

## The Alid Iconography between Bektashi Claiming and Popular Piety in Contemporary Albania

Gianfranco Bria and Gustavo Mayerà

In this work, we analysed the intertwining of social transformations and evolution of lived religion through the kaleidoscope of Alid iconographic worship in a post-socialist context such as Albania. In this framework, the Bektashi community restored and renewed Alid iconography, at first supported by transnational Iranian and Alevi networks, in order to hold social and political legitimation within the fragmented religious field. The embodying experiences of iconographic worship

could shape the cognitive perceptions and moral dispositions of believers who partly play, critically and individually, their own religiosity. Finally, the spread of the icons seems to indicate a marketization of religious piety and a surfacing of public Islam, promoted by the Bektashiyya, in order to renegotiate power relations within Albanian society.

**Keywords:** Islam; Albania; Bektashiyya; Sufism; Iconography

“I keep this image always with me, to bring me luck.”  
(Interview with Ramisha).<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

This sentence synthetically expresses the intertwined factors and varied discourses about the veneration of Islamic Alid icons in contemporary Albania. The iconographic cult of some figures related to Alid tradition seems to be absolutely spontaneous and integrated within the religious experience as an integral part of the living religions in Albania.

In recent time, several works have analysed the institutional and political mutations of Balkan Islam in the post-Communist era (Elbasani 2; Bougarel and Clayer 15). Less attention has been dedicated to the study of everyday-life Islamic transformations (Duijzings 157). Starting from this point, this work analysed the iconographic worship at the local and supra-local levels where it takes on several social and political connotations, composed within different discursive fields. This study is based on information collected during a year of ethnographic research within the Albanian mystical networks in 2014.<sup>2</sup> The general aim is to examine the intertwining of the social and cultural transformations with different religious traditions, native or foreign, that are thus directly detectable in

the evolution of the religious worship – such as Alid iconography – in public and private spaces. Considering this, we will focus exclusively on the worship of Islamic icons related to the Alid tradition promoted by the Bektashi community in contemporary Albania. By Alid iconography we mean “the feeling or expression of reverence and adoration for the figures of ‘Alī bin Abī Ṭālib<sup>3</sup> and his descendants Ḥusayn, Ḥassan and all Shi’a Imams”. Although this work concerns Islam in particular, it is important to note that Albania is a multi-confessional country; according to the last census, conducted in 2011, the makeup of the country was 60% Muslim, 10% Catholic, and 7% Orthodox (IPSOS).<sup>4</sup>

The first goal of this paper is to analyse the material and discursive strategies produced by Bektashi community and the transnational frame of this phenomenon related to the networking strategies of some foreign actors, Iran and Turkish Alevis, and by Bektashis. The paper will then analyse the counter-narrative generated by religious authorities about the “orthodox cult of icons” to contribute actively to the configuration of the power landscape that shapes and fragments the religious field (Salvatore 91). Later, we will focus on the narratives intertwining with worship diversification and subjective embodied experiences by believers

This paper partly follows the theoretical approach of Talal Asad on the discursive nature of the Islamic tradition (Asad 14). From this contemporary standpoint, this work considers that the internalisation of public meaning, cognitive categories and recognised norms are configured by the worship *embodying* (Csordas 11) that develops the *habitus* (Bourdieu 124) and the practical-emotional dispositions of the believers’ “sense of self” (Pinto 104).

#### **Albanian Backgrounds: Secularisation and Fragmented Religious Field**

During the communist period that ended in 1990, the religious field underwent a strong sclerosis<sup>5</sup>: through a control and monitoring system, the Communist regime banned religious worship, which could only be practised clandestinely (Clayer, “Saints” 36). After the Communist regime collapsed, the reconstruction of religious worship was carried out to ensure support and legitimacy for the new post-communist political course (Clayer, “God” 279). However, post-socialist Albanian society was partially transformed: the secularisation of society from 1967 to 1990 – the period of the religion ban – showed its effects in the decline of religious practice (Clayer and Bougarel

228). and exaltation of the ecumenical and multi-faith and secular character of the Albanian civil religion (Sulstarova 28). The role of religion was politically marginal in the public sphere; the atheist constitution and the secular/atheist ideological background avoided the presence of religious authorities within state apparatuses. The state, through its bureaucratic apparatus built during communist times, continued to monitor and control Albanian society (Elbasani and Roy 461). However, this did not prevent some politicians from exploiting religion for their own electoral and geopolitical goals (Lakshman-Lepain 156). The collapse of the regime led to several mutations, such as the appearance of a competitive political system, a rapid urbanization of the Tirana district and the opening of the global space after years of isolationism. The secularisation legacy and religious pluralism favoured a critical individualistic attitude of believers towards the institutional religions.

In this mutable and changeable context, several actors contributed to the reconstruction of religious worship according to a triple dynamic (Clayer, “God” 290). Firstly, the state-supported religious authorities *from above*; secondly, several foreign religious actors *from outside* – Saudi Arabia, Syria and Iran – tried to proselytize their own faith; thirdly, the popula-

tion *from below*, especially in peripheral areas, produced locally and individually a relatively strong need for religiosity.

The overlapping of secular/religious, individual/institutional and domestic/ foreign instances *fragmented* the religious field (Elbasani and Roy 462) that was temporarily *formatted* by national-secular ideology. This double dynamic created a strong competition between different official and unofficial actors who implement different strategies of self-legitimation and de-legitimation. Sometimes these strategies grasp the offer of religious goods such as practices or items that are critically *consumed* by believers who subjectively *choose* their own be-in-the-world. Contemporarily, it contributes to frame and embody moral disposition, corporal technique and cognitive schema by the believers-customers. To understand this double dynamic, this work analyses how the Bektashi community reconstructed the iconographic worship of the Prophet's family, in order to legitimise its religious and political authority within post-socialist Albanian society.

### The Alid Iconography: Post-socialist Revival and Customizing Spread

The Bektashiyya, treated administratively as a *ṭarīqa* (sufi order), was one of the largest Sufi brotherhoods in the Ottoman imperial territory, due in part to the symbiotic bond with the Janissaries. The founder of the order was Hajji Bektashi (1209-1271),<sup>6</sup> considered a descendant of Musa al-Kazim<sup>7</sup> (Melikoff 58). Nevertheless, historical information about Bektashi origins is often fragmented or unclear (De Jong 7). The suppression of the Janissary order<sup>8</sup> in 1826 weakened the Bektashi presence in Ottoman territory. A few decades later, the Bektashiyya had a moderate revival mainly concentrated in the Balkan Peninsula.

At the turn of the twentieth century, the Bektashiyya played an active role in the construction of the Albanian separatist project; several Bektashi *babas*<sup>9</sup> encouraged the spread of the Albanian language and books in the national language (Clayer, "Bektachisme" 281). By integrating nationalism with its doctrine and participating in national liberation movements, the Albanian Bektashiyya had a strong expansion between 1878 and 1912. The number of *tekke*<sup>10</sup> doubled from twenty to over fifty, mostly located in the south of the country (Clayer, "Bektachisme" 281).

This position assumed by Bektashis contributed to the forging of the ecumenical and laic character of the Albanian nation that never held Islam as the official religion, despite being a Muslim majority - 70% versus 20% Christian Orthodox and 10% Christian Catholic (Clayer, *Origines* 413). The matter was to legitimize the presence of a predominantly Muslim nation in Europe, different from the Turkish nation, and to allow the establishment of an Albanian state after the fall of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>11</sup> Consequently, this brotherhood acquired a specific place on the religious and political scene in Albania: it became *de facto* a religious community apart (Clayer, *Origines* 413).

The symbiosis with the Albanian nation marginally influenced Bektashi beliefs, even the iconographic worship that was widespread in several Bektashi branches within the imperial territory.<sup>12</sup> As de Jong quoted, the Alid iconography is a feature of Bektashi tradition:

One of the central dogmas in Bektashism is that the Imam 'Alī was a manifestation of the Divine on earth [...] the images (of Ahl el-Bayt) epitomize the central elements of Bektashi teaching. They confront the Bektashi with some of the essentials of Bektashi belief. Thus, these symbols derive their force from their feedback to this belief, i.e.

they are important since they stand for what is important in the Bektashi belief-system which, in its turn, retains its importance by dint of the force of the symbol (9).

In many senses, the Bektashi iconography embodies the heart of its creed. The relationship between icons and beliefs is dualistic: the icons draw their legitimacy from the Bektashi beliefs, but they in turn reinforce beliefs. As a result, the iconography is characterized by Sufi, Alid and Hurufi elements of the Bektashi order (Birge 88).<sup>13</sup> According to de Jong's study, these icons are basically divided into three categories: purely figurative, purely calligraphic and finally both calligraphic and figurative compositions. Many images were formed by two sides that symbolize the division between *bāṭin* (the esoteric) of the Divine embodied by 'Ali and the exoteric of *zāhir* (the Divine) embodied by Muhammed that are both the manifestation of the same Divine Reality (de Jong 9).

In this way, Allah, 'Ali and Muhammed represent a Trinity manifesting the same and ultimate *ḥaqīqa* (truth); it follows that the cult of 'Ali, real deity, was presented by many images or calligraphic works that express his union with Allah and Muhammed (Bektashi trinity). In addition to the transformation of 'Ali into a lion, dif-

ferent images represent his famous sword, *dhū al-fiqār*, with two points that symbolizes his supreme power. Over the anthropomorphic cult of 'Ali, Bektashi icons represent the Twelve Imams and Fatima in calligraphic or figurative form. Imam Husayn assumes a certain pre-eminence as a martyr in Karbala; the colour green, used as background in different icons, symbolizes his martyrdom. In addition to the Prophet's family, the Bektashi icons depict their saint epitome, Hajji Bektashi, often in the form of a golden lion (de Jong 11.).

According to interviews with some Bektashi *babas*<sup>14</sup> and surveys in the field, the Alid iconographies were quite widespread among Bektashi networks in inter-war Albania. Moreover, the iconographic worship seemed to spread in the Balkans, as demonstrated by the study of de Jong, who found several icons in the former Yugoslavia and Greece dating back to the early 1900s.

Following the interview with some old Albanian dervishes,<sup>15</sup> it appears probable that the iconographic worship was spread not only in Bektashi courts (Interview with Agroni; Hasani). The Alid cult, not merely iconographic, could be present in other Sufi orders that spread<sup>16</sup> in post-Ottoman Albania, such as the Rifa'iyya, the Sa'diyya, the Qadiriyya, the Mevleliyya and different

branches of the Halvetiyya.<sup>17</sup> Unfortunately, at the moment we do not have empirical proof on this specific topic because during the Communist regime, many icons and religious leaders were destroyed.<sup>18</sup>

After the end of the communist period and of the religion ban, Bektashism was rebuilt primarily around the memory of the community, which tried to reorganize through its leaders (Clayer, "L'Islam Balkanique" 38). The remains and memories of old Bektashi *babas* were exhumed, while several sacred sites were reopened. In addition, religious legitimacy was revived by the demand of sanctity by local populations (Clayer, "L'Islam Balkanique" 38). This revival also included the reconstruction of religious practices, including iconographic worship.

However, the community lacked the material and economic means to restore the icons destroyed during communist times. A decisive help came from the Iranian and Turkish Alevi<sup>19</sup> networks. From 1995-1996, the contact with Shi'a missionaries, who shared the common beliefs between the Shi'i and the Bektashis, provided Shi'a literature to Bektashi leaders (Clayer). The Iranian support was linked to a governmental expansion strategy of political and economic power in the Balkan area (Lakshman-Lepain 147). Offering support to Bektashi post-socialist revivalism, Alevi

tried to evolve from a locally invisible to a transnationally visible belief community, heightening their symbolic and political weight in post-Ottoman space (Zihr 1760). These bilateral relations involved the circulation of several images dedicated to the veneration of 'Ali, Husayn and the Twelve Imams; in the mid-nineties, several icons of the Prophet's family came from Iran and Turkey (see fig. 3). The formation of these transnational networks is one of the most important transformations compared to the post-Ottoman period that affected Sufism in the Balkans (Raudevere 2). It contributed to the legitimation of authority and even the practical and doctrinal corpus of many Islamic mystical communities (Henig 910).

In the case of Bektashis iconographies, the Shi'a and Alevi icons placed inside the *tekke* generated a partial renewal of iconographic worship. From one side, the main subjects were the same as in pre-communist time: the characters of 'Ali, Husayn, Hajji Baktash and the Twelve Imams depicted or simply written in Arabic or Turkish language (see fig. 1 and fig. 3). On the other side, these new icons were different: the serial printing techniques improved the quality of the images and expanded the number of copies available. The new printing media *renewed* the Bektashi iconography; images were more

numerous, more accurate and more accessible. The spread of these icons did not exclusively involve Bektashism, but also the Albanian Sufi networks: several Alid icons were purchased to adorn the sacred sites of the Rifā'iyya, Halvetiyya and Qadiriyya orders<sup>20</sup> (see for example fig. 3). A further renewing boost of the iconographic cult occurred at the turn of 21<sup>st</sup> century, when the Bektashi community decided to gradually organize the fabrication and diffusion of the icons by themselves. Most of the images taken by the Bektashiyya were inspired by Shiite iconographies, which were already widespread in Albania. However, this time the icons of the Prophet's family were joined by some prominent *babas* portrayed as fathers of the Albanian homeland. The *sanctification* and *iconisation* of these Bektashi figures, such as Naim Frashëri,<sup>21</sup> aimed to promote an intellectual and nationalist identity looking for legitimisation in the post-communist religious space. The Albanian language was used in these gadgets to demonstrate the alliance with the national identity (see fig. 2).

Moreover, this new strategy caused an iconographic renewal that concerned not only frames and portraits, but various objects, such as pens, pins, and pocket images. New icons did not replace the earlier ones, which still continue to exist,

but increased the iconographic presence in the religious field. Several images, printed by local manufacturers in the Tirana industrial area,<sup>22</sup> were spread in Bektashi holy centres, religious shops and libraries in Albania, and even in Macedonia and Kosovo, where Alid iconographic worship is also common among the Sufi brotherhood.<sup>23</sup> It promoted the emergence of local and even transnational distribution networks that gave undeniable economic benefit to the Bektashi community.

This iconographic renewal corresponds to the Bektashi looking for political accreditation and religious legitimacy within Albanian society. Mixing traditional religious elements, nationalism and progressivism, the community tried to approach different parts of Albanian society. On the one hand, the Bektashis sought to keep exercising the forms of traditional religiosity, reorganizing pilgrimages<sup>24</sup> and offering spiritual and social support to local populations; on the other hand, a substantial part – not everyone<sup>25</sup> – of the Bektashi clergy proposed the implementation of some rationalists and nationalist elements to involve the highly educated young people and the cultural-political elite of urban zones. In this way, Bektashism tried to boast a monopoly on Albanian mysticism and simultaneously be a third

religious way, compared to Islam and Christianity: a way more evolved, according to a rational-positivist perspective, more democratic and intrinsically tolerant.<sup>26</sup> In this way, the Bektashi community attempted to claim the status of an independent religious community recognized by the Albanian state, as it had been during the interwar period.<sup>27</sup>

However, the iconographic impulse by Bektashis led to counter-narratives by other Islamic authorities about their correctness within the Albanian religious field. The Islamic Community of Albania (KMSH) distanced itself from the Alid iconography promoted by Bektashis, but basically tolerates its worship because „everyone should be free to practice the religion of his choice“ (Endresen 224). KMSH is government-supported and encompasses, under its organisational umbrella, the main madrasa and mosques of the country. Moderation and tolerance are the fundamental principles of its Islam that are traditionally Albanian-rooted (Endresen 224). However, while not directly delegitimizing the narratives of the Bektashi, the KMSH find a legitimacy space through tolerance and affirmation of freedom of worship according to the surah of the Qur‘ān (2: 256; 109: 6).

In contrast, the League of Imams (LI) linked to scriptural Islamic interpretation

(Endresen 231) strongly opposes the use and dissemination of Alid icons, considering them “blasphemous” and contrary to the “original and true principles” of Islam. The LI is composed of clerics who studied in some Islamic religious institutions of Saudi Arabia and Syria and who were then expelled from KMSH due to being considered fundamentalists and fanatics (Endresen 231). For the LI, the only acceptable religious models are the Prophet and his companions, and any other figure is blasphemous, as is the use of any type of image:

Bektashis use the icons because they are politicians, nothing to do with the religion. They are against the teachings of the Prophet [...] these pictures cannot be used in Islam. It's haram!!! (Interview with Samiin).<sup>28</sup>

The Sufi brotherhoods in Albania, the Rifā‘iyya, the Halvetiyya, the Qadiriyya and the Sa‘diyya, maintained a rather ambivalent attitude toward Bektashi icons. Some shaykhs, such as Sheh Hajdari of Rifā‘i in Tropoja, do not want to adopt the Bektashi icons and criticise their aspirations. Although sharing the Alid worship, the Rifā‘iyya in Tropoja assert their distinct identity from Sufi Sunni Islam and from Bektashis:

the Bektashiyya is a *tariqa* like us in all [...] only in Albania it is a religious

sect, but just for politics and economic advantages [...] The worship of Alid icons belongs to all brotherhood, not even Bektashiyya. (Interview with Sheh Hajdari).<sup>29</sup>

Other shaykhs instead fall under the institutional umbrella of KMSH and respect the positions of Bektashis, carefully using their icons. For Sheh ‘Ali Pazari who led the Halveti Center in Tirana under the KMSH umbrella:

They became a religious sect [...] they are free to do so. It's right; they are different than us (Halveti brotherhood). They are free to pray to those who want. (Interview Sheh Ali Pazari).<sup>30</sup>

Some shaykhs decided to join the Bektashi community and Iranian embassy. For example, Sheh Qemaludin Reka of Rifā‘iyya in Tirana stated:

The Bektashi are our friends [...] we are all sons of Ahl el-Bayt! The Alid way is the best! (Interview with Sheh Qemaludin Reka).<sup>31</sup>

Nevertheless, new icons made and traded by the Bektashi community are often spread not only among the Bektashi but are also used by other brotherhoods. Images of ‘Ali, Husayn and the Twelve Imams are present in several Sufi lodges and graves, while dervishes usually buy icons for their homes and gadgets to wear. The narrations and counter-narrations

towards Bektashi iconographies resulted from the presence of a conflictual and fragmented religious arena; each actor mobilises different strategies of self-legitimation or de-legitimation to validate its authority. In fact, they choose whether to criticize or support Bektashi iconographies according to their different strategies of legitimation concerning both, internal and external factors or institutional and personal elements, like religious charisma.

#### Embodied and lived icons

In many ways, the confrontation between these religious authorities seems to be detached from the faithful who choose critically and individually how to express their religiosity. The main iconographic users are the believers that obtain the icons to satisfy their individual religious and sacred needs. For many reasons, Bektashis could intercept the contingent, individualized and extemporaneous religiosity of the faithful. On the other hand, by spreading their icons, the Bektashis sought to shape popular piety to receive religious and social legitimacy within Albanian society. In this sense, the iconographic renewal contributed to *customize* and *format* the Albanian religious field

framing religious behaviours by believers-customers. Bektashis seem to use these images as *consumer-products* to satisfy the religious needs of the faithful that use the icons for different reasons: requests for money, luck or health. In this sense, the icons could represent *fast-items* that are rapid to use and easy to find within the religious market.

The faithful who obtain the icons do not necessarily have detailed knowledge of 'Ali, Husayn and the Twelve Imams and the history associated with them; they focus more on their healing and merciful influence. They are not necessarily Bektashi or even have an Islamic-familiar background; their confessional membership seems to be extremely varied, while their social extraction is also very heterogeneous. These faithful seem to be relatively occasional consumers of icons. In this sense, the veneration of icons could intercept individualised religious instances by believers who can express their religiosity even in a private space according to their contingent requirements and needs.

However, the rapid use/consummation of snapshots and the icons frames cognitive behaviours and emotional perceptions. For the faithful, the icons are a tactile visual and material device that emits beneficial power and reconnects the *baraka* (divine blessing) of the saint wherever and when-

ever. The impact and the visual perception of the icons modulate the believers' semantic interpretation. Some aspects, such as scratches and tears on the face of Husayn focus the mercy and admirations of the faithful. The dreams are the privileged visionary experiences that seem to express these blessing aspects:

I dreamed [of] H̄usayn telling me to be patient, that my husband would find a job soon [...] He got off his horse and gave me some coins in my hands. [...] Later my husband got a job. We received a miracle. (Interview with Sabura).<sup>32</sup>

I bought these images to keep here with me [...] I live in Italy; a year ago, I returned to Tirana and bought a little picture in a kiosk in the street before taking an exam. Before I dreamed he (Ali') gave me a pat on the cheek [...] He made me well. Later, I bought a badge that I always keep in my bag; I would not want the good luck to go away! (Interview with Nada).<sup>33</sup>

These experiences are perceived as authentic and contribute to *legitimising* the iconography as a *correct* linking-divine worship. It forges the religious behaviour and shapes living religion; the icons have become one of the main ways

to link the human being to the divine. This embodying experience produces cumulative effects in the construction of moral disposition and a sense of self of the believers. 'Ali and Husayn are represented as figures that are merciful and righteous; pious models forged by embodying experiences of the believers that fix solidarity-community webs between the actors. These networks share a morality formed by the symbolic capital of Bektashism, based on ecumenical, progressive and neo-spiritual values. The slogan "Bektashism supports religious harmony and tolerance" is the most widely shared quote of many believers.<sup>34</sup>

The faithful believe that Bektashi-made icons can protect and sanctify their bodies and homes. When the icon is a baba gift, its beneficial effect cumulates with the sanctity of the donor. In this way, the iconographic miraculous effects not only come from the magic powers of the characters portrayed, but also from the hands of the giver. As a gift from *Baba*, the icons embodied his sacred power (*baraka*):

The Baba's touch has magical benefits; even his breath can make good or heal. (Interview with Agron).<sup>35</sup>

This model of holiness in Albania is defined using the name *njeri i mire* (holy man) and takes on a multi-faith character i.e. not limited to Sufism. The *Baba's* holy

body is perceived as an extension of the ambience of divinely inspired love (Werbner and Hasu 6); his touch gives the opportunity to enjoy the beneficial and miraculous effects of his divine transcendence. Even the objects that come in contact with his body absorb his magical powers:

A Baba gave me these pictures, telling me to pray [to] them to renew his blessing [...] I keep some images with me. My children do it too. Holiness can constantly protect us. (Interview with Feriha).<sup>36</sup>

Through iconography, this model of traditional holiness is transformed and spread through modern techniques of dissemination. The large-scale production of images and objects provides the opportunity to more easily spread the Bektashi holiness. The beneficial influence is not only obtained through the life or death of saint people (shaykhs, priests), but also through icons that become part of the Albanians' lived religion.

However, it would be wrong to think that believers are merely passive actors. Their embodying experiences contribute to setting the normative and semiotic elements of the worship. For example, in the mausoleums and tombs, they deposit the photos of people to ask for beatification and healing for them (see fig. 1):

I leave this picture so that the Holy [one can] bless my daughter<sup>37</sup> said an old woman at the Bektashi grave of Sari Saltik<sup>38</sup> in Krujë. This practice indicates the believers' roles in shaping worship through their experiences. It shows that the believers are active agents in the establishment and restructuring of religious worship detached from the narratives implemented by the Bektashi establishment.

### Conclusions

The case of Alid iconography would indicate a public counter-return of spiritual piety (Casanova 14), after the secularisation by the Communist regime. In some contexts, Sufism, or religious esotericism in general, seems to be isolated in a so-called escape to "the realm of private religious conscience" due to the public space domination by nationalistic projects and secular institutions (Heck 3). In Albania, the fragmented and competitive religious space encouraged the emersion of "public Islam", which concerns the intertwining of Islam with the political process (Salvatore 91). The aim of Bektashism is to find a space in the public sphere of thought, renegotiating the relationships of power and co-opting the national-ecumenical and secular ideology. From this point of view, iconography has a public



relevance: its daily experiences embody semantic values and practical dispositions that would affect the social and political legitimation of the Bektashi community. Simultaneously, religious piety seems to be touted as an individual piety product.

Iconography meets the religious needs of the faithful and contributes to customize the sacred within the global-local religious market.





Figure 1: This portrait was found in the Bektashi Headquarters in Tirana. It portrays various images of 'Ali, Abbas and Husayn according to a Shiite iconography. Husayn's is pictured on a horseback and pierced by some arrows, which recalls his martyrdom at Karbala. In the lower right there is a photo of a baby - in Albania, it is common to leave pictures of people at gravesites for blessing. Courtesy of the authors, Albania, 2014.

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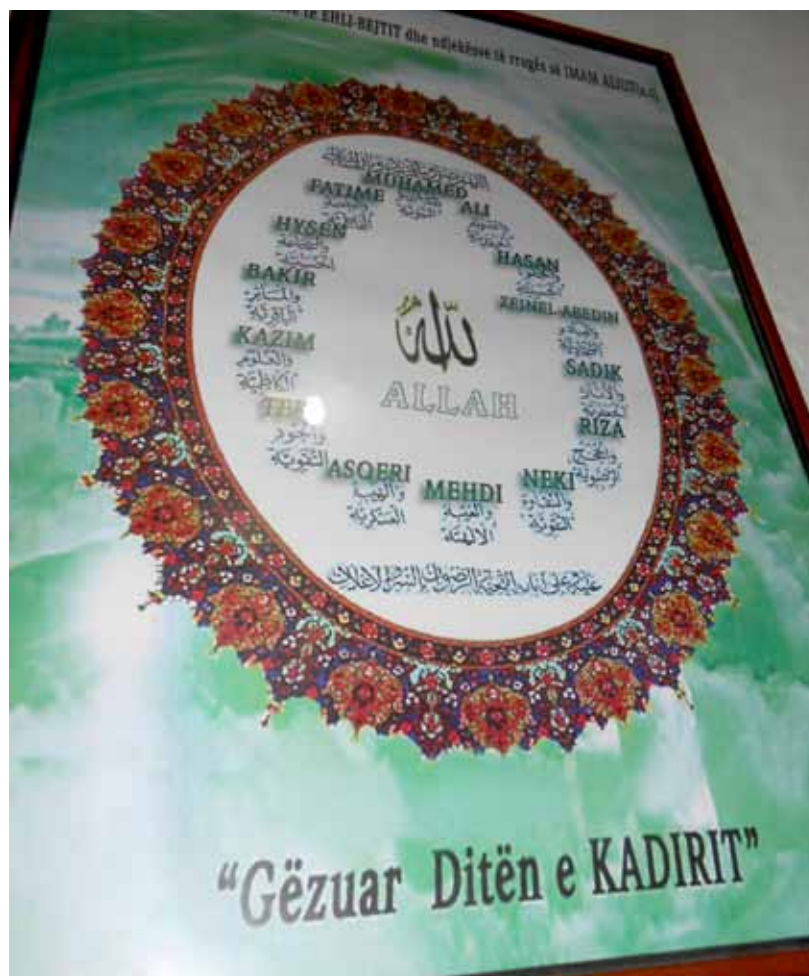


Figure 2: This frame was found in a Bektashi tekke in Gjakastër, Southern Albania. This frame was produced by Bektashi community for Musa, the Baba of the center. It shows the names of the Twelve Imams, Muhammed and Fatima in Albanian and in Arabic. During the ethnographic survey in Albania, this image was found also in several Sufi lodges, such as Halveityya in Tirana. Within the frame is printed in Albanian: “To all the lovers of the Prophet’s Family and followers of ‘Alī Way” and “Good Day of Laylat al-Qadr (Night of Destiny)”. Courtesy of the authors, Albania, 2014.

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Figure 3: According to dialogue with Hasani, the shaykh of the center in Mallakstër, this frame comes from Alevi Turkish networks. It shows the images of the Twelve Imams and their names in Turkish. Under the Bektashi frame, there are the pictures of several shaykhs belonging to the Halvetiyya in Albania. Courtesy of the authors, Albania, 2014.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Ramisha is a 60 years old woman in Kavaja, in September 2014.

<sup>2</sup> Gianfranco Bria's Ph.D. research focused on a Sufi revival in post-communist Albania. This one year research adopted an ethnographic method based on observing participation of daily life of Albania dervishes, including ritual and practices.

<sup>3</sup> The Prophet, his cousin and son-in-law 'Ali, his daughter Fatima, his grandchildren Hasan and Husayn and their direct descendants and successors, the Imam, are certainly a peculiar framework in the Shi'ism. However, the function of these figures is characterized by a number of peculiarities that have their origin in the sacred story and in the doctrine of all forms of Alidism. These characteristics have favored the rise over the centuries of political ideology and even artistic or religious expressions, such as the iconography of this family within the Islamic world. Probably, the original confessional fluidity between Shiism and Sunnism (crystallized only in the Safavid era) shaped an inherent common presence of some elements of Alid worship among the mystical movements borne or formed in Anatolian-Iranian area. See Bausani, Alessandro. *Persia religiosa. Da Zaratustra a Bahá'u'lláh*. Edizioni Lionello Giordano, 1998.

<sup>4</sup> These percentages have been widely criticized and are still a sensitive topic. For more information see Endresen, C. "Status report Albania 100 years." *Strategies of symbolic nation-building in South Eastern Europe*. Ed. Pål Kolstø, Ashgate, 2012.

<sup>5</sup> Many Sufi shaykhs were imprisoned or killed and many places of worship were closed and destroyed; also many religious items were lost, see Clayer, Nathalie. "God in the 'Land of the Mercedes'. The Religious Communities in Albania since 1990". *Albanien*. Peter Jordan et al., Österreichische Osthefte, 2003.

<sup>6</sup> On the person of Haji Bektashi see Melikoff, Irene. *Hadji Bektach: Un Mythe Et Ses Avatars: Genesee et Evolution du Soufisme Populaire en Turquie*. Brill Academic Publishers, 1998.

<sup>7</sup> Bulbrahim Musa b. Ja'far b. Muhammad al-Kazim (745-799) was the seventh imam of the Imamiyyah.

<sup>8</sup> *Janissary elite corps*, from Turkish *yeniçeri* (new soldier) and collectively the *new militia*, of the Ottoman Empire (established in the 14th century). Originally, they were formed of young people forcibly enlisted from Christian families who were then brought up in the Muslim religion (*devshirme*). Cf. Rossi, Ettore. "Giannizzeri." *Enciclopedia Italiana*, Istituto dell'Enciclopedia Italiana, 1932.

<sup>9</sup> It is important to clarify the hierarchical levels within the Bektashi Community: first of all, *Kryegjyshi Boterori Bektashinjve* (The world leader of the Bektashi); first degree is Dede; second degree is *Baba*; third degree is Dervish; last degree is Myhib. Cf. *Statuti I Kryegjyshatës Botërore Bektashiane*, 2009.

<sup>10</sup> *Tekke* in Turkish (in Albanian *teqe*) is a building designed specifically for gatherings of a Sufi brotherhood and is a place for spiritual retreat and character reformation.

<sup>11</sup> For further information on Albanian nationalism see Clayer, Nathalie. *Aux origines du nationalisme albanais : la naissance d'une nation majoritairement musulmane en Europe*. Karthala, 2007.

<sup>12</sup> For a general survey about iconographies in the Ottoman and post-Ottoman Empire, see Schick, Irvin Cemil. "The Iconicity of Islamic Calligraphy in Turkey." *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, no. 53/54, 2008. Schick, Irvin Cemil. "The Content of Form: Islamic Calligraphy between Text and Representation." *Sign and Design: Script as Image in Cross-Cultural Perspective*. Ed. Brigitte M. Bedos-Rezak and ed. Jeffrey F. Hamburger, Dumbarton Oaks, 2016.

<sup>13</sup> For full details on the Bektashi belief see Birge K. J. *The Bektashi Order of Dervishes*. Luzac, 1927.

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- <sup>14</sup> The most significant interviews about this topic were two: the first to Hanif, Bektashi *dede* (approx. 60 years old) in the headquarters of Bektashi Community in Tirana, December 2014; the second, to Musa, a *baba* (approx. 50 years old) in Gjirokastër in April 2014. Both said that Alid iconography was spread in Bektashi *tekke* in post-Ottoman Albania.
- <sup>15</sup> For Agroni a 60 years old Rifā'i dervish, the icons were placed in several Albanian *tekkes*, and contained calligraphic and figurative illustrations relating to the family of the Prophet and the Twelve Imam. Also for Hasani, a 63 years old dervish of Halvetiyya, the icons of Twelve Imams were present in the *tekke* of his father.
- <sup>16</sup> In interwar Albania, there were present Sufi orders Nqshbandiyya and Tijaniyya that probably did not get iconographies. Cf. Tahsin, Hasan. *Shtyllat themelore të tarikatis tixhani*. Gutenberg, 1941; Luli, Faik, Islam Dizdari, and Nexhmi Bushati. *Ne" kujtimte" brezave*. Rozafat, 1997.
- <sup>17</sup> In 1936, under the invitation of King Zog, the Rifā'i, the Sa'diyya, the Qadiri and Tijaniyya formed the association *Drita Hyjnore* (Divine Light), under the institutional umbrella of the Islamic Community of Albania. Cf. Popovic, Alexandre. *Les Derviches Balkaniques hier et aujourd'hui*. Les Éditions ISIS, 1994.
- <sup>18</sup> "Hoxha's communist servants destroyed many images [...] only the images of the dictator were permitted" said Hanif, Bektashi *dede* (approx. 60 years old) in the headquarters of Bektashi Community in Tirana, December 2014.
- <sup>19</sup> The definition of Alevi, sometimes called Kizilbaş, is somewhat complex and problematic. This article treats Alevi as a mystical branch of Islam whose adherents are followers of 'Ali, the Twelve Imams and their descendants in contemporary Turkey. For further information about Alevi and Kizilbaş (terms often confused) see Dressler, Markus. *Writing Religion. The making of Turkish Alevi Islam*, Oxford UP, 2013.
- <sup>20</sup> According to Bria's ethnographic surveys in 2014, the Sufi orders still present in post-socialist Albania are Halvetiyya, Rifā'iyya, Qadiriyya and Sa'diyya.
- <sup>21</sup> Poet and leader of the Albanian Renaissance, Naim Frashëri (1846-1900), was the author of an epic poem *Qerbelâ* dedicated to the martyrdom of Husayn, the grandson of the Prophet, from which nationalist and patriotic themes develop. The Bektashi leaders elected him to *baba of honor*, as the father of Bektashism and the Albanian nation.
- <sup>22</sup> Information gathered during a survey in Albania in March 2016.
- <sup>23</sup> Information gathered during a survey in Kosovo and Macedonia in March 2016.
- <sup>24</sup> One of the most famous pilgrimages is performed to Mount Tomor every August. Cf. Çuni, Nuri. *Tomorr, o mal i bekuar*, 1999; Amir-Moezzi, Mohammad Ali. *Lieux de l'islam. Cultes et cultures de l'Afrique à Java*, Éditions Autrement, 1996.
- <sup>25</sup> Some members of the Brotherhood criticized this intellectualist interpretation of Bektashism, because it excessively distances Bektashism from Islam. See Baki, Dollma. *Historiku I Sarisalltëk Babait e Teqesë bektashiane të Dollmës*, 2004.
- <sup>26</sup> All these values are reported in the last Community Statute. See *Statuti I Kryegjyshitës Botërore Bektashiane*, 2009.
- <sup>27</sup> See *Statuti I Kryegjyshitës Botërore Bektashiane*, 2000.
- <sup>28</sup> Samiin is a 28 years old gym-coach in Tirana who frequents the mosque of *rruga e durrësit* in Tirana, which is managed by an imam of the League of Imams.
- <sup>29</sup> Sheh Hajdari is the shaykh of a Rifā'iyya center in Tropoja.
- <sup>30</sup> Sheh Ali Pazari led the Halvetiyya in Tirana Reka.
- <sup>31</sup> Sheh Qemaludin Reka is Shaykh Rifā'i in Tirana.
- <sup>32</sup> Sabura is 52 years old housewife in Durrës.
- <sup>33</sup> Nada is a young female business university student in Tirana.
- <sup>34</sup> According to several Interviews conducted in Bektashi headquarter in Tirana in October-November 2014.
- <sup>35</sup> From a dialog with Agron, a Bektashi dervish in Tirana.
- <sup>36</sup> Feriha is a 35 years old housewife in Shkoder.
- <sup>37</sup> According to an interview conducted in Kruja in September 2014.
- <sup>38</sup> Sari Saltik (m. 1298) was a 13th century semi-legendary Turkish dervish, venerated as a saint by the Bektashis in Albania. See Kolczynska, Marta. "On the Asphalt Path to Divinity. Contemporary Trasformation in Albanian Bektashism: The case of Sari Saltik Teqe in Krujë." *Anthropological Journal of European Cultures*, vol. 22, no. 2, 2013.

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