Modern and Post-Secular Alevi and Bektāşī Religiosities and the Slavo-Turkic Heretical Imaginary

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During the last few decades a series of publications in the field of Islamic, Balkan, Turkish studies (and related areas) have addressed a variety of aspects of contemporary and post-secular Alevi and Bektāşī religiosities in Turkey, South-East Europe and in diasporic milieux in Western Europe and North America. These publications inevitably ventured into the treacherous and contested areas of the evolving debates over the recognition and definitions of the complex of teachings and practices which possibly can be identified as Islamic "heresy", "heterodoxy" and/or "gnosis", in both previous religio-political and current contexts.

Such debates have been particularly vigorous in the case of the various Balkan and Anatolian non-conformist and Shiʿite-leaning and -influenced ethno-religious groups (which came to be categorized by the generic term *Kızılbaş* (which has largely been replaced by "Alevi", while also remaining interchangeable with it) and the *Bektāşīyya*, which after a somewhat obscure rise and nascent history in the early Ottoman era, ultimately came to recognized and functioned until 1826 (the year of its formal abolition) as one of the main Ottoman Sufi *ṭarīqat*/orders. The intensity of these debates has been conditioned largely by the convoluted and dissonant process of transmutation, interplay and contradictions between traditional and ascribed (in the post-Ottoman period) Alevi and Bektāşī identities in Asia Minor and the Balkans since the late Ottoman period. This process has been also affected by the enduring and extant complex of Sunni elite and popular negative stances and clichés concerning Alevism based on inherited confessionalist Sunni discourses on the perceived doctrinal and ritual "deviances" of the *Kızılbaş* communities. In the Ottoman era this

admixture of stereotypes and attitudes could be used to rationalize and provoke legal and discriminatory measures against these groups.

At the same time, the distinct and ongoing Alevi revivalism in Turkey and the Alevi diaspora in the last three decades or so has developed an impressive religious, cultural and social dynamic vis-à-vis the progress of the Sunni-based unitarian *Türk-İslam sentezi* ("Turkish-Islamic Synthesis") project of the 1980s and the consequent expansion and electoral ascendancy of political Sunni Islam in contemporary Turkey. Inevitably, much of the recent and persisting intense disputes about (or within) traditional Balkan and Anatolian (as well as West European diasporic) Alevism have been concentrated on the problem of the historical, received and reconstructed Alevi markers of identity(ies). While the role of Shiʿism in Alevi doctrines and cultic life remains a major topic in any of these disputes, attention has been also drawn to the possible influences of pre-and non-Islamic religious trends on Alevism and Bektāşīsm. Such postulated influences have ranged from pre-Islamic Turkic Central Asian beliefs and rituals to Eastern Christian (Armenian, Greek or Slavonic as well as orthodox, heterodox or dualist) doctrinal lore and cultic observances which naturally necessitates interdisciplinary approaches in the study of the eclectic complex of beliefs and practices underlying what has been frequently construed as the phenomenon of Alevi-Bektāşī syncretism.[1] As with other Near Eastern syncretistic groups such as the Yezidis and Ahl-e Haqq, Alevi/Bektāşī syncretism has been defined and approached as a conglomerate structure [2] whose various components need to be stratified, so that the earliest and foundational strata could be thus identified.[3] The separation of the core layers, variously recognized as ancient Anatolian, pre-Islamic Turkic/Central Asia shamanistic, Shiʿite- and Sufi-related, as well as Iranian (especially in Kurdish- and Zaza-speaking Alevi circles) as

[1] The phenomenon of "Alevi/Bektāşī syncretism" has been systematically explored in a series of studies of Irène Mélikoff, most of which have assembled in her volumes of selected articles: *Au banquet des quarante: exploration au coeur du bektachisme-alevisme,* Istanbul: Isis, 2001, and *Sur les traces du soufisme turc: recherches sur l'Islam populaire en Anatolie,* Istanbul: Isis, 1992; as well as in her monograph, *Hadji Bektach: un mythe et ses avatars: genèse et évolution du soufisme populaire en Turquie,* Leiden: Brill, 1998.

[2] For an early definition and analysis of such "conglomerate-like" belief system, see Vladimir Ivanov, *The Truth-Worshippers of Kurdistan*: *Ahl-i haqq Texts* (Bombay: Maṭbaʿ-i Qādirī, , 1950), 31-75 (in which the respective layers of this structure are identified as ancient animism, solar cult lore, popular Mazdaism, Christian sectarian teachings as well as Islamic Shiʿite Ismaili and Safavid-related strata).

[3] The most methodical use of such stratification approach can be discerned in Irène Mélikoff's studies of Alevism and Bektāşīsm; see especially Irène Mélikoff, "Recherches sur les composantes du syncrétisme Bektachi-Alevi", repr. in *eadem, Sur le traces du soufisme turc,* 41-61 and *eadem, Hadji Bektach,* ch. 4.

well as identifying the posited Eastern Christian (Armenian and Greek in Asia Minor, Greek and Slavonic in the Balkans), naturally could reflect a variety of often contrasting ethno-confessional and ideological agendas.

The striking plurality of approaches to and discourses on historical and modern Alevism represents also the outcome of the diverse and contrasting trends in early research on Alevism and Bektāşīsm. The early study of Alevism and Bektāşīsm was to a great extent inevitably and variously affected by the nation-building and confessional ideologies and prerogatives of the different, national historiographies of the late and post-Ottoman era, maturing amid political conflicts, initially in the Balkans, then in Kemalist Turkey. At the same time, some characteristic and influential currents in the early research on Alevism and Bektāşīsm developed under the impact of the stated or inferred theological and missionary concerns in many of the main early Western accounts of their beliefs and observances (some of these narratives were produced by actual missionaries).[4]

Contemporary research on Alevism and Bektāşīsm has been enriched and transformed by the progress of the evidence-based investigation of diverse primary source material and hitherto inaccessible state or private archival collections, especially over the last few decades. An increasing number of relevant manuscript source material has been made available in general and critical publications and translations of (accompanied on occasion by commentaries on) principal primary sources. These include the *Menakıb-nāmes* and *Vilāyet-nāmes* of important Alevi and Bektāşī sacred personages; the manuscripts of the two versions of the Alevi doctrinal-catechistic work, the *Buyruk*; the *Maqālat*, the "sayings" ascribed to the reputed founder of the Bektāşī order, Hacı Bektaş Veli (c. 1300 ?), the religious hymns, *nefes*; etc. Pioneering art-historical, architectural and anthropological work has been undertaken at a number of the most prominent Alevi and Bektāşī religious and cultic sites and complexes, *tekkes, zaviyes, türbes,* etc. in Asia Minor and the Balkans. The outcome of this work includes publications and surveys of inscriptions, funerary stele and iconography explored at these sites. The progress of inter-disciplinary work among Balkan and Anatolian Alevi groups (and those who perceive themselves as affiliated with Bektāşīsm) has been also

[4] For Protestant missionary campaigns among the Alevis and their *modus operandi*, see Ayfer Karakaya-Stump, "The Emergence of the Kizilbas in Western Thought: Missionary Accounts and their Aftermath", in *Archaeology, Anthropology and Heritage in the Balkans and Anatolia: the Life and Times of F.W. Hasluck, 1878-1920*, ed. David Shankland, (Istanbul: Isis, 2004), vol. 1, 328-353; Hans-Lukas Kieser, "Muslim Heterodoxy and Protestant Utopia. The Interactions between Alevis and Missionaries", *Die Welt des Islams*, n. s., 41:1 (2001): 89-111.

impressive. Ethnographic and anthropological research in particular has made inroads into such vital spheres of Alevi belief and ritual systems such as the oral diffusion of various types of internally controlled knowledge within the community (variously pertaining to cosmogony, cosmology and anthropogony, on one hand, or the transmission of religious authority along within its distinct institution of hereditary religious leadership, the *dedelik*, and/or Sufi *silsilas*, on the other). Although the early history of *Kızılbaş*ism and Bektāşīsm still presents a series of vexed religio-historical problems, expanding historical research has broken new ground in a variety of vital areas. These areas concern, for example, the diverse primary evidence of the early history of the Bektāşī order (historiography, polemics, hagiography and early shrine complexes), its interrelations with antinomian dervish groups (Ḳalenders, Abdâls of Rûm, Ḥayderîs, Câmîs and Şems-i Tebrîzîs) and their incorporation into the Bektāşī network in the sixteenth century.[5] Further advance has been achieved on the fortunes of *Kızılbaş*ism and Bektāşīsm in the classical Ottoman era and the post-sixteenth century trajectories of *modus vivendi* accomplished between the various Anatolian and Balkan *Kızılbaş* groups and the Ottoman central and local authorities, as well as the role of the Bektāşī order in these processes.[6]

These recent advances in research have not always been reflected (or could be indeed actually misrepresented) in the ongoing socio-religious debates and controversies regarding the historical fortunes and the current religio-political orientation of Alevism and Bektāşīsm. These disputes and controversies have initially developed under the impact and manifold pressures of Kemalist modernity in Republican Turkey and in the changed climate of the more recent prominence and advance of political Islam in the country. Starting with the early Kemalist period, Alevi socio-religious organization and its hereditary religious leadership, the *dedelik*, as well as its traditional religious life revolving around the Alevi and Bektāşīs

[5] Ahmet T. Karamustafa, "Ḳalenders, Abdâls, Ḥayderîs: The Formatian of the Bektâşîye in the Sixteenth Century", in *Süleyman the Second and his Time*, ed. Halil Inalcik and Cemal Kafadar (Istanbul: Isis, 1993), 121-129; *idem*, "Origins of Anatolian Sufism", in *Sufism and Sufis in Ottoman Society: Sources, Doctrine, Rituals, Turuq, Architecture, Literature and Fine Arts, Modernisms*, ed. Ahmet Y. Ocak (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2005), 67-95.

[6] See, for example, Suraija Faroqhi, *Der Bektaschi-Orden in Anatolien: (vom späten fünfzehnten Jahrhundert bis 1826*), Vienna: Verlag des Institutes für Orientalistik der Universität Wien, 1981; *eadem*, "Conflict, Accommodation and Long-Term Survival. The Bektāşī Order and the Ottoman State (Sixteenth-seventeenth centuries)", in *Bektachiyya, Estudés sur l'ordre mystique des Bektachis et les groupes relevant de Hadji Bektach*, ed. Alexandre Popovic and Gilles Veinstein, (Paris: Geuthner, 1995), 167-181.

sanctuaries, the *cemevi* (Alevi assembly houses of worship) and the respective *cem* ceremonies, were exposed to the various secularization reforms of the Kemalist modernization movement. One of the centrepieces of these reforms, the ban on the Sufi orders and closure of their convents in 1925, inevitably had a strong impact on both the status and religious roles of the Alevi religious leaders, the *dedes* and the functioning of the Alevi sacred places. Among other factors, the extensive effects of migration to urban areas and immigration abroad as well as expanding secularization led to the emergence of secularized Alevi élites who began to challenge the traditional authority of the *dedes*, exploiting a variety of new channels, including journalistic and literary publications.[7] Apart from such largely generational conflicts, these processes of modernization, secularization and immigration influenced also the general politicisation and growing popularity of leftist ideologies among the Alevis in the 1960s-70s as well as the more recent formation and increasing activism of transnational networks of Alevi associations.

Accordingly, stances on the left of the Alevi political spectrum highlight and draw on the received attitudes seen to be shaped by the historical Alevi anti-establishment, non-conformist and oppositional standpoint, moulded and reinforced in the course of long-standing confrontations with persecuting secular and religious institutions. Such stances can concurrently understate and minimize the religious core of and esoteric elements in Alevism, while resorting to vocabulary and rhetoric approximating those used in popular Marxism and sociologized adaptations of liberation theology (pro-Kurdish emancipation standpoints can also be accommodated into such leftist ideological frameworks).[8] Influential currents in

[7] On the ongoing restructuring of the *dedelik* institution in new communal and settings, both in Turkey and among West European Alevi diasporas, see, for example, Ali Yaman, *Kızılbaş Alevi Ocakları* (Ankara, Elips, 2006); Martin Sökefeld, "Alevi Dedes in the German Diaspora: The Transformation of a Religious Institution," *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie* 127 (2002): 163–186; Markus Dressler, "The Modern Dede: Changing Parameters for Religious Authority in Contemporary Turkish Alevism," in *Speaking for Islam: Religious Authorities in Muslim Societies,* ed. Gudrun Krämer and Sabine Schmidtke (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 269-294; Özlem Göner, "The Transformation of the Alevi Collective Identity," *Cultural Dynamics*, 17:2 (2005): 122-124.

[8] On these currents, see for example, Karin Vorhoff, *Zwischen Glaube, Nation und neuer Gemeinschaft. alevitische Identität in der Türkei der Gegenwart* (Berlin: K. Schwarz Verlag, 1995), 102-105; Faruk Bilici, "The Function of Alevi-Bektashi Theology in Modern Turkey", in ., *Alevi Identity: Cultural, Religious and Social Perspectives*, ed. Tord Olsson, Elisabeth Özdalga and Catharina Raudver, (Istanbul: Swedish Research Institute, 1998), 52-53;Tahire Erman and Emrah Göker, "Alevi Politics in Contemporary Turkey," *Middle Eastern Studies*, 36/4 (2000), 99–118 104-105, 108, 110-111; Markus Dressler, *Die alevitische Religion. Traditionslinien und Neubestimmungen* (Würzburg: Ergon, 2002), 124-191 *passim;* Élise Massicard, *L'Autre Turquie. Le mouvement aléviste et ses territoires* (Paris: PUF Proche Orient, 2005), 101-103.

contemporary Alevi political self-consciousness remain grounded in Alevi aspirations to support and take part in the modernizing reforms of Kemalism, aspirations articulated with a "progressivist" rhetoric, drawing on a series of posited analogies between secular modernity and Alevi core values like liberalism, humanism, religious tolerance and freedom.[9]

Such modernist positions co-exist in the Alevi socio-cultural space with religionist Sunni-leaning and Sufi-oriented circles (which largely aim to "standardize" Alevism within the framework of the diverse Ottoman Sunni Sufi traditions and orders)[10] as well as other groups seeking to alter the sense of direction of Alevism towards the type of legalist Twelver Shiʿite Islam established in the Islamic Republic of Iran after 1979. [11]

Post-secular religio-political developments and discourses in Turkey following the end of the Cold War (conditioned by factors such as the collapse of Communism in the Eastern Bloc countries and the consequent diminished appeal of socialism, the expansion of political Islam, etc.) intensified the tensions between the secularizing modernist and religionist trends in modern Alevism. At the same time, the restructuring processes in Alevism have already brought about designs and efforts seeking to start a scripturalization and standardization of Alevi doctrinal and ritual traditions which are now continuing also in post-secularist settings. With their inevitable transformative effect on Alevi socio-religious

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[9] On these currents, cf. Karin Vorhoff, "Let's reclaim our history and culture!"— Imagining Alevi community in contemporary Turkey", *Welt des Islams* 38 (1998): 240-242; *eadem*, "Discourses on the Alevis in Contemporary Turkey", in *Syncretistic Religious Communities in the Near East*, ed. Krisztina Kehl-Bodrogi, Barbara Kellner-Heinkele and Anke Otter-Beaujean, (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 100-101; Erman and Göker, "Alevi Politics in Contemporary Turkey," 111-112; Markus Dressler, *Die civil religion der Türkei. Kemalistische und alevitische Atatürk-Rezeption im Vergleich* (Würzburg: Ergon, 1999), pp. 83-113 *passim*; *idem*, *Die alevitische Religion,* 224-243 *passim.*

[10] On the Sunni-leaning trends in contemporary Alevism, see for example Reha Çamuroglu, "Alevi Revivalism in Turkey", in *Alevi Identity: Cultural, Religious and Social Perspectives*, ed. Tord Olsson, Elisabeth Özdalga and Catharina Raudvere (Istanbul: Swedish Research Institute, 1998), 81-82; *idem*, "Some Notes on the Contemporary Process of Restructuring Alevilik in Turkey," in *Syncretistic Religious Communities*, ed. Kehl-Bodrogi, Kellner-Heinkele and Otter-Beaujean, 28-29; Erman and Göker, "Alevi Politics in Contemporary Turkey," 106.

[11] On Twelver Shiʿite proselytism and publishing programmes (arranged by the Islamic Republic of Iran), focused on Alevism in Turkey, see, for example, Bilici, "The Function of Alevi-Bektashi Theology," 55-57; Erman and Göker, "Alevi Politics in Contemporary Turkey," 105-106; for some of their more radical offshoots, see Ruşen Çakır, *Ayet ve Slogan Türkiye"de İslami Oluşumla,* Istanbul: Metis, 1990, 155-164.

life and accompanied by related projects to "modernize" Alevi/Bektāşī theology) such developments find their analogies among other religious minority groups in the Near and Middle East (considered "heterodox" by the respective majority "normative" traditions.[12] .[13] Intensifying in current post-secular environments, these developments would also explain the revitalization of religious references and vocabulary in current Alevi self-representational discourses, especially in Turkey and the Balkans. These developments are also directly related to the ongoing debates over the inclusion of Alevi-related topics into the mandatory religious courses in the Turkish state school system as well as the successful campaign for the integration of Alevi religious curricula in German and British public schools.[14] They also predicate the plans for the establishment of high schools and modern educational programmes for the Alevi *dedes,*[15] evidently devised to bring higher theological learning to Alevi clerical leadership comparable to that required for Sunni and Shiʿite religious scholarship. Finally, among West European Alevi diasporas such processes co-exist with attempts to highlight the convergence of Sufi and humanistic ideals in Alevi religiosity (while understating its Islamic theological and historical contexts) to present an image of Alevism built on the modern

[12] On this process, see, for example, Çamuroglu, "Alevi Revivalism ", 82-83; *idem*, "Some Notes", 30-31; Bilici, "The Function of Alevi-Bektāşī Theology in Modern Turkey", 57-59; Tord Olsson, "Epilogue: The Scripturalization of Ali-Oriented Religions", in *Alevi Identity*, ed. Olsson, Özdalga and Raudvere, 199-209; Anke Otter-Beaujean, "Schriftliche Überlieferung versus mündliche Tradition - zum Stellenwert der Buyruk-Handschriften im Alevitum", in ed. Kehl-Bodrogi, Kellner-Heinkele and Otter-Beaujean *Syncretistic Religious Communities*, 224-226 Şehriban Şahin, "The Rise of Alevism as a Public Religion," *Current Sociology*, 53:3 (2005), pp. 465–485, David Shankland, "The *Buyruk* in Alevi village life: Thoughts from the field on rival sources of religious inspiration," in *Syncrétismes et hérésies dans l''Orient seldjoukide et ottoman (XIVe-. XVIIIe siècle). Actes du Colloque du Collège de France, octobre* 2001, ed. Gilles Veinstein, Paris & Dudley, 2005, 311-324; Massicard, *L'Autre Turquie*, 150-160; Markus Dressler, "Religio-Secular Metamorphoses: The Re-Making of Turkish Alevism", *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 76:2 (2008), 286-288, 304-305.

[13] For comparable contemporary developments among the Ahl-e Haqq, see, for example, Ziba Mir-Hosseini, "Breaking the Seal: the New Face of the Ahl-i Haqq", in *Syncretistic Religious Communities*, ed. Kehl-Bodrogi, Kellner-Heinkele and Otter-Beaujean, 175-195.

[14] On the pioneering introduction of Alevi lessons as part of the compulsory Religious Education curriculum in British schools, see Celia Jenkins & Umit Cetin, "From a 'Sort of Muslim' to 'Proud to be Alevi': the Alevi Religion and Identity Project Combatting the Negative Identity among Second-generation Alevis in the UK", *National Identities*, 2017, DOI: 10.1080/14608944.2016.1244933

[15] On these initiatives, see, for example, Şahin, "The Rise of Alevism as a Public Religion", 476 ff.; Dressler, "The Modern Dede", 276-287; *idem*, "Religio-Secular Metamorphoses", 299-304; Martin Sökefeld, *Struggling for Recognition: The Alevi Movement in Germany and in Transnational Space* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2008), 147-178, *passim*.

model of a world religious philosophy, endowed with own universal spiritual traits and appeal.[16]

Likewise with their co-religionists in Asia Minor, the Balkan Alevi and Bektāşī communities have been subjected to similar processes of migration, immigration, urbanization and secularization which characterized the advent of post-Ottoman modernity and lately, also post-secular realities. But the dynamics and consequences of the parallel processes in post-Ottoman Turkey and the Balkans also differed in a number of significant ways, conditioned by their contrasting sets of socio-political and ideological factors. Significantly, these ideological factors included the question of the nature and origins of the modern Slav-speaking Muslim groups in South-Eastern Europe (Bosnia, Bulgaria, Serbia, Macedonia and Greece) which was one of preoccupations of nationalist historiographies and nation-building narratives in the late Ottoman and early post-Ottoman periods. The expansion of concern with and debates on the then vital ethno-confessional and religio-political dimensions of this problem occurred in a period when Alevism and Bektāşīsm were already implicated in popular and elite discourses in the broader area of Christian-Islamic inter-relations and inter-change in the Ottoman empire. Treating the ethno-genesis and confessional orientation of the Slavophone Muslim, Alevi and Bektāşī Balkan communities in similar reconstructed historical contexts of Islamicisation and Turkification, made possible the conceptualization of models of Slavo-Turkic continuities and imaginaries, with enduring impact and appeal in South-East Europe.

The origins, initial settlements and migrations of the *Kızılbaş* groups and the Bektāşī order in the Balkans is indeed one of the most intriguing religio-historic problems arising from the religious and political history of the early Ottoman empire. The ongoing research on the Islamic heterodox communities in the central and eastern Balkans (whose self-definitions variously refers to their Baba'i, Bektāşī or *Kızılbaş* background) has generated sufficient evidence that at least some of these groups most likely descend from pro-Safavid *Kızılbaş* deportees re-settled there by the Ottoman authorities in the sixteenth century. Other groups may arguably trace their ancestors to heterodox Turkoman groups (some of whom may have been led by dervishes and charismatic leaders) who settled into the Balkans in

[16] On these attempts, see, for example, Dressler, "Religio-Secular Metamorphoses," 292-293, 304-305; Vorhoff, "Discourses on the Alevis", 101.

earlier periods.[17] Generally, the study of the expansion, history and religious topography of the *Kızılbaş* communities and the Bektāşī order in the Balkans has been hampered by the extensive damage inflicted on a number of *Kızılbaş*/Alevi and Bektāşī cultic sites in the period of the formation of the post-Ottoman Balkan states.[18] During this period of political and military conflicts in the region in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, some of the traditional Alevi and Bektāşī networks were fragmented and some of their communities found themselves displaced. By that time the Bektāşī order, moreover, had already endured extensive and unrecoverable losses following its suppression and the consequent confiscation of its religious edifices and property after 1826.

Early publications on Balkan Alevism and Bektāşīsm had an insufficient and restricted access to pertinent internal and external historical and doctrinal source material. Still, early Western accounts focused on Anatolian and Balkan *Kızılbaş* and Bektāşī communities, their religious beliefs and customs, which were written and published in the late Ottoman period reflected the first-hand observations of Western historians, diplomats, anthropologists, travelers or missionaries. These experiences, moreover, were gathered at *Kızılbaş* and Bektāşī cultic sites and complexes, many of which were gravely damaged during the conflicts leading to the Ottoman empire's break-up and post-Ottoman state-building. Such early reports also could record oral traditions and cultic observances which since then may have virtually vanished, but will have also to be treated critically due to the obvious Orientalist, theological and missionary predilections underlying these accounts.[19]

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[17] See the recent surveys of the evidence and research in Frederick De Jong, "Problems concerning the Origins of the Qizilbāş in Bulgaria: Remnants of the Safaviyya?", in *Convegno sul tema: La Shi'a nell'Impero Ottomano (Roma, 15 Aprile 1991)* (Rome: Accademia nazionale dei Lincei, 1993), 203-16; Nevena Gramatikova, *Neortodokslaniiat isliam v bŭlgarskite zemi. Minalo i suvremennost*, Sofia: Gutenberg, 2011

[18] See, for example, the discussion of the precarious situation and damage and destruction wreaked on the Bektāşī order in Albanian and Greek Epirus in Clayer, Nathalie, *L'Albanie, pays des derviches: les ordres mystiques musulmans en Albanie á l'époque post-ottomane (1912-1967)*, Berlin: Harrassowitz, 1990, 181-185; Harry T. Norris, "Bektashi Life on the Border Between Albania and Greece", in David Shankland, ed., *Archaeology, Anthropology and Heritage in the Balkans and Anatolia*, ed. Shankland, 309-328; *idem*, "The Bektashiyya brotherhood, its village communities and inter- religious tensions along the border between Albania and Greek Epirus at the beginning of the 20th century", in *idem, Popular Sufism in Eastern Europe: Sufi Brotherhoods and the Dialogue with Christianity and "Heterodoxy"* (New York and London: Routledge, 2006), 78-92.

[19] Karakaya-Stump, "The Emergence of the Kizilbas in Western Thought"; Kieser, "Muslim Heterodoxy and Protestant Utopia".

In post-Ottoman South-Eastern Europe and Kemalist Turkey the first studies of and reports on Alevism and Bektāşīsm inevitably variously betrayed principal and goals of the evolving competing regional nation/state-building programmes and strategies. Against the background of the dramatic ethno-confessional conflicts and transmutations of the period, the consequent approaches to the beliefs and history of Alevism and Bektāşīsm were strongly influenced by the grand interpretative narratives of Islamic-Christian interrelations in the Ottoman era, as formulated and elaborated in the contemporary Balkan national historiographies. The *raison d'être* and trajectories of the advancing Islamicisation in Ottoman-era Anatolia and South-East Europe as well as the ethnic, cultural and linguistic background of the Slavophone Islamic communities and enclaves in these regions was and remained one of the major problem areas in these rival historiographies. Accordingly to one of the persistently influential and exploited (from the mid-nineteenth century onwards) interpretative schemas the Balkan and Anatolian dissenting sectarian communities representing the two principal trends of medieval Eastern Christian dualism, Bogomilism and Paulicianism,[20] converted *en masse* to Islam in the early Ottoman period. This conversion scenario was based on the uncritical assumptions that late medieval Bogomil communities (at that stage largely Slavophone) and the increasingly Slavicised Paulician groups chose to convert as a whole to Islam in reaction to their long-drawn suppression by the secular and ecclesiastical establishments of the medieval Balkan-Byzantine world.[21]

Utilized initially to explain the progress of Islamicisation in early Ottoman Bosnia and Herzegovina (which underwent a period of confrontation between Roman Catholicism and the schismatic Bosnian Church just prior to the Ottoman conquest)[22], this conversion model

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[20] On the provenance, historical development and doctrinal systems of the Christian dualist movements and trends in the medieval Eastern Christian world, see the anthology of translated primary sources in Janet Hamilton and Bernard Hamilton, eds., Yuri Stoyanov, assist. ed., *Christian Dualist Heresies in the Byzantine World c.650-c.1450* (Manchester and New York), 1998.

[21] For a survey of the early formulations and principal arguments of these theories and some of their more recent reinstatements, see Yuri Stoyanov, "On Some Parallels between Anatolian and Balkan Heterodox Islamic Traditions and the Problem of their Coexistence and Interaction in the Ottoman Period", in *Sycrétismes et hérésies*, ed. Veinstein, 83-90.

[22] The Bosnian church had developed as a clerical body, schismatic both from Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy and the exact nature and evolution of its inter-relations with Christian dualist movements in the Western Balkans and Western Europe have attracted a prolonged and ongoing debate, especially in the last few decades - see Yuri Stoyanov, "Between Heresiology and Political Theology: the Rise of the Paradigm of the Heretical Bosnian Church and the Paradoxes of its Medieval and Modern Developments', in *Political Theologies of the Monotheistic Religions.*

was subsequently extended at one time or another to most of the Slavophone Islamic communities in the Balkans. Large groups in the extant Balkan Slavophone Muslim population (who predominantly follow Hannafi Sunni Islam) were accordingly branded descendants of medieval Christian heretics. [23] While subsequent research and the accumulation of diverse evidence increasingly demonstrated the untenability of such sweeping scenarios of large-scale conversion among Balkan heterodox and dissenting groups, in the earlier stages of the promulgations of these theories, the Alevi and Bektāşī communities were especially liable to be implicated and exploited in the such models and narratives of postulated massive conversion of Christian heretical communities to Islam.

The growing popular and scholarly interest in and arguments for Christian or Christian-influenced elements in the strata of Alevi-Bektāşī syncretism could be ideologized and theologized to be integrated into the emerging post-Ottoman ethno-confessional constructs and physical and religious territoriality aspirations. The strategies adopted by the respective new political and religious élites in the post-Ottoman Christian-majority successor states intended to cope with the inherited multi-confessional polities in their territories and remold collective identities display some telling parallels and contrasts. Some of these analogies and dissimilarities can be clearly discerned, for example, in the strategies and policies implemented in the post-World War I kingdoms of Yugoslavia. The earlier quests and arguments for Christian provenance for *Kızılbaş*im and Bektāşīsm were partially integrated during this period into the historical, religious and general discourses accompanying the establishment of nation-building historiographies. A variety of conjectures and dubious evidence were produced and started to be exploited in spurious reconstructions of historical and religious genealogies, aiming to prove that that Alevi and Bektāşī communities actually were descendants of Slavonic Christian groups (orthodox or heterodox), forcibly Islamicised in the Ottoman era.[24] Such discourses naturally also tended

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Representation of the Divine and Dynamics of Power (Brescia: Morcelliana, 2005), ed. Giovanni. Filoramo, 161-180.

[23] See, for example, Konstantin Irećek, *Istoriia na bŭlgarite*, Tŭrnovo, 1886 (2nd ed., Sofia, 1929), 271, 289; Aleksandŭr Teodorov-Balan, "Bŭlgarskite katolitsi v Svishtovsko i tiahnata cherkovna borba", *Letopis na bŭlgarskoto knizhovno druzhestvo*, 2, 1902, 123ff.; more recently, Stavro Skendi, "Crypto-Christianity in the Balkan Area under the Ottomans", in Stavro Skendi, *Balkan Cultural Studies*, (Boulder, Colo.& New York, 1980) 240.

[24] For symptomatic arguments that at least some of the *Kızılbaş* - and Bektāşī-related groups in the eastern Balkans descend from Christian (or heretical Christian, i.e. Bogomil) communities, see, for

to downplay or ignore the Muslim dimension of their teachings and rites and supplied the principal notions which formed the core of the indigenization approach to Alevi and Bektāşī identities, which in the framework of reconstructed Slavo-Turkic continuity, aimed to recognize and trace their origins and foundational beliefs in local Slavonic Christian (or even pre-Christian) folk cultures and habitats.[25]

Although proceeding slowly and unevenly (especially in the South East European Communist countries during the Cold War period), subsequent research on Alevi and Bektāşī religious and cultic sites in the Balkans (some of which have been reclaimed by the respective communities over the past thirty years), anthropological fieldwork and work on Ottoman-era source material has made a number of crucial contributions to Ottoman religious, political and cultural history, Christian-Muslim and Suinni-Shi'ite inter-relations, especially in the field of local studies.[26] The conclusions and publications of this evidence-based research are particularly important for the future study of the role of the dervish orders and especially Bektāşīsm in the Ottoman colonization of the Balkans, the unfolding and patterns of Christian-Islamic syncretism, the phenomenon of crypto-Christianity and some other related fields.[27] Despite the massive and growing evidence to the contrary, however, the claims and theories postulating a pre-Ottoman Slavonic Christian identity of the Balkan *Kızılbaş* and Bektāşī groups has endured into the post-Communist period, continuing to be exploited in fanciful and populist historiographies of the Balkans in the Ottoman period.

In the post-Communist period more recent reiterations and eloborations of the notions of the Slavo-Turkic heretical imaginary continue to resort to simplistic and outdated

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example, Dimitŭr Marinov, "Narodna viara i religiozni narodni obichai", S*bornik za narodni umotvoreniia, nauka i knizhnina*, 28 (1914), 423f.; Vasil Marinov, *Deliorman (Iuzhna chast). Oblastno-geografsko izuchavane, (*Sofia: Self-published, 1941), 54f., 79-80.

[25] See the analysis of this indigenization approach in Yuri Stoyanov, "Early and Recent Formulations of Theories for a Formative Christian Heterodox Impact on Alevism", *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 37(3), (2010), 266-67.

[26] See the surveys of the development of the local studies of the Alevi and Bektāşī groups Soutjh-east Europe in Nevena Gramatikova, "Changing Fates and the Issue of Alevi Identity in Bulgaria," in *Ethnology of Sufi Orders: Theory and Practice: Proceedings of the British-Bulgarian Workshop on Sufi Orders 19-23 May 2000, Sofia, Bulgaria,* ed. Antonina Zhelyazkova and Jorgen Nielsen, **(**Sofia: IMIR: 2001), 567-581; Lybomir Mikov, *Kultova arhitektura i izkustvo na heterodoksnite miusulmani v Bŭlgaria (XVI -XX vek)bektashi kŭzŭlbashi/alevii* (Sofia; AI "Marin Drinov", 2005 (repr. 2007)), 21-33 *passim.*

[27] Analysis of the importance of this newly accumulated evidence of Alevism and Bektāşīsm for these fields in Yuri Stoyanov. "On Some Parallels",

methodologies to accommodate the extant or newly made available evidence into a general preconceived model of a Christian Slavonic dualist (Bogomil) origin for Alevism. The proposed claims for and reconstructions of a Bogomil/Christian Slavonic dualist formative impact on Alevism in areas like organizational hierarchy, socio-political stances, angelology, diabology, visionary mysticism and eschatology are on the whole either anachronistic or historically flawed and untenable.[28] Other attempts to identify and define medieval Christian Slavonic dualist (Bogomil) and Paulician layers (with alleged parallels to and resonances of late antique Gnosticism) in Alevism and Bektāşīsm have been further prejudiced employing very dubious methodologies and strategies (which have included the falsification of primary source material to)[29] to blatantly implement obvious ideological and ethno-confessional agendas.

Following decades of stagnation of Alevi and Bektāşī religious and cultural traditions under the pressure of the aggressive secularism of the respective Eastern Bloc Communist regimes, the process of reclaiming Alevi and Bektāşī identities in the Orthodox-majority cultures in South-Eastern Europe and in post-secular settings follows a distinctive dynamics. While newly exposed to local and transnationally coordinated Sunnification pressures and Twelver Twelver Shiʿite pro-active programmes, emanating from the Islamic Republic of Iran, both trends within these communities and in the post-Communist South-East European cultures in general continue to reimagine and rearticulate their identities in the framework of the Slavo-Turkic heretical imaginary. In some cases this occurs in the framework of a post-secular application of the so-called "pre-continuity" approach,[30] (continuously utilized in the Balkans from the late nineteenth century onwards), in which a postulated pre-Ottoman Slavonic heretical past becomes the basis for the re-legitimization of the identity of Slavonic- and even Albanian-speaking Muslim communities in South-Eastern Europe.

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[28] Analysis and critique in Yuri Stoyanov, "Early and Recent Formulations", 268-272.

[29] See the analysis of such falsifications of original textual evidence in Hamza Aksut, Hasan Harmancı and Ünsal Öztürk, *Alevi Tarıh Yazmında Skandal*, (Istanbul: Yurt Kitap Yayın 2010), and Stoyanov, "Early and Recent Formulations ", 271-272.

[30] Nathalie Clayer, "The Issue of the Conversion to Islam in the Restructuring of Albanian Politics and Identities", *La perception de l'héritage ottoman dans les Balkans, Paris: L'Harmattan*, 2005), ed. Sylvie Gangloff, 95-128 (discussing the case of Albanian Muslim identities – the distinct dynamics of the development of Bektāşīsm in late Ottoman and post-Ottoman Albania and its revival in the post-Communist period remains outside the scope of this article.