

**“FACTS, MEANINGS, AND COSMOLOGIES”:
BEKTASHI RESPONSES TO THE ABOLITION OF RELIGIOUS
ORDERS IN 1925**

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ABSTRACT

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IN 1925**

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This thesis investigates Bektashi responses to the abolition of religious orders in Turkey in 1925. In order to understand the immediate impact of the legislation among Bektashis, I analyze three series of articles and a novel written in that period, while also tracing the repercussions of similar narratives which were continued to be used by Bektashis in the subsequent decades. I, thereby, explore the ways in which Bektashis developed alternative narratives rationalizing and justifying the abolition of their religious order.

Since its proclamation, Law #677 regarding the abolition of religious orders has been subjected to many different readings by both the decision-

makers of that period and the dervishes who were affected by the Law. In this thesis, I try to give an empathetic account of Bektashi readings, and argue that it is impossible to present a homogeneous stance by Bektashis towards the abolition of their religious orders, since there is a great diversity in their perceptions of the legislation, which are shaped by Bektashi cosmologies. Bektashis' responses range from their harsh criticisms of the state policy to their imaginative strategies for accommodating the legislation. While arguing that Bektashis' strategies exhibit common patterns that take shape around the strategies which I identify as accommodation, I still point out the significance of grasping the subjectivity within these strategies. Thus, in this thesis, through the analysis of an historical event, I explore the ways in which Bektashis transform and accommodate "the past" for constructing and legitimizing "the present".

Keywords: Bektashis, the abolition of religious orders, accommodation, reconstruction of the past, cosmology.

ÖZ

“OLAYLAR, ANLAMLAR VE KOZMOLOJİLER”:
1925 YILINDA TEKKE VE ZAVİYELERİN KAPATILMASINA
BEKTAŞİLER’İN TEPKİLERİ

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Bu tez, 1925 yılında çıkarılan tekke ve zaviyelerin kapatılmasına yönelik karara, Bektaşiler’in verdikleri tepkileri analiz etmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bu kanunun Bektaşiler üzerindeki etkisini anlamak için, söz konusu dönemde gazetelerde yayımlanmış Bektaşilik ile ilgili üç yazı dizisini ve bir romanı analiz ederken, aynı zamanda Bektaşiler tarafından sonraki yıllarda kullanılmaya devam eden söylemlerin de izlerini sürüyorum. Bektaşiler’in tekkelerinin yasaklanmasını rasyonelleştirdikleri ve haklılaştırdıkları alternatif söylemleri nasıl geliştirdiklerini inceliyorum.

Tekke ve zaviyelerin kapatılmasına yönelik 677 sayılı kanun, hem dönemin kanun yapıcıları hem de kanundan etkilenen dervişler tarafından çok farklı okumalara tabi tutulmuştur. Bu tezde, Bektaşiler'in yorumlarını empatik bir bakış açısı ile vermeye çalışırken, onların bu karara karşı homojen bir duruş sergilediklerini söylemenin imkansızlığını ifade ediyorum. Bektaşiler'in kozmolojileri tarafından belirlenen algılayışları ciddi bir çeşitlilik arz etmekte ve verdikleri tepkiler devlet politikasının sert eleştirisinden kanunu kabullenmeye yönelik yaratıcı stratejilere kadar uzanmaktadır. Bektaşiler'in kullandıkları stratejilerin kabullenme olarak tanımladığım stratejiler çerçevesinde ortak örüntüler sergilediklerini iddia etmekle birlikte, bu stratejilerin Bektaşiler tarafından kullanımlarının da kendi içlerinde arz ettikleri öznelliğin kavranmasının önemini vurguluyorum. Bu anlamda, bu tezde, tarihsel bir olay üzerinden, Bektaşiler'in "bugünü" kurmak ve haklılaştırmak için "geçmişi" nasıl dönüştürüp kabullendiklerini inceliyorum.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Bektaşiler, tekke ve zaviyelerin kapatılması, kabullenme, tarihin yeniden yapılandırılması, kozmoloji.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Research Question

In this thesis, I explore the attitudes and responses of Bektashis towards the abolition of religious orders in 1925 by the newly established Republic of Turkey. In this respect, I intend to seek answers to the following questions: How did Bektashis respond to the legislation? What were the effective factors that contributed to the shaping of these responses? Which discourses did Bektashis have recourse to in order to cope with this problem? In which points, did the discourses of Bektashis differ from those of the decision-makers? What were the consequences of the 1925 legislation in the ways in which Bektashis positioned themselves vis-à-vis the republic and established relations with the political authorities? I am aware that there has been a multiplicity of Bektashi attitudes, responses, discourses, and strategies. I shall present an overview of the Bektashi predicament without making sweeping generalizations.

My research interest might stimulate the following question: Why do I focus on the Bektashi order and the Bektashis' attitudes towards the abolition of religious orders? With regard to the first part of the question, there are two

different dimensions to my answer. The first dimension pertains to the peculiarities of the Bektashi order: Its inclusion of Shiite elements in its structure, which is a reflection of its basic difference from the other orders in Turkey; its relatively different and unsteady relations with the Ottoman Empire; and its alleged support to the republic in spite of the continuation of similar discriminative policies towards the order,. The other dimension is more connected to my personal experience. It is not as clear as the former one, but it is a mixture of curiosity and an aspiration to get rid of a disturbing memory from my childhood about the prejudiced perception of Bektashis among Sunnis.

With regard to the second part of the question, the abolition of religious orders, I believe, has a key position through which the relationship between Bektashis and the republic has been shaped in the subsequent decades. This can be understood from the continuing currency of the subject in the narratives and publications of the Bektashi writers after so many years. The abolition of religious orders can be used as a point of departure for assessing the strategies employed by Bektashis when they were confronted with the policies of the state agencies that have a predominantly Sunni character.

Since its proclamation, Law #677 regarding the abolition of religious orders has been subjected to many different readings by both the decision-makers of that period, and the dervishes who were affected by the Law. In

this thesis, I argue that it is impossible to present a homogeneous stance of Bektashis towards the abolition of their religious order; rather there is a great diversity in their perceptions of the legislation. Their responses range from harsh criticisms of the state policy to imaginative strategies for accommodating the legislation. Even though it can be asserted that the accommodation policies are used by Bektashis more frequently than overt resistance, there is also significant diversification among the utilization of these accommodation policies. My aim is to grasp the main factors that shaped these policies: Bektashis' perception of their own religious order, the principles that constituted their point of view about the world, time, belief and love, their relations with a predominantly Sunni state and society, etc. These dimensions are all mutually determining and effective in shaping their responses to the legislation; therefore, all of them should be examined carefully in order to analyze and interpret Bektashis' attitudes correctly.

When I started reading and researching on the subject, I did not really know what I would come across. In consequence of the review of the existing scholarship, as well as the survey among the journals and newspapers of the period in question, I came across an exciting multiplicity of materials. These materials were generous enough to share their silent experiences with anyone who would like to trace them, but simultaneously demure in exposing their meanings. It was challenging to analyze them, because of the gaps between us with regard to time, place and attitude. Thus, I tried to consider all factors

likely to be influential in the process, and form the chapters of the thesis for the purpose of overcoming the difficulties, if partially, coming out of these gaps. However, in addition to the limitations peculiar to social science research, I experienced further difficulties because of the lack of information about some critical issues, such as the ambiguity of identities of the writers whose articles I analyzed in this thesis.

In the second chapter, I give the necessary historical background of the religious orders in the Ottoman Empire period, as well as in the transformative years of the new republic. I will explain the interaction taking place between the reformers and the dervishes during and in the immediate aftermath of the national liberation movement. Then, I will try to analyze the circumstances that necessitated the proclamation of Law #677, and the attitudes of dervishes from several different lodges.

In the third chapter, I concentrate on case studies from the period between 1920 and 1935. In an attempt to understand the immediate impression of the legislation among Bektashis, I survey newspapers and journals, and present three series of articles and a novel written in that period. Two of these works clearly illustrate Bektashi accommodation attempts, narrating the characteristics and history of the Bektashi order, and ending with an argument that portrays Bektashism to be compatible with the policy of the new republic. The third one has the same attitude towards the legislation—that it was a proper decision—but executes this in a way which discredits the

Bektashi order. A similar attitude towards the order is reflected in Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu's novel *Nur Baba*. These articles and the novel are analyzed in a comparative manner for a better understanding of that period's atmosphere.

In the fourth chapter, I analyze various factors effective in shaping of Bektashis' relatively different stance towards the abolition of their religious order. Through an analysis of the historical experiences that determine their collective memory and identity, I will try to understand how they perceive and locate themselves in Turkish society; because, as Connerton argues, "our experience of the present very largely depends upon our knowledge of the past" (1989:2). I will also try to understand how they construct their identity, and in which ways they keep it alive.

I argue that the process of the abolition of religious orders is more problematic for Bektashis than for the dervishes of other religious orders, because of a crucial part of their identity: The emphasis on the Turkish culture from the beginning, and their alleged solidarity with the new republic, Atatürk, and his reform program. In that sense, it is imperative to analyze how they mythologize Atatürk and how they deal with the conflict between the sympathetic images of Atatürk in their opinion and the negative view of the legislation which is an essential part of Atatürk's reform program. I will

explore this tension by explaining the Bektashi image of Atatürk, as someone who is portrayed almost as a cult figure.¹

Bektashis' strategies and reinterpretations of events are occasionally inclined to be regarded as attempts to distort history. This basically stemmed from the distance between the different perceptions of concepts. Some expressions of Bektashis make much more sense once considered within the Bektashi framework. Time is one salient example of these different perceptions. In the same chapter, I explore how time is made to diverge from its linear conceptualization in the hands of Bektashi beliefs, rituals, and notions. I claim that, the discourses of Bektashis should be analyzed without overlooking their distinctive peculiarities and perceptions. Thus, it will become possible to see how their recounting of history is a meaningful component within the integrity of a narrative that aims to protect their existence, vulnerable to harsh attacks.

In the conclusion, I try to make a general analysis of the narratives and strategies employed by Bektashis, and try to understand the continuing meaning of the legislation for them. But in this thesis, I do not intend to carry out a comprehensive analysis of all Bektashi attitudes and responses to the legislation; rather, I argue for the impossibility of a generalization of a common Bektashi stance towards the abolition of their religious order. I

¹ Throughout the thesis, in order to preserve a standard form of narration, I have preferred to use only "Atatürk", even when I mention events before 1934, the date of which he was given this surname with the enactment of the law on family names. However, when I provide quotations from sources, I have stuck to the original texts.

simply provide an illustrative example of how a single subject was assessed in many different ways.

1.2. Research Methods

In this thesis, I intend to reflect the opinions of Bektashis about the abolition of their religious order; therefore I have recourse to and give reference to the non-Bektashi comment on the subject only when it is necessary. The observation of the clash of Sunni and non-Sunni ideas in this arena is not the purpose of this study; rather I try only to reflect the diversity of the Bektashi opinions on the subject by analyzing their narratives and publications. However, I am aware of the conflicting accounts and views of the respective parties and the presence of partisan, even prejudiced opinions. Nevertheless, I am willing to venture the challenge of writing a relatively impartial, but empathetic account of one of the parties, namely the Bektashis.

I try to avoid two possible traps: To get lost in the Bektashi imagination of the world and become a part of their stance towards life; or to remain a mere outsider who aims to observe them, and couldn't go beyond the prejudiced discourses of existing literature about them. This study is an effort to understand the Bektashi reading of an event which has different connotations in their history. Therefore, by considering the necessity to think through the understanding of Bektashis and to base the analysis on their

concepts, I am wary of depending exclusively on etic terms. I try to grasp the emic conceptualizations of the terms, such as time, and explain how Bektashis define, interpret and reshape key concepts in their own imagination. The reshaping of concepts has vital and momentous effects on the construction process of the meanings of events, since people perceive life through their own concepts. Thus, it is a futile attempt to comprehend how people interpret events without understanding their formulations. However, while discovering Bektashis' concepts and viewpoints, and trying to feel empathy for them, I am careful not to sacrifice my objectivity for the sake of internalizing their perceptions, and not to "go native." Thus, I attempt to contribute to a better understanding of an event by presenting it from Bektashis' viewpoints in their own terms. This attempt involves a basic intention which Kay characterized as follows: "the guiding spirit of an emic approach is to rid oneself of *preconceptions* about universal structures so that the data may be analyzed objectively to reveal the true universal structures" (Kay quoted in Feleppa 1986:244).

In this study, three particular research methods and tools have been employed for data gathering and analysis: Historical analysis, content analysis, and interviews. I basically tried to examine an historical event, namely the Law of 1925, its effects on a particular group of people in the course of time, and their interpretations of the event. However, I have not confined my study to a mere collection of data from the period at issue; but

extended it to discover its traces in the social and political sphere, as well as in people's minds. I narrate the events in chronological sequence in the second chapter of the thesis, but I express how Bektashis construct the same events in a different way, and with a different logic, in the following chapters. During the historical research, I used both primary and secondary sources to collect information. There were articles and news published in the journals and newspapers of that period, type recording of a Bektashi *baba*, Turgut Koca, life histories of the articles' writers, as well as books and journals written on the subject. I also made an internet survey for gathering information related to my subject.²

Throughout the different chapters of the thesis, the analysis of the Bektashi response to the legislation is complemented with reference to recent narratives of Bektashis. Although I specifically concentrate on the texts published shortly after the Law of 1925, I also felt the need to trace the effects of the abolition of religious orders in the subsequent periods, since there was a surprising amount of repercussions even 80 years after the legislation.

In the course of the content analysis of the texts, I do not question the factuality of the information given by the writers about the Bektashi order. I specifically focus on the writers' identities and their attitudes towards both the Bektashi order and the abolition of religious orders, their way of expressing themselves, the similarities and disparities in their narratives, their reaction to

² All translations from Turkish and Ottoman Turkish texts into English throughout the thesis are mine unless noted otherwise.

alternative approaches, and the meanings they attributed to the words and concepts. I was aware of the significance of counting the “correct” examples to analyze, which would profoundly affect the research with their characteristics. Thus, I was careful to choose disparate examples in order to reflect the diversity of attitudes.

I try to make inferences by examining the use of language in the articles, expecting to understand the motivations and intentions of the writers, though I am aware of the impossibility of determining a person’s real thoughts and feelings. I reached some conclusions, if not definite, but it was clear that there were hidden meanings under the sentences which bring the readers to different perceptions. I think it should be considered that these articles were not independent of the purposes for which they were designed. Thus, I was primarily concerned with making inferences about the relationship between the articles and the circumstances in which they were written.

I conducted semi-structured interviews as an auxiliary and complementary method for accessing information about the identities of the writers. I went to interview respondents with some specific questions and topics in my mind, and then I led the conversation flow more spontaneously. During the research, I used the advantage of observing Bektashis from outside as a non-Bektashi person, but with regard to the interviews, it was difficult to convince interviewees about my academic concern. I even had to cope with questions about my family and our home town, since Alevi and Bektashi

regions are quite apparent in Anatolia, and it can be a sign to determine my confessional background. I frequently heard the same sentence with a smile on their face: “We will make you a Bektashi one day”; even though their behavior towards me was generally friendly and interested.

The abolition of religious orders is helpful in eliciting the different, and sometimes contradictory, recounting of historical events. It should be regarded as an example that indicates how a seemingly clear event can be differentiated and blurred in diverse perceptions of people. This reminds us of the earthly reality of the characteristics of all events that there is no single and correct interpretation of the events. Thus, I argue that the Bektashi standpoint is as important as the other viewpoints, and it is worthy of consideration.

CHAPTER 2

“FACTS”: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

2.1. The Place of Religious Orders in Turkish Society

Religious orders, representing a relatively more flexible interpretation of Islam in comparison to scholastic orthodox Islam³ and differing considerably in their orientations, were widespread and influential in social, cultural, and political dimensions of the Ottoman history. The large majority of the people were affiliated to religious orders, or at least influenced by them (1965 [1937]:13-14). According to Mardin, “the religious institution proper established much of the upper class politico-ideological basis, while ‘dervish’ religion functioned more as a community-reinforcing and identity-forming process among the lower classes” (1971:206). Thus, dervish lodges were places of social interaction. Their “proletarian” (Kissling 1954:28) character, which provided the interaction between people from different layers of the society, regardless of their education and economic conditions, made them appealing to the masses, especially the poor. Moreover, they engaged in

³ However, I do not understand orthodoxy and heterodoxy as mutually exclusive dualistic categories. Kafadar criticizes these dichotomies in studies of Ottoman history. According to him, “Ottoman literary history, indeed all Ottoman cultural history, has been traditionally viewed within the framework of a dualistic schema: courtly (high, learned, orthodox, cosmopolitan, polished, artificial, stiff, inaccessible to the masses) versus popular (folk, tainted with unorthodox beliefs-practices and superstitions, but pure and simple in the sense of preserving ‘national’ spirit, natural, honest)” (1989:121).

charitable activities and also served travelers at the crossroads, through their considerable economic power.

Dervish lodges provided the link between the masses and the political authority. Not only was their influence over the population manipulated by the sultans for legitimating their policies, but they also “had rendered the services of colonizing and settling many parts of the empire” (Mardin 1971:203). According to Küçük, “(t)he socio-cultural activities of the Sufi orders in the conquered lands, as representatives of state power, helped to integrate the local people into Ottoman culture, and teach them the Turkish language and religion in the centres they established in newly conquered lands” (2002:46). In addition, dervish lodges were prominent centers for the development of Ottoman culture, with its own forms of literature, poetry, music, and architecture;⁴ furthermore, they “provided educational institutions at lower levels” (Mardin 1971:203).

2.2. Early Republican Period and the War of National Independence

Religious orders had different stances towards the national liberation struggle and the subsequent reforms. Küçük asserts that none of the orders fully supported or opposed them as a whole; however, their support for

⁴ See Lifchez (ed.) (1992).

nationalists was much stronger than their support for anti-nationalists

(2002:121-123). She states,

The nationalist Sufi leaders fulfilled several roles during the Struggle, such as legitimation of the nationalists, mobilization of resources and the people and sometimes acting as mediators... the opponents were mostly supporters of the HIF [*Hürriyet ve İtilaf Fırkası* (Freedom and Understanding Party)] which confused opposition to the IT [*İttihad ve Terakki Djem'iyyeti* (Committee of Union and Progress)] with opposition to the National Struggle, therefore was called the *Mukhalif Parti* (Opposition Party, a description says much about the perception of the Kemalists) by the nationalists owing to its generally known opposition to the IT. (2002:122-123)

Thus, Küçük interprets the services of religious orders during the War of National Independence as not being “appreciated and later, after 1923, were ignored” by the nationalists, referring to their abolishment (2002:123). Lewis agrees with the idea that religious orders were in general supported the nationalists in Anatolia, and he mentions the roles of Bektashis, Mevlevis and Naqshbandis in the parliament in that period (2004:405). However, he also acknowledges that, especially after the split between Istanbul and the nationalist movement in Anatolia, some dervishes actively supported the *Hilafet Ordusu* (Caliphate Army) (2004:405), which was established by the government in Istanbul in order to counteract the *Kuva-i Milliye* (National Force).⁵

In order to receive the support of traditional Sunni religious leaders as well as the leaders of Alevi community and the Bektashi order in the national

⁵ For a detailed study of the role of the Bektashis in national movement, see Küçük (2002). For a similar study regarding Mevlevis, see Köstüklü (2005).

movement, Atatürk was careful to cultivate close relations with them (Zürcher 1999:222). Sakallıoğlu explains the dynamics of this intention clearly:

During the War of National Independence (1919-22), which preceded the founding of the republic, Islamic discourse was used as a unifying theme to rally the local Anatolian notables, religious leaders, and the peasantry. The pragmatic manner in which secular nationalists recruited Islam for legitimation is illustrated by the way in which they presented the war against occupying Western forces and the Ottoman state: as a jihad, or holy war. (1996:235)

While initially Atatürk communicated with dervish lodges by correspondence and requested that they participate in the national movement, he then chose instead to pay visits to prominent leaders of these communities personally (Kara 1999:261-264). However, despite this active involvement of religious orders in the national movement, all of them were outlawed in 1925 without exception regardless of their positive or negative stances, with the reason that they became “the ground of intrigue and superstition” (*entrika ve batıl inançların ocağı*) (Jäschke 1972:36).

2.3. The Abolition of Religious Orders

Since the proclamation of the Republic in 1923, the policymakers have tried to limit the influence of Islam in politics and the public sphere in order to establish a Western-oriented and secular nation state. Contrary to the heritage of the Ottoman Empire, the new Republic emphasized a national identity,

rather than a religious one, as the basic vehicle for the social cohesion of Turkish society. A series of reforms, which reorganized the matters concerning the religious sphere of social life, was put into practice, one of which was the position of the dervish lodges.

As part of this secularizing reform program, the Grand National Assembly of the Turkish Republic passed Law #677 on 30 November 1925, closing dervish lodges. All religious orders were prohibited from operating and their assets were confiscated. Law #677 also banned the profession of tomb keeping, the wearing of dervish costumes and the use of titles associated with mysticism such as *şeyh*, *mürşid*, *mürid*, *derviş*, *dede*, *baba*, *çelebi*, *halife*, and *emir*. The tombs of the sultans and dervish lodges were closed. In his public speech in Kastamonu on 30 August 1925, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk stated, “The Turkish Republic cannot be a country of sheikhs, dervishes, disciples and lay brothers. The truest and the most authentic *tarikât* is that of civilization” (quoted in İnönü 1983:262). In his speech in Çankırı on the same day, he added, “None of us needs the guidance of dervish lodges” (quoted in Çankaya 1985:247).

The motivations of Atatürk for abolishing religious orders have been highly debated. First of all, it must be noted that a series of revolts that began with the Sheikh Sa’id rebellion in 1925, followed by another uprising in

Menemen in 1930,⁶ must have been factors in this process. Mustafa Kara attributes the abolition of religious orders entirely to the unrest in the east of Anatolia, and he claims that there was no discussion opposing the religious orders in the parliament till then (1999:266). Lewis also claims that the secular reforms in 1924 were directed against the ulema, not the dervishes; however the most dangerous resistance came from the dervishes, who were already used to “independence and opposition”, unlike the ulema (2004:405).

However, I maintain that Atatürk had already decided to abolish religious orders, and was just waiting for the right time in order to lessen and control the reactions against the legislation. The uprisings happening in the east part of Anatolia probably accelerated the process, and justified assertions of their “subversive” characteristics.

The influences of the charismatic sheikhs and their power to mobilize people were manipulated by the political authorities, but simultaneously were always regarded as dangerous, and the lodges were seen as easily becoming the centers of rebellion. Shankland states that

This flexible organisation which could make *tarikats* centres of ideological dissent in the cities, the organising principle of rural unrest in the countryside, and, when linked with the tribal forces of the east, formidable military opponents, explains some of the vehemence and firmness with which they were condemned by Atatürk” (1999:65).

⁶ On the character of the Sheikh Sa’id rebellion, Zürcher argues, “While the leadership was undoubtedly motivated by the desire for an autonomous or even independent Kurdistan, the rank and file acted from religious motives, demanding the restoration of the holy law and the caliphate” (1994:178). The other rebellion, in the town of Menemen, was carried out by a group of Naqshbandi disciples who attacked and beheaded a young reserve officer, Kubilay, in 1930.

Birge discusses moral dangers implicit in all religious orders.

Regarding the influences of *mürşit*, he argues,

All too often in every dervish order, the *mürşit* has been a man possibly well learned in his own system but without any basis in real culture and with perhaps no conception whatever of what the world to-day calls science. Give such a man spiritual authority over a few score or a few hundred followers, and his influence, even if good in one direction, must work for evil in other directions. (1965[1937]:202)

Probably for this reason, Atatürk pointed out a new guide to those who adhere to the Sufi path with the statement: “The real guide in life is science”.⁷ Moreover, the opinion that the religious orders had degenerated was widely held in that period, and the attempts to reform them, made even by dervishes themselves, were in vain.⁸ Zarcone states that “(t)he Sufis themselves, however, were not unaware of the lamentable condition of numerous Sufi lodges, ruled by illiterate and rapacious şeyhs, which were really ‘houses of laziness’ (*tembelhane*), as they were described by their opponents” (2001:199).

Thus, religious orders were considered incompatible with the modern and secular ideals of the new Republic, and their existence in the social,

⁷ *Guide* (*mürşid*) means a person who leads disciples in finding the truth, the sheikh in Sufi orders.

⁸ According to Zarcone, “(a) first attempt to reform the Muslim brotherhoods was made in the middle of the nineteenth century with the establishment of the Assembly of the Şeyhs (*Meclis-i Meşayih*), followed during the Constitutional period with the appearance of two other associations, the United Sufi Society and the Sufi Society” (2001:199).

political, and cultural life of Turkish society was put to an end, at least in the eyes of law.

2.4. The Responses of the Dervishes to the Abolition of Religious Orders

After the promulgation of Law #677 banning all dervish lodges, nor collective movement or overt protest of dervishes as a reaction to the Law occurred. There are various arguments about the reasons for this silence. Barnes finds the nonexistence of a general outcry against the legislation astonishing, in consideration of the notion that religious orders were such a vital part of Turkish society. He answers the question with the fact that

(T)he law ending the dervish orders in Turkey was not a sudden and arbitrary act of a dictator. Considering the events which had taken place over the preceding two centuries, the decision towards a thorough secularization in Turkish society was inevitable, the logical conclusion of reform policies carried out by Westernizing statesmen during the 19th century. (1974:35)

He states that the 19th century economic reform program which undermined the economic foundation of dervish orders is enough to understand their relatively easy and complete dissolution by Atatürk (1974:36). Kreiser comes out with an explanation parallel to Barnes', that the religious orders had a significant role in the establishment of Turkish culture; however, it is acknowledged that they had already degenerated for a long while and completed their life span (2004:97).

The other factor that might have affected the responses of dervishes is the strict measures taken by the government in that period. The resistance of the public to the hat reform and the dissolution of the dervish lodges were repressed, and the Revolutionary Courts (*İstiklâl Mahkemeleri*) arrested 7,500 people and executed 660 under the Law on the Maintenance of Order (*Takrir-i Sükûn Kanunu*) (Zürcher 1999:252). Thus, these circumstances might have caused a widespread conviction about the danger and futility of reacting.

İsmail Kara does not attribute the silence of dervishes to such a fear, but rather to their mentality and sobriety which derived from their education in mystic tradition. He explains his pretension with an example (1991:14). According to him, the sheikh of the Eyüp Hatuniye lodge, Sadeddin Ceylan Efendi, declined to be awarded with the Liberty Medal for his services during the national struggle period, on account of the fact that these services rendered for the sake of religion and homeland were already obligatory for them (1991: 15 and 20, footnote 2). Kara, by giving examples from various dervish orders, argues that there was no serious tension over the dissolution of dervish lodges (1991:14).

Mustafa Kara explains various reactions of dervishes to the prohibition of their lodges. According to him, some dervishes assumed a submissive attitude, and continued to transfer the mystic culture in different ways. They did not consider the prohibition as a termination, because this “occupation” was not in need of formality. They seem to have accommodated themselves to

this compulsion by asserting that prayer and zikr always continued morally everywhere. Some dervishes really thought that lodges were already closed, because they could not restore themselves, and had become out of date. Thus, they found it meaningless to raise an objection that became materially and spiritually useless to the nation, and the religion. According to another idea, the closure of tekkes was a return to the original, because there were no lodges in the period of Prophet Muhammed. Mustafa Kara asserts that some dervishes accepted that decision just because the government made it, and regarded as destiny (2005: 261-262).

Zarcone explains the responses of the dervishes in connection with the characteristics of the Sufi orders:

The interpretation of the events of 1925 must be twofold: first, we have to consider the position of the radical Sufis (Nakşibendis) which did not criticize the closure of the Sufi lodges because they thought the *tekkes* were not respectful of Islam and its traditions, and also because the *tekkes* were not essential for them; second, we need to look at the opinion of some particular orders like the Melâmi where Sufi were above all philosophical and spiritual, and where the *tekkes* also were not essential... Hence, for them the closure of the *tekkes* and the abolition of the *tarikats* in 1925 cannot be interpreted as an end, but as an important turning point in their history. (2001:202-203)

Thus, according to Zarcone, besides their “positive” (2001:203) reaction against the closure of the lodges, these orders were able to continue to gather secretly in their lodges, because of the particular nature of the silent zikr and their rejection of music and dance (2001:201). However, it was not

so easy for Bektashis and Mevlevis, whose ceremonies required a special architectural setting. The other aspect that Zarcone emphasizes is that,

(I)t is only among the Bektāşis that we find a particular class of celibate dervishes, the Dede Baba, who lived in the lodge as permanent residents... Since their lodges depended on a central organization located at Hacibektaş for the Bektāşis, and at Konya for Mevlevis, it became difficult for them to function as independent groups. (2001: 201)

In conclusion, we could not evaluate all responses in the same patterns, because there are various factors that shapes dervishes' responses, including individualistic life circumstances and experiences. For example, the dervishes who earn their keep from the lodges might have been affected differently and probably more deeply.⁹

It should also be noted that silence does not necessarily connote passiveness or compliance, but a passive resistance. This passive resistance might have manifested itself with direct and indirect ways, from continuing the activities of the lodges clandestinely, to reacting it between the lines of publications.

⁹ For such examples from the Mevlevi order, see Harmanşah (2006).

CHAPTER 3

“MEANINGS”: BEKTASHI PERCEPTIONS AND INTERPRETATIONS OF THE ABOLITION OF RELIGIOUS ORDERS

The early republican period of Turkey witnessed a considerable increase in publications concerning the Bektashi order. In this chapter, I am going to analyze a novel and three series of articles published in newspapers in that period, considering their chronological sequence. I will discuss the first two publications that basically reflect negative attitude towards Bektashis separately, because of their different characteristics, and attempt to make a comparative analysis in conclusion section. Then, I will analyze two other series of articles that have a more favorable stance towards Bektashis together.

3.1. Accusations against the Bektashi Order

3.1.1. *Nur Baba* (1921)

The novel *Nur Baba*, written by Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu, was first published in installments in the newspaper *Akşam* (Evening) in 1921, and then published as a book in 1922. The novel led to significant debates and

reactions, particularly among Bektashis. Karaosmanoğlu, a prominent late Ottoman and early republican novelist, wrote this novel at a time when he had close relations with Bektashis. In the novel, the author narrated the way of life and rites of Bektashis in a scandalous manner, for which he received heavy criticisms from Bektashis. He replied to the critiques in the second and third editions of the book.

Karaosmanoğlu is one of the most renowned novelists in Turkish literature. Besides being a leading novelist, he was also a prominent figure during the National Independence War of Turkey. He returned from Switzerland to Anatolia following the invitation of the nationalist movement in Ankara. He wrote articles in newspapers and journals such as *Akşam*, *Dergah*, *İkdam*, *Türk Yurdu*, and *Yeni Mecmua* in support of the war. He was elected as a member of the parliament in 1923 and 1931 to represent the provinces of Mardin and Manisa respectively. Following 1934, he also served as the Turkish ambassador in Tiran, Prague, the Hague, Bern, and Tehran.

Writing novels was a priority for Karaosmanoğlu although he also wrote short stories, plays, poems, and memoirs. Akı (2001:95) explains this tendency of Karaosmanoğlu as the outcome of his feelings of responsibility in a period of social disorder. In his novels, the author intended to analyze the society in a broader perspective. In fact, he experienced significant events during the Reforms of Reorganization (1839) and republican periods,

including the Balkan Wars and World War I. This novel, therefore, needs be analyzed with attention given to the milieu in which it was written.

3.1.1.1. The Novel: *Nur Baba*

In this novel, the author describes the initiation of an upper-class woman, Nigar Hanım, into a Bektashi lodge, and the rest of her life there. Becoming the lover of the Bektashi sheikh, Nur Baba, she left her family, and spent all of her wealth for the lodge. In the end, because of the disordered and tiring life, including long nights of drinking alcohol; Nigar Hanım became decrepit, and the sheikh decided to marry another of his disciples. Nigar Hanım could not return to her family, and thus she stayed in the lodge, started using drugs, and had a miserable life, which was portrayed tragically by the author.

In the personality of his characters in the novel, Karaosmanoğlu intends to reflect the “corrupt” and “immoral” life of Bektashis. While the novel seems to be mainly about the relation between Nur Baba and Nigar Hanım, the author gives the impression that this was only one example of the sheikh’s love affairs and how he ruined the lives of his disciples. The author characterizes the sheikh as a greedy and ambitious person, and depicts how he indulged himself in pleasure. He describes the sheikh as a person deprived of the basic principles of Bektashis, and as someone who misused the rites for the

sake of his own benefit. Another point that he criticized is the financial contribution that the newly accepted disciples had to pay to the lodge.

The novel attracted public attention because of the information given about Bektashis in it. The reactions and the subsequent controversy most likely to increased the sales of the book. The author gives sensational headings to the parts of the novel in order to attract more attention, such as “How is a Bektashi sheikh trained?” (*Bir Bektaşî şeyhi nasıl yetişir?*) or “How are the candles blown out in a Bektashi lodge?” (*Bir Bektaşî tekkesinde mumlar nasıl söndürülür?*) which is a reference to the allegations of communal orgies in Bektashi ceremonies.¹⁰

3.1.1.2. The Movie Based on the Novel: *Boğaziçi Esrarı* (Mystery of the Bosphorus)¹¹

The novel was filmed by the director Muhsin Ertuğrul in 1922. This was the first movie in the Turkish cinema to refer to the Alevis (Odabaş 2004:546). However, it was not screened until 13 December 1923. According to Odabaş, “because of the troubles, the movie banned by the occupying forces, was presented after the liberation of İstanbul” (2004:548). The name

¹⁰ “Blowing out the candle” is a very touchy expression in Turkey. It refers to the Sunni accusation of inappropriate sexual relations directed towards Alevis and Bektashis during their religious ceremonies. It is a reaction towards their religious ceremonies, in which men and women are not segregated.

¹¹ For an analysis of the term “*esrar*”, see pg. 70.

of the movie was also changed from *Nur Baba* to *Boğaziçi Esrarı* (Şener 1972:79).

Çalapala claims that with the incitement that the movie was opposed to them; Bektashis raided the movie studio, and roughed the actors up (1944:23). The police got the turmoil under control, but an Armanian actor, Vahram Papazyan, who was playing one of the main characters of the movie, did not want to continue, and his role was played by the director, Muhsin Ertuğrul (1944:23).

According to Şener, the film's producer Şakir Seden asserts that no similar events followed, but that they received unsigned threat letters, and also that the cinema owners were reluctant to screen the movie because of the threats. But when the movie was screened one year later, and attracted attention of the populace, they made many proposals to the producer company (1972:79). Çalapala states that there was an assumption about all Bektashis that they were tolerant and patient. But this assumption came out wrong for some Bektashis with the novel *Nur Baba* (1944:22). Turgut Koca, a prominent Bektashi *baba*, acknowledges that there was a Bektashi raid in reaction to the film (1987). However, he states that it was a not significant event, since none of the Bektashis were brought to court after the raid. Koca also claims that Karaosmanoğlu was sent abroad by president Mustafa Kemal Atatürk after this event. However, I was unable to locate any information in books about him that justified this claim. He became deputy of Mardin in

1923, and then he went to Switzerland in 1926 because of his illness. His first appointment as an ambassador to Tiran was in 1934 (Karaosmanoğlu 2004:180).

3.1.1.3. Critiques and Responses

The novel can be evaluated from different perspectives with regard to its relevance to Bektashis, the possible intentions of the author, and the literary value of the novel.

To start with, the novel was harshly criticized by Bektashis who felt obliged to defend themselves against its accusations. Among the most important of the criticisms, there was a charge that the author had betrayed the Bektashi secret, and narrated the rites of the order. Karaosmanoğlu asserts that “Bektashi secret” is a baseless concept, that there is no mention of its secrecy in old Bektashi sources, and that it emerged only after the abolition of the Janissary corps along with the Bektashi lodges in 1826 (2004: 12-13). He states that it becomes a necessity to hold secret ceremonies in order to protect themselves from the Ottoman Empire. According to him, this secrecy causes slander and a bad reputation for the Bektashis among the public. He also emphasizes in the novel that many bad things were said against Bektashis

when Nigar Hanım was a child. They were called “Kızılbaşlar”¹², and she trembled with fear and hatred when she heard that word (2004:56). He claims that he even brought out the real features of their rites and that’s why he served the interests of the order by writing this novel (2004:13).

In reply to his statement about the openness of the Bektashi lodges to the public before they were prohibited, Aytaş asserts that the conversations in the lodges were open to everybody, but the special rites were secret, and except for Bektashis, nobody could participate in them. Aytaş criticizes his defense as being inconsistent (2005:2-3).

The author is also accused of humiliating the Bektashis, and insulting them with this novel (Aytaş 2005:2). However, he regards himself as a genuine and sincere Bektashi, who grew up within this tradition. He complains about the degeneration of some Bektashi lodges, but he explains it in connection with the general corruption in the country (Karaosmanoğlu 2004:13). He claims to have started the reformation of the Bektashi lodges with this novel (2004: 14), which is also criticized in the point of “aiming at reforming Bektashi lodges by using a novel instead of creating a literary work” (Cahit 1934: 251). But, in his second reply text, he seems to contradict this statement, asserting that he was not so frivolous a person as to examine a religious order with a novel. He emphasizes the “literary” nature of the novel,

¹² This is a pejorative word, reflecting the Sunni prejudice against Bektashis. Like the expression “blowing out the candle”, it implies “someone who practices means incest.”

and not any religious or philosophical character of it (Karaosmanoğlu 2004: 19).

Even though Karaosmanoğlu rejects the accusation that the characters of the novel reflected real persons, he does not refrain from expressing that they were not real, but natural, and could possibly exist (2004:15). Although he claims that the novel was a “figment of the imagination” (2004:14), he clarifies in his memoirs that he described in the novel how he spent his time in the lodge which he frequented (1969:167). The author attended a Bektashi lodge, which “was said to be Kısıklı” (Akı 2001:100, footnote 67) in Çamlıca, İstanbul. Akı claims that some aspects of the novel pertaining to the author’s personality were conspicuous. One character of the novel, Macid, a friend of Nigar Hanım, is physically reminiscent of Karaosmanoğlu himself (2001:101).

Another point about Bektashis that Karaosmanoğlu frequently emphasized is the excessive consumption of alcohol during their rites, both in the novel and in his memoirs about the lodge he attended. He states that a woman served drink to them (1969:171). Based on this claim, Noyan¹³ accuses him of distorting the truths about the rites of Bektashis. He explains that women never carry out that task in the Bektashi rites (2003:205).

Years later, Karaosmanoğlu published some of his memoirs in the newspaper *Ulus*, and tried to justify himself (1961). According to him, he was

¹³ Bedri Noyan was the dedebaba of Babagan branch of Bektashis and died in 1997. According to the definition of Norton, *Dedebaba* is “the baba elected to head the whole movement” (1983:74).

invited by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk to a gathering in which the real sheikh of Çamlıca lodge, Ali Baba, participated.¹⁴ Mustafa Kemal intended to understand whether Nur Baba was based on Ali Baba or not. Karaosmanoğlu said to Mustafa Kemal that Ali Baba was only the “raw material” of *Nur Baba*, that he was only physically reminiscent, and furthermore that Ali Baba was neither capable of singing, nor was he elegant in his behaviors like Nur Baba. The author stated that Mustafa Kemal appreciated that as an increase of the novel’s value.

The most interesting part of his memoirs was his claim about the attitude of the sheikh. Karaosmanoğlu asserts that the sheikh thanked him for his novel which had advertised his lodge, and increased the number of his disciples. But, incoherently, the author states a couple of paragraphs later that the sheikh “sidled” up to him, and complained that the lodge was closed, and he had become impoverished. He asked Karaosmanoğlu to explain his situation to Mustafa Kemal, and find him a job.

The discussions aroused curiosity about the Bektashi aspect of the novelist. Akı tries to examine the reasons for the author’s establishment of contact with Bektashis. Even though he estimates that it could be linked with the insistence of his friends, or his illness in that time, which led him to wait for a “spiritual consolation from the mystic milieu of a lodge” (2001:100), Akı basically attributes it to his interest as an author in an interesting, and

¹⁴ The exact date of the gathering was not given.

exotic place which society was curious about. The popularity of the Bektashi subject in literature in that period is also probably a factor.

Karaosmanoğlu explains that the reason he attended a Bektashi lodge was “partly for his addiction to Sufism and partly for his curiosity about the Bektashi secret” (1974:30). However, he declares that the lodge was disappointing. Ali Baba was an illiterate man, and he had no connection with Sufism. He had no resemblance to Nur Baba except for his physical appearance, and his passion for women (1974:30).

The author’s intentions for writing such a novel can be analyzed in two different ways. Firstly, he is assumed to have written this novel to arouse the public’s interest, and become popular. Owing to the mysterious aspect of their rites, Bektashis’ beliefs and principles have always drawn the public’s attention. Karaosmanoğlu, using his experiences with Bektashis, published *Nur Baba* in installments, and then decided to publish it as a book in a period when public interest in the Bektashi order was increased. In fact, this possible intention of the novelist is justified by the style he used in the novel. For example, the sensational headings of the chapters are clearly aiming at attracting attention.

For some, the novel was evaluated as an effort of an author who showed interest in social matters. *Kiralık Konak* (Mansion for Rent, 1922), the preceding novel of Karaosmanoğlu, considered the matter of “family”; and afterwards the author turned towards a larger institution of the society, a

Bektashi lodge, with *Nur Baba* (Akı 2001:99). As a Bektashi, he wished to express his sadness about the regression, and the corruption of Bektashis in the frame of a novel which everybody could understand. İleri asserts that Karaosmanoğlu, intentionally and consciously, saw only the corruption and degeneration of the lodge, and chose to be unaware of the seven-hundred-year history of it (1990:67).

Bahadır evaluates this novel by asserting that, during the early republican period of Turkey, the negative approach to Alevis reflected in the novels in order to curry favor with Mustafa Kemal, or because of the majority of the leaders who were bound to Mevleviyye in that time. He states that while Alevi sheikhs were given every sort of negative role, Mevlevi sheikhs were presented as intellectual, tolerant, well-informed persons (2002:19, footnote 25).

The author may write the novel with his sense of responsibility for informing society. However, he does not only seem to introduce the Bektashi order to the public, but also to convince, and warn them against its degeneration. Schimmel even claims that this novel, at least to an extent, influenced Kemal Atatürk's conviction of the necessity for the closure of the dervish lodges in Turkey (2001:332-33). I claim that his effort may also be useful for preparing a suitable background for preventing the public reactions just before the prohibition of the Sufi orders in Turkey in 1925. Creating such a bad image of the dervishes could justify the decision.

Karaosmanoğlu particularly emphasizes the notion that Nur Baba used the lodge for his own benefit, and that he led people down the wrong paths in his novel. He describes how Nur Baba became a Bektashi sheikh in the lodge: He was adopted by a Bektashi sheikh when he was eight or nine years old. He was so naughty that he caused disciples to go away from the lodge. But the former sheikh, Afif Baba, was tolerant of him. When the sheikh died, Nur Baba married his wife. At this point, the author seems to criticize the way of becoming a sheikh in the Bektashi lodge, pointing out how unqualified persons had started to become sheikhs.

As for the literary value of the novel, Karaosmanoğlu sometimes states that he is offended by the fact that his novel is evaluated for its relation with Bektashis, and not for its literary value; the exception being Halide Edip Adıvar's article in *İkdam* newspaper in 1922. She considers the reactions towards the novel as a proof of the author's success in writing "an alive and genuine novel" (Adıvar 1922).

Towards the conclusion, the novel gives the reader the feeling that it was written hastily and carelessly. Karaosmanoğlu explains that he had started to publish the installments in the newspaper after he had only partly finished the novel (Oğuzkan 1968:23). It could be concluded that with the concern of the populace, he hastened to finish it. Akı claims that in his novels written during 1920s, the author sacrificed their quality because he aimed to see their consequences quickly. These novels were on topics related to the

whole society, which was experiencing disorder during this period (2001:95). It is understood from an interview conducted with Karaosmanoğlu in 1928 by Selahaddin Mim, that he attached importance to his social responsibility as an intellectual more than to his literary aspect. His ideas are reflected in an answer to a question about which of his products he liked the most. He states that he found his articles in *İkdam* newspaper during the National Independence War as the most valuable ones, because of the function they fulfilled, and despite the fact that they did not have any literary value (1928:3).

3.1.1.4. Conclusion

The discussions regarding the novel *Nur Baba* have been shaped around different approaches. The most striking criticism directed at Karaosmanoğlu, is related to his novel's concern about the Bektashi order. Bektashis regarded themselves as humiliated by the novel, and they endeavored to deny the claims put forward by the novelist. Their reactions reached a peak with the film that was based on the novel.

The novel can also be examined through Karaosmanoğlu's aims in writing such a novel. For a proper analysis of the novel, the touchy situation of the country during this period should be carefully analyzed. It was inevitable that the circumstances would influence the products of this novelist, since the author was closely connected to the National Independence

Movement during the 1920s. He frequently emphasized his responsibility for the society as an intellectual, and sometimes tried to justify the novel based on this notion. However, these justifications did not prevent accusations of his ambition for popularity. Karaosmanoğlu, by intention or not, succeeded in gaining the attention of the populace with this novel, but he had to cope with harsh criticisms directed at him. His statements sometimes seem to contradict each other, and he could not put forward persuasive explanations for either his good intentions, or the literary value of his novel. There are also evaluations pertaining to the literary quality of the novel. However, these evaluations seem to be overshadowed by the others.

3.1.2. *Bir Bektaşî Babasının Hatıratı* (1926-1927)

Aziz kari'ler... Bu yazıları nefretle, istikrâhla satır satır okuyunuz ve bizi yıllarca, asırlarca medeniyetten geri bırakan bu yuvaları lanetle yad ediniz ve büyük Gazi'nin işaret ettiğini [sic] büyük medeniyet hedefine süratle ilerleyiniz.

[Dear readers... Read these articles line by line with disgust, and remember these hotbeds by cursing them, and move fast towards the target of civilization which the Gazi¹⁵ has pointed out.]

(Büyük Gazete, 1926, November 25)

This sentence is repeated persistently throughout a series of articles with the title of *Bir Bektaşî Babasının Hatıratı: Senelerce Bektaşî Tekkesinde Neler Gördüm?* [Memoirs of a Bektashi Baba: What Did I See in Bektashi

¹⁵ The term refers to Mustafa Kemal Atatürk.

Lodge For Years?] published in *Büyük Gazete* (Ground Newspaper)¹⁶ between November 11, 1926, and March 3, 1927. In a separate heading under the main title of the articles, there was a statement announcing that a Bektashi baba of 20 years was going to confide all the secrets of Bektashism to readers.

The author starts by identifying Bektashism as “a world of outrageousness, prostitution, and immorality,” (*rezalet, fuhuş ve ahlaksızlık alemi*) (1926, Nov 11) and maintains a negative and insulting tone towards Bektashis throughout the articles. He analyzes the history of the Bektashi order and its basic principles, and describes its various rituals in detail. However, his constant exaggeration of and emphasis on some issues, like virgins in *cem* rituals, are the ways in which he chose to spread progoganda against the Bektashi order. These reflect his motivations for writing these articles.

These articles are part of a tripartite series of publications concerning Bektashism, *Kızılbaşlık* and Hurufism in *Büyük Gazete*. The introductory question of the publications was “what was happening in these vanished institutions?” (*Bu tarihe karışan müesseselerde acaba ne olurdu?*). Thus, the newspaper started to publish a series of articles on *Kızılbaşlık* with the title *Kızılbaşlık...Esrarı Nedir?* (*Kızılbaşlık...What is its Mystery?*),¹⁷ which was written by Enver Behnan, then another series of articles on Hurufism with the

¹⁶ *Büyük Gazete* was a weekly newspaper published in Istanbul by Zeki Cemal.

¹⁷ For an analysis of the term “*esrar*”, see p. 70.

title *Hurufilik ve Bektaşilik: Ne İdiler ve Nasıl Kaynaştılar?* (Hurufism and Bektashism: What Were They and How Did They Fuse?) which was written by Sadık Vıcdani, just after the articles about Bektashism.

The striking point of the series of articles about Bektashism is the reflection of a negative attitude which targets not only the Bektashi order, but also the other religious orders in general. The author characterizes dervish lodges as “hotbeds of laziness, prostitution, and outrageousness” (*tembellik, fuhuş, ve rezalet yuvaları*) (1926, Nov 18) and states that Turkish people started to make progress after getting rid of them. At this point, I would like to quote a sentence from the articles that clearly demonstrates the stance of the newspaper against the religious orders:

Aziz kari’ler... Böyle tekkelere aid yazıları sırasıyla okursanız Türk milletinin ve Türk yurdunun şimdiye kadar ne için terakki edemediğinin esbabını anlayacaksınız.

[Dear readers, if you read such articles about the lodges in order, you are going to be able to understand the reasons why Turkish nation and Turkish homeland have been unable to make progress until now.] (1926, Nov 18)

Thus, it seems that the newspaper puts the blame of the backwardness of the Turkish nation basically on the dervish lodges, and persistently spreads negative propoganda against them. The emphasis on the degeneration of religious orders inevitably makes the readers think that the articles were written to justify and support the policies of the political authorities against the dervish lodges, and/or to impede and alleviate the possible resistance to their

abolition. Another remarkable point is about the authors of the articles. It is said that *Büyük Gazete* was going to publish articles about religious orders which were written by people from within. This allegation gives the impression that it is intended to make the articles more convincing for the readers. I am going to analyze only the author of the articles about Bektashism, which appears to be confusing.

3.1.2.1. Author or Narrator? Habil Adem or not?

Though Birge calls the articles in question as “a series of anonymous articles” (1965 [1937]:278), they were signed with letters, “ا.ا.” which is acknowledged as the abbreviation of “Habil Adem” in various publications, without any questioning of the veracity of this claim.¹⁸ However, it is not clear whether the text was written by Habil Adem himself, and if so, whether he quotes what a Bektashi *baba* told him. It is interesting to note that in the first article, the author put his signature directly under the part in which he explains his intentions in writing these articles (November 11, 1926). But later, the initials appeared with a new attribute, “narrated by” (*nakli*), which makes the readers confused about the “real” author of the articles.

¹⁸ See for example, Taşgın (2002), Bahadır (2006).

It is understood from a few articles about Habil Adem that we do not have sufficient and clear information about his life.¹⁹ His given name was Naci İsmail Pelister, but he generally preferred to use the pen name Habil Adem in his publications and translations (1994a:13, footnote 20), and even sometimes created false names when writing his own ideas (1994a:8). He had a philosophy degree from Germany (1994a:9), and he translated various publications, worked as a journalist in newspapers and journals, and wrote books and articles in Turkey and abroad.

What is interesting about Habil Adem is the debate on his relations with *İttihad Terakki Cemiyeti* (Committee of Union and Progress). Şahin and Akyol claim that they were not sure whether he was pro-CUP or not, but point out that his life had parallels with the fluctuation of the history of CUP (1994a:10). For instance, they say, when CUP seized power in 1913, Habil Adem returned from abroad and started to work in a department of the Ministry of the Interior (1994a:10)²⁰; then when the members of CUP was regarded as responsible for the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in the First World War, Habil Adem had to hide to escape from a probable arrest (1994a:11). However, Birdoğan openly declares Habil Adem's relations with CUP by claiming that he was one of the people appointed to research various

¹⁹ See Şahin and Akyol (1994a) and (1994b). Also see Okay (1996) and Öztürk (2005).

²⁰ *Aşair ve Muhacirin Müdüriyet-i Umumiyesi, Türkmenler Bölümü* (General Directorate of Tribes and Immigrants, Department ofTurkmens).

communities in Anatolia by the CUP (1994a:8). He translated many books in Turkish, but only his book on Turkmen tribes was published (1994a:9).

While explaining some of the “nationalist” ideas reflected in some of his translations, Aksakal states that

Habil Adem/Naci İsmail’s vision of the political future was extremely close to the ideology of the eventual Kemalist Republic after 1923, underscoring the deep ideological connections between Modern Turkey and the pre-World War I era. (2004:522)

Depending on the existent information about him, though scattered and insufficient, it can be asserted that if the articles were really written by him, the viewpoint reflected in the articles concerning the religious orders is as expected: It is compatible with what Atatürk and the former members of CUP were trying to accomplish in that period. It is probable that Habil Adem preferred to hide his name either to protect himself from accusations, or to satisfy the readers about veracity of his claims concerning the Bektashi order.

It is disappointing that there neither exists information about Habil Adem’s Bektashism nor whether he wrote the series of articles about Bektashism published in *Büyük Gazete*. Habil Adem’s writing style raises doubts about his relation with Bektashism. Taşğın argues that there are significant contradictions throughout the articles, and that while sometimes attacking the Bektashis, he sometimes attempted to discuss the subject objectively. He also adds that his terms seemed not to be compatible with the terms of Bektashism (2002:83). According to my reading, his insulting and

“reductionistic” manner towards the Bektashis demonstrates his remoteness from the order and imperfect grasp of its belief system. Thus, it appears that he was not a Bektashi. However, the most confusing and unclear point is how he wrote such a long series of articles without having much idea about Bektashism, because he describes the rituals in such a detailed way, as if he participated in them. In consideration of the fact that Habil Adem was an Albanian, it can be claimed that he obtained at least some knowledge about the Bektashi belief system in Albania, where Bektashism had significant impacts. However, this connection is just estimation, and it is most probable that he describes what a Bektashi *baba* had told him previously.

Thus, his exaggeratedly unfavorable way of representing the Bektashi order affects the persuasiveness of the articles. However, it should be noted that they might still have had a considerable impact on the general public, especially on people who had no idea about Bektashism in the atmosphere of that period.

3.1.2.2. Conclusion

In this section, I have attempted to analyze two different publications in the early republican period of Turkey, *Nur Baba* by Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu, and *Bir Bektaşî Babasının Hatıratı* by Habil Adem, both of which have basically negative attitude towards the Bektashi order. Though we

are not sure about the intentions of the authors, it can be asserted that both publications were written in order to support and legitimize the policies of the government against the religious orders. They appear to have aimed at convincing the public of the degeneration of the religious orders and their negative consequences on society. Thus, the two publications are part of a trend in that period among the media towards a decisive discrediting manner towards the orders. This allegation is supported by both authors' close relations with the political authorities in that period.

The strikingly common point in these two publications is their decisive and conscious negative reading of Bektashism. Both of them specifically lay stress on the rituals of Bektashis that include "alcohol" and "women". The authors basically depend their arguments on these issues in order to prove the order's outrageousness.

Both authors frequently emphasize another idea that they were writing from within. Thus, this assurance would convince the readers of the situation in Bektashi lodges. That emphasis is more meaningful and even necessary for a religious order which is famed for its "closeness". The articles are probably made more attractive for the readers by the notion that centuries-old mystery is clarified in them.

3.2. Accommodating the Legislation

In this part, I intend to discuss how various Bektashis accommodated the legislation that abolished religious orders. Bektashi accommodation involved various strategic reformulations and reinterpretations of the legislation. For this, I will explore the discussions in which Bektashis developed alternative narratives rationalizing, legitimizing, and justifying the abolition of their religious order.

Regarding themselves as different from the other Sufi orders, there was an expectation among Bektashis that they would be excluded from the scope of the legislation. As Birge argues,

There were many who felt that the Bektashi order in its literary tradition, in its secret ritual, and in its more liberal attitude toward social and religious problems had preserved down through history such traces of the original Turkish culture as still persisted. The point was argued therefore that, far from abolishing the order, Bektashiism should be made the religion of the whole Turkish people. (1965 [1937]:84)

In reaction to this legislation, Bektashis preferred to accommodate it, either by perceiving the legislation as not targeting Bektashis, or by trying to console themselves with the claim that their objectives for the Turkish population were brought about by the establishment of the new Republic.

As examples of the policy that emphasizes Bektashis' absolute harmony with the reforms and ideals put forward by the Republic, I am going

to discuss two series of articles, both of which were written by Bektashis. Initially, I will mention the contents of the articles comparatively, in order to evaluate their perception of the Bektashi order; then I will try to analyze their thoughts regarding the abolition of their orders by the newly established Republic in 1925. Then, I will trace the repercussions of similar narratives that had continued to be used by Bektashis in the subsequent decades.

3.2.1. *Hacı Bektaş Veli* (1930) and *Bektaşilik* (1931)

3.2.1.1. Reading the Lines

Eyvallah diyerek tekkelerinin eşiklerini öptüler. Ve artık lüzum kalmayan tarikatçılıktan büyük bir vicdan istirahatı ile çekildiler

[Saying all right, they kissed the thresholds of their dervish lodges. And they withdrew with a clear conscience from the mystic path, for which there was no longer a need.]

*Ziya
(Yeni Gün, 1931, March 8)*

The first series of articles titled *Hacı Bektaş Veli* were written by Galip Baba²¹ between 15 September and 13 November 1930 in the newspaper *Yarın*

²¹ The term *Baba* referred to “those who, after a period of service and study in the grade of Dervish, are elected to lead and instruct groups of Dervishes and aşiks” (Norton 1983:74).

(Tomorrow)²². The other series of articles were written by Ziya, under the title of *Bektaşilik*, between 26 January and 8 March 1931 in the newspaper *Yeni Gün* (New Day)²³.

The authors present their identities at the beginning of the articles. Ziya asserts that he is one of the disciple of a Bektashi guide, Rıza Gani Baba. When referring to himself, he prefers the word “faqir” (*fakir*), a general term used by Sufis in place of “I” (1931, Jan. 26).²⁴ Galip Baba also used the word “faqir” and identifies himself as a Bektashi of forty years (1930, Sep. 15).

They both explain why they need to write these articles on Bektashism, and criticize previous publications on the issue. Ziya asserts that he would divulge the mystery of the order that was concealed for six centuries (1931, Jan. 26). Galip Baba also claims to reveal the Bektashi secret and lift the curtain of mystery in Bektashism. In particular, he mentions the multiplicity of recent publications on Bektashism and criticizes them as cursory articles failing to explain the Bektashi order correctly and misleading the public (1930, Sept.15). Throughout the articles, he complains several times about the critiques directed to him for his articles. While reminding of his rights to

²² The newspaper *Yarın* was published in 1929 and 1930 by Arif Oruç; “but it was closed down in 1931 after the adoption of a new press law which gave the government powers to close down any paper which published anything contradicting the ‘general policies of the country’” (Zürcher, 1994:188).

²³ The newspaper *Yeni Gün* newspaper was published in Istanbul for one year (Bayrak, 1994:159).

²⁴This term especially used by Sufis in order to express modesty, and contentedness. For the meaning of the term in Alevi terminology, see İsmail Onarlı’s article at www.aleviyol.com/kulfakir.htm [accessed in 13.08.2006]

write however he likes, he states that there is no disgraceful aspect of Bektashism that one would hesitate to describe (1930, Oct. 3-Nov. 13).

Although both authors claim to be objective at the beginning of their articles, the articles are written, as Birge argues for Ziya's ones, "from the Bektashi point of view" (1965 [1937]:20). Ziya writes the articles in a literary and enthusiastic style which gets even more intense as he describes some events that Bektashis attach importance to, like the death of Husayn in Kerbala, or victories of the Janissaries. Galip Baba claims at the beginning that he has no benefit nor malice in writing these articles, but he expresses his belief in the necessity for analysis of these orders. Like Ziya, he states that he will explain both the negative and positive aspects of the order, and he does not shy away from revealing the criticized aspects of the order; but he seems to exonerate the order from accusations with the excuse that it is not unlikely to come across with immoral people in such a populous order. Then, he describes the moral degeneration in other orders, so to speak, as a reply to the criticisms directed at the Bektashi order.

Ziya starts his articles by describing the emergence of Shi'ism and Sunnism, and attempts to demonstrate the differences between them in terms of their beliefs (1931, Jan. 26-Feb. 1). He describes the life of Hacı Bektaş Veli and the emergence and historical transformation of the Bektashi order (1931, Feb. 1-6). Then he explains the inner structure of the organization, the financial conditions and sections of lodges, and the registration of disciples to

lodges (1931, Feb. 6-7). He also makes an analogy between Bektashism and Masonry in terms of the signs peculiar to Bektashis (1931, Feb. 8).

Ziya presents the regular customs and rituals in detail. He explicates the ceremony of initiation with its prayers (1931, Feb.9-13), as well as the ceremonies performed once a year. One of them was a ceremony in which disciples confessed their sins to the sheikh (*çırağ merasimi*) (1931, Feb. 13-14), and the other was carried out in memory of the death of Husein, the grandchild of the Prophet, in Karbala (*muharrem ayini*) (1931, Feb. 15-16). Then, he explains the fundamental principles of the Bektashi belief system, and the rules which the disciples have to obey in their relations with the guides. (1931, Feb.17-Mar. 1). Then he continues to relate the history of the Bektashi order, especially during the Ottoman Empire period (1931, Mar.1-8), and finishes the articles with his opinions concerning the ban on the Bektashi order (1931, Mar.8).

Galip Baba also narrates the life history of Hacı Bektaş Veli and how he established the Bektashi order (1930, Sept.15-18). Then he explains his own perception of the Bektashi order by comparing it with other religious orders (1930, Sept. 18-20). Like Ziya, he also discusses the similarities and differences between Bektashism and Masonry, by telling about one of his memories with a Mason disciple in his lodge (1930, Sept.20-Oct.2). Galip Baba's articles have a different aspect in comparison to other publications on Bektashism in that period. He provides comprehensive and detailed

information about the Bektashi lodges outside of Anatolia. He explains Bektashism in the Balkans and Egypt, and its connection with Christianity (1930, Oct.3-Nov.3). He sometimes makes reference to the work of F.W. Hasluck. Then, he recounts the life of Sarı Saltuk (1930, Nov.3-Nov.11), and starts to explain “mysticism and Bektashism”; but his articles were apparently interrupted ending with the expression that “the end of part one”. The articles did not continue to be published, and ended on November 13, 1930.

Ziya and Galip Baba criticize the other Sufi orders for their religious fanaticism and highlight the suitability of the Alevi and Shii belief systems to the disposition of Turks who could not get used to the oppressive principles of Sunnism. Both of them particularly emphasize the Sunni restriction over women’s participation in public life (Ziya 1931, Jan.31; Galip Baba 1930, Sept.19). Galip Baba asserts that democracy is the basic principle of Bektashism, because lodges were established for the benefit of the public. Thus, it is more suitable to the character of the Turkish nation (1930, Sept.16). However, they disagree in their opinions concerning the Mevlevi order. Ziya criticizes the Mevlevi by asserting that they are dominated by Persian culture, and he states that they affected Seljuk sultans by their “elegant and harmonious ceremonies”, and by “their poems and music full of magic” (1931, Mar. 3). Galip Baba identifies the Bektashi and Mevlevi orders as the guards of the freedom of religion and conscience for centuries (1930, Sept.16). He emphasizes the corruption of the other orders in time, especially after the

period of Mahmud II, because of the transition of religious leadership of lodges from one generation to the next, regardless of their education and knowledge. According to him, the Bektashi and Mevlevi orders have never consisted only of formal rituals like the others. He claims that there were inspectorships for lodges during the Ottoman Empire, but these inspectors never controlled the Bektashi and Mevlevi lodges (1930, Sept.19).

3.2.1.2. Reading Between and Beyond the Lines

The interpretation of these two texts holds significant challenges. In fact, the necessity of having some idea about the identities, intentions, moods, and anxieties of the authors as well as the circumstances in that period is one of the difficulties of accessing the intended meanings of the texts. Texts bear the influences of all these factors which we can never be completely aware of. We have temporal, spatial, and mental disparities with the authors. With regard to temporal disparities, I think that time intervenes between us and the text in two different senses: Initially, without doubt, texts continue to live. Beyond their own independent existences, they share their meanings with the readers and keep themselves open to interpretation. Thus, the meanings imposed on them change not only from person to person, but also from time to time. In that sense, we already have time between us and the text. This

distance probably deepens with the Bektashis' different perception of time and worldly events.²⁵

Herein, I intend only to invite the readers to different readings of the texts. While trying to understand the hidden meanings of the texts, I am aware of the impossibility of gaining an absolute insight into them and the validity of even an opposite interpretation.

In my attempt to evaluate the two series of articles, I think that, while trying to make the readers feel that they absolutely support the ban on religious orders, both Ziya and Galip Baba express their reproach and passive resistance to it between the lines. They described the peculiarities of the Bektashi order in their own styles, though finally they reached the same conclusion with regard to the abolition of their religious order:

Since the Republic, they say, has by government action accomplished what Bektashis long stood for –abolition of the Caliphate, freedom of women from the veil and social constraints, putting an end to the fanaticism of religious leaders– there is no longer need for the continuance of the order within the borders of the Republic. (Birge 1965 [1937]: 20)

Galip Baba asserts that religious orders emerged to oppose the religious fanaticism and despotism of the madrasa and the Ottoman sultans. In view of the fact that these were abolished by the reforms of the Turkish Republic, there was no more need for their existence (1930, Oct. 2). He even says that when “the Turkish nation witnessed the light of the civilization” (*bu*

²⁵ See Chapter Four.

millet medeniyet nurunu gördü), religious orders should have closed themselves before Mustafa Kemal expressed his intentions to abolish them (1930, Oct. 3). Although he admitted the validity of this notion also for Bektashis, he emphasized a distinct aspect of them by claiming that Bektashism is not a religious order, but a “social formation” (*içtimai bir teşekkül*) (1930, Sept. 18). He identifies Bektashi lodges as democratic grassroots organizations in which every individual has freedom of thought (1930, Sept. 16).

As for Ziya, he claims that the main objectives of Bektashis were to protect Turks from the assimilation of Arabs and Iranians, to provide national sovereignty, and to achieve freedom of conscience and thought by neutralizing the effects of the conservative ulama. Since the new Republic realized these targets, Bektashis were totally satisfied with the new situation (1931, Mar. 7). Like Galip Baba’s declaration of Bektashism as a social formation, Ziya advocates that the Bektashi order had already become “an assembly of wisdom” (*irfan meclisi*), by withdrawing from politics since Mahmut II. Although Ziya claims that the reasons for the existence of Bektashis had disappeared with the establishment of the Republic, he was satisfied with the freedom in social life supplied by the Republic, and expected Bektashis to be freer in their rituals (1931, Mar. 8).

Thus, both authors seem to accommodate the abolition of religious orders by giving an exclusive position to the Bektashi order for the republican

project. Erdemir argues that “back in the early 1930s, the similarity between Bektashism and republican ideals was invoked to eliminate the Bektashi order” (2005:939). Shankland explains the alleged parallels between early republican ideology and the Alevi way of looking at the world. He states that “we may consider the Republicans’ emphasis on the pre-Islamic, Turkish roots of the nation. The Alevis often embrace this eagerly, contrasting themselves with the Sunnis whom, they say, have been converted to Arabic culture” (2003:156). Both Ziya and Galip Baba frequently make such a nationalist emphasis on Turkishness of the Bektashi order, and the compatibility of its belief system to Turkish life style.

As I mentioned before, the identities of the authors might be illuminative in the evaluation of their articles. Both authors’ identities are unclear, since the surname law was not yet adopted in that period. The only information about them is their own declaration of their identities at the beginning of the articles. I could not find any information about Galip Baba neither from the written sources, nor from the Bektashis whom I met.

As far as Ziya concerned, his identity seems to be controversial. He claims to be one of the disciples of a Bektashi guide, Rıza Gani Baba. Küçük, based on information she obtained from Şevki Koca, the late son of the prominent Bektashi guide Turgut Koca, claims that Ziya was a Bektashi who opposed the standard system of Bektashis by declaring himself to be a religious guide, and he was, therefore, excluded from the community

(2003:195-96). Küçük argues that his full name was Mehmet Ziya, and he wrote poems with the nickname, Abdal Ziya (2003:196). However, this argument is refuted by the officials of the pious foundation, which was established in the name of Mehmet Ziya. I interviewed Hasan Erdoğan, one of the officials of the Ziya Baba Karaşar Faith, Education, Charity Foundation (*Ziya Baba Karaşar İnanç Eğitim Hayır Vakfı*).²⁶ Erdoğan refuses the claims of Şevki Koca and he argues that Ziya Baba served the Bektashi community until his death. He also states that the articles in *Yeni Gün* newspaper could not have been written by Ziya Baba. I interviewed two daughters of Ziya Şişman, namely Leman Geren and Semanur Haytoğlu, and also Leman Geren's son Serdar Geren;²⁷ they confirmed the statements of Hasan Erdoğan. Şakir Keçeli, a prominent Bektashi *baba*, also asserts that Şevki Koca is frequently mistaken while recalling the identities of Bektashis.²⁸ Various Bektashi groups in Turkey seem to be in disagreement about the identity of Ziya.

Thus, it becomes complicated to analyze the intentions of Ziya in writing these articles. Küçük evaluates his articles as a consolation effort against the prohibition of the order, and finds the sincerity of his statements

²⁶ The web site of the foundation is www.ziyababa.org.tr

²⁷ On 4 February 2006, Bostancı, İstanbul.

²⁸ Personal communication (November 2005). Şakir Keçeli is a lawyer, and he filed suit against the Ministry of National Education in the European Court of Human Rights, alleging that compulsory religious education in schools violates human rights.

doubtful by asserting that it could be easily understood by the fact that he was still using Sufi concepts while defining himself (2003:196).

Küçük is not the only person who thinks that Ziya's statements are insincere. Bahadır argues that Ziya had some political objectives, and with these articles, he aimed to calm down the reactions of Alevis against the destruction and plunder of Bektashi lodges in 1930s (2002:72).²⁹ However, if we take into consideration the ambiguous language in which the articles were written, and the factors that affected Ziya's perception of this legislation, it is neither possible nor meaningful to attempt to decide his real intentions. The ambiguity of Ziya's identity and the near impossibility of determining someone's "real" intentions should be taken into consideration.

3.2.2. Transforming the "Meanings"

Bektashis frequently have recourse to different allegations pertaining to the nature of the legislation. They believed that Law #677 targeted religious fanaticism among other orders, which proved to be dangerous through the series of revolts during the early republican period of Turkey.³⁰ According to Noyan, Bektashi and Mevlevi orders were considered to be excluded from the legislation, but in order to prevent the possibility that the

²⁹ Bahadır claims that many dervish lodges were demolished, and their properties were put up for sale or plundered after the legislation (2002:70-72).

³⁰ This refers to the Sheikh Sa'id uprising in 1925, and the Menemen uprising in 1930.

disciples from other orders join them, they were prohibited as well (2002:5). I frequently came across the same assumption among Bektashis; however, they have never depicted themselves as victims. Noyan expresses his belief in the abolishment of this legislation in the future, since the constitution ensures the freedom of worship for all sects (2002:9). He defines the obligation of secret worship as “oppression” (*zulüm*) (2002:9). These statements actually employ harsh criticism toward the policy of the Republic; however, he expresses them in such a careful way that prevents him from opposing the government.

In a contradictory manner, while Bektashis convey their loyalty to the Republic, they explicitly declare the continuity of their rituals and gatherings, although they know it is still illegal. Their tendency to conduct their rituals in secret for centuries helps them to reverse the setback to their advantage.

Turgut Koca states that

(T)he government did not close down the Bektashi tekkes: they were already closed, as they were open only to Bektashis. Closing them down changed nothing, as ceremonies were performed in Bektashis’ homes or places closed to outsiders. (quoted in Küçük 2002:241-242).

This contention also involves the idea that the legislation is insignificant for them, since it does not produce any difference for their “already concealed life which has no connection with the system” (Yıldırım, n.d.).

It is remarkable that although Albania was proclaimed the new center of Bektashism when the leader of Bektashis, Salih Niyazi, moved there in 1931; Noyan refutes this claim, and states that Salih Niyazi had such an intention, but the monarch of Albania did not permit that (2002:4). He seems to emphasize the idea that Turkey continued to be the center of Bektashism, despite the legislation (2002:4). This idea is supported by the following example: The Bektashi lodge in Tire has never been closed by the government (Turgut Koca 1987, Şakir Keçeli³¹, Öz 2004:173), for the reason that, unlike the other lodges, there was no Naqshbandi sheikh in that lodge. During the abolition of the Janissaries in 1826 by Mahmud II, the Bektashi lodges were kept under the control of Naqshbandi sheikhs (Küçük 2003:35). Koca also asserts that Atatürk demanded to keep it as a “sample” (*numune*) for the prospective Bektashi lodges that he considered to open in a little while after the legislation (1987).

3.2.3. Conclusion

I would like to conclude with a quote which illustrates how a single sentence can be perceived in diametrically opposite ways. Ziya is recorded to have said:

³¹ Personal communication

Halbuki bütün dünyada (Sosyete) denilen ve her medeni insan için bir hak ve ihtiyaç olarak kabul edilen aile meclislerile; bektâşilerin asırlardanberi devam eden (Ayini cem) leri arasında ne fark vardı? (Ziya, 1931, March 8)

What difference is there between the *Aynicem* of the Bektashis and the family gatherings which constitute society in all the world, and which are accepted as the right and necessity for every civilized man? (quoted in Birge 1965 [1937]:85).

This sentence is understood by Birge as indicating the parallels between the republican ideal and the Bektashi belief (1965 [1937]:20) and accordingly, that Ziya approved the idea of unnecessary of the Bektashi order. However, according to the perception of Noyan, the parallelism between the *Aynicem* of the Bektashis and the family gatherings in fact made the legislation meaningless for the Bektashi order, and Bektashis' life styles has already accorded with the modern life, which the Republic aimed to impose (2002:10). There is a subtle, but significant difference between these two perceptions. When we regard Ziya's general overview of the legislation, which he reflected in his articles, Birge's perception is apparently correct. However, as we are not sure about the intentions or "sincerity"³² (*samimiyet*) of the author, the sentence can be approached in both ways. Perhaps he criticizes the legislation covertly.

In this chapter, I have tried to show that facts can be perceived in various, even contradictory ways by different people. By reconstructing the

³² This dual perception of Ziya's sentences indicates once more that we should consider the matter cautiously before claiming the insincerity of the author, as Küçük did.

meanings, Bektashis isolate themselves from anxiety, dissatisfaction and resentment. Bektashis publish industriously in order to justify their narratives, and struggle to prove their assertions by using references to documents and memories of the people.

The Law #677, approximately as old as the Republic, still has problematic effects on Bektashis. In reaction to the legislation, Bektashis seemed to employ different strategies in order to cope with the challenges facing them. By redefining the meaning and intention of the legislation from their own point of view, Bektashis created a more bearable reality which enabled them to survive in the face of a decision that prohibited their religious way of life. In this part, I have tried to present their narratives, but I do not mean to claim that they distorted reality: rather, I try to reflect the idea that reality is not free from how it is perceived from different points of view. These perceptions interpenetrate and shape the way we see the past. In that sense, they are of value to examine, but only if we also pay attention to the conditions in which they were formed.

CHAPTER 4

“COSMOLOGIES”: UNDERLYING BEKTASHI

CONCEPTUALIZATIONS

With this chapter, I am passing from ‘personal written texts’ to the ‘collective symbolic texts’ of Bektashis. I am going to analyze certain aspects of Bektashi identity which I believe to be factors in Bektashis’ interpretations of historical events. The content, form and essence of these aspects are closely linked to specific historical contexts. This chapter, however, is not an attempt to take a look back at the formation process of Bektashi identity, but rather an attempt to examine the way in which it has been put to use. Moreover, I am interested in examining various reflections of Bektashi identity in their cosmologies. I approach the beliefs, assumptions, attitudes and perceptions of Bektashis that compose their cosmologies, as part of a complex totality. I am aware of the fact that they are also constructed through individual experiences along with the collective ones and very susceptible to change, both spatially and temporally. The apparently ambitious scope of the chapter will be confined to the analysis of some specific dimensions of Bektashi cosmologies.

4.1. Collective Identity of Bektashis

4.1.1. Self and the Other

4.1.1.1. Confrontation of Bektashi and Sunni Cosmologies

In this part, I will explore how Bektashis are perceived by the Sunni majority, and the influences of the interaction with Sunnis on Bektashis' self-perception. These mutual perceptions have been shaped through historical experiences, and specifically determined by the predominantly Sunni-based policies of political authorities.

According to Erdemir, “(h)istorically Alevi and Sunni cosmologies have been constituted in an antagonistically dialogic manner” (2004:68). The antagonistic, prejudiced ideas regarding ‘the other’ and mutual distrust have arisen for various reasons. Bektashis have basically been subject to accusations for the eclectic character of their belief system, including Sufi practices and Shiite tendencies.³³ Bektashis share some basic beliefs and practices with other dervish orders, which Birge summarizes under three basic doctrines: the doctrine of the *mürşit*, the doctrine of the four gates, and mysticism (*tasavvuf*) (1965 [1937]:95-131). This more flexible version of

³³ Bektashism has a syncretic character which contains influences of Shiite and Sunni Islam, Shamanism, Christianity, and neo-Platonism. See Birge (1965 [1937]:210-218).

Islam has often been criticized by conservative Sunnis³⁴ because Bektashis tend not to adhere strictly to the formal observance of religious prescriptions. They do not follow the five pillars of Islam, and even sometimes violate some principles of Shariat, such as consumption of alcohol in their rituals. Bektashis emphasize the direct knowledge of God and aim to grasp the esoteric meanings of the Quran in addition to the exoteric ones.

Being the *ghulat*³⁵ (extremist) of Turkey, Bektashis show extreme reverence for Imam Ali, which is regarded by mainstream Muslims as heresy. In addition to the beliefs which they share with Shiites, like the love of the Twelve Imams,³⁶ they also have their own doctrines peculiar to themselves (Birge 1965 [1937]:131-162). Schimmel states that “(t)he Bektashis have always maintained strong relations with the Imamiya-Shia in Iran” (1975:338) which must have given rise to suspicions about their collaboration with the Safavid Empire by the Ottoman Empire. However, Birge claims that

It is said that the Shiis of Persia do not recognize the Bektashis as fellow Shiis, for they carry to an absolute extreme their deification of Ali, but in one Bektashi poem at least the claim is made that the Bektashis are the original Shiis:

Even from the gathering of Eternity we are the confessed Shiis

³⁴ For a discussion concerning this duality in interpretation of Islam, and the tension between the ulama and Sufis, see Atay (2004:91-103).

³⁵ I am inspired by Kathryn Babayan (2002) in my choice of terminology.

³⁶ Schimmel claims that “not only did ‘normal’ Shia ideas strongly permeate the *tariqa* and grow there into strange forms that are sometimes reminiscent of popular developments of the Ismailiyya in India, but one of the strangest offsprings of Shia thought, the Hurufis, had an influence on the Bektashis” (1975:339).

Here, making that confession again, we are the Shiis.

*Ta ezel bezminden ikrar eyliyen şiiyeriz
Bunda ol ikrarı tekrar eyliyen şiiyeriz.* (1965 [1937]:132)

Another reason for Sunnis' criticism of Bektashis is the togetherness of men and women in Bektashi rituals. This often brings about accusations of practicing immorality and orgies, which are augmented by the secrecy of the rituals. However, according to Birge, "(t)he seclusion of Bektashi tekkes at localities removed from other houses, has had as one of its reasons the fact of equal participation of men and women in its rites" (1965 [1937]:159), and that is why "the Alevi traditionally do not allow strangers access to their ceremonies, nor do they provide detailed accounts of their rituals, procedures and doctrines" (Shankland 1998:20). Thus, apparently these reciprocal misconceptions and the prejudiced ideas about the other often contribute to the expansion of the split between the two communities.

4.1.1.2. Historical Experiences and the Discourse of "Persecution"

The Bektashi order held a very prominent place during the Ottoman Empire period. Its flexible structure has made the order more attractive to people than the rigid orthodox interpretation of Islam. The Bektashi order had significant roles in the integration of the newly conquered areas into the Ottoman Empire, consolidating the existence of Ottoman Empire in conquered

areas. According to Cornell and Svanberg, “(i)n particular, the Bektashi order was responsible for the religious education of the Christian-born children raised to serve in the Ottoman bureaucracy through the devshirme (‘blood tax’) system” (1999:140).

However, despite their close connections with the Ottoman Empire, Bektashis’ relations with the Sunni Muslim majority and the political authorities, which have a predominantly Sunni character, have been uneasy. According to Norton, “(d)oubts about their political loyalty plus their disregard for standard Islamic observances, while at the same time indulging in heretical practices, often led to their being persecuted” (1983:75). Mahmud II suppressed the Bektashi order in 1826 because of its association with the Janissaries. He executed or exiled many Bektashi leaders, and their possessions were either razed or handed over to the Naqshibandis.

Norton explains another reason for their being regarded as “dangerous” by the Ottoman Empire: “Bektashi rejection of orthodoxy had always attracted many political dissidents to its ranks, and this further increased the antipathy of authorities and led to frequent persecutions, sometimes borne with great fortitude” (1983:78). Thus, he claims that “suffering at the hands of the authorities” (1983:78) was also a reality for Bektashis and cites a quotation from Gustav Thaiss which can also be applied to the Bektashi suffering:

... basic to the Shi’a world view is a sense of persecution – unjust persecution. Much as the underlying assumptions of Freudian

psychoanalysis focus on certain negative attributes of the personality, so the Shi'a are preconditioned to see the negative, the sad, the tragic and those who are persecuted. The Shi'a see themselves in a passive situation as people who are and have been acted upon. (quoted in Norton 1983:78)

Thus, "persecution" became one of the most common themes of Bektashi discourses. With opposition and resistance to the authorities and the Sunni for centuries, Bektashi and especially Alevi identity depend on an "anti" stance, which is basically nourished by Karbala Event and the suffering of Husayn.³⁷ According to Nakash,

Perhaps no other single event in Islamic history has played so central a role in shaping Shi'i identity and communal sense as the martyrdom of Husayn and his companions at Karbala... This symbol established powerful and long-lasting moods and motivations among Shi'is, reinforcing their Shi'i communal sense and distinct sectarian identity as distinguished from the Sunni... Husayn's martyrdom represents a symbol of sacrifice in the struggle (jihad) for right against wrong, and for justice and truth against wrongdoing and falsehood. (1993:161-162)

Although a tradition of *ta'ziya*, theatrical representation of the events in Karbala, did not develop among the Shi'i Turks in Anatolia, which is, according to Nakash, due to the Sunni predominance (1993:173), this sense is perpetuated among Bektashis and Alevis through their own commemorative ceremonies, which are held during the month of Muharram in particular. Bektashis fast for twelve days in this month in memory of Husayn and the

³⁷ We must consider the relatively different historical experiences of Alevis and Bektashis. For an analysis of their differences and similarities, see Mélikoff (1996:1-7), (Birge (1965 [1937]: 211-212), Shankland (1999:18-19), Küçük (2002: 26-32).

Twelve Imams (Yaman and Erdemir 2006:77). “*Aşure* and sacrifice are made to celebrate the salvation of Imam Zeynel Abidin from the massacre at Kerbala, and the continuance of the lineage of the *Ahl al-Bayt* from him.” (2006:78)

Commemoration of the martyrdom of Husayn is an instance of what Connerton identifies as a “distinctive class of rites which have an explicitly backward-looking and calendrical character” (1989:45), because this commemoration refers to an explicit event which had taken place at a fixed historical date and place. However, ironically, it has nothing to do with “time” or “place” for Bektashis, as is well-expressed in the statement “every day is Ashura, every place is Karbala”. Thus, it is a symbolic event and a ‘lesson’ (*ibret*) inspiring people to fight against injustice.

However, the internalization of the discourse on persecutor and persecuted is not confined to Husayn’s suffering for Bektashis. Norton states that, “at times the Bektashis attempted to rebel, and their literature praises the stand against tyranny made by such heroes as the sixteenth century Pir Sultan Abdal, who, according to tradition, was hanged for his part in a rebellion” (1983:78).

I claim that, by creating a shared sense of pain, these persecution discourses and commemorative ceremonies not only reinforce the identity and coherence of the community; but also determine their way of interaction with the outside world. Connerton states,

(W)hatever is demonstrated on rites permeates also non-ritual behaviour and mentality. Although demarcated in time and space, rites are also as it were porous. They are held to be meaningful because rites have significance with respect to a set of further non-ritual actions, to the whole life of a community. Rites have the capacity to give value and meaning to the life of those who perform them. (1989:44-45)

Bektashis' exposure to oppression must have contributed to their secrecy in their rituals. Birge states that "(s)ince there is so much in the Bektashi faith that would shock the leaders of orthodox Sunni Islam it seems altogether probable, however, that in a land avowedly Sunni, secrecy had always been necessary." (1965 [1937]:79). In the next section, I will explain the Bektashi secret and its functions for Bektashis, which I believe to hold clues for their self-perception.

4.1.1.3. *Bektaşî Sırrı* (Bektashi Secret)

*Abdal Ziya kelâmın oldu tamam
Sözün riyâsız, anlar ârif olan
Tövbe, ahmak bunu bir daha soran
Söyleyemem, serde Bektâşilik var*

*Abdal Ziya*³⁸

³⁸ Mehmet Ziya Baba Divânı (1991). Ankara: Ziya Baba Karaşar İnanç Eğitim Hayır Vakfı, p.88.

One of the foremost and outstanding characteristics of Bektashis is their “mysteriousness”. It reflects the prevalence of hidden meanings, and the multi-layered aspect of Bektashi belief system. The cognizance of these esoteric meanings is accessible only to Bektashis, and allegedly discovered by disciples step by step throughout their training in the lodges. Alongside the secrecy, this multilayeredness of the Bektashi belief system is maintained through Bektashis’ sense of humor and jokes, their predominantly poetic way of expressing themselves, and the influences of Hurufism. All of these hold significant challenges for outsiders who try to penetrate Bektashis’ mentality. Bektashis intensively use pictorial and textual symbols which hold multiple meanings.

These impenetrable manners of telling and living might have binary aspects: Firstly, as Birge claims, “there is a love of mysteriousness for its own sake, a satisfaction and pride in having a secret which the outsider cannot understand” (1965 [1937]:95). This satisfaction is one of the most significant factors that strengthen their collective identity. Sharing such an exclusive language goes beyond satisfying Bektashis’ sense of belonging to a group, but probably gives them another feeling that they enjoy the privilege of possessing an extraordinary status which is independent of time and place. Namely, Bektashis may have experienced hard times, and even have been discriminated against by the authorities; this concealed part of their identity might have stayed inaccessible, thus permanent to sustain the cohesiveness of the group.

Thus, it at the same time creates the largest gap between insiders and outsiders of the Bektashi order. Self and the other could be identified through the awareness of this secrecy. Using these symbols and loading multiple meanings to their expressions might also provide them the advantage of covertly expressing their ideas which are difficult to express openly.

However, this introversion and closeness bear the risk of accusations from the outside. Schimmel states that “(t)he fact that the Bektashis kept their doctrines as secret as possible, especially after the extinction of the Janissaries, has excited the imaginations of orthodox defenders of the pure faith, as is the case with secret societies” (1975:341). Thus, the secrecy of the order is generally interpreted as an endeavor to disguise Bektashis’ allegedly immoral rituals. Heresy accusations are augmented by this introversion. Apparently these two processes, namely the isolated character of the Bektashi community and prejudiced opinions about it among Sunnis, mutually reinforce each other.

It is claimed that Bektashis practice the principle of *takiye* (dissimulation), generally attributed to Shi’ite creeds, which means the concealment of their real convictions in order to protect their existence in case of external hostility. *Takiye* must have had a functional practice specifically at times of repression and discrimination against them. While it is disputable

that they still need or prefer the practice of this principle,³⁹ the significance of confidence is sensibly strong among Bektashis.

Lastly, I would like to discuss the word “*esrar*” which is used for expressing the secrecy of the Bektashi order in Turkish. *Esrar* is the plural form of the word “*sır*” (secret). The term also has the meaning of “hashish” in Turkish. In the Turkish dictionary, the term “*esrar tekkesi*” is explained as “the place where people smoke hashish together secretly” (Eren et al., 1988:469). I could not find a linguistic analysis of the term, and whether the two meanings of the word “*esrar*” are produced depending on the relation established between the consumption of hashish in lodges by dervishes and their secrecy. But the interesting point for me is that this term is frequently used in various publications that criticize the Bektashi order in the early republican period. For example, the movie based on the novel *Nur Baba* has the name *Boğaziçi Esrarı* (Mystery of the Bosphorus). Another example is a series of articles published in 1927 in *Büyük Gazete* which was titled *Kızılbaşlık...Esrarı Nedir? (Kızılbaşlık...What is its Mystery?)*. It is most likely that the word was consciously preferred to imply how these lodges benumbed the minds of people. Thus, the term apparently well served for the

³⁹ For a discussion of the opening up of Alevi community to the outer world, and the “collapse” of such traditional principles, see Vorhoff, (2003:105-106). In another study, Vorhoff claims that “Alevi and Bektashi started to reflect openly on the doctrines and ritual practices of their once esoteric religion – a transgression that would in former times have incurred the penalty of exclusion from the community” (1998:23), and gives an example of a book with a title that could hardly have been written some ten years ago: “Alevism is no secret” (*Alevilik bir sır değildir*) (1998:23).

aims these narratives, which are, I claim, to dispraise the religious orders in the eyes of the public.

4.1.2. Self-Perception of Bektashis

*“Bektashiism means to Bektashis different things.”
Birge (1965 [1937]:101)*

The behaviors and assumptions of the Bektashis are shaped not only by the cosmologies of Sunnis and their reflections on their relations with Bektashis, but also by the self-perception of Bektashis of their own identity. In this section, I will analyze some of the Bektashis’ discourses regarding the character of Bektashism, which I believe to be a factor in constructing their responses to events they confronted.

4.1.2.1. Bektashism: A Political Program?

Before and after the proclamation of Law #677 in 1925, declarations of Bektashi religious guides were published in various newspapers calling on Bektashis and Alevis to obey and support the decisions of Atatürk. For example, Veliyeddin Çelebi wrote a declaration addressing the whole Alevi community in Anatolia, which was published in the newspaper *Yenigün* on 25 April 1923. He states that,

It is imperative for us to supply every demands of Gazi Paşa regarding the progress and development of the country. His relevant ideas will ensure the liberation and happiness of our nation. Anyone who denies it has nothing to do with us without question. I confidently say to members of our noble order that they should not vote for candidates apart from those of Mustafa Kemal's, and the liberation of our homeland will be implemented in this way. If someone does not take my advice, then he is not of us. (quoted in Şener, 1994:82)

Another remarkable example was put forward by Naki Baba, the head of the Erikli Baba lodge in Istanbul on 12 September 1925, just after the legislation:

The Mahdi⁴⁰, who was expected for centuries by humankind and Bektashis as the saviour, has appeared. The lives, properties and comfort of the whole Muslim world are now secured. Now our task is to obey his commands, close our dervish lodges and hand over their keys to the officials of the Republic. (quoted in Öz 2004:175)⁴¹

Regarding these kinds of declarations, Yalçınkaya claims that “Bektashism is introduced as a political program, rather than a moral and belief doctrine.” (1996:154). According to him, the Bektashi order was previously involved in providing support to dominant powers (1996:152). He claims that, Bektashism lost its influence and prestige in the eyes of people after the ban on it along with the Janissaries during the reign of Mahmud II. In order to regain its influences on the masses, Bektashis established close relations with the Union and Progress Party (*İttihad Terakki Partisi*), and

⁴⁰ The term refers to Mustafa Kemal Atatürk here.

⁴¹ I neither could reach the original document, nor could check it from any other source.

“dragged” their supporters into World War I (1996:155). He concludes that although it is based on the enlightenment principles that Atatürk advocated, it has to be analyzed in light of the historical context and the internal circumstances of the order (1996:155). He asked a critical question:

Although there is no place for ‘if’ in history, if there had been a religious leadership in that period instead of M. Kemal’s leadership, what would be the attitude of the Bektashi tekke?

[Tarihte “eğer”lere yer olmamasına karşın, eğer o sırada M. Kemal önderliği değil de, kopkoyu bir dinsel önderlik söz konusu olsaydı, Bektaşî Tekkesi’nin tavrı ne olacaktı acaba?] (1996:156)

I agree with Yalçınkaya concerning the point that Bektashis tried to establish amicable relations with the administrations of the time, and incorporate themselves into mainstream society. In that sense, they frequently seem to highlight their political stances in the face of different historical experiences. This assumption is supported by Odyakmaz, who states that, contrary to other Sufi orders, the Bektashi order, “despite depending on Sufism, gives precedence to worldly thoughts” (1988:35). However, the story is not limited to that, particularly if their attitudes towards the abolition of religious orders is examined. Yalçınkaya bases his argument on the example that such Bektashi attitudes were already reflected in the words of Ziya, who claimed that there was no more a need for the existence of the Bektashi order (1996:154). I interpret Ziya’s articles from a different point of view than that of Yalçınkaya. I believe that, although at the first appearance, Ziya’s (and also

Galip Baba's) comments on the abolition of the Bektashi order give readers the impression that they reduced the order to a political entity which could be dissolved or replaced with a new political entity; they instead, in my opinion, seem to emphasize its "social" functions in Turkish society, in the face of the absurdity of insisting on advocating its political existence in that period.

Norton makes a distinction between 'religious Bektashis' and 'political Bektashis':

'Religious Bektashis' are here taken to mean those whose prime concern is with the sincere veneration of `Ali in the traditional manner, including the continuation of Bektashi religious teachings and customs, whereas 'political Bektashis' are those who ... see the chief value of Bektashism as being a movement that could help to bring about a more just society organized in accordance with socialist principles. (1983:80-81)

Concerning such classifications, I agree that Bektashism has various forms, meanings and attributes for its members and others. It has the power to shape the perceptions and mentality of people, and necessarily shape Bektashis' political and social stances more or less, beyond its concern with its 'religious' aspects. Bektashism perhaps fulfills that more than other belief systems, due to its historical experiences and confrontation with political authorities. However, Norton's identification of two specific categories disregards a significant anxiety of Bektashis, specifically after their abolishment in 1826. Although they continue to be involved in politics openly or secretly, their discourses frequently underscores their withdrawal from

politics. This is more likely related to their concerns about the possible implications of being involved in the politics. Thus, they rather emphasize the ‘social objectives’ of their order. They refer to various terms in order to explain the characteristics of their order. In the next section, I will analyze their application to such a term, *sosyete* (society), which is a meaningful and useful tool for being exempted from accusations. Before that, I would like to emphasize and reiterate one more point, that the identification and distinction of the social and political spheres for Bektashis is a problematic one. The objectives of the Bektashi order, which are expressed frequently by Bektashis, clearly refers to their interest in politics. However, the subtle point is about in what ways they express that and carry it out. Thus, we are again facing the transformations of meanings and the reidentification of some terms according to the Bektashi way of thinking, which we have to be careful and sensitive to, and we need to understand it in the totality of their discourses.

4.1.2.2. *Sosyete* (Society)

In order to contribute to a better understanding of the Bektashis’ identification of their own religious order, another term used by them should be analyzed: “*sosyete*” (society/ high society). In the Turkish dictionary, this term basically has two meanings: It is identified as “society” and “a group of people whose level of income is high and who have their own life style” (Eren

et al., 1988:1329). Bektashis apparently use this term to refer to a modern way of life, in which men and women are not segregated. Today, *sosyete* is mostly used in reference to wealthy people in society; even sometimes in a pejorative way, as in the “jet set”, criticizing their alleged extravagant or degenerated life style. Namely, the term has more emphasis on wealthiness as the unit of measurement for labeling people as *sosyete* in time.⁴² But it still has an ascription to a modern life style, which generally corresponds to a Western style.

However, the employment of the term *sosyete* in the early republican period of Turkey was slightly different from its recent usage. Though it was also used with critical purposes in reference to the wealthy classes, and their gatherings including alcohol, gambling, and dance⁴³ it appeared to have somewhat more emphasis on a positive and appreciated aspect: a modern, secular, Western life style that is totally compatible with what the republican project tries to establish. As far as I understand from the publications of that period, *sosyete* was also utilized as an exact translation of the French word “*société*” (society).⁴⁴ Atatürk, in one of his speeches in the 4th General

⁴² I refer to various resources, including articles, novels, newspapers, as well as the internet, that involve, if not directly, and explain the term *sosyete*, in order to understand the changing perceptions of it in the course of time. However, the necessity of a more detailed and critical study of it remains. I would like to thank Nesim Şeker (METU/Department of History) and Adnan Akçay (METU/Department of Sociology) for their contribution: I have benefited from my discussions with them about this concept.

⁴³ In order to see such a critical usage of the term, see Nami (1931).

⁴⁴ For the employment of the term in this meaning, see Turgeon (1935).

Congress of the Republican People's Party on 9 May 1935, also used the term in place of "society" while speaking about the achievements in cultural and social fields: "Modern Turkish society where women and men have equal rights, is the production of the last years with its new alphabet, national history, its own language, scientific music and technical institutions."⁴⁵

It is clear in the employment of the term by Bektashis that it does not refer to an "economic" but to an "ideal" status that the Republic was expected to recognize. Bektashis' anxiety about their lodges, for being regarded as subversive centers like other dervish lodges, makes it imperative for them to present these lodges as secular and modern institutions. Thus, it seems that while Bektashis underestimate the religious components of their order to demonstrate its putative harmony with secularism, they emphasize the 'social' functions of their order rather than 'political' ones to exonerate themselves from the accusations about their involvement in political affairs. Ziya even claims that Bektashis had already withdrawn from all political ideas and targets after "the bloody coup of Mahmud II" (1931, Mar. 8). The safest way to justify the existence of their lodges and to incorporate them into the new system might have been to identify their order as a social entity, which is in harmony with republican ideals.

⁴⁵ www.chp.org.tr/index.php?module=museum&page=stream&entry_id=893

4.1.2.3. Emphasis on “Turkishness”

There are various discourses by Bektashis and others in which Bektashism is regarded as the repository of the genuine Turkish culture and religion. Birge states that “the Bektashis consistently held to the Turkish language and perpetuated in their belief system and practice some at least of the pre-Islamic elements of Turkish culture” (1965 [1937]:16). I have come across discourses where Bektashis frequently have recourse to and proudly emphasize the Turkish color of their identity, criticizing the other religious orders as being under the influence of Arab or Persian cultures. Thus, the comparison of the Bektashi order with the other religious orders on this basis helps them to advance the idea that the Bektashi belief system is more suitable for the Turkish people. Bektashis resort to such claims, especially in the early republican period, as we witnessed in the example of Galip Baba and Ziya’s articles in the former chapter, in order to indicate the importance of their belief system for establishing a Turkish based “nation” state. However, this emphasis on “Turkishness” does not necessarily refer to an ethnic identity, but rather to a binding element for the whole population. Doja claims that

(T)his view sees Alevism as a Turkish-Anatolian religion combining Islam with elements of Turkish culture, as the authentic expression of an Anatolian culture and civilization. In contrast to a specific Turkish nationalism, an Anatolian cultural mosaic is set up, which includes many other groups allied with the Alevis against Ottoman oppression. (2006:446)

Bektashism's emphasis on Turkish culture was manipulated by political authorities and movements. As mentioned before, Bektashi lodges were used to establish and consolidate the dominance of the Ottoman Empire in the newly conquered areas. After the suppression of the Bektashi order by Mahmud II, Bektashis went underground and continued their activities clandestinely. They became stronger and widespread again by the end of the nineteenth century and "in the reign of `Abd al-Hamid II (1876-1909) the Bektashi order proved useful to the Young Turks, who found its network of tekkes, its penchant for secrecy, and its predisposition to oppose the central government valuable assets in their fight against the sultan's tyranny" (Norton 1983:79). There was a considerable rise in publications regarding Bektashis, *Ahis* and Armenians in that period, which were backed by the Young Turks in the formulation process of a new ideology. Ziya Gökalp charged Baha Sait Bey with the duty of researching *Kızılbaş* and Bektashis in order to "understand the morphologic and physiological structure of the Turkish society" (quoted in Birdoğan 1994:7-8).⁴⁶ Thus, "(i)ncreasing attempts were made to interest Bektashi leaders and other dervish orders in the modern state and use their assistance in formulating a cultural program, which would later give rise to Turkish nationalism" (Doja 2006:444). In the later periods, Bektashis continued to emphasize the characteristics of their belief system,

⁴⁶ Baha Sait Bey's published his observations in the journal titled *Türk Yurdu* in 1926-27.

which holds pre-Islamic Turkic elements in its structure for ensuring support from nationalist movements.

4.1.3. Conclusion

In this section, I have attempted to analyze the construction of Bektashi identity through history from both inside and outside. Bektashi identity is not only shaped by the common experiences, perceptions, beliefs, and behaviors of its members, but is also transformed by the Sunni population and the policies of political authorities. This group identity, in turn, plays an important role in the formation of the cosmologies of people. I think that Bektashis have a relatively strong identity that determines how they envision current and past events. This is dynamically sustained through their rituals.

In order to understand Bektashis' self-perceptions and their mutual relations with Sunnis, I have focused on some aspects of the Bektashi identity. In the first section, I basically explained Bektashis' confrontation with the Sunni cosmology and state policies, and how they found methods to cope with the challenges and accusations directed at their existence. The discourse of oppression, inspired by the martyrdom of Husayn in the battle of Karbala and originated in the Shiite sense of injustice, is basically attributed to the policies of the Ottoman Empire concerning the Bektashi order.

In the second part of the chapter, I intended to grasp Bektashis' own imaginations about the characteristics of their identity, and witnessed the various meanings of Bektashism even for Bektashis themselves. Moreover, Bektashi identity is continuously reinterpreted and reconstructed according to the circumstances they faced. Thus, it becomes difficult to decide the dominant color of Bektashism: whether it is a political, social or a religious program. The answer can change considerably. However, it appears that Bektashis do not identify their belief system as a political or religious program, but as a social one. It is understandable if we analyze their former experiences within the Ottoman Empire. Thus, it becomes more plausible to present the Bektashi order as a social entity, which would make it easy to incorporate into the newly established secular Republic.

4.2. Clashing Images, Tough Dilemmas: Atatürk and the Abolition of Religious Orders

The image of Atatürk among Bektashis and their opinions concerning the newly established republic play an important role in shaping Bektashi

perceptions and responses to the abolition of religious orders.⁴⁷ In this chapter, I aim to analyze how the contradiction between the negative image of the Law #677 with the positive image of Atatürk, contribute to the ways in which Bektashis made sense of the Law #677. Questioning the legitimacy and correctness of the Law, as well as giving an explicit and harsh reaction to it, may have denoted to a posture which includes a criticism of Atatürk. However, I claim that most Bektashis have generally preferred not to criticize him. So, reshaping the meaning and the legislation process of the Law in the Bektashis' imagination comes into prominence at this point.

In accordance with the positive image of Atatürk, Bektashis seem to have confidence and agreement about his "good intentions". They frequently express their support for his decisions and activities in the political sphere, which they believed to be undoubtedly on behalf of the whole Turkish society. They interpret the situation with a preconceived opinion that he must have acted with good intentions. The Law concerning the abolition of religious

⁴⁷ In spite of the discussions about the distinction between Bektashis and Alevis, and the focus of this thesis on Bektashis in particular; I have also used the sources on Alevis' relations with Atatürk in this section. It is not just about the oscillation of the sources between these terms, but also about both groups' parallel attitudes towards Atatürk, if they are not exactly the same. Thus, I had to use the terms "Alevi" and "Bektashi" alternately. Nevertheless, I would like to explain the striking allegations of Ayhan Yalçınkaya in this regard. Yalçınkaya claims that the relations of Alevis with Atatürk were established via Bektashis, and Bektashi lodges have mediated to activate the Alevi-Bektashi groups (1996:152-153). Although Yalçınkaya accepts that Alevis, like Bektashis, have positive attitudes towards Atatürk and regard him as the Mahdi, he underlines the disparities arising from the different historical experiences of these two groups during the Ottoman Empire period. According to him, Alevis' tension with the Ottoman governance was about their existence; however such a tension has never played a dominant role for Bektashis. He claims that unlike Bektashism, Alevism has never resigned itself to the idea of Mustafa Kemal, but rather gives meaning to him within its own paradigm (1996:156-157).

orders should also be evaluated in this perspective. If his decisions caused “unintended” or “unexpected” outcomes, they must have stemmed from external factors. Thus, I will explain the “responsible persons and circumstances,” as far as the Bektashis are concerned, in the decision to include the Bektashi lodges in the scope of the law. Then, I will try to analyze how they form the necessary background for their expressions regarding the intentions of Atatürk. But before I explain the influence of Atatürk’s image in this process, I would like to examine how this image is constructed by Bektashis.

4.2.1. Mahdi Atatürk

The identities attributed to Atatürk by Bektashis are one of the most prominent parts of the justification of Atatürk’s policies. Since the establishment of the Republic, Bektashis have frequently expressed their sentiments of attachment and loyalty to Atatürk. However, these sentiments go somewhat beyond veneration for him, and some Bektashis see him as “the Twelfth Imam Mahdi.”⁴⁸ The Mahdi is a messianic figure who is expected to return one day and restore the Islamic community. However, the Mahdi is not a single person, but represents a principle which appears in the personality of different persons in different times, in accordance with their belief in *tenasiüh*

⁴⁸ See for example Şener (1994):11-15.

(metempsychosis).⁴⁹ Thus, Atatürk is also regarded as one example of these persons. This is clearly elucidated by Şakir Keçeli in the following statement: “Mustafa Kemal Atatürk is the one who has come to world again by circulation in place of *Hünkar* Hacı Bektaş Veli and even Imam Ali. He is the Mahdi for some Alevi Bektashi” (Noyan 2002:10-11).⁵⁰ The significance of these three figures for Bektashis can also be understood from the places they live in. There frequently exists a corner in homes and offices that displays the portraits of Hz. Ali, Hacı Bektaş Veli, and Atatürk together.

This characterization of Atatürk releases him from all possible responsibility and accusations, because it becomes plausible to accept that he was a just ruler, and he made decisions on behalf of the whole society. Erdemir states that “Atatürk’s secular and republican project in 1920s was seen as the implementation of peace and order by the Mahdi” (2004: 113), and he adds “(i)n fact this belief turned out to be the key factor in mobilizing the Alevi groups in support of the Turkish national struggle” (2004:114). A clear example that supports Erdemir’s claim is a declaration which was published by the head of the Erikli Baba lodge, Naki Baba on September 12, 1925. Naki Baba was calling for his dervishes to obey Atatürk’s commands in his declaration with the words “the Mahdi, who was expected for centuries by

⁴⁹ See time section of the chapter for a more detailed explanation of Mahdi belief among Bektashis.

⁵⁰ Şakir Keçeli consciously preferred to use the terms Bektashi and Alevi together which he believed to be synonymous, and he criticizes people who perceive them as different belief systems. See Keçeli (2005): 119.

humankind and Bektashis as the savior, has appeared” (quoted in Öz 2004:175).

The utilization of terms, such as “savior” (*kurtarıcı*) and “Mahdi” for Atatürk indicates the status which Bektashis imposed on him, beyond his role as a statesman and a commander in the war of independence. It is somewhat a quasi-sacramental position that bears the characteristics of a Mahdi for them. According to Kehl-Bodrogi, Alevis consider the period of Turkey under the leadership of Atatürk as the termination of the reign of Yezid, which has symbolized injustice for the Alevis: “What they had hoped that the *Mahdi* Shah Isma’il would do was now accomplished by Mustafa Kemal: the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire and the disestablishment of the Islamic *ulema*” (2002:58).

These achievements were accompanied by Atatürk’s reform program towards the secularization of the new nation: the abolishment of the caliphate, the dissolution of Shari’a courts and the office of *Şeyhulislam*, the restriction on religious education, the adoption of the Gregorian calendar etc.; namely the elimination of the former emphasis on religion in the public space. The breaking off with the Ottoman Empire and keeping distance with its heritage as well as the secularization reform programs heralded and paved the way for a secular, modern and liberal way of life which Bektashis and Alevis always announced as their own life style. According to David Shankland,

It [Kemalism] offered them relief from persecution, whether real or supposed, a Republic within which they were promised full rights irrespective of their sect... However, the Alevi veneration for Atatürk goes further than appreciation for the reforms he instigated when he created the Turkish nation. Many regard Atatürk as a creator of an ideal way of life... (2003:156).

Shankland also underlines the parallels between early republican ideology and the Alevi world view, such as the emphasis on the pre-Islamic, Turkish roots of the nation, as the main reasons for their veneration for Atatürk (2003:156). This reciprocal relation established in the perception of these two groups with the new regime can be clearly understood from the following statements of two Bektashis: Keçeli says that “the (r)epublic has been a four-hundred-year dream of Alevis” (2005 :119),⁵¹ and Turgut Koca says that “Bektashism is the guarantee of Atatürk’s reforms and the life fountain of Turkishness” (1987).

Thus, in the eyes of Alevis and Bektashis, Atatürk was the symbol and personification of the new regime, which connotes a new era that broke relations with the past and brought the equitable circumstances they had expected for centuries. Kehl-Bodrogi claims that Alevis’ reverence for Atatürk indicates a breaking point of hostile relations between Alevis and state authorities, which had continued for centuries. She states that “(w)ith Atatürk, the traditional anti-state attitude of the Alevis was transformed into loyalty, at

⁵¹ I would like to remind Yalçınkaya’s emphasis on the difference between Bektashis and Alevis at this point (1996:152-157).

least as long as the state keeps loyal to the principle of secularism, laid down by Atatürk himself” (2003:53).

However, the reforms carried out by the Republic in accordance with the principle of secularism, became disadvantageous for Bektashis, such as Law #677, which was enacted under the same frame; but these policies did not seem to affect the Bektashi veneration of Atatürk. Rather, Bektashis directed their criticisms towards other people, conditions, or events.

4.2.2. Bektashi Atatürk

One of the strategies which Bektashis employed for justifying the policies of Atatürk is their claim of his Bektashism. Turgut Koca asserts that he was initiated to the order by Hurşit Baba in Selanik when he was a child (1987). Atatürk’s visit to Hacıbektaş, the town where the shrine of Hacı Bektaş Veli is located, in order to meet with Bektashi religious guides Salih Niyazi Dede Baba and Çelebi Cemalettin Efendi in 1919, the existence of Bektashis around him, and their support to his reform program, and their assignment to the parliament as deputies, were all perceived as evidences of his Bektashism. I frequently came across this conviction among Bektashis in books and articles written by them, as well as during my personal communication with them. For example, Noyan announces Atatürk as one of the famous Bektashis in Turkey, in one volume of his book series on

Bektashism and Alevism (2003:57-58). Öz and Şener attempt to support this notion with their claims about the descent of Atatürk by making a connection with a branch of Alevi community, Kızılakocaoğulları in Anatolia, and his family (Öz 1990:1-3, Şener 1994:43-46). Although Öz emphasizes that it was difficult to reach an exact decision about his Bektashism with the current information on hand, he advocates the existence of more evidences that verifies his Bektashism (1990:1).

Bahadır criticizes these attempts and finds it more reasonable to think that Atatürk was a Mevlevi (2002:16-19). He asserts that because of the belief in Atatürk's Bektashism, Alevis do not critically comment on relations between state apparatus and Alevis during the early republican period (2002:7). I agree with the point that the claims of Bektashis and Alevis concerning Atatürk's identity have great influences on their interpretations of events in that period. However, I believe that Bektashis and Alevis criticize some policies towards themselves in a careful way which does not place responsibility on Atatürk. They directed their criticisms and accusations at either Sunni bureaucracy, or circumstances.

4.2.3. Exonerating Atatürk

The decision of inclusion in the scope of the law of the Bektashi lodges is sometimes attributed either to the people around Atatürk, or to

circumstances which he couldn't fully control. For example, Keçeli claims that the draft of the law prepared by the deputy of Konya, Refik Koraltan, in following the request of Atatürk, did not include the Bektashi titles like *dede*, *baba*, *halifebaba*, *dedebaba*, and *çelebi*. These titles were added to the draft with the offer of the Yozgat deputies, Süleyman Sırrı İçöz and Ahmet Hamdi.⁵² İçöz identified the lodge of Hacı Bektaş Veli as a “filthy and messy place” (*mezelletgah*), and he also proposed the property issues of lodges for the agenda. Keçeli states that Atatürk could not prevent the religious fanaticism and the Alevi-Bektashi hostility, and he emphasizes the “loneliness of Atatürk” in the parliament in that period (Noyan 2002:11-12). While explaining the same promulgation process of the Law, and accepting the inclusion of the Bektashi titles into the scope of the law, Öz calls attention to an overlooked part of the Law. According to him, the main place of worship for Alevis and Bektashis (*cemevi*) was not prohibited by the Law, but these places were regarded as under the ban by the “Sunni bureaucracy” without any legal base (2004:169).

İsmet Paşa,⁵³ the deputy of Malatya in that period, is the other person who was held responsible for the abolition of Bektashi lodges. Turgut Koca states that during the preparation of the Law, Atatürk asked whether they

⁵² Öz, in contrast, mentions Zonguldak deputy Tunalı Hilmi as the person who laid stress on the abolishment of the title “*dedelik*” (2004:157).

⁵³ İsmet Paşa is one of the most prominent soldiers and statesmen during the national liberation movement. He was the second president of Turkey between 1938 and 1950.

should abolish Bektashi lodges along with the others, and İsmet Paşa answered with the phrase “all or nothing” (quoted in Öz 2004:171).

Öz interprets the abolition of Bektashi lodges as an “unfair punishment”; but he also refrains from putting the blame on Atatürk, rather he blames Sunni bureaucrats who served in high-level government positions as well as the Bektashi-Alevi community who unconsciously stayed unresponsive to the issue (2004:172).

Bektashis seemed to ground their confidence about the intentions of Atatürk regarding the Bektashi lodges to various claims. Initially, they refer to their belief in his intention to reopen the Bektashi lodges and his regret for closing them. While accepting that the legislation was an obligation under the conditions of that period, Noyan advocates that Atatürk was thinking of reopening Bektashi lodges, once the danger stemming from the other religious orders disappeared (2003:58). He even claims that he ordered the preparation of regulations with the purpose of reopening the Bektashi lodges (2003:58). He supports his idea with the assumption about his regret for closing Bektashi and Mevlevi lodges, and bases this assumption on an alleged dialogue between the leader of the Mevlevi order, Veled Çelebi and Atatürk. According to him, in response to the words of Atatürk concerning his regret for closing the Mevlevi and Bektashi lodges, Veled Çelebi consoled him that the lodges could not be closed; the law only closed the buildings, not the lodges (2002:5).

In a parallel way, the failure of this second attempt, the reopening of the Bektashi lodges, is not ascribed to Atatürk. According to Turgut Koca, when Atatürk intended to reopen the Bektashi lodges, the Dersim rebellion⁵⁴ started and the military opposed his idea with the pretext that the circumstances are inappropriate. Thus, Atatürk could not keep his promise to Bektashis in that period; he gave himself over to drinking for three years with this trouble, and committed suicide (1987). This statement indicates another clear example for Bektashis' conviction that Atatürk was free from all accusations regarding the matters about Bektashis.

Bektashis' and Alevis' reaction to the Dersim rebellion and their interpretation of Atatürk's role in it is an explanatory example. According to Erdemir, "(t)his Alevi uprising was brutally suppressed by the republican forces and its history remained as one of the most controversial topics, which presented a constant challenge for Alevi intellectuals" (2002:3). He explains how Alevis exonerate Atatürk of the Dersim massacre by using an illness trope. Kehl-Bodrogi not only points out this illness trope among Alevis, but also mentions how the people around him are held responsible for the massacre. She also expresses that Alevis regarded the operation as not directed at them, but at backward tribesmen (2002:66). The following sentences clearly demonstrate their endeavor for exonerating Atatürk:

⁵⁴ An uprising occurred in Dersim, which has been a predominantly Kurdish-Alevi region, against a law passed by the Republic, which "provided for the deportation of Dersim's population, in order to build new 'Turkish' cities" (Bozarslan 2002:10). The military suppressed the rebellion by coercive means, which resulted in annihilation of many people in 1937-38. For discussions about the Dersim rebellion, see Leezenberg (2003).

Members of the old generation are still convinced that Atatürk was consciously misinformed by the advisers about what really was going on, as he had never given his permission for the killing of Alevis. According to a widely held belief, recorded by the author in 1991: When the sick Atatürk was informed by the military that they were going to fire on the Dersim rebels, he cried out: 'DUR!' ('Stop!'). The men around him, however, misunderstood his word as 'VUR!' ('Shoot!'). Thus the military gave the order to fire and everything came how it came. When Atatürk later learned what happened, he was very grieved. (2002:66)

However, Atatürk defined the Dersim region as an abscess that should be pierced in his speech in 1935 (Bozarslan 2002:10); but Bektashis appear to disregard the responsibility of Atatürk for the policies against them, and they continue to believe in his absolute support for Bektashis.

In conclusion, for Bektashis and Alevis, some decisions and policies of Atatürk give rise to a crisis of legitimacy about his positive image and meaning in Bektashi and Alevi imagination. Thus, this threat necessitates narratives to eliminate the contradiction between events and acknowledgements. In order to refrain from putting the blame on Atatürk, they develop various narratives, which involve not only the reinterpretation of the events, but also the necessary background for basing their claims on. To a certain extent, that process causes a vicious circle that continuously reproduces itself, and regenerated with every interpretation. The image of Atatürk and the construction of events reciprocally have affected and nourished each other.

4.3. The Cyclical Time Conceptualization of Bektashis

One of the definitions of time provided by Webster's Dictionary is a "continuum which lacks spatial dimensions and in which events succeed one another from past through present to future" (Mish et al., 1988:1245). People generally tend to think about the concept of time, in accordance with this linear perception and attribute to it the meaning of a definite sequence of past, present, and future. However, "(s)ince time has no self-evident manifestation" (Leach 1956:126), it can be constructed in many different ways; it is very much about people's perceptions of life and death, and their consciousness of the past and the cosmos, and it is closely connected with their belief systems.

In this section, I will try to explore the Bektashi perception of the concept of time. As I argued in the previous chapters, in response to the abolition of their religious order in 1925, many Bektashis preferred to accommodate the legislation by employing some strategic discourses. In this process, I argue that, different conceptualizations of time provided them a useful instrument to mold the reality in a more bearable form. At this level, facts are illustrated somewhat differently, in favor of what Bektashis would like to see.

In an attempt to understand the Bektashi conceptualization of time, I refer to two alternative conceptions of time in the literature: linear and cyclical. The Bektashi imagination of time is evaluated by Çamuroğlu (1993)

and Günay (2002) under the term of cyclical time, but here I do not intend to generalize the Bektashi time perception. Therefore, I do not attribute this conceptualization of time to all members of the Bektashi order, at least due to the relativistic and non-homogeneous characteristic of time. I neither intend to investigate the roots of this perception in Bektashi system, nor elaborate the belief system under which it is shaped; but I simply focus on some of the examples of the Bektashi utilizations of time. I use the term “cyclical time” to refer to Bektashis’ time conceptualization in accordance with the existing literature, depending on the idea that it is apparently more dominant in the Bektashi imagination. However, I still argue that time perceptions of people can neither be restricted to, nor identified with certain shapes, such as circles or lines. Bektashis’ imagination corresponds to a complexity which incorporates cyclical, linear and other perceptions. I take the definitions of Farriss as my starting point:

According to a cyclical conception, time is a perpetual repetition, corresponding to the diurnal and seasonal rhythms of the natural world, and the past therefore is infinitely repeatable. In a linear conception, time advances along a path as an irreversible chain of events.
(1987:566)

However, linear and cyclical time conceptions are not mutually exclusive, as Farriss put it, they “can coincide within the same cognitive system and often, perhaps usually, do” (1987:569). It can be asserted that this is especially valid for such a heterogeneous system like Bektashism, which has

been for centuries, just like many other belief systems, influenced by different belief systems, and has held many different, even contradictory elements in its structure. I think the tense relations between these contradictory elements make the Bektashi system flexible, appealing and dynamic; but also it is these elements which make generalizations impossible and meaningless. If we speak of time, a constructed abstract concept, the impossibility of generalization becomes more evident. The existence of time in and of itself, independent from its perceptions is arguable more than any other concept. It is contingent on historical, spatial and socio-cultural conceptualizations; and it is very much unstable, namely holds a contradiction in itself that it changes continuously because of its own existential nature.

Besides the examples I am confronted with while interviewing the Bektashis or reading their publications, there are also some common principles that reflect the cyclical part of their time imagination. While supporting my argument with these examples, I need to re-emphasize that these “common principles” can also be disputed. They are not necessarily perceived by all Bektashis in similar ways; thus, I speak of general tendencies, and do not attribute them to each member of the Bektashi order.

4.3.1.Social Time and History

People tend to understand and express the flow of time in a unilinear and homogenous way. That makes them think that time is a continuous succession of events, one following another. Kracauer claims that this chronological sense of time is of modern and Western origin, and “(i)t came into being in the wake of increasing secularization and the concomitant rise of scientific inquiry” (1966:66). According to Marcus, the idea of progress permeated the world of European society, and it presupposed a linear conception of time that “has become a basic factor in Western man’s concept of reality” (1961:126).

Historians necessarily have grounded their studies on an objective and chronological time in order to unfold the historical events of past. However, this linear conceptualization of time becomes alien when we refer to the same events in collective and individual memory. People generally do not imagine in a way parallel way with the historians who establish a cause and effect relationship between events, depending on their chronological sequence. Connerton mentions the socialist historians who “have seen in the practice of oral history the possibility of rescuing from silence the history and culture of subordinate groups” (1989:18). However, according to Connerton, while reconstructing the life histories of individuals from these groups, if historians embark on a form of a sequential narrative which has its origin in the culture

of the ruling elites, this will impede the realization of their intentions.

Because subordinate groups have another type of history which has a different rhythm of its own; “(t)he life of the interviewee is not a curriculum vitae but a series of cycles” (1989:20). In that sense, I believe that Bektashis also have a different sense of time, which we have to consider while constructing their historical experiences.

Bektashis’ distinctive perception of time demonstrates itself in their approaches to events and life. This gives rise to their exposure to accusations that they distort history. For example, according to Turgut Koca, “there is place, but not time in Bektashi *menâkıbnames*” (quoted in Çamuroğlu 1993:60),⁵⁵ thus it is not nonsense that people from different centuries come together or travel long distances in a little while. Çamuroğlu asserts that this apparent complexity is totally suitable to Bektashi time perception (1993:59-60). These mythological realities, which have significant functions for Bektashis, should not be judged according to objective history, but to the intentions behind them (1993:78-79). This evokes the multilayeredness of meanings in the Bektashi system, which urges us to catch the hidden meanings under them.⁵⁶

The Bektashi style of narration does not trace the logical sequence of events; therefore it challenges the linear perception of time. At this point, I

⁵⁵ *Menâkıbnâmes* narrate the miracles and supernatural lives of saints or spiritual leaders of Sufi orders. For more information about Bektashi *menâkıbnâmes*, see Ocak (2001).

⁵⁶ For the Bektashis’ multi-storeyed mode of expression, see Temren (1994:110).

would like to give two examples which may give hints about their distinctive perception of time and rhythm of life:

During my personal communication with Keçeli, he told me that God decides the length of one's life not by the number of days or years, but by the count of breaths. Human-beings decide the length of their lives by the ways in which they "use their breath which is given to them by God as a blessing."

While telling an anecdote in a witty attitude peculiar to Bektashis, Turgut Koca refers to a similar idea, that length and value of life is based on how one assesses it:

While passing by a cemetery, a Bektashi traveler stopped to pray for the dead. He noticed the tombstones, and he was puzzled that nobody lived more than a month. He thought that all the dead were children in this village. When he went into the village, he saw that the villagers were all old people with long white beards. He asked them why so many children died in their village. The villagers told him that they were not children, and explained the situation: when someone came to their village and died, a committee met to decide how many days s/he lived as a human to inscribe on the tombstone. Thereupon, the Bektashi answered that if he died there, they should write on his tombstone that he died immediately after birth. (1987)

Thus, it is obvious that the criterion of the rhythm of time is relative. First of all, time has a very personal aspect: It changes considerably according to personal experiences. According to Kracauer, calendaric time is irrelevant to mechanics of our memory (1966:69). We do not think of events in an order of a calendar; they have several connotations with different intensities in our minds. They shape our sense of time and the recollection of memories. Thus,

it makes time more flexible in terms of its speed, which is never reflected in a chronological sequence. It sometimes passes more slowly or more quickly, depending on the influence of events and people over us.

Time reckoning is also determined by collective perceptions.

Collective life, shaped by common customs, beliefs, rituals, and historical experiences creates its own scale of time, which is identified as “social time” by Sorokin and Merton. They claim that

In judgments of time there enter considerations of aptitude, opportunity, continuity, constancy, and similarity, and the equal values which are attributed to time intervals are not necessarily equal measures. These differences in quality lead to the dependence of relative values of time durations not only on their absolute length but also on the nature and intensity of their qualities. (1937:622)

So, the internal clock of collective life is working with reference to historical events which have considerable impact on the collective identity of the group. It is far from having a stable, linear, homogeneous form; it is further diversified with personal experiences.

Now, I am going to explain that some common characteristics of the Bektashi system remind one of the coherence of the cyclical time perception with the system.

4.3.2. The Cyclicity of Life and Death

Bektashis seem to have a sense of eternity, at least due to their ideas about death. Death is not regarded as extinction. The idea of metempsychosis (*tenasüh*) in Bektashis, inherited from Neo-Platonism (Birge 1965 [1937]:214-215), connotes to the transition of the soul after death into another existence. The soul may pass to another person, or as in the case of transmutation (*don değıştirme*), to an animal or even a non-living thing, depending on the quality of the previous life (Gölpınarlı 1977:94-95). When Bektashis speak about the death of a person, they prefer to use expressions like *Hakk’a yürüdü* (s/he walked towards the God) or *kalıbını değıştirdi* (s/he changed his/her mold), instead of saying that he or she died (Gülçiçek 2004:621). It is well reflected in a *devriye*⁵⁷ written by Şirî:

Sometimes I was Prophet, sometimes Saint
Sometimes sane, sometimes fool I appeared
Sometimes as Ahmet, sometimes as Ali I appeared
No one knows my mystery, I was cunning.

Gâhi Nebi gâhi veli göründüm
Gâhi uslu gâhi deli göründüm
Gâhi Ahmet gâhi Ali göründüm
Kimse bilmez sırrım kallaş idim ben.

(quoted in Birge 1965 [1937]:125)

⁵⁷ *Devriye* is “the name of any poem which describes the cycle of emanation away from and back into the godhead” (Birge 1965 [1937]:260).

Instead of a belief in the Day of Judgment, and in the existence of heaven and hell, Bektashis think of a cycle of existence which is composed of two Great Arcs: the Arc of Ascent and the Arc of Descent (Birge 1965 [1937]:114-117). Bektashis have similarities with Sufis on account of their goal to find oneness with the Real Existence. The struggle of the soul with itself in order to attain this goal, brings Sufis to the last stage of the Arc of Ascent, being a Perfect Man (*insan-ı kâmil*), in which the soul accesses the Divine time. Schimmel says,

The *waqt*, the “cutting sword”, as it was defined by the Sufis, ... the time beyond time in which there is neither before nor hereafter. It is this timelessness out of which the mystics spoke their paradoxes, for the distinction between generations and ages exists no longer – thus al-Hallaj can sing, as did many others:

My mother has borne her father,
And my daughters are my sisters. (1994:75)

For Sufis in general, neither yesterday nor tomorrow, but the moment (*ân*) dominated their time perception. Because, as Hasnaoui explains, “(t)he confident abandonment of self to this time of the presence, the resolute acceptance of the judgement it brings, are an essential condition of salvation” (1977:72), and he says that “(t)he Sufi, the ‘son of his *waqt*’, is in the constant state of receptivity vis-à-vis his *waqt*, ‘absorbed’ by the voice within him, responding with full attentiveness to the call which he hears” (1977:71).

4.3.3. The Cyclicity of Hope: Mahdi Belief

In spite of Bektashis' common belief in metempsychosis, it is difficult to assume the existence of a general belief among them with regard to what happens after death. According to Birge,

In general there is astonishingly little said about the next life in the poems and other literature of the Bektashis.... The return back into the Godhead, the actual attaining to the goal of their journey is the only idea upon which they place emphasis. As a matter of practical belief, however,...Bektashis call for help on the great Saints of the order. The return into the Godhead is not in actual practice conceived as any loss of individuality. The departed Saint is still a living presence upon whom the believer can call for assistance in time of need. (1965 [1937]:131)

At this point, I should discuss the Mahdi belief among the Bektashis, which I believe to be a constitutive factor in molding their perception of time. In the eighth century, the dispute over the heir of Imam Jafar al-Sadiq divided the Shi'i community into two groups. While the Twelvers followed the younger son of Jafar al-Sadiq, the Isma'ilis accepted the elder son as the heir. However, then both groups developed their own eschatological doctrine of the hidden Imam. According to them,

He would return as a messianic figure, the Mahdi, at the end of the world to vindicate his loyal followers, restore the community to its rightful place, and usher in a perfect Islamic society in which truth and justice will prevail. (Esposito 1991:46-47)

The Isma'ilis developed a relatively different perception and “combined a historical cyclical concept of prophetology with eschatological messianism” (Lapidus 1988:119). For Isma'ilism, Henry Corbin asserts that “the great moments of the cosmic drama are announced and ‘dated’ in the homologous periods of the cycles by the apparition of figures which are conceived as the recurrence of one and the same eternal Figure” (1983:56-57). This vision is analogous with the Bektashi imagination of “multiplicity of Mahdi figures” (Erdemir 2004:120), rather than a single, ultimate one. The eternal Imam resurrects in the personality of different figures in different times. As Erdemir claims, “according to the Alevi cosmology it is not irrational for Imam ‘Ali’s soul to reappear in the founding saint Hacı Bektaş’s body, or for both of their souls to be present in Mustafa Kemal Atatürk”(2004:114).⁵⁸

This cyclicity of time does not seem to be in the shape of a circle that is turning around and returning to the same point, but rather a twisting spiral, passing through parallel points, if not the same ones.⁵⁹ Thus, time occurs as a totality of these multiple resurrection cycles of these figures, it is not a closed circuit, but more like a helical spring, ranging to eternity.

⁵⁸ For the Mahdi image of Atatürk in Bektashi imagination, see the Atatürk section of the chapter.

⁵⁹ This conceptualization emerged during my discussions with my thesis advisor, Aykan Erdemir. For our common study on this subject, see Erdemir and Harmanşah (2006).

4.3.4. The Cyclicity of Motion: *Semâ*'

The ritual dance performed by Bektashis during their ceremonies, which is called *semâ*' (the circular dance), does not only consist of moving around consistently as in the Mevlevi dance, but its "choreography involves circle and line formations" (Markoff 2002:795). While encircling the *meydan*⁶⁰, dancers also move around themselves (Ziya 1931, Feb.16). Gülçiçek claims that the circular figures of *semâ*' are inspired by the pre-Islamic cult of nature, imitating the rotation of planets around the sun (2004:708). Birge traces the origins of the dance back to Shamanism, like Ziya (1931, Feb.16), and also to Sufism (1965 [1937]:199-200, footnote 4). There are regional variants of *semâ*', but particularly one of the most widespread of them among Bektashis and Alevis, the dance of the cranes (*turnalar semahı*), reflects the sense of circulation both with its figures and the meaning it bears: "the image of the elegant crane (*turna*) preparing for flight symbolizes both the ascending soul of Imam 'Ali and the metamorphosis of Central Asian miracle-working shamans into birds" (Markoff 2002:795).

Ahmad Gazali, in elaborating the meaning of dance for the Sufis in general, states,

(t)he dancing is a reference to the circling of the spirit around the cycle of existing things on account of receiving the effects of the unveilings

⁶⁰ According to Birge's definition, *meydan* is "the place where the ceremonies of the order are performed" (1965 [1937]:268).

and revelations; and this is the state of the mystic. The whirling is a reference to the spirit's standing with God in its Secret [*sirr*] (quoted in Bakhtiar 1976:70).

For Bektashis, “the physical world is a reflection of reality in Adem, non-existence; and the sense of duality, *ikilik*, is the veil which hides the reality of God's existence from men” (Birge 1965 [1937]:110). Therefore, perhaps while they tend to understand Absolute Being with its opposite, non-existence, and find oneness with God, they have to start with an understanding of the hidden meanings of the existing world, and dance might be an instrument for that in which “the principal is the escalation of the spirit with ecstasy” (Ziya 1931, Feb.16). Thus, the dervish may become free of time and place, namely *lamekan*, which is basically attributed to the God. Then, the soul may become independent of the limits of the body, and come closer to God.

4.3.5. Disregarding the Chronology: Esoteric Meanings

The cyclical understanding of time prompts the disregarding of chronology, due to its sense of continuity. On account of the ambiguity about the distinction between past and present, chronology loses its meaning. For Bektashis, certainly I am not speaking of what Leach calls a “primitive attitude to time” (1956:114), in which time is regarded as immeasurable.

However, I claim that this feature of cyclical time is sometimes used by Bektashis as a way to express their “troubles.” As Çamuroğlu emphasizes, we should realize the multiple meanings of Bektashi statements, and understand the real hidden meaning under them (1993:59-81).

In this part, I will give two examples to indicate how Bektashis disregard the chronological sequence of events to support their assertions. In the first example that I will present, they explicitly intended to disregard chronological sequence; as for the second one, the intentions seem to oscillate between inattentiveness, and regardless.

In the novel *Nur Baba*⁶¹, Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu claimed to describe the features of the Bektashi order, but realized that in a humiliating manner. The novel was later filmed by Muhsin Ertuğrul in 1922. In order to demonstrate their displeasure, Bektashis allegedly raided and disrupted the film studio. During the interview with Turgut Koca, he mentioned this event (1987). Although he acknowledged that the event had taken place, he emphasized the insignificance of the event by asserting that none of the Bektashis were brought to court after the raid. To highlight the idea that Mustafa Kemal Atatürk did not approve Karaosmanoğlu’s novel, Koca claimed that Karaosmanoğlu was sent abroad “hastily” by Atatürk after this event. Besides the non-existence of any information that justifies Koca’s claim, it is also impossible to reach such a conclusion with the existing

⁶¹ For detailed discussion of the novel, see Chapter Three.

historical data. Karaosmanoğlu became a member of the parliament from the city of Mardin in 1923, and then he went to Switzerland in 1926 following his illness. His first appointment as an ambassador to Tiran was in 1934 (Karaosmanoğlu 2004:180), namely twelve years after the publishing of the novel. The chronology, which the Bektashis sometimes prefer to disregard, clearly indicates a different reality: We can not speak of the successiveness of these two events; they are sufficiently far from each other timewise to make it impossible to establish a direct casual relationship between them. Also, existing scholarship points to the fact that, one of the most important reasons for Karaosmanoğlu's appointment to Tiran was his involvement in the *Kadro* movement.

In the previous chapter, while analyzing a series of articles written by a Bektashi named Ziya in 1931, I explained the controversy about the identity of Ziya.⁶² Küçük asserts that according to the information she obtained from Şevki Koca, the articles belonged to Ziya Şişman, who wrote poems under the penname Abdal Ziya (2003:196). Şevki Koca's claim was refuted by both Hasan Erdoğan, an official of the Ziya Baba Karaşar Faith, Education, and Charity Foundation (*Ziya Baba Karaşar İnanç Eğitim Hayır Vakfı*), and Ziya Şişman's family. I think the probable reason for Şevki Koca's claim is related to the accusations about Ziya Şişman that he opposed the standard system of Bektashism by declaring himself to be a religious guide, and his exclusion

⁶² See Chapter Three.

from Bektashi society. On the basis of the ideas reflected in the articles towards the Bektashi order, Şevki Koca might have concluded that articles of this kind could have only been written by him. Bahadır supports my claim by asserting that probably Şevki Koca answered Küçük's question by telling her about the only Ziya he knew of.⁶³ Keçeli also states that Şevki Koca was frequently mistaken about the identities of Bektashis.⁶⁴

According to the biography of Ziya Şişman, he moved to Turkey from Skopje in 1932 and he was a Naqshbandi at that time. When he met Hasan Basri Baba, a Bektashi guide, Ziya Şişman joined the Bektashi order and served this order until his death. I received more detailed information about him from his family, but a brief biography of Ziya Şişman can be easily accessed via the internet, from the website of the Ziya Baba Karaşar Faith, Education, and Charity Foundation.⁶⁵ Normally, one can easily conclude the unlikelihood of this presumption by tracing the chronological consecutiveness of the events. It seems to me that for Şevki Koca, the actual chronology is insignificant. Other minor data that hint the plausibility of Şevki Koca's imagination is sufficient to prove it right. Interestingly, the chronology is disregarded not only by Şevki Koca, but also by Küçük.

⁶³ E-mail correspondence with İbrahim Bahadır on February 23, 2006.

⁶⁴ Personal communication.

⁶⁵ The website is www.ziyababa.org.tr. The biography of Ziya Şişman is given under the link of Mehmet Ziya Baba. [accessed August 17, 2006]

Thus, the different time perception of Bektashis emerges with their approach to some issues in a different manner. People, who observe the Bektashis from outside without paying attention to their own mystical terms and imaginations, are generally inclined to consider that the Bektashis distorted history and reality. In fact, through their *sui generis* perspective stemming from their unique perception of time and the freedom provided by this perspective, they basically attempt to express their thoughts and feelings about events. This cyclical perception of time brought about the meaningless of the dualities related to logical sequence of two things: former-latter, predecessor-successor, past-future, etc. They put aside these concepts and exist in a time of “untimeliness.” The cyclical time brings about not only the disregard of the succession of events, but also the impossibility of establishing a strict relation between cause and effect: If time is cyclical, how can one decide that an event took place before or after another event. In cyclical time, it is the motion that matters.

4.3.6. Conclusion

In this part, I try to explain a factor which I believe to be effective in the Bektashi way of looking at life and their interpretation of events. Surely, it is not easy to clarify the direct impact of the time perception of Bektashis over their responses to the abolition of religious orders clearly, and my reading will

not go further than an attempt to understand them. I just try to pass over the timewise distance between us and them.

Bektashis' expressions sometimes seem to contradict the narrations of objective history; however they will only make sense if they take into account the totality of their belief system. Their strategies and discourses in the abolition of their lodges seem to be compatible with their general attitude against the unpleasant situations they experienced. According to Çamuroğlu, Bektashis do not prefer to collide with spiritual and other difficulties, but they behave like water: "Water firstly wanders around the rock, which appears in front of it, then erodes and carves its bottom slowly" (1993:61). Apparently, the Bektashis' way of competing with the decision, which brought restriction over their religious life, seems not to be exempted from them. However, they keep their hope alive to see the condition turns to their advantage. According to Çamuroğlu, the sense of the *fait accompli* in linear time is disturbing for Bektashis (1993:60). Everything is compensable in circular time. This perception is connected with their sense of hope and expectation, which has been dominant in their way of looking at life. According to Lapidus,

Shi'ism was characterized by a religious mood which stressed messianic hopes and chiliastic expectations... While Sunni and Shi'i Muslims did not differ much in their orientation to daily life they differed profoundly in the emotional mood through which they saw worldly reality (1988:119).

I think that a similar mood also existed among Bektashis, which can be understood from their Mahdi belief, and the circularity of life and death.

Bektashis do not put their reactions forth directly and rigidly, but they seem to choose one of the two strategies: Either they perceive the facts exactly as they are, but transform their meanings into a more acceptable level and their sense of expectation help them in this process; or they perceive them as what they prefer to see in their mythical imagination and are convinced of the unnecessary of opposing it. There is a subtle difference between them timewise, which has already lost its meaning in cyclical time. Both of them have the same conclusion for a Bektashi. Bektashis' time will provide this flexibility to them in any case.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION: CONFLICTING FACTS, MEANINGS AND COSMOLOGIES

Before beginning a comprehensive analysis of the entirety of the material I have presented throughout the chapters, I would like to explain what I have tried to accomplish in this study, and what I have learned from it. First of all, I tried to approach the subject through the sensitivity which Atay points out concerning the problems of studying a religious order in Turkey. To this end, I asked questions to obtain an insightful vision of the “inner” perceptions, definitions, and interpretations of Bektashis rather than what is generally expected from us, namely “revealing their misdeeds” (2004:55).⁶⁶ Thus, this thesis is an attempt to give an emic account of Bektashi interpretation of an historical event, rather than an attempt to either represent an etic perspective, or a consciously subjective reading of it, which Atay implies. In order to accomplish that, I necessarily questioned diverse ways of conceptualizing these religious institutions and the identities of their subjects that are represented both in the sources and narratives.

⁶⁶ However, I should stress that I am aware of the differences between studying the Bektashi order, and a Sunni religious order which Atay basically refers to. But I still think that, though the “subjects” and “parts” of the issues and their “expectations” are considerably different from each other, the primary concerns and the problems of approaching the subjects have considerable parallels.

While resisting the narrow comparative-based approaches that portray the history of Bektashis as having only negative connotations and a history of antinomy, confrontation or incompatibility, I struggled to refrain from interpreting them from a Sunni stance, as far as possible. But at the same time, I also endeavored to be skeptical of Bektashi discourses, and not to become lost in them. However, it should still be noted that, as I have frequently emphasized throughout the thesis, these are my own readings of the texts and narratives, and they are open to new readings, in spite of my struggle to keep my own reading away from the delusion of reflecting my own self-image, which inevitably affected my observations. Although I tried to give the local meanings of an event and depend on empathetic accounts, the study still reflects my own categories and “capacities”.

Secondly, with this study I observed how an apparently clear legislation which was summarized in a few sentences was reproduced many times in people’s perceptions. These interpretations were not only considerably differentiated from each other, but were also transformed in the course of time. It was also interesting to note that diversification can also be observed within the members of a community. However, I do not only mention these diversifications between and within the discourses of the communities, and reduce the analysis to their confrontation; I also would like to analyze the intersection points of these discourses, surprisingly even the intersections of antagonistically constructed ones. Thus, I would like to start

by analyzing these diverse discourses in that period, and then I will focus on some dominant patterns of Bektashi narratives that I claim to take shape around their “accommodation” strategies, but by already acknowledging the diversity within them.

There was a considerable increase in the publications concerning the Bektashi order and its belief system in journals and newspapers in the early republican period. I think that this was not only the consequence of the attempts of *İttihad Terakki Cemiyeti* (Committee of Union and Progress) in investigating the belief systems and sects of Anatolia in that period, but was also closely related to the abolition of religious orders. If we consider the examples I analyzed in the previous chapters, the publications attacking and insulting the Bektashi order were published just before and after the legislation. In my cases, the authors of these publications were the people who had relations with the then administration of the time. Thus, in my view, they attempted to picture the Bektashi order as a degenerated institution, in order to justify the policies of the political authorities, and alleviate possible public reaction. The articles that have a positive attitude were generally published chronologically later, which apparently justifies the allegation that they were attempting to exonerate the Bektashi order in the eyes of the society. The doubts about Bektashis, because of the ambiguity stemming from the Bektashi secret among the population, should have been deepened with their abolition by the new republic. The interesting point is that, though the Law

#677 was regarded as more targeting the more militantly reactionary Naqshbandis in that period,⁶⁷ Bektashis seemed to become the targets of the attacks continuing in publications more than Naqshbandis. Thus, it seems that the secular anti-dervish discourse in that period had intersected with the Sunni-conservative discourses against the Bektashi order. While Sunni conservatives obtained the opportunity to *re*-underline the “immoral” and “heretic” character of the Bektashi order, the publications of that period tried to legitimize the policies of the government by reflecting the degeneration of religious orders via the example of the Bektashi order. Thus, while confronting with all these accusations and struggling to extricate themselves from that kind of portraying, Bektashis simultaneously tried to incorporate themselves to the new political system.

Now, I will try to analyze the Bektashi interpretations of the abolition of religious orders by the newly established Republic in 1925. I claim that Bektashis’ interpretations of the legislation are considerably differentiated from “official discourse”⁶⁸ in various points. Though the legislation was directed also against the Bektashi order, along with the other religious orders,

⁶⁷ The immediate proclamation of the Law just after the Sheikh Sa’id rebellion is considered to be meaningful. This claim is based on the characteristics of the Naqshbandi order, and historical experiences. Kafadar claims that “(o)nly the Nakşibendi order, true to *its* tradition, has consistently and militantly opposed the secular state” (1992:311).

⁶⁸ It should be pointed out that the term “official discourse” is somewhat problematic. I take it to refer only to the discourse of the policy makers in that period, a particular reading of the legislation which supports the policies of the current government and is promoted through historical narratives. However, I use the term without ignoring the fact that this discourse is also not stable, and is open to diverse readings.

Bektashis have recourse to diverse strategies to exonerate themselves from that classification. Bektashis resent the treatment of the authorities which equate the Bektashi order with the other religious orders. I claim that, for some Bektashis, more than being restricted in their rituals, and other possible consequences of the legislation, the “meanings” behind the legislation, put forward in the official discourse, were far more disturbing. In order to get rid of all these meanings, they develop alternative narratives that reconstructed the legislation’s meanings in their imagination. Therefore, Bektashis consistently claim that the Bektashi order is different from the other orders, by deploying various narratives.

First of all, Bektashis emphasize the distinct characteristics of the order, portraying it as a secular and modern institution which already has “nationalistic” tones with its emphasis on Turkish culture. According to them, it holds the ideal form of religion for Turkish people in itself, and it is totally compatible with the ideals of the newly established Republic. By emphasizing the “social” aspects and functions of the order, they attempt to make it independent from the “reductionist” character of the legislation that approaches the Bektashi order as a “religious” order. Representing the Bektashi order as a “non-religious” and “apolitical” institution would enable the Bektashis to consider the Bektashi order as being already exempted from the target of legislation.

Secondly, Bektashis claim to have an exclusive relation with Atatürk, which would also support their arguments about the distinct characteristics of the Bektashi order. This intention gives rise to the exaggeration of the pragmatic strategy of Atatürk for taking the support of Bektashi order for the national struggle and using their influences over the public. Bektashis do not only persist in their attempts to prove that Atatürk was a Bektashi; they also endeavor to support that allegation by emphasizing the number of Bektashis around Atatürk in that period. These assumptions enable Bektashis to verify their claim about their close relations with Atatürk, and bring about the rejection of the possibility that Atatürk had some policies directly against Bektashis.

However, I think that Bektashis' strategies concerning their relations with Atatürk and the Turkish Republic are always beyond such utilitarian intentions, because of the special meanings they attached to them. Based on the idea that Turkish Republic ensures the freedom of religion and puts an end to the dominance and oppressiveness of Sunni Islam during the Ottoman Empire period, Bektashis identify the new administration and their relations with it through their experiences in the former period. Thus, while the Republic symbolizes an ideal model of state for Bektashis, Atatürk is the embodiment of it. We could understand this assumption with the identification of Atatürk by Bektashis with terms which are passing beyond a political or a military figure, and reaching a somewhat sacred statute. He was

called “the Twelfth Imam Mahdi” or “the savior”, which refer to various historical experiences, like battle of Karbala or the persecution of Bektashis by Mahmud II, but basically depending on the same idea: Atatürk was the person who saved them from injustice, religious fanaticism and persecution. Therefore, they exonerate him from all negative attributions, accusations and responsibilities of unfavorable policies. Thus, if necessary, Bektashis put the blame of all predicaments on other persons or circumstances.

I claim that although the abolition of their religious order by the Turkish Republic was also an oppressive policy, most Bektashis prefer not to call it an unjust act. They try to accommodate the legislation in various different ways. I approach various Bektashi reinterpretations, parallel to Sharon Roseman’s approach in her work titled “How we built the road: The politics of memory in rural Galicia” (1996). Roseman uses the term *making do* in order to explain the symbolic constitution of an event, road construction, at the local level in rural Galicia (1996:837). According to her, “making do often involves both partial accommodations and resistance to externally imposed material conditions and cultural meanings” (1996:837). I believe that Bektashis’ responses are in accordance with the strategies that were argued to be explanatory for Galicians by Roseman. The responses and attitudes of Bektashis do not represent a total rejection or an overt reaction to the legislation; but that they are an attempt to accommodate it by changing its meaning. The features, targets, and scope of the legislation were transformed

in a totally different form by which it became acceptable and bearable for Bektashis. This does not lead to the assumption that Bektashis did not react to the legislation; rather it was an active reaction to its imminent outcomes in their lives. I do not use the term accommodation here as passive obedience and submission, accepting or submitting to the legislation without objection or resistance; rather I use it as a way of making the conditions more bearable.

I argue that Bektashis' way of accommodation involves a kind of resistance. This resistance is offered by reconstructing the meanings in accordance with their viewpoint. Between and beyond the lines of their publications and narratives, as well as with the continuing activities of the lodges, Bektashis appear to show partial and implicit resistance to the abolition of their religious order. But their strategies which I identify as "resistance" may not necessarily imply an act of resisting the legislation in Bektashi perception, as they frequently emphasize their solidarity with the newly established Republic, and the compatibility of their life style with its modern and secular ideals. Thus, the meanings and possible implications of the abolition of religious orders for Bektashis were differentiated in their minds that make the out-of-control situation bearable, while also allowing them to keep their hopes alive that one day their disappointment would be recompensed.

In recent decades, the legislation has been more overtly criticized by them, since the tight control over religious orders has softened. However, they

still did not and do not prefer to criticize it in a harsh style. I believe there are two reasons for this lack of criticism: Firstly, Bektashis were not able to express their ideas easily and openly since there were occasional persecutions of Bektashis who continued to hold congregational meetings. For example, Turgut Koca asserts that their meetings were raided by the police after the legislation (1987). Secondly, criticizing the legislation also involves a very dangerous element in its structure: It can quickly turn into a criticism of Atatürk which Bektashis have preferred not to do.

I claim that the other reason for Bektashis' more accommodating manner is their endeavor to establish good relations with the new Republic, by giving the image of loyal citizens to its reforms. Erdemir claims that "(t)he recent Alevi histories written during the years following the brutal repression of the military rule in Turkey, strived, and to a certain extent managed, to make the present safe by reinserting Alevis as loyal, patriotic, self-sacrificing and obedient citizens within the nationalist cosmology" (2002: 9). I believe that this strategy is also valid for Bektashis, and their reinterpretation of historical events is shaped through this idea. The abolition of their lodges, in a sense, was an opportunity for them to show their loyalty to the Republic. For example, some Bektashi leaders published announcements in newspapers, calling their disciples to obey the Law #677.⁶⁹ There was also a self-sacrificing attitude behind these announcements. They asserted that the

⁶⁹ See p. 71-72.

legislation was directed at Sunni orders, but because of the possibility that other dervishes may have continued their activities in Bektashi lodges, they were closed as well. Thus, they give the impression that they sacrificed their lodges for the sake of the country.

While generally experiencing unstable and turbulent relations with the authorities, Bektashis' attempts at incorporation into the new political system must have been effective in their accommodation strategies. As Erdemir claims for the Alevis' discourses and attitudes which are utilized to cope with the challenges, Bektashi reaction to Law #677 can be approached as an example of "the processes of accommodation through which the Alevis gradually incorporated themselves into the Turkish political system while also attributing to it a certain degree of legitimacy" (2004:114). Thus, although I refrain from making generalizations, and persistently emphasize the multiplicity of the responses of Bektashis to the legislation, at least because of the diversification stemming from different personal experiences and purposes; I claim that they still exhibit some common patterns which I can identify as accommodation, in order to protect and survive their existence.

In this thesis, through the example of an historical event, I observe how the "past" is transformed and reconstructed in people's imaginations in order to construct and justify the "present". The abolition of religious orders had a conflicting character with various cornerstones of Bektashi identity. That's why it remains a problematic issue for Bektashis and was continued to be

discussed after more than 80 years. Thus, Bektashis felt the need to reproduce the meanings of this tough experience in their own imaginations, not only for exonerating themselves in the eyes of society, but also settling with the conflicting components of their identities with the new circumstances.

I have argued that in order to understand the distinct reconstruction of the meanings by Bektashis, we should consider various filters that they pass the events through. Thus, I analyzed some factors that I believe to have shaped their perceptions. I problematized cosmologies of Bektashis for grasping the logic of the need for their reinterpretation of the events. I claim that, the discourses used by Bektashis regarding the abolishment of their religious order become more meaningful if they are considered as part of a complex totality. This totality has an internal coherence in itself, and consisted of various discourses of Bektashis regarding their relations with the Ottoman Empire, the Turkish Republic, Atatürk, Sunni population etc. Thus, all details of it had to be considered when deliberating on the reconstruction of meanings in Bektashis' perceptions.

While the representation of the past in a different form is determined by and carried through cosmologies of Bektashis, these cosmologies are also transformed into various different shapes with the impact of both the new circumstances themselves and the attempts of Bektashis to internalize them. This reciprocal interaction turns to be a vital process, and a vicious circle that continuously reproduce itself. In conclusion, I claim that the abolition of

religious orders was subjected to diverse readings by Bektashis, in order to accommodate the past and justify the present, and these diverse readings were determined by various factors which demonstrates us the fact that it is not very much possible to speak about “facts”, but “meanings”, which are embedded in “cosmologies”.

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APPENDIX

TEKKE VE ZAVİYELERLE TÜRBELERİN SEDDİNE VE TÜRBEDARLIKLARLA BİRTAKIM ÜNVANLARIN MEN VE İLGASINA DAİR KANUN⁷⁰

Kanun No: 677

Md. 1 – T.C. dahilinde gerek vakıf suretiyle, gerek mülk olarak şeyhinin taht-ı tasarrufunda gerek suver-i âherle tesis edilmiş bulunan bilumum tekkeler ve zaviyeler sahiblerinin diğer şekilde hakk-ı temellük ve tasarrufları bâki kalmak üzere kamilen seddedilmiştir. Bunlardan usûl-ı mevzuası dairesinde filhâl cami veya mescid olarak istimal edilenler ibkâ edilir.

Alelumum tarikatlarla, şeyhlik, dervişlik, müridlik, dedelik, seyyidlik, çelebilik, babalık, emirlik, nakiplik, halifelik, falcılık, büyücülük, üfürükçülük ve gaibden haber vermek ve murada kavuşturmak maksadıyla nüshacılık ve ünvan ve sıfatlarının istimaliyle, bu ünvan ve sıfatlara ait hizmet görmek ifa ve kisve iktisası memnudur. T.C. dahilinde, selâtine ait veya bir tarikat veyahut cerr-i menfaata mesned olanlarla, bilumum sair türbeler mesdûd ve türbedarlıklar mülğadır. Seddedilmiş olan tekke veya zaviyeleri veya türbeleri açanlar veyahut bunları yeniden ihdas edenler veya tarikat icrasına mahsus olarak velev muvakkaten olsa bile yer verenler ve yukarıdaki ünvanları

⁷⁰ Quoted in Kara (1999:362-363).

taşıyanlar veya bunlara mahsus hidematı ifa veya kıyafet iktisa eyleyen kimseler üç aydan eksik olmamak üzere hapis ve elli liradan aşağı olmamak üzere cezay-ı nakdî ile cezalandırılır.

Md. 2 – İşbu kanun neşri tarihinden itibaren muteberdir.

Md. 3 – İşbu kanun icrasına İcra Vekilleri Heyeti Memurdur.

(Resmi gazete, no: 243)

Law No: 677 ⁷¹

Clause 1 – All the tekkes (dervish lodges) and zaviyes (central dervish lodges) in the Turkish Republic, either in the form of wakf (religious foundations) or under the personal property of its sheikh or established in any other ways, are closed. The right of property and possession of their owners continue. Those used as mosques and mescits (small mosques) may be retained as such. All of the orders using the descriptions as sheikh, dervish, disciple, dedelik (elder of Alevis) chelebilik (title of the leader of one branch of Alevis), seyyitlik (a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad), babalık (elder of Bektaşî order, a kind of sheikh), emirlik (descendant of the Prophet Muhammad), nakiplik (warden of religious order), halifelik (deputy sheikh), faldjilik (fortune teller), buyudjuluk (witchcraft), ufurukchuluk (a person who claims to cure by means of the breath), divining, and giving written charms in order to make someone

⁷¹ Quoted in Markussen (2000:92).

reach their desire: service to these titles, and the wearing of dervish costume, are prohibited. The tombs of the sultans, the tombs of the dervish orders are closed, and the profession of tomb keeping is abolished. Those who open the closed tekkes (dervish lodges) or zaviyes (central dervish lodges), or the tombs, and those who re-establish them or those who give temporary places to the orders of people who are called by any of the mystical names mentioned above or those who serve them, will be sentenced to at least three months in prison and will be fined at least fifty Turkish liras.

Clause 2 – This law is effective immediately.

Clause 3 – The cabinet is charged with its implementation.