

Bektaşı Demiş:

ORTHODOX SUNNI, HETERODOX BEKTAŞIAND INCONGRUITY IN BEKTAŞI FIKRALARI

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Abstrakt

Bektasjinene er en sufi-orden i Tyrkia. Bektasjiene har tradisjonelt sett skilt seg fra ortodokse retninger av sjia- og sunni islam på flere måter: ved at de ikke bryr seg mye om påbudene; sharia havner i bakgrunnen da det blir sett på som den mest primitive delen av religion; felles deltagelse av begge kjønn i bønn og ritual; konsum av alkohol; lære om syklisk tidsforståelse og reinkarnasjon; og ved å støtte opp under sekularisme. Denne oppgaven tar for seg en vitsetradisjon fra Tyrkia som bærer ordenens navn. Under det osmanske riket ble ordenen ble fordrevet fra Istanbul i 1826 i et blod oppgjør mellom Sultanen og janisarene. 100 år senere ble organisert sufisme og sufistisk overtro forbudt. Gjennom denne tidene har Bektasjiene utviklet en lære som inkluderer hemmelig medlemskap. Man kan ikke vite om noen er en bektasji eller ikke.

Målet er å inkorporere religionsvitenskaplig perspektiver med humor teori for å belyse vitse tradisjonene. Vitsene, på en annen side kan fortelles av alle. På denne måten fungerer vitsene som et "offentlig ansikt" for en gruppe som ellers er skjult. I utredning av vitsene er det forsøkt å vise hvordan henger sammen med historiske, kulturelle og sosiale omstendigheter for slik å vise hvordan religiøs identitet blir presentert. Et mål er å vise i hvilken kulturelle, sosiale og religiøse sammenhenger vitser og humor kan brukes til å forhandle identitet. Et av hovedargumentene i oppgaven er at bektasjivitsene representerer et alternativ image til islamsk konservatisme i dagens Tyrkia og at de derfor burde ha en spesiell appell til liberale og sekulære tyrkere.

To Fikret Kızılok and Neyzen Tevfik

Both masters of music,

and satire.

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1. INTRODUCTION¹

When I first stayed in [it was as] Turkey as foreign exchange student. Though I had made up my mind to learn as much as I could from the courses of the university, I was also interested in absorbing as much as possible of the culture and history and religion as I could also outside of the class. With regards to my own academic interests, two things struck me. First was that socially speaking, almost all I had learned about Islam from my school was more or less useless. Most people had little or no interest in talking about religion and dryly replied «we do not make theoretical or critical discussion about those sorts of things». Secondly, I realized that all the theological concepts, religious terms and so on, we had learned almost exclusively in Arabic as transcribed from Arabic script to English. For example we had learned about *salat*, but I did not know that in Turkish vernacular it was known more or less exclusively through its Persian name *namaz*. *Umayyad*, I learned, was called *Emevi*. As time passed, and as I learned, I was also able to «translate» much of the knowledge I had acquired from earlier. This process at the same time entailed a process of going from the predefined and theoretical, into a more empirical «flesh».

Among those friends whom with I found relief in being able to talk freely and interested about religion and Islam, most were students. Usually these were among students from departments such as history or anthropology. It was also from these friends where I first became acquainted with the Bektaşî-figure. This was an amusing, interesting, if not slightly alienating encounter which I will narrate roughly as following. First I heard the word, without knowing anything about it; secondly I heard these amusing stories of witticism with certain religious over- or undertones where this Bektaşî-figure would be an almost indispensable part of the assemblage. I found these stories entertaining, particularly because many of them were completely outside my limited and prejudiced view of Islam. Thirdly, I suddenly found my friend introducing me or asserting that *I* was a Bektaşî. At this point I was really curious about whom this Bektaşî person really was. And to a large extent, this curiosity is the cause of this paper.

In a broader context, their presentation or claim that I was a Bektaşî made some sense. People, of either pious, uneducated or working class people tended to point out that it was okay for me to drink, not them, as I was Christian and they were Muslim.² At the same time, one of the

¹ Other than the general introduction and discussion, this part is meant to serve as a positioning of the writer to the readers.

² Little did my objection that drinking was not considered a particularly «Christian» behavior where I came seem to matter to them. Seemingly content with the fact that: «Christians drink».

anecdotes associated with the Bektaşî narratives could go like this: “If you place a bucket of water and a bucket of wine in front of a donkey, which does it choose? - Water. Why is that? - Why? Because it is a donkey”! As I never have identified myself as Christian, I at least felt thus that both the designations were equally misleading.

In hindsight, many things can be said about the word «Bektaşî». In Turkish language, it can refer to gooseberry («Bektaşî üzümü»), literally: “Grape of the Bektaşî” or “Bektaşî grape”), that is a sweet and sour green berry with thorny bushes, some which carry red berries which when they are ripe, and which are fruity and have a lot of black seeds which are bitter with a sort of “sting” to it. I have been told “Bektaşî” can refer to a “drunkard” in Greek, but have not been able to confirm this. The “-taşî” end of the word, suggests a Turkish origin. It is a compound of the suffix “-da” (locative) and word “-eş” (the word “spouse”) which is commonly used in words refer to different titling of people, such as: “*arkadaş*”, friend, literally “spouse at the back”; “*yoldaş*”, comrade, literally “spouse of the road”; “*adaş*”, name brother, or literally «spouse in the name», and so on. Following the idea of compound, I assumed that the root of «*bek*» could refer either to “*beng*”, hashish, or lord, «*bey*»(sir, in present day meaning), «*bek*», «*begh*» or «*beg*». First would mean a friend you have with the hashish. The second mean someone who is your friend or ally with, at and against the lord, or equal to a lord. The assumption that the «-taşî» in the word «Bektaşî» is derived from «*ta*» and «*eş*» wouldn’t have to be the case. «*Taş*» alone can mean stone. *Bektaşîtaşî* means alabaster, which carries some significance.³ However, as we shall see, in one way or another, all of these interpretations of the word has certain resonance to them.

The most important relation between the Bektaşî-figure and the word, however, is through the historical and mythical character of Hacı Bektaş Veli. Hacı Bektaş Veli is the eponymous saint (*pir*) of the Bektaşî order of dervishes, as well as revered saint of the Alevis of Turkey. The Bektaşî order of dervishes has been of some importance in regards to many issues regarding both the history of the Turkish Republic and Ottoman Empire especially Western Ottoman Anatolia and Balkans. (Both the history of the order and its importance will be treated in chapter 2) but which as a religious order safely can be said to have diminished. Today, the Bektaşî as an organization exists almost exclusively in Albania and Turkey. In Turkey, the Bektaşî convents were closed together with other Sufî convents at 30. November 1925. (Küçük 2002:237) At this time many Bektaşî moved to Albania. Other carried out their

3 See chapter Bektaşî religion, teslim taşı (Birge 217

practices in secrecy and behind close door. In Albania, however, they experienced prosecution and oppression through half a century in a communist dictatorship which boasted being the first Atheist country in the world.⁴

This thesis is about the stories about the Bektaşî that are known in Turkey as *Bektaşî fıkraları*, which I will refer to as Bektaşî Jokes. The Bektaşî image as presented in the jokes provides an alternative model for piety that is distinguished from the Sunni model. While piety of the bektaşî is mostly constructed outside the framework of this particular corpus of narratives (the bektaşî jokes) the jokes nevertheless reflects part of their piety, most of all in their contrast to the Sunni model.

Polysemy of “Bektaşî”

This paper deals primarily with the Bektaşî as a literary construct and as a image or a stereotype. The Bektaşî that appears in the joke appears in a sort of narrative that is not presented as a being the actual universe, one of fiction. The elements this fictive universe is made up with however, are based on and relate to the actual universe. Situation in the narratives depend on the social situation as evolves in the dramaturgy of the individual story. Here too, the Bektaşî is given a individual role, different from story to story. The main connection between this particular genres of jokes is nominal, the Bektaşî that appear in it. However, there are other connections between the stories. Across several of stories, certain typical characteristics and traits appear. Some are contradictory. Some are negative; more are positive. In all but a very few, the Bektaşî is the main character. The purpose of this thesis is to examine the actions, attitudes, activates, behavior and sensibilities of this character and see what sort of image comes forth. This image, however, should not be seen as it appears in the narratives alone. A wider cultural context also has to be taken into account. How does the image from the narratives fit with the image as it is in the broader society? How does it fit with how various groups who relate themselves to the historical and mythological Hacı Bektaş present themselves? Because of this, it is important first to take a look at “Bektaşî” in its broadest sense, as a word, and clarify its various implications.

First we need to look at the name Bektaşî. The etymology of the proper name “Bektaş” has been translated to “companion in rank” and “an equal with a prince”.⁵ According to this etymology, The word is a compound noun and root of the word is “eş”, meaning spouse or companion. The constellation of locative suffix “-ta” together with “eş” are, as shown, root to

⁴ (Endresen 2010: 66-76; Doja 2006:87; Cornell in Olsson at al:9)

⁵ This etymology is supported by Kingsley (1937:36) as well as the etymological dictionary by Sosyal Yayınlar(Eyuboğlu 2004)

many terms for titillations and statuses. The combining of the word “beğ” is generally taken to mean “equal” or “at ranks with”. The word “beğdeşsiz”, which carries the same roots and construction with the addition of the derivational suffix “-siz” which means “without” similarly to English “-less”, means unparalleled or unmatched. That the word contains the word “beğ”, it indicates that the nature of the “companionship” is related to the word “beğ”. The word “beğ” has the modern form “bey”, today meaning sir. Earlier it would have meaning that could be rendered as “sir” or “prince” in Turkish. Etymologically it means “wealthy” or “notables”.⁶ However, I do not quite contend with the sources on the interpretation that it means “equal to a prince”. If we examine the other words above which share the root “-eş” preceded by the locative suffix “-ta”, we see that all of them refer to a companionship. However, who the companionship is with seems never to be defined by the the first word. The first word seems only to define then nature of the companionship. *Adaş* mean that you share name with your companion, not that your name *is* your companion. The same goes for *yoldaş*, who is after a friend you share path with, not a title with someone who is friend with the path. “[Little]brother”, or “sibling” illustrates it even better. You are not the companion *with* the womb (“*karın*”, “belly” or “abdonment” but in this case “womb”), but the companion in which you have *shared* the womb. I cannot say that I am right, and the etymological dictionaries are wrong, but certainly there is a case for the interpretation of the word “Bektaş” as someone who is a companion with whom you share a sire.

The word “bektaşî” has accusative in the end. This lets us accurately render it as “of Bektaş”

Now let us take a look at some possessive construction in the form of noun phrases that contain the word “Bektaşî”. “Bektaşî tekke” could be rendered as “tekke of the Bektaşî”.⁷ Here each of the two words are associated with each other like the phrase “Christian church”, “Muslim mosque”. Likewise, “bektaşî dervish” like “Buddhist monk” or “Christian monk” or “Sufi dervish” or “Muslim dervish”, or “Bektaşî dede” like “Christian cardinal”. First noun of the first nominal phrase refers to a building and the predicative specifies its relation to the Bektaşî; the second and third phrases’ nouns refer to a status or position of a sort of religious figure. In all the examples here, the nouns that have a



Figure 1 - Teslimtasi.

⁶ See enties on Bektaş, “Bektaşilik”, “Beğ” and “Eş” in Eyuboğlu. The first reveals that renderings of the “bektaşî” as “Bektaşî” or “Bektâşî” it cadet(^) appears after translation from Persian and Arabic.

⁷ The tekke of the Bektaşî: “Bektaşinin tekkesi”.

Bektaşî predicative are nouns that also apply to sufi terminology. As we have seen, the word “Bektaşî”(see chapter 3, history) is primarily connected with the historical character. The village he settled later took the name *Hacibektaş*. Those who follow the example as understood set by Hacı Bektaş Veli can be said to follow the “way of Hacı Bektaş Veli”, “Bektaşî yolu”. It is this sense of the word that is used in the phrases like “The Bektaşî Order” (“Bektaşî tarikatı”). The words in these phrases can thus be said to belong to the same domain – that related to Bektaşî, their religion, organizations, positions, and so on. This meaning of the word will be properly dealt with in Chapter 3.

There are a few other contexts where the word “bektaşî” and where the connection between the the name Bektaş – and its connections: historical person, the sufi brotherhood, and the



Figure 2 – Bektaşî motive in the shape of teslimtasi. Notice latin writing of “Hu” in the middle (For “Hu” see p 444)

religious phenomena – is unclear. The word for alabaster in is “Bektaşîtaşı” for example. While the relation between these origin of these words is unclear, it should be noted that the *teslim taşı* alevi and Bektaşî wear, comes from HacıBektaşkoyu and is made from... alabaster.

The possessive construction is “Bektaşî üzümü” literally means “grape of the Bektaşî”, but this refers to gooseberries. Any connection beyond the nominal is unknown.

Another possessive construction is “*bektaşî sırrı*”. Google translate for exemple, render this as “The secret of Bektaşî”, while this is undeniably true, it is not the convential meaning of the phrase. The phrase means unfathomable secret⁸ or deep secret. The word “sırrı” - secret or mystery - has descriptive value when it comes to the Bektaşî. The term *takiye* is mentioned. *Takiye* been used to describe the doctrines that tells one to hide ones religious identity to avoid prececution.⁹ It is not certain when the *Bektaşî* started adopting this doctrine, but it has been seen in connection with the christian background of the sultans soldiers. A point where

⁸ According Langenscheidt Standard Dictionary

this practice became a necessity was when the bektaşî order was persecuted, their members being executed and the order prohibited altogether in the bloody confrontations when sultan Mahmud II abolished the janissaries.

If *sırrı* is taken to mean “secret”, the secret is to hide one's true identity in order to avoid perception, which has been present in the history of the Bektaşî. If you render the word as mystery, it also applied Bektaşî by both typical sufi plead to look at the inside as well as their general secrecy. I possess no privileged knowledge of what the Bektaşî inner workings of Bektaşî brotherhood and the goal of this research is neither an attempt to expose or to. Bektaşî in an as broad and open as possible definition so that a wider spectrum of groups and people may be examined in order to see their supposed or claimed relation to the content of Bektaşî as an adjective or predicative.



Figur 3 Hacibektaş village

As a metaphor encompassing this study secret – which has many relations and entail or relates to many different concepts – will be used. The secret will be used as a guiding metaphor to explain one of the underlying connections between association of humor with the image of the Bektaşî. The more you think of the idea of “keeping a secret” becomes a contradiction when the “secret” is attributed to a particular group or person. The Notion of Bektaşî secret become more or less absurd. In the “the Bektaşî secret” it seems that the very notion of secrecy and mysteriousness becomes more relevant than “the secret” itself.

Use of the “Bektaşî” word as a term

When I use the phrase “the Bektaşî”, I use the word in the most general sense, usually meaning mostly the image of the Bektaşî or the character of the Bektaşî in the stories. I have tried as much as possible to specify that I refer to “the Bektaşî order” when I do so.

Structure of the thesis

The second chapter I will deal with the methodical and theoretical issues of the paper. This is the most comprehensive part. I will first present the basic research and data collection

⁹ See for example: Moomen (1985:39) for origin. See 183 for

approach. Then I will go on to discuss the theoretical perspectives of humor and of religion. After this I give some consideration to the relationship between humor and study. Finally I will present a particular method of interpreting jokes that I have applied to a selection of them. In the third chapter, I will use the theoretical perspective on religion as formulated before and give a basic introduction to religious phenomena that characterize various Bektaşî related groups, then give a basic historical introduction, and finally introduce three sort identities and their relation with the Bektaşî: the Bektaşî order, the Alevi and Sunni. In the fourth chapter I will give a general introduction to humor in Islam with a heavy focus on humorous narratives from Middle to late Ottoman Empire until the start of last century. The focus is on characters, repertoire and stories and not on a chronological, historical introduction. I will also, based on the theory of humor, look at some parts of the religion and culture which are used in order to create humor. In the fifth chapter, I will present a case study specifically on the humorous Bektaşî narratives. This case study is based on the method of interpretation outlined in the second chapter. Here we examine a selection of Bektaşî jokes whose humor relies on incongruity between the image of the Bektaşî and the image of Sunni. In the six chapter I will summarize my findings.

CHAPTER 2: METHOD AND THEORY! REFLECTIONS ON HUMOR IN THE STUDY OF RELIGION

In the second chapter I will deal with the methodical and theoretical issues of the paper. This is the most comprehensive part. I will first present the basic research and data collection approach. Then I will go on to discuss the theoretical perspectives of humor and of religion. After this I give some consideration to the relationship between humor and study. Finally I will present a particular method of interpreting jokes that I have applied to a selection of them.

In this chapter I will explain the considerations behind my data selection and present my choices of translation. I will also examine theories of humor in order to outline the approach of the study, especially Oring's incongruity theory. I understand Oring's approach to hold that humor can only be understood by understanding the social and cultural context. The examination of this context also conforms to the context of the religious world. The chapter comes in two parts. First I dwell on methodical and conceptual issues of humor, second on religion.

Before I address some common assumptions about the relationship between humor and religion, basic clarification of general method and of terms are needed.

2.1 Preliminary Metodological Considerations on Translation and Choice of Terminology

This part is to provide a basic clarification of the course of study and research and how it was conducted. Aside for textual dimension which is properly accounted for, I have also relied in insight from friends and informants. Anecdotal evidence is hardly scientific fact, but they nevertheless illustrate what idea and conceptions people can have about various topics; they let us learn how widely know various phenomena are, and so on. When something here is presented as a "fact" or as a "truth", I have tried to evaluate whether or not this is common knowledge, or if it needs a source. Sometimes informants have provided me with interesting information which needs verification. If I have not been able to verify it independently or with reliable sources, I have either omitted it, or made it clear that it is unverified. For the latter, I have attempted to restrict myself to purposes of illustrating perspectives that people can have on the various topics.

2.1.1 Reflections on terms for humor in English and in Turkish

It is only the recent century that theorization of joking and wit has been conceptualized in terms of humor. Before that, it took the guise of laughter, because the word “humor” was associated with the bodily fluids. (Humor, from Latin: “moisture”, “liquid”)(Oring 2010: ix) That just this word has taken the meaning that it is associated with it today is related with a belief that four bodily fluids regulated our mood, behavior and sensibilities. This view was also held in the Ottoman Middle East and did not let go for real until 19th century. (Ze’evi 2006: 18-20 and 21) Humor today is associated with good mood and laughter. While laughter is an outward phenomenon, biological, visual and audible and social, humor is more abstract. The word for the academic study of humor in Turkish is “*gölme teoriler*”. “*Gölme*” means both “laughing” and “smiling”, and the word “*gül*” in addition to smile and grin, can also mean rose.

«When joke is used as a verb, it can point to different kinds of humor. When used as a noun, it tends to designate a specific literary genre.» The Turkish equivalent of the word, only the latter holds true. If one accepts that knowledge and idea is somehow related, then the Turkish and Norwegian words for this literary genre are closer than in English. Joking, in Norwegian, is «*spøke*» (literally: to haunt), whereas in Turkish it is difficult to make the same verb without using a verb phrase, such as «*şaka yapmak*» (to make a joke) or «*fikra anlatmak*»(to explain an anecdote). *Fikra* is derived from the Arabic root ك ر ء (#FKR) meaning «thought» or «idea». In the Turkish sense as "*bektaşî fikralar*" means “Bektaşî anecdotes”. Because of their resemblance to jokes and their humoristic style, and because my chief goal is to explore the humor in them, I render it in English as "Bektaşî jokes". The word *fikra* is also better used to refer to jokes as a literal genre, rather than joking in general. There are no books with collections of “*şaka*”,¹⁰ only of “*fikra*”.

2.1.2 Why “Joke”

The genre of narrative I explore is *fikra* in Turkish.¹¹ To make the text less complicated, I will render it simply as a “joke”. However this does come without complication. After all, an anecdote and a joke is not completely the same. Therefore I will attempt to clarify differences and similarities, and look at the case of the Bektaşî *fikralar* in order to argue why, how and in what sense I translate it as “joke”.

¹⁰ It is interesting to note that while the word “*fikra*” is ultimately derived from a root meaning “idea” or “thought”, the root of “*şaka*” (also Arabic) is misfortune.

¹¹ Other terms for narrative and similar narratives is described in “Joke in Turkish”

First, it needs to be clear that by a joke is not meant something that is considered necessarily as vulgar¹² or “false”. By false, I mean that the joke does not need to denote deception. If someone enters a room where they have been invited to something specific and see something else and they say “is this a joke”, joke directly implies falsehood and deception. When the word “joke” is used here, it refers specifically to a literary genre. According to Oring “the word created in the tale emphasizes the normal, the typical, and the rational; the world of the joke involves the abnormal, the bizarre and nonsensical”. If the world created in the narration of a joke is fictive, and understood so by both the performer and the audience, than it is no more a “lie” than any other sort of fiction. Other characteristics that differentiate the joke from other genres of narration includes that the joke is usually be shorter. The joke also typically ends with a punchline. It also tend to be told in present tense, whereas tales are usually told in passed.¹³

In terms of past and present tense-distinction, both those *fıkra* that properly belongs to the “jokes”-category and those that belong to the “tale”-category tend to use the same tense in Turkish language. This is tense does not have a single declination or expression in Turkish.¹⁴

Except for the linguistic part, where the Turkish language simply differs from the English, some of the Bektaşî jokes conform to the model of joke as explained before; some clearly belong to the counterpart Oring calls “tale”. Because we are examining particularly the humor of the narratives, I have chosen to render them more as “joke”, rather than the other obvious candidate “anecdote”. This is because I believe that the genre joke is as a text a clearer expression of humor.¹⁵ The choice of “translating as joke” is thus not just a choice of the words (“*fıkra*” -> “joke”) but also a choice in the emphasis of meaning in the translations of the text. Also, while there are instances where the printed Bektaşî anecdotes do not conform to the standard of jokes, there are far more cases when they do. As – and also because - I have chosen to emphasis the narrative as jokes in my translation, I have also to a greater extent focused on the narratives that resemble jokes.

¹² The affinity between jokes, humor and offensiveness and vulgarity is accounted for in the paragraph with the header “Unhumoristic Incongruity”.

¹³ Oring (2010:81)

¹⁴ Expressed with the suffix “-miş” “is the tense of a verb showing that the action belonging to the past is told by someone else or showing an indefinite action”. Sometimes, however, jokes – particularly oneliners – use simple present tense “-r”(“-ar”, “-er”, “-ır”, “-ir”, “-ur”, “-ür”.) (Grammatical information: Hengirmen 2001:151-153)

¹⁵ Oring (2010:81-82)

My approach to humor has also directed my choice in translation of the jokes. I have translated these so that the main focus is given to the humorous context. Another approach could have been to highlight the literary quality. I have not done this, as I believe it is easier to translate and explain humor than it is to reproduce true literary quality.¹⁶ However, it should be mentioned that the phrasing of the jokes as they are in Turkish probably reveal a higher literary quality than my translations. I have also, where I could find English translation, used them to supplement my understanding of them. If there is a major difference between the Turkish version and the English version of the same joke, I reflect on the difference of their structure. However, I *do not* reflect on the motivation for these changes; only the outcome.

2.1.3 Research Approach

My first step was to collect all the jokes I could find with the label “Bektaşî” on them. In the end, I tried to focus my research mostly on the jokes from Yildirim Dursun’s doctoral thesis about “Bektaşî anecdotes”. This is because Dursun’s work is more reliable than many other sources, both due to its structure and because he lists his sources clearly. Also, this serves to narrow the inquiry slightly in terms of the historical period from which the narratives come. Since there has been a confluence of the stories used in Bektaşî jokes and those of other joke traditions, I will use three of these other traditions to highlight particular characteristics of the Bektaşî jokes. There may be other traditions that have given stories to the repertoire of Bektaşî jokes, but I have chosen to focus on those most relevant and related, and most frequently mentioned together with Bektaşî jokes. There are Neyzen Fevfik, Nasreddin Hoca and Bekri Mustafa. I also use these particular three for illustration because I believe choosing a comparative sample which is more similar makes the differentiation more precise. Another reason why I have chosen also to try and rely on jokes that are part of the Turkish repertoire for illustrations is to embed the data in a Turkish cultural context, so that the reader is given a wider sense of context. I place most emphasis on differentiating between Nasreddin Hoca and Bektaşî jokes. This is because they are at more than one occasion indicated to be either to be very similar or essential the same. Furthermore, from time to time there are attempts at describing the main theme of the Nasreddin Hoca jokes as religion; sometimes simply because of the title, *hoca*. I argue that the Bektaşî jokes deal more directly and more often with themes of religious nature. Likewise I argue that jokes of Nasreddin Hoca usually deal with other aspects for formulating their humor. Though there are similarities and sometimes

¹⁶ Though the two are more related than mutually exclusive!

even the same stories, they address a different underlying problematic and do so in different ways.

2.1.4 What about women?

I have not been able to account for a feminist perspective. It is frequently claimed by Alevi, as well as Bektaşî, as well as writers on both, that women enjoy a better position among them than they would in Turkey or in Islamic society in general. This is a claim that should be properly investigated and either qualified or criticized. As this thesis is particularly about the jokes, and thus rather limited in scope, the question of women's roles has not been accounted for. This is due to the fact that in the material (the jokes), women have a very peripheral role. Even Though a few of the jokes are about women or somehow relates to women I have only encountered a single joke where it is clear that the women is the main character. Furthermore, when I write about the Bektaşî character, I use masculine 3rd person pronoun, "he", because it appears plausible to me as a man.



I will now turn to my theoretical approach. This is twofold. First deals with humor. The next deals with religion. We will now turn to part about humor.

2.2 Humor Theory

In this part I will describe outline the theoretical perspective on humor. I will start by briefly reviewing the main theories of humor and give an interpretation as an illustration of them.

The three main branches of laughter theory can be characterized as following: superiority (or aggression) theory, incongruity theory and relief (or stress-release) theory. (Attardo 1992; Moreall in Raskin: 2008) All of these come with various strands and branches which I will not dwell much into. I will, review incongruity theory and superiority to some extent, because I will variously employ them in the interpretation of Bektaşî jokes. For illustration, consider the following Nasreddin Hoca joke:

Nasreddin Hoca is seen walking around searching. His neighbors ask him:

- “What are you searching for?”
- “My key.” He replied
- “But where did you see it last?” they ask
- “In my barn.”
- “Why are you looking in the garden?”
- “It’s too dark in the barn.”

According to superiority theories we laugh at witnessing the inferiority of others which reminds us of our own superiority. As a broad theory of laughter in general, this theory will look fundamentally different than when applied to jokes and humorous narratives. The superiority which triggers funniness in jokes is usually at the cost of fictional characters.¹⁷ I would claim that superiority theory is purposefully applied in that it is funny that Nasreddin Hoca is searching where he knows the key should not be. But it’s different to laugh at Nasreddin Hoca in this joke, than to see someone going about on a futile job due to their own stupidity. Moreall writes that: “[...] feelings of superiority do not always lead to laughter. A rich man riding in this coach past ragged beggars, Hutcheson said, is more likely to feel pity for them than laugh at them”. (Moreall in Raskin: 2008:221)

Stress-release in laughter theory implies that laughter is related to discarding of stress or negative emotion. . “Laughter is an expression of the relief felt when the pressure is released, thus functioning as a safety valve for the individual and society.” (Gilhus 1997:5) It is less applicable to analysis of the Nasreddin joke because it examines laughter rather than humor. Thus, it could imply the question of why someone would laugh at this joke. One could argue that laughter may arise for people who are in a hopeless position. Many sympathetic helpers and interlocutors may be futility and helpless. Thus Nasreddin’s answer should be logical enough from the outside of the situation - that light is a major factor when searching. For all the audience of the joke - as well as Nasreddin’ neighbors – could know Nasreddin may very well have searched thoroughly in the garden. Likewise, it may be seen as a rude reply to someone more into the frustration of losing one’s key rather than trying to relate to constructive attitudes of others. Thus the identification with between one’s own situation and Nasreddin, his comic answer would imply relief. As a humor theory, this would be implying

¹⁷ It may be argued that there are jokes where the particular choice of character is made to ridicule. For this in connection with Bektaşî jokes, see “Others”

that causes of stress and negative emotion also provide a potential for humor, which in turn could or would cause laughter.

The important point about the stress-release theory of humor is it a popular (lay) theory of humor can be said to belong to this: people frequently see humor (also humor of other countries and culture) as an expression of stress and trauma experience.

Incongruity theory implies that humor sets together two more elements that are generally considered to be mutually exclusive. For example, Schopenhauer considers humor lie between abstract concepts and sensory experiences of the things that the concepts are supposed to refer to. Or Kierkegaard who: “Where there is contradiction [...] the comical is present.” (Moreall in Raskin 2008:226) According to incongruity theory, the joke is funny because of what factors Nasreddin Hoca consider relevant for his search. The lighting is important for eyesight, which again is important for searching. Darkness is likewise obstructive. However, the main factor to determine where a search for a lost item is purposeful is where the item is likely to be. Nasreddin Hoca search where searching is less difficult, instead of where the key is likely to be located.

2.2.1 Appropriate Incongruity as Humor

I will mostly rely on the works of anthropologist and folklorist Elliot Oring for my theoretical. It is also his work I will base the method of my case study on. Oring is a proponent of incongruity theory of humor. We will now look at his concept of appropriate incongruity.

Oring’s formulate his version of incongruity theory as follows: “the perception of humor depends upon the perception of an *appropriate incongruity* [...]”¹⁸ The statement has both theoretical strength and short comings. The appearance of the word “perception” twice highlights a very important: humor does not depend on the text alone; without an audience, a spectator, a reader, humor is impossible. Furthermore, it supposes that humor has to be perceived, that humor is not just something that exists by itself. There is no humor without an element of interpretation. This conceptualization highlights individuality and subjectivity because it allows for these both in the judgment of what is (god) humor and whether or not whatever is perceived is deemed by it.

While I believe that the proper derived function of humor is to cause laughter, I do not subscribe to a perspective that simply relegates humor to laughter. Humor can also be a

¹⁸ Oring 2010:2

sudden realization of a manifold of nuances at once held together in a few sentences, a feeling of proudness rather than outright amusement.

While it can be argued that Oring's definition has a problem of circularity with its double dependence on perception it nevertheless provides a framework where humor – and particularly humorous repertoire – can be purposefully approached. In addition, I find many of Oring's other insights purposeful.

While I depend on Oring's approach to theory for my method of interpreting the narratives as jokes, I will expand on this adding additional cultural context. Furthermore, I will tie this cultural context to a religious context. This is because I believe the Bektaşî jokes are relevant to understand the religion, and vice versa. The topics and problems addressed are tied to religion; an address to the term religion is needed. In this chapter I will clarify the theoretic and methodic approach to study of humor and of religion. First, I will address humor theory, where I will use the approach of humor as used by Elliot Oring. While I don't completely agree on all of Oring's claims, I find his writing useful. I will use his approach on structure of humorous repertoire¹⁹

1. method of identification of humor in text,
2. method interpretation of humor as a form of literature, in its expansion as a cultural artefact
3. Conceptualization and method of humor in translation (?)

This approach also relies on the perspective he criticizes, that is Attardo and Raskin's general theory of verbal humor (hereafter: GTVH). The GTVH is an attempt to make a classification model for humor in general. I have a few contentions to their model. Their model relies on a particular construction of knowledge, and consists of 6 categories of knowledge, according to how they relate to humor.²⁰ The "general" part of their theory of humor has a problem for cross-cultural comparison, as it does not take into account that humorous narratives may differ in their structure, or how they relate to external (cognitive and cultural) structures outside of the model they construct. This does not render the model useless, but it difficult to use on Bektaşî jokes. This because they come from a foreign culture. Because cultural

¹⁹ Oring (2010:41-66)

²⁰ Attardo and Raskin (1991)

difference cannot be intuitively grasped, they require knowledge of language and history, it would have been difficult to account for this and applying it to a formalistic hierarchical model at the same time. Their model, theoretical value aside, has not been used, as the clarification of cultural differences would render it too big and too ambitious for this research.

2.2.2 PROBLEM – UNHUMORISTIC INCONGRUITY

The theory of appropriate incongruity serves to explain *why* something is funny, not what funniness or humor is.

There are many instances where something incongruous is anything but humorous. The word “incongruity” is synonymous with: “absurd, conflicted, contradictory, contrary, discordant, discrepant, ill-matched, inapposite, inappropriate, incommensurable, incompatible, inconsistent, inharmonious, irreconcilable, mismatched, mismatched, repugnant, unsuitable”. The concept of incongruity in order words seems similar to Mary Douglas’ aphorism of dirtiness as “manner out of place”. “Where there is dirt there is system”,²¹ should thus apply also to humor. Having put this down it should seem only clear that what can be funny in one situation may just as well be shocking or offensive in the other. Humor is dependent on situation, audience; social circumstance and cultural context.

According to Oring’s position, the predicative to distinguish incongruity of humor from other kinds relies on “perception” and if it is “appropriate” within the context. While both these words denote concepts which are necessary for any instance of humor, I cannot see that they help to delineate what is humoristic and what is not. Nevertheless, it provides a framework wherein one can explore instances deemed as humor. It has also allowed him to formulate many valuable insights about humor. “[...] humor proceeds upon the apprehension of a structure of ideas rather from the reaction to particular ideas, motives, or events.”²²

2.2.3 Why are jokes relevant? Jokes as a media for ideas

Aristotle calls the ability to come up with humor at the right time, the right place and in the right manner *eutrapelia* (Raskin 2008 : 215).

“An idea cannot be transmitted unless it combines two aspects. First, it must be sufficiently familiar so that it is not automatically rejected as nonsense. It must conform in most respects to an intuitive ontology that the audience subscribes to. Second, it must be sufficiently interesting or attention-grabbing so that it becomes memorable enough to be transmitted.

²¹ Douglas (2002:44-50)

²² Oring (2010:81)

What makes an idea interesting is when it goes against our expectations of what the world is like. Interesting ideas are counter-intuitive. They surprise us.”²³ Lawson addressed the spreading of religious idea according to cognitive science, but he has also explained why joke ideas spread in a way which conforms surprisingly well with concepts from incongruity theory.

2.2.4 Theoretical Issues

Religion, as an object of study, is studied primarily “as manifest in intersubjective social relations, rather than [as Kierkegaard does] those that are intensely personal and interior.”²⁴ Jokes told are social, and their intersubjectivity is situational. Jokes as literature is as intersubjective as text. While the first is highly affected by factors such as the individual performance of the teller or the subjective preferences of audience, the second is mostly affected by factors pertaining to the author and the reader.

- 1) intersubjective approach study of religion give primacy to outer dimension of religion, such as text, ritual, architecture and art, music and so on.
- 2) Intersubjective approach to the study of religion would also

The polythetic approach to religions may be likewise be purposefully applied to the notion of Bektaşî religion considering the number of religious movements, sects, groups and sub-groups ascribing Hacı Bektaş Veli as their *pir*, or regarding him as their founder.

2.2.5 Conceptual Framework

Identifying humor in religion requires that we clarify what we mean by humor. It also requires that we clarify what we mean by religion. This is the goal of this chapter.

I will not tie this clarification to a strict definition. Instead I will clarify the approaches to definition that will be employed in regards to these two different concepts: humor; religion.

(In regards to religion I will use a polythetic approach. Because I am studying a particular kind cultural artifact in a tradition which I for the sake of this thesis deem as religious, I think that the object of the research has an empirical character to it – namely the translation and presentation of jokes. However, since this particular cultural artifact has a narrative

²³ Lawson (in Braun et al 2006:80)

²⁴ Lincoln 416 in Braun *et al*

dimension, one may object whether or not this narrative dimension can be identified as religion. Because I believe that it does not matter whether the joke is “religious”, whether it is “religion in it” or whether it simply relates to something that can be deemed as “religion” or “religious”, I think that a polythetic approach is most appropriate.

In regards to humor, I will use a more minimal approach. Here I will draw on Orings concept of “appropriate incongruity”. Though, according to Orings claim that the virtue of conceptualizing humor in terms of its “appropriate incongruity” lies in its “imprecision” (2003:142)

2.2.6 Main Branches of Laughter and humor theory

Incongruity and humor, however, cannot be said to stand in a direct relationship that goes both ways. Many things that are incongruous are experienced as dirty.²⁵ Sometimes incongruous may just as well be an abomination. It can unsettle, be scary or – maybe most typically – inappropriate or shocking or directly rude. Instances of attempt for humor can also be this. However, what may be shocking to one may be entertaining to another. A staunch proponent of aggression theory would hold that the one that is entertained is so because he or she shares the aggression of the expression. Today,

Aggression theory is reductionist. While it may be true that many sorts of jokes and many instances of humor may be offensive, I do not agree that humor can be reduced to aggression. The closest to a plausible aggression theory of humor would be some sort of stress-relief, where aggression and negative emotions can be redirected to the humorous and laughter. For some people it may be considered the most important to deem this sort of interaction unacceptable. This, however, confines us to only look at one aspect the motivation of the expression, and tells us fairly little about context. The connection between aggression, offensiveness and humor nevertheless remain. Likewise, sexual content in joke is often considered offensive, and in the extension of that an expression of aggression. Birkalan-Gedik recounts the Fifth International Conference of Turkish Folk Culture: “Başgöz recounted an obscene Nasreddin Hoca joke. The rendition outraged [...] another Turkish folklorist at the conference, who protested “This is an insult to our Turkish identity!”.” She recounts a similar incident about Boratavs, reknown Bulgarian folklorist who specialized in Turkish culture, especially jokes and fairietales. His last book with collection of all Naseddin Hoca jokes he

²⁵ Douglas (2006:44-45)

could find – in Turkey and abroad – was recalled due to “unspeakable” jokes.²⁶ According to Seyfi Karabaş there is “There is a tendency among contemporary Turkish researchers to launder Nasreddin Hoca in order to convert him into a “well-behaving”, “clean-cut,” rather old man of religion.”

2.3 Theory of religion

I rely on a polythetic approach to religion²⁷ based on family resemblance²⁸ which means religion is not based on single criteria, but on a prototype. This prototype is ideal and theoretical.²⁹ The prototype inhibits many traits which can be located in different dimensions: experience, textual, physical, ritual, doctrinal, et c. While I consider the term “religion” a western construct³⁰ I still believe that it can be purposefully applied cross-culturally. Furtherone, it is worthwhile to ask that the term “western” is at least as problematic as “religion”. Because of this, I hope that the empirical nature of the inquire

Rather than setting up a prototypical approach to religion based on any theoretician writing on religion in general, I will base mine on the works of specialist in Islamic Studies Carl W. Ernst. Rather than presenting his work or his model here, I will incorporate it directly into the part on religious phenomena in chapter 4 part 1.

2.3.1 RELIGION AND HUMOR

I will discuss some commonly held view of religion. While words like “assumption” and “hypothesis” can analogy be related to vioew, it is important to point out that that while these assumptions are widely held they is not, as a generalization, meant considered as common in academic and theoretical discourse as I general.

First argument is that humor and religion are mutually exclusive categories. This view may once have been well represented among theologians and academicians. There are probably

²⁶ Birkalan-Gedik (2005: 117-118)

²⁷ Saler (1993: 158-226)

²⁸ The theoretician is use for humor opposes the use of the family resemblance approach to humor. (Oring 2003: 8-9) In doing so, he also delivers a criticism of the Wittgensteinian notion of family resemblance: “family membership depends of common ancestors, not resemblance”. (10-11) His position is that all instances of humor depend on some sort of incongruity. (8-11) I contend, however, that its less problematic to make an essentialist or monothetic definition of humor than or religion. While humor tends to be power-critical, religion tends to be the opposite. Exclusive, essentialist or ethnocentric definitions of religion have also historically served for hegemonic purposes.

²⁹ As guiding metaphors and as summarizing important categories of religion, I find Klass’s (1995: 38), Flood’s (1999: 47) and Tweed’s (2006:54) all insightful. However, I find all their conceptualization of formerly been those sides of religion variously refered to as “magical”, “sacred”, “supernatural” and so on. Cognitive approaches use less euphemisms while referring to “counter-intuitive concepts”

³⁰ Flood (1999: 42-64)

two reasons while this assumption no longer carries much currency. First is that religion, particularly to those who study it, has lost a lot of its innocence. The other reason is that the academic study of humor has become much more developed. However, it is probably not completely without reason that the two became associated. Looking up humor in the dictionary, I am referred to “wit”. Antonyms of wit are for example gravity, seriousness, sobriety, solemnity and stolidity, all words which religion is frequently associated with.

This was the case when the Bektaşî jokes made their way into the Wikipedia article about the Bektaşî. Soon after, someone had removed it. This resulted in a heated discussion about whether or not these jokes belonged here. The pro-argument was that the jokes were important to Bektaşî culture. The counter argument could be summed up like this: «The jokes you posted were deleted because you do not put “jokes” on a religious article. That is like putting black jokes on the African American article». In the end a third opinion is called upon, which ruled that the jokes were relevant and not offensive. Nevertheless, they are not there today.³¹

Even Ataseven reports the joking *muhîp* as enjoying «[...] his Bektaşîness as a way to regard everything with a laugh» but still feel the need of making a disclaimer by saying he does not know how serious this person took his religion. (Ataseven 1997:246) This is worthwhile mentioning because this illustrates a persisting idea about the mutual exclusivity of religion – or at least sacredness - and humor and laughter.

Also in Christian tradition, humor (laughter) was rejected until the time of Aquinas and the rediscovery of Aristotle. (Morell in Raskin 2008: 216-219)

I do not argue, like Kierkegaard, that religion and humor goes hand in hand, but that they should be considered altogether different phenomena whose relation to each other is not predetermined, but context-dependent. This does not exclude affinities in common conceptualizations of the two. If one subscribes to the theory of incongruity that according to cognitive study of religion, the configuration of something counter-intuitive may just as well be considered something humorous as a religious representation. I consider this argument as not a blurring between the boundaries of religion and humor, but – rather than looking at them

31 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:Bektashi_Order#Humor_.26_Legacy It can be added that the chief proponent for removing the jokes is banned from editing in wikipedia. The one who wanted to have them there in the first place has quit editing because «I believe it does not provide an environment for free and fair contribution.» (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/User:AldirmaGonul> and <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/User:Freestylefrappe>)

as opposed or mutual exclusive – religion may just as well be considered a potentiality of humor.

Indeed, Saroglou (2002) reviews the issue from the perspective of personality psychology and does not support exclusivity between religiousness and sense of humor, but a negative association. Saroglou makes it clear he does not deal with “the *presence or function* of humor in a religious context” but “that religion may *influence* the sense of humor, and this in the negative, intuitive, direction, or at least whether religiousness [...] may *be associated* with a low propensity for humor”.

One of the main differences between humor in text (e.g. jokes) and religion in text (as doctrine, myth, or creed) can be said to be that while the first is taken to be purely fiction and as a narrative for the sake entertainment and the narrative itself, the second is taken to be a literal or allegorical truth. It might be that for many Christians and Muslims alike this generalization is true and representative for their approach. On the other hand, is it certain that people’s conception of God really rely on the counterintuitive model? Is it not possible that God for them is a matter of symbol and pragmatic application of terms in understanding one’s own experiences and life?

Much of this study relies on the assumption of a personality trait deemed “orthodox”. While the article does not mention what are the definition of such a personality trait.

2.3.2 Humor theory and Bektāşi Jokes

The purpose of this part is to clarify the research methodology employed in the case study in the 6th chapter. For this, I will rely on the works of American anthropologist and folklorist Elliot Oring and his work on humor. Oring use a version incongruity theory which based on the concept of “appropriate incongruity”. He defines it in the following terms “the perception of humor depends upon the perception of an *appropriate incongruity* [...]” (original italics). He goes on to state that this means “the perception of an appropriate interrelationship of elements from domains that are generally regarded as incongruous”.³² My attempt is to use example set by Oring in his analysis of the essay “On the Structure of a Humorous Repertoire” in order to interpret a series of Bektāşi jokes which are identified with common themes. This will be dealt with below; after I have introduced the line of analysis I will follow.

³² Oring (2010: 2)

In his essay, Oring analyses a sample of tales called “*chizbat*”³³, which were told by underground commandoes of Palestine jews during the 1940’s. He argues that the stories all rely on contrast between two images, the *sabra* and the *galut*.³⁴ After we have look in details into his analysis and interpretation, we will look at the major differences in the material of Oring’s study and that of the Bektaşi chosen repertoire of jokes.

Oring examines various stories and demonstrates that the humor of the stories depends on the contrast of these two images. While the *sabra* is characterized as “Levantine”, “primitive”, “dirty”, “boorish”, “unemotional”, “practical” and so on. Whereas the *galut* is “Eurpoan”, “civilized”, “clean”, “cultured”, “emotional”.³⁵ There is not the one or the other stereotype that is the butt, but excessive behavior at any part, or the misunderstandings that can arise in the contrast between them. Two stories to exemplify:

- 1) “One ideological instructor is hiking. In addition, he is a *jecke* [i.e. subgroup of *galut* category], the most naïve person ever to be with a group, and they are hiking and they go to an Arab village, and they see an Arab beating his wife. A very natural occurrence. It’s his wife and he wants to beat her. And then he says “I don’t understand why he hits her. Couldn’t he try explaining it to her?”³⁶
- 2) ”Say what you will about Avivi, but one thing you have to admit. In the entire Palmach it was hard to find a better rifle instructor than he. That is, not that he was something special, but he simply knew how to find a suitable example for every lesson. And when the guys heard an example, they immediately knew what Avivi was talking about.

For example, he would day, “Fellows. A rifle is not an ear. The rifle you have to clean daily.”³⁷

The first joke, the character – the instructor - is certainly a representative of the *galut*. While in the modern world, the beating of one’s wife would be considered unacceptable, it is seems to be considered nothing but a man’s right (“It’s his wife and he wants to beat her”). The instructor, however, being ideologically minded European diaspora jew (*galut*), automatically

³³ from Arabic: “lies”

³⁴ Oring (2010: 43-45 and 48-52)

³⁵ Oring (2010: 49-50)

³⁶ Oring (2010: 46)

³⁷ Oring (2010: 48)

assumes that the background for the husband's violence is a disagreement and furthermore desires a non-violent way of resolving it.

While many children are raised up with having to wash one's ear every night, the character of the second story is a representative of the dirty peasant attitude of the *sabra*. For him, the ears appear exactly as something that *doesn't* have to be washed everyday; being a good rifle instructor he knows that the rifle would malfunction.

According to Oring incongruity theory can be used as a methodology to interpret humor. With the incongruities of the various jokes, you can design a set of binary oppositions, similar to the analysis of myth of Levy Strauss.³⁸ “The syntagmatic (plot) structure of a narrative is ignored in the pursuit of paradigmatic (thematic) structures framed in the form of binary oppositions. Both approaches emphasize the conceptual relations of narrative elements independent of their place or function in the plot.”³⁹ However, Oring notes some differences between this form of humor interpretation and the interpretation of myth. “The binary structure of humor is intuitively recognized by all but the most unreflective of jokers and listeners.” May I add, except if the audience is exposed to jokes from a foreign culture. In such “When tellers try to explain a joke that listeners have failed to apprehend, they regularly resort to highlighting the elements that reflect the underlying oppositions [...] Such structures [i.e. the binary] are genuinely verifiable with respect to real groups of tellers and listeners. The same cannot be said of myth.” In the end he goes on to encourage: “Through a close analysis of the categories or scripts incongruously united in humorous expressions, a potential exists for apprehending a society's deepest conflicts and concern.”⁴⁰

To Oring two incongruities of the jokes revolve around the two images *sabra* and *galut* which are systematically related to another. “[The] [...] two images of central concern to the Palmach: the *sabra* image, which they created and after which they modeled themselves, and the *galut* image, which they abhorred and consciously and actively rejected.” However, though the Palmach favored the *sabra* image, the *chizpat* is not about propagandizing to one and demonizing the other, rather it “... demonstrates that each much lead to recognition of the other [...] incongruously the attempt of the Palmach to divorce themselves from the European and Jewish heritage only emphasizes the strength of their connections to it.”⁴¹

³⁸ Levy-Strauss (1978: 254-277)

³⁹ Oring (2010: 51)

⁴⁰ Oring (2010: 52)

⁴¹ Oring (2010: 50-51)

My case study will be to follow the example of break down the paradigmatic structure of the jokes in order to make an analysis based on binary opposition. Here, I have made a deliberate choice in themes I have chosen to base my interpretation on rather than an attempt to exhaust the topic. It is possible for Oring to make a more holistic approach to his material because of two reasons: 1) the *chizbat* took place in a particular ritualized setting⁴² and 2) appeared in a particular geographical (Palestine), cultural (Kibbutz) and historical (1940s-) context. Any concrete connection between the Bektaşi brotherhood and the jokes is unknown. The Bektaşi jokes are at least older than 1918, though their concrete historical origins are unknown.⁴³

Furthermore, an attempt to analyze a whole repertoire of jokes, even only a single book of collection were to be used as primary source, would be too big and arduous work for this scope. Rather I have chosen to base the case on the following considerations: 1) to illustrate the Bektaşi image in the society, 2) in a way which is socially relevant, 3) and which illustrates example of identity construction. To do this, I have chosen to base the binary oppositions in my research program on the image of the Bektaşi as it has been presented to me⁴⁴

For purpose that a large bulk of the Bektaşi jokes rely on an incongruity between the (assumed) liberal or heterodox Bektaşi and the (assumed) intolerant and legalistic Sunni Islam. These two images will be properly introduced in the next chapter.

For applying theory of jokes I purpose to employ some terms from some terms from cognitive theory. Incongruity in theory of joking, according to Oring, means to combine elements from domains that are considered different or taken apart. Implicit ontology, or ontology, works well to conceptualize such a domain.

In this sense, a punchline could to a large extent be conceptualized as counter-intuitive.

The jokes treated her might be considered offensive in certain situations, inappropriate in some, but it is important for the reader to know that these jokes does not originate from a simple wish to degrade, demonize or ridicule the Bektaşi.

⁴² The “cumzit” (Oring 2010)

⁴³ See footnote 2, in Birge (1937:92)

⁴⁴ I haven’t stated it explicit, but as I have indicated, my impression from Albania and from Turkey of this image was coherent.

2.3.3 Incongruity theory as Interpretive Tool

Appropriate Incongruity (for laughter)

Last of all, considering jokes a particular variety of more wider narrative, one can ask what is characteristic about this particular genre that makes humor; what in particular about jokes as genre makes it humorous?

Humor in jokes depend on a «perceived appropriate incongruity». I do not agree that humor sums up to incongruity. Incongruity detached from the idea of funniness or humor is just as much characteristic for dirtiness (Douglas *Purity and Danger*) or for something shocking, offensive or something unsettling. However, this reminds us the precarious relationship between exactly the funniness and the offensive. This is why also the one running one of the Bektaşî joke pages on facebook feels that he (or she) has to excuse and tell particularly that it the jokes are not met to make fun off or hurt anyone. Thus humor might very well depend on incongruity, but incongruity does not depend on humor.

If the incongruous part of the jokes is perceived as inappropriate, it will either be too absurd, too ridiculous, or - at worst – too rude or offensive.

Perceived denotes that the audience is actually able to notice and to understand the incongruous parts of to an extent that the tension creates humor. However, the need not conceptualize the incongruous part consciously. The incongruous parts must in some way be noticed, even if only saliently because if it is in no way noticed, it is perceived either.

How it is perceived, however, does not depend on objective measures. While it relies on cultural references of the audience, it also depends on subjectivity such as individual preferences. There can also be references to the situation of its performance (joke as gloss, Oring). The universe the joking narrative that the joker establish by telling it. the social situation when it is being told.

Perceived incongruity means that the audience must have a notion of the incongruities that are used in the joke. This requires personal judgement and cultural preferences. For conceptualizing this, we can use the concept of Knowledge Resources (KR) in Raskins General Theory of Verbal Humor (GTVH). The knowledge resources are as following Language (L),

In many humorous stories, jokes and narratives, puns are made through homophony by employing concepts that are radically different, only brought together by their similarity in

name – sometimes it can be homophony, similarity in writing: anything that brings two different concepts together in a way which defers from their literal or conventional meaning.

2.3.4 On religion, humor and jokes

Recently, in the cognitive study of religion, the notion that religion is connected to the concept of counter-intuitive claims has had increased popularity. This concept is frequently used argue for the vindication of God and concepts of gods as closely related to religion. In explaining religion, Boyer goes to great detail to explain the cognitive configuration of the idea of counter-intuitive claims. (Its a tree, but this tree talks. It is a person, but its invisible, and everywhere!) The analytical concept of counter-intuitive claim in fact supposes an incongruity; it supposes a predefined logical script that is broken in counter-intuitive claims such as curses, spiritual beings or deities.

By the configuration, the counter-intuitive could be said to be characterized as building on incongruity. Also the expounders of cognitive study of religion have also draws the comparison of jokes to counter-intuitive idea by means of causing cognitive disequilibrium. According to them, when the joke causes cognitive disequilibrium which makes them easier to remember. The religious ideas have this same effect. According to them, this is important for the epidemiology (spreading) of religious idea. Being counter-intuitive, it goes, makes them easier to remember. *While it is true that, for example the hagiography of Haci Bektaş Veli is littered with stories with counter-intuitive idea (walls that walk, a man who comes as a bird, a man who travels to Mecca without leaving the place where he was)*

Then, why do not people laugh in religious idea? Of course, in is commonly held that people often do laugh at other people religion. If one follows the idea of the sacred as ominous, one does not laugh at the paradoxical of religious idea, but take it very serious. With a joke, you laugh from the perceived incongruous; this stereotype is that of religious people relate to their (incongruous) religious idea completely opposite. In fact, Saroglou (2002) reviews a great deal of researches and concludes that there is indication of a negative correlation between religiousness and humor, but points out that the studies rely mostly on material from Christianity. (205-206) Kierkegaard holds a opposite view of religion and humor and, according to Moreall «Religious people, especially Christians, need t have a sense of humor to live with the incongruities in such puzzling beliefs as the Incarnation and the Trinity». This «the humorous is present throughout Christianity» Furthermore (Moreall 228)

Certain characteristic traits should increase the likeliness that a group is humorous or considered to be humorous:

1. Unorthodox or at odds with orthodox (as described by Val
2. Plural society with counter-intuitive concepts"
3. Other elements or underlying tensions
4. Ability to laugh at oneself and/or self-degrading behavior
5. Affinity with playfulness or symbolism.

Though most of the bektaşî jokes are set in Ottoman empire, the problems addressed in the jokes – religious police, religious intolerance – can still be encountered today.

It serves to be mentioned that the Bektaşî are not considered simply irreligious by many muslims. There are still many expressions of popular piety, reprimanded by the DIB, which parallels modes of Bektaşî related piety. Visitations (*ziyaret*) of holy places and tombs (*turbe*) of saints (*eren*, are still considered pious and religious people by many Turks. Contrary to what a reader of this thesis may be led to believe, they are not necessarily considered “fake”, “lax”, “lazy” or muslims – of course, depending on what sort of muslim you would ask. Many use the Bektaşî as a “proof” that muslim and liberality does not need to be mutual exclusive; other – even though they may themselves abstain from alcohol - use it to highlight plurality among muslims and plurality in their commandments and interpretations of them by while referring to them as “muslims who drink”

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In this chapter I will outline the negotiation of identities between different groups in Turkey. I argue that on one hand there are different identities which are variously associated with the Bektaşî through the concept of Bektaşî religion. I will go on to outline the aspects of religious phenomena associated with this concept while specifying when they are only identified with a specific group. Then, I give a short introduction to the general history of Hacı Bektaşî Veli. Then the history of the Bektaşî order up until 1926, and then of the Turkish republic from then and up till today with a special attention to events which are relevant for either Bektaşî or Alevî. Lastly, I reflect on different groups and their relation to the personage of Hacı Bektaş Veli, and to the respective group in terms identity negotiation in Turkey.

3.1 Bektaşî related religious phenomena

“It seems that the Bektaşîyya became receptacle for all kinds of non-Sunni current, though the Khurasanian spiritual chain of Hajji Bektaşh would have required a strict Sunni ideology. However, not only did “normal” Shia ideas strongly permeate the *tariqa* and grow there into strange forms that are sometimes reminiscent of popular developments of the Ismailiyya in India, but one of the strangest offsprings of Shia thought, the Hurufis, had an influence on the Bektaşîs. Fadlullah of Asterabad in Knurasan had received revelation according to which God was revealed in the word and developed theories of kabbalistic speculations about the letters, their values and their interior meaning [...] The greatest Hurufi poet, Nesimi (who was flayed alive in Aleppo in 1417), has left a deep imprint on Turkish poetry, with his glowing and passionate mystical hymns. The Hurufi influence is visible in the pictures that sometimes adorned Bektaşî convents: the faces of ‘Ali, Hasan and Husayn, or others, are drawn by combining the letters of their names.”⁴⁵

“Out of the diverse heritages of heterodox Islamic tendencies and Christian Anatolian and Turkish superstitions came the Bektaşî order[...].”⁴⁶

These two statements illustrate the views of the Bektaşî. I will not present general religious phenomena associated with the various groups associated with the Bektaşî

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3.1.1 TASAVVUF

According to Ernst the word “tasavvuf” can be rendered something like “the process of becoming a Sufi”.⁴⁷ Furthermore, according to him, one of the basic metaphors in sufi rhetoric is the stress on God as the inner (“*batın*”).⁴⁸ This stress has been explained to me by a friend in the following way. “Imagine religion being like a coin. One side is sharia, the outer religion, the other is tasavvuf, the inner religion”. For those who are into theory of tasavvuf, religion is furthermore divided into the concept of “the four doors” or “the four gateways to religion” (“*dört kapı*”). These are Sharia, “*tarikât*”, *marifet*” and “*hakikat*”, which translate to “the law” or “the road”, “the path”, “gnosis” or “knowledge”, and finally “reality”.⁴⁹

Influences from other sufi-branches seems to be to a large extent

In addition, there is the *sema* dance,⁵⁰ with local variant among both the Alevi and Bektaşî. *Cem*, congregation or gathering which is the Alevi ritual. The Bektaşî have their version, the *Ayn-ı Cem*. Both the *cem* ceremonies are based on a story from the Cafer as-saddık (the 6th Imam)

3.1.2 Shia and shia-like doctrines and heterodoxy

Küçük observes “difference between Bektaşîs and Alevis originates mainly from some social factors [...] In their doctrines they are Shi’i, acknowledging the twelve Imams, in particular Cafer al-Sadık [...] in high esteem. The center of their worship is Ali, one unit of their trinity (Allah-Muhammed-Ali). During the first ten days of *Muharrem*, they celebrate *Matem Geceleri* [...] [and] their doctrines of *tavalla* and *tebarra* are adopted from Shi’”.⁵¹ To understand the Shi aspect of Bektasi religion the particularity of their approach to Shia doctrines need to be appreciated. There are some other doctrines which they share with other heterodox shia groups, also usually labeled as *ghulat*. Though they share the heterodox doctrines I see in connection with the Shia doctrines (which they also share) the outcome which I do not believe to outcome I will explain is particularly much shared with other branches of *ghulat*. The two doctrines are *tenasuh*, or mentempsychosis, or transmigration of soul. The other one is *devriye*, which is the notion of cyclical time. These view sometimes results in an interpretation of personage, contemporary or historical, being considered reincarnation of

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of However, it may be more practical to describe them as two distinct group, since you are either born an Alevi or not.⁵⁴ Bektaşî also conceal themselves, which is one of the meanings of Bektaşî *sırrı*.⁵⁵ This also sets them apart from the Alevi.

Having said this, I wish to make one additional point about the Bektaşî that I think most writers and researchers on Bektaşîism have failed to mention. While it is true that there is a Bektaşî brotherhood that needs initiation, one cannot assume that becoming a part of this organization is the only way to be a true Bektaşî. It is not only Alevi who from time to time refer to themselves as Bektaşî. Also Sunni and sometimes secularist Turks occasionally can ascribe this label to themselves. Also, for those who think that one has to be formally part of this brotherhood to be a Bektaşî, it should be mentioned that the day of the *Tarikat*, sufi lodges and *dergah* is widely considered over. This view is held by many, religionists and secularists alike. While many religionists opposed and opposes Kemalism's secularism, the closing of the *dergah* and sufi-orders 1925 is often considered a necessary move in the step of modernizing.⁵⁶ It is not necessarily the orders and organizations who are considered the best or true representatives of Bektaşîism.

⁵² For *tenasüh* among the *Nusayri* see Myhr (1995: 99-116, and 119-124)

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3.1.3 Heterodox practices in the Turkish Society

It is not just the Alevi and Bektaşî who hold Hacı Bektaş in high esteem. Also religiously devout Sunni, as well as more orthodox Sunni groups like the *Halveti* who holds him as a *Veli*. In addition, many of the practices so common among the Alevi, like *ziyaret*,⁵⁷ or the celebration in *Müharrem* and *Aşüre* are considered particularly Alevi practices, but are still popular among Sunni populations too, particularly in villages and other rural areas. Also *hızirellez* is celebrated by Alevi and Sunni alike. According to Turgut Baba, it is also mostly Sunni Muslims who apply to join the Bektaşî Order.⁵⁸

The last substantial population to become Muslim in Anatolia are the Laz, who are widely considered to be the most conservative and nationalist.

3.1.4 Teaching, masters, sheiks, friends and lovers

Those who have attained higher station in the religion as said to have been set example by Hacı Bektaş Veli and reached The third and forth doors are for adepts of religion and is *marifat* and *hakikat*, are called *eren*. Saints and adepts of religion who are associated with *keramet*, that is, miracles or miracle powers. These are the ones who have attained (*ermek*, to attain; *eren* one who has attained). Other honorific or saintly titles include “*Pir*”, Sheikh, “*Eren*”, “*Dede*”, (for the Alevi *seyyit*, the *çelebiğân*, and for the highest ranks of the *babağân*) “*Baba*”. There are also dervish, who are initiated into the orders. There are *aşık*, who are people on their way into the path of *tarikât*, in order to be fully initiated. Those who have completed the first step of initiation are called *muhip*.⁵⁹

Among the Alevi the Muhip and Aşık

Erkân, or commandments. There is also *erkânname* which are instruction manuals. Each *dergah* or *tekke* can have their own *erkânname* with local variants of practices.

The primacy of “inner religion” to “external behavior” is also reflected in the *batını* doctrine. Primacy is given to *batın* (hidden) meaning and *batını* interpretation (esoteric) over *zahir*, the outwards or external. (This may reflect *melami* influences.⁶⁰)

⁵⁷ Literally “visitation”, the word refers both to certain places of vilitation and the practice itself. *Ziyaret* can be visitation to friends and family, but mostly the word refers to the grave of saints (*turbe*) or to “holy places”. For example, see “Religious practices in the Turco-Iranian world: continuity and change” by VanBruinessen.

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⁶⁰ Küçük (2002) characterizes Melami in following terms “a stream of Sufism which pays no attention to appearance and external manifestations such as the wearing of woollen garments and headgear. Fearing hypocrisy, they do not pray openly.” (16) According to Inalcık (2000) “they sought not fame and respect but

4.1.6 Confluence of bektāşism and *tasavvuf* to the wider Turkish Society

Sufism, and particularly Bektaşism, has had an impact on the wider Turkish society. Words like *muhabbet*, which have a particular meaning in Bektaş terminology, is also used in widespread use outside of Bektaş communities. While the commonly understood meaning of *muhabbet* could be translated as “conversation”, it has a much more pleasant connotation. If you want to talk with someone purely to convey information, or about some everyday topic, you would use a word like *konuşma*. The word *muhabbet* still has remains of its etymological meaning, with its origin from the Arabic word for “love”.⁶¹ Likewise is the word “*eyvallah*”.⁶² Earlier it had ritual meanings in the *sema*. Its usage by the Bektaş is also reflected in the jokes. Today its usage very is common, mostly in slang and street language, and almost exclusively by men and boys. Because of this, it is often considered inappropriate or rude. One informant claimed that the use of the word *eyvallah* became common only in the 1970’s. Whether this is true or not, his perception illustrates the Alevi entrance to the urban scene at this time.

“ONLY THE MOST SUNNI” SUNNI, ALEVI & BEKTAŞI RELATIONS

In addition, Alevi and Sunni both tend to admire Mevlana while Bektaş regard Hacı Bektaş Veli as their only *pir*. There are also humorous narratives that are about Hacı Bektaş Veli and Mevlana. In these Hacı Bektaş Veli definitely comes out in the best light, but on unambiguously.⁶³ The *Vilayetname* of Hacı Bektaş Veli also includes instance of rivalry between these two figures. However, in none of these occasions, either of them are portrayed in a *bad* light in any way.⁶⁴ Yunus Emre is admired by all, but Alevi and Bektaş both tend to consider them as “one of theirs”.

Other than the shared practices, teachings and symbols (Hacı Bektaş) the Alevi and Bektaş have another shared element. Both Alevi and Bektaş tend to construe their identity by supposing a “meaningful other”. I will here make a presentation of how earlier writers have presented this, and how their sources and informants have conceptualized this “other”. I use

blame and censure...” (191) and in the Ottoman Empire were, according to Ze’evi (2006)” completely heterodox conglomerations of sects, known collectively as the [...] [melamati] [...]” (80-81) Indeed, the *hırka* (cardigan) of the Bektasi is known as *Melamet Hırkası*. As Arabi considers the *Melami* the truest of the sufi, it is likely that bektasi would claim that they are the true *melami*.

⁶¹ (حَبِّ) which also has a Turkish form (ahbap, meaning friend)

⁶² The meaning of this word was long unknown for me. I was told many different origins and meanings. Accordig to Nisanyansozluk, it comes from Arabic *والله اى* and means “I swear by God”, or literally “yes and God!”

⁶³ Vits om dyreofferet.

⁶⁴ Yunus E

the stranger as a symbol for those various groups associated with Bektāṣī religion. The “other” as we will see, is most commonly conceptualized as Sunni.

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“ONLY THE MOST SUNNI” SUNNI, ALEVI & BEKTAŞI RELATIONS

As we have seen, Alevi, Bektāşī and Sunni alike can admire and look up to Hacı Bektaş as a *pir*.

In addition, Alevi and Sunni both tend to admire Mevlana while Bektāşī regard Hacı Bektaş Veli as their only *pir*. There are also humorous narratives that are about Hacı Bektaş Veli and Mevlana. In these Hacı Bektaş Veli definitely comes out in the best light, but on unambiguously.⁸³ The *Vilayetname* of Hacı Bektaş Veli also includes instance of rivalry between these two figures. However, in none of these occasions, either of them are portrayed in a *bad* light in any way.⁸⁴ Yunus Emre is admired by all, but Alevi and Bektāşī both tend to consider them as “one of theirs”.

Other than the shared practices, teachings and symbols (Hacı Bektāşī) the Alevi and Bektāşī have another shared element. Both Alevi and Bektāşī tend to construe their identity by supposing a “meaningful other”. I will here make a presentation of how earlier writers have presented this, and how their sources and informants have conceptualized this “other”. I use

⁸¹ (حَبِّ) which also has a Turkish form (ahbap, meaning friend)

⁸² The meaning of this word was long unknown for me. I was told many different origins and meanings. According to Nisanyansozluk, it comes from Arabic *والله اى* and means “I swear by God”, or literally “yes and God!”

⁸³ Vits om dyreofferet.

⁸⁴ Yunus E

the stranger as a symbol for those various groups associated with Bektaşî religion. The “other” as we will see, is most commonly conceptualized as Sunni.

3.2 Historical Background

3.2.1 The history Hacı Bektaş Veli

As we have seen, the name Bektaşî is ultimately derived from the historical figure Hacı Bektaş Veli. He is said to have come to Anatolia in the 13th where he settled in the village of Sulucakarahöyük. After his death, the village changed its name to the village of Hacı Bektaşî, Hacı Bektaşî Köyü. He is mentioned in a collection of stories about Mevlana Celaluddin Rumi, founder of the mevlevî order, in the following terms “Haji Bektaşh of *Horasan* who was a mystic of enlightened heart, but a man who had not felt constrained to follow the law as given by the prophet.”⁸⁵ His arrival tends to be mentioned in connection to - although not identical to - other movements, and orders that are also variously associated with his personality. Including the eponymous sufi order, these are *kalenderî*, *haydari*, *baba’î*, *melameti* and *abdals*. That these are mentioned together, particular the *abdals* are most likely due to the Horasan-euphemism.⁸⁶ That is, the migration movement that Hacı Bektaş was a part of, must have been the same as many other contemporaries.

Little is known about the actual life of Hacı Bektaş. Among other, this includes whether or not the order was founded by Bektaşî or not. There has been some differing opinion on this as well.⁸⁷ According to Trimmingham “His [Hacı Bektaş Veli] name is simply a term to provide a point of identity.”⁸⁸ Once this is said, we can concede to establish that other the Central Asian origins, European roots of the Bektaşî should also been mentioned. In the establishment of an organization, Balım Sultan is taken to be so important that he is sometimes described to be “ikinci Hacı Bektaş”, that is, “the second Hacı Bektaş” of whom Turgut Koca Baba comes

⁸⁵ Birge 1967:42.

⁸⁶ Mélikoff in Olsson describes the route which “from Horasan” may refer to as “...from Central Asia or Transoxiana, passed through Khorassan and followed the Caspian shore into Iranian Azerbaijan. It was the usual road that avoided the Iranian deserts. So the mention of coming from Khorassan” meant that the people involved were not autochtones, but immigrants.” In their article “The Impossibility of Abdal identity” writes about the same path of migration after the defeat of the Ghaznavid mawâlî by the Selçuk at Dandânqan: “The “path” of migration [...] took them from Ghaznâ to Dandânqân [...] along the traditional “silk roads” of the southern cspian (*Bahr al-Khazar*) through Ismâ’îlî territory and into Adharbayjan [that is: Azerbaijan] and the lands of Armîniya[i.e. Armenia].”

⁸⁷ According the Arnakis, the view that it was founded by Bektas is held by himself and Birge, whereas Hasluck and Uzunçarşılı is said to hold the opposition view. (1953: 242)

⁸⁸ Trimmingham (1971: 81)

with the following insight about: “Balım Sultan came from Rumeli, from Europe to Anatolia [...] [not the other way around] [...] when he came to Anatolia his first task was to reorganize Bektaşism”.⁸⁹

3.2.1 Bektasi in middle Ottoman Empire: 1500-1800

Historically, also the janissaries were “*Haci Bektaş ogullari*” (Sons of Haci Bektaş). Turgut Baba calls the beктаşi and the janissaries “*Özdeş*” and “*Pirdaş*”.⁹⁰ One can consider all these groups together with all other groups feeling that they belonged to or were affiliated with the founder and the orders connected to him as the “Bektaşî taifa”. The janissaries were recruited through the *devşirme* system. This means that the janissaries were children of the sultan. In Constantinople and other cities of western Anatolia and Balkan they were converted to Islam.

3.2.2 Later history of the Bektasi: Becoming Minority

In 1826, Sultan Mahmud II abolished the janissaries While the beктаşi consider Haci Bektaş Veli their only *pir*, the alevi have several. (Küçük 2002:30)

The beктаşi became influential and influential in the Ottoman Empire. They were so powerful and influential they can have said to be a part of the establishment, even if this establishment was full of internal competition and divisions. Because of their association with the janissaries, the beктаşi lost their influence in the establishment and fell from grace at the time of the janissaries’ abolishment. For this time on, the Bektaşî can be said to have made their transition to a “minority”.

Various groups affiliated with the eponymous founder of the order. Of these groups are the Bektaşî themselves, split into two branches, the *babağan* and the *celebiğan*. In addition, there are the Alevi. They too frequently refer to themselves as Bektaşî or say that their religion is “Bektaşî religion”. Bektaşî from the order, however, tend to point out they are different and that Alevi are not Bektaşî. (Ataseven 1997:XX, Küçük) This wil be treated in length below.

3.3 Identity Issues

«*The self-knowledge entailed by responsibility and agency within social constraints becomes more complicated when 'encumbered by a history' shared with others.*»⁹¹

⁸⁹ Ataseven (1997: 227)

⁹⁰ Ataseven (1997: 235, 243)

⁹¹ Sandels in Flood: 1999: 198

Turkey, a society generally considered to be collectivist. Moralizing and reprisal in public space is not rare. In the village and *mahalle* model of the Turkish neighborhood and villages, same sort of social pressure exists. It is quite frequent to hear youths complain about this. Many adults suffer a lot of stress, something that may be why fights frequently break out after traffic accidents⁹², in lines, so on. Among young boys, a frequently used sort of humor (and which I have experienced firsthand at several of different occasions) to poke fun at each other in a particular way. “Dueling among Turkish boys is expressed in terms that feminize and subordinate an opponent by portraying him as a submissive female to be sexually penetrated.” (Oring in Raskin, 2008:187) Except for these sorts of masculinists forms of pressure, there is also religious conservatism. Youth complains about older people reprimanding them for boys and girls mingling. In 2007 I visited Konya together with group of students for an excursion to visit the grave of Mevlana Celaluddin Rumi and to see the *sema* of of the Mevlevi. When wanted to have a few beers for the evening but knew that we could neither find, nor buy, close to the hotel we stayed. While in the center, search for almost half an hour before we found *tekel*. An anonymous house in a narrow street where the beers bottles were stacked in boxes, the shop resembled more a storehouse than a business. While we were there an elderly covered woman entered: “you will burn in hell for this!” she reprimanded the shopkeeper. He was frustrated “I am running a legal business” he said, “but still I have to endure this 3-4 every day?” The language and the dressing of the the woman indicates that this was religiously motivated – Konya is city known for its religious conservatism.

3.3.1 HOMOGENITY AND IDEOLOGY OF UNITY

Turkish nationalism stresses the unity of Turkish people. This is reflected in sayings like “*ne mütlü türk diye*”, “how happy is the one who can say I am Turkish”, or “*burası Türkiye, burası türk bayrağı*” “this is Turkey, here is the Turkish flag!” Because of this identity difference is frequently under-communicated. Under-communication of identity is commonly observed among ethnic minorities.⁹³ I was together with a group of friend, when they realized that one of them was alevi. One of the friends turned to me and said “I am so stupid. His name is Cem and I never realized he was Alevi”. When this man later got a girlfriend named Sema, I commented to the same friend who had made this comment “Isn’t that sweet? Cem has found his Sema”. It was only much later in the conversation that he realized that both their names were also names of alevi rite. Many other turks wouldn’t know about the cem of the alevi (or ayn-ı cem of Bektaşî) or the sema, and would not have gotten the reference at all.

⁹² It is said that it is not the traffic accidents that kills, but the fights that follow.

⁹³ See for example Barth (1994: 39-57)

3.3.2 IDENTITY CONFUSION

A friend who was together with me asked a carpet seller from Bitlis, “are you alevi”. He replied “*yok, kurdum*”, “no, I am kurd”. In other words, to him, kurd and alevi were considered exclusive identities. How can this be, when there are also alevi kurds? During the Maraş massacre Sunnis were going from door to door killing the alevi they could find. One landlord who had alevi tenant came out to the angry mob and said “this is a Turkish house”. That this prompted the mob to move on may indicate that Kurd would have implied Alevi and Turk Sunni to the mob.⁹⁴

In regards to complication and confusion of identity label, Grønhaug has the following remark which is clarifying “von Luschan treated the following as four different populations: 1) Turks, 2) Tahtacı, 3) Kızılbaş (or Alevi), and 4) Nomad (‘yörük’) In fact these are terms that can be used to refer to one and the same Tahtacı person, as respectively 1) language, and today national membership, 2) occupation and some concomitant cultural features, 3) religious belonging, and 4) to a form of geographical mobility.” In other words, identity labels need not be exclusive. One can be Kurdish and Alevi, just as one can be Turk and Sunni, sedentary or nomad, urban or rural, just as one can be religious or not. Furthermore, the interesting part is at which situations one undercommunicates and at one exaggerates part of identity.

3.3.3 IDENTITIES, PRIMODIAL OR SITUATIONAL

A girl told me in 2007, that she was interested in Alevi. She had heard that they were similar to protestant, but Muslim, and was thinking of becoming one, and consulted me asking what I thought about it. I met her again in Januar of 2011 and learned that she was making a degree in anthropology, doing fieldwork in the Şahkulu cemevi in Merdivenköy in Istanbul. I asked her if she had been able to become Alevi whereupon she replied ”Its a question of culture. Whether or not I adopt their system of value, I am still of Sunni background”.

I think it the claim that one cannot become Alevi has become a truism. Alevi is, in addition to religious identity is also an ethnic label. In addition Alevi society has traditionally been closed societies. Some of them have been further defined within tribal structures. Still, historically, it is more plausible that there has been confluences and instances of Sunni becoming Alevi,

⁹⁴ White and Jongerden (2003:231)

like Alevi sometimes become Sunni.⁹⁵ However, it is true there is not established road, *yol*, or path, *tarikât*, for the transition from non-Alevi to Alevi.

3.3.4 BOUNDARY NEGOTIATION: *CEM* AND *AYN-I CEM*

Dedebaba Mondi illustrated this by saying “they have *cem*, we have *ayn-ı cem*. We have *erkân*.”⁹⁶ Dedebaba Mondi’ saying is representative of the Bektaşî attitude to alevi. Dedebaba Mondi’ use of two words differentiation between the Alevi and the Bektaşî is representative for the Bektaşî attitude to Alevi. Alevi, on the other hand, frequently refer to their belief as “Alevi-Bektaşî”. The *cem* of the Alevi is public, whereas the *ayn-I cem* is secret. Because of this, the only other difference between them I can discern is their names. This is one example of how boundaries can be articulated in terms of differing practices and different names of them. Another example of how differences between Bektaşî Order and Alevi are articulated is in term of *pir*. While the Bektaşî Orders has Hacı Bektaş as their only *pir*, the Alevi have others as well.⁹⁷ This shows how both beliefs and practices can serve in identity negotiation.

The Alevi have *cemevi* (congregation houses) as place of worship, though many hold that this is a pretty recent invention and that their *cem* ceremony was traditionally held outside.

3.3.5 AS AN IDENTITY LABEL

Not all these labels can be considered as as an integral part of the term Bektaşî, but rather related to it in various ways. This goes for the groups that go under the label “Alevi”. This relation is in religious terms. The alevi identity has, in generalization, since the 70’s, been more and more associated with the political left. Another movement started in the 90’s referred to as the alevi renaissance where the *tahtacı*,

Other than the similarities in religion and their relation with the figure (*Pir, Eren*) of Hacı Bektaş Veli, the Bektaşî and Alevi also have some connection through historical similarity. This connection is one of oppression during the Ottoman Empire, as often mentioned. However, historical persecution of the brotherhood of the Bektaşî occurs only *after* the abolishment of the janissaries. Before that, the word “bektaşî” cannot be said to be considered

⁹⁵ In fact, Shankland portrays it as though it would seem *şeriat kapısı* for alevi is sunnism. This rings true to some extent, as there is still still seems to be a sunni imam who is the religious functionaire at a funeral, for example. That it is like this this in the present, however, is likely to be related to the establishment of the secular state.

⁹⁶ Interview 22.07.2011.

⁹⁷ Küçük (2002:30)

a persecuted minority in the sense that Alevi see themselves as the victims of heretical claims. (If heterodoxy follows heresy, and heresy is an expression and not a cause of oppression, Bektaşî can be said to have been heterodox only after their abolishment. Before that, they and “their ways” should be considered to be inside the orthodoxy of the establishment.

3.3.6 HACI BEKTAŞ VELİ AS THE POLE

“His name is simply a term to provide a point of identity”, Trimmingham

The relation between the Bektaşî and their mythological founder. (81) According to Trimmingham’s model of sufism, *tarikât* is the method, and ta’ifa is the organization. I will not dwell on the details of this model, but the separation between belonging to a wider community, such as one united under the name of a founder, and those who are particularly interested or devoted to set of practices (*tarikât*) attributed to this

We started out the first part with showing different phrases and words with the word “Bektaşî” in it. In this chapter we will go further in depth on the parts of this than can be viewed as religious. As we have seen, different contexts, different things, can be united by the name “Bektaşî”. Likewise, different groups and people direct themselves to this name in various ways. I will outline the broad dividing lines between the groups in using 3 terms, sunni, Bektaşî and alevi, in their relevance to the words “Bektaşî”.

Before I outline these three groups something typical of both Alevi and a Bektaşî atmosphere should be mentioned. There is a strong tendency towards aphorisms and sayings in Turkey in general. For example, the *atasöz*,⁹⁸ of Atatürk, like “Peace at home, peace in the world”. Sayings of Yunus Emre can be found decorating municipal monuments or inside schools and universities, such as “*ilim ilim bilmektir, ilim kendin bilmektir*”, “to know science is to know science, to know science is to know yourself.”⁹⁹ By far the most famous aphorism attributed to Hacı Bektaş Veli is “*eline, beline, diline sahip ol!*”, or “be the master of your hands, loins and tongue”. Usually this is explained as “do not steal, do not cheat and do not lie”.¹⁰⁰

ALEVI

The word Alevi became increasingly popular during the last century. It was used to refer to various groups around Anatolia whose religion differed from the Sunni majority. Though the

⁹⁸ Proverb, literally “father-word”.

⁹⁹ A friend of mine refused to accept the meaning “science” of the word “*ilim*”, insisting it should be rendered as “pseudo-science”. Dictionaries, however, does not seem to agree with him.

¹⁰⁰ Alternately, it can be interpreted as “be the master of your land, your friend and your language”, see

term “Alevi” a particular religious group have gained a lot currency, especially during and after the 1980’s. This has been related to a process that has been named the Alevi renaissance.

Shankland gives a thorough presentation of the Alevi and the Sunni village in the sub-province. He report several of cases of Alevi under-communicating their identity while in the town center.¹⁰¹ He still reports that the Alevi he has talked with has not been familiar or comfortable with the concept of “*takiye*”.

In reality, the term was used to point to a group; it would at the very least point to an extremely heterogeneous group, encompassing Turkish, Kurdish and Zaza-speaking communities. Traditionally these were set apart from the Sunni society through living in endogamous societies, often in isolation. The reification of these into the notion of one word “Alevi” to refer all of them, has caused a division and disagreement between Alevi. This division is not in terms of ethnic or economic lines, but in terms of ideological ones. With all these different groups contained in the one name, the different opinions of what it describes becomes visible when we look at various interpretations of what the word “alevi” comes from. The most common interpretation is that the word “alevi” consist of “Ali” and “Evi”. This makes up the meaning “House of Ali”. Likewise, the words “Musevi” and “Isevi” can be used respectively to refer to Judaism and Christianity. This interpretation place “Alevi” as a successor from Judaism, Christianity and finally Islam as established by the example of Ali. Others, however, emphasize a distance to the Islamic framework by insisting that “Alevi” comes from the Azeri word “Alev”, meaning flame. “Of the flame”, would be the meaning when the accusative “-i” is added. This interpretation gives importance to the nationalist interpretation, because it claims the Turkish origin of the word “Alevi”.¹⁰² In this combination it also emphasizes secularism by marking distance from an Islamic framework. The most heterodox interpretation of the word is that “Alevi” origin lies in the word “Luw”, referring to ancient population of Anatolia. According to this interpretation, Alevi religion is an expression of the original religion. Many so-called heresies, from the Cathars of France, the Fraticelli of Italy, the Bogomils of the Balkans, to the *Bedreddinlü* of Anatolia, are considered by some expression of the same religion that had to be kept secret because of oppression. While the first interpretation by far is the most widespread one (and, in terms of etymology, the most plausible), the second one is also fairly conventional and popular, especially as it fits

¹⁰¹ Shankland (2003:35-38)

¹⁰² Though the word “alev” does not conform to turkish vowel harmony, nisanyansözlük informs us that: Anadolu ağzlarında *yalaz, yalım, yalağ, yalağız, yalavı, yalaf* biçimleri yaygındır. Esasen Türkçe bir kelime olduğu halde // sesinin inceltilmesi Farsça etkisi veya Farsçadan ikincil alıntı gösterir.”

well with Turkish nationalism. The third one can be said to be adhered to with what I consider a sort of “cultic milieu” among Alevi. While it is not very well known, it is controversial and has a strong resonance in many New Age milieus.¹⁰³

Alevi frequently refer to their religion as “Bektaşî”. Hacı Bektaş Veli is held as a *pir*,
BEKTAŞI

The Baba that Ataseven did his interviews with express explicitly that he is not comfortable with the term Sunni. “Now if you say Sunni... there is no such thing as Sunni. If it is Sunni [...], we are all Sunni [...], tied to the deeds of prophet.”¹⁰⁴ Later he says “If you call them Sunni [...] these orders, they are Sunni.” The attitude to the phrasing and terminology regarding “Sunni” may be a resistance to being treated as the one who is the different, or the exception. For example, during the time of the Ottoman Empire, Christian and Jewish citizens were referred to as “*gayri muslim*” – fake muslim, They were a part of the community and under the Sultan, but because they hadn’t accepted the religion of the prophet,, the label “fake” had to be used to describe them. The Bektaşî maintain that they are “unpolitical” and likewise consider reactionary or intolerant Islam a form of politicization. In the 9th congress of the Albanian *babağan* established that “We have the right to consider our orientation as an heir to and continuation of authentic Islam. That is the reason why we say that Islam has never been wrong or deficient [...] It has only been distorted and implemented in the wrong way in order to achieve certain goals in this world.”

To sum up, the Bektaşî *tarikât* want to remain “religious” rather than “cultural” or “political”, whereas the alevi renaissance entail an fusion where alevism is taken to mean refer to both a religious and cultural identity (alevi music and dance), as well as having ideological orientation (secularism, liberalism, radicalism).¹⁰⁵

Turgut Baba says “Hacı Bektaş was a man of religion, Atatürk a man of politics. Alevi poetry, on the other hand frequently uses religious language to describe Atatürk variously as *madhi*.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ For example on the last interpretation, see “İşte isim isim ‘Mum Söndü’ hareketini yapanlar”.
“<http://www.odatv.com/n.php?n=iste-isim-isim-mum-sondu-hakaretini-yapanlar-0910101200>”

¹⁰⁴ Ataseven (1997:214)

¹⁰⁵ See for example Dressler (2008). In

¹⁰⁶ According to Küçük there were indeed bektasi during the national struggle who mused if Atatürk was the *madhi*. (2002:XX)

Today, *şeriatçi* is used derogatively for “the other” Muslims, who are seen by the Alevi to adhere to the religion in a superficial and mechanical way – often also associated with dogmatism, literalism, intolerance and violence. Besides this word, there are others like ‘*yobaz*’ However, it is still reported that religious people associated with Bektaşî religion – in this case Alevi – also follow the path of sharia as set out by Sunni Islam, and becomes imam within the framework of DIB (shankland). Liberal-minded religious people appreciate alevi because of their contribution to Turkish culture.¹⁰⁷

Alevi often use the phrase “alevi-Bektaşî”. Those from the Bektaşî *tarikât*, however, distance themselves by underlining their difference from alevi.¹⁰⁸

3.4 Sunni and Bektasi image as binary opposition

The Bektaşî is typically variously characterized in terms of stupidity, either due to literalist interpretation of the world as direct product of God’s will, or due to his apparent ignorance of basic islamic dogmas. However, while these are often underlying structures of the joking narratives

In conversation in English, this is most commonly rendered to as “orthodox” or “Sunni”. For the purpose of my case study, I will use the word “orthodox” to refer to the other as they are represented in the jokes. Because I think the jokes presents the “other” in an unfortunate light, I think its fairer to use the more abstract name “orthodox”, rather than Sunni, which is more of a real name. But now that this is mentioned, it much also be mentioned that it is not rarely the word “Sunni” carries with it somewhat negative connotations of intolerance, conservatism or the reactionaries in Turkey – especially by many Alevi. This is another reason for why I chose not to use the word “Sunni” for the purpose of the case study; the implications that the word Sunni carries with it in Turkey does not apply in many other Islamic contexts. That the population affiliated with Shia Islam is considered to be the “progressive” assumes the other one to be “reactionary”. This is not the case for the image of “Sunni” and “Shia” in many other Islamic contexts. The choice of the word “orthodox” is not an attempt to introduce new technical vocabulary or to argue that “orthodox” is a better term for understanding Sunni Islam in general, but purely a choice of phrasing for the study of the jokes.

¹⁰⁷ I base this on experience with my friends in Turkey. Particularly music is one part of the Turkish culture where alevi are over-represented. Shankland reports that the musicians are found in alevi, not sunni, villages. (2003:36) Likewise folk-trubadors, *ozan*, are of alevi tradition. Also the references to Hata’î and that alevi are also influenced by the mystical ideas of Arabi are appreciated by many liberal sunni.

¹⁰⁸ Küçük (2002), Markussen (), Turgut Baba in Ataseven (1997:XX)

Chapter 4. Review of Humoristic stories in Islam and of the Bektāṣi

The German orientalist Hellmut Ritter (1952), in his article *Muslim Mystics Strife with God* gives a deal of examples of humorous anecdotes and stories, most of them from Attar.¹⁰⁹ One mayor humoristic point in these is that the main characters see the course of events in the world, what happens or not to them, as a direct result of God's will. The mystic fool is not only in contact with God, but in strife too. In Ritter's view, the stories from the time of Attar seem to represent some change in the tradition of poetry, because before it was centered around the kings and courts, but in his poetry and thereafter became more centered on "beggars, fools, and sufis, who mostly also belong to a low social stratum". According to Ritter, it was Sufism that gave the lower classes a new self-consciousness.¹¹⁰ The stories Ritter presents have the same theme; a person's suffering, tribulations and from that, strife with God. For example:

An officer regularly sends food to a poor fool living next door. One day the king sends orders for the officer, and he has to leave town. The fool asks: Whom will you charge with provisioning me? The officer says: God. The fool replies: Don't do that; he will be sure to keep me hungry

Another one:

Another fool who feels persecuted by God is molested by the street boys, who throw stones at him. At the same time, it begins to hail. Then he looks up to the sky and says: Is it not enough that Thou hast taken away my heart (that is, my reason); was it necessary to collaborate with these boys?

Certainly, these are stories full of tragedy and some people may look at them as sad rather than witty. Nevertheless, they are humorous as well, displaying at the very least some sort of gallows humor. The humor of these two stories – as well as most of the stories Ritter presents in his article – revolves around one basic incongruity. Helmut doesn't use this phrase, but he does make mention of this. This incongruity can at its base be described as the notion of a perfect Creator, a perfect God, in meeting with an imperfect – and unjust! – world. In theological terms, Ritter elaborates two opposing views. Mainly he focuses on the opposition between the *mu'tazila* school and the orthodoxy (*al-h as-sunna wal-jamâ'a*¹¹¹). According to Ritter, the *mu'tazila* view of God is that God is incapable – or mostly incapable - of doing

¹⁰⁹ Farid ad-Din Attar ("The apothecary), famous Persian mystic and poet.

¹¹⁰ Ritter (1952:2-3)

¹¹¹ Hereafter "*ehl-l sunnet*", turkified Arabic for: the people of the Sunna.

evil. “The unbelievers, who are condemned to Hell, would embrace the true faith and go to paradise”.¹¹² Whereas to the orthodox “teaches that God causes benefits for the believers and causes harm to the unbeliever”. However, none of the theological teachings positions are able to comfort the fool in any other way than causing him to turn directly to God and address him as an oppressor. The funniness, I believe, lie in lines that can be understood as similar to superiority, but like in the example with the noble passing beggar, this is not an aggressive sort of superiority, but rather one of sympathy. You feel sorry and at the same time charmed by the fools whose “direct and intimate relation to God characterizes them as genuine mystics, as mystical fools, and distinguishes them from heretics and philosophers”. The philosophers are not funny due to their sophistication, pretentiousness, and privileged position. Their rationality has “alienated [them] from God”. This is “one of the reasons why these people [the fools] are treated with a certain respect in the East. They are foolish lovers of God”¹¹³

One of the forms in which their foolishness finds expression can be described as anthropomorphism.¹¹⁴ Anthropomorphism has generally been viewed as problematic or heretical by the Islamic establishment. Ritter, for example, mentions “Jahmiya, Jahm ibn Safwan, who was put to death in 745 CE. He denied all the attributes of God which resemble human attributes, and is reported to have taken his adherents to the lepers and other kinds of sufferers. Then he would say: Look! Such things are done by the most merciful of merciful”.¹¹⁵

These stories are reminiscent of the story of Nesimi being flayed alive. According to this story, Nesimi says “The God you worship is under my feet”. As if the implication that God is under his feet is itself enough to make a story. The anecdote however, continues to implicate that what in particular is under his feet is relevant. Like a mystery being revealed, his foot is covering a coin. Thus, a statement that will be perceived as a heretical statement is transformed into a fierce criticism of a corrupted materialist society. This reveal is a twist not all dissimilar to that of the punch line of a joke.¹¹⁶ Ritter has written about the historical and

¹¹² (Ritter 1952:5)

¹¹³ Ritter (1952: 9)

¹¹⁴ Anthropomorphism (*tashbiih*) in the sense Momen (1985:p66p) uses it. In the sense of muslim orthodoxy' ascription of certain people or groups “the fault of” ascribing human attribute or human-like traits to God; at its most exemplified by God being finite in time and space (having a body) and being able to changing his plan. Another point, which is less relevant for the jokes but more for understanding bektaşî religion is

¹¹⁵ Ritter (1952: 6)

¹¹⁶ Burrill (1972:31)

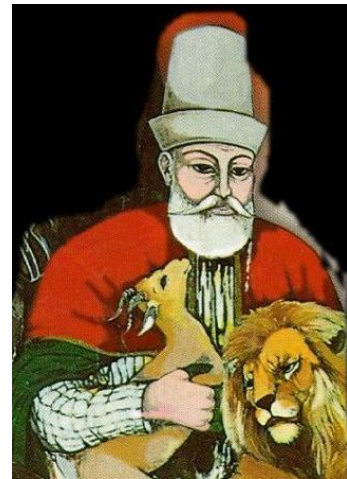
religious context of his anecdotes, but can we find similar elements in our stories about Bektaşî jokes?

4.1 Historical Background for Incongruity

I will look at movements of Sufism, teachings, doctrines and episodes in history, as well as other humorous narratives which I believe can give a context to some of the expressions in which Bektaşî wit finds its form. The main backdrop for tension among cultural groups that can give cause to incongruity I consider the divide between orthodoxy (*ehl-i sunnet*) and heterodoxy.

the Turkish historian Halil İnalcık, can be characterized with what he calls the “*gazi spirit*”.

(İnalcık 1953: 2) *Gazi*, meaning holy warriors, were frontiersmen. Both state of Byzantine and Selçuk were in ruins, and the lands of Anatolia was a ruined country split into warring *beylik* - principalities. One of these principalities would eventually grow into the Ottoman Empire. We have seen in the backgrounds chapter that the early days of Ottoman Empire did not only see the entry of Hacı Bektaşîbut also the arrival grand persona like Celaleddin Rumi, and supposedly being the lifetime of Yunus Emre and Nasreddin Hoca, We have looked into the name Bektaş, but can we add another interpretation to this name that makes sense in his time and context? Bektaş is portrayed with two attribute animals; the



Figur 4 Hacı Bektaş portrayed with a lion and a deer in his hands

deer and the lion. It is a common claim among Alevi that it represents the peace between the fiercest of animal – the lion - and the innocent deer. If we interpret the lion to symbolize the equestrian Turcoman, the warring Beys and the various bands of bandits and mercenaries, the deer can symbolize the Anatolian peasantry, shepherds, villagers and city folk. Anatolia had been subject to continual east-west migration by Turcoman, later the crusades, and finally – with Turcoman migration still continuing – the Mongol hordes. At the establishment and initial expansion of the Ottoman Empire, it is very important to note that the initial Sultanate was firmly established in Balkan even before I cover all of Anatolia.¹¹⁷ It is thus safe to consider the Ottoman Empire essentially more Anatolian and Balkan than for example Middle-Eastern. It is logical that a state that was able to establish itself in the central west of Anatolia

¹¹⁷ Cf Finkel 2006: 2-21, İnalcık 1953

was a state that were able to accommodate the various migrational streams as well as cultural and religious trends that come with this. Of those traditions of Sufism that Hacı Bektaş is said to represent by Alevi and Bektaşî sources, is that which is called “the Horasan style” or “*Horasanlı*”. Rather than trying to confine this notion to the geographical location of Horasan¹¹⁸ we can see it as symbolically for streams and trends of wandering and mendicant dervishes at the time. There are in particular those Sufis that can be characterized as heterodox in regards to *ahl as-sunna wal'-camâ'a*, such as the *kalender* and the *melami* branches of Sufism that is relevant.

Of those groups that are mentioned in the *Vilayet-name* are the “*Abdal*”. The word has a special meaning in Sufi Theosophy¹¹⁹. However, there are several of reasons to believe that the word has a different meaning in the *Vilayet-name*. First of all, the *Vilayet-name* specifies the “*Abdal of Rum*”. Secondly, *vilayet-name* mentions the *Abdal of Rum* as counting in the thousands; the *Abdals* as described by the German orientalist Annemarie Schimmel comes in a hierarchy where they are either 40 or (according to Arabi) 7. It is more likely that the *Abdal* mentioned in the *vilayet-name* has a meaning closer to the contemporary Turkish meaning of the word “gypsy”. The first Byzantine mentioning of gypsies “*Aigutissa*” and “*Atsinganoi*”¹²⁰ is only a bit more than hundred years before the start of the Ottoman expansion. Today, the *Abdals* are mostly alevi.¹²¹

Two other classes of dervishes which arrived at these times in Anatolia were the *kalender*¹²² and the *melami*. As we have seen, it is both the opinion of Schimmel and Trimmingham that these movements are thoroughly connected with what would become the Bektaşî.¹²³ Parts of this can still be seen today, for example in that the habit of the Bektaşî is called “*melamet hırkası*” habit of blame. Though the *melami* and *kalender* are not exactly the same, I will treat them together for simplicity’s sake in this thesis, since they both are relevant in regards with the Bektaşî and with the background of the humor. The themes that gives them a place in understanding humor in these contexts, and which is characteristic of either of these two movements are: 1. Anti-nominal, 2. Self-ridiculing and self-degrading behavior, 3. Marginality and/or at-odds with the state, and (when it comes to *melami*) 4. Secrecy.

¹¹⁸ As we have seen, the phrase “from Horasan” is sort of a literary cliché.

¹¹⁹ See Schimmel (1975: 200)

¹²⁰ Strand and Marsh in Markusson *et al* 2005: 160-161)

¹²¹ Strand and Marsh in Markusson *et al* 2005; Barth in J. Nicolaisen *et al* 1968: 226)

¹²² Usually written: *qalandar* or *qalandari*. Başkal 2010: 30-31. For further information, see also Trimmingham

APPENDIX 1

¹²³ Schimmel, Trimmingham

One of the stories about a *kaldender* dervish is the story of Barak Baba who went around in animal skins shouting like a bear and dancing like a monkey.¹²⁴ Certainly, as this behavior might have been scary, it might also make a good humoristic anecdote. What is particularly interesting, however, is how set the course of conduct seem to be to break norms of decency. While the *kaldender* broke the norms, the *melami* would willfully attract the contempt of the rest of society upon themselves. However, a rather austere element of the *melami* tradition is the notion that doing anything for the sake of reward in the afterlife is a sin

Melami and Bektaşism has not melted into each other, but Bektaşism has taken into itself elements of the *melami* and made its own. There still exists *melami* groups, and in society today – like the Bektaş Order – their trademark is secret membership. It has been told to me that certain secret *melami* groups today hold sessions where they tell jokes. Various jokes are supposed to invoke various sort of experiences and mystical experiences. While hear-say like this is far from scientific fact, it nevertheless illustrate that this idea –whether purely myth or true – exists in society.

4.2 Episodes of Social Tension and Humor

Sometimes, social situations serve to create settings with a tension from which incongruity arises. It is not a rule or a law that joke or joke cycles will arise from such situations, but the conditions are particularly suitable for joking.

One such example is observed by Dutch anthropologist Martin van Bruinessen about poor *seyyit* in Kurdistan. The *seyyit* in Kurdistan generally live in an impoverished condition and are often the butt of jokes. According to van Bruinessen there is tension between the notion *insan-i kemil* – the perfect human – and the practical condition, and goes on to note that: «[...] there is an ambiguity, an inner conflict in the attitudes of most people towards him, a conflict that is often resolved in joking: the *sayyid* is a favorite – and usually very tolerant – object of jokes, as I noticed at several places.»¹²⁵

Many of the same conditions also goes for the Alevi and Bektaşî, such as the notion of *insan-i kemil* and *seyyit* – particular for the Alevi and the *çelebi* branch of the Bektaşî, with their *seyyit* and dede-linages. However, in many of the social and economic settings of the Alevi and Bektaşî might not represent the same circumstance at all!

¹²⁴ Schimmel (1975:335)

¹²⁵ Van Bruinessen (1992:207)

Historically one can find other sorts situations with relevant to similar tension. 16th century Flemish diplomat Ogier Des Busbescq¹²⁶ tells a story about the *yeniçeris*, set after Suleyman killed the usurper Mustafa, who was their favourite. Prior to the murder, Suleyman is said to have had an positive image even in the rest of Europe¹²⁷. Even his own «slaves», the janissaries, mourned the death. Certainly this disparity between the will of the sultan and the will of his subjects also contain a sort of internal tension which can also be cause of humor. Contemporary soldier and writer Yahya Bey commented: «We condemn him with the Padishah, but we mourn him with the people.»¹²⁸ This statement contains an incongruity not all that different from humor. As he is a soldier, he's supposed to be the Padishah' slave and obey his will.

I look at a few episodes in history of the Ottoman Empire and Bektaşism with social situations and instances which entails social and societal tension than can be viewed as a sort of incongruity. This is not because I believe that concrete jokes have arisen directly from the episodes presented, but because I believe they can give us insight to some parts of social life which can have provided backdrops to humor.

It can be said that anthropomorphism is used to provide incongruities for the jokes. I categorize the sorts of anthropomorphisms in following ways; crude anthropomorphisms, relational anthropomorphisms and personal anthropomorphisms. The first kind involves analogy between God and vile, sinful, immoral or vulgar humans or human attributes. The second involves usually a comparison between people and God, but in a way where the human comparison is not *explicitly* negatively laden. It simply implies resemblance or similarity in analogy. In the third, God is treated as a human in a way of such a personal relation. This existence is treated as a discourse with God; the joker sees himself in a dialogue with God, the outcomes of life are the outcomes of this dialog. God is a partner. It is frequently said «God is a human being», like «the greatest book of all is humankind», but at the same time, there are sayings like «Iblis, you are human».

In the regards to wit, Kingsley points out humorous points as involving some sort of identification through analogy between the God of the orthodox and less-than-favourable

¹²⁶ Des Busbescq (2005: 21-22)

¹²⁷ Inalcik (2008:183)

¹²⁸ Elise (1992: 5)

human roles such as a grocer (weighting the deeds of our merit)¹²⁹, a creator of those who criticize him, of his own rebellion (and upholder of this “varsın şöyle dursun deyu”) and resembling a bastard child (“ne anan var, ne baban var/benzersin sen piçe Tanrı” that is “what mother and what father do you have?) God is anthropomorphized in many senses.¹³⁰

Ahmet Yaşar Ocak argues that such content in the poetry of Yunus Emre shows Kalendari tendencies.¹³¹ However, according to Zekeriya Başkal, these sort of writings in poetry has only part a part in a broader picture of sufism.¹³²

But it is not a mild instance of anthropomorphism. It is not appearance or ability of God to take human attributes. The poet is putting forward an explicit *expectation* or even *demanding* of God to act in an anthropomorphized way. This is clearly expressed in the middle of the poem is a theme you can find in other poets. This poem is by Yunus Emre:

Oh Lord you have created a bridge, hair-thin

and you say, «whoever can cross this bridge

shall achieve the perfection of heaven on earth».

«Dear God, millions of us have fallen off it

in the attempt. I am now going to sit back

and ask you to cross the bridge of your own making.»

In this theme, the poem or poet asks of God to archive the perfection on earth of which he requires from his faithful.

¹²⁹ (Birge-Kingsley 55),

¹³⁰ (Birge-Kingsley 88-90.)

¹³¹ (Başkal 2010:50-51)

¹³² (Başkal 2010:52-54).

It seems as if though, according to Birge-Kingsley, the chief source of incongruity in Bektashi wit, lies in the tension between the idea of a perfect creator and the imperfections of the created. However, in a narrative, joke or anecdote, to make use of this incongruity, you have to have someone who either takes the understand of God as the infallible creator of world and existence literal, someone who expresses it as so, or some who explicitly expresses the very opposite – God as the demiurge, the fallible and possibly mischievous and jealous creator of a fallible and flawed existence.

4.3 Nasreddin Hoca Jokes

“On one occasion a Pasha who was giving a feast of this kind in his house had invited a Sanjak-Bey, who had chanced to come in, to sit next to him. in the next place to him but one was seated an old man of the class which they call Hodjas, that is, men of learning. The Hojda, seeing before him a large collection of different kinds of food, and having eaten his fill, wished to take something back for his wife, and began to look for his handkerchief but found that he had left it at home. He was not at a loss, however, and devised a plan of campaign on the spot. He laid hold of the head-dress which was hanging behind him (and belonged not to himself as he thought, but to the Sanjak-Bey) and packed it as full as he could, putting on the top a piece of bread to act as a cork and prevent anything from falling out; for he had to put it back in its place for a moment, in order to bid his host farewell in the Turkish fashion, saluting his superiors by placing his hands on his breasts or at his sides. Having preformed his salutation he gather up the head-dress, taking this time his own, and, as he left the room, he carefully felt it and, to his astonishment, found that it was empty. However, he could do nothing but wend his way sadly home.*

Not long afterwards the Sanjak-Bey also rose from the table and, after doing obeisance to the Pasha, prepared to depart, in complete ignorance of the load which was hanging behind him. However, at every step the head-dress began to deliver itself of its contents, and the Sanjak-Bey left a long trail of morsels behind him. When everyone laughed, he looked behind and saw to his shame that the headdress was disgorging fragments of food. The Pasha, who guessed what had happened, called him back, bade him to sit down again, and sent for the Hodja. Then turning towards him he said, “As you are a neighbor and an old friend of mine, and have a wife and children at home, and there was plenty for you to take for them from my table, I am surprised that you did not do so.” To this the Hodja replied, “It is not my fault, master, that I did not do so, but my protecting genius must have been angry. Having foolishly left my handkerchief at home, I had hidden the remains of my meal in my head-dress, but

when I left the room I found that it mysteriously become empty.” Thus the Sanjak-Bey’s bushes were quenched, and the disappointment of the learned old gentleman and the oddness of the incident gave the bystanders more food for laughter.”¹³³

The most famous humorous character of the Islamic world, by far, is the character of Nasreddin Hoca.¹³⁴ These jokes are told by people from Balkans through Sicily and Morocco stretching all the way to China and Indonesia. He is often claimed to have been a historical figure and claimed to have hailed from the respective country where he is told. Other times he is just a figure of a humorous story told, where entertainment and interaction is most important and little thought is given to “origin” or speculations about “ethnicity” or “nationality”. In Turkey, Nasreddin Hoca is also considered to be a historical figure that lived in Akşehir during the Seljuk era. He is commonly stressed – in conversations as well as in literature – to have been not only a humorist, but also a writer, philosopher, scholar and sage. It is also commonly claimed that he wrote philosophical and scientific treatises. It is possible that these beliefs arise from confusion with other “Nasr ad-din”, such as al-Tusi¹³⁵. The truth or the origins of these claims aside, it needs to be stressed how extremely common it is to say that Nasreddin Hoca is not just a humoristic figure but also a real historical figure who was a great thinker as well as a great educator.

Nasreddin Hoca jokes are very much alive today, and new jokes about him are created in modern framework (i.e. with cars, parking lots and dentists).

4.3.2 Nasreddin and Bektaşî jokes

Like Nasreddin jokes, Bektaşî jokes are generally considered primarily to have educational purpose. I have barely encountered explicit treatment of this joking cycle in any academic literature. However, it should be stressed that the view that the purpose of Bektaşî jokes are educational has been held near to all Turkish people I have talked to. Some held slightly differing view, but didn’t oppose this claim either. One Turkish friend from department of anthropology observed that “you can learn a lot from them”. When I asked what he meant by it, he elaborated by saying that he meant to imply that you could learn a lot about history and culture of the past, particularly Ottoman history.

¹³³ Busbecq 2001: 149-150

¹³⁴ Known by many names, though Molla Nasreddin, Nasreddin Hoca, Naşraddīn Juḥā or just Juḥā are most common. (Fedai 2001:3)

¹³⁵ Nasir al-Din al-Tusi was a Persian scientist, scholar and philosopher. He is also mentioned in *Vilayet-name*. In the west he is best known simply as Tusi.

When it comes to the Bektaşî jokes, the claims of connection between them and those of Nasreddin seem ubiquitous. One claim is that Nasreddin Hoca was in fact a follower of Hacı Bektaş Veli. According to Fedai¹³⁶, Ebu'l-Hayr-i Rûmî (1480CE) claims Nasreddin Hoca to be the follower of the same *pir* as Sarı Saltuk.¹³⁷ This “*pir*” should be Hacı Bektaş as Sarı Saltuk is generally venerated by the Bektaşî as well as it is being held that he was a Bektaşî himself. The question of whether or not Nasreddin Hoca really was or was not Bektaşî is rather irrelevant here. More relevant is that it establishes that the association between the Bektaşî and Nasreddin Hoca does not seem to appear from nowhere.

A different claim of connection between the Bektaşî jokes and Nasreddin Hoca jokes is found in Ataseven. He characterizes the humorous tales of the Bektaşî as following “humoristic stories about *Nasreddin Hoca*, a folk-tale character, do not have an overt connection with any brotherhood, but are in their essence, form and content the same repertoire of stories used by one particular brotherhood, the Bektaşî”. Thus he explicitly disagrees with the claim of 15th century Heyr-i Rûmî, by making a different *sort* of connection. While I do not disagree that one can find a connection between Nasreddin Hoca jokes and Bektaşî jokes, I *do disagree* with Ataseven's claim that they are the same “in their essence, form and content”. I believe that the “sameness” in content, form and essence is, at one hand, form and content shared between many of the jokes. The essence that Ataseven claims, must be humor, and not something that belongs otherwise particularly to both the bektaşî and Nasreddin jokes. In fact, I will argue that Bektaşî jokes represents an overtly *different* joking tradition than the Nasreddin jokes.

4.4 Neyzen Tevfik

Ney is the reed flute and *neyzen* means “ney-master”. Neyzen was born in Bodrum in the end of the 19th century. His father taught him Persian and Arabic as a child, which he learned, as well as *ney*. His father had in mind for his son to become a *mevlevî* dervish, which he also did. Later, though still a young man, he moved to Istanbul where he became a Bektaşî. He later also stayed a few years in Egypt. Upon returning to Istanbul, he also became a published poet. More-over, he became famous for his *ney-virtuosity*. Neyzen Tevfik is a popular character, highly mythological. Among other, the alternative band Replikas, has an album dedicated to him. One of the stories about him, which is also told in this album, tells that he had his own room in the mental hospital in Bakırköy, Istanbul, and he could come there whenever he

¹³⁶ (Fedai 2001: 2)

¹³⁷ (Fedai 2001: 2)

wanted and stay there as much as he liked. He is also said to have been an alcoholic. He also published two collections of poems (“*Hiç*”, nothing, and “*Azab-ı Mukaddes*”) But aside from his mastery of the ney, he is maybe most famous for the humorous anecdotes, Neyzen Fikraları. These jokes are mostly oral, and not very easy to find, though there are published collections of them. One of the anecdotes goes as following:

One day Neyzen Tevfik was attending a sermon while someone was lecturing on morality. “If you place a bucket with water and a bucket of *rakı* in front of a donkey, what will it choose?” All the religious people, *dinciler*, early replied “The water.” And why is that, asks the doctor, whereupon Neyzen Tevfik couldn’t hold himself “Why? Because it’s a donkey!”.

Atatürk heard the story and liked it very much. One day he was travelling through the villages with his entourage. It was evening and they were drinking *rakı*. Close to them, a boy from the village came. Atatürk called the boy over and asked him “Do you know what we are doing?”

- “you are drinking *rakı*”, said the boy.

- “And if you put a bucket of water and a bucket of *rakı* in front of a donkey, what will it choose? Asks Atatürk.

- “The *rakı*”, replies the boy, then suddenly hurries to add “don’t ask me why!”

In another example, the story appears in the form of a joke:

Do you drink, Neyzen? – Yes. Do you fast during ramazan? – No. So, how can that be, you drink, but you don’t fast? –When ramazan goes (is finished), it will come again. When I go (ie. Die), I will never be back.

Neyzen Tevfik is a true historical personage. He and the jokes about him that are relevant because he to a large extent embodies the character of the Bektaşî in the jokes. While his jokes can address issues relevant to religion and morality, particularly drinking, they are not specifically religious jokes. As we see, both these jokes revolve around the topic of drinking. Other two jokes I have come over both questions authority and nepotism.

The provincial governor brags to Neyzen: - “My son is like a pea, he grows so fast. At 18 he is already at the rank of a governor of a sub-province.” – I know a second

way in which he resembles a pea,” replies Neyzen, “he also needs to cling to the back of someone in order to rise.”

4.5 Bekri Mustafa

Bekri Mustafa is a character associated with drunkenness. *Bekri*, in fact, translate to drunkard. Bekri Mustafa is also a character from the shadow plays, *Hacivat and Karagöz*.¹³⁸ It is possible that some of the Bekri Mustafa jokes have been taken from episodes from the shadow theatre, and later been appropriated into the Bektaşî repertoire. The jokes of Bekri Mustafa are all set in the reign of sultan Murat IV.

During the reign of Murad IV, the Sultan dresses up as a commoner to inspect his subjects. He goes to a tavern where he sits down next to Bekri Mustafa. Bekri Mustafa has a bottle of wine and drinks from his glass.

- “What is that?” asks the Padishah.

Not wanting to be caught breaking the law, Bekri Mustafa skeptically replies:

- “it is coloured syrup.”
- “May I try two sips?” asks the Sultan.

Skeptically, Bekri Mustafa gives him the glass

- “But this is wine!” exclaims the Sultan after having taken the second sip.
- “Yes it is,” replies Bekri Mustafa.
- “But sir, I have forbidden wine.”
- “Man, who are you to forbid things?”
- “Why, I am the Sultan” replies Murad.
- “Two sips of wine, and you think are the sultan. Finish the bottle and you’ll say it was you that created the world!”

In 1877, the Ottoman parliament discussed restrictions on humor during war. Already there had been published collections of Nasreddin Hoca jokes in Egypt.

Consider the Nasreddin Hoca joke where the veteran brags to the hoca that he cut one of the enemies’ legs straight off, and the hoca replies that this is impossible as someone has already done this. The first time I heard this, I considered the direct meaning of the reply of

¹³⁸ And (1987: 80)

Nasreddin. After imagining it as a Bektaşî joke, suddenly the action entailed in the punch line seemed like a testament of the incomprehensible and grotesque inhumanities that people might experience in war; all the traumatic situation of unnecessary gore and brutality.

The incongruity is built on the expectation of great valor and strength. This expectation is developed further when you know Nasreddin does not possess the stereotypical traits of a brutal and brave fighter, claiming to have done something that typically requires these qualities. This tension, for audiences who know the Nasreddin character, is definitely a narrative strategy.

4.6 THE BEKTAŞI IMAGE AND THE CONTEXT OF BEKTAŞI IN A JOKING LANDSCAPE

I will outline some themes and topics in Islam history, history of Sufism and of Bektaşîism that I deem relevant for the context of humor. I argue that two different movements in the history Sufism can be relevant for the connection between Bektaşî and humor. These are *Kalendari* and *Melami*. In connection to *Kalendari* I will discuss the issue of transgression and incongruity, as well as transgression and self-ridicule. I will also look at some themes and topics in Bektaşî poetry and in Bektaşî religion that seems to make some sense in regards to humor and witticism.

The audience or teller of a Bektaşî joke may chose to identify or not to identify with the Bektaşî character of the joke. Alevi or Bektaşî exclusivity aside, when exposed to a narrative the identification with the roles of the characters in the narrative may more important than nominal - organizational or ethnical – identity of the character. Because of this, I argue that for the purpose of the joke, the role that the Bektaşî takes on in the narratives are more important than what the ingroup-outgroup element in wider social or religious context is.¹³⁹

As we have already established, what is funny may as well be something that is shocking. Shocking or surprising acts are not alien to Islamic society, nor to Bektaşî culture. The *Kalendari* would wear ridiculous clothes¹⁴⁰ and invert religious norms as a purgatory part of their rituals. There is the anecdote of the *Melami* saint who came to a town, and as he did not

¹³⁹ !!! move to conceptual framework sey part is? I cant aruge that the jokes aren't about educational purpose, but I can argue about what sort of education this can be. My claim is that the bektasi jokes aren't an indication about what the image of the bektasi character is in the wider public, but that they are indeed demonstrative.

¹⁴⁰

approve of the townspeople cheering him, peed right in front of them in order to shock them away.¹⁴¹

The most common idea I have come across, which is by far the most widespread opinion of this when you ask people in Turkey, is that “they have an educational purpose”. No one has informed what is educational about them, or what sort of education this is. However, with all the literature I have reviewed, the purpose of the Bektaşî jokes - or their role within the Bektaşî organization remains unknown.¹⁴² It appears as if though the *Dede* and the *Baba*, or *murşid* or other sort of leader characters rely a lot of stories and parables. Also the use of humor is not uncommon. This also appears to be the opinion of Ataseven.¹⁴³ Still, I do not believe that it is right to assume that they should be understood as the “teller” of these jokes or that Bektaşî and/or Alevî should be characterized specifically as joke-tellers. Nor that the *Dede* or the *Baba*, or indeed any other leader figure is to be considered the proper performer of these jokes. Rather, the connection between the Bektaşî and the jokes – other than the purely nominal – lies in the image that the Bektaşî have. It is revealing that the only mentioning I have come across of a Bektaşî in fictional literature, is in the Norwegian language novel “Svart Himmel, Svart Hav” by Izzet Celasi. Here, the main character describes a Kurdish man who has a good-natured mood (“godlyndt”), which the main character believes is probably due to his connection with “the mystical brotherhood of the Bektaşî”. This image of the Bektaşî is not isolated to narrator of the story, nor can it be claimed to belong to the author. Rather it is a common held idea that the Bektaşî are good-natured, with good mood, and of tolerant temperance. This is also reflected for example in Birge,

Birge mentions Bektaşî and humor explicitly and deals with it in a subchapter. Birge's discussion of Bektaşî humor is interesting but somewhat undertheoretized. There is a doctoral thesis by Dürsün from 1976 with a collection of 389 jokes called “*Türk Edebiyatında Bektaşî Tipine Bağlı Fıkralar*” or “Different types of Bektaşî jokes in Turkish literature”. Dürsün works from a folkloric perspective gives a great deal of examples of other joking traditions. I will not give a great deal of attention to these. Because when it comes to comparing Bektaşî jokes to other jokes, I will mainly restrict myself to his Nasreddin Hoca jokes. However, the list other jokes he provides and their potential relevance to further studies

¹⁴¹ Schimmel (1975:86)

¹⁴²

¹⁴³ Ataseven (find page, conclusion)

will be discussed in the discussion of further research. When Dürsün deals directly with the Bektaşî jokes, he makes an analysis where they are separated thematically into jokes about 1) belief, 2) transaction and, 3) moral and decency.

As mentioned above, Ataseven characterizes several of his informants and material in terms of humor-related concept such as: humoristic stories¹⁴⁴; “Bektaşîness as a way to regard everything with a laugh”¹⁴⁵ and; “[a] Baba follows a joking leader figure model”.¹⁴⁶

Halil İbrahim Şahin, professor in Turkish language and Literature, wrote an article about Bektaşî Jokes and humor theory. Here he looks at the 3 main branches of humor theory and the Bektaşî Jokes. His aim is to apply these 3 theories in order to explore why people still laugh at Bektaşî Jokes today. The main virtue of Şahin is the application how humor theory to the material of Bektaşî jokes. However, Şahin relies almost exclusively on Turkish-language sources on humor theory. In addition, he does not elaborate on social, cultural or religious context. (Şahin) None of these, however, provide any comprehensive discussion about the meaning, nor the context of the humor.

Now, while Kierkegaard claims Christianity to be the most humorous of religion on the basis that one must be reconciled with so many paradoxical doctrines, aren't there paradoxical doctrines in other religion? are there no other religion as outrageous paradoxes as the Christian trinity?

¹⁴⁴ Ataseven (1997: 83)

¹⁴⁵ Ataseven (1997:246)

¹⁴⁶ Ataseven (1997:251)

5. Case study: Incongruity of Bektaşî and Sunni image in Bektaşî jokes

This chapter will present Bektaşî jokes by a selection of jokes. It presents a case study with jokes whose stories rely on the difference between the views of the Sunni and the Bektaşî. The sort of themes and problems we are will then be demonstrated.

As we have seen, the Bektasi jokes are called by various names, *hikaye*, *fikra*, and *dedikleri*. Most of them take form of anecdotes or small stories, and are often slightly too elaborate to be called jokes in the conventional sense. Some of them have a “moral” after the punch line. For the jokes I present and the jokes I have translated I have given priority to the translation and presentation of the humor. Sometimes a line of two of the stories can have been taken away in order to place emphasis on the humor. If the joke does not have a citation, it means they have been told to me in person. In such occasions, I have attempted to reproduce them as close to the way they were presented as I can. These jokes – that I’ve heard – have also tended to be shorter and to follow a more typical joke structure with a short narrative presenting the scripts and a punch line where these scripts are violated. (Incongruity.)

I have not discovered any jokes in “question-answer” format. The closest are the (quite many) jokes which start with someone asking a question to the Bektasi. This is not a riddle joke though, because it doesn’t direct a riddle at the audience, but simply use a story which is based around a question. However, I once heard someone asking (an Albanian) Bektasi why they did not eat rabbit, and he replied at the very instant: “We are too lazy to catch them!”

5.1 Bektasi Jokes:

Still, we have not yet turned our attention properly to the jokes. The following example demonstrates the incongruity of identities in jokes:

- 1) Two students had been naughty. The teacher gave them the punishment of writing their names 100 times of the blackboard. “But teacher! This is very unfair!” complains one of the students. “Why is that?” replies the teacher. “Because I am Hasan-Huseyin and he is Ali”.

This joke has no overt connection with the Bektasi other than that Hasan, Husseyin and Ali are all names carry a particular significance with Bektasi and Bektasi-related groups: it is the names of the three first Shia imams, and are names commonly used by Alevi. However, the humor of the joke does not depend of this reference. The names of the students might as well have been replaced with any two names with an equal discrepancy in their length. The choice of the names in this joke gives them an explicit reference to something related to Bektaşî as well as Alevi culture, but just the reference to the name of the three first imams may just as well have been a reference to any Shia culture in general. There is, however, two other ways in which this joke exemplifies typical characteristics of Bektasi jokes.

Firstly, the structure of the joke relies on the setting of an event. In this setting one of the characters comes with a particularly suitable or witty respond. This word also frequently appears in bektaşî jokes. The phrase “*bektasi hazır-cevap*” (“the Bektasi quick-wittedly ays]”) as a phrase, is so much a stamp of the Bektasi joke, that the phrase “*bektasi demis*” almost could be said to mean the same. The quick-wittedness of the student, together with the name references, is to cause identification with the Bektaşî character as the character from the Turkish jokes. However, quick-wit is a typical trait of many joke characters, including the three Turkish review above.

Secondly, the quick-witted answer of the student relies on terms which have been established by another character, the teacher. Because the teacher has measured the degree of punishment by the number of times their name, he neglects the great difference in the length of their names. Given that they wrote in Turkish, one would have had to write 300 letters and the other 1200! This is the incongruity, between the teachers assumption (100=100) and that of the student (300<1200).

While the joke itself carries explicit religious references with the names of the students, it cannot be said to deal with anything explicitly religious. The theme of the joke is more related to injustice or lack of attention in how you treat others, or to their individual differences – which, as the joke shows, can have tangible consequences no matter how external and superficial these differences were to be.

In this joke, the pupil is not afraid to speak up his mind against injustice (against himself). In other jokes the Bektashi is so free-spoken that his behavior seems shocking, sometimes rude, or dishonest. In one joke he comes to a ferryman.¹⁴⁷ Not wanting to pay the coin for the crossing he rather offers a piece of wisdom upon reaching the other side. The ferryman agrees and when on the other side the Bektasi tells him never to do this again, as he will end up hungry in the night. In another, as a narrative:

- 2) In a despaired state, a man whose son was very sick called on a nearby Bektashi Baba; he asked the Baba to come to recite prayers in order that his boy will be cured.

The Baba, who cannot get out of this duty, accepted the plea and soon arrived at the door of the townsman. Standing near the child, he opened his hands towards the sky and prayed, “My God, make it so that this boy dies immediately.”

The horrified father grabbed the Baba and threw him out of the house.

Many days later the man came across the Baba on the street and said, “Do you remember when you came to recite prayers for my son and, contrary to what I asked of you, you asked God to take his life? Well God did not listen to you and, *El-Hamdulillah*, my son is cured!”

The Bektashi started to laugh and responded, “It’s for that reason that I cursed the lad. I have been on bad terms with God lately and He has been giving me the opposite of what I ask for!”¹⁴⁸

To pray for a sick person to die – and particularly to do this in front of that persons’ family – is certainly a shocking and preposterous act, and far outside most conventions. Nevertheless, this is breach of conduct; it is not “representative behavior of their orthodox or heterodox Islam. The prayer of the *eren* for God to kill the son serves only to make the humor in the punch line, and that only *after* the son turns out to be good. It might also be funny for the audience that the Bektasi makes such a blunt, hostile even, prayer; a sort of conduct that runs contrary to what is expected by a saint may also be considered a form of incongruity.

In addition, the Bektasi character of the joke can certainly said to be relatively shameless. He is often cunning and in many jokes uses his status as an *Eren* – as someone who is held in high esteem – to obtain rewards. An example of this can be found in the following joke:

3. - «Does *erenler* keep the fast?»

¹⁴⁷ En Guzel Bektasi fikralari

¹⁴⁸ Joke #3, at <http://bektashiorder.com/nodequeue/1?page=3>

- « I would, but my condition does not allow for it.»

- «If someone invites you for *iftar*, would you go?»

- «Without doubt!» Another explains:

- «You don't follow any of Allah's regulations yourself yet you are so eager to accept an invitation to eat from one of Allah's obedient servants?» The *baba* countered:

- «Why do you reprimand me? You all know that Allah is the Most Merciful of the merciful. He forgives with ease all those who spurn His call. But are the human beings like that? For the least of reasons, they are insulted and dishonored. Because of that it's necessary to accept their invitations immediately!»¹⁴⁹

The Bektaşî of the joke does not want to keep the fast which reflects the relax attitude of the Bektaşî when it comes to fasting.

4. - What is the best part of the fast?

Bektaşî:

- That it can be eaten!¹⁵⁰

He doesn't just want to break the fast, but also to make a feast for *Ramazan* without paying attention to whether it is time for *Iftar* or not.¹⁵¹ The conflict between the orthodoxy and establishment, and the Bektaşî is what the most jokes revolve around. Sometimes the commandments of Sunni religion are upheld by police officers. To reinforce this, the stories often take place in the Ottoman Empire. In fact, most of the Bektaşî jokes revolve around Islamic orthodoxy in particular. Sometimes the representative of Islamic orthodoxy is the *Hoca*, sometimes the religious student *Softa*¹⁵² and a few times the *yobaz*.¹⁵³ At times, the role will be played by the Bektaşî's neighbor.

5. ... a pig went into a Mosque. The people began to chase it, and slap it, and hit it until they killed it. They carried it out and left it on the street in front of the mosque. A Bektashi was there and saw the dead pig. He looked at it and said, "Oh, pig, did you not know that it was not safe to go into a mosque. Now you are dead. Why did you not ask me? I could have told you. Look, I am alive and I never go into a mosque."¹⁵⁴

6. A bigot (*yobaz*) mentioned to the Bektashi what he'd seen in his dream. - For days I had been ill. Last night I saw my Sheikh in my dream. He said "Get up you pimp!" to me, and I got up. "None of my things remained. What does it mean to you?" The Bektashi replied: "Whatever will happen it will be blessed."¹⁵⁵

The appearances of animals in the jokes are not rare:

¹⁴⁹ Joke #1, <http://bektashiorder.com/nodequeue/1>

¹⁵⁰ To "break fast" in Turkish is called "Oruc yemek", which literally means "to eat the fast".

¹⁵¹ See appendix joke #1.

¹⁵² *Softa* also carries connotation to "bigot" or "reactionary".

¹⁵³ "Dictator".

¹⁵⁴ Jansen 142-143.

¹⁵⁵ Yıldırım (1978Ç: 106) joke ^88

7. A *Softa* and a Bektāşi is sitting together in the road and chat¹⁵⁶. “Take this dog”, says the student, “is he one of us, or one of you?”. The Bektāşi replies: “Put a rabbit in front of it, if he eats it he is one of us, if he doesn't, he is one of you.”

8. The Bektāşi passes a *cami* and sees the *Hoca* beating a dog. “Why are you beating this poor animal?” asks the Bektasi. “He entered the *cami*! Can you imagine what shame!” replies the *hoca*. “Poor creature! Show some compassion. He just a dog; he doesn't know he's not supposed to enter a mosque”.

9. The Bektasi is convinced by his friends to attend the preaching of a *Hoca*. The *Hoca* is saying “If you put a bucket of *raki* in front of a donkey, which will it drink?” Someone in the crowd answered “The water of course”. “Why so?”, asks the *Hoca*. “Why so?!” exclaims the Bektasi “because he is a donkey”.¹⁵⁷

Negative behavior of the Sunni is illustrated by comparison with various negative traits at animals. *Softa* is like a dog because he, like the dog, would eat the rabbit. The next joke makes an analogy between the Sunni and the Dog as the Bektasi is the only of those three who has understood that he is not supposed to go to the *cami*. The last of the three ties the donkey and the Sunni together by means of their stubbornness in regards to alcohol. In the jokes, the Bektasi is consistent in his position towards the issues of his own identity. Especially a lot of the jokes resolve around alcohol. A few times the behavior of the Sunni is rather benign but the Bektasi still rejects inference. For example there is the joke about the poor drunk Bektasi who keep falling. Someone put their arms around him saying “see how bad it can be to be too drunk”. The Bektasi replied “It's not the drinking that is bad, it's the walking!”¹⁵⁸ In another joke the Bektasi is praying in the *cami* for more money for *raki*. He is reprimanded by the *hoca* “don't you see the person next to you is praying for forgiveness?”. The Bektasi replied “but I already have God's forgiveness, aren't you supposed to pray for things you *don't* have?” From this, we can see a few contrasts appear:

10. The Bektāşi has a Sunni neighbor. One day as the Bektāşi pass him, he sees his neighbor beating his son. “Why are you hitting your son?” asks the Bektāşi. “I am teaching him to say *besmele* (bismillah) before the prayer”. “Well”, replies the Bektāşi “did you remember to say *besmele* before you started beating him?”



The Bektāşi asserts that if the father want to beat the son to teach him to say “in the name of God”, he should at least say “in the name of God” first himself. When we look at joke 5, 7 and 8 together with

¹⁵⁶ “Mühabbet”

¹⁵⁷ In the joke, the word “*eşeklik*” “donkey-ness” is used. *Eşeklik*, however, also means stubbornness.

¹⁵⁸ Yıldırım (1978: 163. #238)

this we can put one more characteristic to the Sunni image presented here. They all imply some sort of violence, whether towards people or animal. It is the image of a person who enforces his vision of religion upon others, even in by means of violence.

The jokes with the Bektasi in argument with the *Hoca* are the most common. In other jokes the characters are a *Mevlevi* and a Bektasi dervish.¹⁵⁹ The *Mevlevi* character barely resembles the Sunni stereotype. Rather than moralizing, he tends to come with pretentious comments; the Bektasi is able to pull his leg and end up with the last word. In other jokes, various representatives of Sufi orders are represented, like the “Who Ate the Halva”-joke.¹⁶⁰

The *Hoca* is not necessarily violent, like the Sunni characters as a broader stereotype can be said to be, but he is the articulated representative of the establishment. Thus, not surprisingly, many of these jokes take place inside a *cami*. Some of the narratives of the joke even makes note that this is a sort of “out-of-context” place for the Bektasi. Like joke 7, it specifies that the Bektasi has ventured into the domain of the devout. The Bektasi in the jokes seem much less prone to go to *cami* than his real counterparts. He does appear there from time to time nevertheless:

11. One day, a Bektashi decided to go to the mosque. Not having found a place to attach his donkey or somebody with whom he could entrust it, he left it in front of the mosque saying: “My God I entrust my donkey to You.” When he came out of the mosque, he could not find
“Alright!” he shouted, “who just prayed for a donkey? Cause Allah gave him mine!”

The incongruity of this joke lies in the attribution of the turn of events to the will of God, similar to what you can find in joke 2. Here the outcome of the action is not just attributed to the will of God, but God’ will is also relative to the relationship between the Bektasi and God. (I.e. the God does the opposite of what the Bektasi asks him to.) It is important to note that the jokes in themselves never specify that the source of outcome is the will of God.

12. A Bektasi was sitting by the sea, drinks set out and enjoying. Suddenly there comes a strong wind. His bottles knocked over, the fire of his barbeque went out, dust and smoke everywhere. The Bektasi lift his head to the sky and says: “Hey, my God, I drank; did you get drunk?”¹⁶¹

The Sunni never gets to talk directly to God with results. Nor does he get to riposte to the Bektasi’ witty reply. The following joke follows a typical structure. A representative of the orthodoxy makes a statement about religion. The Bektasi gets to show its absurdity.

13. *Hoca*: «the *abdest* is the fundament of religion», bektasi: «what sort of fundament is that? That is ruined by a fart»

When this joke is consider carefully, it becomes clear that the Bektasi is not saying that Islam is as weak as to be ruined by a fart, or that its fundaments is so flimsical that it is ruined by this little blow of bodily air. It is the *Hoca* that makes the assertion that the *abdest* is the fundament of religion, the Bektasi merely applies the *Hoca*’ own orthodoxy to his own assertion.

Other jokes too address basic tentents of Islam, such as this one.

¹⁵⁹ See Yıldırım (1978: 109-110, joke number 96-99)

¹⁶⁰ See last Chapter.

¹⁶¹ Yıldırım (1978:68 #7)

14. “How many pillars are there in Islam?” “Only one” “Hold on! Let me explain *hodja*,” replied the Bektashi. “You see, I’ve noticed that all you Sunnis don’t go on the *Hajj* and all of you don’t pay the *Zakat*. Well, not all of us Bektashis fast in *Ramazan*, and most of us don’t even pray *Namaz*. Between the both of us, what’s left of the five pillars except the *Shahadah*?”

It time to summarize more of the contrasts as they appear in the jokes

Sunni	Bektasi
Doesn’t drink	Drinks
Keep fast (But want to eat)	Breaks fast
Moralizing	Criticizing
Doctrinal Theology	Personal relation with God
	Spontaneous
Dogmatic	Critical/

6. CONCLUSION

In the end of his discussion, Yıldırım writes that the bektasi jokes contain a mentality and that this mentality affects the common people.¹⁶² Rather than following Yıldırım's example and making an analysis which groups the jokes in different categories, I have tried to demonstrate what the cultural, social and religious context where this mentality is presented. I have furthermore tried to show how this mentality appears in the jokes, but have chosen to conceptualize it as "image" rather than Yıldırım's mentality ("zihniyet"). I have done this by breaking up the paradigmatic part of the joke and group them together to see how the jokes address a specific over-reaching theme. Based on interpretation of incongruity in these jokes, two conflicting images appear. Just like with Oring's *sabra* and *galut*, both the Sunni image and the Bektasi image has to stay together in the same situation. In a way, the Bektaşî jokes can be compared to an Alevi *aşık* in that it can spread the idea of the image of the Bektaşî outside of, for example the strict confines of a secret order.

Furthermore, the following observations can be made.

- 1) The humor of the jokes rely on a basic understand of sharia and islamic orthodoxy. This is assumed as the modus operandi. It is the religiosity of the Bektaşî that defies the established, not the Bektaşî religion that is the basic and the sharia religion of the orthodox that deviates.
- 2) We have examined a limited number of Bektaşî jokes selected on the basis of incongruity in the image of Sunni orthodoxy and Bektaşî. On the basis of this, certain dichotomies of this, we have found that the sunni is presented variously as violent, intolerant and moralizing sharia. The Bektaşî is quick-witted in defense of his deviance to sunni orthodoxy, he opposes violence against animal and children, and has a liberal attitude towards his own behaviors, and thus presumable, of others. Furthermore, the attitude of the Bektasi as humorous and the Sunni as less shows an image of an "Islamic orthodoxy" in Similar terms to that discussed by
- 3) We have compared Bektaşî jokes with a limited sample of Nasreddin Hoca jokes. However, while the theme of religion is present in every sample of Bektaşî jokes, none of the Nasreddin Hoca jokes have really had this. While religious identity (Bektaşî vs orthodox religion), ideas of religious law and conceptions of God are present in the Bektaşî jokes. Furthermore, the incongruity in some of the jokes () resolves around

¹⁶² Yıldırım (1976: 34)

topics of religion. The same be said about the same Nasreddin Hoca jokes. On this basis, we can separate Nasreddin Hoca and Bektaşi jokes. We can furthermore say that Bektaşi jokes deal with religion, and particularly with religious intolerance. Some Bektaşi jokes also relate themes of tassavvuf(Sufism). To demonstrate an absolute separation of the two, further research would be needed.

- 4) The origins of Bektaşi jokes and when the idea that jokes, joking, humor and wit became attached to Bektaşi remain unknown. There is, however, a strong case suggesting that the Bektaşi jokes of the present days is related with the auspicious incident in 1826 when Bektaşi shifted from establishment to (persecuted) minority. The minority sense of the Bektaşi image together with the secret membership means that one cannot know whether one who tells a joke is a Bektasi or not. The Bektasi character of the joke can symbolize any minority.
- 5) The role of the idea of Bektaşiism in Turkish nationalism allows for the appeal of Bektaşiism and Bektaşi jokes for people who adhere to nationalism, to republicans and to liberal or modern minded people. The Turkish nationalism, however, did not represent a shift in the mainstream model of religion from Sunnism to Bektaşiism.
- 6) Concrete connection between the jokes and the Bektaşi brotherhood (*tarikât*) remains unknown. There are indications, however, of connection between humor and wit, and the Bektaşi jokes.
- 7) The Bektaşi defies basic conceptions of Islamic piety. Consumption of alcohol and intoxicants is a good exemplification of this. Even if one accepts that it goes against the rules of Islam to drink alcohol, does it mean that a person who drink is incapable to having devotion, or of having a personal relationship with God? The discrepancy between the assumptions that devotion or religiosity needs to be expressed in the orthodox model of piety provides a space for humor based on religion

The image of the Bektaşi character is not just the image of one who defies the commandments of God as in the Sunni version of Sharia, but the image of one who is able to transcend it. While he face percecution in some of the jokes, he, though his quick-wittiness, *hazir-cevap* or *eutraplia*, is able to come out as the victor of the narratives. He is the main character, and he is endowed with sympathy by the audience.

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