

## ALTERNATIVE VOICES IN OTTOMAN RELIGIOUS CULTURE: BEKTAŞI STORIES OSMANLI DİNİ KÜLTÜRÜNDE ALTERNATİF SESLER: BEKTAŞI HİKAYELERİ İSKENDER CÜRE\*

Sorumlu Yazar

### Abstract

In the field of cultural history, which scrutinizes the interactions between history, culture, and society, the numerous versions of storytelling are one of the specific subjects of interest. In this article, “Bektaşî stories” which were constantly narrated in the Ottoman religious culture and humorously indicate the divergences of Bektaşîs with the widespread religious narrative, are set as the topic. In this regard, Bektaşî stories from different sources are compiled and explained, which are eccentric and can be named “alternative voices” that are heard by all. These stories could be regarded as peculiar representations of the Ottoman religious culture and Bektaşî, the main hero of the stories, is generally a versatile stereotype that represents the alternative voices of the religious culture. The Bektaşî stereotype speaks to certain figures of Ottoman society from several social degrees and the structure of the stories mirrors various characteristics of the Bektaşî stereotype as well as his authentic interpretations of events and facts. The Bektaşî is ultimately not a deist or an atheist, but his mindset differs from the widespread Muslim narrative in many senses. These stories which contain various elements for interpretation have been reproduced within the religious and cultural field and they could be survived to the present day. This article aims to articulate how the differences and alternative voices are quoted in a humorous way in Ottoman religious culture and how the stories of religious groups that have the potential to be seen outside of orthodoxy are conveyed delicately thanks to the tradition of storytelling.

**Keywords:** Bektaşî, Ottoman, Story, Narrative, Culture

### Öz

Basitçe bir “kültür tarihi” olmaktan öte tarih, kültür ve toplum arasındaki etkileşimi inceleyen kültürel tarih alanındaki çalışma konularından birisi de hikâye anlatıcılığının farklı versiyonlarıdır. Bu çalışmada, Osmanlı dini kültüründe sürekli olarak anlatılan ve yaygın dini anlatının dışında kalan zümrelerin mizahi bir dille ifade edildiği “Bektaşî Hikâyeleri” araştırma konusu olarak belirlenmiştir. Bu kapsamda, farklı kaynaklardan alınan ve “alternatif sesler” olarak adlandırılabilir Bektaşî hikâyeleri ele alınmış ve incelenmiştir. Osmanlı dini kültürünün kendine özgü temsilleri olarak tanımlanabilecek Bektaşî hikâyelerinin ana kahramanı olan Bektaşî, genellikle çok yönlü bir tiplerdir. Hikâyelerde Bektaşî tiplmesi, toplumun farklı kesimlerinden insanlarla konuşur ve hikâyelerdeki yapı, Bektaşî tiplmesinin çeşitli özelliklerini yansıtmının yanı sıra olaylara ve olgulara dair özgün yorumlarını da gösterebilir. Bektaşî tiplmesi, deist veya ateist değildir ancak onun inanma ve düşünme biçimi, yaygın dini anlatıdan çeşitli şekillerde farklılaşmaktadır. Nesiller arasında aktararak günümüzde de anlatılmaya devam eden bu hikâyeler, anlama ve yorumlama için zengin öğeler barındırmaktadır. Bu makale, Osmanlı dini kültüründe farklılıkların ve alternatif seslerin mizahi bir dille nasıl aktarıldığını ve yaygın dini kültürün dışında görülmeye potansiyeline sahip dini grupların hikâyelerinin, anlatı geleneği aracılığıyla nasıl incelikte aktarıldığını ortaya koymaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Bektaşî, Osmanlı, Hikâye, Anlatı, Kültür

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\* Öğrenci, Yıldız Teknik Üniversitesi Kültürel Çalışmalar Doktora Programı, E-mail: iskendercure@hotmail.com, ORCID ID: 0000-0003-3716-7245.

## Introduction

Culture is a vast phenomenon delineated in numerous ways and it can be considered the main interests of different sub-disciplines of social sciences. Among the branches that are primarily engaged with culture, “cultural history” comes to the fore in this sense, as well as “cultural studies” which is called multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary, or anti-disciplinary. The initial oeuvres of cultural history occurred in the late eighteenth century thanks to the texts of intellectuals and thinkers as well as ordinary people. The histories of unspoken assumptions, representations, etc., and the approach summarized as “history from below” formulated the sphere of cultural history around this era (Burke, 1997, 16). Moreover, with the effect of the emergence of new attempts, entitled “cultural turn” or “linguistic turn”, a more anthropological approach to history named “New Cultural History” that focuses on interpretation rather than description, has opened new gates within the field in the postwar period.

In the field of cultural history, which scrutinizes the interactions between history, culture, and society and is not merely a history of culture, the numerous versions of storytelling are one of the specific subjects of interest. One of the prominent products of this literature is the review of “Mother Goose Tales” (Darnton, 1999). This consideration peruses the variation of stories that are prevalent among peasants, according to different scopes of societies, cultures, spaces, and periods. Furthermore, it also involves obscure messages behind the stories and deciphers the features beyond the literal meaning by shedding light on blind spots of texts. Uncovering the implied meaning, achieving the further one, and following the reconstruction of a narrative is the first phase of the article’s motivation.

Examinations of storytelling are not limited to tales and another notable study of the stories is about Martin Guerre, who lived in the 16th century. “Return of the Martin Guerre” was told and reproduced for many years, and it became a popular story. The author of the study states that “the story of Martin Guerre is told and retold because it reminds us that astonishing things are possible.” (Davis, 1983, 125). Related to this, reminding the astonishing things are possible and focusing on variations of narratives of the same character is the second phase.

Another study related to this attitude is “The Cheese and The Worms”, which tells the heterodox and heretic beliefs of an ordinary peasant living in Italy in the same century. The book tells the story of a little-informed man who opposes orthodox beliefs based on written documents (Ginzburg, 1992). The Cheese and The Worms reveals that alternative voices that differ from the widespread religious narratives are conceivable in the early centuries. On the other hand, the disapproval was not from an elite, it was from below. Finally, understanding the alternative voices in the religious culture related to ordinary people’s mindset is the third phase. The ultimate framework of this study was inspired by these three reference books. “Bektaşî Stories” which were constantly narrated in the Ottoman religious culture and express the alternative voices of the Ottoman religious culture in a humorous language is the prime scope.

In this study, Bektaşî stories gathered from a variety of sources are discussed. Stories could be effective in the memorization process with their impressive components, comprehensive messages, and convenience of repetition. The remembering process has great potential for reproduction as well as reconstruction and repeated and expansive stories -also included in literal sources or oral sources- can be narrated by modifying the protagonists, the storytellers, the places, and the periods. Different versions of the same events are circulated in the storytelling, and

it can sound contradictory and ambiguous. Nevertheless, in another study conducted by the researcher on the construction of collective memory through narrative in Sufi culture, it was mentioned that this reformulation was declared as the fertility of oral culture for them. Contrary, they prefer to focus on the apparent and deeper messages of the stories rather than questioning their accommodation with the historical facts (Cüre, 2021).

While selecting the stories, various sources are preferred to enrich the content and widen the approach of the article. A book has recently been published titled “Bektaşî Stories” in Turkey, but the author of the book reveals that he did not compile all the stories with their original versions in order not to offend the members of these religious groups (Toprak, 2017). Nevertheless, one story is chosen from this book because the same story is similarly vivid in oral sources and some nuances can sign reconstruction and reproduction of the narrative. In consideration of the oral culture that has a great impact on Sufi culture and especially on Bektaşî Sufi order, the continuity in the collective memory wanted to be highlighted and stories from two different sources (one still alive, the other recently deceased) were also chosen.

In the initial section of the article, the short history of the Bektaşî Sufi order will be briefly explained by mentioning their essential characteristics, the main figures of their collective memory, and the milestones of the order to ease the understanding the context of Bektaşî stories. While doing that, the ruptures and the ambiguities of the Bektaşî Sufi order’s history will be clarified to illuminate the polyphony of the discourse about it. In the second part, the chosen stories are narrated, and the literal and further meanings of the stories are enlightened by taking into consideration the denotations and connotations of the texts. Finally, the main outputs of the study are evaluated and concluded.

### **1. Ruptures and Ambiguities: Bektaşî Sufi order in Ottoman Empire**

The Ottoman Sufi culture has a wide range of heritage initially shaped by the Muslims who migrated from different geographies and assembled around Anatolian. If we examine the origins of this culture, the 13th century has a great impact that is the time in which the Ottoman Empire was established. That was the era when Mongol invasions continued, mass migrations to Anatolia arrived and many small principalities occurred (Gölpınarlı, 1969). Despite seemingly gloomy political and military cases, the 13<sup>th</sup> century can be titled the belle époque of Anatolian Sufism history because Rumi, Hacı Bektaş Veli, and Yunus Emre, the iconic figures of Anatolian Sufism lived in Anatolian during the akin periods.

However, these three names have quite diverse personal histories and impacts on Ottoman culture. For instance, while Mevlana’s thoughts inspire a Sufi order well-known for their artistic contribution and Yunus Emre’s poems are adopted by many, since Hacı Bektaş Veli left behind no large-scale written sources and his legacy did not influence the artistic spheres of the Ottoman elites, his name and perpetuating his memory were not as public as Mevlana and Yunus Emre in terms of written culture. The communities related to Hacı Bektaş’s legacy were less evident in urban culture because they generally lived in rural areas and they had more interacted with oral culture rather than written one (Soileau, 2018, 148).

One of the primary causes of the shadowy passages in the Bektaşî Sufi order’s history is the adoption of oral culture rather than written culture. Hence, studying Hacı Bektaş Veli and Bektaşî Sufi order has some ambiguities and complexities in

many senses. First, it is not conceivable to simply acknowledge a unique and holistic narrative about the Bektaşî Sufî order. Various factors, which will be touched on briefly, affected the diversification of discourse about the Bektaşî order's practices and history. Mehmed Fuad Köprülü, in his reference work, stresses that the Bektaşî tradition can interpret differently the historical facts and they can reconstruct a new reality in their authentic tradition's memory (Köprülü, 2020, 80). For this reason, it is seen in various studies that some assumptions about the Bektaşî Sufî order are suspiciously handled by academics.

However, there are some historical facts about the history of the Bektaşî Sufî order and according to the common point of view, it is possible to mention three fundamental periods in the history of the Bektaşî order. The first of these periods begins with the time of Hacı Bektaş Veli, considered the founder of the order. There are many speculations about his life because of the limited written or archival sources about him and the narrative of his life can simply be diversified. Nevertheless, it can be mentioned that he lived in the same period as Rumi and migrated to Anatolia because of the invasions of Mongolians like Rumi had. Assertions about the date of his death are also varied as the claims about his personal life, but it seems possible to recognize the year 1271 (Ocak, 1996, 457). After he arrived from Central Asia to Anatolia, he lived in Nevşehir-Sulucakarahöyük for many years, instructed dervishes, and deceased here. Abdal Musa, a dervish of Hacı Bektaş, is considered the first representative to establish the Bektaşî order after his demise (Şahin, 2020, 80).

The second distinctive period in the history of the Bektaşî order begins with Balım Sultan, who lived in the 16th century (Aköz, 2021, 542). Sultan Bayezid II brought Balım Sultan from the Balkans (Dimetoka) to Anatolia and he reorganized the Bektaşî order meantime. Balım Sultan was declared as the second founder of the order with references to this period (Ocak, 1992, 18). The construction of Bektaşî dervish lodges in Istanbul, which is still considered ancient, is also dated to the same era as (Yılmaz, 2015, 110). The Bektaşî order's reciprocal relations with the state were intensive during this time, but the beginning of this relationship goes back to the establishment of the Ottoman Empire.

Beginning from the early eras of the Ottoman Empire, Bektaşîs had a close and direct relationship with the Ottoman army and Janissaries (Maden, 2015, 175). The third period of the Bektaşî Sufî order is significantly related to this relationship between the Ottoman Empire and the Bektaşî order. A new stage of Ottoman history started with the cessation of the expansion of the Ottoman Empire, political uncertainties, and territorial losses, and especially with the rise of trials for Westernization, which was quite remarkable in the 19th century, several reformations were operated, and the transformation gained momentum. It can be said that the Bektaşî Sufî order is the most affected by these reforms as a victim of its eccentricity among the Sufî orders.

With the closure of the Janissaries, the Bektaşî order, which was organically linked with them for many centuries, was also officially banned for a while and Nakşibendis substantially replaced their chairs (Küçüközyiğit, 2014, 234). In Ottoman history, orders were prohibited massively for the first time after the disputes and sometimes battles between the Kadızades and the Sivasîs in the 17th century (Çavuşoğlu, 2001, 100). The prohibition of the Bektaşî order at the beginning of the 19th century was the second mass intervention of the state against the Sufî groups differently from temporary local interferences. It is possible to say that the constraint of the order in this period signs a dramatic rupture and epistemological break in the permanence of the Bektaşî Sufî order's collective memory. After this restriction, Bektaşîs dispersed

into other Sufi groups for a while. It is possible to say that the word “tarik-i nazenin/ the order of coys”, which is still used for the order today, was used instead of the word Bektaşî since Bektaşî Sufi order was forbidden in this period.

Bektaşî Sufi order interacted with unorthodox groups that can be called alternative voices differs from the mainstream Ottoman religious culture since its first eras. The Kalenderis and similar alternative groups living in Anatolia in the 13th century can also be defined as the “first Bektaşîs” (Ocak, 1992b, 373) and precursors of them in many senses. Especially in this century, the people of various alternative religious groups of Islamic society were evident but mainstream Sunni Islam or orthodox Islam has become the official faith of the state in time. This regulation doesn’t mean that they were entirely heterodox at the beginning, and they converted to orthodoxy over time. This process was related to the institutionalization of the empire around Sunnism which was essential for the sultans from the initial periods. Therefore, alternative groups disappeared in religious and social life but some of the beliefs and practices of these groups survived within Bektaşî Sufi order (Karamustafa, 2020, 102).

We can summarize the reasons for the existence of the polyphony about the discourse of the history of the Bektaşî Sufi order as follows in addition to the hegemony of the oral culture among them:

- Archival and official sources about Hacı Bektaş Veli’s life are quite limited and ambiguous and there is no clear consensus about his personal life.
- The Bektaşî Sufi order interacted with many unorthodox groups beginning from its establishment and they kept alive among Bektaşîs throughout the Ottoman period.
- The period between Hacı Bektaş Veli and Balım Sultan is nearly 250 years and the structure of the order within this era is unclarified.
- Pieces of information about Balım Sultan, the second founder, are also limited.
- The Bektaşî Sufi order was prohibited with the closure of Janissaries.
- After the ban, vagueness and esoterism increased within the order.

The tradition of “Bektaşî Stories” was formed in Ottoman culture around these prominent causes that are shaped with ruptures and ambiguities of the Bektaşî Sufi order. These stories have a great potential to mirror and uncover alternative motifs in various aspects. On the other hand, another principle of Bektaşî stories is their funny and humorous features. All stories chosen for research include both alternative voices and humor. From this point of view, the chosen stories will be narrated, and the literal and obscure meanings of the stories will be tried to explain by aiming to scrutinize how the discursive practices are operated in terms of religious culture thanks to storytelling.

## **2. Alternative Voices in Ottoman Religious Culture: Bektaşî Stories**

In this article, Bektaşî stories that are constantly narrated in the Ottoman religious culture by humorously indicating their divergences with the widespread religious culture, are set as the topic. Bektaşî stories from different sources are compiled and discussed which are eccentric and can be named “alternative voices”, in comparison to the common one. These stories can be regarded as peculiar representations of the Ottoman religious culture and the main hero of the stories Bektaşî, generally symbolizes a stereotype (Yıldırım, 1999, 29) that variously reveals the mindset of alternative figures in the Ottoman religious culture.

The Bektaşî stereotype speaks to certain people of Ottoman society and the dialogues in the stories mirror various characteristics of the Bektaşî stereotype as well as his authentic interpretations of events and facts. The Bektaşî is ultimately not a deist or an atheist, but his mentality differs from the extensive religious culture in discourse and practice. These stories do not entirely commentate the historical facts and they are broadly fictional. Bektaşî stories are typically dialogic, and a large-scale criticism is quite remarkable in the dialogues. Bektaşî's criticisms are not limited to the religious field and he also highlights some social problems cunningly in a humorous way (Elaltuntaş, 2016, 27).

These stories containing various elements for interpretation have been reproduced within the religious and cultural field and have survived to the present day. The structures in the stories give lots of issues about the Bektaşî stereotype and they can illustrate particular features of the Bektaşî stereotype as well as express his authentic approaches (Solmaz, 2019, 94; Yalçınkaya, 2015, 115). Stories compiled from different sources will articulate how the differences and alternative voices are quoted in a humorous way in Ottoman religious culture and how the stories of religious groups that have the potential can be seen outside of orthodoxy, are conveyed delicately thanks to the tradition of storytelling.

### 2.1. Bektaşî vs. Infidels

As mentioned above, Bektaşî stories are dualistic, and they have both literal or apparent and obscure or deeper meanings that give lots of potential matters for interpretation. One of the fundamental characteristics of the stereotype is his authentic mentality. He is not quite familiar with the literal mainstream religious knowledge, and many can name him as an "ignoramus" ordinary man. Even if he represents the borders of the Islamic religious sphere, at least according to his self-proclamation, he is not entirely out of the court.

The first chosen story expresses the relationship between the Bektaşî stereotype and religious knowledge, with a dialogue between him and his infidel neighbor. I compiled this story for the research from a Bektaşî I met, and the story is as follows:

#### Story 1

The Bektaşî is neighbored by a Jewish. There was no conflict between them, and they were close friends. One day, as soon as the Bektaşî saw the Jewish, he attacked him. The Jewish was stunned by the attack and asked: "Why are you hitting me? Did I do something wrong?" Bektaşî answered: "You Jews persecuted and tortured our prophet, Moses." Jewish "Yes, but these happened hundreds of years ago." said. Bektaşî answered: "Yes, they may have happened centuries ago, but I just learned them. (Source: a living Bektaşî)

In terms of Muslim religious culture, several forms of storytelling are reformulated according to the contents or narration of stories. Storytelling is primarily a narrative form that is cited in the Qur'an in numerous ways (Şengül, 2002). The stories of the sons of Adam, prophets such as Noah, Joseph, and Moses, as well as tribes such as Ad and Thamud can be exemplified as Qur'anic stories. The narratives about substantial matters such as the Miraj of the prophet, migration of the Muslims from Mecca to Medina, and significant wars such as the Battle of Badr and the Battle of Uhud in the life of the prophet Muhammad are also quoted in the Qur'an. Such stories of prophets, who are notable figures in the collective memories of Muslims, perpetuate the vividness of Islamic narrative culture and the stories about companions of the prophet and saints enrich it in many senses.

As the stories of several prophets are told in the Qur'an, stories of various prophets quoted in holy books are not limited to Islamic belief. These stories particularly lie in both Christian and Jewish culture, and they narrate the impressive lives of prophets, who lived with both believers and infidels. One of these prophets Moses is also remarkable for the Jews and particularly, surah al-Baqara, the second surah and longest surah of the Qur'an, comprehensively describes the troubles and struggles that Moses faced with the Israelites. Prophet Moses, holy to the Jews, tries in different ways to convince the Israelites in the Quranic narrative, and stories about him are cited in many verses of the Quran.

In the story, the narrative about Moses's ordeal against Israelites in the Quran caused Bektaşî's unexpected and carefree attack on Jewish men. In terms of the relationship between religious knowledge and the Bektaşî, although the prophet's life stories are widespread among both Muslim and non-Muslim religious cultures, it is possible to say that Bektaşî is ignorant about it. The knowledge about the prophet Moses' trials concerning Jews, requires the practices such as the recitation of the Quran, reading the translation of the Quran, learning Quranic Arabic, or at least reading any orthodox religious oeuvre. The Bektaşî, a lesser-informed, uneducated, and ordinary man of the religious culture, has no chance to learn them and probably he just heard it from an oral source. However, he is a sincere believer, and he immediately does his best against infidels as it occurred in the story.

His unsurprised reaction can also demonstrate his reckless characteristic behavior. He attempts to avenge his holy prophet as soon as he learns of the suffering, and this is a chance for revenge on infidels. His style of reacting by directly hitting the Jewish men without any dialogue expresses the mundane and naive mindset of the Bektaşî stereotype. As seen in numerous Bektaşî stories, the Bektaşî stereotype is generally less knowledgeable, lives simply, and thinks simply (Yaçınkaya, 2015, 107). His authentic way of thinking is connoted with similar stories and this fundamental characteristic remained in the storytelling tradition about Bektaşîs. The Bektaşî is a character who acts without giving them much consideration, is prone to acting suddenly, and can be identified by both his thoughts and his actions, as the story makes clear.

Another prominent aspect of the story is Bektaşî's self-definition by othering the non-Muslims. To purify the relationship between the Bektaşî and infidels, another short story can be exemplified. Accordingly, when an Armenian man is on the verge of death, he requests to convert to Islam and demands a Muslim there to reiterate the Muslim's profession of faith to him. The Bektaşî suddenly covers his mouth with a pillow to muffle the infidel when he begins to repeat. In response to the startled and inquiring looks from those in attendance, he said, "I have spent my life struggling with the difficulties of worship such as prayer, fasting, and pilgrimage. This infidel's trial to salvation on his deathbed did not please me." As evidenced by this, the Bektaşî, despite his struggles with worship, does not consider himself to be an infidel. Since, at least he defined himself within Muslim culture by positioning himself against infidels, although he is eccentric, it is required to examine him within Muslim culture.

## 2.2. Bektaşî vs. Imam

Another prominent feature of Bektaşî stories is his wittiness which is emphasized nearly in all the stories. Bektaşî's wittiness sometimes tries to shade his disadvantages and weaknesses across the regular worshipper's religiosity. Although he is faithful and he others the infidels, Bektaşî is not a regularly praying or fasting man as expressed in

many stories. Therefore, indifference to worship and some fundamental faiths can be added to his main features in the stories. In the next stories, he declares his indifference and self-consciousness in various ways:

### Story 2

One day, a derelict camel notices that the door of the mosque is open, and the camel directly enters the mosque. While the animal is wandering inside the mosque, the camel hits the lamps of the mosque and begins to break them. The imam of the mosque was shocked by this incident and found a stick for beating the animal and struggled to get it out of the mosque. Bektaşî, passing by, sees them and asks: “Why are you beating this animal?” Imam answers: “The animal entered the mosque and broke the lamps. I am struggling to get it out.” Bektaşî answers: “Do not beat him, he is an animal after all. He entered the mosque because he was dumb. He would not have entered the mosque if he was sage. For example, look at me, do I ever enter a mosque? (Toprak, 2017, 34) (Altaylı, 2009).

This humorous story is a precedent of reproduction and reconstruction of narrative through written and oral culture. This version is also cited in a written source that compiles Bektaşî stories, but another version was told by Nezhîh Uzel, a name who lived in the last century and was in the latest Sufi sphere. The main narrative is nearly similar in both stories but there is a remarkable exception. In Nezhîh Uzel’s version, the animal that is one of the heroes of the story is not a camel, but a donkey. The written source preferred to say the camel instead of the donkey and reproduced the narrative according to his filter while conveying. The author’s concern not to compile the stories with their original versions so as not to offend the members of these religious groups is evident in this sense.

While interpreting these preferences, the choice of animals can be mentioned. On the one hand, in oral culture, the term donkey (eşek in Turkish) could be spelled with a double “ş” that strengthens the pejorative meaning of the word with stress (eşşek). On the other hand, “eş-şek” also means the doubt in Arabic. Therefore, the articulation of donkey implies the subalternity and suspiciousness. We can conclude that this is not an unconscious choice if we also include the fact that the donkey is commemorated by its unpleasant and unsightly voice in folktales, proverbs, and idioms. Selecting the camel -which has a lot of religious references in written sources- instead of the notorious donkey in the domesticated version of the story, can be considered similarly.

Even though the storyteller varies, the narrative clarifies another main characteristic of the Bektaşî stereotype: Although he is a faithful man, he is indifferent to worship. He sincerely declares that he does not go to the mosque and does not pray. His indifference is not limited to performing salah, and there are many examples of stories about Bektaşî who do not fast during Ramadan. For instance, Bektaşî is informed that tomorrow is Ramadan by someone. Since he is illiterate, Bektaşî endites “Ramadan tomorrow” on a piece of paper and places it next to his bed so he won’t forget. He sees the paper that reminds “Ramadan tomorrow” when he wakes up every day and he spends the month of Ramadan without fasting.

It is not precise when these stories spread or how they relate to the facts. Nonetheless his non-worship can be considered as another essential feature in the narratives. In addition, his humorous and cunning criticism is visible while non-praying Bektaşî expresses his thoughts about those who go to the mosque in his reply to the imam. The imam character symbolizes the man who is an official representative of mainstream religious culture and an officer of the government. According to Bektaşî, the imam

who hits the animal does the wrong thing because, for him, the people who go to the mosque are camels or donkeys and dumb-like animals. If they were sages, they would not go to the mosque. As a result, Bektaşî does not go to the mosque because he is a sage, or in other words, he acknowledges the essence of the religion instead of worship.

### 2.3. Alevi and Bektaşî

Bektaşî culture includes also Alevi who are more than millions living in different parts of modern Turkey and understanding the historical background of their interaction requires some explanations. Although Alevism has joint principles with the Bektaşî Sufi order and also Shiism, it differs in certain points as another doctrine. It needs a detailed and volumed expression but briefly can be said that some of the Alevi groups in the Ottoman period belonged to the Bektaşîs (Şahin, 2007). Alevism was generally organized in the provinces and villages but after the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923, masses of them migrated from the villages to the cities. So, new types of Alevisms have emerged and their lifestyles, conventions, and beliefs have been partially or radically reshaped in many senses both in Turkey and the other countries where they migrated (Zırh, 2017).

On the other hand, although the Bektaşî Sufi order was banned with the prohibition of all the Sufi lodges and shrines in 1925, Alevism was transferred to the cities as well as living in the provinces after the 50s. Thus, the Alevi-Bektaşî tradition survived, and this culture dominated the alternative religious culture narrative in this period thanks to its rising appearance. Related to our subject of research, we can mention that another version of storytelling about Bektaşîs is Alevi stories, and the last chosen story is from Ahmet Yurt, an Alevi Dede who lived in Tunceli as a representative of traditional Alevism and deceased recently:

#### Story 3

A wealthy man's son is in trouble because of a severe illness. Doctors tried to heal him from the disease, but they couldn't succeed. Someone said, "Go to Dede of the Alevi and request help, let's see what he will do". The man went to Dede and requested his help to pray for his child's well-being. Dede said, "If you promise to give me a horse when the child gets better, I will come to your house to pray." The man immediately accepted, and Dede arrived home. He saw that the child could not get out of bed and said that he needed to be alone with the son. The boy's family went out of the room. In the evening, the boy's father secretly listened their speeches to understand how Dede was praying. Dede was repeating: "Let this son not live till the morning, let this son die. Why don't you take his soul?" In the morning, the boy's father asked Dede's permission to enter the room. He saw the boy begin to feel better. Dede prayed for two more days, and the son was completely well-being. Dede decided to return, and the son's father prepared the horse for Dede, but he was confused. He asked Dede: "Your gift is ready and thank you for everything, but I have one more question. Don't you fear Allah? You've been praying for my son's death for three days. What a weird man you are!" Dede answered: "My son! Do I have an excellent relationship with Allah? I prayed for his death; Allah healed the boy to be the opposite of what I wanted. If I had prayed for his well-being, the opposite would have happened, and the child would have died." (Nezih Ünen, 2008)

The first feature that comes to the fore in this story, which is longer than the others, expression of the "ocak" culture that is extensively practiced in Anatolia. People living

in different regions of Anatolia heal people by reading some special prayers, giving manuscripts, preparing treacle water, etc. and they named “ocak” as representatives of the traditional medicine culture of Anatolian (Göçen & Cüre, 2022). Usage of this culture can differ, and it can be declared alternative, complementary, or supplementary medicine related to illness and the method of treatment. As mentioned in the story, the family first tried various doctors but finally, they had to desperately request Dede’s help who is a practitioner of this traditional medicine culture as well as a religious figure of the alternative religious culture.

Dede’s request for a horse can sound weird at first glance but it explains another significant element of this medical culture. As far as I learned from practitioners of this tradition that I met forty of them for another research, there had to be a material or non-material cost for this operation because while they pray for the well-being of the sick, they cast out the illness from the body. If they don’t transmit this bad soul or energy to anyone or anywhere, the practitioner takes it to his or her body. Similarly, the price requested by the agreement ensures that the practitioner does not become ill because of the operation.

Dede’s authentic way of praying and his dialogues with the father are also remarkable in terms of the Bektaşî stereotype’s self-proclamation and awareness of self-consciousness. Dede describes himself as a man who awakes that his relationship with God is not excellent due to his way of living and thinking in an alternative way. The Bektaşî stereotype who accepts his disadvantaged position by God, tries to reformulate his problematic faith style in a humorous and quick-witted way. Finally, the son becomes well-being, the father is pleased, and Dede who lives in the country like the big part of Alevis, takes the horse. The happy end of the story represents an ordinary man’s triumph who can produce cunningly his authentic strategy, facing his exceptionality.

### **Evaluation and Conclusion**

Ottoman religious culture includes both scholars and Sufis as well as ordinary believers. The history of Ottoman Sufi religious culture is not straightforward or uniform and many fragmentations were established differently with numerous Sufi orders. In the enormous and diverse Ottoman Sufi field that creates an authentic oral and written culture, there are various groups represent the mainstream, common, and widespread Islamic faith as well as those who can be considered outside of the court or who are within the faith but differ thanks to their way of interpreting. It can be mentioned that all the variations of these groups emerged in Ottoman Sufism history, but they were temporarily prohibited, banned, exiled, or executed even if they were honorable to the sultans or governors. Various historical incidents demonstrate that although alternative voices were occasionally stifled, they were heard until the fall of the empire.

In terms of the relationship between the Bektaşî Sufi order and the unorthodoxy, several approaches can be mentioned. If we focus on the convergence among them, the interactions could be seen as never disappeared from the very beginning to the end. It is possible to say that some unorthodox groups such as Kalenderis were shadowed under the umbrella of the Bektaşî Sufi Order over time and in particular, they commenced to dominate the Bektaşî culture during the closure period of the order in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. On the other hand, it is possible to say that the operation of oppression on Bektaşîs may have radicalized or marginalized them in many senses.

The prohibitions and pressures may have contributed to this tendency's increase, or they may have driven them in this direction.

By looking at the discourses of Sufi authors who lived in the last period of the Ottoman Empire that witnessed the Bektaşis of the period, their approaches to Bektaşis could be seen as strictly negative. Although it is necessary to be suspicious due to the political atmosphere of the era, the declarations of the sheiks of other orthodox Sufi orders about the closure of the Bektaşî Sufi order, are quite remarkable. In this context, they declared that Hacı Bektaş Veli was a saint and a friend of Allah, but some ignorant people had deformed the Bektaşî Sufi order, and they could not have any connections with anyone like them (Gündüz, 2019, 149).

The recognition that unorthodox groups deform the Bektaşî Sufi order is not limited to this time, and it persisted in the following periods as well. Hüseyin Vassaf (1872-1929), a Halveti sheik who lived in the last century, is well-known for an encyclopedia that wrote about numerous orders. Vassaf, who talks about the history and Sufis of many orders with great respect and praise, conversely changes his narration in the Bektaşî part. For him, Bektaşis are entirely outside of orthodox belief. They abandoned prayer and interpreted the fundamental religious postulates and beliefs in their own -ignorant- way. Their deviation is not limited to these and they direct people who have started to move away from religious practices to do the things that are forbidden by religion (Vassaf, 2015, 494).

Another Sufi author, Sadettin Nüzhet Ergun (1899-1946), who lived in similar eras and wrote a voluminous anthology on religious music culture, portrays Bektaşis similarly. According to him, since the Ottoman religious field was bound by sharia and established around the Sunni faith, they did not allow Bektaşis to get involved in terms of both belief and culture. The Bektaşis do not pray and although they declared their devotion to him, they had no concern with Hacı Bektaş. For Ergun, the poems of Bektaşis that are sung in their ceremonies are structured in a way that ridicules common religious essences, and they lack any religious content. As a result, it is more accurate to examine Bektaşî poems as non-religious literature rather than as religious (Ergun, 1943, 9-409).

It is not quite probable for us to scrutinize how much the Vassaf's and Ergun's descriptive narrations about Bektaşis were part of the truth and mirrored reality. We also do not know exactly which Bektaşis were the origins of their criticisms. But it is evident that, at least in the last period of the Ottoman Empire, the sheiks of the mainstream Sufi groups did not consider the Bektaşis as members of the common orthodox faith. Concordantly, the negative portrayal of them could be dated to early sources of Mevlevîs in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, Eflâki's *Menâkıbu'l-Ârifin* and Hacı Bektaş become the main orientational point for groups that are not closely bound to the Islamic orthopraxy (Soileau, 2018, 150-151). The diversity and multidimensionality of the narrative about the Bektaşî Sufi order can be found also in the articles of Yusuf Fahir Baba (1892-1967), a Bektaşî who lived in the same period (Ataer, 2019). Consequently, similar to historical ambiguities, their depictions strengthen the assumption of the impossibility of a unique or holistic Bektaşî narrative.

From the explanations provided thus far, in the manner that it is portrayed in a variety of ways by different actors, the Bektaşî Sufi order indicates an alternative to the common religious culture. Although the alternative voices survived in the Ottoman from the establishment to the collapse, they did not entirely represent the common Sufi culture. As Ergun coted, almost all of them were Sunni and orthodox orders such

as Halvetis, Celvetis, Kadiris, etc. and the government generally had no problem with these. Similarly, the Bektaşis, who can be called the stereotyped and institutionalized version of alternative groups, have cooperated with the state in military affairs till the end of the Janissaries.

During the initial periods of the Ottoman Empire, the orders, like the state, were not institutionalized yet, and therefore it is possible to describe a fragmented structure in both the political field and the religious field. That was also a belle epoque of alternative groups considering the oral culture because of the lack of convincing written sources about this era. The alternative voices commenced disappearing over time with the institutionalization of government around the mainstream religious culture. Nonetheless, most of them melted in the crucible of the Bektaşis, whom they considered closest to them. In this long story, stories that differ from mainstream religious narratives and that reveal the various characteristics of the mouthpieces of alternative voices remain in the collective memories.

This article articulates how the differences and alternative voices are quoted in a humorous way in Ottoman religious culture and how the stories of religious groups that have the potential can be seen outside of orthodoxy are conveyed delicately thanks to the tradition of storytelling. Ottoman cultural sphere is densely dynamic as expressed in the chosen stories above. There are many differences in names, places, dates, etc. over time and some of them can be reproduced or reconstructed. This reformulation and transformation in the narration of stories express how culture can construct collective memory.

In this sense, it can be mentioned that some stories are forgotten, and others come to the fore in the cultural sphere. Additionally, the main elements of the stories like the hero, time, place, etc. become faded, and the message of the stories becomes permanent. As a result, stereotyped narratives such as “Dervish Stories”, “Mullah Stories”, and “Bektaşî Stories” remained over time in Ottoman religious culture. Thanks to these stories, narratives mirror various characters of stereotypes such as dervish, mullah, and Bektaşî, and with the repetition of these stereotypes, the definitions of identities are reinforced in the reproduction process.

As a result, the stereotype told in the Bektaşî stories is not a representation of the completely mainstream or orthodox way of believing, living, and thinking. Nevertheless, he is witty and funny, and he is neither a deist nor an atheist, but his style of interpretation is eccentric. It is not known exactly when these stories originated. Still, as someone who has been involved with Sufi groups for a long time, I can say that telling a Bektaşî story is a narrative still alive in various groups. With these stories, alternative voices are heard humorously, and the stories of alternative groups, which may seem strange, are conveyed with ease.

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