For orthodox Islam, Muhammad and Ali are human beings and they cannot be of divine essence. In a much symmetrical but inverse relation, for the doctrine of Trinity in Catholic orthodoxy there cannot be any hierarchical projection within a divine essence. Now, as Christian heresy pursue a doctrine of Docetism that refuses Trinity and denies the fusion of divinity and human nature as inseparably united and fully achieved in the person of Christ, in a symmetric inversed relationship, the divinity of Mohammed and

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<sup>99</sup>(A recent case in point is Douglas-Klotz 2005)

<sup>100</sup>(Trimingham 1971 [1998]: 27)

Ali is obviously a very extremist and heretic Shiite concept.

In the history of Christianity the recognition of Jesus Christ's divinity seemed to threaten Christian monotheism, while the denial of his divinity put salvation in doubt. Hence the doctrine of Trinity represented the radical reformulation of the doctrine of Godhead to meet the demands of Christian faith. It was formulated in the Nicene Council called in the fourth century by the Byzantine Emperor Constantine, and became since the formal statement of orthodox Christian belief. In striking similarity, Balim Sultan, the great reformer of the Bektashi Order appointed in the sixteenth century by the Ottoman Sultan Bayezid II, is said to have formalized the belief system that propounded the concept of trinity peculiar to Bektashism,<sup>101</sup> which is still in force amongst current authoritarian leaders of the Order.

Baba Rexhebi, for instance, the influential leader of the Albanian Bektashi foundation of Michigan, in one of his treatises on Bektashism, makes a clear distinction between the triune Bektashi conception of divinity comprising inseparably the Ultimate Truth-Reality of God, Muhammad and Ali, while militating against the heretic and heterodox traditions in Bektashi conceptions regarding the divinity of Ali. Furthermore, he once again maintained that the order respects the rituals of faith and insisted that Bektashi rituals are not in opposition to Sunni Islam, that Bektashism is "within Islam" and, sometimes, that it is even the "real" Islam.<sup>102</sup> Allegations of this kind, fervently claimed by religious scholars,<sup>103</sup> or naively justified by seemingly well-intentioned local scholars,<sup>104</sup> may well be no-

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<sup>101</sup>(Norton 2001: 171)

<sup>102</sup> (Rexhebi 1970)

<sup>103</sup> (Izeti 2001: 53-55)

<sup>104</sup> (Rexhepagiqi 1999: 258)

ticed by area specialists,<sup>105</sup> but without necessarily explaining – nor indeed understanding at all – that a deep evolution had been already achieved, not only in organizational and political structures, but also in theological and religious conceptions.

When during the Communist period, Baba Rexhebi escaped to the United States where he founded the Bektashi lodge of Detroit, he came in contact with more sophisticated types of Sufism, read in English the works of Western Orientalists, specifically French Orientalist Henry Corbin,<sup>106</sup> and understood that to survive Bektashism would need to go through a drastic revision. In his theological treatise he tried to put Bektashism in the perspective of Muslim mysticism and relate it to other more elaborate forms of Sufism. In particular, he demonstrated that Bektashism is closely related to Iranian Shiism, and he tried to dismiss the shamanistic and pre-Islamic influences in order to bring Bektashism back onto the path of Shiite orthodoxy. As this book is the only one of its kind available in the Albanian language, his work had a tremendous influence on Bektashis, even though the doctrines found in it differ greatly from the Bektashi traditions.

There is no wonder afterwards that precisely his book opened the door to Iranian influence in post-communist Albania, which is aimed at bringing all the Bektashis back to the Shiite flock and hardening the orthodox line of the Order. Similarly, amongst the different factions competing for political audience in Turkey after the revival in the 1990s, there is a reformulation of Bektashi-Alevism in connection with Iranian Shiism that sometimes has reached a quite different conclusion of the most taken for granted way of evolution. It is increasingly becoming

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<sup>105</sup> (Clayer 1990: 77-78; Norris 1993: 94)

<sup>106</sup>(e.g. Corbin 1971, 1979, 1982, 1983)

clearer that a certain version of Alevism, rather than reject the links with Iran that were formerly part of Bektashi history, welcomes them, and has forged links with the modern Iranian state.

Indeed, instead of the traditional local leaders, they already regard themselves bound to spiritual leaders who are sent from Iran. From them, they learn a form of Shiism that insists on the veiling of women, on men and women worshipping apart, and upon the importance of the *Sheriat*. Rather than reject mosques, this movement appears to create or build Shiite mosques which act as centres of religious activity in a way that is unusual in Bektashi tradition. While active in West Europe, particularly in Germany, it is also said to influence the Alevi villages in Turkey.<sup>107</sup> In this case, it appears that the segregating, puritanical elements of orthodox practice have come to the fore, and once more with an emphasis on the subordination of women. The result appears to be a religious revolutionary spirit that is as potentially aggressive as any other form of fundamentalism.

Similar development, especially with regard to Iranian influence, can be clearly singled out in the case of Bektashism in Albania. Iranians, like Saudi Arabians, came in Albania after the fall of Communism in the 1990s with impressive budget and are now the most active of Islamic missionaries who have succeeded in rallying a number of intellectuals, especially of the older generation. Not surprisingly, they are more successful in recruiting members of the former Communist Party than independent intellectuals. Apparently those who had put their faith in Communism feel a great vacuum of power opportunities when the ideology was discredited. Indeed, not only they

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<sup>107</sup>(Shankland 2003: 169)



are more open to look for another ideology to replace the old one, but they are also motivated by more worldly reasons such as large salaries paid by Iran and other Muslim countries and many business opportunities with foreign investors. In turn, Muslim propagandists have succeeded in creating somehow a nucleus of Albanian Muslims sharing their strict view of orthodox Islam, which remains nevertheless a partial success limited to some urban settings only, for the bulk of rural population is quite resistant to this version of Islam.

Although Bektashis are not orthodox Shiites, Iran is very active in supporting them. A good example of promoting Iranian political and diplomatic objectives is the creation of the influential Saadi Shirazi Foundation. In practice, according to some scholars,<sup>108</sup> the foundation is believed to be a cover for the Iranian secret services, even though the official purpose is to promote Persian culture and Islamic values. The single aim of the impressive translation and publication programmes and other research and cultural activities is to link Muslims in Albania to Iran. Under the pretext of reviving 'the great Islamic culture that Albania has inherited', Iranians finance all sorts of historical and sociological research aimed at demonstrating that Albania is part of the Islamic world. In a way, this policy helps to revive the particular Ottoman and Oriental legacy in Albania. Cultural production of this kind is mostly ideological, however, aimed among other things at showing that Albanian nationalism and Islam are not contradictory insofar as the nationalist ideology is believed to be grounded in the Bektashi and other tolerant traditions of progressivist Islam.

In turn, such a mystification allows Iranians to seize the opportunity of bringing the Bektashis back to the Shiite flock

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<sup>108</sup>(Lakshman-Lepain 2002)

and hardening the orthodox line of Bektashism. Among other things, a significant number of new Albanian Bektashi dervishes are also sent to Iran at the Theological Faculty of the Holy City of Qom for religious training. It is probable that when they return to Albania they will be much closer to Iranian Shiism than Bektashism ever was.

Once again specialists may touch upon these recent conflictual developments within Bektashism. After the 6<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Albanian Bektashis in Tīrana, for instance, growing opposition is noticed among the remaining Bektashis in Macedonia and Kosova as well as immigrant Bektashi communities in Western Europe and overseas against Arch-grandfather Reshat Bardhi in Tirana. Yet, quite simplistically, there is no other explanation offered than a supposed weakness of the current leader of the Bektashis, who unlike his energetic predecessors, seems to be only “an old man with little education” who “lacks the vision necessary for the movement’s survival”.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>109</sup>(Lakshman-Lepain 2002: 54)

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

The establishment of dervish orders can be considered as the organized form of mysticism, and the psychological affinity between mysticism and pantheism, related as much to dualist and gnostic conceptions as to the Shiite devotion to Ali has been pointed out. This is doubtless justified, but at the very starting moment of organization and systematization, there must be whether a split into different sects or a beginning to create a new separate orthodoxy of its own.<sup>110</sup> The moment of crisis would have come at that point, for mysticism does not allow itself to be pressed into a system originating in rational considerations. The contrast of any mysticism to its own orthodoxy, as far as it exists, as it does in the case of Bektashism, lies in the fact that mysticism is always based on a feeling of pantheistic wholeness, while any monotheism is the result of intellectual thought. The all-embracing sentiment relies on itself, while monotheism and any theism are the result of a search for the respective causes. The development of orthodoxy is aimed precisely to overcome these irreconcilable differences.

The overall model finally turns around a classic point of modern social anthropology that assumes that both culture and the social order are inculcated by the authority to which people have given their subservience and that those favoured by the

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<sup>110</sup> (Kissling 1954: 25)

social order teach often successfully their own validation. An obvious instance would be the way that religious leaders who are in a privileged position on top of the hierarchy tend to profess, and even insist upon, a world-view that maintains that hierarchy. They may teach that they are particularly favoured by God to fulfil that role, claiming that either holy writ or spiritual knowledge ordains, even demands, their assuming a dominant position.

Basically, translated in sociological terms, this means that the rigid, intolerant and authoritarian attitudes of the local religious dignitaries, as well as the formalism and dogmatism prevailing in all fields, religious or political, simply express the haunting fear that they will lose their power. Within the political system, as Levtzion has argued for other contexts,<sup>111</sup> Islam and religious ideology are by no means abstract concepts, but represent different social groups competing to extend their influence over political authority. A religious leader might react first against established authority out of personal or factional interest or ambition, or he might be a channel for the expression of social discontents. Yet very soon leaders of heterodox movements will often aspire to political power. Normally, religious leaders from local hagiocracies sooner or later will evolve into pillars of the established order and the society at large.

Every Church, having been a sect itself at its beginnings, that is, a movement of social and religious protest breaking with society at large, ends up being reconciled with the latter. As Bryan Wilson has argued, the first stage of this process normally occurs at the second generation of members. Characteristically, there is a loss of the original spontaneity in all fields, the creation of professional ministries, the adoption of oaths, a

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<sup>111</sup> (Levtzion 1979: 213)

positive attitude toward society at large and the acceptance of pluralism. This transformation parallels the access of members of the group to respectable social status, whereas the sects, originally very much in reaction against society at large, soon become *established* when the second generation takes the reins, even though there will always be a *first* generation to be recruited in a sect.<sup>112</sup>

Protest may come within a recognized religious group and establish an *ecclesiola in Ecclesia*, a religious "way", *collegium pietatis*, characterized by mysticism as in the case of early Bektashism. But it may also lead to dissidence and factionalism, in which case we often observe the formation of ecclesiastic bodies of the Church type, or of semi-ecclesiastic bodies such as autonomic Churches or, again, of new sects to which ecclesiastic and theological terminology will preferably refer as either schism or heresy, and recent political discourse as fundamentalism.

In conclusion, I believe we must put the dialectics of development of Bektashism into the same perspective as the reformist vision of all other 'revived forms of Islam',<sup>113</sup> whose prime ideal is the integration of religious and political authority, which implies an activist political concept of Islam. The active commitment comes to destroy corrupt versions of Islam and bring into being an ideal Muslim community modelled on the example of the Prophet. Such an ideal may spread first in religious circles, but it makes soon a wide social impact, the reformers being particularly effective in organizing religious movements in transition societies. Many examples of reformist movements in lineage or tribal societies the world over did lead

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<sup>112</sup> (Wilson 1990)

<sup>113</sup>(Voll 1994)

this way to the formation of states dedicated to the integration of political and religious authority.<sup>114</sup> Similarly, the contemporary Islamic revival, the so-called fundamentalist movements are inspired by the vision of a prophetic community. They attempt to return to the principles of Islamic morality and to a renewal of personal commitment to the symbolic foundations of Islam. They commonly aim to control the state and to use the power of the state to enforce what is believed to be the true Islam.

Still, the constant tension that subsists between orthodoxy and mystical movements is not exclusive to Islam. The polemic against sects and heterodox religious movements is primarily and essentially expressed in terms of conflict on doctrinal grounds. If the sociological perspective points to the economic and social roots of religious movements, it tends to underestimate the importance of the religious structure itself. Up to now, the ideological and doctrinal field has been left exclusively in the hands of theologians, occasionally disputed by Orientalist and Medievalist historians. I have discussed elsewhere the particular affinity that sociologists and anthropologists have always shown between new religious movements and social, cultural and national crisis movements, as well as the extent to which religious ideas must be regarded either as a justification for liberationist movements or as an ideology justifying domination.<sup>115</sup> The analysis of doctrinal-ideological and structural-organizational characteristics of Bektashism in Albanian context that I presented here, is an illustrative suggestion that it is precisely on these structural and ideological grounds that such a dialectical correlation may be correctly addressed.

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<sup>114</sup> (Evans-Pritchard 1949; Geertz 1960; Peacock 1978)

<sup>115</sup> (Doja 2000a: 677-679)

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