'Reluctant' Muslims?
Turkish Cypriots, Islam, and Sufism

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Abstract

Scholars and other observers have often remarked upon the minimal participation of Turkish Cypriots in Muslim religious rituals. Theories to explain this have included that Turkish Cypriots are actually crypto-Christians or that they are the descendants of Alevis, a heterodox branch of Islam. This paper argues, in contrast, that the decline of Muslim religious practice began in the island in the mid-nineteenth century, with Ottoman reforms that attempted to root out the Sufi folk practices that were common in the island, particularly in rural areas. The paper shows that this institutional suppression of Sufi Islam created a fertile ground for the rise of secularist Kemalism in the 1920s and 1930s.

'European travellers in Asia Minor, mainly classical archaeologists and very seldom orientalists, are generally better acquainted with Christianity than with Islam. Consequently, the divisions of the Christians are more obvious to them than those of the Mahommedan populations. By most the latter are regarded as a single whole, and any divergence they may notice from orthodox Sunni practice suggests to them that the population in question has been affected by Christianity that is, it represents an originally Christian population half-converted to Islam' (Hasluck, 1921, p. 310).

Introduction

One spring day, I guided a young documentary film director on a tour of former Turkish Cypriot villages in the Paphos district of the island. The director was considering making a film about such abandoned villages, and we toured as many as possible, trying to find a suitable spot for filming. One such village was in the rolling Paphos hills, with a steep slope into the valley below. As we pulled into the abandoned village and parked next to the mosque, we noticed a car coming towards us. It was a Turkish Cypriot family, originally from the village, visiting to look at their former homes. After the usual introductions and questions about the village, I asked when the minaret had been built, as I had been doing research on minaret and steeple building in the island. The man with whom I spoke was in his mid-fifties and so remembered the minaret's construction in the late 1960s. He had heard from his aunt that the mosque had been constructed in the 1920s, and I later confirmed this.

'But it was probably a *cemevi*, since it didn't have a minaret', he commented, referring to the place of worship of Alevism, an Islamic sect related to Shi'ism that is known for its more liberal views on drinking alcohol and gender relations, for instance.

'Why should it be a *cemevi*?' I asked. 'It was most likely a *mescit*.' The latter is the equivalent of a small chapel and would not have a minaret.

'Well, I read somewhere that mosques without minarets are most probably cemevis', he replied.

Starting in the 1990s, with the Alevi revival in Turkey, this became one of the favoured ways for Turkish Cypriots to explain their 'fundamental' secularism. While Turkish Cypriots are nominally Muslim, many researchers have commented on their lack of overt religiosity, including that they do not attend mosque or engage in religious education.[1] Turkish Cypriots, in turn, have sought to explain their own lack of religious practice, and when one book by a local historian, doctor and politician claimed that the reason was a historical Alevism,[2] for many people this was a convincing – if conveniently easy – explanation that stuck. Indeed, I would hear on many similar occasions that mosques without minarets 'demonstrated' that Turkish Cypriots were surely Alevi. Especially given the ways that the secularist state in Turkey has used the history of Alevism in Anatolia to point to a more fundamental Turkic secularism that had been corrupted by 'Arab' elements,[3] it should not be surprising that Turkish Cypriots would seek to explicate their radical adoption of Kemalist secularism in the mid-twentieth century in this way.

However, this is not the only explanation currently circulating for Turkish Cypriot society's secularism. On numerous other occasions it has been suggested to me that my blue eyes must surely indicate Latin roots, and that Turkish Cypriots are basically not Turkish but of Lusignan origin. An older explanation, and one primarily favoured by Greek Cypriots, is that Turkish Cypriots were really Greek Cypriots who had converted to Islam, so the latter religion never really took hold in the society. Moreover, the confusion regarding the roots of Turkish Cypriot secularism is not aided by the dearth of information. While there are several studies on the history and practice of the Orthodox Church in Cyprus, there has been very little on the structure of faith and practice in Turkish Cypriot society.

This article attempts to untangle Turkish Cypriots' *secular* and relaxed attitude to Islam from *secularism* based on the Westernising and modernising politics of Turkish nationalism.

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1   B. Yeşilada (2009) 'Islam and the Turkish Cypriots', *Social Compass*, Vol. 56, No. 1, pp. 46–59; B. Yeşilada, P. Noordijk and C. Webster (2009) 'Religiosity and Social Values of the Cypriots', *Social Compass*, Vol. 56, No. 1, pp. 15–34.

2   N. Beratlı (1997) *Kıbrıs Türklerin Tarihi* [History of the Turkish Cypriot], Lefkoşa: Galeri Kültür Yayınları.

3   K. Tambar (2014) *The Reckoning of Pluralism: Political Belonging and the Demands of History in Turkey*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

I will claim that both of these are present at the same time, having different roots but often overlapping in Turkish Cypriots' current attitudes towards religion, particularly as it has been politicised during the Justice and Development Party [Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (AKP)] rule in Turkey. As I remark above, several observers have noted Turkish Cypriots' reluctant approach to Islam. The mosques that in the past Turkish Cypriots at least attended on Fridays are today filled with immigrant workers and foreign university students. What is more, apart from funerals, Turkish Cypriots at present are not disposed to attend ceremonies at mosques, and the various rituals associated with Islam – such as circumcision, the *mevlits* that take place at various times after a death, or sacrifices – happen within the home or community but not in the institutions that are normally associated with religion.

In addition to this secular approach to Islam, there is also, amongst many Turkish Cypriots, a secularist approach inherited from Kemalist Turkish nationalism.[4] Today, for instance, Turkish Cypriots exhibit significant resistance to pressure coming from the Turkish government to reinstitute the religious classes that for many years had been erased from school curricula. As detailed below, this politicisation of the secular view has a historical background that dates to the nineteenth century, when the beginning of nationalism is perceived alongside the effects of the exiled Young Turks who filled the island during that period.[5] Conversely, this politicised secularism took root and spread in the community with the rising Kemalist tide that hit Cyprus' shores in the 1920s. But, one of the most striking facets of Kemalism's arrival in the island was the speed and ease with which religion disappeared from the public sphere, and the relative lack of controversy therein, especially compared to Anatolia. Below it is argued that the ease with which a Kemalist militant secularism took root in the community is directly related to an earlier period of secularisation that made Turkish Cypriots into reluctant Muslims.

It is advocated here that we can understand the emergence of Turkish Cypriot secularism only by understanding the historical practice of Islam in the island, and the changes in that practice that began with the Ottoman Empire's efforts at modernisation of the nineteenth century. Rather than resorting to Alevism or Crypto-Christianity as justifications, I demonstrate that we should instead begin with the variety of interpretations and practices within the Islamic tradition and culture.[6] İlber Ortaylı criticises the contemporary field of historiography for its erroneous portrayal of a single

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4   H.M. Ateşin (1996) *Kıbrıs'ta İslâmî Kimlik Dâvâsi* [The Issue of Islamic Identity in Cyprus], İstanbul: Marifet Yayınları.

5   A. Nevzat (2005) *Nationalism amongst the Turks of Cyprus: The First Wave*. PhD Dissertation, University of Oulu, Finland.

6   M.H. Yavuz (2004) 'Is there a Turkish Islam? The Emergence of Convergence and Consensus', *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, Vol. XXIV, No. 2, (October), pp. 213–232.

Islamic world and a monotypic *homo islamicus*.[7] Ortaylı also stresses that those who adopt this erroneous conception are generally intellectuals from the Middle East:

> 'Intellectual leaders of Arab nationalism were the ones that embraced and utilized the orientalist approaches of L. Massignon, T.E. Lawrence, and W.S. Blunt. Beyond the world of historiography and political thought, today's Islam is becoming more and more an ideological force' (Ortaylı, 2005, p. 21).

On the other hand, many writers point out that there are highly differentiated and at times contradictory interpretations of Islam.[8] For example, there is an immense difference between Islam in some Arab nations, or, to be more specific, Islamic belief in Saudi Arabia (Wahhabism) and Shia Islam in Iran. Hakan Yavuz lists the reasons for the emergence of such diverse interpretations as follows: the legacy of colonialism, the process of historical formation, different ways of adopting Islam, socio-cultural and political transformations, and different geographies.[9] Ocak claims that it is of utmost importance from the perspective of historical development to explore 'the Turk's' interpretation of Islam in the light of two main parallel processes, one of Sunni (orthodox) Islam and the other of non-Sunni (heterodox) Islam, developing simultaneously in a very large geographical space extending from Central Asia to the Balkans and over a long time in history'.[10] In this context, it is clear that it is more appropriate to investigate the Islamic character of Cyprus (at least during the Ottoman era) within the framework of Ottoman Islam.

A look at the relationship of the Ottoman Empire with Islam shows that while there are many different schools and sects of Islam, within the empire one may heuristically distinguish four forms of practice: 'State Islam, Literal Islam (Islam taught in the *madrasah*), Folk (popular) Islam, and Mystic Islam (Islam of the lodges, i.e. *tekke*)'.[11] According to Poulton, State Islam is controlled by the Islamic clergy (*ulema*) and has a legalistic structure practised in accordance with certain written rules.[12] It is argued that,

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7   İ. Ortaylı (2005) *İmparatorluğun En Uzun Yüzyılı* [The Long Century of the Ottoman Empire], İstanbul: Alkım Yayınları, p. 21.

8   Yavuz (2004) 'Is there a Turkish Islam?', *op. cit.*, pp. 213–214; A.Y. Ocak (1999) *Türkler, Türkiye ve İslâm: Yaklaşım, Yöntemler ve Yorum Denemeleri* [Turks, Turkey and Islam: Approaches, Methods, and Interpretative Efforts], İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, pp. 79–80; T. Akpınar (1993) *Türk Tarihinde İslâmiyet* [Islam in Turkish History], İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, pp. 33–35.

9   Yavuz (2004) 'Is there a Turkish Islam?', *op. cit.*, pp. 213–232.

10 Ocak (1999) *Türkler, Türkiye ve İslâm, op. cit.*, p. 35.

11 *Ibid.*, pp. 51–69.

12 H. Poulton (1997) *Top Hat Grey Wolf and Crescent: Turkish Nationalism and the Turkish Republic*, London: Hurst and Company, pp. 36–37.

'because it created a systematic theology and law throughout its history and institutionalized in the vicinity of other cultures', the State Islam with Sunni origins, 'became the official preference of the Turkish states, aside from a few exceptions, and therefore turned into a state policy'.[13] Literal Islam was the result of a tradition of theological activities (from a Sunni perspective) aimed at explaining the Qur'an and the Sunnah (the sayings and living habits of Muhammad) at the *madrasah* (Islamic schools) and generally contributed to State Islam through interpretation and education.[14] The third category, Folk Islam, is the one practised by the Muslim people.[15] Ocak describes this popular version of Islam as follows:

> 'The term Folk Islam represents a more unmethodical way of being a Muslim that is not only interpreted and lived as a faith and social lifestyle in accordance with the basic tenets of Islam, but also largely determined by the traditional way of life partially based on superstition' (Ocak, 1999, p. 52).

Ocak emphasises as well that Folk Islam has 'two dimensions, one orthodox and the other heterodox' and opposes the view that Folk Islam can solely be based on heterodoxy.[16]

> 'For example, among both the Sunnis and Alevi-Bektashis, and even among Sufi circles, beliefs and practices associated with a common cult of saints closely resemble each other (with certain exceptions). The "ulama" sector, however, eventually excluded and condemned such beliefs and practices, emphasizing insistently that these were to be considered causes of infidelity and heresy' (Ocak, 2001–2002).[17]

The final category of Mystic Islam (Islam belonging to the lodge or *tekke*), which is also the main theme of this article, represents what is known in Turkish as *tasavvuf* (sufism).[18] According to Turgut Akpınar, mystics or *sufis* 'seek and try to reach God not in a collective and formal manner as practised by organized religion, but in an individuated way and on their own'.[19] Furthermore, it is often argued that Islam entered

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13 Ocak (1999) *Türkler, Türkiye ve İslâm, op. cit.*, p. 60.

14 *Ibid.*, pp. 53–54.

15 *Ibid.*, pp. 52–53.

16 *Ibid.*, p. 52.

17 A.Y. Ocak (2001–2002) 'The Ottoman Empire and Islam, Framework for a New Interpretation', at *The 2001–2002 Sawyer Seminar*, the University of Chicago.

18 Akpınar (1993) *Türk Tarihinde İslâmiyet, op. cit.*, pp. 84–86.

19 *Ibid.*, p. 85.

the Turkish world of faith through Sufism. This, it is believed, is why Mystic Islam is the oldest mode of practice used by the Turks.[20] The Turkish tradition of Sufism 'can be described as a moral and scientific philosophy that reevaluated the pre-Islamic notion of providence in the light of Islamic contemplation'.[21]

For centuries, many different Sufi orders spread the tradition of Sufism to every corner of the Ottoman Empire. Hundreds of lodges served as centres where the Sufis practiced and discussed their mystic doctrines. Şerif Mardin says that Sufism became institutionalised in time and depicts its relationship with the Sunni State Islam as follows:

'The years after the establishment of the Empire represent a period of truce between these two versions of Islam; the Sunni Islam, on the one hand, and the institutionalized Sufism, on the other. While those who disseminated the word of the official religion gave a more cultivated shape to the Sunni sect of Islam, organizations at the various levels of society established official relationships with religious orders. The Janissaries [an elite corps of soldier-slaves] and the guilds were all affiliated with certain orders' (Mardin, 1983, pp. 92–93).[22]

The relationship between Mystic Islam and Folk Islam is worthy of analysis, too. One of the most important reasons behind the popularity of the Sufis among the people was their ability to offer the love of God to the masses in variegated forms. Poetry and music were among the most significant means to achieve this. Historical Sufi bards and dervishes such as Yunus Emre or Pir Sultan Abdal, quite popular even today, are important examples in this regard. Because they used the Turkish language when spreading their message, this helped the Turkish-speaking people to understand their philosophies much more easily. Many sects and orders had syncretic structures and quotidian rituals which made them preferable compared to the Islamic interpretation based on the strict rules of Sunni Islam. In lieu of the State Islam opposed to the heterodox and esoteric beliefs, these types of sects and Sufis that internalised a wide variety of traditional local cultures were more successful in building a strong bridge between the popular culture and the official ruling culture of the time. Although the State was at times in conflict with them, it tried to utilise the influence that the Sufis had over the people. Many powerful figures from the ruling circles were members of some orders, as well (especially the Mevlevi order). Such relationships not only provided the people with the

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20 Ocak (1999) *Türkler, Türkiye ve İslâm, op. cit.*, p. 56.
21 M.N. Bardakçı (2005) 'Bir Tasavvuf Mektebi Olarak Bektaşilik' [Bektashism as a School of Mysticism], *Uluslararası Bektaşilik ve Alevilik Sempozyumu* [International Symposium of Bektashism and Shiism], Süleyman Demirel University, Faculty of Theology, Isparta, 28–30 September, p. 51.
22 Ş. Mardin (1983) *Din ve İdeoloji* [Religion and Ideology], İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, pp. 92–93.

opportunity of social mobility, but similarly served as channels through which the State could increase its influence and power over the society.

The Ottoman Cyprus of the same period reflected all of the above-mentioned Islamic attitudes and practices. One of the most important elements of this diversity in Cyprus under Ottoman rule was the Sufi alternative, which, as is demonstrated below, had a large share of religious practice in the island, especially in rural areas. It should be emphasised, however, that my argument is not that Sufi heteropraxy made Muslim Cypriots less ardent practitioners of an orthodox Islam. Indeed, what constitutes orthodoxy and what constitutes heterodoxy may be argued to shift over time and location. Rather, I argue that it was the Ottoman state's attempt, starting in the early nineteenth century, to impose a particular interpretation of orthodoxy and suppression of what its rulers perceived to be heterodoxy that gradually tore Muslim Cypriots from the sources of their religious devotion.

The Emergence of Mystic Islam in Cyprus

The conversion of certain churches (mostly Catholic churches) into mosques and the establishment of an Islamic court by the Ottomans immediately after the conquest of the island in 1571 were the first symbolic signs of the new Islamic rule in Cyprus. In order to reinforce and strengthen the sovereignty of Islam on the island, the Ottoman Empire transferred some of the population from its other regions (mainly, from Anatolia) to Cyprus, as they had done previously in other newly conquered lands, and thus created the conditions for the formation of a Muslim community on the island. Many Muslims from Anatolia or sometimes from other regions came or were transferred to Cyprus up to the end of the nineteenth century. In addition to the transferred populations, the conversion of some non-Muslims to Islam also contributed to a rise in the number of Muslims on the island.[23] According to the first official census carried out in 1831, Muslims constituted 35% of the island's population.[24] This shows that over time the population transfers created a stable Muslim community on the island. If we analyse the structure of the Muslim settler population of Cyprus, the evidence for the above-mentioned religious/cultural diversity can easily be detected.

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23 R.C. Jennings (1993) *Christians and Muslims in Ottoman Cyprus and the Mediterranean World, 1571–1640*, New York/London: New York University Press, pp. 137–139.

24 M.A. Erdoğru (1997) 'Kıbrıs Adası'nın 1831 Tarihli Bir Osmanlı Nüfus Sayımı' [The 1831 Ottoman Census of the Island of Cyprus], *Ege Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Tarih İncelemeleri Dergisi* [Ege University, Faculty of Literature, Journal of Historical Studies], İzmir Proceedings Seventh Cultural Studies Symposium, No. 12, p. 82.

The first signs of Sufism or Mystic Islam – the main focus of this article – were observed during the Ottoman conquest of the island. In each war that was waged by the Ottomans there were quite a few Sufis who provided spiritual guidance for the soldiers as well as participated in battles with them.[25] It is known that Sufis were buried as martyrs at the places where they fell. Many of them died alongside the soldiers while trying to seize a fortress during the conquest of Cyprus, and in particular of Nicosia, and their graves are still preserved. It is worth noting that the burial places of these entombed saints have been and continue to be sites of veneration as an essential part of Folk Islamic tradition. Bağışkan writes that a great number of the sites of spiritual offerings in Cyprus include locations where entombed saints or rather shrines are situated. He notes too that such sites are considered to have the power of healing:

> '[T]hese places (in the light of a superstitious belief) were seen as hospitals and the entombed Sufis were regarded as doctors. It was widely believed that visiting these sites, making offerings there, and tying pieces of clothing belonging to the sick persons on the graves, or on the windows of the shrines, or on the trees near the holy sites will heal the sick by binding the sickness there and/or that those who made offerings in these places will see their wishes come true. Therefore, when the believers who made offerings were healed or saw their wishes come true, this was seen as the proof of the spiritual power that these graves held' (Bağışkan, 2005, p. 285).[26]

On the other hand, it is believed that the first Sufi lodge to be established in Cyprus is Mevlevi Lodge (*mevlevihane*) near Kyrenia Gate. Harid Fedai and Mustafa Haşim Altan claim that the Mevlevi Lodge was constructed soon after the conquest. Historical records show that it was built with endowments provided by Arap Ahmet Pasha, one of the first governors of Cyprus.[27] Yusuf Agha, the master of Janissaries, and other leading figures of the period were among the donors who made contributions toward the maintenance of the lodge.[28] Besides support from military elites, some non-Muslims were also known to provide the lodge with funds from their properties. For instance, Rafael Lazari, a Jew, donated the income from his house in Lefkoşa/Nicosia to this lodge.[29]

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25 Ö.L. Barkan (1942) 'İstila Devirlerinin Kolonizatör Türk Dervişleri ve Zaviyeler' [The Coloniser Turkish Sufis and Hermitages of the Conquest Periods], *Vakıflar Dergisi* [Endowments Journal], No. 2, pp. 281–285.

26 T. Bağışkan (2005) *Kıbrıs'ta Osmanlı-Türk Eserleri* [The Ottoman-Turkish Monuments in Cyprus], Lefkoşa: Kuzey Kıbrıs Müze Dostları Derneği Yayını [Published by the North Cyprus Association of Museum Friends], p. 285.

27 H. Fedai and M.H. Altan (1997) *Lefkoşa Mevlevihanesi* [Lefkosa Mevlevi Lodge], Ankara: TRNC Ministry of National Education, Culture, Youth Affairs and Sports Publications, pp. 6–8.

28 *Ibid.*, p. 9.

29 Jennings (1993) *Christians and Muslims*, *op. cit.*, pp. 57–58.

After the conquest of Cyprus the establishment of the Mevlevi Lodge was followed by the formation of lodges and convents by several other religious orders. It has been documented that there were six orders that were active in the above-mentioned period: They were Bektashi, Mevlevi, Naqshbandi, Kadiri, Rufai, Melami and Halveti. Some foreign visitors were also interested in the above Sufi orders in Cyprus, and it is estimated that the activities surrounding the Bektashi order – one of the most important heterodox orders of the day – began with the deployment of a 1,000-man Janissary garrison. Many historians dwelt upon the subject of the Bektashi–Janissary relationship[30] and the focus of their research is discussed below. Until the beginning of the sixteenth century, the garrison soldiers were generally *devshirmes* (boys taken from Christian families to be conscripted and converted to Islam by force) and their patron saint was Hacı Bektaş Veli.[31] Reşat Ekrem Koçu (2004) claims that the historical sources of the time call the Janissaries 'Zumrei Bektashiyan' [*Bektashi clan*] or 'Dudmanı Bektaşiyan' [*Bektashi tribe*]. Other sources from the same period indicate that the headwear [*börk*] worn by the Janissaries was authorised by a *dervish* (Sufi practitioner).[32] Although some argue that the *börk* was authorised by Hacı Bektaş Veli himself, there are many documents proving this claim to be anachronistic, because Hacı Bektaş Veli died long before the establishment of the infantry units known as the Janissaries.[33]

J.A.B. Palmer (2000) focuses on the possibility that this dervish was a Bektaşi dervish from Amasya[34] but İsmail Hakkı Uzunçarşılı relates the Janissary–Bektashi link to the Ahi order or community, a craftsmen lodge system in which each occupation, with its own lodge, also had its own spiritual Sufi leader. Uzunçarşılı (1988) claims that in light of this tradition the Janissaries chose Hacı Bektaş Veli as their master or patron saint and thereby became the members of his order.[35] The words of the following Janissary march or prayer (*gülbank*) attest to this possibility:

> 'O God Almighty
> Head is naked, heart is burning, sword is in blood
> Many are beheaded here, but no one cares
> O God Almighty

30 İ. Ortaylı (2000) *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda İktisadi ve Sosyal Değişim: Makaleler I* [Economic and Social Change in the Ottoman Empire: Essays I], Ankara: Turhan Publications, pp. 345–351.

31 R.E. Koçu (2004) *Yeniçeriler* [Janissaries], İstanbul: Doğan Books, pp. 11–13.

32 *Ibid.*, pp. 11–17.

33 J.A.B. Palmer (2000) 'Yeniçerilerin Kökeni' [The Origins of the Janissaries], in O. Özel and M. Öz (eds), *Söğüt'ten İstanbul'a* [From Söğüt to Istanbul], İstanbul: İmge Publications, pp. 484–485.

34 *Ibid.*, pp. 484–485.

35 İ.H. Uzunçarşılı (1988) *Osmanlı Devleti Teşkilatından Kapıkulu Ocakları* [Household Troops in the Ottoman State System], Ankara: Turkish Historical Society Publications, pp. 148–149.

Our sword aims at harming the enemy
Our allegiance is to the Crown
Threes, sevens, forties
Prayers for Muhammed and Ali
And for our master Hacı Bektaş Veli
Let's say "hu" for time immemorial!
Huuuuuuuuuuu!' (Koçu, 2004, p. 11).

Şevki Koca's list of the Bektashi lodges in Cyprus includes the Bayraktar (Alemdar) Baba (Bayraktar Mosque) Lodge, not far from the Ömeriye district.[36] This lodge was constructed on the city walls of what is known as the Kostanza Tower. Koca argues that the lodge 'was constructed in memory of the Janissary Bektashi saint who fell during the conquest in 1570 just as he was about to plant a flag'. It is also believed that the shrine of Bayraktar Baba is here.[37] The Bektashi order, which has made an important impact on Ottoman social and cultural life, quickly grew in size after the sixteenth century. The order spread to the farthest corners of the Balkans and Greece and aimed to expand the influence of Islam by maintaining most of the pre-Islamic faith motifs and continuing many of the Christian-based traditions. The Bektashi faith was predominantly popular in the newly Islamicising societies. The spiritual leaders of many craftsmen lodges were Bektashis, too. It is not a coincidence that the patron saint of tanners and butchers in Cyprus was Ahi Revan.[38] Berkes argues that the Bektashi order, which became ever more powerful throughout the eighteenth century, also encouraged several rebellions against the Ottoman Sultan in which the Janissaries were involved.[39]

It is widely held that the heterodox nature of faith within the order became more potent as time moved on. For instance, in the fifteenth century, the heterodox Hurufi dervishes, perceived as a threat to the state in Iran, sought refuge in Anatolia, where they influenced the Bektashi order.[40] Bardakçı describes this process as follows:

'When Balım Sultan, who was educated in Dimetoka Seyid Ali Sultan lodge, the largest Bektashi lodge in the Balkans, became the sheikh of the Hacı Bektaş order, he

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36 Ş. Koca (2003) *Kıbrıs'ta Bektaşi Dergahları* [The Bektashi Lodges in Cyprus], 7 September 2001. Available at: [http://www.cemvakfi.org.tr/makale-deneyimler/kibris-bektasi-dergahlari/], last accessed on 6 March 2016.

37 *Ibid*.

38 R. Katsiaounis (1996) *Labour, Society and Politics in Cyprus: During the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century*, Nicosia: Cyprus Research Centre, p. 45.

39 N. Berkes (2002) *Türkiye'de Çağdaşlaşma* [Modernisation in Turkey], İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Publications, pp. 157–160.

40 Bardakçı (2005) 'Bir Tasavvuf Mektebi', *op. cit*., pp. 58–59.

transformed certain widespread practices into principles, which enabled the consolidation of a mix of Christian, Shiite, and Hurufi beliefs within the Bektashi faith. In this way, traditions like twelve Imams, *mücerretlik* (living an unmarried life), *demlenme* (drinking wine), *ibahilik* (based on refuting Sunni bans and perception of sins), wearing earring, trinity (Allah-Muhammed-Ali), *hulül* (the entry of God into the realm of appearances), and twelve posts gained legitimacy' (Bardakçı, 2005, pp. 58–60).

Sufi Lodges and Rituals in Cyprus

Giovanni Maritti visited the island in 1760 and observed that there were many Sufi dervishes attached to different orders in Cyprus. Maritti provides a detailed description of a lodge located in Larnaca which the Christians named 'Ayios Arab' and the Muslims simply 'Arab'.[41] This is probably the Turabi Lodge, which was administered by Bektashis in the eighteenth century.[42] Turkish Cypriots believe that the shrine in the lodge belongs to 'Umm Haram's black servant Türabi Dede', whereas Greek Cypriots and Catholics believe that it is the shrine of 'the black skinned Saint Therapon who is known as "Ayios Arab" in the Middle Ages and called Tarabo or Harabo by the common people'.[43] Maritti claims that their founder was a Molla Khunkiar, 'under whose rule they are formed into sundry convents and mosques'. He notes, moreover, that their practices are unusual in that they include the participation of women:

'They preach in these [the convents and lodges] twice a week, and admit to their sermons men and women, a thing not usually allowed in other mosques. One of them begins his discourse with a passage from the Qur'an, generally in condemnation of the very vices from which they themselves never abstain. The other Dervishes stand listening, separated from the people by a grating. When the sermon is over some of them begin to sing a hymn, accompanied by the music of reed-flutes, and by a dance which their chief begins and the others join in. They begin to turn very gently round the mosque, one after another, gradually increasing the pace until they circle round close together, with such speed that the eye can scarcely follow them. The dance over they squat down on their heels, and wait very demurely until their chief begins the dance anew, when all follow him' (Maritti, 1971, p. 34).

Bağışkan claims that this ritual is the Mevlevi *Sama* ceremony. However, if one reads Maritti's description more carefully, it can be detected that the ritual also bears the mark

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41 G. Maritti (1971) *Travels in the Island of Cyprus*, translated by C. Cobham, London: Zeno, pp. 33–35.
42 Bağışkan (2005) *Kıbrıs'ta Osmanlı-Türk Eserleri, op. cit.*, pp. 52–53.
43 *Ibid.*, p. 53.

of Bektashi *semah*.[44] Maritti distinguishes between three kinds of dervishes in that period: Dervishes, '*santons*' and '*abdalis*'.[45] Maritti, who besides giving a detailed description of the clothes worn by the dervishes, writes that although their manners are courteous, they nevertheless practice 'unnatural' vices, while 'their feigned devoutness helps them to indulge their unhallowed tastes'.[46] He continues that dervishes differ from santons in both their clothing and their behaviour. Santons, whom Maritti finds 'uncivil' and 'repulsive', 'are always filthy and wander around half-naked like the poor from India'. Their rituals are as follows:

> 'Their religious exercises take place three hours after sunset, and consist in whirlings and contortions and howls which become bestial bellowings, terrible to hear. One of them meanwhile clashes cymbals or beats a drum, shouting continually Allah (God): at last they fall faint from fatigue, and foam fearfully at the mouth: it is now that Mohammadans believe that the Santons are conversing with God and Mohammad. Recovered from their swoon they feast and consort with youths and women after a most unseemly fashion. These monks however enjoy no great credit with their fellow Mohammadans' (Maritti, 1971, p. 35).

Finally, Maritti notes that there was another group called 'abdali' (abdal) in Cyprus who did not have their own place of worship. He maintains that abdals were those dervishes who constantly wandered and were reminiscent of santons because of their lifestyle. He particularly notes that women were extremely attracted to abdals.[47] Moreover, the abdals who were respected were the Alevite/Bektashi Sufis, who were known for their unconventionality. Although they lacked lodges, abdals were able to perform religious rites by coming together with the people wherever they went. Most of them were folk poets as well, and they generally followed Sufism. The well-known Sufi poet Yunus Emre was an abdal, and his verses paradigmatically represent their beliefs:

> 'Dear Friend, let me plunge in the sea of love,
> Let me sink in that sea and walk on.
> Let both worlds become my sphere where I can
> Delight in the mystic glee and walk on.'[48]

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44 Bağışkan (2005) *Kıbrıs'ta Osmanlı-Türk Eserleri*, *op. cit*., p. 55.

45 Maritti (1971) *Travels in the Island of Cyprus*, *op. cit*., pp. 34–35.

46 *Ibid*., p. 34.

47 *Ibid*., p. 35.

48 'Dear Friend, let me plunge in the sea of love' by Y. Emre, published in T.S. Halman and J.L. Warner (eds) (2005) *Nightingales and Pleasure Gardens: Turkish Love Poems*. Translated by T.S. Halman. New York: Syracuse University Press, p. 25.

It can easily be observed from the foregoing that there were many heterodox devout dervishes in Cyprus in the period under consideration here. The alleged 'immorality', including the claim that rituals ended with sex, was probably slander spread by other orthodox Sunni Muslims with the aim of humiliating the heterodox dervishes. Even today such ideas are used to degrade those who hold Alevite beliefs. For instance, because in Alevism men and women worship together, it is widely believed that rituals end with a practice called *mum söndü* 'The candle went out', in which believers engage in indiscriminate sex in the dark. This myth bears no relation to Alevi practice and is one example of the popular degradation of Alevi belief. In contrast to these more orthodox attempts at degradation, we know that dervishes, contrary to the legalistic State Islam with strict rules, were widely revered by persons with little knowledge of formal Islam and who remained within the remit of the religion through forms of worship such as invocation (*zikir*) and whirling (*sama*). According to Sir Harry Luke:

'The purpose of the Sufi doctrine is to help the soul which was once one with God but got separated from him by entering the world return to God and achieve reunion with him. The journey of returning to God takes place on a "path" (*tarik*) taken by one of the dervish "orders" (*tarikatlar*). The stages of this "path" are represented by *zikir*, that is, rituals which differ in each order and which are performed so as to reach a state of transcendence that enables the mind to withdraw from worldly things and get closer to the Divine Power' (Luke, 2006, pp. 19–20).[49]

In the Mevlevi order, *zikir* involves dancing and whirling until one does not have the power to stand up. On the other hand, in the Nakshibendi and Rufai orders, *zikir* involves a rhythmic repetition of certain religious statements. This repetition continues until one has entered a trance, which ultimately results in exhaustion. This state of exhaustion is known as *hâl*.[50] Some dervishes are also known to hurt themselves with a skewer or sword after they reach the state of *hâl*. It is believed that they become immune to pain in this state of exaltation.[51] Luke himself witnessed this kind of *zikir* in the first quarter of the twentieth century in the *Kırklar Tekkesi*, an old Bektashi lodge under Nakshibendi control located 10 kilometres outside Lefkoşa/Nicosia, and gave a detailed description of this ritual in his book:

'Dervishes crouched on the floor in the shape of a circle in the mosque [lodge] call out to God with one voice in a beautiful and distinct rhythm. They swing from side to side and

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49 H.C. Luke (2006) *Dans Eden Dervişler: Seyahatname* [The City of the Dancing Dervishes], İstanbul: Gri Press, pp. 19–20.
50 *Ibid.*, pp. 60–61.
51 *Ibid.*

repeat "God help us, God help us" (*Ya medet, ya Allah, ya medet ya Allah*). After a short while, the rhythm and the prayer change. At the end of each statement, they bow down and shout out "There is no god but Allah, there is no god but Allah" (*La ilahe illallah, la ilahe ilallah!*), faster and louder each time, putting a special stress on the last two syllables. After a while, they move on to mystic words and shout "*Ya Hu!*" with a sound from the throat similar to howling. Now their swinging is much faster, so fast that even though they are still crouched on the floor they begin to shake. ... Suddenly, the old Sheikh jumps to his feet with a strange look in his eyes ... and takes off his clothes. He pulls off the sword waiting for him and runs forward with the sword's sharp end pushing towards his body. ... Although he is left breathless, he shouts "*Ya hu*" ... Now he has a long skewer in his hand ... He pulls the skin on his chest as far as he could and, after turning the skewer a few times in his hand, pushes it through his skin without shedding blood ...' (Luke, 2006, pp. 61–63).

This spectacle, which is a standard trick in any circus nowadays, understandably had the potential to make a huge impact on ordinary villagers of the time. Performances like these were actions that reinforced the belief among the people regarding the supernatural powers possessed by dervishes. For instance, Sheikh Ali Rıfkı Efendi, the last sheikh of the Turabi Lodge between 1911 and 1950, was considered a 'miracle-making' dervish. Bağışkan describes the folk belief in this sheikh's extraordinary healing powers:

It is still remembered that he had numberless Turkish and Greek patients who visited him because of their belief in his potent breath. He was especially considered a master in healing mental patients. After saying prayers for and blowing holy breath towards (*okuyup üflemek*) his patients inside a building next to the lodge, he made amulets for them. ... [O]nce, a mentally ill Greek girl who assaulted everyone around her and was chained because even six people could not hold her down was brought to the sheikh. He made the girl sit on the chair in front of him and began to blow his breath on her face. After half an hour, when he finished saying his prayers, the girl was transformed into a normal person. After becoming a healthy person, the girl often visited the sheikh, begging him to convert her to Islam ...' (Bağışkan, 2005, p. 53).

Reforms of the Nineteenth Century and the Decline of Mystic Islam

In the nineteenth century, Sultan Mahmut II initiated a comprehensive reform movement in order to respond to the general decline of the Ottoman Empire. In addition to the modernisation of the army and the establishment of a central bureaucracy, it was decided in 1826 that the Janissary units which resisted modernisation should be dissolved. This was achieved in a relatively short time. Mahmut II likewise initiated the prohibition of the Bektashi faith due to its close relationship with the Janissaries. He sent into exile and even

ordered the execution of many Bektashi fathers.[52] This decision was equally supported by the Sunni *ulema*, who argued that the Bektashi faith should be banned not because of its connection with the Janissaries, but on account of its heterodox nature. The *ulema* accused Bektashis of *Rafizilik* (Shia Islam) and argued that they were *mülhit* (heretics)[53] using the pages of the Qur'an as corks in wine bottles, abusing the names of three of the four caliphs, and abandoning the rituals of daily prayers (*namaz*) and fasting (*oruç*).[54] With Mahmut II's decision, many of the Bektashi lodges that had been constructed less than sixty years earlier were demolished. Mahmut II then transferred the remaining Bektashi lodges to those orders which were loyal to him. Nakshibendis viewed this as an opportunity to seize the property of what they regarded to be a rival order and thereby became a significant force within the Empire.[55]

The effects of the reforms were quickly felt in Cyprus, too. A lot of Bektashi lodges found on the island were transferred to Nakshibendis and Kadiris. It is known that the Bektashis had several lodges, including the *Bayraktar Dergahı* (Flagbearer Lodge), before the implementation of the reforms. Among the important Bektashi lodges in Cyprus were *Zuhurât (Zuhûri) Baba Dergâhı, Kırklar (Can Baba) Dergâhı, Katip Osman (Kutup Osman) Baba Dergâhı* and *Hasan Baba Dergâhı*.[56] The Bektashi lodge known as the *Zuhûrî Baba Tekkesi* was in Larnaca. It is depicted in Evliya Çelebi's *Seyahatname* (*Book of Travels*) as an important site of the craftsmen lodge, Zuhuri, which comprises Ottoman masters of traditional shadow play. Koca states that lodges were taken away from the Bektashis in 1826 and transferred to orthodox Sufi orders loyal to the Sultan. One of the most obvious examples of such a transfer is the Zuhuri lodge (*tekke/dergah*):

'This lodge [*dergâh*] was partially destroyed after 1826, following the abolition of the Janissary units and the Bektashi order. Although the lodge was renovated during the reign of Sultan Abdülaziz (1860), a minaret with a balcony [*şerefe*] and two arches [*çifte kemerli*] was also added to the original plan. The lodge was transferred to the

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52 B. Lewis (1961) *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*, London: Oxford University Press, pp. 78–80.

53 According to Lewis, the term *mülhid* or *mülhit* accounted for all kinds of sceptical beliefs that fell beyond the confines of Sunni Islam, including materialism, atheism, agnosticism, that is, all sorts of religious tendencies that were considered a threat to the State. See B. Lewis (1953) 'Some Observations on the Significance of Heresy in the History of Islâm', *Studia Islamica*, No. 1, pp. 54–56.

54 A.Y. Soyyer (2005) 'Bektaşi Tekkelerinin 1826'da Kapatılışını Anlamak' [Understanding Why the Bektashi Lodges Were Closed Down in 1826], *Uluslararası Bektaşilik Ve Alevilik Sempozyumu* [International Symposium on the Bektashi and Alevite Faiths], Süleyman Demirel University, Faculty of Theology (September), pp. 28–30.

55 Soyyer (2005) 'Bektaşi Tekkelerinin 1826'da Kapatılışını Anlamak', *op. cit.*, pp. 28–30.

56 Koca (2003) *Kıbrıs'ta Bektaşi Dergahları*, *op. cit.*, at: [http://www.cemvakfi.org.tr/makale-deneyimler/kibris-bektasi-dergahlari/].

Nakshibendi order from this year onwards and in 1869 it was given to Hafız Huseyin Efendi, a Sunni from the Nakshibendi order. In the years that followed, this lodge also served as a Mevlevi *dergâh'* (Koca, 2003).[57]

In this same period, the other lodges mentioned above were either turned into mosques or set up to be administered by Nakshibendi or Kadiri dervishes. This was a time when the Bektashi order was forced underground in every corner of the Ottoman Empire. Many Bektashis began to disguise their identities as Nakshibendis, and in time this brought about the emergence of a Nakshibendi/Bektashi mix. Soyyer explains this as follows:

'Despite this reality, a Nakshi–Bektashi conception also developed. At times this was caused by the adoption of the Bektashi esoteric mentality by the Nakshibendi sheikhs appointed to the Bektashi lodges. At other times, these sheikhs were influenced by a semi-Bektashi and semi-Nakshibendi attitude. Indeed some Nakshibendi groups were completely transformed into Bektashis in terms of their perceptions and methods, although their names remained unchanged' (Soyyer, 2005, p. 70).

The Tânzimat (*reorganisation*) era which began in 1839 and constituted a continuation of the reforms initiated by Sultan Mahmut II had different consequences insofar as it shook the foundations of not only Bektashi lodges, but of all the Islamic institutions of the Empire. The most significant new reforms were those concerning the Islamic *waqf*; that is to say, those relating to donated or bequeathed assets as religious endowments or foundations. The new reforms ushered in the exemption from taxation of Islamic endowments under a central authority and resulted in the transfer of the administration of many autonomous endowments to provincial directorates under the authority of the Ministry of Endowments in İstanbul. It is widely acknowledged that during the Ottoman period, a major share of endowment revenues was used to maintain religious sites. Countless endowed resources comprising farm revenues and shop rents constituted a vital portion of the revenues received by many religious institutions including Sufi lodges.[58] Furthermore, many sheikhs affiliated with Sufi lodges maintained their own family endowments. All revenues endowed to the lodge were usually controlled by the sheikh of that particular lodge and his family. The incomes were used to provide for the poor, uphold the lodges and meet the daily needs of the dervishes.[59]

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57 *Ibid.*
58 J.R. Barens (1987) *An Introduction to Religious Foundations in the Ottoman Empire*, New York: E.J. Brill, pp. 87–97.
59 *Ibid.*, pp. 87–90.

Following the phase of centralisation, many lodges and their sheikhs lost control of their economic resources. Moreover, many of the local endowment directors appointed by İstanbul in an attempt to establish a central, 'modern' administration were known to utilise the advantage of being away from the centre. They brought their own men to the vacant positions of previous members of the board of trustees. They even took possession of certain endowment properties by claiming ownership either in their own name or in the name of third persons (usually their relatives).[60] At the time of the British arrival on the island, many of the lodges (and other religious institutions) were dilapidated owing to the lack of material resources, and most dervishes sought their survival as beggars.[61] The only order to survive the destruction triggered by such reforms was the Mevlevi order, which had always managed to sustain good relations with the state. In 1860, the Mevlevis succeeded in receiving a warrant from the Sultan, which allowed them to retain control of their endowments. Over and above this they gained the opportunity to take control of lodges that belonged to some orders that lacked the material means to survive.[62] Mevlevis were able to preserve their privileged status until the end of the Ottoman Empire.

With the establishment of the Republic of Turkey, all Sufi orders were banned. Mevlevis, too, whose administrative centre was Konya, moved to Halep (Aleppo) and continued their activities there in response to the ban. The Cyprus Mevlevi lodge (*Mevlevihane*) was first affiliated with Halep; however, their activities had to end in the 1950s as a consequence of the persistent resistance of the Kemalist Turkish Cypriot leadership.

In Cyprus, the existence of such orders was important in terms of making Islam available to those living in rural regions where Sunni Islam could not penetrate due to its legal and formal structure. Most lodges were able to meet the spiritual needs of the people with their music, dance, and poems and nurture them within the remit of Islam. Dervishes wandering from village to village were the only carriers of Islam in those places where no mosques or *imams* existed. The lodges in towns were also used as shelters by the poor and acted as sites of social care where orphans were looked after and the hungry were fed. The Ottoman modernisation and reforms followed by the socio-cultural and political transformations under British sovereignty all resulted in the demise of lodges. Up until the nineteenth century, Sufis were akin to missionaries spreading the word of Islam in Cyprus, the spiritual leaders of the villagers, and fathers to the many orphaned and poor. Their demise was a major blow to Folk Islam. From the end of the nineteenth century onwards, some rural Cypriot Muslims who were left without spiritual guidance

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60 M.B. Seager (1883) *Reports on the Evkaf Properties*, London: Cyprus Colonial Office, pp. 11–12.
61 *Ibid*., pp. 43–44 and 58.
62 *Ibid*., p. 29.

from visiting Sufis were obliged to meet their religious needs by either converting to other religions or by finding new spiritual guides. In most cases the new spiritual guides were the Orthodox bishops who were gradually becoming more powerful. Hafız Lokman Hekim describes the 'danger' of that period in the following words:

> 'Turks were less in number than Greeks in the villages, they were speaking in Greek and with no schools, *imam*s, and mosques, Turkish villages were in a pathetic state to the extent that some Turks were even becoming Greeks under the influence of crafty bishops' (Nesim, 1987, p. 65).[63]

Of course, there were various other reasons behind conversions, including economic, social and political aspirations. Still, the disappearance of traditional religious guides from most of the villages in the nineteenth century deserves to be counted among the main reasons, particularly following a period when folk and heterodox religious beliefs were widespread in certain locations and when such beliefs were generally nurtured by Sufi orders. As the wide Sufi networks in the villages became less and less influential, the religious needs of villagers were met through practices based on folk Islamic rituals (such as rain prayers and healing through prayers) which were increasingly being met by the 'miracle-making' bishops of the Orthodox Church. Conversions occurred under such circumstances.

Conclusion

Sufi orders had been active since the time the Turks first accepted Islam as their religion. In the newly conquered lands Sufi orders brought different interpretations to Islam by syncretically blending them with the old Turkish faiths and local religions. As Sufis became more institutionalised over a period of time and began to act as a bridge between State Islam and Folk Islam, they started to assume the role of social welfare functionaries. Along with their lodge-based social care activities supported by their endowments, they guided and directed the people's metaphysical needs, as well. Although Sufis were sometimes used by the state to pacify resistance movements against the sovereign, they occasionally acted as mediators and even at times leaders of popular reactions against the administration. Moreover, they were involved in several rebellions and subjected to prosecutions and oppression as a result.

As in other regions of the Ottoman Empire, the Sufis in Cyprus were instrumental in enabling the people to keep faith with Islam through their syncretic interpretations that

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63 A. Nesim (1987) *Batmayan Eğitim Güneşlerimiz* [Our Education Suns That Never Set], Lefkoşa: TRNC Ministry of National Education and Culture Publications, p. 65.

were open to folk rituals. Their eventual demise had a huge negative effect on the state of Islam in the island. With the arrival of British rule, following a period in which lodges were closed down or repressed, many Muslim villagers opted to change their religion. Nevertheless, it would not be wrong to argue that the beliefs and practices of the times when heterodox lodges were influential, highly determined the secular attitude acquired by the Cypriot Muslims in subsequent years. One of the reasons why Kemalist and secular ideas were so readily accepted after reaching the island near the end of the 1920s should be sought in the fact that Cypriot Muslims had, for centuries, been practicing a 'soft' version of Islam informed by heterodox orders. Additionally, many Islamic institutions (including Sufi lodges) were both materially and spiritually shaken by the reforms of the nineteenth century, and in consequence, their ability to influence Muslim villages in rural regions was considerably reduced.

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