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From the ashes of atheism: the reconstitution of Bektashi religious life in postcommunist Albania

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Dissertation

**FROM THE ASHES OF ATHEISM:
THE RECONSTITUTION OF BEKTASHI RELIGIOUS LIFE
IN POSTCOMMUNIST ALBANIA**

by

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requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

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DEDICATION

To

Myslim and Shermin Mustafa

who opened the door to the American dream to me and so many others

and

to my parents Astrit and Myhyre Mustafa

who sacrificed their lives for their children's education.

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Boston University Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, 2015

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is an historical and ethnographic account of the postcommunist reconstitution of Albanian Bektashi Sufi practices and community life in the aftermath of a state-based program of radical atheistic secularism. The study is based on 12 months of intensive anthropological fieldwork (9 months in 2007 and shorter research trips between 2005 and 2011) and archival research.

The Bektashi Muslims were once closely associated with and supported by the Ottoman state. Since then they have suffered many reversals in fortune. The most severe attack on the Bektashi occurred in communist Albania. Public manifestations of religion and its institutions were entirely dismantled and many spiritual leaders killed or exiled. Nonetheless, survivors now claim that Bektashi devotees secretly believed in and revered the sacred shrines despite efforts by the authoritarian state to do away with all expressions of religious life.

Providing both historical and cultural context, the thesis uses ethnographic fieldwork data based on observation, interviews and life histories collected from within

the Bektashi community. These document and explore the group's various efforts at community building and regaining legitimacy. In particular, it describes the rebuilding of devastated Bektashi lodges (*tekke*), the configuration and management of sacred spaces, the ways of becoming Bektashi as reflected in conversion narratives, and the emergence of new saintly authority figures. The penultimate chapter is about religious observance, investigating in depth how the present community of leaders, followers, and guests interact within sacred spaces during pilgrimages, paying special attention to the ambiguities of spiritual authority in the postcommunist setting.

The study of present-day religious observance and community building shows that despite their efforts, the Bektashi today are experiencing difficulty establishing order within their own ranks and in winning real support in Albanian society as a whole. The small gains in reclaiming lost authority and access to their now lost economic estates reflects the legacy of atheist secularism and corruption, which coincides with wide spread suspicion of authority figures, including religious authorities. Albanian postcommunist religiosity coincides with a more "Western European" pattern of secularism that is generally characterized by a much diminished level of religious observance.

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GLOSSARY

Ashik – Derived from Arabic “*asheq*,” literally “in love.” The term is used to refer to uninitiated friends of the Bektashi. Attracted to the Sufi path, ashiks are considered to be potential candidates for initiation.

Baba – literally “father.” The head of a tekke and a spiritual leader higher in rank from dervishes and lower than dede.

Dede – from Turkish, literally “grandfather.” Spiritual leader of the Bektashi.

Dervish – the first degree of initiation into celibate monasticism. It is a clerical rank above that of *muhib* and below that of *baba*.

Duva – in Albanian is used to refer to “*lutje*,” literally “prayer,” as well as for charms offered by Bektashi clerics to their guests. From Arabic, “*du’ā*,” literally “to pray.”

Halife – a Bektashi rank above that of a baba and below that of the Dede. Equivalent of Albanian “*gjysh*” or grandfather and one who oversees his own tekke as well as a number of babas and their tekkes in a region or district.

Kurban – religious sacrifice such as a ram. The natal families of babas and dervishes are often referred to as those who sacrificed their sons, making them *kurbans* to Bektashia.

Mekam – from Arabic “*makam*” for burial place. Also “*mezar*,” or a tomb inclusive of the tombstone and the skeletal remains of holy men contained therein (see also *vakëf*).

Mejdan – from Turkish “*mejdan*” for an open space or public square (noun) or to advance, reveal, or bring to light (verb). The ceremonial room in a tekke reserved

for initiations and communal prayer. Only the formally initiated members are allowed entrance into this room.

Muhabet – based on the Arabic word with the root *hbb*, to love. Compassionate and spiritually infused discussions that take place between the Baba and his supplicants and sometimes their visitors.

Muhib – is a male or female who has gone through the private initiation ceremony of the Bektashi. For most *muhiban* (plural for muhib) this is the only ritual of initiation, whereas for those who progress further on the Bektashi ladder of membership becoming a muhib is only the first degree of membership in the multilayered initiatic hierarchy.

Murshid – spiritual guide and master of the Sufi path.

Mytehil – a Bektashi Baba or Dervish who has given up their marriage vows and filial obligation at some point before taking the oath of celibacy upon initiation. From Turkish “*mütehil*,” one meaning of which is ‘spouse,’ literally ‘to be without a spouse.’

Myxhyret – celibate members of the Bektashi. A cleric who has never married. From Turkish “*mücerret*” for alone, unmarried or celibate.

Nefes – literally “breath” in Turkish. Spiritual and often instructional poems, songs, or hymns about spiritual guides that are composed by the Bektashi leaders, often by babas and dervishes.

Nefes evladi– in Albanian “*fëmi i frymës*,” literally “a child of the breath.” Children believed to have been born (often to childless parents) through the intercessory prayers of Babas or Dede.

Pir – from Turkish, literally “the first.” Refers to the founder of the order and spiritual guide Haji Bektash Veli. Plural “*pirs*” refers to the spiritual leaders and forbearers of the Order.

Qeramet – from Arabic “*karamat*” or charismatic gift of producing miracles which is believed to be the defining characteristic of saintliness.

Sigurimi – literally “security” in Albanian. The feared secret services of the Albanian communist state whose agents were notorious for constantly harassing and brutally punishing political dissidents and religious leaders alike.

Silsila – spiritual genealogy and source of leaders’ spiritual authority. In Sufism, the sacred chain of transmission of spiritual knowledge.

Takiyye – the practice of dissimulation or the right to withhold one’s religious affiliation when facing extreme prosecution.

Tarikat – refers to the Sufi path or a Sufi order associated with the name of the *pir* who founded it. While in Arabic “*tarikat*” is a plural, in Turkish and Albanian it is the singular for “Sufi path.”

Taxh or *taj* – the headpiece and part of the clerical dress of the celibate monastic leaders of the Order. It is a cylindrical white headpiece wrapped in either a white (for dervishes) or green band (for babas, or the dede).

Tekke – or *teqe* in Albanian. From Arabic “*takiyya*,” “to rely on,” “receive support,” and “place or thing on which one relies, where one rests.” A dervish lodge and place of meeting and residence for members of a *tarik* or Sufi order. In addition to these, the Bektashi *tekke* also must minimally contain a *tyrbe* or a burial place for *babas* and dervishes who have served at the center.

Teslim – a circular stone with twelve flutings. Known also as “the stone of surrender” that dervishes of Halveti, Bektashi, and other Sufis hang on their neck and over the chest as a token of their membership.

Tyrbe – Albanian for a burial chamber, mausoleum of a saint, or saintly tomb. From Turkish “*türbe*.”

Tyrbeqar – Albanian for a shrine’s caretaker. From Turkish “*tyrbedar*,” caretaker of the saintly tomb or guardian of the mausoleum of the saint.

Vakëf – or “*vend i shenjtë*,” Albanian for “sacred place.” From Arabic “*waqf*,” a religious or pious endowment.

Veli – honorary title. The equivalent of *wali*, or *awliyā’* (plural for *wali*) from Arabic meaning “friends of God.”

Wahdat al-wujud – or unity of existence. A belief that God is one and everywhere, divinity is in all forms of life and in nature and the discovery of God’s reality within one’s self.

INTRODUCTION

The tomb raiding incident

One of the most baffling events that I experienced during my fieldwork in Albania was the “robbing” of the shrine in broad daylight. It happened in the summer of 2011. What was a rather ordinary day at the Bektashi shrine, later turned into an extraordinary series of events. That day, I had situated myself within the shrine vicinity in order to observe the rituals of shrine visitation. I paid close attention to people’s moods and behaviors entering and exiting the shrine and documented the ritualized sequencing of shrine circumnavigation. I conversed with pilgrims who made their way to the site as well as the shrine caretakers. It was exactly 20 years after the 1991 collapse of the Communist regime in Albania. The scores of visitors to the shrine, especially the young pilgrims who dominated the crowd, left an impression of a lively atmosphere and a dynamic religious observance. This was even more remarkable given that this shrine, like many religious centers through the country, was shut down in the 1960s as a result of the infamous crack down on religion by the officially atheistic Socialist Republic of Albania.

Any newcomers to the shrine would probably have had a hard time noticing traces of a recent antireligious campaign that day. People were traveling in groups of friends and families. A good portion of the visitors were young and the mood was celebratory. The crowded and jovial atmosphere that I was experiencing was no different from similar events that I participated in during annual commemorations hosted by Bektashi centers. At times there were as many people in the shrine as the small enclosed circular area could

fit (about 5 meters in diameter, 15-20 people tight fit capacity). There were also intermittent intervals when the shrine received only a few occasional visitors. Outside of the shrine people took photos with the shrine in the background. They also made a ram sacrifice, lit candles and offered prayers for themselves and their loved ones. Others brought with them letters and photos from people who could not make the trip and carefully placed them in the small crevices beneath the foundation of the shrine. Some pilgrims carried away small grains of soil from within the compound that they could later use for healing purposes.

From careful observations, it was clear that there was a difference between involved visitors and others who were less committed to the rituals of shrine visitation. The former, likely formally initiated members of the Bektashi community, followed meticulous ritualized routines in approaching, visiting and exiting the shrine. The latter were less knowledgeable or less committed. Some did not even take off their shoes as is expected of visitors to the holy sites. Others stepped on the shrine threshold upon entering instead of stepping over the threshold as the Bektashi norm dictates and circumnavigated the shrine as if they were at a casino or taking a leisurely walk at the beach avoiding common etiquettes of bowing down, prostrating, and touching the tombstone. The manners of these somewhat disoriented looking pilgrims appeared strikingly similar to the way that both Communist and ex-Communists pay homage to the cemeteries of their fallen comrades. All that was missing to make a perfect analogy was the raising of their right fist above their shoulder, a common Communist greeting gesture that are still sporadically visible in certain national holidays in Albania today.

The holy man's tomb was covered with paper money and coins of different shapes and sizes. Most of the bills were Albanian currency. Others hailed from destinations such as Greece, countries of the European Union, and even England and the United States. A heavy metal safe was securely bolted on the cement floor. Most pilgrims placed their donations on the saint's tomb. The shrine caretakers periodically moved the monetary donations to the metal box whenever the donation on the tomb began to spill over. Some pilgrims inserted their alms directly into the safe. Although it is generally forbidden for anyone to walk behind the tombstone of the shrine (out of respect for the holy man), during pilgrimage events it is allowed for pilgrims to circumnavigate in a counterclockwise fashion. This crowd control measure makes it possible to streamline the flow of visitors through the constricted shrine's interior. Whenever this flow was interrupted by ardent pilgrims who approached the feet of the tomb and oscillated three times between the left and right sides of the tombstone avoiding the circumnavigation of the shrine, confusion ensued which tended to cause occasional temporary human traffic congestion during peak visitation hours. Ironically, the heavy safe was placed just above the right hand side over the shoulders of the saint which forces visitors who want to insert their donation into the safe to go around the saint's upper body and even turn their back on the saint (an action that is carefully avoided by the more devoted visitors) in order to make their donation. Clearly the interior designers did not take under consideration the Bektashi sensibilities of pious shrine visitation.

Pilgrims brought with them numerous gifts which were placed on the window ledges. There were t-shirts, sweaters, jeans and other clothing, as well as boxes of sweets

and bottles of olive oil. So much stuff had been accumulated that the caretakers were occasionally removing jeans and sweaters from within the shrine and spreading them on the rocks immediately below the exterior shrine wall. Big white satchels stood tall on a corner, filled with clothes left by pilgrims to soak in the sacredness of the site. Some visitors returned to retrieve the clothes which, when put on, are believed to bring good fortune but most were left at the shrine. The shrine is open for all who want to visit. The only interruption to the flow of pilgrims happened when a Bektashi baba or dervish visited. When this happened, pilgrims were cleared from the interior of the shrine, the cleric entered, door closed, and several minutes later the doors were opened again for the cleric to exit. It was widely understood that babas and dervishes performed more elaborate rituals and could also sometimes be heard to be chanting prayers in Albanian with sporadic uses of Arabic terms such as Allah, *Bismilahir*, *Resululah*, *Aliulah*, and the name of the founder of the order, Haji Bektash Veli. So it was until a different kind of visitor made its way to the shrine, in the late afternoon, when traffic to the shrine had trickled down to only an occasional visitor.

A team of three men approached the shrine in a determined almost militaristic gait. They seemed to be in a hurry. I noticed that they were two middle aged male administrators and a younger man who was the driver of their SUV as well as their bodyguard. They entered the shrine following none of the ritualized behaviors that are expected of most visitors. The shrine suddenly was transformed into a rather different kind of setting: it now seemed to be these men's office. These visitors did not take much notice of me even though I was just a few meters away sitting on the floor and leaning

against the shrine wall on the other side of the tomb. I was writing on my notebook, and taking advantage of the cool shade of the shrine's stone vault. Upon their arrival, the men immediately began looking through all of the things on the floor and window ledges. They started lifting things at once, looking under them, throwing clothes on the floor. The caretakers began to gather all the clothes and push them down in big nylon sacks. At this point I began to think that this was a cleanup assignment. Meanwhile, the bodyguard started to collect the money from the tomb, grabbing whatever he could with both hands and putting it all in a large sack which was being used as their money collection bag. They opened the safe too, and hurriedly and without counting or following any apparent protocol emptied it in the white sack that was now visibly heavy from all the coins and bulging from the paper money that was stuffed in there. Just like that, without any rituals of entry and exit, they walked out. It all happened very fast but the event was since then engraved in my memory much like a moment frozen in time. This visit left an impression of disregard for a site that is considered sacred by many as well as the pilgrim's donations.

All these human interactions that I was simultaneously observing and being a part of, at that time, they left an impression of a robbery even though I knew that the men were authorized to collect the shrine proceeds. I wondered how the donors would feel if they knew how their gifts to the holy man were treated. Later on, in a different part of the pilgrimage site, I happened to be in the right place at the right time and experienced another episode of what was transpiring to be a serial robbery. The same squad came into the room where I was conversing with visitors and was quiet until the men showed up.

They wanted to open the heavy safe, but apparently the safe could not open. The bodyguard, a hostile looking man in his thirties, was holding a money bag on his shoulders and was wearing heavy army boots. Not able to open the safe, he started kicking the handles hoping that his pounding would release the lock. It was only a split moment that I noted this behavior, but it was one of those fieldwork moments that impresses itself upon the fieldworker, demanding further analysis and ultimately an explanation. His boss was calmly standing nearby, looking at the safe, assured that his right hand man was going to get the job done. The scene itself revealed that all they were after was the money and that they were going to get it even if it meant kicking and destroying the safe itself. There was no regard for the occupants in the room who were conversing, just as there was no regard earlier at the shrine for the pilgrims who could have arrived and witnessed the shrine abuse that was taking place.

What does this plurality of observations and experiences at religious centers mean? If indeed this was a robbing of the shrine and not just an unprofessional collection of the shrine proceeds, how can its occurrence be explained? It is clear in the above observation that there are three main groups of people that interact with the sacred sites of the Bektashi: the spiritual leaders or formally initiated members, the shrine visitors, and the administrators of the project of religious revival. Although a full explanation of these events will become apparent with a careful elaboration of the historical and cultural context in the chapters that follow, the story about the robbing of the shrine hints at a particular relationship between religious leaders, administrators, and the laymen among themselves in relation to the holy sites. This thesis traces this relationship in regards to

the management of collective memory, space, membership, saintly authority, and religious observance. Only then will the events at the shrine become better understood.

Before I get to the main contents of this thesis, I first need to introduce myself, the storyteller, and to outline the main context within which my fieldwork data were generated: the context of the return of religion in Albania after Communism. In addition to the thesis outline, in this introduction, I discuss the methods of data collection and analysis, the places that I visited, and the people that I talked to. This way, the reader will learn how I was able to access the Albanian Bektashi as a community and the degree to which I had access to the contents and the ongoing processes of the return of religion in postcommunist Albania. Next, I describe how my positionality in relation to the Albanian Bektashi shifted over time. I describe how I related to the Albanian Bektashi during my initial contacts in 2005 and how my relationship with the community was transformed over time up until the last data collection expedition in the summer of 2011.

About the narrator

Behind every story is a storyteller. My own personal and academic background led me to become interested in the study of religion after Communism in general and the Albanian Bektashi in particular. I was born and raised in Golem, a small mountainous village in the southern Albanian district of Gjirokastër. My fascination with the Bektashi predated my research interest with this community. In my childhood years I remember listening to conversations between elderly men and women about places and people that were associated with unusual events. The explanation of such stories was left to listeners'

imagination. For example, in talking about how people from the village would set out to visit a shrine on the neighboring village, I recall the elderly talking in great detail about their preparations for what sounded like an elaborate picnic. All of the details on their dress, the preparations of food, the readying of mules, for what was described as once a year festive event, were impressive recollections by comparison to a present under communism that was lacking almost all religious manifestations. It seemed like their memories were set in an imagined past that was centuries away from the current time that I was witnessing in the early years of my life.

Out of all the details that stood out for me in the villagers' coffee talk about things past during idle seasons and long winter nights was the rams that were raised to be sacrificed on Saint's Day. Over and again, they mentioned that the rams brought to the shrine, in the pre-Communist times, were not tied up. Instead, they were allowed to be free and lead the procession of people over the mountain range and to the next village. Without any guidance from the pilgrims, the rams were described as beasts who knew where they would be sacrificed and how to get there. By the workings of an inexplicable power, the rams approached the threshold of the shrine on their own. In retrospect, the emphasis was on the rams being free and untied on tekke grounds. The lesson was that if the intentions of the pilgrims who visit the sacred places of the Bektashi are sincere, the rams are tamed by the sanctity of the holy site. Growing up, I heard stories such as this associated with the sites that were now either in ruins or turned into storage facilities or army barracks. I always wondered how such miraculous feats could be possible.

When I was in boarding school, in the 9th grade, my friends and I would often venture outside of town in search for berries, chestnuts, and figs. In retrospect, I now remember that in one such foraging trip, we ended up in the most impressive, mysterious, and abandoned place. I remember cows resting indoors in a thick-walled stone building. It was clear that they were using the main entrance to access the shaded areas of the site. There were no windows, nor doors, just cavities. Everything that was made out of wood that had rotted away. All that was left was made of stone. Perhaps the mix between evident (and in retrospect temporary) signs of abuse and decay and original stone construction added to the mysteriousness of this place. There were signs of fire discoloration on the interior walls. Fading Communist engravings were pervasively placed in both interior and exterior walls. One read “*Partia mbi të gjitha,*” literally, the Party above all; another “*Rroftë Marksizëm-Leninizmi,*” literally, Long life to Marxism-Leninism. More than two decades later I learned that I had ventured on the grounds one of the main Bektashi centers in Southern Albania, the Melan Tekke. My 1988 visit to what remained of this important center was my very first visit to a Bektashi site. I did not know then what a tekke was and I cannot even recall ever hearing the word Bektashi until several years later during the transition and official reinstatement of religious liberties in 1991.

In June of 1991, as soon as I had completed my second year of high school, my family and I left the country. We were part of what became known as the Albanian exodus of the early 1990s. Hundreds of thousands of Albanian left the country just as soon as the tight hold of the Communist regime on the borders was relaxed. I come from

a village with a Muslim background. However, there was neither mosque nor any tekke in the village. There were only a few shrines and sites considered to be sacred places (*vend i shenjtë*). Historically, the villagers visit both Bektashi as well as Halveti centers in the neighboring villages in order to seek the blessings of the Sufi saints. When my father and I decided to leave for Greece with the goal of later returning to retrieve the rest of my family, my mother insisted that we visit the newly re-opened Asim Baba tekke. This was in the summer of 1991.

Only months after the reinstatement of religious liberties by the Albanian state, a Bektashi survivor had taken residence at the site. Because the tekke was being used as an old age home up until the onset of democratic transformations, most of the buildings were still intact. One of them had been turned into a waiting room during the day and served as sleeping quarters for baba at night. When we went, I noticed that a good number of visitors were on their way to the Greek border (only a few hours walk from the tekke) to try their luck at making a better living abroad. Like us, they too were seeking baba's blessings for a trip that could have many unexpected outcomes. Returnees spoke about being captured, robbed, and abused by Greek soldiers that preyed upon migrants into their country. Others spoke about being taken advantage of by refugee smugglers on both sides of the border. Once in Greece, the refugees dealt also with the uncertainty of illegal migration.

Our visit to a Bektashi tekke was a brief stop as my father and I were about to try our luck at crossing the border: a decision that eventually led to our family being granted legal entry into the United States in March of 1992. I do not recall many details of this

visit, except that a man in a curious dress and long beard was dispensing charms to his guests. My family's escape to Greece was part of a mass migration of people from impoverished Albania only three years after the fall of the Berlin wall. The exodus demarcated the onset of democratic transformations and was associated with formal recognition of the rights of assembly, multiparty elections, and the reinstatement of religious rights.

The stories about holy man, the visit to the abandoned Melan Tekke, and the newly opened Asim Baba tekke were my only exposure to the Albanian Bektashi prior to my taking a scholarly interest on the subject. The question of my own identity in relation to the Bektashi begs further elaboration. By virtue of my personal background and by comparison to other non-Albanian scholars working in Albania, I stand out as an insider. Albania is my native language and I am no stranger to the Albanian society in general and Albanian people in particular. But there is more to the story of how I came to be interested in the anthropological study of religion, Albania, and postcommunism.

My journey to anthropology passed through archaeology. Several years after my family's migration to the United States, I found myself taking an introduction to Archaeology course which was being taught by Professor Julie Hansen at Boston University. Aside from knowing that I wanted to pursue a career that would allow me to travel and perhaps also return to Albania to work, I had no specific idea about what I was going to major in. As an undergraduate student, the very first lecture in archaeology inspired the long journey that led me first to Anthropology and later to this study on the Albanian Bektashi. Part of the presentation by Professor Hansen included photos about

the excavation of a Neolithic cave site in the town of Konispol, a border town in the southernmost tip of Albania. As I was sitting through the lecture, I made note of every detail about the project, including the fact that 5 gallon buckets needed to transfer the cave deposits to the makeshift sifting station had to be brought over from neighboring Greece. Communist Albania had just experienced a total collapse and a pronounced scarcity of even the most basic goods and services was the reality on the ground. How curious, too, that just when scores of Albanians refugees like myself were leaving for Greece and Italy in search for work, a few others, like American Archaeologists, were returning to work and study in Albania. It was then that I first entertained the thought of returning to Albania as a traveling scholar.

When I left Albania in 1991, I had my first exposure to a different culture through a 9-month stay as a migrant laborer in Greece. I worked as a lumber extractor and manual laborer at a wood charcoal factory. Through work, I learned Greek from my coworkers. This experience was followed with another immersive experience when my family settled north of Boston in 1992 when I was at the age of 17. The last few years at Manchester High School were associated with attempts to learn English, fit in, and to prepare for college. At this time, my life experiences had offered the opportunity to live, work, and study in Albania, Greece, and the United States. At this point, it was important for me to continue traveling as well as to put my social and linguistic skills to use where they were needed most.

From the first course in archaeology, my criteria for choosing an academic path was to return to Albania in order to contribute to Albanology (the study of things related

to Albania and Albanians). This was a field of study that needed to be rescued from the prolonged isolation of Albanian scholars during Communism and from being hijacked by the present regime to serve its political agenda. It was also a field of study that experienced significant shortages in researchers that were trained outside of Albania and who, up until the early 1990s, found it impossible to carry out research in a country that became increasingly isolated during the dictatorship of Enver Hoxha and his successors (1945-1991). In the immediate aftermath of the Communist collapse, the difficulties of carrying out research in Albania were a consequence of the unstable political and economic situation and the chaotic events of widespread violence that culminated in the infamous events of 1997. Albanians stormed the army barracks and ruled the Albanian public space with Kalashnikovs, hand held grenades, and even the occasional army tanks that fell into their hands.

During my undergraduate years at Boston University and graduate studies at the University of Arizona, I participated in several archaeological projects. I helped excavate the Maya city of La Milpa in Belize in 1998, was part of the systematic surface survey project in Mallakstra region of Central Albania in 1998, helped rescue a Paleoindian Cave site in Alabama in 1999, and excavated an Upper Paleolithic site on the southernmost point of the Turkish-Syrian border in the summer of year 2000. Aside from the particular intellectual challenge that archaeologists confront in their profession, namely to make silent artifacts reveal and speak about the past, the most rewarding part of the traveling abroad for me was the experience of being with the locals. As well as the lived experiences that revealed, in our interactions, so much about them as well as about

myself. The reader will again be reminded about the author's archaeological past in the opening chapters of the dissertation which are about the early history of the Albanian Bektashi (chapter 1), the history of religion under Communism (chapter 2), and the spatial dimension of the institutions of the order (chapter 3). These are chapters that build upon skills from my previous training in archaeology as both spatial and historical science. The experience of travel and getting to know my hosts became the main inspiration as well as an invitation to a full-fledged commitment to anthropology and ethnographic fieldwork. Both my fluency in Albanian and interests in understanding the postcommunist transformations that were taking place in the country led to an interest in religion after Communism in Albania for my topic and area focus in cultural anthropology, respectively.

Albanians' religious affiliations

But who are the Albanians and what of their religion? This may be answered through a brief historical account of the Albanian people and the appearance of world religions in Albanian-populated lands (more historical details are offered on the first chapter). Albanians claim ancestry from the ancient Illyrians who were contemporaneous with ancient Greece. Mortuary and historical evidence indicates an Illyrian spiritual life that was dominated by magical spells and belief in the evil eye (Wilkes 1992: 243-4). Despite the controversy over their origins, Illyrians are considered a people from an Indo-European stock who inhabited the central-western Balkans well beyond modern Albanian borders. On the much debated question of the origins of the Albanian people, Albanian

scholars trained under the auspices of the authoritarian regime tended to claim continuity between ancient Illyrians and modern Albanians (see for example Korkuti 2003, Tirta 2006). Even when change over time is recognized as is the case with a study of Albanian dress styles from the 13th to 20th century, the author claims that “this evolution has occurred on the basic substratum from which they have originated” (Gjergji 2004: 5). Nor are Illyrian links to modern Albanians without controversy, since other ethnic groups in the Balkans also claim connections to an Illyrian heritage.¹ By excavating the most distant past as the origins of modern Albanians, the monotheistic religions of Islam and Christianity appear as relative newcomer beliefs and practices to the more ancient paganism and polytheism of the ancestors of the modern Albanian people.

By virtue of geographical positioning, as a midpoint between Jerusalem and the Vatican, Albanian lands were introduced to Christianity quite early by Saint Paul. The domination of the Roman Empire for many centuries Christianized the early Albanians while Orthodoxy was introduced through the Byzantine and the Slavic invasions from the 6th century A.D. onward. Lastly, Islam was brought into the Albanian lands by prolonged presence of the Ottoman Empire in the Balkans. The earliest Ottomans arrived in Albania in 1385 via an invitation by a feudal lord of the city of Durrës to help against his struggles against the Balsha clan who were masters of most of central Albania at the time (Winnifrith 1992: 75). Albania gained its independence shortly after the Young Turk uprising of 1908 in November 28th of 1912.

¹ The details of this controversy are beyond the scope of this thesis: see for example Jacques 1995, Vickers 1995, Harding 1992 and references therein for further details.

A series of unsuccessful and short-lived governments dominated the period prior to the rise of Ahmet Zogu (later King Zog), a Sunni Muslim from northern Albania, as the monarch of the new European kingdom (discussed further on chapter 1 and in a biography by Tomes 2003). Throughout this period, the different religious denominations were functioning with relatively little interference from the monarchy. The Bektashi, for example, experienced an increase in popularity when Mustafa Kemal Atatürk outlawed all dervish orders in Turkey in 1925. Many Bektashi clerics of Albanian descent returned to Albania which became the *de facto* heartland of the Bektashi Order of Dervishes with the transfer of the leadership's headquarters in the country's capital in 1929.

In 1939, Albania was occupied by fascist Italy, and shortly after by Nazi Germany. The Albanian Communist Party (*Partia Komuniste Shqiptare*) was founded with the help of the Yugoslav Communists to counter the National Front Party (*Balli Kombëtar*). The latter was the most popular political party in Albania with the ambition to unify the lands inhabited by ethnic Albanians in present day Montenegro, Kosovo, Macedonia, and Greece. Instead of fighting the Germans, the National front used the logistical and military support received from Yugoslavia as well as from the Allied forces by the Albanian partisans to crush their opposition (Jacques 1995). When the Communists came to power in 1945 several battalions were sent to Kosovo to subdue the secessionist uprising by the Albanians of Kosovo. Throughout the years of Communist rule the Albanian government honored the deal with Yugoslav Communists to deny any territorial claims for Kosovo. More importantly, the rise of Communist power marked the beginning of a new era where religious practice was at first barely tolerated and later

criminalized and entirely abolished from the public space. Chapter 2 offers details of the degree to which the atheistic crusade impacted religious communities: the public expressions of religion were dismantled, religious centers closed, destroyed, or put to other uses, and religious leaders were executed, sent to labor camps, or interned. Religious observance and its propagation were illegal. There is good reason to classify Albania as radically different from all of the countries of the Eastern Bloc in the treatment of religious communities. It was one of Europe's most rigorously atheistic dictatorship.

At present, Albania is a small country in southeastern Europe with a religiously diverse population of about three million people. Up until 2011, the most dependable census that collected information on the religious demographics of the country was conducted in 1942 on behalf of *Annuario Statistico Italiano* (Annual Italian Statistics) under the auspices of Institute Centrale di Stato del Regno d'Italia (Central Institute of Countries Under Italian Rule). This census showed a 70-20-10 % tripartite religious division (Muslims-Orthodox Christians-Catholics). The majority Muslim population was composed largely of Sunni (78 %) and of Bektashi adherents (21 %). The presence of other dervish orders has been documented by Clayer (1990). The Halveti is reported to have had about 150 *teqes* or dervish lodges in Albania. Also present were the Kadiri, Rifa'i, Sa'di, and Tijani. Clayer also emphasizes a more accurate division of 55 % Sunni Muslim, 20 % Orthodox Christians, 15 % Bektashis and 10 % Catholics which better captures the religious diversity in Albania (1997: 118), though the former statistic is more reflective of the history of the people than of their actual faith.

In 2011, people were optionally asked² if they belonged to a religious faith and, if they did, to specify which religious faith they belonged to (Nurja 2011: 32). They aimed to discern the religious affiliations of the Albanian people as well as their ethnic backgrounds. Understood by some as a move that was destined to disturb the relative religious and ethnic harmony that the country enjoyed, this data collection effort was strongly opposed by political factions such as the nationalist Red and Black Alliance. The Albanian Orthodox staged a boycott of the census on the grounds that it would disfavor religious minorities, but there were no reports that the Bektashi also boycotted the census. There was widespread disapproval on the part of the Albanian Orthodox Christians and the Bektashi once the results were published. The latest data from this disputed 2011 census (Nurja 2012) reports the Albanian Orthodox to be only 6.75%, ranked under Catholics (10.03%), and the Albanian Bektashi as being only 2.09% of the total of 2,831,741 population of the country. The Bektashi themselves claim to be at least quarter of a million strong in Albania and about 6 million worldwide. As the chapter on ways of becoming Bektashi describes in detail, the question of belonging involves both formally initiated as well as uninitiated (but affiliated) members. In my understanding, sometimes the formally initiated may deny their Bektashi affiliation, since this relationship is between them and their spiritual master and not to be indulged in public pronouncements. How much this concealment is a function of persecution during the Communist years is impossible to say. Furthermore, the uninitiated who nevertheless have relations with the

² The other options under the religious affiliation question were b) I do not belong to any religious faith, but I am a believer c) I do not belong to a religious faith and am not a believer, and d) I prefer not to say.

Bektashi tekke (as relatives of the formal initiates, *ashiks*) are not likely to declare a religious affiliation with the Bektashi but are, as the chapter on membership explains, a vital constituent of the Albanian Bektashi community broadly defined.

The controversy over religious demographics plays a role in present-day debates concerning the country's European identity in the context of growing religious ties with the Muslim World as well as the internal debate over religious and political identity. In the post-1990s or postcommunist era, Albania attracted missionary workers from the East and the West who introduced new ideological orientations. The end of Communist rule allowed the country to open up to the outside world. This and the reinstatement of religious practice, which has been described as a religious revival, rebirth, resurfacing, or resurgence based on authors' conceptualization of Albanian religiosity, have brought about a politically charged national discourse on issues of religious and national identity.

Thesis rationale and outline

This thesis documents the return of religion after communism from the perspective of the Albanian Bektashi. Leaving the results of the study for the concluding remarks in the last chapter of the thesis, this outline describes each of the subsequent chapters as well as the main dilemmas or challenges that are associated with the Bektashis early history (chapter 1), collective memory of the socialist past (chapter 2), construction of sacred space (chapter 3), membership structure and ways of becoming Bektashi (chapter 4), saintly authority (chapter 5), and pilgrimage as a form of reconstituted religious observance (chapter 6).

During my interactions with the Bektashi, it soon became clear that the reconstitution of religion was a multifaceted project. That is to say, the Bektashi were investing their time and resources on a number of fronts: the rewriting of their recent history under communism (collective memory); the rebuilding and reopening of their centers (construction of sacred space); the reinstatement of the ways of becoming Bektashi (membership strategies); the construction and maintenance of authority structures (saintliness); and the return of the commemorative life of the order and pilgrimage (religious observance).

The thesis is divided into chapters that correspond to these main areas of the reconstitution of religious practice and community life. It is clear from the descriptive data and analysis that the project for the return of religion is still, even two decades after the onset of the postcommunist and democratic transformations, very much ongoing and under construction. What this means is that there are a number of main dilemmas, paradoxes, and internal dynamics that accompany the ways that the Bektashi are handling their collective memory on the Communist past, the construction and maintenance of their sacred spaces, internal dynamics of membership, saintly authority, and religious observance. This section briefly describes each of the main domains where the reconstitutive efforts are centered, noting the primary challenges and dilemmas that the Bektashi are encountering in their efforts to reestablish themselves and regain the importance that they once enjoyed in Albanian society.

There is a diachronic rationale behind my ordering of the aforementioned areas of religious practice and community building that is at present under construction. To begin,

it was necessary to present the reader with the broader historical context within which the Albanian Bektashi fit. The Bektashi, like most Muslim communities that put a heavy emphasis on their past as the template for how their communities ought to strive for at present, emphasize the life and example of Prophet Mohammed, Imam Ali, twelve Imams, their founder Haji Bektash Veli, and the spiritual leaders of the Order all the way to the present day. The main questions about the early history of the Bektashi up to the onset of Communist rule in Albania have to do with the ways that the Bektashi have handled the shifts in their fortunes based on the archival records and historian's reconstructions of the Bektashi past. In addition, the history of the Bektashi (chapter one) pays close attention to the ways that the Bektashi recount their historical past. It seeks to answer to not only how the Bektashi talk about their early history but it explains why, out of the many events in their history, they underscore certain conjunctures as more important than others. Furthermore, the opening chapter looks into the ways that the past is recounted in relationship to the main concerns of the present. The events about the past that the Bektashi are centered on at the moment are the life and predictions of Haji Bektash, the two major abolitions of the Order in 1826 and 1925, and the onset of the Communist suppression of religion during the 2nd World War. It makes sense that at a time soon after a major attack on the Bektashi community, what receives the greatest attention is the historical memory of their founder and the previous vacillations in the popularity of the Bektashi. The opening chapter describes both the Bektashi history and historicity (positioned versions of the past recounted to legitimize the present) and offers

explanations about the reasons behind the selective process whereby certain aspects of the past are now being emphasized more than others.

Out of the main historical events since the founding of the Bektashi order in the 13th century, the main point of reference for the Albanian Bektashi at present is Communist Albania and the state suppression of religion (1945-1990). Both in their talk and in their written works, the Bektashi are especially fixated on what happened to religion in general and to the Bektashi and their sacred sites in particular under atheistic secularism. From my early discussions with Bektashi leaders and followers during my continuous nine month stay with the Bektashi in Albania in 2007, communism was brought up in two particular contexts. First, communism is used to explain the present state of the Bektashi revivalist project and the dilemmas that the community faces. For example, when the Bektashi are questioned by their guests about the lack of dependable publications and booklets in English for the use of their foreign guests and or the extent to which the world headquarters has an administrative authority over Bektashi in Turkey or Iran, the Bektashi are more likely to bring up the devastation that the order suffered under communism. The severe break with the past or “the decapitation narrative” is often employed to an outsider audience, who are potential donors in support of the revivalist project, in order to explain the sluggish efficacy of the reconstitutive efforts. But there is also another main narrative in relation to the Communist past that the Bektashi employ. This I encountered primarily within groups of insiders and under the context of legitimizing the current leadership of the order. Employing symbolisms of continuity, Bektashia is seen like a tree whose leaves fell but whose roots and trunks remained intact

during communism, which is portrayed as a long and difficult winter. Such narratives about the Communist past aim to establish continuity between Albanian Bektashi and the pre-Communist Bektashi.

Chapter two describes the ways that the Bektashi at present discuss their past under communism – it is about the management of the community’s collective memory. Giving sufficient examples, the chapter describes the context under which different and often opposing narratives about communism are employed. Chapter two explains how the dilemmas that the community is facing with both tropes: the narrative of continuity and the narrative of a complete break with past. Choosing to depend on one over the other leads to contestations of legitimacy. Every time the Bektashi say that communism was radically effective in uprooting religion in general and Bektashism in particular, this undermines any claims of legitimacy that the current leadership can make by associating themselves with the Bektashi leadership of the past. Every time a claim of continuity is emphasized, this undermines the severity of the communist rule on religious communities and goes against what Bektashi survivors in particular and Albanians at large recall of their experience under communism.

The experience of the Bektashi under communism was usually described in terms of those things that were retained, such as believing in the sanctity of the sacred sites of the order despite their destruction and transformation into sites with nonreligious functions. In regards to those things that were lost, the narratives about religion under communism agree that what was lost was the ownership and use of the Bektashi tekke, the spiritual, social, economic and educational sites of the Order. Chapter three seeks to

contextualize and describe just what defines the “tekke” that the Bektashi lost during communism. The chapter on tekke as sacred space and the construction and maintenance of spatially bound sacrality is appropriate at this point of my thesis because one of the first steps that the surviving Bektashi took in the early 1990s was to reclaim, rebuild, and reopen the main Bektashi tekkes.

Making use of thick descriptions of both spaces within a tekke compound and the activities that take place therein, the reader is invited to experience space the way much like Bektashi visitors often do. It becomes clear that some spaces within the tekke compound are deemed more sacred than others. Furthermore, although the visitors to Bektashi tekke expect free access to their sacred sites (in contrast to the prolonged heavy controls and prohibitions against the sacred sites of the order under communism), and despite Bektashi babas requests that people freely visit the tekkes and regard them as their own property, visitors find that real barriers exist. For example, most shrines may be visited during the daytime, but in some tekkes shrines are locked and visitors need to be let in by the full time residents or people employed by the tekke. Even though visitors may want to meet with the spiritual leaders of the centers, access to the leading figures is managed by lower ranked disciples. The chapter discusses the tekke as a site of great symbolic importance as well as a setting for the coming together of the community leaders, Bektashi followers, as well as their guests.

One of the main conclusions that is derived from the available data about the Bektashi tekke is that the Bektashi are a tekke-centered community. In order to fully appreciate the degree to which the Bektashi are a tekke-centered community, chapter four

interrogates the very notion of “community” by looking into the process of becoming Bektashi. Noting that the Bektashi community is organized hierarchically along different degrees of membership (ashik, muhib, dervish, baba, dede), the chapter is organized around two main modes of becoming Bektashi. The first claims that the Bektashi are not born, they become. That is, membership into the order is not hereditary. Instead, to become a member one has to undergo the process of initiation. However as one moves from one degree of initiation into another, a very select group of members who occupy the highest degree of membership (very few babas and dedes), the narrative changes from *becoming* Bektashi to having been born Bektashi. Using ethnographic details about actual cases of becoming and navigating the hierarchy of membership as well as post-expulsion narratives about those who have been kicked out of the Order for various unforgivable infractions and misconduct, the chapter explains why these two seemingly opposing narratives of membership are different aspects of the way that community building processes take place in the postcommunist transition. The chapter suggests that there is a heavy dependence on monitoring and witnessing of religious performance by Bektashi leaders. The testimony of the following about certain leaders can be a deciding factor in the leadership’s decisions about one’s advancement in the spiritual path. Another area of opposition surfaces. It is customarily acknowledged that candidate’s spiritual performance is assessed by the highest leadership of the order (membership into the higher categories by proofs of saintliness). Traditional requirements for dervishes to complete a one thousand and one day residence in service at a Bektashi tekke prior to taking the oaths of celibate monasticism are bypassed by petitions to the leadership of the

order by followers. In some cases, they can collect sufficient signatures by members of the order who testify that they have witnessed enough spiritual proofs that, in their view, ought to move the proposed candidate to a higher degree of the order (membership by votes). These procedures occur in the context of a marked shortage of clerics that is a legacy of communism and a contemporary reality. There are only very few male candidates who wish to embrace celibate monasticism.

While the chapter on ways of becoming Bektashi depends on life histories collected from insiders in different degrees of membership, chapter five is about the life history of the spiritual leader of the Order. The chapter serves two main purposes. First, Dede Reshat's (1937-2011) life is one that began in pre-Communist Albania. He lived through the Communist regime and witnessed the closing of Bektashi tekkes. He was also a survivor and was the man – for the Albanian Bektashi and others a saint – in charge of putting the Bektashi together again in the postcommunist era. Dede Reshat's life provides the reader with a sense of how the recent history of the Albanian Bektashi plays out in the life of an exemplary member of this community. Secondly, the chapter on the saintly life of Dede Reshat follows up the implications derived from an account of the main ways of becoming Bektashi. While it is true that the Bektashi are not born Bektashi but become so, it is also the case that some Bektashi (i.e., saintly leaders of the order) are born Bektashi. The shift in the narrative from becoming to being born is exemplified in the life of Dede Reshat. This way the details of the life of Dede Reshat offer an explanation about the construction and maintenance of saintly authority. Still, the paradoxes that are associated with saintly living, i.e., the Dede is surrounded by people yet feels alone and

the monitoring of the biography of the leader by the administrators of the Order, are indicative of the postcommunist dilemmas that accompany the project of the return of religion.

Having accounted for history, collective memory, the tekke or main institution of religion, the ways of becoming Bektashi, and saintly authority, the last chapter is about religious observance. Within religious observance, I choose to focus on commemorative life and pilgrimage events that are hosted annually by Bektashi tekkes throughout Albania. These are rare opportunities to see the community of leaders, followers, and their guests come together and interact in particular ways. The tension with the Bektashi pilgrimage has to do with the emphasis on the sanctity of the site. That is, the sacredness of the sites is enacted and upheld in the observed discourses and behaviors that I was able to document during numerous participations in such events. The locus of contestations against the order and the authorities is situated not on the sacred sites per se, but towards the current leadership of the Order and the stewards of the events, i.e., the secular administrators – who are likened to the “robbers” I mentioned in the fieldwork observations that began this introduction.

Available data and collection methods

In order to assess the degree to which a religious revival is taking place in postcommunist Albania and the processes that are associated with the return of religion, I employ a historical comparison with the role of religious practices in the recent and more distant past as well as a multi sited ethnographic study. Three phases may be constructed

for our heuristic purposes. Starting with the most recent they are: the postcommunist revival (1991-2011, chapters 3-6), the Communist or religiously abolitionist (1945-1990, chapter 2), the pre-Communist and Ottoman or pre-independence phases (before 1945, chapter 1). The ethnographic data in support of the historical reconstruction are derived primarily from my observations during the late communist and post-1990s periods in Albania, from interviews about religious practice in communist and postcommunist Albania as well as ethnographic data derived from the method of participant observation between 2005 and 2011. The reconstruction of religious life from the earliest two periods is based on the available archival literature about the Bektashi.

This section describes the available lines of evidence such as personal and family life histories, structured and semi-structured surveys and materials from formal and informal interactions with the community, as well as observations of rituals like wedding ceremonies at the Bektashi headquarters, *teqe* and *tyrbe* visitation, and the reception of guests by babas and dervishes. Other lines of evidence include archival materials and local publications by and for the community which I have translated from Albanian.

The membership structure and ways of becoming Bektashi (chapter 4) is based largely on life histories. These were collected from structured and semi-structured interviews which were conducted during the last half of my fieldwork in 2007. I refrained from conducting interviews early on in my stay with the Bektashi because I wanted to wait until the community leaders and members at large became familiar with my project. When the fieldworker sits with the people, asks questions and writes down the answers, the interviewees are bound to supply formal responses. By the time that I sat down to

collect interview data, I had made sufficient on the ground observations about Bektashi life and ritual. I had also gotten to know the community of leaders and most followers well and was also no longer a stranger within the community. All of these helped with the interview phase of my fieldwork. It was, by this time into my fieldwork, expected that I take notes while talking to people and most people that I interviewed wanted me to listen to their stories and take their words seriously.

The bulk of my data, as well as the source of my understanding of the Albanian Bektashi, comes from both formal and informal encounters with the community in Bektashi centers. These occurred over quiet times when the tekke residents were on their own, during visitation hours when the tekke was a place of interaction between hosts and guests, and during pilgrimage events when the centers were transformed into sites of heightened ritualized behavior.

Alongside interviews and data from participant observations, I collected and discussed locally published materials with the Albanian Bektashi. These included the bimonthly journal of the Order *Urtësia* as well as publications (of writings by serving and previous leaders of the Order, translations of works on the Bektashi and Sufism by foreign scholars, and histories of the Bektashi centers) that were meant primarily for internal but also for limited circulation outside of the membership ranks of the Bektashi. These literary sources were graciously presented to the author as gifts during my stays at Bektashi tekkes. Although some of these sources are critical expositions, in general they tend to reflect highly idealized views on the community and the Bektashi past, and so are useful for understanding those aspects of their faith the Bektashi wish to forefront.

During my stays at the Bektashi tekke, it was striking to see how the centers were furnished. Another set of data were in the form of photographs of the tekke settings. Aside from photo recording places and people within tekke compounds, the majority of this data set were photos of photographs or posters which contained useful information on the important leaders of the community, framed publications about the center, framed photos of what the tekke used to be like in the past, as well as framed religious images like that of Imam Ali, the twelve imams, Bektashi calligraphic writing, and various other sculptures in stone, wood, and metal. These images testify to the community's physical presence. They are an official self-portrait of the community. Bektashi babas invest a great deal of attention to their centers' interior design, just as they also do in soliciting and approving books and audio compact discs from authors in order to be involved in the way that Bektashism is projected to its members and the public at large.

Methodological challenges and shifting positionality

Although background information about narrator of this thesis has already been given, my point of reference in relation to the Bektashi community during fieldwork needs further elaboration. Here I address how this fieldworker was situated within the community under concern, the point of entree (both practical and conceptual), fieldwork relations, and post-fieldwork rights and obligations towards the community. Most anthropologists, whether insiders or outsiders to the respective communities under study, develop some kind of relationship that needs to be described in order to situate the ethnographer in relation to the study. The Bektashi themselves have their own discourse

on how to handle questions of nearness or distance in their involvement with Bektashia. In the words of a Bektashi Dervish, it is best not to be so close that you get burned, yet not too far so that you get cold (*“mos rri shum afër se digjesh, por jo shum larg se ftohesh”*). In my experience, the question of nearness and farness oscillated over time. My own relationship to the community was constantly negotiated from my initial fieldwork in the summer of 2005 to my last visit fieldwork foray in the summer of 2011. A “shifting positionality” best describes my relationship with the Bektashi community during fieldwork and after.

Because I describe the first visit with the spiritual leader of the Bektashi in greater detail in chapter 5, here I suffice to note that my point of practical (if not legal and formal) entree into my study was facilitated from a permission that was granted by the spiritual leader of the Order in April of 2007. This came also with Dede Reshat’s blessing for a productive study. The request for his permission was well received. He noted that all those who have written about Bektashia in the past have found good fortune. It was followed by an immediate response wishing me luck with the road that I have chosen. This practical entree was made possible through previously acquired sensibilities that were reflected in the manner through which the request was presented. Asking for permission acknowledged the necessity for obtaining a permit to conduct fieldwork by the spiritual leadership of the Bektashi. It reaffirmed Dede’s position of authority by showing my understanding that his consent is needed to pursue a study of the community. This is clear when considering that the Bektashi often claimed “that many scholars from

all around the world have visited *our tekkes* and learned from *our babas and dervishes*.”

It was clear to me that there was an interest in maintaining this reputation.

From their perspective, a distant guest who has left his family and life behind in the United States in order to study amongst the Bektashi speaks loudly about the spiritual importance of the clerics who are known to receive such guests. During my stay, a number of scholars of psychology, history, photography, and journalism, visited the lodges. They were hosted in much more glamorous ways in the comfort of a private hosting area while regular tekke visitors are often hosted in less formal and rather casual areas of the tekke. Needless to say, from their point of view, my asking for permission to conduct the study was seen also as ratification of the supremacy of spiritual authority over academic authority – note, however, that this relationship is reversed in the phase of the data analysis and the writing of the results which necessarily subject religious knowledge to empirical anthropological inquiry. Dede’s permission was given in the form of a blessing in order to claim the supremacy of the spiritual over all other forms of authority. As it will become apparent, while the access granted by the spiritual leaders of the community to conduct the study is necessary, in the post-fieldwork and writing processes of this research, the power dynamic shifts: while I was at the mercy of Dede’s permission to even begin my study, Dede’s life story (chapter 6) and fieldwork experiences are the mercy of the storyteller who decides what aspects to select and how to present them to the reader. To put it another way, I was limited as to the places I could see and who I could talk to. But in the process of discerning what it all means to me, the manner of presenting the data that I collected, and the subsequent analysis, I become the

privileged decision maker over those aspects of Bektashia that need to be underscored and others that were left out.

My decision to conduct an ethnographic study of the Bektashi was an answer to a demand that was coming from two different kinds of scholarship. First, while the Bektashi have attracted a number of historians (Clayer 1990, Popovic and Veinstein 1995, Birge 1937, and Mèlikoff 1998), and a good number of more specialized studies by a diverse group of scholars (Hasluck 1913, 1925, Bruinessen 2000, Cornell 2006, Kressing 2007, De Jong 1989, Doja 2003, Norton 2001, Ocak 1983, 1991, 2002, Ringgren 1965, Schwartz 2008, Yurekli 2012, Soileau 2012), the Albanian Bektashi do not yet have an ethnography about them with the possible exception of the work by Frances Trix (1993, 2009). This is partly due to issues of accessing the community. Second, a growing number of comparative works on issues of religion in Postsocialist settings (i.e., Tomka 2011, Burawoy and Verdery 1999, Berdahl et al. 2000, Kurti and Skalnik 2009, Hann 2002, 2006, 2010, Kipnis 2008) recognize a great need for a concerted effort to add to the pool of available ethnographic sources like Ghodsee's study in Bulgaria (2010), Mahieu and Naumescu work with Greek-Catholic churches in Eastern Europe (2008), Pelkmans' study of postsocialist identity in Georgia (2006), Verdery's research on property and value in Transylvania (2003), the study of Islam and communism in central Asia by Khalid (2007), Fosztó's study of ritual revitalization in Transylvania (2007), the study of law and religion after communism by Durham and Ferrari (2004), Buzalka's study of the politics of commemoration in Poland (2006), Rasanayagam research on Islam in Uzbekistan (2011), Stan and Turcescu study of

religion and politics in postsocialist Rumania (2007), and Creed's study of ritual and dispossession in Bulgaria (2011). These and additional new studies are needed to better understand the spectrum of postsocialist religiosities. This study, so far as I know, is the first comprehensive study of religion after communism in Albania.

The community is very much concerned with their image at home and abroad. They are fully aware that scholars can help reach audiences in ways that they themselves might not be able to. A number of scholars who have worked with the Bektashi (i.e. Melikoff, c.f., Küçük, and others) have talked about invitations to scholars of Bektashia to join the Order. Although I did not feel pressured to join, the topic of becoming a member was not infrequent in my conversations with the Bektashi. There were fewer such discussions in the early stages of fieldwork. Mentioning of what it would be like to join and referrals about the possible spiritual guides that I ought to stay close with became more frequent in the last several months of my fieldwork. I am happy with my decision to remain loyal to my ethnographic project without introducing a major change in an already changing relationship between myself and the Bektashi. It is my understanding that I would have lost a good degree of scholarly flexibility and analytical (as well as personal) liberty if I decided to learn Bektashia from the point of view of the participating initiate, where secrecy is required.

But just because I did not become a Bektashi by initiation, this is not to say that an outsider's insider perspective was impossible to attain. This was accomplished through the local membership category *ashik*: an uninitiated member who has the access to the members of the community. Known as the seekers of the truth or the lovers of the way,

ashiks share many of the goals of the fieldworker. My task was to achieve objective understanding with explanatory potential about Bektashia. When I explained my purpose for being with the Bektashi, they immediately associated my vocation with ashikhood. As an ashik, I was in compliance with my professional commitments as a researcher of Bektashia. These commitments justified my positioning in relation to the community under study as “one whose eyes and ears are always open.” Stated another way, the ashik for the Bektashi is the participant observer in anthropology.

In an effort to manage the insider/outsider boundary I always reminded myself to find a middle ground. My hopes are that this study will be useful for anthropology and anthropologists as well as for the Albanian Bektashi. I have reason to believe that the Bektashi may not very much like my handling of the internal dynamics of the religious community crisis in the aftermath of communism, the very internal tensions and contestations that this thesis is about. Yet I hope that in the near future the Bektashi will appreciate looking back at their past after communism and see in the following pages the very dilemmas that concerned the people charged with the task of rebuilding Bektashia.

My positioning in relation to the community was based on learning facilitated by extensive cohabitation of social space. In practical terms this meant that I was present throughout the day and often also through weeklong visits and occasional overnight stays within tekke compounds. Appendix 1 lists the main tekke visits and stays from 2005-2011. The fact that I was there to learn was not always explicitly signaled, but was more than often implicit in my interactions with the Bektashi. For example, in many cases my conversations with babas and dervishes were a learning experience of the most direct

kind. Most such conversations are structured as requests for help by believers and advice and blessings by dervishes and babas. Advice may be for various situations including relation with others, conflict, quarrels, and even feuds as well as consolation and emotional support for those in need. Within advice are also prescriptions and even commands given to followers.

During the first several months of fieldwork, I was often told that “one is not born a Bektashi, but rather becomes” (“*Bektashinjtë nuk lindin, ata bëhen*”). Because I deal with this dynamic of membership in more details in chapter four, here I discuss it as it relates to my relationship with the Bektashi. In their own explanation of the above lines, the Bektashi noted that one has no choice over who their mother and father is. We are simply born to a set of parents, whether we like them or not. By comparison, one chooses their spiritual guide. It was especially important to understand this point since I am born into a family that has had, like most Albanians of southern Albania, a history of fidelity to the Asim Baba tekke. My interlocutors were saying that that the Bektashi heritage does not make one a Bektashi for one must actively partake in the process of becoming Bektashi. From this perspective, when one says to the Bektashi that one wants to learn about Bektashism, the likely response is always an invitation to join the Order. In being there for the purpose of learning, I must have been somewhat of a stranger to the Bektashi for I was someone who wanted to learn without a formal commitment to becoming through initiation into the Order. The more I persisted in furthering my knowledge, the more the Bektashi insisted on the point that Bektashia is learned best by

the act of becoming a conscious and committed seeker of esoteric knowledge and by becoming an initiated member of the order.

Like this, with me wanting to learn more and them instructing me to get closer, I proceeded. During my stays at the tekke, I was also given literature to read and learn from. The very first was a translation of *Edeb Jahu*, a work by a Bosnian author on the how one ought to prepare for their tekke visit and behave while on tekke grounds. It advises, for example, that “upon arrival, one must walk slowly and not hurry, and see only ahead” (Miçjeviq 1990). Boys may stay near baba as long as they are calm. If not, parents should not bring them to the tekke. Girls should stay near their mothers, and so on. Altogether, in my first several months, I was trained by dervishes on the proper ways of being on tekke grounds, the appropriate time to meet with baba and others, and when I needed to retreat to spend time alone on the tekke garden.

From the earlier days of fieldwork discussions of this kind were aimed at clarifying my very intent and place within an already established social hierarchy. If I was not a Bektashi, who was I to them? From my point of view I was asking just the opposite: in general I wanted to know who they were, but more specifically I was interested to know who are they to me? The former question was quickly resolved by my insistence that my priority was first and foremost to complete the study for which I had come to Albania for, a project that, once explained, received the support of the community. Being careful not to reject their wishes that I join the Order, I maintained that I could contribute more as a fieldworker. As for becoming a member, I inevitably replied “God willing, one day it may be so. For now I have plenty to look after.”

My own interests on the study of the Bektashi were always clearly stated while occasional invitations to become a member were respectfully declined through an emphasis on the research objectives. Being that the context of my fieldwork was highly charged, I felt that a decision to become a member would have unnecessarily complicated my relationship with the community and put various demands and obligations that I did not have as an uninitiated researcher. The most significant barrier would have been a demand for an insider to portray the community in their writing as the community itself wishes to be portrayed to the outsiders: wrinkle free and idealized. This dissertation which is very much about the internal dynamics of the reconstitution of religious life would not have been possible from someone who is a formal member of the Order. The thesis depends on the very liberties that I enjoyed as an uninitiated member of the Order.

Throughout my fieldwork with the Albanian Bektashi I was constantly reminded about the ways that I related to the Albanian Bektashi. Upon arriving to a Bektashi tekke, my hosts immediately asked if I was “*i brendshëm*”, literally an insider or initiated member of the Order. And the question about my own relationship to the Bektashi was brought up in a number of ways. “Are you of the color [green]?” and “are you a *muhib*?” were all questions whose answer regulated the interactions between Bektashi insiders and their guests like myself who are not members of the Bektashi Order. From contents of conversation to granting access to various spaces within the tekke compounds, my ability to get to know the Bektashi was structured along the insider / initiated and outsider / uninitiated boundaries. My fieldwork benefited from the advantages of being an insider

as well as outsider as well as the limitations that are often associated with both types of statuses.

All of the familiarity with the sites and stories about the Bektashi babas, as well as my language and cultural background, were assets that helped me gain a relatively quick positioning in the field. It would have taken an outsider to both Albania, Albanian, and the Bektashi a great deal of time prior to accomplishing what Malinowski referred to as the “proper conditions of ethnographic work” (1922: 6). Within the first 10 days of my arrival in Tirana, I was already spending a good deal of time at the Bektashi Headquarters in Tirana. I had also received Dede Reshat’s official permission as well as blessing for the study. I stress that I received his permission and blessing because my positionality, at the time, in my view, was not only that of an insider, nor strictly that of an outsider or even that of an insider and outsider. Indeed, my positionality carried elements of an insider as well as an outsider and shifted over the span of my fieldwork along the two ends of the insider-outsider continuum.

When I asked Dede Reshat to allow me to stay around the Headquarters for the purpose of conducting a study, I was introduced to him by Dervish Mikel whom I had met in 2005 at the Asim Baba tekke where he was a shepherd, at first, and later a muhib, or initiate to the first degree. To others, Dervish Mikel introduced me as a “frequenter of the Bektashi tekke” to others. This was an introduction that I would get used to in the months that followed. At the same time, Dervish Mikel introduced me as a student from America who had traveled to learn more about the Bektashi. As I mentioned above, as I became more intimate with the order I would be referred to as an *ashik*, or the seeker of

the truth and one whose eyes and ears are always open. The Bektashi made use of a local category of membership. Ashiks are uninitiated members who frequent the Bektashi tekkes and to whom esoteric knowledge about the Bektashia may be granted from the non-binding relationship that they may develop with the initiated members of the Order. Ashiks are in-betweens and they make a buffer zone in the hierarchy of Bektashi membership between the initiated members (insiders) and non-Bektashi others. When I made my intention to study and learn about the Bektashi known, I was told that “scholars are the descendants of the Prophet,” fusing this way the boundary between objective knowledge about the Bektashi and the esoteric teachings of the Order. When I asked Dede Reshat to allow me to stay and study the Bektashi his permission was a necessary formality needed to proceed with the study. At this stage, I was perceived as an outsider, in that I did not know but sought to find out. As well as an insider who knew enough about the Bektashi to acknowledge that Dede’s permission was not only a formal but also a religious necessity. This permission opened many doors, but as the events of the dissertation that are described in the chapters that follow show, it served also as a barrier between myself and centers on the margins whose leaders were not always in good terms with the spiritual center and the administrators of the order.

The biggest shift in the first half of my fieldwork was from being left more or less on my own at first to gradually being involved in more events at the headquarters. Most of the early days I spent sitting on the benches of the Headquarters having only brief encounters with the people that came and went. I went home to a small apartment for lunch and returned again in the afternoon to do more sitting on the yard. I could tell that

the full time residents at the center were careful with the way that they negotiated my daily presence at the center. Gradually, I began to move around the compound more frequently. I visited the shrines and the orchard. It was clear that most people that came and went were visitors who at times were asking me about the whereabouts of the waiting room, the shrines, and if Baba was around or not. It was comforting to see that from being a complete outsider and full time occupant of the outdoor benches, there were others who were even more distanced and who needed my help to find their way through the many buildings of the Headquarters.

Eventually I was invited to have lunch at the headquarters with the dervishes and to be present and assist one of the dervishes with hosting duties. Every day, one of the dervishes was assigned the task of welcoming the visitors to the tekke and keeping them company from their arrival to the time until Dede Reshat was free to see them. My duties were to bring sweets to visitors while they were waiting to meet Dede Reshat, and run any errands that were given to me by dervishes. It was also a great opportunity to talk with the visitors and find out where they were coming from. At times I was also able to see firsthand their emotional profile prior to meeting with Dede Reshat, to see their reactions towards the headquarters for first time visitors, and to hear any issues and concerns that they wished to share with either myself or the Dervishes prior to their meeting with Dede Reshat.

At this stage of fieldwork, only a few months into it, I was often perceived as an insider by the visitors at the tekke. In some occasions, when I was the only one at the waiting room, some visitors would often mistake me for an insider in training to become

a dervish. In a number of occasions I remember that even when I was given an explanation about my purpose for being there, it was sometimes dismissed. Some guests were convinced that I was surely on the way of becoming a dervish and that I was either too humble to admit it or not yet aware of my destiny. Even at this turning point in my positionality, the community maintained a perception of myself that, while recognizing that my relationship with the center was one of relative closeness to the people and their daily routines, to the initiated members it was clear that I was an outsider. Outside of the ashik category of membership, the Bektashi employ a clear boundary that separates outsiders from insiders. The details of this are discussed in greater details in chapter 4. Since the last fieldwork trip to Albania in the summer of 2011, my positionality has gradually shifted yet again to that of a progressively more distant outsider. As to the future, as I told my Bektashi friends, “only God knows.” They would surely agree.

CHAPTER 1

History and histories of Bektashism from Haji Bektash Veli to WWII

The Albanian Bektashi is a community that has experienced a long and complex past. This chapter answers the question “who are the Bektashi” by reconstructing a culture history of the community that highlights important historical conjunctures from their early beginnings in the 13th century up until the onset of the communist suppression of religion in Albania at the end of the second world war. Alongside the formal history of the community developed by the historians of the Order, I also show how the Albanian Bektashi themselves talk about and remember their past. The history of the Order is reconstructed here from published sources while the latter is derived from collective memory and oral histories recounted by the Bektashi to validate the present.

According to standard texts, the history of the Bektashi is organized in four main periods. The first falls within the Islamic Middle period and covers the time from year 1250 to 1550. This period is characterized by the esoteric teachings of Haji Bektash Veli, the rise of socially deviant and renunciatory forms of Sufism, and the early beginnings of what later became institutionalized Bektashism. The second period, bracketed between 1550 and 1826, covers the standardization of the Bektashi practices by the second founder of the Order, Balım Sultan, the rise of the Order’s importance in Ottoman society by their association with the Janissaries, as well as their major decline at the hands of Mahmud II who set out to dismantle both the Janissaries and the Bektashi in an effort to

modernize the Turkish military. The third historical period covers the Bektashi revival from 1826 to 1925 in Anatolia and the Balkans and their subsequent decline as the result of the rise of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's secular Turkish Republic, which outlawed just about all of the Sufi Orders. The last of the historical periods is the brief yet eventful period between 1925 to 1945 wherein the Bektashi in Albania were reconsolidated, experienced a period of relative growth, but became again targeted by the incoming communist and antireligious regime that was installed in Albania shortly after the retreat of the German armies at the end of the second world war. Because the scholarship on the Bektashi has attracted a good number of historians who have contributed to the understanding of specific intervals in the long history of the Bektashi, my main concern here is to bring out those aspects of the history of Bektashism that are relevant to the main interests of the thesis. The following survey of both history and histories show that the Bektashi confronted the communist suppression of religion (chapter 2) and the challenges posed by the postcommunist reconstitution of religious life (chapters 3-6) with a long history of twists and turns in popularity as well a prolonged experience surviving internal tensions and external attacks against their centers (tekkes), leaders (babas and dervishes) and the community at large.

There is another more direct way that this background history chapter relates to the main interests of the thesis. Alongside the historians' understandings of the Bektashi history, there are also local recounting of incidents in their past by the Albanian Bektashi themselves. The last section of this chapter describes how and why the Bektashi are especially concerned with four main events in their past: a) the prophecy of Haji Bektash

Veli, the spiritual founder of the Bektashi, and his prediction about the future of Bektashism, b) the way that Bektashi babas and dervishes handled the 1826 official dismantling of the Bektashi by the Ottoman Porte, c) the Albanian Bektashi perception of the 1925 de-legitimation of Bektashia by Atatürk's secularist republic, and d) the positioning of the Bektashi leaders in relation to the onset of the communist suppression of religion in Albania in the early 1940s. These four important historical conjunctures are recalled by the Albanian Bektashi to legitimize their situation in the present. In contemporary Albania, the discourse on these events stresses themes of resilience and survival despite hardships. Recounting of the past maintains the rationale and the momentum of the ongoing postcommunist religious revival and community rebuilding project that the Albanian Bektashi were mostly concerned with throughout my fieldwork between 2005 and 2011.

From Haji Bektash to Balım Sultan: Bektashi beginnings, 1250 to 1550

The origins of Bektashia are linked to a dynamic historical period of Turkmen penetrations into Asia Minor and the decline of the Byzantine Empire. By the end of the 13th century the whole of Asia Minor was turkified. The rise of mystical and secret fraternities coincided with the crumbling of a unified state before the Mongol incursions. It was a time of such "social unrest that even high spirits were driven to the search for inner peace in a life of religious devotion" (Birge 1937: 27). The context for the early Bektashi beginnings is one where the de-legitimation of existing power structures and overall social disintegration served as sources for change, and as an impulse toward

mysticism. The rise of mystics such as Mevlana Rumi and Haji Bektash Veli, in Birge's view (1937), were the byproduct of aversion for the changing world and an overall quest for meaning that transcended the uncertainties of life.

There was nevertheless a militant impulse associated with the early origins of the Ottoman Empire: "a warlike desire to conquer the world in the name of religion" (Birge 1937: 27). It was this second factor that gave rise to the rise of organized Sufi Orders such as Rumi's Mevlevi, commonly known as the Whirling Dervishes, and Haji Bektash's brotherhood which by the 1550s was consolidated and recognized as the Bektashi Order of Dervishes. In an attempt to understand and explain dervish piety in the 16th century, Karamustafa (1994) argues that the earlier trend of turning away from the disintegrating world, as documented by Birge, gave rise to a socially deviant and renouncing form of Sufism. The impulse to conquer the world in the name of religion was a later development. That is, the early history of the Bektashi from the 13th century teachings of Haji Bektash to the 16th century institutionalization of the Order by Balim Sultan, the second founder of the Order, is best understood as a transformation into a Sufi Order that "continued to uphold the legacy of deviant renunciation" (Karamustafa 1994: 84). This is most notable in the institutionalized Bektashi practice of celibate monasticism that continues to uniquely characterize Bektashism at present.

A second characteristic of the Order, namely religious syncretism (within the diverse traditions of Islam), also remains a defining Bektashi characteristic. This too has been traced to the early origins of the Bektashi. According to Birge (1937), the people on the frontiers were alienated from the centralized authority since their relationship with the

state had been primarily one of furnishing soldiers for war and taxes that fed the militant impulse to conquer the world in the name of religion.³ Among the common people, heresies of all sorts were welcomed especially when they undermined Sunni authority. The dervishes enjoyed tremendous power over the people as they offered an underground alternative to the competing authority of the state (Kissling 1954). While the central government embraced orthodoxy, the religion of the common people, as Moslems and Christians on the frontiers mingled, became a mixed affair. It is out of this mixing of Christian, Mohammedan and pagan elements, that the Bektashi and affiliated Kizilbash/Alevi sectaries developed (Birge 1937: 31).

Karamustafa offers a more nuanced explanation about the full-fledged syncretism of the “classical” Bektashi. In Karamustafa’s view, syncretism is best understood as a legacy of their early beginnings in a deviant and renunciatory form of Sufism. In summarizing his perspective, Karamustafa (1994: 11) does not dispute that Islam incorporated existing forms of religiosity but emphasized that “their reconfiguration into a visibly Islamic mode of religiosity occurred as a result of social dynamics internal to Islamic societies.” Treating syncretism as neither “survivals” nor “traces” but the very “building blocks of a new Islamic synthesis,” Karamustafa extends an invitation whereby “the explanation for the emergence and entrenchment for the emergence of this (dervish)

³ Note that a similar situation prevailed with the crumbling of existing social structures in late Ottoman Albania with the Ottoman retreat from the Balkans. As is later discussed in this chapter, the Bektashi of the early 1900s were actively preoccupied with the nationalist cause and Albania’s struggle for independence. During a time when religious differences were succumbed by interfaith cooperation, the Bektashi were working together with Sunni Muslims as well as the Catholic and Orthodox Christians to give rise to what became known as the Albanian National awakening.

mode of Islamic piety should be located within, rather than without, Islamic societies” (1994: 11). Following this view, Bektashi practices of celibate monasticism, for example, are better understood when we see celibacy as a rare but present occurrence in Islam (as in Bashir 2008) and proceed to see how and why celibacy is practiced and debated by Muslims rather than treating it strictly as a borrowing from Judeo-Christian traditions.

Four main groups were active in the Anatolian plateau and the Balkans in the 13th and 14th centuries: Qalandars, Haydaris, Abdals of Rum, and the early Bektashis. During this time, the Turkmen *babas* were influential in introducing a tradition of traveling dervishes and wandering mystics. One of these was the charismatic founder of the Bektashi Order, Haji Bektash Veli. The followers of Haji Bektash were what Karamustafa considers to be the original Bektashi. Alongside the original Bektashi were the Qalandars, commonly known as wandering dervishes. They were first described in detail by Italian travelers Spandugino as “*torlacchi*” (beardless, handsome youth) who were “not to be found in convents like monks, but are thieves, rascals, and assassins” (Karamustafa 1994: 66). Later descriptions by Menavino that were published in 1548 confirmed earlier accounts of the Qalandars’ appearances and their “reprehensible sexual practices” adding that they devised crafty tricks that were appealing especially to women and designed to get alms from people. The Haydaris, were another group of early Sufis with long beards and hair who were for the most part celibate and who “wore large iron earrings, collars, and bracelets as well as iron and silver rings of unequal size and weight on their genitals in order to keep themselves from engaging in sexual intercourse” (Karamustafa 194: 68). Yet another group, Abdals of Rum, were described as completely

naked except for a felt garment secured with a woolen belt, they shaved their heads and beards, walked in bare feet, consumed hashish and wine, and their drawings shows them carrying snakes on their arms.

Other deviant Sufis were contemporaneous with the early Bektashi (such as Jamis and Shamsi Tabrizis). However the “classical” Bektashi of the later Ottoman periods, in Karamustafa’s view, “arose as a fusion of the beliefs and practices of the earlier Qalandars, Haydaris, and Abdals of Rum as well as the original Bektashis” (1994: 84). The “fusion of the beliefs and practices” is visible among the Bektashi even today: the dependence and skills to attain alms, the emphasis on celibacy symbolized by piercing of the left ear, and the occasional ritualized consumption of alcohol, are survivals from Qalandaris, Haydaris, and Abdals of Rum, respectively. The pressures of the Ottoman state against the more socially deviant Sufism led to the institutionalization of the Bektashi Order and their eventual rise as a major Sufi Order of the Ottoman Empire whereas the Qalandars, Haydaris, Abdals of Rum, (as well as other deviant Sufis like Jamis, and Shamsi Tabrizis) were never recognized or institutionalized.

In the periods that followed the pattern of charismatic leadership of Bektashi babas provided the model for master-disciple relationships and for the relationship between the Bektashi and the community at large.⁴ The Bektashi claim their spiritual founder to be a historical as well as mythical figure, a mystic known by his noble name

⁴ Hammoudi (1997) offers a convincing treatment of the master and disciple relationship as a cultural schema capable of transforming the disciple and by contributing to the overall stability of the society.

Haji Bektash Veli⁵ (1248-1337 A.D. by most historical accounts, died in 1341 at the age of 93 according to Baba Rexheb in his *Misticizma Islame dhe Bektashizma* (1970: 126) although the exact dates are debated by historians⁶). He is referred to as their *pir*, the founder of the order and spiritual guide. Sources from the 14th and 15th century (in Mélikoff 2001: 37), refer to Haji Bektash as both the descendent and disciple of Baba Resul, alias for Baba Ilyas, one of the main leaders of the Babai revolt that shattered the Seljuk Empire during the years 1239-1240.

Most of the information on Haji Bektash's life is derived from a legendary account of his life, a hagiography entitled *Vilayetname* that portrays him as capable of performing miracles comparable to those of Biblical and other prophetic figures. For example, as an infant in a cradle, Haji Bektash was heard to recite the word of testimony of God's unity. When he met his instructor, Lokman Perende, a famous Turkish saint of Central Asia, two figures were seen teaching the Qur'an to Haji Bektash. When asked, he said that the one on the right was "my ancestor Mohammed Mustafa, upon him be

⁵ "*Bektash*," literally, "companion in rank" or "an equal with a prince" (Birge 1937: 36). "*Veli*," from Arabic "*wali*," for a friend of God.

⁶ Haji Bektash's date of birth and death are contested in the available literature. De Jong (1989: 7) supplies year of birth as 1248 and year of death being 1337. The controversy over the historical presence of Haji Bektash and the early spread of his teachings is closely tied to two main issues. First, the Bektashi favor the later date and, by doing so, strengthen the claim of a direct spiritual inheritance from Haji Bektash which was established by the leader's own disciples. Whereas the earlier estimates of his presence in Anatolia, extend the time between Haji Bektash and the early Bektashi whose activities to establish the institutions of the Order did not fully materialize until the early 16th century under the leadership of Balim Sultan. Second, there is a controversy over whether or not Haji Bektash himself blessed the Janissaries. An earlier date of death offered by histories would make this virtually unrealistic as the forming of the Janissary corps is separated by the early estimate of Haji Bektash's death by as much as a whole century. Whereas, the later estimate (d. 1337), makes it more likely that Haji Bektash and/or his closest disciples were associated with the forming of the Janissary corps from the very beginning.

supplication and peace,” and the one to the left was “the pole of saintship, the cupbearer of *Kevser*, the lion of the lord, the lord of the worlds, the commander of believers *Ali el Mürteza*” (cited in Birge 1937: 36). The miracles he is said to have performed are many. To mention just a few, Haji Bektash is hailed for turning attacking lions into stone, being greeted by fish in the river, and commanding a stone to move. The hagiographical descriptions correspond to that of a typical wandering dervish who became the leader of the Anatolian Abdals in the second half of the 13th century. According to this work, Haji Bektash Veli’s genealogy and source of his spiritual authority (*silsila*) is traced to Prophet Mohammed via the 6th Imam. He is said to have been the son of Sultan Ibrahim, a learned ruler of Khorassan⁷ who may have migrated from an unspecified north east region of present-day Iran into Anatolia during the Turkmen conquests of Asia Minor.

In this first period of the founding of Bektashia, the historical evidence indicates the arrival of Turkmen Baba and Haji Bektash Veli brought with them practices of Central Asian Sufis and the teachings of Turkish saint Ahmet Yesevi. Through publicly performed and observed miracles, which hagiographies present as the source of mystical legitimacy and proof of saintly sanctity, Haji Bektash won a following, initiated some followers, and introduced several rituals such as the use of the candle, a ceremonial meal and dance. He wore and gave his followers a characteristic headpiece and before he died he sent his apostles in different directions to propagate his teachings. Such was the

⁷ Mélikoff (2001: 38) notes that the reference to Khorassan does not correspond to a place of origin but rather to indicate that Haji Bektash was not a local of Anatolian plateau, but a migrant. “Coming from Khorasan,” in the way that the term was used in the 14th and 15th century, was more an indication of one’s migrant status and less of a geographical location of one’s homeland.

overall state of the Bektashia prior to 1500s. In this context, the Bektashi promise of normative stability through the manifest charisma of the leader acted to counteract the anxiety generated from the disintegration of existing power structures. The emergence of the Bektashi brotherhood around the example and teachings of Haji Bektash served as a religious calling through which the decadence of the world could be refuted.

The hagiography of Haji Bektash is not, strictly speaking, a biographical narrative. Instead, it is a collection of stories about Haji Bektash that have been collected by his followers. They catalogue the saintly proofs of the leader and are put together as a document aimed at establishing, without commentary, the many different ways that Haji Bektash established his superiority over other saints.⁸ Similar stories are found among the Mevlevi such as the story where Rumi is able to discern a Bektashi disguised as Rumi's follower who, according to this story, had been sent by Haji Bektash to learn the source of Rumi's greatness. Rumi recognizes the true intentions of his visitor and instantaneously composes a poem⁹ which is to reassure Mevlevi disciples that they have

⁸ A story collected amongst the Bektashi dervishes between 1481 and 1501 by Uzun Ferdowsi Deraz, for example, hails the superiority of Haji Bektash over Rumi. In this story (recounted in Lewis 2000: 192), found also in the *Vilayetname*, Rumi's murshid Shams was decapitated by his son Sultan Valad who could no longer tolerate hearing that his father was dancing and singing with Rumi in the presence of his wife and daughters. Having thus been decapitated, Shams rose again in the whirling dance with his own head in tow, and disappears. Rumi follows him to find him dancing on top of the green minaret in Konya and joins him there. But as soon as he gets there, Shams is seen on the bottom of the minaret: this cycle of showing himself, disappearing, and being caught up by Rumi is repeated seven times until Rumi gives up and throws himself from the minaret only to be caught by Shams. Although significant esoteric knowledge is meant to be associated with the fantastic events up to this point of the story, the Bektashi recounting of the storyline follows with Sham's commanding Rumi to bury him there and to go see Haji Bektash. It is believed by the Bektashi that Rumi buries his murshid and then stays at the kitchen of Haji Bektash for forty days until he is given permission to return to Konya. This way, Rumi is presented as a disciple of Haji Bektash.

⁹ If you do not have somebody to love,

If you have not yet seen the Friend,

nothing to learn from Haji Bektash and his followers which cannot be learned more fully from complete devotion to their own master. The four lines by Rumi are a poetic version of a Bektashi and Sufi axiom that highlight the crucial dependence of spiritual attainment on having a murshid or spiritual guide. To this day, I often heard the Bektashi saying “those who do not have a murshid are guided by Satan.”

It is clear from Mevlevi as well as Bektashi sources that there was a rivalry between the spiritual founders of the two communities, the contemporaneous Mevlana Jalâl al-Din Rumi (d. 1273) and Haji Bektash Veli (d. 1271). I pause to consider this relationship because the Orders they originated exemplified the characteristics of the founders which emerged out of the early rivalry between Rumi and Haji Bekash (e.g., Sariönder 2004). Hailing from Galkh, a town in today’s Afghanistan, Rumi settled in an urban center of Konya, which once served as the capital of the Seljuk Empire. Haji Bektash’s story begins with his settlement in Sulucakarahöyük (today known as Hacıbektaş in his honor), a small village in the northeast region of Nevşehir, not too far from Konya. Only limited historical information is known about his origins which, as mentioned previously, are commonly accepted as being from the region of Khorassan.

There are many distinctions between the two saints. Rumi was centered in an urban center and surrounded himself by learned men. Whereas Haji Bektash’s area of influence was among the rural, uneducated Turkmen. Rumi wrote in Persian and is widely known in the Muslim world as well as in the West for his mystical verses. By

why don’t you seek somebody?
And if you have found someone to love,
why don’t you sing out of joy? (in Lewis 2000: 36)

why do you not search for him?
If you have attained to him,
why are you agitated? (in Birge 1937: 43)

comparison, it is difficult, outside of the hagiography of Haji Bektash and collections of his sayings which were composed in the Ottoman Turkish language, to even begin to match Rumi's written works. We know that "the animating spirit of Rumi and his teacher" was rooted in a pious life and Sunni rules following the ways of the Prophet whereas, although Haji Bektash was "an illuminated gnostic at heart," living in ecstasy and solitude, he did not obey Islamic rules in a strict sense (Lewis 2000: 36). Rumi married and had children whereas Haji Bektash, as far as we can tell, lived a celibate life. From accounts of a Mevlevi disciple Ahmad Aflâki, it is clear that Haji Bektash had a sizable circle of disciples around him and that the Mevlevis considered him a rival. Both Mevlevi and Bektashi verses testify to the rivalry between the two communities. There exist a number of Rumi-Haji Bektash interactions in literature and these are predominantly about the Mevlevi preeminence over the relative inferiority of the Bektashi. Here I make use of a less well-known story of interaction between Haji Bektash and Jalâl al-Din Rumi from Haji Bektash's *Vilayetname*.

Haji Bektash Veli and Mevlana Jalâl al-Din Rumi

One day Sari Ismail (Haji Bektash's closest disciple, companion) came into the presence of the Monarch [Haji Bektash] and clasped his hands. The Monarch said, "Speak!" Sari Ismail said, "I have prepared a little warm water for you to wash in. If you please come." The Monarch said, "It is not the time for that now. Go quickly to Konya into the presence of Master Jalâl al-Din. He has borrowed a book from me, take it and come back." Sari Ismail immediately set out on the road and when he approached Konya

he saw that Master Jalâl al-Din was coming towards him. They greeted and visited with each other. Sari Ismail said, “One day I had warmed some water and I said, “I will clean the dirt on your blessed back.” He said, “It is not the time for that now. We have a book with Master Jalâl al-Din. Go to Konya. Take it and come back. I set out on the road and came. I have seen your blessed face and found honor.” When Master Jalâl al-Din heard these words he said, “Everyday seven seas and eight rivers visit the person of the Monarch Haji Bektash the Saint. What need is there for him to enter water as you said, mystic?” After Sari Ismail heard these words, he said, “Sir, present the book and I will depart.” The Master said, “The meaning of the book was this advice which I have just explained.” In accordance with this, Sari Ismail bade farewell and returned to the tekke (translation in Smith 1971: 103).

There are a few common patterns in the interactions that are taking place in this story. First, the master and disciple relationship is universal in all such stories. For masters are masters by virtue of their disciples. The master orders the disciple and the disciple obeys. The warm water is meant to suggest cleansing, much like ablutions that precede Muslim prayer. There is an acknowledgement on the part of the storytellers (Bektashi dervishes) of the sanctity of Rumi. He is a worthy mystic able to foresee that Haji Bektash has sent his disciple to meet with him. After all, the rivalry with an esteemed mystic is much more rewarding than with another less established mystic. It is one thing to be a greater than another rival, and quite another to be greater than Rumi. Sari Ismail sets out to bring back a book which is with Rumi but what he brings back are Rumi’s words which are meant to be the meaning of the book. Rumi’s answer

emphasizes that the meaning of the book is Haji Bektash himself. This is an elaboration of the Sufi belief in *wahdat al-wujud* or unity of existence: that God is one and everywhere, divinity is in all forms of life and in nature and the discovery of God's reality within oneself. The meaning of the book, by Rumi's admission, is Haji Bektash himself. Since seven seas and eight rivers cleanse Haji Bektash every day, he enjoys eternal purity and is in no need for additional ablutions. Indeed he is born a saint even though he is unwilling to tell his disciples who he really is. All he can do is show his sanctity by sending his disciple to Rumi who testifies to the saintliness of Haji Bektash. The story does not continue beyond the return of Sari Ismail because there is no need for Haji Bektash to be told what he already knows: namely, his perpetual cleanliness and commitment to the mystical recollection of God.

The rivalry between Rumi and Haji Bektash spilled over to a Mevlevi and Bektashi rivalry after the passing away of the two mystics of Islam. In the later centuries, the Bektashi enjoyed a broader appeal by virtue of their association with the Janissaries, whereas the Mevlevi suffered a relative decline by comparison. The reign of Selim II (1789-1807) and Mahmud II (1808-1839) which were periods of Bektashi decline, witnessed a closer alliance between the Ottoman Porte and the Mevlevi (who stood for interreligious tolerance) not only against the Janissaries and the Bektashi but also against the ulema or religious scholars who were seeking legal superiority of Muslims over Christians (Gölpınarlı 1983: 271). Due to the elitist and urban characteristics of the Mevlevi, versus the heterodox and rural areas of influence of the Bektashi, there was a reversal in the influence of the two Orders after the rise of the Atatürk's Republic. Unlike

the Bektashi, The Mevlevi were spared from being totally outlawed. The Mevlana tekke was transformed into a museum whereas the property of Haji Bektash Tekke was confiscated by the state, and suffered serious damage to the buildings as a result. The Bektashi and other Sufi communities led a very limited underground existence in Turkey after the consolidation of the raising state. The Haji Bektash tekke did eventually open as a museum in 1964 and annual festivals have taken place there since then. In the last decade, a number of Bektashi babas and dervishes from Albania have journeyed to take part in the festivals at this center. At present, the compound where Rumi once taught, as well as his shrine, enjoy much more attention from tourists and followers alike. Whereas Haji Bektash tekke and indeed the Bektashi in general are not as publically visible in Turkey by comparison to the Mevlevi.

Compared to other Sufi Orders, Haji Bektash and his followers formed a new and different order of dervishes: “meditative, metaphysical, charitable, hospitable and tolerant” (Jacques 1995: 223). As mentioned, the major legacies of the founder of Bektashia were syncretism, heterodoxy, and celibate monasticism. To a lesser extent, other aspects included the metamorphosis of the saint (taking the shape of the dove), his metempsychosis (being in more than one place at the same time), and levitation. These show up in hagiographical sources and remain part of the Bektashi discourse until the present. Other characteristics of the Order that have their origins in the teachings and saintly performance of Haji Bektash are the Sufi commitment to *wahdat al-wujud*, the unity of existence or that God is one and everywhere. The ability to be to more than one place at once which is present in the hagiography of Haji Bektash is ascribed also to a

select number of his followers (e.g., Sari Saltik in Norris 2006: 54-66). The belief in metempsychosis or transmigration of the souls and to a lesser extent the belief on reincarnation which figures still among contemporary Bektashi may have been a legacy from the pre-Islamic Turks and is characteristic of heterodox Druze and the 'Alawites of Syria as well (Norris 1993: 90-91).

The rise of the Bektashi Order of Dervishes, 1550 to 1826

Abdal Musa, a follower in the convent of Haji Bektash, was the person responsible for spreading the teachings of Haji Bektash after his death (c. 14th century). The Bektashi were first established as a recognized Order in the beginning of the 16th century by Balim Sultan. The tekkes, which were spread to towns and villages, were centralized during his era. In relation to other Sufi Orders such as the Mevlevi, the Rifai (Popovic 1993), and the Halveti (Clayer 1994), the Bektashi developed a heavy emphasis on celibacy. In this they took after Haji Bektash who, according to Bektashi belief, left no hereditary descendants. While the stewardship of other orders often became the hereditary responsibility of the descendants of their founders, Haji Bektash (and a few babas who joined the Order in the centuries that followed) has direct hereditary links to the family of Prophet Mohammed. The line of succession from Haji Bektash to the Prophet of Islam has been preserved and presented in detail in the *Makalat*, the book of the teachings of Haji Bektash Veli, as well as in important sources on the Order by Baba Rexheb (1970: 105) and Birge (1937: 35). According to these sources the Bektashi *silsila* is as follows: Prophet Mohammed, Fatma the wife of Ali, Imam Huseyin, Imam

Zeynulabidin, Imam Mohammed Bakir, Imam Cafer Sadik, Imam Musa Kazim, Seyit Ibrahim el Mucab, Seyit Musa Sani, Seyit Sultan Ibrahim Sani, and Haji Bektash Veli.

After Haji Bektash Veli, the Bektashi shifted from a totally hereditary line of succession to a silsila or chain of succession that is held together by spiritual links of succession. That is, inheritance of stewardship at a Mevlevi tekke passed on from Rumi to his sons, and on to their hereditary descendants. Whereas, at a Bektashi tekke, the stewardship of the tekke passed on from a serving celibate baba to his closest disciples or spiritual descendants. The latter are not related by blood to their master, though in principle a nephew or sibling of the baba could inherit his position. The celibate line of succession was well in place by the mid-16th century during Balım Sultan's leadership of the Order.

Balım Sultan is the most important figure of the Bektashi after the Haji Bektash. He was responsible for giving a permanent form and content to the practices and the institutional organization of the Bektashi. Among the new practices introduced by this leader, often referred to as *Piri Sani* or second founder, were the use of 12 candles and the standardization of the Bektashi clerical dress (Figure 1.1). A celibate branch of Bektashia was also officially established. It is at this point that we see also a preoccupation with the practice of an institutionalized form of secrecy. The commitment to abstain from marital relations, for example, was justified as protecting the secrets of Haji Bektash and his mysteries. In addition the Bektashi restricted the rituals of the *mejdan* (the room for initiation and communal prayer) to only those who are formal

members of the Order by initiation. The Balim Sultan era reflects a commitment towards the routinization of normative stability and the consolidation of the charismatic order.

Balim Sultan formalized the Bektashi order to embody the characteristics that are typical of the order today: the authoritarian principle of unconditional obedience to the Bektashi *baba*, the strict organization with a stern hierarchy from the *baba* to the *murshid* to the novice, initiation rites, ceremonies, rituals of trials and fortitude, the repeated and frequent exercises of abstention, and the common dress and symbolic representations associated with the order's ideology (Kissling 1954: 24). The rituals and organization of the *tekkes* in or near towns were more organized, so that in the post-1500s period one can speak of the Bektashi Order of Dervishes as an institutionalized entity.

This was also when a split widened between the Bektashi who lived a sedentary life in organized *tekkes* and the Kizilbash (an earlier stage of Alevism) who were still nomads or semi-nomads. Both groups hail Haji Bektash as their *pir*. While Alevis are more often treated as one religious group there are differences between Turkish Alevis who are likely to be sedentary rather than tribal or transhumant and closely affiliated with Bektashis, Kurdish Alevis appear less likely to identify as strongly with Haji Bektash and more likely to be affiliated with local shrines (Shankland 2003). Turkish Alevis label themselves as village Bektashis while Kurdish Alevis call themselves Kizilbash, a term that refers historically to the Safavid tribes who fought against the Ottoman Porte and with whom Alevis may have been allied.

The most striking difference between the Bektashi and Alevi has to do with the rules of membership. One becomes a Bektashi through initiation into the Order, not by

being born into a Bektashi family (see chapter 4 on ways of becoming Bektashi). One cannot become an Alevi if one is not born an Alevi. Succession of leadership at a Bektashi center follows a spiritual line of succession, from master to disciple. It is not, as among the Alevi, a hereditary succession, from father to son. The distinctions refer back to the life of Haji Bektash Veli. As mentioned, the Bektashi believe that their spiritual leader never married and left no hereditary successors. Rather, he left his teachings with his disciples who followed his path. Whereas the Alevi believe that Kadıncık and Idris, the hosts of Haji Bektash in the village that is now known by his name, were childless. It was to this Kadıncık that two children were born after she drank the water with which Haji Bektash had performed the ablution, since two drops of blood from Haji Bektash had been mixed with the water (Birge 1937: 8). These children are believed to be Haji Bektash's own descendants and the event is the basis for Alevi's emphasis on hereditary succession of their spiritual leaders. In their other practices and beliefs the Bektashi have been largely influenced by the Balkans whereas the Alevi by the people of Eastern Anatolia including the Iranians and Kurds.

Furthermore, a "dualistic organization" exists within the Bektashi that is unique by comparison to other Sufi Orders (Faroqhi 1995: 19). Outside of the Bektashi Alevi divide, internally the Bektashi recognize a celibate as well as a non-celibate division of their spiritual leadership. Historically as well as at present, the Bektashi babas are dervishes who have never married. They are called *mücerret* (from Turkish for alone, unmarried or celibate) and belong to the Babağan branch of the Bektashi (also known as the sons of the path because they emphasize the deeds of Haji Bektash and not his

lineage). It is this branch that has exclusive rights to the spiritual leadership of the Order. However, historically as well as at present some babas and dervishes who have been married can also join the Çelebi or Sofiyân branch of the Order (otherwise known as the sons of the loin for their emphasis on being descendants of Haji Bektash). They are known as *mytehil* in contemporary Albanian Bektashi terminology. Although they have been married and in many cases have children of their own, upon joining the Bektashi they are expected to give up their parental and marital attachments and live celibate lives within the Bektashi tekke. A de facto prohibition against the married Babas and dervishes exists in regards to the vows of celibacy which are only revealed to the members of the celibate branch. Within the sect, an internal tension has developed concerning the authority of the permanently celibate mücerret leaders and the secondary position of the Çelebi who, by sheer majority of their numbers, are seen as a potential threat against the supremacy of the mücerret clerics as the rightful inheritors of the spiritual leadership of the Order. As will be discussed further in the chapters that follow, the anxieties that result from a noted shortage of clerics at present in Albania have contributed to an imbalance between the few celibate babas and dervishes and the growing numbers of mytehils.

Another important dimension of the Bektashi life in the period associated with the consolidation and rise of the Bektashi was the association of the leadership of the Order with the elite Ottoman troops, the Janissary corps. Although the timing of the initial association of the elite corps with the Bektashi is disputed, by the late 16th century the Bektashi were officially attached to the corps through the ninety-ninth battalion, with their grand master (serving dede, spiritual leader of the order) appointed also as that

battalion's leader (Shaw 1976: 123). Upon becoming members of the corps, the Janissaries were addressed as the servants of Haji Bektash and were asked to make the vow of faithfulness as part of the membership ritual. The emphasis is on the sacred vows as a requirement for membership and a sign of loyalty. At this point the Bektashia managed to provisionally resolve the problem of succession that generally problematizes the stability of charismatic movements. In this instance, the charisma of the founder is passed on to Bektashi *babas* who are authorized by previous *babas* as legitimate spiritual descendants of Haji Bektash. The crisis of succession is further dealt by means of a second line of succession which is secular: anyone who proves himself worthy of membership into the order and progresses in the spiritual path under the guidance of a Bektashi *baba*, qualifies as an adequate spiritual descendent. The chapters about membership, spiritual hierarchy (chapter 4) and saintly leadership (chapter 5) explain in detail how the community decides on their spiritual leaders and what necessary spiritual qualifications are attributed to them. The cycle is one where a legitimized *baba* may train others to travel the path of spiritual attainment that he himself has traveled, and to then name accomplished disciples as successors. This way, the master and disciple relationship facilitates the intergenerational continuity of the order.

The growth of the Bektashi following was associated with a struggle against the centralized government. The growth of charismatic groups often undermines the authority of the state and it was no different for the Bektashi who had gained an unprecedented popularity among the Janissaries, who were much feared by the Ottoman Porte. In their sheer numbers and military potency, they were a dangerous competing

power to the Sultan's authority, and were known to sometimes break the rules and other times make them. In the early 1800s, the chief military problem was the weakness of the Janissaries against internal and external threats such as the rebellion of Ali Pasha of Yannina and Mohammed Ali in Egypt (two of a number of Albanians of Bektashi descent who ranked high in the Ottoman military), as well as the Serbian revolt which was settled in 1815, and the boiling conflict with Russia which eventually led to the surrendering of the Danube delta in 1919 (Jelavich and Jelavich 1977: 101-102). With the enthronement of Mahmud II in 1808, plans to modernize the military led to the extirpation of the Janissaries. In the decisive battle of June 15th, 1826 some four thousand Janissaries revolted against the creation of a new body of regular soldiers. The Janissaries were barricaded in their quarters in Istanbul. The gunners and marines of the navy along with the bombardiers and sappers brought about a bloody end of the Janissary corps. Thousands of others were executed throughout the Empire in the days that followed. The Ottoman state then outlawed the Babağan or celibate branch of Bektashism which up until that point had been widespread among the most influential centers of the Order. This was the beginning of the Order's great decline. Birge reports that in the early 1900s the Bektashi claimed that Mahmud II vowed to execute seventy-thousand Bektashi (1937: 78). When there were no more to be found he ordered the decapitation of the Bektashi tombstones until the number was complete. This apocryphal story is a measure of the Bektashi perception of their losses during the 1826 efforts to uproot the Order. Historical sources cited in Birge (1937: 77) indicate that 8 major tekkes were indeed razed to the ground in Istanbul, while many Bektashi babas were either executed or sent

to exile along with their dervishes. The stewardship of the Bektashi tekkes was transferred to the Naqshbandi Order.

From 1550 to 1826, the history of Bektashia witnessed an effort to standardize the religious life with new rituals, dress codes, oaths of membership and loyalty to the Order. It was a phase associated with a growth¹⁰ of the Bektashi Order and their influence via the association with the Janissaries. The leaders of the Bektashi tekke were considered local-level dignitaries in mainstream Ottoman society while their widespread popularity via their connections with the Janissaries provided the centers with a relative autonomy from the Ottoman governing elites. While other religious communities had the Porte's approval for their leaders (the petition to the Ottoman administration had to be made through the local *kadi*, a Sunni legal authority), the Bektashi enjoyed a special privilege. Based on two Ottoman *fermans* or Sultanic orders brought to light by Suraiya Faroqhi (1997: 174-176), the petition for appointing the Bektashi leaders came not from the state official but from the serving leader of the Haji Bektash tekke who insisted that his right to present candidates for positions of leadership be respected. And throughout the 17th and 18th century the Ottoman administration confirmed this privilege. Despite the relative rise in popularity of the Bektashi from 1550 to 1826, this Golden Age of Bektashism ended

¹⁰ Growth does not imply that the relationship between the Bektashi and the Ottoman Porte was always a friendly one. Some Sultans were more inclined towards strict forms of Sunni Islam whereas others less so. As a result, while the relationship between 1550 and 1826 was generally a positive one, there were occasional eruptions of aggression against Bektashi centers. In 1668, for example, Vani Mehmed Efendi convinced a grand vizier to issue orders to destroy the Shrine of Kamber Baba located on a hill overlooking Edirne on the grounds that it had become a site of pilgrimage. Upon hearing that "near Hafsa there is a grave of a certain Kamber Baba to which some people come with bad convictions and slip into polytheism," the sultan issued a decree ordering the destruction of the shrine – the tyrbe of Kamber Baba was razed to the ground as a result (Baer 2008: 114).

with the almost total wiping out of the Order by Mahmud II. His ambitions to modernize the military demanded the dismantling of both the Janissaries as well as their spiritual base. The 1826 events in Bektashi history illustrate external sources for change and the political consequences of the Order's alliance with the Janissaries. With the loss of the historical Bektashi-Janissary alliance, the Bektashi lost also a buffer that had protected them from government actions and Sunni hostilities against them.

The Bektashi in Albania, 1550 to 1826

The establishment of Bektashia in Albanian lands may have begun when the Ottoman troops under Murad II invaded lands populated by Albanian speakers in 1431. This has led to speculations that Bektashism may have traveled with the Janissaries to the Balkans soon thereafter. Norris has convincingly showed that the Bektashi movement took root in the Balkans with the Ottoman conquest: "peacefully, slowly and without serious opposition" (1993: 124). Small traveling groups of a baba and two dervishes like Pir Abdall in Kosovo and Shah Kalender in Elbasan were some of the first Bektashi to reach Albania in the late 15th and 16th Century. The evidence from travelers' accounts and archaeological dating of Bektashi centers in Albania indicate that it was in the mid-17th century that Bektashism finally gained a firm footing and noted architectural visibility in Albania. In the 18th century, established tekkes were present in southern Albania (Asim Baba Tekke, c. 1780), central Albania (Shememi Baba Tekke, c. 1790) and Elbasan (Xhefaj Ibrahim Baba, c. 1723-1780). Baba Rexheb (1970: 289) claims that the first functioning tekke was that of Asim Baba which was established in 1780; prior to this,

smaller centers were established by early Bektashi missionaries. For example, Arshi Baba (d. 1796) was situated in the city of Gjirokaštër while Ali Baba Horasan settled in the city of Krujë. They were only able to leave behind their shrines (*tyrbe*) but no tekkes that could provide a setting for ordinary functions and religious ceremonies that are normally ascribed to the Bektashi centers (see chapter 3 for more details).

Baba Rexheb gives the following chronology for the spread of Bektashism in the Balkans: Sejjid Ali Sultan was centered in Dimotek, Bulgaria in the 14th Century. Arshi Baba was active in southern Albanian city of Gjirokaštër (d. 1621). Shememi Baba opened a center in Fushkrujë, central Albania which was functional by the end of the 18th century. The spread of Bektashism in the Balkans was no doubt influenced by the events at the spiritual center of the Order in Turkey, the Haji Bektash tekke and its leadership. For example, Sersem Ali Dede, an Albanian from Tetovo in Macedonia, served as the spiritual leader of the Bektashi in the tekke of Haji Bektash Veli from 1550-1569.

In addition, from 1753 to 1942, 15 of 16 babas that served at one of the most influential Bektashi centers in the Balkans and the epicenter for training Bektashi Dervishes, the tekke of Durballi¹¹ Sulltan in the Larissa region of Greece, were Albanian. The other babas that served at the same tekke since it was founded in 1480 came from Baghdad, Iran, Turkey, and Pakistan (Rexheb 1970: 270-271). Although a more rigorous study of this center's presumed early antiquity has been deemed unlikely in architectural, epigraphic and historical sources (Kiel 2005, claims that the tekke was founded between

¹¹ "Durballi Sulltan" is the modern Albanian equivalent of "Turbe Ali Sultan" tekke reported by F.W. Hasluck and M.M. Hasluck (1929: 115, 467) and F.W. Hasluck (1913: 110).

1630-1640), the monopoly that the Albanian babas and dervishes wielded over Durballi Sulltan tekke¹² in the last two and a half centuries prior to its abandonment in 1973 (Figure 1.2) indicates that Bektashia was well settled in Albania by the end of the 17th century for the Albanian lands to supply babas to tekkes further east. An important archival discovery was made by Kiel (1997: 267-268) in 1583 Ottoman census register held in Istanbul where there is mention of a congregation of Muslims appointed to repair the road of Sari Saltik, the legendary Bektashi mystic whose shrine is located in a remote mountaintop above the city. This evidence pushes back the organized presence of Bektashism in Albania to c. 1560s, slightly ahead of the slow conversion of primarily Catholic Albanians to Islam, which had made little progress up until the mid-17th century.

Census data utilized by Arnold (1913: 180, and references therein) suggest that in 1610 Albanian Christians exceeded the Muslims in the proportion of ten to one. Most villages were inhabited by Christians, with a very small admixture of Muslims. The conversions to Islam appear to have been more frequent in the large towns. From 1620-1650 some 300,000, or more than 1/3 of Albanians, had converted to Islam. The mass conversion, in Arnold's view, was coupled with a decline in the spiritual life of the

¹² During my own visit to this site in November of 2007, the tekke lay in ruins. The main building and the shrines of the founders showed signs of recent repair and maintenance by Albanian migrants to Greece. All of what must have once been an impressive Bektashi center showed signs of prolonged neglect. The remnants of the compound's walls qualify for archaeological ruins waiting their rediscovery. A letter dating November 19th, 1998 and addressed to Machiel Kiel by the last official guardians of the tekke states: "Since the death of Babay Seyyid [last occupant of the tekke, d. 1973] the situation of the tekke deteriorated rapidly. Manuscripts and Bektāshī *lawas* with interesting calligraphies were stolen, doors and windows smashed. In the 1990s nationalist Greek fanatics largely destroyed the existing building, smashed the calligraphed Bektashi grave stones, opened the tombs and graves, and scattered the bones of the dead, an act of vandalism unworthy [of] the descendants of the oldest civilised nation of Europe" (Kiel 2005: 423).

Catholic Church. One convincing explanation for this has to do with the practice of interfaith marriages. Albanian Christian families had no problem giving their daughters in marriage to Muslim men. The male children of these marriages were raised as Muslim whereas the girls were allowed to follow the faith of their mothers. However the Church did not approve of the practice and ordered the mothers to be excluded from the churches and the taking of sacraments. This often led to the Church losing both the mothers and their children and thus to suffer a rapid decline in members which often translated into rapid gains in the numbers of the converted to Islam. The population increase on the Muslim side continued for a good deal longer. A Turkish traveler to the northern Albanian city of Shkodër reported the presence of 11 mosques in 1662 compared to 26 of them that were reported at the outset of the 20th century (Skendi 1980: 156).

The Bektashi revival and subsequent decline, 1826 to 1925

Charles MacFarlane, an Englishman who traveled through Anatolia in 1847 and was “on intimate¹³ terms with one or two Bektashi leaders” provided convincing descriptive details about the rapid return of the Bektashi (Birge 1937: 79). “It seemed to be generally agreed that the Bektash dervishes are now-a-days very free in their life and conversation” writes MacFarlane in his travelogue (1850: 506). His travels coincide with Sultan Abdülmecid reign (1839 to 1861): it was well known that the successor of Mahmud II was sympathetic towards the Bektashi. An 1852 decree returned the

¹³ In the Bektashi context the relationship between Bektashi babas and their disciples is a close one. Birge seems to be implying that MacFarlane had either established a close relationship with Bektashi babas or that he did perhaps join the Order.

leadership of the Haji Bektash lodge to the Bektashi; the Naqshbandi tarika controlled the lodge since 1826 (Ortaylı 1999: 71). Additionally, MacFarlane noted that accessing any information on Bektashi faith and practice was impossible. The experience of persecution had heightened the demand for secrecy within the group and increased the sharp distinction between members and uninitiated outsiders. As noted previously, Bektashis, like Shi'ites, practice dissimulation (*takiyya*) for protection. Having a long history of coexistence within a society that was predominantly orthodox and in favor of Sunni Islam, secrecy or an investment in proactive limitation of outsiders' knowledge about the community had been characteristic of the Bektashia from early on, but after the 1826 experience of the near total annihilation of the order, heightened secrecy became the norm (Tefft 1992).

The growth of the order and its wide geographical presence in the Balkans as well in Asia Minor necessitated better institutional organization especially in light of the attacks incurred in 1826. The Bektashi, who did not claim that Haji Bektash had any descendants of his own stock, recognized a *dede* (absolute leader) who resided at Haji Bektash village as their leader. The *dede* was surrounded by eight *babas* who formed the ruling council. Although the degree to which the center yielded influence beyond its immediate vicinities fluctuated over time, in 1914 the Haji Bektash *tekke* was reported to enjoy the loyalty of 362 villages and generated revenue of about 60,000 pounds sterling a year (Hasluck 1914: 87). Alongside the Bektashi *dede* who resided at Haji Bektash, the main *tekke* was also under the co-ownership of a Çelebi, leader of the Kizilbash tribes

who claimed direct hereditary descent from Haji Bektash. The profits from the compound were divided equally between the Bektashi and Kizilbash.

As shall be discussed in more detail later in this dissertation, the Bektashi lodges are, aside from their religious importance, economic centers and land owning institutions. Each center is also in control of the proceeds donated by visitors who give alms to the *baba* and make offerings – often monetary – to the shrines erected in veneration of Bektashi *babas*. Considering all of the income that can be ascertained from available records, the *tekke* was “one of the largest economic units in central Anatolia” (Faroqhi 1976: 194). While the *tekke* was a wealth accumulating institution, it also provided a degree of economic stability to the neighboring regions by redistributing wealth back to the community in times of shortage.

The Haji Bektash *tekke* served also as a place of pilgrimage for Albanian and other non-Turkish Bektashis. After his visit to the tomb and shrine of Haji Bektash in the early 1900s, White remarked:

The purpose of the Dervish life is the rest, peace, satisfaction, that come on taking the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, and withdrawing from the world. It was a surprise to find that out of about four-score dervishes resident at the *tekye* [tekke], nearly all are Albanians (White 1913: 694).

Just as the early history of the Order suggested an east to west as well as west to east flow of people, so this period of Bektashi revival and subsequent decline shows a similar pattern. Albanian *babas* and dervishes progressively continued to visit and stay at the Haji Bektash *tekke* up until the repression of the Order by the secularist Turkish Republic of the 1920s which was led to a retreat of a number of Bektashi *babas* and dervishes, of Albanian as well as of Turkish descent, to Albania.

Bektashism in Albania, 1826 to 1925

In lands populated by Albanians during the period from 1826 to 1925, the historical relevance of the Bektashi was closely tied with the struggle of the Albanian people to gain their independence from the Ottoman Empire and their attempt to curb the partitioning of their lands by Serbia and Greece. Albanians were latecomers to nationalist movements of the late 19th and early 20th centuries by comparison to other peoples of the Balkans like Greeks and Serbs who had already begun their revolt against the Ottoman Porte and consolidated their national character. The Serbian affairs were settled in 1815 while Greece established its formal independence in 1830, exactly a full century before Albania's independence was formally recognized.

The Ottoman Empire afforded Albanians a kind of semiautonomous status. In fact, the Turkish government was apparently never able to appoint or confirm any provincial governor who was not a native of Albania. Several tribes and clans like the Northern Catholic tribes also remained just as independent as they were before the Ottoman conquest (Galaty et al. 2014). Under these circumstances, the Albanian national awakening happened not so much as a reaction against the Ottomans. Instead, it was the Treaty of San Stefano in 1878 that granted lands to Slav nations of Montenegro and Serbia that triggered the Albanian nationalist movement. Months later the League of Prizren was established. The main organizer was Abdul Frashëri, a Bektashi from southern Albania and the “driving nationalistic force of the time” (Jelavich and Jelavich 1977: 224). The League decided that, in order to prevent the partitioning of Albanian

lands to Slav neighbors, they would support the integrity of the disintegrating Ottoman Empire at the Congress of Berlin and simultaneously petition the Sultan to unite the four predominantly Albanian vilayets of Janina, Monastir, Shkup, and Shkodër into one political and administrative unit – the sought after independent Albanian nation-state. None of the autonomy-within-the-empire type demands were actually accomplished. Without a common religion or geographic center, the common language remained the one bond between the people and the center of the Albanian nationalist awakening.

The alliance between the Bektashi tekkes and the national awakening movement brought about a remarkable increase in the popular perception and popularity of the Bektashi in Albania (which continues to the present day). This identification with the Albanian nation required a good deal of sacrifice for the Bektashi, since the Bektashi centers became targets for Serbian and Greek forays into Albania as well increasing the ire of the weakening Ottoman state that wanted, at all costs, to prevent further disintegration of the Balkan stronghold in general and the rise of Albanian nationalism in particular. From recently uncovered correspondences between British consuls located in the southern Albanian and northeastern Greek cities (Norris 2006), the human and material loss from tekke closings indicate that the early 1900s were a period of decline for the Albanian Bektashi. It was brought about from the Greek military incursions, territorial claims to southern Albania and the reprisals against the Bektashi as a result of their involvement with Albanian nationalism. A letter from the city of Yannina dated March 8, 1915 states: “Things Bektashi are very flat here. They say that when the Greeks got in, the ‘andarts’ ran amuck and biffed the tombs, etc. Also elsewhere in the district

the ‘*tekkes*’ have been burned and the sect is lying low” (Norris 2006: 89). Much like the aggression of the Ottoman Porte in 1826, the Greek aggression along the Bektashi *tekkes* of Southern Albania caused the loss of religious architecture and, more significantly, the loss of religious knowledge. In the concluding section of Baba Rexheb’s *Misticizma Islame dhe Bektashizma* titled The Last Two Words, the reader is given a long list of influential Babas like Hafiz Baba of Devoll who “fell victim of the Greek aggression in 1914, along with other famous Babas from Konitza Tekke, Turabi Baba, Baba Hajdar and others . . . from who we have not a single *nefes* (spiritual hymn) of theirs that can be brought to readers’ attention” (Rexheb 1970: 382-385).

Events happening elsewhere also had an impact on the status quo of Bektashism in Albania. The second major setback in the history of the Bektashi was the abolishment of the dervish orders in Turkey in 1925. All religious practice was prohibited and the tombs in connection with *tekkes* were closed down or passed on to the ownership of and use by state-run Ethnographic Museums. The abolition of the Bektashi order in Turkey turned Albania into the *de facto* heartland of Bektashia with the headquarters of the order remaining in Tirana. We have however a number of sources at our disposal, historical as well as ethnographic, which can be utilized to present a modern account of Bektashism with particular attention to Albania.

The decades prior to the 1st world war, namely 1878-1912, belongs to what has been coined by historians of Albania as the national awakening period. With the weakening of the Ottoman Empire and the gradual rise of the nation-states, Albanians’ first step towards a belated independence of 1912, was to confront the question of

national identity. It was within this movement that the Albanian Bektashi played a central role. Prior to Albania's 1912 independence, Bektashi tekkes became centers for the distribution of books and the propagation of the Albanian language (Lear 1965: 142-159).

Because the Bektashi and to some degree also the Franciscans recorded religious literature in the language of the people, even before the standardization of the Albanian alphabet in 1909, written Albanian had its beginnings in the writing of religious hymns by Bektashi babas and dervishes and Franciscan priests.¹⁴ In 1842, Dalip Bey of Frashër, for example, published a translation of Fuzuli's 16th century *Hadiqat al-Su`ada* (The Garden of the Blessed) in Albanian which was written using Arabic characters at the time. According to Baba Rexheb's preface to his own translation of the same work (1997: 2), the first translation of *Hadiqat al-Su`ada* was widely used in Bektashi tekkes until the publication of Naim Frashëri's 1898 publication of *Qerbelaja*, an epic and lamentation of the martyrs of the Battle of Karbala. Many Albanian literati of Bektashi descent were part of Congress of Monastir. Despite pressures by the Young Turks to prevent the standardization of the Albanian language and the printing of books in the Albanian language, the Congress of Monastir moved to standardize the Albanian language which was to be written in Latin letters (not using the Greek, Arabic, or Ottoman Turkish character as before). Attempts to consolidate the movement across ethnic (northern geg

¹⁴ Two of the main authors for the national cause were Naim Frashëri, a romantic nationalist poet of a strongly religious (Bektashi) temperament and Father Gjergj Fishta, a Catholic priest from northern Albania. Frashëri's best known works are *Bagëti e Bujqësi* (Cattle and Land), *Lulet e Verës* (Spring Flowers), and *Histori e Skënderbeut* (History of Skenderbeg). Fishta's great epic *Lahuta e Malësisë* (The Lute of the Mountains) was published in three volumes between 1905 and 1931 and is mainly about the struggle of the Albanians against the Slavs.

vs. southern tosk, a division that was accentuated after the 1054 religious schism whereby Albania was divided into Catholic north and Orthodox south), religious (Christians and Muslims), and regional divides that emerged from the long lived administrative legacy of the Ottoman Empire could be partially overcome with the help of the Bektashi babas and dervishes. It was only because the Bektashi community supported the nationalist cause that the notables of southern and central Albania were convinced to participate (for the central importance of the Bektashi in the nationalist movement, see Skendi 1967: 41).

The Albanian League of Prizren took place in June 20, 1878 in the Kosovo town of Prizren. The opening address was by Abdul Frashëri (b. 1839). He was serving in the first Ottoman Parliament as a deputy of Jannina, and came from a family with close ties to the Bektashi tekke in his hometown of Frashër of southern Albania. After the League, the united Albanian front, whose main purpose was to protect the territorial integrity of the Albanian territories in present-day Albania, Montenegro, Kosovo, Macedonia, and northwest Greece, and to make possible Albanians independence, hinged upon the collaboration of notable landowners. Abdul Frashëri visited many Bektashi tekkes. With the support of Baba Alush of Frashër, another meeting was held at the tekke in Frashër with representatives from regions of southern Albania which resolved the organizational hurdle by allowing the raising of troops for the defense of Albanian territories through local committees. While the northerner Gëgs relied on their tribal network to disseminate information and organize, in the south the Tosk Albanians relied heavily on the Bektashi network for mobilizing the people (Gawrych 2006: 64).

The Albanian Bektashi prior to the onset of the communist rule, 1925 to 1945

The closing down of the Bektashi tekkes in Turkey saw the transferring of the leadership of the Bektashi from the tekke of Haji Bektash Veli in Turkey to Albania's capital in 1925. The person responsible for this move was Sali Nijazi Dede (d. 1942), an Albanian Bektashi who served as the spiritual leader of the Bektashi at the Haji Bektash tekke from 1916 to 1926. The transfer of the Bektashi spiritual center from Turkey to Albania and the consolidation of both Turkish and Albanian states, led to the eventual divide between the Bektashi in Turkey and the Albanian Bektashi. Over time, the Bektashi of Turkey lost much of their historical importance and fused with the much larger Alevi minority who, as described above, also hail Haji Bektash Veli as their spiritual founder. The main events that led to the rise of the Alevi dominance over the Bektashi in Turkey were the 1826 banning of the Babağan or celibate branch of the Bektashi and the alliance between Atatürk's Republic and the Çelebi Bektashi / Alevi which aided the growing Alevi dominance and control of Haji Bektash center and most other influential Bektashi centers (Yaman and Erdemir 2006: 27-33). The use of the term Alevi-Bektashi in the contemporary literature to refer to the Turkish Bektashi reflects the perceptions of Bektashi identity as a minority group that has been absorbed into the Turkish Alevi, a significantly larger religious minority in Turkey. At present, the Bektashi of Turkey are not seen as a separate community but as part of Turkish Alevism¹⁵ (e.g., Ataseven 1997). While the history of Bektashism in Turkey during the

¹⁵ A flaw in the treatment of Bektashism as a branch of Alevism has been noted by Hülya Küçük (2002: 26-32). Among a number of reasons, because Alevism is affiliated to the Çelebi branch of Bektashism, Bektashism cannot be its sub branch for the logical reason that a unit cannot be

interwar period is one of decline and merging with the Alevi, a period of growing popularity and social significance characterizes Bektashism in Albania.

The interwar history of the Albanian Bektashi is one of the reorganization of the community and crystallization of their identity as independently organized and administered separately from other Sufi Orders in Albania as well as from Sunni Islam. The very first historic Pan-Bektashi Congress took place in January of 1921 at the tekke of Prishtë near the city of Berat. Attending Bektashi babas, clerics and Albanian literati who were also sympathizers with the Order helped to draft and agree on the contents of the *Statusi Bektashian* or Bektashi Constitution. The Bektashi became the first religious body of Albania to declare itself free of all foreign control (Jacques 1995: 373). The relative success in reorganizing and uniting the Bektashi community reflected two main events in history: the consolidation of the Albanian state and the effects of growing nationalist fervor. However, neither of these processes were bound to religion and, in fact, could easily be construed as rivals with religion for the loyalty of the people. This led later to the oppression of the Bektashi by nationalist forces, as I shall document below.

When Albanians were able to establish their independence in 1912 (formally recognized by international conventions in 1930), Albania joined the rest of nations as the only predominantly Muslim country in Europe. By the formal recognition of the country's independent status in 1920s, around 70% of the people of Albania were

subordinated to its sub branch. Despite the main noted similarities, a main point of difference between the two is that Bektashism is a mystical order with Shi'a characteristics whereas Alevism is a branch of Shi'a Islam.

Muslims. Despite the Muslim majority status, and because of the moderate and tolerant form of Islam that Albanians ascribed to, the subsequent governments that were formed during the interwar period were “*afetar*” (Albanian for without religion) and were dominated by secularist leaders who did not recognize any of the four main religions (Sunni and Bektashi Islam, and Orthodox and Catholic Christianity) as the official religion of the Albanian state (Clayer 2008a: 128). Since the state was multidominational and dominated by secularist intellectuals, for a time the religious communities enjoyed a relative freedom to look after their affairs without any hindrance from the series of short lived governments.

A second factor that worked in the favor of the Albanian Bektashi had to do with their perceived popularity among Albanians as the religious community that was heavily invested to the nationalist cause from the onset of the Albanian national awakening. Because Sunni Islam, and especially Christian Orthodoxy and Catholicism imposed upon their communities transnational loyalties to the weakening Ottoman Caliphate (namely to the Greek Orthodox Church and the Vatican, respectively), the Bektashi in Albania provided a local and uncompromising alternative. Perceived as a liberal form of Islam, the Albanian nationalists promoted Bektashia as the community better suited to represent the Albanian nation.¹⁶ Given this relative popularity of the Bektashi, both in terms of the presence of their centers throughout the Albanian landscape as well as their perceived

¹⁶ See for example Duijzings (2002) on Naim Frashëri’s Bektashi nationalist writings; Clayer (2008b) on the role of the Bektashi in the reform of Islam in the interwar period which included granting autonomy to Sufi brotherhoods, the suppression of Shari’a courts, and the banning of the veil in 1923; and Malcolm (2002: 85-86) on Bektashi contributions towards Albania’s religious tolerance.

popularity among Albanians, the community was able to establish its independence from the Islamic Community and earn a recognition that it enjoys to this day as one of the four main state-recognized religious communities in Albania. In contrast, other Sufi groups such as the Qadiri, Rifa'i, Sa'di, and Tijani who were also present in Albania at the time, have been grouped within the Islamic Community and under the authority of the Sunni majority (Clayer 1990; Popovic 1986).

For reasons that will become fully apparent when formal and informal membership structure are considered (chapter 4), the degree to which the Bektashi experienced a resurgence in the interwar period is more easily discerned through the increase in Bektashi lodges rather than the size of the community. Data on the number of tekkes in Albania that were collected by Franciscan missions in 1930s report that there were 43 functional tekkes whereas only a few years later 50 tekkes were reported (Rocca 1990). Making use of available demographic sources on the number of functioning Bektashi centers in Albania from 1929 to 1942, Clayer (1990: 95-96) reports a gradual increase from 43 to 60 centers. If this is an accurate count of the increase in tekkes in a span of a few years, the opening of new Bektashi centers in the 1930s surpasses the reopening of a total of 20 functioning tekkes over two decades by the Bektashi Headquarters in Tirana from the communist collapse of 1990s to the present.

Another more dependable measure, the impact of the Bektashi literati on events of national importance, supports the thesis of a rise in the popular status of the Bektashi. This is linked to the paramount importance of the Frashëri brothers. Abdyl Frashëri (d. 1892), was an Albanian academic, diplomat, statesman and politician in the Ottoman

Empire. He founded the Central Committee for Defending Albanian Rights in Istanbul and served as the deputy representative of the Yannina Vilayet of southern Albania/northwestern Greece in the Ottoman Parliament from 1876-77. Naim Frashëri (d. 1900), a poet and a writer, was one of the most important figures of the Albanian Awakening period. He wrote on the vernacular Albanian bringing the themes of the national awakening close to the people. Moreover, he published *Fletorja e Bektashinjvet* (literally, Bektashi Notebook) which remains the major reference for Albanians at large and Albanian Bektashi alike to learn and be reminded about the characteristics of the faith. Although the Frashëri brothers received their higher education abroad, their early education and upbringing was at the Bektashi tekke in the town of Frashër in southern Albania. Sami Frashëri (in Turkish, Şemseddin Sami Bey, d. 1904) arranged for the modern Turkish and Albania alphabet to be written using Latin characters and was a prominent figure of Turkish nationalism and laicism. Published in 1899, his work *Albania, What was, What is, and What will Become?* became the manifesto of the Albanian National Awakening. Mehdi Frashëri (d. 1963), also from the village of Frashër, served as deputy, civil servant, minister, president of the Council of State and intellectual – he was one of the architects of the Civil Code introduced in King Zog's Albania in 1928-29 and one of the main officials responsible for the autonomy for the Bektashi community, which he represented in 1943-44 on the Regency Council, being himself a Bektashi.

Zog I, King of Albanians, the self-proclaimed monarch since September 1st, 1928, reigned in Albania until he was forced to exile by the Italian invasion of Albania which

took place on April 7th, 1939. Three years prior to his royal accession, Ahmed Zogu (d. 1969) had served as the president of the Albanian Republic – this office had allowed him to eliminate his rivals and pave the way for the installation of his absolute rule in what was declared to be a democratic, constitutional and hereditary monarchy (Vickers 1995; see also Swire 1929 for the events leading up to the rise of the monarchy). Although both internal and external strife accompanied the consolidation of the Kingdom, King Zog's reign is reported to have been a period of peace and stability by comparison to centuries of struggle that dominated Albanian affairs (Chater 1931). It was a period characterized by a trend towards further secularization of both the state as well as the Sunni and Bektashi Muslims: there was no state religion and all creeds were equal before the law, even though some Muslim practices were made illegal. For example, polygamy and veiling were outlawed and marriages had to take place on civil courts. In 1935, King Zog's Cabinet was composed entirely of younger liberal-minded intellectuals who had received their education after Albania gained its independence from the Turks – the Prime Minister was Mehdi Bey Frashëri, a leading Bektashi Muslim and representative of Albania at the League of Nations for many years (Pearson 2004: 373-374). King Zog's regime was centralized around the authority of the monarch – it was also “outspokenly nationalist” with apparent tendencies towards European modernity and secularism (Tomes 2001: 48). Having abolished both the veil and polygamy, King Zog arranged for his three youngest sisters to tour Albania in 1937 dressed in tight skirts and freshly colored stockings (ibid. 49).

It is true that the consolidation of the monarchy was associated with a heavier influence of the centralized state upon religion. The religious leaders, including the Bektashi dede, had to be approved by the King; the government had to approve the communities' statuses and annual budgets; priests did not have the right to vote except when they renounced their religious functions; and all religious affairs were subject to the Ministry of Justice (Daniel 1990: 18). On the other hand, although King Zog's main interests were to bring the religious communities under his control and curtail their resistance towards the secularization of the Albanian society, the Monarchy also improved the integration of the religious within Albanian society. For example, it was because of the encouragement from the Monarchy (more discussion to follow below), that the Albanian Orthodox achieved autocephalous status from the Greek Orthodox Church in 1937. The Tijani, for example, became well integrated with the Islamic community, and formed an alliance with the Albanian Rifa'i and Sa'di orders called *Drita Hyjnore* (The Divine Light) which operated under the auspices of the Islamic community, and the religious leaders earned important teaching appointments in madrasas in major cities of Tirana and Shkodër (Clayer 2009).

The Italian invasion of Albania inspired little resistance from the religious communities. "The one exception was the Bektashi dervish organization, much of whose leadership never fully accepted the Italian invasion" (Fischer 1999: 55). Perhaps as a result, the spiritual leader of the Bektashi community, Sali Nijazi Dede (1976-1940) was murdered by Italian Gendarmes in Tirana (Pearson 2005: 175). Nijazi Dede was responsible for transferring the World Headquarters of the Bektashi from the historical

center in Haji Bektash Village to the Capital of Tirana in 1929. Although the circumstances of his assassination have not been fully disclosed, Italian archives researched by Fischer (1999: 55-56), indicate that five fascist policemen were present outside of the Bektashi headquarters when shots were fired but they did not interfere.

The end of the interwar period under discussion (1925-1945) saw also the rise of the communist party and the civil war between communists and nationalist of the National Front. Because I elaborate later on this relationship that implicates also the Albanian Bektashi who leaned primarily on the nationalists' side, here I simply refer to the most renowned chronicler of modern Albanian history, who shows that the open persecution of religious communities – especially the Bektashi – by the atheist regime originated well before the civil war and the installment of the communist regime in Albania in mid-1940s.

October 17, 1943. During the evening a Communist band entered the tekke (monastery) of the Bektashi sect at Turan, near Korçë, and assassinated Baba Zylfo the abbot. They also murdered Sabri Panariti and Refat Goskova in the monastery, and they seized Bame Gjonomadhi in the village of Gjonomadh, flayed him alive, and shod him with horse-shoes. All four were members of Balli Kombëtar (National Front) (Pearson 2005: 288).

Bektashi histories about their distant past in contemporary discourse

Out of a long and eventful past, the Albanian Bektashi today tend to circulate accounts of a selective set of stories and events. The reasons behind the selective choices and discursive strategies will become fully apparent when we consider the ways that the Bektashi construct and manage their collective memory on the question of religion under communist rule (Chapter 2): the contents of the stories about the Bektashi past and the

meanings that are being emphasized are in service of the overall project of the reconstitution of religion. In this section, I present stories that I encountered frequently during fieldwork about the early history of the Bektashia up until to the Second World War. In doing so, I shift from a chronological survey of the Bektashi history to a concern with the question of how the Bektashi at present talk about specific events of the past.

As will be shown from the repertoire of events that show up more frequently in narratives circulated in postcommunist Albania, the Bektashi pay particular attention to those elements of these stories that highlight the fundamentals of Bektashi practice and belief system: namely, commitment to the saintliness of their spiritual founder, the teachings and prophecy of Haji Bektash Veli (and by extension their loyalty to Prophet's family), and the tekke-bound practices of celibate monasticism. These relate to the main concerns of the community in a postsocialist and revivalist context: after a prolonged break incurred under atheistic communist rule, the Albanian Bektashi seek to revive the community that originated with the teachings of Haji Bektash Veli. They also seek to reinstate the paramount importance of the Bektashi tekke, rebuild the sacred sites of the order, and replenish their ranks with dervishes and babas who commit to celibate monasticism. The stories they now tell tend to emphasize the fundamental characteristics of the Bektashi that the community seeks to reestablish. Four main clusters of stories emerge from a survey of the events that the Bektashi highlight from their past: 1) the life and teachings of Haji Bektash Veli, 2) the way that the Bektashi reacted to the first major decline of the Order in 1826, 3) the second major setback in 1925 and the transfer of the

Bektashi center from Turkey to Albania, and 4) events from the Second World War which foreshadowed worse things to come for the Bektashi in communist Albania.

Haji Bektash Veli on the future of Bektashia

On more than one occasion dervishes and babas recounted to me what Haji Bektash Veli had said and done. The inclusion of the sayings and examples of the spiritual founder of the Order in everyday conversations was often evoked as a validation of the main theme under discussion: things ought to be this way because our spiritual leader commands it so. In effect, the sayings and example of Haji Bektash worked much like hadiths do. This is not to imply that Haji Bektash outcompetes the sayings and life example of Prophet Mohammed in Bektashi discourses. Instead, the emphasis on the saintliness of Haji Bektash is in the service of solidifying a major link in the silsila or the sacred line of succession that connect the Bektashi, through Haji Bektash's hereditary genealogy, to Prophet Mohammed.

For example, I heard the following statement about Haji Bektash in the summer of 2007 when the dervishes in Tirana and I were discussing the noted shortage of clerics willing to serve at the Baba Rexheb tekke in Taylor, Michigan, the decline of Bektashism (and religion in general) in communist Albania, and the slow return of the Bektashi tekkes in Albania after communism. Having discussed the long history of ups and downs in Bektashi popularity over the centuries, the predication of Haji Bektash that is cited below was offered by the Bektashi as a validation of the saintly sanctity of their spiritual leader: things happened the way the saint predicted they would. Thus sanctity is validated through the reiteration of the saint's predictions about the future.

When Haji Bektash Veli was asked about the fate of his teachings and his way his answer was as follows: My path (tarika, in Albanian “*rruga ime*”) is like a string that never breaks. Over time it will stretch and get very thin, but it will never break. When the *çirak* (candles lit daily at sunset at Bektashi centers) are lit in the east they will go out in the west, and when they are burning in the west, they will be extinguished in the east.

There are countless quotes and proverbial lessons authored by Haji Bektash Veli that the Albanian Bektashi could draw from. Instead, this particular prediction and others like it are emphasized. The answers behind this particular selection pattern ultimately links to another question: why tell these stories now? The answer to this question is relevant in a number of ways. First, the underlying assumption or taken for granted lesson in this exchange is that the spiritual founder has predicted the future of the Order. It serves as a source of confidence that legitimizes the current efforts of the Bektashi to re-emerge as a community with social significance, despite their history of persecution.

More specifically, an internal rationale is given in the saintly prediction of the things to come. It explains, to the Bektashi believer, that atheism in Albania, the reopening of the Bektashi tekkes after the collapse of the communist regime, even the early historical shifts in fortune that the Bektashi experienced, are thinning and thickening of the Bektashi string. Atheism in communist Albania (1945-1991, discussed in detail in chapter 2) put the damper on the burning Bektashi candles in the east. Baba Rexheb’s founding of the Albanian American Bektashi Tekke in 1954 in Michigan, U.S.A. is the prophesized beginning of the lighting of the candles in the west. Because I will again discuss the Bektashi tekke on American soil in later chapters, I only emphasize here that the difficulties that this tekke is having with a shortage of clerics is explained by the Albanian Bektashi as another predictable shift in the fortunes of the Order. The

Bektashi in Albania reason that now that the candles are again burning on Bektashi tekkes in Albania (east), it is only a matter of time that Bektashi candles burning in the west are waning. What is clear in this use of the sayings of Haji Bektash is the use of the past to validate the present. That is, the flow of things that have happened serve as a saintly sanctification of today's spiritual leaders. This in turn, legitimizes and even sacralizes the community at present, i.e., our involvement in the revival project is part of the prophesized thickening of the Bektashi string.

A related quote is the saying of Haji Bektash that there will be a time that even the wooden fence posts will wear the dervish garb. As is true of many Bektashi sayings, two rather opposed meanings may be derived from them. In this case, the saying may be seen as a prediction of a widespread popularity of the Bektashi, whereby the dervish garb will be as ubiquitously spaced as the distances between the fence posts. An image of a world full of Dervishes is evoked with this particular interpretation. The other side of the prediction is the narrative of the decline or the depletion of the ranks of membership. Based on my conversations with Bektashi dervishes, it is this meaning of the story that is voiced more frequently by the Albanian Bektashi. In this version, the prediction is meant to signal the coming of a time when people as unworthy as a wooden fence post will wear the Bektashi garb. Given the postsocialist shortage of potential candidates, the community is forced to be less selective than they would otherwise have been in the initiation of members and their promotion to the higher degrees of membership (more details are given on chapter 4). So the predictions of Haji Bektash are more often voiced to legitimize the current leadership and the hard choices that the community has to make

in regards to membership. The sanctity and veracity of these predictions is never questioned. Both the historical past and the present-day affairs of the order are made to fit into the contents of the prophecy of the founder, whose saintliness (see chapter 5 for more details) is verified by his ability to foretell the future. This ability is an indication of *qeramet* (from Arabic “*karamat*” or charismatic gift) which is believed to be the defining characteristic of the *wali* (from Arabic for “friends of God”) or nearness to God.

One's head may be given, one's oath shall not be broken

The *Vaka-i Şerriyye* or “unfortunate incident” refers to the forced dismantling of the centuries-old Janissary corps by Ottoman Sultan Mahmud II in June 1826. Historians link this event to a shift in modernizing the military prowess of the Ottoman Empire. Although the Janissaries had been influential in the rise of the Ottoman Empire, as a military formation they had become rather stagnant and costly. A new modern corps, *Asakir-i Mansure-i Muhammediye* (Mohammed's Victorious Army) was established by Mahmud II to guard the Sultan and replace the Janissaries. As already described, the Bektashi who served as the spiritual guides to the Janissary, were brought down as well. The Order was disbanded, and its followers executed or exiled. The Albanian Bektashi at present, however, stress a different aspect of the events of 1826. They recall, among other things, the burning of Bektashi tekkes and the sizable book holdings of tekke libraries. This was not unlike the way that communists in Albania dealt with religious centers. In these small but important book repositories manuscripts hand written by Bektashi dedes and babas could be found.

The event was narrated by Baba Rexheb (d. 1995) who recalled the ways that *Bektashinjtë e vërtetë* (literally, “true Bektashi”) dealt with pressures under the sharp edge of the sword to give up their ways: “*koka jepet, fjala s’kthehet*” – literally, “one’s head may be given up [i.e., decapitated], the oath shall not be broken.” In explaining this as the widespread response to the Ottoman suppression of the Order, the Bektashi dervishes referred to the eternity of their vows of initiation. In doing so, they also downplayed the enactment of the practice of dissimulation (*takiyye*, right to withhold one’s religious affiliation when facing extreme prosecution) which historians’ accounts document as a widespread response to the 1826 abolishment of the Order. For example, it is said that Bektashi babas and dervishes temporarily joined other Sufi Orders or went into hiding. The latter are details that are left out in the contemporary Bektashi narratives of the events of 1826. Instead, what is emphasized is the Bektashi ties indicating that one’s membership to the Order is always upheld, even against the worst repression. The emphasis of the recounting of this particular event is on the vows of initiation. Judging from the context under which the Bektashi reaction to demands by the Ottomans to give up their Bektashi garb and their practice of celibate monasticism, this upholds an impression of continuity during 1826 and communist repression of the Bektashi and emphasizes the seriousness of the Bektashi oath of membership for prospective members to the Order. It is upon the latter that the continuity of the Order and the success of the revivalist project depends upon.

The Bektashi, as well as Sufis all over, make use of an understanding that can be summarized as “that which remains after loss.” In Sufi understanding this is about the

journey to and from God and the annihilation of the self. After this loss, it is what remains that matters. The Albanian Bektashi refer to this as “*mbetja mbas humbjes*”, literally, remnants after loss and it is no doubt derived from Sufistic understandings of progress in the spiritual path. In its current use however, the principle is not restricted only to a description of the spiritual journey towards God. It was used frequently alongside the narrative of the demolition of the Bektashi by the Ottomans. When the Bektashi were asked if they would give up their dress, they answered that it is better to give their heads as their word (oaths of initiation) cannot be broken (whereas their heads could be cut). The thousands that did lose their heads, along with the destruction of tekkes and sacred sites of the Bektashi, were the loss. What remained is the moral tale of the Bektashi response towards pressures to abandon Bektashia and the sanctity of the Bektashi oath of initiation that the Bektashi have rigorously clung to over the centuries.

The Bektashi center on the move

The Alevi-Bektashi of Turkey were supportive of a secular republic and loyal to Atatürk’s nation-building vision. They were nevertheless the unfortunate minority whose religious freedoms were greatly reduced by the new republic. The spiritual center of the Order in Hacibektaş, a small village near Rumi’s Konya on the northwest region of Nevşehir, was placed under heavy state supervision forcing the acting dede of the Order, Nijazi Dede to return to King Zog’s Albania. Enjoying a close relationship between the royal house and the Bektashi tekke, Nijazi Dede built the new center just outside of Tirana on the gentle eastern hills of the city. Kryegjyshata Bektashiane (literally, head

grandfatherhood) is now commonly known as the World Headquarters of the Bektashi Order of Dervishes.

The Albanian Bektashi isolate this event among others because for them this meant the return of Albanian and Turkish Babas and Dervishes to Albania which, at the time, provided a relatively safe haven for the Albanian Bektashi until the onset of the communist and later antireligious authoritarian rule. The 1925 suppression of the Sufi Orders in Atatürk's Turkish Republic and the Bektashi response to the closing of the most influential tekkes in Anatolia is a story of resilience and survival. It was accomplished by the unprecedented relocation of the spiritual center of the Order to Albania in 1929. In this narrative, the word or core teachings of Bektashia are just like seeds that may be planted elsewhere – in this case in Albania. This story of the mobile potential of the center served as a survival strategy during the communist era. In fact I was asked to write about the Albanian Bektashi from tekkes in Gjirokastër, Drizar, Martanesh, and others who at different historical conjunctures served as temporary shelters for the spiritual leadership of the Order. The same may be said about tekkes outside of Albania that claim to have served the role of the Bektashi center: Harabati Baba in Tetovo of Macedonia, and Bektashi tekkes in Egypt, and the United States.

The contemporary emphasis on the 1929 relocation of the Headquarters from Turkey to Tirana is crucially important for Bektashi legitimacy claims. Retaining the status of the World Headquarters of the Bektashi Order of Dervishes extends the authority of the Albanian Bektashi over an estimated seven million Bektashis worldwide. This includes the Albanian Bektashi of Montenegro, Kosovo, Macedonia, Greece and the

United States, the historical epicenters of Bektashia in the Anatolian plateau as well as the Bektashi of Iran, Iraq, and Egypt. The push for national as well as transnational recognition by the Albanian Bektashi of their legitimacy adds another important element to the interactions between the Albanian state, its neighboring states, and the countries where the Bektashi area of influence extends. In the ongoing competition between the different religious communities in Albania, the World Headquarters designation helps to offset the Bektashi's minority status in relation to Sunni Muslims and Catholic and Orthodox Christians of Albania. All of these claims hinge upon and are legitimated by the 1929 transfer of the Bektashi center to Albania. Tales of the relocation of the main institution of the order reflect the Order's spatial flexibility and adaptability embedded in the ways through which the community has been kept together both through time and across space. The story of continuity and the survival strategies that the Bektashi employed during the communist suppression of religion are legitimized through the antecedent of the 1920s.

The martyrdom of Baba Selim and the fundamentals of the faith

The way that World War II was staged in Albania resulted internally in two main political fractions. As previously discussed, most tekkes were already heavily invested in nation building efforts and were thus allied with the *Balli Kombëtar* (National Front). There were however some babas and dervishes who declared their loyalty to the partisans. Known as *nacional çlirimtar* or national liberators, most of them were committed to free Albania from the occupying armies and not the communist dogma. Baba Selim's tekke on the outskirts of the city of Gjirokastër, a historical center of

Albanian nationalism, was frequented by many who sought Baba's blessings to win the war. Most Albanians' refer to the intra-Albanian conflict as *vëllavrasja*, literally, brother killing, to refer to the fact that the alignment of the above two main political factions over the main international actors of WWII, led to targeting of Albanians by other Albanians, and Bektashi targeting other Bektashi.

A much told story illustrates the tensions of this era. Baba Selim's guests were asking for Baba's blessings to win the war against other Albanians. Seeing this happen, and according to recent claims that Baba Selim (1869-1944) was certain that far worse things were yet to come (that is, the Communist atheistic crusade against religion), he held one final meeting with his closest disciples. During this meeting, in what is narrated as a solemn act, Baba Selim broke the string which held together his praying beads and threw them on the floor. In retrospect, Albanian Bektashi see in this as a prediction of further fracturing of the community under Communism. Other interpretations see the breaking apart of the beads and their spreading over the floor as a foretelling of what was to become of Albanians who today are spread over five different neighboring nation states (Albania, Montenegro, Kosovo, Macedonia, and Greece). It is also interpreted as a sign of the Albanians' inability to settle down, both because of state imposed internment and population mixing and as a consequence of Albanians working as migrant laborers mostly to Greece and Italy after the breakup of the communist rule. Since the events of his last meeting with Bektashi disciples, Baba Selim is remembered to have refrained from eating, drinking and sleeping, thus hastening his own death a week later. The recounting of Baba Selim's martyrdom shows that the present state of affairs is to be

found in the prophecies of Bektashi leaders: things are the way they were predicted to be. The present, therefore, legitimizes the sanctity of the saintly leadership of the Order.

Clearly, the Bektashi's own engagement with their history and the recounting of their past offers insights into the way they perceive themselves as a collective that persist through time and across space. Present day narratives and stories of survival are in turn informed by interpretations about the events of the past. In some instances, it was evident to me that the source of the stories that the Bektashi circulate about their past were retrieved from the very work by historians referenced in this chapter. In regards to the publications meant for internal circulation, a good deal of the community's resources went into the translations into Albanian books like John Kingsley Birge's *The Bektashi Order of Dervishes (Urdhëri Bektashi i Dervishëve* published in translation in 2008), and Roberto Morozzo Della Rocca's *Nazione e religione in Albania (Kombi dhe Feja në Shqipëri, Nation and Religion in Albania* published in translation in 1994). The historical past of the community offers a wide range of events, people, and places. What is significant is that, even when historians' research is the source of some of the recounted events by the Bektashi about their past, particular stories are mobilized in contemporary context to emphasize certain lessons. The selection of the contents about these stories as well as the strategic decisions about the ways that events, people, places of the past are mobilized to serve a discursive purpose at present can be rendered meaningful only through an explication of the social and cultural context in which the recounting of the past happens.

In this last section of this chapter we are not concerned with what is often the main thrust of historical approaches: to first find out what happened, reconstruct the past and to ultimately give an explanation about why things happened in the way suggested by historical events. As I have shown, specific historical conjunctures such the memory of Haji Bektash, 1826 and 1925 suppression of the Bektashi, and Baba Selim's martyrdom remain vibrant in people's historical consciousness. I found the Albanian Bektashi preoccupied with their meanings which did not always match up to the fullness of the historical particulars that surrounds the events in historians' narratives. The events in question demarcate a people's historical persistence.

In this chapter, I presented a survey of the history of the Bektashi from the time of Haji Bektash in the 13th century to the onset of the communist rule in Albania at the end of the Second World War. In addition, I isolated a number of narratives that make use of events in a community's past and look into how the circulation of these kinds of discourses make use of a Bektashi framing of the past in service of present-day concerns of the community with its own legitimacy and religious revival. These include: the sanctity of the spiritual leader of the order, the emphasis on membership through binding initiation, the importance of the Bektashi center and its mobility to ensure survival and continuity, and the martyrdom of Baba Selim as an expression of a nonnegotiable commitment to Albanian nationalism.

Lastly, within the anthropological literature, the Bektashi are regarded as a millenarian movement (e.g., Doja 2006, 2003). Having affinities with twelver Shi'ism, the Bektashi believe in the return of the hidden imam who will restore peace and order in

a progressively disintegrating world. Bektashi believe that the return of the social influence of their tekkes is the model for the ideal society. Their prayers include wishes for their tekkes to be filled with true believers. I end with the following explanation of the Nizari, Ismaili Muslims, the largest group among twelver Shi'ism, and a millenarian movement with parallels to the Bektashi. I find the following explanation is relevant for both the Bektashi history of shifts in fortune as well as their histories – the past recounted to legitimize the present – which seek to render incurred continuities and breaks meaningful.

Such [millenarian] movements usually end either in collapse or retreat to a more disenchanting worldview. However, as the Nizari sect demonstrates, it is possible for true believers to maintain a sense of spiritual exaltation regardless of (or perhaps because of) experiences of marginality, defeat and fragmentation. By focusing completely on worship of a single sacred leader with the capacity to manufacture a complete and new reality every generation, the inwardly-turned Nizari were able to sustain their community and their faith until today” (Lindholm 1996: 131).

As it has been shown, the Bektashi knew when it was a time to lie low and when it was time to stand upright. Having survived two major abolitions of the Order in 1826 Ottoman Anatolia and in 1925 Turkey, the Bektashi remain to tell their stories, even after the atheistic communist crusade against religion in Albania. Indeed, the consolidation of the Order by Balım Sultan, the institutionalization of celibate monasticism, the progressive emphasis on secrecy, enactment of the principle of dissimulation, the mobility of their center, inclusion in prayer of women on equal footing with men, are some of the ways that the Bektashi have managed to survive within a changing historical and social context. Exactly how the Bektashi emerged from the ashes of atheism, and

more importantly, how they are putting themselves together again at present is the main task of the chapters that follow.



Figure 1.1. A Bektashi Baba in full regalia. Cairo, Egypt, c. 1914. Shaban Baba from Prishtë, Albania while in residence at the Qayghusuz Sulltan Tekke where Baba sought refuge from the Greek aggression of the early 1900s in southern Albania.

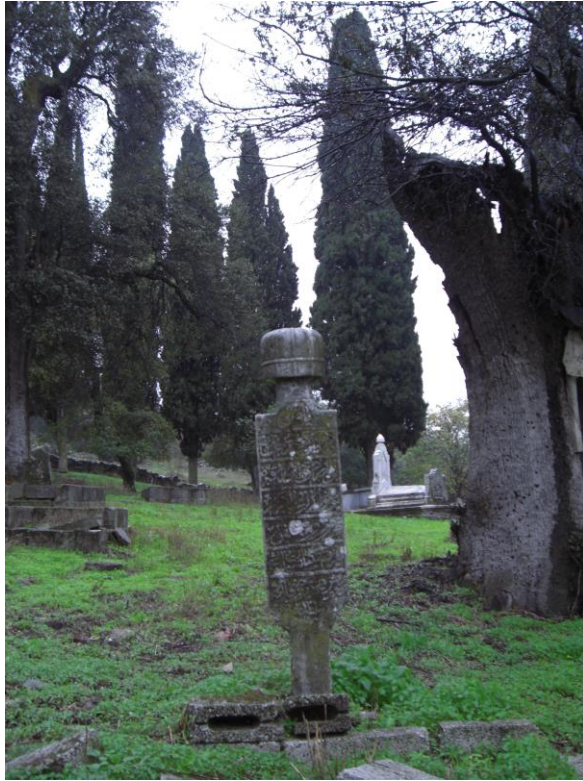


Figure 1.2. Bektashi tombstones and the ruins of Durballi Sultan Tekke. Larissa, Greece, 2007.

CHAPTER 2

Reclaiming sacredness from an “atheist” past

“Asgjë nuk humbet”
 “Nothing [ever] gets lost”
 Attributed to Haji Bektash Veli

During my stays at the main tekke of the Albanian Bektashi in Tirana (known as *Kryegjyshata Botërore Bektashiane*, World Bektashi Headquarters) I spent a good deal of time on this center’s hallways. Like the dervishes whose task was to manage the queue of the guests and aid their master Dede Reshat during visitation hours, my activities included staying with guests, talking to them, walking up and down the hallway that linked the hosting room and the kitchen to get sweets or drinks when needed, and conversing with the Dervishes and Dede Reshat whenever a brief visitor free occasion arose. I remember the visitation hours as the fieldwork activities that I enjoyed mostly because they brought me in close contact with Dede Reshat, his dervishes and supporting staff, and their guests. Moreover, I was also brought in close contact with the faces of babas that had served at this center and many others throughout Albania in the more distant past.

The images of spiritual leaders were displayed in what may be called the Bektashi hall of fame at the Headquarters. On the long hallway adjacent to the guest room were a number of portraits, most of them black and white enlarged photographs of Bektashi dedes and babas in their clerical dress. The names and the dates of birth and death were printed below the images. Very quickly I recognized that the hallway was a kind of work in progress as new framed photos were occasionally added. As photos of clerics were

being donated by people to tekkes, they were later delivered to the Headquarters along with the relevant information. They were subsequently enlarged and framed for display. There were some 50 such photos by the end of my stay in 2007. When I returned again in 2011, there were over 200 photos on both sides of the narrow and long hallway. As I was looking at each new addition to the wall, a disciple walked nearby. She began to tell me about the life story and teachings of one of the babas: his image was in front of us and I could see also our foreshadowed reflections on the canvas as we were talking about him.

The project of populating the walls with the portraits of clerics who once served at Bektashi tekkes is about bringing back to the collective memory not only the faces but also the teachings of babas that were effaced in communist Albania. I start with the hallway of fame because it serves as a telling analogy for the ongoing management of collective memory. The latter is a process of recovery and return of the faces and teachings, and even the remains of the religious leaders that were removed from the canvas of history by the authoritarian regime whose dominant narrative about the past neglected and suppressed the voices of religious communities. The story that this chapter tells is a story of *how* the canvas of history is being populated with the faces, works, and the sacred sites of the Bektashi. This is a chapter about the postcommunist management of collective memory.

There are a number of competing narratives on religion and about religious communities under first antireligious (1945-1967) and later full-fledged atheist authoritarian rule (1967-1991) in Albania. More specifically, this chapter documents the narrative history of the communist state and the collective memory of the Bektashi on the

community's experiences under communism. The state and state bureaucracy is transitioning from a collective system of ownership, an authoritarian and ultra-secularist, if not a full-fledged atheist past (from 1944 to 1991). Since 1991, Albanians were introduced to free market economy, democratic multiparty system of rule, and a laic state whose main unresolved grievance with religious communities remains the issue of land ownership and the return of substantial amount of land whose rightful owners are Bektashi tekkes, Sunni mosques, and Christian parishes (discussed at length in chapter 3). Postcommunist relations between the state and religious communities are enmeshed within a European Union demand upon Albania in regards to religious freedoms. Against this background, the present state, a remnant of communism, was and continues to be invested in a positioned account of the past. At present, the antireligious sentiments from the religiously abolitionist era persist through the prevalence of socialist trained administrators who, despite being employed by Bektashi tekkes and other religious communities, remain largely antagonistic towards religion and, as this thesis argues, also stand in the way of the reconstitution of religious life.

Here I consider both the history of the socialist state in relation to religion and religious communities and Bektashi's own historical awareness of their experience under communist rule. A history of religion, seen strictly from a historians perspective, ought to rely primarily on an excavation of the archives pertaining to the past, whereas the point of departure for a historicity of religion are people's own perceptions of their past recovered in the ethnographic present (here 2005 to 2011 with the bulk of the ethnographic data derived from 9 months of fieldwork in 2007). In agreement with Abufarha (2009: 25-26),

here I employ a distinction between histories grounded primarily on the record and the event and historicities which, in addition, take into account “how the event is remembered, how it is narrated, presented, and told and by whom.” Aside from understanding the event (here the atheist crusade), historicity which “reflects both the historical experiences ... and the cultural significance of recalling the past” (Whitehead 2003: xi) is the necessary bridge that leads ultimately to the impact of the event (here the postcommunist legacy of an atheist past). In considering the latter, beyond serving as a historical background, we learn that the positioning towards the past in a particular way is heavily influenced by the present day concerns of the community. For the time I spent with the Albanian Bektashi, what received constant attention from them was growing and maintaining the number of initiated members, the brothers and sisters of the way, and tending to the rebuilding project.

Country-specific experiences under communist rule show significant differences in the ways that socialist projects in general and atheism in particular influenced religious communities (Mihăilescu et al. 2008; Hann et al. 2005; Zrinščak 2004). My inquiry into what was originally a historical question on the state of religious practice and religious communities under socialism was shaped by two seemingly opposing reconstructions of the past: the first tended to exaggerate a historical break and the success of the atheist project in uprooting religion while the second leaned towards continuity, resilience and survival despite the state's coercion against religious communities. When the plurality of Bektashi narratives about the past is considered more closely, two main story lines emerge: a story of persistence and survival meant primarily for internal consumption by

members of the Order and a story of a complete break with the past and uprooting of the community told by the Bektashi clerical leadership primarily to uninitiated outsiders (foreign guests and state representatives). The past, and the socialist past especially, is a resource that is strategically managed in the production and dissemination of collective memory. Here I argue that the management of collective memory by and for the Albanian Bektashi about what happened with religion in socialist Albania is the first, but not only, step towards postsocialist resacralization of the Bektashi. That is, the sacredness that was “lost” and rendered insignificant in state's narrative history is reclaimed through the production of a positioned view on the socialist past that is reflected in how the Bektashi themselves construct and circulate narratives about socialist religiosities. A regard for positioned views on the socialist past, allows us to understand something about how realities of religious communities under atheism are *now* presented and even more about the way that the past is managed given the concerns of ongoing processes of the postcommunist reconstitution of religious life.

Religion during the rise and fall of the communist state, 1945 to 1991

During the 2nd World War, there were two main political factions in Albania: the Albanian Communist Party (*Partia Komuniste Shqiptare*) and the National Front (*Balli Kombëtar*). Because the Bektashi as a religious community have historically shown a pronounced interest in nation building¹⁷, most of the Bektashi tekkes and babas aligned

¹⁷ Most visibly expressed in the Bektashi motto “*pa atdhe s'ka fe*,” literally, “without country there is no religion,” which is ubiquitously engraved in stone on main gateways that greet visitors to Bektashi centers. For the role of the Bektashi toward nation building in Albania see Naim Frashëri's *Qerbelaja: Religion and Nationalism among the Albanians* in Duijzings' *Religion and*

closely with the National Front. Both the Albanian Bektashi and *ballistët* (members of the National Front) shared a commitment to the Albanian nation and hoped for the unification of ethnic Albanians in today's Montenegro, Kosovo, Macedonia, and Greece. The logistical and military support that the Albanian communists received from Yugoslavia as well as from the Allied forces was primarily used to crush the opposition instead of fighting German occupiers (Jacques 1995: 422). When the communists came to power in 1945, several battalions of partisans were sent to Kosovo to subdue the secessionist uprising there. Throughout the years of communist rule the Albanian government honored the deal with Yugoslav communists by refraining from making any territorial claims on Kosovo. The National Front-Bektashi alignment of the early 1940s, as well as the perceived threat of independently organized religious institutions to the communist and authoritarian project, are the main reasons for the severing relations between the communist state and religious communities. Those that were with the National Front were considered to be against the Communist Party and thus potential enemies of the state and a potential threat to the socialist project. The eventual rise of communist power in the 1940s marked the beginning of a new era where religious practice was at first tolerated, later criminalized, and subsequently almost entirely eliminated from public space.

During the war, the National Front was committed to protecting the country from unnecessary losses and destruction from the war. It considered the German armies in

Politics of Identity in Kosovo (2000: 157-177). For Turkey see Küçük's *The Role of the Bektashis in Turkey's National Struggle* (2002).

retreat and transitory. The nationalists refrained from open warfare against them. The Communist Party played up an image whereby the German armies were seen as invaders and during the war, as well as later, all those who collaborated with them were considered traitors. The executions ordered from above and without trial (Fischer 1999: 230), prolonged prison sentences and labor camps that followed were rationalized this way, at least in the immediate aftermath of the war. Dervish Ali Riza Koçia (1918-1944) from Mallakstra who allied with the National Front, for example, was accused of collaborating with nationalists and Germans (deemed anti-communist by association) – accusations that in the morning of August 31st of 1944 brought him face to face with the rifles of the “commissaries of death” who shot and killed him in the presence of his own father (Ahmataj 1997: 19). In this early phase of the Bektashi encounter with the emerging authoritarian rule, the interests of the perpetrators were to integrate anyone who could be brought into affiliation with Communists and to eliminate all other political rivals.

At the onset of the communist takeover, the conflicts between the partisans and the clergy were not ideological but about the consolidation of political power. While most of the Bektashi, especially tekkes in Central and Southern Albania aligned with the National Front, there were also others in Central Western and Northern Albania who aligned more closely with the communists. Baba Mustafa Xhani known as Baba Faja (1910-1947) of Ballëm Sulltan tekke, for example (Kressing 2002: 79), was elected the commandant of the newly formed Martanesh Brigade in 1942 shortly after the spiritual leader of the order Sali Nijazi Dede (1876-1942) was murdered by occupying Italians

because he refused to sign papers that would make the country's capitulation to Italian invasion official. A number of Bektashi became active in the communist guerilla movement of the early 1940s following this assassination (Norton 2001: 192). Committed to the liberation cause primarily and less interested in the communist ideology, Dede Ahmet (1916-1980) also fought alongside the Partisans until 1945 when Albania was "liberated." Asked to continue taking part in the newly installed communist state as an administrator, Dede Ahmet answered that his duty towards his country had been accomplished once the last of the German armies had left the country. Now it was his role as a religious leader that he wished to look after. As will be discussed below, Dede Ahmet was allowed to return to his tekke as dede, a spiritual and administrative leader of the Albanian Bektashi at the highest level, and is remembered by his *followers* to have increased the membership into the order and keeping Bektashi tekkes open (Ahmataj 2001: 14). Despite the affiliation of some Bektashi leaders with the communists, this seemingly non-antagonistic relationship between state and religious communities – including also Sunni Muslims and Albanian Catholic and Orthodox Christians – has been argued by westerners and Albanians alike to have had a dark side of "weird series of assassinations, or purges, impossible to interpret" (Shuster 1954: 202). From its conception in 1945 until its demise in 1991, the political history on relations between the authoritarian state and religious communities were progressively dominated by coercion and antireligious sentiments. Those that were willing to make deals with the communists were mobilized to fracture religious communities (and rival political formations) and serve as splinter contingents against their own communities. In the end, both those who

resisted and those who cooperated with the authorities fell victim to the fury of the ruthless regime.

The historical period from 1945 to 1991 is bracketed by two events that steered the history of Albanians in particular directions especially as it relates to the fate of religious communities. Year 1945 marked the coming to power of the then Albanian Communist Party and the subduing of all political rivals like the National Front and others. “Elections” were held in December of 1945, which were described by British and American Missions as both “free and secret” (Bland 1992: 125). A remarkable 90% of the population was reported to partake in the election, with a hard to believe outcome of 93% casting their votes in favor of Albania joining the path towards socialism. It is an early indication that the newly installed state was fixing the outcomes of historical events. As will become apparent below, the state was invested in the production and dissemination of a history that was in opposition to religion in general and religious communities in particular. The elections of 1991 toppled the unilateral and unrivaled socialist rule and paved the way for democratization processes that were simultaneously coupled with the restoration of religious freedoms. The post-1991 era was associated also with a gradual and ongoing interest in the management of the historical record.

While at first the executions, imprisonment, and confiscations of property served to consolidate the power by the emerging state, the state controlled historiography expounded the links between these and the socialist project. In retrospect, the aim was to build the economic base for socialism and the elimination of “oppressing classes” (*klasat shfrytëzuese*), which obstructed the socialist efforts to seek and realize a classless society

(Dojaka 1977: 191). The two aims are complementary in that the communal property was built up from confiscations of land, goods, and money from those who had them, including the clergy and Bektashi tekkes who were historically land owning institutions. The latter were depicted as a kind of social barrier for the transformations that the state sought. Following the Marxist-Leninist premise that in all societies exist two antagonistic classes, “we [socialist Albanians] leave religion, totally, in the political and ideological arsenal of the oppressive class” (Hako 1977: 311).

Making “friends” and “enemies” abroad and at home

Over time, the newly formed government aligned most closely with the socialist republics of the Eastern Bloc. The Albanian version of Marxism-Leninism, nevertheless, led to the rise of a peculiarly harsh Stalinist dictatorship. It is partly why I prefer to refer to the dictatorship as “communist” rather than “socialist,” although both terms fail to fully represent exactly what happened in Albania under the dictatorship for much of the entirety of the second half of the 20th century. The detailed tracing of the political history of Hoxha’s regime, which lasted until his death from natural causes in 1985, is beyond the scope and objective of this chapter. Suffice it to say that the regime’s manner of rule and intensity of the grip over the people of Albania changed over time. So did relations with near and distant neighbors of the Eastern Bloc and the subsequent fate of religion in socialist Albania.

Change was visible in the temporary stability and eventual severing of international alliances with Tito’s Yugoslavia (1945-1948), Soviet Union (1948-1961),

and China (1961-1978) to mention but a few. All of these partnerships came with substantial and much needed economic aid to Albania but they also came with strings attached. Tito's Yugoslavia was reportedly seeking for Albania to join the Yugoslav federation, the Soviet Union wanted to import raw materials from Albania who would in return buy Soviet manufactured goods, whereas China exported its cultural revolution, wanted Albania's foreign policy (especially in regards to the Soviet Union) to be adopted (Bland 1992: 125-126), and "was looking for suitable allies to provide a window on Europe" (Broun and Sikorska 1988: 26). These alliances were officially severed on the grounds that all of the members of the Eastern Bloc, in regime's view, were revisionary deviants of Marxism. Some argue that, weakened by war and internal strife, the Albanian state made temporary use of its partners to develop its infrastructure and achieve a relative measure of self-sufficiency (see for example Zickel and Iwaskiw 1994: 37-53 and references therein).

In the case of Yugoslavia, for example, major Yugoslav investments were made for the creating of mining, railroad construction, and the production of petroleum and electricity. Because Tito sought to incorporate Albania into Yugoslavia, investments made in Albania were seen as investments in the future of Yugoslavia. In an attempt to gain further support inside the Albanian Communist Party, Belgrade extended 40 million U.S. dollars in credits to Albania in 1947 – this was 58% of Albania's total state budget. When attempts to pass a measure that would merge the military and economies of Albania with those of Yugoslavia, all Yugoslavs in the country were given 48 hours to leave in September of 1948. Moscow stepped in to compensate for Albania's loss of

Yugoslav aid. The cycle of befriending and bewitching “big brothers” in the international arena bolstered the state's legitimacy at home.

On the other hand, the subsequent break with major players in world politics was a display of the unpredictable and unquestionable power of a growing authoritarian rule. Under the pretext of each successive break up abroad was accompanied by the elimination of more party members and potential deserters at home. Beyond this, the state grew more and more isolated and the people more and more fearful and hopeless. Just as the first grievances of the incoming rule had to do with the consolidation of power, so too the international alliances may have been perceived as limiting the authoritarian reach that the leader desired to have over his own people.

With a growing paranoia and in strikingly similar fashion religion and religious communities became more and more problematic for the state. There were four main communities: the Albanian Catholic and Orthodox Christians had their centers abroad in the Vatican and Boston¹⁸ respectively, and the Sunni and Bektashi Muslims were more or less independently administered. All four communities were landowners. Furthermore, the loyalties of the people to the state were undermined by the loyalties of the people to their religious leaders and centers (as well as strong kinship ties of patrilineal descent).

¹⁸ The Albanian Orthodox who had migrated to the United States of America (primarily in South Boston and along the Eastern seaboard) sought their independence from the Greek Orthodox under the leadership of Fan Noli (1882-1965), an orthodox priest who began to preach and deliver Orthodox liturgies in Albanian. The efforts to separate with the Greek Orthodox Church involved the doing away of the reading of the Holy Scripture in Greek as was the case for much of the history of the Albanian Orthodox Church up to the reforms by Fan Noli in the 1920s. It was during the reign of King Zog in Albania that the Ecumenical Patriarchate issued a Tomos of Autocephaly on April 12, 1937, which forms the basis for church polity even today.

From an ideological viewpoint, the clash between the socialist state and religious communities was anticipated simply because communities that believed in and propagated God's existence could not become allies with those that bracketed religion as false consciousness. While such alliances were common elsewhere in the Eastern Bloc, the Albanian state put more emphasis on the principle of anti-deism by comparison – a point that will be further elaborated below. The Albanian regime sought to consolidate power and people's religious affiliations and the religious institutions themselves were deemed competitors and a hurdle in the consolidation of power by the centralized communist state.

The Albanian communist and later socialist state borrowed heavily from its alliances abroad, economically as well as ideologically. The Cultural Revolution that swept the Eastern Bloc for example found its most ardent application in Albania. The creation of the “new man” (“*njeriu i ri*”), the creation of new culture and its propagation to the masses was a new form of religiosity that competed with older forms. While religious communities aimed at increasing their ranks with new members, maintaining and expanding their institutions, the state was interested in “the revolutionary and ideological formation of workers” (*formimi ideologjik revolucionar*) for this was reportedly considered one of the most important tasks of the socialist project.

It is clear in the selected statements given at the 1976 National Conference of Ethnographic Studies that religion was part of a wider reconstruction of Albanian society and the reinstatement of a “materialist worldview” (“*botëkuptimi materialist*”) and the creation of “a culture that in its very essence was atheist” (Xholi 1977: 69). By mid-

1970s the state had brought under its ruling apparatus an entire arsenal of institutions, including research and educational centers such as the Institute of History and the Department of Ethnography. Here is how ethnographers trained in socialist Albania discussed socio-cultural revolution and how it relates to the national popular culture:

In noting that the materialist worldview is a reality that is being born and that is settling once and for all within its own culture and life, our society is not and will not make any illusions that religion (*feja*) and religious presuppositions have been entirely annihilated from the minds and feelings of all, and that they have no way of being reborn (*ringjallje*) and reactivated in this or that particular person (i.e., in nobody), in this or another particular situation (Xholi 1977: 69, author's translation).

This was one of the objectives of the Cultural Revolution as it was applied in Albania. In the same conference, it was further reasoned that religion devalued culture and that it was in its essence anti-cultural.

Even though a product of people's mental activity, even though a people's own construction, religion cannot be called culture in the proper sense of the term. Religion is a distorted reflection of reality, an unintelligent falsification of reality, it is a reaction against life, it is in the way of freeing the workers and of social progress. Religion, in its very essence, is anticulture.

The fight against the old ways and in order to create "new traditions" was naturally transformed into an open warfare against religion, against its institutions, against its servants and clerics that were spreading religious beliefs and were keeping religion alive (Xholi 1977: 68).

Setting themselves against the past, the Albanian socialists positioned themselves against the west as well.

In accordance with Lenin's teachings, who states that the only way to be delivered from darkness is by making use of all that world culture has to offer, and all useful realizations of the past . . . Our culture has and will continue to be critical against world culture and will borrow from it only scientific, materialistic, and

democratic ideas. We will discard any idealistic, clerical, mystical, and any other kinds of ideas that plant the seed of disbelief in life and man, that look down upon work and the masses of workers, that justify oppression, exploitation, and obscurantism.

Seen another way, the war against religion was rationalized as an act of national defense.

The clergy were associated with occupying armies, the institutions of religions, such as churches and mosques, were portrayed as nests of anti-Albanianism.

Internally, the state followed four main policies that together amounted to a dictatorship of the ruling elites over the populace at large: *lufta e klasave* or the systematic and open warfare against classes of people who oppose the state, *prona private* or the limitations of private property in order to build communally owned (and state managed) property, *tregu i lirë* or the downgrading and elimination of the free market, and *agjitacion dhe prapagandë* or an open warfare against those who may cause [political] agitation and propaganda (i.e. attempts to persuade) against the state. The war of classes depended on the division of society into the privileged (*të privilegjuar*) and the declassified (*të deklasuar*). The first was made up of all the people with a favorable political background who were either neutral or who supported the socialist project. The ones that joined the partisan brigades were members of the communist party and their families. The latter, all those who directly or indirectly associated with the National Front, were property owners who were classified as *kulaks*, and their families. The category of land owners included also religious institutions. Many who sided with the National Front and held leadership roles in their parties were executed. Their families and relatives were by default members of the declassified and were treated with suspicion for the remainder of the authoritarian rule.

The landowners (including also the clergy and lands owned by religious institutions) were considered a threat to the rising socialist state. Their lands were quickly confiscated and their families and relatives were declassified. In 1966, the 5th congress of the Communist Party conjoined the war of classes with the war on religion by introducing a new slogan: “the war against religious ideology is also war of classes” (Hako 1977: 315). The policy against the free market aimed to convert all property into public property owned by the state. The state argued that the free market generated a gap between some who had become rich and the many who remained poor. Therefore the state gradually controlled all trade – almost all goods and services were provided by the state. Only a small portion of the economy remained outside of the state control, including exchanges of goods between people such as home grown tobacco, home brewed alcohol (*raki*), home kept domesticates (horses, mules, cows, sheep, goat) and the borrowing of money between relatives and friends which became a common practice in times of scarcity and the only way to purchase expensive items such as furniture, appliances like a stove or a television set etcetera.

The fourth policy mandated an active monitoring and punishment of potential enemies of the socialist state. Through a very extensive network of spies and secret operatives who were monitoring people’s activities and conversations, the state went after anyone who might be involved in propaganda against the institutions of the state and state’s adopted socialist way. Those suspected of treason were executed. Others received prison sentences, while their families were forcefully sent to internal internment in difficult-to-live-in regions of Albania with severe travel limitations. This enabled the

state to maintain the pressure on the declassified people and ensure that those who could oppose the government had no means for starting a successful rebellion.

All in all, these policies brought the religious communities into direct conflict with the Stalinist regime. In addition to the problems that religious leaders and institutions posed for the consolidation of power, the propagation of religious sentiments and dogma was deemed to be a direct threat. Outside ties that religious communities brought with them by virtue of their history of origin, were considered to be de facto connections to the outsider non-Albanian world, and therefore dangerous and potentially treacherous.

The totalitarian state's efforts to consolidate power necessitated the removal of social barriers. Since all religious communities were independently organized, leaders and clerics of these communities were targeted. Some were converted to join the socialist project and to support the dictatorship. Others were coercively eliminated or dispersed and rendered harmless. At the same time new ideologies replaced religious ones. A form of militant atheism that was coupled with an ultranationalist project swept the country. This cross-fertilization went hand in hand with Stalinist totalitarianism, which was the cornerstone of Hoxha's rule. Religion as ideology in general, and religious institutions and leaders in particular were an obstacle to his dictatorship.

Year 1991 marks the end of the "socialist" period. This is a conjuncture of national significance in the history of the people of Albania. Although the dictator had passed away in 1985, his successor Ramiz Alia (1925-2011) continued in Hoxha's footsteps. Pressured by the change and political and economic failure of communist states

in Eastern Europe as well as by growing antagonism towards the ruling elite in Albania, the country found itself engulfed with mass protests, storming of foreign embassies, and unchecked illegal crossings of international borders. Political unrest led to the first democratic elections in Albania since the coming to power of the communist party some 46 years ago. Put another way, the period from 1945 to 1991 is demarcated by the onset and demise of the socialist rule in Albania, respectively. Seen from the perspective of religious communities, the period in question correlates with the onset of the state attack on religion culminating with the constitutional decree of 1967 that criminalized all religious practice. The political transformations of 1991 correlate with the reinstatement of religious freedoms. The political history of Albania in regards to religious communities from 1945 to 1991 is a complex trajectory of many shifts and turns. So is the experience of the state attack on religion by the religious communities.

Remnants of religion in “atheist” Albania

In 2007, it was clear to me that the plurality of accounts that referred to the “atheist” era emphasized that something remained despite state’s efforts to eradicate all religious expressions. Before I delve into the details of how the Bektashi now remember their past under communism, in this section I consider the life history of Dervish Neki, a Halveti Albanian Sufi, and other testimonies collected in 2007 in order to see how the state attack on religion played out in individual lives and what remained despite all efforts by the state to uproot religion in communist Albania.

The story of Dervish Neki was narrated to me by a man who is now in his mid-60s. The narrator comes from a family with a Bektashi background, but who himself is not a practitioner of religion, nor one who believes. In fact, the narrator presented Dervish Neki as a Bektashi cleric. However Dervish Neki is certainly not a Bektashi since he is a family man with many children whereas the dervishes of the Bektashi sect are celibate. It is common, given the popularity of the Bektashi Order in Albania, that the Halveti, Rifa'i, Kadiri and other less widespread Sufi dervishes are often erroneously considered to be Bektashi. Like the narrator of Dervish Neki's life story, there are now a significant number of people in Albania who trace a religious identity simply by their family's history. They are not practicing believers and remain largely uninterested and deeply skeptical of the efforts to revive the main religious communities in Albania. Some of them may not even believe in the existence of God. The interlocutor who narrated his knowledge about Dervish Neki, like the many of those who are uninterested in religion, was born during the Second World War and was brought up in communist/atheist Albania. What he shares with Dervish Neki is a history of prosecution and oppression by the socialist state, though they are different in that Dervish Neki was religious and remained so, whereas the narrator of Dervish Neki's story was sent to internment and kept under the surveillance of the secret police after the execution of his father because of his leadership role with the National Front. The narrator and the narrated in this section serve to show that the fury of the authoritarian state extended to all segments of Albanian society that might threaten the state's absolute power.

According to this narration, Dervish Neki originally came from a poor family in a small mountainous village in southern Albania. His family and narrator's family had a long history of friendly relations with one another. During the Greek occupation of southern Albania in 1914, most of the people fled to the mountains. Upon their return they found most of their homes and trees had been used as fuel to keep the Greek armies warm during the harsh winter. What remained were ruins as well as a new church that the Greeks had built in a hurry. According to people's testimonies, it was a common practice by Greeks that whenever they penetrated well into southern Albania in villages known to be of Albanian ethnicity, they would build churches and bury old stones and relics brought over from Greece. The implantation of what was to turn up as archaeological evidence in the future would support Greek territorial claims to southern Albania. The narrator's family was one of the first to return to the village and took shelter at the newly built church until they fixed their own house. Soon after the repairs were completed, they moved to their own house and left the church to Dervish Neki's family since they were fewer in number and rather poor. In fact, over the years our narrator's family had always kept Dervish Neki's family close: whenever they would kill a lamb, portions of it were sent to Dervish, when they milked their sheep, they would send milk to Dervish Neki's family. Since then, the narrator's family relocated to the city, whereas Dervish Neki's family remained in the village.

The narrator remembers three main events and instances that are characteristic of what happened with religion in general and religious clerics in particular in socialist Albania. In 1958, the narrator's family was ordered to be relocated as part of internal

internment state agenda where all land owners (*kulaks*) were sent back to their places of origin. At this time, the state had already confiscated most of the lands from private holders as well as from religious institutions. While religious practice was still allowed, over time the state was placing more and more control over religious institutions, and was progressively more antireligious in their socialist propaganda. At the age of 20, the narrator and his family were moved from the city to the village. “I was very upset and angry and did not want to settle in. Nothing interested me and I was sure that this was temporary; if they did not let me go back to the city, I was thinking of escaping over the border.” At this stage only years before the official constitutional decree that criminalized all religious practice, Dervish Neki took our narrator (only in his early twenties at the time) aside. “Do not lose hope,” he said, “look who is in charge: Hoxha and Shehu¹⁹. God has sent them so that we may live God’s punishment upon us. Therefore be patient, remain calm, think of your family, and do not do anything in a hurry.” At the time, those who were able to escape brought a lot of suffering to their families who were declared enemies of the state. These words of advice had come to a point where the narrator was craving a wise word from somebody; when he had no one to relate to in the village mostly because of his background in the city but also because of his own and his family’s status as *të persekutuar* (persecuted by the state) which was a status that often led to

¹⁹ “*hoxha*,” is a religious title, a teacher at a madrasa, or an imam at a mosque. “*shehu*,” is an Albanian equivalent for *sheikh*, Sufi leader. At the time Enver Hoxha was the leader of the Communist Party and Mehmet Shehu, his right hand man. They are the two people responsible for ordering many executions of political and religious foes who were considered to be a problem for the growingly harsh Stalinist, authoritarian, and also atheist regime.

social marginalization. It is at this very time when the narrator needed to hear words of advice from someone that Dervish Neki came to his rescue.

Dervish's advice makes sense of suffering as part of God's plan. This way, it calls for acceptance and calmness by people and patience to let this part of God's plan play out. In retrospective, he talked some sense into a disillusioned young man, giving him advice that gradually helped him settle down, cope with the difficulties of his situation, and be an asset rather than a cause for more problems for his family. It also shows how the religious leaders were keeping an eye out for the people and, in this case, were the ones to offer a kind word of advice when people needed it most.

Later on, as the narrator got used to village life, Dervish Neki remains again in his memories of communist Albania as someone who looked after his wellbeing. At this time the narrator had acquired an old mule which was a necessary but luxurious aid for villagers to secure firewood for the winter from the forest some three hours way and for other daily tasks – the mule is a man's best friend in rural and rugged terrains. The narrator had set his mind to exchanging the mule for a younger and stronger one and found a young foal in the nearby village. The problem was that he had no money to purchase it, only the old mule that he planned to sell. After some debate over the price (35 K lek or the equivalent of the annual salary of a cooperative worker, a large sum of money), the seller agreed to let the foal go for 5 K lek which the narrator borrowed from a relative, with the promise that the money that would be attained from the sale of the old mule would go to the seller. In any case, an agreement was reached that by the end of the year the loan would be paid off entirely. The narrator hoped to collect medicinal plants

and sell them; money from the plants and salary for working for the cooperative and if necessary borrowing from family members would help pay the loan back. Because it took a few months to find an interested party to buy the older mule, the narrator, for the time being, was left with two mules and this was a rarity in the village. Many families could barely afford a donkey, and few others had one mule per household. To make things worse, the village had one water hole that was located near the center of the village and was used daily by the village animals: mules, donkeys, and cows. Whether one wanted or not, all were forced to make an appearance to the waterhole in the morning before all workers were sent with various working tasks for the day. In the evening when everyone returned from work, they let the animals have a final drink before they retired to their stables for the night.

Having come from the city only a few years back, and being in his mid-twenties the narrator took great pride parading the two mules and was unaware of the fact that the village was booming with rumors and expressions of jealousy. They wondered “How is it that a family that was brought to the village through forced internment and state orders, is now able to have more property than others?” It was one day after work that Dervish Neki had been on the lookout for the narrator. He took him aside, careful so that other villagers did not notice, and gave the following advice: “you must not be seen with two mules, bring them to the water hole very early in the morning before everyone else is up and around, and late in the evening after all the others have gone to their homes.” Dervish’s fears were over the evil eye and for further unwanted attention to narrator’s family that having and displaying wealth could lead to. This advice took the narrator by

surprise, that he did indeed have two mules but that he was in deep debt; the sale of one of them would only help with the debt but not pay it entirely. “Nobody cares about that,” continued the Dervish, “people care about the fact that you have two mules.” This was a time where the state was already curtailing religious freedoms of people. Yet it is a stage where the religious leaders still maintained their functions as advisors looking after people despite these pressures. In effect, the narration reflects an effort by Dervish Neki, who went out of his way to warn people of building harm. He also offered moral advice about how to act in society even though this is not imparted explicitly through a religious frame. It is teaching that occurs outside of religious institutions thus indicating that with growing state pressure against institutions of religion we see a gradual shift of religious practice onto private spheres of social life.

What is also memorable about the life of Dervish Neki is that he was pressured by both his family as well as state officials to give up his “*teslim*,” the stone of surrender that dervishes of Halveti, Bektashi, and other Sufi groups hang on their neck and over the chest. It is often kept underneath one’s clothing although some clerics may choose to openly display it. This key symbol of the Bektashi is often engraved over the entrances to the sacred sites of the Order (Figure 2.1). The village was visited by a delegation who had come for the sole purpose of speaking against religion and making known the socialist dogma on religion as an obstacle towards progress. After a speech that lasted for several hours the official asked villagers about anyone in the village that remained loyal to their religion. All eyes pointed to Dervish Neki who was present at the town hall meeting. His brother, who held a state paid position, stated that Dervish Neki will listen to his family

and the Party (i.e. Albanian Labor Party) and will remove his teslim. Then the Dervish spoke:

What is the reason for this? What the party teaches, religion also teaches: not to steal, not to lie, and to do good deeds. Every morning all workers in the villages are asked to exercise communally, bending down and raising up. So does religion as Muslim prayer is also a similar form of exercise. But may I ask: are our houses owned by the state or are they private property? If my house is owned by the state than I shall do as the state asks. As long as our house remains private property I shall do within the confines of the house what I shall.

Not only did Dervish Neki not remove the teslim, but he was also known to follow his religious obligations of prayer in his own home. The narrator reports him to have also been a special visitor during births, deaths and important occasions such as to bless the onset of the building of the new house. Although he visited in secret, he would perform the religious rites, prayers, and singing Qur'anic verses during these occasions.

When religious ceremonies were again allowed, Dervish Neki grew a beard and it was in 1991 that the narrator recalls the third piece of advice from Dervish Neki. It was right at a time when so much time had passed under the dictatorship that, although change was expected, when change finally arrived it was hard to believe. Most were left with little hope for future prospects in the country and the narrator had decided to join the many Albanians who migrated illegally to Greece and Italy in the Albanian exodus of early 1990s. Before leaving the narrator visited Dervish Neki, left a small gift for him and let him know about the plans of departure. "Go without doubt, dervish stated, because this country will not make it any time soon. May it all go well for you." It is an interesting contrast and change in the message. In the 1960, it was Dervish Neki who warned the narrator not to do anything (including escaping) for it was dangerous for him

and could bring much trouble for the family and relatives who were left behind. In the early 1990s, times had changed and Dervish blessed the journey of migration abroad. Coincidentally, in 2007 and 2011 we will see how the Bektashi message calls for the return of the Albanians abroad, and emphasizes a concern for people to succeed in their own country.

In order to appreciate the degree to which religiosities persisted in socialist Albania, it is worthwhile to consider how the processes of survival played out in other religious communities²⁰. Despite a tremendous policing and monitoring of people's lives in communist Albania, formal and informal interview data indicate that the private domain made room for some rituals to persist. Albanian Catholics report that Saint's holidays were celebrated by silent prayer and by preparing in advance for a dinner that was richer than the usual scanty dinners throughout the year. Informants report that they always advised their children not to mention anything about the dinner or prayers in school. Often, the children would be asked by teachers about the food they ate for holiday nights in order to find out and later report any suspicions of religious activity to the authorities. Some testified that electricity would be cut off during these holidays so that it would be easier for people appointed by the government to spot any burning candles. Still people often figured out clever ways to conduct their religious obligations and reported

²⁰ Because Albania under communism became deeply paranoid towards foreigners and progressively isolationist over time, there is a marked scarcity of information over the fate of religious communities especially from 1967 to 1989. See Broun and Sikorska (1988: 23-43) for an account of all religious communities and their fate under communism, and Mustafa (2008) for more details about what happened with religion under communism from the perspective of Albanian Catholics and Bektashi.

that they would sacrifice an animal days before the holiday in order to avoid suspicion while people in rural areas secretly raised animals such as pigs for Catholics, and lambs for Muslims which were then sacrificed for the religious holidays. The type of religious practice indicated by these testimonies is largely confined to the private sphere. They also emphasize a confirmative dimension of ritual in that religious practice preserved the people's commitment to what was left of their religious life. More importantly, they were more than often acts of defiance against the government's sustained efforts to eradicate all religious expressions in Albania and also indicators of the existence of political agency, despite the state's pervasive efforts to quash all forms of resistance.

In addition, there are other symbolic indications of the persistence of religious sentiments in communist Albania. Many people reported that despite efforts to confiscate and destroy all religious symbols, some religious books, icons, crosses, and church bells were hidden and kept safe. An informant who was a former member of the communist party proudly leading a tour of his house took great pride in his woodcarvings of nationalistic imagery of the double headed eagle and that of the national hero Skënderbeg (1405-1468). Whereas, the ceiling in his bedroom, the most intimate and private space in the house, was wittily carved in a way that the design camouflaged the shape of a large cross.

While the remnants of religious life were largely confined to the private domain, there is one exception that has to do with natural landmarks such as a crevice or trees that are within the confines of public space. These were widely regarded as sacred places prior to and throughout the abolitionist era, and as such, they testify to the preservation of

a sense of sacred space. At present, formal shrines are built over some of these places or mega crosses erected in order to demarcate them. In the abolitionist period of the communist rule, often coins would still be left in these places and other times burnt candles would be found which often caused much commotion and worry among the authorities. Yet, the secretly circulated stories of calamities that befell those who disturbed these sites often led authorities to allow a silent coexistence of these shrines despite the antireligious public presentation of landscape in communist Albania. These secretly performed religious acts, rituals, and demarcations of sacred space in the public sphere carried with them a political statement of defiance against the systematic suppression of religious life.

In short, the claims of accomplishing a truly atheistic society often proudly stated as a matter of fact by former communist zealots and official voices of the communist regime must be confined to the public eradication of the religious markers. These are churches, mosques, religious schools and the press, and other public symbols in cemeteries generally found within public space. The evidence suggests that faith was preserved in the private domain and that secretly performed rituals played a confirmative role in maintaining religious commitments and shape political identity against the state's attempts to impose atheism as a national ideology. Had religious life and faith been completely eradicated from Albanian consciousness as the communist government claimed, this would severely handicap (if not halt) the likelihood of a revival of religion in postcommunist Albania.

The Bektashi experience with the antireligious rule

There are two main stages that most Albanians, Bektashi as well as others, recognize when they discuss the topic of religion in relation to the socialist state: 1945 to 1967 and 1967 to 1991. What follows are different examples of how leaders and followers within the Bektashi *now* claim to have maintained their faith during these periods of religious repression. Patterns of continuity on the collective memory on the religious under socialism dominate the multiplicity of voices that are sampled in this section. They contrast competing claims of state sponsored history that underscore a complete break with religion.

The 1967 adoption of atheism as the official ideology is universally recognized as the climax of state's attack on religious communities. Still, it is clear from available data, both written records as well as verbal testimonies that the early phase set up the stage for the second phase and the eventual installation of *ateizmi* (atheism) as the official ideology of the People's Socialist Republic of Albania. This section traces the events that led to the 1967 abolishment of religion as well as the impact of the overall antireligious posture of the state upon the Bektashi community utilizing sources in narrative history that reflect Bektashi's own view of their history as it pertains to the communist period.

In the years immediately after 1945, the communist state showed an interest in reforming the Bektashi community. Two Bektashi babas who had fought alongside the partisans, namely Baba Faja and Baba Fejzo, were at the forefront of sought-after reforms by the newly installed authoritarian and ultra-secularist state to get rid of mandatory celibacy and the use of the religious garb by Bektashi leaders. Some believe that this was

one of the first attempts by the state to gain control over Bektashi internal affairs. The expected internal fracturing that this caused would make it easier for the state to dismantle the Bektashi community. Others within the community claim that Baba Faja had fallen in love during the war with a lady who was also pregnant and, in order to cope with this, he himself called for an end to celibacy. Baba Faja and Baba Fejzo pressed most strongly to do away with celibacy. As already discussed, during the early years of the newly installed state, babas and dervishes that had close alliances with the National Front were rounded up to prison. Some were forced to flee like Baba Rexheb who went to Italy, Egypt, and later settled in Taylor, Michigan where he founded the first Bektashi tekke in the United States of America. His journey, both spiritual as well as migratory, is most notably narrated in great detail in *The Sufi Journey of Baba Rexheb* (Trix 2009).

In a survivor's testimony, and in an impressive reflection of the degree to which post-World War II had fractured the Bektashi, Baba Kamber and Baba Muço were imprisoned and interrogated by Baba Faja and Baba Fejzo (Aliko 2004: 31). The latter were renegade clerics and state officials. They charged the imprisoned for collaborating with the National Front. This was the equivalent of treason against their own country (*tradhti ndaj atdheut*), which at the time carried the death sentence (Ajazi 1996: 8). When it became clear that Baba Kamber and Baba Muço were not willing to give up their *taxh* (headpiece, part of the Bektashi uniform) (Figure 2.1) Baba Faja and Baba Fejzo took the headpieces away by force and ordered the guardians to take them to the prison's barber for their beards to be shaved. Ajazi (1996: 8) who was Baba Kamber's cell mate writes about the encounter between Baba Faja and Baba Kamber. The latter narrated it to the

author noting that after the *taxh* was removed from his head by force, Baba Kamberi uttered: “*të vraftë, të vraftë*” (literally, may [it] kill you, may it kill you). In a testimony given to me in 2011, Baba Kamber’s cell mate, former secretary general of the Order, and author of Bektashi letters Tomorr Aliko again put the same emphasis on the double repetition of the omen “may it kill you” that was uttered by Baba Kamber. In addition he stated that several days after the event he remembers Baba to have been overwhelmed by deep sadness. Baba Kamber passed away following a 10 day seclusion which only worsened his diabetic condition. When Baba Muço learned of the news in a nearby prison, he too passed away the very same day.

Before Baba Kamber and Baba Muço died, in March of 1947, Baba Faja and Baba Fejzo approached the Bektashi Headquarters with hopes of convincing Dede Abaz to let go of celibacy. The meeting resulted in more deaths: two of them are narrated as events foreshadowed by Baba Kamber’s omen, whereas the third is accounted for not as death but the sublime sacrifice by a Bektashi leader in defense of the fundamentals of the Order. Abaz Ilmi Dede (1887-1947), who was serving at the Headquarters at the time, refused to allow a move away from celibacy and the relaxation of the requirement for clerics to be clothed in the traditional religious garb. Upon pressures to comply with the state requests to reform the community of clerics, Dede Abaz shot and killed both Baba Faja and Baba Fejzo while hosting them in his own room at the headquarters. When Dede Abaz’ dervish heard the shots he asked what it was. “It is nothing son,” Dede Abaz replied. “Just a snake that tried to get in.” Before the armed soldiers that were accompanying the visiting [babas] officers arrived at the scene, Dede Abaz reportedly

turned the gun onto himself. This is one of the most talked about events in the recent history of Albanian Bektashi as well as one that is surrounded by a great deal of mystery. It is an event that is deeply tied to relations between religious communities and the progressive encroachment of the state upon their internal affairs. To foreign Albanologists the two Bektashi clerics and government officials were “reported to have died violently in circumstances that were not clear” (Pearson 2006: 166) whereas the understanding that circulated by Albanian laymen and political historians alike consider Enver Hoxha and his aides as the masterminds behind the killings (see for example Doja 2006, Hysaj 2003). The events were a prelude of worse things yet to happen, since in 1967 the ambitions of Baba Faja and Baba Fejzo, and more, would be realized.

According to a testimony given to me by a Bektashi *ashik* and retiree of the secret police, from 1945 to 1967 religious practice was allowed but controlled by the state. That is the tekkes, babas and dervishes that were living there were able to receive guests despite ongoing covert monitoring by secret agents. Clerics were able to discuss religious matters as long as they were purged of political statements that could be interpreted as anti-state by the government watch dogs. Initiations of new members continued. The community was able to conduct their rituals. However, the tekkes had lost much of their properties to the state’s land reform of 1946 aimed at confiscating and limiting land owned by religious institutions. Those tekkes that had 40 hectares of land were only left with a couple of hectares. The limitation on property owned made it more difficult for the babas and dervishes to maintain their long held degree of self-sufficiency. The details of

the processes of collectivization and the consequences of land confiscation to the fate of the Bektashi tekkes are discussed in greater detail in the next chapter.

During this first phase, some tekkes, were entirely overtaken by the state. For example, Kuzum Baba in the city of Vlorë was turned into a military station as early as 1948. The tekke was positioned on the hills overlooking the city of Vlorë and the Adriatic harbor and was therefore also a strategic place to install anti-aircraft weaponry. People of Vlorë would swear by Kuzum Baba, and at the time of the take over and the closing of the tekke Dede Ahmet (1916-1980) spoke against the takeover of “the house of God.” The tyrbë of Kuzum Baba was itself leveled and Dede Ahmet took the remains of this Bektashi *shenjtor* (saint) to the Headquarters of the Albanian Bektashi located in the capital of Tirana. When the Headquarters was closed in 1967 the remains of dedes, babas, and dervishes were taken to the public cemeteries. After Dede Ahmet passed away in 1980 he too was buried in the public cemetery in the same locale.

In 2011, Ashik Fetah told me the life story of Dede Reshat (Chapter 5) and his *murshid* Dede Ahmet during our ascent to Mt. Tomorr and our weeklong stay at this pilgrimage site (Chapter 6). In his own view, Ashik recognized the above two stages as the most difficult of their lives as leaders of the community. Ashik Fetah is the maternal nephew of Dede Ahmet and as such since 1940s to the present has been a frequent visitor of the Headquarters. He remembers staying for weeks sometimes months at a time at the Headquarters. Dede Reshat, according to Ashik Fetah, was first employed as a cattle herder at the age of 16 by Dede Ahmet in 1948. He was kept close by Dede Ahmet who noted (then) Reshat’s “*prirje, intelektin, ndershmërine, dhe përkushtimin,*” (literally,

aptitude, intellect, honesty, and devotion) and kept him close and “fed him with the nectar of Bektashism.” Two years later Ashik Reshat became a *muhib* and later ordained as a dervish. He served at the Headquarters until 1958 at this capacity. Initiations, the training of members, and employment of supporting personnel were reportedly still part of the religious and institutional life of religious communities in the early phase prior to 1967.

Baba Selim Kaliçani (1922-2001), for example, was ordained Dervish *myxhyret* (celibate) in 1948 at the Headquarters in Tirana. In February of 1953 (then) Dervish Selim was ordained Baba by Dede Ahmet and sent to serve at the Ballëm Sulltan Tekke in Martanesh. Below I paraphrase my own translation of a biographical sketch titled *Baba Selim Kaliçani 1953-1958* published by *Urtësia*, the publishing house of the Bektashi Headquarters.

Baba Selim was known to be a hard worker, agile, and quite skilled in his communications with people. He spoke very fluidly and mastered the art of humor. There were always people around him, ready to help with projects to upkeep and renovate the tekke. Among other things, he was able to build a small hydro plant which furnished the tekke with electricity. This was a remarkable achievement because it was not until the late 1960s that electricity was turned into a reality for most Albanian homes. Moreover, the numbers of the initiated and ashiks at Baba Selim’s tekke were said to have increased substantially. At times it was necessary not only to have the initiation rite conducted for several people at once but to also conduct the ceremony more than once in the same week. During the period between 1953 and 1958, the propagation of the faith continued more or less uninterrupted.

Baba continued to give candid advice, and to harshly criticize people’s mistakes often saying: “Do not lie, because you will be lied to, do not curse because you will be cursed, do not steal because you will be stolen from, do not beat up anyone because you will be beaten up by others, do not kill because you will be killed” (Sula et al. 2005:148). Part of the skill to keep a following together and increase the numbers of believers around the tekke was his devotion to his duty and the people in the neighboring communities. Once, people from a village far away had misunderstood some matter and were unhappy with the baba and

stopped visiting the tekke. Noting this, Baba took the distant journey upon himself and visited them saying: “when it so happens that you do not come to us [to babas, dervishes], we will come to you” (Sula et al. 2005: 149).

This gesture, and, as the Bektashi would likely add, the mystery of Baba Selim, normalized the relationships between them. Although tekkes remained opened and their activities relatively uninterrupted, there was a growing concern over the infiltration of religious communities by socialist zealots and a growing antireligious stance that the state was adopting.

Baba Selim was free to practice his duties as a baba at first but by the late 1950s, by his own admission (in preface of Zendani 2000: 8), he noted the heightened anxiety that characterized the relationships between Bektashi tekkes and the state most notably present in the constant covert surveillance of religious centers by spies and secret police. In 1958 Dede Ahmet assigned Baba Selim to another tekke in Frashër of southern Albania, in 1960 to a tekke in Plashnik, near the southern Albanian city of Berat. During one of the conversations with a visitor, Baba evoked the story of the Pharaoh of Egypt stating among other things that Pharaoh’s drowning and fate was the will of God. The visitor turned out to be a secret agent who later reported that Baba had stated that the party leaders had become like pharaohs of Egypt. The authorities took Baba into custody. He was released from police custody only after the mufti of the city of Berat testified that Baba had simply recited a Qur'anic verse²¹ about the rulers of ancient Egypt.

²¹ Probably from Jonah 10:90: We took the children of Israel across the sea. Pharaoh and his troops pursued them in arrogance and aggression. But as he was drowning he cried, “I believe there is no God except the one the Children of Israel believe in. I submit to Him” (translated by Haleem 2004: 134).

A growing set of difficulties came with an increasing state control over religious institutions. According to Ashik Fetah, in 1956, for example, the state had invited all the leaders of the religious communities (Bektashi, Catholic, Orthodox, and Sunni) to take part in an International Conference of Peace organized by the Central Committee (*Komiteti Qëndror*). Dede Ahmet was asked to address the conference and was to send his speech in writing to the committee for approval of the contents therein. Once the organizing members looked the draft over, they noted that it was “too religious” (*shumë fetare*) and asked Dede Ahmet to modify it. In response, Dede Ahmet asked the committee members to write the speech they desired and that he would be happy to deliver the text for them. In the end, Dede Ahmet read the prepared speech but followed it by an impromptu speech that lasted exactly 60 minutes. Present was also Enver Hoxha who after the talk indicated that his impromptu speech was much longer than the written one. Dede Ahmet replied: “the first was the Party’s speech. That which followed was the word of God.” It was a brief encounter not followed by a reply by the party leader, but it was well understood that Dede Ahmet had crossed the line. Although he had at first given in to the State’s claim to exercise complete authority over the religious message, at the conference he had courageously managed to separate the contents of the state’s message from the religious one. This attempt to keep the two separate did not go unnoticed, since the state had already begun to gradually delegitimize religious leaders and religious ideology as incompatible with the official ideology of the state.

A year later, in 1957, Dede Ahmet was ordered to liberalize religion (*të liberalizonte fenë*) as a step leading up to the ruining of religion (*të prishte fenë*)²². He did not agree to proposals from above to introduce marriage and to “liberalize” the Bektashi whose members of the highest degrees (namely dede, babas, and dervishes) practice celibate monasticism. These two direct disagreements between the state and the leader of the community, according to Ashik Fetah, led to the ordering of Dede Ahmet’s exile and internment in the small and remote village of Drizar in central western Albania in 1958. He and Dervish Reshat took residence in an abandoned tekke. By this time it was clear that the state was exercising more and more power over the contents of the religious message as well as over the very leadership of the religious communities.

In 1967, the communist government moved to officially eradicate of all forms of religious expression as a preliminary step in the drafting of the new constitution of 1967²³, which included a clause that declared Albania an atheist country. Article 37 of the

²² “Liberalize,” this curiously non-Marxist phrase, worked well in the period leading up to the constitutional ban of religion. At this early state, in the view of my informants, the state was interested in weakening the clergy and gradually diminishing the role of religious institutions in public life. This multi-step process may have had a strategic purpose as well. That is, in order to achieve the end result (atheism), it was deemed necessary to first prepare the ground for the onset of atheism. So, for example, in the 1940s we saw the elimination of clergy deemed too difficult or impossible to compromise. In the 1950s laws were passed to limit the hours that churches, mosques and tekkes were to remain open to the public. Other measures included the taking away of arable lands that were legally owned by religious institutions. “Liberalize” in this context meant to first deal with and weaken those conservative aspects of religion such as celibacy and monasticism. This would lead up to the final blow against religion and the dismantling of religious institutions all together by the constitutional decree of 1967.

²³ The demolitions and closings of religious institutions began long before the constitutional degree of 1967. In 1964, for example, a commune in the district of Elbasan was involved in an intensive work between the youth that was inspired by the antireligious propaganda of the Central Committee and the socialist party. This work led to the leveling of the mosque in the village of Shalë-Gostimë. A Catholic priest in the village of Shënkoll, also in 1966, was kicked out of the

constitution reiterated that the state recognized no religion and the new penal code included severe sentencing for religious activities. Religious practice and public display of symbols were thus criminalized. Wearing a cross or displaying other religious symbols could be punished with up to ten years in prison. More serious offenses such as holding mass or propagating religion were punished with lifelong prison sentences accompanied with heavy labor and even death.

While 1967 sharply divides early communist from later communist and a religious abolitionist era, it is clear that the state attack against religion was a gradual process. For, as it was often declared in conferences and in press, “the success against the war on religion did not come about through an administrative act but by convincing, educating, and the enhancements of schooling and culture, and by simultaneously transforming life based in socialism” (Xholi 1977: 68). In these regards, party meetings, town hall gatherings, and schools became the battle ground for the propagation of a new and antireligious worldview. Other ways included the use of media, rumors, and fabricated denunciations against the clergy for immorality, theft, and misuse of their positions to become wealthy. All relevant institutions and media were mobilized to stage war against the religious communities and beliefs. A state-founded museum glorifying atheism was opened in the northern city of Shkodër (Figure 2.2).

The 1976 National Conference of Ethnographic Studies, for example, was attended by the leader of the Party, Enver Hoxha, secretaries and members of the Central

village and the church was locked up; only 4 people were reported to have come to the aid of the excommunicated priest (Hako 1977: 315).

Committee. Among other works that were presented at the conference was one titled *The destruction of prayer centers (faltore) and of clerics in Albania as an important hallmark of the ideological and cultural revolution*. One report claimed that “microsociological observations of 100 workers of different ages, professions, and schooling, 80 result in an atheist position, 5 are unsure, and 15 remain believers” (Hako 1977: 314). There is no explanation of the ways that the data were collected and it is likely that the data are fixed to favor state's interests: to claim a victory of the war on religion while at the same time maintaining the rationale for a continued vigilance towards few that still remain unchanged and enemies of the state. Taken at face value, the “empirical” findings claim a success in the efforts to eradicate religion: only 10 years after the 1967 official abolishment of religious practice only a small percentage of believers remained. By projecting an inflated figure on the atheist demographic measure, the central government was at once demanding all communities to meet the quota and granting a license to local governance to continue harassing religious communities.

From 1967-1991 it became illegal to practice and propagate religion. Bektashi centers, as well as churches, monasteries, and mosques were closed down. Some 62 Bektashi tekkes and tyrbes were destroyed; their properties – land, domesticates, furnishings – were confiscated (Aliko 2004: 27). The state no longer recognized the religious institutions. The state approved statuses of the four communities, Sunni, Bektashi, Orthodox, and Catholic, which were officially retracted in November of 1967. The clerics were forced to shave their beards, remove their religious garbs, and live civilian lives. Most Bektashi babas and dervishes returned to live with their families.

Based on survey data from 2007, Dede Ahmet, lived a civilian life with his brother's family in Tirana. He was kept under heavy surveillance so that he could not provide charms, host guests for religious purposes and the like – these and all religious practice were forbidden by law. Clearly, at least if we were to go by the books, the People's Socialist Republic of Albania outlawed religion. It claimed atheism as the only constitutionally proclaimed ideology that was compatible with the socialist project. Nonetheless, despite this organized coercion to uproot all religious practice and beliefs and install an atheist ideology, there is a good deal of evidence in postsocialist recollections of socialist past that emphasizes the resilience and survival of religious beliefs, ideals, and knowledge. Secretive religious practice served to counter a socialist worldview stripped of all religion.

For example, according to Ashik Fetah, Dede Ahmet visited him twice in the post-1967 era and reportedly stayed with his family once for 15 days, another time for an entire month. Dede Ahmet also visited other relatives and believers as well because “he liked to be on the move.” In close circles of five or six people and when in the company of his own family, he would fast and partake in the *ashura* rituals. At times he would read from the Qur'an, and would converse about God. As Ashik Fetah told me, “this way, he would, illegally, keep faith alive.” He would often remind Ashik Fetah that the religious prohibition was a transitional stage. He was convinced that “this thing [prohibition of religion] is God's will delivered by Hoxha. It must be done, but it will pass.” Ashik Fetah's was narrating history and simultaneously claiming sacredness in Dede Ahmet's ability to foretell future events. In stark contrast to official historical narratives that claim

a complete break with religion and the past, Ashik Fetah's story upholds continuity amidst definite change.

During stays at Bektashi tekkes in 2007, I conducted structured and semi-structured interviews where respondents were asked to recall their experiences under communism. Additionally, and thanks to the generosity of my hosts, I amassed a sample of locally published and primarily internally circulated newspapers, journals, and books which are heavily invested in accounts about what happened with the Bektashi under atheism. In discussing the interplay between clerics and their followers during “atheist” Albania, these sources document the ways that people themselves now talk and write about their past in socialist Albania. Baba Selim Kaliçani was first sent to work as a mechanic and later for the brickmaking factory – wherever he went he claims to “never have given up speaking the Islamic truth that was boiling within his soul” (Zendani 2000: 9). Despite many pressures from relatives as well as party officials, Baba Selim remained unmarried.²⁴ As soon as religious freedoms were reinstated, he once again took on the Bektashi garb and grew his beard.

²⁴ Baba Çerçiz’ story was narrated to me by an Albanian Orthodox who recalls that Baba was the last baba to serve at the Teqe e Kulmakut on Mt. Tomorr. Because of baba’s resistance in an attempt to prevent the youth from destroying the tekke in 1967, he was taken to prison where he spent several years. Later Baba Çerçiz was employed to drive a pickup truck. He returned to Skrapar in the early 1970s and met with Bektashi muhiban. He passed away in 1980s. In the later years of his life his family and friends pressured him to marry and he did marry and reportedly had a child. Yet despite the giving up of celibacy, Baba Çerçiz remained a religious figure. One of his most memorable skills was Baba Çerçiz’ story telling. Often his stories would last for hours but “he was capable of telling stories for days in days out.” Another quality of Baba Çerçiz is that if he had anything against you he would say it. He had a lot of courage. He was also very much loved by the people. His most memorable advice was that there will be a day when this *sistemi* (literally “system,” colloquial for dictatorship or authoritarian regime) would pass.

One Dervish named Iliaz Maricaj (1926-2004) was asked to join the communist party. In response, Dervish Iliaz declined the offer and asked to be relieved of his military duties in order to continue his commitment to the path of Haji Bektash Veli. When his tekke in Maricaj was closed by state orders, he lived by himself taking care of several sheep until the state confiscated them as well. He spent the rest of his life, unmarried, living with his brother who recalls that often Dervish Iliaz would face Mt. Tomorr's peak, towards the *tyrbe* (sacred tomb) of Abaz Ali and say: "*pse e vonon, ktheje prapë?*" (literally, "why do You delay it, return it again?") (Hamzaj 2006: 13). The "it" that Dervish Iliaz was referring to was the freedom to practice religion. The above two cases are not as unrelated and limited as they appear. Aside from the main actors of these biographical sketches (Baba Selim and Dervish Iliaz) there are also receivers of the message. By refusing to give up the oath of celibacy, Baba Selim resisted state authority over individual religious commitments. His repeated addresses to the saint on the mountain peak is a religious act that (aside from its personal value) carries with it a message for others to turn towards the sacred sites and a reminder that the suppression of religious freedoms was only a temporary one. Each narrative event reinforces the sacred quality embedded with each recollection of the past.

Other life histories also testify to the situation of the Bektashi during this era. The following biographical sketch is found in a booklet. Its style of writing fits the tekke history genera that consists of a series of biographies of all those who served at a tekke

from its founding to the present, as well as their individual contributions²⁵. Here is a short biographical sketch of Baba Sherif found in Dedej and Dedej (1997) and paraphrased from my own translation.

From 1945-1946 Baba Sherif first attended the religious school that was being offered at the Bektashi Headquarters. In 1948 he was ordained baba by Dede Ahmet and was sent to serve at the Leskovik Tekke. In 1949 he was transferred to the Asim Baba Tekke near the southern city of Gjirokaštër. In 1953 the Headquarters appoints Baba Ibrahim as the Grandfather (*gjysh*) of Asim Baba Tekke and orders Baba Sherif to serve at Baba Xhemal tekke in the city of Elbasan in central Albania. At this tekke Baba Sherif is known to have increased the numbers of muhiban and to administer the tekke well. In 1958 Baba Sherif is sent to Ballëm Sulltan tekke and returned again at Baba Xhemal tekke in Elbasan in 1963. He served there until its closing in 1967 after which he is known to have lived a civilian life (Dedej and Dedej 1997: 119). Afterwards, Baba Sherif turned his own house into a kind of “tekke.” There people would come and hear Baba Sherif who is remembered to often say: “these are difficult and testing times. Blessed are those who are going to pass them. The truth will come to light, but patience is necessary, because patience saves” (Sula 2005: 168).

In another biography in the same publication, the reader learns that Baba Qazim became a muhib in 1909 and was ordained dervish in 1944. In 1950, Dede Ahmet ordained him as Baba and only three months later he was ordained as *gjysh* (grandfather) or halife. He contributed mostly with publications. His *General Knowledge about Bektashism* is the most important contribution. He passed away in November of 1962. Baba Qazim was buried with “special honors” on the grounds of Baba Xhemal Tekke where he served.

Present were muhiban as well as people of Elbasan and surrounding regions (Dedej and

²⁵ Although such publication may be single authored, this disguises the co-authorship of this type of locally produced historiography. Each successor who serves at the tekke, adds to this collective effort that goes into this project in the preservation of collective memory. Babas in the pre-1945 era are known to handwrite previous manuscripts of their tekke histories and add their account of the activities of their predecessors to the same post. More than likely, serving babas base their account on the contributions of previous leaders of the tekke on orally transmitted collective memory of the following about passed leadership.

Dedej 1997: 68). Despite early attempts to delegitimize religious leaders, they were able to retain their status within the religious communities. Again, locally produced histories claim an increase in religious activity (initiations, publications and opening of new centers) that counters the claims of state-sponsored histories of a decline in religious participation up until the 1967 ban. The state's claim of a complete break with the past work to document gains on the war on religion and reinforce the authority of the state over religious communities, while internally produced and circulated historical accounts counter state's hegemony, highlights continuity, and works to project communal cohesiveness.

The reinforcement of the “we remained despite hardship” narrative by the retelling of survivor stories in postsocialist and religiously revivalist context has to do, among other things, with legitimacy claims of current leadership (see Chapters 4 on ways of becoming and Chapter 5 on saintly life). Ibrahim Hasnaj (1912-1995) was present during the event when Dede Abaz shot and killed two Bektashi Babas who were pressing state’s request to introduce marriage among the celibate clerics. Muhib Ibrahim was the Secretary General of the Headquarters from 1937-1947. He had fought alongside other members of the National Front Party against the Serbs in Kosovo. After witnessing the event at the Headquarters, he was arrested and sent to 20 years in prison. The event at the Headquarters was only the pretext to his arrest. In reality he was sent to a long prison term because he held strong nationalist, anti-Communist, and religious beliefs. Any one of these beliefs was sure to raise state suspicion. Three of them were an unfortunate mix likely to bring about the fury of the state. In addition he was also charged with

collaboration with a cell that worked to sabotage and reportedly even bring down the communist rule. After his prison term he was sent to three years in labor camps. Despite the hardships, Greblleshi reports in the Bektashi bimonthly *Urtësia* that Muhib Ibrahim kept “*to himself* the religious inspiration and to others Bektashi ideals and commitments” (2005: 24, emphasis added). In the period between 1967 and 1990 his unpublished hand written literary works are reported to amount to 20,000 lines.

The claims that forms of religious practice remained even after 1967 is emphasized by the Bektashi despite state claims on the installation of atheism as the official ideology of the Socialist Republic and its people. Muhib Ferit (d. 2007) in a memoriam published in the bimonthly magazine of the Bektashi community *Urtësia* was reported to secretly observe religious rites. He was later entered in the lists of those to keep watch over by the regime (*lista e të përndjekurve*). Muhibe Xhemile from Krujë who also passed away in 2007, became an insider through initiation only several years before her death. People remember her to talk about her two sisters who were also muhiban. It was “their wisdom (*urtësi*), cleanliness (*pastërti*) and love (*dashuri*) that they showed towards all people that inspired Muhibe Xhemile to also become like them” (Pistolja 2007: 22). It was this inspiration from her own sisters that amounted to her being one of the first to be initiated into the Bektashi community soon after the relaxation of state grip over religion in the early 1990s.

The most important factor in keeping the soul of the believer alive (*shpirti i besimtarit*), were the informal social networks between Bektashi leaders. Babas and Dervishes maintained ongoing contacts with muhiban and ashiks (a term that refers to the

uninitiated adherents of the Bektashi). The Bektashi would come and go to one another for different occasions. Furthermore, people would still go to sacred sites, seeking spiritual comfort, and so that they could maintain their hopes for change. Near the Ballëm Sulltan Tekke there is another site, the Xixulla Cave, also revered as a sacred site. When the tekke was open, the Xixulla Cave was frequented much less by comparison, but when the tekke grounds were turned into a military station, it was the Xixulla Cave that received visitors. Without being noticed, people would go to the cave, rest there, pray, and some would leave coins which could be collected by travelers and the needy. Stealing from these sites was believed to cause misfortunes to the perpetrator and their families.

Resacralizing the present by historicizing the past

One afternoon in the summer of 2007 one of the dervishes, a *muhib* and I had taken refuge from the midday sun under the shade of the grape vine on the *tekke's* garden. Muhib's response to my persistent queries on the fate of religion in atheist Albania was as follows:

“Think of it this way,” he said. “Think of religion as a tree. When autumn settles in, it sheds its leaves. In the harsh winter it may *seem* as if there will be no leaves again. But as the harsh season subsides, the leaves sprout again. So it was with religion in atheist Albania.”

This response followed a longer conversation which, like most other recollections of Albania under communism, accept that there was an almost total eradication of religion and religious expressions in the public sphere, while also acknowledging at the same time

that “the roots and even the trunk” of religious life were preserved within the private domain.

The diversity of sources on religion under socialism is best handled by sorting out the audiences that particular stories about the past are addressed to: namely, insiders (initiated and potential members) and outsider (uninitiated Albanians and foreigners). Survey data, life histories found in publications such as magazines and books that are meant primarily for internal consumption that I collected primarily in 2007 and 2011 alternate in the message of continuity and break depending on the audience they each are addressing²⁶. At first they seem to be retellings of lived memories about religion in socialist Albania. However, because these testimonies are generated within the post socialist context, they are also conjoined to perceptions about the state of religion and religious communities at present.

In Muhib’s analogy of the changing seasons and return of spring, a claim is being made about atheism in Albania as a long and harsh winter. Religion in postsocialist Albania is seen as part of the same tree trunk and roots that survived the harsh winter and out of which religious life sprouted again. In fact, similar discourses that make use of such tropes as roots, tree trunk, and leaves, in talking about the religious in socialist Albania, recognize that the roots (*rrënjë*) survived even though all that was above ground

²⁶ When Dede Reshat evoked the story of decapitation, he did so in the presence of foreign guests and dignitaries. It was an audience of outsiders who received the narrative of discontinuity. Whereas, when Dervish Mikel evoked the analogy of a harsh winter whereby trees lose their leaves only to regain them again once the harsh winter passed, his was an audience of insiders. They, while seating in the company of Dervishes, received the narrative of continuity, i.e. the leaves fell, but again sprouted after the long winter.

was completely and utterly destroyed. So extreme was the state attack on religious life and religious communities that often survivors speak of an uprooting (*çrrënjosje*) of religion. The earlier version legitimized present day community by claiming continuity between those who remained and their forefathers. The latter acknowledges that the community suffered an extreme break with its past.

The significance of the two perceptions about the past becomes apparent when we also consider claims of legitimacy that surrounds the current Bektashi leadership in post socialist Albania as well as the audiences to which these stories tend to be emphasized more often. That is, I was more likely to hear the “uprooting” version from someone who is skeptical about the authenticity and legitimacy of present day religious communities and their leadership. Whereas, the “harsh winter” and “foliage” analogy is one that makes a claim of continuity for the religious communities with the past, both in socialist as well as pre-socialist Albania. This reveals the first step in the reconstitution of religious life has to do with a conscious and systematic deployment of historicity. If the state strived to desacralize the Bektashi and other religious communities, the initial efforts in response to a specific past is, among other things, to reclaim the sacred in the Bektashi history under atheism. Both permutations of this history – the story of continuity told to insiders and the story of break told to outsiders – serve to claim the sacred in a desacralized past. The former narrative is the survivor story that keeps the Sufi *silsila* or sacred chain of transmission intact; it consolidates membership and glues the remaining community of believers and the initiated around a shared past. The latter, emphasizes the extreme aftermath of religious repression and, in doing so, calls upon the sensibilities of potential

outside donors to fund the ongoing project on the post socialist return of religion. Subsequently, the legacies of today's Bektashi leaders are judged based on the degree to which they contribute to the persistence of the spiritual silsila of Haji Bektash Veli. Put another way, the degree to which they succeed with the project of the return of religion, for the insiders, they add to the story of continuity and resilience despite hardship.

There is a change even in the way that the Bektashi talked about their past in 2011 and 2007. With the passing away of Dede Reshat in 2011, the emerging leadership spoke of the 1991-2011 as an era when "the seeds have been planted." Given that Dede Reshat did not appoint a successor, presenting the previous decade of post socialism this way establishes continuity with the spiritual leadership of the past. This indicates that a community's collective memory of the recent past is at present being reconstructed to serve the present with the future in mind. In 2007, it was clear that the plurality of previously discussed accounts on the past that were meant for an audience of insiders emphasized that something remained despite state's efforts to eradicate all religious expressions in the public as well as private sphere.

In 2007, my conversations at the headquarters were often in small groups of people. Although ashiks, muhiban, and dervishes would come and go, during down time between morning and afternoon visitation hours, we had ample occasions to converse. Often reverting to topics of religion under communism, the stories spoken about in these settings were about the survival of religious life. Pressing them on the state sponsored project to eradicate religion, Muhib Kastriot stated:

“... Imagine you have one or more ideals. These are your convictions, the things that you really believe in. Will you let them go because somebody slapped you on the face and told you not to hold onto your ideals anymore?”

This reply, agrees with most of testimonies as well as the plurality of sources in claiming that religious beliefs were retained.

Beyond that, I was able to collect the following answers to the open ended question that asked the interviewees to describe religious life (beliefs and/or practices) during the communist era. All but two of the 17 structured interviews were conducted on the tekke grounds. A previously constructed questionnaire was verbally presented to the respondents however they were allowed to freely expand on answers given particular questions. The surveys ranged from several hours long to multiple such sessions spanning between a number of days to weeklong periods. I met Muhibe Meme at the Kuzum Baba Tekke during a weeklong stay and later during a number of shorter follow up visits. She is now well into her 80s and in regards to the degree of religious participation during socialist Albania she stated:

“I had passion about the sacred places (*vendet e mira*), I respected them. After 1967, I would still visit the tekke. In 1973, they sent people to transport the stones of the walls to a *tyrbe* (sacred tomb), to another place. All four volunteers who were involved, died. One of them died within the month, another died locked away in a mental asylum.”

Ashike Fatime, a 65 years old women, stated that she was aware of the tyrbe when she passed nearby and sometimes placed money under the stones therein. When her baby was crying nonstop, she would take him to the *mekam* even though it was destroyed, we would go and stay there a while. “He would stop crying. When we returned home he would cry again.” Miracles maintain continuity. Indeed, survival amidst threats

of total eradication are miracles that maintain continuity. One of the ways that the sacred is passed on is through a memory of the sacred. Those who remember (full time residents of the tekke and the initiated members of the community), are also partaking in the miracle of carrying and passing on the Bektashi torch.

Other responses indicated a more proactive approach. Ashik Agim, now in his late fifties, testified that he protected the olive trees that belonged to the tekke. Later he sent a letter to the authorities proposing to turn the Ballëm Sulltan tekke into a museum. At the very least, this measure would preserve the tekke structures even though its religious functions would not take place. The tekke was first recognized as a national monument and was reconstructed along with the tyrbe even though the latter was outside of the official plans. Finally the tekke was turned into a medical center whereas the tyrbe was used to deposit pesticides. Dervish Kalender, like many others, noted that he maintained his faith “in his heart.” A degree of religious practice was observed in secrecy by lighting candles, and conducting “*ca shërbime*” (literally, certain [religious] services). Dervish was a historian with the Academy of Science. He reported to have conducted his own research on the Bektashi which was a source of knowledge for him. Other active ways of practice, albeit camouflaged from state’s operatives, according to Muhibe Ismete, was pilgrimage to sacred sites, and educating children. Both of these were claimed to have been performed individually and in secret. *Mezaret* or skeletal remains from sacred tombs were taken to the public cemetery in an attempt to desacralize sacred spaces and transform tekke grounds into state property. *Tyrbeqarja* or the tomb caretaker claimed to visit the public cemetery daily. During these visits, she stated that she washed the

tombstones daily and sometimes lit candles in the evenings in accordance with the daily evening ritual of the lighting of the candles in the saintly tombs. People reportedly visited the secular burial grounds at the public cemetery despite heavy surveillance. Photos of clerics in civilian dress were displayed over the tombstones while the clerics had their first and last name inscribed over them without any indication of religious titles.

Because one may become Bektashi only through formal initiation (discussed in great detail on Chapter 4), it was difficult *to become* during the prohibition era because initiations rites could not be performed outside of the tekke. Yet, in the testimonies of survivors, it was not difficult for former members of the Order to remain Bektashi and for the dede, babas, and dervishes, although leaving a civilian life, to still serve as an example for to be followed by the rest of the community and society at large. In Muhibe Meme's words, "we respected the tekke and visited baba when we could. Baba Sherif was able to protect [believe] in secret. At night he would receive people he could trust; he would host them and answer to their burdens (*halle*), but only at night. In Elbasan he also had people who were serving him; helping him even though he was being monitored by the state officials. He was imprisoned for 2 months."

The shortest and yet most meaningful reply to the survey question was that of Baba Faik who answered that religion was kept within "*në shpirt*," literally, internally or in the soul, pointing inwardly by gently placing his right hand over his heart. For him the locus of the religious experience by the devout believer occurs within his internal being, the spiritual self, and one's own soul. While the sacred sites and the institutions of religion could be easily targeted by the state, the spiritual being, and belief in general, is

personal. Those who chose to retain it, and lived to tell about it, did. Once again, a story of survival is emphasized within an audience of insiders.

That is not to say that certain aspects of the religious experience were not lost, indeed some were.²⁷ The Bektashi talk about those as well. More often than not, stories of loss are voiced in the presence of outsiders. This was clear in a conversation I witnessed in helping translate between Dede Reshat and his English speaking guests at the Headquarters. During several hours of hosting guests who were invited each to visit at a given time, half at 11, half at noon in order to avoid overcrowding, the guest room experienced a cycle of brief periods of time where most were seated, exchanging greetings and wishes for the holiday, and conversing with the baba, interrupted by periods of entry by incoming guests. Upon arrival, those who had been staying for a while asked for Dede's permission to leave, greeted Dede once again, and the seats that they freed were once again occupied by newcomers. Although the visits of some guests such as the representative of the European Union, Greek and American Ambassador lasted for 15-20 minutes. Most visits were about 5-10 minutes long. Although they were short lived, it was enough time in most cases for Dede to accept and deliver wishes for the holiday as well as to briefly discuss issues that concerned ongoing interactions between Dede Reshat and his guests. For example, with the President of Albania Dede

²⁷ A Christian Orthodox believer in his late 50s stated the following during an informal interview: "even though we were raised in a system that unclad us from things of this nature [religion], I do not want to show off as if I am more religious than the Pope. I do not like to exaggerate. However, it is that which I told you – I have respect for religious centers because they are representative of something *hyjnore* – supernatural. I come to the mountain every year, I have visited mosques, as well as Catholic cathedrals."

Reshat discussed the issue of the return of lands to Bektashi tekkes and rightful Albanian owners who had lost land and property such as houses and livestock to state confiscations over the years. With the director of the Committee of Cults, Dede discussed promised state funds that were to be used for the up keeping of the road to the Peak of Mountain Tomorr, much needed renovations that are necessary to facilitate the annual commute of thousands of pilgrims who visit the Bektashi tomb of Abaz Ali. Indeed the reason for the occasion is to celebrate, yet much of the interaction that happened during Kurban Barjam hosting of the guests is more than that. The series of questions by the Rumanian Ambassador is yet a third kind of interaction that can be discerned from the visitations.

During the visitations by foreign ambassadors to the Headquarters in Tirana in December of 2007, Dede Reshat was asked a number of questions by the Rumanian ambassador. In the middle of the guest room there was a low table upon which a Qur'an was displayed opened up: the size of the book was rather big, and the text were in Arabic, in large font and in green over a white background. First the Ambassador asked if the book was opened in a particular page so that it corresponds to the holiday of Kurban Barjam for which they were invited to visit? Since the Dede often took some time prior to offering an answer, the Ambassador continued with a series of inquiries that appeared, at least to me, to have been prepared well in advance and with a clear intent of not only wanting to know but to question the legitimacy of the headquarters as a world center for the Bektashi. "Do you have connections with the Bektashi in Bulgaria, in Rumania, in Turkey," the ambassador continued? "Are there any books that the headquarters could give guests in languages other than Albanian?" The ambassador who was fluent in

Albanian was clearly a bit irritated by the Dede's hesitation in answering. This conversation was occurring in front of other guests who were seated each in their own armchair on a semicircle. Dede's only answer to all of the questions was one that related to what the Bektashi lost during the state attack on religion:

“Outside of Albania? It has been 50 years that we have been decapitated by communism. Our head has been cut off . . .”

The “decapitation” of religion is the first most important category of discourses on the impact of the state coercion towards religious communities. It refers to the systematic demolition of the institutionalized realm of religious life and the removal of religious expression from the public sphere. The former relates to the delegitimizing of the structures that hold together the religious communities and the actual reappropriation of religious centers for other uses, the closing down and even destruction of religious sites. The latter refers to the criminalization of the propagation of religion as well as of religious practice.

Almost all responses agree with this aftermath of atheism in Albania, which was the fate for all four main religious communities in the country. Dede's answer however includes also an explanation where the historical legitimacy of the headquarters as a world center is reinserted. Because the World Bektashi center is in Albania, the Bektashi argue, the community suffered a bigger loss by comparison to other communities. The disparity between the state-bound historical account of atheism shows uniformity in the way that the state dealt with the four main religious communities contrasts with the Bektashi's own account of their past under communism which at present highlights a disproportionate treatment of the Bektashi by the authoritarian regime. Instead of

pinpointing what actually happened, a more revealing endeavor would be to look into the way that the present is historicized and access, this way, the context of the ethnographic present that is needed to understand the fieldwork data that this study has to offer. While the Catholic community suffered greatly in Albania, their “head” so to speak remained intact for the Vatican was not affected by the criminalization of religion in Albania. The same may be said about the Albanian Orthodox Christians and Sunni Muslims. For the Bektashi, their center was moved from Turkey to Tirana in the late 1920s. The isolation of Albania from the rest of the world led also to the weakening of the international ties of the headquarters with other Bektashi communities elsewhere. The closing of Bektashi tekkes was detrimental to the propagation of religious knowledge which occurs at the lodge and final criminalization of all religious life and propagation lead to loss of religious knowledge and religious personnel including here also the means to acquire the traditional languages needed to access the sacred scriptures: Arabic, Persian, and Turkish.

Finally, Dede’s answer, explains also why the Headquarters does not yet have publications that will reach a widespread audience through prints other than in the Albanian language. His statement offers a sympathetic reason why the community, after two decades since the onset of democratization processes of the early 1990s, is still struggling over issues of land ownership, shortage of clerics, and infrastructure. Dede’s answer offers another explanation as to how it is that the Albanian Orthodox Christians have opened and at present operate three different seminaries whereas the Bektashi are struggling to open their first. Having incurred most damage from state grip over religion in atheist Albania by comparison to other religious communities, the postsocialist

reconstitutive efforts for the Bektashi and the ability for the Headquarters to truly serve as a world center are severely handicapped. To put it another way, the challenge posed by the questions asked, i.e. insinuation that the Headquarters is not really a world center of the Bektashi, are met with a reinsertion that not only is the Headquarter the world center, but because of the very status as a world center the effects of the state attack on religious communities in Albania were most severe. Presenting the past this way ultimately serves the institutional concerns to legitimize the present. In regards to attracting potential donors to fund the efforts to reconstitute religious life and Bektashi community, Dede Reshat is also saying that we are where we are at present, not because we are less worthy by comparison to others, but because we suffered greatly under communism.

In recapitulating, the story of how the Albanian Bektashi orient themselves towards the socialist past is informed by the concerns of the ongoing attempt to resacralize the Order. The use of the concept of “resacralization” to describe the processes of the return of religion in postcommunist Albania is appropriate here because, in regards to Muslim and Christian communities, the history of the Socialist Republic of Albania for the better half of the last century is about state mandated and organized open warfare against religious leaders, their followers, and the institutions of religion. The confiscating of tekke property by the state, the stripping away of religious symbols, the destruction of shrines and reburial of saints’ remains on public cemeteries, and appropriation of tekke grounds to army storage facilities, infirmaries, and shelter for livestock are *desacralizing* acts. Applied nationwide, these measures led to the almost near stripping away the physical and symbolic expressions of religion in public space.

This much is agreed upon by both the socialist state and the religious communities. When the two main voices about the socialist past are considered (the voice of the secular atheist state and that of the Albanian Bektashi), the disagreement is over the degree to which the Bektashi survived the state's onslaught on religious communities. The narratives of continuity and the Bektashi positioned understanding of their past under communism tell the story of survival *now* because the context under which the narratives about the past are generated. The “we remained despite all else” story legitimizes the current leadership to the Bektashi layman as well as potential donors both at home and abroad. The Bektashi depend mostly on the narrative of continuity but voicing also the narrative of an abrupt break with the past to audiences of outsiders and under circumstances where the legitimacy of the current leadership is questioned.

Albanians under communism share a history of destruction of religious communities by the state. Post communism is a history of a new accommodation of the religious communities by the state even if only as part of the liberties of religion that are demanded by the sought after standards of civil society in emerging democracies as well as like measures needed for membership in the European Union. It is against the backdrop of this reversal in the relationship of the state with religious communities that different narratives about the past come about. As it turns out, the ways that the Bektashi manage their past turns out to have much to do with ongoing community building processes of the present. Much of the selections over the contents of the memory under communism goes through the hands of non-Bektashi administrators such as journal editors and tekkes' secretaries who in most cases are not religious. Although this is a

point that will become more apparent in the chapters that follow, the materials presented here lead up to it: structurally speaking, more than a residue of oppression is maintained at present both at the state and community level which brings about much skepticism upon and contestation of the leadership of the Order. The latter are responsible for manning their tekkes as well manage the reconstruction of the Albanian Bektashi. These responsibilities often demand that the leaders appeal to the state and bureaucrats that were trained under the communist rule and who maintain less than friendly, if not antagonizing sentiments against the institutions of religion and religious leaders. The collective memory on the communist past and narratives of continuity and break are ultimately also about who has the rights to represent the community. The next chapter is about the continuing resacralization of Bektashi shrines and tekkes. By comparison to the story about the management of collective memory told here, the construction and management of space is more visibly associated with strife over the way in which the sacred as both personal as well as spatially bound, is ascertained and undermined.



Figure 2.1. A Dervish wearing the *taxh*, the Bektashi clerical headpiece. Alipostivan Tekke, Përmet, 2007. The large circular stone over the tekke's entrance is the *teslim*, or stone of surrender.

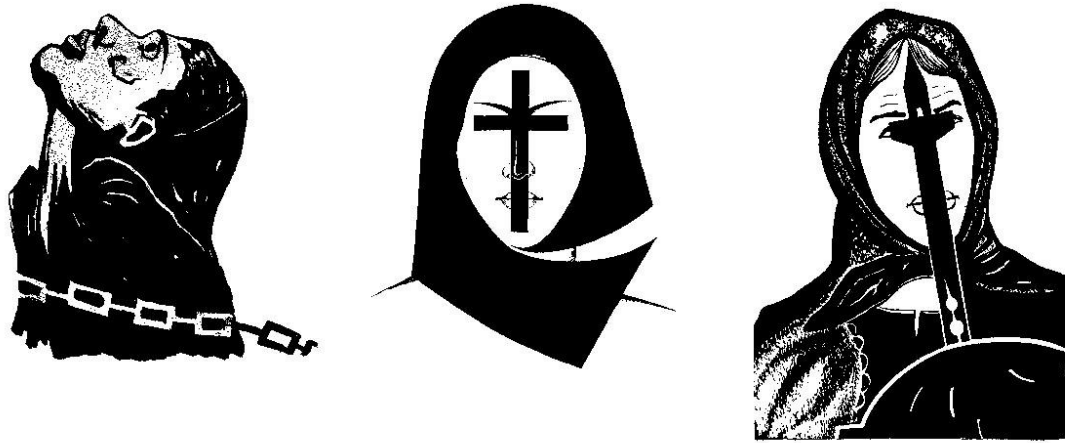


Figure 2.2. Artist's depiction of what the codified traditional law, Bible, and the Qur'an do to women. Display at the Muzeu Ateist (Museum of Atheism). Shkodër, 1980s. Photo is courtesy of Ann Christine Eek.

CHAPTER 3

Resacralizing space and the return of the Bektashi *tekke*

*"Këtu gjeta atë që këërkoja."*²⁸
 "Here I found what I was looking for."

The previous chapter on the management of collective memory shows the Bektashi discourse on their past under communism is closely tied to the image and importance of the tekke (*teqe* in Albanian, sanctuary, dervish lodge, place of meeting and residence for members of a Sufi brotherhood). In this chapter, to the ongoing processes of reclaiming the sacred from a desacralized past I add the postcommunist processes of the preservation and legitimization of sacred space. There are two main contributions that the following contents make to the larger story about postcommunist reconstitution of religion. First, it describes and documents the efforts to rebuild the sacred sites after the 1990s. By implication, this account brings the previous chapter on collective memory into better focus by contextualizing loss and the destruction of sacred spaces in socialist Albania. The following discussion is about what the tekke is to and does for the Bektashi. It gives a more concrete assessment of the damage to the institutions of religion that were sustained by the Albanian Muslims and Christians under communism. Second, the following pages analyze the function, organization, and spatial configuration of the Bektashi tekke in postcommunist era. Altogether, the materials presented here lay the

²⁸ Reply to "What brings you here at the tekke?" given to the author by a Bektashi muhib from Elbasan in December of 2007.

foundation for what is the subject matter of the next chapter, which considers ways of becoming Bektashi within the tekke compound and the hierarchies of membership.

Two main sources may be used to provide an introductory summary characterization of the tekke. The second edition of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (see entry “*tekke*” in Clayer 2008b) links tekke with Arabic *takiyya*, a derivative of *takī’a*, from form VIII of the root *w-k-*, which signifies “to rely on,” “receive support,” and “place or thing on which one relies, where one rests.” The common denominator between the Turkish *tekke* or *tekiyye*, Persian *takiya* and Arabic *takiyya* is to denote an establishment belonging to a group of Sufis who gather around a *sheikh* or spiritual leader, and a site where their ritual and devotional commitments take place. Clayer (2008, and references therein) reports that the term “tekke” became popular in the 16th century onward “with the rise of an organized Ottoman network of brotherhoods, controlled by the state and responding to the needs of mystical communities more stable and more permanent than was previously the case;” prior to this development, the term *zâwiya*, a like institution of cells adjoining a prayer hall that served wandering dervishes or mobile Sufism was in common use. Since the end of the Ottoman period, in Anatolia and in the Balkans, scale often distinguishes a tekke from a *zâwiye*: a tekke is a building or a complex comprising several buildings designed for the confraternal life (corresponding well with discussion on the Albanian tekke in this chapter) whereas *zâwiye* refers to a place where dervishes congregate, in a building. According to Clayer (2008), the use of the word “tekke” is not widespread outside of the Ottoman domain. When used in the Arabic provinces, tekkiye/takiyya denoted Sufi establishment that associated with Ottoman authority and/or

Turkish dervishes, were relatively large scale establishments, and that received support from fairly substantial *wakfs* (religious endowments). *The Dervish Lodge*, testifies that the buildings associated with the tarika, or Sufi brotherhoods, are often referred to be a number of names: *tekke*, *hanekâh*, *asitane*, *zaviye*, *dergâh* (Lifchez 1992: 76). In Turkish Islamic sources *tekke* and *hanekâh* are generic terms for any dervish facility, with *tekke* being the commonplace reference. *Asitane* generally indicates a major tarikat facility such as a grand lodge while *zaviye* a dervish hostel or residence belonging to no particular order. *Dergâh* is a term used for a *tekke* with a tomb attached to it.

The use of the word “tekke” is widespread in Albania. Not only the Bektashi, but other Sufi groups such as the Halveti, Rifa’i, and Kadiri brotherhoods refer to their centers by the Albanian *teqe*: both a place to meet and pray as well as a repository of the remains of the dervishes and sheiks that are revered by the respective communities. The Albanian Bektashi are a *tekke*-centered community through and through. In their speech and actions the Bektashi emphasize the (re) establishment of their *tekkes* as a central requirement for reviving a devastated community. What follows provides first a chronologically-ordered narrative of the community efforts to reclaim *tekke* territories and to rebuild the compounds in postcommunist Albania (1991-2011). The initial steps of rebuilding any Bektashi community required attaining, opening, and rebuilding the main *tekke* in Tirana as well as others throughout much of central and southern Albania, as well as Bektashi *tekkes* in Kosovo and Macedonia. In the opening section of this chapter I trace how these concrete and symbolic representations of Bektashi religion and identity were returned to a degree of functionality that most centers had not enjoyed for decades.

Based primarily on ethnographic observations, the remainder analyzes the function and spatial organization of the tekke, describing what it looks like as space set aside for particular uses, as well as the types of activities and human interactions that happen there. This section is an account of what a Bektashi tekke is. It describes the organization of space and the main social functions that one is likely to encounter in most tekkes. Another section of the chapter focuses on the forms and contents of the activities that take place at the Bektashi tekke. When a plurality of views on the Bektashi tekkes is considered, it shows that there are a diversity of ways of identifying with the tekke. Against this overall background, one of the tasks of ethnography is to account for the observed diversity of identifications and meanings that the guests and residents of the tekke associate with the institution of the Order.

The mapping of social relations onto the spatial confines of the Bektashi lodge suggests that the tekke is both a symbolic representation of the community as well as an arena for community building. The main argument of this chapter is that within any given cycle of visiting and hosting events, the spatial hierarchies within the tekke compound mediate religious practice and erect barriers between visitors to the tekke and the sacred spaces therein. Seeking unmediated and unhindered access to the sacred sites of the order, the barriers that are erected between pilgrims and their sacred sites raise ongoing contestations with regard to the current leadership. The latter are at times charged with widespread mismanagement of holy sites and the allocation of monetary proceeds which for most people follows a pattern of investing not on the up keeping of the holy sites, but

towards the luxurious enhancement of the leaders' shelter, their means of transport, and, according to some, to supply funds to privately owned bank accounts.

The chapter's outline was inspired by Baba Rexheb's insights on the Bektashi tekke as place that takes on personified characteristics by the social activities²⁹ that take place therein. The regeneration of the community depends on tekke as space exclusively set aside for initiations of the new members, repository of the remains and memory of the saintly leadership of the Order, full time shelter for babas, dervishes, and tekke personnel, and a point toward which the Bektashi community at large (ashiks, muhiban, and non-Bektashi others) gravitate. It is to tekke as tekke is talked about by Albanian Bektashi themselves that I turn to next.

The tekke in the words of the Bektashi

Soon after the reinstatement of religious liberties, Baba Rexheb (1901-1995), at the time residing in the United States, received many letters and phone calls from the Bektashi of southern Albania who requested Baba's return from Tylor, Michigan. Since his migration to America in the early 1950s, Baba founded the first and, still half a century later, only Albanian American Bektashi tekke in the west. At the time of the audio recording in early 1990s, the Bektashi of southern Albania were wishing for Baba,

²⁹ It is quite difficult, if not impossible, to describe the tekke spatial arrangements without mentioning also the activities that demarcate spatial divisions. While this chapter is primarily about the management of space, it necessarily incorporates discussions of the activities that one is likely to encounter at a tekke. Note however that the social activities that take place at the Bektashi tekke receive a more systematic attention in the following chapter on the ways of becoming Bektashi and the degrees of membership.

now in his 90s, to return to Asim Baba tekke where he was first initiated and served as a dervish. During the war in 1940s, then Dervish Rexheb was an ardent supporter of the National Front. Heeding the advice of his murshid (Baba Selim, Dervish Rexheb's spiritual guide) who is known to have predicted that the "communists will not allow even the remains of holy man to rest in peace," in the winter of 1944, Baba Rexheb fled to Italy. Later he spend time at the Bektashi tekke in Egypt, and eventually migrated to America. In 1954, with the monetary help of Albanian Americans, he purchased land in Tylor, Michigan and established a tekke there. Uncompromised by communist Albania, and in light of a pronounced shortage of qualified leaders at the onset of postsocialist transformations, Baba Rexheb was deemed by many to be a deserving leader of the community. However, due to old age and ailing health, Baba was never able to physically return to Albania to assume the highest leadership role of the order (*dede*). On August 6th of 1992, at the age of 91 years old, an audio cassette with Baba's message arrived to Albania. It was quickly duplicated and sent to many believers throughout the country. His message was brief. What follows is my own translation of a selection of audio segments from a YouTube audio posting on the web:

My beloved. The people of Lazarat, Libohovës, and other villages along the southwestern edges of the Albanian-Greek border and other communities that have frequented Tekke e Zallit, whose names I do not at the moment recall. This is your Baba that is speaking. This is Baba whom you adored and who adored [you] ... I know that this way [via a cassette recording] we cannot show our care/love, because we are far away. This happens because I am at an age that has passed, and that I may not accomplish what I would love to [travel back to Albania], I cannot come [to you] to see you and that you can see me. This is why I am speaking from afar and wish that in the future God may grant it that we may see each other, to talk about our concerns the way that we have talked always.

Do not forget about *Teqe e Zallit* [literally, Tekke of Pebbles, local toponym for Asim Baba tekke], do not forget about *your* tekke that you have

always loved and that has loved you always; that has supported you and that you have supported [looked after], that always has brought you close [to it, and one another] and that you have kept close. That is *your* tekke, the tekke that wants your best, the tekke that wants your progress for your own good, for the good of society, for the good of humanity, for the good of the world, of all people and our nation. Tekke is that which will guide you the way that it has guided you, will show you the right path the same way that it has shown you the right path before ... This is then, my beloved, Baba's advice that I am today telling you from afar ...

In response to a significant shortage of clerics and in clear demand by people for leaders uncompromised by the long lived dictatorship, this leader responds with a defense for the religious institutions of the order and a pronouncement about the importance of the Bektashi tekke. At the onset of the postsocialist return of religion the advice given by survivors in the diaspora was to look after the “forgotten” tekkes that were, by 1991, either destroyed or in ruins. This initial interest in first safeguarding what has remained, literally ruins and abandoned walls, accompanied the initial stages of the return of religious life in the early 1990s. When the human element is fused with the remnant contours of the tekke compound as they are in Baba's message, the centrality of the lodges and holy shrines in the life of the Bektashi community emerges: the tekke guides and serves to orient (in a postcommunist context *reorient*) people towards the sacred.

Although Baba Rexheb advises the people of Lazarat not to “forget” the tekke, in turn he is also advising them about how the tekke is to be remembered. The tekke is talked about as a personified entity that may be forgotten, and perhaps even rendered irrelevant without people's attention and care. Tekke is a personified entity that is capable of loving and being loved back, of supporting and being supported, and one that keeps people together and that it is kept together by people. The sacred depends on social recognition for it to exist. The following ratifies the sacred (leaders, shrines, and places).

The listeners are urged not to forget for the tekke is also a memory that needs to be nurtured. Tekke belongs to the people that do not forget to remember it, to those that support it. As a religious, social, and educational institution, the tekke desires people's best interest, for their *përparim*, or advancement and staying current and with modernity, in service of society for the benefit of humanity. At present, the sacredness of the past is partly upheld in collective memory and partly through its spatial manifestations. Having accounted for details of collective memory in the previous chapter, here I am concerned with the sacred as it is spatially configured.

There is a tension in what became known as Baba Rexheb's farewell address (*fjalimi i lamtumirës*). First and despite attempts to desacralize the holy sites of the Bektashi in communist Albania, the underlying apriori assumption employed by most Albanian Bektashi is the persistence of tekke's sacred quality to “always bring people together” even during its closure. Most of the advice given by Baba Rexheb has to do with how people (including here also those assuming positions of leadership) ought to handle sacred space. This supports the theme of uncertainty and ambiguity that prevails in the postsocialist transition. Second, there is a heavy reliance on *this* message by the surviving Bektashi leadership in Albania during the very first years of the transition in the early 1990s. The Bektashi tekke benefited from widespread promotion of messages from surviving leaders from abroad that were uninfluenced by the legacy of the authoritarian rule. The message hints as much in that it is the tekke, or the sacred, that ought to guide the people rather than the surviving leadership of the Order in Albania which goes unmentioned in the audio recording.

Like Baba Rexheb's address, a good deal of the collective memory about the suppression of religion in socialist Albania is about the resilience of the ideal of the Bektashi tekke and a general notion of the sacred. The initial efforts of the handful of surviving Bektashi leaders and followers in the very first years of the reinstatement of religious liberties in post-1991 Albania were intended to do no more than rebuild the devastated Bektashi lodges and shrines.

The return of the Bektashi tekke, 1991 to 2007

During my stays at Bektashi tekkes, I asked the Bektashi “what brings you here,” “why Bektashism,” “what keeps you here at the tekke?” They often responded: “here I found what I was looking for.” “Here” refers to an actual place as here, now, this way or even as a state of being or a spiritual condition. Given that the questions were posed on tekke grounds, “here” also refers to the Bektashi tekke both as a physical and social space as well as to the spiritual Bektashi community and to the social relations that hold it together. The “tekke” is both an actual place as well as a conceptual construct that serves as a cognitive asylum (a symbolic amalgam, further discussed below) that is a physical refuge from the world and social relations outside of the tekke walls.

The tekke as a physical building may have been destroyed or transformed into nonreligious use, but the idea of lodges and shrines persisted. When people tell stories about visiting the places where once there was a functioning tekke they stress that what was lost was the legal ownership of tekke lands by the community. “We could not go to the shrine on top of Mt. Tomorr because a military base was stationed there,” “the

headquarters was turned into a state owned and monitored elderly home,” and “the tyrbe was bulldozed down.” What was retained was people’s belief in what the tekke stood for and its symbolic representations. According to the testimony given to me by a middle aged lady, one still approached the tombs and tekke grounds seeking saints’ intercession: in her case she visited the location where a shrine once stood in order to heal a distressed child. Similar recollections of religious practice during socialist era are deeply influenced by a present day postcommunist context. Whether the lady did actually take the distressed child to the shrine or mentally appealed to the sacred mountaintop, the notion that the shrine heals has been retained into the present.

As the previous chapter argues, claims about socialist religiosity were collected at a time when the Bektashi are involved in a project of religious revival. Therefore we can be absolutely confident that *now*-perspectives on the fate of religion under communism are informed by and are reflective of the present day context. That is, we may not be able to assess whether the Bektashi testimony for a religious life beneath the atheist state regulated mantle corresponds with an accurate depiction of the past under atheism. For we have only few ways of determining whether the practice of religion in secret was a widespread phenomenon or not in communist Albania. What we are more sure about are the ways that the Bektashi speak about communism is the “now” context within which the discourse is produced. What the claims are about is that now, in postcommunist and religiously revivalist times, the Albanian Bektashi talk about religion and their sacred sites in a particular way. The symbolic significance of the tekke as a place of refuge from

sickness and other afflictions appears to have been largely retained in contrast to the way people interact with (and sometimes avoid) leaders on tekke grounds.

Because initiations and learning of the Bektashi way take place at a tekke, the loss of the buildings and religious functions they support (initiation, communal prayer, etc.) is unquestionably regarded as a great loss by the Bektashi. What the Bektashi lost in socialist Albania was the “here” in “here is what I was looking for” that is an actual and legal place, as well as the “here” that kept them near one another in ways that were difficult to accomplish outside of tekke grounds. Tekkes suffered prolonged neglect and were put to uses other than what they were intended for such as storage facilities, army bases, etc. It is no surprise that the first steps taken after the return of religious freedoms in early 1991s were to repatriate tekke territories and properties and to return a degree of functionality to the Bektashi tekkes. The “being” of the community is largely due to the tekke’s existence as a *vakëf* (Albanian for “sacred space,” from Arabic *waqf*, “pious endowment”) or sacred place (*vend i shenjtë*). Sacredness is constructed through a transformation of place into an arena for the enactment of social relations that ground individuals within a moral and conceptual spiritual community. Seen this way, the post-1990s recapturing of lost sacred landscapes was not only an assertion of survival and resilience, but also a matter of practical and immediate importance for the reconstitution of the Bektashi.

In 1991 there were no functioning tekkes in Albania whereas in 2011 there were 20 tekkes that were operational in various capacities. Each of these tekkes has its own story describing its survival before and after socialism. Local print media include a

growing literary genre that specializes on tekke histories and memoirs about particular tekkes over time. Dollma Tekke in Krujë, Asim Baba Tekke in Gjirokastrë, and Ballëm Sulltan Tekke in Martanesh are some of the tekkes that now have published historiographies. They relate how the tekke was founded in 1500s, 1600s, and 1700s respectively (Hysi 2004; Dollma 2004; Kalliçani 1997). These locally produced histories include biographies of clerics who served there, what happened to the tekkes during socialist Albania, and the current status of efforts to reestablish them at present. Because the tekkes are located in different localities (some in rural others in urban settings, some near Bektashi majority communities others amidst Orthodox villages near the Greek border) it is a challenge to navigate through diverse and localized histories. In their particular details, all tekkes are unique in the ways they were established and reopened in postsocialist era. Here I outline some general patterns behind the efforts that returned the tekke – both its grounds as well as its sacrality – to the Bektashi community. But first, what makes a tekke a sacred space and what are the minimal and sufficient requirements needed to establish a tekke?

At present, the Bektashi recognize two main sacred sites: the *tyrbe* and the tekke. The sacredness of both of these is most immediately connected to a fusing of place and the service of Bektashi *shenjtör* (saint). This is a trend that has been recognized by historians. Yürekli's *Architecture and Hagiography in the Ottoman Empire: The Politics of Bektashi Shrines in the Classical Age* (2012), for example, demonstrates a compelling correlation between the ongoing construction of hagiographies and the corresponding architectural transformations of the sacred sites of the order. The spiritual center of the

Bektashi, the Tekke of Haji Bektash Veli is located in the village that bears the name of the founding saint of the Order, Hacibektaş Köy, formerly known as Sulucakarahüyük until the 13th century, on the northwestern parts of the district of Nevşehir Province in the Central Anatolia region of Turkey. While in residence, this founding saint of the Bektashi order passed on his teachings to his disciples. His burial grounds and sacred chambers remain a pilgrimage destination to the present day. On their way to Mecca or upon their return trip from the hajj, Bektashi Babas make a point to visit also the mausoleum of Haji Bektash Veli.

Tekkes are sacred because they are localities that collective memory identifies as sites of saintly performances and miracles (*mrekulli*). In addition, they contain the remains of sacred people. Sacred people are primarily Babas and less often exemplary dervishes who are able to intervene in miraculous ways on behalf of their people. Often their sacredness multiplies posthumously whenever there is recognition of miraculous acts in relation to their tombs. The Dermihan Tekke in the southern district of Tepelenë is known for its founder who was decapitated in early 1800s when the Ottoman Porte persecuted Bektashi Babas and Dervishes. He is said to have miraculously caught his own severed head with his hands, walked this way for a while on his own feet, and rested finally where now one finds his saintly tomb; the gradual expansion of the compound into a lodge gradually transformed the site into a tekke. Durballi Sultan tekke in Greece was founded by Ali Sultan Baba who upon arrival to what was then a Greek Orthodox monastery found the priests in distress over the lack of water in their well. It is said that Baba struck the ground with his staff and out of it sprang the water – a miraculous feat

that led the priests to willingly donate their monastery to the Baba and his disciples. Baba, in return, threw his staff so strongly that where it landed miles away became the place for the new Christian Orthodox monastery. Another Baba, at Asim Baba tekke, asked for his tomb not to be covered. Several times the followers of the famous Baba, out of respect, tried to build a dome over the open-air tomb but to no avail, as it repeatedly collapsed. These miraculous occurrences are still understood as evidence of *shenjtëri* or saintliness.

If the spiritual performances of Babas and dervishes are required for holy lodges and shrines to be recognized as sacred, the question that follows has to do with baba's own source of sacredness. A well informed answer to this question will have to wait until the accounts of the ways of becoming Bektashi (chapter 4) and the saintly life of Dede Reshat (chapter 5). Suffice it to say, that it is not just that a miraculous baba lived and died there. There must also be spiritual descendants who look after the holy site and believers to witness (and testify) the saintliness of the shrine.

In general, most tekkes' story of origin starts with the founding Baba and the contents of their sacredness. For this reason, visitors to a tekke almost always visit the tomb of the founding Baba first and his successors later. When the candles are lit every evening at sunset, the first candle to be lit is that of the founding Baba. The light of the candle is taken from the founder to his successor next in line, and from him, in order, all the way to the most recent successor of the same *silsila* or spiritual chain of succession. In Sufism in general, and for the Albanian Bektashi babas and dervishes in particular, in addition to the spiritual chain of succession there need to be both miracles as well as

living memory of these. The fact that one is the spiritual descendant of Dede Reshat, for example, links him to the spiritual links of succession between Dede Reshat, his master Dede Ahmet, and onward all the way to Haji Bektash Veli who is himself a *sayed* or descendent of the Sixth Imam, and through him tracing links to Imam Ali and Prophet Mohammed. Both tyrbes and tekkes are erected in places where previous Babas have been in service; their passing away being considered not death but ultimate birth in the presence of God. The locality where their bodies gave their last breath is demarcated as sacred and a source of sacredness. If it so happens that a Bektashi Baba passes away while traveling, the place of his burial could well become a tyrbe and have a mausoleum erected over it, turning also into a pilgrimage destination. If pilgrims' donations to a tyrbe are sufficient to expand the compound, acquire land around it and build shelter structures for dervishes, Babas, and their guests, and if the sacred tombs are turned into a compound for serving dervishes, then the site is considered a functioning tekke.

A compound that does not yet contain the remains of a Bektashi Baba or dervish but that is set aside by a Baba or dervish for purposes of celibate monasticism and hosting of the guest is also considered to be a tekke. It is only after the serving cleric passes away and after the veneration of the cleric's place of burial as a site of visitation and pilgrimage that the tekke enjoys an unconditional status as a Bektashi tekke. This was the case for the Baba Rexheb tekke in Taylor, Michigan. It was formally registered as a Bektashi tekke and functioned just like all tekkes while Baba Rexheb and Dervish Arshi were in service there even though there were no tyrbes on the premises. Before passing away, Baba Rexheb managed to attain a city permit allowing him to be buried on the

compound. He was the architect and builder of his own tomb and advised Dervish Arshi (now Baba Arshi) that his body was to be laid to rest therein. With his passing away in 1995, visitors could visit not only Baba Arshi but also the sacred tomb of Baba Rexheb – the establishment of the sacred tomb formalized the status of the compound as a legitimate Bektashi tekke. A poem composed of four stanzas with four lines each is engraved in gold over a green background of a stand located right at the entrance of the mausoleum. Two of the lines read

*Kjo tyrbe përkujton teqenë, e përjetëson,
Brez pas brezi nëpër mote falëtore do qëndrojë.*

This tyrbe commemorates tekke, eternalizes it
Through all seasons, generations, to remain a sanctuary (prayer chamber).

Because the sacred tombs contain the remains of those who have served at the tekke in the past, they commemorate their service as well. The above lines make a clear connection between tyrbes as a necessary component of the Bektashi tekke. The second line highlights one of the main functions of the tekke which I will discuss below, namely that it is a sanctuary as well as a house of prayer. Had Baba Rexheb yielded to the requests of the Albanian Bektashi in southern Albania who so wanted Baba to return to Asim Baba Tekke, his “tekke” in Detroit would probably have been recognized as *mekam* or *vend i mirë* (good or sacred place) by association with the religious activity of Baba Rexheb and Dervish Arshi, but not as a tekke in the fullest sense of the term.

While the minimum and sufficient requirements for a tekke are the sacred tombs (*tyrbe*) and serving clerics, the minimum and sufficient requirements for a tekke to be considered as “functional” (in Albanian, *funksionale*, or *në përdorim*, literally, in use) are

to have a residence structure for at least one serving cleric (Baba or dervish) and some hosting accommodations for visitors. Such tekkes are considered to be functional or to have regained a degree of functionality in my analysis, “with doors opened” (*me dyer të hapura*), for visitors who approach the compound. The very act of reestablishing the Bektashi tekke in postsocialist Albania was referred to in the future progressive tense “*të hapim*” or “will be *opening*” the tekke. To have the doors of the tekke open means the Babas, dervishes, and supporting staff are there and able to host tekke visitors and serve their guests, whomsoever they may be.

Seen this way, the processes of opening the tekkes required first and foremost the reclaiming of tekke compound, including land as well as existing buildings where the actual tekke structures were intact. Furthermore, the initial steps involved immediate attention to the tyrbes within tekke walls. In the cases where the remains of Babas and dervishes had been forcefully taken to public cemeteries, these remains were disinterred and brought back to the tekke grounds. For those cases where the remains were left intact but the tombs over them had been destroyed, the tombstones were repaired and the sacred mausoleums erected over them.

This process of rebuilding often required complex negotiations. For example, the first step in reopening the Bektashi headquarters in Tirana was to figure out how to best acquire the compound, which was still being used as a home for the elderly. Mother Teresa (1910-1997), an Albanian Catholic sister and missionary and her organization came to the aid of the Bektashi by finding an alternate shelter for the elderly. The tekke was reopened as Dede Reshat and a few of his closest followers took up full time

residence at the tekke. The remains of the Babas who were once buried on the grounds were brought over from the public cemeteries. Thus, in time, the sacred tombs were also erected. Once the headquarters was capable of serving both visitors as well as novices, slowly it began to train dervishes. Once dervishes had spent one to three years in residence at the headquarters they were sent to the main tekke sites around the country: their spiritual worth was tested with the challenge to reopen tekkes in ruins starting almost always from scratch. I am drawing a parallel here between the original opening of a tekke and tekke's reopening after the fall of communism.

This process was not as easy as rebuilding the walls, nor as simple as bringing back the remains of Bektashi Baba's and dervishes. When I was visiting the Melan Tekke in southern Albania, as well as other tekkes, it was clear that a major concern in people's minds was repairing the spiritual damage caused when sacred chambers were destroyed or otherwise denigrated and defaced. Recall that some tyrbes were turned into depositories of pesticides. In another instance, when people were asked to remove the remains from the tyrbe and send them to the public cemetery they uncovered the skull of a mule. The communists claimed this to be evidence of how the clergy were deceiving people whereas the Bektashi claimed that this skull was planted to instill doubt on the people over the authenticity of sacred places. An answer to a serious question was demanded by those who grew skeptical over the years: where were the saints, extant and living, during the onslaught against religion? If they had vanished, so also had the link to the sacredness of space. Creative answers were given to these concerns as is apparent in

the account I provide below of how Dervish Myrteza was able to resurrect the abandoned Melan Tekke.

When I visited the Melan tekke in December of 2007, it was clear that the tyrbe was well maintained and must have been rebuilt for quite some time. It was freshly painted for the annual celebration that was being held at the tekke. Dervish Myrteza, who was hosting the event, showed me around. The tekke used to be a Christian church built in the 1600s but had been used as a Bektashi tekke since the mid-1700s. The structure itself was still intact although upon arrival a crew of three young men in their early 20s and two adult males were mixing cement and bringing it over the roof where they were repairing some structural damage to the building. What is most characteristic of this tekke is its location over a hill overlooking the city of Gjirokastër on the eastern side of the valley (Figure 3.1). It has a majestic view as the hill sticks out onto the valley so that it almost looks as if the tekke has a royal view of the city on the other side of the valley and of much of the spread of the Drinos River along the north and south stretches of the valley. The tekke is located between Vllaho-Goranci, a Christian village and Nepravishtë, a Sunni and Bektashi village. The tekke grounds are covered by very old cypress trees. In fact the entrance into the tekke compound has a straight line of cypress trees which open up to the top of the hill where the tekke and tyrbe are located. Upon entry I could see sharply defined trenches much like remnants of archaeological excavations (see Muçaj and Hodbari 2005 for a more detailed description of the site and the archaeological finds). Later I found out that because the Melan Tekke is considered also to be a national

historical monument, for many years since its reopening in 1999 the British and Albanian archaeological field schools was shelter at the tekke.

When Dervish Myrteza was first stationed at the Melan tekke in 1999, his most urgent task was to repair the tekke and rebuild the tyrbe of the founder (Figure 3.2). Once Dervish, through dreams, received enough signs that work on the tyrbe could now commence, he assembled a working crew of Bektashi believers from the neighboring Lazarat village who would be responsible for the erection of the walls in the very same locale where the tyrbe once stood. In a later discussion, one of the workers who was involved talked about the difficulty entailed in the rebuilding and up keeping of the tomb. Given that almost nothing except for the visible contours of the old tyrbe remained, the work involved entering the interior of the tyrbe with equipment, cement, stones, and paint. Once the surrounding walls were built they had to work on the cupola. Building the walls they needed to be careful not to turn their backs to the tomb and avoid walking over it, in order not to disrespect the saint. However, their work on the rooftop would almost certainly required that they be over the tomb, which should also be avoided by the Bektashi. The dilemma of the workers was resolved when one morning, prior to the commencement of work on the tyrbe, one of the workers returned to the tekke with good news. In a dream he had heard the voice of Baba commanding them to work on the tyrbe and not be worried for “we are not there, we are at the cave beneath the hill where the tekke stands.” What is important here is that not only was the permission of the deceased founders of the tekke, as well as permission of living spiritual leaders, necessary to commence work to rebuild and repair tekkes and tyrbes, but it offers also an explanation

about the whereabouts of the saints during the prohibition of religion. Moreover, this is an example of how sites desacralized by the communist rule, are, in practical terms, resacralized again through the miraculous intervention of the saints through dreams that impel the followers to carry out the will of the saints.

When we consider the acts of reclaiming religious sites, it is important to realize that these very spaces had now accumulated a history of atheist or nonreligious use. For example, the Teqe e Shtufit in the city of Gjirokaštër is located on a hill with a picturesque view of the medieval castle that stands over the city as well as the city of stone whose houses are characteristically built upon the mountain side one close to another on the steep slopes of the Mali i Gjërë (literally, Wide Mountain). The city is a UNESCO site recognized both for its history as well as unique masonry work. When I visited the tekke in 2007, Baba Skënder had been serving there for several years. During this time he had rebuilt the tekke: a room for Baba, another for the guests, as well as a kitchen. Baba had also rebuilt one of the many tyrbes on tekke grounds. There were also at least four other ruined tyrbes that had not yet been worked on. They were in the same shape since the early 1990s. The tyrbes are almost always circular sacred chambers, with walls made of stone and covered with slabs of stone. Most of the tyrbes in ruins were missing their cover, their walls were cracked and showed extreme fire discoloration. While the window opening was visible, none of the windows were actually intact (Figure 3.3). Because the hill where the tekke once stood was used as an army base, during the many years since 1990s most of it was now being used as grazing land for sheep and cows owned by new city dwellers who had arrived from nearby villages. One could tell

from the contours on the land that a web of pathways dissected the hill and some of walking trails went straight through the tyrbes entering from one cracked opening on the wall and out through the other. Both people as well as animals could easily get into the unrepaired tyrbes, and the entrance and exit was other than the only one traditional door that most tyrbes have: pedestrian travel through the tyrbe also meant walking over the Baba and/or dervish remains which were within the tyrbes.

When I asked Baba why these tyrbes were not fenced off to prevent further damage, Baba noted that one cannot do what one pleases at a tekke. “Just because I am here, and even though it hurts me to see the sheep and others walk through the tyrbes, I cannot simply fix them: first I must have permission.” At first I thought that permission was needed from Dede Reshat at the headquarters. “That too,” said Baba, “because we do not do anything without our murshid’s approval. But we also need the permission of *të parëve* (literally, the leaders, forbearers, *pirs*) of this tekke.” Baba was talking about the spiritual permission from the deceased Babas and Dervishes whose tombs needed repairs. “When I arrived here,” Baba continued, “I simply camped out here on the hill and waited. I could not do anything unless I was allowed to. First, in a dream, I was granted permission to build the tyrbe that you now see standing and is open to visitors on top of the hill. Later I was able to build the guest house, my room, and the kitchen around you. As for the rest of the tyrbes, I will have to wait for their *leje* (saint’s permission),” i.e. the permission of the Babas and dervishes whose remains lay therein.

It was obvious from return visits and stays at Bektashi tekkes in 2007 that most tekkes were at different stages of the rebuilding process. While securing the tyrbe and

building and maintaining the sacred shrines was clearly the priority, new construction projects were also part of the efforts of rebuilding the tekkes. While the tyrbe sheltering five Babas at the Headquarters was functional and complete as a structure, in 2007 Muhib Kastriot who lives at the tekke hired paid workers to erect a new candle burning niche. I often stopped to see the progress of this project which lasted for much of the summer. First two circular poles made of stone and cement were erected. Above them was built a horizontal platform that later held a miniature house with a chimney. When it all looked complete, Muhib Kastriot brought over a fireproof canvas upon which a famous verse from the Qur'an (24:35-36) was engraved:

“God is the Light of the heavens and earth. His Light is like this: there is a niche, and in it a lamp, the lamp inside a glass, a glass like a glittering star, fuelled from a blessed olive tree from neither east nor west, whose oil almost gives light even when no fire touches it – light upon light – God guides whoever He will to his Light; God draws such comparisons for people; God has full knowledge of everything – shining out in houses of worship” (translation by Haleem 2004).

Situated right outside the tombs, the new structure made it possible for distant pilgrims to light candles at daytime (Figure 3.4). This way, the problem of prohibiting pilgrims from lighting candles within the tyrbe during the day was solved by pointing out a fire hazard and by directing them to use the outdoor candle niche. The indoor burning of the candles was not normally permitted with the exception of intensified pilgrimage events to the remote centers. Although, visitors from places outside of Tirana whose trip to the tekke was a daylong ordeal often insisted that they be allowed to light a candle indoors and as close as possible to the saint's buried therein: for them, the lighting of the candle is the act associated with the prayers that pilgrims to Bektashi tekke consider to be the highlight of the ritual and of their tekke visitation.

Another ongoing construction project at the headquarters included building a surrounding wall to keep trespassers from entering the tekke grounds and stealing tekke property. The surrounding wall was one of the biggest undertaking that called for full time employment of a team of about 10 workers. It was not until 2010 that the wall was finally completed. In 2007 the basic structure of the Odeon was in place (Figure 3.5). The monumental project remained unfinished in 2011 (Figure 3.6) although the dome's interior and walls, less the installation of windows and doors, was complete (Figure 3.7). It is the equivalent of a seven-story building with a cupola resting on a circle of metal poles. Ashik Fetah, whom I met in 2011, referred to it as a building higher than the Eifel tower. This was an exaggeration, though it does outcompete some of the highest religious landmarks in Albania. At the moment, the company hired to complete the project has ceased working on it because the community is reportedly \$ 2,000,000 short of payment for work already done. Completing the doors, windows, and furnishing of the Odeon requires for several more million dollars over the nine million that it has already cost. With this major project frozen, in 2011, I noticed that other investments had been made to the tekke. The building that shelters Dede and dervishes was expanded several meters to the eastern side, and newly built balconies and large glass windows had opened up their view to the east. An elevator was also installed that serviced the two floors of the building – making it easier for ailing Dede Reshat to access his sleeping quarters on the second floor.

Throughout Albania, many other tekkes were at various stages of constructions and upkeep depending on the resources, both human as well as financial, necessary to

fund such projects. Being that most money reportedly comes from people's donations, there are discussions about the ways that tekke proceeds are used. People would like to see their donations put to use for the tekke up keeping and rebuilding. So here people are much more approving of a baba who builds, one who through visible works (walls, rooms, and shrine) is clearly laboring and putting people's donations for their intended use. Baba's who are less active in their use of tekke funds are sometimes seen as holding on to people's donations or as unable to attract donations and the means to build and renovate.

With the return of a democratic rule in the early 1990s, the communities were able to attain most of the religious items that had been confiscated from the tekkes by the dictatorship, but a permanent solution to land ownership and property lost to urban expansion has been an important legal preoccupation of the Order from the early 1990s to the present day. These are lands that may have been donated to the tekke, or lands that the tekke itself acquired through earnings of its inhabitants and the management of the tekke financial proceeds. Asim Baba Tekke, for example, owns much land both around the tekke grounds and elsewhere in the neighboring vicinities. In the early 1920s, a serving Baba of the tekke reportedly purchased some 100 hectares of land along the southern Albanian coastline south of the city of Sarandë. A family loyal to the tekke donated a smaller but fertile parcel of land and the olive trees that it contained. Since the land is in a village some 50 km away from the tekke, the parcel is still referred to by its local toponym as *tokat e teqesë* or the lands of the tekke. As such, local villagers loyal to the tekke voluntarily tend to the olive trees, harvest them, and deliver the produce, both

as unpressed olives and oil, to the tekke. Again, not only by the outreach of the activities that take place at a tekke but even in its spatial organization, a tekke may extend spatially beyond its immediate locale to more distant places where tekke properties are located. In general, people consider all tekke land, near or far, to be sacred. Because the state recognized the four religious communities as nonprofit organizations, tekke land and its produce are not taxed.

The main areas of contestation in the history of the return of the Bektashi tekke has to do with the leadership claims to control what sites get renovated, the areas within a tekke that receive reconstructive attention (whether clerics quarters or the shrines for example), and who the beneficiaries of the rebuilding efforts are. People suspicious of the present-day leadership often ignore the well-furnished residences of Babas and dervishes and limit their visits to the tekke to lighting a candle at the tomb – even if this takes place at an outdoor niche and not within the sacred chambers where most pilgrims to Bektashi tekkes light a candle, make a wish, and leave a donation. The limited allocation of funds towards rebuilding often draws on a stark contrast between the lavishly furnished residences of the Babas and dervishes, on one hand, and tyrbes that are more simply adorned or left unkempt showing visible wear and tear in clear need for repairs, on the other.

Spatial arrangements and their symbolic representations

In 2007, there were over 15 functioning tekkes in Albania at the time that slowly grew to reach about 20 open tekkes in 2011. Even though all of the tekkes had some

project under way to rebuilt, redesign, or maintain existing structures, extended stays at the headquarters and lengthy visits to Asim Baba in Gjirokastër, Baba Xhemal Turku Tekke in Elbasan, and Shememi Baba Tekke in Fushëkrujë, as well as others, helped me to understand the Bektashi tekke as a symbolic space, both as it appears to insiders and outsiders. For the purposes of this section, I refer to the insiders as full time residents of the tekke (Babas, dervishes, and sometimes celibate muhiban) as well as tekke staff who spend most of their working week on tekke grounds (secretaries, cooks, gardener, and sometimes guards, and groundskeepers). While the latter may or may not be formal members by initiation, they are considered here as insiders because they occupy tekke grounds on a regular basis. To them, as well as the full time residents of the tekke, the different confines of the compound look and mean something different than they do to people who may only occasionally visit the tekke. Visitors to the tekke include both Bektashi and non-Bektashi. Their visits to the tekke may last from 15-30 minutes to several hours. At times they may stay for a meal and on occasion some of them may stay overnight on tekke grounds. I consider these outsiders because during their brief and occasional visit they usually are allowed to occupy only certain spaces within a tekke (tyrbe, hosting room, garden, kitchen, and sleeping quarters) whereas insiders, based on their assigned roles and established spatial hierarchies occupy different spaces for longer periods of time within the compound. Not only are there different perceptions about the tekkes between insiders and outsiders, but there are also differences over symbolic representations that certain spatial arrangements signify. The distinction over perceptions

of the tekke as a social space leads also to differences over symbolic representations that certain spatial arrangements signify.

An example involves Dede Reshat's nephew, who is the guard of the main tekke in Tirana (an insider), and neighbors of the tekke (outsiders). Like most tekkes, the headquarters is composed of many buildings that make up the compound as well as several hectares of arable land all of which is surrounded by a concrete wall. There is only one entrance to the entire compound and this is the main gate (*porta kryesore*) (Figure 3.8). The wall around the main gate is made to last: it is close to a meter in thickness, three to four meters high and is built of big boulders fashioned into cubes, and held together with cement. The main gate is surrounded by two structures that resemble an entrance into a fortified castle and that leave the impression of watchman's towers serving to protect all that lies within the surrounding wall. The actual gate is built of hard wood over which is engraved the stone of surrender (*teslim*), an important Bektashi symbol about the surrendering to the path and the Bektashi way. The gate is opened at sunrise and closed at night, and in one of the watchman's towers where Dede Reshat's nephew, the tekke guard, spends the night at the tekke. He remains on duty during the times when the tekke is most frequented during morning and evening visitation hours and during events such as Friday evening prayer, initiations, and other functions of the Order. The guard goes home during siesta hours.

The gate most clearly marks tekke territory off from the outside world. Although the neighborhood houses that are now crowding the area immediately outside of the tekke wall are actually on tekke property, the wall was partly build to put an end to the

encroachments of the city sprawl onto tekke lands, as well as a way to establish a quiet environment within the tekke walls. Most of the first time visitors to the tekke mention this very stark contrast between the busy, polluted, and loud slums (Figure 3.9) and an entirely different atmosphere they encounter as soon as they step into the tekke territory (Figure 3.10). The tekke is quiet. It contains a garden that is maintained year around by a full time landscaper and an area that is inhabited not only by people but also by doves, pigeons and cats, cows, sheep, whose bucolic sounds always impress visitors by contrast to the frequent squeaking brakes of cars in congested city alleys, the overuse of horns by Albanian drivers, occasional commotion caused by packs of stray dogs, and other noise pollution that accompanies urban living.

Most of the neighborhoods through which one has to make one's way towards the tekke's main gate are very crowded five story buildings with two bedroom apartments – they are the legacy of communist architecture, and show definite signs of prolonged decay. Their walls are almost never painted on the outside, there are no proper sidewalks, and the narrow streets are crammed with parked cars on both sides leaving only enough room for one car to meander ever so carefully. During busy morning and afternoon hours it is a challenge for anyone, whether walking, on bike, or in a car, to navigate through the alleys. The balconies are often covered with hand washed clothes that are hung out to dry. Elders as well as adult men are seen either playing dominos or cards on the sidewalk or their balconies, drinking coffee, while younger man crowd the many video game and billiard parlors or drink beer and raki in the many bars housed on the first stories of these buildings. All this is within the span of a minute-long walk from the take.

When I visited the headquarters for the first time in 2005, Dede Reshat's main concerns had to do with bars and pubs being open and full of people from morning to night, while chairs at *kryegjyshata* and religious centers remain largely unoccupied. Stray dogs and cats are an inseparable part of the very narrow "path" that one must pass to make it to the main gate of the headquarters. At any one afternoon, the area immediately in front of the main gate offers a pleasant flat paved opening for the kids to play soccer and other games. The area immediately behind the gate and inside the tekke property opens up to a vast garden and a straight driveway and walkway that after about a mile stretch leads straight up to the tyrbe (sacred tombs). The guard's duty is to look after the tekke property, the livestock, and construction equipment and raw materials, and to bar any unwanted guests from the compound. Some of the elderly neighbors very much like to wander into the interior of the tekke walls, sit and chat to one another on both sides of the walkway right next to the main gate. However, knowing that this is a religious center they would only reluctantly take their customary evening stroll (*xhiro*) to the tyrbe and back. Because the city outskirts near the tekke have little to no adequate space to partake in the *xhiro*, the Dede often advised the guard to let the tekke neighbors access the garden and walk around the tekke grounds in the evening. He sometimes called upon the reluctant elders sitting next to the gate: "*hajdeni, kaloni, shëtisni, juaja është, nuk është e imja,*" "come, pass, and walk about, it [tekke] is yours, it is not mine."

For the guard, the tekke grounds are primarily a place of work. For its neighbors the tekke is an opportunity to escape the crowded and stressful vicinities of their own residences and a venue for them to carry out their traditional evening stroll, and chitchat

with their neighbors. Their walk to and from the tyrbe may or may not be out of religious conviction. In fact, often groups of visitors consist of older women dressed in black (as an indication of being in mourning, widows, or for having lost close family members), as well as *nuse* (brides) or young mothers who may often be holding on to a young child and/or pushing a baby stroller. One such occasional visitor was a middle-aged man accompanied by his teenage daughter who walked in with big empty containers. They returned again after sunset with their containers full of water. To them the tekke is a water fountain and a solution to the water shortages that are a common occurrence throughout the capital. However, not everyone is welcome. As a paid staff member of the tekke, the guard restricts entrance of unwanted parties such as young couples who at times are attracted to the quiet interior and landscaped garden to hold hands and make out, thieves who may be after tekke property, and other intruders that may harass the residents of the tekke or its visitors.

To the dede, for whom the tekke is a shelter – both in the physical as well as in the spiritual sense of the term – the gate symbolizes the inclusive yet restrictive openness of the tekke to the outside world. While the surrounding wall, the gate, and the gatekeeper leave an impression of the tekke as guarded property, Dede's invitation to his neighbors to walk freely and have access to its garden for their daily strolls emphasizes an insider's perception of the tekke not as something owned by the Bektashi but as a social space that must be available to others. Still, while the invitation to walk freely leaves this impression of openness, that invitation is limited in scope. Most evening strollers restrict themselves to the walkway that links the main gate and the tyrbe. Most of

them do not enter the tyrbes, others may never have entered the interior spaces of the hosting room, the sleeping quarters for the guests, the tekke kitchen and dining room, the administrations offices, nor do they walk through the fields that surround the tekke. To the outsiders there is a clear distinction between spaces that the invitation to be there applies, and others that are perceived as spaces reserved for insiders.

Unlike ordinary neighborhood visitors, entry into tekke and the gate to the tekke and the tyrbe have a special significance to the Bektashi. Babas, dervishes, and muhiban perform a series of rituals before they cross the threshold of the gate. First they approach saying “*bismilahim e rrahman e rrahim*” (in the name of God, the beneficent, the merciful). Upon arrival at the gate they kneel and kiss the threshold, raise and kiss the right side of the gate three times, and make contact with their forehead between each kiss. The same is repeated on the left side of the gate. After this is complete, they proceed to enter, right foot first, making sure not to step over the threshold. Here is an unedited translation of Dervish Mikel’s explanation about *porta* or the gate given as he was entering the tyrbes at the Headquarters (Figure 3.11).

The threshold that the Bektashi kiss upon entry symbolizes a hadith of Prophet Mohammed about Imam Ali: “I am the city of knowledge and Imam Ali is the gate to this city.” This means that Prophet Mohammed could not enter into the city without passing first from the gate. This is why the Bektashi kiss the gate’s threshold, because the entire gate respects, commemorates, or actually symbolizes Imam Ali – therefore we give *selam* [salutations of peace] to the gate. The threshold below that the Bektashi kneel to kiss symbolizes Prophet Mohammed, may blessings be upon him, because he is an entry, a stepping stone for people, devoted Muslims, (in Albanian, *imeti i Muhametit*, Islamic *umma*) to pass onto paradise. The arch of the gate symbolizes Hazreti Fatime, may we have her forgiveness, the right side Imam Hasan, and the left side Imam Hysen. These are Ehli Beyt, prophetic family, therefore the Bektashi give peace salutations (*selam*) before they enter a *vakëf* (sacred site), be it a mosque, tyrbe, tekke, or *mesxhit* (prayer house without a minaret). This is the symbolism of the gate.

After the Dervish noted this, we both entered one after another following the proper rituals. The Dervish continued with these greetings chanted within the tyrbe while facing the sacred tombs:

*Paqja e Zotit qoftë mbi ju o burrat e sheriatit,
Paqja e Zotit qoftë mbi ju o pleqtë e tarikatit,
Paqja e Zotit qoftë mbi ju o mjeshtrit e hakikatit,
Paqja e Zotit qoftë mbi ju o të përsosurit e marifetit.*

Peace be with you, men of *sharia*,
Peace be with you, the elderly of *tarika*,
Peace be with you, masters of *hakika*,
Peace be with you, the perfected of *marifa*.

The Bektashi believe that there are four gateways of knowledge each of which leads to the perfected man (“*ihsani qamil*”). The spatial barriers demarcated by walls and gateways within any tekke represent the above stages of progress in the spiritual path. Although going to a tekke does not, strictly speaking, substitute for Muslim obligation to daily prayer (*salat*), meeting with baba and visiting the tyrbe and the ritual routines therein constitute prayer as devotional acts of worship. And while there is no substitute for the hajj, a visit to the tekke is a kind of mini-hajj. In addition, it is often during tekke visitations that the Bektashi followers give alms to babas and dervishes. This way, the Bektashi reason that visiting their tekke satisfies some of the basic requirements of worship (*sharia*). In meeting with the Sufi leaders (Babas and dervishes) one may attain lessons on the Sufi path (*tarika*). By visiting a saintly tomb or partaking in the rituals of the mejdan, tekke visitors are in the presence of the absolute truth (*hakika*) and testify to its sacrality. For the initiated, by taking part on the rituals of the mejdan, Bektashi insiders are able to access those who have arrived to the realm of the perfected (*marifa*).

For an example of this symbolism, consider the tekke of Haji Bektash Veli in Turkey, which is spatially constructed in such a way that to get from outside to the sacred chambers one has to physically pass through four main gates. The symbolism of passing through gates is an expression of travel on the Sufi path or orientation of the self towards the center to attain spiritual knowledge and movement along the path. Here is how the serving Dede Edmond explained the relations between the four gateways of knowledge during my August of 2011 visit to the Headquarters.

“Islam is like a tree. The trunk of the tree is *sharia*. Its branches are *tarika*, the leaves are *hakika*, and the fruit of this tree is *marifa*. Sharia is law (*ligj*). Tarika is the mystical Islamic path (*rrugë mistike Islame*). Marifa is (*njohuri*) knowledge. Hakika is truth (*e vërteta*) that must be told even if it is against your benefit.”

Travel in the path is aided by entry into sacred spaces and asking for blessings and forgiveness from God and the Saints, as well as from those who have learned and mastered the four gateways of knowledge.

Not all tekkes are organized the same way and not all of the spaces that one finds at the main tekke in Tirana are found in all tekkes throughout Albania. However, most urban tekkes, are enclosed by a surrounding wall and have a main gate whereby visitors can pass through the threshold and thus onto tekke grounds. Rural centers like Melan Tekke that occupy an entire hill, have no surrounding wall. There is no gate either. Instead, the entry is demarcated by two raised platforms that mark the boundary of the compound. Thus, although urban and rural tekkes differ in layout, they all mark entrance into sacred space in some manner.

As mentioned before, the tyrbe or sacred tombs and a shelter or residence for the serving clerics are the minimal requirements for designating a site as a tekke. The

headquarters has these as well as a guest house, elaborate dining rooms and a kitchen that may serve up to 150 guests. Dede and his dervishes sleep each in their own rooms that are located on the second floor of tekke's main building. On the first floor of the building one finds the mejdan or ritual room, a hosting room, a newly build kitchen, and another room where Baba meets with his dervishes and his disciples; the latter has a fire place.

The headquarters has an entire building known as the Administration where the Secretary General's office is located as well as offices for the accountants and other administrators of the order. In the same building, one room is reserved for the archives of the Headquarters as well as the library. Most other tekkes have a single room devoted to the administrative aspect of the tekke, paperwork, as well as a library which is used by serving Babas and dervishes as well as the tekke secretary. The Headquarters has a publishing house on tekke grounds which, aside from publications of Bektashi content, publishes also manuscripts by authors who compensate the tekke for the service. Other spaces within the tekke include a farmers' shed, animal quarters, and sometimes a green house. Figure 3.12 shows an aerial view of the Headquarters and the location of various structures within the tekke grounds: the main gate, the walkway to the tyrbe, the tyrbes, the Odeon, Baba and Dervish residence, hosting room, kitchen and dining room, the administration, publishing house, and the farmers' and gardener's sheds. Note here both the publishing, promotional aspect along with sacred spaces, as well as pragmatic sheds, and farming areas. The symbolic representation of community can be traced through the forms and contents of the kinds of activities that happen at a Bektashi tekke, to which I turn to next.

The Bektashi as a tekke-centered community

From the outset, it is best to briefly explain the observed variation between the Bektashi tekkes that are discussed here. As already mentioned, there is no tekke without a tyrbe, nor any of these without the necessary link between spaces and witnessed miraculous performance by a Bektashi dede, baba, or dervish. Still, and in addition to the sacred tombs, each tekke must also have an initiation room (*mejdani*), hosting quarters, kitchen, and sleeping quarters for full time residents and guests. A pattern of what the tekke ought to be like is clearly circulated throughout the tekkes in Albania. While most of the tekkes that I was able to visit in 2007 had more or less the plurality of these features, there still is a great degree of variability in the ways that tekkes, spatially conceptualized, ought to be divided and function.

Much of the observed variability has to do with serving baba's own preferences and vision for the center. Some tekkes are smoke free, in others, a good deal of smoking occurs. The deciding factor is baba's own preference on the matter and indeed the baba in smoke free tekke is a non-smoker and quite active with his congregation for smoke cessation and antismoking education. The baba whose tekke permits smoking is himself, like many in Albania, a chain smoker. I drew this distinction here in order to make it plain that indeed tekkes as space where human activity takes place differ largely due to the preferences of the serving Bektashi baba or dervish. Baba's choices for furnishing the tekke interior and the overall exterior image that tekke leaves upon visitors are also sources of variability within different tekkes. Indeed, tekkes often go through radical transformations with every incoming cleric. Burning of accumulated clothes in shrines,

and erection of brand new structures on tekke grounds are some of the events that have taken place shortly after a replacement of leaders at a tekke. Aside from a spatial variability, the greatest degree of diversity between tekkes throughout Albania has to do with the communities to which every tekke corresponds.

For the Babas and dervishes who comprise the clerical personnel, the tekke is a place where religious experience unfolds in ways unmatched by other religious activities elsewhere. The tekke is the location most immediately concerned with the religious activities of past and present saintly figures of the Order. In my view, a tekke is not only a sacred locality or place, it is also space populated by a community in transition that relates to tekkes in diverse ways. The tekkes encompass groups of people who are centrally and hierarchically organized around sacred sites via the activities that happen there. While I have so far presented tekkes at the center of the Bektashi ritualized life (*tyrbe, mejdan*) and a shelter for the spiritual leaders of the community, this section describes how the different spaces are used during regular daily routines. It deals with the Bektashi tekke as a place where the Bektashi interact with their leaders and non-Bektashi visitors in particular ways.

Tekkes are first and foremost the shelter of the spiritual leadership of the Bektashi community. Living full time within any tekke compound are Babas, dervishes, as well as some muhiban. Of course, in the Headquarters the dede is in permanent residence as the leader of the whole community. Succession of leadership within a tekke cannot be based on descent since dervishes and Babas are celibate clerics or *myxhyret*. Most of them have never married, and those that were married and even had children before joining the

brotherhood have given up their family ties and parental obligations and taken their vows of celibate monasticism (*mytehil*). Instead, a serving Baba would most likely give their blessings for next in the spiritual line of leadership over the tekke to a disciple of his own choice. Often a Baba will call a muhib “*biri im*” (literally, my son) – although they are not related by birth but only spiritually as the muhiban choose to take his murshid’s hand in initiation and trust him for guidance in the Sufi path (*tarika*). By contrast, people at large cannot, in most cases, choose their parents. This act of choosing (which includes also an aspect of being chosen, further discussed in the chapter that follows) creates the master to disciple links of the sacred chain of succession (*silsila*).

In addition to sheltering the spiritual leaders of the community (deceased and living Babas and dervishes), the tekke is also the place where the perpetuation of the sacred chain of the spiritual genealogy (master-disciple link) is ensured and serves as well as the training ground of future inheritors of the community's leadership. The next chapter on membership categories is really about the internal workings of the sacred chain of transmission. For now it is enough to say that the sacred chain of transmission is the Bektashi own explanation of continuity. The chain of transmission between generations of disciples and masters, the repository of sacredness itself, is produced and reproduced within the tekke compounds.

The highest seat of leadership is considered sacred. It is believed to protect itself from the unworthy, and by implication, it is also not truly contestable. Continuity and stability are associated with the sacred leadership of the Order (*dede*), even if the deliberations by the sacred council may be, and often are, associated with political

manipulation and rivalry between contenders for the centralized leadership role. In cases where an appointment of the successor has not been declared by a Baba, a complicated process takes place with the tekke cook taking over as the temporary leader of the tekke according to internal rules and regulations of the Order, as written down in a publication titled *Rregullorja e Brendshme*, literally, Manual of Internal Governance. The fatherly council (*Këshilli Atnor*), composed of celibate Babas, convenes in such cases to decide matters of succession at a particular tekke or regarding the successor of the Dede when one is not appointed by the previous leader. The authority of the leaders may sometimes be contested. This is usually done on grounds of deviance and for actions that go against the rights and responsibilities of spiritual leaders as they are spelled out in the Manual. Still, despite all the controversy that may ensue, a muhib assured me that “in the end, when all is said and done, the rightful leader worthy of leading the followers of Haji Bektash Veli always prevails.”

The qualities insuring the sacred legitimacy of the leader are attributed to the miraculous powers emanating from the sacred tombs. The higher degrees (dede, Babas) may pass judgment on others occupying lower degrees of membership (dervishes, muhiban, ashiks), but, theoretically at least, the opposite rarely occurs. In principle, the followers should accept the leader selected for them, either by the previous leaders (dede, or Babas) or by a counsel of the elite celibate leadership. Such acceptance is part of Bektashi training in which initially one learns how to submit and gradually, through learning as well as through the grace of God and that of the *wali* (friends of God or saints), there is a shift between serving and being served, between those who kiss other's

hands and the ones whose hands are kissed. It is in the tekke that such sacralizing transformations of the individual take place and transform the very makeup of the community.

Although at the outset the tekke behaves much like most Albanian households (in that both follow strict rules of patriliney), what separates the tekke from other household-like networks is that it is most evidently an institution of sacred learning that exists in the presence of living as well as deceased spiritual leaders. Inheritance is not through blood, but by recognition of an individual's superior spiritual status. The couplet that follows was repeated frequently by dervishes during my discussions with them:

<i>Bëhu dervish prej oxhaku,</i>	Become a dervish of the hearth, ³⁰
<i>E jo dervish prej sokaku.</i>	And not a dervish of the streets.

There is more than one lesson that the dervishes wanted to highlight each time they mentioned these instructional lines to me. First there is the first word which is really a command “to become” (*bëhu*). A lesson is hidden within another lesson and, just as the Bektashi often mention, the world, seen this way, is ambiguous and mysterious: “*mister brenda misterit*,” literally, a mystery within a mystery. Interpretations of the active verb “become” are reserved for the next chapter on membership. For our purposes here, the preferred way of becoming is by learning the sacred path *at the tekke*. Becoming is a

³⁰ With hearth or fire place (Turkish “*ocak*,” Albanian “*oxhak*”) here is meant one who stays around the tekke and whose quest for spiritual progress is nourished at the tekke not the streets. The hearth is also a symbol of the Albanian household. When a family has no living descendants, people often speak of the fire being extinguished (“*u është shuar zjarri*,” *oxhaku*). The proverb often mentioned by Bektashi dervishes polarize the distinction between the “sacred” and the “profane” with tekke conceptualized here as different from the streets with proper guidance implicitly underscored.

process of transformation that involves frequent passing through the main gate, frequent and progressively lengthier stays at the tekke, repeated visits and conversations with Babas and dervishes, are essential to the making of the Bektashi members of the first degree (muhib). For members to the second (dervish) and third (Baba) degrees, the aforementioned process of becoming culminates with permanent residence at a tekke. Access to proper guidance and a *murshid* or spiritual guide in this process of spiritual transformation can only be attained at a tekke.

What the above instructional couplet highlights most forcefully is a distinction between two kinds of dervishes: one whose training is received around a tekke, tending to the fireplace, who through disciplined monastic regime seeks God's allotted share and ultimately nearness to Him. The other type of "dervish," or a "no dervish at all," is the exact opposite of the first. To become a perfected human being, one must become a dervish of the hearth. The alternative is to become a human being molded in the dusty and laud streets, in the alleys just outside of tekke walls where peoples only guidance is in idle passing of the day hours and activities such as gambling, drinking, and seeking personal gain.

The two kinds of human beings in the proverbial statement are further presented as causalities between two different pedagogical environments. The first requires learning at a tekke which is considered a formal way of becoming a dervish. According to Article 5.b. of the official rules and regulations of the Order (*Rregullorja e Përgjithshme e Administrimit të Mbrendshëm të Komunitetit Bektashian Shqiptar*, 1950, Neni 5b), anyone who wishes to advance and is worthy of advancing to dervishhood must be in

service and full time residence for at least 1001 consecutive days at a tekke prior to initiation and donning the ceremonial dervish garb for the first time. However, as will be discussed in the next chapter, legitimacy and spiritual authority may be accomplished in other ways, such as by having a large enough following willing to testify to the readiness of a potential cleric to be formally allowed to wear the garb of the *fakirs* (poor ones) despite the fact that the claimant may have not yet completed the required 1001 day service at a tekke of their master's choosing. Becoming a recognized Sufi master through popular acclamation represents a link between tekke and the outside world: learning within the wall serves to teach others and offer moral examples for them to follow, while gaining a following by outsiders can, at least at this transitional phase, also legitimize becoming a dervish or a Baba. At least in one occasion, a dervish who is following a formal training in residence at the tekke took great pride on the recognition of his attainment by serving his required days at the tekke stating "*jam bërë me prova jo me vota,*" literally, "I have become by proofs not [like others] by votes." The couplet implicitly highlights that the real test that legitimizes a seeker as a dervish is the intent and quality of service performed at a tekke. The emphasis on this is reinforced by the second line that tells the listener the exact opposite of the proscribed type: the only proper dervish is one who is formally trained *within* tekke grounds.

Tyrbes and tekkes serve to reorient guests' attention away from the streets and toward the sacred. As I was told by a *tyrbeqar* or tomb keeper, "If you visit here with a clean consciousness (*me shpirt të pastër*) and as a truthful believer (*besimtar i vërtetë*), your wishes will come true." But just being within sacred sites is not sufficient to

accomplish a person's reorientation towards the sacred. Rather, intent and the proper manner of approach is required, as underscored by the following lines which are found engraved on the welcoming stand in front of Baba Rexheb's tyrbe.

<i>Sa herë që e vizitoni këtë vend të shenjtëruar,</i>	Everytime you visit this sacralized place,
<i>Drejtoni mendimin tuajë me adhurim të vërtetë,</i>	Orient your thought with truthful adoration,
<i>Mos kurseni Fatihanë për Baba jetë-ndruar,</i>	Do not spare the Fatiha ³¹ for life-changed ³² Baba,
<i>Që edhe Zoti kurdoherë në zemër për jetë t'ju këtë.</i>	So God will hold you forever in His heart.

Clearly, in their own ways of referring to the sacred, the Bektashi regard the sacred as orienting people's minds. The sacred (tekke, tyrbe, dede) is primarily upheld and (re) confirmed. The same may not be said about the people who serve and are trained within tekke grounds. Laymen may leave their donations at the tekke, but, as I mentioned earlier, they are not totally satisfied until they see their money concretely invested in its rebuilding. That is, the custodians of the Bektashi tekkes are in many ways not fully trusted with their management of tekke proceeds. As the next chapter will further elaborate, in regards to the current leaders of the Order, the internal discourse reflects a more contested view on leadership and tekke custodians.

The engraved instructional passages from the Qur'an and spiritual lines composed by Babas, and conversations encountered during my visits to Bektashi centers highlight

³¹ “*Fatiha*” is the first chapter of the Qur'an; the lines are part of *rak'ah* or prescribed daily prayers for Muslims.

³² i.e. indicated that Baba has swapped this life for another. It is a Bektashi way of talking about the deceased. Instead of saying that someone “died” they refer to their passing away as “changed this life for another,” or “otherized [this] life for the next.”

the fact that tekkes are the Bektashi centers of learning. Learning usually takes place during the hosting of guests³³, both Bektashi as well as non-Bektashi others, which is another important and highly ritualized activity that occupies much of daily routines in all open and functioning tekkes. Dervishes often wish for the tekke grounds to be filled with *besimtar* or believers for it is understood by most Bektashi Babas and dervishes that the main function of the tekke is education in the Sufi path. Although influential tekkes may have a specific building, such as a school house, dedicated to formal learning, every tekke has at least one room dedicated to formal learning where one can find and, with Baba's permission, read handwritten and published manuscripts inherited from previous Babas. These humble holdings are collections of instructional manuals, including books from local presses and very few foreign ones. Aside from these, learning from the Baba takes places throughout the tekke grounds and is facilitated amidst hosting events, during casual walks on the tekke garden, during meals, afternoon rest, before bedtime, and in the early hours following communal morning prayer. While dervishes are responsible for bringing the sweets to the visitors when Baba is preoccupied with his guests, by being present during hosting events the dervish learns about the form of hosting as well as the contents of *muhabet* or spiritually imbued conversation that take place between the Baba and his supplicants and other visitors.

³³ Dervishes spoke of two kinds of visitors: those in need or *nevojtar* and the believers or *besimtar*. The needy may be divided into some Bektashi and non-Bektashi, Albanian Orthodox or Catholic Christians and non-Albanian visitors like a Greek lady who in 2007 sought Baba's blessings for a fast recovery from her deteriorating health or a Turkish lady of Bektashi descent who wanted Baba's blessings for her son who in 2007 was serving in the Turkish military in Northern Iraq. For the formally initiated, the reputation of the tekke is assessed by the frequency of visits by believers.

The sessions of *muhabet*³⁴ or compassionate and spiritually infused talk take place in a room called *kafe oxhak* or *paramejdan* as well as at the kitchen table, on the outdoor spaces of the tekke, or anywhere within the tekke compound (or elsewhere outside of tekke walls). The minimum and sufficient requirements that separates everyday discussions from muhabet, in my understanding of the concept, is a shared and tacit awareness by the participants on the spiritual contents of the conversation and the voluntary engagement of the participants to recall and/or advance esoteric knowledge. This understanding derived from both the experience of partaking in muhabet and from its contents, I believe, is what Trix (1993) refers to as the “dramatic action” whereas the setting – “as a general form of congenial social interaction, as a sort of gathering in which talk, and sometimes food, drink, and song prevailed, . . . as the more public ceremony after the secret part of the initiation ceremony of a muhib at a tekke” – is “just a background” (138). The room where the muhabet is likely to occur is typically furnished with white sheep skins that are simply spread throughout the corners of the room and around the fireplace. Often Babas or dervishes will sit furthest from the entrance door to this room and immediately close to the fireplace. Baba’s post is often in a more elaborate skin that is often dyed in green and slightly elevated from the rest. Green is the color of the Bektashi flag and of Islam. Green, in different intensities, covers most of the interior walls of the rooms and hallways at the tekkes. Baba’s post is not occupied by anybody

³⁴ “*Muhabet*,” for the Bektashi, is not just a particular way of talking. More than that, it is an experience and a way of being and learning esoteric knowledge and the way of the Bektashi. Trix (1993: 132-145) considers the muhabet, both the discussions between baba and muhiban at a teqe as well as well as the “closeness and pleasure and joy” associated with muhabet as the very Bektashi frame of learning.

else. Even when Baba is not present, visitors still pay high regard to Baba's post by pointing respectfully to Baba's seating place and referring to situations that make Baba's presence part of the conversation.

During my extended stays at the headquarters and other tekkes, what stood out to me about people's interactions was the prevalence of routinized forms of behavior. Upon entering Bektashi tekkes, I observed parents teaching their young children about the appropriate rites for going through the main gate of a tekke. Right before the sunset locals may be seen converging at some tekkes to light candles and make prayers. At Asim Baba tekke for example, a second doorway demarcates the entrance to yet another circular enclave within which the sacred tombs of Babas and dervishes that served at this locality are to be found. With the tyrbe most people follow a complex and involved routine of kneeling and kissing the cloth that covers the raised sarcophagus, its feet, sides, and tombstone. The latter is placed immediately over the forehead of the sarcophagus and is fashioned to represent the Bektashi headpiece or *taj*. Some insist on circumventing the tomb three times and they exit backwards making sure not to turn their backs on the tomb. When dervishes come and go from a Baba's room and whenever they are in his presence they are also careful not to turn their backs on him. It is at this doorway that a visitor must pass through a line of tombs on either side of the entrance. It is also here that candles are lit daily every evening before sunset and wishes made. With the exception of more distant guests who may spend the night at the tekke, the ritual of the lighting of the candles concludes the visit for any late comers to the tekke. Quiet hours are used by full

time residents to retreat in the baba's company, rest, to resume the aforementioned cycle of events as they repeat themselves in daily tekke routines.

Bektashi tekkes are sites where the dispensation of intercession on behalf of the following and tekke guests takes place. From between 10 am to noon time, and 4 to 6 pm, Babas and dervishes have set visitation hours where they are at the service of unannounced guests. They may be accessed at other times by guests who seek immediate help with severe sickness or life crisis, but outside of visiting hours it is Baba's aides (dervishes and muhiban) that the guest must pass through first. Whether during or outside of visiting hours, Baba's guests have to first deal with Baba's aides. The latter manage the line of visitors and are sometimes perceived as cumbersome barriers between spiritual leaders (dede, Babas) and their guests. By contrast, guests access to the holy shrines (tyrbe) is almost entirely unobstructed³⁵ by tekke residents.

At any given day, a number of visitors to the Bektashi tekkes entered the tyrbe by foregoing a visit with Babas or dervishes. A lesser number of tekke visitors meet with Bektashi residents at the tekke. Those that seek a meeting with Baba specifically first ask whether Baba is available or not. It may be that they are hosted by a serving dervish or even a muhib who looks after the tombs, or perhaps also the tekke personnel. The latter may or may not be formal members of the tekke but they are all employed and

³⁵ The only possible exception to this is during pilgrimage events where dense crowds of people surround the holy shrines make anyone's visit a difficult ordeal to accomplish. During these events, the crowds are dispersed to make way for Babas and dervishes who are given enough time and space to perform their rituals of tyrbe visitation. During serious life crisis, the tyrbes may still be accessed with the help and permission of the serving dervish or Baba who hold the keys needed to open the tyrbe doors after sunset and before sunrise.

handpicked by the head of the tekke. Any one tekke can only afford full time employment to a very small number of people (in most tekkes a secretary, a cook, and driver). Amidst high and worsening unemployment rates in Albania, the selection of candidates to fill these positions leaves a large pool of unsuccessful applicants unhappy. Their only hope for employment with the tekke is the transfer of serving Babas and dervishes to other tekkes (or their expulsion), which leads to the total removal and subsequent replacement of the tekke's supporting staff.

Those employed receive regular salaries equivalent to similar occupations elsewhere in Albania in 2007 making on average about \$200 a month as secretaries and slightly less for a guard, groundskeeper, and sometimes even a cook and a driver. These specialized laborers perform other duties in their daily activities especially when a tekke is only able to support the employment of one person who in actuality becomes a driver, secretary, guard, and even a cook all in one. This is especially the case for formal members of the Order who are more than often employed by the tekke and whose membership demands that they help during tekke functions and other occasions such as maintenance and construction, serving sweets to visitors, accommodating overnight stays by providing bedding, showing visitors to their sleeping quarters, and accompanying them when Babas or dervishes are otherwise occupied.

The entire space within the tekke walls is regarded as sacred by the Bektashi. “Upon entering I make sure to dress my best,” a visitor explained, “and not to bring anything in my person from the world out there that is not fitting to this “*vend i mirë*,” literally, a good place, implies sacredness.” “Upon leaving,” the informant continued, “I

shake my shoes well so that I am careful not to take away with me even the smallest grain of dirt from the holy grounds.” All of the space within and every grain of dirt therein is considered as sacred or *vend i shenjtë*, literally, a saintly place. Moreover, the above discourse shows that taking anything from a tekke except for blessings is considered a sinful act.

The ambivalence and ambiguity of the revival

While the tekke is widely considered sacred, shortly after the onset of postcommunist transformations, the Bektashi tekkes in Albania were subjected to ongoing processes of resacralization. The fate of Bektashi tekkes during communist rule may be summarized as having incurred a series of desacralizing acts. These include the confiscation of tekke property and its collectivization so that tekke land once in use for and by a religious institution was transferred to state property and put to secular or nonreligious use. The forceful removal of the remains of Bektashi babas and dervishes and their relocation to public cemeteries were also a defacing and desacralizing acts against the Bektashi holy shrines. The return of the remains to their original resting place, as well as the rebuilding and up keeping of the tyrbes in the postcommunist period are efforts to reconstitute, and by extension also resacralize the holy sites of the order. They aim to normalize the sacredness associated with the tekke institution of the Bektashi and remedy the damages that the tekkes throughout the country incurred during communism. In addition, this chapter has narrated the overall efforts of the community to rebuild and

reestablish the spaces and architectural integrity of the tekke, the main institution of the order.

The processes of the resacralization of space are associated with a problem of ambivalence towards the caretakers of the newly re-established tekkes. On one hand, the construction and management of sacred space brings place, worshippers, and tekke custodians into a particular set of relationships. While, Dede Reshat calls upon the gatekeepers to allow people to walk freely on tekke walkaways, there are other barriers within tekke grounds that serve to impose spatial distinctions and hierarchies and restrict access of tekke spaces. A residue of communist forms of authority in the management of space is most evidently associated with gatekeepers (the administrators of the Order especially). There is a stark difference between communists who closed the tekkes altogether, banning the religious use of the site, and present day custodians of the religious revival project who, while returning the integrity of the sites to relative normalcy, are also erecting and maintaining barriers that hinder people's free access to the sacred sites of the order. Both the projected authority of the custodians of the revivalist project and the barriers of space are perceived by laymen as remnants of a communist-like form of aggression towards religion. There is also the ambivalence of followers that coincides with the hierarchical structuring of access to the charismatic leader – more explanation is provided in the next chapter. All in all, these concerns often lead to skepticism by the Bektashi layman about the authenticity of the religious revival and an overall ambiguity about the success of the postcommunist reconstitution of religious life.

Amidst contestations, there are also degrees of solidarity that need mention.

Clearly, the Albanian Bektashi show solidarity in acknowledging that space has symbolic authority. Furthermore, the symbolisms of the spatial configurations are evidence of the spiritual message of the Bektashi. A discussion of spatial configurations as well as the social activities that take place at a Bektashi tekke is ultimately connected to the topic of the internal dynamics of the community. Along with the ambiguities that have occurred, now that the most tekkes has been reopened, is another area of concern for the Bektashi: the “community” in “tekke-centered community.” This necessitates a closer look at how the Albanian Bektashi talk and think about the question of becoming members of their community. If one of the main thrusts of this chapter about the tekke is about ways of resacralizing space, the next chapter is about the individual members of the community and the ways of becoming Bektashi.



Figure 3.1. The location of Melan Tekke and the reflected view of the Drinos Valley. Melan, Gjirokaštër, 2007. The arrow points to tekke's location on the hill.



Figure 3.2. The Melan Tekke and newly repaired shrine. Gjirokastrë, 2007.



Figure 3.3. Bektashi shrines showing signs of neglect and awaiting repairs. Gjirokastrë, 2007.



Figure 3.4. Newly constructed candle niche. Tirana, 2007.



Figure 3.5. The prayer house under construction. Tirana, 2007.



Figure 3.6. The nearly complete prayer house. Tirana, 2011.



Figure 3.7. The decorated interiors of the prayer house. Tirana, 2011.



Figure 3.8. The main gate and surrounding wall of the Bektashi Headquarters. Tirana, 2011.



Figure 3.9. The Headquarters' rooftop view showing the encroaching urban sprawl. Tirana, 2007.



Figure 3.10. Tekke walkways and garden at the Bektashi Headquarters. Tirana, 2007.



Figure 3.11. Tyrbes and the entrances to the sacred tombs. Tirana, 2007.

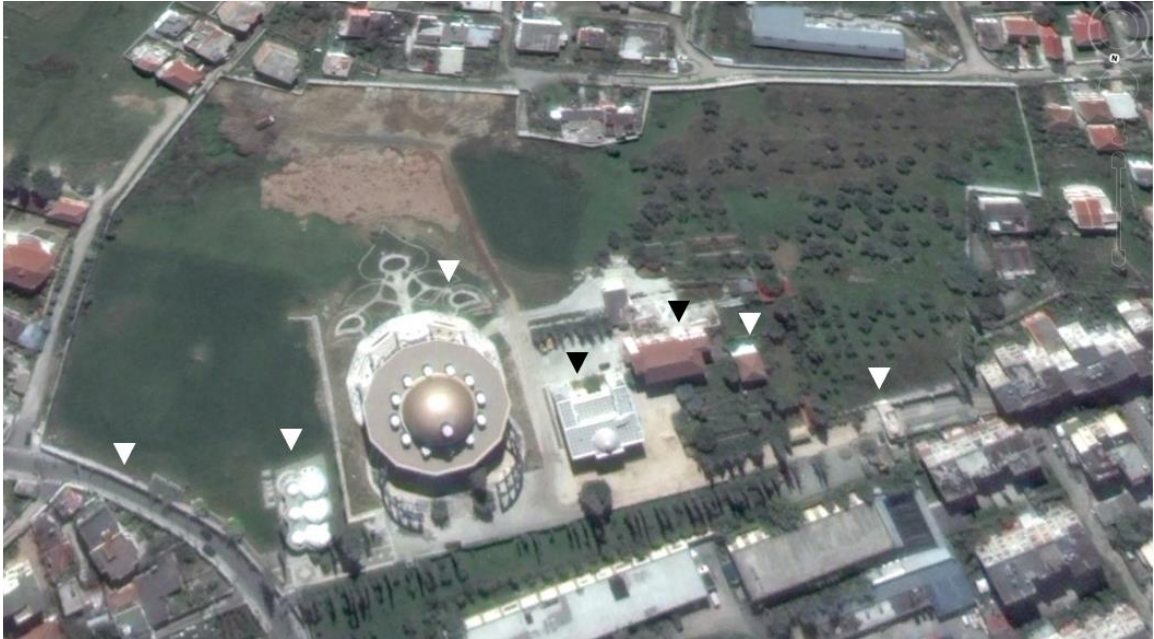


Figure 3.12. Aerial view of the Bektashi Headquarters. Tirana, 2010. Google Earth Image. From left to right the arrows are point to: surrounding wall, holy shrines, Odeon, residence and prayer house (mejdan), hostel, administration, and main gate.

CHAPTER 4

Ways of becoming and unbecoming Bektashi

“Do ja nis me bismilah, Bektashi jam ejvalla.”
 “[I] begin in the name of God, [I] am Bektashi, yes, by God.”

In November of 2007, I visited Melan tekke in southern Albania for the first time. I found Dervish Myrteza and few of his helpers taking a coffee break from last minute preparations for the annual feast that was to happen the next day. I learned that Dervish Myrteza was an employee of the tekke at first and was initiated into the order while still in his late teens. When I met him, he was only in his early twenties and was the youngest Albanian Bektashi dervish. I was struck by the easygoing nature of the Dervish and his thoughtful and original insights that he was able to project during my stay with him. Shortly after the coffee break was over, I was invited to a tour of the tekke. As we were moving around the various areas of the tekke, Dervish often paused, turned towards me to make eye contact, and spoke while looking directly in my eyes – an unusually intense form of communication. On one occasion, Dervish was explaining what it meant to him to be on the path of becoming a Bektashi. It was also the first time that I heard a succinct explanation about the meaning of the Bektashi headpiece, the *taxh*. As in many other things, a good deal of mystery is associated with this relic of Bektashia and the central symbolic importance of this inseparable part of the clerical dress. Divided in 12 flutes that converge to a single point at the center (this symbolizing a secret so dear to the order that no dervish or baba would go into any detail about its meaning), the *taxh* or clerical headpiece is kept on throughout the day. When it is removed at given intervals, dervishes

and babas kiss its lower edges three times and subsequently touch their forehead with its outer edge. When sleeping, the headpiece is taken off but kept always no further than an arm's length away from its owner. Pointing to his clerical headpiece with his index finger, Dervish Myrteza said: *“ky nuk është taç, por është saç – ose të pjek ose të djeg.”* In its literal translation, Dervish said: “this is not a taxh, but a saç (metal dome over which live cinders are placed for baking of traditional Albanian dishes) – it either cooks or burns you.” What was clear in Dervish's talk was the fact that carrying the symbols of the order was a heavy burden. Dervish was fully aware that becoming, seen this way, is a double-edged sword: it either makes or breaks the disciple. Much of what follows, tries to explain both “the cooking” of the Bektashi disciples beginning with the initial steps of selecting the ingredients to the final step of achieving a finished product. I am also concerned with the other side of the story of becoming: the burning or expulsion of some of the members.

An earlier chapter about the management of collective memory argued that part of what was lost under communism was the use of the Bektashi tekke. The full extent of that loss was not revealed until the previous chapter which accounted for the return of Bektashi tekke in postcommunist Albania and the restoring of tekkes to a degree of functionality. A further inquiry into the Bektashi tekke revealed that it is both sacred space as well as an arena for community building. The reconstitution of religious life in the aftermath of communism naturally leads to the issue of how the Bektashi are regaining membership levels and reconstituting communities that were nearly obliterated under communism.

For the Bektashi the replenishing of membership ranks with new members as well as the training of the fully committed members (babas, dervishes) who serve as spiritual guides to the rest of the community of insiders (muhiban, ashiks) is part of the larger story of identity which is here presented as the different ways of becoming Bektashi. Ultimately their efforts to again give a sacred quality to the collective memory about the communist past and to the sacred sites of the order such as tekkes and tyrbes, these efforts would fall short without also an attempt to reconstitute the Bektashi community itself. What follows focuses on those aspects of the return of religion that have to do with the ways individuals become members of the Bektashi community as reflected in narratives of becoming (initiation) and unbecoming (expulsion). I also explore the criteria for initiation into different degrees of membership, and the resulting social hierarchies.

Being Muslim the Bektashi way

My fieldwork presented numerous occasions and hosting events where one of the most frequently occurring and most predictable inquiries from non-Bektashi guests to their Bektashi hosts had to do with the relationship between Bektashia and Islam. While most people generally inquired about this relationship, others picked on particular aspects of Bektashi life that were assumed to be in conflict with mainstream Islam. Celibacy, monasticism, frequency of daily prayer, integration of women in communal prayers, and shrine visitations were some of the concerns raised by guests of the Bektashi tekkes. Other issues had to do with ritualized consumption of alcohol, the clerical dress code, and the ubiquitous display of framed photographs, paintings, statuettes, and other relics of importance to the Bektashi. Whether it was a simple inquiry about consumption of

alcohol or a more serious one about monasticism in Islam, all of these concerns received careful consideration by Bektashi babas and dervishes. Their responses were often delivered in defense of their Muslim identity. “Bektashia is the essence of Islam, the secret of the Qur’an,” “*ajka e Islamit, sekreti i Qur’anit*” was an often repeated reply. And babas and dervishes made their explanations with great care and attention to detail, often citing passages from the Qur’an, recalling *hadiths* or sayings and life examples of Prophet Mohammed and the twelve Imams. Regardless of the elaboration on specific issues, the strongest and most direct response to questions of relationship was “*Bektashizmi është në Islam,*” literally, “Bektashia is *in* Islam.” For the Bektashi babas and dervishes, there is no question that theirs is a Muslim identity. Therefore, my discussion about ways of becoming Bektashi begins by considering this position of the faith within the Muslim tradition.

Despite the multiplicity of views held by different Muslim communities, there is a general agreement between Muslims that inquiries about Islam must refer back to the fundamentals of the faith as found in the five pillars of Islam. The proclamation of faith (*shahada*) testifies that there is no God but God and that Prophet Mohammed is his last messenger. In classical Muslim jurisprudence (*fiqh*) the profession of the *shahada* in a state of able mindedness with sincere intent makes one a Muslim. While the story of when one becomes Muslim in strict legalist terms is pretty clear, for the Bektashi the *shahada* is best seen as only the beginning of a long and difficult process of becoming a Muslim. If one looks at the next four pillars of Islam it is clear that they command Muslims to become and remain Muslims by way of partaking in acts of worship towards

God. Taken in order, the next four pillars of Islam command Muslims to pray (*salat*), fast (*sawm*), give (*zakat*), and go to pilgrimage (*hajj*). Being Muslim entails partaking on ongoing processes of becoming. There is not one single act of worship that completes one's Muslim identity. Rather, there are a number of worship obligations where intent (subjectively and objectively validated) is paramount. Indeed, as will be argued here, the agreement between the internal narrative as shaped by ideology (Islam) and Bektashi views on the "everydayness" and "how they speak their faith" (Ammerman 2014) is that being is a function of becoming: ideally, one always seeks to become a better Bektashi Muslim.

The Bektashi love to tell stories and parables as a way to explain that they are Muslims who are distinct from other Muslims. Set in the Ottoman past, the following parable offers insights on the question of what it means to be a Bektashi Muslim by comparison to the Sunni perspective. The story is followed by my own interpretation highlighting those aspects of like-stories that the Bektashi would likely emphasize.

During the holy month of Ramadan a Bektashi dervish set up a table in front of his tekke. It was filled with all kinds of *meze* (appetizers often consumed alongside alcoholic drinks). Sitting down, the Bektashi began sipping *raki* (alcoholic drink fermented from grapes). The neighborhood *Hoja* (mosque leader) walked by. Bewildered that the Bektashi was eating and drinking during Ramadan, the Hoja spoke to the dervish: "what are you doing?" Pretending not to hear what Hoja said, the dervish replied: "Oh my Hoja! Thank you very much! I am fine! And you? How have you been?" "My brother," said Hoja, "I did not ask how you were, but what you are doing?" "Offering a feast to my stomach, please join me. The meze is quite good." "God forbid, said the Hoja, you may keep your meze for yourself." "You do not have to have any raki said the dervish, just take a few bits of meze." As Hoja relaxed a bit, he wondered if the time to break the fast had arrived. "I heard the canon announcing sunset said the dervish." Reassured that the time to break the fast had passed, hoja sat down, and began to eat. Being so hungry, he did not pay attention what he was eating and had also a few sips of

raki. As they were feasting, a patrol of Janissaries arrived and seeing that they were eating and drinking during the holy month of Ramadan, rounded both men up and brought them to the kadi (religious judge). The *kadi* asked for dervish's name. Putting on a foreign accent, the dervish answered: "I am only your wretched servant." "So you are an Armenian (non-Muslim) then, step aside ordered the judge." "My name is Ahmet" replied Hoja. "You are a Muslim, said the judge, lock him up and give him 40 lashes." Hearing Hoja's cry as the soldiers were securing his hands, the dervish was moved out of pity and approached the judge: "Efendi, all of this has really moved me. I now understand both your generosity as well as the greatness of Islam. If you would only let this man go, I will become a Muslim." Immediately, the judge made the Bektashi recite the Islamic profession of faith (*shahada*), following which both men were released from custody. Upon leaving the court, the Bektashi turned to the Hoja and exclaimed: "Very interesting indeed! I became an infidel and I was freed. Then I became a Muslim and I freed you!"

First, it must be emphasized that both the Hoja and the Dervish are Muslims. Both of them observe fasting during the holy month of Ramadan. The difference is how and why they are fasting and worship. In terms of their duties of observance the Sunni hoja (and the *kadi*) is concerned with the outer observance of worship, i.e. whether or not people are fasting, if they are consuming alcohol or not, and *what it is that they are doing* rather than how they may be feeling. Whereas the dervish is concerned with the inner aspects of faith, i.e. he asks not "what" hoja is doing but about Hoja's state of being and is concerned, in the end, with the spiritual quest of saving himself and others. For the dervish, and in agreement with the principle of dissimulation (*takiye*) one may alter outward appearances to avoid prosecution by the authorities. For the hoja, unbecoming has to do with matters of proper conduct in worship. Even in regards to unbecoming, the former is concerned with the inner, hidden, *batin*, whereas the latter is concerned with the outer, *zahir*, observable cues that are indicative of proper practice. The story is saying that the hoja worries whether people are behaving according to formal rules, whereas the

dervish is busy saving Hoja's and other people's souls. Quite strikingly, the story ends with an explanation of what it means to be and become a Muslim. In this view, the question of being is not so much concerned with outer observance of Islam, but even denying one's own identity in search of salvation; becoming is concerned with freeing others. At the very least we may deduce that to become a Muslim in dervish's view is linked to a process of doing. Granted that if it were not for the dervish's temptations hoja would not have been imprisoned, the doing here is freeing a fellow Muslim who became a captive of the Ottoman court. Indeed, in being a Bektashi parable for a Bektashi consumption, the story tells also a triumph of tarika (Sufi path) over sharia (Muslim law) as well as heterodox over orthodox practice.

I start with a story of who the Bektashi are by way of comparison to Sunni Islam because this is a popular way of explaining the diverse ways of understanding and experiencing Islam. As Dabashi succinctly puts it, "through historical and theological disputations, members of these branches of Islam have at once constituted and consolidated their respective self-understanding . . . , and yet, by virtue of the interpenetrative impulse of opposing forces, adopted and assimilated, however negatively, each other's discourse" (2006: 156). Multiple meanings may be, and in reality are, derived from such stories. Two seemingly different understandings of what is important for inner and outer professions of Islam depend also on one another for their elucidation. In my experience of hearing many stories of comparative self-understanding told by the Bektashi and Sunni Muslims, it is common for the Bektashi to make gentle fun of other Muslims and their ways of understanding and living Islam. In contrast, Sunni

Muslims in Albania are often forcefully critical of the Bektashi non-conformism towards sharia in general and their overall dismissal of the required daily prayer in particular. The two modes of self-representation may reflect of Sunni-Sufi or majority-minority dynamic: that is, the Sunni majority can afford to marginalize a non-conforming minority, whereas the Bektashi minority makes gentle fun at the Sunni majority as a way to avoid direct confrontation and preserve the protection that their affiliation with the umma offers. Still, the contrast in the ways of identifying through the other highlights an expected emphasis between a legalist, sharia centered understanding of Islam that employs clear cut boundaries of membership against a Sufi emphasis on interpretation that makes use of stories and parables laden with multiple meanings and understandings.

The Bektashi spiritual songs (*nefes*³⁶) are another venue to explore the interplay between Bektashi identity as a particular kind of Muslim identity. The majority of the internally circulated discourse is made up of sacred hymns that reflect idealizations of what it means to be a true Bektashi. The opening quote to this chapter is a line to a Bektashi *nefes* written in the early 1900s by a Bektashi baba. It is now chanted during *sofra*³⁷ gatherings and is part of an audio recording titled *Këngë Bektashiane* (literally, Bektashi songs). It is important to note that the first song to this album opens in the

³⁶ *Nefes*, literally, “breath” in Turkish. From Arabic “*nafas*.” Spiritual and often instructional songs written by babas and dervishes and often by Sufi leaders about their spiritual masters.

³⁷ *Sofra*, literally, table in Turkish. When it is used as “*sofra Bektashiane*,” it refers to all the occasions where the Bektashi tekke meal is served. These feasts are often open by invitation to non-members, but it is primarily the serving baba or dervish at the tekke, their closest disciples and full time residents of the tekke, the guests of the tekke which may be initiated members or uninitiated others. For occasions when the *sofra* is put together for posthumous commemorations of babas, dervishes, and muhiban, their relatives may be present as well. See Soileau (2012) for a detailed description of the sharing and partaking in the Bektashi ritual meal.

traditional Muslim manner. This start with “in the name of Allah³⁸, I am Bektashi, yes, by God³⁹” dissolves all doubts that the Bektashi see themselves as no other but Muslims. Opening this way, the nefes preserves the pronounced monotheistic orientation of Islam. The following is the Albanian text and my own translation of the nefes. This spiritual hymn presents claims of being and becoming in an intertwined and interdependent kind of way.

*Do ja nis me Bismilah,
Bektashi jam Ejvalla,
Bektashi jam Bektashi,
Nga ezeli gjer nashti.*

I will start with *Bismilah*,
[I] am Bektashi, in the name of God,
Bektashi am, Bektashi,
From beginning of time until now.

*Fjala jonë pak, e saktë,
Feja jonë është e artë,
Si kush, kush, i jep një emër,
Na [ne] i japim vetes zemër.*

Our words are few and exact,
Our faith is golden,
When they give themselves a name,
We give ourselves heart.

*Sa që jemi, t'gjithë fakir,
Kamja jonë s'ka kufi,
Muhamed, Aliu, Zoti,
Na ushqen me pika loti.*

Until we all become destitute,
Our riches are boundless,
Mohammed, Ali, God,
Feed us with tear drops.

*Ne që jemi Bektashi,
Kur thotë bota bie shi,
Na kujtojmë se pika e shiut,
Eshtë loti i bektashiut.*

We that are Bektashi,
When others say it rains,
We think that the rain drop,
Is the tear of the Bektashi.

³⁸ *Bismilah*, "In the name of Allah (God)." It is a shortened version of “Bismilah ar-Rahman ar-Raheem” (In the name of Allah, most gracious, most merciful) and it precedes all suras (chapters) of the Qur’an except one. Bismilah is said as a blessing before eating food and other actions that are worthy of giving thanks to Allah.

³⁹ *Eyvallah*, from Arabic *علاؤى* “yes, by god,” means thank you, respects, or goodbye, depending on the context. In mystic terminology it is also a very respectful greeting word: hail. One hears it in many occasions and it is the common form of address and part of daily routines, often outcompeting *bismilah*, arguably the most commonly evoked Arabic term by Muslims around the world.

The opening line of the hymn is a statement of indefinite being: it is a claim of being always from the beginning of time. It leaves an impression of unchanging state and testifies to the antiquity of the faith. However, a present future progressive tense is used with “until we all become destitute⁴⁰” which Bektashi being as an ongoing process that will not end until every one of the authors, singers, and audience are left with nothing else but God. The song reverts to a view on being that is again static and unchanging much like the first line (“we that are Bektashi”). Here we need to consider the context under which nefes are generally composed and the ways that they are circulated. In most cases, including this one, the nefes are written by babas and dervishes. They are performed by a closed circle of adepts who may hear the nefes chanted or who may hear them as part of their instructions in the path. In many cases they become internally circulated by babas and dervishes along a particular line of succession and some may remain restricted in their use. However, those nefes that become part of *sofra bektashiane* and or part of widely circulated albums will reach a larger audience.

Here is another Bektashi hymn written by a Bektashi baba. It was published in the same album as the previous song. Titled “How did I, a stranger, learn?” it couples “becoming” with “learning,” and, as it will be elaborated latter, with initiation into the order.

*Si mësova, unë garibi, që s'më zuri këmba dhe?
Merrni kupën edhe pini, mësim tjetër më nuk ke.
Merrni kupën e vërtetë, ky është qarr i vjetër,
Çfar të mbjellësh në këtë jetë, atë do të korrësh në botën tjetër.*

⁴⁰ *Fakir*, from Turkish, poor or destitute. In Sufi terminology, it refers to the wandering dervishes, i.e., without anything else except God; seeking nothing else but God; shedding all of the worldly attachments but God.

*Trëndafilat sa i due, kur çel gonxhet burbuqe,
Edhe rrushi është për mue, verë të bardhë edhe të kuqe.
Pleqëria është me huqe, u bëfsh i madh e i shkallu,
Një kup të bardhë e një të kuqe, erdhi vakti me kalu.*

How did I, a stranger, learn, that my feet finally settled?
Take the cup and drink, other lesson you will not have.
Take the true cup, this is an old hearth,
What you plant in this life, you will scythe in the other.
The roses, how I like them, when they bloom in red,
And the grape is for me, white wine and red.
Old age comes uneasy, may you become great and elevated,
A white cup and a red one, it is time [for time] to pass.

In this nefes, becoming is about learning and one accomplishes both becoming and learning through initiation. The first line is difficult to precisely interpret in English translation. What can be inferred is that the singer has been a spiritual seeker for some time, his feet never settling until he finally learned that there is but one lesson to be learned and that is the lesson of Bektashi initiation. What the listeners can understand is only that the author of the song found no need to look elsewhere and all that he was searching for (what exactly is not divulged) he found in initiation. One needs to be initiated in order to know what this elusive something is. However, as this chapter explains further, initiation as a single event in an adept's life is not sufficient to become Bektashi: becoming is an ongoing lifelong cumulative struggle.

In this hymn we see also a characteristic concern with the transmission of esoteric knowledge in a hierarchical manner: some answers, such as the meaning of the song, can only be found by some of the initiates. There is a separation between insiders and outsiders with the former having access to esoteric knowledge while the latter are ignorant. The second to the last line implicitly links knowledge in the first line with

“greatness” and “elevation” because “*shkallu*” (literally, ladder or layered) refers to the Bektashi hierarchies of membership. This is a statement about the spiritual hierarchy that directs the blessings and wishes in this line to the few members of the order who occupy the highest positions of authority. Metaphorical devices that may be sufficient to impart a spiritual lesson to an informed audience but leave other audiences in obscurity are, in my view, ways to control the image and knowledge to be imparted by the nefes. For the Bektashi, the very sacredness of these religious hymns (most circulated nefes are written by saintly leaders of the Order), may be attributed to their ability to both reveal esoteric knowledge to insiders (ashiks, dervishes, babas, dedes) as well as conceal it from outsiders (non-Bektashi others).

The Bektashi often refer to initiation as “*lindje e vërtetë*” or “true birth.” Those who are initiated speak of initiation as the birth that matters. Amongst themselves, the initiated refer to their age as the number of years after initiation. With non-Bektashi others, they state their age since birth, but quickly follow by adding “*por në të vërtetë linda . . .*,” literally, “but in all truthfulness [in reality] I was born on . . .” followed by the day, month, and year of their initiation. So it is not biological birth that matters most but spiritual birth. Thus, the Bektashi continually remind themselves and others of their spiritual birth into the Order. When two babas meet, years after initiation determines who kisses whose hand. The date of initiation is not the only determinant of superiority. The baba, whatever his spiritual age, is always superior to the dervishes and muhiban. When an “elderly” baba arrives at a tekke, the younger hosting baba gives up his seat. When the community of formally initiated insiders gathers (muhiban, dervishes, babas, and dede),

their sitting positions follow a pattern determined primarily by rank, but within ranks the sitting hierarchy is determined not by biological age but by date of initiation. It is therefore quite possible, and it often happens, that in a group of initiates to the first degree (muhiban), sometimes the younger in biological age may be higher in the social hierarchy over older people who have only recently joined.

The available material on becoming Muslim the Bektashi way is closely linked to a social transformation in the life of the individual as he or she⁴¹ joins a larger collective. As the Bektashi often stated, “one is not born but rather becomes.” That is, one is not born into Bektashia. To become a Bektashi a second birth is necessary and the latter is a social birth through the process of initiation. The saying “not born, but become” is appropriate for all members in all ranks of the Order, for to be a fully committed member (dede, baba, and dervish) one must first be initiated to the first degree (muhib) and proceed to seek membership into higher categories. However, Dede, some Babas, and even a few reputable dervishes are often talked about as “*të lindur*” or born holy. Miracles of healing, the ability to open a tekke despite existing hardships, and accurate predictions of things to come are some of the criteria that justify the disciples’ claim (“*janë të lindur ata*”) that their babas are born. “Born” in this case refers to supernatural qualities that they have manifested since birth. Although these select saintly leaders advanced in the path through initiation, in retrospect, the following merges spiritual birth with biological birth. This fusion occurs only for a few of the highest degrees of

⁴¹ Although there has been no report of a female ever becoming a dervish, baba, or dede, adult women may and do frequently join the Bektashi Order as initiates to the first degree (muhib).

membership (who also command saintly authority). The difference between the vast majority who have *become* and the few who are *born* Bektashi corresponds to the entry degrees of membership (ashiks, muhiban, dervishes) and the saintly leadership (some babas and the dede), respectively. The switch in narrative between “becoming” and “born” is a function of elevation, of proven spiritual powers, and saintliness. One only “realizes” the inborn spiritual qualities as the devotee moves up the ladder. Their holiness is verified by the position that they attain. The prevalent marking of the degrees of becoming is articulated in the different ranks of the Order.

Hierarchies of becoming

As indicated above, the Bektashi have an elaborate hierarchical system of membership. Going from the lowest to the highest degree, the Bektashi recognize five main devotee categories: ashiks, muhiban, dervishes, babas, and dede. I refer to them respectively as members to the first degree of initiation (muhiban), second degree (dervishes), third degree (babas) and, at any given time, one member of the highest degree (dede). Ashiks are not formally initiated into the order as are the rest, but they are very much considered to be members of the Bektashi community at large given their interest in Bektashia and, for some, their presumed intent to one day become initiated. From the beginning several points may be highlighted about the membership structure (Figure 4.1). The ashiks, or “lovers of the faith” and “those who seek to know,” is the most populous category. Moving up the ladder, the numbers in each category decrease

significantly: there are far fewer muhiban than there are ashiks, fewer dervishes than muhiban, many fewer babas than dervishes, and only one dede at any given time.

The headquarters in Tirana, for example, shelters the dede-baba, who runs the main tekke of the Order, aided by two co-resident dervishes. Dede oversees a community of initiates to the first degree consisting of about 150 men and women who are primarily adults or elders as well as a good number of young men and women in their late teens and early twenties. The Dervishes and Dede at the headquarters have in addition a large following of people related to the spiritual members of the order. They are frequent visitors to the tekke and are considered ashiks. Membership categories follow this pyramidal structure in other tekkes as well although there is rarely a dervish in service to a baba in other tekkes given the shortage of members in the highest degrees that the community is currently experiencing. The demographics of membership vary considerably from one tekke to the next. The baba who serves at Shememi Baba Tekke, for example, has no dervishes on site and when I visited him in November of 2007, he had just excommunicated his only two muhiban. According to baba, he was seeing some of the ashiks, who are not initiates of the order and therefore have no formal obligations towards the tekke, more often than his disciples who visited Baba once every year or so. Baba Sadik, in contrast, is known to have a following (estimated to be in the thousands) of formally initiated disciples. At the time of my fieldwork in 2007 he was in charge of two tekkes (Kuzum Baba and Sari Salltëk tekke), and had just been appointed to Asim Baba tekke. In 2011, he built a brand new tekke in the southern coastal city of Sarandë,

which was named Haji Dede Reshat Bardhi tekke in memory of Dede Reshat (1937-2011) (whose life is the subject matter of chapter 5).

There are a few more important observations that need to be made about the initiatic hierarchy in general before specific cases are provided to illustrate how one navigates the complex of rights and responsibilities associated with different degrees of membership. Both men and women in their late teens and older may populate the ashik and muhib categories. Some who are disallowed from membership include the mentally ill, those with visible disabilities or handicaps, and those who either held or continue to hold a communist party membership. There is no distinction in dress codes and ashiks and muhiban live civilian lives outside of tekke. When on tekke grounds ashiks and muhiban are recognized by the intricate gestures they employ when greeting dervishes, babas, and dede. Male muhiban are seen wearing a plain white cap during tekke functions and while entering the tyrbe. Female muhiban also cover their heads with a white scarf during the rituals of the mejdan and when visiting the sacred tombs. Dervishes, babas, and dede are always males and there is no report of females ever serving in these higher degrees of Bektashi membership. The Rifa'i (most commonly known as the howling dervishes, see Popovic 1993 for the history and spread of the Rifa'iyya into southeastern Europe), like the Bektashi, allow women into the entry levels of membership, i.e., muhiban. The difference is in the ways that women participate in the ritual life of the orders. During a Rifa'i dhikr that I participated in 2007, women and children sat together behind the group of participating males whereas women in the Bektashi rituals of the mejdan are integrated with men and share the same space.

Although ashiks are considered to be members of the community broadly defined, the boundary between insiders and outsiders is clearly demarcated by initiation into the order. The Bektashi are greatly concerned about who has access to the place of initiation: the *mejdán*. As discussed in the previous chapter, this is a room that is used by insiders to the Order for daily prayers of dawn and dusk and for initiating new members. The uninitiated are not allowed to enter into the room unless they are accompanied by a serving Baba at the tekke. Each tekke community is fully aware of who is initiated and who is not. For those members who are traveling and seek shelter at a different tekke, special utterances or passcodes known only to insiders are demanded of them prior to allowing them access to the rituals of the *mejdán*. During many visits to different Bektashi tekkes around the country, over and over again I was asked if I was an insider (“*I brendshëm jeni?*”) or if I was of the color (“*I ngjyrës jeni?*”), i.e. of the color green which is the background color of the Bektashi and Prophet Mohammed’s flag, as well as the color of paradise.

Even though the hierarchy of membership between ashiks and initiated insiders is clearly demarcated, this hierarchy is negotiated so that members can move up (and sometimes down) in the Order. As previously discussed, two possible ways for advancement are observed at present. The first is by performative proofs that reflect attained spiritual knowledge and saintliness. The second is by petitioning the leadership of the Order to recognize a following's support for their leader to be ordained into a higher degree of membership. The theme of relative inclusiveness is supported also by the presence of honorary degrees which are bestowed upon those who embody the

qualities of a given degree but who have not been formally initiated into it. Exemplary ashiks may receive the Honorary Muhib status (*Muhib Nderi*), exemplary muhiban may receive Honorary Dervish (*Dervish Nderi*) recognition. These titles are primarily symbolic in nature and although a muhib who is acknowledged as Honorable Dervish is actually called by others as Dervish, this does not come with the full rights and privileges that a fully ordained dervish enjoys, i.e. having an officiating role in community's ritual life. In practice, all members have an open path for spiritual advancement. However, the possible outcomes, as it will be shown below, are advancement and progress in the spiritual hierarchy, stagnation, or demotion which in its extreme form results in expulsion from the Order.

One of my earliest discussions with Dede Reshat focused on the qualities of the ashik that each of the other categories above it must have. "A muhib, a dervish, a baba, a dede, must first and foremost be an Ashik" was Dede's remark. Dervishes that I met would often add to the qualities of an ashik as "one whose eyes and ears must always be open, someone who is constantly searching for the truth." As an anthropologist interested in learning about the Bektashi, the ashik category was a local and readymade category that the Albanian Bektashi associated with me. Being interested in learning about the Bektashi, no matter that my interests were to primarily seek empirically grounded explanations of observed human interactions, the qualities of inquisitive learning, according to my hosts, are the very qualities that ashiks must have. While there is a clear distinction between initiated and uninitiated others (muhib-ashik boundary above), the ashik category embodies qualities that accompany other categories as well. The ashiks

and what they represent are indicative of the common thread shared by muhiban, dervishes, babas, and dedes. The boundary between ashiks and muhiban is therefore only indicative of who is initiated and who is not rather than a strict marker of exclusiveness.

For some insiders the process of becoming relates to the navigation of the boundaries that separate the different degrees of membership. The degrees of membership are visibly discreet categories. In any one gathering of the community of insiders one notes the hierarchies between muhiban, dervishes, babas, and dede most visibly in dress code, seating arrangements, and duties or performance. In terms of dress codes, it has been noted that the only clothing that distinguishes the muhiban from the rest is a white cap and scarf for males and females respectively. Moving up the hierarchy of membership, the dress becomes one of the most visible symbolic markers that separates the upper degrees of membership from muhiban and dervishes. The dervishes wear a white dress and head dress, babas are distinguished from dervishes by wearing a green band around their white head piece, and dede is the only member who is covered in a green cloak and wears a white headpiece that is wrapped around by a long green cloth which leaves much less white visible than the green band of babas (see Figures 2.1 and 5.1). Color becomes a symbol of hierarchy and authority with white reserved for dervishes. One's progress in the spiritual hierarchy is demarcated by the right to wear progressively more of the color green.

The muhib-dervish boundary is also marked by celibate monasticism. Dervishes, babas, and dede are required to be full time residents of the Bektashi tekke. Those who have been married in the past and who may also have children must give up their families

and assume the life of a celibate monastic. With the exception of the dede who by Bektashi constitution has to come from the celibate branch (never married), dervishes and babas are further divided in two groups⁴²: *myxhyret* (never married) and *mytehil* (once married who commit to celibacy upon initiation). The later, as part of being ordained into these higher leadership roles of the order, give up their family ties in order to take full time residence at a tekke.

While the observance of celibacy is exceptional in Islam, the Bektashi are not the only Muslim community that practice it. The Mourides of Senegal, as an example, are known to practice temporary celibacy during the initiation process. The most devoted Mouride followers “serve as young men for an indefinite number of years on their leader’s agricultural estates, where they remain celibate, geographically isolated, unpaid, sometimes unclothed, and forced to beg for food” (O’Brien 1971: 3). Because Islam emerged in a context familiar to celibate monasticism, Muslims have and continue to engage with the idea in a number of ways, most notably in the relationship between celibacy, death, and Sufi asceticism (see Bashir 2008 and references therein). The

⁴² The historical roots of an earlier division among the followers of Haji Bektash that was based on the issue of marriage and succession see Melikoff 1998. There are two related groups that follow the teachings of Haji Bektash: the Bektashi and Alevi (formerly known as Kızılbaş). The Bektashi believed that Haji Bektash had no children of his own whereas the Alevi believe just the opposite. In accordance with their respective beliefs, the Bektashi leaders practice celibacy whereas the Alevi leaders are allowed to marry and have children. Furthermore, with a few noted exceptions, anyone may seek to become a Bektashi whether they come from a Bektashi family background or not, whereas one cannot become an Alevi if they are not born Alevi. In the early stages of the bipartition, the Bektashi tended to be found in tekkes near sedentary settlements whereas the Alevi, known also as “country” or “village Bektashis,” are found in rural areas. The Bektashi of Turkey are often referred to as Alevi-Bektashi reflecting their double minority status. They are subsumed by the more numerous – but still a minority in Turkey – Alevi. In Albania, the Bektashi are part of umma but are independently organized from Sunni Muslims and other Sufi groups.

difference between the Bektashi, Mourides, and other Muslim engagements with celibacy is that the Bektashi stand alone amongst all Muslims in their institutionalized form of celibate monasticism that is required for membership into the highest ranks of the Order (dervishes, babas, and dedes).

Amongst the Bektashi followers, it is the celibate and never married members of the community who enjoy most respect. The reasons given for this are many. In the words of Baba Mondi, “one may only hold one melon under one’s arm, not two. In choosing between either God or a wife, the celibate Bektashi Dervishes, babas, and dede have chosen God.” Other more satirical ways of explaining the preferences for the celibate over the married branch have to do with the pervasive practice of kissing the leaders’ hands. A devout ashik explains how one knows not what the hands of a non-celibate cleric have been meddling with while in bed with their wives would thus be reluctant to kiss their hands whereas the hands of celibate dervishes, babas, and dede are clean. At the organizational level, the myxhyret have more weight in matters of succession. When a successor was not named by the deceased dede, it is the Sacred Council (*Këshilli i Shenjtë*) that is composed of only celibate members (never married) who vote on a successor not the mytehil. In 2011, for example, when Dede Reshat passed away without naming a successor, the council was composed of 5 celibate babas and 4 celibate dervishes who together voted Baba Mondi as the new leader of the community.

Among the rights and responsibilities associated with the different degrees of membership are the authority to guide others or *udhërrëfim* (from Albania, “*udhë*” or road, path and “*rrëfe*,” to show, to tell). The capacity to show someone the way of the

Bektashi is a central aspect in how members of the order evaluate the different degrees of membership from an uninitiated seeker (talib, ashik) to the highest degrees of membership (baba, dede). In his discussion of the care in selecting the spiritual members of the order, Baba Rexheb refers to spiritual advancement as *gradim* (literally, promotion, to change in degree) or *merr titullin* (literally, to get the title) whereas the initiates who undergo the actual rituals of initiation from muhib to dervish or from dervish to baba are referred to as people who “see another ceremony and take the title dervish or baba” (1970:112). Put this way, another distinguishing aspect that separates the members is between those who have seen or who are shown certain rituals that others are kept away from. More importantly, Babas may guide and promote ashiks to become muhiban, and muhiban to become dervishes. Dede has all the officiating powers as he may, in addition, ordain dervishes to become baba. Babas and dervishes may recommend individual candidates for membership into the order. Dervishes have no ordaining privileges, although celibate dervishes are members of the sacred council which may vote a serving baba into the position of dede when a successor is not named by a serving dede prior to his passing away. Dervishes, babas, and dede have the right to be sheltered in a Bektashi tekke and to have exclusive rights to running the daily functions of that tekke. Ashiks and muhiban may visit the tekke and stay there temporarily. However, with only a few noted exceptions, their rights do not include full time shelter privileges. The following of ashiks and muhiban may not ordain any members but they do often have a power to convince the leaders of the order for someone’s candidacy for dervish or baba. As has often occurred in postcommunist Albania, a following may petition the leadership of the order

to ordain a dervish and make him a baba. Convinced by proofs of their candidate's spiritual performance, the following may collect signatures and offer them to the appropriate leaders as testimony to a candidate's proofs for advancement.

The community is organized around a principle of the creation and maintenance of social layering. Most immediately, the existent divisions are about hierarchies of exclusivity, i.e. members in the different degrees of membership are clearly distinguished from one another. On a closer inspection, however, it is evident that the categories themselves are permeable and not as exclusively bounded as they appear to be. Not only can people move between the different categories of membership, but the possibility exists (though rarely evoked in lieu of expulsion) for someone to be demoted from a higher level back down to a lower one. Thus far I have outlined the idealized version of the internal narrative on becoming Bektashi, its relationship to becoming Muslim, and the hierarchy of membership. Now I turn to the observed nuances of becoming as seen 1. in the ways that religious practice reproduces separations and exclusions and 2. how ongoing processes of becoming (and unbecoming) Bektashi are part of the overall efforts to resacralize individual members of the community and by extension also the Bektashi collective as a whole.

Hierarchies of religious practice

This section traces the relationship between the hierarchy of membership and religious practice. It finds that the practice of Bektashia at present serves to both legitimize as well as delegitimize the hierarchy of membership. The following silhouettes of Bektashi praxis indicate that members experience different preoccupations with

religious observance. Full residents of the tekke may be further differentiated in the different roles and tasks that they undertake in their daily routines. Tasks and ritual displays are indicative of the degrees of initiation. While babas are the primary hosts in charge of other residents of the tekke and the ones who delegate, assign tasks, and hold people accountable, the routines of the residing dervish may include daily chores around the tekke, lighting the candles and maintaining the tyrbe for use by pilgrims, and hosting visitors. Tasks assigned to and carried out by a muhib include those assigned by dervish, such as errands, shopping, courier of messages on behalf of baba and other tasks such as to memorize and be able to sing nefes or sacred verses to the Bektashi. The daily routines of full time residents are much more closely related to religious observance for much of their intent and purpose is in support of the functions of the tekke. The latter are, largely but not exclusively, religious in nature.

The experience of Bektashia for full time residents of the tekke is of quite a different scale from that of a Bektashi layman. Varying religious preoccupations are informed by the established hierarchy of membership. The entry degrees of membership (ashik and muhib) enjoy greater leniency in their religious practice whereas more advanced types of membership (dervish, baba, dede) tend to be more rigidly scrutinized by the community at large. Generally speaking, in light of a lack of (and loss of) knowledge about how to properly practice Bektashia and Islam, most validation of proper conduct hinges upon the supposed or proclaimed intent behind various practices.

This sacralization of mundane practices amongst different degrees of membership is clear in the practice of Bektashi prayer (*lutje, falje*). When talking about prayer,

Bektashi are careful to note that work is prayer (*puna është falje*) and that prayer when one's kids are starving is *haram* or forbidden. This way, the Bektashi allow for many kinds of activities that can constitute prayer but that are also necessary for daily living. Mere mundane tasks are likened to prayer by intent and purpose that these occupations are said to accomplish. *Bismilah*, for example, if uttered at the beginning of one's new task, declares the intent that the work to follow is in the name of God. While many Bektashi babas and dervishes at present and in the past are known to occasionally visit mosques for Friday prayer, and to themselves observe the duty to pray (*namaz*), the Bektashi at large are comfortable with their leaders' laxity regarding formal Islamic prayer. While babas and dervishes advise it is well to observe daily prayer, no one at present is reprimanded for not observing them. Instead of the obligations of daily prayer that concern all other Muslims, what constitutes prayer for the Bektashi babas and dervishes (as well as muhiban and ashiks) is any service or work performed at the Bektashi lodge. One's visitation of the *tyrbe* and other sites that are considered sacred to the Bektashi is an alternate form of prayer. Visitations to a Bektashi tekke or tyrbe, or pilgrimage to a sacred site to the Bektashi, are the kind of activities that many consider their only religious practice. Other acts that are equally valued as religious observance are believer's intentional recalling of the memory of a Bektashi Baba and a meditative appeal to baba's blessings and intercession. Similarly, appeals to Imam Ali, Prophet Muhamad, and Allah are acts unquestionably intended to attain the intercession of higher entities in the Bektashi spiritual hierarchy and so are regarded as prayer.

During my stays at Bektashi lodges I was struck by the frequency of conversations about proper religious practice. Pilgrims to Bektashi tekkes and tyrbes would often admit that they did not know how to properly enter the saintly tombs, whether they were to step in with the right foot first or the left. Pilgrims were concerned with the timing of their visit, with synchronizing their ram sacrifice with sunset and sunrise. While on pilgrimage, an elderly man advised me against visiting the Abaz Ali tyrbe on the mountaintop after sunset. Yet, another middle-aged man was reported to have spent the entire night within the confines of the tyrbe. What these concerns point to is a collective effort to clarify how to conduct oneself while visiting sacred spaces. They are internal conversations on what it means to be Bektashi in practical terms. This emphasis on religious practice was present throughout my stay with the Albanian Bektashi for most of 2007 and in my observations in 2008 and 2011. The significance of this diversity of views shows a widespread concern about proper ways of being Bektashi as well as an adjustment of religious practice to a supposed Bektashi standard. The latter is perhaps no longer existent given the 1945 -1991 disruption of religious practice: it is being manufactured by leaders and followers alike as well as to some extent by the administrators of the Order, who are the primary beneficiaries of the religious revivalist project.

The saying that one is not born but rather becomes a Bektashi is sometimes meant as an excuse for those who do not know the proper rites, other times as an intriguing invitation to learn more about the Bektashi. Becoming Bektashi involves living Bektashia and re-orienting one's life to certain Bektashi sensibilities. In talking about the qualities

of becoming Bektashi and its rewards, Bektashi Dervishes often recite the following instructional lines:

*Bëhu pluhur, bëhu baltë,
Të fitosh gradën e lartë.*

Become dust, become mud,
To deserve [attain] the highest degree.

*Me respekt e dashuri,
Të fitosh gradën njeri.*

With respect and love [care],
To earn [the degree] human [ity].

The first line draws our attention to the process of earning one's right to be human, or to earn and deserve one's humanity. This serious commitment is anchored on humility, which is accomplished by denying the ego the pleasure of this-worldly yearnings that are deemed obstacles in the way of spiritual progress. For the Bektashia, and for Sufis in general, service to their *murshid* (spiritual guide), to visitors at a tekke, and to people in general is a virtue that instills humility. The chores necessary to support the basic functions of the tekke as a religious, economic, and social institution are the duties of dervishes first and foremost. Aside from their religious obligations of prayer, participation in the rituals of the *mejdani*, tasks for dervishes include cleaning the baba's room and other tekke quarters, cooking for baba, his guests, and workers employed by the tekke and lastly for themselves, hosting visitors, serving them sweets and coffee, often listening to people's concerns and the intent of their visit and offering *duva* or charms and blessings via prayers to God on visitor's behalf. Other tasks include tending to the fireplace, looking after the arable land parcels and domesticates for tekkes that have them, and arranging shopping and other errands as needed to support tekke functions. When there are no dervishes in service, these responsibilities are looked after by the serving baba or others who may be present, (i.e. *muhiban* and *ashiks* who may

visit tekke more often than occasional guests). Service to others and devaluing ones ego is symbolized by the common image of the believer becoming dust and mud. Grade here refers to spiritual attainment and making progress in the quest for nearness to God. To be Bektashi, as is indeed true of Islamic mysticism and the Sufi path, one goes through a transformation and reconfiguration of the self through the negation of ego. It is a goal-oriented experience aimed toward earning of the quality of being human. “Humanness” here is earned only with the practices that discipline the sensibilities of respect and love. *Mëria* or prolonged anger towards others is not permitted to the initiated members of the Order and prohibited for babas and dervishes. In referring to the role of baba at a tekke, dervishes note that “baba offers explanation, education, advice and critique (*këshilla dhe vërejtje*), so his followers attain respect, wisdom, and perfection (*respekt, urtësi, përsosmëri*).”

Bektashi clerics in song are presented as miraculous and gentle, yet capable of sharp, sometime humorous, responses. Most of their nefes and testimonials glorify a leader’s spiritual performance during their service at one or more Bektashi center as well as their post-mortem intercessions on behalf of their followers. This is part of *shërbim* or service offered by *murshid* or spiritual guides to brothers and sisters of the Sufi/Bektashi way (*motra dhe vëllezër të rrugës*), the initiated or insiders to the Order (muhiban, dervishes, babas, dede) and uninitiated friends of the order (ashik), and uninitiated pilgrims that may seek such intercessions.

Here is a portion of a song about Baba Meleq (c. 1800s) of Martanesh tekke. I heard it during the annual pilgrimage to Baba Meleq’s tekke in April of 2007.

*Korriku njëzetë e tetë,
Tyja të dogjën teqetë,
Teqetë do ti ndërtoj vetë,
Aman o Baba Meleq.*

July twenty eighth,
They burned your tekke [by intruders],
[I] myself will rebuild them,
Glory to Baba Meleq.

As is usually the case with many polyphonies that are attributed to Bektashi Babas and Dervishes, the song opens with specific contextual information. Another song, for example, starts with “*Shëmitri gjashtëmbëdhjetë ishte ditë e dielë,*” literally, December sixteenth, it was a Sunday. While our selection above states the month and day, it does not mention the year. Still, when such songs are chanted during commemorations and festive community events, the majority of the people that have close ties to that particular cleric or more often to a particular tekke are attuned to a particular event in their community’s history. Here, the event is the intentional burning down of the tekke grounds by ill-willed intruders. The song is about an actual event. In my view, by falling short of providing an actual year of the event, the song draws the listeners’ attention to a timeless yet actual quality of the message that it carries. In this case, we learn that Baba’s tekke had burned down while the next line is a quick reply by now long gone baba who states that he himself will rebuild the tekke. The statement is in the present progressive tense. The song glorifies Baba Meleq as able to take care of his tekke and capable of rebuilding the tekke compound on his own after it was razed to the ground by arson. Recall from the last chapter that the rebuilding narratives emphasize guidance from the saints and that the ability to build is attributed to baba’s post-mortem intercession. Similar songs are voiced now in a transitory postcommunist era to again affirm the saintliness of the leadership of the past.

The extent to which Bektashia is lived as religious observance and the way the Bektashi faith is experienced varies across the board. In this regard, a distinction is apparent between full time residents of the tekke and others who may occasionally visit the tekke, and others yet who may very rarely visit the tekke in times of need, for whom religious observance may not play a large part in their daily routines. When a pilgrim was asked about the tekke that he frequented most and Baba Sadik who served there he answered straightforwardly without a delay: "I know only to visit the sacred tomb, to light a candle, and that is it." He was stating outright that his visits to the tekke did not include visitations with the serving baba but only to the mausoleum that sheltered remains of the founders of that tekke. In effect, he was also questioning the legitimacy of present day leadership of the tekke while showing much more confidence in the sanctity of the founders of the tekke. A number of visitors to the tekke do not fully participate in the routinized behaviors such as embracing the host, while initiated others observe these rituals more systematically. Other visitors appear unconnected to the displays of patterned and ritualized interactions observed at a Bektashi tekke. Nor are people reprimanded or instructed on proper routines. Initiated members of the order put a heavier emphasis on their approach and ways that they interact with one another. They orient their behavior toward members of different degrees of membership accordingly, being especially respectful towards older and more accomplished members such as babas and dede.

It would be very difficult for an outsider to Bektashia to make sense of the intricate and highly variable ways of approach towards Bektashi leaders. The initial

reaction to the variability in greetings leaves many puzzled as the routine is not easy to follow and understand. Babas especially are bathed in a series of highly ritualized gestures whenever their followers approach them. Although non-Bektashi layman may only shake baba's hand, others' greetings may minimally include the kissing and touching baba's hand with ones forehead three times. Initiated insiders are offered the inner side of the palm whereas uninitiated others the dorsal side of baba's right hand. Other more intricate displays in embracing baba may include the kissing first of the lower end of his dress, sometimes even his feet, and the sequenced kissing of the following parts: hand, the left side of baba's chest, and both sides of his beard, all while keeping both hands crossed. Upon the end of the embrace, with baba's permission, visitors may unclasp their hands and either kneel in baba's presence or do as instructed by baba. Although these were rarely observed, Dervish Sali once showed me in front of Dede Reshat that the proper way to greet baba is to first halt one's approach a few feet before dede, and to kneel and kiss the ground that separates baba and the greeter three times, prior to continuing with any of the more complex greeting routines mentioned above. I suspect that this particular greeting may well be the one employed in the prayer room while in exclusive company of insiders. Beyond these, one may also note that Baba's closest followers are also extremely careful around Baba and avoid inviting Baba's raised voice towards themselves. Sometimes, people are careful not to distract baba while he is meditating, or appears to be focusing on his own thoughts which may be indicative of saintly preoccupations. Many believe that although baba may be in the presence of guests but his saintly intervention on behalf of the following may be at work elsewhere.

There are some elements of the interactional veneration observed among the Bektashi that resemble the interaction rituals observed elsewhere in contemporary Albanian society and elsewhere in the Balkans. The kissing of the clothes worn by Sufi sheikhs is practiced also by the Rifa'i, Halveti, and Kadiri followers in Albania and Kosovo. In primarily rural areas of Albania, the young do occasionally still kiss the hand of the elderly. When this is done, the elderly often follow the gesture by saying *paç uratën* (Albanian, may you have my blessing). In Turkey, it is still customary, especially during a wedding ceremony, for the bride to solemnly kiss the hand of all who are present at her braiding ceremony and all those who are present at the wedding party that is sponsored by her natal family, and of her mother and father in law upon arrival to her husband's house (Delaney 1991: 130-137). In Ottoman times, it was customary for visitors of the Sultan and high ranked officials to be approached through prostrations and the kissing of their hand and the bottom end of their clothing. The direction of causality, or whether the Bektashi greeting behavior is modelled after the way that commoners may in the past have approached the Sultan or local aristocrats or vice versa is unclear⁴³.

⁴³ Most of the literature on the Bektashi refers to the community as heterodox (see Norris 2006 on "popular Sufism" and Norton 2001 on "deviations from Sunny orthodoxy"), "syncretic" (most extensively described by Ocak 1983 in relation to pre-Islamic beliefs, see also Birge 1937: 210-218 in relation to village Alevis, Sunni and Shi'a Islam, Shamanism, Neo-Platonism, and Christianity, and Mélikoff 1998: 104-143 in relation to Alevis, Hurufis, and Kizilbash), and as being especially malleable towards and conforming to local customs and practices (see Kressing 2002: 76-80 on the "Albanisation" of Bektashia and Mustafa 2008 on "nativized otherness"). This would suggest that the Bektashi kinds of interactions are modelled after interaction rituals that were already operative in Albanian society. Whereas Hammoudi (1993: 157), in his analysis of Sufism in Morocco and elsewhere in the Arab world, provides an example of how Sufistic meta-schemata like the "master-disciple relationship reaches other domains of the *socius* (relations of governance, labor, education, and so forth)." This is a view of Sufism as transforming existing social milieu.

Beyond this ritualized greeting behavior, in everyday interactions, a number of Babas are known for their awareness of details about one's life that most people cannot possibly know about. In fact, another important quality most notably reflected by visitor's reaction during hosting events is that "baba pays attention to guests and their dilemmas." A friend and colleague of mine from Scotland who works as a photographer for the national museum in Norway joined me for a visit to the Headquarters in the summer of 2007. Afterwards, she noted that she felt "a compelling demand to be deeply honest" throughout her visit with Dervish Mikel, more so than she would normally have to be in her daily interactions with other people. After the visit she noted that hers was nevertheless an "unusually comfortable experience" where she was quite aware that her presence and conversation mattered. Other guests underscore the fact that they held Baba's attention precisely because he showed a knowledge of inner states and details of one's life that are normally considered out of the reach of others, i.e. things each of one of us considers deeply personal and hidden to others are believed to be within the reach of accomplished Babas whose "saintly gaze penetrates all barriers." No matter the differences between different leaders, with some more capable of seeing beyond the boundaries of the naked eye, in song and speech babas and some dervishes are regarded as *shenjtorë* or saints: they, unlike Bektashi layman, are born as such and are even "hand-picked by God."⁴⁴

⁴⁴ "O ju njerëzit shenjtorë, zoti ju zgjodhi me dorë . . .," literally, "O you saintly people, handpicked by God . . ."

In regards to their mannerisms in interacting with baba, muhiban and dervishes are often silent and they try not to interrupt or concern themselves with idle talk when in the presence of dede. They always approach facing baba, often with their hands crossed and clinched on their shoulders as if surrendering to their leaders, and leave baba by maintaining eye contact as they backtrack their steps in reverse upon leaving so that they do not turn their backs on him for this is considered disrespectful. A similar pattern of approach is observed during tomb visitations as well: both sides of the gate are kissed, each in turn, than the visitor to the tombs bends down and kisses the threshold, crosses with right foot first being careful not to step over it, and approaches the tomb with their hands crossed, departing by walking backwards in the same posture bowing numerous times. Living babas are approached much the same way that they will be approached when they become deceased and their bodies sheltered in the sacred tombs of the tekke that they serve. When in the presence of baba, dervishes and initiated others always initiate a conversation by proclaiming “*ejvalla*,” (God, yes, by God) or *nazari* (literally, your gaze). However, uninitiated visitors do not equally observe these interactive etiquette.

On becoming in conversion narratives

The way that Bektashi muhiban and dervishes talk about their own lives is both diverse and patterned. Using materials from conversation with muhiban, dervishes, babas, and dede, this section describes the diversity of views about how one becomes a Bektashi and the main patterns present in narratives of conversion. Initiation and subsequent initiations into higher degrees of membership relate (and reproduce) hierarchy. For

masters to be masters, they need disciples. By the same token, for followers to become Bektashi, they need spiritual guides. The master and disciple relationship is a hierarchical relationship. As such, the hierarchy of membership is erected and maintained through initiations of members into the Order, and of current members to higher degrees of membership.

When asked about ways of becoming the Bektashi dervishes and babas would point to *shërbim* or service towards others. Baba Arshi (b. 1906 –) and who has been a dervish since his late teens (ordained baba by Dede Reshat in 2004) mentioned two points on the question of becoming. “When I was a dervish,” he said, “our hands would hurt” from the heavy farming and labor around the newly built tekke in Taylor, Michigan. “We would sleep only two hours each night, and that was all.” As we were sitting indoor conversing, Baba Arshi was preparing to exit the tekke and visit the tyrbe located on the far end of the tekke grounds. “It is raining, baba,” said Dervish Eliton. “All these years,” answered baba, “not rain, nor snow has kept me from visiting the tyrbe,” and, aided by his walking stick, he moved slowly towards the door. Minutes later Dervish and I got up and followed, noting that baba was making his way slowly but surely, first taking a look at the newly planted pine trees that Dervish was working on the night before when we arrived, and later gazing towards the tyrbe. For dervishes, babas, and dede, their daily life is centered on the duties of serving others: hosting their guests, tending to their needs, and serving their spiritual leaders whether alive and standing as Dervish Eliton serves Baba Arshi or passed away as Baba Arshi serves Baba Rexheb whose body rests in the sacred tombs of the tekke. So the answer to how one becomes a Bektashi, regardless of

degree of membership, is through service and dedication to the Bektashi way. This, however, only begins to scratch the surface.

That is, it is not sufficient for one to simply be in service of others and to conduct heavy labor in service of the tekke where they belong in order to become Bektashi. A story that I was often told about illustrates this point best. A dervish had spent his entire life looking after his master praying that his master's blessings would be upon him. When the master's breath was giving away and in need for a last sip of water, the dervish happened to be busy collecting firewood. It was the servant who was there to bring the glass of water and the servant who received the blessing of the master. Often I was advised to be alert around Dede Reshat for "one knows not when he grants his blessings." The passing on of God's graces is unpredictable. A disciple may work all his life in service of his master. What truly matters is if the disciple is there when that service is needed most as well as the disciple's undivided attention towards their master. A muhib told me that once Dede Reshat and his disciples were sitting around on an afternoon coffee break and began to eat apples from a bowl that was placed in front of them. The muhib was not up to consuming an apple but when Dede Reshat handed her (and only her) an apple from the bowl she gladly accepted it without hesitation. Again, when she was telling me this story, the emphasis was on the unpredictability of the passing on of God's grace and master's sacredness to his followers: without explicitly stating it, the statement implied that along with the apple came also Dede's blessings. Service and labor around the tekke is a function that is closely linked to achieving nearness towards the saintly authorities, which in return are the Bektashi gateway towards God. The individual

may be sacralized by the saintly authority of the leadership of the Order. All they have to do is be near them, and act appropriately.

Part of the story of becoming is learning a set of Bektashi sensibilities that are part of an existing social validation that compares idealized ways of being and becoming with observed qualities that different members of the order embody. One hot summer day in 2007 I followed Dervish Mikel on his afternoon walk around the headquarters' garden. This walk was part of his daily routine. First he checked on a flock of chickens. After feeding them and collecting any eggs, we briefly checked on the handful of farm workers that aided with the cows, fruits, vines, and vegetable garden to see if they needed anything. After that, we made our way back by inspecting the grapes and the figs for their ripeness. As we were inspecting the fig tree, Dervish was more able to find ripe figs than me. As he offered me a few of his own finds, he started to tell me about the time when he was initiated into dervishhood.

Dede Reshat had just arrived from Tirana to Asim Baba tekke in Southern Albania to officiate the initiation ceremony that granted Dervish Mikel entry into the celibate branch of Bektashia. It is at Asim Baba tekke that Dervish was first employed as a cook and, as he became more attached to the tekke, was initiated as a muhib and after much struggle, according to his own testimony, into a dervish. It was at his home tekke that initiates and invited guests had gathered to see Dervish Mikel in the standard dress of the Bektashi dervishes. Typically this is put on for the first time during the initiation and a celebratory dinner with invited guests that follows thereafter. Gifts are given to the new cleric who is congratulated on the most esteemed status within the community: celibate

dervishhood. It was also that day, Dervish recalls, that Dede made it known that Dervish Mikel was to serve at the main tekke in Tirana. A much older muhib from the town of Lazarat was also present. When I met muhib in 2007, he was well into his late 90s and an honorary member of the Sacred Council of the Albanian Bektashi by virtue of his seniority amongst all muhiban in Albania. Muhib was initiated into the order by Baba Selim (d. 1944) of Asim Baba tekke. Once he heard that Dervish Mikel was to serve in Tirana, he asked dede for permission to speak, and having Dede's permission to speak, the muhib from Lazarat, in Dervish Mikel's own recounting of the story, said: "Our Dervish is well behaved, amongst the better ones, because his hand is always open, [i.e., he gives, helps out everyone]. Why not allow him to stay here, in our tekke where we need him most? I plead to you not to leave our tekke without a dervish." In Dervish Mikel's words, Dede's answered by telling the following story in return:

One day, the mother-in-law sent a recently wed *nuse* (bride, women's son's wife) to collect some figs from the tree and to bring them over. She was not sure just what kind of bride she would make, so she wanted to test her with this simple task: to fetch some figs for her mother-in-law (*vjerra*). As the new bride made her way to the fig tree, her mother-in-law positioned herself someplace where she could still see the bride but where she herself could not be seen by her. She noticed that the young bride was checking each fig for its tenderness prior to placing it in the basket. Whenever she found a fully ripened fig, she ate it for herself; she placed all other semi-ripened figs in the basket. Seeing all of this, the mother-in-law yelled out: "Nuse, do not tire yourself searching for the best figs. All I want is but one or two figs like the ones you are eating."

The Bektashi often deflate confronting situations by narrating like situations and by use of analogy. It distracts the attention of the inquirer and directs it to a story whereby like lesson applies also to the initial inquiry. This opens up a larger issue: the ability of the audience to "get it" is also a way in which the audience's understanding is judged. The

story itself is not an explicit answer to inquirer's questions. All it tells us is that this mother-in-law wants the same ripe figs that her *nuse* is selfishly sampling for herself. This way of talking makes room and allows for the imparting of moral lessons to an audience. The lesson is never revealed explicitly, but rather implied. Here, just like the home tekke wants to keep an exemplary Dervish in service, so does Dede require the best dervishes to serve at *Kryegjyshata*, the main center and the World Headquarters of the Bektashi Order of Dervishes. Perhaps too, the configuration of mother-in-law and bride is intentional to nourish the sensibility of members to the order about the hierarchy of decision making (here Dede, who occupies a position of authority over all other formalized stages of membership, i.e. babas, dervishes, and muhiban). Whatever other functions this way of constructing their conversations has, it is clear that Bektashi Babas and Dervishes try always to maintain their gentle yet commanding control over their conversations and to display their authority over the followers. In Dervish Mikel's retelling of the story we must account for multiple audiences. First there is myself the anthropologist: just like in the story which commands one to want for others what they want for themselves, Dervish Mikel is doing just that and imparting with this lesson about his state of being as a dervish which entails something more about service than the simple practice of serving. To the simple act of giving ripened figs Dervish Mikel adds a deeper lesson about his state as a dervish in service of the tekke and about hierarchy and authority to make decisions.

On the other hand, in the story of figs above, the multiple audience consists primarily of Dede who has arrived to ordain and claim Dervish Mikel for service at the

headquarters, the elderly muhib who speaks on behalf of the Dervish's home tekke community and their intention to keep Dervish Mikel in service at their tekke, and the newly ordained Dervish Mikel who may well be getting his first lesson as a dervish from his murshid, Dede Reshat. The elderly Muhib is behaving like the young bride in wanting to keep Dervish Mikel for his own tekke and through the story is reminded by Dede Reshat that at the core of disciple's service is selflessness. Disciples ought to willfully and wholeheartedly want for their spiritual masters the best of what they desire for themselves. In lived interactions and in their recollections we see how Dervish Mikel is learning from Dede Reshat's encounters with others. In his recounting of the event, he is involved in reflection and interpretation of past events which become the very tools for understanding and teaching others.

Not only is there an emphasis on a particular way of carrying conversations, but more than that we see how esoteric knowledge is handled in human interactions. The story of becoming, entails above all a story of learning both the hows of service as well as the esoteric knowledge that renders Bektashi practice meaningful. Indeed, a claim has been made about the tekke as the only institution of learning for the Bektashi, but there are no classrooms at the tekke, nor teaching curricula that babas and dede make use of to teach dervishes and muhiban. Trix (1993) documented this mode of indirect teaching and the use of a gradually gained "attunement" between master and disciple. Spiritual discourse was made possible only when Trix asked her master, Baba Rexheb of Detroit, "how his murshid taught him." With that question she proved herself to have understood the centrality and importance of the master in the life and spiritual attainment of the

disciple. She demonstrated after years of one on one lessons with the spiritual master that she was finally able to ask the right questions and thus showed that she was attuned to and sensible towards something fundamental about Bektashia and Sufism: the master and disciple relationship in the propagation of the sacred chain of transmission (*silsila*).

Learning in my own fieldwork experiences was most visible during hosting events. Although Dervishes seem to have only a minor role in these events – one sees them greeting guests and leading them to dede, bringing in the sweets and carrying out any other requests that dede may have while hosting the guests, and accompanying the guests upon their departure – the hosts are involved in multiple tasks. One, and by no means the least important, is monitoring dervishes and guiding them into the experience of hosting. By observing how dede hosts the guests, by listening to the manner and contents of the conversation, questions and replies, the dervishes and muhiban present are learning from their master. The story of the ripened figs that Dervish Mikel narrated to me during the walk in the garden is a testimony to this modality of learning. Thus it is also part of the story of becoming.

Anyone that spends some time with the Albanian Bektashi would notice something peculiar about the way they construct their conversations. Often Bektashi Babas and Dervishes may appear as though they are avoiding answering questions authored by their visitors. To the untrained eye, they may appear as if they are drifting away into another story about some event that involved people in certain situations. It is in the contents of the kinds of interactions presented in the stories, and sometimes stories about stories, that the audience is gently invited to recover a camouflaged meaning.

Muhabet (previously discussed) is a skill that Bektashi babas and dervishes have fine-tuned as an art form. The Bektashi, in my view, are master conversationalists. *Muhabet* is deemed as sacred for it makes possible the circulation of esoteric knowledge, which cannot be stated directly, but only inferred indirectly. A Bektashi baba is not worried that the audience may not receive a certain lesson: in the end the Bektashi believe that those worthy of receiving esoteric knowledge will receive it. Those who do not receive it, based on the local beliefs, were not meant to receive it. The Bektashi consider it a sin to work against what is bound to happen and attempts to change what is destined by the will of God. The same attitude is attributed to becoming Bektashi leaders: few achieve spiritual authority while many others do not. And yet, some knowledge is only for the initiates. The occasional telling of stories that some can understand and others cannot is a way of teaching as well as a way of excluding.

The birthday of the Bektashi

Ditëlindja Bektashiane (literally, Bektashi birthday) is the most important rite of passage in any initiate's life. If there is one event that is always present in conversion narratives circulated by the Bektashi, it is the day of initiation. The Bektashi who shared their story of conversion to me remember this day very vividly and in their talk they isolate this day, especially the rites of initiation, as a deeply transforming experience unparalleled by anyone's life events and circumstances. The initiation into the Order is talked about as *martesë shpirtërore*, literally, a spiritual wedding. It is often referred to as the opening of the doors, eyes, heart, and mind and always talked about as an

extraordinary experience that the uninitiated are unable to fully capture. During this day initiates are allowed to enter the *mejdán*, an interior space exclusively reserved for those who are initiated into the order: muhiban, dervishes, babas, and dede. Their uninitiated relatives are considered to be ashiks or friends of the tekke, so they may be allowed to enter this room in the presence of a baba. However uninitiated visitors are not allowed to take part in the rituals of the mejdan. Mejdán, in Turkish means “open ground,” battle field, or place for settling disputes. According to the Bektashi, worthy believers consider the mejdan the sacred ground and to those are granted access “to see,” it is during the rituals of the mejdan that they may experience a spiritual state in the presence of the martyrs of the Battle of Karbala.

This extreme exclusivity placed upon membership rights in their ceremonial life has been one of the most spoken about characteristics of this Sufi Order over its existence most certainly since 1500s⁴⁵. In my experience, it is certainly something that the Albanian Bektashi uphold rigorously and are very cautious about. During my visits to many Bektashi tekkes, I was asked if I was an insider or *vëlla i rrugës*, literally, brother of the [Bektashi] way immediately upon arrival. When asked, I admitted my role as an anthropologist with an interest to know more about Bektashia and that I was not an initiated insider. With the headquarters being my primary field site, I enjoyed certain advantages. The main tekke received constant visitations from Babas and Dervishes from elsewhere in Albania. When I finally visited their centers, in most cases I had already met

⁴⁵ Balum Sulltan is attributed as the spiritual leader who established a routinized form of ritual life with the practice of the daily lighting of the candles (*çirak*) in saintly tombs, secrecy, and celibacy being the most notably characteristics of the order from 1500s onward.

my hosts but not their entourage. During my fieldwork in 2007, I was able to enter the interiors of several mejdans accompanied by hosting babas and dervishes but because I am not an initiated member of the Order, I have not observed or taken part in the actual rituals of the mejdan. What I know about the Bektashi mejdan, apart from being in the actual space while not in ceremonial use (Figure 4.2), is by being on tekke grounds prior to the ceremonies and after the conclusion of the rites and by taking part in the celebratory meals that followed where I was often present. In the end, I learned about the Bektashi day of becoming and other mejdan related ceremonies primarily from how and what the Bektashi say about them.

Aside from adding a new member to the fellowship of insiders, the initiation process involves the members of the community in processes of reflection, evaluation and deliberation, since the initiation is a story of becoming of the individual as well as the eventual making and remaking of the collective. The admittance of a candidate to any one of the membership categories requires a recommendation of an insider. The insider may have closely observed the candidate for a period of time, inquired about their character and conduct at work, in school, from their friends and colleagues, family members near and distant, events in the candidate's past and how they may have been handled. The insider may occasionally bring the candidate to the tekke so that other members may get to know him or her. Judging from my impressions of the interactions, it was clear that the relationship between the candidate and the recommender had to be one of advisorship that centered on readying the candidate for entry into the prayer room and initiation. Using their words, there needs to be a spark that the guide (*rehber* or *udhërrëfyes*,

literally, he who shows the path or a guide) nourishes and turns into a burning flame. Any muhib or dervish may act as an intermediary who puts the candidate in touch with a spiritual guide (a baba or dede). Because the initiation process involves the entry into the prayer room and the sharing of a number of secrets of the order not otherwise disclosed to the uninitiated, the quality that is preferred most in candidates for initiation is, to put it bluntly “to have a steady behind,” i.e. to be able to sit still and not one who hops around from one brotherhood to the next. That is, searching for a compatible master is highly advised for prospective members. The initiates, however, are expected to sit steadily in one prayer room, not indulge the secrets of the order including the ritual of initiation, and stick with the master for a relationship that is ideally expected to last in this world and the next. The personal tie to the master is deemed crucial.

The candidates who are invited to join must win the approval of their families prior to joining. For it is a requirement that the candidates have their parents’ consent to become formal members of the Bektashi community. When one becomes a muhib, this does not often present much of a problem. However when a muhib fulfills the requirements of becoming a dervish (and therefore a celibate monastic), this often brings about a major struggle between parents and the dervish to be. Their parents’ consent is indicated by either meeting with baba in person or by signing a letter of consent that does, despite all objections, give biological parents’ blessings to their son to become a dervish. This brings the families of the members into the fold of the community’s deliberations on membership advances.

Dervish Mikel is the oldest of three brothers. His parents wished him to marry and have children. Dervish Mikel described many quarrels over the issue of becoming a celibate dervish with his parents. For Dervish Myrteza, the only son in his family, the decision and approval of the parents for him to become a dervish was much more dramatic. When I visited Dervish Myrteza at Melan Tekke, his parents had taken residence with him and were employed by the tekke: his father was helping with a flock of sheep, while his mother was helping with cooking and indoor chores. This seemed to be the compromise they had made since they had no other children to support them in their old age. Not just parents, but some babas condemn the initiation of those who are the only boys in their families. In this strictly patrilineal society, parents whose only sons have become dervishes often assign blame for the halt of their patrilineal descent line onto the next generation to the Bektashi babas who initiated their sons into the Order.

Ways of advancement in the Sufi path

Becoming is a collective process that involves many actors. Leaders and followers, the spiritual family and the natal families of the insiders, all have a decisive input on the process. Thus the makeup of the community is in the hands of those who partake in the process of becoming. The following (ashiks and muhiban, but also dervishes in regards to baba's advance) maintain a performance log on their leaders. This performance history can become instrumental in making decisions about who to advance from a muhib to a dervish or from a dervish to a baba. As I have mentioned, there are two main ways of navigating the membership hierarchy. The first is spiritual worthiness,

which is judged by the size of the following and their public commendation of their leader's spiritual, and other, success. Some dervishes may be known for building and maintaining the tekke, others for successfully resolving the needs of their guests such as intercessions to heal, blessing a safe trip abroad, to have children, and sometimes even to pass a test in school.

One way to gauge the trust and respect people have (or lack) for their devotees, is to consider the ways in which success is measured by the Bektashi. Return visits by visitors whose wishes materialize are an indication of these dervishes' intercession and therefore also of God's favors upon them. The recognition that one's prayers are heard and of successful intercessions on behalf of the following are the most respected ways of advancing a member to a higher degree of initiation. These are verified through keeping track and being witness to prayers heard and others ignored: when someone seeks baba's help for an illness, receives a charm from baba, and later is healed, this counts in favor of baba's spiritual might. Prayers that go unheard become part of the following's collective memory of the leader's lack of spiritual worth. The following and clerics' peers also track leaders' command over esoteric knowledge and the degree that they operate within the parameters of the Bektashi norm in their daily routines. A proper dervish is seen hosting guests rather than socializing in local bars in the late hours. He is seen gardening and cooking rather than sleeping and watching television most of the day. A proper dervish starts his speech with *bismilah* and ends it with *eyvallah* rather than using foul language. A dervish that is committed to reading and discussing the Qur'an and texts written by mystics rather than reading about scandal and talking about celebrities. All of these are

criteria used for initiation into the higher degrees of membership. While advancement in the path is legitimated on observable grounds of practice, behavior, and knowledge, these attributes, in turn, are said to express God's grace as the minimal and sufficient explanation for why some advance and why others do not.

Baba Sadik, for example, is one of the many controversial leadership figures among the Albanian Bektashi. There is a growing corpus of testimonies on his performance that is circulated within a wide circle of his disciples in several Bektashi clusters throughout Albania. In their narratives of becoming Bektashi, most of his disciples note how, upon their first meeting with baba, they were struck almost instantaneously by baba's charismatic appeal and commanding presence. For many of his disciples the persona of baba became an immediate attraction and an invitation to join the Order. In addition, the attraction had to do also with the stark contrast between the idleness that often characterizes postsocialist Albania and Baba's active partaking in manual labor such as tending to tekkes' lands and looking after the animals, or building and maintaining tekke walls and structures. Since the members of the highest degrees of authority are spiritual guides to others, their conduct is very much under the constant scrutiny of the following. His commitment to rebuilding has earned Baba Sadik a reputation as a leader who is all about "*gur dhe beton,*" literally stones and concrete.

Baba's ability to build and his willingness to labor with his own hands validates his sanctity, as the following story illustrates. A couple who had set out to visit Baba Sadik at his Kuc Baba Tekke in the city of Vlorë approached a group of young men laying the foundation for the lower end of the retaining wall over which the tekke yard

and building is erected. They asked men who were covered in concrete after a long day's work of mixing cement and laying the foundation if they knew where baba was. They were told that baba would be with them shortly. What they did not realize right there and then was that they were actually talking to Baba Sadik who like the rest of his construction crew was covered in sweat and cement. This was a story told and retold to me numerous times by a good number of people that I met during several visits to Kuc Baba tekke. Aside from the usual stories about piety that followers present as evidence of their Baba's spiritual worth, narratives about the things that a baba or dervish has physically accomplished help to legitimize his position by meeting local criteria that are deployed to clarify and maintain existing social hierarchies. They deserve particular attention in our quest to learn something more of the ways that religious economy intersects with spiritual authority. I explore this further in the next section.

On unbecoming in expulsion narratives

Not all who may want to become formal members of the order succeed in their ambitions. Those who do, however, gain access to the social networks affiliated with the brothers and sisters of the way. A good many others occupy one membership category for the rest of their lives while few may either be demoted to lower degrees of membership or expelled altogether. Like the Tijaniyya (Abun-Nasr 1965: 39), the Bektashi⁴⁶ take membership into their order very seriously and avoid at all costs what Dervish Myrteza

⁴⁶ The Tijani believe that those who leave their order would have an adverse termination of their lives and die infidels (Abun-Nasr 1965: 39) while the Bektashi believe that those who leave invite the Bektashi curse that follows the expelled and their families for seven generations.

refers to as being burned by the Bektashi taxh. If initiation serves to reflect ways of becoming, expulsions, when they do happen, reflect a breach of virtues that are held sacred to the Bektashi. Expulsions reveal existing authority structures put in motion by a crisis and are indicative, in our case, of the internal rationale for another layer of the story of becoming: unbecoming. By clothing the leadership with saintly qualities, the authority of the leaders is idealized as absolute. Subsequently, while initiation or the binding of the master-disciple relationship is revered as a spiritual birthday, the severing of master-disciple relationship is more or less regarded as doomsday.

In practice, and largely because of the proliferation of secular and socialist forms of authority in postcommunist settings, expulsions often expose a contestation of leadership and saintly authority. This tension between people and institutions, in general, and institutions of religion, in particular, is part of a post socialist crisis of leadership that often revolves around questions of land and ambiguities of land ownership. It is especially the latter that presents the Bektashi community with moral dilemmas that challenge the solidarity of the order. Expulsions also reflect internal strife. They are anchored around the concern with how tekke lands should be handled and managed but they are also part of a wider pattern of power struggles within the community. The quest for power and authority within a fractured community permeates the discourses of demotion and help explain the interlocutors' perceptions about the events that led to the lowering in rank or even excommunications of Bektashi Babas, dervishes, and muhiban or formally initiated members. Expulsions are public statements that forever terminate the

community's relations with members who have served the community in the capacity of spiritual leaders and managers of tekke communities and properties.

For example, consider the case of Baba Besnik, who was expelled from the Bektashi for his handling of the tekke lands in the southern Albanian districts. His case is typical in that most of the pressure that leads to grievances and demotion comes from a demand in the current market for land parcels which are used for the erection of costly multi-story apartment complexes. In most cases, the owner of the parcel agrees to enter into a contract with a private developer whereby the owner allows the construction of an apartment complex on their land and in the end the land owner loses their one story home but usually gets ownership of two or more apartments in the new complex in return. One may be used as a residence, while a first floor apartment is either sold, leased out for the use of a small business (a grocery store or coffee shop), or the land owner may himself start up a new business. Much of the city of Tirana is now covered with newly-built apartment complexes and many of the characteristic two-story houses that once covered the city are slowly being replaced with the rising towers. In many places, neighbors would all have to agree to let a private development firm built on their neighborhoods. Most find it a good opportunity to give up their old homes for newly built apartment complexes. But others resist and some pockets of the old city still remain. These tend to be house blocks where the owners either do not themselves have the legal rights to sell (i.e. they own their homes which were given to them by the state but not the land) or who have not been able to strike a deal with their neighbors and developing firms who are aggressively looking for any available plots of land for new construction.

Both pressure from developers as well as the substantial monetary enticement that land-ownership promises have caused a highly charged debate about how tekkes should handle their land. In the past it was categorically forbidden to sell tekke lands for profit. Tekke lands, both those bought with tekke savings or gifted out to a tekke from private donors, are considered sacred property (*waqf* in Arabic, *vakëf* or *vend i shenjtë* in Albanian). Their management calls for the observance of rightful conduct. In cases where these lands are far away from the tekke and worked by layman, the expectation is that any agricultural production, less the expenses associated with their cultivation, will be donated to the tekke. One common belief repeated over and over again by the Bektashi, as well as by Albanians in general, is that “one should not take or steal from sacred sites.” As a Baba indicated during an after dinner conversation, this prohibition is not because “something will happen to you right away... but gradually and without noticing the sacred places will reclaim what has been taken from them: they take your soul slowly and without notice much like cotton balls take in moisture.” Many stories of ills and misfortune that befall those who have wronged a Bektashi tekke and used its properties for gain are circulated in a way that brings about fascination and interest in, as well as fear of, the “mystical” powers of tekkes and babas and dervishes to revenge any wrong done to them.

The only legitimate exceptions to the rule against selling tekke land are cases of last resort when the tekke may be facing extreme poverty. In these instances, and by the written approval of the sacred council, a tekke’s lands and/or structures could be sold to feed its inhabitants. In most cases, however, renting tekke properties is more likely, since

selling of land considered to be *vakëf* is *harram* and forbidden. However, there seems to be a tacit negotiation of this prohibition in postcommunist times, since sources for finances necessary to rebuild tekkes in ruins are few, and none of these sources has the financial potential that land sales offer at the current highly inflated prices. Thus, because of the confusion that currently reigns over land ownership throughout Albania and because of the intense demands for resources to fund the reconstitution of the Bektashi community, there is a heavy pressure on Bektashi clerics to sell small parcels from tekke holdings to private developers or to legally transfer tekke lands to the dwellers whose apartments and houses were built on tekke lands when the socialist state had control over them. But such acts are still regarded as disreputable and are sanctioned against if they become too blatant and can be cause for expulsion from the community.

The expulsion of Baba Besnik centered on the issue of his management of tekke properties in southern Albania, and illustrates some of the issues involved. According to the media who reported on the controversy, Baba Besnik revolted against a forged power of attorney granted to the secretary general of the order. This gave an authority to a third party to make decisions about tekke lands, such as selling them for profit. However according to the Bektashi constitution, this authority belongs to either an acting baba or a dervish of each tekke who oversees not only the religious functions of his center but who is also responsible for the management and use of tekke property. The denunciation of the secretary's authority that was granted by the supreme leader of the Order was the grounds for Baba Besnik's expulsion. But soon after the expulsion of Baba Besnik from the Order, a letter to the editors of *Panorama*, a national daily newspaper, appeared in

press. In this letter, Baba Besnik, a serving baba at the Asim Baba tekke who had been initiated by dede and elevated to the de-facto role of *gjysh* or grandfather and who was in charge of a number of historically well-established tekkes in southern Albanian districts, explained his side of the story. According to Dervish Mikel's testimony, Baba Besnik may have been well within his rights to defend the mismanagement of tekke properties but in doing so he may have undermined the authority of the office of the secretary general with the Headquarters and thus also that of Dede Reshat. The issue therefore was not merely one of mismanaging land, but of defiance of the Bektashi hierarchy. Before the sacred council had even met, Dede Reshat already had the Order's secretary general draft the excommunication notice that was then presented to the sacred council for approval. "I have made up my mind" were Dede Reshat's words to the council, "you [attending babas and dervishes] do what you will." Because progress in the Bektashi spiritual path is so dependent on the guidance and absolute authority of the spiritual leaders, all but two of the members in the council followed his lead and signed to expel Baba Besnik.

Another post-expulsion narrative that surrounds Baba Besnik's ordeal posits an even bigger conspiracy – a vendetta by the center against Baba Besnik that threatened to fracture the community internally. After his expulsion was ordered, Baba Besnik, unmarried and with almost a decade of service as a celibate monastic, returned to his father's home. His father, also an insider to the order and a disciple of Dede Reshat, traveled to the headquarters to demand an explanation for his son's misfortune. Although Dede Reshat was present at the tekke he had his dervishes notify the guest that he was

away. Angrily Baba Besnik's father shouted out his disapproval for the Dede to hear, saying that his family was now left without a future, and that he himself would give up his membership because of the unjust treatment of his son. Days later, a number of dervishes showed up to Baba Besnik's door demanding that he surrender his *taxh*, the headgear that symbolizes membership in the capacity of a dervish, baba, or dede for the Bektashi. They were told that he had received the headpiece at the mejdan and it was at the mejdan that he would return it in person. He was not about to "surrender his headpiece on the streets" (an insult to the dervishes who were portrayed as if they were dervishes of the street whereas Baba Besnik was a dervish of the hearth). After tempers cooled down Baba Besnik returned his clerical regalia on his own terms and the controversy was over. In the summer of 2011, I almost failed to recognize him amongst the pilgrims. He had shaved the beard and was dressed as most civilians in jeans and long sleeved shirt. I could now see his smile. He seemed happy and after a brief conversation he disappeared again into the crowd walking towards the shrine of Abaz Ali.

Expulsions reflect internal strife. They are anchored around the concern with how tekke lands should be handled and managed but they are also part of a wider pattern of power struggles within the community. The quest for power and authority within a fractured community underlies the discourses of expulsion and help to explain the interlocutors' perceptions about the events that led to eventual demoting or even excommunications of Bektashi Babas, dervishes, and muhiban or formally initiated members. For another example of this process, let us look at a much talked about expulsion of Baba Flamur, which alerts us to how land is still the issue of concern and a

backdrop to the establishment, reinforcement, or maintenance of authority. An account of becoming is closely aligned to these concerns for every promotion and an expansion of the circle of insiders realigns the social networks within individual tekke communities as well as the Albanian community as a whole.

Baba Flamur became notoriously popular with a good sized following and even more impressive networks. Some of his monetary gains were deemed suspicious and even illegal by other Bektashi commentators. Whatever the actual content of his “under the table” business dealings, clearly the networks he developed elevated baba to a person with a substantial monetary worth. In the impoverished postsocialist context, his accumulated wealth put Baba Flamur in a position of authority over investments meant to rebuild tekkes in ruins, and made him a popular host for lavish social events. An ashik who has been part of the personnel in charge of running the biggest pilgrimage event of the Bektashi community recalled how Baba Flamur arrived at the mountain, asked about the price for each lamb, and paid in cash for three of them. What the Ashik remembered as most unusual was that almost always pilgrims may purchase a lamb which they sacrifice (*kurban*) and later they roast the lamb on a spit, consume what they can on the mountain, give a portion (usually the right forelimb) to the tekke, and take the rest home with them to share with members of the family and also give some small portions to their relatives and neighbors. It is not exactly the ram sacrifice that pilgrims to Mecca or most Muslims around the world offer to the needy in its entirety, but what Baba Flamur did with his three rams is far from both. He severed the necks of each of the lambs himself, and as they were bleeding out and giving their last breath, he is reported to have thrown

them down the ravine. Ashik Fetah's biggest concerns were that there were plenty of poor people (gypsies) who come to the mountain to beg and collect what they can from pilgrims – that could certainly have used and appreciated the meat. In addition, the manner of his interactions with lamb owners and onlookers which was described as dismissive, arrogant, and quite unlike the expectations of someone dressed in the Bektashi garb.

In another scandalous act and again according to post-expulsion discourse, Baba Flamur is reported to have first demanded that a waiter at a restaurant in the southern coastal city of Sarandë kiss his hand as is customary for the Bektashi to kiss baba's hand. Baba Flamur's act was hardly a demonstration of charisma – it was rather an imperious demand for deference that should be granted spontaneously. As the waiter did not abide by this bizarre request, baba is reported to have used foul language and more remarkably to have also beaten the waiter. Other extravagant gestures were reported from various sources with many of them coming from the Albanian-American Bektashi of the Baba Rexheb Tekke in Detroit where Baba Flamur was sent for clerical service by Dede Reshat of the Headquarters in Tirana. Later during my fieldwork, I found out that this may have been technically an opportunity extended to Baba Flamur as a last chance to repair his antagonistic relations with the headquarters. It was also perhaps a way to send overseas the many headaches Baba Flamur was causing back home.

While in temporary residence at the Detroit tekke, Baba Flamur is remembered as one who handled and frequently used a number of cell phones. These, he often explained to those present, are part of his *punë* or business. While in the middle of conversations

with guests, Baba Flamur would answer every ring stating to the guests: “*puna nuk pret*” (literally, work does not wait). This is in direct contrast with what transpires during hosting events for the Bektashi. As already described, ample attention is given to each visitor by the hosts. Most dervishes and babas host each visitor or visiting party in private. They often sit very close to one another. In cases when a baba or dervish hosts guests as they come, a special effort is made by the hosts to converse with each and every visitor. When new guests arrive, they are greeted and asked to sit near the host. Upon conclusion of the conversation with one guest, babas and dervishes move on to the others. Upon arrival and departure the guests kiss baba’s hand and it is with their permission that they take a seat or leave the room. According to post-expulsion testimonies of those who were willing to discuss Baba Flamur’s fate within the Order, he did not fit the expected parameters for the degree of membership that he occupied; nor was he shy in showing the wealth that he had accumulated.

Many reasons were given to why he was removed as one of 20 or so babas who are currently in service in Albania, Kosovo, and Macedonia. They mostly concerned moral shortcomings such as those listed above, which were linked to his strong-willed character, his arrogance, and his tendency to be less than concerned with proper etiquette, as often demonstrated in unpleasant and impolite dealings with other people. Other explanations forefront his attention to secular business matters at the expense of expected spiritual monastic service at the tekke.

The tekke community in Detroit was progressively irritated with the repeated infractions in his interactions at the tekke as well as Baba Flamur’s interruptions of the

tekke activities by the ongoing ringing of cell phones from undisclosed parties. Finally, the board of the tekke sent a letter to the headquarters in Tirana formally asking to have Baba Flamur relieved of his duties at their tekke.⁴⁷ However, the most interesting, telling, and widely circulated event that is used to explain Baba Flamur's formal expulsion occurred during a pilgrimage to a mountaintop in Albania to which he traveled in a helicopter. This was a time when even dede, much older than Baba Flamur and not in good health, was still ascending the mountain via the unpaved and difficult mountain roads accompanied with his driver and anyone else that he shared a ride with. Most other people also drive to these remote destinations. Few people may hike or ride their mules and horses to the mountaintop. The poor quality of the roads makes for a daylong trip which in turn necessitates an overnight stay at the pilgrimage site. Most helicopter appearances to these remote sacred sites are by state figures such as the president and prime minister who often visit dede on the mountaintop during important pilgrimages such as the Days of Tomorr in Abaz Ali tekke. In 2007, years after the expulsion of Baba

⁴⁷ It should be noted that there have been many babas and dervishes from Albania in the last decade who were sent to Baba Rexheb tekke in the outskirts of Detroit with the aim of bringing this tekke under the leadership of the World Headquarters in Tirana. While in Taylor, Michigan, newly arrived babas recall their new residence as a difficult place to serve since people here come for a short visit on weekends because they have busy working schedules throughout the week. In contrast, in Albania, there is a constant flow of guests throughout the day, and babas and dervishes are in constant company of people who seek out their company. Another difficulty has been the determination of the Baba Rexheb Tekke's administrators, who have so far resisted handing over the leadership of the tekke to clerics sent from Albania. Of course, tekke financial property and land property are at stake when it comes to a merger between the more or less independently administered Baba Rexheb tekke in Michigan and the Headquarters in Tirana. This conflict of interest is seen in other American mosques where mullahs from Saudi Arabia or Egypt may not be in tune with the beliefs and practices of their congregations. But Muslim Americans have a choice, whereas the Bektashi have only a recourse to the central authority of the headquarters in Tirana.

Flamur, dede Reshat also used military helicopters lent to him by the Albanian Armed Forces, courtesy of generals and high ranked officials of Bektashi descent, to get to and from the mountaintop. It was during the descent of the helicopter carrying Sali Berisha, former prime minister of Albania, that a muhib of the Order told me about Baba Flamur's irreparable mistake.

“The helicopter went around the mountaintop several times,” said the muhib. “It raised a cloud of dust and made such a commotion. While everybody was expecting the president of Albania, there appeared Baba Flamur coming out of the helicopter,” muhib said. To many, this was considered the final act that severed Bab Flamur's relationship with dede to a point of no repair. It was in effect an undermining of Dede's authority by a blatant show of power and authority afforded by wealth. The gesture implies that “I, a baba, can afford a helicopter whereas dede can only afford a bumpy ride to the top of the mountain.” After the expulsion, Baba Flamur is believed to have maintained part of his following and continues to practice some of the functions that he previously practiced as a bona fide Bektashi Baba. But most members of the order did not like to speak about him, and I was unable to learn much about his present circumstances. Most of the testimonies provided about this case of expulsion were collected through brief conversations with different people: mostly ashiks and muhiban. Dervishes and babas tended to be much more reluctant to divulge the happenings in any great detail. In most cases they simply stated their disapproval of Baba Flamur's conduct. There are a few sporadic mentions of Baba Flamur in post-expulsion literary output. Some acknowledge that Baba Flamur was a highly attained mystic who has gone into hiding. Others believe

that he is a *kalender* or wandering mystic whose whereabouts are unknown. His more committed followers may well argue that he has gone beyond the ordinary rules of conduct and that he may be enlightened.

Whatever the truth may be, it is clear that Baba Flamur has been denied entrance to the tekke as a site of formal learning in direct contradiction to the rights afforded to him by the Bektashi constitution of 1929 Article 40 which clearly states: “when muhiban of a tekke accuse the highest ranked at their tekke for inability (*pazotësi*), and when the accusations are proven to be true by the highest ranked of that grandfatherhood, the sacred council, based on the dispositions granted by the Bektashi constitution may remove the accused from their post and grants them a place just for living.” That is, the demoted are allowed to live out their days at a tekke away from the one where they had served but are no longer allowed the previously held rights to wear Bektashi garb or to serve the people. This right is again confirmed in the 1951 Constitution Article 66 which grants the right to Dede to secure a living space at a tekke to all those removed from service because of old age, physical inability, or disciplinary reasons. Curiously, and perhaps as a result of circumstances of the postcommunist transition, the constitutions of 1993 and 2000 make no mention of post-expulsion rights for shelter. All in all, it appears that expulsion nullifies all rights and privileges that members once held, puts a halt to the possibility for spiritual advance, but perhaps not to the popularity of the excommunicated amongst their following.

Post-expulsion discourses may not be primarily about the actual events and motivations behind the expulsions. Given the heightened sensitive nature of the

circumstances surrounding these events, it was not possible for me to discern whether the allegations against Baba Besnik or Baba Flamur were true or not. What is important for my purposes here is to document and explain the ways that people speak about ways of unbecoming in post-expulsion narratives. Rather, they should be regarded as the people's testimony of what they consider to be legitimate reasons for being excommunicated from the ranks of the Bektashi. In addition, the available discourses on expulsion make boundaries and authority structures apparent. Post-expulsion narratives reflect reframing of the actual events and responses that surround the excommunication of members in some of the highest spiritual and administrative leadership of the order. They highlight an undermining of established spiritual authority in handling tekke properties and wealth.

Both cases I have cited are examples of the use, and also abuse, of conspicuous consumption as a power enabled by economic worth. This way we see in both cases that such consumption is understood as a public undermining of dede, who holds the central authority in the Order and whose authority is in the Bektashi view absolute. Especially in Baba Flamur's case, we see how he showed too much wealth, and in a way have revealed to the public that which should, as the discourses suggest, not be publically displayed – that is, rivalry and discord within the order.

The Bektashi conceptualizations of spiritual authority in both cases reveal something about tacit knowledge on becoming and remaining Bektashi. What expulsions in the end show in ways that other kinds of ethnographic data do not is that which may not be tolerated by the community. In these important internal junctures or differences of opinion about the handling of tekke lands, management of tekke properties, nuances of

instrumentality, greed, and proper conduct by the leadership of the Order we may be in a better position to uncover the ambiguities and tensions implicit in the Order's internal structures of authority. In the Bektashi case, undermining these foundational structures of Bektashia threatens the very identity of Bektashi as a social system inclusive of tekke, leaders, and their followers. Revealing these challenges from within, as opposed to keeping them hidden away, is a blow to the very essence of esoteric knowledge, which depends to a large degree on secrecy. What I mean by secrecy here is an organized effort to keep insider knowledge away not only from outsiders to the order, but more importantly, as the previous account of spiritual hierarchy demonstrates, to control the flow of esoteric knowledge internally and in accordance with hierarchy. The later concerns primarily insiders. However, since expulsions are necessarily public statements severing the community's relations with former members, they offer a snapshot of lived experiences where insider-outsider boundaries are put in sharper focus. The substratum in the story of becoming is to teach obedience and respect and reinforce the fractured and contested authority of the spiritual leadership, which is exemplified in stories of unbecoming.

The emerging story I have told about the ways of becoming and unbecoming Bektashi takes place in a context of a shortage of clerics and a competition over a relatively low number of people willing to become initiated into a Sufi Brotherhood whose committed devotees must commit to celibate monasticism. In Krujë, a city that is predominantly Bektashi, there are at least three competing Bektashi clusters. This is unlike other places where the Albanian Bektashi are often found living next to Albanian

Orthodox and Catholic Christians as well as Albanian Sunni Muslims. On the mountain overlooking the city of Krujë is Sari Salltëk Tekke, and just on the way out of the city is a much frequented tyrbe erected over the footstep of Sari Salltëk, a Bektashi missionary who brought the teaching of Haji Bektash Veli to the Balkans in the 15th century. Sari Salltëk is believed to have left his footprint (a landing mark) in jumping from the mountaintop and traveling onward to the Greek Island of Corfu where he is believed to have preached under the name of Saint Spiridhion. Aside from these main sites, the Shememi Baba Tekke just outside of the city is one of the six grandfatherhoods in Albania. It oversees a number of tekkes in several neighboring districts. Other sites are located throughout this region and a considerable number of people are frequent visitors to Bektashi tekkes while a good many others have participated in the initiation of a number of babas who are active in this region. Only recently, there have been mass initiations in groups of 30 and sometimes close to 100 or more people reported in Krujë where Dede Reshat, Baba Mondi, and Baba Sadik have each in turn established sizable followings. That they are not always on good terms with one another was clear during my visits to these sites in 2007 and the less than favorable impressions that each of the three camps voiced about one another. Each member's loyalties are with their murshid and his following and while all babas are expected to be in solidarity with one another, competition over the limited number of followers, available resources, and differing visions over contents of sacralization and the reconstitution of religious life often lead to tensions and fragmentations of the community.

This competition is most clearly visible over uninitiated ashiks and potential candidates for membership. Initiation happens only when the initiate has taken his time before deciding on his murshid. After the initiation, the bond between the two is idealized as steadfast and absolute, since the fate of the disciple in the here and the hereafter is in the hands of their spiritual guide. There are some rare cases where a Bektashi dervish and baba may also hold membership in other orders like the Rifa'i. But even though in principle followers are free to look around and find a suitable murshid after initiation any shifting of followers' loyalties is frowned upon. In fact, the disciples of Dede Reshat, continue to be loyal to Dede Reshat even after his passing way. "He lets us know," stated one of his disciples in talking about Dede continuous posthumous advice and looking after his followers.

Baba Sadik, the man of "stones and concrete," is a leader who has gained fame as he has renovated and rebuilt some of the main tekkes in Albania. He has a devout and skilled following made up of people in positions of power such as politicians, lawyers, doctors, and professors. He enjoys also an apparent charismatic appeal that holds his disciples captive under his command. More usual is the trajectory of Baba Sadik, who has established a following in several main urban centers of Albania, most notably in Vlorë where he was able to recover tekke lands, and get the necessary permits and needed wealth to build Kuc Baba tekke from the ground up, in Krujë where he most recently renovating the Tekke of Fushkrujë, and most recently also in Gjirokastër where Baba Sadik took over Baba Besnik's leadership of Asim Baba Tekke following Baba Besnik's expulsion from the Order.

Seen this way, expulsions reveal a pattern of shifting alliances and growth in the popularity of particular babas and dervishes with charismatic appeal and ability to lead effectively both in spiritual and practical realms of daily routines. Some clerics, like Baba Flamur, are expelled from the path of spiritual attainment and quest for saintly authority within the order while others, like Baba Sadik, experience a rise in their popularity and are aided in their rise by official recognition from the Dede. The common denominator in the stories of becoming and unbecoming has to do with evolving structures of authority as well as the impact of the following on the makeup of the leadership. The process of becoming to which the Bektashi pay much attention shows a persistent interrogation of the devotees' performance by their followers: despite a clear shortage of celibate monastics, there are still expulsions. When the story of becoming is put together with stories of expulsion, we understand becoming as ambiguous (progress is possible but so is demotion) and centered on the persona of the dede, and certain babas and dervishes. Beyond the individual, these processes purge the much contested leadership of the Order of undesired members.

Finally, the underlying concerns suggested by stories of becoming and unbecoming are about babas, dervishes, and other persons in position of leadership and about the "tekke" as a moral collective. There is a competition over each tekke's reputation which is based on its specific functions and overall performance in serving a following over time. A tekke's reputation is often associated with the performance of babas and dervishes who have served there, for a tekke is first and foremost a place where things happen in a particular way. In this manner, I often heard the Bektashi of

Taylor, Michigan speak of the greatness of their tekke that “did not hold” the likes of Baba Flamur as if the keeping of the leadership as well as their removal is part of the overall performance of the sacred and of the resacralizing qualities of the holy sites of the Order. In this manner a tekke is known as a place where miracles happen through displays of supernatural powers and intercessions by the babas and dervishes that serve there. At least in regards to higher membership (dervish, baba, dede), the tekke is also a place of exclusion of those who cannot meet standards of integrity and sacrifice. Exclusion validates the honor of the tekke and upholds its sanctity. In all cases, followers validate their leaders based on their moral character, i.e. living what one is preaching as well as the degree to which a baba or dervish conforms the normative expectations of the collective, an idealized imaginary of who the Bektashi are and how they ought to operate both internally as well as in their relations with the outside world. It is an imaginary that is accessible in people’s formulations of what the embodiments and enactments of certain social roles such as baba and dede should entail. Expulsions show insiders’ boundaries that may not be compromised. They may also show, as reported in public venues, the ways outsiders interpret internal boundaries and transgressions. The unbelievers may well focus on expulsions as proof of the hypocrisy of the babas and the falsity of Bektashi claims to sanctity. Whereas, insiders focus on expulsions as ways to sacralize the community by purging individual members who deviate from the fundamentals of the Bektashi creed.

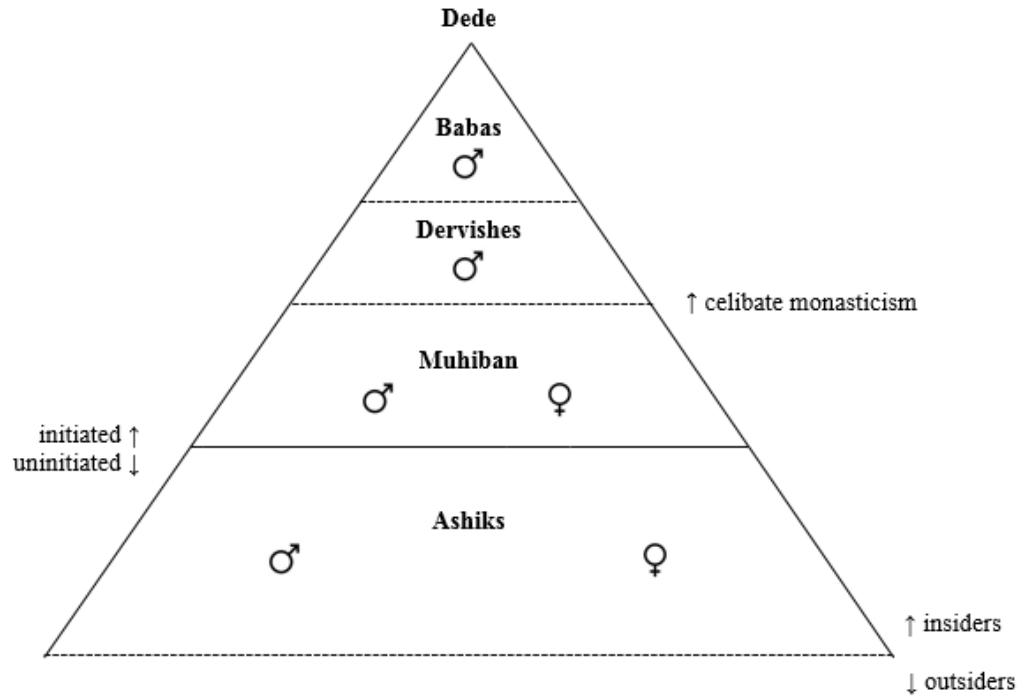


Figure 4.1. Bektashi initiatic hierarchy and boundaries of membership.



Figure 4.2. Photo of the ceremonial room at a Bektashi tekke. Gjirokaštër, 2007.

CHAPTER 5

The Sainly Life of Haji Dede Reshat Bardhi

“Bektashinjtë nuk lindin, ata bëhen.”
 “The Bektashi are not born, they become.”

When asked about the destiny of Bektashia, Haji Bektash is believed to have stated that "my way is like a string that will, at times, stretch really thin, but never break." An account about the postsocialist reconstitution of religion that this dissertation is committed to would be incomplete without a regard for the individual actors who live and experience the very thinning and thickening of the string that links past and present Bektashi through time and across space. Dede Reshat (1935-2011), more than others, was behind the Bektashi efforts to put themselves together in the first two decades following the fall of the communist rule. Assuming the leadership role of the Albanian Bektashi from 1991 until his passing away in 2011, Dede Reshat received his community in complete ruins with no functioning tekkes or serving clerics. During communism, and afterwards, he is responsible for keeping the string of Bektashia unbroken and the postcommunist return of the Albanian Bektashi community. An excursion into the biographical details about Dede's life illuminates the resacralization of leadership and the legitimacy of saintly authority. It offers also a study case of how an individual's life was impacted by the turbulent history from the onset of the communist rule to its eventual demise.

I refer to Dede Reshat's life as "sainly" because this is a locally deployed category. People spoke about Dede as "*i shenjtë*" (sainly [male]), or as "*shenjtor*"

(saint). Since 1993, his official title has been *Kryegjyshi Botëror i Bektashinjve* (literally, World Arch-Grandfather of the Bektashi). In 1991, then Baba Reshat performed the pilgrimage to Mecca, and is among a handful of Dedes and Babas in the history of Bektashia who have earned the honorary title “Haji.” For the Bektashi, the position of Dede may only be occupied by one central spiritual and supreme leader of the Order. Often referred to as “*udhëheqës shpirtëror i Bektashinjve*” (“spiritual leader of the Bektashi”) by the formal members of the Order, he will be remembered as a spiritual guide and is trusted to maintain this role for many of his disciples even (and especially) after he passed away on Saturday of April 2nd, 2011. By *Rregullore e Brendshme* (Book of Internal Ordinance) Dedes have to be celibate and to have never married. Despite many pressures by the antireligious state-sponsored warfare that pressured him to forgo his religious oath to celibacy, Dede Reshat was among the few survivors who remained faithful to his oath of celibacy.

Shortly after the passing of Dede Reshat, news media were quick to note his role in the *ringjallje* (revival) and *rimëkëmbje* (literally, to walk again on one’s own feet, i.e. that the community regains its uprightness) of the Albanian Bektashi. It is under Dede’s care, claimed a newscast by *News24* that the construction of some 120 *objekte të kultit* (religious centers, both tekkes and tyrbes) “accomplished a true revival” (*ringjallje të vërtetë*) of the Bektashi faith in Albania. In his condolences Eugen Wollfarth, the serving ambassador of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe to Albania stated that "Dede’s contribution towards religious harmony and tolerance in Albania and abroad and especially within the Bektashi community will remain one of his longer lived

legacies." Dede Reshat has been recognized as one of 500 most influential Muslims of his time under the "Lineage" category by the Royal Islamic Strategic Studies Centre of Georgetown University. It is here where he is noted to be the leader of 5-7 million Bektashi adherents worldwide. To the Bektashi, these accomplishments and recognitions are considered a part of Dede Reshat's arsenal of saintly proofs.

This chapter aims to reconstruct the life history of the spiritual leader of the Bektashi community and looks into the way that Dede's life story is managed by his following. Dede Reshat's life story spans from pre- to postsocialist Albania, thus reflecting how the history of the community in these important periods plays out in the life of an individual. His leadership role and his duties to reinstate and maintain the functions of Kryegjyshata (Headquarters) demanded much of his energy during the last 19 years of his life. Isolating several revealing situations from fieldwork settings, I look into the complexities of saintly life in Dede's interactions with visitors, documentary film makers and journalists, with his Ashiks, Muhiban, Dervishes, and Babas. The ethnographic narrative recalls his early days in the words of those who were close to him. I analyze an apparent paradox: in his later years, Dede was often surrounded by people, yet, by his own admission and my observations loneliness prevails. Other tensions that are intertwined with that of loneliness amidst constant company are the tensions between his kin (blood family) and his devotees (spiritual family) as well as between sainthood and the demands of modern life.

To be better understood, the three tensions must be carefully contextualized. To do this, I first present a biographical sketch of Dede Reshat based on two main sources.

The first is an official biography that was first published by the bimonthly journal of the Albanian Bektashi *Urtësia* and later republished in lieu of an obituary the Sunday immediately following the passing away of Dede Reshat. The second account gives another view on Dede's life history from someone who has known him closely from the time when Dede became a Dervish at the age of 17 until his passing when he was 76 years old. The third section provides more details into the saintly qualities of Dede Reshat and the way that they are talked about by Dede's following both in daily discourse as well as in songs about him. The concluding remarks concern an explanation of the paradoxes of saintly life that makes use of the account on conversion narratives of being and becoming that were discussed in the previous chapter. The broader significance revealed by the use of different media is that the biography of the saintly figure is carefully managed, if not censored, by actors that are active in the processes of the reconstitution of religious life. The data points to a hijacking of saint's biography by those that through an assumed authority over the biographical detail claim also their legitimacy to lead (and be the beneficiaries of) the revivalist project.

The narrative of suffering that is highlighted by both Dede Reshat's own words as well as by conversion narratives are an integral part of the internal stories of being born and becoming. While the preceding chapter is mainly about ways of becoming Bektashi, this chapter focuses on the story of being born [saintly]. Suffering and sacrifice go hand in hand with the sacralization of the individual spiritual leaders of the community. Given the accomplishments of Dede Reshat as evidenced in the plurality of spiritual songs and poetry about him, and by emphasizing narratives of being born over narratives of

becoming (the latter are posthumously at the service of the former), what is accomplished is a concerted testimony that elevates Dede Reshat's biography to a hagiography about a saintly life. These, too, are narratives that serve to legitimize not only the sanctity of spiritual leaders but also that of the community that they lead. It is at the same time an ongoing authentication of the current leadership whose legitimacy depends on previous claims to leaders who hold spiritual chain of succession (*silsila*) together by linking the community at present to Haji Bektash and through the spiritual founder of the Order to Imam Ali, Prophet Mohammed, and ultimately to God.

Saintly biography conundrum

The construction of biographies depends on abstractions and interpretations of what is known about one's life. Admittedly, the writing of this life history is complicated by the fact that there are nearly no autobiographical materials to be used for cross referencing. If there is a blind spot that must be remedied, it has to do with the fact that Dede was rarely, if ever, indulging into details about his own past. The biography presented here is constructed using four types of sources: my own fieldwork experience with Dede Reshat, representations of Dede Reshat in songs authored by his following, his official biography compiled and managed by the administrators of the Headquarters, and biographical details by firsthand accounts from people who claimed to know him well for much of his life. In this section I draw upon a set of first hand encounters with Dede Reshat. These eye witness accounts and fieldwork observations are the strength of this work as a whole. In this chapter, however, the interactions that I had with Dede Reshat give a sense of how he was when I met him and reveal only a fraction of his life history

from 2005 to 2008. The following interactions show that even occasions there were expected to yield autobiographical data were permeated by Dede's primary concern with his guests and preoccupations with his community in transition rather than any autobiographical indulgence.

My very first meeting with Dede Reshat took place around noon on Sunday, July 17th of 2005. I spent most of that summer working as one of the two ethnographers for a diverse research team of archaeologists, historians, and ethnographers in a northern Albanian Catholic enclave (Galaty et al. 2013). That summer I was also scouting for a dissertation fieldwork site and made a brief visits to the main Bektashi tekke in Tirana. I remember the day of my visit to the Headquarters to be a mildly hot summer day. Yet the well-shaded areas within the tekke walls helped provide a relative coolness and calmness that was in stark contrast with the hot, crowded and loud neighboring parts of the city. By contrast to the more busy interiors that I got accustomed to during my fieldwork two years later, the tekke grounds stood out as vast and, at first sight, deserted. This being the main tekke of the Albanian Bektashi and the World Headquarters of the Order, the relative lack of human commotion within the compound and apparent signs of buildings under construction defeated my expectations.

As I made my way towards the main building of the compound, I found Dede Reshat sitting on a bench under the shade of a cypress tree. From a distance he seemed to be playfully chit chatting with a young boy who must have been about 7 or 8 years old. As I approached, I noticed Dede sent the boy away towards the main building which allowed for us to have a one on one first meeting. I kissed Baba's hand in conformity with

custom, and he held my hand and drew me closer to embrace and be embraced by him. Dede held on to my hand and gestured for me to sit next to him on the bench. For a while, and again later, we were looking at one another without a verbal exchange and in full anticipation of the conversation that was expected to follow. It felt as though Dede wanted to know the reason for my visit. In retrospect, I became very familiar with the piercing gaze of Dede Reshat who preferred and commanded direct eye contact while talking with guests. As well as the gentle rhythmic tapping of the fingers, his turning outwards and to the side of one or both of his hands as if to ask: so? These looks and gestures often served to demarcate conversational shifts from one topic to the next, or to invite his guests to partake in conversation and talk about the reason for their visit.

Dede rarely talked first. When he did, it was only to invite his guests into his conversation. From being part of countless hosting events during my time at the Headquarters, the usual greetings between Baba and his guests would almost always be followed by an explanation of the guests' intent behind their visit. Confronted with prolonged silence which to me was also a demand to speak, I mentioned to Dede that I had been at the Asim Baba tekke in Gjirokastër before, and that because I had not yet been at the main tekke in Tirana, I wanted to visit. He was happy to hear this and proceeded to ask about the whereabouts of my family, studies, and when I had left Albania. Upon hearing that my family members were abroad and either working, in school, or both, Dede interjected: "Albanians outside of Albania work diligently, but here no one wants to work." "Instead," he continued, "their first order of business upon waking

up early in the morning is to pay a visit to the local pubs which one can find wide open and ready for business well before sunrise."

Dede, by now in his late 60s, held onto my arm as if to use me for support and got up slowly. He invited me inside so that he could offer me something sweet. Candies or *llokume* (Turkish delights) are customary offerings to tekke guests. We made our way slowly up the stairs of the main building, through the main gate (Figure 5.1), and into a hallway that led us to a guest room. The place was well furnished but as deserted as the outside courtyard. The guest room was simply furnished with thin single sitting armchairs that were positioned in a circular fashion. Each one of them was covered by a white sheep skin which made for a comfortable cushion. The guest room had many long and wide windows looking over the courtyard. It was very quiet in the guest room and comfortably cool. The only discernible noise was a breeze that gently caressed the long curtains in translucent white as the draft made its way into the interior spaces of the tekke.

Dede reached over for the bowl of sweets and he offered them to me. As I was accepting one of the sweets, Dede pointed to the many empty chairs in the room with his left hand. "The pubs have their chairs lined up, just like my chairs here," he stated. "The only difference is that the pubs' chairs are always full from the early hours of the morning until well after midnight." Again he brought up the topic of Albanians leaving the country en mass. In 2007, and indeed until Dede passed away in 2011, the call for Albanians to settle down and work in their own country and for Albanians abroad to return home remained one of Dede's main appeal to all Albanians, Bektashi and non-

Bektashi alike. At this stage he paused once again as if he was expecting me to carry on. It was just the right occasion for me to let Baba know about my plans of return. "Some do return, Baba," I said. As soon as I was about to disclose my intentions of coming back to the tekke for fieldwork, Baba pulled me towards him with his right arm and hugged me. It felt as if he had granted his approval for me to return for fieldwork without the need for me to ask for it.

At first, Baba's speech was not easy to understand. Not only did he speak the Northern Geg dialect which I had just beginning to pick up from my fieldwork in the remote northern Albanian villages of the Shala Valley, but his advanced age and particular intonation demanded a great deal of effort to understand his conversation in its entirety. For some visitors this worked to discourage them from trying to follow but for most of Dede's guests it was an incentive to pay close attention in order to glean his meaning. At this first meeting, and during the first few months of fieldwork in 2007, I understood more of what he was saying partly from his words and mostly from his highly suggestive expressions and body movements. For example Dede did not need to describe that the chairs on his guest room were empty. He did this through body movements: an upward swiping of his left hand towards the direction of the empty chairs and his melancholic facial expression which revealed a longing for the company of tekke guests in ways that words by themselves fail to match. Because Baba had recently undergone a heart bypass operation, he seemed a bit tired. Soon after the conversation and the offerings of sweets, he walked along with me to the main door, holding my left arm and gently leaning on me as if to find extra support. I found him to be very approachable and

felt as if we had known one another for some time. His use of words "*bir*" (literally, son) at the end of his sentences, constant eye contact, and closeness in sitting and walking mannerisms all added to this first impression. I bowed and kissed Dede's hand again and bid him farewell not entirely sure whether he understood my intentions to return nor whether I had the permission I needed to return for fieldwork.

Two years later I was to spend most of my days on the tekke grounds. The initial impressions of a space lacking people were quickly overridden by daily routines whereby the tekke was less crowded at certain times but more so in others. In retrospective, I may have met Dede at a quiet time, though it is also true that from 2005 to 2011 the tekke progressively received more visitors. Throughout my fieldwork in 2007, Dede Reshat was more frequently in the company of others. Now Dervish Mikel had taken residence at the headquarters and was in service of Dede Reshat. Dede would wake up in the early hours before sunrise and together with about 10 full time residents at the tekke spent the hours before sunrise in the prayer room (*mejdan*) and in each other's company. Afterwards, each would retreat to their own sleep quarters and meet again for coffee, tea, and breakfast. By 8 a.m. the secretary general and the staff of the administration (secretary, accountants, cooks, gardeners, and workers of the publishing house) one by one would meet with Dede Reshat to say good morning, catch up with any developments and tasks that needed his permission and paperwork that needed his signature. The time from 10 a.m. to noon as well as 5 to 7 p.m. were reserved for unannounced open door visitations. Visitors were not turned away at other times. However, people had the best chances of visiting with Dede Reshat during these hours. It was no longer possible to

simply walk up to Dede Reshat as I did in my first visit to the center for guests were first greeted by Dede's helpers. In some occasions, only some of the guests were allowed to meet with Dede. This was often left at the discretion of Dede's helpers.

Dede Reshat ate lunch in the company of the Dervishes and any guests who spent a day or two on the tekke's hostel while the workers, men and women, ate their lunch on the room adjacent to the kitchen where Dede dined. Other times the carefully prepared meals were brought to his room by his disciples. During siesta hours Dede spent some time relatively uninterrupted in his own quarters. In the hours preceding the afternoon visitations Dede was often with his disciples, drinking coffee and conversing. Dinners were also occasions for Dede, his Dervishes, disciples, guests and personnel to come together in bigger gatherings of 15-20 people. Other dinners required two long rows of tables and chairs to be set up and they often averaged up to 50 or more participants. During these functions Dede Reshat was in charge, making sure all was in order with the food and drinks, taking care of where the guests sat. The opening and closing rituals of the dinner were always officiated by him, and he kept close watch over the contents of the conversation and chanting in between making sure that religious hymns were sang in the proper rhythm without any missing lines or even words. In other occasions, during *ashura* rituals for example, and the feast of sacrifice (*kurban barjam*), the room where I noted the empty chairs were not sufficient for incoming guests who were there to meet with Dede Reshat. During these occasions the tekke's interior and exterior saw a flood of guests from diverse backgrounds which were hosted in two separate guest rooms, welcomed by a handful of greeters and a careful management of waiting lines.

Dede Reshat's life for the time that I got to know him in person was very much about being in service of his tekke, disciples, and guests. In 2007 visitations for *kurban barjam*, the tekke was visited by foreign ambassadors to Albania, leaders of other religious communities, members of the Albanian parliament, Albania's President and Prime Minister along with their entourage, a good number of security personnel, police officers, and members of Albanian military to the highest ranks. Dede's disciples were each assigned different functions during these hosting events. An elderly Muhib was assigned to greet guests and show them to the guest room. With the help of another they kept track of guests coming and going by expediting their stays and making sure that each chair was not put through the ordeal of holding the weight of any single dignitary for too long. It took some skill in Dede's part who directed incoming guests to free chairs, often leading to all those who were sitting to shift down a space. Dede was in effect keeping and installing a hierarchy of favor through the aid of his helpers who, through a series of signals and gestures, tried to manage the crowds and offer the customary sweets to each one of them. In 2007 the invitations for the holiday were split into two different time frames which helped with traffic management.

Dede's chairs were clearly used well in 2007 even as the chairs at the pubs located just outside of the tekke's surrounding walls remained equally busy with customers. What more, even though Dede was clearly in high demand and almost always surrounded by people, he himself would talk about being alone. One early morning I had just arrived at the tekke. There was much commotion over the matter of a documentary film making crew that had arrived from America. They were putting together a

documentary about the saving of Jews in Albania in World War II (Goslins 2012). At the headquarters they wanted to film the tekke and interview Dede Reshat about the particular role of the Bektashi community in sheltering and protecting the small Jewish community in Albania as well as other Jews who ended up in Albania as they were leaving Western Europe and countries that were occupied by German armies (Gershman 2008). Although Dede Reshat had agreed to the interview, his Dervishes and others at the tekke were very much concerned about the repercussions of being part of this project. For one thing, Dede Reshat knew that the Albanian Bektashi were really behind this humanitarian act. Mithat Frashëri, a Bektashi who was a high ranking official with the ministry of interior at the time is reported to have issued an under the radar order about a possible search and capture offensive by Germans against any Jews residing in Albania. However, while the documentary was singling out Albanian Muslims (and the Bektashi primarily) as those who saved the Jews⁴⁸ the Dervishes were concerned that by appearing in the documentary and taking credit for saving the Jews, the Albanian Bektashi would antagonize Albanians of Muslim as well as Christian background who also answered Mithat Frashëri's call to protect the Jewish families. To Dede Reshat, aside from the task of leading the efforts of the reconstitution of religion on behalf of the Albanian Bektashi, building and maintaining mutual ties with the other religious communities in Albania was just as important a priority as any.

⁴⁸ The documentary was initially titled *God's House*. A JWM Production, it is now titled *Besa: The Promise*. Since its release in July 19th, 2012 the documentary is being shown in select theaters in United States and abroad.

That morning I sat, as I often did, on the benches outside the kitchen with Dervish Mikel and we were both gazing over the northern horizon. It was overcast and fluffy white clouds were hanging over the mountain ranges around the capital. Dervish called upon the clouds to come on and come along and to bring down a mighty rain. Unsure of the outcome of helping the film production, he hoped that the scheduled trip of the documentary crew would be cancelled because of bad weather. Despite the appeal to the heavens for bad weather, the camera crew arrived. They set up their cameras, the lights were on, and Dede was shown to his seat. Surrounded by the bright lights, one of the crewmembers hooked the microphone to his green cloak and the cameraman operating a mounted camera only a few feet away from Dede made a few final adjustments. Meanwhile Dede was gently tapping his fingers on the armrest in anticipation of the guests' inquiries. The director was holding a microphone but was not part of the shot. She was surrounded by the filming crew who were in their second visit to Albania filming the country and interviewing survivors or descendants of the people able to retell the story about the saving of the Jews. The Secretary General who was involved in the logistics of setting up the interview was there, as well as two Dervishes in residence at the headquarters. I was involved in the communications between the documentary crew, Dede, and his administration from their initial visit, through the many failed attempts to bring the filming crew and Dede together. Now that Dede was sitting in front of the camera, I was also present this late Sunday morning in the fall of 2007, trusted to serve as the interpreter for the occasion.

With all systems ready to go, director's first request was for Dede to state his name and affiliation for the record. It was the most awkward first questions to translate. I told Dede that they wish to know who he was. For a brief moment, it seemed that I was experiencing the perfect set up for a flow of autobiographical detail. It was awkward because Dede, Babas and Dervishes generally avoid speaking about themselves. It is this very Sufistic tendency to avoid autobiographical indulgence that poses a challenge to putting together a comprehensive sketch of Dede's life history. Appearing visibly puzzled by the request, Dede jettisoned the filmmaker's demand and jumped right into Bektashi commitment to the People of the Book, Abrahamic faiths, and how Albanians of Muslim and Christian backgrounds all contributed to protecting Jewish families in the war years of 1940s. As Dede walked out of the taping room and into the hallway where his dervishes were waiting for him, he opened his arms as if to say that despite their anxiety over the outcome there was nothing to worry about.

The next morning, I met with Dede Reshat who had come to the kitchen for a glass of milk – his usual breakfast. We were by ourselves for a moment despite the commotion that the Dervishes and the kitchen staff were making in the adjacent room. Dede's remarks, however, had nothing to do with the attention of the filmmakers that he had recently received. Instead, he looked at me and said: "*Jam vetëm*," literally "I am alone." He continued, "I wake up in the morning, alone. I take a bath, there is no one to help me but myself. I go to sleep, all alone." He had made similar remarks before but never this directly and in such plain language. In another occasion, he was talking to an elderly guest about his loneliness, and the guest in return disagreed. "You have the

Dervishes, Baba," he said. "What dervishes, what dervishes do I have?" was Dede's quick reply, as if to imply that they were but a few or that they do not live up to his expectations. Perhaps his point of reference was the early days when he too was a Dervish. To him there was a big difference between dervishes of the postcommunist present and those of the pre-communist past.

My own encounters with Dede Reshat, his daily preoccupations at the Headquarters, and the interchange with the documentary film making crew, lead up to the difficulty of constructing a biography. In light of a lack of autobiographical detail in fieldwork setting, the task of getting to the life history of Dede Reshat must also depend on other sources about the life and works of the Bektashi leader. It is to these that I turn to next.

The official biographical sketch

Although Dede did not speak much about his early life, he spoke a great deal more, by comparison, about his murshid Dede Ahmed Ahmataj (1916-1980). Aside from these recounted stories about his past, people who were close to Dede (in my sample his biological brother, and the nephew of Dede's master Ashik Fetah) spoke to me about the early life of Dede Reshat, as well as about the whereabouts and life of Dede Reshat during- and in postcommunist Albania. Given Dede Reshat's leadership role over the Albanian Bektashi, the Albanian press as well as the administration at the headquarters was progressively interested in Dede Reshat's life story. There have been, therefore, a number of short and informative details about Dede's life published in daily newspapers. In addition to these, there are a plentitude of songs about Dede Reshat that are circulated

in national media outlets, in audio disks and cassettes and online. All of these materials offer information about the life story of Dede Reshat which may be divided in three main phases: birth and early childhood, initiation into the Bektashi Order and subsequent tribulations brought by the rise of antireligious communist dictatorship, and the postsocialist revival of Bektashia.

Dede rarely stated his leadership role publically. He lived and experienced it instead. The only exception to stating his position was under persistent requests by the administrators of the Headquarters who continuously reminded Dede to emphasize the “world” in World Headquarters. The administration’s secretary general of the order as well as a director for international affairs were also Dede’s speech writers. It was clear that Dede did not author many of his speeches because he often stumbled over fancy vocabulary and, at times, long sentences were not read in a continuous flow that characterized Dede’s own unscripted conversation. His highly suggestive facial expressions and occasional pensive pauses and puzzling looks often left an impression that Dede was not sure about the text he was being asked to read and at times also unhappy with the authors who prepared it. Dede was in demand both inside the tekke walls as well as outside. He participated in symposiums and events put together by state programs, foreign embassies, and other religious communities. Dede was quite visible in the public arena often seen next to the Archbishops of the Albanian Orthodox and Catholic Churches and the Grand Mufti of Albania. The public and the press wanted to know more about the life of Dede Reshat. Upon the invitation of Baba Edmond Brahimaj (Dede’s right hand man and eventual successor) and the Secretary General of the Order

Kujtim Ahmataj, a journalist was reportedly able to meet with Dede Reshat. The resulting biography revealed some details about Dede's personal life. Later these were published in a special section of the daily newspaper *Gazeta Tema* issued on Sunday, April 3rd, 2011 (Kaloçi et al. 2011).

The interview is reported to have happened at the Headquarters on March 4th of 2003 during Dede's 68th birthday. I paraphrase my own translation of the contents of the published biography below.

Of his early days, it is reported that Dede was the sixth of eight children. He was born to a poor family in the village Lusëm of northern Albanian district of Kukës. At the age of nine he was responsible for the few sheep and goats that the family owned and remembers spending most of his childhood days on the pastures with his flock. In the autumn of 1944 he remembers his house being burned by Albanian partisans and finds his brothers and sisters exiting to escape the flames that engulfed the house. Dede recalls this as the most frightening experience and remembers himself crying at the sight of his house being burned down. In another version of the same interview, young Reshat remembers seeing his mother coming in and out of the burning house and calling upon God for help. Young Reshat also uttered a prayer. As the brothers and sisters were getting out they too were terrified and were lamenting. It was Dede's mother that counted only seven of them and when noting that the youngest of the children (at the time only 2 or 3 years old) was missing she began screaming "Rexhepi, Rexhepi" and with both of her hands scratching her face in agony and disbelief she entered the burning house only to emerge out of the flames and smoke with young Rexhep on her arms. Although Dede Reshat only indirectly implies that the house had been burned by the communist brigades who suspected Dede's family to be involved with the opposing National Front, Dede recalls that the family decided to leave their hometown in order to escape other more serious repercussions for his family's political involvement.

After the family sold the flocks they had, all together they traveled by foot to settle on the outskirts of Tirana. It was easier to be "lost" so to speak in the city and his parents promised that the city was much more beautiful and the chances to go to school there were much better. They settled right on the foothills of the Bektashi Headquarters. The very first years in Tirana, Dede refers to as "*vite helmi*" (literally, venom years). What he remembers most is crowds of Albanians shouting "deserters [to other Albanians] on the gallows." One day he was walking on the street and he was surrounded by people who were impatiently waiting for the verdict of the trials of other Albanians. When it was announced by a speaker

phone that the verdict was death by execution, the crowds began to clap their hands. Right there and then, Dede Reshat recalls a kind of emptiness from within, just like the way he felt when he found his house in Lusëm burning.

Still life went on for Dede Reshat who looked over a small flock of domesticates on the hill where Kryegjyshata was located. He was curious over the different people that would visit the Headquarters but still at the time he was not sure what the buildings stood for. Several years later, in 1948, Dede Ahmet from the southern district of Vlorë came to the headquarters. Shortly after that, young Reshat visited the tekke more often and later was initiated into the order: first as a muhib and later as a dervish. Dede Ahmet was well known as a wise man who upon arrival in Tirana gathered many people around him: his interests were not only to instill Bektashi beliefs but to give rise once again to feelings of love and understanding among Albanians. "Dede Ahmet would keep me close," Dede is reported to recall, "and would often take me along to visit the burial place of Naim Frashëri on tekke grounds." Dede Ahmet would speak at length about Naim Frashëri and would often recite in entirety his poems, especially the epic entitled "Karbala." "May you be lucky and work for your homeland as did the martyrs of Karbala" Dede Ahmet would often say to then Muhib Reshat. Seven years later, in August of 1954, Muhib Reshat wore the Dervish garb and was initiated into the mysteries that belong to the higher degree of membership. Dede stated that the day of initiation into Dervishhood was the most memorable day of his life; "I was emotional," he stated in the interview "mostly because I was taking a heavy burden on my shoulders and because I knew that the way, while promising, demanded much struggle." Two days later, Dede Ahmet noticed Dervish Reshat to be in a very pensive mood and said: "When I surrendered to become a Dervish, I too was [lost] in thoughts."⁴⁹

The time from his initiation until the collapse of the communist regime was characterized by a series of efforts by *Sigurimi* – state secret police – to bring the leadership of the Order under their control. In 1958, Dede Reshat reportedly states that Dede Ahmet was called twice by the secret police who put lots of pressure on him to become their operative (additional details on the events that led to this are provided below). After these efforts failed, Dede Ahmet was ordered to leave the headquarters and relocated to an abandoned tekke in the village of Drizar, in the central Albanian district of Mallakastër. He was further ordered not to meet with people and that a written permission of the ministry of interior was necessary for him to undertake any travels outside of Drizar. Then Dervish Reshat asked to go along with Dede Ahmet who had to abide by state's internment orders. The new tekke was on top of the mountain and the terrain was barren, rocky, and almost inhospitable. Both Dede Reshat's recollections of the early years at this tekke as well as a number of testimonies from those who secretly visited Dede Ahmet and Dervish Reshat at this residence highlight the hard work by the Bektashi clerics in

⁴⁹ Narrative establishes likeness in the experience of becoming a dervish between Dede Ahmet and his disciple and later successor Dede Reshat.

residence and the transformation of the once barren land into an oasis of a kind. Within a short time, the villagers of Drizar were astonished by the transformation of the abandoned tekke and surrounding land into an orchard. The contrast between the tekke and the rest of the village lands, as well as the hard work by Babas and Dervishes under Dede Ahmet's supervision "won over many hearts" of the locals. Despite state monitoring of comings and goings into the tekke, this center⁵⁰ hosted hundreds of believers who came from the surrounding areas as well as from far away districts of Kukës, Bulqizë, Krujë, Burrel, Vlorë, Delvinë, and others.

Much of the ongoing work to rebuild the tekke in Drizar was interrupted again, however, with the onset of state's efforts to eradicate all religious life and the 1967 constitutional decree which criminalized all religious gatherings, propagation, and activities. Amidst the ambiguity of what was to happen in regards to religious communities, or, being able to foresee what was to happen as internal narratives highlight, just at that time, on June 30th of 1967, that Dede Ahmet is known to have handwritten a Saintly Decree where he appoints Dervish Reshat to be his successor regardless of the approval or disapproval of the communist party. Note that most of the dates of the events given in the article up to this point are only approximations. That is the events of the burning of the house is approximated to the fall of 1944, and other years including the criminalization of religious life are given as "at about 1967," whereas the article is very precise on the day that this decree was signed. In the original text of the succession decree signed by Dede Ahmet amongst other things was written:

"I order all Bektashi clerics and believers, not only of Albania but throughout the world, to recognize Haji Dede Reshat Bardhi, as my successor, because he is

⁵⁰ Attempts to assign a temporary Headquarter status to Drizar Tekke by way of having functioned as hosting Bektashi from around Albania when it sheltered the leadership of the Order during Dede Ahmet and Dervish Reshat's internment. At the same time, the headquarters in Tirana was led by a state appointed leader who is purged from the socialist history of the Order and thus delegitimized by omission.

the illuminated mirror that will lead most honorably. The knowledgeable will honor him with their knowledge, the brave will protect him with their bravery, and the hospitable will protect him with their hospitality. All believers without exception [should] kneel and take light from Him just as the stars take light from the sun.”

During my fieldwork in 2007, an enlarged and somewhat hard to read copy of the signed decree was displayed in a frame next to the Bektashi flag. The decree became part of the struggle for leadership between surviving disciples of Dede Ahmet in the early 1990s. The authenticity of the document was maintained by tekke administrators though the original proved to be impossible to trace down. It was unusual that then Dervish Reshat was referred to as Haji Dede Reshat Bardhi for Dede Reshat did not go to pilgrimage to Mecca until 1991 and was not recognized as Dede until the late 1990s when the first Bektashi Congress after the fall of communism officially recognized him as such with the approval of the Sacred Council of the Albanian Bektashi. The ambiguity over succession still foreshadows current struggles over the legitimacy of the leadership of the Order. The sanctity of Dede Reshat's leadership as appointed by Dede Ahmet, legitimizes Baba Edmond Brahimaj's leadership. Baba Mondi is one of the oldest disciples of Dede Reshat and a maternal nephew of Dede Ahmet. Since Dede Reshat's passing away, the enlarged photo of the decree is no longer in display at the Headquarters whereas the current narrative about the recent past has shifted from narratives of “decapitation” and “survival” (previously discussed on chapter 2) to another exposition of continuity: "Dede Reshat planted the seeds, it is up to us to see them grow" is now emphasized by Baba Mondi and Dede Reshat's disciples. The life story of the saintly authority is a powerful

legitimizing (and delegitimizing) instrument in the hands of the current leadership, administration, and the following.

In an earlier chapter on religiosity in socialist Albania it was documented that although religion was publically uprooted, underground survival of religious commitments emerged as the main postsocialist narrative. In regards to Dede Reshat's own testimony reported in the newspaper article in question, Dede Reshat was ordered to give up religious service towards Dede Ahmet and was a farm worker where "a shovel and pruning scissors" became his best companions for many years of hard labor. The newspaper article cites Dede Reshat saying:

"I worked continuously for the next 20 years. It was hard labor that could have handicapped me and still I did not give in to ongoing pressures to become a secret agent. I categorically refused offers in two specific occasions. During these difficult times, it was my closest family members that helped me maintain my belief in God. Although I was required to work from morning to night time, under all-weather condition, sun, rain, or snow, I managed on the weekends to travel to Drizar to visit Dede Ahmet to care for him. Dede Ahmet would warm my soul. But again I would leave him for I had to report to work the following Monday. But I was not sad by this, because suffering makes one a better human being" (Kaloçi et al. 2011).

This is what Dede Reshat recalls about his hardship during socialist Albania for which, according to the newspaper article, "he did not wish to dwell upon at great lengths." The article reports that after 1990, when religious liberties were reinstated again, Dede Reshat returned to the headquarters and found it in ruins from continuous use as a home for the elderly. Underscoring hard work, the headquarters was transformed once again to its condition during its days of use as a Bektashi tekke in the past.

The two page special in the daily newspaper ends with an excerpt which highlights the main achievements of Dede Reshat. This last section of the special is

subtitled: “The man, under whose care, 120 religious centers were erected.” Once again, the health of the Order is always related to the buildings, rather than the number of believers; underlying the perspective of the secular state and the media that it controls is an implicit comparison with the destruction of the material base of religion under antireligious authoritarianism. Just like the communist state equated the war against religious communities with the destruction of religious buildings, the postsocialist assessment of the return of religion remains tied up to the visible symbols of religion. Furthermore, the fact that the health of the Order is measured in relation to the communist past supports my use of “postcommunism” as a legitimate category despite the valid arguments that question the validity of “postcommunism,” “postsocialism,” and post-isms in general (see for example Buyandelgeriyn 2008). Reserving the concluding chapter for a more systematic engagement with the debates on the use of the postsocialist and postcommunist category, I return to another more recently published source on the life and achievements of Dede Reshat. The following is my own translation of the published text.

Haji Dede Reshat Bardhi was born on the 4th of March, 1935 in the village of Lusëm, Kukës. The first religious lessons were taken from the mufti of the village. Later he attended a “formation” course in the *madrassa* of Tirana. In 1954 he surrendered as Dervish to World Arch Grandfather of that time, Dede Ahmet Ahmataj. From 1958 to 1967 he was in forced internment together with Dede Ahmet in Drizar of Mallakastër. After 1967 he has worked for 23 years in a row for the state owned and operated farm “Gjergj Dimitrov” in Tirana. In 1991 he undertook the traditional Islamic pilgrimage to the sacred city of Mecca and earned the title Haji. In the same year, with the help and assistance of Mother Teresa, he reopens the Bektashi World Headquarters. In July 20, 1993 he organized and directed the 6th Bektashi Congress, where he is announced world Arch Grandfather (Dede) of the Bektashi. Seven years later, in September of 2000, he organized the 7th Bektashi Congress and in September of 2005, the 8th Bektashi Congress. This last fourteen years since the collapse of the authoritarian

communist rule, under the personal care of Dede Reshat, there are about 120 new religious objects that are rebuilt and reopened in the service of Bektashi believers. Dede Reshat has played a primary role for the preservation of traditional ties between religious communities of different faiths in Albania, and has elevated religious tolerance as vital necessity and a sacred duty. He has been honored with the title “The torch of democracy;” has been recognized by the President of the United States of America George W. Bush, Jr. in relation to his clear cut denouncement of the barbaric acts of September 11, 2001. He has been honored by Pope John Paul II during the world conference for international dialogue for peace. In these years he has been honored in our country with different titles such as: Honorable citizen of the districts of Berat, Kukës, Krujë, Bulqizë, Martanesh, and in March of 2005, on the occasion of his 70th birthday, the President of the Republic of Albania passed on to him the honorary order “Naim Frashëri.” In April 2010, President Bamir Topi grants the highest honors of the Republic of Albania: “Gjergj Kastriot Skënderbeu.”

As noted earlier, the exact same article on Dede Reshat is to be found in the bimonthly journal of the Bektashi community *Urtësia*, number 26 that was published in June 2001. It is authored by the secretary general of the order and shows only slight variations in wording with the obituary article in *Gazeta Tema* of 2011 above having incurred only minor editorial revisions. Based on this, it is clear that the biographical sketch of Dede Reshat is an official biography which is closely monitored in form and content. The duplication of the original article from 2001 in a 2011 daily newspaper calls into question the stated contextual information about a journalist’s interview with Dede Reshat upon the invitation of Baba Edmond and Secretary General. In another interview published in 2008 by daily *Gazeta Albania*, it appears that the same interview is circulated again with slight variations in the degree of detail reportedly given by Dede Reshat about his life story. Dede’s early life as it is presented in his biographical accounts matches the broader trend that characterizes Islamic hagiography about Muslim saints as “beginnings both humble and spectacular” (Renard 2008: 13): although a young and uneducated shepherd,

it is through his miraculous intercession and prayer that his siblings manage to survive the fire that totaled their house. In retrospective, even though Dede came from humble background, he is seen again as the shepherd that brought the dispersed flock together and managed to save a community from the ashes of atheism. The tracing of the biographical detail that is progressively added to the individual life story shows a sustained effort to place Dede Reshat within the ranks of *awliyā'* (plural for *wali*) or the friends of God. Minor revisions in the later versions, for example, show that Dede Reshat took his early religious lessons from mufti of Lusëm and remembers the very first lesson being a hadith of Prophet Mohammed about cleanliness as the sign of the devout. Like my own encounters with Dede, failed attempts by administrators and journalists to access biographical details from primary sources led them to retreat to a recirculation of an officially constructed and carefully managed biography.

Saintly life in the words of a follower

I first met Ashik Fetah in the summer of 2011 at the headquarters in Tirana. Prior to taking part for the third time in the Mt. Tomorr pilgrimage, we both spent a couple of nights at the headquarters. From there we shared the trip by public transportation to the pilgrimage site. Ashik Fetah was continuously employed as a greeter during the week long events of the pilgrimage which happens annually from August 19th to 25th. I was to spend the next 10 days observing and documenting the event (the results of these observations are presented on chapter 6). I had many opportunities to talk to Ashik Fetah both during our short stay at the headquarters, during the day long trip to the top of Mt. Tomorr, as well as during the actual pilgrimage. While we were waiting for a ride where

the dirt road that takes one to the mountaintop meets the national paved road, and with Ashik Fetah's permission, I taped a conversation that concerned the life of Dede Reshat from the early years of the onset of the communist rule in early 1940s until his passing away that very same year in 2011. Curiously, Ashik Fetah divided Dede Reshat's life into three stages, much like the official biographical sketch of the newspaper that I paraphrased above which he may well have read, referred, and even contributed to. In this section I include those aspects of Dede Reshat's life that were not part of the previous biographical sketch noting, whenever possible, also the areas of overlap between the two sources on Dede Reshat's life story.

Ashik Fetah is the maternal nephew of Dede Ahmet. When I first met him in 2011, he was in his late 70s. Since his youth, he remembers being sent by his family to visit his uncle Dede Ahmet first at the Headquarters and later in Drizar where Dede Ahmet and then Dervish Reshat were in internment. He stated that his stays would last for weeks and even months and even after 1967 when Dede Ahmet was living with his family members in Tirana and was under close surveillance by the government, Ashik Fetah, by his own admission, was a regular visitor of Dede Ahmet. He has known and claims to have had a close relationship with Dede Reshat ever since he can remember. In the years after the collapse of communism, Ashik Fetah has been an active participant in the efforts to reopen the tekkes. His presence in photographs of inaugurations of tekkes and tyrbes, often right behind Dede Reshat, on the background, or near him in more private settings like dinners and conversations with insiders is ubiquitous. Ashik Fetah makes no secret of the fact that he was officially a member of the communist party and

went at great lengths defending the ideals that the party stood for with the exception of the increasing antagonizing relationship with religious communities which he considers to have been "a mistake." Nor does he hold back on his full time employment as an operative of the Albanian *Sigurimi*, the much feared secret services of the communist state that constantly harassed political dissidents and religious leaders alike, including Dede Ahmet and Dede Reshat especially in the post-1967 prohibition of religion era.

When asked why he is not a formal member of the order Ashik Fetah answers rather uneasily that "it was not meant to be." He has been a regular attendee at the annual pilgrimage event in Mt. Tomorr since the first pilgrimage event in the early 1990s and is often mistakenly taken for an insider given his presence at almost all important gatherings at the headquarters and tekkes both locally in his hometown of Vlorë as well as nationally. He is well versed in the history of the Bektashi as well as in the belief systems and rituals and is himself a devout practitioner of the faith. During the week long pilgrimage events in 2011, I often saw him visit the tyrbes right before sunset holding a candle on his hands. He was meticulous in his approach of the holy shrines in the mountain and is well respected by the Bektashi insiders and Ashiks alike for his knowledge and devotion to the Bektashi way. I suspect that had he not held a membership card to the communist party, he would have been an initiated member of the Order and perhaps even a member of the sacred council. Nonetheless, he is proud of the close bonds he had with Dede Reshat and interacts almost without barriers of formality that are often visible in the interactions between Muhiban and their superiors (Dervishes, Babas, and Dede). Given his personal relationship to Dede Reshat from his early days

when he joined the order all the way to the present, I make use of his biographical sketch of Dede Reshat's life and persona as was given to me by Ashik Fetah in order to add to the official biographies previously discussed. What follows is paraphrased from a taped conversation and is translated by the author. Literal translations of select statements are in quotation marks.

Dede Reshat [starts Ashik Fetah] was a cleric with the "highest mystico-religious values." His first service at the headquarters was to look after the tekke's cattle. This volunteering work kept him close to the tekke and Dede Ahmet recognized his "intellect, sincerity, and devotion." Later Dede Ahmet nourished these, and "fed young Reshat the nectar of Bektashia." He first became a Muhib and later a Dervish in service of the main tekke in Tirana until 1958. Dede Reshat, in Ashik Fetah's words, has lived three difficult stages of his life: a) from 1948 when he arrived at the headquarters until 1967, b) from 1967 to 1991 when the religious liberties were nullified by a constitutional decree, and c) 1991 to 2011 which saw the reinstatement of religious liberties with the onset of democratic transformations. The first was a free but a heavily monitored period by the state. It was also the period that saw the relocation of the headquarters from Tirana to Drizar where the leadership of the order was sent to forced internment. In the second still very difficult period practitioners of religions were prosecuted by the state. During this time, Dede Ahmet and Dervish Reshat were sheltered by their relatives and kept safe by the Bektashi believers. Still under these conditions, with a steady faith in the great God, he worked still to keep the light of Haji Bektash ablaze in people's heart. At one point Dervish Reshat was working in a state owned farm and was earning 3000 Lek (equivalent of 80 dollars?) a month. The state officials noted that he was making a lot in salaries and that he was completing 3-5 times the daily norm required of regular workers. He planted trees, pruned them, and is remembered as a master horticulturalist. For Dede Ahmet had taught him verses from the Qur'an where those who plant trees and care for them will go to paradise.

Shortly after 1990s, according to this testimony, Ashik called Dede Reshat to suggest the reopening of Kuzum Baba Tekke in Ashik Fetah's home city of Vlorë.

"Wait," Dede Reshat, said, "we have to open the main tekke in Tirana first and later the other ones." At the time there were 4 surviving disciples of Dede Ahmet. Together they met and although Baba Selim Kaliçan, Dervish Barjam who served 25 years in prison, and Baba Sherif were the eldest and perhaps most obvious candidates for the leadership of the community, together they decided to appoint

Dede Reshat as their leader simply because he was a bit younger in age and thus deemed more suitable to survive the long and difficult transition of the community from communist Albania to an attempted reconstitution of the Bektashi at the local, national, and even transnational level. At that time, once it was agreed that Dervish Reshat was to be the spiritual leader of the order, Dede Reshat shows the decree signed by Dede Ahmet who had appointed him as the legitimate successor. "I recall also a gift that was given to me by Dede Ahmet," [continued Ashik Fetah]. It was a big ring with a green crystal that Dede Ahmet wanted Ashik Fetah to have. "By God," replied Ashik Fetah, "this ring ought to go to him who will follow on your footsteps, your successor. That very same ring is now on Dede Reshat's finger," stated Ashik Fetah with confidence. To return to the third period of difficulty in postsocialist Albania, although religious freedoms were again recognized, de facto they were not. This because, while by law religion was recognized again, lands have yet to be returned to the tekkes. Much of his early years in 1990s Dede Reshat spent fighting and quarreling with the state for land properties, a process that stood in the way of the full return of lost tekke grounds and sacred sites to the Bektashi.

When I asked what the difficulties for Dede Reshat were more concretely during the three outlined stages, Ashik Fetah answered.

At first because the state fought against religious communities, beliefs, and values, this made then Dervish Reshat's life as a Bektashi cleric more difficult. In 1956, for example, Dede Ahmet and other leaders of religious communities were asked to address a meeting of the communist party. When a draft of the speech was offered for approval, the dictator replied that Dede Ahmet's speech was too religious and that it needed heavy revisions. Still, during the congress, Dede Ahmet spoke without a script for a full 60 minutes. Soon after the end of the speech, Enver Hoxha's only comment to Dede Ahmet was that his speech was a long one. Dede Ahmet replied in the presence of others delegates that this was a meeting of the Party but his speech was the word of God. Not much was said in reply, but this was the first open grievance between the leadership of the Order and the growing authoritarian rule. In 1957, Enver Hoxha asked Dede Ahmet to reform the order, to allow marriage of clerics and the removal of the Bektashi garb. Dede Ahmet did not agree to this. These were more likely the reasons for later sending the leadership of the Order to internment by removing them from the capital where the head of the state was located to a faraway place in the rural district of Mallakastër.

But still, the most difficult time for Dede Reshat was after 1991 when religious life and communities were protected by law but the return of tekke properties and the reconstitution of religious life were made difficult for the stubborn bureaucracy and bureaucrats who stood in the way of a full-fledged return of religious life. During this time, Dede Reshat compiled an inventory of

tekke properties throughout Albania as well as a list of clerics that lost their lives (repatriated their remains wherever they were thrown) and those that remained alive. Secondly, he began to rebuild collapsed tekkes and tyrbes and build new ones from scratch. For rebuilding the community upon the old foundations that were brought to mere ruins in socialist Albania, a Bektashi infrastructure based on the old tradition as well as on modern European values suitable to the west, are made possible by two things: “mystical inspiration and erudite thoughtfulness of Dede Reshat.” He has been recognized by the Albanian state for this contribution. The Monday following the passing away of Dede Reshat, April 4th, 2011 was declared *ditë zie*, an official day of mourning to honor the passing away of the spiritual leadership of the order. The Albanian flags waved at half-mast and a minute of silence was observed by the Albanian parliament, council of ministers, and all state offices throughout Albania.

Being a former member of the socialist party and a state operative, Ashik Fetah is a complicated source of information on the spiritual leader of the order. He represents the complex ways that state actors have and continue to mingle with religious communities. Having no way of collaborating Ashik Fetah's actual connections to the communist regime⁵¹, here I can only highlight other more plausible interests of Ashik Fetah that are more apparent through his kin ties as a family member of Dede Ahmet. As such his interests are to see the spiritual descendants of Dede Ahmet, his own kin, persist as legitimate leaders. In that, he can also remain a beneficiary of the persistence of Dede Ahmet's silsila. At the present Ashik Fetah is retired and his retirement income of \$170 a month are reportedly the only monetary resource for his family. While his 10 day employment during the pilgrimage event brings in only 400 extra dollars, relative to his monthly retirement earnings, this is a way of bringing in necessary cash, the equivalent of just over two additional months of income annually. It is no surprise that Ashik Fetah

⁵¹ Albania remains one of the only former communist countries that has not yet allowed the opening of the state archives and the disclosure of those who collaborated with the Communist regime.

appeared at the headquarters two days before the event and was quite anxious over the matter of how we were going to get, and if we would be able to make it to the mountaintop for the pilgrimage event. This is an employment opportunity that he cannot afford to miss.

Saintliness recognized

Haji Dede Reshat Bardhi (1935-2011) was an integral part of the larger historical narrative about the Albanian Bektashi and their efforts towards reconstitution after the 1990s. The last two decades of Dede's life were entirely devoted towards community building and the establishment of the institutional as well as spiritual components of the Albanian Bektashi. Dede was one of a handful of clerics who survived the state attack on religious leaders whereas his links to Dede Ahmet tie Dede Reshat to the leadership of the Order rooted in pre-communist past. Like Imzot Rrok Mirdita (b. 1939) of the Albanian Catholic Church, and his peer Baba Bajram Mahmutaj (1912-1995), Dede became an important figure behind the efforts of the Albanian Bektashi to retain equal footing relative to the four main traditional and historically accepted religious communities that enjoy state recognition in Albania: the Albanian Orthodox and Catholic Christians and Albanian Sunni and Bektashi Muslims. His commitment towards interfaith relations (*mbarëvajtje*, literally, to go well) became an important part of Dede Reshat's vision. This is especially important for the relative numerical weakness of the Bektashi who are struggling to recoup their property. Allies like Mother Teresa, the Pope, and others are indispensable in these regards. Maintaining friendly interfaith relations is a shared image, and one that in light of future prospects for European membership, state

officials and leaders of religious communities highlight as an example that Albania displays in being a kind of a nest of interfaith wellbeing (*mbarëvajtje ndërjetare*) where commonalities, not differences, are emphasized as instrumental for ways of being in religiously pluralistic society. In the eyes of the Bektashi, suffering, survival and a vision for peaceful coexistence across religious lines are part of Dede Reshat's saintly stamina.

There are many examples that may be listed to see how the Albanian Bektashi legitimize claims of saintly authority. One of the most talked about *prova* (literally, proofs) that Dede's followers mention is Dede's ability to account for his followers' whereabouts regardless of whether Dede was physically in his followers' presence or not. During one of my visits to Tekke e Zallit in southern Albania in 2007 I befriended Baba Besnik's driver. He knew Dede Reshat because Dede Reshat is the murshid of both Baba Besnik as well as Baba Besnik's biological father. Whenever Baba Besnik visited Dede Reshat in Tirana, his driver also joined in. The driver knew Dede Reshat from taking Baba Besnik to pilgrimage events to different Bektashi centers throughout the country. When the driver talked about Dede Reshat, he would always make note of the fact that the conversation had shifted to someone that he had a great deal of respect. He would adjust his posture to maximize eye contact and a slightly lower intonation, his speech was always respectful, well measured and emphasized noted reverence for this *shenjtor* (saint).

One time, [the driver was telling me], I happened to go to the city for private business. When we went to Tirana with Baba Besnik, even if our task at hand did not involve the headquarters, such as when we have to go to the national archives or other *zyra* (literally, government offices), I saw Dede Reshat. And every time that I see him I was impressed with how much he knew about me. He always asked about my parents, being careful to mention their names, about my health,

and my job. But that one time, I went to Tirana with private business and did not manage to visit Dede. Many months passed by before I returned to the city with Baba Besnik again. When we met, Dede asked me as usual, in detail about my parents, my health, and job, however this time he added: "where have you been this long? It has been a long time." "I have been busy," the driver answered, mentioning some tasks that have kept him and Baba Besnik busy. But Baba continued telling the driver about his last time in Tirana, the people he had seen, even the details of the kinds of foods he had during the driver's last trip to the city.

The astonishment and proof of saintly authority here is associated with Dede's ability to "see" and be present in his disciple's lives even when he was not physically near them.

The Bektashi assign this ability to "*syri i zemrës*" or the eye of the heart. The few elect members who are well accomplished in their spiritual path, are believed to have about them a saintly gaze, the sight to see beyond barriers that prevent one from seeing what lies behind. In relation to Dede Reshat, there are a good number of similar claims that are often emphasized to note Dede's elevated status as *robi i zotit* (in Albanian, literally, God's captive, colloquial for God's child), and *i lindur* (born, rather than made).

One morning, narrates Dervish Mikel, Dede calls upon Dervish Sali. After they greeted each other, and after Dervish Sali kissed Dede's palm and robe, Dede asked how Dervish was. Dervish Sali, now well into his 60s, is slender and in good shape with the exception of his lower back that often gives him trouble, sometimes forcing him to limit his movements around the tekke and other times simply grounding him to his bed. Dervish Sali was always well groomed, and loved to wear cologne. Being told that Dervish had not slept all that well, Dede agreed but added that it was because Dervish was too busy looking at himself in the mirror late at night, "turning this way and that way like a *grua e ligë*" (literally, bad lady, polite for a whore).

Dervishes brought this story to my attention a couple of times in the days that followed, and again the undertones and emphasis here was to bear witness to Dede's ability to be present in the lives of his followers through his ability to see through the eye of the heart and to make quite uncomfortable moral judgments. Other stories told by Dede's

followers as a testimony of his saintly qualities had to with offering blessings to the sick who claim to have been helped with their condition by Dede's intercession and "spiritual fathering" many *nefes* (in Turkish, *nefes evladi*) or children of the breath as they are called. These are primarily male but also female children who are believed to have been born to childless parents with Dede's blessing and, customarily, also named by him. A number of formally initiated members to the Order are also children of Dede's breath.

Another way that Dede Reshat is considered a saintly figure by his following, is in regards to his ability to maintain a growing community of followers based on what they consider to be miracles of sainthood (*mrekullitë e shenjtërisë*). The very state of the Bektashi community is attributed to a large extent to the abilities of the saintly leadership. To those who is not given to them to witness proofs of saintliness, they make use of observable measures of leader's performance. These are based very pragmatically on proofs such as how many walls did a Baba build while in charge of the tekke and what kinds of repairs and expansions he was able to accomplish. For pragmatic building demonstrates the power to grow and maintain the Order in a concrete fashion. Often layman spoke of their community leaders in terms of this worldly works whereas within the formal membership of the Order the more miraculous proofs mentioned above are circulated between initiated members of the Order. Outsiders or peripheral members mention this worldly success while internal members stress more magical powers. Baba Sadik (whose works were discussed in chapter 4) who is known also as the man of stone and cement, (a disciple of Dede Reshat), has been very active in reopening, repairing, and

building new structures where tekkes once stood. The signs of his saintliness to his followers stem partly from his ability to build.

When I finally visited the tekke of Kuzum Baba that was built from scratch by Baba Sadik, I again was convinced that while some of the miracles attributed to saintly figures are otherworldly, the miracles that the Albanian Bektashi often associated their leadership with were this worldly endeavors and accomplishments. "Have you seen his tekke in the city of Vlorë," I was once asked? "Oh, he has done miracles there" (*"ka bërë mrekullira atje"*). In Baba Sadik's case, it was his ability to attain necessary city permits and pull resources to rebuild the tekke. At times, Baba Sadik himself worked mixing cement and laying bricks and several of his followers talked in great lengths about instances where visitors to the tekke could not recognize Baba Sadik while he was working with a handful of young men, covered in cement and mason's dust. It is this kind of commitment to the tekkes they serve that is often voiced as another important way for Babas to earn the respect of their following. Note also that Dede Reshat himself worked for years at menial labor⁵². Being able to build is understood as a sign of saintly authority for God favors those closest to him. While Baba Sadik's followers associate the miracles at their tekke with their Baba, Baba Sadik associated his exploits to his spiritual guide: Dede Reshat. This way, there is a communal sense of attributing the overall success of

⁵² Along with spiritual knowledge, disciples learn also ways of being from their masters. Just like Dede Reshat's life was one of heavy labor, so the life of his disciple Baba Sadik. The replication of the life ways of the saint by his disciples is also visible in the ways blessings are administered. Both Dede Reshat and Baba Sadik administered blessings through breath (by blowing over the receivers of their blessings).

the community – and by extension also God's favors – to the highest leadership of the Order.

Some of the most memorable moments of my fieldwork had to do with instances when Baba was visited by those he had helped. "*Lutës jemi ne,*" literally, we are prayer [makers] was often repeated by Dede Reshat, Babas and Dervishes. We pray on behalf of the people, they often claim. It is up to God which prayers are heard and others that are not. Sainly authority is recognized by the degree to which prayers are believed to have been heard. Babas and Dervishes each used their own specific way of delivering their prayers and blessings. Some made use of charms that they constructed in the presence of charm seekers, neighbors to the tekke and more distant visitors. These are pieces of paper folded into a triangle. Prior to folding them, Babas write specific suras from the Qur'an known to work for specific wishes. These are wrapped in bees' wax paper and often carried around as necklaces and or little inserts into people's wallets. Other Babas, may also offer sweets, or a drink of water mixed with a little dust from the sacred shrine as a form of intercession. Dede Reshat, rarely offered charms. When visitors insisted, he had his Dervishes put one together for him. When this was done, he would blow three times and chant over the receivers of the charm. His own breath was his preferred way of delivering a blessing. There was a hierarchy of blessings whereby myxhyret dervishes and babas used breath only whereas dervishes and babas who had been married in the past made more frequent use of charms. No matter which way Babas delivered their blessings, the most talked about visitations to the tekke were often by those whose

prayers had been answered. Saintliness is reserved to the few clerics who outcompete others by amassing testimonies by people who witness their prayers answered.

Next to Dede's hospitality, delivering blessings was one of the most sought after *shërbim* (literally, service) by his visitors. So much so, that giving his blessings had become almost habitual for Dede Reshat. When I mentioned an upcoming trip back to the States for my sister's wedding, for example, or whenever I expressed an interest to visit other tekkes in Albania, Dede immediately took these as occasions to administer a blessing. Holding my hand with one of his, and while gently rubbing his long grayish-white beard with the other hand, he always started with *bismilahir e rrahman e rrahim*, and continued reciting his blessing which took a good one minute. Keeping his eyelids gently closed yet appearing clearly alert, part of his blessing always included the use of his breath which was gently blown over the seekers of his blessings in three slow upward body sweeping exhalations. That was Dede's preferred way of making a *duva* (in Albanian is used to refer to "*lutje*," literally "prayer," from Arabic, *du'ā*, as well as for charms offered by some babas upon requests from the following) is through breath. During my stay, I witnessed Dede host two middle aged women from Turkey. Being of Albanian descent, they spoke Albanian and as Dede made his way to meet them, one of the women's first impression noted: "what a beautiful light/aura has befallen you" ("*çfarë nur i bukur që të ka rënë*"). Shortly after this, one of the visitors mentioned that her son was serving his compulsory military service in Northern Iraq. Before the lady continued any further, Dede grabbed her hand, and proceeded with administering his blessing.

Through the mother, Dede's blessings was for a safe service, for God to keep the soldiers out of harm's way.

Channeling saintliness

The title of this chapter draws our attention to the fact that this account is primarily about one life, that of Dede Reshat. Sainly life can only be told through the intertwining of life histories about masters and disciples and their interactions with their families, their guests, and tekke personnel. One's saintliness can only be told through the legitimizing life stories of their master's and predecessors as well as by the legitimizing recollections of saintly proofs by a leader's following. It is not his life that the reader learns about most immediately here, and this in return is our window into the lives of spiritual leaders, Babas and Dervishes elsewhere in Albania as well as their spiritual ancestors. The telling of a saintly life, is ultimately also about the story of the community whose resacralization hinges upon the sanctity of the saintly leadership through time and across space.

Access to Dede were carefully managed by his supporting staff. The leadership role of the tekke added an immense amount of pressure on Baba's time and energy. Because Dede is considered to be the head of the tekke household, all decisions that relate to the daily operations of tekke functions, are funneled through him. Things like getting permission to undertake rebuilding of a tekke, approvals for intended architectural designs, all brought Dede's followers to his doorstep for his approval of these projects as well as blessing for the intended undertakings such as setting off on a long trip, starting college and so on. My own contacts with Dede were generally brief and few and far

between even though I was a constant presence on tekke grounds. When Dede was in the tekke, it was expected that all visitors greet him at some point during their stay. Between his trips to the residence halls to the next building where breakfast was served in the morning and back again to the residence halls and waiting rooms, these were opportunities for full time residents as well as visitors to the tekke to greet Baba and have however little personal time possible with him before the start of his day. Sometimes, and usually after the afternoon waiting hours, Dede liked to stroll around the tekke compound. Many times he wanted to be by himself and often would go to the sacred tombs, other times further on around the *odeon* inspecting the progress of the tekke walls which were completed in 2007. Other times he clearly wanted the company of others and shared this walk with one of the full time residents. There was of course competition over attention from the Dede for his daily routines were necessarily split to attend a number of functions.

Dede's supporting staff served as a barrier that limits people's contact with him. While sometime guests were prevented from meeting with Dede, other times Dede would sneak up on them in quite unexpected ways. Just because Dede was present on tekke grounds does not mean that tekke guests were always able to see him. He was gentle in his manners and moved around slowly but effortlessly. Often we were surprised to learn that Dede Reshat had been leaning over the window looking from outside into the kitchen and listening to a conversation between Dervish Mikel, Muhib Kastriot, and myself. He very much liked to see and hear us talk about matters related to the tekke and Sufism.

Dede's time was heavily carved by the demands of his leadership role. Most Fridays, at the end of the working day and before the sunset, the tekke was often more crowded than usual. It was during these afternoons that Dede often held the rituals of the *mejdan* and many of the formal members (Muhiban, serving Dervishes, and visiting insiders from other tekkes) converged to the tekke. One such Friday, I spent the morning at the tekke but retreated to my flat for siesta hours only to return again in the midafternoon. When I entered the tekke, I noticed that Dede was sitting on one of the enclaves of the yard. The bushes gave a sense of privacy as they surrounded several benches and thus cutting this sitting area off from the other more opened vicinities of the tekke grounds. Throughout the main yard people were sitting in groups of four and five along the outside walls of the kitchen and the residence compound. This particular day, it was obvious that Dede was busy meeting with his Muhiban. Although there were some 20-30 people present on the premises, it was surprisingly quiet. So as to not disturb the ongoing conversation that Dede was having with one of his Muhiban, I first faced Baba, paused, gently bowed in his direction, and quietly proceeded to greet the Dervishes who were facing him some 30 yards away from where Dede was sitting. Soon after my arrival, and after a brief interchange with a group of muhiban, Dervish Mikel approached, took me aside, and asked for a favor: to take his malfunctioning cellular phone for a reprogramming to a particular repair shop downtown. This took me away from the tekke grounds for at least one hour. When I returned everyone was partaking in the customary *sofra* meal that follows after the ritual of the *mejdan*. It was clear to me that I was sent on an impossible mission: under the pretext of reprogramming a locked phone, the real

mission, at the time, was to keep me away from the community of insiders and the exclusive rituals of the mejdan. Nor was this distance between myself and the community created by Dede's request. When I joined everyone during the dinner, I first greeted Dede. Because he had seen me earlier, he looked quite puzzled and asked: "where did you go?" Over time, I realized that the distance between Dede and his guests was managed by his dervishes and staff at the tekke: sometimes prioritizing the health and comfort of ailing leader while in other occasions as a way to curtail people's advance with their relationship with baba.

Whenever Dede was outdoors, taking a walk or talking to his guests on one of the benches, Dervishes and Muhiban, especially full time residents of the tekke, made sure to greet him either from afar and in person by kissing his hand or his dress, or positioning themselves so that Dede was in their view and making sure they did not turn their back on him. As such, it was rather difficult for Dede to maintain some degree of privacy within a very open social setting where all eyes were on him. At other times it was difficult to find where Dede was within the compound and often I found him sitting under a shade on the benches behind the administration building talking in private to one of his disciples so as to avoid being interrupted by visitors or other residents of the tekke who sought every opportunity possible to have quiet time with Dede.

Dede never got tired of hosting guests and loved this task more than any other for hosting is the quintessential quality of saintly figures. Access to his guests was channeled through his personnel. There were times where Dede's staff were more concerned with Dede's wellbeing and rest, which sometimes meant that the visitors were either left

waiting for an opportunity to see Dede or directed to the sacred tombs, to meet with the Dervishes, and advised to return at a time when Dede was feeling better. Health concerns were often a reason for cutting down on Dede's visitation hours. At other times, Dede himself sought his own privacy by chanting nonstop for hours. Such was the case one Sunday morning. When I arrived at the tekke, the Dervishes, several Muhiban, the kitchen staff, and several parties of guests were all outdoors and were less talkative than usual. It was a sunny early autumn morning. As I walked into the tekke grounds I could hear Dede's chanting nefes (spiritual songs about Dede Ahmet, Dede's master). This was rather unusual and Dervishes mentioned that he has been singing nonstop all morning and that Dede was "in his own world" ("*në botën e tij*"). I was further advised that if I wanted to see him, best to stay nearby so that I could make use of a brief intermission. I was let in during the next intermission at the end of a long song. Knowing of Dede's fondness for flowers, and because my walk to the headquarters cut through the few rare florist kiosks in the city, I brought with me a red rose for Dede. He welcomed me as always, had me sit near him and began to inspect the rose petals as if to make sure whether it was manufactured or fresh. I stated that it was real (*i vërtetë*). Dede quickly replied with a question: "what about you, are you real?" Dede seemed covered with sweat and held a green hand towel over his neck giving an impression of someone who had just finished a serious workout. As soon as I gathered my thoughts on the question and before I could say yes, as far as I can tell, Dede placed his hand over my shoulder and smiled. It was as if his was not a question that required an immediate answer but a rhetorical one demanding thought and reflection. Many years later as I am preparing this manuscript, I

revisit this encounter. For now, I can say the void and melancholy in Dede's life had to do with the fact that he was surrounded with people whose intentions and sincerity in regards to the rebuilding of the community of the faithful was always questionable.

I could tell that the demands of visiting hours took a lot of energy and effort out of Dede and that chanting on his own was a way for him to make room in his otherwise heavily planned daily routines for his own spiritual needs – composing and chanting spiritual songs for his master. To this day I still wonder what the question was about. In retrospective, I now acknowledge that Dede was truthful to his faith through and through and sought after resemblances of sincerity and truthfulness in the people he was surrounded with. This in light of being in the company of less than sincere, truthful administrators, personnel, and even some formally initiated insiders.

Searching for the sources of spiritual anxiety

Aside from the concern to find some space in his own tekke where he could temporarily be by himself, there is also a voiced concern about the quality of his following and the sincerity of the people that always surrounded Dede. There were a number of encounters on tekke grounds when Dede, in the presence of his disciples, would hold people accountable for unfinished projects such as an unkempt walkway that connected the main gate with the shrine or the delay with the process of approving promised funds that were needed to maintain the road to Mt. Tomorr. One time when we were talking about roles of various paid positions such as secretary general, administrators, lawyers, and the training and lack of it thereof that typified the people

holding these positions. Dede's frustration with the fact of not having the right people behind these functions was apparent. On more than one occasion, Dede's concluding remarks to me were: "point your finger to somebody so that I can hire them." He was dealing not with a disinterest in hiring the right people, but with a lack of deserving people to work for the tekke. Like his overall dissatisfaction with the dervishes and following in general, Dede's loneliness linked to a stark reality of the transition: a shortage of clerics and trustworthy staff to man the return of religious communities. This forced Dede to compromise the quality of the following as well as of administrators hired by the Headquarters. Dede was both surrounded by people and yet, was still rather alone – during his final days although he had Babas and Dervishes who served him, he did not keep anyone particularly close and he grew increasingly suspicious of his relatives who were one after the other dismissed from their functions at the headquarters.

Dede was vocal about his loneliness (*vetmi*). In my view, one root cause of his loneliness was the fact that socialist, and in most cases antireligious bureaucrats, were the only ones with sufficient training to assume positions such as secretaries, archivist, accountants and technicians to run the publishing house. Some of them have even become disciples not out of spiritual yearnings but more as a way to secure long term employment and functions that are necessitated by the revival of religion project. Surrounded by people whose pasts recalled the dismantling of the Order by the communist regime, the hurdles in the way of a full reinstatement of religious life and occasional stagnation with various aspects of the revival all added to the feeling of entrapment that fed Dede's loneliness and restricted the channeling of his saintly

authority. On one hand the disciples are not trained, not competent, while bureaucrats are. On the other, the disciples are more trustworthy and less skilled, whereas the bureaucrats are untrustworthy but skilled in the functions and demands of the revivalist project which is religious as well as economic, legal, and political in nature.

Another source of loneliness has to do with Dede's relationship with his family. Dede himself came from a big family of eight children. He had many brothers and sisters as well as paternal and maternal uncles and aunts as well as some 84 first cousins. It was his family that took Dervish Reshat in after his internment with Dede Ahmet. While his religious persona was demoted and publically delegitimized, Dede is remembered for having kept informal ties with the Bektashi when he was living a "civilian life." The family members remember that he hosted people even at the hospital up until he gave his last breath. Further, they testify to Dede Reshat's unwavering commitment to his call and oath of allegiance to Bektashia. Although membership to the celibate branch of Bektashia comes with a permanent severing of family ties, because of the fate that the religious communities faced in socialist and antireligious regime, the family became the only place of refuge for Bektashi Dervishes after the constitutional ban of religion in 1967. Dede Reshat lived with his own brother and his family. He had his own room and is remembered to have hosted visitors much like he did at the tekke in his later years.

When I first met Dede in 2005, he was surrounded by a good number of family members. Much of the staff of the publishing house that Kryegjyshata owns and operates are formal members of the Order and disciples of Dede Reshat. Many of his relatives are on tekke's payroll and some of them occupy high positions in the administrative

hierarchy of the headquarters. Many of the people at the headquarters however, both new and old hires, were cognizant of the fact that, gradually, Dede had severed his relations with his family members. Some he had fired and others were sent away asked to never set foot on tekke grounds again. The gardener often brought up Dede's growing impatience with his family members, noting immediately that the tekke is for everybody and does not belong to any one family. It makes sense however that the family was still Dede's main base of support at first and that later, with the rebuilding community efforts underway, that the circle of trust would include actors who are responsible for the rebuilding of the community; a community where membership is in effect an act of breaking the ties of blood and family in order to build new ties of brotherhood and spiritual guidance. On the one hand, some adjustment was necessary to leave his own flesh and blood who had sheltered and protected him against the onslaught of the state and resume full time residence and religious practice at the Headquarters. On the other hand, Dede had to depend on his family members to get the ball rolling with the community rebuilding project. Gradually, tensions between non-kin based spiritual community demanded less and less dependence on Dede's kin who made the tekke appear much like a family enterprise and caused jealousy as well. Ultimately, the underperformance of both kin and spiritual family alike, led Dede, especially in the later years of his life, to find his comfort in the company of his own nefes and meditating God.

There is a channeling of saintliness that emerges from the writing of Dede's biography as well. The life of Dede Reshat is officially reported as a kind of autobiography – for the saint must in the end be the source of his own biography.

However, it is the newspaper editor who is invited by the secretary general and Dede's disciple who are actually reporting on Dede Reshat's biography. The close alignment between the life story reported in the newspaper and that reported by Ashik Fetah indicate an intentional agreement on telling the story of Dede Reshat in a particular way. It is the latter who are also making the final selections about which events of his life to report and which to leave out. In my view, the process of compiling a biography of a saint or a hagiography of the spiritual leader, corresponds with the previously described story of becoming Bektashi: while most Bektashi become, very few who actually do become saintly are recognized as born. Theirs and Dede Reshat's life history are reconstructed through an excavation of past saintly performance and biographical proofs of saintliness which testify and legitimize saintly authority.

Taking this into consideration, the few details of Dede Reshat's early life may be understood not only as recollections that Dede Reshat is willing to offer but as part of the switch in the narrative that Dede Reshat was, aside from paying his dues by way of service as a way to navigate the spiritual hierarchy, born and destined to fill the leadership role. He is portrayed as a shepherd of a small sized flock who was the sole provider of a poor family of eight children. When the house was burning it was when Dede Reshat returned from the pastures that all of his siblings miraculously escaped the flames. The Bektashi see these as signs of someone who is born a saint, even though he himself may not have been aware of his saintly powers at the time. In addition, it was this suffering that led to a relocation of his family to Tirana and again, as a young shepherd, he is now in proximity to the main center of Albanian Bektashi. It is not that there are no

other details of his life, but that these are the details selected, in retrospective, to accompany the life story of the spiritual leader. Biographies and testimonies of saintly proofs are, in effect, ways of claiming that Dede was born a saint and was capable of performing saintliness.

A number of patterns are apparent in the life history of Dede Reshat. First there is a bias against the amount of detail (or lack thereof) given in his early life relative to the latter two stages during the peak of the state's oppression of religious life and Dede's role in the post socialist efforts to put the community together again. The pattern is present not only in Dede Reshat's own lack of interest to delve into the details of his early life, but also in the accounts of the same by his following. By contrast, there is no shortage of testimonies of saintly performances in songs or testimonies by the disciples and adherents of Dede Reshat. The pattern is to be anticipated by the results of the previous chapter on the discourses of becoming. It was clear that, at least for the leadership of the Bektashi, there is a switch from narratives of becoming Bektashi through service and devotion to narratives of having been born. Becoming means one is proven to have been born to the position of saintliness. As further elaborated in the previous chapter, the following plays a large part in the social recognition of their leaders' navigation of the spiritual hierarchy. This is largely accomplished by a close monitoring of the narratives of being and becoming and the collective emphasis on those aspects of leadership's lives that the following chooses to emphasize: saving his siblings from fire, being ordained by Dede Ahmet to lead the community, seeing the unseen, and rebuilding the community from the ashes of atheism. The move to a discussion of being born is a recognition of saintliness

and a legitimizing discursive signaling that separates those who are becoming and those who have become and are subsequently recognized as “born” [saintly]. The recognition of a leader as born or saintly, is at once a legitimization of their following.

I return again to the paradox of loneliness that was highlighted by Dede’s own admission. In his life story there are obvious events in his life when a feeling of being alone are most strongly obvious. First it was at the age of nine when his house was being burned by fellow Albanians. Later the feeling of loneliness shows up again when he witnesses fellow Albanians cheering a court order that brought other Albanians to the execution squad only because of their political preferences. What each of these instances share is a feeling of both helplessness and hopefulness. All young Reshat could do while his house was being burned is watch, pray, and hope that his family made it out of a burning house alive. In another interview published by the daily *Gazeta Albania* (March 4th, 2008), Dede Reshat again recalls this event and adds that when he saw his mother coming in and out of the burning house and praying out loud to God for help, young Reshat prayed also. Although he did not want to leave his home village that he had grown to love despite the poverty of his family, he had to go along with hopes that the move to Tirana would be for the best. He could not help reverse the political executions and internments that became part of lived realities of communism for many Albanians. All he could do was hope for things to change and to be with and in service of his master.

What is most significant about Dede's loneliness is the fact that the resacralizing impulse in his story is part of a bureaucratization and institutionalization of saintly authority. The reconstitution of religious life has to deal with the tension between

secularizing and sacralizing trends that have engulfed Albanian society. Although what needs to be done for religious communities involved in the project of community rebuilding is clear (reclaim lost land and properties, rebuild tekkes, initiate and train followers, appoint leaders, recognize and channel saintliness, and so on) the ambiguity of the project itself yields a great deal of uncertainty. This in return, can serve as a source of loneliness to leaders like Dede Reshat who are fully invested in rebuilding of spiritual families and who are truthful to their religious calling.

Loneliness may also relate to the indirect relationship between saintliness and the precariousness of authority it can yield. The disciples, as previously elaborated with the expulsion stories, brought about a number of challenges to Dede's own vision for the community. Although Dede occupied the formal centralized position of authority, each tekke was more or less independently organized. While 25 % of each tekke's annual earnings were to be given to the headquarters, these were rarely collected, reportedly under the pretext that tekkes were all involved in financially expensive rebuilding efforts. Because of this, Dede had waived this important monetary responsibility towards the center. Perhaps too, Dede, seeing that it was hopeless to collect, left it up to each tekke to volunteer a portion of their earnings to go to the Headquarters instead. Even over matters of ordaining members to leadership, while Dede has the sole right and power to recognize and ordain Dervishes and Babas, often he had to yield to petitions by a following who by the sheer number of votes that testified to candidate's mystical prowess and ordain some members under these circumstances. Dede was always skeptical and unhappy with his

closest allies. His followers recognized this as well, often noting the proverb: “when one does not have a chicken, they must eat a crow.”

Dede envisioned and sought to rebuild a community like he knew it in the early years of his life. This was not possible given the circumstances surrounding postsocialist transformation. Perhaps this was also a source of disappointment over the current state of affairs with the community struggling to regain a sense of continuity with the past. A nostalgia about the companionship of Dede Ahmet, unmatched by any of the many relationships that he had with members of his community and wide circle of friends and visitors that sought Dede's company, may also have been a source of his loneliness. Dede Reshat was buried in the same tyrbe as that of Dede Ahmet, right next to his master's grave. He named no one as his successor and, when asked who would take his lead, he pointed his index finger to the sky drawing people's attention to God as the sole legitimizer and appointer. In a way, the claim of being alone despite being surrounded by people at the headquarters in the last years of his life was a statement of association with the saintly leadership and the sacred chain of the Order for saints. He is closer to his master than to his disciples. The resacralizing impulse is obvious in the Sufi ideology whereby loneliness breeds spiritual wealth. As Baba Mondi put it: “God Himself takes away one's taste and yearnings of being with people.” To be lonely amidst people is perhaps another proof of saintliness: “alone *with* the Alone” (Corbin 1997: 6). There is a sense, as well, that the holy one only remains among us out of pity and that the people are not worthy of his suffering. Thus elevated by their following, the saints find comfort only

in the company of one another and, according to the emphasis on Sufi doctrine on the destination of the spiritual path, with God.



Figure 5.1. Dede Reshat at the main entrance of the Bektashi World Headquarters.
Tirana, 2007.

CHAPTER 6

On pilgrimage, the commemoration of saintliness, and the projection of postsocialist hierarchies

My first visit to Ali Baba Tekke or, as locals themselves call it *Teqeja e Alipostivanit*, was my first experience at a Bektashi pilgrimage, a commemorative form of religious activity. It was also my first research excursion outside of the capital after having spent the first months of fieldwork in the main Bektashi center where Dede Reshat resided. I was enthusiastic prior to undertaking this trip because it was soon after the typically challenging first months of fieldwork. Like many anthropologists, the start of my research required a lot of sitting and waiting for anyone who was willing to talk to me. Given a so far predictable daily routines of fieldwork, my participation in an event at a different center was a much welcomed change. I could by now more confidently claim to be a student of Bektashia at the Headquarters and this was sufficient to allow me access to be present and observe sites of pilgrimage. Because these events are open to the public, I found a greater degree of movement and access was possible in spaces where pilgrimage unfolds.

My visit to Ali Baba Tekke in spring of 2007 marked an important juncture in my fieldwork. Months after fieldwork had started, I was still entertaining an assumption that literature review and pre-fieldwork research entrenched in my understanding and expectations of the Bektashi. At the time I was not yet compelled to question the taken for granted assumption of the cohesiveness of the community and its correspondence to idealized self-representations of the community by the Bektashi themselves. Nor did I

have a reason to question the ordered or tightly bounded representations of Sufi groups that, in isolating a particular community, leave an impression of what may be called islands of Sufism or Sufi communities that exist as discrete and unconnected entities. I am referring here especially to earlier works such as Abun-Nasr's *The Tijaniyya* (1965) and O'Brien's *The Mourides of Senegal* (1971). Even though the more recent work of Ernst and Lawrence (2002) does much better in tracing the transnational networks of the Order, it still echoes the assumption of the order's cohesion amidst the regional and global outreach of the community. The unexpected events that unfolded during my visit at Ali Baba Tekke in April of 2007 led to the putting aside received literary knowledge about Sufism and opened up an inquiry into the deep fracturing of the Albanian Bektashi that remained part of my inquiry throughout out my fieldwork. It is for this reason that this chapter about Bektashi pilgrimage begins with my visit to Ali Baba Tekke during this center's hosting of the annual commemoration in 2007.

Ali Baba Tekke is located well within the southern regions of Albania (Figure 6.1) and is erected on a mountain ridge that is secluded and on higher grounds than any of the villages nearby and the vast Vjosa River valley (Figure 6.2). When Dervish Hekuran was granted initiation into Dervishhood he was sent to Alipostivan tekke. Based on testimonies by his disciples, at the time of his arrival the tekke was hardly noticeable. The task of rebuilding and reopening the center was both a promise as well as one of the challenges that ambitious young Dervishes have to overcome. The ability to build up and reopen an abandoned tekke is this decade's rite of passage for Bektashi muhiban who become initiated as dervishes and dervishes who aspire to become babas. It is not that this

is the only criteria for progress into the spiritual path. However, the ability to reopen and keep open the Bektashi tekke is widely recognized as a marker of saintliness. The element of pride in the contrast between what the tekke once was and its present condition is prevalent especially during commemorative events.

It was at this event and in the months that follows, that I learned that Dervish Hekuran was initiated into the Order upon his return from many years of hard migrant labor in neighboring Greece. According to one of Dervish's disciples, an older man in his 60s, Dervish Hekuran moved quite fast from being a muhib to becoming a dervish. His disciples see this as a sign that their murshid has the qualities of those who are born Bektashi. Just as his hagiography is pervaded by much struggle and suffering in his life prior to his initiation into the Sufi path, so is also his recent life as a Bektashi disciple and dervish. This is best seen in the way that his disciples talk about the struggles that Dervish had to overcome in regards to the administrators' takeover of the Abaz Ali shrine and their holding hostage of the administrating and reaping the proceeds of the main pilgrimage event of the Bektashi. Noted also by followers of Dervish Hekuran are his dedicated work at improving this important pilgrimage center while in service at Kulmak Tekke, which hosts the largest Bektashi pilgrimage in the annual cycle of the festivities of the Order. But there is no better occasion to show Dervish's worth than to be able to rebuild an abandoned tekke and in opening the doors of the sacred sanctuary to thousands of pilgrims.

I made it to the center by using public transportation and hitch hiking. As unpredictable as this can be, I arrived before Dervish Mikel and a group of muhiban from

the Headquarters. This gave me an opportunity to experience the transformations that take place from the time of the coming of the guests to their departure. Once there, I found Dervish Hekuran on top of a newly constructed but not yet finished building. There, sitting on a chair, he was greeting incoming visitors. Extending his hand to be kissed by young and old, men and women, he left an impression that he was letting them know that he was standing tall and building big. The once deserted hill with only few visible remnants of tekke structures was now transformed into a vast compound that could be discerned from the farthest distances in the valley below and the mountain ranges that surrounded it.

The holy shrines were newly repaired and painted in bright colors of green and white. A couple of buildings were clearly in their early stages of construction. Newly erected tombstones were spread throughout the hill. According to one of the muhiban. It was in a dream that Dervish Hekuran was commanded by the martyrs of the Karbala (members of Prophet Mohammed's family) to build their tombstones as well as those of their ancestors; the engravings mention Hazreti Fatima, Hazreti Hasan, Hazreti Hysen and so on. This way of resacralizing space is also an effort to elevate Alipostivan tekke to the ranks of such major Bektashi centers in Albania like the Abaz Ali shrine, Headquarters, and Ballëm Sulltan Tekke. All these are centers that claim to be saintly through direct affiliations to the descendant of Prophet Mohammed, the spiritual founder of the Order Haji Bektash Veli, and Balim Sultan, the second most well regarded figure of the Bektashi respectively.

Since Dervish Hekuran stood on top of a newly constructed building, in order to access him, the guests had to navigate through the construction site, climb over a set of unfinished stairs that provided no railing for support, and onto the terrace where they each kissed Dervish's hand and greeted their host. Representing the center of the spiritual hierarchy, Dervish Mikel and his entourage from the capital found this an extravagant behavior but followed the routine established by the line of pilgrims waiting to meet with Dervish Hekuran. As lunch was being set on a long table where 30 or so guests were to join Dervish Hekuran for the ceremonial meal, the guests from the headquarters all sat under a shade discussing how to best act given the disregard that Dervish Hekuran was showing towards them. "We come here on the behalf of Dede Reshat and as such deserve the same regard that he would give if Dede was here." Getting to the site itself required much uphill and off road struggle. There was no need, in their view, for Dervish to inconvenience his guest with yet another difficult climb to the top of the unfinished building. At the very least, they expected Dervish to come down from his self-made pedestal to greet his distant and, and in their view, most esteemed guests from the capital. Furthermore, as the line of pilgrims was getting longer, it looked less likely that Dervish Hekuran would find the time to sit, ever so briefly, and welcome his guests from the Headquarters as is customarily expected. Before the start of the luncheon, the humiliated guests from the headquarters got in their four wheel drive vehicle and headed for Tirana. I stayed for the remainder of the event. When I returned to the Headquarters I learned that Dervish Mikel and his companions had stopped for lunch at a restaurant along the way and had brought up the incident to the attention of Dede Reshat upon their return at the

main lodge in Tirana. The aborting of further participation in the event because the authority of the Headquarters was challenged is further evidence of deep-seated contention and competition over saintly authority and hierarchy in the context of the Bektashi pilgrimage.

While I was visiting Alipostivan tekke, Dervish Mikel asked me to take some pictures of the newly erected tombstones that did not face eastward toward Mecca but were turned instead towards the opposite direction. Dervish Mikel performed his prayers (*duva*) over the tombs nevertheless. With his palms opened in prayer, he ended by saying: “God, Oh God, if there is something here, accept our prayers; if not, forgive our transgressions.” As we were visiting each of the newly erected graves, Dervish Mikel asked that I take photos of two tombstones in particular. Thinking that developing two photos was far too little by comparison to the time and attention that Dervishes were giving me every day of my fieldwork, I obliged. I brought the photos to Dervish when I next returned to the headquarters. The claim made by a disciple of Dervish Hekuran was that Dervish dreamt the location and direction of each of the tombstones that were erected there. By the compelling power of these dreams, Dervish Hekuran had marked the place and orientation of each of the graves. When Hazreti Fatima appeared to him, a tombstone was erected on the hill, when Imam Hasan appeared to him, a tombstone was erected: the layout of the hill was transformed to demarcate the exact place on the hill where Dervish Hekuran’s dream dictated the positions of the members of Prophet's family without regard to the Muslim conventions of grave orientation towards Mecca. Dervish Mikel used photos I had taken of these to draw the attention of Dede Reshat and the

Headquarters to Dervish Hekuran's alteration of sacred space without a regard for the Bektashi and Muslim norm.

The grievance between the host of the pilgrimage and the delegation from the Headquarters and the controversy over the direction and layout of the tombstones offer a concrete examples that link pilgrimage, resacralization, and the projection of hierarchy in particular ways. In Alipostivan, it was not the sacredness of the site itself that was being contested, but rather the right of Dervish Hekuran to control and exploit sacred space. As I shall show in this chapter, contrary to existing theories that claim pilgrimage to be largely an arena for the contestation of the sacred, in the context of the Albanian Bektashi commemorative life, pilgrimage reaffirms the sacred in the sites or places of pilgrimage as well as the sanctity of ancestral saintly figures. Because saintliness depends on a recognition of hierarchy, the reaffirmation of saintliness necessitates also the projection or reinstatement of hierarchy, which can be contested by other Bektashi parties, as occurred in Alipostivan. I find the latter social dynamic to be pervasive in pilgrimage settings, as it was in other aspects of Bektashi life that have been discussed in greater detail in previous chapters.

The emphasis on establishing authority becomes fully apparent when one considers not just one main pilgrimage event of the Bektashi, but the entire and ongoing cycle of pilgrimage events that the community is involved in. To do this, the first section of this chapter spells out the details of the sample utilized to account for the commemorative life of the Bektashi. Following an account of settings, I then consider the overall context of commemorative life of the community in the singular. This is because

pilgrimage events that I observed in 2007, and during return visits in 2008 and 2011 for participation in the pilgrimage to Mt. Tomorr, are part of an ongoing ritual cycle and also part of the overall efforts of the community to restore itself in the postcommunist era.

In an effort to understand the available data, I turn my attention to and seek guidance from two main anthropological paradigms in the study of pilgrimage. First, when I apply Victor Turner's theory on pilgrimage as social processes his liminality hypothesis holds well whereas his notions of *communitas* and *antistructure* are largely unsupported in my data. Second, when I consider Eade and Sallnow's theory on pilgrimage as largely about the contestation of the sacred, I do find a great deal of contestation in the context of the Albanian Bektashi pilgrimage. However, the authenticity of the sacred appears to be strongly upheld despite ongoing contestations and controversy concerning the current leadership and their stewardship of the sacred sites. Thus, while adequate in some respects, these influential theories of pilgrimage leave many questions unanswered, and thus necessitate an attempt to account for the discrepancy between theoretical expectations and ethnographic observations. This chapter concludes with several tentative explanations of this discrepancy that I consider again in greater detail in the concluding chapter of the thesis.

Pilgrimage settings and context

Most of my fieldwork activities involved frequent day to week long stays in Bektashi tekkes. At least once a month (sometimes more frequently), the attention of the community shifted to different tekkes throughout Albania. In 2007 I became a participant

par excellence by way of persistent presence in the ongoing annual routines of pilgrimage and celebratory life cycle of the Albanian Bektashi. So much so, that the reaction of Dede Reshat gradually switched from being surprised and asking “What about you, where did you come from?” upon my arrival to the first events held at remote centers to an expectation that I would be present in most if not all of such events that took place in the second half of my research. In this section I outline the contextual details of postsocialist commemorative life as I observed it through my own participation in the ritual cycle of the Bektashi.

The annual event hosted by each of the tekkes commemorates the founder's legacy and the establishment of a Bektashi center. The dates of these celebrations are fixed and often correspond to what is widely believed to be an actual event in the early history of the center. For example, the Baba Xhemal tekke in Elbasan holds its annual commemorative event on the 16th of February. This, according to the Bektashi calendar that is published by the Headquarters, is reserved to celebrate the building of a shrine over the grave of Baba Ali Horasan by his successor at the same site, Baba Xhemal Turk. Baba Ali Horasan promoted Bektashi beliefs and practices in central Albania at the end of the 14th and beginning of the 15th century, whereas the erection of a shrine over his grave by Baba Xhemal Turk took place centuries later in the early 1800s. As was previously described in chapter 2, the stationing or installment of a Bektashi baba or Dervish in full time residence and in service at the shrine transforms a tyrbe into a tekke. It is both the legacy of Baba Ali Horasan as well as the act of establishing a tekke in his honor that the annual event of the 16th of February commemorates.

With nearly 20 tekkes up and running nationwide, there was at least one event each month outside of the headquarters. Attendance at these allowed me to get to know other tekkes throughout Albania. All in all I visited a dozen tekkes during festive events. I also visited more than half of them outside of their commemorative cycle. For example, I participated in the pilgrimage to Abaz Ali tyrbe on top of Mountain Tomorr three times: in August of 2007, 2008, and 2011.

Although I draw from materials collected in different commemorative and pilgrimage events, I focus my analysis here on four main pilgrimage sites: Abaz Ali tyrbe, and the tekkes of Ballëm Sulltan, Melan, and Alipostivan (Figure 6.1). In 2007 the events in Alipostivan, Martanesh, and Melan, were held in May 14th, June 29th, and November 14th respectively. The events on Mt. Tomorr at the Abaz Ali tyrbe take place annually from August 19th to the 25th. Since these are events in different locations and times of the year, the sample is representative of the annual commemorative cycle of the Albanian Bektashi and reflects the degree to which the community is consolidated or fractured. Having introduced Alipostivan tekke in the story of Dervish Hekuran above, the following subsections describe these three other sites of pilgrimage noting both similarities as well as differences between them in regards to what is being commemorated and how.

Ballëm Sulltan Tekke

In Martanesh, the pilgrimage lasts several days and the festivities are known as the Days of Ballëm Sulltan. Balum Sultan (Turkish spelling, “Ballëm Sulltan” in

Albanian) is the legendary first disciple of Haji Bektash Veli who was responsible for bringing the teachings of his master to the Balkans. There are several sites associated with Balum Sultan in Albania and surrounding regions. All in all, according to the mythical hagiography of the saint, seven different shrines⁵³ are found throughout the Balkans. The place known as Ballënjë, is located a day's ride on unpaved road, east of the capital of Tirana, through the picturesque southwestern most extension of the Carpathian Mountains known locally as Mali me Gropa (literally, the mountain with cavities). In the caves found on the hilly mountainous, deeply rural and hard to get to region of the District of Martanesh, there have been sightings of the spirit of Balum Sultan. Stories of miraculous healings and aid attained near these caves are attributed to miraculous intercessions of this saint. The entire region bears Balum Sultan's name and is colloquially known as Ballënjë. During the communist regime, the tekke near the saintly caves was closed and the network of caves (including those that served as shrines) on the hills were in turn subsumed by a fortified military station (Figure 6.3: a, b). The remnants of the militarization of the region were still visible in 2007.

At present the caves associated with sightings of the saint are visited by pilgrims who converge at the site especially during the pilgrimage at the end of June. In the caves' interiors, during the celebrations, one finds several coffins above ground. They are covered in green cloth, burning candles are placed on them by visitors, and there is a

⁵³ It is believed that at the time of his death, Balum Sultan asked his disciples to prepare seven coffins, and that his body, after his death, was to be placed in one of them. All seven were to be dispatched to seven different sites throughout the Balkans. Obeying their Master's wishes, the disciples were later in disbelief: when each of the coffins were opened for inspection, Balum Sultan's body was found in each one of them.

constant flow of money donations, letters written by believers who seek saint's favors, as well as folded clothing and other personal items that are left by the pilgrims over time in order to absorb the sacredness of the place. These are later taken back to pilgrims' homes for the use of children who suffer from panic attacks due to nightmares, to cure sickness, or aid women who may be experiencing difficult pregnancies. At Ballëm Sulltan tekke, one finds primarily northern Albanian gegs⁵⁴, a good number of mine workers and their families who enjoy the outdoor picnic and time off from heavy work regimes in nearby copper mines, as well as a small group of Bektashi ashiks and sympathizers who follow the ritual cycle of the Bektashi wherever there were festivities. In Martanesh, I experienced diversity within the Bektashi community for the first time. There people sang spiritual songs using of the traditional northern Albanian instrument of choice, *çifteli* whereas in the southern Albanian Melan Tekke traditional Albanian polyphonic singing was the exclusive medium of choice.

Asim Baba Tekke

The tekke in Martanesh has historically served as an in between post on the route that linked the headquarters of the Order in Tirana with major eastern Bektashi centers

⁵⁴ While most Albanologists recognize twelve different ethno-linguistic regions in Albania (Dhima 1994), the distinction recognized most widely by Albanians themselves is between the Northern gegs and Southern tosk. Although there is some controversy over the exact boundary, Shkumbin River that runs eastward through the city of Elbasan in central Albania and that empties in the Adriatic Sea is commonly accepted as the dividing line between gegs and tosk. The distinction is primarily linguistics: while a northern geg and tosk both speak and understand their Albanian tongue with only minor difficulties, the geg and tosk are recognized as two different dialects of Albanian.

such as Harabati Baba tekke in Macedonia. The Melan tekke is also strategically located in the Albanian-Greek border, in the town of Melan. It is only half an hour drive northward to the city of Gjirokaštër. Like Martanesh, Melan tekke is part of a regional network of tekkes which are in each other's view. On a clear day, one may see both Asim Baba tekke on the outskirts of the city, as well as Shtuf tekke which is located right on the foothills of the city of Gjirokaštër. Beyond this, Melan tekke has been home to a number of famous babas. In Ottoman times, it was part of a wider network of tekkes in the region of Larissa, Greece, which consisted of Durballi Sulltan tekke and the network of tekkes linked through this tekke in the historical Anatolian heartland where the largest concentration of tekkes were located.

On November 14th, Melan tekke celebrates the rebuilding of the tekke by Baba Ali Haqi in the late 1800s. Judging from the structure of the building as well as archaeological investigations at this UNESCO heritage center, the site was first used as a Christian cathedral (Muçaj and Hobdari 2005). The tekke itself is at present located in an area surrounded by villages of Greek and Albanian Orthodox Christians. The celebrations there had a present and obvious sensitivity towards the fact that the visitors to the tekke came from nearby Asim Baba tekke and Shtuf tekke. Among others, there were Bektashi and non-Bektashi guests from the city of Gjirokaštër who together hold this annual event in a village inhabited almost exclusively by Orthodox Christians, part of a cluster of a handful of village established by Greek migrants to Albanian lands over the centuries. It is partly the case that in addition to celebrating postcommunist resilience and survival, by being in the southernmost point of Albania only a short walk to the Greek border,

pilgrimage to this tekke and the celebrations therein take on a particular nationalist flavor that is not as distinctly present in Martanesh or other inland centers. Festivities in Melan are also different in that they are limited to shrine visitation and a dinner with about 100-150 invited guests. This site does not host an event of mass participation such as the pilgrimages to Martanesh and Mt. Tomorr do.

The Shrine of Abaz Ali

The shrine of Abaz Ali is located halfway between northern Martanesh and southern Melan sites. This site attracts the largest and most diverse participation to a Bektashi-hosted event in Albania. The pilgrimage event is known as the Days of August (*Ditët e Gushtit*). It happens every year between 19th and 25th of August with the peak of pilgrimage activity culminating on August 22nd. The sacredness of the site is different from Ballëm Sulltan tekke and Melan Tekke. The main and most frequented shrine is that of Abaz Ali. According to Baba Mondi, Abaz Ali was the flag bearer at the Battle of Karbala, and a descendant of Prophet Mohammed. When he was martyred, his spirit is believed to have settled at the Albanian mountaintop. Furthermore, when a Bektashi baba visited the site of the battle of Karbala in present day Iraq, he brought back a handful of soil that was later sprinkled over the mountaintop where the shrine of Abaz Ali now stands. The shrine is typical of other Bektashi shrines in that it is a rounded vaulted structure with 12 windows; inside the shrine is an above ground tomb and tombstone draped with green cloth. At the peak of the pilgrimage events, the shrine is covered with coins and bills of smallest to highest value, mostly Albanian lek but also foreign bills

such as euros and U.S. dollars. It is an atypical shrine, in the sense that there is not an actual saint buried there. In addition to this, there are other shrines on the mountain that are part of pilgrims' destinations during this event. A shrine known as *Gjurma* or "footprint" of Abaz Ali is the first shrine that the pilgrims encounter as they claim the mountaintop (Figure 6.4). Near the Kulmak tekke are the shrines, which are actual burial sites for the babas and dervishes that served at this location in pre-communist Albania. Like Martanesh, the shrine of Abaz Ali was razed to the ground and turned into an army base. At present one still finds there a labyrinth of fortified tunnels and underground system of connected bunkers. During the weeklong celebration, herdsman who station their flocks of rams near the shrine and tomb keepers use the bunkers as temporary shelter from the cool overnight temperatures and for shade from the scorching midday sun.

The pilgrimage to the shrine of Abaz Ali is the largest event hosted by the Albanian Bektashi. In terms of the number of the participation, it outcompetes similar events in Martanesh and Melan. While the latter may attract a few dignitaries such as town mayors, the festivities in Mt. Tomorr enjoy a constant flow of nationally acclaimed personalities such as country's parliament members, members of foreign embassies in Albania and, on occasion, the highest state figures. In 2005, President Alfred Moisiu was the guest of honor while in 2006 Sali Berisha, the Prime Minister of Albania, visited Martanesh. Outside of Albania, a good number of visitors come from neighboring Greece. Many Albanian Bektashi arrive also from Macedonia, Kosovo, and the Albanian diaspora elsewhere. Moreover, the leadership of the order, Bektashi babas and dervishes,

although almost never all present at the same event, more universally participate in this pilgrimage making it the only event where large members of the Bektashi spiritual leadership are found together all at once. Both the scale and content of the activities take on a different proportion by comparison to the other events. Nationally recognized pop and folk singers are part of an organized concert for the enjoyment of the honorary guests and pilgrims at large. A separate lunch in honor of the present dignitaries takes place on the 22nd while other pilgrims, in a self-organized fashion, bring their meals with them or visit the many makeshift pubs and restaurants that cover an area equivalent to several football fields over the rugged mountain.

Although one may continue describing differences in the settings that Bektashi commemoration takes place, another example of difference and the impact that it has on the overall experience of the events will suffice. This has to do with the degree of functionality of the aforementioned centers. Both tekkes in Martanesh and Melan are fully functional. They have tyrbes or holy shrines and a baba and dervish is in full residence in both. They each host visitors throughout the year as well as pilgrims to these centers during the annual celebrations. They each have and maintain the ritual space that is reserved for initiations. They both are representatives of what I previously referred to as tekke centered communities.

In contrast, when Bektashi arrive for the first time on Kulmak tekke (Figure 6.5) on Mt. Tomorr they almost all link their first impressions to the peculiar elements of this center that stand in stark contrast to what is normally found in almost all other centers. First, no serving baba or dervish (except for a few in pre-communist times) have made

this tekke their primary residence. This is both because the winter makes full time residence a nearly impossible task but also because the status of this center is yet to be settled by the Bektashi leadership and administration.

Dervish Hekuran who is now stationed in Alipostivan tekke and another Baba both spent considerable amounts of time at this tekke. They both invested in the rebuilding of the Abaz Ali shrine, the rebuilding of the abandoned tekke structure, and the road infrastructure that makes travel for pilgrimage possible. However, both of them did not manage to overcome the pressures from the non-clerical administrators of the pilgrimage who continue to enjoy a decade long monopoly and stewardship over the pilgrimage event and its proceeds. There is no functioning *mejdán* at this tekke and the room that resembles the interior of the Bektashi prayer room is used to host guests during the day and as sleeping quarters at night during the weeklong event. While the fully functional tekkes enjoy also a dependable local following that make up the core of the initiated participants during commemorative functions, the tekke that hosts the major event of the community suffers not only from ongoing competition between various spiritual leaders that try to wield their authority during the pilgrimage but also between the spiritual leadership and the secular (if not antireligious) bureaucrats that claim stewardship over the event and the proceeds ⁵⁵ that it yields. The most important impact

⁵⁵ In 2011, the events at Kulmak tekke were afflicted by a visible decline in participation. It was the year of the passing away of Dede Reshat. The much anticipated concert was cancelled and the tekke walls were extended to make more room for members and guests of the tekke to camp within the tekke walls and to keep the temporary businesses such as pubs, restaurants, and other vendors farther away from the tekke walls. In respect of Dede Reshat, singing was prohibited within the tekke walls. The ban on music and singing was not and could not be extended to the businesses around the tekke walls. A conservative estimate of the proceeds collected from the

of these two different settings and tekkes' functionality on the commemorations that take place there is that in Martanesh and Melan the events are more compact and localized whereas in Mt. Tomorr the pilgrimage is much more diverse, fractured and, as I show in the section that follow, with more visible tensions over the legitimacy of the leadership over the event, the community itself, as well as the stewardship over the sacred site.

Liminality, communitas, and anti-structure

Pilgrimage as a particular form of religious practice in general, and Dervish Hekuran's story in particular, does not quite fit in existing anthropological theories of pilgrimage. For example, there is a significant difference in Turner's account of pilgrimage and my own interest in those aspects of observed behavior of the Albanian Bektashi that have to do with travel to and the commemoration of the sacred. Turner's *Pilgrimage as Social Processes* (1974: 166-230) is a comparative study of pilgrimage in which Turner seeks to isolate those social processes or patterns of human behavior that are visibly present in pilgrimage across different religious contexts. More specifically Turner's interests are with the "major historical religion, [such as] Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, and Shintoism" (1974: 166). That his interests are to uncover universal patterns or deep structures of pilgrimage is evidenced in Turner's sampling choices of pilgrimage behavior from temporally as well as spatially diverse range of human behavior. Following an analytical mode that

three shrines on the mountain for 2011 puts the net amount to 250, 000 dollars whereas uncorroborated claims for the years prior (2007 and 2008) put the annual proceeds from the event between one to two million dollars in annual proceeds.

resembles van Gennep's *The Rites of Passage* (1960), in his analysis Turner includes materials on pilgrimages in archaic societies such as Egypt, Babylonia as well as the civilizations of Meso-America and pre-Christian Europe. Both literate and nonliterate societies are subject to his analysis.

Like Turner's seminal work that established pilgrimage as a topic of interest and attention in anthropological literature, my interest in seeking to explain Bektashi pilgrimage are also comparative. The aim here is to inquire into the degree to which my ethnographic data on pilgrimage – they concern a single community (Albanian Bektashi) at a given time (primarily in 2007, but also in 2008 and 2011) and a given space (within the territorial confines of postsocialist Albania) – agree with the three main anticipated universals of pilgrimage in Turner's analysis: liminality, anti-structure, and *communitas*. In so doing, my work is comparative in that it tests Turner's "universal" theory in a specific case.

In relation to pilgrimage, liminality is an important analytical construct in Turner's theory. In his own words, "pilgrimages are liminal phenomena" (Turner 1974: 166) with "liminality" being "spatial separation from the familiar and habitual" (196). It is a concept borrowed from van Gennep who noted that most rites of passage include a stage of separation, another in-between phase, and a reaggregation stage. For Turner, who noted a marked peripherality of pilgrimage shrines, pilgrimages themselves also have an in-between spatial aspect.

In my sample of observed pilgrimage events, Abaz Ali tyrbe on the mountain fits a liminal or in-between characterization well (Figure 6.6). The site is located on top of

the highest mountain peak in southern Albania. Located at 2,416 meters above sea level, the shrine is on the mountain peak that formerly was reachable only by hiking or by riding horses or mules (which happens still today to some degree). Today, most pilgrims arrive in heavy all-wheel drive vehicles during the summer months. The mountaintop is only accessible to the rare and well trained mountaineers with alpine hiking gear in the winter season. For much of the winter, the mountain peak where the sacred shrine of Abaz Ali is located, is uninhabited, covered in snow, and receives no visitors, layman or pilgrims alike. During the summer, some 200 meters below the mountain peak one finds a Bektashi tekke and a few workers who begin the preparations for the weeklong pilgrimage event that happens annually every August. Given the heavy emphasis on the spatial aspect of liminality employed by Turner, the pilgrims who make it to the mountaintop, Bektashi and non-Bektashi alike, are well within Turner's conditions of spatial liminality.

The participants are temporarily separated from the familiar and habitual settings that they occupy as well. A greater degree of liminality is accomplished in the behavioral routines that the pilgrims take part in during their stay at the pilgrimage site. From the decision to undertake the journey – Albanians indicate this by the saying “*kam taksur një rrugë te vendi i mirë*” or literally, “I have made the intention to journey to the good place” – until the return home, the pilgrims undergo a series of highly ritualized forms of behavior that are not typically a part of their everyday behavioral routines.

A typical routine for a pilgrim to Abaz Ali's shrine is as follows. Halfway to the main shrine, the pilgrim stops at the first shrine where a footprint is found that is believed

to be made by Abaz Ali. Like most shrine visitations, the pilgrim stops at the doorstep, kisses both sides of the doorway, kneels to kiss the threshold, and enters the shrine. Once inside, the pilgrim proceeds to the center, kneels again and kisses and/or gently caresses the footstep. He/she may leave some coins in the footstep or make a money donation by inserting coins or paper bills in the locked safe installed inside the shrine. Although candles are not customarily lit during the day in Bektashi tekkes, this restriction is lifted during the pilgrimage to the mountain and people are allowed to light a candle either in the interior of the shrine or on a candle stand where most pilgrims are encouraged to light their candles. Once the pilgrim performs these actions, they back away facing the shrine, being careful not to turn their backs towards it and, by again kissing both sides of the doorway and the threshold, they exit. Most pilgrims take only about 5 minutes to perform these rites although others may decide to stay longer. Inside the shrine they quietly kneel (sometimes whispering to themselves or each other), maintain a contemplative posture. If they decide to stay in the vicinity nearby the shrine they chat with other pilgrims in louder voices, men may smoke cigarettes, and take photos with the tyrbe and picturesque surroundings and spectacular views that the mountaintop offers.

Pilgrims continue their trip onward and make similar stops at the shrines of Bektashi babas and dervishes who once served at the tekke on the mountain. At this midway point between the shrine over the footstep of Abaz Ali and the mountaintop, pilgrims perform much the same rites described above. Furthermore, they may circumnavigate the sacred tombs in a counter clockwise direction and en route may touch the tombstones with their hands, kneel to kiss the green cloth over the tombs, and collect

small amounts of soil near the tombs to take with them for use during difficult pregnancies or births, prolonged suffering of the dying, or other sicknesses: small amounts of soil are mixed in water which when consumed may help relieve pain or cure certain sicknesses. Candles are again lit here and pilgrims who wish may also visit the interior of the tekke where they are briefly hosted by present babas or dervishes.

The visits with babas and dervishes on the way up to the main site are also highly ritualized. The pilgrim kisses the resident baba's hand upon entry and departure. Most do this and exit in order to make way for the lines of pilgrims who want to do the same. When fewer visitors are present, Baba hosts guests for longer periods of time during which the visitors talk about where they are coming from as well as share any burdens they wish to be relieved from by baba's intercession. When time permits and the pilgrims want baba's help, in the presence of other guests, they whisper what it is that troubles them (headaches, children bothered by nightmares, or simply seeking a blessing for good luck), which is followed by a brief silent prayer and a blessing from the baba who breathes three times over the pilgrims body and face. Most pilgrims make it a point to visit the shepherds soon after their visit to the shrine and their meeting with baba. They buy a ram to sacrifice (about \$ 100), hire a butcher (about \$ 15) and someone to prep and roast it (about \$ 20), and move on to reach the mountain peak where the shrine of Abaz Ali is about 45 minutes away by an all-wheel drive or about two hours walk from the tekke for the very few that chose to hike instead.

Whether by foot, by a horse, an all-wheel drive, or by a helicopter for those who can afford it, just about all pilgrims make it to the mountaintop. The visitation of the

shrine of Abaz Ali is the most important obligation for the pilgrims who make it a central ritual in their required obligations towards their Bektashi faith. While all shrines are spiritually beneficial, most stories of miracles and interventions are associated with the shrine of Abaz Ali. Those who make it to this shrine prefer to sacrifice their ram near the shrine while some insist on killing their ram in the immediate vicinity of the shrine. Facing east towards Mecca and by first making the traditional Muslim prayer *bismillahim* (in the name of God), a butcher slices the animal's throat, though in some cases the pilgrim does so himself. In all of my observations the butcher was always a male. The ram is left to bleed and its movements as it gives out its last breath is observed closely. It is believed that the most propitious sacrifice is when a ram is sacrificed facing the east but gives the last breath facing the shrine of Abaz Ali. At this midpoint location, the rituals of shrine visitation increase in their intensity and variety. The candle threshold is crowded to a point of near suffocation. Because it is windy at the mountaintop, the burning candles create a massive fire. Pilgrims try to light a candle per family member individually, but quickly give in to the impossibility and simply throw the candles in the fire and let them be consumed by the incense flames of the collective: the single most compelling image of *communitas* is accomplished thanks in part to the meteorological constraints on burning individual candles on the mountaintop.

While at the shrine of Abaz Ali, people insist on taking with them some soil within the areas immediately under the shrines enclosure. This leaves many visible holes in the ground, and the interior and exterior areas of the shrines, when I visited in 2007, 2008, and 2011 were covered with clothing, letters written by pilgrims' relatives and

friends who could not make it to the mountaintop. Together with their photos and prayers seeking the help of Abaz Ali, these make up the arsenal of relics found at the shrine and that signify sacredness. While at the mountaintop I spent hour after hour observing the pilgrims coming and going. Their visits did not last long: several minutes inside the shrine, and several more enjoying the spectacular view from the southernmost top of the mountain. Picture taking was a ubiquitous preoccupation. Next to the soil that people took with them, the pictures they took are displayed beneath the rear view mirror of the interior of their cars, as well as on their homes, for protection against the evil eye. Public displays of these relics serve also as a testimony that they indeed visited the shrine. After the journey to the mountaintop, pilgrims return the tekke grounds, recover their roasted ram, give a portion of it to the tekke, and feast on the rest with their family members and friends. Those who wish to return home right after their trip take the meat with them and give small portions of it to their closest relatives, neighbors, and close friends.

Whether a pilgrim chooses to complete the above routine in one day, arrive at the mountain in the afternoon, camp out for the night, and depart in the morning hours, or stay on the mountaintop for several days, Turner's theme of spatial and habitual liminality is confirmed. When we introduce the outsider/insider distinction however, liminality is less obvious. All three of my trips to the mountaintops started from the headquarters. Dervish Mikel did not make the trip to the mountaintop in any of the three summers that I was there. I asked him before my second trip if he was to go to Mt. Tomorr. "Mt. Tomorr is right here where I am standing", he quickly replied, nodding towards the sacred tombs that are sheltered at the Headquarters. While for the Albanian layman going to an out of

the way Bektashi tekke during a heightened pilgrimage activity like the Days of August is truly a rare event, seen from the perspective of Bektashi babas and dervishes who are full time residents and servants at Bektashi tekke's, visiting another tekke is hardly a change. They may be spatially removed, but the extent of liminality ends there. Whether at their own tekke or another, their daily routines during and outside of pilgrimage are, generally speaking, rather similar. They visit tyrbes at their own tekke and they do so also at the pilgrimage site – the rites that accompany their visit to any tyrbe show little to no variation regardless of locality or occasion. They host and greet visitors in both instances. The only difference is a change in frequency since during pilgrimage they meet and greet many more people than any other event in the annual cycle of events. Still many of the people that they meet and greet while in pilgrimage are the very people who frequent babas and dervishes at their home tekke. It is much more meritorious for the muhiban and ashiks to meet with babas or dervishes during the pilgrimage for they are much more likely to receive a potent blessing. Often babas and dervishes arrive with their entourage and circle of followers. Upon arrival, and sometimes with the arrival of elite guests of the tekke the followers line up and one by one kiss baba's hand in open display of loyalty towards him. Nonetheless, despite these indications of loyalty, the routines of Bektashi insiders during pilgrimage are a continuation and replication of daily routines that insiders ordinarily experience at their home centers.

If liminality is so far only lightly, if at all, problematized, *communitas* and anti-structure are more visibly problematic in the context of Bektashi pilgrimage after communism. In Turner's view, liminality begets *communitas*, and *communitas* is

substantiated by the pervasiveness of anti-structure. In Turner's words, "communitas is a modality of social relatedness; friendships made in . . . circumstances of liminal seclusion" (1975: 201). In a more explicit statement of relationship between liminality, communitas, and anti-structure Turner states: "liminality, the optimal setting of communitas relations, and communitas, a spontaneously generated relationship between leveled and equal total and individuated human beings, stripped of structural attributes, together constitute what one might call anti-structure" (1974: 202). In an attempt to further clarify the meaning of "liminality," "communitas" and "anti-structure" (terms that were introduced in *The Ritual Process* (1969), Turner writes: "In liminality, communitas tends to characterize relationships between those jointly undergoing ritual transition. The bonds of communitas are anti-structural in the sense that they are undifferentiated, equalitarian, direct . . . relationships" (Turner 1974: 274). While indications of communitas and anti-structure may be found in pilgrimage sites that are frequented by the Albanian Bektashi and their guests, what is striking is that observations in this study show pilgrimage as an arena for the display of differentiated and hierarchical types of relationships.

More specifically, the "undifferentiated" and "equalitarian" bonds that Turner theorized to be prevalent in pilgrimage (a condition of liminality) are rarely observed in my sample. What prevails instead are bonds between individual participants in pilgrimage that mirror the structural differentiations that exist between individuals outside of the pilgrimage event. There are many examples that may be listed in support of this, and here I include only some of the more striking ones. Pilgrims arrive at the

mountaintop either by themselves, with their friends, their families, or in organized groups such as a dozen undergraduate students from Germany, six American Peace Corps volunteers, or a squad of Albanian police officers, all of whom made it to the pilgrimage site. While we may speak of shared experiences between most pilgrims (shrine visitation, temporary cohabitation of pilgrimage site), most people bring with them the structural differentiations and these, in my sample, either remain intact or are further reinforced during and after the pilgrimage experience.

For example, if we were to shadow a family during their pilgrimage we would notice that they arrive to the mountain by themselves. In most cases they bring with them their own food – they share their meals together. All along, the mother sets up the meals and is in charge of putting leftovers away at the end of the picnic. Mothers keep close guard over their unmarried daughters, and mothers-in-law chaperone their daughters-in-law during the overly crowded days on 21st and 22nd of August when the pilgrimage activities reach their peak. During the day, the family may visit the makeshift bars for coffee and soft drinks together. In the evening, the father may seek the pleasure of having alcoholic beverages in the company of other men at the same makeshift bars that remain open throughout the night during the pilgrimage event. The scene is no different from pubs in the cities where they may have a mixed male and female clientele during the day but only male customers in the late evening hours. There is no breakdown of structural differentiation in the existing bonds between pilgrims: the alpha male in a group of friends remains the most vocal member of the group during the pilgrimage, those who were leaders upon the arrival of the student group from Germany continued to be their

decision makers throughout their stay at the pilgrimage, and the chain of command among the squad of police officers remained intact, as revealed when their leader enjoyed the privilege of meeting with Dede Reshat and by the fact that each time they dined at the tekke they clearly sat in more or less a similar hierarchical formation with the eldest and highest ranked at the head of the table and the youngest lowest ranked in the force seating last and farther away from their leaders.

Guests of the Bektashi at pilgrimage events were not only individuals and groups of friends and families, but also representatives of the state. Next to police officers they included high ranking politicians, members of the foreign embassies in Albania, members of the Albanian parliament and so on. These too are participants in pilgrimage events and they too bring with them a set of structural and hierarchical relationship that are not dissolved but upheld throughout their stay on Mt. Tomorr. Not only do they not have to wait to meet with Dede Reshat and Baba's, but the latter wait to escort them from the very instant of their arrival by all-wheel vehicles or helicopters. While only some pilgrims are lucky to find a baba or dervish at the shrines during their visit, the more esteemed guests of the Bektashi are accompanied to the shrines by an entourage of babas, dervishes, their chauffeurs and bodyguards, and of course the media camera crews who report on the movements of the pilgrimage elite – indeed a sharply focused public display of existing hierarchies. While most pilgrims bring their meals with them to the mountain and have their meals in the open air, the more esteemed guests of the Bektashi are served multi course warm meals with all the fixings indoors with the same protocol and

diplomatic sensitivity that is typical of dinners at Sheraton Hotel or Tirana International for state sponsored events.

So far I have traced those aspect of Bektashi commemorative ritual cycle that agreed as well as those that disagreed with Turner's theory on pilgrimage. The resulting pattern is one that upholds the liminality characterization of pilgrimage without an expected tendency towards *communitas* and *antistructure*. Instead, it appears that the opening incident to this chapter between Dervish Hekuran and his guests from the Headquarters as well as observed religious practice during pilgrimage events in the context of the Albanian Bektashi tend toward fragmentation and a preoccupation with the hierarchical structuring of the community and its guests. I turn now to a different model about the sacred as a discursive contestation in order to test its theoretical competence in explaining the particular observed nuances of the postsocialist pilgrimage.

Patterned contestations of the sacred

In contrast to Turner who developed a model for structural change, a major paradigm in the study of pilgrimage has emerged in the last couple of decades which sees pilgrimage not only as a field of social relations but more importantly as a "realm of competing discourses" (Eade and Sallnow 1991: 5; Coleman and Eade 2004). This is a move away from Turner's notion of equality and commensality. Drawing from fieldwork in the high Andes in Peru, Sallnow (1987) was compelled by the complexity of interactions between religious and secular relations of pilgrimage and the relative inability of Turner's interplay between structure and *communitas* to explain this

cohabitation of the secular and religious in pilgrimage sites. The findings were later mobilized to view the sacred as a "contested religious void" and the heuristic agenda thus formulated to "deconstruct the very category "pilgrimage" into historically and culturally specific behaviours and meanings . . . for if one can no longer take for granted the meaning of a pilgrimage for its participants, one cannot take for granted a uniform definition of the phenomenon of pilgrimage either" (Eade and Sallnow 1991: 3).

At the center of this theoretical approach to the study of pilgrimage is the contesting of the sacred. Several immediate examples are apparent in the application of this perspective to Bektashi pilgrimage. First there is an ongoing contestation of the sacrality of the religious centers that divides the diverse participants into two main groups: insider and outsiders to the order. Most outsiders, primarily secular Albanians and foreign visitors, question the validity of Bektashi claims that are used to defend the sacredness of the holy shrines. The most obvious examples for this are challenges by outsiders to the sanctity of shrines such as that of Abaz Ali on Mt. Tomorr and the tombstones of the members of the Prophet's family in Alipostivan. Recall that it is believed that although the actual remains of Abaz Ali are not buried at the mountaintop, the mountaintop is considered to be his final place of rest. The sanctity of the shrine is emphasized through a secondary sacralization of this place whereby sand from Karbala was brought to and sprinkled over the mountaintop. Dreams and intercessions received by pilgrims serve as testimonies that amount to ongoing resacralization events of this site. In rather similar ways, outsiders have a hard time buying into the sacredness of Alipostivan given that the tombs of the members of the Prophets family are erected based

on dream that was received by Dervish Hekuran. A dividing boundary is visible between insiders to the order who believe on the sacredness of the sites based on their ability to generate miraculous interventions and the outsiders who are drawn to the events as occasions for outings and picnics with friends and relatives rather than because of an exclusively religious appeal.

Contestation can be external to the Bektashi order, or internal to it. In Melan, there is external tension over the stewardship of the site. The center is sacred to the Bektashi because of the shrine of founding baba that is located on tekke grounds whereas the neighboring Christian village considers the center as sacred by virtue of its history as a medieval cathedral. In Mt. Tomorr, there are competing stories about the mountain, which is said by some to have been a site for pagan worship in ancient times. For example, while ascending towards the mountaintop, I shared a ride on a pick up track with a Sunni Muslim from the nearby city of Berat. When I asked a teenager who was holding on to the horns of a ram along the bumpy ride what the purpose of his visit was, he answered: "we have heard people saying that this is a good place (i.e. *vakëf*, or sacred), others saying that it was good to have visited, and we said why not, let us try it for good luck." On the mountaintop, the family offered their ram as a sacrifice, and returned home without paying a visit to the interiors of the shrine. For them, the Bektashi aspect of the site was irrelevant. Again, a contestation of the sacred here is apparent in the ways that Sunni Muslims and the Bektashi interact with sacred spaces. Still despite this evidence supporting Eade and Sallnow's theory of contestation, the sacredness of the shrine is nevertheless reinforced by most pilgrims, Sunni and Bektashi alike, despite

disagreements over the acceptance of shrine veneration as a viable form of religious practice in Islam.

There is ample evidence in my data that for many, the thrust of contestation surrounds the stewardship of the pilgrimage event and the legitimacy of the current spiritual leadership of the community. For example, as a middle aged father and his son in the mid-twenties approached the Kulmak tekke, we greeted one another and began talking. As is the case with most greetings, we asked where each one of us was from. Learning that they arrived from the coastal city of Vlorë, whose closest Bektashi center is the Kuzum Baba tekke, I asked if they had been at the newly built tekke of Baba Sadik. Recall from an earlier chapter that Baba Sadik is the baba of “stone and cement” who has been responsible for the building of a number of tekkes from the ground up, including here also the newly constructed Kuzum Baba tekke. Much to my surprise and before his father had his say, the young man wasted no time in sharply responding to my inquiry. Using a thick Vlorë accent which puts a heavy emphasis on just about all words in a sentence he stated: “*unë di të vete të ndez një qiri dhe aq,*” literally “I know to go and light a candle (at the shrine) and that is it.” In Kuzum Baba tekke, the shrine of the founder, is located outside of the tekke's surrounding walls, which makes it quite easy for visitors to the shrine to avoid stopping at the tekke as well. His father, who was standing nearby, displayed unwavering agreement and a visible sense of pride about his son's proclamation.

This was not the first time I had encountered this sentiment. For example, while staying at Asim Baba tekke, it was evident that most of the visitors there preferred to visit

the shrines and forego a visit with the serving baba. This happened frequently even though visitors have to go through the main gates of the tekke to access the shrines that are right next to the main tekke compound and in clear view of baba's hosting quarters. What was surprising about the young man's pronouncement was that the conversation was taking place right in front of the main Kulmak tekke entrance, under the towering shadow of the holy shrine of Abaz Ali that was within our eye sight on the mountaintop. We were also surrounded by many pilgrims as well as people in service at the tekke during a major pilgrimage event. The statement is, in effect, a blatant dismissal of the current spiritual leadership of the order while, at the same time, it strongly reaffirms the sanctity of the Bektashi shrines.

In 2011, I spent a good deal of time observing pilgrims visit the shrines near the Kulmak tekke as well as the Abaz Ali shrine on the mountaintop. In alternating between two sites, I found the shared trips to and from the shrines to be quite revealing of pilgrims' moods and concerns immediately before and after shrine visitations. I descended also to the shrine of the footprint of Abaz Ali that was the first site to welcome pilgrims on their ascent to the mountaintop and last to bid them farewell on their return home. Halfway through my walk to this shrine, I hitched a ride on a van with pilgrims from southern Albania whose home tekke is in Melan. This group of middle aged men drove up to the mountaintop just to pay respects and visit the shrine of Abaz Ali. In about half an hour of conversation as we were approaching the shrine of the footprint, they were very vocal over the unkempt condition that they found the shrine at the mountaintop. "The tomb keepers," they said, "stay there all day, and never touch the

broom to sweep the dust that accumulates from ongoing human traffic. What they are most concerned about is keeping close watch over people to make sure what money comes in and how much they give.” What is striking is that even though they found the shrine in a sorry state of affairs, dirty and unkempt, this did not undermine the sacred quality of the shrine, but spoke to the incompetence and greed of the men hired to look after it. Indeed they were referring not to the tomb keeping but the “tomb raiding” that this thesis opened up with.

The headquarters’ authority and the stewardship of the pilgrimage site was also challenged by the small business owners who take advantage of the week long human event and the temporary yet condensed clientele that it provides. They express anxieties about the gradual expansion of the tekke walls, which leads to a spatial marginalization of these businesses and their relocation to harder to reach spaces further away from the center. Complaints over the lack of accommodations, mainly water, and about the shoddy up keeping of the main roadway to the mountaintop and the lack of sufficient toilet facilities are the main concerns that small business owners and pilgrims alike make against the local administrators and the personnel imported from the headquarters in Tirana to manage the event. In local and national presses, the concerns of the pilgrims and public at large are linked to the proceeds of the pilgrimage: namely the donations left at the three shrines as well as the profits from the sale of rams which are used for the customary sacrifice (*kurban*) by pilgrims to the mountain. Speculations are made over hefty sums of money stored in bank accounts of well to do businesses of those who serve

as administrators of the pilgrimage. These accusations of the incompetence and greed of the site managers spread to taint the spiritual authority of the Bektashi as well.

But the most blatant challenge to the authority of the Headquarters over the Mt. Tomorr pilgrimage event comes from local claims by parties who consider themselves legitimate successors of Dervish Iliaz. The latter is remembered by the villages closest to Mt. Tomorr for his miraculous gallantry while in full residence at Kulmak Tekke. His remains are one of the five Bektashi leaders found within the open air shrine enclosure on tekke grounds. In 2011, I spent some time with German students who had an interest not only in the pilgrimage, but more specifically in the Roma participation in it. Their advisor in Germany had introduced them to issues relating to the Roma of the Balkans and because the pilgrimage attracted a visible group of Gypsy families, the pilgrimage was especially appropriate occasion to solicit money and gifts of food from pilgrims. A group of musicians of Roma ancestry were hired to play traditional Albanian songs with the conventional set of instruments, a tambourine, clarinet, and accordion. The German students followed this group closely and became also their most profitable clients. It is customary that when a band of musicians makes music that moves people to dance in weddings or other festive events, those who enjoy the music and dance give money to the musicians. The main beneficiary of these donations was no other than the man who had hired the musicians and who claimed to be a direct descendant of Dervish Iliaz.

As we were sitting at a pub, and while the German students were keen to make the boss talk about his relationship with the Roma musicians, I became interested in his combative speech against what he referred to as "those who are now running the tekke."

The pub was located near the only water fountain just below a steep ravine that separates the tekke above and the pubs below it. Over the horizon immediately in front of us stood the shrine of Abaz Ali. As the boss was openly dismissing the current administrators of the pilgrimage as "atheist thieves" who have taken over Dervish Iliaz's tekke, his speech was punctuated by appeals to the shrine of Abaz Ali. "*Për Abaz Ali*" (literally, in the name of Abaz Ali) or "*për atë majë mali*" (literally, in the name of that mountaintop). As he was drinking shots of raki (hard liquor) bottoms up in the early hours of the morning, the musicians' boss further claimed: "if they do not give up their claims over Dervish Iliaz's tekke, I will take it from them." The statement was finished by a trigger finger gesture of the right hand signifying the use of a weapon to do so. There is no need for further comment: wherever there is a contestation, it is patterned in a particular way. What is being contested is the current stewardship of the pilgrimage site and, at the same time, contestations are an affirmation of the sacred, which the present stewards are said to be profaning.

Postsocialist pilgrimage and the projection of hierarchy

My analysis employs a contextual approach to the study of pilgrimage in order to move away from universalist narratives on human behavior. The results however are in disagreement with the theory on pilgrimage as an arena for the contestation of the sacred for, by and large, the evidence leans toward a different kind of contestation: that of the authority and legitimacy of current leadership and stewardship of the sacred sites. The contestations and opposition that is present in these cases affirm rather than challenge the

sacredness of the sites. The heuristic dilemma demanding further explanation is the apparent disparity between the two main theoretical frameworks and the observed ethnographic data. That is, how can we better explain pilgrimage events that agree with Turner's notions of liminality as well as substantiating alternative theories of pilgrimage as contestation, but that do not show *communitas* and *antistructure*, nor do they lead to desacralization, but rather they display a reassertion of hierarchy, reaffirmation of structure and the upholding of the sacred?

While reserving an extended account of pilgrimage within the larger context of the reconstitution of religion for the concluding chapter of the dissertation, I will make a few tentative explanations here. Let us again account not for pilgrimage but pilgrimages. For the Bektashi, the national headquarters is heavily invested in the maintenance of local pilgrimage cycles. Headquarters publishes an annual calendar that promotes each pilgrimage event nationally. The leader of the community who resides at the headquarters (Dede Reshat until 2011, Baba Mondi since 2011) personally takes part in the most popular events such as those at Mt. Tomorr and in Martanesh, while he sends Dervish Mikel to take part on events with more modest participation. In all cases where Dede Reshat is a participant he assumes the leadership role of the event: he is offered the seat occupied by the tekke's host, sits at the head of the table, and officiates opening and closing of the celebratory banquet. Pilgrimage then is an arena for the reenactment and reaffirmation of the existing structures of the spiritual. Seen this way, the actual absence of structure is remedied through the public projection of what it ought to look like via the participation of the Dede and his assistants.

Just as there is a display of the hierarchy of leadership, the tekkes themselves are also hierarchically ranked. The Headquarters, by virtue of housing the dedehood or highest spiritual leadership of the orders since its relocation from Haji Bektash tekke in Turkey to the capital of Albania in 1923, is at the top of this hierarchy. Other tekkes are ranked by the following by virtue of the babas that have served there, their saintly performance, and the degree to which centers attract a following over time. Centers with larger following are ranked higher. Pilgrimage events are part of the ongoing resacralization processes at the community level. Under the influence of the administrators, decisions are made whether Dede Reshat or his dervishes are to visit a certain tekke, whether or not and how much of the resources are assigned to aid individual tekkes in their annual celebration. A truck full of equipment, including the platform wherefrom dignitaries address the crowds, as well as an entire team of plumbers, electricians, cooks, accountants, guards, tomb keepers and grounds keepers are sent every year by the Headquarters to Mt. Tomorr to support the events there. By contrast, only a modest group composed of Dervish Mikel and a muhib made the trip to Melan for the annual celebration in 2007. Thus, a certain hierarchy of tekkes is maintained from above in the overall management of the annual pilgrimage cycle.

Another process yields a further demarcation of hierarchy. Each local community (town or city based) considers their tekke to be their own spiritual center while still upholding one way or another the ultimate spiritual authority of Dede Reshat and that of the headquarters. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, when asked if he was going to make the pilgrimage to Mt. Tomorr, Dervish Mikel insisted that Mt. Tomorr is already

with him, at the headquarters where he was to remain directing his gaze towards the shrines there. When asked if he has plans to visit Mecca and partake in the hajj, he answers that "my Mecca is right here, on headquarters' grounds" implying that his point of reference and spiritual orientation is towards Dede Reshat and his spiritual ancestors who have served at the Headquarters. Much of the hosts' efforts in the different tekkes that I visited during their annual commemoration and pilgrimage events were the never ending stories about proofs of the sacredness of the holy shrines and the babas and dervishes that were once in service and the ones serving there now. While each was convinced of the sacredness of their particular leaders, they were also upholding the centrality of their tekke as a point of spiritual reference. A good number of my hosts and insiders to the tekke centered communities that I visited often pleaded and sometimes demanded that their tekke receive the special attention in my thesis that they thought it deserved to have. This is further evidence that there is an ongoing competition over the ranking of each tekke based on its popularity and is another testimony to the prevalence of the hierarchy principle for the Bektashi. Given that throughout the year each tekke-centered community is independently organized, pilgrimage events are occasions where hierarchy and authority structures are on display in an ongoing competition for recognition. Some of the measures used to compare the tekkes that host pilgrimage events include, the size of the participation, the type of dignitaries and visitors that each tekke receives, and also the amount of donations that each event collects, and on the use of proceeds, both symbolic as well as monetary. This way, pilgrimage offers an arena for the reenactment as well as a reconfiguration of existing hierarchies.

While participants and managers of particular pilgrimage sites are able to work together and thus construct the boundaries of local communities, at the national level the Bektashi community fractures into rival camps claiming different spatial areas of influence over the sacred. I found that commemorative events were prone to turning into occasions where such tensions were made public. Recall for example Baba Flamur's arrival on a helicopter hovering over the mountaintop in clear defiance of Dede Reshat's authority which, as was previously discussed on chapter 3, led to the Baba's expulsion from the Order.

Also indicative here is an event that first directed my attention to the precarious and antagonistic relations that existed between the center in Tirana and tekkes elsewhere in Albania, Kosovo, and Macedonia. Dervish Hekuran began his service in Mt. Tomorr where he was known for hard work, and successfully made substantial improvement of the tekke compound and of the other structures there. He was nevertheless in effect demoted by the administrators of this tekke. The administrators enjoy authority over the management of the pilgrimage event on Mt. Tomorr, as long as there is no dervish or baba appointed by headquarters to serve at this tekke. A strong lobby of secular administrators – mostly businessmen – is believed to stand in the way of a successful installation of a baba or dervish at Kulmak tekke in Mt. Tomorr. In the last decade the same body of administrators with links to the secular administrators of Bektashi headquarters has been in charge of the event. Some are of the opinion that any cleric who is stationed at Mt. Tomorr would be a threat to the authority of the administrators (and perhaps also the leadership) of the headquarters since the appointment would also grant

that cleric sponsorship of the largest and most profitable pilgrimage event of the Order. As a result, a compromise that keeps Mt. Tomorr baba/dervish free while splitting the stewardship of the pilgrimage site and the proceeds from it between the local civil administrators and those at the headquarters seems to be in effect.

Another explanation that is connected to the postsocialist setting may help explain the pattern of pilgrimage as a devaluation not of the sacred sites themselves, but of the leadership/stewardship over the sacred sites. Recall that in “atheist” Albania religion was removed from the public sphere and pushed into an underground existence and the private domain, but that a reverence for the sacred spaces was secretly maintained. At the same time, since 1967, a heavy dose of skepticism and open warfare against the clergy was in full effect in socialist Albania. Perhaps focusing resacralization at the community level in a transition from socialist/antireligious and postsocialist/resacralizing Albania is, by extension, associated with a wide spread skepticism towards religious figures and anxiety over the infiltration of religious communities by the state and its representatives.

There are a number of similarities between the observed postsocialist commemorative settings presented here and commemorative life that came to be predominant in socialist Albania. First, both feature the diverse participation of people from different religious, political, and social backgrounds. Second, there are also structural affinities in the use of an elevated platform that is restricted to dignitaries and leadership figures, both religious and secular. Third, although the reasons for mass festivities in socialist Albania were not religious, and despite the fact that religious

figures were removed from the participation in them, both socialist and postsocialist religious commemorations require presence of the state representatives and institutions. Fourth, the overall atmospheres prevailing in socialist and postsocialist commemorative events are also alike. In a counterintuitive manner, the socialist ideology of egalitarianism was represented only in the speeches of Party members. In actual performance, state festivities divided the Party leaders, who enjoyed an unmatched elite status, from the rest of the population, just as is the case in pilgrimages and religious celebrations today. Fifth, and most importantly, secular ceremonies in socialist Albania and religious commemorations and pilgrimage in postsocialist Albania are strikingly similar in their preoccupation with an overall expression and demarcation of hierarchy.

This is illustrated in a number of ways. For example, a major part of the self-expression that postsocialist pilgrimage allows the Bektashi is to permit them to rebuild their shrines on top of the communist fortifications that had once replaced them, thus highlighting both change and continuity between socialist and postsocialist hierarchical orders. Each commemorative event – socialist or postsocialist – is pervasively accompanied by actions that symbolize authority structures; e.g., the local host is displaced by an incoming authority figure who officiates over the event. Among the Bektashi, Babas arrival displaces Dervish Myrteza. Wherever Dede Reshat goes, he becomes the symbolic authority figure. Pilgrimage, as a form of religious practice, is a symbolic arena for the affirmation and maintenance of existing spiritual authority.

During the pilgrimage, Mt. Tomorr is the center. The spiritual leader (the Dede) is always present to officiate and manage the event. So are his disciples who leave their

home centers to be with their leader. During the pilgrimage in Martanesh, Ballënjë becomes the temporary spiritual center of the Bektashi. During the pilgrimage to Alipostivan tekke in the southern district of Përmet, this tekke is a temporary center. This reflects a larger debate about the meaning of center and periphery in Islam. While Mecca is the direction towards which Muslims pray and a site of Islam's major pilgrimage, there are other undeniable Muslim centers like Karbala, Najaf, and Qum. While few Albanian Bektashi babas have made the hajj to Mecca, a number of babas and Dervishes have paid numerous visits to the shrine of Haji Bektash in Turkey. Just about all of the serving babas and dervishes have visited the shrine of Abaz Ali and participated in some of the most popular commemorative pilgrimages like Alipostivan, Ballënjë of Martanesh, and Sari Salltëk in Krujë.

When we consider only one pilgrimage event, the presence of liminality in the absence of *communitas* and *antistructure* is best explained as an intentional projection of internal hierarchy which replicates existing forms of spiritual hierarchy, hierarchy of membership, and a concern for the management of insider outsider boundaries. But when the multiplicity of pilgrimage events is considered as a complex ritualized cycle, additional and sometimes contradictory layers to the projection of hierarchy become apparent: namely the hierarchy of holy shrines, centers, and a persistent interest in the delineation of ancestral saintly figures, emerging spiritual leaders that are, if not yet born, about to be born, and those that have simply become and that are not (yet) associated with saintliness. All this leads to considerable ambiguity and room for contestation

among rivals representing different aspects of the sacred who nonetheless share the overarching liminal space.

What is contested, according to observations in several pilgrimage sites, is the legitimacy of the current leadership as well as that of the stewardship of the sacred sites. It is not contestations of the sacred itself, but rather rivalry for sacred authority between those who have recently become Bektashi. Opposition to the current leadership of the order indicates that resacralization is focused on the individual members of the community. As chapter 2 on religion in atheist Albania suggested, a reverence and recognition of the sacred remained a part of socialist religiosity even if only in the belief system. Socialist Albania left a mark of persistent skepticism on the remnants of religious communities over the state and the corrupt members of the society which waged the atheist crusade against religious communities. The biggest challenge for the Bektashi is not about a lack of sacred sites. Of these, the Bektashi have many, some rebuilt and others in ruins waiting to be repopulated. The main problem is the shortage in membership and an anxiety over an infiltration of the community that seeks to be resacralized by individuals that have no interest in becoming Bektashi per se but rather in reaping the benefits to be had through their association with the rebuilding project.

Despite the diversity in the settings under which Bektashi commemoration and pilgrimage takes place, it is the overall context that unites them, reflecting the networked reality of commemoration and pilgrimage. For one thing, the annual publication of the Bektashi headquarters indicates the dates when each tekke is to celebrate and offers a brief description of what the event is about. While each serving baba and dervish is

largely responsible for the annual event at their tekke, all babas and dervishes are disciples of Dede Reshat. By hosting a commemorative or pilgrimage event, the hosts are at once fulfilling an obligation to the spiritual master as well as contributing to the ritual cycle of the Bektashi (locally as well as nationally). To some degree, and this links to the common context of Albanian Bektashi pilgrimage, what is being commemorated, aside from the originary founding of the centers, are the ongoing gains in the overall reinstatement of religious life in postsocialist Albania: the survival story is reinforced with each passing pilgrimage event. Each celebration in the annual cycle is a reassertion of the symbolic value of religious celebration as a valid reason for collective participation. The implicit comparison is to events in socialist Albania that were commemorations of the state's political achievements, even though these were stripped of religious significance and openly promoted antireligious sentiments.

The context of postsocialist reconstitution of religious life within which Bektashi commemorative life is embedded is characterized by internal as well as external competition for adherents. Because what follows is an elaboration on the internal dynamics of competition, the context of Bektashi commemorative life reveals itself only when we consider the interdenominational competition over influence in the country's religious life. For example, while the pilgrimage on Mt. Tomorr is unmatched by other events hosted by the Albanian Bektashi, a pilgrimage event hosted by Albanian Catholics in the northern city of Laç is its equivalent. In fact, a number of people that I met at Mt. Tomorr often referred to events of and by other communities (primarily the Catholic pilgrimage) and or the absence of such activities by peoples of other faiths. In Laç, it is

claimed that close to a million people each year are attracted to a basilica built in a place sightings of St. Paul and Virgin Mary have occurred and where there are testimonies of miracles and the healing of the sick. When the Christian pilgrimage is mentioned at Bektashi sites, it is almost always compared to the events put together by the Albanian Bektashi. Both the Albanian Catholic and Orthodox Christians, Albanian Bektashi and Sunni Muslims are actively involved in the rebuilding of their respective communities. The backdrop for the reconstitution of religion, the reinstatement of commemorative life is postsocialist Albania, and the competition for available resources to accomplish the rebuilding of the community in accordance with the contents of the respective faiths, outlines the shared context of Bektashi pilgrimage that I return to the next concluding chapter of the dissertation.

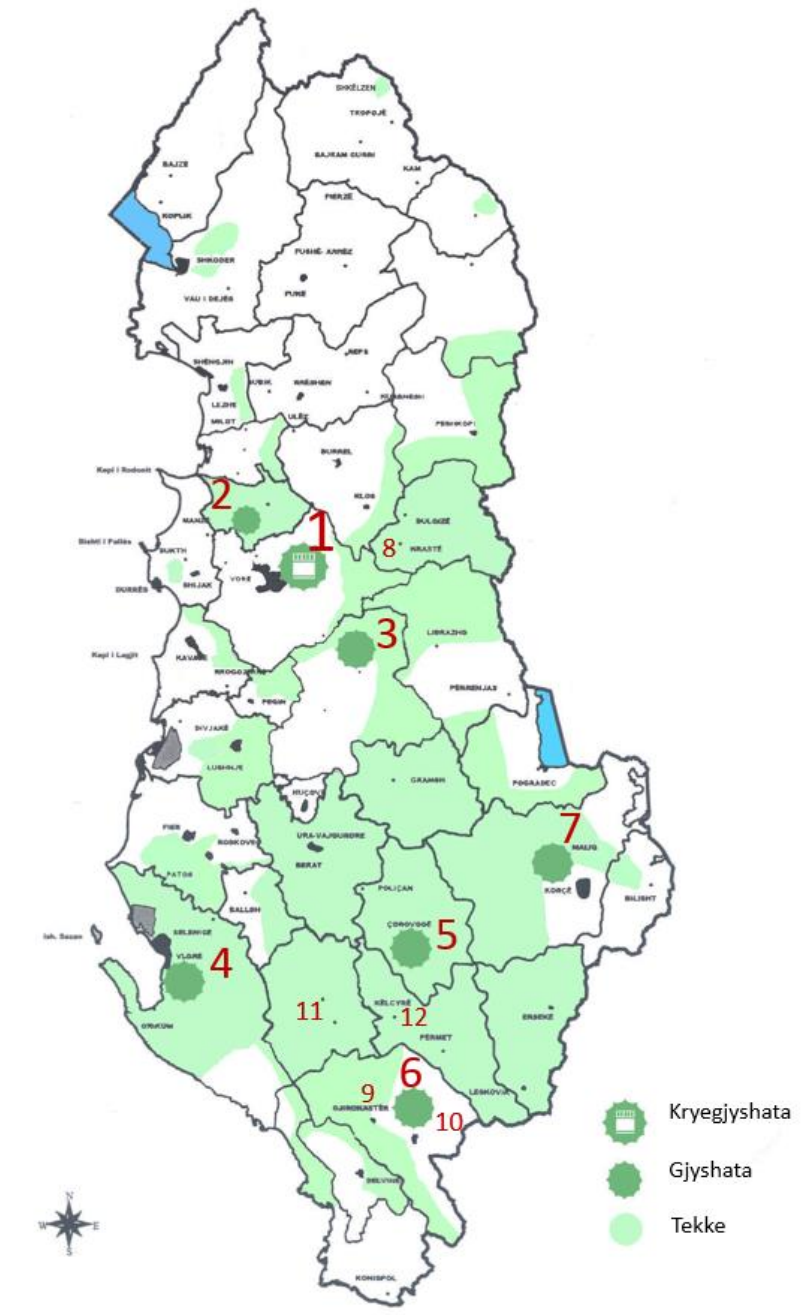


Figure 6.1. Map of Albania showing the location of Bektashi centers mentioned in the text. World Headquarters of the Bektashi, Tirana (1), Shememi Baba Tekke, Fushëkrujë (2), Xhefai Baba Tekke, Elbasan (3), Kuzum Baba Tekke, Vlorë (4), Asim Baba Tekke, Gjirokastrë (6), Turan Tekke, Korçë (7), Ballëm Sulltan Tekke, Martanesh (8), Shtuf Tekke, Gjirokastrë (9), Melan Tekke, Gjirokastrë (10), Koshtan Tekke, Tepelenë (11), Baba Ali Tekke, Përmet, (12). Map is courtesy of the *Arkiva e Kryegjyshitës Bektashiane* – Archives of the Bektashi Headquarters.



Figure 6.2. Alipostivan Tekke showing newly constructed staircase and *tyrbe*. Përmet, 2007. The building under construction now include a new kitchen, living quarters, and ceremonial room.



Figure 6.3a Shrines at Ballëm Sulltan tekke. Ballënjë, Martanesh, 2007. The three openings below the shrines are abandoned underground fortifications that were constructed by the Albanian army during the communist era.



Figure 6.3b. Pilgrimage event at Ballëm Sulltan Tekke, Ballënjë, Martanesh, 2007. Northward view from the shrine on the hill shown in Figure 6.3a. Note the podium set up on the right hand side and the helicopters that brought with them President Moisiu and other dignitaries.



Figure 6.4. Bektashi tyrbe and first site of veneration on pilgrims' ascent to Mt. Tomorr. Berat, 2011.



a.



b.



c.

Figure 6.5. View of pilgrimage activities at Kulmak Tekke (green building) in 2007 (a) and 2011 (b & c). Abaz Ali shrine is located on the highest peak on the mountain, on the background of the image. Note the addition of retaining wall along the walkway and of the expansion of the tekke's surrounding wall over the span of four years.



Figure 6.6. Pilgrims on the way to Abaz Ali Shrine. Mt. Tomorr, Berat, 2007.

CONCLUSIONS

This study contributes to the sparse existing literature on the Bektashi and Sufism in Albania after Communism. The previous chapters document the complex processes of preserving and legitimizing the sacred in a postsocialist setting. This is a country- as well as community-based study. This work contributes to the study of postsocialist religion in one of the harshest environment of all Europe. It shows the conflicts and ambivalences that accompany the return of religion after Communism. In the concluding remarks that follow, I present the main findings that emerged from each of the proceeding chapters.

Early history and the recounting of the past under Communism

In regards to the community's past, it is clear that the Bektashi inherited a long history of continuity as well as rupture. The 15th century coalescing of the Qalandars, Haydaris, Abdals of Rum, and the early Bektashis was followed by the Bektashi Kızılbaş/Alevi split of the 16th and 17th centuries. The emergence of the consolidated Bektashi Order of Dervishes centered on the teachings of Haji Bektash Veli. The subsequent Alevi/Bektashi divide was largely over contested recollections of Haji Bektash Veli and the issue of celibacy. The 17th and 18th centuries are associated with the rise in popularity of the Bektashi and their close association of Bektashi babas, dervishes, and their tekkes with the Janissaries. Some of the internal dynamics that characterize the community today have their roots in the Bektashi past. The tensions between the married and celibate branches of Bektashi, for example, persist to the present. In fact, one of the

anxieties that the community of Bektashi clerics is experiencing today is the relative abundance of babas and dervishes who were married prior to their initiation into the Order. They are seen as a threat by the less numerous but more venerated celibate babas and dervishes who seek to preserve the supremacy of celibate monasticism.

Next to the above mentioned broader historical trends, Bektashi history is replete with external attacks from both conservative and Sunni Ottoman sultanates. Most notable of these was the reign of Mahmud II in the 1820s as well as the rise of Atatürk's secularist republic in 1920s Turkey. In addition to these, the Albanian Bektashi lived through the harsh atheistic dictatorship of the People's Socialist Republic of Albania from 1945 to 1991. In their own recounting of their early history there is strong evidence that the point of reference for understanding the past is the postcommunist present. For example, the prophecy of Haji Bektash Veli that claims the Bektashi path is like a string that never breaks, and legends of the Bektashi response to the 1820 suppression whereby many babas and dervishes opted to be decapitated rather than break the oath of initiation, are highlighted more than any other events in the Bektashi past. This is because the Bektashi response to major historical conjunctures serve to address the main anxieties that this community in transition is facing. Namely, that the past (and present), with all of its ups and downs, is part of the sacred foretelling of the future by the spiritual leader of the Order and the belief that membership is more valuable than life, respectively. By extension, participants are active agents of resacralization by partaking in the project of religious revival.

The history of the Bektashi community under Communism is understandably most heavily debated at present. The stories about Communism are ultimately linked to the issue of the legitimacy of the current leadership. In oscillating between stories of continuity and rupture, a distinction is stressed between the “insider” and “outsider” receivers of the two main narratives about the community’s past under Communism. The current leadership and the administrators of the Order are predisposed to emphasizing the narrative of continuity to the community of the insiders and Bektashi layman. This story says that the Bektashi remained despite all the fury of the atheist crusade against the religious communities in Albania. However this narrative generates ambivalence against the current leadership because most know very well that during the Communist dictatorship the legitimate and unyielding leaders of the religious communities were gradually eliminated. People wonder just how present-day leaders survived when many others perished.

In contrast, the narrative of a complete break with the Communist past presents the current leadership with both benefits and dilemmas. The story of communal decapitation and the narrative that the Bektashi suffered the most by comparison to other Albanians under Communism is voiced most strongly to an outsider audience and potential sponsors of the religious revival project. It is often an explanation of last resort about the stagnation and slow pace that characterizes the reconstitution of religious life. The message is: “We are this way because we suffered a great deal under Communism.” However, the narrative of Communism as a complete break with the Bektashi past also problematizes the legitimacy of the current leadership. That is, if there was a complete

break with the Bektashi past, what legitimates the current leaders of the Order? At present, the Bektashi make use of both explanations about their past under Communism. They handle the conflicts and ambivalences that ensue by emphasizing the story of continuity primarily to the audience of insiders and the story of discontinuity primarily to an audience of outsiders.

The Bektashi narrative of the early history of the Order as well as the recounting of the community's history under Communism accomplishes two main goals. The first is to provide the necessary historical context that is needed for a temporal situating of the contemporary Bektashi. Second, the historical and positioned narratives about the past point to one of the many struggles that the project for the reconstitution of religious life hinges upon: the contents and strategies that the Bektashi now employ to rewrite and sacralize their past. Other domains of resacralization or efforts aimed to resuscitate religious life include the return of the Bektashi tekke, membership or community building, leadership or saintly authority, and religious observance or commemorative life. I take each one of these in Order and summarize the main tensions and dilemmas that accompany them.

The return of the Bektashi tekke

Lands within a tekke are considered *vakëf*. This term is derived from Arabic *waqf* or a religious endowment. *Vakëf* is considered sacred property by the Bektashi community. Here, what was at its origin an Islamic legal institution, has become spiritualized. The sacredness of the tekke is apparent from the functions it plays. Tekkes

are shelters for the celibate monastics, the spiritual leadership of the Order. They are the educational institutions of the Order where the training of disciples takes place. Tekkes also host the community's commemorative life. Last but not least, tekkes are also administrative centers for the Order. When all aspects of the Bektashi community and institutional life are taken under consideration, it is clear that the Albanian Bektashi are truly a tekke-centered community. It is for this reason that much of the community's efforts and energies are put on the rebuilding and reopening of the Bektashi tekkes. Nevertheless, even the return of the spiritualized tekke is not free of conflict and ambivalence.

Aside from being the center of the Bektashi community life, the tekke offers access to a limited set of resources and opportunities for employment against the backdrop of widespread unemployment that has characterized Albania since the early 1990s. People demand that tekke resources be redistributed fairly among the Bektashi faithful. Sometimes babas and dervishes are in charge of the decisions about employment opportunities at the tekke. They also control people's access to social networks that the tekke-centered community offers. Serving members of the Order influence decisions over membership into the Order and initiates' ability to navigate the social hierarchies of the Order. At other times, the secular and in many cases nonreligious administrators either influence or make these decisions. For the most part, the administrators of the Order represent a belonging without believing pattern of religiosity. That is, their employment gives them an institutional form of belonging which does not necessitate believing in the religious project that they serve.

Babas and dervishes are under pressure from their own family members and ties to their region of origin to offer employment to their relatives and friends. Their duties of membership and loyalty to their spiritual family pressures tekke leaders to offer these limited jobs and resources to worthy candidates for the jobs and possibly to either muhiban or ashiks who have a formal affiliation to the Order through initiation. Given that the tekke is the center of a spiritual family, ambivalence transpires especially against those leaders who surround themselves with their own family members. But ambivalence takes a toll also when a kind of monopoly emerges as a result of decisions by tekke leaders to hire only members who are loyal to the leader of the tekke but who do not otherwise have any established ties to the local community. In the latter case, locals often speak of a tekke takeover and follow a wait and see strategy, believing that eventually those unworthy of leading and serving their center will be weeded out. For some this cleansing of the ranks of the Bektashi will occur automatically, as an expression of the sacredness of the sites of the Order. But for others, nepotism casts a long shadow over the legitimacy of the tekke's leadership – although the tekke itself, as a space and a building, retains its spiritual quality.

Another evident source for the contestation of the current leadership and stewardship of the sacred has to do with the barriers that prevent people from having free access to the sacred leadership and the even more sacred sites of the Order. For between tekke visitors and the spiritual leaders stand the guards, administrators, and lower ranked members. And while leaders state that the tekke belongs to the people, visitors have access only to select portions of the compound and not others. To some, present-day

restrictions on the visitors' movements are reminiscent of the heavy restrictions that the authoritarian regime placed on the centers of worship. For this reason, people are often skeptical and highly critical of the stewards of the sacred sites. Thus, visitors to the tekke sometimes only visit the sacred tombs, foregoing a visit with the serving babas or dervishes. The pattern is much like the one described by Grace Davie as "believing without belonging" which is characteristic of Western European religiosity.

Another major area of contestation has to do with the tekke's land ownership. Expulsions and post-expulsion narratives show that the demoting of babas and dervishes and their excommunication (despite the marked shortage of babas and dervishes) is often a result of their handling of tekke wealth and properties. The expulsions offer also the best evidence of how the secular bureaucracy of the tekkes, people who were trained under Communism, can meddle with the way that the tekke properties are handled. These bureaucrats may and often do influence the babas' and dervishes' decisions about which members of the Order are elevated and who are demoted. Those Bektashi who oppose such influence peddling gain heightened sacred status among the community. For example, Baba Besnik stood up against the administrators' ambitions to control the selling of tekke lands under the pretext of funding the revivalist project.

Ways of Becoming Bektashi

Next to a recounting of history and the reinstatement of the Bektashi tekke, a good deal of the Bektashi's energy is put on maintaining and increasing the quality and quantity of the membership ranks. There are two main processes that accomplish this:

initiations and expulsions. Within the hierarchy of initiated membership, members of the Order can make progress by becoming celibate monastics and through learning from a spiritual master. This can be a long and arduous way to navigate the hierarchies of membership. Amidst pronounced shortages of babas and dervishes and a demand to man the numerous Bektashi centers throughout Albania, many traditional requirements for moving up the spiritual ladder have been relaxed. For example, it has long been the case that a muhib who seeks to become a dervish must serve for 1001 days at a tekke during which time proofs of spiritual progress are carefully monitored by his spiritual master. There are cases of this three year requirement has been shortened to months and sometimes even weeks. The proof of the disciple's worthiness is no longer sought during their stay with a master but is discovered in the disciple's ability to withstand the test of reopening an abandoned tekke and returning it to a degree of functionality. In other occasions, membership through acclamation also takes places. This occurs through a petition to the leadership of the Order. If the petition has sufficient support of a following through their votes, the leader may be pressured to ordain a dervish up to the rank of baba. From the perspective of the layman, the process of recognition by proofs is favored over the process of recognition by votes. The later, reminiscent of party elections during Communism, adds another (possibly corrupt) bureaucratic layer over the efforts of the community to resacralize.

Resacralizing does not only means adding new members and initiating officers, but also maintaining the community's inner virtues, which requires expelling members who violate standards of honesty, integrity and other moral or inner guidelines that are

sacred to the Bektashi. On one hand, expulsions show that the centralized leader's authority has been contested. On the other hand, the post-expulsion narratives show that Dede can excommunicate members at will. Ambivalence towards centralized forms of authority is part of the legacy of Communism and prolonged authoritarian rule. Among the Bektashi there remains deep skepticism towards authoritarianism in general and hierarchical structuring in particular. For many believers, religious hierarchies of leadership resemble socialist forms of authority to a point that leads to uneasiness on the part of the following, whose spirituality is oriented towards the sacred sites rather than to the current leadership of the Order.

Saintly life

The saintly life of Dede Reshat shows that there are also well meaning individuals who are part of the revivalist project. Tracing his life from the early beginnings before the Second World War, through the different stages of the Communist regime, and finally to his last decades after the democratic transformations of the early 1990s, one sees just how the lives of individual members of the religious communities were impacted under Communism and after. Suffering internment and forced labor, and later pressures to marry, Dede Reshat's refuge was the support of his own family. It was also his family that was his support mechanism in the early years of the opening of the Bektashi headquarters. Gradually, as the alternative spiritual family of the initiated grew, Dede fired a number of his natal family members who had previously been hired by the tekke. The tension between his own family and the spiritual family that he was in charge of

looking after added to Dede's overall sense of loneliness and sadness that he often linked to the lack of sincerity of the people who surrounded him.

In my process of constructing Dede's life history, additional insights emerged. It is clear that the community itself, especially the administrators of the Order, are interested in the details of their leader's biography and its inscription into a hagiography. The legitimacy of the leadership is closely tied to the legitimacy of the administrators of the Order. Two main lessons emerged from my research into the life and works of Haji Dede Reshat Bardhi. First, it became clear that Dede Reshat was perceived as an unworldly saintly leader who was not in charge of the details of his own life. Instead, a series of publications that appeared to be autobiographical in nature, showed clear signs of intentional ordering by people other than Dede himself. While believers saw Dede Reshat as the saint who was looking over their lives, the administrators of the Order saw themselves as the masters in charge of his biography and life history. The images of Dede Reshat in the publications of the Order were taken and selected by the administrators. His speeches were by and large written by his secretaries. These served to erect additional barriers between the people who sought unmediated access to their spiritual leader.

Second, the life history of Dede Reshat exemplifies the transformations that separate the lives of ordinary members from the saintly leaders of the Order. In the discourses on ways of becoming Bektashi the motto of membership is "the Bektashi are not born, they become." Becoming is an act that potential members ought to actively participate in. It is a process that involves the community of insiders and potential candidates for membership in a series of interactions. The making of a saint turns out to

be a process of collective witnessing of saintly proofs. But at a certain point, there is a reversal on the discourses associated with saintly leaders. Saints are born [saintly]. Dede Reshat's life history begins much like that of most members of the Bektashi. At an early age he began his training in the path of becoming a Bektashi: first as a muhib and later as a dervish. Many of the details about his early life correspond with his dedication to his spiritual guide and to serving the tekke. Closer scrutiny of his biographical details shows that the reversal from an emphasis on becoming to an emphasis on having been born with saintly qualities, included definite rearrangements of the details of his life history. For example, in these retellings it is only upon his return from the pastures that his family members are miraculously saved from a house fire. The numerous songs that have been composed about him assign saintliness qualities to his persona for becoming the shepherd of lost flock and for keeping the Bektashi candles burning. He is also said to come to the aid of his believers through prayer and blessings and to be fully aware of his followers' whereabouts even when physically separated from them.

Pilgrimage

The way that the Bektashi position themselves in regards to their early history and their Communist past, the problematic behind the reinstatement of the Bektashi tekke, membership, and their spiritual leadership are expressed in the community's commemorative life. What prevails at the pilgrimage sites is a cacophony of voices and perceptions of Bektashism. During pilgrimage events we see pilgrims undermining the administrators and the current leadership while at the same time reinforcing their own

belief and commitment to the sacred sites of the Order. During pilgrimage we clearly see the tensions between local inheritors of the sacred sites against what they consider to be the illegitimate custodians from the capital. In addition, there is a diversity of pilgrims to these sites, including Sunni Muslims as well as Albanian and foreign Christians. And there is also a presence of the state by way of police officers who are in charge of the events' security, party representatives, and elected officials to the Albanian parliament and even, on occasion, the country's president and prime minister. Civil society representatives and European Union officials are also regular attendees at some of the more important commemorative events of the Order. Evidently, the project for the return of religious liberties and the full reinstatement of religious life does not concern the Bektashi only. Having recently been granted status as a candidate for membership, the Albanian state is under the constant monitoring gaze of the European Union. Interested primarily in the degree to which the country's democratization processes are taking shape, the European Union and the United States is particularly concerned with matters of religious freedoms in general and religious communities in particular. The degree to which religious communities are able to reconstitute themselves is a measure of how the Albanian state handles the question of religious minorities. In service of demonstrating the state's active compliance with EU guidelines, during pilgrimage the Bektashi act as hosts to many members of the Albanian state apparatus. Bektashi babas and dervishes are also often paraded and photographed in the company of state officials. Some of these officials are the members of the older authoritarian regime who were responsible for the

dismantling and persecution of the religious communities in the first place, adding to widespread suspicion of the Order's leadership.

Another source for conflict and ambivalence against the current leadership has to do with the management of the proceeds gathered from community's commemorative life. People are concerned for a kind of monopoly that has emerged over the sites of pilgrimage. On one hand, the custodians often are not investing in the upkeep of the sacred sites and this leaves people wandering where their donations are going. On the other hand, the less than transparent way of handling the shrine donations combined with obvious signs of wealth that surpass the administrator's official wages adds more fuel to the growing antipathy to the current leadership and especially the administrators of the revivalist project. The place, people, and the sacred amalgam that this thesis has traced shows itself most strongly during pilgrimage. Under the conditions that have been described in full in the previous chapters, the trend is for people's devotion to the sacred sites to grow while their devotion to the current leadership is on the wane.

Sufism and resacralization

The results of this study suggest that the Albanian Bektashi show slow-paced gains in the reinstatement of religious life. In regards to the literature that documented and/or predicted a global Sufi decline, the Bektashi are an example of a return to relevance of contemporary Sufism. Nonetheless, in comparison to the Chishti Order (Ernst and Lawrence 2002) who have had a remarkable resurgence in their local and transnational networks of South Asia and beyond, the Albanian Bektashi show weak and

heavily contested transnational ties to the non-Albanian Bektashi in the Balkans, Turkey, and elsewhere. Still, despite the small gains toward the reinstatement of the social prestige that the community once enjoyed, the struggles of the Albanian Bektashi are a testimony against the global Sufi decline that some scholars of Sufism predicted. Slowly more tekkes are being reopened and renovated, and there is a definite increase in the visitors to the Bektashi centers, especially during commemorative events.

The degree to which the Albanian Bektashi are experiencing a religious revival is better supported in the comparison of the Bektashi with the other religious communities in Albania. In regard to other Sufi communities such as the Rifa'i, Halveti, Kadiri, the Bektashi enjoy their status as independently run and organized congregation and are doing remarkably better in terms of the size of their membership and the number of tekkes that have been reopened. However, in comparison to Orthodox and Catholic communities in Albania, the Bektashi have been outcompeted in regards to the impressions of monumentality of religion upon the Albanian landscape. Albanian Sunni Muslims are well established institutionally. But even given their majority status, they display signs of fatigue. This is symbolized in their inability to make it possible for mosque goers to have a mosque in the capital big enough to handle the communal prayers to begin and end the holy month of Ramadan. Despite promises by incoming administrations, Muslims continue to perform their main prayers on the main boulevard in the country's capital. Although the Sunnis have sufficient land of their own, the permit to build the grand mosque hinges upon the final approval of the state, which has been delayed for the last two decades. In contrast, both the Orthodox and Catholic

communities have achieved relative success in terms of their monumental presence throughout Albania. And they also have influential ties abroad. Archbishop Anastas Yanulatus, a Greek national, has been leading the revival of the Albanian Orthodox with many mega constructions of churches in major metropolis throughout the country. The Albanian Catholics have also hosted visits by Pope John Paul II in 1993 and Pope Frances in 2014. Catholic churches and corresponding parishes are now found well beyond the traditional northern Albanian areas of Catholic influence such as in the city of Gjirokastër and other southernmost regions of Albania.

Postcommunist transformations of religion

This work joins the growing body of literature that deals with the question of what is happening with religion in Eastern Europe in general and religious communities in particular. What is unique about this study is that it adds a multilayered approach to the study of postsocialist religiosity. A total of five measures are considered: the question of how the community deals with their past under Communism, the physical rebuilding of the spiritual centers (tekke) and the corresponding institutional structures of the Order, and the constitution of membership, leadership, and religious observance. Altogether these measures show a slow progress with the project of religious revival: tekkes are being opened, membership is slowly but gradually increasing, and commemorative life is experiencing a rise in popularity. There are also signs of decline associated primarily with religious observance, expulsions, and the mismanagement of tekke proceeds. The trends of believing without belonging as well as belonging without believing are both present.

By extension, this study offers possible comparisons and implications. It suggests that community based studies both in Albania and elsewhere in the postsocialist world may provide a valuable point of comparison for tracking the main questions and theoretical debates about the nature of religion after Communism. Comparative studies of postsocialist religiosities often miss the community based details behind the return of religion as well as the experiences of individuals who are participating in the religious revivalist project. If, for example, only the measure of “church” attendance or religious participation was considered, the Bektashi pilgrimage as a form of religious observance would strongly indicate rapidly increasing levels of religiosity. The pilgrimage sites are attended by many and there is a healthy degree of discussions and debates about the different ways that the pilgrimage experience may be improved for the hosts and their guests alike.

However, this thesis tells a different story because it reveals the greater details of religious observance in general and pilgrimage in particular. I find that the “robbing” of a shrine – the observed fieldwork experience with which I began this thesis – is an accurate small-scale reflection of the legacy of atheistic Communist past and the overall failed politics of the postcommunist present. Furthermore, religious observance is only one of the many measures that the thesis considers in order to assess the degree (and directionality) to which the reinstatement of religious life is headed in Albania. In this regard, the manipulation of collective memory is used to inspire the religious revival. But in fact, positioned historiography has an ambivalent outcome. It serves both to legitimize as well as to delegitimize the current leadership. In the construction and maintenance of

sacred space we see how the rebuilding and restoration of the Bektashi tekke is a measure of success. In a parallel fashion, the spatial and habitual barriers that are erected between tekke visitors and sacred shrines and holy leaders reinforce a preexisting belief in the sacred character of the sites of the Order, while also resulting in increased contestation of the current Bektashi leadership and stewardship. In regards to membership, the Bektashi face a dire need for new members who are willing to become celibate monastics. The shortage of clerics is the main area of anxiety for the community. The biographical and hagiographical details of saintly life show that the community of followers as well as the secular administrators are very much authors in the making of holiness. Their actions too can legitimize as well as delegitimize the babas and dervishes who seek saintly recognition. When all of these measures are taken under consideration, a community-based ethnographic study clearly offers a more nuanced and more contextualized understanding of religion after Communism. On the one hand, the rise in religiosity is apparent in the reestablishment of Bektashi tekkes and the reinstatement of Bektashi commemorative life. On the other hand, the spatial barriers between layman and the sacred spaces of the Order, the shortage in celibate monastic membership, and the infiltration of the religious revival project by secular administrators, all indicate a religious decline that resembles the trajectory of Western European religiosity.

The focus of this thesis has been on religion and community building. However, by implication, the thesis is also about the stagnation of the democratization processes in Albania. As mentioned, one of the measures by which European Union assesses the degree to which democratization processes are under way in Albania is by looking, into

the degree to which the state is allowing the full reinstatement of religious liberties. Of major concern here is return of lands that were confiscated by the Communist state from Bektashi tekkes and other religious communities. Another area of investigation has to do with the degree to which state officials, largely perceived as trained under Communism and therefore also antireligious, are allowing for religious participation that is free of state encroachment. Finally, the most important area of concern has to do with the infiltration of the religious communities (and their administration particularly) by people who are taking advantage of the opportunities for corruption and profit offered by the revivalist project. Although Grace Davie's (2000) "believing without belonging" is apparent, there is also belonging without believing in the Albanian case, as people who do not necessarily believe become initiated members of the community in Order to enhance and secure their jobs.

There is a parallel between the dilemmas that religious communities are facing and the broader Postsocialist context of uncertainty and corruption. It has become a routine practice in Albanian politics that every time there is a change in party rule, close to all of the civil servants of the previous administrators are replaced. This has been the case since 1991. Before the June 2013 elections, a bipartisan agreement was reached that would protect the civil servants from losing their jobs to partisan appointments. With the coming to power of the Socialist party a democratic vote was immediately taken in order to delay the enactment of the bilateral agreement. Meanwhile thousands of police officers and civil workers lost their jobs as soon as the new administration was sworn into office. This is especially frustrating for civil society, N.G.O.s, and E.U. and U.S. interests who

wish to curb the politically motivated appointments in country's administration because trained administrators are replaced by new untrained but politically connected people. Part of the reason why Albania is still in transition, is because people have gotten used to not expecting their appointments to last beyond the political lifecycle of any one administration. Because of this, office holders, once appointed to a position, seek to take full advantage of the benefits that the position could bring, including corrupt practices. Uncertainty of any continuity in transition of personnel is therefore linked to bribery and nepotism.

Uncertainty about continuity is present also within religious communities. Expulsions take place despite the shortage of clerics. Movements of leaders from one center to the next are associated with the replacement of existing personnel. Those in charge of their centers are only temporarily powerful. Once in a position of authority most feel, quite rationally, that their authority will not last and try to benefit from positions to the maximum extent possible. As I have shown, the uncertainty of maintaining authority, the endemic corruption of the system, and concomitant popular suspicion of the motives and legitimacy of those in power that plague the Postsocialist transformation also plagues the Bektashi projects that seek the return and reformation of their religious communities. I suspect that like problems are not unique to the Bektashi. Albanian religious groups of Sunni Muslim and Catholic and Orthodox Christian backgrounds are confronting similar issues.

The biggest surprise that emerged for me from my fieldwork experience was that, while maintaining an integrated public image, the community is internally fractured by

rivalries over leadership. Given shortages in members, the community is predisposed to be more open to the possibility of attracting new followers (even some that would not otherwise be admitted to join under regular circumstances). While at the same time, the effort to solidify the legitimacy of the central authority leads to the opposite trend, as the hierarchy becomes more closed and rigid. Areas of struggle involve local decisions about the interiors of the tekke; about when and how to go about reopening tekkes; and about the contents of religious life that takes place therein. In Alipostivan tekke, it was clear that the serving Dervish followed his own calling through a dream, and so that all the martyrs of the Battle of Karbala that appeared in his dream were represented by a grave on tekke ground, against the orders of the central authority under the Dede. What is more, the direction of the graves violated the Muslim norm. The presiding Dervish's complete disregard for the authority of the center led to many debates and complaints among the believers, but no reprimands were issued, apparently out of fear of alienating an important segment of the Order. In the story of expulsions from the Bektashi, we see the extreme instances of the internal strife and controversy about authority that the community faces.

Others areas of conflict are evident in the competition for followers and the emergence of various cliques around most influential community leaders. While these two trends are not visibly antagonistic to one another, they signify a fractured collective that is seeking a more integrated public image and a more cohesive internal structure. The Bektashi community is in the process of wanting to solidify and forge a coherent identity. The discovery of a community in crisis links to the broader context: namely, the

postcommunist reconstitution of religious life and the institutionalization and bureaucratization of charismatic leadership. As I have shown, the processes of membership into the higher degrees of membership involve the collecting of votes from a following in order to bypass clerical requirements. The tekke leaders are also the official representatives of their centers to the local and centralized government, thus perceived as *de facto* government officers themselves. And the state, having an interest in displaying its achievements in reinstating religious liberties in order to attain membership into the European Union, invites religious leaders to be part of their protocol in events of local and national significance.

Thus, there are two main motivations for those who seek to fill the leadership roles within the Bektashi community. First, there is the religious motivation: a desire to heal others, to find peace, God, to discover lost meanings, and to administer blessings. A second motivation is a consequence of high levels of unemployment, failed migrant experiences, and the difficulty of having a job at the tekke that is both symbolically rewarding and pragmatically enticing, since such work entails free food and shelter and the authority to be the head of a religious household. Some of the recurrent patterns in the life histories of the current leadership show young men who start working as shepherds or caretakers at the Bektashi tekke and later become spiritual seekers. Other biographies describe young men who have returned from migrant labor abroad only to be further disillusioned with the unforgiving and unpromising economic and social disparities at home, and join the Order out of a combination of both desperation and hope.

Altogether, the ethnographic materials reflect the plight of religious communities after radical secularism in a postsocialist society that was once one of Europe's most vigorously atheistic. The legacy of Communism in Albania shattered the late nineteenth century pattern of religious authority and popular religiosity. The proceeding chapters illustrate some details of this "post-traditional" situation as it is reflected in the postcommunist reconstitution of religious life. Available fieldwork and archival materials testify to the challenge of rebuilding religious community and observance in Albania in the aftermath of a state-based program of radical atheistic secularism. The sites where postcommunist religious observance take place offer a particularly situated and poignant finding: however much the Bektashi may have once enjoyed great social prestige and social, economic, and political resources, the Bektashi today are able to accomplish only small gains towards the reconstitution of their former religious life. Their community, like that of the Albanian Sunni Muslims and Catholic and Orthodox Christians, is experiencing difficulty establishing order and commitment within their own ranks, and in winning real support (including access to their now lost economic estates) in Albanian society as a whole. The inability to regain lost authority reflects the ravaging legacy of atheist secularism and state corruption, with subsequent ambivalence of Albanians toward all forms of official authority, including religious authority. It reflects as well as postcommunist openness and the leaning of the Albanians to a more "European" pattern of secularism that is generally characterized by a much diminished level of religious observance.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Main fieldwork activities, 2005 to 2011

2005

- 07/17 Bektashi Headquarters, Tirana, with Dede Reshat
 07/21 Asim Baba Tekke, Gjirokastër, with Baba Besnik and caretakers

2006

- 09/27 Baba Rexheb Tekke, Taylor, Michigan, with Baba Arshi and caretakers
 11/15 Haji Bektash Veli Tekke and Mausoleum, Nevşehir Province, Turkey
 12/16 Haji Bektash Veli Tekke and Mausoleum, Nevşehir, Turkey
 12/17 Mevlana Jalâl al-Din Rumi Mausoleum and compound, Konya, Turkey

2007

- 04/25 Baba Shemsi Tekke, Gjakovë, Kosovo with Baba Mumin and caretakers
 04/28 Ballëm Sulltan Tekke, Ballënjë, Martanesh, with Baba Hysni and pilgrims
 05/09 Bektashi Headquarters, Tirana, with Dervishes, Muhiban, and guests
 05/14 Alipostivan Tekke, Përmet, with Dervish Hekuran and pilgrims
 05/17 Bektashi Headquarters, Tirana, with Dede Reshat and administrators
 08/10 Bektashi Headquarters, Tirana, with Dervish Mikel, Sali, and guests
 08/22 Abaz Ali Tyrbe, Mt. Tomorr, Berat, during pilgrimage event
 09/14 Sari Saltik Tekke, Krujë, with Muhiban and caretakers
 09/28 Bektashi Headquarters, Tirana, with Baba Xhemal, Dervishes and guests
 10/01 Bektashi Headquarters, Tirana, with Dede Reshat, Dervishes, and guests
 10/02 Komuniteti Musliman Shqiptar, Albanian Muslim Community, Tirana
 10/11 Bektashi Headquarters, Tirana, with Dede Reshat. Dervishes and Muhiban
 10/07 Albanian Alevi Community, Tirana, with Sheh Ali Pazari
 10/15 Koshtan Tekke, Tepelenë, with Baba Abdyl and pilgrims
 10/16 Kuzum Baba Tekke, Vlorë, with Baba Sadik, Muhiban and guests
 11/07 Halveti Tekke, Sveti Naum / Sari Saltik, Ohrid, Macedonia
 11/14 Melan Tekke, Gjirokastër, with Dervish Myrteza, during pilgrimage event
 11/16 Shtuf Tekke, Gjirokastër, with Baba Skënder, Ashiks, and secretary
 11/17 Baba Hasan Tyrbe, Borsh, Sarandë, with Rifa'i Dervish
 11/20 Saint Spiridhion / Sari Saltik, Corfu, Greece
 11/21 Asim Baba Tekke, Gjirokastër, with Baba Besnik, Ashiks, and caretakers
 12/03 Shememi Baba Tekke, Fushkrujë, with Baba Halil and Baba Sadik
 12/06 Albanian Rifa'i Community Dhikr, with Shaikh Kemaludin Reka
 12/11 Baba Skënder Tyrbe, Lushnjë
 12/13 Baba Xhemal Turk Tekke, Elbasan, with Baba Faik, Muhiban, and guests
 12/15 Turan Tekke, Korçë, with Muhiban, guests, and administrator
 12/17 Symposium in honor of Mevlana Jalâl al-Din Rumi, Tirana
 12/21 Bektashi Headquarters, Tirana, during Kurban Barjam hosting of guests

2008

- 01/20 Baba Rexheb Tekke, Taylor, Michigan, during *ashura* event
- 08/17 Headquarters with Dede Reshat, Dervish Mikel, administrators, and guests
- 08/20 Abaz Ali Tyrbe, Mt .Tomorr, Berat, during pilgrimage event

2011

- 08/15 Headquarters with Dervish Sali, Muhiban, administrators and guests
- 08/18 Abaz Ali Tyrbe, Mt. Tomorr, Berat, during pilgrimage event

Appendix 2. A note on the fate of religion communities under atheism, a comparative account

Enver Hoxha (1908-1945) came from a family with a Sunni Muslim background and known to have had contacts with the Bektashi tekkes in his birth city of Gjirokastrë. Based on testimonies by Albanian Bektashi in 2007, it is believed that prior to Hoxha's journey to France for a college education that he never finished, the young man stopped at the tekke seeking money to be able to afford to trip abroad. He was hosted and given some money by Dervish Rexheb of the Asim Baba Tekke. Upon departure, Baba Selim (1869-1944), a mystic recognized for his keen ability to accurately foretell the future, said: "You did the right thing for helping him, but know that a day will come that he will not let even our bones rest in peace in one place". This seeming innocent young man, during the time of his reign was especially ruthless towards his family members and childhood friends and indiscriminately chastised his own kind as well as all others.

From the early years of the communist rule, memoirs, personal journals, and available sources (most recently convincingly compiled by Albanian journalist Fevziu in the recent biography titled *Enver Hoxha: The first biography based on documents of his personal archive and in the testimony of those who knew him*) show that the biggest hurdle for his ambitions to apply Marxism-Leninism to Albania was the specific situation of the Albanian society in 1940s: a conservative people, with a historical antipathy towards Russia and Slavs in general, and nonbelievers in communism and communists (Fevziu 2011: 95). It was for this reason, and because the regime served the ambitions of the leader to build and maintain *kultin e individit* or the cult of the individual that all religious communities suffered more or less the same fate under Hoxha's rule. At the

legislation level, at least, the state policy made no distinction between the four main religious communities. In November 13, 1967 a constitutional decree (#4337) nullified all four decrees that had previously legally recognized the Albanian Muslim Community, The Albanian Autocephalous Orthodox Church, The Albanian Bektashi Community, and the Albanian Catholic Church. Some claim that the Albanian Catholic leadership was treated especially harshly in the early years of the regime because of this community's assumed ties with Fascist Italy and the Vatican. Whereas there were historical alliances with Yugoslavs and even Greeks to warrant a lighter hand on the Albanian Orthodox. All in all, because the state was clearly determined to disestablish all forms of authority that competed with state's authority, the law itself was uniform in regards to all religious communities claiming that Atheism is the country's only official ideology. All communities suffered more or less the same fate: their land and other properties were confiscated, their most loyal leaders killed, other clerics sent to labor camps, or on forced internment, and the right to religious education and congregation were denied. The inquiry is the disproportionate handling of the four religious communities by the authoritarian state demands a comparatively detailed research of a different kind than the one that is being reported in this thesis. First, it is worth recognizing that each community's subjective understanding of that which they lost under communism is like that of no other community. For how can the executed Orthodox priests, regardless of their numbers, to the Orthodox, be any less of a loss than the executed Bektashi babas?

Let us consider the data that is given in a publication about the loss of human life titled *Genocide on the Intellectual elite of the Albanian Nation under the Communist*

Terror (Aliko 2007). The author in this study is a survivor of political imprisonment by the communist regime and in the postcommunist era has become involved with the task of uncovering the well hidden atrocities such as executions without trials, inhumane treatment of the prisoners in labor camps and the torture tactics used by the state's operatives. Several years after the publication of this book, I met with the author and learned how difficult it had been for him to find out dependable information on the numbers of people that had vanished in communist Albania and to access state archives and largely nonexistent data that was needed to give an accurate count on the loss of human life and suffering. Since the publication of the first edition, he stated that survivors from families of those eliminated or severely punished by the regime had been in touch with the author, and supply photos and other details about their relatives that, they thought, needed to be included in this postcommunist archive about a "genocide against Albanians by Albanians".

Assuming that the author presents an accurate sample of the clergy that were either executed, sent to labor camps, or in internment, a comparison can be made between the losses of human life that each community experienced during communist. Based on this publication, the count of the executed is as follows: 24 Catholic priests, 11 Bektashi leaders, 20 Sunni Muslim leaders, and 8 Orthodox priests. Of those who suffered prolonged imprisonment, labor camp sentences who may also have died while carrying out their sentences the counts are as follows: 24 Catholic priest and 7 Bektashi babas (no data was given on imprisonment counts about Sunni Muslims and Orthodox Christians). Given the communist-Slav alliance that was present from the founding of the Albanian

Communist Party, and seen also in the concessions made to Yugoslavia and Greece, the inconclusive data suggest that the Orthodox had a lighter treatment by comparison to Catholics.

To assess whether state policies favored some communities more than others, a number of measures such as demographics of human loss and the assessment of the landmarks of religions (mosques, tekkes, and churches) that remained unharmed and/or that were protected by the communist state as tourist landmarks need to be looked at. This could be a fruitful and revealing research to be pursued at a later date, especially when it considers also the religious background of the communist leaders and whether this had an impact in the way that the state policies played out during the prohibition of religion era.

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- van Gennep, A. (1960). The Rites of Passage. Chicago, The University of Chicago Press.
- Verdery, K. (2003). The Vanishing Hectare: Property and Value in Postsocialist Transylvania. Ithaca, Cornell University Press.
- Vickers, M. (1995). The Albanians: a Modern History. London, I.B. Tauris.
- White, G. E. (1913). "The Alevi Turks of Asia Minor." The Contemporary Review 104(July 1): 690-698.
- Whitehead, N. L. (2003). Histories and Historicities in Amazonia. Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press.
- Wilkes, J. (1992). The Illyrians. Cambridge, Blackwell.
- Winnifrieth, T., Ed. (1992). Perspectives on Albania. New York, St. Martin's Press.
- Xholi, Z. (1977). "Revolucioni Kulturor Socialist dhe Kultura Popullore Kombëtare." Konference Kombëtare e Studimeve Etnografike June 1976: 55-73.
- Yaman, A. and A. Erdemir (2006). Alevism-Bektashism: A Brief Introduction. Istanbul, Cem Foundation.
- Yürekli, Z. (2012). Architecture and Hagiography in the Ottoman Empire: the Politics of Bektashi Shrines in the Classical Age. Burlington, Vermont, Ashgate.
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Education

09/04-05/15 Ph.D., Anthropology, Boston University, 12/11/14.
06/03-05/06 M.Ed., Education, Salem State College, 05/20/06.
08/99-12/02 M.A., Anthropology, University of Arizona, 12/21/02.
09/95-05/99 B.A., Archaeological Sciences, Cum Laude with Distinction, minor in Anthropology, Boston University, 05/23/99.

Publications

- 2013 Mustafa, M. et al. "Spatial and Temporal Patterns of Kinship Relations: Descent, Marriage, and Feuding." In *Light and Shadow: Isolation and Interaction in the Shala Valley of Northern Albania*, pp. 85-106. Eds. Galaty, M.L. et al. Los Angeles: Cotsen Institute of Archaeology Press at UCLA. Winner of Society for American Archeology Book Award, in the "Scholarly" Category.
- 2013 Lee, W. E., M. Lubin, E. Ndreca with Contributions by M.L. Galaty, M. Mustafa, and R. Schon. Archival Historical Research. In: *Light and Shadow: Isolation and Interaction in the Shala Valley of Northern Albania*, pages 45-84. Edited by M. Galaty et al. Los Angeles: Cotsen Institute of Archaeology Press at UCLA.
- 2010 Mustafa, M. "Turkey and Eastern Europe." In *Muslim World: Modern Muslim Communities*, pp. 322-333. Eds. Crowe, Felicity et al. New York: Marshall Cavendish Reference.
- 2009 M. Galaty, O. Lafe, Z. Tafilica, C. Watkinson, W. Lee, M. Mustafa, R. Schon, and A. Young. The Shala Valley Project. York: Archaeology Data Service (doi:10.5284/1000103). http://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/archives/view/svp_mellon_2009/
- 2008 Mustafa, M. "What Remained of Religion in an "Atheist" State and the Return of Religion in Post-Communist Albania." *MESS and RAMSES II, Mediterranean Ethnological Summer School*, vol. 7: 51-76. Eds. Jaka Repič, Alenka Bartulović and Katarina Sajovec Altshul. Zupanic's Collection nr. 28. Ljubljana: University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Arts.
- 2008 Mustafa, M. "Giving Ottoman Otherness a Local Flavour: The Bektashi Order of Dervishes in Contemporary Albania." *Austrian Academy of Sciences Working Papers in Social Anthropology*, Volume 3: 1-29. Eds. Andre Gingrich and Helmut Lukas, Online publication: <http://hw.oeaw.ac.at/?arp=0x001c98f7>.
- 2008 Mustafa, M. and A. Young. "Feud narratives: contemporary deployments of *kanun* in Shala Valley, northern Albania." *Anthropological Notebooks XIV* (2: Contributions to Albanian Studies): 87-107.

- 2007 Mustafa, M. "The Bektashi Ecumenical Experience: Heterodox Islam, National Identity, and Modernity in Post-Communist Albania." Online publication: <http://www.irex.org/programs/iaro/research/06-07/Mentor.pdf>.
- 2007 Mustafa, M., and G. Clark. "Quantifying Technological Continuity: 'Ain Difla Rockshelter (Jordan) and the Evolution of Levantine Mousterian Technology.'" *Journal of Eurasian Prehistory*, 5(1): 47-83.
- 2006 Galaty, M., O. Lafe, Z. Tafilica, W. Lee, M. Mustafa, C. Watkinson, A. Young. "Projekti i Luginës së Shalës: Fushata 2005." *Shkodra në Shekuj* 1: 232-238.

Teaching Experience

- Courses Taught: Children and Culture (Boston University)
 Islam and the Muslim World (Amherst College)
 The Islamic Mystical Tradition (Amherst College)
 Anthropology of Religion (Boston University)
 Anthropology of Muslim Cultures and Politics (Boston University)
 Introduction to Cultural Anthropology (Curry College, Boston University)
 Introduction to Sociology (Middlesex Community College)
 Human Biology, Behavior, and Evolution (Boston University)
- 01/13-Present Lecturer, *Introduction to Cultural Anthropology* (AN101). Metropolitan College, Boston University. Boston, Massachusetts.
- Summer 2014 Lecturer, *Children and Culture* (AN290), Summer School, Boston University.
- 05/08-08/11 Lecturer, *Anthropology of Muslim Cultures and Politics* (AN319), Summer School, Boston University.
- Summer 2012 Lecturer, *Anthropological Study of Religion* (AN384). Summer School, Boston University.
- Spring 2012 Visiting Assistant Professor of Religion, *Islam and the Muslim World* (RN182) and *Islamic Mystical Tradition* (RN285). Department of Religion, Amherst College, Amherst, Massachusetts.
- Fall 2011 Lecturer, *Introduction to Cultural Anthropology* (ANTH1020) Department of Sociology and Criminal Justice, Curry College, Milton, Massachusetts.
- 01/09-12/11 Adjunct Faculty, *Introduction to Cultural Anthropology* (ANT101), *Introduction to Sociology* (SOC101). Department of Behavioral Sciences, Middlesex Community College, Bedford, Massachusetts.
- 01/08-05/11 Teaching Fellow, *Introduction to Cultural Anthropology* (AN101). Department of Anthropology, Boston University.
- 09/10-05/11 Teaching Fellow, *Human Biology, Behavior, and Evolution* (AN102). Department of Anthropology, Boston University.
- Spring 2004 Visiting Lecturer, *History of World Civilizations I* (HIS101). Department of History, Salem State College, Salem, Massachusetts.

Public Lectures

- 09/05/2014 “*From the Ashes of Atheism: The Reconstitution of Bektashi Religious Observance in Post-Communist Albania.*” The University Centre Saint-Ignatius Antwerp Summer School: Religion and Culture in a Globalized World: Questioning Our Research Frames.
- 03/14/2014 “*Resurrecting Faith after Atheism in Postcommunist Albania.*” Council for European Studies at Columbia University 21st International Conference of Europeanists: Resurrections, Washington D.C. Session: *In Keeping the Faith: Examining the Nexus of Political and Religious Identity in Europe.*
- 03/16/2014 Invited Chair, *Territories of Faith: Reclaiming Europe’s Religious Heritages.* In Council for European Studies at Columbia University 21st International Conference of Europeanists: Resurrections, Washington D.C.
- 11/24/2013 “*The Muslim Shrine Then and Now: Resacralizing the Bektashi Sufi Order in Contemporary Albania.*” American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting, Baltimore. In Islamic Mysticism Group Session: *Global Sufism.*
- 11/20/2013 “*Resacralizing Pilgrimage and the Sacred in Postsocialist Europe: The Case of Contemporary Albanian Sufis.*” American Anthropological Association Annual Meeting, Chicago. Society for the Anthropology of Religion Session *Moral Geographies and Sacred Sites: Space and Boundaries in Religious Practice.*
- 11/8/2013 “*The Relevance of Contemporary Sufism to Postsocialist Society.*” Society for the Scientific Study of Religion Annual Meeting: *How does Religion Work?* Boston, Massachusetts. In SSSR Session: *European Religious Landscapes.*
- 11/10/2013 Convener: Religion in Turkey. Society for the Scientific Study of Religion Annual Meeting: *How Does Religion Work?* Boston, Massachusetts.
- 04/18/2012 “*A case study in Sufism: The Albanian Bektashi.*” Prof. A. Steinfel’s Sufism: the Mystical Path in Islam (Religion 311s), Department of Religion, Mount Holyoke College. South Hadley, Massachusetts.
- 09/26/2011 “*Ways of Giving: How to Give and Why in a Muslim Tradition.*” Kenan Colloquium on Giving, Amherst College, Center for Community Engagement. Amherst, Massachusetts.
- 02/18/2011 “*Contestations of Trans-national Sacred Landscapes and the Albanian Bektashi Perspective on Islam and the International Neighborhood.*” Boston University International Relations First Annual Graduate Student Conference.
- 11/06/2009 “*Post-communist Reconstitution of Religion: Albanian Bektashi Engagement of Local, National, and Transnational Arenas.*” Boston University Graduate Lecture Series in Anthropology of Religion.
- 02/11/2009 “*Sufism Today: A Study Case from the Balkans.*” The Relevance of Sufism to the Modern World: A Panel Discussion, moderated by Prof. H. Chehabi and co-sponsored by the Center for Middle Eastern Studies, Harvard University. Cambridge, Massachusetts.
- 10/29/2008 “*The Experience of Secrecy in Islamic Mysticism and the Maintenance of the Bektashi Spiritual Hierarchy.*” Boston University Institute for the Study of Muslim Societies and Civilizations Doctoral Candidate Seminar Series.
- 10/19/2008 “*Numbers Matter: Religious Affiliations and Political Identity in Albania.*” For *Anthropology of Islamic Cultures and Politics* (AN319), Department of Anthropology, Boston University.
- 07/03/2007 “*Islamic Mysticism and the Bektashi Order of Dervishes.*” Shala Valley Project 2007, Millsaps College, Mississippi and the Institute of Archaeology, Tirana.

- 03/20/2007 “*Sufistic Emotions and Emotionless States: the Manifestation and Disciplining of Human Emotions in Islamic Mysticism.*” Prof. R. LeVine’s Seminar *Anthropology of Culture and Emotions* (AN594), Department of Anthropology, Boston University.
- 11/01/2006 “*Bektashi Experience: Heterodox Islam, Identity, and Modernity in Post-Communist Albania.*” Social Science and Religion Network (SSRN), Boston University.
- 01/09/2004 “*New Evidence on the Origins of Anatomically Modern Humans.*” Department of Prehistory and the Institute of Archaeology, University of Tirana. Tirana, Albania.

Symposia and Summer Schools

- 09/2014 “The Reconstitution of Bektashi Religious Observance in Post-Communist Albania.” In: *Religion and Culture in a Globalized World: Questioning our Research Frames.* University Centre Saint-Ignatius Antwerp Summer School 2014. University of Antwerp, Belgium.
- 07/2013 “*From the Ashes of 'atheism': Resacralizing the Bektashi Sufi Order in Postsocialist Albania.*” In *Borders in Motion: New Dynamics of Inclusion and Exclusion across Europe and North America.* Transatlantic Summer Institute 2013. Center for German and European Studies, University of Minnesota.
- 02/2011 First Annual Graduate Student Conference in International Relations, Boston University: “*Expansion and Contraction of the International Neighborhood.*”
- 08/2008 10th Conference of the European Association of Social Anthropologists (EASA), University of Ljubljana, Slovenia. Panel Organizer: “*Islam Within and Across Religious Communities: Case studies from the Balkan and Europe.*” Paper Presentation: “*The experience of diversity and mutuality through an ethnography and historical anthropology of Islam in Albania.*” With the sponsorship of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences and the Department of Anthropology at Boston University, Wenner Gren Foundation, and EASA 2008 research and travel grants.
- 11/2007 Social Anthropology Research Unit (SARU) International Guest Lecture Series at the Austrian Academy of Sciences. “*Giving Ottoman Otherness a Local Flavor: the Bektashi Order of Dervishes in Contemporary Albania*” With the Sponsorship of the Institute for the Study of Muslim Societies and Civilizations at Boston University and SARU at the Austrian Academy of Sciences.
- 11/2007 Religion Sites in the Mediterranean Region Lecture Series, Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology, University of Vienna. “*Sufism in Ghazali’s Theology and Philosophy and the Mevlevi and Bektashi Order of Dervishes.*”
- 09/2007 UCSIA Summer School on Religion, Culture and Society, University of Antwerp, Belgium. Poster Presentation: “*Religious Practice and Political Identity in “Atheist” and Post-Communist Albania.*” Special Event Organizer: “*Islam Up-Close and Personal: the Shapes, Numbers, Colors, and Sounds of Sufism.*”
- 08/2007 14th Mediterranean Ethnological Summer Symposium. Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, University of Ljubljana. Bektashism in Southeastern Europe Workshop, “*What Remained of Religion in an “Atheist” State and the Situation of the Bektashi Order of Dervishes in Contemporary Albania.*”

Contributions to Publications

- 2009 Reviewer for *Nations and Nationalism*, Journal for the Association for the Study of Ethnicity and Nationalism. Blackwell Publishing.
- 2009 The New Cambridge History of Islam, Vol. 6: Muslims and Modernity: Culture and Society since 1800s. Edited by R. W. Hefner
- 2007 *Schooling Islam: Modern Muslim Education*, Hefner, R. and M.Q. Zaman, eds. Princeton University Press.
- 2007 Gungor, K., M. Sagir and I. Ozer. Evaluation of the Gonial Angle in the Anatolian Populations: From Past to Present. *Collegium Anthropologicum* 31 (2): 375-378.
- 2006 Schon, R. and M. L. Galaty. Diachronic Frontiers: Landscape Archaeology in Highland Albania. *Journal of World-Systems Research* XII (2): 231-262.
- 2004 Sherwood, S. C. et al. Chronology and Stratigraphy at Dust Cave, Alabama. *American Antiquity* 69(3):533-554.
- 2001 Walker, R. B. et al. Berries, Bones, and Blades: Reconstructing Late Paleoindian Subsistence Economy at Dust Cave, Alabama. *Midcontinental Journal of Archaeology* 26(2):169-197.
- 2001 Kuhn, S. L. et al. Ornaments of the earliest Upper Paleolithic: New insights from the Levant. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 98(13):7641-7646.
- 2001 Quade, J. Desert pavements and associated rock varnish in the Mojave Desert: How old can they be? *Geology* 29(9):855-858.
- 2000 Korkuti, M. et al. The Mallakstra Regional Archaeological Project: First Season, 1998. *Iliria* 1998(1-2):253-273.
- 1998 Hammond, N. et al. No slow dusk: Maya urban development and decline at La Milpa, Belize. *Antiquity* 72(1998):831-837.

Research Experience

- 01/05-06/06 Research Assistant, Prof. R. W. Hefner. Institute on Culture, Religion, and World Affairs (CURA), Boston University, Boston, Massachusetts.
- 01/04-05/04 Graduate Research Assistant for Dean A. T. Gerard. Learning Center, Salem State University.
- 01/03-06/03 Research Assistant, Prof. O. Bar-Yosef. Department of Anthropology, Harvard University.
- 08/00-12/02 Research Assistant, Prof. M. C. Stiner. Department of Anthropology, University of Arizona.
- 08/99-06/00 Research Assistant, Prof. S. L. Kuhn. Department of Anthropology. University of Arizona.

Academic Fellowships, Scholarships, Grants, and Honorary Awards

- 07/08-20/13 Trans-Atlantic Summer Institute in European Studies Fellowship, Center for German and European Studies, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis
- 01/11-06/11 Cora du Bois Fellowship, Harvard University.
- 09/08-05/09 Muslim Fellow, Institute for the Study of Muslim Societies and Civilizations, Boston University.

- 05/07-12/07 American Council of Learned Societies Language Training Grant to Study Albanian. Under the advisorship of Professor Muzafer Korkuti, University of Tirana, Albania.
- 11/06-08/07 Research Fellow, IREX for anthropological fieldwork on Contemporary Religious Practice, National Identity, and Modernity in Post-Communist Albania.
- 09/05-06/06 Earhart Research Fellow under the advisorship of Prof. Peter L. Berger of the Institute on Culture, Religion and World Affairs at Boston University.
- 03/11/2001 National Science Foundation Honorable Mention.
- 08/00-06/01 William Shirley Fulton Scholarship, University of Arizona, Anthropology Department for academic excellence.
- 08/99-06/01 University of Arizona Emil W. Haury Educational Fund for Archaeology, Anthropology Department for academic excellence.
- 08/99-06/01 Albanian American National Organization Educational Scholarship for academic achievement in upholding the Albanian-American values esteemed by the organization.
- 05/23/1999 Boston University Archaeology Department Price for Excellence for outstanding academic performance by a graduating senior.

Fieldwork Experience

- 08/11-09/11 Dissertation Fieldwork in Albania. Funded by Department of Anthropology Graduate Summer Research Abroad Fellowship.
- 03/07-12/07 Dissertation Fieldwork in Albania. Funded by IREX, the International Research & Exchanges Board, Individual Advanced Research Opportunities Program.
- 05/07-06/07 East European Language Training in Albanian. Funded by the American Council of Learned Societies.
- 11/06-12/06 Language Study and Ethnographic Research in Turkey. Funded by the Institute of Turkish Studies in affiliation with Ankara University / Tömer.
- 06/05-12/10 Ethnographer and Senior Staff Member, Shala Valley Project, Albania (<http://www.millsaps.edu/svp/>).
- 05/00-07/00 Archaeologist, University of Arizona and Ankara University Paleolithic Uçağızlı Cave in Hatay, Turkey (<http://w3.arizona.edu/~hatayup/>).
- 06/99-08/99 Archaeologist, University of Alabama Dust Cave Field School, Alabama (<http://www.dustcave.ua.edu/>).
- 06/98-07/98 Archaeologist and Interpreter, University of Cincinnati and the Albanian Institute of Archaeology Mallakstra Regional Archaeological Project in Albania (river.blg.uc.edu/mrap/MRAP.html).
- 01/98-04/98 Archaeologist, La Milpa: Boston University Archaeological Project and Study Abroad in Belize (<http://www.bu.edu/lamilpa/>).

Languages

Native Speaker of Albanian and English fluency.

Translations

- 2008 Albanian Translation & Comparison with the Original of J. K. Birge's *The Bektashi Order of Dervishes*, Luzac Oriental, 1937. *Urdhëri Bektashi i Dervishëve*, Urtësia Bekashiane, Tirana.

Memberships

Council for European Studies at Columbia University, 2014--.

European Association of Social Anthropologists, 2008--.

American Anthropological Association

- Society for the Anthropology of Europe, 2005--.
- Society for the Anthropology of Religion, 2005--.
- Society for Cultural Anthropology, 2005--.

American Academy of Religion, 2009--.

Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, 2013--.

Boston University

- Social Science and Religion Network, 2005--.
- Institute for the Study of Muslim Societies and Civilizations, 2006--.
- Institute on Religion, Culture and World Affairs, Boston University, 2006--.

Middle East Studies Association, 2009--.

Society of American Archaeology, 1998-2003.

Professional Development Workshops and Certificates

- Classroom Management in the New Millennium Workshop, May 26, June 2, 9, 2010. Professional and Instructional Development, Middlesex Community College, Bedford Massachusetts.
- Strategies for Success (Title III) Workshop, May 3, 10, June 7, 2010. Professional and Instructional Development, Middlesex Community College, Bedford, Massachusetts.
- Teaching Strategies for Successful Learning Workshop, October 3, 2009. Academic Affairs and Professional and Instructional Development, Middlesex Community College, Bedford, Massachusetts.
- Human Subjects Protection Certification. Rochester Program: Protecting Study Volunteers in Research, January 30, 2001. Research Standards and Compliance, University of Arizona, Tucson, Arizona.