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Prinz-Eugen- Straße 8 – 10
1040 Wien
Fax: 01/ 51581 - 6450
E-Mail: sozialanthropologie@oeaw.ac.at

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**Giving Ottoman otherness a local flavor:
the Bektashi Order of Dervishes in contemporary Albania**

Mentor Mustafa

Department of Anthropology
Boston University
232 Bay State Road #101
Boston, Massachusetts 02215 U.S.A.
mentor@bu.edu

Introduction

This paper joins the literature concerned with Ottoman legacies in Europe by considering the case of Bektashiyya, a Sufi order of Islam and a system of beliefs and practices that originated with Haxhi Bektash Veli – the 13th century spiritual leader and the *pir*¹ founder of the Order. The origins of the founder of the Order are in the regions of northwestern Iran, central Anatolia where he devoted most of his teachings. It is here in the 15th and 16th centuries that Bektashiyya emerged as a highly organized Sufi Order and certainly one of the most influential dervish Orders established in the Balkans by the Ottoman rule (Norton 2001). By the 17th century we have a presence of Bektashi *teqes* (Sufi convents or lodges) and *babas* and dervishes serving local communities and travelers throughout much of the southern Balkans. Moreover, it is in Albania where the Bektashi continue to have a presence as the third largest religious community after Sunni Muslims and Christians (Albanian Orthodox and Catholics). Ottoman legacy, in this context includes the historical contributions to the religious landscape, namely the emergence of a predominantly Muslim character of Albanian religiosity, which was shaped during the prolonged contact under the Ottoman influence in Albania and in the neighboring Albanian populated territories, most notably in Kosovo but also in Macedonia.

The following account suggests that we find ‘Ottoman legacy’ not simply as ‘the other’ in southeastern Europe, but rather as a highly localized or even ‘nativized other’. In this view, Albanian Bektashi discourses present Bektashiyya as highly congruent with Albanian culture. To accounts of Ottoman legacies in Europe, the historical and socio-anthropological materials that follow relate to processes of cultural diffusion and models dealing with dynamics between

¹ Here I am adopting proper Albanian for honorifics and religious terminology, but will offer also Turkish equivalents of selected terms whenever possible.

centers and peripheries, cores and margins as well as perspectives on local and global or national or transnational contexts. The Bektashi of Albania as a case in point suggests that the 'other' is localized through cross-fertilization between socio-cultural and religious imports and native cultural milieu. Ottoman legacy in southeastern Europe is indeed a legitimate area of inquiry with evident theoretical implications. In this case we find Bektashiyya in Albania not only as local tradition, but sometimes also without apparent traces of its originating source in central Anatolia.

'Ottoman legacy' here follows Roth (1998: 220) and is broadly defined as the imprint left by prolonged exposure to foreign domination or the part of the Ottoman culture that remains in Albania and elsewhere in eastern Europe. Without delving into the theoretical discussion of 'Ottoman' as a unified category, for our purposes here we discuss Bektashiyya as an element of Ottoman culture, and observe its contemporary characteristics in our search for that which remains from a historical past. Subsequently, this study takes note of the call for a search for Ottoman legacy in the 'invisible' domain and in 'value systems', indeed in the slow adaptations and syncretism that characterizes them (Roth 1998: 231). The study also relates to Todorova's (1996: 54) central problem about Ottoman legacy, the problem of cultural continuity or break and subsequent questions about the areas of influence and the extent to which there is Ottoman legacy in contemporary contexts. The following is an account of the processes of the production and the reproduction of localness as they are encountered in the historical past but also in the ethnographic present of Bektashiyya.

Methodology

My own training in Anthropology aspires to Fredrik Barth's contributions to methodology in anthropology, with an emphasis on the studies of ritual and religion that emphasizes an *in-situ* engagement and application of the ethnographic method (see especially Barth 1993, but also 1961, 1975). The bottom up approach to conducting fieldwork gives the investigator a liberty of not having to commit to a particular theory *a priori*. It invites anthropologists to strive instead, and find significance in the deployment of explanatory models about social and cultural phenomena. This methodological approach highlights above all the usefulness of heuristic design in the analysis of materials collected through ethnographic research and participant observation. Ethnographic materials collected in this manner are offered here in an effort to learn something more about Bektashiyya.

The manner in which I conduct fieldwork revolves around the necessity of 'being there,' with 'there' broadly defined as a place or space occupied by the community of choice. The practice of conducting fieldwork depends on learning about a particular community from formal as well as less than formal ethnographic encounters in everyday situations with members of the community under study. The results of participant observation are supplemented by the collection of data from semi-structured and guided interviews with culturally competent interlocutors. For this study, which is part of ongoing dissertation

research and nine months of ethnographic fieldwork in 2007, I conducted structured interviews where interviewees answered a series of questions about the Bektashi system of beliefs and practices. The answers were later compiled and analyzed for consistent sentiments and understandings especially in regards to discourses of localized otherness - our matter at hand.

Among others, one line of inquiry that I was interested to follow was to see if interviewees were able to indicate a way to sort various essential elements of Bektashism or Bektashi practices and discourses and, furthermore, if they could explicate the relation of these to popular Albanian culture and everyday life. Next to the demographic sphere, popular culture in particular has been separated from other spheres such as the economic and political, as areas that have not previously experienced a break with Ottoman legacy (Todorova 1996: 69). Corresponding research questions behind these inquiries were employed to discern the possibility for there being discursive elements from the corpus of Bektashi beliefs or practices isolated from Albanian culture that are either in contradiction with or not a part of the Bektashi milieu or from their experiential pool and knowledge. My efforts with this line of questioning have not provided any apparent incongruence between Bektashiyya as it is found in contemporary Albania and mainstream and religiously diverse Albanian culture. Respondents have not been able to identify any antagonisms between the characteristics of the Albanian cultural landscape and its Bektashi variant.

Another way to solicit interlocutor input about the issue of localized otherness is to seek their views on the nature of the relationship between Albanianism and Bektashism. Follow up interview questions were designed to see if and how the Bektashi respondents differentiate between these two different identities - namely national identity as Albanian and religious identity as Bektashi - if indeed they differentiate between the two of them at all. One answer best summarizes the plurality of responses to these inquiries as follows: "*për Zotin* [by God], when I think of Bektashism I have *only* Albanians in mind, I don't know that there are *others* [i.e., non-Albanians, or foreigners] who are Bektashi". The emphasis of this statement is in conceptualizing Bektashism, a belief system that originated in central Anatolia, as inherently and exclusively Albanian. Indeed this quote speaks most strongly for Bektashiyya as the localized other and it is thus the point of departure for this study.

As a system of beliefs Bektashi presents itself as a localized phenomenon despite its historical origins outside of the Balkan peninsula. This account is a contextualized perspective about a localized encounter with Ottoman legacy in southeastern Europe. Other perspectives on Ottoman legacies have been highlighted in the Balkans and are organized around themes of cultural survivals (Crowfoot 1900); the 'commodification of otherness' (Blumi 1998); relations between Muslims and non-Muslim others, namely as an 'affirmation of Muslim-Christian unity' (Trix 1995); literary heritage or legacy as Elsie (1992) notes in his analysis of Albanian literature in the Moslem tradition among others; and historical figures such as the controversial figure of Ali Pasha of Ioannina (Arafat 1987; Fleming 1999). Let us now see how the localizing of otherness is found in historical and ethnographic encounters with Bektashiyya and add to available

accounts that document Ottoman legacy in popular culture and the socio-cultural spheres of religious beliefs and practices.

A brief history of Bektashiyya

Sufism or *tasawwuf* made it to the Balkans via Turkey and the Caucasus and its origins are in Persian mysticism (Norris 1993: 82). Bektashiyya is a system of beliefs and ritual practices that originated in central Anatolia. Although the origins of the Bektashi Order are obscure and our knowledge of its history is fragmentary (de Jong 1986 and references therein), we may attempt to briefly outline some elements of the history of the order that most closely align with our purposes here. Since the origins of the founder of the Order are in Horasan (Khurāsān) of northwestern Iran, Bektashi origins are also closely tied to Persian mysticism. A mystic who lived from approximately 1248 to 1337 (Birge 1937) and a contemporary with Rumi, Haxhi Bektash Veli is known in local discourses to have performed a 40 year-long pilgrimage to the major religious sites of the Near East after which time he synthesized this knowledge into the corpus of Bektashi beliefs that were passed onto his disciples. Bektashi beliefs in the transmigration of the soul, the use of candles and the worshipping of tombs and sacred places are often attributed to syncretic borrowings from Buddhism, Judaism, and Christianity to which the spiritual founder of the Order may have been exposed to during the time that led up to the emergence of his teachings.

The hagiography of the founder of the Order, himself a descendant of the prophetic line via Imam Xhafer Sadik (Jafar Sadik), is one explanation for a tendency towards a syncretistic belief system and ritual practice. The history of the Order after the activity of the founder offers another line of evidence for the prevalence of syncretic beliefs and practices as well as the tendency for Bektashiyya to embed itself within local contexts. Syncretism fits a larger pattern of social and cultural interaction between the people of the Balkans and Ottomans to such an extent that popular Islam in the Balkans became strikingly different from more conservative Islam found elsewhere in the Muslim World (i.e. Inalick 1996: 24, Hasluck 2000, but see also Popovic 1997:186 for an opposing view). Norris (1993: 88) characterizes Bektashiyya as an “eclectic and syncretic system, heterogeneous and sometimes even incoherent, a kind of conglomerate of Muslim esotericism, of indigenous beliefs . . . with an infiltration of diverse schismatic forms of Christianity and philosophical and Sufi ideas”. An approach committed even more strongly to a fundamentally “all-encompassing syncretism” (Doja 2006: 85) links the lack of a well defined theology to a noted flexibility in accommodating local influence.

The historical trajectory of the order necessarily starts with the founder whose tomb is still venerated and visited by many pilgrims. As far as historical sources indicate, the legacy of Haxhi Bektash Veli was to leave behind a corpus of knowledge which his disciples would spread during a relatively unchecked growth of the order. Until the 1500s, this growth appears to be closely linked to the particularities of individual mystics and the followers of Haxhi Bektash who each in their own ways emphasized a diversity of lessons from the Bektashi

doctrine. A hierarchy of learning based on marked degrees of spiritual attainment is noted as a pervasive characteristic of Bektashiyya. Given that the transmission of spiritual knowledge is heavily dependent on the master disciple relationship, different masters chose to focus their teachings in particular doctrines and their followers often display a highly diverse religious life. Up to the activities of the second founder of the order, we can characterize the earliest stages of Bektashiyya from the time of Haxhi Bektash Veli to the early 1500s as a diverse system of beliefs and practices by comparison to the more standardized forms that emerged in the 16th and 17th centuries.

In the 1500s, Ballëm Sultan (Bālim Sultān), also known as the second *pir* founder of the Order gave a standard form to Bektashiyya. By standardization we mean the attempt to give ritual, dress, and belief system a uniform outlook. This second founder of the Order is known to have utilized what was remembered of Haxhi Bektash Veli and his disciples and to re-establish celibacy and the use of candles (Birge 1937). Next to Haxhi Bektash Veli, he is one of the most prominent spiritual leaders of Bektashiyya. At the beginning of 16th century under Safavid influence Bektashism adopted a new and strongly Shiite and Sufi character (Clayer 1997: 115) which was later to incorporate other elements (Birge 1994; de Jong 1989).

From the early 1500s until the 1830's Bektashiyya experiences a growth seen in the establishments of *teqes* in vast areas of the Ottoman Empire, especially in the Anatolian Plateau and in the southern Balkans (Mèlikoff 1998). This may be called the Golden Era of Bektashism, a growth and influence that Bektashism has yet to re-experience. This was largely due to an entrenchment of Bektashi *babas* and dervishes at the periphery of the expanding Ottoman Empire through close links with Janissaries, the elite guards of the Empire (*yeniçeri*). The corps of the Janissary was first established in the middle of the fourteenth century with its first battle being the conquest of Adrianople in 1362 (Gross 1970) followed by their first major battle against the Karamanian Turks at Konya in 1389 (Nicolle 1995: 26). It was a standing army and one of the first disciplined corps of infantry that was composed initially from captives of war such as young, non-Muslim boys most of which were taken from Byzantine territories as ransom or as an obligation of the *Devşirme* system that often required 1 out of 5 boys for every 40 households in some Slav and Albanian areas of the empire (Nicolle 1995: 8) as a blood tax. The captives were later transformed into soldiers through disciplined training in military arts. Later this included also non-Turkish volunteers who, like many Albanians who served as Janissaries, found financial enticements that this kind of military service promised. In 1591, the head of the Janissaries was made an honorary colonel of the Corps while eight Bektashi dervishes were appointed to the 99th *orta* (battalion) to perform duties similar to those of an army chaplain (Norton 2001: 183). From that moment onward the Bektashi maintained a reputation as the Chaplains of the Janissaries (Birge 1937)². Wherever the

² Faroqhi (1995: 21) disputes the claim for a direct causal relation between the closing down of Bektashi *teqes* in 1826 and the dismantling of the Janissaries corps. In his view, the Order's main influence was in rural Anatolia and Rumelia where the Janissaries were of marginal importance. Other accounts highlight the fact that the official connection of the Bektashi with the Janissaries corresponds with a period of their

troops were, there were also the dervishes on their side providing religious service to the army. Favoring a full time commitment to the corps, the Janissaries were celibate and continued their virtually invincible military supremacy for some three centuries until their dismantling by Mahmut II who simultaneously outlawed the Bektashi Order in 1826 (Goodwin 2006). With the strengthening of the elite forces, the Janissaries became a threat to the Ottoman Porte. When the Porte decided to bring down the Janissaries, together with them went also the Bektashi. It was at this unprecedented event that the Bektashi Order suffered their first great decline and a subsequent retreat to underground existence and eventual dependence on secrecy.

For the next forty years, according to travelers' accounts, there were no Bektashi to be seen anywhere nor were the *teqes* open for visitors. With this organized coercion against the Order we see the first wave of retreats from the heart of the Ottoman Empire to its peripheral regions. With many Bektashi clerics practicing *takiye* or dissimulation and going into hiding, we have an influx of the Bektashi into the Balkans. After some 40 years of absence from the public space, the Bektashi are reported to have reappeared again (Birge 1937). This documented reappearance underlines their ability for underground survival and proclivity towards secrecy. At the very least, this pressured the Bektashi to adopt ways that allow them to maintain religious identities and commitments to the Order despite a religiously hostile public sphere. It is a way of preserving the religious community that, as it will be discussed in more detail below, is also linked to the processes of producing localness.

In 1924, the Order suffered another set-back in with the founding of the Turkish Republic and the ban of the Sufi Orders – with the possible exception of Mevleviyya - and the closing of their lodges. At present, some Bektashi lodges in Turkey are operated as museums and are not what they were originally intended for, i.e. *teqes* where visitors and travelers may be hosted by *babas* and dervishes as one finds them in present-day Albania. In 1929, the Bektashi leadership transferred from Haçī Bektash Köy in the area of Nehşevir of Central Anatolia to the capital of Albania, on the eastern hilly outskirts of Tirana. The influential Baba Xhemal Turku, himself from Turkey, served at the *teqe* of Elbasan in central Albania while Sali Niyazi Dede served as the head of the Order on the grounds of what continues to be the *de facto* World Headquarters of the Bektashi Order of Dervishes. Known to Albanians as the *Kryegjyshata Botërore Bektashiane*, this main *teqe* holds the seat of the leadership for at least the Albanian Bektashi of Albania, Kosova, and Macedonia. The historical seat of the Order in Haçī Bektash Köy of Turkey retains a symbolic and spiritual appeal to the Albanian Bektashi. This site is currently operated as a public museum and is still sought after by Bektashi pilgrims who converge every month of August for religious and cultural activities.

As one of the main *teqes* visited by the author, *Kryegjyshata* plays several important roles at present. The Headquarters shelters the administrative

decline and that their connection was not strong enough to affect their conduct (Gibb and Bowen 1950: 66). Still other's (Palmer 1953) questions the legendary belief that the origin of Janissaries coincided with Haxhi Bektash, the founder of the Bektashi Order (Palmer 1953).

apparatus of the Order and their own press, *Urtësia Bektashiane* or Bektashi Wisdom which documents and disseminates a diverse body of literature composed of 1) translations of works related to Bektashiyya as well as 2) locally produced literary output relating to the activities of the Order on the national and transnational spheres of life. Notably, the *pir evi* or main lodge is a pilgrimage destination of many Bektashis in central Anatolia prior to its closure as a religious institution in 1924 was populated with dervishes and *babas* of Albanian descent to a point that (Norris 1993: 92) rightly asks: “what are these Albanians doing, away over in Central Asia Minor”? By virtue of a historical preoccupation with welfare and migrant labor, Albanians during the Ottoman era found military service in the ranks of Janissaries a worthy labor and in so doing were exposed to Bektashiyya quite early, perhaps as early as the 14th century.

A political history of Albanian Bektashi in the 19th century is dominated by the national cause. The National Awakening period (1878-1912) in Albania was coupled also with the movement to standardize the Albanian language and a debate to utilize the Latin-based alphabet instead of the other variants that had been used up until its standardization such as Arabic, Persian, and Greek alphabets. Having always displayed a particular emphasis to the ideals of nationhood as has been documented in Bektashi support of the Young Turks (Ramsaur 1942), southern Albanian Bektashi *teges* and dervishes played an important role in the propagation of the Albanian language and the quest for Albania’s independence that finally transpired in 1912 (Poulton 2000; Kressing 2007). Of relevance is especially the works of Naim Frashëri (esp. 1896) who tried whenever he could to introduce Albanian equivalents to the Bektashi degrees of initiation. The word ‘dervish’, for example, in *Fletorja e Bekashinjvet* (Notebook of the Bektashi) was replaced by the word *varfë* (lit. in Albanian, poor) and for *dede* its Albanian equivalent *gjysh* or grandfather. These are examples of how Albanians in their National Awakening period tried to give Bektashism a local flavor. For the Bektashis who are closely tied to local culture for reasons that will become apparent in the sections that follow, this was an important movement.

The history of Bektashiyya in communist Albania (1945-1991) is much like the rest of the religious communities in the country. They were all affected by the 1967 constitutional proclamation that makes Albania the first ever officially atheist country in the world. The abolishment of all the religions including the four main officially recognized as the traditional religions of Albania: Bektashis, Albanian Christians of Orthodox and Catholic creeds, and Sunni Muslims. This meant the closing and demolishment of centers, the confiscation of their property, imposing hard labor upon religious leaders, imprisonment and executions of the clergy and sometimes also their relatives coupled with an ongoing propaganda that spoke heavily against religion by upholding the communist view that ‘religion is the opium of the people.’ Despite this organized coercion against religion, interview data and inquiries into religious life in communist Albania documented secretive practice in the private sphere and the preservation of an ideology and reverence towards sacred places which were commemorated as such by secretly leaving coins as offerings and by illegally lighting candles (Mustafa 2008).

In 1990s, in the post-communist revivalist phase, we have the return of religion to the public sphere. At present we are dealing with a revivalist stage where we now see an organized Bektashi community whose presence and activities are quite visible in the public sphere. What I am exploring here is the reasons why Ottoman otherness manifests a strong tendency towards a localized flavor. In addition to the documentation of 'localized otherness,' I explore also the processes of localizing the other and contextualize these with ethnographic observations from contemporary Albania.

The Bektashi Order of Dervishes in Albania

Around the world and by virtue of the history of the Order that was just outlined, the Bektashi are organized around six grand-fatherhoods (*gjyshata*). This mirrors the way of their regional and administrative organization in Ottoman times, and it is organized in a similar way in Albania today with six administrative regions that include also Bektashi lodges in Macedonia, and Kosovo. Questions of legitimacy of the 'world headquarter' as the leading and administrative center are about the lack of obvious links to Bektashi areas outside of the Balkans. In the Balkans, for example, the Ottoman grand-fatherhood was the lodge of Dimoteka. The Durballi Sulltan lodge is another influential lodge in the Larisa region of Greece. While the numbers that follow are to be taken with a grain of salt, we can say that there are about 423 Bektashi sites around the world with most of them being in the heartland of central Anatolia but a good number of them (256 *teqes* and *tyrbe* sites) are under the administrative umbrella of the headquarters in Tirana.

We may also state that Albania already is or at the very least it is becoming the heartland of Bektashiyya. Presently religion in Albania is a legitimate activity and the right of all citizens in Albania while in Turkey we have an underground presence of Bektashi religious life with their lodges no longer playing their traditional roles in educating and training dervishes. A Bektashi dervish, known now as Baba Rexhebi, left Albania during the communist take over in 1945, traveled to Egypt where he was in contact with Bektashi clerics, and finally settled in Taylor, Michigan where his *tyrbe* (saintly shrine) is presently located. During the time of communist abolishment of religion in Albania, this was the only Bektashi *teqe* that remained opened. Baba Rexhebi was well versed in the traditional languages of Bektashism (Arabic, Persian, and Turkish). His writings, namely *Misticizma dhe Bektashizma* (1970) and *Hadikaja* (1997) are the most valuable resources for the revival of Bektashism today in Albania.

By comparison to other religious communities whose centers outside of Albania continued their educational activities, for the Bektashi the prolonged disruption of religious life from 1967-1991 was more extreme especially given the fact that religious knowledge in the Bektashi setting is orally transmitted via the fundamental master-disciple relationship. Knowledge loss incurred from many decades of religiously abolitionist state oriented coercion is presented as drastic and perhaps irreparable for present day Bektashis in Albania and, to some extent, also in Turkey. The transmission of religious knowledge in this context

depends on one-on-one learning relationship, a *murshid* (master, or spiritual leader) and a *talib* (disciple or student). The prolonged lack of this educational system (cf. Kissling 1954) can amount to a tremendous loss of esoteric knowledge.

If we were to describe the Albanian religious landscape (**Figure 1**), we note that the Bektashi are primarily scattered in the southern parts of Albania which have remained open to migrations eastwards via Macedonia and Greece and thus also in contact with the historical heartland of the Bektashi in Anatolia. The next door neighbors for the Bektashi are Albanian Sunni Muslims and Albanian Christian Orthodox whereas the southernmost areas of Albania are populated by a small Greek Orthodox minority and throughout Greece during the Ottoman period Albanian Bektashi have been in ongoing interactions with the Greek Orthodox Christians. Interactions with Albanian Catholic communities are limited primarily due to their situation in northern-most areas of Albania in more or less homogenous rural settlements. We exclude here central Albania and the northern city of Shkodra where the Bektashi communities are in close contact with Sunni Muslims and Albanian Orthodox and Catholics. The southern grandfatherhood of Gjirokastër enlists most *teqes* and *tyrbes* in Albania. There are a total of 152 Bektashi sites in Albania along with the headquarters in Tirana. There are also 2 independent religious sites in Albania, bringing the grand total to some 154 religious sites registered with the state *Komiteti Shtetëror i Kulteve* (State Committee of Cults) which oversees the contact between religious communities and the Albanian state. Out of these some 20 *teqes* have been able to re-open their doors with almost that many Bektashi *babas* and dervishes leading local communities centered on the Bektashi lodge.

The production of localness

Let us now go into some ethnographic materials in sorting out the otherness/local dichotomy. To begin we may note that Bektashi as a community of believers is not only locally orientated but more importantly it is a community that is locally committed. The local belief is that if one is not able to look after one's self, to look after matters that concern one at home, than one may not be able to be much good elsewhere. In local terms, this means that the Bektashi must first and foremost look after local communities. With local community we mean all the visitors at the lodge and here the Bektashi include also distant visitors who by virtue of proximity accomplished by their travel to the *teqe* receive the same hospitality and care as many other visitors who frequent Bektashi centers. Local beliefs hold that at any one point, all people who are found under the roof of any particular lodge are under its protection with *baba* being directly responsible for their well-being.

Localness in discourses of Bektashiyya is framed around notions of identity, with identity framed around the notion of belonging. Bektashi followers will identify with a particular lodge. They may ask one another: are you of such lodge? Or, to which *teqe* do you belong? The reply is often stated as 'I am of such lodge'. Any particular lodge is committed to serve its most immediate

community with community demarcated as people within a locality who have in various degrees some kind of relation, formal or informal, with their local lodge. Belonging in this manner, implies also obligations and these are also locally oriented. Initiated members within each *teqe* are required to offer their time and help, both financially and in terms of manual labor, towards their local lodge. These obligations are necessary for initiated members to spend necessary time around the *teqe* for it is there where they may receive the guidance they need to improve in the spiritual path. It is a religious duty that cements local loyalties and commitments to the issues and concerns that occupy members' respective communities.

Why do people visit Bektashi *teqes*? While the incentives to visit the lodge are multiple and diverse, it appears that most visitors to the lodge seek some kind of cure for sicknesses through herbal remedies or miraculous interventions via charms provided by *babas* and sometimes also dervishes. Most of the narratives offered by regular visitors are about cures for sicknesses that they could not find elsewhere, including here also ineffective interventions by hospitals and medical doctors. Most such cases included couples that have been unable to conceive despite their desire to do so. The Bektashi clerics are known to have secret formulas for these cases and other medical conditions that are not part of the modern medical enterprise. Other visitors approach the lodge and the *baba* residing there for conflict resolution, and I encountered many instances of feuding relations and other conflicts (Mustafa and Young 2008) where the intervention of the Bektashi cleric was accepted as final by virtue of their spiritual authority and the conflicts in question considered closed as a result. The killing of another human being in Bektashiyya is one thing that may not be forgiven by the Bektashi for one belief holds that human beings are inherently *mëkatar* or sinful. Human life is considered sacred for in every one of us there is a reflection of God and taking human life away is a grave sin beyond Bektashi repair.

The Bektashi lodge makes itself useful to the community it serves by redistributing the wealth that it attains through donations by its visitors or via pastoral and agricultural yields from the lands it owns. During the First World War, for example, a Bektashi cleric dissolved what the *teqe* owned, i.e. livestock and monetary wealth that was used to purchase food and to help the people who were hiding in the mountains. In these regards, the *teqe* acts as an institution that accumulates wealth through donations which at times of need it may also redistribute back to the community. Other ways of redistribution have to do with *teqe*'s hosting of visitors. Historically the lodges are known to provide food and shelter to travelers without an expected payment or obligation giving the Bektashi a reputation as the "providers of many things" (Faroqhi 1997: 168) and the Bektashi *teqe* a kind of economic and social position inherited from the Ottoman past (Faroqhi 1976).

Let us now highlight the parts of Albanian culture that are also part of the Bektashi way of life. With respect to the elderly, if one were to focus on authority or hierarchy within the Albanian household it would always be the elderly that would be on top of that hierarchy for the elderly have a special place within Albanian society. Amongst the Bektashi it is the very same authority of the

elderly that is highlighted as spiritual hierarchy. Within a group of dervishes, the one who is initiated earliest enjoys the benefits of respect and authority that one would normally enjoy for being older. The dervishes consider their initiation as their birthday that matters most and the ones who have a longer history into the ranks of the initiated into the order sit closer to the *baba* and occupy the more honorable seats during the ritualistic gatherings of the order.

Even the mannerisms and body etiquette in greeting the Bektashi elderly are not unlike ways of greeting an elderly person in Albania. For example, young children in rural Albania may kiss the hand of the elderly and touch it with their forehead and this is seen as a way to accept their *uratë* (grace). Interestingly, in communist Albania this was not at all taught in a religious context, but rather as a way to greet the elderly. The practice of greeting the Bektashi clerics is the same as one available in the popular sphere but coupled with the dimensions of charismatic leadership. The Bektashi *baba* is the equivalent of the Sufi *sheik*. 'Baba' means father in Albania, and as a father is the leader of his household but he is the *baba* the leader of his *teqe*. He is a *baba* because he is able to perform miracles such as curing illnesses and a spiritual leader to the initiates who need his guidance in their arduous spiritual undertaking.

We may further our discussion of the fictive terms of kinship within the Bektashi lodge and of the community or the brotherhood. In drawing parallels with the broader kinship terminology in Albania, we note that *gjysh* translates into grandfather. For the Bektashi, *gjysh* oversees the leadership activities of several *babas*, and the council of the grandfathers is headed by the *dede* or head grandfather. If two people are initiated at the same time, they could be two males or two females, if they are initiated at the same time they become '*vëllezër haku*' or *hak* brothers, *hak* being the absolute truth and related to one of the four gateways of knowledge that are central to Bektashi cosmology, namely, *sharia*, *tariqa*, *marifa* and *hakikat*. Those who are initiated by the same *baba* may not marry amongst one another for it would be like marrying within the same descent group which would violate the preference for pronounced exogamy in the Albanian kinship system (Dojaka 1974). As the leader of the *teqe*, a *baba* has exclusive authority of what happens within the *teqe*. Everyday life at a lodge revolves around the *baba* and his dervishes: *baba* oversees the daily necessities of the lodge such as food and shelter for guests, the communication with outsiders, and looking over other neighboring *teqes* if necessary. He is not unlike the head of an Albanian household in the Albanian society. *Baba* is sometimes referred to as the shepherd of the flock for he is the head of his family of initiates. As the leading elderly he is also responsible for the well being of the family and often finds himself intervening on behalf of the members of the community in dealing with the society at large.

Another way to approach the issue of the localized other is by further looking into some characteristics of Bektashiyya and the degree to which religious practice is localized. What aspects of the tradition best support the thesis of locality? Most immediately, in terms of interpersonal relations within Bektashiyya as a religious community, we note approachability. Bektashi *babas* and dervishes are very approachable in the eyes of the communities that

surround them. Among other things, approachability facilitates and propagates learning. Someone may not learn as much from leaders of the community who are not approachable members. Bektashism is Sufism, Islamic mysticism, and as such it is above all a knowledge-driven system and a cosmology centered on approaching and subsisting in God. Knowledge, therefore, and this may be sacred or practical knowledge, is central to this world view. Without an environment that facilitates learning of esoteric knowledge, we may find it hard to experience Islamic mysticism as it is found in the contemporary world.

The historical pattern of Bektashiyya documents a trajectory where the community retrieved from the public sphere and depended more heavily in the practice of secrecy by limiting the sharing of the sacred corpus of Bektashi knowledge only to the initiates. The initiates are further divided into a hierarchy marked by initiation into the order or initiation to the first degree by virtue of which initiates become *muhips* or lovers of the way. Another initiation is necessary after a *muhip* has spent some 1001 days in residence and under the guidance of his *murshid* or *baba* in the *tarikah* or the Sufi way. This initiation marks the beginning of *dervish* life as a full time commitment to full time residence at a *teqe* chosen by the *murshid* and the *muhips* learn thereafter mysteries of Bektashiyya. For those who take an oath of celibacy, a special initiation in the *myxhyret* or celibate branch of the Order is performed for those dervishes who remain celibate for the remainder of their lives. For those dervishes who are granted leadership of a *teqe* and its local community, another initiation elevates them to the venerated community of Bektashi *babas*; the community of *babas* recognizes one of their most accomplished members as their leader, *dede* or *kryegjysh*, literally grandfather, who is the spiritual leader of the community. This way Bektashiyya is highly centralized and hierarchical in its social organization. The hierarchy is constructed and maintained through the distribution of sacred knowledge. Indeed authority is often legitimized through claims of knowing Bektashiyya and its innermost mysteries.

The hierarchy of membership may be further outlined as follows:

Ashik (tk. Aşik) – this comprises the vast majority of visitors to the Bektashi *teqes* who are not formally initiated into the Order. Birge (1937) has assigned this to be the first degree of the order since it is a preliminary condition of one still outside the order. Ashiks are interested in Bektashiyya and although not yet initiated, they are a primary source of membership into the Order. Because *ashiks* are members of a circle composed of those seeking initiation, they form a kind of buffer zone against the non-initiates which not only protects the religious community from the outside world, but it also furnishes potential candidates for full membership.

Muhip – this is the second degree of the order. *Muhip* means ‘one who loves’ or ‘an affectionate friend’ and it technically refers to somebody who has passed through the initiation rite of *ikrarayını* (the ceremony of the confession of the faith) or *aynicem* (ceremony of assembly) by taking his/her *nasip* (literally ‘portion’ or ‘share’ and thus ‘fate’), and who is therefore qualified to sit in the formal ceremonies of the order generally known as the rituals of the *mejdani* (tk. *meydan*). *Muhips* live their personal lives outside of *teqe*’s confines but are required to maintain close contacts

with their *teqe*, offer services during celebrations and other *teqe* functions, and remain committed to their advancement in the spiritual path.

Dervish – this is the third degree and requires a full commitment to the religious life and full time residence in a *teqe* under the guidance of the serving *baba*. Through a special initiation ceremony of dedication of body or existence (*vakfi vucut*) the initiate wears the official headdress³ of the order. Although the time requirements may vary, it is often stated that a *muhip* should spend 1001 days in residence and under religious guidance and training prior to being accepted to *dervish*-hood while as much as 10 years are needed for a *dervish* to become a *baba*; the later is a prolonged time with implications for the populating of the Bektashi centers during this initial stage of the reconstitution of Bektashiyya in post-communist Albania. A special ceremony (*mücerret ayını*) may be performed by which a dervish is made a celibate dervish. The celibate branch of the order was re-established by Balim Sultan in the early 1500s and the celibate branch continues onto the present and is held as the more esteemed branch in comparison to the non-celibate variant.

Baba - a *dervish* deemed worthy is elevated to the fourth degree of the order - *baba* (literally ‘father’ in Albanian) - via a special ceremony in which by rank he is the head of a *teqe* and a *murşid* or master to the seekers who ask for instruction and initiation and “a pastor to the wider flock of those in families and among friends who look to the Bektashi *baba* as friend, priest, and advisor.” Babas’ full time residence is the Bektashi *teqe* where he is in charge of the *teqe*’s functions and the instruction of members in various degrees of initiation.

Halife - literally meaning “successor”, like *dede* - *halife* or *gjysh* (literally “grandfather” in Albanian) ordains *babas* and exercises a supervisory relationship over the work of the order in a given district.

Dede - is the highest degree in the Bektashi hierarchy and resides at the International Headquarters of the Bektashi Order of Dervishes in Tirana, Albania. Birge (1937) reports that the *Dede* was appointed to that position by the King of Albania and it remains to be explored how this appointment is now made, who is in charge, and on what grounds they lead.

The spiritual hierarchy or the sacred chain is held together by the master and disciple relationship with each Bektashi cleric having taken the hand of another cleric. This way we may construct a spiritual genealogy that eventually leads us to some of the earliest Bektashi leaders and ultimately to Haxhi Bektash Veli. The founder of the Order is by descent related to the sixth Imam and thus through the Imamate to Imam Ali, Prophet Mohamed and Allah.

Having explored some characteristics of Bektashiyya, let us continue our encounter with a localized other. The furnishings in the Bektashi *teqes* are very

³ The different ranks in the Bektashi spiritual hierarchy are marked by a variety of dresses each specific to a particular rank. *Muhips* wear regular everyday lay-man clothing but may, in addition, keep a *taç*, or headpiece. *Dervishes* and *babas* are often seen in a long plain white dresses called *hırka* and associated with Muhammad’s heavenly journey in which he encountered Ali, the revealer of mystical understanding of the Qur’an, a *taç* or headpiece which is different from that worn by a *baba*, *halife*, and *dede*, both in shape and color; the dress is fasted together with a *kemer* or belt around the waist. While dervishes are covered in plain white clothing, *babas*, *halifes*, and *dedes* often dress in a combination of white and green.

typical to traditional and local Albanian styles. This is seen in tapestry and ornaments around Bektashi *teqes* in culturally and regionally diverse areas of Albania. In the southern city of Gjirokastër the region is known for their characteristic masonry and their architecture in locally available stone. The *teqes* and the *tyrbes* here are built in the very same local style (**Figure 2**). It is significant to note that it was part of the Albanian tradition to bury family members within the confines of family grounds. Until the use of public cemeteries, families had their own burial grounds. Taking care of family burial grounds is a pre-Islamic tradition. The importance of locality has to do with a double attachment to where one lives and where one's ancestors are buried. The Bektashi have this saintly- and often tomb-orientated belief system. As a practice, the veneration of saintly tombs was not a foreign concept to pre-Islamic Albania.

Perhaps the best evidence for a locally-centered world view is the Bektashi motto '*s'ka fe pa atdhe*', there is no faith without country. This is often engraved in *teqe* door-ways and is widely circulated in printed literature (**Figure 3**). Bektashis often cite one of the sayings of the Prophet where he advises his followers look after their countrymen. Bektashis in Albania reason this way: what kind of believer would someone be if they do not love their own country? Other sayings like "*guri i rëndë në vend të vet*", lit. 'a stone weighs heavier in its own place,' exemplify an emphasis on locality and the local contexts. Naim Frashëri, who is hailed as one of the finest writers from the Albanian Bektashi heritage mobilizes his lines in support of a nation-building cause:

'Ku është balta më e ëmbël se mjalta? Në Shqipëri'.

Where is the soil sweeter than honey? In Albania.

The Bektashi use of national symbols is pervasive. The national flag of Albania is found next to the Bektashi flag in every *teqe* and all celebrations and religious functions. Bektashi strongly believe that there is no religion without country and are committed to nationalism and serving their country. At a local level this translates into cultural events and activities for local communities which Bektashi dervishes and *babas* take part in. The widespread candle burning practices exemplify a leniency in practice. There is no highly structured way of performing certain rituals such as the manner of approaching the sacred tombs. Often one finds it difficult to observe two people who perform the same ritual in the same sequence of events. The Bektashi themselves are not too worried about the way rituals are performed but more concerned with their intent. They are more committed to ritualistic sincerity as the fundamental premise of the performative aspects of Bektashiyya. There is almost no apparent and rigid way of being a Bektashi and the ideology allows for such diversity and a hierarchical distribution of knowledge.

Sites like high mountain peaks and caves are often deemed sacred by association with certain Bektashi clerics. Footsteps on cliffs such as that of Sari Salltik (**Figure 5**), and trees such as the one in *Teqeje e Fushëkrujës* where Shememi Baba planted a dry piece of wood out of which a tree later grew are approached as standing miracles associated with Bektashi saints and are revered as sacred. To get to some Bektashi *teqes* may be difficult as they are

more often located on mountain tops and otherwise hard-to-get-to places of rural Albania that are deemed most suitable for monastic life (**Figure 6-9**). The Bektashi think of the *babas* as the shepherds of their flock. There are other elements of ideology that are connected to the pastoral way of life which historically has been the primary preoccupation of rural Albania.

There are other parallels between Bektashiyya and local culture that need some mention. Bektashi place a heavy emphasis on dreams and this is not at all foreign to Albanians especially in southern Albania. Kadare's *Palace of Dreams* (1990) is a novel inspired by Albanians' attachments to dreams and their relevance to how Albanians conduct their daily lives. The emphasis in dreams and revelation in Bektashiyya parallels an existing predisposition towards dreams in Albanian culture. So far it has been difficult to find elements of popular Albanian culture that in opposition to elements that belong specifically to Bektashiyya and vice versa.

In terms of participation to Bektashi rituals and pilgrimages, a good number of those present are not necessarily Bektashi and many taking part are of different faiths including Albanian Catholics and Christian Orthodox. There are a number of them that know a little about Bektashism, but a good number of participants, excluding here those initiated into the ranks of Bektashi, are not participating religiously in any specific way. They may use the festive environment created by Bektashi pilgrimages as cultural events that offer an opportunity to spend a day with relatives who may have returned from their migrant labor in Greece, Italy, or from the Albania's cities where most have settled especially in the post-1990s phase.

It appears from my materials that religious orientation of Albanians is very much folk-oriented in religious beliefs and practices. Existing debates claims that Albanians were never fully Christianized, and never fully Islamized but instead they have preserved a pre-Islamic and perhaps even pre-Christian substratum albeit with a layer of Christianity and Islam. While they adhere to monotheistic faith, in the sub-stratum they may have preserved their folk-oriented tendencies and belief systems. We may add that Islam is an accommodating religion at least judging from Muslim's duties and obligations to their faith. This way, one is required to go to the *hajj* if they have the means and are able to do so. A Bektashi will preferably sacrifice a ram but if unable a more modest *kurban* (sacrifice) may be offered. The belief in evil-eye is one example of the folk substratum and examples of relics that prevent from the evil eye are plentiful within the Bektashi system of beliefs. One may note ram horns hanging on gates of *teqes*, others may be carrying charms (*duva*) with them as a protection from the evil eye and other dangers (**Figure 10**).

The last connection in our survey has to do with singing styles which are very diverse and region-specific. While a small country, Albania is organized along several main ethnic divisions such as northern *geg* and southern *tosk*. Furthermore they are divided regionally between regions with distinct belief systems, dialects, and socio-cultural expressions. Each of these regions has also their own traditional way of singing. Some contrasting styles are the southern polyphonies known as *kënga labe*, or the northern use of a two-string instrument

locally known as *çifteli*. Bektashi spiritual songs or *nefes* are written in local dialects and usually sang in regionally distinct styles. That is, when one goes to a Bektashi religious function in southern Albania, one hears Bektashi *nefes* sang with polyphonies, but at a function in northern Albania one may find the same *nefes* being sung at a much different beat and in a localized northern dialect and with the use of the *çifteli*. By comparison, the Bektashi *nefes* in Anatolia, while diverse in their styles of singing, contain basic rhythmic elements that are unquestionably Bektashi. It may be the marching rhythm or the melancholy related to this lamenting culture which we find expressed in great diversity within singing styles. There appears to be a predisposition to sing to the local melodies and rhythms.

Conclusion

The evidence provided by Doja (2000) from the perspective of identity is relevant in our discussion. The argument rests in the historical evidence that suggests that Albanians mass converted to Islam in the 17th and 18th centuries. This was after some 150-200 years after the Ottoman armies reached the Albanian lands for the first time. Turks arrived in Albania in 1385 as invited guests of a feudal lord of Durrës who needed help against the Balsha family of central Albania (Winnifrith 1992). This early appearance may have been coupled with the proselytizing influence of Bektashi dervishes that predates the pre-Ottoman and early-Ottoman times that were the 'high-water mark of the Ottoman imperial centralization' (Faroqhi 1997: 178). Archival evidence from existing registers the Bektashi of Kruja maintaining a road to the shrine of Sari Salltëk Dede (Sarı Saltık) in 1568 which may be taken as a rough period of the establishment of the Bektashi Order in Albania (Kiel 1997). Even so, we do not see mass conversions into Islam until the late 16th and early 17th century (Skëndi 1980: 151-156, Rizaj 1985) with a visible presence of Bektashi *teqes* and other monuments of the Order belonging to mid to late 17th century. Doja (2000) maintains that Islamization of Albanians must consider ongoing pressures of assimilation by the Christian Orthodox Greek and Slav neighbors and argues that Albanians may have further demarcated their differences with their ethnic Slav and Greek rivals by embracing Islam. While reasons behind the resulting Islamization may be many, scholars generally highlight a slow-paced Islamization that did *not* include forceful conversions during a period characterized by 'tolerant dimensions of cultural pluralism' in the Ottoman Empire (Gawrych 1983; Rizaj 1985). In the anthropological literature from the Balkans has added to topics like syncretism, ambiguous sanctuaries, crypto-Christianity and religious amphibianism (Malcolm 2001, Skëndi 1967; Hasluck 1913).

These views agree with ours here, in that a closer alignment with the 'other' is mobilized in order to serve a local context and the construction of national identities. Occurring during a Balkan-wide quests for national identity to serve national causes during the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire, Albanians may have retained the imports that an experience with the other ultimately offered, and mobilized these together with the available cultural resources. This

account implicates models of heavy-handed Islamization by aligning more closely with an essentially non-assimilative and “multinational” spirit of the Ottoman rule (Poulton 2000: 46). To cite Norris (1993: 239-40), Bektashiyya generally took root ‘peacefully, slowly and without serious opposition’. It supports most closely a slow-paced Islamization. The degree to which Bektashiyya is considered a local cultural resource without an implied regard to its historical origins elsewhere, relates to the broader issues of Islam as a world religion and its interactions with local culture.

It is important to note in closing that religion was not the only source to be utilized towards the national cause. The Albanian language was also mobilized as an essential element of national identity, and one that would make the boundaries even more clear between their encroaching neighbors. More specifically, Bektashiyya is at present conceived as a locally and endemically available cultural resource without attributing to it a connection to its non-local source. Whether or not religion is of significant importance to Albanians in comparison to national identity which appears to be ‘superseding religion’ (Babuna 2000), we may still account for degrees to which religious communities distinguish between local cultural resources and imports. More importantly, we may also account for the degree to which cultural imports still retain their original characteristics in light of a history of cultural diffusion and subsequent incorporations of these within existing cultural milieu – a task that may be pursued for another occasion.

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Figure 1. Bektashi presence in Albania (in green) showing main cities and locations of the World Headquarters of the Bektashi Order of Dervishes in Tirana. 22
Courtesy of the Archives of the Bektashi Headquarters (*Arkiva e Kryegjyshitës Bektashiane*), Tirana.

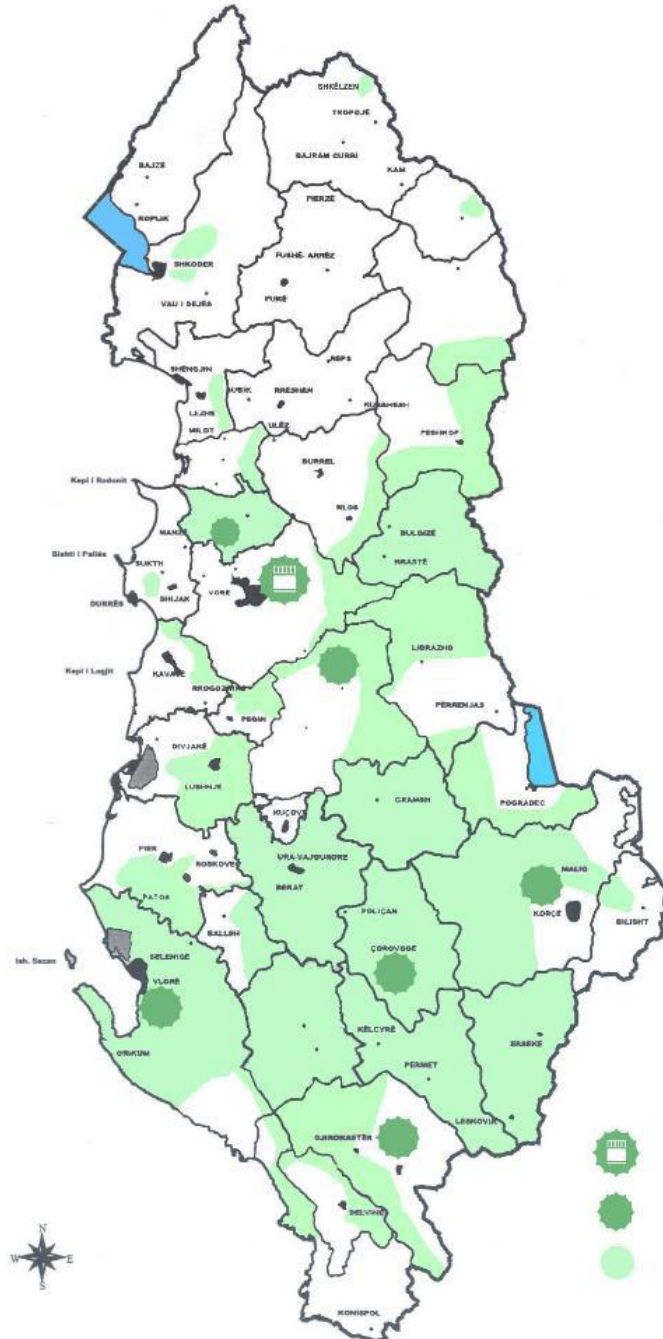


Figure 2. Bektashi *tyrbe* (sacred tombs) that serve as an entrance to *Teqeja e Zallit* in southern Albania; tombs belong to circa 1700s with post-communist reconstructions visible on the left structure. 23



Figure 3. Gateway to a Bektashi *tyrbe* displaying the Albanian national flag and the Bektashi motto 'without country there is no faith'.



Figure 4. Bektashi *babas* with their spiritual leader Haxhi Dede Baba Reshat Bardhi (center) during pilgrimage celebrations in Martanesh, Albania.



Figure 5. The footstep of Sari Salltëk in the city of Krujë, north of Tirana is a site of visitation and destination for the Bektashi pilgrims.



Figure 6. Path leading to the *Teqe e Melanit* outside of the southern Albanian city of Gjirokastra.



Figure 7. Pilgrims and a Bektashi *tyrbe* on the peaks of *Mali i Tomorrit* during the annual Bektashi celebrations known as *Ditët e Tomorrit* (literally, Days of Mt. Tomorr).



Figure 8. View from a Bektashi *teqe* in southern Albania looking towards the western horizon.



Figure 9. Bektashi *baba* on the way to a *tyrbe* in southern Albania.



Figure 10. Doorway exiting the *Teqe e Bektashinjve* in Gjakova, Kosovo.

