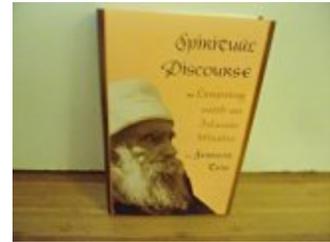


Frances Trix. *Spiritual discourse: learning with an Islamic master*. Conduct and Communication Series. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993. xi + 189p. \$30.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8122-3165-6.

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## An Albanian Bektashi Master, Discourse Ethnography of Learning and the Spiritual Making of an Anthropologist: An Account on Method and Content

An Albanian Bektashi Master, Discourse Ethnography of Learning and the Spiritual Making of an Anthropologist: An Account on Method and Content

Discourse analysis and ethnography are now sophisticated research methods used in fieldwork by both linguist and cultural or social anthropologists. Certainly the object of research could be the research method itself, as the recent tendencies in both (sub-) disciplines have made abundantly clear that reflexive ethnography and discourse analysis is become central for the current fundamental developments in anthropological theory. The book published by Frances Trix, *Spiritual discourse: learning with an Islamic master* (Conduct and Communication Series, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), certainly addressed important issues in this respect.

The object of her study is one lesson with an Albanian-American Islamic master, Baba Rexheb, leader of the Bektashi order, at the tekke (Islamic lodge or monastery) of Detroit in Michigan. The lesson is rich in poetry and parable, narrative and face-saving humour. As Trix seeks to understand how Baba teaches, she conceptualises the lesson in terms of episodes and dialogic patterns. Baba teaches through a highly personalised, recursive sort of language “play” that engenders current attention while constantly evoking an ever-growing past and narrative building identity.

Trix’s assumption is that a description of a lesson

with Baba would shed most light on the murshid-talib relationship, whereas she was faced with the puzzle of how to view the relationship of murshid and talib in the context of analysing a lesson. Previous Islamic studies have preserved the poetry of murshids and certain biographical details but have tended to take for granted the process of their teaching. Previous interactional studies, such as those between interviewer and client, teacher and student, or doctor and patient, have also taken the relationships for granted. Other discourse studies have tended to fossilize transcriptions of interactions whereas in this case, if learning indeed took place, a developmental approach was necessary.

For scholars of discourse and interaction, the study contributes the central concept of linguistic convergence that operates not at the level of speech community, but rather at the level of dialogic encounter, and that occurs most often among people who have long interacted. For anthropologists and scholars of religious studies, the importance of oral interaction in the transmission of spiritual knowledge has long been appreciated, but the conceptual framework and methodology for its analysis have been lacking.

The methodological aspects of the book are certainly important and interesting. Without disregarding what linguists and discourse analysis specialists are indeed much more competent to recognize, I shall focus my discussion however onto the very content of the object of

her study, which is the meaning of the relations between talib and murshid, since her main assumption concerns exactly this relationship. In other words I would like to question to what extent her conceptual framework and methodology provide a better understanding of Bektashi religious conceptions in particular and of mystical and heterodox orders in general. In turn, this understanding could be conceptualised externally in terms of the societal, personal, and ritual meanings it presumes.

The foundation of the Bektashi and all Sufi orders is the system and relationship of master and disciple. In Bektashi milieu time is mostly spent making muhabet, which is talking with each other and chanting or reading nefes, the Bektashi spiritual hymns and poems. In this way, they learn how to be a talib 'one who seeks, who strives after', the name given to the follower, the aspirant or the disciple of a murshid, that is the master, the spiritual guide, or roughly the 'teacher'. In nefes, this 'breath of spirit', the feelings and devotion toward one's particular murshid are endlessly evoked and elaborated. Frances Trix believed the nefes could thus be seen as a particular Bektashi language of talib/murshid relationship. The Bektashis see the power of a nefes as an actualisation of the relationship with the murshid, for the inspiration to compose a nefes comes from one's own murshid.

Among Bektashis the importance of the talib and murshid relationship is overriding. I have had the opportunity to show elsewhere that among Albanians, the family name has often been derived from the name of the own's father or direct ancestor as well as of the village or town that the family came from, and how this feature became constituent for structuring the morphology of Albanian social structure.[1] But among Bektashis the next identity frame is also the name of one's murshid. In the Bektashi world of discourse, in parables and narratives, poetry and nefes, the centrality of the relationship with the murshid is the norm. The murshid himself, the master, is also a talib, a disciple, for each murshid is a talib of his own murshid (Trix p. 75).

Frances Trix, before becoming associate professor of anthropology at Wayne State University, had been a talib for twenty-five years, learning Bektashism if not aiming to become a Bektashi, from her own murshid. The basic analogy of her study evolved into the learning in the relationship of talib to murshid similar to the learning of a language, with language understood as personally linked games, the main game being the sharing of nefes, and the linkages of which have theological significance. In this sense, her study represents a rare experience in the

application of linguistic anthropology to the transmission of spiritual knowledge to oneself. Her statements are particularly interesting from both points of view, one of the talib learning spiritual knowledge from her own murshid, and one of the anthropologist interpreting this knowledge from her own scholarship.

One of the aspects of religion as a social system, especially in Christianity and Islam, is to be a mediating cultural system of representation between powerless earthly creatures and an all-powerful God located in the firmament. Mediation makes it possible for the heavenly divinity to intercede on behalf of the powerless humans on earth. The mediational structure may very well be hierarchical. The mediator is a human being, the priest or sacrificer for instance, acting as a representative of a secular congregation, who places himself on a higher plane than the latter but is in a position of inferiority with respect to the deity. The religious structure may just as well be of another type, and claim to be the negation of hierarchy of any sort. The initiative is entirely in the hands of the divinity, which manifests itself without any mediation, by dispensing the gifts of its grace on the faithful, with believers receiving direct, immediate inspiration. Charisma, or divine grace, touches them without the help of any intermediary, and is in no way affected by any ritual, more or less efficient, performed by a mediating priest. In this case, the intensity of religious life prevails over its extension, and salvation becomes a personal affair rather than a relationship with some grace-dispensing agency.

An important issue is the fact—shared by all apologists of Sufism—that the Albanian spiritual master repeatedly made the point for his talib, Frances Trix in this instance, that Sunni Islam considers the relationship of human beings to God as a direct one “without intermediary”. The critical message was that Bektashism, in contrast to orthodox Islam and Christianity, adheres strongly to the belief in intermediaries between humans and God, the murshid being such an intermediary. The build-up to this message was first a quick likening of Christianity with Sunni Islam, and an equally swift contrasting of these forms with Sufi Islam. The new understanding that emerged reinforced the message of the murshid being an intermediary, and more specifically an intercessor. Through many connections, by repeatedly telling and retelling narratives and adages, chanting nefes and making muhabet, the understanding of the message that the murshid is the intermediary between human beings and God is evoked, reformulated and memorably forged throughout Frances Trix's book (see for instance pp. 33,

69-70, 95, 120-125, 127, 131, 151). This in turn gives the talib an expanded understanding of the murshid, both as intercessor and as agent of inspiration.

I assume when linguists and anthropologists are analysing discourse and using ethnography, this is not only for the sake of an exclusive self-reflexive methodology. I consider indeed that the scope of anthropology as a discipline, be it linguistic or not, by using different kinds of research methods for writing and talking culture and cultural content is supposed to be after all a search of meaning. In this respect, before considering to what extent Frances Trix's methodology and statements could help for understanding Bektashism as a mystical, heterodox order within Islam, I think it is necessary to show to which model of religious structure could Bektashism be ascribed as an ideological and cultural system.

Bektachism essentially responded to the spiritual need for a non-conformist religious experience in which there was no room for a clear-cut separation between man and the divinity, such as exists in the orthodox Sunni dogma. It represents the demand for a pantheist approach and a 'warm' faith. When mystical union with God is not quite the goal sought, it is the cult of the miracle-working saints, living or dead, through worship of their tombs, which prevailed in their religious fervour.

Albanian Bektashi conceptions, in particular, would appear heterodox and heretical as much as for Sunni Islam than for Twelver Shiism as established in Iran, to whose tradition is often supposed to be related. The well-known nineteenth-century Albanian poet Naim Frashëri, for instance, in his *Bektashi Pages*,<sup>[2]</sup> even rejected the authority of the Koran, the sacred book of Islam. In perfect agreement with conceptions evolved in Bektashism, he explained that the Bektashis' book is their faith in the Universe, and especially in human beings, since religion is in their heart, and is not written anywhere, neither on any paper nor book.

The Bektashis are universal 'brothers'. They viewed men and women as equal, the most chaste being closest to perfection. Bektashis have accepted and initiated women as inner members since the beginning of the Order in central Anatolia more than seven hundred years ago. This acceptance of women has brought them criticism over the centuries and yet they have persisted in it. Frances Trix believed that her current acceptance as student of a Bektashi master was certainly facilitated by the long-standing precedent of female talibs (p. 149).

The Bektashis recognize no outside shape for the re-

ligion, they do not practise the five daily prayers, nor the ritual ablutions, they do not observe the fast of Ramadan and do not believe in the necessity of the pilgrimage in Mecca. They affirm, for instance, the importance of the Sunni injunction to pilgrimage but they understand true pilgrimage not as a physical journey to Mecca but rather as a spiritual journey to the heart (Trix p. 34). Besides, they sing in their nefes that "a true Moslem does not need a mosque" and that Arabic or Persian, the languages of the Prophet or the Imams, though especially intended for religious practice, "are not convenient" for them.<sup>[3]</sup>

In Bektashi conceptions, an analogy between human actions and the created world is re-established, but also the analogy between moral actions and a world that should be denied, because for all Reality (hakikat) there is no existence but the Truth (hakikat), which is in fact nothing else than God (al-Hakk). Therefore everything in the world is nothing else than God, even the created world, being only an appearance, does not exist. This "hidden" aspect of the created world seems to have pantheistic connotations, which are typical of the mainstream tradition in Bektashism.<sup>[4]</sup> God is everywhere, in every animate and inanimate being and his essence shows itself in all the creatures.

Bektashism has deepened the correspondences between visible and invisible worlds, as much as those between human beings (the microcosm) and the world (the macrocosm). There are correspondences between the natural and the supernatural, and the universe is structured in a hierarchy starting from heaven and coming down on earth. Bektashi tracts refer explicitly to the belief that the Divine is present in Man. Its signs are outwardly manifest in the shapes of a number of Arabic letters found in the human face and in the human body. In this way, Man is created in the best of forms, because the same letters are used to write down the Revelation. By locating the letters of Revelation and the signs of Zodiac in Man,<sup>[5]</sup> Bektashi teaching does not cast Man, however, as a microcosm reflecting the macrocosm, but rather presents the cosmos as a projection of Man. For Bektachis, the real believer should know that God is not either in the heavens, but inside the human heart: "God is me and I am God".<sup>[6]</sup>

The potential for perfection is present in every human being, since God is present in everyone. However, in order to reach the stage of the Perfect Man (insan-i kamil), to go through the Gateways of spiritual growth and to experience the ultimate Truth (hakikat) from inside,<sup>[7]</sup> one needs a guide, a spiritual master, namely the

murshid, who himself has reached the perfection stage of insan-i kamil.[8] In an extended Bektashi adage, it is asserted that a talib is one who “knows that he or she does not know” (Trix p. 86). That which he or she does not know refers of course to more than facts, for when Bektashis in general speak of knowledge, they mean spiritual knowledge - in coming closer to God. For Bektashis, each human being is a mosque and each human face is the face of perfection (vech-i kamil) of one’s murshid. In him the outer signs of perfection are matched by inner perfection. For this reason, Bektashis equal ritual prayer (namaz) with paying visits to one’s murshid.

Orthodox Islam in general is strictly monotheistic. But for the Bektashis, in particular, who clashed with official Islam at a very early date, one of the central beliefs is that the Imam Ali was a manifestation of the divine on earth. Ali, the son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad, is one of the first Muslims and the one to whom Shiites attribute the revelation of mystic understanding of the Koran. For Bektashis, beliefs of reincarnation (tenassuh) and of God’s manifestation in human form (tecelli) imply a belief in transformation and the multiplicity of forms. One of the divine manifestations, the Allah’s mazhar, the perfect reflection of God, is realised notably in Ali, who represents the totality of the divine essence, as an expression of the perfect, divine beauty.[9] The three letters of Ali’s name, which meet themselves in the face of every man, represent the shape of the face of God.

Ali is held to be the originator (shahib-i risala) of the Koran, while Muhammad is referred to as the mouthpiece (natiq-i risala) of Ali. A different way of formulating this relationship is that the exoteric (zahir) aspect of the divine came into the world with Mohammad, while in its esoteric (batin) aspect the divine is identical with Ali. In other words, Muhammad and Ali are both manifestations of the same divine reality. In this way, Allah, Muhammad and Ali form a sort of Trinity (referred to as the ucler) manifesting one and the same Truth (hakikat), and thought of as a miraculous unity (tawhid). In Bektashi liturgical objects and pictorial art, the trinity Allah-Muhammad-Ali is all-important. Ali is always depicted in a hierarchically organised divine triad, miraculously unified with the Prophet and Allah, the supreme God. Even in everyday speech, Muhammad and Ali are understood as the same manifestation of and as identical with the Divine, the ultimate Truth, the hakikat.[10]

The importance to the Bektashis of the hierarchical divine triad is also reflected, among other instances in the Albanian-American tekke of Michigan, in its being evi-

dently displayed on a banner in the large public meeting room of the tekke (Trix p. 105). The banner hangs prominently between the Albanian and American flags directly behind leader’s chair. On the banner are verses from the Koran, translated into Albanian and written in white letters. In the corners of the banner are four names: Allah, Muhammad, Ali, and Hadji Bektash. This contrasts with a common Sunni pattern and replicates the Bektashi chain of spiritual knowledge and therefore as an explicit keying and rejection of the Sunni pattern.

The Koran is the word of God corroborating the other revealed Books, just as the prophet Mohammad, the agent of the revelation, is the last of a series of messengers of God starting with Adam and including, among others, Abraham, Moses and Jesus, viewed as a prophet among others. For the Bektashis, all the Prophets and the Imams are reincarnations of Ali and one will understand that in certain contexts, notably in Christian environments, Jesus (Hasreti Isa) is equated to Ali.

>From her master Frances Trix learned among other things that in Bektashi conception there are explicit hierarchical series or chains (silsila) all connecting back to Cennabi Hakk, the term for God. The theological rationalisation is that “Cenabi Hakk could not always stay and guide humankind, so he sent the following people in his place: Cenabi Hakk

khalifa  
prophet  
veliler (saints)  
tarikats (Sufi Orders)  
murshid

” (Trix p. 102-103). But other hierarchical chains reveal even more specifically the hierarchy of spiritual revelation and hence of spiritual or supernatural powers of the saints. “The power to perform miracles comes through:

Cenabi Hakk  
Cebrail (Gabriel)  
Muhammad  
Ali  
the imams  
saint Hadji Bektash  
the murshid

” (Trix p. 103-104). The divine series are quasi-historical chains in that the prophets are understood to have ended with the coming of Muhammad, and the tarikats or Sufi Orders to appear much later. In mentioning Ali, the place of the mystic revelation, characteristic of the Bektashis, is specifically emphasised. As for the saints, “some are hidden, some are known” (Trix p. 103). In other words, they can be considered differently, according to the hier-

archical chains of spiritual revelation or power.

There is also an unbroken chain of talibs and murshids through which Bektashis connect themselves to the founder of the order, their patron saint Hadji Bektash. This unbroken chain of talibs and murshids continues the link from Hadji Bektash to earlier saints, to the imams, and back to Hussein, whose murshid was Ali, whose murshid was the Prophet Muhammad, whose murshid was the Angel Gabriel, and thus to God. Building on this continuity, Bektashis come into relation with God through devotion and obedience to their personal murshid. The murshid carries on with the guidance of individual talibs, but the relationship of talib to murshid is indeed a model of the relationship of human beings to God.

Frances Trix viewed both divine and historical chains connecting to God in Bektashi conception exactly as “a sort of logic in that its function is to display connections and thereby to legitimise the place of the murshid cosmologically” (p. 103). If God’s manifestation, the God’s *mazhar par excellence*, is Ali who shows himself under various forms, in Bektashi poetry and prose, numerous indications can be found testifying to the belief that the traditional founder of the Order was appeared as Ali. In other words, Hadji Bektash also was God in a different guise.

Coming back to the relationship between talib and murshid, in my view, this is particularly relevant for understanding Bektashi religious conceptions. Whereas for a talib the message of the murshid as an intermediary between humans and God is well assessed and clearly understood, how should the anthropologist understand the Bektashi’s conception of the relationship between humans and God: as mediated and hierarchical or as a direct, unmediated one? In other words, if there is any intermediary hierarchy, should it be found in the conceptualisation of the divinity or in the organisation of the worldly, human society?

To what extent does the murshid/talib relationship contribute to this understanding could indeed be shown through the very experience of Frances Trix herself as a talib. Her story, gracefully and humbly told, is a discourse ethnography of learning and a sociolinguistic illustration of mysticism, but above all it illuminates the process of an interpersonal encounter. Overall what is being passed on is not facts but a relationship and a communication, for the relationship and communication between seeker and master mirrors that of human and God.

Most Bektashi narratives, for instance, especially those with new, much more Sufi episodes, show a progression from a more limited orthodox understanding to the deeper Sufi understanding. In these narratives, the point is clearly made that “the murshid is the way through which the student reaches God” (Trix p. 121). In one of these narratives, the murshid commanded his talib to swim across the water with him, holding onto his collar and all the time saying *Pir Hakk!*, “the *Pir* (patron saint, here murshid) is the Truth”. The talib, however, showed his lack of trust in the murshid by reconsidering halfway across the water and calling out to God instead, at which point he began to drown. In his explanation, the master made clear that it was murshid’s place to call out to *Cenabi Hakk* (Bektashi term for God) for both of them; as for the talib, his place was to call out only to the murshid.

Normally in Bektashi world, “for a murshid to *speak for someone* does not mean he would put words in his mouth when speaking to other men, but implied *speaking to God for one*” (Trix p. 123). A Bektashi talib also learns that all that one *sees*, or *writes* in spiritual matters is *in-come* from God through one’s murshid. Especially *nefes* are such *in-come* from the murshid. In Bektashi terms, inspiration in poetry came *from the heart* - which is the seat of higher faculties of perception -and it is brought to the heart by God, *Cenabi Hakk*, or one’s murshid as intermediary (Trix p. 127).

When in these narratives the point is clearly made that “the murshid is the way through which the student reaches God”, this is because the murshid has already acquired the stage of the Perfect Man (*insan-i kamil*), in other words, the capacity to communicate directly with God, and the talib has not yet. God could respond to the murshid if called upon, but not yet to the talib. The talib is still a follower, though encouraged to pass through the gateways of ultimate Truth (*hakikat*), and in his or her turn, to become perfect and to reach his or her own union with God (*tawhid*). The murshid could speak to God for someone, -even though apparently he is acting for the talib as a simple “intercession” (Trix p. 123), -in the same way that all that one sees, or writes in spiritual matters is *in-come*, inspiration from God through one’s murshid. In other words, here too, the murshid seems to be not only a simple intermediary: “Before, I had understood it as the means to reach God, but now with the added example of *in-spiration* I could see that it meant to receive from God as well” (Trix p. 124, emphasis added).

The Sufi term generally translated ‘inspiration’, il-

ham, is in Bektashi usage near in meaning to personal 'revelation', and contrasts with exoteric impersonal prophetic revelation.[11] The esoteric knowledge that the Bektashi murshids possess has come to them, not by genealogical, but by spiritual progression. In fact, it came to them by a twofold action of God, by transmission from Muhammad, through a chain of elect masters, and also by direct inspiration from God.

In the same way, the experience of spiritual learning is achieved by means of the murshid as a communication process with the Bektashi spiritual knowledge. Had this process led to possession of the mystical gnosis (*marifat*), as normally expected in the very 'faithful' sense of the experience, the novice might have been sanctified as a potential saint, in a mystic union with God (*tawhid*). But the union, involving divine inspiration would not be possible without progressive communication through different conceptions of divinity split into a series of hierarchical emanations, the most accessible of which is in fact nobody else than one's own master.

Finally, for the talib the difference definitely lies in the presence of the murshid as the intermediary between humans and God in the case of Bektashism, while the relationship is seen as a direct one without intermediary in the case of orthodox Islam or Christianity. Frances Trix, as a talib, viewed well the relationship in this way. But Frances Trix, not any more as a talib but already as a confirmed anthropologist, did not have been able, however, to recognize a different meaning for her relationship as a talib. This concerns what anthropologists know as the danger of "going native", which refers to the possibility of becoming over-involved with the people being studied, and so losing the detachment that is essential to the role of the analyst.

In my view, for the anthropologist would be important to ask the question of difference between Bektashism and orthodox Islam and Christianity as concerned either with a hierarchical, intermediary organisational structure or with the presence of a direct, unmediated communication between humans and God through transmission of mystical gnosis from one's murshid in the case of Bektashism, and the absence of such a communication for orthodox Islam and Christianity.

At the end of the book is an epilogue, in which a famous murshid from the 13th century tells his talib story and "conveys in one page what I have taken many to suggest", wrote Trix (p. 147) very modestly indeed. In the same way that Frances Trix did, I think the story - well-known in Sufi milieux - worth retelling:

"It seems that one day Rumi [the talib] went to his murshid's house. But when he arrived, he found that Tabrizi [the murshid] had just left. Rumi quickly looked down the narrow streets and saw the coattails of his master as he turned into an alley. He followed his murshid. Yet whenever he got near, Tabrizi was just turning another corner in the twisting streets. Finally Tabrizi went into a house, and Rumi followed him in. But once inside he did not see his master anywhere, so he went up on the flat roof. But he did not see him on the roofs either. So he jumped off, and his murshid caught him in his arms." (told in Trix p. 158).

I argue the importance of the understanding of communication between humans and God lay in the fact that the hierarchical model of religious mediation corresponds to the dogma of orthodox faiths, whereas the model in which all hierarchies are denied, in their real embodiments, is closely linked to millenarian and mystical beliefs and to the development of heresies and heterodoxies, such as those related to Bektashism. The former model may well support an established, hierarchical power, whereas the latter corresponds to an oppressed or deprived minority, seeking justification of its revolt against the established authorities. According to this model, the establishment of a political hierarchy within human society goes hand in hand with the introjection of a unified conception of divinity, a pure monotheism within the theological system. On the other hand, a visible hierarchical conception of the divinity goes along with an egalitarian politics in human society. The conception of a relational equality, derived from the idea that people are equal in their relations with the divinity, is effectively present alongside an ideology of substantial egalitarianism among human beings.[12]

Broadly speaking, and aside from the peculiarities that may be accounted for by the political and economic systems of the countries in which they spread, the initial structures specific to heretic and heterodox movements remain rather indistinct. Their communities are suggestive of the early Christian groups of the first centuries, as described in the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles of Paul. Earlier Sufi and Bektashi groups had been linked by enthusiasm, common devotions, and methods of spiritual discipline, with the aim of stripping the soul and eliminating self to attain vision of Reality.[13] They were therefore integrated by spirit and aim rather than by any formal organisation, and were in fact very loose organisations. In this way, Bektashism, as early Sufism, was a subjective expression of personal religion in relation to the expression of religion as a communal matter.

It was an assertion of a person's right to pursue a life of contemplation, seeking contact with the source of being and reality, against institutionalised religion as based on authority.

Viewed from this angle, the structure of these religious groups corresponds more or less to the type of religious organisation conventionally known as charismatic groups. They are inspired by the ideal of a community of the spiritually pure gifted with graces and powers that knowledge is supposed to procure, and called upon to dispense the benefits around them. A dividing line splits followers into two classes, depending on whether they are capable or worthy of receiving some or all of the gifts of grace and spirit, with some people having acquired them and possessing them fully, while others aspire to partake of them, or are just at the beginnings.

Significantly enough, as time went by, the organisational system of the Bektashi Order was increasingly replaced by another one, more sophisticated and much more institutional and hierarchical. The distinction between talibs and murshids was maintained, but both simply became the last two ranks in a hierarchy then containing a number of other additional grades. In other words, other classes were added to the two previously existing ones, by superposition, or more accurately, an order with two classes was replaced by a much more complex one.

Out of the diverse heritages of heterodox Islamic tendencies and Christian Anatolian and Turkish superstitions, the Bektashi order came very nebulous at first. It became a hierarchical institution, highly organized and centralized, yet parochial, providing a village religion, a system of lodges, and a link with the powerful military corps of Janissaries. The officials of the order approached nearer to a clergy class than any other in Islam, whilst the tekke was the equivalent of the local church. The murshid ceased to teach directly but delegated authority both to teach and initiate to representatives (khalifa). A special cult surrounded the murshid's person, associated with the power emanating from the founder-saint of the order.

A new aura emanates now from the murshid as a protégé (wali) of God, which eventually, in this stage, was to become belief in his mediumship and intercessory status with God. The Bektashi life of recollection and meditation now becomes increasingly associated with a line of ascription, which bestowed the order, its formulae and symbols, as from the master and guided all disciples along his Way in his name. The change, as in early

Sufism, came with development of the collegium pietatis into a collegium initiati whose members ascribed themselves to their initiator and his spiritual ancestry, and were prepared to follow his Way and transmit it themselves to future generations.

The transformation of Sufi companionships into initiatory colleges began with the Sunni triumphs over Shi'ite dynasties, which coincided with the foundation of the Ottoman Empire.[14] The Bektashism, in the peak of its hallmark days during the seventeenth century, maintaining a strong central organization, with affiliated village groups limited to Anatolia and its European provinces, even claimed to be a Sunni order,[15] though in fact very unorthodox and considered as a Shi'ite order due to its reverence for the House of Ali. One consequence of this association with the Janissaries and so with Ottoman authority was that the Bektashis were rarely attacked on grounds of doctrine or innovations. In turn, the officials of the order formed clearly their loyalty to the Sunna of the Prophet as a necessary stage in their code of discipline.

In other words, the final stage of the hierarchical and centralised organization coincides with the establishment of orthodox religious and political power. The same process was reiterated in Albania when the organisational structure of Bektashism, due once again to an explicit political position, reached a very peculiar expression, not only in terminological, local terms but also in a more sophisticated and clear-cut hierarchy than in the Ottoman context, as specialists show by abundant documentary evidence.[16]

During the period of independent Albania, representatives of the hierarchy of the Albanian Bektashi clergy expressed themselves against assertions that often tend to consider the order of Bektashis as a doctrine of strong syncretism, diverging from orthodox Sunni Islam much more than the other orders. They underlined that Bektashism is "inside (Sunni) Islam" and, sometimes, that it is even the "real Islam", as specialists have given documentary evidence,[17] without necessarily explaining—neither indeed understanding at all—that a deep evolution had been already achieved, not only in organisational and political structures, but also in theological and religious conceptions.

However, when linguists and anthropologists are analysing discourse and using ethnography, I wonder myself if it were only for the sake of an exclusive self-reflexive methodology and discoursing verbal flow. Verbal and poetic interaction is highly valued among Bek-

tashis and among Albanians. To paraphrase a pair of Bektashi couplets, brought up by Trix (p. 93), I wonder myself, are they in search of meaning or are they not, are they writing and talking culture or are they not?

#### Notes

[\*]. This review is a further elaboration of an earlier version which appeared in *The Linguist List* vol-12-1315. <http://www.linguistlist.org/issues/12/12-1315.html>.

[1]. See Doja, Albert. 1998. Inscription patronymique et mythologie de fondation: Éléments d'analyse pour une généalogie des noms de personne chez les Albanais. *Anthropos. International Review of Anthropology and Linguistics* 93 (1-3), 155-172; Doja, Albert. 1999. Morphologie traditionnelle de la société albanaise. *Social anthropology. Journal of the European Association of Social Anthropologists* 7 (1), 37-55.

[2]. Published in English translation by Hasluck, Frederick W. 1929. *Christianity and Islam under the Sultans*. (ed.) M.M.H. Hasluck. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 552-563. [Reprint New York: Octagon Books, 1973].

[3]. Mélikoff, Irène. 1982. L'islam hétérodoxe en Anatolie: non-conformisme - syncrétisme - gnose. *Turcica* 14, 142-154. (see p. 151-152).

[4]. Birge, John K. 1937. *The Bektashi order of dervishes*. London: Luzac Oriental & Hartford Seminary Press, 288-291. [Revised, facsimile 1994].

[5]. *Ibid.*, 282.

[6]. Mélikoff, 150.

[7]. Birge, 102-103.

[8]. *Ibid.*, 96-97.

[9]. See Mélikoff.

[10]. For details, see DeJong, Frederick. 1989. The iconography of Bektashism: a survey of themes and symbolism in clerical costume, liturgical objects and pictorial art. *Manuscripts of the Middle East* 4, 7-29.

[11]. Trimingham, J. Spencer. 1971. *The Sufi orders in Islam*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 145. [Reprint, 1998].

[12]. For a developed account, see Doja, Albert. 2000. Histoire et dialectique des idéologies et significations religieuses. *European Legacy. Journal of the International Society for the Study of European Ideas* 5 (5), 663-686.

[13]. Trimingham, 13.

[14]. *Ibid.*, 67-104.

[15]. *Ibid.*, 80.

[16]. See Clayer, Nathalie. 1990. *L'Albanie, pays des derviches: les ordres mystiques musulmans en Albanie à l'époque post-ottomane, 1912-1967* (Balkanologische Veröffentlichungen, 17). Berlin/Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 47-67.

[17]. *Ibid.*, 77-78.

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