Analysis of Y-Chromosomal STR Variation Reveals High Paternal Genetic Diversity in Albanian Populations

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Received: 25 March 2026 | **Accepted:** 12 June 2026 | **Published:** 23 July 2026

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DOI: 10.56345/ijrdv13n238

Abstract

The Albanian population occupies an important position within the genetic landscape of the Balkan Peninsula. The present study investigates the Y-chromosomal genetic diversity and forensic characteristics of Albanian male populations using Y-chromosomal Short Tandem Repeat (Y-STR) markers. A total of 170 unrelated male individuals from different geographic regions of Albania were analysed using a multiplex Y-STR panel to assess allele variation, haplotype diversity, forensic efficiency, and internal population structure. The analysis identified 151 different haplotypes, including 136 unique haplotypes, indicating substantial paternal lineage heterogeneity. The overall haplotype diversity was 0.9979 ± 0.0018, demonstrating high Y-chromosomal variability within the studied population. The discrimination capacity was 0.8779, while the match probability was 0.0079. Combined forensic parameters showed near-complete discriminatory performance, with combined power of discrimination and combined power of exclusion approaching 1.000. The analysed loci DYS385, DYS458, DYS456, and DYS635 exhibited the highest polymorphism and forensic informativeness, whereas DYS392 and DYS391 showed lower allelic diversity. Concerning the haplogroup distribution the population was characterized by the predominance of E1b1b-V13, followed by J2b2-M241, I2a, R1b, and R1a, representing the principal paternal lineages of the Albanian population. These haplogroups are widely recognized as characteristic components of the western Balkan genetic landscape and provide evidence of long-term paternal lineage continuity in the region. Comparative analysis of haplogroup frequencies and multivariate clustering suggested regional variation between Gegë and Toskë population groups, indicating the presence of internal paternal genetic structuring within Albania. These findings provide new reference data for Albanian Y-chromosomal diversity and highlight the high forensic utility of Y-STR markers. The study contributes to the understanding of paternal genetic structure in Albania and offers valuable data for forensic genetics, population genetics, and comparative Balkan genetic research.

Keywords: Albanian population; Y-STR; haplotype diversity; forensic genetics; paternal lineage; population genetics

1. Introduction

The Albanian population represents one of the most distinctive populations in the Balkan Peninsula, characterized by a unique historical continuity, geographic diversity, and complex demographic background. Because of its special position at the crossroads between southern Europe, the Mediterranean, and the Near East, Albania has experienced for a long time multiple prehistoric and historic population movements, but however, preserving its linguistic and cultural identity. For this reason, Albanian populations constitute an important subject of investigation in population genetics, anthropological genetics, and forensic genetics. Previous investigations based on classical genetic markers, surnames (Mikerezi et al 2013), autosomal STRs (Zaimi et al 2025), and other chromosomal markers have indicated a complex population structure influenced by migration, isolation, and genetic drift. In this context, especially comprehensive Y-chromosomal studies based on high-resolution Y-STR are still relatively limited, especially those focused on internal population structure and regional differentiation.

It is well known that the human Y chromosome, transmitted virtually unchanged from father to son, is a highly informative genetic marker for the investigation of paternal ancestry and male lineage relationships. Short Tandem Repeats, which are used normally in populations investigations, located on the Y chromosome (Y-STRs) are characterized by high polymorphism and mutation rate, making them particularly useful for forensic identification, paternity testing, kinship analysis (Ralf et al 2023). In this context, they provide valuable information concerning paternal genetic structure, lineage diversification, and historical demographic processes (de Knijff, P. 2022, Andersen & Balding 2021, Hodişan et al. 2024)

In population genetics, the analysis based on Y-STR markers allows estimation of allele and haplotype frequencies, discrimination capacity, haplotype diversity, and population relationships through phylogenetic and multivariate approaches, as well (Kayser et al. 2017)

Previous genetic studies have suggested the presence of characteristic Balkan haplogroups in Albanian males, with important contributions from lineages such as E-V13, J2, R1b, I2, and R1a, reflecting both ancient Balkan continuity and later demographic events (Davranoglou et al 2026). However, the distribution and diversity of Y-STR haplotypes within Albanian populations at the regional level remain insufficiently characterized.

The aim of the present study is to investigate the Y-chromosomal genetic diversity and paternal population structure of Albanian human populations using Y-STR markers. Specifically, the study aims to: (i) determine allele and haplotype frequencies of Y-STR loci in Albanian males; (ii) evaluate the forensic efficiency and genetic diversity parameters of the marker set; (iii) assess regional patterns of paternal genetic variation within Albania; and (iv) contribute new reference data for forensic, anthropological, and population-genetic studies in the Balkan region. The results obtained are expected to provide new insights into the paternal genetic landscape of Albanians and to enrich the existing genetic database of southeastern European populations.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1 Population samples

This study included 170 unrelated male individuals originating from the Albanian population. Saliva samples were collected by using *Oragene® DNA collection kits* from healthy adult volunteers representing several geographic regions of Albania, with the aim of covering the major territorial and ethnolinguistic diversity of the country. Only individuals with confirmed paternal Albanian ancestry for at least two generations were included in the analysis in order to minimize the influence of recent migration or non-local paternal lineages.

Participants were selected from different districts across Albania, representing both northern and southern population groups. Information regarding geographic origin and paternal ancestry was recorded anonymously after informed consent was obtained from each participant. Sampling was

performed according to ethical principles for human genetic research and in accordance with national regulations for the use of biological material in scientific studies.

2.2 DNA extraction and Y-STR genotyping

In our analysis 30 µl of liquid saliva samples were collected from the study participants and genomic DNA was extracted manually using the QIAamp DNA Mini Kit . The manufacturer's protocol was slightly modified to accommodate the liquid saliva samples by reducing the incubation time to 10 minutes during the lysis step, while all other extraction procedures were performed according to the recommended protocol.

Y-chromosomal short tandem repeat (Y-STR) profiles were generated using the AmpFlSTR™ Yfiler™ PCR Amplification Kit (Applied Biosystems, USA), which amplifies 16 Y-STR loci. PCR amplification was performed on a VeritiPro Thermal Cycler (Applied Biosystems, USA) following the manufacturer's recommendations. The amplified PCR products were separated by capillary electrophoresis on an Applied Biosystems 3500 Genetic Analyzer. Allele calling and profile interpretation were performed using IDX software. Allelic ladders provided with the Yfiler kit. The Dye Set used, is Gene Scan size standart 600 LIZ. For the identification of the Y STR haplogroups the NEVGEN online predictor was used. Among the haplogroups that this predictor identified, all those that appeared with a probability < 80% were excluded from the analysis.

2.3 Statistical and population genetic analysis

Allele frequencies for each Y-STR locus were calculated by direct counting. Haplotype frequencies were estimated from observed Y-STR profiles within the studied sample. To assess genetic diversity and forensic informativeness of the analysed Y-STR markers, different forensic parameters were calculated for each locus where appropriate. Y-STR haplotype diversity was estimated according to standard population genetics formulas (Zaimi et al 2025). The discriminatory power of the complete haplotype set was evaluated through haplotype frequency distribution and overall match probability. Multivariate analysis Principal Components was used to visualize genetic relationships among sampled groups.. Graphical representation of the data was generated to identify regional clustering patterns and possible north–south differentiation. Statistical analyses were performed using population genetics and forensic genetics software package STATISTICA commonly employed for data analysis, including allele-frequency calculations and distance-based population comparison methods.

3. Results

3.1 Y-STR diversity and haplotype composition of the Albanian population

A total of 170 unrelated Albanian male individuals were analysed using a panel of Y-chromosomal STR loci. The dataset generated 151 distinct Y-STR haplotypes, of which 136 were unique, indicating a high level of paternal lineage diversity within the studied population. The overall haplotype diversity (HD) was 0.9979 ± 0.0018, demonstrating extensive Y-chromosomal variability among Albanian males. The discrimination capacity (DC) was 0.8779, showing that nearly 88% of individuals carried distinguishable haplotypes. The match probability (MP) was 0.0079, indicating a low probability of two unrelated individuals sharing the same haplotype in the studied sample. Combined forensic analysis across all investigated loci revealed very high values of combined power of discrimination (CPD ≈ 1.000) and combined power of exclusion (CPE ≈ 1.000), confirming the strong forensic informativeness of the analysed Y-STR marker set in the Albanian population.

3.2 Allelic variation across Y-STR loci

In the following Table 1 different forensic parameters that characterize the population under the investigation are shown. Substantial variation was observed among loci regarding allele number and genetic diversity. Several markers displayed high polymorphism, particularly DYS385, DYS385b, DYS458, DYS456, and DYS635, which showed elevated polymorphic information content and discrimination power. Among these, DYS385b demonstrated the highest typical paternity index and one of the highest levels of polymorphism.

Table 1: Summary forensic statistical parameters and haplotype diversity estimates of the Y-STR haplotypes observed in the Albanian population

Locus	Most common allele	Power of Discrimination (PD)	Probability of Exclusion (PE)	Polymorphic Information Content (PIC)	Polymorphic Information Content (PIC)	Typical Paternity Index (TPI)
DYS456	15	0.7555	0.4701	0.717	0.717	4.0907
DYS389I	13	0.5581	0.4024	0.4748	0.4748	2.2632
DYS390	24	0.5897	0.4158	0.551	0.551	2.4373
DYS389II	28	0.7501	0.4688	0.7074	0.7074	4.0011
DYS458	15.0	0.7731	0.4743	0.7401	0.7401	4.4076
DYS19	14	0.7205	0.4609	0.6711	0.6711	3.5781
DYS385	14	0.8008	0.4802	0.7736	0.7736	5.021
DYS385_b	17	0.8304	0.4856	0.8095	0.8095	5.8979
DYS393	13	0.5502	0.3988	0.4733	0.4733	2.223
DYS391	10	0.4283	0.3366	0.3665	0.3665	1.7491
DYS439	12	0.6499	0.4387	0.6025	0.6025	2.8567
DYS635	21	0.7222	0.4614	0.6727	0.6727	3.5999
DYS392	11	0.2445	0.2146	0.2222	0.2222	1.3237
YGATAH4	11	0.5636	0.4048	0.4767	0.4767	2.2916
DYS437	14	0.6614	0.4427	0.5958	0.5958	2.9531
DYS438	10	0.6147	0.4258	0.5574	0.5574	2.5951
DYS448	20	0.5746	0.4095	0.4902	0.4902	2.3505

In contrast, as shown in Figure 1, loci such as DYS392 and DYS391 showed lower variability and a narrower allele distribution, reflecting more conserved paternal inheritance patterns in the analysed population

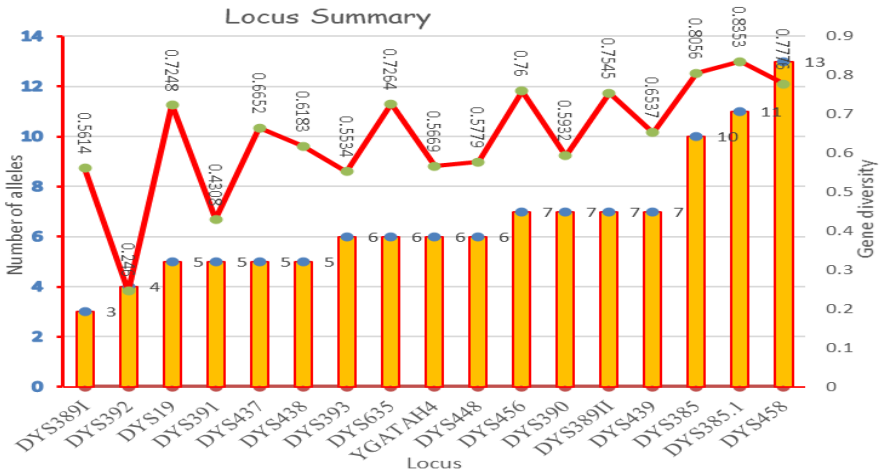

Figure 1: Distribution of allele frequencies and gene diversity across the analysed Y-STR loci i n the Albanian male population.

The most frequent alleles varied among loci, with recurrent modal alleles observed at DYS393, DYS390, DYS391, DYS392, and DYS389I, representing common paternal signatures within Albanian Y-chromosomal variation.

3.3 Haplogroup frequency distribution

The distribution of Y-chromosomal haplogroups, as shown in Figure 2, demonstrated heterogeneous paternal ancestry within the Albanian population. The predominance of haplogroups like E1b1b-V13 and the substantial representation of J2b2, I2a, R1b, and R1a indicate that the Albanian paternal gene pool is composed mainly of lineages that are characteristic of Balkan and southeastern European populations with additional lower-frequency haplogroups contributing to overall diversity (Mihajlovic et al. 2022, Jankova et al. 2025)

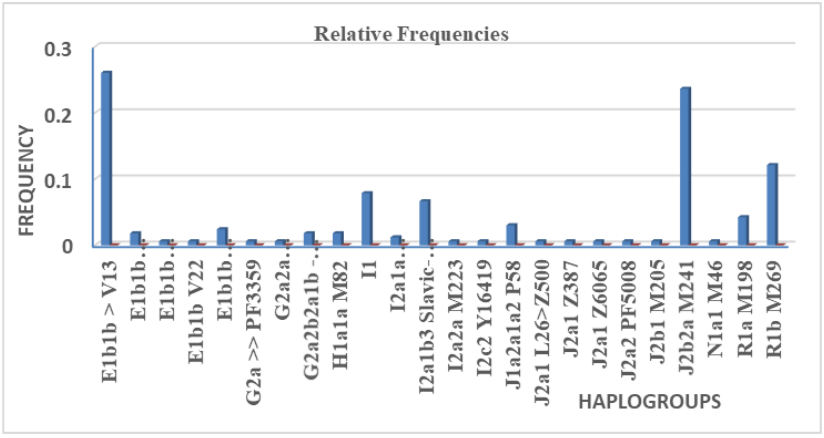

Figure 2: Haplogroups frequency in Albanian population

Comparison between **Gegë** and **Toskë** dialect groups based on the same haplogroups identified is shown in Figure 3 and Figure 4.

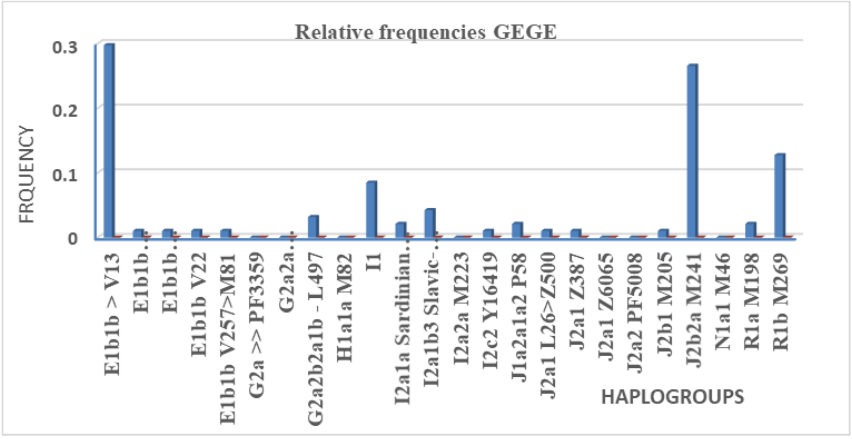

Figure 3: Haplogroup frequency in the dialect subgroup Gegë

Some differences in haplogroup frequency distribution have been revealed, suggesting regional structuring of paternal lineages.

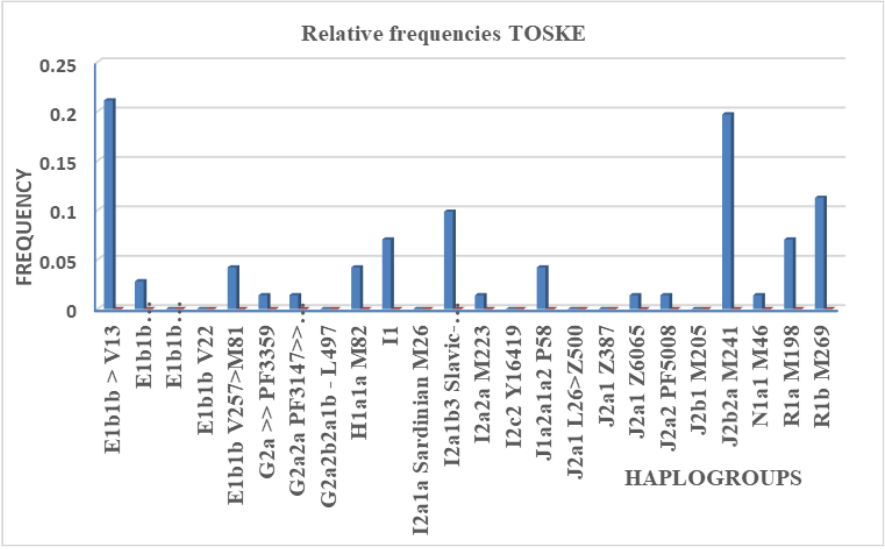

Figure 4: Haplogroup frequency in the dialect subgroup Toskë

Although both groups shared the principal haplogroup background typical of Albanian populations, variation in relative frequencies was observed between northern and southern groups.

In the Table 2 the data of our study are given in a comparative manner with those of several countries of the region. It should be noted that the data were constructed by combining the different haplogroup subclades from the populations under the study.

From the data in this table, as expected, the similarity of frequency values among Albanian populations is clearly observed even though the data for Kosovo Albanians were obtained from foreign authors and not from a comprehensive investigation of local research institutions.

Table 2. Comparison of frequency data for some Y STR haplogroups in the Balcan region

Country	I2a (%)	E1b1b (%)	R1a (%)	R1b (%)	J2 (%)	Reference
Albania	9.0	31.2	4.2	12.1	26,6	Our data
Kosova Albanians	7-10	40-45	4-7	15-20	15-20	Pericic et al.2005 ; Battaglia et al.2009
Montenegro	29.2	27.0	7.4	9.2	8-10	Mirabal et al.2010
Serbia	29.1	18.5	14.6	7.0	6.0	Mihajlovic et al. 2022
Bosnia & Herzegovina	40.0	22.0	15.0	5.0	7.0	Marjanovic et al.; Battaglia et al.2009
Croatia	31.2	10-12	24-25	9-10	5-6	Pericic et al 2005.; Battaglia et al.2009
North Macedonia	25-30	20-25	10-15	8-10	10-15	Jovcevska et al. 2019
Bulgaria	18-22	20-23	16-18	10-12	10-12	Karachanak et al.; Battaglia et al.2009
Greece	10-15	20-25	10-12	15-20	15-25	Semino et al 2004.; King et al.2008
Romania	17.7	21.4	20.0	18.0	13-14	Pericic et al.2005; Martinez-Cruz et al.2022

However, a comparison based on multivariate analyses is foreseen after enriching our data with other calculated population parameters.

3.4 Population structure analysis

In the following Figure 5 and Figure 6 the results of Multivariate analysis based on haplotype frequencies and Euclidean distance are shown. It is worth noting that when performing Multivariate analysis, like Principal Components Analysis (PCA), the data about haplotype frequencies are transformed into genetic distances, in this case Euclidean distance was used.

In the Figure 5 it is shown the population substructure resulting among sampled Albanian districts. Principal component analysis revealed a visible distribution of districts across the first two principal components, indicating a trend of geographic differentiation of population according to Y-chromosomal composition.

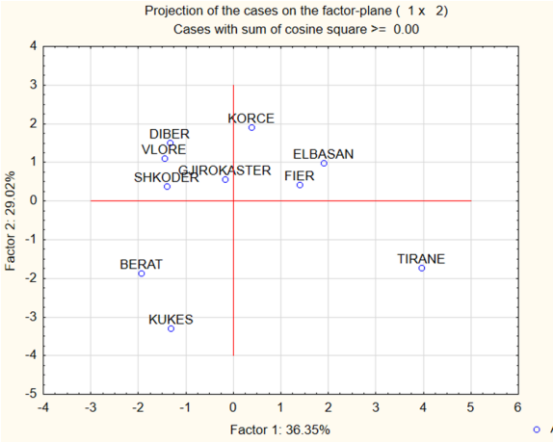

Figure 5: Scatter of different districts in the space of first two principal components

Nearly a similar trend pattern was observed in the comparison between Gegë and Toskë subdialect groups, where partial clustering suggested genetic differentiation consistent with regional and historical separation, while still maintaining overall genetic affinity within the Albanian population.

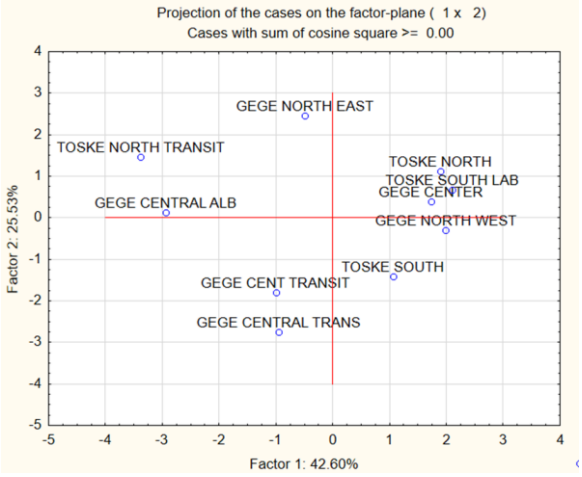

Figure 6: Scatter of different subdialects in the space of first two principal components

4. Discussion

The present study provides a detailed overview of Y-chromosomal diversity in Albanian male populations and contributes new population-genetic and forensic data for the western Balkan region. The very high haplotype diversity observed in this study (HD = 0.9979) indicates substantial paternal genetic heterogeneity among Albanian males and suggests the coexistence of numerous paternal lineages within the population.

The presence of 151 haplotypes among 170 individuals, with 136 unique haplotypes, reflects a highly diverse paternal gene pool and limited haplotype sharing among unrelated individuals. This pattern is consistent with previous Y-chromosome studies from Balkan populations, where high paternal lineage diversity has been associated with complex demographic history, repeated migration waves, founder effects, and long-term regional continuity (Mihajlovic et al. (2022) Jankova et al. (2025)

The high discrimination capacity and very low match probability further demonstrate the usefulness of the Y-STR panel for forensic applications (Ralf et al. 2023). The near-complete combined power of discrimination and exclusion confirms that the marker set is highly effective for male identification, paternal lineage analysis, kinship testing, and forensic casework in the Albanian population.

Locus-specific analysis showed that DYS385, DYS458, DYS456, and DYS635 were among the most informative markers. Their high polymorphism makes them particularly useful for differentiating closely related paternal lineages. In contrast, DYS392 and DYS391 exhibited lower diversity, which is expected due to their more conserved mutation behaviour.

The predominance of E1b1b-V13 represents one of the most characteristic genetic features of Albanian populations and is consistent with previous studies reporting high frequencies of this lineage throughout the western Balkans. The high occurrence of E1b1b-V13 has often been associated with long-term population continuity and demographic expansions in southeastern Europe. The presence of J2b2-M241 further supports the importance of ancient Balkan and eastern Mediterranean genetic influences, whereas I2a likely reflects the persistence of old European paternal lineages that survived in the Balkan Peninsula. The frequencies of R1b-M269 and R1a-M198 indicate contributions from broader European paternal genetic backgrounds, while I1 may represent more recent historical gene flow from central and northern Europe.

Overall, the haplogroup composition observed in the Albanian population reflects a combination of ancient Balkan ancestry and later demographic processes, supporting the view that Albanians preserve a distinctive yet diverse paternal genetic heritage within southeastern Europe (Davranoglou,et al.2026, Jankova et al. 2025).

The comparison of the Albanian population with neighbour Balkan populations reveals a clear genetic affinity between Albanians from Albania and Albanians from Kosova. They display a very similar Y-chromosome haplogroup profiles, mainly characterized by high frequencies of E1b1b and lower frequencies of R1a. These findings support their common paternal ancestry and genetic continuity; in addition, it is clearly consistent with their shared linguistic, historical and cultural heritage. Differences observed with neighbour Balkan populations are mainly related to the higher frequencies of I2a and R1a lineages among South Slavic groups that reflects a different genetic and demographic history (Davranoglou, L.R. et al. 2026).

An important aspect of this study is the comparison between Gegë and Toskë subgroups. The observed differences in haplogroup frequencies and clustering patterns suggest a degree of paternal genetic substructure within Albania. These differences may reflect historical settlement patterns, geographic barriers, social endogamy, and regional demographic processes that have shaped the distribution of paternal lineages over time. At the same time, the overlap between groups supports the shared genetic background of Albanian populations.

The detected internal variation is particularly relevant in the context of Albania's geographic position in the Balkan Peninsula, a region characterized by intense prehistoric and historical human mobility. The Albanian paternal genetic landscape likely preserves signals of ancient Balkan continuity

together with later demographic influences from neighbouring Mediterranean, Adriatic, and southeastern European populations (Mihajlovic et al. 2022, 2025).

From a broader perspective, the results presented here enrich the Y-chromosomal reference database for Albanian populations and provide useful comparative data for future studies in forensic genetics, human population history, and Balkan phylogeography. Further investigation with larger regional sampling and high-resolution Y-SNP analysis would be valuable for refining haplogroup classification and reconstructing the deeper paternal ancestry of Albanian populations.

5. Conclusions

The present study demonstrates a high level of Y-chromosomal diversity within Albanian populations, characterized by elevated haplotype diversity, strong forensic efficiency, and the predominance of paternal haplogroups that are typical of the western Balkan region. The distribution of major lineages, particularly E1b1b-V13 together with J2b2, I2a, R1b, and R1a, reflects a complex demographic history shaped by long-term regional continuity and historical population processes. The observed Y-chromosomal structure is consistent with previous genetic, archaeological, historical, and linguistic evidence suggesting substantial biological continuity between modern Albanian populations and the ancient populations that inhabited the western Balkans, including the Illyrian groups traditionally associated with this region. Although genetic data alone cannot directly identify specific historical ethnic groups, the results support the hypothesis that present-day Albanians preserve an important component of the paternal genetic heritage of the ancient western Balkan populations.

Overall, the findings contribute valuable evidence to the understanding of Albanian population history and reinforce the significance of Albania as a key region for investigating the genetic continuity and demographic evolution of southeastern Europe.

6. Acknowledgements

The authors would like to sincerely thank all voluntary participants who donated biological samples and made this study possible. Their contribution is highly appreciated.

We are grateful to the laboratory staff and collaborators involved in sample collection, DNA extraction, amplification, and genotyping for their valuable technical assistance throughout the study.

7. Ethics Statement

All participants included in this study voluntarily donated biological samples after providing written informed consent. Prior to sample collection, each participant was informed about the objectives of the study, the procedures involved, and the confidential handling of personal and genetic data. The study was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles of the Declaration of Helsinki and the applicable national regulations governing research involving human subjects. Ethical approval for the study was granted by the Council of Ethics of the Albanian Academy of Sciences (Decision No. 56/1, dated 03 April 2025).

7.1 AI Use Statement

The author declare that artificial intelligence tools were used during the preparation of this manuscript. Specifically, AI-assisted tools were used for language editing, grammar correction, and improvement of clarity. The intellectual content, analysis, interpretation of results, and final approval of the manuscript remain the sole responsibility of the author.

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The Crisis in the Bektashi Order Headquarters: 1945-1947

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Received: 20 March 2026 | **Accepted:** 3 July 2026 | **Published:** 23 July 2026

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DOI: 10.56345/ijrdv13n239

Abstract

Immediately after the Second World War, the Bektashi Order faced a crisis as it was expected to assume its statutory responsibilities as an independent institution. This event, beyond being a human tragedy, caused significant turmoil and shook public confidence in the stability of religious organizations. It also affected the foundations of the communist regime in Albania. The crisis was primarily rooted in internal conflicts within the Bektashi Order, particularly those arising from divergent dogmatic currents. Although the communist regime attempted to portray the crisis as resistance to reform, the reality was more complex. These internal tensions hindered a smooth transition to independence. The turmoil within the Bektashi Order posed serious challenges for the newly established regime as it sought to consolidate power and assert control over the country's institutions. Judging by the means and tactics used—and above all by the tragic consequences—the crisis in the Bektashi Headquarters was almost indistinguishable from those driven by political motives. Members of the Order held high state functions and were known to the public more for their political and military merits than for their religious roles. Moreover, the so-called 'new Bektashism,' in addition to violating the essence of Bektashi doctrine, alienated the community by reducing it to a civil association.

Keywords: Bektashi, Grandfather, dervish, order, community, reform

1. Introduction

The Bektashi Order, a dervish order of Sufi Islamic inspiration, traces its roots to Türkiye. Bektashis are Muslims who believe in one God, yet their liberal interpretation of faith closely resembles the Western concept of pantheism. Their beliefs are grounded in the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad and the Quran. Rather than worshipping in mosques, Bektashis gather and pray in temples known as tekkes.

Bektashism is also recognized for its tolerance toward other religious beliefs. (https://www.teqeusa.org/history-of-bektashism).

The origins of the Bektashi Order are steeped in legend and lore, lending a mystical aura to its founding story. According to Bektashi tradition, the order traces its roots to a revered Turkoman figure, Haji Bektash Veli. He is believed to have originated from the Khorasan region in northeastern Iran and migrated to central Anatolia in the thirteenth century. Haji Bektash Veli settled in a village—now known as Hacıbektaşköy (Haji Bektash Village)—where he laid the foundations for what would later become the influential Bektashi Order. He is venerated as the order's founder and spiritual guide.

Despite being banned and suppressed in Türkiye in 1925, the Bektashi Order found refuge and flourished in Albania. The community quietly thrived and evolved into a prominent religious entity, eventually gaining recognition as the fourth official religion in Albania, alongside Sunni Islam, Eastern Orthodoxy, and Roman Catholicism. In Albania, the Bektashi community played a pivotal role in shaping the country's cultural, religious, and social fabric. Their presence and contributions have left a lasting imprint on Albanian society, enriching its diversity and heritage. The Order's influence has been profound, making it an integral part of the nation's religious tapestry (Elsie, 2019, p.1).

After the end of World War II, the Bektashi clergy saw an opportunity to pursue their long-standing aspiration for independence. They believed the Bektashi Order had become a significant part of society and that the political climate was favourable for achieving autonomy. Consequently, they swiftly organized the 4th Congress, which served as their principal decision-making body.

2. Methodology

This article approaches the crisis of the Bektashi Order through a combination of historical reconstruction and interpretative analysis, with particular attention to the interaction between religious structures and political power in post–World War II Albania.

The primary layer of analysis is grounded in archival documentation, mainly drawn from the Central State Archive and the archives of the Ministry of Interior. These sources are not treated as neutral records, but rather as products of a specific political context, shaped by the emerging communist regime and its ideological priorities. For this reason, a critical reading has been applied, focusing not only on the information they convey but also on the intentions and narratives they reflect.

At a second level, the study engages with broader theoretical perspectives on religion and state formation. In this regard, the work of (Clayer, 2014) provides an important interpretative framework, particularly in understanding how religious institutions in the Balkans have historically been intertwined with processes of political transformation and nation-building. This perspective allows the Bektashi crisis to be interpreted beyond its immediate context, as part of a wider reconfiguration of religion under modern political conditions.

In parallel, insights from (Elsie, 2019) are used to contextualize the internal dynamics of the Bektashi Order, especially its traditionally flexible and inclusive character. This helps to explain why attempts at reform generated such intense reactions, as they touched upon elements that were central to the Order's identity.

Finally, elements of discourse analysis have been incorporated in order to examine how the crisis was framed in contemporary language. Particular attention is paid to the use of terms such as "reform," "progress," and "tradition," which appear not merely as descriptive categories, but as tools through which competing actors sought to legitimize their positions.

3. The Bektashi Congress and the Bektashi Headquarters turmoil.

The Congress took place in Tirana on May 2, 1945 ("Bashkimi" Newspaper, May 6, 1945). A group of influential clerics—most notably Baba Faja Martaneshi (Mustafa Xhani) and Baba Fejzo Dervishi—played a leading role in preparing and organizing this significant event. Both had participated in the Second World War and were widely respected and recognized by the Albanian public. Their prominence within the political and military structures of the communist regime enabled them to

leverage their positions effectively. However, their deep involvement in political affairs led them to prioritize political considerations over religious responsibilities. Seizing the moment, they nearly abandoned their spiritual roles and engaged in political manipulation during the Congress, blurring the line between religious and political commitments (Shahu, 2012, p.190). Their dual roles and political manoeuvring during the Congress underscored the complex intersection of religion and politics in post–World War II Albania.

This Congress stood out for its formal and organizational characteristics, decision-making procedures, and representative structure. With over 200 delegates from various regions of Albania—most of whom held secular roles—the Congress showcased broad-based participation (Central Archives of Albania (CAA), (1945). Fund.490, file 1, p.36). Among the attendees were distinguished guests, government officials, military representatives, and other notable figures, adding layers of complexity and significance to the event. Prominent individuals such as Deputy Prime Minister Myslym Peza, Minister of Social Assistance Bedri Spahiu, Minister of Education Kostaq Cipo, Minister of Public Affairs Haxhi Lleshi, Vice President of the General Council of the National-Liberation Front Hasan Pulo, and Spiro Moisiu were present. The substantial civilian representation, combined with the participation of high-ranking officials and esteemed public figures, created a distinctive atmosphere. While the gathering projected a sense of importance and formality, the diverse composition—particularly the presence of secular participants—tempered some of the idealistic zeal typically associated with such assemblies.

The Congress, which opened with notable deviations from statutory provisions and established procedures, encountered challenges that called into question traditional hierarchies within the community. The decision to have Mustafa Xhani chair the opening session—rather than Supreme Grandfather Xhafer Sadik Dede, the highest Bektashi hierarch—raised concerns about the perceived influence of political authorities over the proceedings. This departure from protocol clearly symbolized the clerics' submission to political power and inadvertently signalled a form of acquiescence to external influence, potentially compromising both the moral integrity and hierarchical structure of the institution. Although official documents state that 'The Supreme Grandfather delegated this task... due to his old age and intellectual disability' (Central Archives of Albania (CAA), (1945). Fund.490, file 1, p.36; Decision of the Council of Ministers, no. 25. (1945: 14 July)), this explanation appears to serve as a justification, masking a deeper issue of loyalty to political forces. Moreover, the confusion and disruptions during the Congress not only disrupted customary order but also led to the neglect of religious norms and rituals, further highlighting the challenges faced by the Bektashi Order at this critical juncture. These actions and oversights reflected a broader struggle among tradition, political pressure, and the evolving dynamics of the time—underscoring the complexities of navigating between religious and political spheres.

The Congress unfolded against the backdrop of World War II triumphalism, with a pervasive atmosphere of celebration and political fervour shaping the proceedings. The Bektashi community's pursuit of independence was framed as a political victory and as a reward for the perceived contributions of Bektashi believers to the anti-fascist struggle. Over the course of the three-day Congress, the event resembled a political party gathering, marked by spirited debates and speeches exalting the heroism of Bektashi clerics who had shown valour and dedication during the war. In recognition of their wartime service, certificates of courage were awarded to prominent figures such as Mustafa Xhani, Fejzo Dervishi, and other esteemed clerics, underscoring their bravery and sacrifice. Additionally, the Congress paid homage to '...the brilliant leader of our people,' expressing reverence and gratitude toward a figure seen as emblematic of national leadership. This emphasis on wartime achievements not only contextualized the Congress within its historical moment but also highlighted the convergence of political narratives and the religious identity of the Bektashi Order during a transformative period in Albanian history.

The Congress marked a pivotal moment in the community's history, declaring its independence amid a revolutionary atmosphere charged with fervour and anticipation among Bektashi believers. The decision was enthusiastically celebrated in the religious press, which praised the move with superlatives and expressed optimism about the prospects for '…greater rates of development and

progress…' under the new organizational framework ("Djersa" no. 1, 1945, p.14). It was emphasized that this declaration of independence did not equate to the formation of a new religion; rather, the doctrinal foundation of Bektashism remained firmly rooted in the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad. This clarification aimed to dispel misconceptions and underscore the continuity of the Bektashi tradition within the broader religious landscape.

Following the declaration of independence, the Congress moved to formalize this new status by ratifying an organizational statute that defined the structure and guiding principles of the independent Bektashi community. The statute reflected a liberal outlook and incorporated elements with political significance. Notably, the first chapter stated that 'in addition to religious sentiments... the Bektashi clergy also bore the responsibility of nurturing its followers with feelings of love and loyalty towards the People's Power... and the homeland' (Official Gazette nr. 60, 1945).

Two months after its endorsement by the Congress, the government officially recognized the new organizational statute in July 1945 (Official Gazette nr. 60, 1945), thereby solidifying the autonomous status of the Bektashi community within Albania. This milestone reflected the complex interplay between religious autonomy, political dynamics, and national identity during a period of profound transition and ideological transformation in the country.

Additionally, the statute introduced a new entity—the General Secretariat—at the Bektashi Order headquarters. Unlike existing community bodies, this institution, not formally integrated into the organizational structure, lacked clearly defined leadership responsibilities. Led by Mustafa Xhani, the Secretariat served as a mechanism that mirrored the decision-making processes of other entities within the community. Described by the religious press as an instrument '...to expand activities in the realm of Bektashis and broaden the scope of Bektashi practices and initiatives...,' the creation of the General Secretariat marked a strategic shift in the Order's organizational dynamics. It reflected an effort to adapt to evolving circumstances and community aspirations during a period of transformative change and independence ("Djersa" no. 1, 1945, p.14). This newly established body represented a departure from the community's traditional structure and introduced a novel mechanism for decision-making and coordination within the Bektashi hierarchy.

At the conclusion of the Congress, the community's governing bodies were elected to oversee its affairs and uphold its organizational structure. These included the General Council, the High Council of Grandfathers, the Gjyshatas Council, the Fathers Council, and the Councils of Dervish Lodges. One of the key positions established by the statute was that of the Head of the Community—known as the Supreme Grandfather (Kryegjyshi)—who was designated as the spiritual leader not only of the Albanian Bektashians but also of Bektashis worldwide, serving as a unifying figurehead for the global Bektashi community. The recognition of the Supreme Grandfather's role underscored the spiritual and symbolic importance of this position within the Bektashi Order's leadership hierarchy.

The 4th Congress held considerable significance and drew notable attention, setting it apart from other post-war religious gatherings. The establishment of the Bektashi Community in its aftermath was regarded as a pivotal moment that reshaped inter-religious relations in the country, fostering an environment conducive to religious understanding and tolerance. This development received broad support from religious, political, and civil figures alike, reflecting a positive reception from both official circles and the wider public, who embraced it with optimism.

Despite the positive reception from many quarters, concerns emerged regarding the Congress's handling of religious symbolism and its portrayal as a sacred institution. The perceived misuse of religious symbols and practices failed to meet expectations associated with such a designation, leading to disappointment among Bektashi believers. This discrepancy raised questions about the Congress's dual values and prompted calls for a reassessment to determine whether it had compromised the institution's religious sanctity. Notably, the Congress instigated division—and in some cases, animosity—among the clergy, resulting in a profound internal crisis within the Bektashi Order. Violations of hierarchical discipline and the misappropriation of religious symbols deeply troubled traditional clerics known for their moral integrity and steadfast commitment to the core values and ideals of Bektashism.

The General Council meeting of the Bektashi Community on September 8, 1945, revealed the

early repercussions of the internal crisis that had emerged following the 4th Congress. During this session, the process of electing a new Supreme Grandfather began, marking a pivotal moment in the community's leadership transition. The candidacy of cleric Baba Abaz Hilmiu—proposed by a group of councillors that included laymen—sparked controversy and discord among the attendees. Although Baba Abaz Hilmiu was widely recognized for his contributions and standing within the community, opposition arose, most notably from Mustafa Xhani's faction. The meeting was marked by prolonged tension, with disagreements escalating until his candidacy was imposed through verbal aggression, reflecting the deep divisions within the council. A striking moment—recalled by a contemporary—occurred when councillor R. Dema intervened with a declaration that underscored the prevailing tensions and power struggles. Pointing at Baba Abazi, Dema remarked, 'Please, why bother us with a problem that can be solved quickly? Here we have our President and Supreme Grandfather' (Ministry of Interior Archives (MIA), (1958), 2nd Directorate Fund, file 60, p.7). This statement captured the complex dynamics at play and the contentious nature of the leadership succession process. The incident exemplified the broader challenges and internal conflicts that plagued the Bektashi Community during this period of transition and uncertainty.

The appointment of Dede Abaz Hilmiu as the first formalized Supreme Grandfather exposed the challenges confronting the Bektashi Community during a period of internal strife and discord. Rather than serving as a unifying figure capable of restoring harmony and overseeing religious affairs, his leadership deepened existing divisions among the clergy. The controversy surrounding his legitimacy sharply polarized the Bektashi leadership, leading to the emergence of two opposing factions with distinct agendas. One faction, aligned with Mustafa Xhani and identified as reformist, advocated for progressive change and supported a modernizing vision for the community. The opposing faction, which supported the Supreme Grandfather (Kryegjyshi), was labelled in contemporary discourse as conservative and backward, reflecting its adherence to traditional values and practices within the Bektashi Order.

The emergence of opposing factions within the Bektashi clergy further deepened the rifts and disagreements that had surfaced after the 4th Congress, highlighting the complex dynamics at play within the community. The divide between the reformist and conservative camps signalled a period of sustained internal tension and ideological conflict that would shape the trajectory of the Bektashi Community's development and governance in the years to follow. The primary source of this split was the initiative led by M. Xhani's group to reform Bektashism in line with the country's concrete realities. Although both sides agreed in principle on the need for reform, they held sharply divergent views regarding both the substance and the method of its implementation.

The reform initiative led by M. Xhani within the Bektashi Community carried a distinctly provocative undertone, reflecting the broader socio-political landscape of post-liberation Albania. While the aftermath of liberation brought substantial transformations in the political sphere, meaningful change in other areas of society remained limited. This context sheds light on the motivations and implications behind the proposed reforms within the Bektashi Order. Set against the backdrop of the war's devastation, Albania faced acute economic and social hardship, casting a long shadow over the country's outlook. The post-war conditions left the population grappling with widespread despair, further compounding the nation's challenges in rebuilding and stabilization.

Moreover, the proponents of the reform initiative found themselves entangled in a conflict of interest, owing to their dual roles within both the Bektashi Community and the state's political hierarchy. This convergence of religious and political authority raised questions about the motivations behind the reform agenda and the degree to which external forces influenced the internal affairs of the Bektashi Community.

The provocative nature of the reform, set against the backdrop of Albania's post-war challenges and the complex entanglement of religion and politics, added further layers of complexity to developments within the Bektashi Order. The interplay of these factors significantly shaped the course of events and affected the community's unity, stability, and ideological orientation during this volatile period of transition and transformation.

The timing of the reform within the Bektashi Community coincided with a broader political

initiative known as the de-fascistization of political life in Albania. This comprehensive campaign sought to eliminate fascist influences across various sectors, including among the clergy, resulting in the removal of a significant portion of the Albanian clerical elite. The official press captured the severity of this purge with the striking motto, '...all fascists in ecclesiastical clothes should be shot in the forehead without trial' (Jacques, 1995, p.489). Within this context, the reform movement within the Bektashi Order became closely associated with the wider anti-fascist purge, fostering a perception that the reform was entangled with an anti-religious agenda.

The conflation of the reform initiative with the broader de-fascistization campaign cast a shadow of suspicion over its original religious intent within the Bektashi Community. The perceived alignment with anti-religious sentiments and the aggressive actions taken against clerical figures risked undermining the reform's credibility and authenticity, introducing a sense of contradiction and ambiguity surrounding its goals and motivations.

As a result, the initiative took on a contradictory character, with its underlying religious aims increasingly obscured by external political dynamics. This complexity contributed to a climate in which the true spiritual purpose of the reform was overshadowed, diluting its intended impact and fostering scepticism and uncertainty among both supporters and critics alike.

However, the swift implementation of such a reform shortly after the war cannot be characterized merely as courageous—especially in light of the limited intellectual resources available to formally validate its alignment with the doctrinal and Quranic principles of Bektashism. Nonetheless, the aforementioned factors lent the reform initiative an air of authority and an apparent guarantee of success in its execution.

It is evident that the reform carried a pronounced political undertone at its core. Broadly speaking, Xhani's group had alluded to their reformist intentions during the 4th Congress, and in the ensuing months, proceeded to develop a platform and establish procedures for its realization. Throughout 1946, the faction intensified its efforts by articulating specific objectives (Ministry of Interior Archives (MIA), (1958), 2nd Directorate Fund, file 60, p.3) and conducting a series of outreach meetings with believers and various interest groups across the country to broaden its support base.

Taken as a whole, the 'Bektashism Reform' extended far beyond the scope of a purely religious initiative, encompassing sweeping changes to the community's organizational structure, doctrinal teachings, and ethical foundations. According to contemporary sources, the reform sought to establish a 'new' or 'true' Bektashism—one that increasingly resembled a people-centric association, operating 'with the people, for the people,' much like a civil organization. The ultimate aim, as articulated by its proponents, was to '...align the fundamental objectives of Bektashism with those of the Democratic Front (Fronti Demokratik), aiming for a progressive identification and fusion of these goals' (Ministry of Interior Archives (MIA), (1958), 2nd Directorate Fund, file 60, p.2).

The group led by the Supreme Grandfather staunchly opposed the reform, viewing it as a threat to the future of Bektashism. Nevertheless, they approached the matter cautiously, directing their critique primarily at the implementation process rather than the reform itself. Their chief concern centered on the absence of competent bodies equipped to manage reforms involving core issues of identity and doctrinal unity within the Bektashi community—an absence they regarded as a major impediment to the reform's successful execution.

The discord between the Supreme Grandfather's group and M. Xhani's faction over the reform impeded the regular conduct of the community's religious practices. To facilitate the reform's implementation, the Supreme Grandfather proposed the establishment of a representative body with an international mandate, to be formed through a congress of Bektashi believers worldwide. He maintained that any alternative proposals put forward by the opposing group were incompatible with the established statutory and doctrinal norms of Bektashism.

The divergent positions of the two factions escalated to the point where public debates became openly confrontational, marked by arrogant and threatening rhetoric with definitive, exclusionary undertones. At times, the discourse employed terminology incompatible with the ethical standards of religious communication. This persistent contention between the groups disrupted the community's religious activities, further strained by the aggressive language used—particularly by M. Xhani's

faction—which resorted to derogatory labels such as 'conservatives,' 'parasites,' 'antiquated,' 'regressive,' 'servile,' and similar terms.

In late 1946, following more than a year of stalemate between the opposing factions, the Supreme Grandfather's group opted for a strategic retreat to prevent further escalation of the conflict. They agreed to delegate responsibility for the reform to the General Council of Bektashism and consented to convene an extraordinary session of the Council. This tactical withdrawal was likely motivated by the belief that their supporters held a numerical advantage within the governing body.

The extraordinary session of the General Council, held on January 5, 1947, convened amid a climate of heightened tension. Representing the initiator group, M. Xhani proposed two significant amendments to the doctrinal code of Bektashism: the legalization of clerical marriage and the relaxation of traditional religious attire. He personally advocated for these changes, citing the historical precedent of the Çelebiaj family, who claimed descent from Haji Bektash Veli, and contended that the Bektashi Order contained no explicit prohibition against clerics marrying. His motivations appeared closely tied to his personal circumstances, as he was the only father within the clergy to have violated celibacy rules. Delivered in an assertive tone, his appeal culminated in a forceful warning: '...in post-war Albania, life has moved past hypocrisy and parasitism' (Central Archives of Albania (CAA). (1947). Fund.490, file 1, p.3).

In addressing the issue of symbolic attire, the reform group advanced a series of original arguments, framing clothing through a Marxist dialectical lens—as a relationship between form and content. However, this interpretive framework appeared to exceed the group's intellectual grasp. They argued that genuine Bektashism should be assessed not through external appearances (form), but through one's actions and conduct (content). Accordingly, they asserted that clothing should not be treated as dogma or a doctrinal imperative, as available evidence failed to substantiate such a claim.

Following this analysis, M. Xhani revealed the true intention behind the reform through a characteristically atheistic conclusion: '...Bektashism is not a dogma, nor a religion (as it was preached), but a spiritual sentiment unrestricted by clothing, much less dictated by it' (Ministry of Interior Archives (MIA) (1958). 2nd Directorate Fund, file 60, p.1). He asserted that attire could be readily modified in accordance with the new Bektashi principle of 'with the people, for the people.' In his view, the new official no longer required the taj, the harkan, or the hajdarie, as these garments did not '...practice the truth of Bektashism; rather, it was the genuine and proactive individuals who embodied the spirit, regardless of whether they wore trousers, hats, or something else.' Consequently, he contended that identifying a Bektashi cleric by their attire was an obsolete concept, rooted in a bygone era.

The proposed changes regarding clerical celibacy and religious attire had a profound impact on the doctrinal identity and internal unity of Bektashism. Within the teleological literature, celibacy and clothing are considered two of the most defining elements of the Bektashi Order. Margaret Hasluck, the Scottish ethnographer and Albanologist, emphasizes that '...the genuine celibacy of the Bektashi dervishes enormously enhances their influence' (Hasluck, 1925, p.67). Similarly, A. Baldacci observes that 'The Bektashi are striking in appearance,' while Enrico Insabato remarks that anyone who has travelled to Albania can easily recognize them by their distinctive 'sugar bread' headdress, divided into twelve melon-like segments—interpreted by some as symbolizing the twelve imams who succeeded Muhammad, and by others as representing the Apostles of Issa (Jesus), 'may Allah give them His blessing' (Baldacci, 1895, p.27).

The 'Supreme Grandfather' faction vehemently opposed the proposed changes, asserting that the General Council lacked the authority to speak on behalf of all Bektashis. The explanations offered by Baba Faja's reformists made a poor impression on most councillors and were met with deep scepticism. Outraged and on the verge of open defiance, they staunchly resisted the reform initiatives. One of their representatives, Baba Fejzo Prishta, firmly declared, 'The Bektashi were born and will die unmarried' (Ministry of Interior Archives (MIA) (1958). 2nd Directorate Fund, file 60, p.1).

The General Council's rejection of the reformist proposals did not deter the reformist faction. On the contrary, it pushed them toward more radical positions. Convinced they had the support of the laity and segments of the clergy; they openly defied the Council's decision. With backing from clerics

connected to political circles, they established a parallel organization—the 'Progressive Bektashi'—in March 1947 (Ministry of Interior Archives (MIA), (1958), 2nd Directorate Fund, file 60, p.27–32). This alternative movement, which diverged sharply from traditional Bektashi doctrine and structure, triggered a deep internal crisis. Its formation intensified existing divisions, further escalating tensions between the reformist and conservative factions.

In a tragic and decisive turn of events, faced with the deepening crisis and feeling increasingly cornered by the internal discord within the Bektashi Order, the World Supreme Grandfather, Abaz Hilmi Dede, committed a shocking act on March 18, 1947. In a moment of devastating violence, he took the lives of the two leading figures of the reformist faction, M. Xhani and F. Dervishi. He then ended his own life—a gesture that was interpreted by some as an act of self-sacrifice in defence of the Bektashi religious cause. This unprecedented act marked a grim culmination of the ideological and institutional divisions that had fractured the community, leaving a profound and lasting impact on the Bektashi Order.

This series of events, marked by violence and ultimate sacrifice, underscored the severity of the crisis engulfing the Bektashi Community at the time. The tragic loss of life and the turmoil that followed reverberated deeply throughout the order, leaving an indelible impact on its leadership, organizational structure, and collective identity.

The incident triggered by the actions of the World Supreme Grandfather constitutes a historical tragedy of unparalleled magnitude—exceptional in both its nature and consequences. Occurring in the shadow of a sacred institution and involving key figures at the crossroads of religious and political life, the event assumed a symbolic and moral weight far beyond its immediate context. Its profound implications secured its enduring place in the collective memory of Albanian society, serving as a sombre reflection of a turbulent and transformative chapter in the history of Bektashism.

The crisis at the Bektashi Order Headquarters assumed a distinctive character, shaped both by its doctrinal roots and the broader contextual backdrop in which it unfolded. Grounded in religious disputes, the crisis held the potential to escalate into a destabilizing conflict of considerable magnitude, with far-reaching implications for the Bektashi Community and beyond. In response, the Communist Party of Albania initially sought to suppress information about the event in an attempt to contain its fallout. Despite these efforts, on the second day following the incident, the newspaper *Bashkimi* broke the news, framing the episode as a dispute centered on the democratization of the organization. The article described the Supreme Grandfather as resorting to violence, reporting that 'Baba Faja and Baba Fejzo had gathered... to discuss the democratization of their organization, but the Supreme Grandfather responded by shooting.' The portrayal cast the Supreme Grandfather as an 'outdated' and 'conservative' figure who turned to firearms against the progressive faction, thereby shaping public perception of the unfolding events (Jacques, 1995, p.540).

The portrayal of the Supreme Grandfather's actions in the media underscored the ideological and political dimensions of the crisis within the Bektashi Order, framing it as a struggle between traditionalism and progressivism. This constructed narrative shaped public discourse surrounding the incident and influenced perceptions of the event and its aftermath within Albanian society.

The tragic conflict within the Bektashi community marked one of the Communist Party's earliest significant setbacks. The expressions of discontent among Bektashi believers in the wake of the incident reflected the depth of this failure. Regional variations in how the event was interpreted further revealed the complexity and intensity of sentiment evoked by the crisis. Many believers viewed the episode as a sacrifice made in defence of religious ideals and principles. In Shkodra, believers attributed political motives to the violence, emphasizing the reformist clerics' alignment with the Democratic Front. In Peshkopia, the prevailing view was that Xhani's reforms were intended to protect his personal interests—particularly his marriage—and to promote government aims. Meanwhile, in the Skrapar region, believers regarded the Supreme Grandfather as a saint-like figure who defended Bektashism. They believed that the reformist clerics had been punished by Haji Bektash Veli himself, as divine retribution for their perceived transgressions.

Support for the Supreme Grandfather remained strong among believers and clerics across various regions, including Durrës, Berat, Gjirokastër, Korçë, Elbasan, and others. He was widely praised for his

unwavering commitment to upholding the tenets of Bektashism and safeguarding the religion's core values (Central Archives of Albania (CAA). (1947). Fundi14/AP, file 59, p.1).

The crisis that engulfed the Bektashi community left deep and lasting repercussions on its religious life and institutional vitality. Despite concerted efforts, the community struggled to reclaim its former role in cultivating and enriching the spiritual and human experience of its adherents—and of Albanian society more broadly.

4. Results

The findings of this study suggest that the 4th Bektashi Congress of May 1945 marked a decisive turning point for the Order. Organized by clerics with strong political ties, the gathering blurred the boundaries between spiritual leadership and state authority. The choice to have Mustafa Xhani preside instead of the Supreme Grandfather highlighted the growing influence of political structures over religious hierarchy.

Broad participation—over 200 delegates, including government officials and military figures—gave the Congress a distinctly political character. Wartime triumphalism permeated the proceedings, with speeches celebrating clerical contributions to the anti-fascist struggle and certificates of courage awarded to prominent leaders.

The declaration of independence was framed as both a religious milestone and a political victory. While the doctrinal foundation remained rooted in Islamic teachings, the new statute emphasized loyalty to the People's Power and the homeland, reflecting the Order's alignment with the communist regime. The creation of the General Secretariat further altered traditional structures, introducing a mechanism for broader initiatives and decision-making.

Leadership disputes soon followed. The appointment of Abaz Hilmiu as Supreme Grandfather deepened divisions, producing reformist and conservative factions. Reformists, led by Xhani, sought to modernize Bektashism in line with Albania's post-war realities, while conservatives defended tradition and doctrinal continuity.

The reform agenda—legalizing clerical marriage, relaxing attire rules, and redefining Bektashism as a civic association—provoked intense opposition. Conservatives rejected these proposals as incompatible with the Order's identity, while reformists pressed ahead, eventually forming a parallel "Progressive Bektashi" movement.

This schism escalated into a profound internal crisis. The clash between reformist ambitions and traditionalist resistance disrupted religious practices, polarized the clergy, and exposed the Order to political manipulation. The period from 1945 to 1947 thus revealed both the potential for institutional transformation and the risks of fragmentation under external pressures.

5. Conclusions

The trajectory of the Bektashi Order in post–World War II Albania reveals the profound entanglement of religion and politics during a time of national transformation. The 4th Congress, while celebrated as a declaration of independence, exposed the vulnerability of religious institutions to political influence and highlighted the tensions between tradition and reform. Leadership disputes and factional rivalries deepened internal divisions, turning reform into a contested project that blurred spiritual aims with ideological agendas. Efforts to modernize doctrine—such as proposals on clerical marriage and attire—challenged long-standing practices and provoked sharp resistance, ultimately destabilizing unity. The emergence of parallel structures and radical initiatives underscored the fragility of consensus and the difficulty of reconciling reformist ambitions with doctrinal continuity. Taken together, these developments illustrate how the pursuit of autonomy and renewal was overshadowed by conflict, leaving the Order marked by crisis and fragmentation at a decisive historical juncture.

6. Acknowledgment

The authors declare that generative AI is used solely for language support, including grammar checking, spelling correction, and minor improvements in clarity and readability.

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