

**BEING ALEVI IN TURKEY: DISCURSIVE UNITY AND
THE CONTESTATION OF COMMUNAL BOUNDARIES,
1980-2009**

by

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the ongoing reconceptualization of Alevi self-understanding within Turkey since 1980. Departing from previous historiography that has focused on the centrality of festivals for Turkey's Alevi community, this thesis examines the way in which Alevis have come to achieve discursive unity through intra-communal concern for three critical issues, namely, the Religious Affairs Ministry, compulsory religious education in public schools, and Alevi houses of worship. This study further examines the deployment of an Alevi terminological repertoire that seeks to demonstrate Alevis' close affinity with "universal values" for the purposes of distancing the community from the country's Sunni population. Lastly, in exploring how being a "minority" in Turkey has been complicated due to negative perceptions of the 1923 Lausanne Treaty, this study suggests that the case of Alevis sheds important light on the fundamental contradictions of what it means to be a citizen in the contemporary Turkish Republic.

Keywords: Alevis; Turkey; Post-1980; Minorities; Lausanne Treaty; Identity Politics; *Diyanet*; *Cemevi*; Sunnis; Sivas Massacre; Centre-Periphery; Discursive Unity; Unitarist Framework; Community Associations; Cultural Monism; Citizenship; Hacı Bektaş Veli; Religious Education; Secularism; Modernity; Media Networks; Shi'a Islam; Imagined Communities; Kemalism; Neoliberalization

To my parents, for all that they have done for me

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A NOTE ON TERMS, TRANSLITERATION, AND TURKISH PRONUNCIATION

Since Turkey is the central focus of this study, I have decided to render all Islamic terms in Turkish instead of Arabic. I do this partly out of the interests of consistency and partly because such terms have, in many cases, become crystallized in their Turkish forms within local discussions on religion and politics (e.g. A person promoting the public imposition of Islamic values is a *şeriatçı*, not a *shari'ahtcı**). *Shari'ah* (crudely translated as Islamic law), is thus found here as *şeriat*, the more familiar *hajj* (pilgrimage) appears as Turkish *hac*, *tariqa* (Sufi order) becomes *tarikât*, and *taqiyya* (pious dissimulation) becomes *takiyye*. The sole exception to this transliteration policy is the Qur'an, which remains, somewhat idiosyncratically, in its international (i.e. Arabic) form instead of the Turkish *Kur'an*.

Turkish is written with Latin characters. It possesses some additional letters (*ç, ğ, ı, ö, ş,* and *ü.*), yet does not have others that are part of Standard English (*q, w,* and *x*). Letters are pronounced as they are in English, except in the following circumstances:

Letter:	International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) Value:	Example:
<i>c</i>	/dʒ/	As <i>j</i> in <i>jump</i>
<i>ç</i>	/tʃ/	As <i>ch</i> in <i>church</i>
<i>ğ</i>	N/A, although /ɣ/ in some dialects	Lengthens preceding vowel
<i>ı</i>	/ɯ/	As <i>e</i> in <i>happen</i>
<i>j</i>	/ʒ/	As <i>s</i> in <i>pleasure</i>
<i>ö</i>	/œ/	As <i>oo</i> in <i>soot</i>
<i>ş</i>	/ʃ/	As <i>sh</i> in <i>ship</i>
<i>u</i>	/u/	As <i>oo</i> in <i>root</i>
<i>ü</i>	/y/	As <i>ü</i> in <i>über</i>

ABBREVIATIONS

AABF	<i>Almanya Alevi Birlikleri Federasyonu</i>	German Federation of Alevi Unions
ABF	<i>Alevi Bektaşı Federasyonu</i>	Alevi-Bektaşı Federation
AKP	<i>Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi</i>	Justice and Development Party
ANAP	<i>Anavatan Partisi</i>	Motherland Party
Ar	Arabic	
CEM (Vakfi)	<i>Cumhuriyetçi Eğitim ve Kültür Merkezi</i>	Republican Education and Education Centre
CHP	<i>Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi</i>	Republican People's Party
DİB	<i>Diyanet İşleri Bakanlığı</i>	Religious Affairs Ministry
DP	<i>Demokrat Parti</i>	Democrat Party
DYP	<i>Doğru Yol Partisi</i>	True Path Party
ECHR	European Court for Human Rights	
IFEA	<i>Insitut français d'études anatoliennes d'Istanbul</i>	
MHP	<i>Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi</i>	Nationalist Action Party
PKK	<i>Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan</i>	Kurdish Workers' Party
PSAKD	<i>Pir Sultan Abdal Kültür Derneği</i>	Pir Sultan Abdal Cultural Association
RP	<i>Refah Partisi</i>	Welfare Party
TBP	<i>Türkiye Birlik Partisi</i>	Turkish Unity Party
TİS	<i>Türk-İslam Sentezi</i>	Turkish-Islam Synthesis
Tr	Turkish	
TRT	<i>Tükiye Radyo ve Televizyonu</i>	Turkish Radio and Television

INTRODUCTION: HISTORIOGRAPHY AND TERMS

Finding Europe in Anatolia

It was a hot, dusty morning as I looked for the local pension after a long, overnight bus ride. Observing my foreign appearance, an older man approached me on the sidewalk and, gesturing to the surrounding town, said, “it’s just like Europe, no?” Geographically, we were in central Anatolia, but, as far as the friendly local man was concerned, we were in a town that belonged to European civilization. The man in the hot, dusty town of Hacibektaş was Alevi, a member of a syncretistic religious group with loose connections to Shi’a Islam constituting between 10-30% of the Turkish population.¹ As I shall elaborate upon in the following chapter, the tendency in *Alevilik*² towards secularism and a disdain for Islamic orthopraxy has rarely escaped the suspicion of some of the more “*shari’ah*-minded”³ adherents of Sunni Islam.

The man’s association of his town with European civilization is symptomatic of some of the larger trends within the present reconceptualization of Alevilik, a topic that forms this thesis’ central focus. In contrast to other scholars, I argue that Alevis do not attain performative unity at yearly festivals, but achieve rather a discursive unity due to Alevi media networks that emerged due to neo-liberal reforms in the 1980s and have consistently emphasized crucial community issues. Moreover, since the discourse of Turkish nationalism forces Alevis to publicly temper their demands for rights, I suggest that the group has been forced to resort to a terminological repertoire that uses “universalist” signifiers as a means of distancing their community from others, especially Sunnis. In the end, the case of Alevis sheds important light on the fundamental contradictions of what it means to be a citizen in the contemporary Turkish Republic.

¹ Reha Çamuroğlu, “Some Notes on the Contemporary Process of Restructuring Alevilik in Turkey,” in *Syncretistic Religious Communities in the Near East*, eds. Krisztina Kehl-Bodrogi, et al. (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1997), 32. I discuss some of the issues behind this discrepancy in population figures in Chapter 3.

² “Aleviness” is the direct English equivalent of *Alevilik*, although I prefer the Turkish since Alevis themselves employ the term. Élise Massicard makes the distinction between “‘Aleviness’ (*Alevilik*), meaning the social phenomenon, [and] Alevism/Alevists (*Alevicilik/Aleviciler*), which refers to the movement in the name of ‘Aleviness,’ in the same way Islam and Islamism are distinguished.” Cf. Élise Massicard, “Alevism in the 1960s: Social Change and Mobilization,” in *Alevis and Alevism: Transformed Identities*, ed. Hege Irene Markussen (Istanbul: Isis, 2005), 110 n1.

³ For Marshall Hodgson, *shari’ah*-minded “refers to a whole complex of attitudes characterizing those Muslims for whom the Sharf’ah has had an unrivalled primacy in religion and in life” and can denote both Sunnis and Twelver Shi’as. Following Hodgson, I employ the term *shari’ah*-minded as the descriptor for those Muslims who adhere to a close, exoteric understanding of the dictates of the *shariat*. Cf. Marshall Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1974), 351, 351 n.

The Historiography: Community Reconceptualizations, Scholarly Interpretations of Festivals, and the Public Sphere

In 1980, the Turkish military staged a coup that ushered in a period of profound social, economic, and political change. As the societal landscape was beginning to change, scholars such as Krisztina Kehl-Bodrogi predicted the gradual dissolution of Alevilik into wider, secular Turkish society.⁴ Others, such as David Shankland and Cemal Şener, suggested that because of the community's migration from rural to urban areas, they would be unable to maintain their previous methods of sacred knowledge transmission,⁵ and would instead witness the slow erosion of their customs.⁶ In the end, the prospects for the continuation of Alevilik into the new millennium did not appear bright at the end of the 1980s.

The beginning of the 1990s, however, demonstrated that Alevilik had not dissolved into the wider Turkish society. Instead, community commentators began to reconceptualize and define what had previously been a largely rural and oral phenomenon. The diversity of the definitions of Alevilik covered a vast spectrum: Some suggested that Alevilik was a Turkish religion that predated Islam.⁷ Others, however, have outlined its Kurdish nationalist qualities.⁸ Some disassociated Alevilik's connection with nationality, positing it instead as the true Islam.⁹ Reha Çamuroğlu, an important Alevi commentator, academic, and politician, emphasizes its heterodox roots in other faiths.¹⁰ Others, meanwhile, agree on Alevilik's heterodoxy, yet

⁴ Krisztina Kehl-Bodrogi, *Die Kızılbaş/Aleviten: Untersuchungen über eine esoterische Glaubensgemeinschaft in Anatolien* [The Kızılbaş/Alevi: Explorations on an esoteric religious community in Anatolia] (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 1988), 242.

⁵ David Shankland, *The Alevis in Turkey: The emergence of a secular Islamic tradition* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2003), 167; David Shankland, "Alevi and Sunni in Rural Anatolia," in *Culture and Economy: Changes in Turkish Villages*, ed. Paul Stirling (Cambridgeshire: Eothen Press, 1993), 47-8.

⁶ Cemal Şener, *Alevilik Olayı: Toplumsal bir Başkaldırının Kısa Tarihçesi* [The Alevi phenomenon: A brief account of a societal uprising] (Istanbul: Yön Yayıncılık, 1989), 168.

⁷ Nejat Birdoğan, *Anadolu'nun gizli kültürü, Alevilik* [Anatolia's secret culture, Alevilik] (Hamburg: Hamburg Alevi Kültür Merkezi, 1990), 13; Fuat Bozkurt, *Türklerin Dini* [The Religion of the Turks] (Istanbul: Cem Yayınevi, 1995), 8; Rıza Zelyut, *Öz kaynaklarına göre Alevilik* [Alevilik according to its own sources] (Istanbul: Anadolu Kültürü Yayınları, 1990), 20-25.

⁸ Martin van Bruinessen writes that members of the Kurdish Workers' Party (*Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan – PKK*) have especially tried to emphasize Alevilik's Kurdish roots. Martin van Bruinessen, *Kürtlük, Türklük, Alevîlik: Etnik ve Dinsel Kimlik Mücadeleleri* [Kurdishness, Turkishness, Alevilik: Struggles for ethnic and religious identity] (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1999), 109. Also, see Cemşid Bender, *Kürt Uygarlığında Alevilik* [Alevilik in Kurdish civilization] (Istanbul: Kaynak Yayınları, 1991), 47.

⁹ Şakir Keçeli and Aziz Yalçın, *Alevilik-Bektaşilik açısından din kültürü ve ahlâk bilgisi* [Religious culture and morality from an Alevi-Bektaşî angle] (Ankara: Ardiç Yayınları, 1996), 81.

¹⁰ Reha Çamuroğlu, *Günümüz Aleviliğinin Sorunları* [The problems of contemporary Alevilik] (Istanbul: Ant Yayınları, 1992), 38-42.

forcefully disavow any connection to Islam.¹¹ Still others, however, argue that Alevilik is not a religion at all, but simply a life philosophy that accords well with left-wing thought.¹²

Hamit Bozarslan has explored many of the themes raised by these Alevi works and has identified three recurring themes within the Alevi “self-understanding.”¹³ First, this literature argues that Alevis always suffered repression under the Sunni Ottoman state. Second, it suggests that Alevis contracted an alliance with the Kemalist state to overcome the marginalization they suffered at the hands of a Sunni-led Ottoman state. Finally, these works argue that Alevis have re-entered into a period of opposition against a post-Kemalist state that, in their view, has lent increasing support to anti-secular groups that could be potentially hostile towards Alevis.¹⁴

While Şehriban Şahin and Karin Vorhoff have focused on ways in which the increasing scripturalization of Alevilik is codifying a previously oral tradition,¹⁵ scholars such as Emma Sinclair-Webb and Élise Massicard have explored the production of Alevilik at yearly festivals. Observing the multifarious definitions of Alevilik, they have avoided producing yet another classification of Alevilik since the group is too diverse for such an undertaking. Instead, they present the Hacibektaş Festival, an annual event drawing hundreds of thousands of Alevis from around Turkey, as a locus in which Alevis achieve a manner of unity. While they are not the first scholars to observe the festival,¹⁶ they are the first – as Massicard purports – “to try to understand,

¹¹ Faik Bulut, *Ali'siz Alevilik* [An Alevilik without Ali] (Ankara: Doruk Yayınları, 1997); Erdoğan Çınar, *Aleviliğin gizli tarihi: demirin üstünde karınca izi* [The secret history of Alevilik: An ant's footprint on iron] (Istanbul: Chiviyazıları Yayınevi, 2004), 232.

¹² Rıza Yürükoğlu, *Okunacak en büyük kitap insandır: tarihte ve günümüzde Alevilik* [The greatest book to read is the human: Alevilik yesterday and today] (Istanbul: Alev Yayınları, 1990), 306.

¹³ Following Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper, I seek to avoid using the term “identity,” since the concept has become somewhat less useful due to its deployment in varied and often contradictory situations. For them, “self-understanding” (i.e. how I see myself) and “identification” (i.e. how others – such as the state – see me) are more precise and useful terms. Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper, “Beyond ‘Identity,’” *Theory and Society* 29, 1 (Feb. 2000), 14.

¹⁴ Hamit Bozarslan, “Alevism and the Myths of Research: The Need for a New Research Agenda,” in *Turkey's Alevi Enigma: A Comprehensive Overview*, eds. Paul White and Joost Jongerden (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2003), 3.

¹⁵ Şehriban Şahin, “The Rise of Alevism as a Public Religion,” *Current Sociology* 53, 3 (2005), 479; Karin Vorhoff, “Academic and Journalistic Publications on the Alevi and Bektashi of Turkey,” in *Alevi Identity*, eds. Tord Olsson, et al. (Istanbul: Swedish Research Institute, 1997), 37.

¹⁶ Cf. John David Norton, “The Development on the Annual Festival at Hacibektaş 1964-1985,” in *Bektachiyya: Études sur l'ordre mystique des Bektachis et les groupes relevant de Hadji Bektach*, eds. Alexandre Popović and Gilles Veinstein (Istanbul: Isis, 1993), 191-200; Hugh Poulton, “Turkish Shi'ism: Alevis, Bektaşis, Kızılbaşis, and the Annual Festival at Hacibektaş, August 1994,” *Turkey Briefing* 8, 3 (1994): 9-11; Mark Soileau, “Festivals and the Formation of Alevi Identity,” in *Alevis and Alevism*, 101. While each reports their findings from the festival over a number of years, their level of analysis is less than that of Massicard or Sinclair-Webb.

if not what Alevism is, [then] at least, how it works.”¹⁷ Focusing on similar issues, Sinclair-Webb suggests that the Hacibektaş Festival functions as a unifying element within Alevilik despite the lack of consensus on the meaning and interpretation of many of the Alevi symbols (be they saints’ images, dances, poetry, religious sayings, and other such things acknowledged by all to be aspects of Alevi culture) produced and consumed at the festival itself.¹⁸ Indeed, as Massicard argues, “the symbols [at the festival have] a central role... in masking differences and in ... creating community;”¹⁹ what binds the community together is the production and consumption of these symbols *at the festival* – their inability to agree on the meanings of such symbols notwithstanding. While these authors make important points, I propose a different understanding of what factors unite Alevis. I suggest that continuing political problems at the festival have precipitated a noticeable decrease in the number of attendees. Because of this, I argue that Alevis are united not so much by the performative aspects of the festival, but rather by shared concern for issues critical to the community, namely that of the Religious Affairs Ministry, compulsory religious education in schools, and the status of Alevi houses of worship. In proposing these as alternate loci of unity, I seek to make a valuable contribution to the literature.

Questions surrounding civil society and the public sphere²⁰ constitute an important component of the historiography on post-1980 Turkish society. For many scholars, the neo-liberal reforms of that period permitted previously marginalized communities the opportunity to challenge Kemalist discourse. Nilüfer Göle argues that the Turkish public sphere has undergone a process of “autonomization” since the coup of 1980 in which the increasing independence of economic sectors, political interests, and cultural groups entails a shift in power from the older state elites to civil society.²¹ This view, for the most part, is further shared by other scholars, such

¹⁷ Élise Massicard, “Alevism as a Productive Misunderstanding: The Hacibektaş Festival,” in *Turkey’s Alevi Enigma*, 125.

¹⁸ Emma Sinclair-Webb, “Pilgrimage, Politics and Folklore: The Making of Alevi Community,” *Les Annales de l’Autre Islam* 6 (1999), 271.

¹⁹ Massicard, “Alevism as a Productive Misunderstanding: The Hacibektaş Festival,” 139.

²⁰ Nilüfer Göle and Esra Özyürek rightly point out that the concept of the public sphere cannot be seamlessly applied to the Turkish case since, during the societal development of the country, the public sphere gradually expanded into the private sphere – the exact opposite of Jürgen Habermas’ original suggestion. Despite this, I use the term here since I think it is the most appropriate and familiar term for denoting the discursive space in which Alevis have sought to make their claims of difference and strive for their rights. Cf. Nilüfer Göle, “Islam in Public: New Visibilities and New Imaginaries,” *Public Culture* 14, 1 (2002), 177; Esra Özyürek, *Nostalgia for the Modern: State Secularism and Everyday Politics in Turkey* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 3.

²¹ Nilüfer Göle, “Toward an Automization of Politics and Civil Society in Turkey,” in *Politics in the Third Turkish Republic*, eds. Metin Heper and Ahmet Evin (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994), 221-2.

as Haluk Şahin and Asu Aksoy,²² Karin Vorhoff,²³ Hakan Yavuz,²⁴ and Ömer Çaha.²⁵ Not all scholars, however, agree that the post-1980 changes in Turkish society have truly permitted more democratic access to the mediatic sphere for marginal social groups. Massicard, in a separate article, along with Lael Navaro-Yashin and Ayşe Öncü suggest that “civil society” actors within the private media, instead of the state, are at the forefront of “policing” other civil society actors – thereby complicating the notion that the emergence of a new civil society guarantees an overturning of the hegemonic discourse of Kemalism.²⁶ Though I agree that announcements portending the end of the unitarist framework are premature, I argue in this thesis that the appearance of these mediatic spaces for groups such as the Alevi guarantees them at least a modicum of discursive space in which to present their views and agitate for rights.

Defining Terms

While I define terms related to Alevilik in detail in the following chapter, an introduction to some recurring terms here is beneficial. Chief among these is the term “Sunni.” In the Alevi discourse I discuss in Chapter 3, “Sunnis” figure very prominently as an ill-defined “other” responsible for the suffering of Alevi throughout history. While the discourse may not precisely define “Sunni,” the term carries characteristics that are particular to a Turkish context. For my purposes, I define “Sunni Islam” as the form of the faith that was institutionalized both in the Ottoman Empire (in the form of the *Şeyhülislam*, the empire’s head *müftü* and the *‘ilmiyye*, an empire-wide hierarchy of religious and legal experts who served as provincial judges and administrators (*kadılar*), jurisconsults (*müftüler*), and teachers (*müderrisler*)) and by the Turkish Republic in the form of the *Diyanet* (Religious Affairs Ministry), with its thousands of imams on the state payroll and official Theology Faculties at the country’s universities. Beyond the level of institutionalization, however, it is also a term intimately associated with daily cultural practices,

²² Haluk Şahin and Asu Aksoy, “Global Media and Cultural Identity in Turkey,” *Journal of Communication* 43, 2 (Spring 1993), 36.

²³ Karin Vorhoff, “Academic and Journalistic Publications,” 23.

²⁴ Hakan Yavuz, “Media Identities for Alevi and Kurds in Turkey,” in *New Media in the Muslim World: The Emerging Public Sphere*, eds. Dale Eickelmann and Jon Anderson (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 185.

²⁵ Ömer Çaha, “The Role of the Media in the Revival of Alevi Identity in Turkey,” *Social Identities* 10, 3 (2004), 331.

²⁶ Élise Massicard, “Claiming Difference in a Unitarist Frame: the Case of Alevism,” in *Turkey Beyond Nationalism: Towards Post-Nationalist Identities*, ed. Hans-Lukas Kieser (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006), 79, 81; Lael Navaro-Yashin, *Faces of the State: Secularism and Public Life in Turkey* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 3; Ayşe Öncü, “Packaging Islam: Cultural Politics on the Landscape of Turkish Commercial Television,” *Public Culture* 8, 1 (Fall 1995), 69.

such as adherence to the Hanefi school of Islam,²⁷ going to the mosque (*cami*), fasting during *Ramazan*, and, if possible, going on *hac* to Mecca.

The term *bölücülük* (separatism) is similarly important to my thesis. The term is one of a number of terminological weapons used as a part of the discourse of Kemalist Turkish nationalism to delegitimize and silence the actions – in either word or deed – of marginal groups that threaten either the unitarist and monist conception of the Turkish nation or the Turkish state’s indivisibility.²⁸ Possessing a remarkable flexibility, *bölücülük* can thus be used to delegitimize both Kurdish militants fighting for an independent Kurdistan (a threat to territorial integrity) as well as Alevis who demand greater rights (a threat to monist understandings of the nation).

Chapter Outline

Chapter 1 introduces Alevi-related terms as well as the historical development of the community from the Turkish War of Liberation (1919-1922) until 1980. While discussing the bases of Alevilik, I importantly define the community in relation to similar heterodox groups in Anatolia. Chapter 2, meanwhile, examines the reconceptualization of Alevilik in the post-1980 period. It suggests that the Alevi achievement of unity through common concern for issues such as the *Diyanet*, religious education, and the legal status of Alevi houses of worship is far more central to the Alevi imagination than is the Hacibektaş Festival. Chapter 3, in turn, explores the construction of the Alevi worldview, especially from the late 1980s until the present day. Since the unitarist framework of the nation prevents public identification based on difference that does not accord with the dictates of Turkish nationalism, I suggest that Alevis have been forced to distance themselves from the “Sunnis” through the usage of terminology that links Alevilik with the ideals of modernity and secularism. Chapter 4, finally, examines the case of Alevis among other non-dominant groups in Turkey. In it, I argue that debate on marginal-group issues has been discouraged in the country due to the extension of “minority” status solely to the Republic’s non-Muslims. Because these communities have been viewed with suspicion, officially Muslim groups such as the Alevis are prevented from seeking “minority rights” due to the term’s connotation with unpatriotic activity.

²⁷ Hanefis constitute one of the four major schools of Sunni Islam. Most Sunni Turks belong to the Hanefi school, though the majority of Sunni Kurds are Şafi’i.

²⁸ See Erik Jan Zürcher, “‘Fundamentalism’ as an Exclusionary Device in Kemalist Turkish Nationalism,” in *Identity Politics in Central Asia and the Muslim World*, eds. Willem van Schendel and Erik Jan Zürcher (London: I.B. Tauris, 2001), 209-22, for an extended discussion of these terms.

1: THE DEVELOPMENT OF ALEVI COMMUNITIES IN THE PRE-1980 ERA

During the reign of Süleyman the Magnificent (1520-1566), the Ottoman Empire faced numerous revolts throughout its territory.¹ In one of the more famous insurrections, Pir Sultan Abdal, the local *pir* (spiritual guide) of the Bektāşi Sufi order in Sivas, entered battle with his *saz* (lute) held high and the following stanza:

Even if the judges and muftis write a fatwa
Even if they hang me
Even if they put me to the sword
Let he who wishes return, but I shall never turn back from my path²

Though Pir Sultan Abdal suffered the ignominy of mortal defeat and execution, his death guaranteed him immortality within the large corpus of Alevi music and oral culture. Echoing the periodization provided by Bozarslan in the introduction, the *pir*'s words neatly encapsulate the recurring theme – insofar as the Alevi worldview is concerned – of tension between the central state and Alevis. Throughout this period, this relationship has been marked by not only the apparent religious tension contained within the stanza above, but also by accompanying economic, political, ideological, and spatial tensions. With these tensions serving as a backdrop, this chapter seeks to introduce terms and practices related to Alevis while providing an overview of the development of the Alevi community³ from its fourteenth-century beginnings until the coup of 1980.

¹ Irène Mélikoff, *Hadji Bektach: un mythe et ses avatars: genèse et évolution du soufisme populaire en Turquie* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1998), 175.

² Sabahattin Eyuboğlu, *Pir Sultan Abdal* (Istanbul: Cem Yayınevi, 1997), 117. “Kadılar müftüler fetva yazarsa/İşte kemend işte boynum asarsa/İşte hançer işte kellem keserse/dönen dönsün ben dönmezem yolumdan.”

³ I realize that confusion can arise out of the usage of the term “community.” Sandria Freitag identifies two very different conceptions of the term in historical, sociological, and anthropological literature: One is predicated on a “relational” nature, in which the community is typically characterized by localized and personalized connections between participants. The other meaning, however, privileges the abstract, ideological, and broad-based sense of the term. Given the depersonalized and more abstract nature of this latter meaning, I take this second interpretation to be more appropriate in the definition of societal groupings of the modern era (e.g.: Turkey’s contemporary Alevi community) since this age’s conditions permit an abstract connectedness between individuals that is not dependent on localized, face-to-face relationships. In instances where I refer to heterodox or Alevi “communities,” my discussion is primarily restricted to small heterodox or Alevi groupings who, in all probability, enjoyed localized and personalized interaction with their neighbours yet likely did not conceive of an abstract, overarching heterodox or Alevi “community.” Cf. Sandria B. Freitag, *Collective Action and Community: Public Arenas and the Emergence of Communalism in North India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 88-89.

Here, I do not seek to problematize understandings of key events in Alevi history during the pre-modern period. Instead, I wish solely to acquaint the reader with the bases of Alevi beliefs and social practices before directing my focus to events in the Turkish Republican period. Due to the paucity of Alevi documents from the pre-republican period, I rely primarily on secondary research in presenting this chapter's topics. Given these caveats, this section will begin with terminological definitions relating to Alevilik before moving on to an important classification of inter-related and occasionally overlapping heterodox groups, namely the Alevis, Kızılbaş, and Bektaşis. Following this necessary clarification of terms, I touch briefly on pre-modern events among Anatolian heterodox movements before charting Alevi historical developments from the Turkish War of Liberation until 1980.

Alevi Beliefs,⁴ Social Conventions, and Religious Practices

The vast majority of Alevis – like their Ottoman-era predecessors before them – have long displayed a non-orthopraxic approach to Islam that fails to adhere to many of the central elements of the faith practised by their erstwhile Sunni neighbours.⁵ Somewhat in jest, Peter Bumkes summarizes the Alevi approach to religion: “From an orthodox Sunni viewpoint, the Alevis are clearly not Muslims, but unbelievers, since they do not take the [central tenets of the faith] seriously ... The range of their heretic fallacies is, in Sunni eyes, almost coterminous with avoidance of all that a pious Muslim is obliged to do.”⁶ The “range of these heretic fallacies” includes not making the pilgrimage (*hac*) to Mecca, not performing the five daily ritual prayers (*namaz*), not fasting during *Ramazan*, and not worshiping in mosques. As a result, such distinctive identifying characteristics have long served to create tensions between Alevis and Sunnis, forcing the former to often hide their *Alevilik* from their Sunni neighbours. Given this

⁴ As a term, “Alevi” did not appear before the end of the nineteenth-century. While mindful of the dangers of projecting the term “Alevi” back in time, I have selected it to present the religious beliefs of pre-modern heterodox movements largely on account of its convenience and because many of the beliefs of these proto-Alevi groups are still shared today by (religiously-inclined) Alevis. Where appropriate, however, I will make reference to other heterodox groups (e.g. Kızılbaş, Bektaşî).

⁵ Further to the discussion on *shari'ah*-mindedness, orthodoxy, and orthopraxy, it might be useful to draw upon the work of Wilfred C. Smith. For him, “a good Muslim is not one whose belief conforms to a give pattern [i.e. orthodoxy]..., but one whose commitment may be expressed in practical terms that conform to an accepted code [i.e. orthopraxy].” Alevis thus elicit disapproval on the part of other Muslims more for their failure to implement the five commonly accepted, praxis-based pillars of Islamic faith than they do for adhering to any supposedly heretical beliefs. Cf. Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Islam in Modern History* (New York: Mentor Books, 1957), 28.

⁶ Peter J. Bumke, “The Kurdish Alevis – Boundaries and Perceptions,” in *Ethnic Groups in the Republic of Turkey*, eds. Peter Andrews and Rüdiger Benninghaus (Wiesbaden: Dr. Ludwig Reichert Verlag, 1989), 516.

disjuncture, the significant departure of Alevi religious praxis from more *shari'ah*-minded interpretations of Islam is not surprising. In addition to the obvious Shi'a Islamic accretions present within Alevilik (including the veneration of Ali and the Twelve Imams), one can identify the influences of Buddhism, Manichaeism, Shamanism, and Nestorian Christianity.⁷ Even though Iranian Twelver Shi'ism has long since abandoned such heterodox sources,⁸ Alevi religious practice has continued to display other syncretistic qualities, including the belief in *tenasiüh* (metempsychosis)⁹ and the *tecelli* (manifestation of God) of Ali.¹⁰ On this last issue, Alevis have occasionally been accused of practising *şirk* (polytheism). Yet Karin Vorhoff indicates that this notion of Ali *qua* God is erroneous since, though God is real within the manifestations of both the Prophet Muhammad and his nephew Ali, they are not the same being. Muhammad proclaimed Islam, yet Ali supersedes his uncle in his function as the gate to a deeper understanding of the faith.¹¹

Though pious Sunnis occasionally admonish Alevis for their inattention and lack of due diligence in performing the dictates of the *şeriat*,¹² spiritually inclined *Alevilik* has traditionally rebuffed such accusations with the assertion that the *şeriat* is an integral part of Alevis' *dört kapı* (four gates) to God. By journeying along the spiritual path laid out by these four gates, *şeriat*, *tarikât* (brotherhood), *marifet* (mystical knowledge of God), and *hakikat* (union with God), Alevis can embark upon the road to becoming the *insan-ı kâmil* (the perfect being),¹³ provided

⁷ Mélikoff, *Hadji Bektach*, 163.

⁸ Irène Mélikoff, "Le problème Bektaşî-Alevî: quelques dernières considerations," *Turcica* 31 (1999), 24.

⁹ Metempsychosis (Ar. *tanasukh*) also known as the transmigration of the souls, refers to the passing of a spirit from one body to another (usually after death). Cf. D. Gimaret, "Tanāsukh," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. Erdoğan Çınar, an Alevi researcher, argues that Alevis, unlike Muslims, Christians, or Jews, do not believe in heaven or hell. Upon finally attaining the status of the perfect man (*insan-ı kâmil*), Alevis return to the "light" (*nur*) which forms the prime source of all creation. All Alevis do not necessarily share Çınar's understanding of such metaphysical matters. Cf. Erdoğan Çınar "Alevî Adı Hz. Ali'den Gelmez" [The name Alevî does not come from Ali], in *Alevîler Alevîliği Tartışıyor* [Alevis Debate Alevilik], eds. Hakan Tanıtturan and Gülşen İşeri (Istanbul: Kalkedon Yayıncılık, 2006), 19.

¹⁰ Krisztina Kehl-Bodrogi, "Atatürk and the Alevis: A Holy Alliance?" in *Turkey's Alevî Enigma*, 62.

¹¹ Karin Vorhoff, *Zwischen Glaube, Nation und neuer Gemeinschaft: Alevitische Identität in der Türkei der Gegenwart* [Between faith, the nation, and new community: Alevî identity in contemporary Turkey] (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 1995), 64.

¹² *Şeriat* is usually rendered as "Islamic Law" in English, yet Brinkley Messick suggests that this translation narrows our understanding of the term given the range of human endeavours encapsulated by the term *şeriat*. He sees the *şeriat* as a "total discourse" that contains room for "religious, legal, moral, economic, and political" expression. More than contravening the legal conventions of Islam, some *shari'ah*-minded Sunnis have regarded Alevis as standing against this "total discourse" of acceptable Islamic behaviour. Cf. Brinkley Messick, *The Calligraphic State: Textual Domination and History in a Muslim Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 3-4.

¹³ Altan Gökalp, "Une minorité chîite en Anatolie: les Alevî," *Annales* 35, 3 (1980), 750-1.

they approach the matter with a *batmî* (literally, “internal”)¹⁴ understanding of the stations. Thus, according to Alevis, mainstream Sunnis and other adherents to doctrinal orthodoxy err in attaching only a superficial, literal interpretation to the Qur’an and the *şeriat*; true belief, rather, requires the seeker of God to search for the internal, esoteric meaning of the commands. The existence of these four gates indicates the extent to which Alevis have been indebted to Sufi orders for such practices, particularly to the Bektâşi order. While it would be incorrect to label the Alevis as a Sufi order (*tarikât*), the ascending progression of an adherent’s spiritual stations demonstrates the distinct influence of systematized Islamic mysticism.

These abstract and theological bases notwithstanding, the core of Alevi belief can often be encapsulated by a simple maxim, namely that of “*eline, beline, diline sahip ol*,” (be master of your hand, your loins, and your tongue).¹⁵ In this way, the four gates and other spiritual stations are summarized in an admonition to guard against stealing (*eline*), against either sexual misconduct or, depending on the interpretation, against exogamy (*beline*), and against either lying or, in more existentially serious cases, against failing to perform pious dissimulation (*takiyye*)¹⁶ in a dangerous situation (*diline*). For a culture that historically was largely illiterate and thus orally based, this “golden rule” provided a concise ethical guide to the adherent in everyday life. Though many spiritually adept members of the community did advance to the third or fourth gates, this aphorism governed far more of intramundane existence than either abstract theological principles or the Qur’anic injunctions enjoined by the *shari’ah*-minded.

Alevi Social Conventions and Religious Practices

Though the pressures of contemporary urbanized society have forced Alevis to reconfigure both their identity and former communal interactions, there are three main social conventions in historically constituted Alevilik: *Dedelik* (communal leadership), *musahiplik* (ritual kinship), and *düşkünlük* (ostracization or excommunication).¹⁷ In areas that were typically

¹⁴ Cf. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, 266. Hodgson writes that “behind the *zâhir*, ‘externals,’ of the revelation which the superficial majority [understands] literally, [lies] a *bâtin*, ‘inward meaning,’ which the majority [are] blind to.”

¹⁵ Altan Gökalp, *Têtes rouges et bouches noirs: une confrérie tribal de l’ouest anatolien* (Paris: Société d’Ethnographie, 1980), 204. Since it is such a simple and widespread aphorism, a researcher is almost certain to hear it repeated in any conversation related to Alevi ethics.

¹⁶ *Takiyye* (“pious dissimulation” – Ar: *taqiyyah*) refers to the Shi’a practice of dissimulating one’s beliefs when confronted by existential danger.

¹⁷ Ali Yaman and Aykan Erdemir, *Alevism-Bektashism: a brief introduction* (Istanbul: Cem Vakfi, 2006), 52.

far from any form of centralized control, the *dede* (literally, grandfather) performed functions that were analogous not only to that of a Sunni imam (tending the spiritual needs of his flock), but also that of the Islamic jurist (administering judicial sanction). The *dede*'s most crucial function was the officiation of the community's central focus: The *ayin-i cem* (the ceremony of union). Despite the importance of the *cem* to the members of the community, comparisons with orthodox Friday prayers would be erroneous: Though it is the week's main spiritual congregation, not only does the ceremony serve multiple functions – including the *sorgu cemi* (“the ceremony of interrogation” in which the local community settles disputes) and the *semah* (ritualized dance) – that are beyond those performed at the mosque on Fridays, but it has historically been performed only in winter, since the abundance of summer agricultural work prevented the regular congregation for the *cem*.¹⁸

During the initial portion of the *ayin-i cem*, the *dede* conducts the *sorgu cemi*; those guilty of transgressing the dictates of the community (especially those proven to have disobeyed the previously mentioned aphorism) typically become *düşkün* (ostracized or excommunicated) and are not permitted to have contact with the community until their period of punishment is complete.¹⁹ Following the *sorgu cemi*, congregants engage in *semahs* that recall the mystical *kırklar meclisi* (assembly of the forty) long into the night.²⁰ Until very recent times, these *cems* were forbidden to non-Alevis – because of this, outsiders accused the Alevis of *mum söndürme* (literally, extinguishing the candle). Due to the *cems*' secrecy, their late-night commencement, the ritual consumption of alcohol, and the mixed-gender dances, non-Alevis opined that, upon extinguishing the candles of the meeting hall, all members ritualistically engaged in an orgy.²¹ While no less a figure than the seventeenth-century Ottoman traveller and diplomat Evliya Çelebi

¹⁸ Gökalp, *Têtes rouges et bouches noirs*, 205.

¹⁹ Vorhoff, *Zwischen Glaube* [Between faith], 69. While in an isolated, rural setting, transgressions related to theft, murder, adultery and so forth typically resulted in *düşkünlük*.

²⁰ John Kingsley Birge, *The Bektashi Order of Dervishes* (London: Luzac & Company, 1937), 138. The *kırklar meclisi*, more than other devotional practices, indicates some of the heterodoxy of Alevi belief. The meeting of the forty was said to have occurred after the Prophet Muhammad had ascended to heaven (*miraç gecesi*). During his return towards earth, Muhammad met the forty, who included such figures as Ali, his sons, and Selman-i Pak. After they had become intoxicated and had begun to turn the *semah* (ritual dance), Muhammad came to recognize Ali as divine.

²¹ Vorhoff, *Zwischen Glaube* [Between faith], 69.

discounted the truth of these claims,²² such tarring has continued to the present day. Because of this, the accusation has served a useful function in denigrating heterodox Alevi as immoral.

A Genealogy of Terms: Kızılbaş, Alevis, and Bektâşis

As has been outlined above, the term “Alevi” is a neologism that belongs to the late nineteenth century. Even then, its usage was largely sporadic; it was only with the rise of the modern Turkish state in the 1920s and its impulse towards knowledge acquisition and information classification that “Alevi” became an umbrella term for a variety of heterodox groups among the state authorities. Concomitant with the advent of this more bureaucratic usage, Alevis themselves began to designate their community in this way.²³ Prior to the adoption of this altered terminology, Alevis were primarily known, and conceived of themselves, as Kızılbaş.

The term Kızılbaş (literally, “red head”) first appeared in the late fifteenth century among a tribal Türkmen confederation of the same name in the borderlands between Azerbaijan, Eastern Anatolia, and Persia. There, members of this tribal group began festooning themselves with red headgear as a symbol of their allegiance to the nascent Safavid movement.²⁴ In the aftermath of the Ottoman victory over the Safavids, however, the term acquired a decidedly pejorative meaning. Imbued with connotations far beyond those of its root etymology, “Kızılbaş” became synonymous with other terms such as *zındık* (heretic) and *mülhid* (atheist) in the conception of the surrounding orthodox Sunni society.²⁵ Long stigmatized with the denigration associated with this term, members of this group themselves favoured the gradual adoption of the more neutral “Alevi” at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Kızılbaş, Alevis, and Bektâşis: Points of Confluence and Divergence

In contemporary Turkey, one observes many Alevi organizations that largely conflate the terms Alevi and Bektâşi. While the two groups indeed share many aspects, Alevis (and, by

²² Robert Dankoff, “An Unpublished Account of *Mum Söndürmek* in the Seyahâtnâme of Evliya Çelebi,” in *Bektâşîyya*, 69-73.

²³ Markus Dressler, *Die Alevitische Religion: Traditionslinien und Neubestimmungen* [The Alevi religion: Lines of tradition and redefinitions] (Würzburg: Ergon Verlag, 2002), 171.

²⁴ Irène Mélikoff, “Le problème kızılbaş,” *Turcica* 6 (1975), 50.

²⁵ Mélikoff, *Hadji Bektâch*, 258. Ahmet Yaşar Ocak has conducted extensive study into the terms *zındık* and *mülhid*. In general, he concludes, *zındık* and *mülhid* have been used by the political centre to delegitimize the beliefs and movements opposed by Sunni Islam, whatever their variety. Ahmet Yaşar Ocak, *Osmanlı Toplumunda Zındıklar ve Mülhidler (15.-17. Yüzyıllar)* [Heretics and atheists in Ottoman society, 15th to 17th centuries] (Istanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 1998), 14.

extension, their Kızılbaş forerunners) and Bektaşis are not entirely coterminous. There are no concrete historical records indicating how the two groups became linked,²⁶ yet Dressler argues that, since many Alevis recognize the *çelebis* (leaders) and *pirs* of the Bektaşî order as spiritual authorities, any attempt to understand the latter would be rendered more meaningful by also exploring the practices of the former.²⁷ Further to this point, Massicard also asserts that, despite the lack of a direct organizational connection between the two, many Kızılbaş had already begun switching their ultimate allegiance to Bektaşî *pirs* such as Hacı Bektaş Veli from their former Safavid protectors not long after the Ottoman-Safavid battle of Çaldıran in 1514. By the seventeenth century, in turn, Hacı Bektaş had supplanted the Safavids' leader, Şah İsmail, as the most important figure within Kızılbaş poetry.²⁸ Thus, pursuing a connection between Alevis and Bektaşis does not necessarily lead to a conflation of the two phenomena, yet it does recognize the fact that the groups cannot comfortably be explored independently of one another.

With this complication of their relationship in mind, the differentiation between Bektaşis and Alevis can be identified upon several axes. For Mélikoff, the most important level of difference is their loci of activity. Though the great rural-to-urban migrations of the twentieth century have somewhat blurred these distinctions, the split between a more state-centred *Bektaşilik* and an isolated, rural *Kızılbaşlık* was the greatest factor separating the two phenomena historically. Here, Bektaşis were typified by a close association with the empire's Janissary corps, while the Kızılbaş were largely illiterate mountain-dwellers. Importantly, the Bektaşis have historically been organized and systematic in their approach to faith, an approach that stems from their long existence as a *tarikât* (Sufi order). The Kızılbaş, meanwhile, were more *ad hoc* in their approach to the faith, typically syncretising far more local practice and legends into their religious beliefs than the Bektaşis, whose praxis was largely immutable due to the more codified rituals of Sufi orders.²⁹ Despite both these differing loci of origin and the inspiration for religious praxis, Bektaşis and Kızılbaş/Alevis share, at their core, the same heterodox approach to faith.

²⁶ Krisztina Kehl-Bodrogi, *Die Kızılbaş/Aleviten* [The Kızılbaş/Alevis], 45.

²⁷ Markus Dressler, "Alevi geleneğin dinsel boyutları" [The religious dimensions of the Alevi tradition], in *Bilgi Toplumunda Alevilik* [Alevilik in the information community], comp. İbrahim Bahadır (Bielefeld: Bielefeld Alevi Kültür Merkezi Yayınları, 2003), 27.

²⁸ Élise Massicard, *L'autre Turquie: Le mouvement aléviste et ses territoires* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2005), 23.

²⁹ Mélikoff, *Hadji Bektach*, 162.

Heterodox Movements in Anatolia, 1514-1914

Between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries, many heterodox and chiliastic movements emerged throughout Anatolia. Like the revolt of Pir Sultan Abdal, these movements centred around charismatic personages and rejected central authority, abstract law, and urban bureaucracy.³⁰ Following the Safavids' assumption of power in Persia, many of these movements looked eastwards for a spiritual and temporal protector. These links, however, were broken with the Ottomans' decisive victory over the Safavids at Çaldıran in 1514; cut off from their heterodox brethren in Persia, Anatolia's Kızılbaş were forced to isolate themselves far from government control in an effort to preserve their survival.³¹ Because the Ottoman state was, on an official level at least, distinctly hostile towards the Kızılbaş's heterodox proclivities,³² these communities adopted strict endogamy to prevent infiltration from outsiders during the pre-modern period.³³

For the most part, heterodox movements in Anatolia were "tolerated" from the sixteenth to the early nineteenth centuries in the sense that the imperial centre left these groups alone provided they did not openly challenge the sultan's authority.³⁴ Tensions, however, arose again in 1826: Due to their long association with the empire's Janissary Corps, Sultan Mahmud II (1808-1839) banned the Bektaşî Order in the course of the former's abolition. Accused of failing to uphold the *şeriat*, the Bektaşîs' leaders were exiled while the order's assets were liquidated.³⁵ Bektaşîs who continued clandestine rites were naturally opposed to this government action. In time, they joined forces with the Young Turks in opposing the autocratic rule of Sultan Abdülhamit II (1876-1908) and agitating for the reinstatement of the abrogated 1876 constitution.

³⁰ Dressler, *Die Alevitische Religion* [The Alevi religion], 59-60.

³¹ Hanna Sohrweide, "Der Sieg des Safawiden in Persien und seine Rückwirkungen auf die Schiiten Anatoliens im 16. Jahrhundert" [The victory of the Safavids in Persia and its repercussions on Anatolian Shi'ites in the 16th century], *Der Welt des Islams* 41 (1965), 195.

³² Cf. the fatwa of *şeyhülislam* Ebusuud Efendi (1490-1574) permitting the killing of Kızılbaş for their heresy. Cf. Baki Öz, *Alevilik ile ilgili Osmanlı belgeleri* [Ottoman documents regarding the Alevis] (Istanbul: Can Yayınları, 1995), 117. While such a declaration might not have precipitated any action, it strengthens the contemporary Alevi perception that the Ottoman state was tyrannical.

³³ Kehl-Bodrogi, *Die Kızılbaş/Aleviten* [The Kızılbaş/Alevis], 40; Kathryn Babayan, "The Safavid Synthesis: From Qizilbash Islam to Imamate Shi'ism," *Iranian Studies* 27, 1-4 (1994), 138.

³⁴ Suraiya Faroqhi, "Conflict, Accommodation and Long-Term Survival: The Bektashi Order and the Ottoman State (Sixteenth-Seventeenth Centuries)," in *Bektachiyya*, 180. On Ottoman toleration, see Karen Barkey: She argues that "toleration is neither equality nor a modern form of 'multiculturalism' in the imperial setting. Rather, it is a means of rule, of extending, consolidating, and enforcing state power." Thus, despite Ebusuud Efendi's vitriol, the Ottoman state was largely content to leave groups like the Kızılbaş alone since it was in the administrative interests of the state. Karen Barkey *Empire of Difference: The Ottomans in Comparative Perspective* (Cambridge: University Press, 2008), 110.

³⁵ Thierry Zarcone, *Mystiques, Philosophes et francs-maçons en Islam: Rıza Tevfik, penseur ottoman (1868-1949) du soufisme à la confrérie* (Paris: IFEA, 1993), 90.

When members of the Young Turks finally succeeded in overthrowing the Sultan in 1908, Bektaşis again won the right to reopen their dervish lodges that had been closed by the central government decades earlier.³⁶ While the empire's Bektaşî and Kızılbaş communities initially greeted the Young Turk victory warmly, trouble was to arise during the War of Liberation.

Alevis in Turkey from 1918 to 1980

During the *Kurtuluş Savaşı* (War of Liberation – 1919-1922), the nationalist forces under Mustafa Kemal Atatürk emerged victorious against the Greek and Armenian occupiers of Anatolia, thereby forcing the victors of World War I to recognize a new Turkish state in that part of the now defunct Ottoman Empire. Alevis identifying with the secular ideals of Kemalism have subsequently portrayed the Alevi involvement in the war as one of total commitment: “Alevi-Bektaşîs, from the beginning to the end united with Atatürk and joined the war *en masse*.”³⁷ Other scholars, however, complicate this picture of organic unity between the nationalist army and the Alevis. Though many Turkish-speaking Alevis joined the war effort, Kurdish Alevis in Dersim, in eastern Anatolia, largely did not: Already mistrusted by the central government for their apparently fraternal relations with the Armenians, even the personal intervention of high-ranking Bektaşî *pirs* was unsuccessful in convincing the region's tribes to join the national forces.³⁸ Such non-involvement complicates one of the primary myths of Alevis' unreserved support for the aims of the nationalist leaders and founders of the Turkish Republic.

Kemalism's Secularizing Reforms and Alevis in the One-Party Era (1923-1950)

The founding of the Turkish Republic in 1923 did not signal a breakage with the immediate past, but rather a continuation of many of the Young Turks' reforms. Through his political vehicle, the *Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi* (Republican People's Party – CHP), Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and his successors were able to radically transform the country's social landscape during the country's one-party era (1923-1950). Seeking to divorce the population from its immediate Ottoman-Islamic past in a far-reaching civilizing mission, Atatürk abolished such

³⁶ Şükrü M. Hanioglu, *The Young Turks in Opposition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 54.

³⁷ Bakı Öz, *Kurtuluş Savaşında Alevi-Bektaşîler* [Alevi-Bektaşîs in the War of Liberation] (Istanbul: Can Yayınları, 1989), 12, 47. “Alevi-Bektaşîler başından sonuna dek Atatürk'le bağlaştılar; O'nunla birlik olup, topluca Kurtuluş Savaşına katıldılar.”

³⁸ Hans-Lukas Kieser, “Muslim Heterodoxy and Protestant Utopia: The Interactions between Alevis and Missionaries in Ottoman Anatolia,” *Die Welt des Islams* 41, 1 (2001), 98, 104.

institutions and Ottoman legacies as the Caliphate, the *şeyhülislam*, the *şeriat*, Arabic script, extirpated many words of Arabic and Persian origin from the lexicon, took steps to emancipate women, championed the supremacy of a Turkish nationalism to the detriment of all other national identities, closed down the Sufi orders, and most importantly, instituted state secularism.³⁹ Far from simply separating religion and state, these secularizing reforms were designed to create a rationalized, “enlightened and humanized” Islam rescued from the clutches of the “ignorant” men of religion.⁴⁰ In revamping Islam, the Kemalists created an institutionalized body to oversee the faith that would later draw much ire from Alevis: The Religious Affairs Ministry (*Diyanet*).

Similar to their conflicting attitudes towards the war effort, Alevis also maintained mixed feelings towards the Kemalist state. In response to the closing of the Bektaşî Order in 1925, one Alevi approached the realm of hyperbole in asserting that “Mustafa Kemal was searching for [what] was already present in Bektaşî society. It had already been practised in history, it just needed to be put into law and implemented politically – and so Mustafa Kemal did.”⁴¹ Clearly, as far as the speaker was concerned, the new Turkish Republic was the culmination of the freethinking, non-*shari’ah*-minded ideals of the order. Indeed, the new regime’s secular orientation liberated the heterodox Alevis from the more aggressive and hostile designs of the formerly pre-eminent *ulema* and *shari’ah*-minded Sufi orders. However, following an uprising in 1930 in which members of the Naqshbandi *tarikât* (Sufi order) killed a young army cadet in Menemen (Western Anatolia) in protest at the central government’s secularization policies, the state took advantage of the situation to clamp down even more strongly on all *bölücü* (separatist) activities that challenged the unity of the nation on linguistic, ethnic, or sectarian grounds.⁴² For Alevis, this meant a full onslaught from the government on Dersim in 1938 when the Alevi, Zaza-speaking⁴³ inhabitants there attempted to resist the new republic’s efforts at centralization. In suppressing the revolt, the Turkish army decimated Tunceli (as Dersim had been renamed) and

³⁹ Hakan Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 48-9.

⁴⁰ Niyazi Berkes, *The Development of Secularism in Turkey* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1964), 483.

⁴¹ From Âdil Gülvahaboğlu, quoted in Markus Dressler, *Die civil religion der Türkei: Kemalistische und alevitische Atatürk-Rezeption im Vergleich* [The civil religion of Turkey: Kemalist and Alevi receptions of Atatürk in comparison] (Würzburg: Ergon Verlag, 1999), 100. “Mustafa Kemal’in arayışı Bektaşî toplumunda yaşıyordu. Tarihte pratiğinde vardı. Ancak hukukileşilmesi ve siyasallaşması gerekiyordu. Mustafa Kemal bunu yaptı.”

⁴² Ayşe Kadioğlu, “Milletini arayan devlet: Türk milliyetçiliğinin açmazları” [The state searching for its nation: The dilemmas of Turkish nationalism], in *75 yılda tebaa’dan yurttaş’a doğru* [From subject to citizen in 75 years], ed. Artun Ünsal (Istanbul: Türkiye Ekonomik ve Toplumsal Tarih Vakfı, 1998), 208.

⁴³ Spoken in Dersim/Tunceli, Zaza is a language – though some say a dialect – related to Kurdish.

deported tens of thousands of the survivors.⁴⁴ The operation was the culmination in a long series of government efforts to pacify unruly regions of the country and, more importantly, forcibly create a new citizen whose sole loyalty would be to the Turkish state. Both Alevi and Sunni dissatisfaction with such policies would lead to seismic political change after World War II.

Mass Migration and New Ideologies: Alevis in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s

In 1950, Adnan Menderes of the *Demokrat Parti* (DP) won the country's first free, multi-party elections after capitalizing on the grievances small merchants, the urban petty bourgeoisie, and, most especially, the agricultural sectors of society had formed against the country's Kemalist leadership and elites over the past two decades. Menderes, in turn, quickly embarked upon policies that would radically alter both urban and rural landscapes by supporting the mass mechanization of the country's agrarian sector. Suddenly finding themselves as surplus labour because of this mechanization, millions of rural migrants flooded the country's western cities in search of employment and a better life,⁴⁵ but were subsequently forced into *gecekondu* (shantytowns) where conditions were poor due to the lack of infrastructure.⁴⁶ Despite the poverty, such urbanization did offer increased educational opportunities. Overall, however, Massicard indicates that the shift to an urban environment greatly weakened Alevis' religious practice: Not only did the migration sever the links between *dedes* and their flock, but many Alevis were also forced to discontinue the *semah* (ritual dance) since, given the taboos against the public performance of Alevilik, it was too difficult to perform in secret. In the end, Alevis may have developed wider contact with the "broader country," but lost "specificity" in the process.⁴⁷

Alleging that the DP had contravened the constitution and overstepped its authority, the military removed the government from power in May 1960 and drafted a more liberal constitution to prevent similar abuses of power in the future. With this greater openness, Alevis began to carve out a niche for their community within the public sphere, even forming an Alevi political party, the *Türkiye Birlik Partisi* (TBP – Turkish Unity Party), in 1966. While most Alevis continued to vote for the secularist CHP or leftist parties, it did succeed in placing the emerging

⁴⁴ For more on the operation in Dersim, see Nicole Watts, "Relocating Dersim: Turkish State-Building and Kurdish Resistance, 1931-1938," *New Perspectives on Turkey* 23 (2000): 5-30.

⁴⁵ Çağlar Keyder, *State and Class in Turkey: A Study in Capitalist Development* (London: Verso, 1987), 123, 135.

⁴⁶ Kemal Karpat, *The Gecekondu: rural migration and urbanization* (Cambridge: University Press, 1976), 260.

⁴⁷ Massicard, "Alevism in the 1960s," 109, 113.

“Alevi question” on the public agenda.⁴⁸ Indeed, the putschists went so far as to create a committee to investigate the needs and desires of the heretofore silent Alevi minority. Such generous overtures, however, drew rebuke from right-wing newspapers like *Adalet* (Justice) worried about the possibility of *mum söndürme* ceremonies (ritual incest) suddenly occurring in mosques.⁴⁹ Though such sentiment did not necessarily reflect the views of all in society, it was indicative of at least a strong undercurrent. Alevis were Turkish citizens like all others, yet their constitutional equality was to be enjoyed merely in private – any attempt to gain a truly equal footing in the court of public opinion would mean overstepping the bounds of a discourse whose strictures did not permit the public proclamation of an Alevi self-understanding.

The 1970s witnessed the gradual political polarization of Turkish society which was in part the consequence of the harsher economic conditions ushered in by the oil crisis of 1973. In the face of continual parliamentary deadlock and economic paralysis, millions of youth increasingly took politics to the streets as they participated in escalating battles that pitted left against right. In this period of ideological ferment, young Alevis dismissed their *dedes* as feudal and superstitious and began reinterpreting their heritage in light of socialist principles: *Semahs* like the *kırklar meclisi* (assembly of the forty) became the mystical prototype of an egalitarian, classless society,⁵⁰ while Hüseyin’s martyrdom in Kerbala became analogous to the martyrdom of contemporaneous Turkish leftist figures during the 1970s.⁵¹ Alevis themselves were not alone in conflating their identity with that of Marxism. Updating their epithets for a new age, members of the ultra-right MHP (*Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi* – Nationalist Action Party) ceased referring to *mum söndürme* ceremonies (ritual incest) and began including Alevis in a triumvirate of enemies they identified as threats to the integrity of the Turkish nation: The “Kurds, Kızılbaş, and Communists.”⁵² This organic association between Alevilik and communism in the minds of the

⁴⁸ For more on the linkages between Alevis and parties and left-leaning parties, see Harald Schüller, “Secularism and Ethnicity: Alevis and Social Democrats,” in *Civil Society in the Grip of Nationalism: Studies on Political Culture in Contemporary Turkey*, eds. Stefanos Yerasimos, et al. (Istanbul: Orient-Institut and IFEA, 2000), 197-250.

⁴⁹ Kelime Ata, *Alevilerin İlk Siyasal Denemesi: (Türkiye) Birlik Partisi (1966-1980)* [Alevis’ first political experiment: The (Turkish) Unity Party (1966-1980)] (Ankara: Kelime Yayınevi, 2007), 49.

⁵⁰ Dressler, *Die Alevitische Religion* [The Alevi religion], 183.

⁵¹ Markus Dressler, “Turkish Alevi Poetry in the Twentieth Century: The Fusion of Political and Religious Identities,” *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics* 23 (2005), 126.

⁵² Peter J. Bumke, “Kızılbaş-Kurden in Dersim (Tunceli, Türkei): Marginalität und Häresie” [Kızılbaş-Kurds in Dersim (Tunceli, Turkey): Marginality and Heresy], *Anthropos* 74, 3/4 (1979), 544. Not only is the alliteration of the names of these threats preserved in Turkish, but each also begins with the letter “K:” “Kürt, Kızılbaş ve Komünist.”

fascist right was to have serious and violent implications for Alevis in the latter half of the 1970s. Later, a letter circulated in Sivas warned the Alevis of this continued association: “Beware Alevis!” it said, “take lessons from history. [You used to turn towards Şah İsmail], but [it is] towards communism that you are [now] heading. We will absolutely prevent this move.”⁵³ Numerous massacres, in turn, constituted this “prevention.” In the late 1970s, MHP supporters massacred hundreds of Alevis in religiously mixed districts such as Çorum, Sivas, Malatya, and Kahramanmaraş.⁵⁴ While the *de facto* civil war was fought ostensibly on the question of political ideology, these pogroms were directed specifically against the regions’ Alevi inhabitants.

In all, this period of political tumult, violence, and increasing extremism precipitated two important events: For Turkey as a whole, it expedited the arrival of the 1980 coup that would forever destroy the left’s mass organizational ability. These decades, however, facilitated the emergence of an “Alevi political space” (*espace politique alévi*) that found its cohesion in the TBP and CHP’s increasing deployment of Alevi symbols such as the lion (representing Ali) or *zülfi kar* (Ali’s sword).⁵⁵ Despite this emergent “Alevi political space” in the 1960s and 1970s, however, a more robust and publicly visible Alevilik would not appear until the beginning of the 1990s.

⁵³ Zeki Coşkun, *Aleviler, Sünniler ve Öteki Sivas* [Alevis, Sunnis, and the other Sivas] (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1995), 289. “Aleviler Dikkat! Tarihi gözönünde bulundurun, bir zaman (Şah, Şah...) diyordunuz. Şimdi Şaha değil komünizme gidiyorsunuz. Bu gidişinizi mutlaka engelleyeceğiz.” A group calling itself *Müslüman Gençlik* (Muslim Youth) distributed the circular in 1978.

⁵⁴ For a detailed investigation of media coverage of the Kahramanmaraş massacre, cf. Emma Sinclair-Webb, “Sectarian Violence,” in *Turkey’s Alevi Enigma*: 215-235. For an overview of the other massacres, cf. Fuat Bozkurt, *Çağdaşlaşma Sürecinde Alevilik* [Alevilik in the era of modernization] (Istanbul: Doğan Kitapçılık, 2000), 92-117.

⁵⁵ Hamit Bozarslan, “L’alévisme et l’impossible équation du nationalisme en Turquie,” In *Nationalisme en mutation en Méditerranée orientale*, eds. Alain Dieckhoff and Riva Kastoryano (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2002), 144.

2: ACHIEVING DISCURSIVE UNITY: ALEVIS AND THE *DIYANET*, COMPULSORY RELIGIOUS CLASSES, AND *CEMEVİS*

The morning of 9 November 2008 was fairly cool, yet, despite the cold and the early hour, over 100,000 Alevis had begun assembling in front of Ankara's train station in preparation for a march on one of the Turkish capital's central squares. Writing a few days after the protest, Necdet Saraç, an Alevi newspaper columnist and television producer, vividly related the euphoria of the event: "For the first time in their history, Alevis – women, men, and children ... along with villagers and urbanites, the rich and the poor – [came out] on to the streets for reasons other than blood, tears, death, or memorials ... With this protest, the Alevi movement which has continuously been [treated] like a second division [football team] said 'no, my place is in the first division.'"¹ Among other issues, the protest centred on Alevi demands for changes to the country's Religious Affairs Ministry (*Diyanet* – DİB) due to the body's inattention to Alevi concerns, a restructuring (or outright abolition) of nationwide, compulsory religious education classes that fail to present Alevi religious beliefs, and legal recognition of the Alevi *cemevi* as a place of worship.²

The march of 9 November was merely the physical manifestation of a larger Alevi concern for these three crucial issues. In fact, I argue that Alevi opprobrium for the current structuring of the *Diyanet*, present organization of compulsory religious classes, and continuing non-recognition of the *cemevi*'s status constitutes an essential aspect of how Alevis "do" Alevilik. The aforementioned march notwithstanding, this mode of being Alevi is predicated far more on a shared, primarily discourse-based concern for these matters than it is on any ritualistic performance of Alevilik. In this, I suggest that historiography that has posited the community's annual festival in Hacıbektaş as the central forum for the performance of Alevilik is not entirely accurate given recent political issues that have resulted in a precipitous drop in the number of visitors. In presenting an alternative argument as to how Alevis relate both to one another and to the Turkish state, this chapter demonstrates that Alevis achieve a sense of discursive unity

¹ Necdet Saraç, "Ben de ordaydım" [I was there too], *BirGün*, 15 November 2008. "Kendi tarihlerinde ilk kez, kan, gözyaşı, ölüm ve anma yokken sokağa çıkan Aleviler ... Kadınlar, erkekler, çocuklar – Köylü, kentli, zengin, fakir ... Bu miting ile sürekli ikinci lige mahkûmmuş gibi gösterilen Alevi hareketi 'hayır, benim yerim birinci lig' dedi."

² Bezhat Miser, "Aleviler taleplerini haykırdı" [Alevis shout their demands], *Radikal*, 10 November 2008.

through a mutual desire to see amelioration on the three major issues listed above. Not all Alevis may agree upon the nature of the desired outcomes to these issues, yet they remain united in their concern for them by intra-communal mediatic links that continually reiterate the pertinence of these questions. Set against the backdrop of the profound changes Turkey witnessed after 1980, this chapter thus seeks to indicate how the debates surrounding these three crucial issues constitute a manner of discursive unity for Turkey's contemporary Alevi community.

Turkey since 1980: A Snapshot of Profound Social, Economic, and Political Change

In response to parliamentary paralysis, economic malaise, and a level of left wing-right wing political violence that had left many areas of Turkey ungovernable, army generals under the direction of Kenan Evren, the chief of staff of the Turkish Armed Forces, initiated a *coup d'état* on 12 September 1980. In the aftermath of the takeover, the army abolished the senate, outlawed the most radical labour unions, disbanded all political parties, banned their incumbent leaders from holding office for 10 years, removed the autonomy of the universities, detained over 120,000 citizens for real or perceived crimes, tortured thousands, and executed 27 for "political and ideological offences."³ In the societal and educational spheres, however, the coup leaders' most enduring legacy was the adoption of the *Türk-İslam Sentezi* (TİS – Turkish-Islam Synthesis) as a guiding principle for the nation's pupils.

After witnessing many years of street violence between groups of youth with polarized political opinions, the architects of Turkey's military intervention identified both the "imported" ideology of communism and radical Islam as the potentially most dangerous factors to the education of the youth and the destabilization of society.⁴ Because of the attraction presented by these twin threats, the government focused its efforts on incorporating aspects of the TİS so as to head off these threats' appeal. Initially the product of a conservative think-tank established with the aim of combating the spread of leftist thought in the 1960s,⁵ the Synthesis was designed to generate respect for both Turkish nationalism and the country's Islamic heritage. Though the framers of the TİS did not specifically disavow Kemalist secularism (insofar as the Synthesis was not a blueprint for an Islamic state), the ideology was conceived of as a "synthesis of the family,

³ Erik J. Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004), 279.

⁴ Hakan Yavuz, "Political Islam and the Welfare (Refah) Party in Turkey," *Comparative Politics* 30, 1 (1997): 67.

⁵ Paul J. Magnarella, *Human Materialism: A Model of Sociocultural Systems and a Strategy for Analysis* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1993), 104.

the mosque, and the barracks.”⁶ In short, TİS’ mixture of nationalism, Islam, and respect for state institutions was presented as the conservative tonic necessary for the salvation of the nation from the threats posed by radical political ideologies of the left and the right.⁷ To inculcate this viewpoint, the government incorporated the tenets of the TİS into the Religious Culture and Morals Class it made mandatory in a new constitution drafted in 1982. Designed to bind students to a unitary conception of the Turkish nation under the banner of (state-sponsored) Islam and foster a sense of unity among pupils who possessed divergent political viewpoints, the class’ nearly exclusive emphasis on Hanefi Sunni religious practice created much discontent among non-Sunni groups such as the Alevis.⁸ Alevi opposition to this TİS-centred class duly represents one of the community’s most crucial areas of grievance towards the Turkish government and, as a result, constitutes an important intersection point on which Alevis relate to one another.

While the incorporation of the Turkish-Islam Synthesis into primary school curricula was a significant development, the government’s economic policies during the 1980s not only radically altered the country’s economic landscape, but also had significant ramifications for all spheres of society. Following the end of military administration in 1983, the government of Turgut Özal (Prime Minister, 1983-89, President, 1989-93) of the centre-right *Anavatan Partisi* (Motherland Party – ANAP) embarked upon a series of wide-ranging economic reforms, including an opening of Turkey’s statist economy to foreign investment, the privatization of many nationally-owned assets, and a downsizing of the social safety net.⁹ While the infusion of global investment benefited members of the provincial bourgeoisie and speculative businesspeople who took advantage of less government regulation of the economy, those on fixed incomes (especially

⁶ Faruk Birtok and Binnaz Toprak, “The Conflictual Agendas of Neo-Liberal Reconstruction and the Rise of Islamic Politics in Turkey: The Hazards of Rewriting Modernity,” *Praxis International* (Jul. 1993), 196.

⁷ For an account of the TİS according to one of its proponents, see İbrahim Kafesoğlu, *Türk-İslam Sentezi* [The Turkish-Islam Synthesis] (Istanbul: Aydınlar Ocağı, 1985). For Turkish language analysis of the TİS in book form, see Bozkurt Güvenç, *Türk-İslam Sentezi Dosyası* [The File on the Turkish-Islam Synthesis] (Istanbul: Sarmal Yayınevi, 1991). For a concise presentation of the Synthesis’ main aspects, consult İlhan Tekeli, “Türk-İslam Sentezi Üzerine” [On the Turkish-Islam Synthesis], *Bilim ve Sanat* [Science and Art] 7, 77 (1987), 5-8. For sources in English in addition to Magnarella and Birtok/Toprak, see Binnaz Toprak, “Religion as State Ideology in a Secular Setting: The Turkish-Islamic Synthesis,” in *Aspects of Religion in Modern Turkey*, ed. J. M. Wagstaff (University of Durham: Centre for Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies, Occasional Paper Series, no. 40, 1990), 10-15.

⁸ For more on how the *Türk-İslam Sentezi* has been applied in the public school system, cf. Sam Kaplan, “‘Religious Nationalism’: A Textbook Case from Turkey,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 25, 3 (2005), 675.

⁹ Jenny B. White, “The Islamist Paradox,” in *Fragments of Culture: The Everyday of Modern Turkey*, eds. Deniz Kandiyoti and Ayşe Saktanber (London: I.B. Tauris, 2002), 196.

civil servants, but also those not involved in the new capitalist projects) tended to suffer greatly in the new economic climate; inflation skyrocketed and purchasing power decreased by 46%, yet there was no corresponding rise in wages. By the mid-1980s, the World Bank reported that Turkey possessed the seventh worst income disparity in the world.¹⁰ In comparison to the pre-coup era, Turkey ended the 1980s with a radically altered social and economic landscape.

The changes of this post-1980 era had a profound effect on all sectors of society, yet especially on marginal groups such as the Alevis. Though Turkey's revamped 1982 Constitution placed restrictions on the limits of political expression (including a law preventing any party winning under 10% of the popular vote from entering parliament), the emergence of both private media – as the result of Turkey's privatization drive – and technological advancement was welcomed by groups like the Alevis. With the “opportunity spaces”¹¹ provided by new Alevi journal, radio, television, and, later on, internet media networks, Alevis were in a much better position to challenge the unitarist discourse of the republic's founding ideology that had accorded the group no opportunity to proclaim its difference during the years of stricter state controls on the dissemination of information. While the suggestion that the growth in new technology and private media networks signalled the death-knell of Kemalist hegemony within the public sphere might be somewhat premature,¹² these mediatic developments have, unquestionably, occasioned greater opportunities for groups such as the Alevis to present their opinions to a wider Turkish audience.¹³ It was an opportunity not lost on Alevi commentators such as Ali Balkız, leader of the Alevi-Bektaşî Federation (*Alevi-Bektaşî Federasyonu* – ABF): “Our present age is the age of

¹⁰ Jenny B. White, *Islamist Mobilization in Turkey: A Study in Vernacular Politics* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002), 43-4. For more on the impact of globalization and neo-liberal economics on the city of Istanbul, see Çağlar Keyder, ed., *Istanbul: Between the Global and the Local* (Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999).

¹¹ For Hakan Yavuz, “opportunity spaces [are] a forum of social interaction that creates new possibilities for augmenting networks of shared meaning and associational life ... The key opportunity space is the market, since economic prosperity allows one to become plugged in to broader cultural and political processes of change. Opportunity spaces allow one to pick and choose in defining personal identity; to resist the policies of the state or the market; and to change the meaning of everyday life. [Furthermore, they] undermine state-based or society-based attempts to generate a hegemonic ideology.” Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey*, 24.

¹² Haluk Şahin and Asu Aksoy, for instance, interpreted the rise of new media as the beginning of a fragmentation of “the unitary identity of Turkey.” Şahin and Aksoy, 36-7.

¹³ For an extended discussion of new media in the post-1980 era, see Ayşe Öncü, “Packaging Islam,” as well as Hakan Yavuz, “Media Identities for Alevis and Kurds in Turkey.”

information, communication, and interaction. However clearly and quickly you can explain your case to however many people, in however many arenas, that's how strong you are.”¹⁴

Concurrent with neo-liberal economic policies and new media has been the appearance of what Gregory Starrett has labelled the “Islamic Trend,”¹⁵ a neutral term that encapsulates both political Islam, as well as the deepening spirituality in arenas far removed from parliamentary politics. Though parties advocating Islamic solutions had existed prior to 1980, they grew in strength after the military intervention. During the liberal transition under Özal, the Welfare Party (*Refah Partisi* – RP) succeeded in drawing support from many sectors of society. Facilitated by the destruction of the Turkish left, *Refah* positioned itself as the voice of justice among poor urbanites who were unhappy with the growing income disparity occasioned by Özal's reforms.¹⁶ The party further drew the support of small business owners and middle class professionals of provincial origin, since these groups had been most excluded by the pre-1980 cooperation between the government and big industrialists.¹⁷ Such popular support provided the basis of stunning electoral success: The RP shocked many by winning most of the country's big municipalities in 1994 local elections, became the largest party in parliament in 1995 with 21.4% of the vote, and, finally, entered a governing coalition with the centre-right DYP (*Doğru Yol Partisi* – True Path Party) in December 1995.¹⁸ Economic factors, however, are not solely responsible for the success of *Refah* and the emergence of the Islamic Trend in Turkey. As Hakan Yavuz argues, “Islamic idioms and practices constitute a set of social, moral, and political cognitive maps for the Muslim imagination” that have been able to “articulate viable alternative social and ethical paradigms”¹⁹ to those offered by an elitist Kemalism that was unsuccessful in transforming the country's human landscape. These paradigms, in turn, are buttressed by longstanding institutional presences in the country – such as the mosque – that offer a locus of

¹⁴ Ali Balkız, “Medya'nın gözde konusu Alevilik” [Alevilik, the media's favourite subject], *Nefes* 3, 25 (Nov. 1995), 38. “Çağımız bilgi çağı, iletişim, etkileşim çağı. Davanızı ne kadar çok insana, ne kadar çok alana, ne kadar net ve hızlı anlatabiliyorsunuz, o kadar güçlüsünüz.”

¹⁵ Gregory Starrett, *Putting Islam to Work: Education, Politics, and Religious Transformation in Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 264, n3.

¹⁶ White, *Islamist Mobilization*, 123.

¹⁷ Haldun Gülalp, “Globalization and Political Islam: The Social Bases of Turkey's Welfare Party,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 33, 3 (2001), 444-5.

¹⁸ Haldun Gülalp, “Political Islam in Turkey: The Rise and Fall of Refah,” *Muslim World* 89, 1 (1999), 22, 36.

¹⁹ Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey*, 4.

political mobilization outside the norms set by militant Kemalism. It is in these ways that political Islam has attained an increasingly important presence in Turkish life.

While this Islamic Trend is significant on many levels, what is important for my purposes – insofar as it concerns the Alevis – are the actions of some of the RP’s more radical followers. The party’s electoral success in the early 1990s worried many secular Turks – Alevis included – that an Islamist government might attempt to impose the *şeriat*.²⁰ However, following the 1993 Sivas massacre in which Islamic radicals shouting *Refah* slogans murdered thirty-seven Alevis at a cultural festival, many Alevis identified radical Islam as an existential threat to the community.²¹ As a result, the killings ensured that the violent margins of the Islamic Trend would have a significant impact on the formation of an Alevi self-understanding in the 1990s.

Alevilik in the Post-1980 Period: Unity through Discourse

Despite the restrictive aspects of Turkey’s unitarist framework that prevented the widespread discussion of the country’s Alevi community within the public sphere prior to 1980, suggesting that Alevilik appeared in the late 1980s *ex nihilo* would be incorrect. Indeed, under the more liberal climate of the early 1960s, the Turkish state provided the occasional forum for the public celebration of Alevi culture. In 1964, the state opened the *türbe* (shrine) of Hacı Bektaş Veli as a museum in the town of Hacıbektaş, according the local municipality the right to hold an annual festival marking the anniversary of the museum’s opening.²² Established as a ceremony to celebrate the teachings of Hacı Bektaş Veli, a thirteenth-century figure of veneration for Alevis and Bektaşis, the location soon became a place of pilgrimage for both groups. Early print-media coverage of the festivities, however, studiously avoided mentioning the Alevis by name. In covering the beginning of the 1968 edition, *Cumhuriyet* [The Republic], a Kemalist daily, anticipated the multitudes of attendees, poetry recitals, and folklore, yet the term “Alevi” was conspicuously absent from the paper.²³ Regardless of whether such omission was deliberate

²⁰ David Shankland, *Islam and Society in Turkey* (Cambridgeshire: Eothen Press, 1999), 100.

²¹ If the “Islamic Trend” encapsulates the wider societal tendency towards Islam while “political Islam” denotes the Trend’s parliamentary manifestation, I use “radical” or “militant” Islam here to denote those within the larger societal movement who use violence to advance their goals.

²² “Hacı Bektaş Veli manzumesinin müze olarak açılış tarihçesi” [A brief account of the opening of the Hacı Bektaş Veli Complex as a museum], *Cem* 5, 51 (Aug. 1999), 14. The festival runs annually from 16-18 August. “Hacıbektaş” (without an intervening space) is the town’s name, while Hacı Bektaş (Veli) is the name of the saint.

²³ “Hacı Bektaş Velî, bugün törenlerle anılıyor” [Hacı Bektaş Veli to be commemorated with ceremonies today], *Cumhuriyet*, 16 August 1968.

or inadvertent, the press' description of both that commemoration as well as subsequent ones suggests the lack of an "Alevi problem" vying for the public's attention. As Vorhoff indicates, most Alevis had little interest in Alevilik, and, if they did so, their understanding of it was largely superficial.²⁴ Given this, it is unsurprising that Vorhoff would categorize the exponential growth of interest in Alevilik during the early 1990s as an "*Alevi patlamasi*" (Alevi Explosion).²⁵

This section, thus, seeks to wrestle with the nature of this "*patlama*." Like other groups that emerged to challenge the strictures of the Kemalist ideology, Alevis were subject to the effects of the same neoliberal reforms that both upset the economic balance of the *status quo ante* and provided the conditions for the flourishing of a private mediatic sphere. The ability of Alevis to utilize the discursive space provided by the advent of these private media and to take advantage of these technological advances served a variety of functions. In addition to facilitating a greater problematization of the hegemonic legitimacy of the all-pervasive official doctrine of secular Turkish nationalism, the opening of these media spaces also provided media-savvy Alevi groups the opportunity to not only question their relationship to other emergent groups (Islamists, for example), but, more importantly, to each other. Because of the increase in higher education as well as technological advancements, such as satellite television and, later, the internet, that permitted more efficient communication, one observes the growing "objectification" of Alevilik.²⁶ As Dale Eickelman and James Piscatori first indicated in *Muslim Politics*, however, "objectification does not presuppose the notion that religion is a uniform or monolithic entity."²⁷ Likewise with Alevis, one can identify the appearance of differing objectified forms of Alevilik: Alevis with wide-ranging opinions on politics, faith, culture – in addition to differing interpretations of how relationships with other Alevis, societal groups, and the state should be managed – have coalesced into various media and organizations each professing a different (though not always unique) conception of Alevilik. Because of this, attempts to define "Alevilik" are bound to fail; given the rich and multifarious interpretations of the faith, any categorical definition of Alevilik is more likely to stem from political, rather than scholarly, considerations.

²⁴ Karin Vorhoff, "'Let's Reclaim our History and Culture!' – Imagining Alevi Community in Contemporary Turkey," *Die Welt des Islams* 38, 2 (Jul. 1998), 236.

²⁵ Vorhoff, "Academic and Journalistic Publications," 35.

²⁶ Dale Eickelman and James Piscatori, *Muslim Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 38. In terms of religion, Eickelman and Piscatori describe "objectification" as the point when a faith becomes "a self-contained system that its believers can describe, characterize, and distinguish from other belief systems."

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 38.

On account of the impossibility in answering the question “what is an Alevi?” researchers like Massicard and Sinclair-Webb have concluded that, in lieu of solving the above question, one can at least identify central aspects common to all Alevis. For them, the performative unity occasioned by the annual festival at Hacı Bektaş provides an indication of such unity.²⁸ I, however, contend that the annual festival in Hacı Bektaş is not as central in producing a notion of a shared Alevilik due to a variety of political issues. Instead, I argue that Alevis of varying viewpoints do not achieve a physical unity through congregational actions at the yearly Hacı Bektaş Festival, but achieve rather a “discursive,” issue-based unity through their commonly-held opprobrium to a troika of recurrent and crucial problems. Alevis are unified not so much by ritual and performance, but by their common discussion and problematization of factors in their relationship with the Turkish state, namely the Religious Affairs Ministry (*Diyanet – DİB*),²⁹ the nature of compulsory religious instruction (*zorunlu din dersleri*) in the national school curriculum, and the status of Alevi *cemevis* in both legal and social terms.

Following a necessary contextualization of some of the historical events in the 1990s that acted as specific catalysts in the reconceptualization of Alevilik, this chapter seeks to problematize the issues listed above. In so doing, I refer largely to evidence accumulated through primary research in the form of oral interviews, Alevi journals, and daily newspapers. For the journals, I use *Cem* (Gathering), *Nefes* (Poem), and *Pir Sultan Abdal Kültür ve Sanat Dergisi* (Pir Sultan Abdal Culture and Art Magazine – PSA); in terms of newspapers, I primarily utilize *BirGün* (One Day), *Cumhuriyet* (The Republic), *Hürriyet* (Liberation), and *Radikal* (Radical). By exploring these sources, I hope to convey the nature of Alevi discontent as represented primarily by the viewpoints expressed by their largest organizations, the *CEM Vakfı* (Cem Foundation),³⁰ the *Pir Sultan Abdal Kültür Derneği* (Pir Sultan Abdal Cultural Association – PSAKD), and the *Almanya Alevi Birlikleri Federasyonu* (Federation of German Alevi Unions – AABF). Though I do not claim that all Alevis approach the problems of the DİB, compulsory religious classes, or

²⁸ Massicard, “Alevism as a Productive Misunderstanding,” 125; Sinclair-Webb, “Pilgrimage, Politics and Folklore,” 271.

²⁹ Known colloquially as the *Diyanet* or the DİB, the Religious Affairs Ministry’s full name is the *Diyanet İşleri Bakanlığı*.

³⁰ The name of the *vakfı* is a clever play on words. Though “cem” has high symbolic resonance with Alevis given its centrality to the community’s religious customs (cf. Chapter 1), the letters in “CEM” officially denote “*Cumhuriyetçi Eğitim ve Kültür Merkezi*” (Republican Education and Cultural Centre). Not only does this dissimulation in nomenclature reflect the foundation’s largely amiable relations with the Turkish state, but it also evades official restrictions on the adoption of sectarian terms in the registration of associations.

cemevis with commonly desired outcomes, I do contend that their frequent discussion of the matter constitutes a “discursive” unity. Indeed, these organizations have differing vested interests in their approach to the issues; this notwithstanding, they are united with their fellow Alevis in a discursive opposition to the Turkish government’s attitude towards these three critical problems.

Telling Secrets: The Implications of Alevilik’s pre-1980 Concealment during the Reconceptualization of the Early 1990s

As has been discussed previously, the advent of the Turkish Republic ushered in an era of relative contentment for Alevis, since the abolition of the *şeriat* removed one of the prime textual bases for official discrimination towards the community. While the unitarist discourse of the new state championed a secular Sunni-Turkish nationalism to the exclusion of alternate discourses of self-identification, the Kemalist state did not display an explicit hostility towards the Alevis as had – officially, at least – the Ottoman Empire. Despite this, the implementation of a new, secularist nationalist ethic in the realm of official discourse did not necessarily alter popularly inherited perceptions, especially those concerning sectarian difference. In the end, the mobilization of a doctrine of official secularism was only partly successful. For Alevis, the partial success of this official discourse was, ironically, doubly disadvantageous. On one hand, the Kemalist conception of the unitarist Turkish nation permitted little discursive room for the public proclamation of Alevilik: Through the deployment of semantic tools, phrases such as “I am Alevi” could be construed as *bölücülük* (separatism). On the other hand, many Sunnis did not necessarily internalize a nationalist discourse that exhorted Turkish citizens to fraternally embrace their neighbour. Thus, Alevis who identified themselves as such faced censure in two aspects. First, any public acknowledgment of an Alevi self-understanding was a discursive transgression against the modern, Kemalist, and indivisible Turkish nation. Second, the public promotion of an Alevi heritage was likely to draw the opprobrium of many Sunni neighbours who had not necessarily internalized – or were actively opposed to – the secular mores of the Kemalist discourse advocating ethnic fraternity; instead, many retained unfavourable perceptions regarding Alevis as a result of received, and generally erroneous, opinions.³¹ In the pre-1980 era,

³¹ Examples of such prejudice for Alevis in some Sunni quarters can be found in myths about the alleged incest of the *mum söndürme* ceremony (cf. Chapter 1), a rumour to whose continued existence the author can personally attest. Other examples include the belief that “*Alevinin kestiği yenmez*” (“One does not eat what an Alevi cuts” – i.e. Alevi meat is not permissible for Muslim consumption (*haram*), presumably entailing that Alevis themselves are also unbelievers.) On this last point, it is unsurprising that the overt dubiousness of the theological basis for such a rumour prompted the former head of the *Diyanet*,

proclaiming oneself an Alevi thus entailed a transgression on the level of both official discourse and sectarian understanding. Because of the risks involved, even those Alevis who wished to identify themselves as Alevis were forced to hide such a self-understanding.

The Alevis' formerly rural locus of habitation ensured that there were few obstacles to the *dede-talip* (*dede-adept*) transmission of sacred knowledge through oral means.³² Mass migration to the metropolitan centres at the beginning of the 1950s, however, served to break this method of knowledge acquisition. This breakage, in turn, was compounded by the shift towards a Marxist worldview among many of the community's youth. Now a respected Alevi academic, Cemal Şener related in 1991 how "we [youth] fought these *dedes* and considered them exploiters and individuals trying to turn the people into ignoramuses, just as we dismissed religion in general as the 'opium of the masses.'" ³³ Not only was orally-based authority difficult to maintain in an unsettled urban environment, but many of the youth growing up in such an environment were, in fact, hostile to the traditional sources of community leadership. For former socialist revolutionaries in the pre-1980 era, the cumulative effects of the community youth's hostility towards the *dedes* was to have repercussions during the early 1990s, since many realized that the practices they associated with an Alevi self-understanding had been largely lost to the community during the years of ideological tumult. As with Şener, this sense of cultural loss prompted Alevi writer and union organizer Yaşar Seyman to regretfully recall her Marxist youth:

During the years in which we took our place in political movements, we never used to attach any importance to Alevilik. [Furthermore,] we used to get angry at the *dedes*. After a panel [on Alevilik] overseas one day, we were eating and I turned to a *dede* and said, 'Dede, the panel's over. We're really tired, let's sit back a bit. Won't you play any *saz* or sing some folk songs?' 'Really, my girl,' he said. 'During your guys' leftist days, you cast us out – since that day, I made a vow never to play the *saz* again.' As revolutionaries, we were against playing the *saz*, the *cem*, and all these other things – we never had any interest in ethnicity or belief. Many years later, many things began to appear, people's Kurdish, Circassian, or Laz identity [for instance.] ... It was in this connection that religious beliefs too came to play a more central role. Alevilik turned up as

Abdülkadir Sezgin, to emphasize the falsity of such a myth. Abdülkadir Sezgin, *Hacı Bektaş Velî ve Bektaşîlik* [Hacı Bektaş Veli and Bektaşîlik] (Istanbul: Sezgin Neşriyat ve Ciltçilik, 1991), 41-42.

³² For Alevi commentator Rıza Zelyut, such a mode of transition was necessitated by a fear of leaving written records that could have drawn unnecessary attention to the Alevis' heterodox religious practices. Rıza Zelyut, "Aleviliğin toplumsal özellikleri" [The societal characteristics of Alevilik], *Nefes* 1, 7 (May 1994), 20.

³³ Krisztina Kehl-Bodrogi, "Vom revolutionären Klassenkampf zum 'wahren' Islam: Transformationsprozesse im Alevitum der Türkei nach 1980" [From revolutionary class struggle to 'true' Islam: Processes of transformation in Turkish Alevilik since 1980], *Sozialanthropologische Arbeitspapiere* [Social-Anthropological Working Papers] 49 (1992), 20. "Wir haben die *Dedes* bekämpft, wir hielten sie für Volksverdummer und Ausbeuter, wie wir überhaupt Religion als 'Opium für's Volk' abgelehnt haben."

a new dynamic also. At that time, we tried to get a grasp on this idea of ‘what is Alevilik?’³⁴

For people like Seyman, there had been no conscious concealment (*takkiye*) of an Alevi self-understanding. Instead, leftist revolutionaries of Alevi background internalized the Marxist discourse which dismissed as bourgeois and reactionary any societal mobilization based on national or religious sensibilities.

While Seyman and others like her had no interest in proclaiming themselves Alevis, those for whom Alevilik was important were prevented from advertising it in a public setting. The case of Hasan Ozan, a fifty-year-old native of Mersin,³⁵ is indicative of the experience of many Alevis who reached adulthood during the 1970s. Ozan was always conscious of the fact that he was Alevi, even though he did not attach much importance to it when he was younger. Like many of his classmates (and, indeed, compatriots), he identified with the left during his youth since the ideological polarization of the period militated against any personal neutrality. Despite these political leanings, he was not particularly active in any protests. During this time, he relates, “you could never say ‘I’m an Alevi.’ If you were to say it, it would be as if you were a completely different person. You might not have been openly excluded, but you felt [uncomfortable]. That’s why everyone needed to hide [their being Alevi] – the *cem* (gathering) was hidden and practised in secret.”³⁶ While such informal strictures afflicted ordinary citizens, the threat of societal sanction prevented such acknowledgement even for those Alevis with a much higher social and religious standing. For Veliyeddin Ulusoy, grandson of Cemalettin Çelebi (who himself had been leader of the Bektāşi Order and host of Mustafa Kemal during the War of Independence), his famous lineage did not prevent problems in declaring his auspicious heritage:

³⁴ Oral Çalışlar, “Sendikacı, yazar, siyasetçi Yaşar Seyman: ‘Alevi örgütleri erkek görünümünde’” [Unionist, writer, politician Yaşar Seyman: ‘Alevi organizations have a male complexion], *Radikal*, 18 November 2008. “Siyasi hareketler içinde yer aldığımız yıllarda Aleviliği önemsemezdik ve dedelere kızardık. Yurtdışında bir panel sonrasında yemek yiyorduk, dedenin birisine dedim ki, “Dede artık panel bitti. Biz çok yorulduk, biraz dinlenelim. Siz saz çalmıyor musunuz, deyiş söylemiyor musunuz?” “Vallahi kızım, solculuğunuzda bizi kovdunuz, ben o günden beri tövbe ettim, saz çalmıyorum” dedi. Bizim devrimciler olarak, saz çalma, cem, bunların hepsine karşıydık. Etnisiteyle, inançla pek ilgili değildik. Yıllar sonra birçok şey ortaya çıktı; insanların Kürtlüğü, Çerkezliği, Lazlığı ... Bunlarla birlikte inançlar da ortaya çıktı. Alevilik de yeni bir dinamik olarak ortaya çıktı. O zaman “Bu Alevilik nedir?” diye kavramaya çalıştık.”

³⁵ Mersin, also known as İçel, is a port city on the Mediterranean Sea. The city is mostly Sunni, yet Alevis of Turkish ethnic background as well as Nusayris (Arab Alevis) also live there. The Nusayris also venerate Ali, yet differ in many aspects from Turkish or Kurdish Alevis and are thus not considered to belong to the same community.

³⁶ Hasan Ozan, interview by author, Hacıbektaş, Nevşehir, Turkey, 15 August 2008. “Söyleyemiyorsun...‘Aleviyim’ söylediğinde sen sanki başka bir insansın. Açıkça dışlanmıyorsun, fakat bu kötü hissi, bunu hissediyorsun. Onun için herkes gizliyordu, cem yapmak gizli ve saklanır.”

The people, informing each other in secret, used to come to our house at night. The beards of the *dedes* were cut. A thousand and one types of mistreatment were carried out – stuff that you could never imagine. And this was all done in the republican period. When people used to ask us where we were from, we'd say Kırşehir ... No one would say Hacıbektaş ... There was no other solution; we had to go along with it.³⁷

Ulusoy, like Ozan and millions of others, was in little physical danger as an Alevi given that the pogroms of the 1970s occurred in specific rural areas. Alevis who had recently migrated to the big cities were rarely threatened physically, yet the prospect of social ostracization was troubling for many. In many cases, the discomfort associated with alienation from neighbours was compounded by the possibility of very real material hardship. In Reha Çamuroğlu's opinion,

The [pre-1980] generations showed great courage and determination in saying "I'm Alevi" [given] the quite difficult conditions in which they found themselves. For the sake [of identifying oneself as an Alevi], some sacrificed their careers, while others were doomed to [resultant] failure in their commercial endeavours. Others still were forced to go to court repeatedly and suffered terrible insults.³⁸

As was discussed in the introduction, the absence of Alevilik from the public sphere, either through personal choice or as the result of possible social disapproval, led many scholars such as Kehl-Bodrogi and Shankland to suggest that there was little future for an Alevilik distinct from mainstream, secular Turkish society. Indeed, even after the initial efflorescence of Alevi activity at the turn of the 1990s, Çamuroğlu himself, then the editor of the fledgling *Cem* journal, remarked that his biggest complaint was that "the youth [of the late 1980s were] becoming distant from our beliefs and traditions and [were] showing no interest in these things."³⁹ It was a disinterest that was not exclusive to youth who played no active role in the ideological ferment of the 1970s; their parents, too, showed little particular inclination for participating in *semahs* (ritual dances), attending the *cem* (gathering), or attempting to reconnect the bond with the *dedes* whom they had castigated as feudal during the pre-1980 period.

³⁷ Oral Çalışlar, "Dışlanmamak için Hacıbektaşlı olduğumuzu bile söylemezdik" [To avoid being ostracized we wouldn't even say that we were from Hacıbektaş], *Radikal*, 9 November 2008. "Yurttaşlar, gizli saklı haberleşerek, evimize gece gelirlerdi. Dedelerin sakalları kesilmiş, akla gelmeyecek bin bir türlü eziyetler uygulanmıştır. Bunlar cumhuriyet döneminde yapılmıştır. Nerelisin diye sorunca Kırşehirliz derdik... Hacıbektaş söylenmezdi... Çaresi yok, uyum sağlamak zorundayız." Kırşehir is a largely Sunni town in central Anatolian close to Hacıbektaş.

³⁸ Reha Çamuroğlu, "Alevilik, Aleviler ve Aleviciler" [Alevilik, Alevis, and Alevists], *Nefes* 1, 8 (Jun. 1994), 11. "Bu kuşaklar gerçekten çok zor koşullar altında 'ben Aleviyim' demek cesaret ve kararlılığı gösterdiler. Kimi bu uğurda kariyerini feda etti, kimi ticari hayatta başarısızlığa mahkûm edildi. Kimi de mahkeme mahkeme dolaşmak zorunda kaldı ve ağır hakaretlere uğradı."

³⁹ Çamuroğlu, *Günümüz Aleviliğinin Sorunları* [The problems of contemporary Alevilik], 11. "Gençler inanç ve geleneklerimizden uzaklaşıyor, ilgi göstermiyor."

Despite this, the beginning of the 1990s heralded the emergence of a new, “dynamic” Alevilik. The growth of this “Alevi explosion” has its roots in many of the same factors that presaged the rise of the Islamic Trend: A shift towards Islamic conservatism in the ideology of the state as reflected in the adoption of the Turkish-Islam Synthesis, neoliberal economic policies that grossly upset the previous distribution of wealth, and the growth of private media that provided new opportunity spaces for marginal voices. In this way, we can situate the appearance of a publicly conscious Alevilik within the concomitant appearance of Kurdish or Islamic self-identifications during the same period within Turkey. While these aforementioned factors played a crucial role in producing the space necessary for these emergent groups to publicly claim new self-understandings, the rise of a public Alevilik cannot be reduced to such factors alone. For Alevis, the impact on the reconceptualization of Alevilik caused by the collapse of the Soviet Union cannot be underestimated given the preponderance with which they joined the left in comparison to other groups in Turkey.⁴⁰ While the physical attacks on left-wing sympathizers in the immediate aftermath of the 1980 coup and the Evren government’s subsequent educational assault on the leftist worldview (in the form of a TİS-centred curriculum) succeeded in diminishing the political ability of leftist parties to mobilize against the economic injustices caused by neoliberal policies of the 1980s, the fall of the USSR dealt a crushing blow to the possibility of leftism being a viable political alternative.

In addition to international leftism’s drop in cachet as a result of the USSR’s collapse, the fall of the Iron Curtain in Eastern Europe presaged greater freedoms for many groups mobilizing along ethnic or religious lines. Because of these political changes, “the struggle for human rights won some considerable victories. [Moreover], the world entered a period of détente. With all of this occurring, it was impossible for Alevis not to be affected [by these changes] and take advantage from these most basic human rights.”⁴¹ Given all of these changes, Alevis had to both find a new ideological home and conceive of different ways of organizing themselves. For many, the shift from a self-understanding based on socialism to one based on Alevilik required some adjustment, but was manageable according to PSAKD Varto Branch Director Haydar Samancı:

Alevi youth first dabbled in leftism, and, while there, again became Alevi and started to live as such ... While with leftists, they became acquainted with Alevi tenets, the lifestyle, and the [historical] leaders – Mansur al-Hallaj or Nesimi for

⁴⁰ Çamuroğlu, “Some Notes on the Contemporary Process of Restructuring Alevilik in Turkey,” 26.

⁴¹ Cemal Şener and Miyase İlknur, “Alevilerin kimlik arayışı” [The quest for Alevi identity], *Cumhuriyet*, 24 August 1994.

instance. They [began to] learn about these types of [Alevi] leaders [who exemplified what we would now see as a leftist worldview] and at that point, they started to understand Alevilik and began returning to the faith.⁴²

But while Samancı illustrates how a few Alevi began to find Alevilik after discovering some of the faith's heroic figures during their time in the socialist movement, the reconceptualization of Alevilik did not proceed rapidly. Furthermore, the discontinuity between the Alevilik of the pre-mass migration era (pre-1950) and the period of reconceptualization at the beginning of the 1990s created additional problems: How would community members of the 1990s generation constitute and define this "new" Alevilik? In the age of nascent challenges against the state's unitarist framework from many disparate groups, what would the Alevi demands be? Most importantly, however, who would assume leadership of this reinvigorated Alevi community?

The "Alevi Manifesto" and the Emergence of a Reconceptualized Alevilik

On 15 May 1990, a number of Alevi writers and sympathizers⁴³ attached their names to a long "Alevi Bildirgesi" (Alevi Manifesto) in the nation's premiere Kemalist daily, *Cumhuriyet*. In their declaration, the intellectuals decried the continuation of Sunni prejudices against Alevi, the failure of state-controlled media outlets such as the TRT (*Türkiye Radyo ve Televizyonu* – Turkish Radio and Television) to recognize the country's Alevi reality, and the opinion among some sections of the Turkish nation that the Alevi were a pawn of Iran's (Shi'ite) Islamic regime. In concluding their remarks, the writers reminded the public that

"Turkey is not a mono-cultural society, but one with several cultures. This reality is also a treasure for our country... [Yet] we hope that politicians' words [imploring] that 'repression against beliefs and ideas must be lifted' will not

⁴² Haydar Samancı, interview by author, Varto, Muş, Turkey, 28 July 2008. "Alevi gençliği, önce solculuğu deniyordu, solculuğun içindeyken Alevi oluyordu, tekrar Alevi olarak yaşıyordu ... Yani solcuların içindeyken Alevi temellerini, yaşamını, önderlerini tanyıyorlardı – Hallac-ı Mansur gibi, Nesimler gibi, bir sürü önderleri öğreniyorlar ve o noktada Alevilik'i anlamaya, Alevi inancına geri dönmeye başlıyorlardı." Al-Hallaj was the famous Sufi executed in Baghdad in 922 AD after proclaiming (Tr.) "Ene'l hakk" – "I am the Truth" (e.g. "I am God"). Samancı's inclusion of al-Hallaj in his list of heroic figures warrents some mention. Though he was not an Anatolian Alevi, al-Hallaj's humanist focus and heterodox approach to faith has made him popular among Alevi. Cf. The masterwork on al-Hallaj, Louis Massignon, *The Passion of al-Hallāj: Mystic and Martyr of Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982). Nesimi, meanwhile, was a fifteenth century poet of the Hurufi Sufi order executed in Aleppo for committing transgressions similar to those of al-Hallaj. Ocak, *Osmanlı Toplumunda Zındıklar ve Mülhidler* [Heretics and atheists in Ottoman society], 68.

⁴³ Among the notable signees were Alevi researchers Nejat Birdoğan and Rıza Zelyut, Cemal Özbey (one of the founding members of the TBP), along with several non-Alevi literary and public figures, including Yaşar Kemal (one of Turkey's best known novelists), Aziz Nesin (a prominent author discussed more in depth below in connection to the 1993 Sivas events), İlhan Selçuk (former editor of *Cumhuriyet* and staunch Kemalist), and Zülfü Livaneli (a prominent writer, musician, and media commentator known for his left wing politics).

remain simply an empty promise. As democratic intellectuals, we expect all Turkish people to support us in this matter.”⁴⁴ (Emphasis in original.)

More important than these matters, however, were the intellectuals’ concerns regarding a number of crucial issues that have continued to beleaguer the relationship between Alevi groups and the wider Turkish society. Among these problems, the writers criticized the *Diyamet*’s focus on solely representing Sunnis, the government’s policy of constructing mosques in Alevi villages, and its compulsory religious classes that only presented the Sunni interpretation of Islam. In the interest of rectifying these injustices, the signatories of the manifesto recommended that the DİB apportion funds to Alevis in proportion to the latter’s share of the Turkish population, immediately cease the physical “Sunnization” of Alevi areas, and include appropriate Alevi-related content for the nation’s religious classes.⁴⁵ For Alevis in Turkey, the “Alevi Manifesto” was highly significant. For the first time in their history, members of the community felt sufficiently assured of the possibility of not only publicly identifying themselves as Alevis, but also of presenting the government with a list of demands. The manifesto thus signalled an initial declaration of the three issues that have retained critical centrality to the Alevi relationship with successive Turkish governments during much of the last twenty years, namely that of the DİB, compulsory religious education, and the status of *cemevis*. While Alevi organizations passionately disagree on their respective desired outcomes in regards to these matters, the continued lack of resolution of these issues, as well as their continued presence in the forefront of Alevi demands on the state, has produced a degree of unity whose strength results from a discourse of common complaint.

The writers who penned the “Alevi Manifesto” not only provided one of the early manifestations of a Turkey-wide efflorescence of Alevi cultural and literary output, but they also heralded a shift in the leadership of the community. Though some members of these writers’ generation had earlier displayed little interest in proclaiming themselves Alevi in the pre-1980 era, these same figures were now at the forefront of the “Alevi Explosion.” Furthermore, they accorded themselves a primary role in the reconceptualization of Alevilik: “In this [manifesto] regarding the problems of the Alevis,” they reasoned, “leadership [on these issues] falls to

⁴⁴ “Alevilik Bildirgesi” [The Alevi Manifesto], *Cumhuriyet*, 15 May 1990. “Türkiye, tek değil, birçok kültürün bulunduğu bir toplumdur. Bu durum da ülkemiz için zengliktir... Siyasetçiler tarafından dile getirilen, ‘İnançlar ve fikirler üzerindeki baskıların kaldırılması gerektiği’ yolundaki açıklamaların sözde kalmamasını diliyoruz. Bu konuda demokrat aydınlar olarak, tüm Türk halkından destek bekliyoruz.”

⁴⁵ Ibid. The suggestions for action in the “Alevi Manifesto” most resemble the *CEM Vakfı*’s recommendations on the matter.

intellectuals, democratic policy makers, businessmen, and professionals.”⁴⁶ At the beginning of the 1990s, this generation no longer reserved the same hostility for the position of the *dede* as it had during its identification with Marxism, yet its assumption of the right to community leadership posed serious questions for the future role of the *dede*. Indeed, while some *dedes* had been instrumental in preserving sacred knowledge that had otherwise been lost during the iconoclasm of the pre-1980 era, the circumstances of the late twentieth century – in which the urban professional classes, those with education, and those with the ability to use the media to disseminate their viewpoint took advantage of the economic reforms – ensured that *dedes* could not retain the dual role they had performed while the community was primarily rural-based. In this, *dedes* remained intrinsically important in providing religious guidance, yet by the 1990s, social control of the community had passed firmly into the hands of intellectuals who drew their legitimacy from occupation (as lawyers, professors, engineers, or doctors), not from the pre-modern, oral acquisition of religious knowledge.⁴⁷ Though he was not referring to the Alevis, Gregory Starrett’s words provide a cogent conclusion to this discussion: “Freed from traditional processes of knowledge acquisition – apprenticeship to a man of learning – these new autodidact intellectuals stand outside of traditional authorizing institutions, instead authorizing themselves in the process of knowledge production and dissemination.”⁴⁸ Despite the initial efflorescence occasioned by intra-Alevi debates centred on arriving at a new self-understanding and presenting demands to the state, membership in the community’s fledgling organizations was to remain low until a critical juncture in post-1980 Alevi history: The Sivas Massacre of 2 July 1993.

The Sivas Massacre and its Effects on Alevi Organizational Development

Though the Pir Sultan Abdal Cultural Association typically organizes a yearly festival in the small, central Anatolian village of Banaz in honour of the sixteenth-century dervish and martyr, Pir Sultan Abdal, the location of the 1993 edition was switched to a hotel in the nearby

⁴⁶ “Alevilik Bildirgesi” [The Alevi Manifesto], *Cumhuriyet*, 15 May 1990. “Alevilerin sorunlarını duyurmada önderlik aydınlara, demokrasiyi isteyen politikacılara, işadamlarına ve serbest meslek sahiplerine düşmektedir.”

⁴⁷ Krisztina Kehl-Bodrogi, “Tarih mitosu ve kollektif kimlik” [The myth of history and collective identity], *Pir Sultan Abdal* 21 (Nov. 1996), 20.

⁴⁸ Starrett, *Putting Islam to Work*, 232. It is not my intention to argue that the *dede-talip* (*dede-adept*) bond was necessarily a “traditional authorizing institution,” since such an assertion might lend an unjustified and artificial sense of concreteness to the bond. Here, I merely wish to underline how these individuals can bypass traditional networks and gain religious legitimacy through the benefits of modern education.

city of Sivas to accommodate more participants. Goaded by the presence of Aziz Nesin (a prominent atheist and the Turkish translator and publisher of Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*) and spurred by inflammatory rumours regarding possible Alevi plots against mosques, Sunni mobs attacked the hotel, killing thirty-seven people.⁴⁹ For the vast majority of Alevis, the massacre committed by the slogan-shouting mob confirmed deeply held suspicions about the apparent fanaticism of radical Muslims.⁵⁰ While the excessive violence and hatred visited upon the Alevi attendees was certainly not representative of the opinions of the vast majority of those who supported Islamic political parties, the unwillingness of either the state security services or the authorities of the *Refah*-controlled Sivas municipality to prevent the massacre left Alevis with a profound sense of alienation. Tensions were further exacerbated by the indifference of Ankara's politicians.⁵¹ In the end, the massacre forced many Alevis to realize that better community organization was the sole option for preventing a future recurrence of violence.

The Sivas massacre unambiguously emphasized the dangers militant Islam posed to Alevis. Many who had rediscovered their Alevi heritage at the beginning of the 1990s participated with like-minded individuals in establishing the community's first organizations, yet the level of membership and overall number of associations remained low. The violence of July 1993, however, had far-reaching effects on Turkey's Alevi community; not only did it inculcate a greater sense of awareness for many citizens' "lost" Alevi heritage, but it also occasioned a sharp rise in the number of Alevi organizations.⁵² Because of the realization that a failure to organize

⁴⁹ Lütfi Kaleli, *Alevi kimliği ve Alevi örgütlenmeleri* [Alevi identity and organizations], 103.

⁵⁰ Lütfi Kaleli recounts some of the slogans shouted by the mob as they attacked the Madımak Hotel. Though many were certainly directed towards the "unbelieving" Alevis (e.g. "The army of Muhammad is the fear of the infidel!" / "*Muhammed'in ordusu, kafirlerin korkusu!*"), others were a direct attack on Turkey's republican foundations: "The Republic was established in Sivas and here it will be destroyed!" / "*Cumhuriyet Sivas'ta kuruldu, Sivas'ta yıkılacak!*" (During the War of Liberation, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk held one of the first nationalist congresses in Sivas.) Meanwhile, the perpetrators also shouted one of *Refah*'s election slogans – itself a play on words of a widespread slogan promoting secularism: "Turkey is Muslim and shall remain so!" / "*Türkiye müslümandır, müslüman kalacak!*" (Here, "Muslim" replaces the more commonly encountered "secular"). Lastly, the shouts of some of the MHP supporters would remain indelible in the minds of many of the panel's participants ("If we should spill our blood, the victory will be for Islam!" / "*Kanımız aksa da zafer İslamın!*"). Lütfi Kaleli, *Sivas katliamı ve şeriat* [The Sivas massacre and *şeriat*] (Istanbul: Alev Yayınları, 1994), 33.

⁵¹ For Alevis, the instructions of then Turkish President, Süleyman Demirel, to local security forces were somewhat troubling: "Don't turn my police on my people." ("*Benim halkımla polisimi karşı karşıya gerirmeyin.*") The comments of Turkish Prime Minister, Tansu Çiller, were even more inflammatory: "Thank goodness no one outside [the hotel] was hurt." ("*Çok şükür dışarıdaki insanlara bir zarar gelmemiştir.*") Needless to say, Alevis treated Çiller's lack of concern with their plight with a healthy degree of contempt. Kaleli, *Sivas katliamı ve şeriat* [The Sivas massacre and *şeriat*], 378.

⁵² Lütfi Kaleli, "Koşulları bilmek" [Knowing the circumstances], *Nefes* 2, 18 (Apr. 1995), 46.

solidarity-based associations might allow for the future occurrence of a similar massacre, Varto PSAKD director Haydar Samancı argues that

Alevi youth born in the 1980s and 1990s have far more influence over Alevi dogma and organizations, and this is because of Sivas. Sivas was seminally important. The massacre was a watershed moment that changed the fate of Alevilik. Really, if the massacre there had not been carried out, Alevilik would not have developed this much. At that time, there were a handful of Alevi organizations, but there are hundreds more now.⁵³

Necdet Saraç agrees on the matter: “For the purposes of organization, the Sivas Massacre at the Madımak [Hotel] was a turning point that signalled ‘enough already’ ... Today, in the main body of the various Alevi movements that have joined together under the roof of the *Alevi Birlikleri Federasyonu* (Federation of Alevi Unions) there are close to 100,000 members.”⁵⁴ Many had begun to realize the necessity of better organization before the events of 2 July 1993, but the militant attack on the Madımak Hotel provided a catalyst for the flourishing of Alevi organizations.

During Sivas, the media acquired an importance that it had not previously possessed in the coverage of such events. The massacres of the late 1970s occurred largely in inaccessible rural areas. Moreover, the corresponding lack of technological capability (to mention nothing of the political willingness) of the TRT to broadcast from the massacre zones ensured that coverage of the events was largely restricted to the print media.⁵⁵ Because of the lack of television, there was no opportunity for the provision of a moment-by-moment visual narration of the visceral destruction that would surely have captivated and provoked much of the nation. During the Sivas Massacre, however, the television networks provided detailed coverage of the violence that was instantaneously beamed into every home in Turkey. For *Cumhuriyet*’s Miyase İlknur, the media not only compelled Alevis to re-evaluate the threat of radicalism, but it also ensured that Turkish society in general was forced to take notice of the Alevi issue.⁵⁶ Sivas did not compel the state to

⁵³ Haydar Samancı, interview by author, Varto, Muş, Turkey, 28 July 2008. “1980-1990 doğumlu Alevi gençliğinin kendi öğretilerine, örgütlerine daha etkili oldukları görülebilir – bunun sebebi Sivas Olayı ... Sivas, bir milat niteliğinde. Sivas’taki katliam, Alevilik’in kaderini değiştiren bir milat oldu. Evet, Sivas katliamı yapılmıyordu, Alevilik bu kadar genişlemezdi. O zamanlar üç-beş tane Alevi örgütü vardı; ama artık yüzlerce var.”

⁵⁴ Necdet Saraç, “Alevi profili değişiyor” [The Alevi profile is changing], *BirGün*, 20 August 2004. “Sivas Madımak katliamı örgütlenmede ‘artık yeter’ anlamında bir dönüm noktası oldu ... Bugün, Alevi Birlikleri Federasyonu çatısı altında biraraya gelen Alevi hareketinin ana gövdesi yaklaşık 100 bin üyeye sahip.” The *Alevi Birlikleri Federasyonu* is the Federation of Alevi Unions – ABF.

⁵⁵ For more on how 1970s massacres like the one in Kahramanmaraş were presented in the print media, see Sinclair-Webb, “Sectarian Violence,” in *Turkey’s Alevi Enigma*, 215-235.

⁵⁶ Miyase İlknur, “Son 10 yıldır medya-Alevi ilişkileri” [Media-Alevi relations of the past ten years], *Nefes* 3, 25 (Nov. 1995), 45.

enact substantive changes in regards to Alevi demands, yet the media's intensive coverage of the event ensured a greater presence of the Alevi question in the nation's collective consciousness.

Despite the exponential growth of Alevi organizations in the wake of the Sivas Massacre, Alevis succeeded neither in reaching a satisfactory outcome on their three main demands on the state nor in halting violent attacks on the community. On 12 March 1995, unknown assailants fired on an Alevi coffeehouse in Gaziosmanpaşa, a poor district in Istanbul inhabited primarily by Alevis. One person died at the scene, while police shot and killed an additional twenty people in ensuing protests that gripped Alevi-populated neighbourhoods around the city. Because of the association of the police with radical Islamic elements in the minds of many Alevis, tensions only began to recede after the army – an institution viewed more favourably due to its strictly secular line – was deployed onto the streets in place of the police.⁵⁷ Regardless of the eventual calming of immediate tensions between Alevis and the police services, one *dede* made the apocryphal observation that “before the Sivas Massacre, Alevis did not have as many associations, federations, or a sense of unity [as they do now]. After Sivas, [however,] people said that ‘however much we were able to breathe with the republic, the massacres just won’t stop.’”⁵⁸

At the end of the 1980s, most Alevis seem to have identified themselves as such only superficially. For one *dede* in Varto, the scant knowledge of Alevilik among the younger generations was due to the failure of the community to continue any form of congregational worship: “Because *cem*s were not performed much before, the youth had no idea what a *cem* or Alevilik was. But in the last ten to fifteen years, Alevilik has witnessed a development as the result of the more educated interest of [our] youth.”⁵⁹ While he is correct in attributing the rise in interest in Alevilik to the increased levels of education among the Alevis, there are other factors which allowed for the emergence of new self-perceptions among groups such as the Alevis, including Turgut Özal's reforms that ushered in a new economic climate, the fall of the Iron Curtain, and the rise of private media. Members of the group who began to wrestle with the question of an Alevi self-understanding at the end of the 1980s endeavoured both to resolve

⁵⁷ For an eyewitness account of the events, cf. Aliza Marcus, “‘Should I Shoot You?’: An Eyewitness Account of an Alevi Uprising in Gazi,” *Middle East Report* 199 (Apr-Jun. 1996): 24-26.

⁵⁸ “Daha Allah yok iken” [When God hadn't come yet], *Express* 81 (Mar. 2008), 24. “Sivas katliamından önce, Alevilerin bu kadar derneği, federasyonu, birlik-beraberliği yoktu. Sivas'tan sonra ‘her ne kadar cumhuriyetle birlikte biraz nefes aldıysak da, katliamın arkası kesilmeyecek’ dendi.”

⁵⁹ Bülent Akbıyık, interview by author, Varto, Muş, Turkey, 28 July 2008. “Eskiden fazla cem yapılmadığı için, gençler cemin ve Aleviliğin ne olduğunu bilmiyordu. Fakat son 10-15 senedir gençler bu konuyla bilimsel olarak ilgilendiği için Alevilik bir gelişim içinde artık.”

questions of community leadership and to form new organizations that would serve as a better platform for the negotiation of Alevi demands on the central state. While these initial attempts at organization yielded some, though not mass numbers of new members, the first massacres in Turkish history to receive instantaneous television coverage demonstrated to many Alevis the imperative of forming associations in the aims of self-preservation. The twin shocks of Sivas and Gaziosmanpaşa compelled Alevis not only to seek relative security in solidarity networks based on a commonly constituted Alevi self-understanding, but also to interrogate more deeply the question of what they, as Alevis, precisely demanded in the post-1980 era.

The Hacı Bektaş Veli Festival: A Unifier for Disparate Alevi Groups?

In 1995, Cemal Şener and Miyase İlknur interviewed Cafer Koç, the director of a small Alevi organization. Koç, in reaction to the horrifying violence of Sivas and the apparent impotence of Alevis in articulating their demands to the state, offered the following comment:

These days, Alevis can mobilize crowds reaching into the hundreds of thousands for the Hacı Bektaş Veli Festival, but they are incapable of doing anything against the implementation of compulsory religious classes. There are crowds out there, but a '*shared consciousness*' is still not on the horizon. Current organizations have neither the maturity nor the positioning to translate a '*shared consciousness*' in the name of Alevis everywhere into operational or intellectual reality.⁶⁰ (Italics in original.)

Koç's lament at the lack of any "shared consciousness" among Alevis notwithstanding, his comments regarding Alevi organizations and their ability to coax hundreds of thousands into coming to the annual Hacıbektaş Festival are very illustrative for our purposes. For us, it raises the important question: How important are the annual ceremonies at the Hacıbektaş Festival in providing a sense of a "common ground" for all Alevis, regardless of what they conceive Alevilik to entail? As was discussed in the introduction, scholars such as Massicard argue that the annual festival provides a platform for "a productive misunderstanding" whereby Alevis can achieve at least a congregational and performative unity through their yearly interaction with each other. Instead of suggesting that the yearly festival induces a manner of ideational convergence among the self-perceptions of Alevilik held by the disparate Alevi groups who come to attend the

⁶⁰ Cemal Şener and Miyase İlknur, *Şeriat ve Aleviler: kırklar meclisinden günümüze Alevi örgütlenmeleri* [Şeriat and Alevis: Alevi associations from the Assembly of the Forty to the present day] (Istanbul: Ant Yayınları, 1995), 112. "Aleviler, bugün için HBV şenliklerinde yüzbinlere ulaşan kalabalıklar yaratabilmektedirler ama, zorunlu din dersleri uygulaması karşısında hiç bir yapamamaktadırlar. Ortada kalabalıklar vardır ama '*ortak bilinç*' henüz ufukta gözükmemektedir. Bugün için var olan örgütlenmelerin hiç birisi Aleviler adına '*ortak bilinç*' yaratarak eylemsel/düşünsel pratikler gerçekleştirebilecek olgunlukta ve noktada değildir."

ceremonies, Massicard argues for a shared inventory of symbols that all can recognize as representative of Alevilik in spite of each individual or group's discordant interpretation of these symbols. Even before Sivas and the resultant increase in the number of members of Alevi associations, *Cem* voiced the notion that the yearly Hacibektaş Festival was the ideal congregational point for all Alevis:

[For some], even if it is only once per year, the [Hacibektaş Festival] is the only place for all of us to watch Alevi-Bektaşî ceremonies and to learn things from one another. For others though ... the [festivities] are, for the moment, the most appropriate venue for thousands of Alevis with different perceptions [of Alevilik] to meet in a democratic surrounding and discuss on common ground [questions of] unity, organization, and how to positively present very serious issues to public opinion and to the political authorities.⁶¹

Indeed, such an evaluation is entirely appropriate; since 1964, the Hacibektaş Festival has been Turkey's longest running annual public Alevi event. Since the end of the 1980s, organizers have established several Alevi festivals around the country, including places such as Erzincan, Tokat, Sivas, Tunceli, as well as Istanbul and Ankara, yet the festival in Hacibektaş remains the only one with a national scope and capability of attracting Alevis from around Turkey and around the world. Hundreds of thousands of Alevis descend upon the small town in Central Anatolia for the festival's offering of fellowship, sacred music, dance, poetry, and debates. Because of the ceremonies' long established nature and mass attendance by Alevi citizens, politicians of all stripes have long utilized the occasion of the festival to engage with Alevis, make speeches, and search for Alevi votes. While Alevis might frequently view the politicians' promises of action on the "Alevi issue" as largely devoid of substance or sincerity, many dutifully attend the festival's first day to hear the words of the latest attendee from Ankara. In addition to the attraction of both the festival's performative aspects and the chance to hear Ankara politicians' views on Alevis, the thirteenth-century saint Hacı Bektaş Veli remains one of the most important attractions. Political and ethnic differences notwithstanding, some commentators argue that "without exception, the *dergâh* (dervish convent) in Hacibektaş is the '*serçeşme*' of the Alevi religious dimension; that is,

⁶¹ Süleyman Cem, "1992 Hacibektaş kültür, tören, şenlik ve etkinliklerinin düşündürdükleri" [Food for thought from the 1992 Hacibektaş cultural, ceremonial, and festive activities], *Cem* 2, 16 (Sep. 1992), 22. "Bazılarına göre Alevi-Bektaşî törenlerini yılda bir de olsa, büyük küçük hepimizin bir arada izlediği, birbirimizden birçok şeyler öğrendiği tek yer. Bir diğerlerine göre ise ... farklı yorumlayan binlerce Alevi-Bektaşî'nin Hacibektaş'ta, demokratik platformda buluşup, tartışıp ortak paydalarda birleşmenin, örgütlenmenin ve siyasi iktidarlara, kamuoyuna olumlu, çok ciddi mesajlar vermenin şimdilik, en uygun yeri ve yolu."

Alevis accept the *dergâh* of Hacı Bektaş as the *Urspring* [of Alevilik].⁶² Thus, for all relatively religiously inclined Alevis, the figure of Hacı Bektaş and the dervish convent he founded function as primary referents for Alevis, regardless of their political views or ethnic origin.

Explaining Alevilik to Alevis: The Role of Politicians at the Hacı Bektaş Festival

While the importance of the Hacı Bektaş Festival is indisputable, there has long been tension at the festival, especially in regards to the visits made by Ankara-based political leaders. Politicians have been attending the Hacıbektaş Festival since the early years of its establishment. While their opening-day speeches are typically well attended, many have criticized the profound lack of substance contained within most of their missives. For some, the messages either dabble far too much in vague platitudes or contain promises Alevis regard as mere electioneering. Following the 2000 edition, Murat Küçük, a writer with *Cem*, could no longer contain his exasperation with the words of the most important visitors: “(Some politician) comes and takes the microphone and then starts explaining Alevilik to Alevis! They explain how Hacı Bektaş Veli worked tirelessly ‘for Turkish national unity and togetherness’ and what not and then, after getting so exhausted dumping out all their arcane historical knowledge, they head back to Ankara.”⁶³ For Küçük and others such as Necdet Saraç, “this [method of speaking] which attempts to present [Alevi] philosophy in simply a mystical light and reduce [Alevilik] into aphorisms [extolling the virtue] of ‘returning no evil for evil’ at every memorial ceremony forgets that Alevilik is, at the same time, a living organism.”⁶⁴

Thus, though the Hacıbektaş Festival itself is perceived as a central venue in which Alevis of all political persuasions can congregate, enjoy the cultural and musical activities, “perform” Alevilik, and, most importantly, present visiting political dignitaries with their inventory of *sine qua non* demands, there is a discrepancy between the wishes of the attending Alevis and the discourse deployed by the visiting politicians. Instead of addressing the

⁶² Necdet Saraç, “Kendine Müslümanlar” [Muslims to themselves], *BirGün*, 17 November 2006. “Hacıbektaş ilçesindeki dergâh istisnasız bütün Alevilerin inanç boyutunda ‘serçeşme’dir. Yani bütün Aleviler Hacı Bektaş Veli Dergâhı’nı ‘ana kaynak, baş kaynak’ olarak kabul ederler.”

⁶³ Murat Küçük, “Hacıbektaş Törenleri ve Siyaset” [The Hacıbektaş Ceremonies and Politics], *Cem* 33, 104 (August 2000), 6. “Mikrofonu ele geçiren, başlıyor Alevilere Aleviliği anlatmaya! Hacı Bektaş Veli’nin ‘Türk milletinin birlik ve beraberliği için’ çalışıp çabaladığını vs. anlatıp, derin tarih bilgilerini döktürmekten bitap halde Ankara’ya dönüyorlar.”

⁶⁴ Necdet Saraç, “Hacı Bektaş törenlerin ardından” [After the Hacı Bektaş ceremonies], *BirGün*, 26 August 2005. “Bu felsefeyi yalnızca mistik bir havada sunmaya çalışan, her anma töreninde ‘incinsen de incitme’ edebiyatına indirgemeye çalışan yaklaşım, Aleviliğin aynı zamanda yaşayan bir organizma olduğunu unutuyor.” “İncinsen de incitme” is one of Hacı Bektaş’s most famous maxims.

contemporaneous context and demands of Alevilik, many official visitors provide larger ahistorical and decontextualized ruminations regarding the supposed life and teachings of Hacı Bektaş Veli. In this process, Alevi spectators assume the role of a mere, undifferentiated audience whose sole function is to act as a symbolic affirmation of the politicians' discourse. While the festival might be perceived as a chance for dialogue between the state and Alevi, the reality is far more unidirectional. Instead of addressing the contemporaneous problems of "living" Alevi, this discourse is deployed instead in the service of the officially sponsored ideology of Turkish nationalism. In this way, the teachings and aphorisms of Hacı Bektaş Veli are hermetically sealed, packaged, and presented to Alevi as an eternal stock of knowledge designed to buttress the discourse of Turkish nationalism.

In conjunction with this decontextualization of Hacı Bektaş at the festival is the frequent usage of such discourse in the secular nationalist press. For its columnists (who, more often than not, are not Alevi), there is a vested interest in the deployment of the "functionalized"⁶⁵ Hacı Bektaş for the purposes of combating the most prominent discursive enemies of secular Turkish nationalism, Islamism and Kurdish nationalism. Thus, in the wake of the "post-modern coup" of 28 February 1997⁶⁶ – and at a time when many secularists were concerned about the possible effect the imposition of *şeriat* would have on women – *Hürriyet*'s İsmet Solak presented Hacı Bektaş Veli in this fashion:

Hacı Bektaş Veli is the great *pir* who saved Anatolia from Arab cultural imperialism and placed Turkish-Islamic Sufism, tolerance, and love in our hearts ... If we were to understand what Hacı Bektaş said in those days today, it would still be valid: 'Send your women to school ... return no evil for evil, be master of your hands, your loins, and your tongue. Whatever you are searching for, find it in yourself. The end of the path without knowledge is darkness.' What, [then,] did Atatürk say? 'The truest guide in life is knowledge and science. Searching for a guide other than knowledge and science is blindness and heresy...'⁶⁷

⁶⁵ By functionalization, I mean the process which Starrett describes as the "[process] of translation in which intellectual objects from one discourse come to serve the strategic or utilitarian ends of another discourse." Starrett, *Putting Islam to Work*, 9.

⁶⁶ By 1997, the military had become increasingly concerned about the anti-secular direction the DYP-*Refah* coalition government was taking, forcing it from office in late February of that year. Several key figures from the government, including R. Tayyip Erdoğan, the present Turkish Prime Minister (as of 2009), were sent to jail for their "anti-secular activities." Cf. White, *Islamist Mobilization*, 136.

⁶⁷ İsmet Solak, "Her ne ararsan kendinde bul" [Whatever you are searching for, find it in yourself], *Hürriyet*, 17 August 1998. "Hacı Bektaş-ı Veli, Anadolu'yu Arap kültür emperyalizminden kurtaran ve Türk İslam tasavvufu ile hoşgörüyü, sevgiyi yüreklere yerleştiren bir Ulu Pir ... Hacı Bektaş'ın o yıllarda söylediklerini bu dönemde anlasak, o bile bize yetip artar: 'Kadınlarınızı okutunuz ... İncinsen de incitme ... Eline, beline, diline sahip ol. Her ne ararsan kendinde bul. Bilimden gidilmeyen yolun sonu karanlıktır.' Atatürk ne demişti? 'Hayatta en hakiki mürşit ilimdir, fendir. Bilim ve fen dışında mürşit aramak gaflettir, dalalettir...'"

This mobilization of Hacı Bektaş Veli for discursive ends has been a feature at the festival for many years. At the 1967 ceremonies, *Cumhuriyet*'s Ragıp Üner described the saint as that “great Turkish thinker and nationalist Hacı Bektaş Veli.”⁶⁸ Two years later, then-CHP member of parliament and future Turkish Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit chose to focus on Hacı Bektaş Veli's principled stand against (religious) “fanaticism” (*taassup*) and his efforts in strengthening Anatolia's Turkishness.⁶⁹ During the mid-1980s, some newspaper columnists sought to portray Hacı Bektaş not so much as the leader of a *tarikât* (Sufi order),⁷⁰ but rather a “modern” (*çağdaş*) thinker who advanced the cause of the Turkish language.⁷¹ Presumably due to the characteristics of tolerance, modernity, enlightenment, and Turkish nationalism to which he is retroactively ascribed, then-Turkish Prime Minister Mesut Yılmaz praised Hacı Bektaş in a 1997 speech for the latter's role in Turkicizing Anatolia before asserting that the saint was a spiritual bridge that would aid Turkey in reaching the twenty-first century.⁷²

While some Alevis indeed have no problems with a festival that presents a Hacı Bektaş as a Turkifier and “modernizer,” others are more upset at the failure of the state to adequately address the critical issues of many Alevis at the festival. In the first festival following the massacre in Sivas, Cemal Şener interviewed an Alevi organizer who raised concerns about the state's indifferent response to Alevi suffering: “The state authorities generally say this: ‘Everything will be solved within a legal framework.’ They advocate patience and tolerance to Alevis. But patience until what point? After the Sivas Massacre, this is the thing I ask myself the most. Really, up until what point with this patience?”⁷³ For many Alevis, the combination of empty promises and an irrelevant discussion of Hacı Bektaş that suits the aims more of the

⁶⁸ Ragıp Üner, “Hacı Bektaş Veli: Ölümün 665inci yılı münasebetiyle” [Hacı Bektaş Veli: In regard to the 665th anniversary of his death], *Cumhuriyet*, 16 August 1967. “... Büyük Türk düşünürü, büyük milliyetçi Hacı Bektaş Veli.”

⁶⁹ “Hacı Bektaş Veli'ye inanlar Atatürk'ü iyi anlar” [Those who believe in Hacı Bektaş Veli understand Atatürk well], *Cumhuriyet*, 18 August 1969. “Hacı Bektaş-ı Veli, taassuba karşı çıkışı ile de Anadolu Türklüğünün güçlenmesine hizmet vermiştir.” Ecevit was Turkish Prime Minister several times during the 1970s, and again at the beginning of the new century. He died in 2006.

⁷⁰ Nafiz Ünlüyurt, “Kır çiçeği Hacı Bektaş” [Hacı Bektaş the wildflower], *Cumhuriyet*, 16 August 1984.

⁷¹ Hulusi Konuk, “Hacı Bektaş ve felsefesi” [Hacı Bektaş and his philosophy], *Cumhuriyet*, 17 August 1985.

⁷² Murat Küçük, “Hükümetten eşitlik sözü” [A promise of equality from the government], *Cem* 7, 70 (Sep. 1997), 8. “Anadolu'ya Türk yapan Erenler'den biriydi. Türk Milleti'nin muhteşem mazisini Yirmibirinci Yüzyıl'a ulaştıracak olan en önemli manevi köprülerden birisi de Hacı Bektaş Veli'dir.” Mesut Yılmaz was Turkish PM for the *Anavatan Partisi* in the late 1990s.

⁷³ Cemal Şener, “Aleviler siyasi partilerce sömürüldü” [Alevis exploited by the political parties], *Cumhuriyet*, 19 August 1993. “Devlet yetkililere genellikle şunu söylüyorlar: ‘Herşey yasal çerçevede çözümlenecektir’. Alevi kesime sabır ve hoşgörü tavsiye ederler. Sabır nereye kadar? Sivas olayından sonra en çok kendime sorduğum bu. Yani nereye kadar sabır?”

speaker than the audience has engendered a certain amount of discontent with some aspects of the festival. Though many retain an idealistic view of the ceremonies as the most appropriate venue for the negotiation of both Alevilik and its demands on the government, this official unresponsiveness has been troubling. These troubles, however, have been supplanted by political developments and questions of event organization in the past few years that have proven far more damaging to the putative goal of performative unity at the festival.

Political Discord and the End of Performative Unity

While the fact of Hacı Bektaş's centrality to Alevis is indisputable, some of the problems with the festival have become evident. Authors such as Massicard and Sinclair-Webb identify a ritualistic, performative quality at the festivities that facilitates the construction of a manner of common Alevilik. Over and beyond the criticisms of the festival that I presented in the previous section, I contend that, despite the unity desired by most Alevi organizations at the event, the Hacıbektaş Festival fails to truly act as a unifying entity for many Alevis due to a number of recent political disagreements between the municipality and several Alevi organizations. Here, I argue that political problems linked to the festival's organization between the municipality and various Alevi organizations (represented especially by the ABF, AABF, and PSAKD) prevent the festival from achieving this desired unity, thus compelling us to search for alternate venues of Alevi unity. Since the election of Ali Rıza Selmanpakoğlu to the mayoralty of Hacıbektaş in 2004, Alevi associations have criticized his exclusionary and imperious attitude towards their organizations,⁷⁴ thereby convincing many of them to either boycott the event, or attend alternative events.⁷⁵ While I do not argue that this more recent breakdown in dialogue between the mayor's office and the aforementioned Alevi organizations is the culmination of these preceding sources of tension, I suggest that the ongoing issues with the condescending attitudes of visiting politicians, along with other matters concerning the legal status of Hacı Bektaş's *türbe* (shrine) mean that the problems of 2004 did not appear *ex nihilo*. In the end, however, it is because of these final political tensions that I conclude we must search for Alevi unity not through performative action, but through alternate, discourse-based avenues.

⁷⁴ Fikri Sağlar, "Hacı Bektaş Veli'yi anarken" [Remembering Hacı Bektaş Veli], *BirGün*, 15 August 2004. During the early 1990s, Sağlar was a Turkish cabinet minister of Alevi origin for the *Sosyal Demokrat Halk Partisi* (Social Democratic People's Party), the immediate ideological precursor to the presently reconstituted CHP.

⁷⁵ "Hacıbektaş'ta neler oluyor?" [What's happening at Hacıbektaş?] *BirGün*, 11 August 2004.

Speaking in 2008, former Hacibektaş Mayor Mustafa Özcivan stated his regrets about how the contemporaneous administration of Ali Rıza Selmanpakoğlu had excluded all Alevi organizations from the organization of the event that did not subscribe to an ideology in line with the TİS. While Özcivan had experienced some difficulties with some Alevi organizations during his time in office,⁷⁶ the ceremonies had unfortunately become “an ordinary event that was discriminatory, self-centred, empty of substance, and far removed from its [original] meaning”⁷⁷ in the intervening time. During the years of his administration, meanwhile, Selmanpakoğlu has denigrated the organizational ability of the ABF, AABF, and PSAKD, while at other times criticising them as unpatriotic and *bölicü* (separatist).⁷⁸ The result of such an attitude is, in the opinion of Ali Balkız, a festival that many Alevis have begun to avoid, given the odiousness of the municipality’s politics: “Because [of Selmanpakoğlu’s actions], Hacibektaş has been left only to the Paşa [i.e. the mayor], his men, and [itinerant] trinket vendors.”⁷⁹ In all, the Alevi organizations that have felt excluded by the unilateral and TİS-centred policies of Selmanpakoğlu’s administration have demanded greater consultation with them in return for the ending of their sporadic boycotts and protests.

Given the verbal accusations both sides of the debate have been exchanging with one another, it is possible to suggest that a simple change of political leadership at the local municipality would result in an end to the protests of many of the excluded Alevi organizations. While such an eventuality is possible, that is not my concern. In fact, the seemingly basic problems between the two parties illustrate a larger issue concerning the festival: Given the level of importance many Alevis attach to the festival, how could the “petty” actions – however anti-democratic they may be – of just one institution have derailed the event’s proceedings so much

⁷⁶ Ayhan Aydın, “Hacibektaş Belediye Başkanı Mustafa Özcivan ile söyleşi” [A conversation with Hacibektaş Mayor Mustafa Özcivan], *Cem* 4, 40 (Sep. 1994), 49.

⁷⁷ Mustafa Özcivan, “Kırk Beşinci Yıl” [The forty-fifth year], *Serçeşme* Special Edition (Aug. 2008), 3. “Ayrımcı, ben merkezli, içeriği boşaltılmış, amacı dışında sıradan bir etkinlik.” I am unsure whether *Serçeşme* has ever been a regular journal – at the 2008 event, it appeared that the four-page “Special Edition” being distributed by volunteers was simply a single-run edition designed to draw attention to the alleged abuses of Selmanpakoğlu’s municipal government.

⁷⁸ Hacibektaş Belediyesi Resmî Web Sitesi, “ABF ve AABK ne yapmak istiyor?” [What do the ABF and the AABK want to do?] 28 August 2007, http://www.hacibektas.bel.tr/portal/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=83&Itemid=2. The AABF and the AABK are the same organization – one version uses “federation” (*federasyon*), while the other uses “confederation” (*konfederasyon*) in the name.

⁷⁹ Ali Balkız, “İşte Geldi Geçti Beş Yıl” [That’s how five years have gone by], *Serçeşme* Special Edition (Aug. 2008), 3. “Dolayısıyla, Hacibektaş bu beş yıl süresince Paşa, adamları ve incik-boncuk satıcılarına kaldı.”

since 2004? I argue that it is precisely because of the partisan political discord of the past few years that we can no longer posit the Hacібektaş Festival as the central venue for the discussion of questions of Alevi self-understanding and demands on the state. Instead, I contend, we must search for other arenas in which Alevis, unaffected by the sometimes contrarian political leanings of their fellow Alevis, find unity. In this, I suggest that we should search for this unity neither in the performative aspect of the festival, nor in an inventory of mutually held characteristics identifying Alevis, but in a discursive unity created by the various organizations' common catalogue of demands on the government.

Creating a Source of Commonality: The *Diyanet*, Compulsory Religious Classes, and *Cemevis* as the Source of Discursive Unity among Alevis

This chapter began with the November 2008 protest in which Alevis who mainly belonged to the PSAKD demanded substantive changes to the way in which the Turkish government runs the *Diyanet*, compulsory religious classes, and its attitude towards *cemevis*. In response to the street march, however, *CEM Vakfı* director İzzettin Doğan criticized the organizers' tactics.⁸⁰ Although Doğan may express his disapproval of the methods and desired outcome of their protests, he still shares the same language of discontent in presenting his demands on the state. As Oral Çalışlar, a writer for the centre-left *Radikal* mentioned following the event, "some [like the PSAKD] organizations prefer making their demands heard in public protests, while some [like the *Cem Vakfı*] hope that by meeting with the government, they'll be able to produce a solution. Some want to abolish the DİB and some want to restructure it."⁸¹ Though Alevis may occasionally differ in their desired outcomes, their shared discourse of discontent often translates into common action, regardless of organizational background. Necdet Saraç, in discussing the particular problems of establishing a dialogue with the governing Islamist Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi – AKP*), offered this comment about the apparent impossibility of collective Alevi action:

In reference to the Alevis, stop saying that 'these guys can't even agree with each other'. The Alevis that you said 'couldn't agree with each other' filled the streets saying that '*cemevis* are central to Alevi belief, and should be recognized like mosques, synagogues, and churches' and collected 557,469 signatures in the

⁸⁰ Mükremin Albayrak, "Sivas ve Gazi'yi planlayan eller, yeni oyun peşinde" [The hands that planned Sivas and Gazi are back at the game], *Zaman*, 9 November 2008.

⁸¹ Oral Çalışlar, "İyi Alevi, kötü Alevi" [Good Alevi, bad Alevi], *Radikal*, 12 November 2008. "Bazı örgütler bunları miting meydanında dile getirmeyi tercih ediyor, bazıları da hükümetle görüşerek bir çözüm üretebileceğini umuyor."

process. So go, hit the streets and see which Alevi will say ‘*cemevis* are not central to Alevi belief’ or that ‘the *Diyanet*, Turkey’s biggest mosque with 100,000 Imams (paid for in part with Alevi’s tax money) also represents me.’⁸²

For years, successive Turkish governments have avoided addressing many of the most pressing concerns of its Alevi populace by adopting a position that may be summarized as follows, “well, it’s not clear how many different types of Alevi there are. They should first unite under one idea, then we’ll talk about whatever they want to say then.”⁸³

Given the diversity of Alevilik, it is unsurprising that Alevi have failed to produce a mutually agreeable set of characteristics identifying an Alevi. Despite this, I contend that the dismissive attitude displayed by successive governments which avoids addressing the Alevi issue until “they can figure out who they are” fails – in ways apart from the political insensitivity of such behaviour – to recognize a commonly articulated Alevi discourse of discontent. In this, I contend that the three *sine qua non* issues on which Alevi organizations seek rectification in their negotiations with the Turkish government constitute a venue of Alevi discursive unity that mobilizes far more members of the community than does the Hacibektaş Festival. While Alevi associations assuredly articulate other anxieties in their discussions with the state,⁸⁴ the *modus operandi* of the DİB, the nature of compulsory classes in the public school system, and the debates surrounding the legal status of the Alevi’s *cemevi*, have remained central areas of concern for all Alevi groups from the beginning of the 1990s until the present day.⁸⁵

⁸² Necdet Saraç, “Aleviliğe ‘don biçme’ sevdasından vazgeçin” [Enough with trying to put Alevilik into a straitjacket], *BirGün*, 23 December 2004. “Alevileri kastederek ‘bunlar kendi aralarında bile anlaşıyorlar’ edebiyatına da lütfen hızla son verin. O ‘anlaşıyorlar’ dediğiniz Aleviler, ‘Cemevleri, Alevilerin inanç merkezidir ve Cami, Mescit, Sinagog, Kilise gibi bir inanç merkezi olarak tanınmalıdır’ diye yola çıktılar ve 557 bin 469 imza topladılar. Buyurun, sokağa çıkın ve sorun bakalım, hangi Alevi ‘Cemevleri Alevilerin inanç merkezi değildir’ diyecek veya Aleviler’in de vergileriyle beslenen ‘Türkiye’nin 100 bin imamı en büyük camisi olan Diyanet, bu haliyle beni de temsil ediyor’ diyecek.”

⁸³ Necdet Saraç, “Memlekette Alevi aşkı artıyor” [The love of Alevi is increasing at home], *BirGün*, 30 November 2007. “E canım Aleviler de kaç parça belli değil. Önce tek bir görüş altında birleşsinler, ne istediklerini söylesinlerki ona göre konuşalım.”

⁸⁴ Examples include an expanded recognition of the Alevi reality on the state broadcaster, TRT, cf. Rıza Zelyut, *Aleviler ne yapmalı? Şehirlerdeki Alevilerin sorunları-çözümleri* [What must Alevi do? The problems and solutions of urban Alevi] (Istanbul: Yön Yayıncılık, 1993), 20-23, as well as the community’s discontent with the “museum” entrance fees to Hacı Bektaş’s shrine. Since it is a religious site, Alevi organizations demand that the provocative entrance fee be removed. Cf. Necdet Saraç, “Hacı Bektaş Veli,” *BirGün*, 12 August 2006; Fevzi Gümüş, “Anti-Demokratiklik ve Tükeniş” [Anti-democraticness and death], *Serçeşme* Special Edition (Aug. 2008), 2. Of increasing importance are also demands for the Madımak Hotel, the site of the Sivas massacre, to be converted into a museum promoting fraternity and human rights. Cf. “‘Madımak müze olana dek acımız dinmeyecek’” [‘Our pain won’t stop until the Madımak becomes a hotel’], *Evensel*, 7 July 2009.

⁸⁵ For a few selected examples of Alevi articulations of these three central demands cf. (in addition to the “Alevi Manifesto,” in *Cumhuriyet*, 15 May 1990), Cemal Şener, “Hacı Bektaş’tan Hacibektaş’a” [From

The fact that Alevi are composed of several differentiated and, occasionally, mutually hostile groups is indisputable. While the necessities of brevity prevent me from providing an extended discussion on the political stances of the various Alevi organizations, some summary remarks might prove beneficial. In broad terms, the *CEM Vakfı* advocates an Alevi presence within both the *Diyanet* and the compulsory religious classes, while the PSAKD favours the complete abolishment of both the DİB and the religious classes. The *vakıf*'s desire for greater understanding with the Turkish government is partly responsible for their offers of compromise on the issue, yet it also has a vested interest in promoting a place for Alevilik under the auspices of the DİB. The foundation, already one of Turkey's largest Alevi associations, has been training its own *dedes* for many years.⁸⁶ In the event that the state were to establish an Alevi branch under the auspices of the DİB, its relatively warm relations with the *vakıf* suggest that the latter would benefit from this advantage in increasing its influence throughout the Alevi community. The PSAKD, however, displays a far greater wariness on the question of rapprochement with the state: "After all," one PSAKD *dede* in Varto related, "If we get a wage from the Diyanet, then they'll be here telling us what to do and what not."⁸⁷ Of the major Alevi organizations, the PSAKD maintains the closest ideological linkages with the left; as such, it has an important stake in avoiding détente with the Turkish government since, through such action, it can position itself as an uncorrupted defender of the repressed. Despite the contrasting attitudes towards negotiations with the government on these three critical issues, associations like the *CEM Vakfı* and the PSAKD maintain an intra-Alevi discursive unity on the issue precisely because they mutually acknowledge the critical import of these questions for the community. In this, their goals may differ yet their discourse remains the same.

Hacı Bektaş to Hacıbektaş], *Nefes* 1, 10 (Aug. 1994), 8; Abbas Altundaş, "Hacı Bektaş şenlikleri ve düşündükleri" [The Hacı Bektaş festivities and its food for thought], *Cem* 5, 52 (Sep. 1995), 18; İlyas Üzümlü, *Günümüz Aleviliği* [Contemporary Alevilik] (Istanbul: İSAM Yayınları, 1997), 129-141; Ali Balkız, "Aleviler nasıl bir Türkiye'de yaşamak istiyorlar?" [What kind of Turkey do Alevi want to live in?] *Pir Sultan Abdal* 34 (Sep. 1999), 10-11; Necdet Saraç, "Alevi Konferansı'nın çağrısı" [The call of the Alevi Conference], *BirGün*, 1 April 2005; Mustafa Cemil Kılıç, *Hangi Sünnilik: Sünniliğe Yönelik Bazı Eleştiriler* [Which Sunnism? Some Criticisms of Sunnism] (Istanbul: Etik Yayınları, 2008), 168-9; Oral Çalışlar, "Aleviler general olmak istiyor, vali de" [Alevi want to generals and governors], *Radikal*, 10 November 2008; Halil Nebiler and Esra Cengiz, "Alevilik kuşatma altında: Avrupa Birliği, Alevilik ve Hak İhlalleri" [Alevi unders siege: The European Union, Alevilik, and rights violations], *BirGün* 15 August 2004; "Alevilerin üç fikirlerine itibar etmiyoruz" [We will not entertain the extreme suggestions of the Alevi], *Radikal*, 9 November 2008.

⁸⁶ H. Nedim Şahhüseynoğlu, *Alevi örgütlerin tarihsel süreci* [The historical development of Alevi organizations] (Ankara: Ayyıldız Yayınları, 2001), 145.

⁸⁷ Bülent Akbıyık, interview by author, Varto, Muş, Turkey, 28 July 2008. "Eğer Diyanet'ten maaş alırsak, onlar gelip bu kurallara uyacaksınız falan diyecekler."

As I outlined above, not only is it important to remember that the Alevi concern for these three issues does not entail complete indifference towards other matters that affect the community and that differing Alevi organizations have differing desired outcomes to these main issues, it is also essential to realize that Alevis themselves have not settled for this shared discourse of complaint in lieu of achieving the “shared consciousness” whose absence Cafer Koç lamented. Indeed, such a quest is far more resonant as an ideal in the subconscious of most Alevis than is the discourse of complaint on these three main issues. On a purely empirical level, however, I merely wish to indicate the modes through which Alevis presently attain a sense of commonality, instead of speculating on community desires for the attainment of “shared consciousness.” In this, I suggest that Alevis already possess a “unified” front in the form of collective complaint over the DİB, compulsory religious education, and *cemevis* in contrast to the government spokespersons who demand that Alevis first identify themselves *before* presenting their demands on these three main issues. In framing the ways in which Alevis attain this discursive unity, I will discuss the mediatic linkages that inculcate an awareness of these issues’ importance before presenting some of the more specific debates between the Turkish government and Alevi organizations in particular reference to the *Diyaset*, compulsory religious education, and *cemevis*.

The discursive unity that binds the Alevi community together based on a shared discontent with these three main issues is not contingent upon achieving any matter of physical unity; it is, instead, constituted primarily through various types of media. As was discussed above, the neoliberal reforms of the Turkish state during the 1980s permitted the emergence of new media that began broadcasting previously underrepresented views. This increase in media spaces accompanied the rise of newly constituted self-understandings among a variety of societal groups whose public self-identification had previously been repressed by the state’s unitarist discourse. Alevis, accordingly, began to broadcast not only on their own radio frequencies and television channels, but also established a number of print media. Here, while not all organizations within the Alevi community may choose to articulate these concerns through the vehicle of street protests, all Alevis have been successful in maintaining a dialogue regarding these three critical issues due to mediatic avenues that were previously unavailable to them.

In the process of articulating the importance of these *sine qua non* demands, I contend that the proliferation of Alevi media who constantly reiterate this troika of issues plays a significant role in creating a “common consciousness” among Alevis. While this consciousness

might not be the one Cafer Koç intended, it is a common consciousness whose roots lie in the sense of perceived injustice at the state's inaction towards their concerns. Through this constant reiteration, the urgency of these problems is reinforced among members of the media-consuming Alevi public. Alevis, thus, attain a "virtual" unity through the mutual recognition of these three issues as the ones that have the greatest impact on the community. Here, Alevi media outlets perform a critical role in providing a consciousness to the community, since they "[enable] an imagined linkage in the present time between subjects who are otherwise disconnected in space and totally ignorant of each other's existence."⁸⁸ Through this, rather than through the exercise of performative unity supposedly realized at the Hacibektaş Festival, Alevis can effect a "common consciousness" rooted in collective discontent over the same three issues.

The *Diyanet* Dilemma: A Representative for all Turkish Muslims?

Regardless of political or organizational background, Alevis have firmly argued for substantial changes to the structure of the *Diyanet* as part of their main corpus of demands on the political centre. The DİB, however, has proved intransigent on the subject, consistently dismissing Alevi claims as baseless. In general, the *Diyanet* has regularly dismissed Alevi demands for redress on the matter, arguing that, since Alevis term themselves Muslims, the DİB was a sufficient representative for all Turkish Muslims. In 1991, the head of the *Diyanet*, Said Yazıcıoğlu shared his opinions on the matter:

The DİB is an institution that provides religious services to all [Muslim] groups and, according to its constitutional commission, is entrusted with 'enlightening society on the question of religion.' In the implementation of these services, the ministry does not differentiate between certain sects (*mezhepler*), but caters to all Muslims – either Alevi or Sunni – regardless of sect.⁸⁹

In reducing Alevilik to the level of a mere Islamic sect, Alevi commentators such as Nejat Birdoğan have observed a policy of assimilation. For him, there was only a small difference between the innocent proclamation which stated that "actually, there's not really that much of an important difference between [us] – and anyway, we have the same Prophet and

⁸⁸ Alev Çınar, *Modernity, Islam, and Secularism in Turkey: Bodies, Places, and Time* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 139.

⁸⁹ Quoted in Pehlivan, *Aleviler ve Diyanet* [Alevis and the *Diyanet*], 36. "DİB, toplumun bütün kesimlerine din hizmeti sunan ve kanunî görevleri arasında 'toplumu din konusunda aydınlatma' görevi bulunan bir kuruluştur. Başkanlık bu hizmetleri yürütürken belirli mezheplere mensup yurttaşlara değil, ister Alevi, ister Sünni, hangi mezhepten olursa olsun bütün Müslümanlara hitap etmektedir." *Mezhep* is used somewhat ambiguously in Turkish. While it can denote sectarian affiliation (e.g.: The Alevi *mezhep*), it can also be used to connote the four main schools of Islam (e.g.: The Hanefi or Şafi'i *mezheps*). In this instance, it appears Yazıcıoğlu intends the former meaning.

book” and the more pernicious mentality which argued that “since we have the same book, then you should adhere to all of the Qur’an’s dictates.”⁹⁰ By accepting the existence of an Alevilik, yet relegating it to the status of a sub-section of Islam, not only has the DİB avoided the necessity of addressing the Alevi issue, but it has also accorded itself the opportunity to slowly assimilate Alevi beliefs into a mainstream, state-sponsored interpretation of the TİS. The tendencies were evident within the Ministry’s discourse in the early 1990s, and have remained present until contemporary times. Speaking in conversation with *Radikal*’s Oral Çalışlar, DİB spokesperson İzzet Er elucidated the ministry’s role in the new century:

The ministry’s mandate is to implement the aspects of the constitution that provide services to Islamic groups in a fashion that regards as valid the [country’s] different religious traditions. [Furthermore, it] does not [provide these services] to society according to differences, but rather provides them to our citizens without discrimination and regardless of school, spiritual nature, political viewpoint or thought in a spirit of enlightenment as it promotes a centrist understanding of Islam’s common and objective knowledge.⁹¹

As Yazıcıoğlu had pronounced some seventeen years earlier, DİB representatives still displayed a similar discourse that, while celebrating the country’s societal and religious diversity, arrogated to itself the sole right in providing religious guidance for these groups. Though the ministry retains the mission of being a centrist, unbiased moderator in these religious affairs, one must problematize precisely what such a “centrist” understanding of Islam implies. For many Alevis, the goal of the DİB is not so much to act as a mediator between varying Islamic groups, but to achieve some sort of ideological uniformity among all groups based on the dominant interpretation of the faith.

Moral Education or Sunni Indoctrination? Compulsory Religious Classes (*Zorunlu Din Dersleri*) in the Turkish Public School System

Since 1983, the Turkish state has implemented a series of mandatory religious classes for all pupils between the grades of four and eight. In this class on “Religious Culture and Morality” (*Din kültürü ve ahlâk bilgisi*), the student has five main tasks:

⁹⁰ Quoted in Pehlivan, *Aleviler ve Diyanet* [Alevis and the *Diyanet*], 24. “Aslında iki mezhep arasında önemli fark yok. Nasılsa aynı Peygamber’e aynı kitaba bağlıyız ... Madem aynı kitaba bağlıyız o halde Kuran’ın bütün hükümlerine uyun.”

⁹¹ Oral Çalışlar, “Cemevleri camiye eşdeğer ibadethane olamaz” [The *cemevi* cannot be a house of worship equivalent to the mosque], *Radikal*, 15 November 2008. “Başkanlık, İslam içi inanç ve dini gelenek farklılaşmasını sosyal ve tabii bir olgu olarak görmekle ve bunu yadırgamamakla birlikte, toplumu bu ayrışmalara göre değil, İslam’ın ortak ve nesnel bilgisini merkeze alarak aydınlatmakta mezhebi, meşrebi, siyasi görüşü ve düşüncesini ne olursa olsun, vatandaşlarımız arasında hiçbir şekilde ayırım yapmadan Kanun’un kendisine verdiği görevleri yerine getirmektedir.”

- 1) To learn the basic concepts of religion and the Islamic religion;
- 2) To understand the bases of belief, worship, and morality in Islam;
- 3) To gain the correct information and attitudes regarding religion and morality;
- 4) To show respect to the beliefs, thoughts, and rights of others;
- 5) To be aware that the Islamic faith and morality aims to create a society that is clean, healthy, honest, orderly, and charitable.⁹²

Notwithstanding the debate regarding whether *compulsory* religious classes accords with state secularism, many Alevis have taken umbrage with the pro-Sunni presentation of the classes. Here, the generalities of the class' teacher's manual fail to provide any sort of meaningful indication as to the true nature of the course: In the opinion of many Alevi commentators, the class is "nothing except a *de facto* instruction in Sunni beliefs."⁹³ Such a practice further reflects the trend we observed above in which the DİB presents itself as a neutral and unbiased arbiter among all Muslims. However, the Education Ministry's vague mission statement regarding the pupil's goal in understanding "belief, worship, and morality in Islam" functions, for all intents and purposes, as a euphemism for the inculcation of the Sunni understanding of Islam. In this way, one can identify the compulsory religious classes as an important component of the larger discourse of assimilation that has received government sanction since the 1980 coup. While the course's incorporation into the school curriculum was designed as an antidote to the allure of both communism and radical Islam, its heavy focus on promoting the Turkish-Islam Synthesis has left many Alevis convinced that it is an assimilatory tool of the Religious Affairs Ministry. Because of this perception, the compulsory religious classes have come to constitute one of the essential components of the Alevi community's catalogue of complaints.

In the 2002 report regarding the progression of Turkey's judiciary in harmonizing its laws preparatory to joining the European Union, an EU commission raised concerns with the nature of these classes, stating that "they cover descriptions of different religions, but are considered by many religious minorities to be subjective and inaccurate."⁹⁴ The Ministry of Education undertook some steps to rectify the problems cited in the commission's report, but

⁹² Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, "Din Kültürü ve Ahlâk Bilgisi Dersi Öğretim Programı" [Teacher's Guide for the Class of Religious Culture and Morality], <http://orgm.meb.gov.tr/OzelEgitimProgramlar/meslekiegitimmerkprog/din.htm>. "1) Din ve İslâm dinine ilişkin temel kavramları tanıy; 2) İslâm'ın iman, ibadet ve ahlâk esaslarını tanıy; 3) Din ve ahlâk hakkında doğru bilgi ve tutumlar kazanır; 4) Başkalarının inançlarına, düşüncelerine ve haklarına saygı gösterir; 5) İslâm dini ve ahlâkının; temiz, sağlıklı, dürüst, düzenli ve yardımsever bir toplum oluşturmayı amaçladığının farkında olur."

⁹³ Necdet Saraç, "Zorunlu din dersleri" [Compulsory religious classes], *BirGün*, 2 September 2005. "...fiili olarak Sünniliğin, Sünni inancının öğretilmesinden başka bir şey değildir."

⁹⁴ Commission of the European Communities, *2002 Regular Report on Turkey's Progress Towards Accession*, 9 October 2002, 39.

many Alevi have remained sceptical and suspicious about the sincerity of any of the changes. In response to a later court case opened by an Alevi citizen against the Turkish state at the European Court for Human Rights (ECHR), the Education Ministry enacted a number of cosmetic changes, yet “the only change they made was to insert an extra definition regarding Alevi in the religious class textbooks – something along the lines of ‘Alevi are those that love Ali.’⁹⁵ Alevi have every right to react against this.”⁹⁶ Though the comment was somewhat facetious, the actual substance of the ministry’s changes is not far beyond the quote’s sentiment. Lawyers for the DİB and the Education Ministry argue that the class textbooks allot a sufficient amount of space to other religions, yet PSAKD director Kâzım Genç took great issue with this assertion in a 2006 interview: “In the textbook for the seventh grade class, there is a fifteen page section on Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, and Baha’ism, but in the other sections, Islam is the only subject there. Where is this ‘religious culture?’ What they’re doing here is getting our kids to see with tunnel vision – ‘you will believe in *this* religion,’”⁹⁷ (italics mine). In all, despite court orders issued by both the EU and the ECHR, the Turkish government has steadfastly refused to make substantive changes to the curriculum of the compulsory religious classes. Instead, despite protestations of inclusiveness, Alevi of all political backgrounds share a discontent over the textbooks’ pro-Sunni bias and erroneous presentation of Alevi beliefs.

⁹⁵ This phrase, or at least close approximations, has had public resonance since it was first used by then-Istanbul mayor R. Tayyip Erdoğan during a television interview. Asked something about Alevi, Erdoğan responded that “if Alevilik means the love of Ali, then sorry, but I’m more Alevi than you.”/“Alevilik olayını Hz. Ali’yi ... sevmek olarak tanımlıyorsanız, kusura bakmayın; ben sizden daha fazla Aleviyim.” Since that interview, the phrase has become a rhetorical tool used to describe a situation in which a Sunni actor attempts to dismiss Alevi claims of difference by declaring that a) Alevilik consists merely of appreciating the sacrifices Ali made like all Muslims, and b) Alevi are “bad” Muslims since they fail to honour Ali in the correct way of the “good” Muslim. Cf. Élise Massicard, “Les Alévis et le discours politique de l’unité en Turquie depuis les années 1980,” in *Aspects of the Political Language in Turkey: (19th-20th Centuries)*, ed. Hans-Lukas Kieser (Istanbul: Isis, 2002), 121.

⁹⁶ Oral Çalışlar, “Alevilerin Rönesansı ve AKP İktidarı” [The Alevi Renaissance and AKP Power], *Radikal*, 11 November 2008. “Yaptıkları tek değişiklik din dersi kitaplarına Alevilikle ilgili bir tanım eklemeleri oldu. ‘Alevi Ali’yi sevenlere denir’ şeklinde. Aleviler haklı olarak buna tepki gösteriyorlar.”

⁹⁷ Kâzım Genç, “Aleviliğin İslamdan En Büyük Farkı Tanrıya Bakışıdır” [Alevilik’s greatest difference from Islam is its view of God], in *Aleviler Aleviliği Tartışıyor* [Alevi debate Alevilik], 76. “7. sınıf ders kitabının 15 sayfalık bölümünde İslamiyetin, Hıristiyanlığın, Museviliğin, Budizmin ve Bahailiğin anlatıldığı diğer bölümlerde yine İslamın anlatıldığı görülmektedir. Hani din kültürüydü, burada yapılan şudur, çocuklarımıza at gözlüğü takılmaktadır. Şu inanca inancaksın denilmektedir.”

Not a Mosque, Church, or Synagogue: Debates Surrounding *Cemevis*' Status as a Legitimate House of Worship

Despite the lack of official, legal recognition of either their community or their *cemevis*, Alevi have striven to construct *cemevis* in both rural and urban settings during the past twenty years. Whereas Alevi in pre-urbanization times held regular *ayin-i cems* (ceremonies of union), the edifice in which they performed the *semah* (ritual dance) was not often a building constructed especially for that purpose. Moreover, the possibility of official censure precluded many Alevi from leaving any architectural legacy that would identify them as members of a heterodox religious group. With the changes since 1980, however, *cemevis* have created a space in which Alevilik is increasingly being transformed into a “congressional” religion.⁹⁸ The transformative aspect of the buildings is a point corroborated by Alevi commentator Ali Yıldırım:

Cemevis, which constitute the places of worship within the Alevi faith, are not only the symbolic houses of worship of the Alevi path in a religious sense, but give meaning and value to all aspects of the Alevi path. Members of the Alevi faith think that, with the building of *cemevis*, they can bring [Alevilik] a concrete, tangible quality.⁹⁹

In this, *cemevis* are the architectural manifestation of the increasingly public constitution of an Alevi self-identification and, in the process, serve to “Alevize” the surrounding space. Though Alevi have succeeded in constructing purpose-specific edifices for the performance of their rites, the group has repeatedly failed in its effort to secure official recognition of the buildings as houses of worship. This failure to acquire official recognition has been one of the most essential factors in uniting Alevi in this common discourse of discontent.

Despite these demands, representatives of the *Diyanet* have refused to recognize the legality of the *cemevi* as a place of worship on numerous occasions. In 2005, a spokesperson for the DİB was quoted as stating that “earnest attempts to portray the *cemevi*, which, in Alevi-Bektaşî culture and tradition, was known as a [*dergâh* or other manner of dervish convents] as a house of worship equal to that of a mosque, church, or synagogue is a contradiction of historical experience and scientific criteria.”¹⁰⁰ Three years later, the ministry’s head reiterated the reasons

⁹⁸ Şehriban Şahin, “The Rise of Alevism as a Public Religion,” 479.

⁹⁹ Ali Yıldırım, “Alevilik, Bağımsız Bir Dindir” [Alevilik is an independent religion], in *Aleviler Aleviliği Tartışıyor* [Alevi Debate Alevilik], 118. “Alevi inancının ibadethaneleri olan cemevleri de Alevi yolunun simgesel bir mâbedi olarak yalnızca inaçsal boyutta değil Alevi yolunu tüm boyutlarında bir anlam, bir değer ifade ediyor. Alevi inancına mensup insanlar bu birikimi inşaa ettikleri cemevleri ile somut, elle tutulur hale getirdiklerini düşünüyorlar.”

¹⁰⁰ Quoted in Berk Özenç, *Avrupa İnsan Hakları Sözleşmesi ve İnaç Özgürlük* [The European Contract of Human Rights and Religious Freedom] (Istanbul: Kitap Yayınevi, 2005), 129. “Alevi-Bektaşî kültür ve

for his board's refusal to accept the *cemevi* as a separate place of worship: "Just as no school or *tarikât* (Sufi order) that views itself as part of Islam has established an alternative to the mosque throughout Islam's history, no places governed by Sufi etiquette and precepts has ever been perceived or defined as a house of worship in place of the mosque."¹⁰¹ In these selections, the DİB echoes its arguments regarding the debates outlined above: In the process of arguing that Alevis must accept the mosque as their only legitimate place of worship because the community does not explicitly disavow Islam,¹⁰² the Ministry again demonstrates its categorization of Alevilik as a sub-stratum of Islam. While legitimately "separate" religions such as Christianity and Judaism are permitted complete freedom in acquiring legal recognition for their places of worship, Alevis remain subject to the broad discursive boundaries of the state that, despite its nominal mandate to represent all Muslims impartially, has typically attempted to homogenize the nation's (amorphous) Muslim population into a unit based on the TİS.

Concomitant with the state's refusal to recognize *cemevis* on a par with other religious buildings have been the allegations that the Turkish state is actively supporting the construction of mosques in Alevi villages throughout the country. Alevis contend that the construction of such edifices in non-Sunni population areas amounts to a TİS-based attempt at assimilating Alevis into the Sunni mainstream.¹⁰³ Spokespersons for the *Diyanet*, however, strenuously deny that there is any program of mosque building within the country; instead, they assert, mosques are built with private funds, even in Alevi areas.¹⁰⁴ Reducing the matter to a question of financing, however, obscures the larger issue. Cemal Şener argued in 1993 that many Alevis refused to actively oppose the construction of mosques in their villages "since one understands that standing against

geleneğinde dergâh, tekke, zaviye ve niyaz evi olarak tanımlanan bugünkü cemevlerinin ısrarla cami, kilise ve sinagog gibi birer mabet olarak gösterilmeye çalışması tarihi tecrübeye ve bilimsel kriterlere aykırıdır." See also Adnan Keskin, "Cemevi, dini değil" [The *cemevi* is not religious], *Radikal*, 25 January 2005.

¹⁰¹ "AKP'nin 'cemevi' takiyyesi" [The AKP's 'cemevi' dissimulation], *Cumhuriyet*, 11 August 2008. "İslam tarihinin hiçbir döneminde kendisini İslam içinde görüp de camie alternatif başka bir ibadethane kuran mezhep ve tarikât olmadığı gibi, tasavvufî adap ve erkânın yürütüldüğü mekânlar da hiçbir zaman caminin alternatifi bir ibadethane olarak algılanmamış ve isimlendirilmemiştir."

¹⁰² As has been outlined above, many Alevis, of course, consider themselves to be beyond the bounds of Islam. However, the state's hegemony in the matter allows it to conveniently deploy rhetorical tools which dismiss all Alevi claims to the group's non-Islamic nature as factually baseless. Due to the DİB's control of the discursive boundaries, they can label these types of Alevis as "bad" and, consequently, unrepresentative of the "good" Alevis who correctly identify themselves as being part of the larger Muslim community (*ümmet*).

¹⁰³ Joost Jongerden, "Violation of Human Rights and the Alevis in Turkey," in *Turkey's Alevi Enigma*, 80.

¹⁰⁴ Çalışlar, "Cemevleri camiye eşdeğer ibadethane olamaz" [The *cemevi* cannot be a house of worship equivalent to the mosque], *Radikal*, 15 November 2008.

the mosques is the same as standing against the state.”¹⁰⁵ Thus, regardless of the actual veracity of the human rights violations identified by Jongerden or the question of voluntary financing argued by the DİB, Alevi perceive the mosque to be a symbolic representation of the state’s power. Though the republican reformers did not permit Alevi claims of difference within the public sphere, their militantly secular policies ensured that Alevi were spared the threat of assimilation into Sunni Islam. With the 1980 coup and the implementation of policy based on the TİS, however, thousands of mosques have been constructed throughout the country; those built in Alevi areas are perceived by the locals as the physical manifestation of the state’s assimilatory policies. While Alevi may acquiesce to the building of mosques in their villages out of fear of opposing the state, permitting their construction is also a strategic necessity in the competition for scarce resources. As one PSAKD member explained to *Cumhuriyet*,

Mosques are built in Alevi villages because villagers are persuaded by the local headman (*muhtar*) that, in the interests of not being discriminated against, building a mosque will demonstrate their conformity [to the surrounding villages]. [More importantly, building mosques] allows villagers to access better services, like roads, water, and clinics ... [The government,] in exchange for the villagers getting roads, water, healthcare, and infrastructure, wants them to build a mosque and take an imam. So the village gets a mosque, but after the imam comes, the assimilation begins.¹⁰⁶

Thus, Alevi villagers may not be compelled either to construct mosques in their villages or to acquiesce to their construction by outsiders, but a settlement without a mosque would remain at a severe disadvantage in any attempt to secure state funding for improving its infrastructure. In this way, the *Diyanet* can informally achieve uniformity – at least insofar as it can Sunnize the landscape – through the withholding of services to population areas that fail to participate in the spatial realization of the TİS.

For members of the DİB, the legitimacy of this policy of Sunnification comes, paradoxically, from secularist Kemalist law. According to Article 2 of the 1924 *Köy Kanunu* (Law on Villages), “a village consists of people, together with their groves, gardens, and fields, living in either shared or detached housing and possessing a mosque, school, (summer) pasture,

¹⁰⁵ Cemal Şener, “Atatürk’ün resminden korkan imam” [The imam who was afraid of Atatürk’s picture], *Cumhuriyet*, 19 August 1993. “... Çünkü camiye karşı gelmek devlete karşı gelmekle özdeş anlaşılıyor.”

¹⁰⁶ Mehmet Menekşe, “Alevi asimilasyonu hızla sürüyor” [The assimilation of Alevi continues with speed], *Cumhuriyet*, 3 January 2008. “Alevi köylerine cami yapılmasının sebebi köy halkının daha iyi hizmet alabilmesi için yol, su, sağlık ocağı gibi hizmetleri alabilmesi için köylerine muhtarların girişimiyle, köylüye de işte bizleri ayırmaları, cami yaptırırsak onlar gibi olduğumuzu, farkımızın olmadığını gösteririz diye ikna ediyorlar... Köylü yol, su, sağlık, alt yapı hizmeti alabilmek adına köyüne camii yapıp, imam istiyor. Köye cami yapıp, imam geldikten sonra da asimilasyon başlıyor.”

and (coppice) forest in common.”¹⁰⁷ As such, Alevi areas of settlement that do not possess a mosque are, legally at least, not truly villages and are consequently denied certain access to state resources available to other, officially recognized “villages.” Reference to regulations like the *Köy Kanunu* by members of the state for the purposes of denying Alevi demands are symptomatic of a larger issue in which members of the DİB dissimulate their desire for greater Muslim uniformity by appealing to the “sacredness” of the secular Turkish Constitution. Here, “sacredness” does not entail any manner of religiosity; rather, the constitution, as a document first implemented by the founders of the republic, possesses an indisputable legitimacy on account of its association with some of the Turkish nation-state’s most important discursive “truths.”¹⁰⁸ Thus, given the axiomatic legitimacy of the constitution, all subsequent debates questioning the permissibility of certain actions can be dismissed with an appeal to the *a priori* supremacy of the document. In legitimizing the policies of the TİS, members of the *Diyanet* can render discursively invalid Alevi demands for the recognition of the *cemevi* – a pronouncement it made in 2005.¹⁰⁹ Here the constitution’s legitimacy is never problematized or questioned because of its “sacred” antecedent. Instead, its invocation is a convenient tool for the short-circuiting of all discussion on the matter at hand. In effect, those implementing such Sunnification policies can legitimize their mission by claiming a “compulsion” inherent in the bureaucratic apparatus created by the state’s laws.¹¹⁰

Thus, we have observed a few of the legitimizing strategies employed by state actors for the denial of recognition to some of the Alevi community’s most critical demands. But while

¹⁰⁷ Köy Kanunu [Law on Villages], no. 442, 18 March 1924, Article 2. “Cami, mektep, otlak, yaylak, baltalık gibi orta malları bulunan ve toplu veya dağınık evlerde oturan insanlar bağ ve bahçe ve tarlalarıyla bir köy teşkil ederler.”

¹⁰⁸ While the appeal to laws from the 1920s is a task requiring less effort due the aggressively secularizing nature of the period, I admit that that appeal to one of the many constitutional changes promoting a greater public role for Islam implemented in the aftermath of the 1980 coup requires more effort in convincing members of the public as to its legitimacy. Nonetheless, the retention of a putative ideology of secularism in every Turkish constitution maintains this “unbroken” line to the first republican laws.

¹⁰⁹ Necdet Saraç, “Cemevi yasağı resimleşiyor” [The prohibition against *cemevis* is becoming official], *BirGün*, 3 February 2005.

¹¹⁰ Such was the mentality of the *miiftü* in Pülümür, a small town in the heavily Alevi Kurdish district of Tunceli. When I asked the *miiftü* his opinion on the assignment of Sunni religious officials to a place that, presumably, produced few locals that actually went to mosque for *namaz* (daily prayer), he replied that he, as a civil servant of the Turkish state, had no choice but to accept the assignment. The central government provides services for every sub-district (*ilçe*) in the country, including healthcare, education, police, and religious officials. For him, the fact that he was a Sunni *miiftü* in a region with no local Sunnis (a history of militant activity meant, however, that there was a large security apparatus in the area composed of people drawn from non-Alevi outsiders) was immaterial: State law made provision for a *miiftü* in every sub-district of Turkey; he, as a civil servant, was merely performing his duty in accepting his posting to Pülümür.

members of the DİB can appeal to the axiomatic authority of the constitution in pursuing their aims, the constant lack of redress on issues such as the *Diyanet*, compulsory religious education, and the legal status of *cemevis* has occasioned a measure of discursive commonality among Alevi. Here, the united front they constitute in articulating their discourse of discontent on these issues is far more evident than the unity displayed at their putative central focus, the Hacibektaş Festival. I have argued that, through the growth of new media spaces occasioned by Turkey's neoliberal revolution in the 1980s, Alevi have not only succeeded in challenging the previous hegemony of the state's unitarist discourse of Turkish nationalism, but have also been able to construct a "reading public" united and reinforced by new Alevi media in the form of journals, newspapers, radio, television, and, increasingly, the internet. Through these, I contend that Alevi remain ever conscious of the three aforementioned issues and thus unite with other Alevi in demanding that the Turkish government address their concerns. While disparate Alevi groups may disagree on their final, desired outcomes in relation to the DİB, compulsory religious education, and houses of worship, the fact of their prominence within the minds of all Alevi groups produces a community that is united by issues, if not by final goals.

3: MORE SECULAR THAN THOU: ARTICULATING ALEVI DIFFERENCE WITH A “UNIVERSALIST” DISCOURSE

“*Hepimiz insan mıyız?*” (“Are we all humans?”): Using the Universal as a Tool of Differentiation

We had just attended a wedding on a rather warm day in Tunceli. The evening, however, brought with it a cool and refreshing breeze so several guests and I repaired to a terrace to relax and enjoy a chat (*sohbet*). One of the guests, a lawyer from Istanbul, began to recount an experience from his high school days during the late 1990s. On the first day of school, he related, the teacher went around the room, asking the children about their hometowns. Being Alevi, he was interested in learning whether his new pupils were also of Alevi background. The first student said that he was from Tunceli. “Ah, very good,” replied the teacher. The second student said he was from Kahramanmaraş. Somewhat apprehensive, the teacher asked whereabouts in the district. “Elbistan,”¹ answered the student, and the visibly relieved teacher offered a second “Ah, very good.” The third student was from Erzincan, and again the teacher nodded his approval. Then came the fourth student: “And where are you from?” the teacher asked. “From Bursa,”² responded the student. The teacher immediately halted the activity with an abrupt “Well, never mind then,” though not before quickly adding that, in the end, “we’re all humans.”³

For the teacher, the game was ended prematurely by the presence of the student from Bursa who, in all likelihood, was Sunni. Lest anyone in the class – particular the Sunni pupils – deduce the instructor’s partiality towards Alevi students, the teacher offered a perfunctory, though not altogether convincingly honest attempt at choosing terminology that would unite those present, instead of dividing them. His usage of the term, however, was a marked exception to the general way in which Alevis deploy the term “humanity” in their relations with Sunnis. Far from being a term of inclusion, this chapter suggests that appeals to humanity by Alevis usually serve the purposes of *distancing* the community from their Sunni neighbours.

¹ Elbistan is a sub-district (*ilçe*) of Kahramanmaraş known for its high Alevi population. As such, it stands in sharp contradistinction to the regional centre whose inhabitants are viewed with a certain amount of suspicion due to the city’s 1979 massacre and the general perception that its residents typically vote for far right or radical Islamist parties.

² Bursa is a large, mostly Sunni city in western Anatolia.

³ “Neyse, hepimiz insanız.”

This chapter, thus, seeks to investigate some of the politics of claiming difference that members of the Alevi community have practised in the post-1980 Turkish state. Here, I posit that while providing both a concrete definition of the Alevi self-understanding and an outline of the group's boundaries vis-à-vis the country's Sunni majority is impossible, many members of the community resort to a certain terminological inventory that serves to differentiate them as Alevis from the wider Sunni society. I suggest that Alevis possess a terminological repertoire that revolves around the deployment of terms such as "human," "modern" (*çağdaş* or *modern*), "secular" (*laik*), "tolerant" (*hosgörülü* or *tahammüllü*), and "women's equality" (*kadınların eşitliği*) – along with many others – that function as effective discursive boundary markers for the community. The usage of this repertoire for the purposes of accentuating difference is further supplemented by an attempt to demonstrate the ancient historicity of such claims in an effort to gain legitimacy. In strengthening their discursive differences, Alevis make a claim to "modernity in the past" in which Alevi modernity (*çağdaşlık*) is portrayed as an inherent Alevi quality, even when referring to a sixteenth-century context. These claims, in turn, are further reinforced by the deployment of "Europe" as a concept designed to legitimize Alevi moral superiority over their Sunni compatriots. By positing "Europe" as the most appropriate yardstick for evaluating a level of civilization, this discourse suggests an affinity between Alevilik and the fruits of the universal Enlightenment and, in the process, implies a discursive exclusion of the country's Sunni majority. Strikingly, the content of these claims displays a remarkable degree of consistency over the past number of years. Despite the influence the Sivas Massacre had on the emergence of Alevi organizations, the massacre, along with the later military intervention against the RP in 1997 as well as the first election victory of the AKP in 2002, has not significantly altered the deployment of this terminological repertoire. In this, one observes profound continuity between the terms Alevis used at the beginning of the 1990s and the terms they have used into the new century.

These practices are important aspects of a wider context. More specifically, I argue that the usage of these self-identifying techniques are part of an Alevi strategy for securing both greater recognition from other members of society as well as an improved legal status from the Turkish government. I link these efforts at claiming difference with more practical concerns about "what needs to be done" to ameliorate the conditions of the community within Turkish society. Here, I identify both Alevis' deployment of somewhat questionably high population figures as a discursive tool designed to draw attention to their physical reality within Turkish society, as well as their stated aim of organizing the community into associations for the purposes

of more effectively representing their interests. In discussing both these discursive and practical strategies, my comments here provide an effective springboard to subsequent discussions regarding one of the country's most vexing, contemporary problems – namely, exploring precisely what being a Turkish citizen actually entails. I suggest that by first exploring these aforementioned issues, one can arrive at a better understanding of the place of marginal communities within the contemporary framework of the unitarist Turkish state.

Strategies of Alevi Differentiation: The Particular in Universal Form

In addition to deploying a discourse of complaint on several key issues, many Alevi are united by a commonly articulated discourse that serves to differentiate their community from the wider Sunni society. In so doing, Alevi often utilize the terminological tools listed above to form a mutually shared “common ground” that serves to distinguish Alevi from Sunnis. In effect, it is a terminological practice in which Alevi of vastly differing political viewpoints can participate. Here, it is important to emphasize that the exact terms of this discursive inventory are variable among Alevi according to their political affiliation, meaning that alternative semantic tools may be deployed to differentiate the actors not only from the surrounding Sunni society, but also from fellow Alevi. Depending on their proclivity, individual Alevi may choose to highlight their difference with terms that emphasize their Kemalist, leftist, or Kurdish background (among other political self-understandings), yet there is a tendency for the core of their semantic repertoire to revolve around terms such as “modern,” “secular,” “tolerant,” and “humanist” when accentuating the differences between themselves and the wider Sunni society.

For Doğan Bermek, the director of one of the smaller Alevi organizations (*Alevi Vakfı* – Alevi Foundation), the attempts of some Alevi organizations to posit their faith as outside of Islam stems from a near pathological desire to draw firm boundaries between themselves and the wider orthopraxic (Sunni) Islamic world. In reference to Sunni Muslims, he suggests that many Alevi display a mentality that says, “if that is what a Muslim is, then I am not a Muslim.”⁴ In this, Alevi register their disapproval of Sunni Islam by seeking to completely disassociate themselves from the religion. While the scope of Bermek's argument is restricted to taking issue with many Alevi who view Islam as a monolithic, conservative entity, his comment is indicative

⁴ Doğan Bermek, “Aleviler Müslümandır” [Alevi are Muslims], in *Aleviler Aleviliği Tartışıyor* [Alevi Debate Alevilik], 44. “İslamı ya da Sünni İslamı tek İslam inancı kabul etmek gibi bir hataları var. ‘O Müslümanca ben değilim’ gibi düşünüyorlar,” (italics mine).

of a mentality shared by many Alevi, regardless of whether or not they assert Alevilik's Islamic nature. Alevi often engage not so much in referring to their heterodox tenets in their self-definitions, but rather in constructing a self-understanding that stands in inverse opposition to what they themselves consider the central elements of the dominant Sunni self-understanding. In the words of Gürcan Koçan and Ahmet Öncü, "this means that Alevi, as a group, have come to reinterpret their moral codes and values in relation to their perceived counterpart, Sunni Islam, institutionally supported by the state."⁵ Thus, with regard to Alevi self-ascriptions, the characteristics of the community are conceived merely as a refutation of the qualities of the dominant Sunni society. In suggesting this, I do not mean to deny the community any agency in producing their own self-understanding, thereby suggesting that Alevi are inherently incapable of creating their own corpus of identifying characteristics independent of any Sunni action. While I do not wish to essentialize the Alevi worldview into an entity that is *only* a negation of Sunni qualities, suggesting that some negation does occur is certainly corroborated by both primary and secondary literature.⁶ Indeed, such a practice is consistent with a discourse that presents an Alevi protagonist that has been repeatedly victimized throughout history by successive states – either of the Ottoman or Turkish variety.⁷ In the end, I suggest that approaching the Alevi worldview from this vantage point will greatly aid our understanding of how Alevi seek to articulate their difference within the contemporary Turkish Republic.

The Techniques of Claiming Alevi Difference

Ahmet Yaşar Ocak has noted the language with which many Alevi have chosen to define themselves. In his analysis, he indicates the conspicuous absence of distinctive Alevi religious characteristics within the self-understandings of many Alevi in post-1980 Turkey, arguing instead that Alevi appeal to many of the terms listed above when describing themselves:

Alevi are able to agree on only a single point from the various trends found within the wide spectrum of their society, namely the idea that Alevilik is an 'Atatürkist, democratic, secular, freedom-promoting, and modern' belief system

⁵ Gürcan Koçan and Ahmet Öncü, "Citizen Alevi in Turkey: Beyond Confirmation and Denial," *Journal of Historical Sociology* 17, 4 (Dec. 2004), 476. In suggesting this, Koçan and Öncü borrow from Friedrich Nietzsche's idea of "slave morality," in which the morality of the oppressed is presented as a negation of the morality of the oppressor. Cf. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Francis Golffing (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1956), 170-1.

⁶ Within the body of secondary literature, Bozarslan has also remarked upon this. According to his observations, Alevi typically adopt a flexible "we" attitude in social relationships with Sunnis. Cf. Hamit Bozarslan, "L'alévisme et l'impossible équation du nationalisme en Turquie," 134.

⁷ See my discussion of Hamit Bozarslan's periodization of Alevi historiography in the introduction.

and that the Alevi community has been demonstrating, protecting, and defending these modern values for centuries. If we pay close attention to this definition, we see that there is no emphasis or reference to Alevilik's classical values.⁸

Leaving aside the concerns Ocak rightly raises about the lack of "classical Alevi" values in these self-descriptions,⁹ it is unsurprising that the deployment of this universalist language for the purposes of effecting a discursive exclusion is, when examined more closely, highly problematic. While I do not wish to elaborate at length on some of the inconsistencies of this discursive practice, a few words on the characteristics of the "Sunni antagonist" excluded by this semantic process might prove beneficial to my overall discussion. On one level, the seemingly incoherent semantic techniques of Alevi in delineating difference stem from a failure to problematize who, precisely, is being demarcated and excluded by such rhetorical tools. While the Alevi worldview may possess an oppositional viewpoint that seeks to negate the "oppressor," this oppressor remains largely unproblematized and undifferentiated. Such unproblematization is evident in the following example: During the 2008 Hacı Bektaş Festival, Ali Öztürk, an Alevi from Ankara, carefully emphasized to me Alevilik's most important characteristics, differentiating in the process his community from those actors he considered to be incapable of sharing these qualities. "If you are hurt, do not hurt back," he said. "This is Alevilik. We have no discrimination – women and men are equal in Alevilik. Did you, as a foreigner, encounter any discrimination here? No, here, it's impossible, not from Alevi. But these Sunni guys," he said,

⁸ Ahmet Yaşar Ocak, "Aleviliğin Çözüm Bekleyen İki Temel Problematığı: Tarih ve Teoloji" [Two fundamental *problematiques* awaiting solution in Alevilik: History and theology], in *Bilgi Toplumunda Alevilik* [Alevilik in the information community], 163. By "classical values," Ocak means values drawn from Alevilik's heterodox past, such as a belief in metempsychosis (*tenasüh*). "Alevi toplumunun bu geniş yelpazede yer alan bütün eğilimleri, bir tek söylemde anlaşıyorlar: Bu söylem Aleviliğin 'Atatürkçü, demokratik, laik, özgürlükçü, çağdaş' bir inanç sistemi ve Alevi toplumunun da bu çağdaş değerleri yüzyıllardan beri sergileyen, koruyan, savunan bir toplum olduğu söylemidir. Dikkat edilirse bu söylem, Aleviliğin klâsik değerlerine vurgu yapmamakta, onlara referans vermemektedir."

⁹ This is not to say that cultural aspects from Alevi history have absolutely no place in these discursive practices. Indeed, one frequently encounters aphorisms – usually from Hacı Bektaş Veli – that can be substituted for these universal principles; thus, "regarding all 72 nations with one eye" (*72 millete aynı nazarla bakma*), "seeing God in humans" (*Tanrıyı insanda görme*), or admonishing "one not to hurt back even if one is hurt" (*incinsen de incitme*) function as respective equivalents for "equality," "humanism," and "tolerance." While the form of these phrases is different, they serve the same discursive goals as the universalist terminology. Though one can find these aphorisms in many Alevi self-identifications, one finds the first two together in Erdoğan Aydın's evaluation of Alevilik. Erdoğan Aydın, "Anadolu Aleviliği Hz. Ali Kökenli Değil" [Anatolian Alevilik has no roots with Ali], *Aleviler Aleviliği Tartışıyor* [Alevi debate Alevilik], 134.

gesturing to the rostrum where Turkish President and AKP dignitary Abdullah Gül was about to address the crowd, “they’re discriminatory. But we Alevi aren’t like that.”¹⁰

In making his argument, Öztürk appealed to me, the researcher, as a neutral referee who could corroborate his statement based on the empirical evidence I had witnessed while attending the festival. While interesting, what is more important for our purposes is his selection of the theme of gender equality from the inventory of the most commonly used semantic tools of differentiation to highlight an ideological separation between Alevi and “Sunni.” Closer inspection, however, reveals that beneath the broad signifier of “Sunni,” the true signified is not a vaguely imagined “Sunni,” but political – and potentially radical – Islam in the form of the AK Party.¹¹ In illustrating difference with these semantic tools, Alevi occasionally imagine an oppositional and amorphous antagonist. When this antagonist is more clearly defined, however, it becomes evident that the true subject of signification is, in reality, only a small aspect of the amorphous “Sunni” whole and that the vast majority of non-radical Sunni Turks may effectively participate in the universalist rhetoric Öztürk deploys to delineate his communal boundaries. Despite this, what remains significant is the maintenance of these discursive – albeit blurred – boundaries. Regardless of the problematic nature of claiming difference in this fashion, the usage of such semantic practices reflects historical circumstances in which Alevi have come to discursively distance themselves from an antagonistic Sunni other due to communal perceptions that dominant Sunni classes have persecuted the region’s Alevi throughout history.¹² This

¹⁰ Ali Öztürk, interview by author, Hacıbektaş, Nevşehir, Turkey, 16 August 2008. “‘İncinsen de incitme.’ Alevilik şu: Bizde hic ayırım yok, kadınlar ve erkekler Alevilik’te eşittir. Sen yabancısın, burada [Hacıbektaş’ta] ayrımcılıkla karşılaştın mı? Burada olamaz, Alevilerden olamaz. Bu Sünniler ama, onlar ayrımcılık yapıyorlar. Ama biz Aleviler onlar gibi değiliz.”

¹¹ While some staunch Kemalists have raised concerns about the possibility that the AKP has a hidden Islamic agenda, others see the party’s electoral successes as an indication of the triumph of politically moderate (instead of radical) Islam. For an extended discussions, see Ömer Çaha, “The Turkish Election of November 2002 and the Rise of ‘Moderate’ Political Islam,” *Alternatives: Turkish Journal of International Relations* 2, 1 (2003): 95-116; among books, Hakan Yavuz’s *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey* is also an invaluable resource.

¹² In reference to Bozarslan’s contention that Alevi have perceived the post-1950 Turkish as antagonistic towards them, one might argue that these current Alevi strategies for claiming difference stem from a desire to return to a form of “true Kemalism” (an ideology which shares much of the same terminology as the Alevi discourse depicted in this chapter) that became less evident in the policies of successive Turkish governments post-1950. In stark contradistinction to the policies of the militantly secular CHP during the one-party era, these governments increasingly appealed to Islamic mores in the quest for votes. While a segment of the Alevi population most certainly perceives itself as one of the last stalwarts of Kemalism against contemporary governments that have lost the moral authority to credibly call themselves Kemalist (however much they might profess their Kemalism notwithstanding), one can not necessarily extrapolate such a practice to all Alevi. In the end, though the vast majority of Alevi might utilize a linguistic repertoire that proclaims their humanism, secularity, and civilized nature as an exclusionary tool, it is

perception fuels the creation of a discourse that perceives a stark division between Alevis and Sunnis due to the process of essentialization inherent within a worldview that is formed within a framework that posits the division of society into oppressor and oppressed groups. While these discursive practices may not find reflection in reality, they appropriately reflect historical perceptions that have been crucial in constructing such discursive boundary making.

Difference through Discourse if not through Action: “Gender Equality” as a Marker of Separation

Alevi appeals to characteristics such as modernity, gender equality, secularism, or democracy for the purpose of claiming difference are not restricted to the examples listed above. According to Zeki Çalışkan, a *dede* I interviewed in Erzincan, Alevi difference can be further accentuated through the appeal to a superior Alevi sense of morality. To illustrate this notion, he recalled an anecdote about Atatürk and his personal doctor, İbrahim Bey. One day, Çalışkan related, “İbrahim Bey turned [to Mustafa Kemal] and asked, ‘tell me, why don’t you make this country Alevi?’ Kemal laughed, and said, ‘if this society were Alevi, there would be no need for lawcourts anymore.’”¹³ Çalışkan implied that Alevis, because of a strong moral sense inculcated through aphorisms like “*eline, beline, diline sahip ol,*” would not commit crime. The story’s diversionary aspects notwithstanding, Çalışkan’s anecdote illustrates an attempt to mark difference not on the basis of an inventory of universal themes, but on morality. In so doing, Çalışkan subtly chastises Sunnis who, for all their professed attachment to consciously upholding the pillars of Islam, require courthouses to correct their immorality. This said, the terms listed above remain the primary vehicle for the expression of Alevi difference vis-à-vis Sunnis.

Mehmet Ersoy, the *CEM Vakfı* representative in Erzincan, conceives of the difference again in terms of gender equality:

We Alevis have absolutely no discrimination between men and women. In fact, women are a step ahead of men. Our *cems* (gatherings) are not like mosques; with us, men sit in the same place as women – and our meetings are just the

difficult to imagine a sizeable contingent of Kurdish Alevis utilizing this discourse to display their “true Kemalism” against increasingly Islamist governments given Kemalism’s inextricable relationship with Turkish nationalism. Thus, while I acknowledge that this perception is present within the minds of some Alevis, it is not applicable to all in the community; instead, I suggest that this discourse is primarily designed to distance Alevis from their vaguely conceived Sunni antagonist.

¹³ Zeki Çalışkan, interview by author, Yeşilçat, Erzincan, Turkey, 26 July 2008. “Gazi Paşa’nın özel doktoru İbrahim Bey diyor ki ... ‘çabuk söyle, bu milleti neden Alevi yapamazsın?’ Gülüyor Gazi Paşa, ‘Eğer bu toplum Alevi olursa, adliye iş kalmaz.’”

same. But you wouldn't be able to see something like that in Sunni parts, for instance. Wherever, whenever, our women are equal to our men.¹⁴

In comparison to the preceding quote by Öztürk, Ersoy is clearer on the question of whom Alevi are distancing themselves from in this claim of difference: Here, the Sunni "other" does not ultimately signify the Sunni Islam of the AKP, but is intended to refer to all Sunnis who attend mosque. Sinclair-Webb, furthermore, is quite explicit in illustrating what the deployment of pronouns such as "our" entails for the construction of an Alevi self-understanding: "'Our' culture automatically implies a demarcated zone which excludes outsiders whose culture is implied to be 'other.'"¹⁵ Though it is evident that appeals to gender equality form a significant part of the repertoire for claiming Alevi difference vis-à-vis Sunnis, some Alevi women lament the profound disjuncture between the ideal of the discourse and its practical application. Sadegül Çavuş, a woman at one of Istanbul's largest *cemevis*, Sultanbeyli, illustrates this discrepancy:

However much Alevi men deny it, they're as conservative [as Sunnis]. There's conservatism on both sides. Yes, we bandy on about tolerance and what not, but that's a lie. In the real world, there's no tolerance. When one gets down to the actual practice, these secret beliefs regarding everyone's equality are nowhere to be found. How many *cemevis* are there? Go take a look – how many have woman directors?¹⁶

Clearly, there exist substantial problems at the practical level: However much Alevi may employ the notion of gender equality as a marker of difference vis-à-vis Sunnis, the *de facto* status of women remains less than that of men. In terms of actual positions of authority within the community, it would appear that local Alevi women are obstructed by a proverbial "glass ceiling." In effect, the fact that *ayin-i cems* (religious ceremonies) are held without gender segregation seems to serve merely as a showcase for the performance of gender equality; behind this public front of equality, such a statement would appear to indicate that male authority over women remains intact.¹⁷ While women activists in Sultanbeyli might complain of the hypocrisy

¹⁴ Mehmet Ersoy, interview by author, Yeşilçat, Erzincan, Turkey, 26 July 2008. "Bizde, Alevilerde kadın-erkek ayrımı kesinlikle yoktur. Hatta kadınlar erkeklerden bir adım öndedir. Cemlerimiz, cami gibi değil, bizde erkeklerle kadınlar aynı yerde otururlar. Toplantılarımızı aynı, Sünni kesiminde mesela öyle bir şey göremezsiniz. Her zaman, her yerde, kadınlarımız erkeklerle eşittir."

¹⁵ Sinclair-Webb, "Pilgrimage, Politics and Folklore: The Making of Alevi Community," 271.

¹⁶ Oral Çalışlar, "Sultanbeyli'de bir cemkondu!" [A shantytown *cem* in Sultanbeyli!] *Radikal*, 20 November 2008. "(Alevi erkekler) ne kadar inkâr etseler de tutucular. Her iki tarafta da var tutuculuk. Hani söyleriz, hoşgörü filan, yalan o. Gerçek yaşamda hoşgörü kalmamış. Bizim inancımızda saklı kalan, herkes eşittir inancı, pratiğe gelince öyle bir şey yok. Kaç tane cemevi var? Gidin bakın; kaçının başında kadın yönetici var?" Sultanbeyli is a poor district buried in the urban sprawl on Istanbul's Asian side. Although mostly Sunni, the district does possess one significant Alevi neighbourhood.

¹⁷ How widespread such gender inequality is in reality is a topic that requires more research. The footnote below suggests that Alevi women in Germany do not overly complain about gender inequality, although,

of the high-minded discourse of some of their male relatives and coreligionists, such discrepancies between the ideal of gender equality and everyday reality are not necessarily community-wide. However, regardless of whether or not such discrimination is widespread¹⁸ (along with the accompanying trouble for women), the very fact that Çavuş cites the constant reiteration of gender equality within the community provides further evidence as to the ubiquity of its usage as a rhetorical tool in claiming difference vis-à-vis Sunnis. In this, practice might not mirror theory, yet such an event demonstrates that the maintenance of the discourse is of far greater importance in accentuating difference than actually implementing these ideals in reality.

Modernity in the Past? Creating Historical Depth as a Legitimizing Tool

In rebutting DİB arguments that suggested that the difference between Sunnis and Alevis was very narrow, several Alevi organizations reiterated the wide chasm between the two: “Alevilik is very different from Sunnism and is a modern (*çağdaş*) synthesis of Islam, Central Asian Turkish traditions, and the local culture of Anatolia. Moreover, Alevilik is a lifestyle that has been modern, progressive, and reformist in accordance with all time periods.”¹⁹ Highlighting the synthesis of Islam, old Turkish traditions, and local Anatolian culture is not novel. In fact,

in reference to Çavuş’s statement, I personally have not met any Alevi women who act as directors at *cemevis*. At the same time, I have rarely encountered an *ayin-i cem* that is not conducted with men and women side-by-side: In the only occasion where I did see photographs of a recent *cemevi*-related function with men and women separated, it struck me as very odd.

¹⁸ There is, of course, a large Alevi diaspora in Germany. Because the scope of this paper regrettably restricts us largely to developments in Turkey, an analysis of the Alevis experience in Europe is mostly absent here. It is, however, important to note that one researcher, Yasemin Aydın-Karakaşoğlu has done anthropological work among Sunni and Alevi women in Germany. In her study, she found that Alevi women themselves did choose to employ themes such as tolerance, gender equality, and humanism as markers of differences in their relations with Sunnis (meaning, presumably, that they could affirm these principles as valid in their lives in a fashion that Alevi women in Sultanbeyli could not). Importantly, Aydın-Karakaşoğlu argues, these Alevi women do not select these qualities from the surrounding German society, but rather from a conception that these are particular Alevi principles. Cf. Yasemin Aydın-Karakaşoğlu, “Unsere Leute sind nicht so’ – Alevitische und sunnitische Studentinnen in Deutschland” [‘Our people aren’t like that’ – Alevi and Sunni Female Students in Germany], in *Die neue muslimische Frau: Standpunkte und Analysen* [The New Muslim Woman: Viewpoints and Analysis], ed. Barbara Pusch (Istanbul: Orient-Institut der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft, 2001), 319. It is a theme that is similarly identified by Dressler. In his observation, Alevis in Germany use anti-Muslim stereotypes to emphasize their compatibility with modern German life – a compatibility that the Sunnis, according to this discourse, do not share. Cf. Markus Dressler, “Religio-Secular Metamorphoses: The Remaking of Turkish Alevism,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 76, 2 (Jun. 2008), 299.

¹⁹ Pehlivan, *Aleviler ve Diyanet* [Alevis and the *Diyanet*], 88. “Alevilik Sünnilikten çok daha farklıdır ve İslamiyet’in, Orta Asya Türk geleneklerinin ve Anadolu’da yaşayan kültürlerin çağdaş bir sentezidir. Alevilik, çağına göre çağdaş, ilerici, yenilikçi bir yaşam biçimidir.”

early republican scholars such as Fuad Köprülü had emphasized such linkages as early as 1926.²⁰ Later, the esteemed Turkologist Irène Mélikoff also posited such a connection,²¹ so the reproduction of such an argument by Alevi organizations is unsurprising. Furthermore, even Alevi groups that incline towards the Marxist left also accept that Islam has had an important influence on Alevilik.²² Thus, the components in the synthesis emphasized by the organizations reveal no groundbreaking information, but their conceptualization of the synthesis as modern (*çağdaş*) warrants some mention. For these groups, an appeal to modernity is not employed as a semantic tool to claim difference solely in the present age. Instead, the lifestyle and philosophy of Alevis in centuries past is portrayed as being equally modern. While one can only surmise as to what the actual contents of this pre-modern modernity include, the lack of a precise definition and the ahistorical treatment of *çağdaşlık* does not prevent the observation that this Alevi “modernity” is implied as an opposition to a discursive antagonist. Benedict Anderson discusses how “imagined communities” seek to create legitimacy for themselves by drawing linkages to an ancient, co-opted past.²³ In the above example, one finds a similar process. The quest to reconceptualize Alevi self-understanding in the post-1980 period necessitated a foundation that only the legitimizing effect of an ancient history was capable of providing. By claiming that their history is *çağdaş* (modern) according to the mores of the age, contemporary Alevi organizations not only provide an historical bedrock of legitimacy for their movement, they also project their strategies of claiming difference back in time.

In his *Nation and Narration*, Homi Bhabha posits the existence of “double-time” among modern nations. In this double-time, states present themselves as existing in two simultaneous eras: On one hand, they exist in an ancient history that is highlighted to remind citizens of the states’ ancient and glorious past; on the other, they exist in a contemporary age in which they project their own modernity.²⁴ Substituting Bhabha’s nation-states with religious communities,

²⁰ [Mehmed Fuad Keuprulu Zadé] Fuad Köprülü, *Les Origines du Bektachisme: Essai sur le Développement Historique de l’Hétérodoxie Musulmane en Asie Mineure* (Paris: s.n., 1926), 6, 8. While it is not this study’s place to question Köprülü’s scholarship, one must mention the author’s decidedly Turkish nationalist bias.

²¹ Irène Mélikoff, “Le problème kızılbaz,” 50.

²² The PSAKD also, for example, acknowledges Islam’s influence on Alevilik. Cf. Şahhüseyinoğlu, *Alevi örgütlerinin tarihsel süreci* [The historical development of Alevi organizations], 227.

²³ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1983), 181.

²⁴ Homi Bhabha, “DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation,” in *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi Bhabha (New York: Routledge, 1990), 300.

there is a similar phenomenon with Alevi claims of difference, yet the process is somewhat altered: Instead of simply positing an awe-inspiring past juxtaposed with a modern present (and future), these Alevi organizations posit a modern Alevi *past* and present. Alevis can exist at different times, yet the descriptors used to characterize their conduct in these simultaneous times are identical. In so doing, Alevis can provide a more developed historical legitimacy (the ahistorical nature of a “modernity” rooted in the past notwithstanding) to their present claims of difference.

Discursive Reinforcement: Employing the Concept of “Europe” as a Legitimizing Agent for Alevi Claims of Difference

In addition to pursuing the multi-temporal avenues available to this discourse of accentuating difference, many Alevis also maintain a discursive relationship with the notion of “Europe” when making these claims. Just as the man in Hacıbektaş in this thesis’ introduction presented his town as a civilizational equal to Europe, other Alevis have made similar connections between themselves and Europe. In a conversation with Oral Çalışlar, Turgut Öker, the head of the AABF, remarked that though “the European Proclamation of Human Rights was accepted sixty years ago, the universal values contained therein had already been accepted centuries before by an Alevi-Bektaşî belief which [had then gone on to produce] the ‘Anatolian Enlightenment.’”²⁵ Öker, like the members of the Alevi organizations who had asserted the “modern” nature of the Alevi synthesis in the preceding example, argues for the historicity of “universal values” (in this instance, the value of tolerance) throughout Alevi history. While this is important for general discussion, it is far more intriguing for my present comments given the juxtaposition of these values to Europe: Here, Öker legitimizes Alevi beliefs by chronologically situating the origins of the community’s values far before the intellectual developments in Europe that would eventually lead to the Enlightenment. However, more than simply providing an “historical depth” to his close association of “universal values” and Alevilik for the purposes of increasing the legitimacy of Alevi claims of difference, Öker utilizes a conception of Europe – one that is characterized by “civilization,” “modernity,” and “tolerance” – to reinforce his accentuation of Alevi difference. In this instance, the goal is not to “impress” Europeans, but

²⁵ Oral Çalışlar, “Avrupa’daki Aleviler, inançlarını yaşayabilen şanslı bir topluluk” [Alevis in Europe are a community that is lucky to be able to live their beliefs], *Radikal*, 16 November 2008. “Bundan 60 yıl önce yayımlanan Avrupa İnsan Hakları Beyannamesi’nde kabul edilen evrensel değerleri yüzlerce yıl önce ‘Anadolu aydınlanması’ olarak tabir edilen Alevi-Bektaşî inancı özümseyerek kabul etmiştir.”

rather to use “Europe” as an external legitimizing principle.²⁶ In making his assertion, Öker believes Alevi can take pride in the longstanding tradition of tolerance within the values of the community – values that appeared in Anatolia centuries before they became widespread in Europe.²⁷ However, it is precisely because such values were later accepted by Europe that Alevi draw legitimacy from positing their heritage as one that protected universal human values. Though Alevi may have continued to employ notions of “civilization” as conceptual tools even without their later assumption by Europeans, the very fact that Enlightenment-era Europeans adopted these values lends the Alevi process of discursive boundary-making added semantic reinforcement. By eventually superseding the Alevi in being able to implement these universal values on a widespread basis, the norms of this discourse suggest that Europe becomes the prime, legitimizing referent for making these claims. However, since “Europe” as a civilizational idea is not a specific party to the negotiations surrounding self-understandings between Sunnis and Alevi, the latter can draw upon the idea of an external, civilized notion of Europe as a semantic tool to wield when claiming difference vis-à-vis Sunnis.

“What do we need to do?” Practical Strategies in the Quest for Rights

Until this point, I have discussed the corpus of Alevi demands as well as some of the strategies Alevi have used in accentuating their difference in their relationship with the wider, Sunni-dominated society. By having recourse to a conceptual inventory that includes notions of modernity, humanity, gender equality, secularism, and other “universal values,” Alevi exhibit their difference from Sunnis. On a more prosaic level, however, what strategies do Alevi perceive as most effective in claiming difference, advancing their demands and attaining more rights? For the vast majority of Alevi, there is an awareness of the necessity of organizing

²⁶ Care must be taken not to conflate “Europe” as a discursive concept with any physical polity (e.g. the EU). While few Turks would consider the EU to be an external agent in Turkish affairs (especially during the currently ongoing accession negotiations), I suggest that the notion of “Europe” is more an external repository of ideas that local actors can draw upon to advance their discursive aims in contestations with compatriots than it is any sort of meddling political actor.

²⁷ Similar to the process in which Alevi have portrayed themselves as bearers of civilization long before the Enlightenment, one also observes Alevi with a socialist worldview emphasizing their Marxist credentials by asserting the profession of Communism by their pre-modern leaders long before the time of Karl Marx. Echoing Haydar Samancı, Şener and İlknur discuss how Alevi with a socialist worldview “came to realize that Alevi leaders possessed certain ideas regarding equality, freedom, [equitable] distribution, and humanism a full 400 to 500 years before Karl Marx after they began investigating [great historical Alevi figures such as Hacı Bektaş and others.]” “Hallac-ı Mansur, Nesimi, Hacı Bektaş Veli, Pir Sultan Abdal, Şeyh Bedreddin incelendiğinde Karl Marx’tan en az 400-500 yıl önce yaşayan Alevi önderlerin eşitlikçi, özgürlükçü, bölüşümcü, hümanist düşünceleri ile tanışıldı.” Şener and İlknur, “Alevilerin kimlik arayışı” [The quest for Alevi Identity], *Cumhuriyet*, 24 August 1994.

themselves into associations. Only by doing this, some argue, can they establish civil society organizations that can more effectively articulate their differences and their demands.²⁸ In addition to this, however, one also observes the deployment of unofficial Alevi population figures as a rhetorical tool designed to emphasize – artificially, perhaps – Turkey’s Alevi reality for the benefits of public consumption. This section, accordingly, seeks to explore the politics of population figures, while also presenting the opinions of some public and community authorities – both Alevi and non-Alevi – on both the imperatives facing the contemporary Alevi community as well as some of the issues that are at stake in such a process.

The Politics of Numbers: Alevi Population Figures as a Strategy for Showcasing the Community

As was outlined in the introduction, there exist no reliable population figures for the total number of Alevis within Turkey. Given the lack of authoritative data, many scholars provide percentage figures that estimate the community’s share of the Turkish population between a conservative estimate of 10% and a high of 30%.²⁹ Other scholars, however, have sought to indicate a more precise figure. Dressler, for example estimates the community’s share of the Turkish population to be 15%,³⁰ while Shankland reckons 20% is the most realistic number.³¹ One Turkish newspaper, meanwhile, conducted a study to determine the number of people who identify themselves as Alevi; in the end, the figure was 4.5 million people (roughly 6.5% of the population). Though Necdet Saraç rightly argues that this number is likely to be artificially low given the apprehension many feel in publicly identifying themselves as Alevis,³² few of the averages provided by non-community sources exceed 20% of the Turkish population.

Given the unofficial estimates that suggest a median figure of no higher than 20%, how should one evaluate Alevi population estimates that posit significantly higher numbers? Indeed, some community sources assert that the Alevis comprise one-third of the Turkish population

²⁸ Süleyman Cem, “1992 Hacıbektaş kültür, tören, şenlik ve etkinliklerinin düşündürdükleri” [Food for thought from the 1992 Hacıbektaş cultural, ceremonial, and festive activities], *Cem* 2, 16 (Sep. 1992), 26.

²⁹ Both Çamuroğlu and Massicard estimate the community’s population to be between 10-25%. Koçan and Öncü, meanwhile, give a figure of 10-30%. Çamuroğlu, “Some Notes on the Contemporary Process of Restructuring Alevilik in Turkey,” 32; Massicard, “Les Alévis et le discours politique de l’unité en Turquie depuis les années 1980,” 118; Koçan and Öncü, 474.

³⁰ Dressler, “Religio-Secular Metamorphoses,” 281.

³¹ Shankland, *Islam and Society in Turkey*, 136.

³² Necdet Saraç, “Alevi Nüfusu” [The Alevi population], *BirGün*, 23 March 2007.

(roughly twenty-five million people),³³ these estimates, meanwhile, have been frequently presented in conjunction with complaints that, although Alevis contribute one-third of the *Diyanet*'s budget through their taxes, Sunnis receive 100% of the ministry's funding.³⁴ Mehmet Ersoy (*CEM Vakfı* Erzincan) reiterated this Alevi anger regarding the disjuncture between population numbers and taxation: "Twenty-five million is not a small number, [really,] we constitute twenty-five million people in this country! If the *Diyanet* doesn't represent these twenty-five million, then that's discrimination."³⁵

While Şener and Ersoy's complaints regarding these unfair taxation practices are certainly relevant to the general problems between the DİB and the Alevis, the deployment of this figure of twenty-five million is more significant for my present discussion of Alevi usages of discourse for the purposes of attaining greater rights within the Turkish Republic. The mobilization of such a figure that, by all secondary accounts, appears to exaggerate the community's population numbers does not constitute part of the repertoire of techniques designed to claim discursive difference, yet it does constitute part of a larger strategy of showcasing the Alevi presence within Turkey. By deploying figures that suggest a third of the Turkish population is Alevi, the community occupies a discursive space left vacant because of the state's refusal to collect census data regarding ethnic and religious marginal groups. In ignoring the existence of cultural groups that do not adhere either to the ideal of the Turkish citizen or belong to one of the officially recognized "minorities" (cf. Chapter 4), the state has provided a discursive vacuum in which Alevi groups can inflate their population numbers without the possibility of receiving any official "correction." In this way, community groups can implant the suggestion of a Turkey comprised of a significant (though, in all probability, artificially high) numerical Alevi minority in the minds of non-Alevis while remaining protected from any official challenge to these figures. This discursive freedom is possible because any state contestation and enumeration of these figures would require an official recognition of the country's Alevi reality. However, given that such an official recognition would require drastic changes to both the Constitution as well as the dominant conceptions of who constitutes the primary elements of the Turkish nation, Alevis retain the discursive freedom to posit abnormally high numbers for themselves. In so

³³ Kazım Genç, "Aleviliğin İslamdan En Büyük Farkı Tanrıya Bakışıdır," [Alevilik's greatest difference from Islam is its view of God], 75.

³⁴ Cemal Şener, "Hacıbektaş'ta Alevi Olmak" [Being an Alevi in Hacıbektaş], *Cem* 1, 3 (Aug. 1991), 34.

³⁵ Mehmet Ersoy, interview by author, Yeşilçat, Erzincan, Turkey, 26 July 2008. "25 milyon az nüfus değil, bu ülkenin 25 milyonu biz oluruz! Bu 25 milyonu Diyanet temsil edilmezse, o da ayırım."

doing, they execute a practical strategy in drawing their compatriots' attention to their physical reality.

“Everyone’s too afraid of a reaction”: The Need for Discussion and Organization in Highlighting Turkey’s Alevi Reality in the post-1980 Period

To argue for the inherent antagonism between Alevis and various representatives of the state would be essentialist and a gross simplification of the reality: Many state officials, in fact, also possess opinions regarding the community that extend beyond the DİB’s apparent desire to effectively deny an Alevi difference. During an interview in Pülümür, Tunceli, the local district official (*kaymakam*), Alper Balcı, related his views on the necessity of rethinking the Alevi problem:

This is the problem: Everyone is protecting their own [version of the truth]. Everyone needs to start talking about new things. They need to learn new things. Everyone is afraid of a [possible] reaction. But if I’m afraid of your input, then there’ll be no progression. Apart from praising violence, every manner of thought, no matter how contradictory, needs to be discussed for progress to occur. There are problems among Alevis – for instance, there’s an MP from the AKP, Reha Çamuroğlu who says that ‘we [Alevis] need to take our place in this system,’ and thus invites the Prime Minister to Alevi functions. But other Alevis just say, ‘you’re *düşkün*’ (excommunicated).³⁶

Here, Balcı intimates his position as a Turkish civil servant in that he affirms the right of all Alevis to discuss their problems, short of “praising violence” – a likely reference to the tendency of some Alevi youth to support militant organizations.³⁷ In addition, he laments the fact that many Alevis immediately dismiss the efforts of some members of the community, notably Reha

³⁶ Alper Balcı, interview by author, Pülümür, Tunceli, Turkey, 25 July 2008. “Sıkıntı şu: Herkes kendi sapmasını koruyor. Herkesin artık yeni birşeyler konuşması lazım. Yeni birşeyler öğrenmesi lazım. Herkes tepkiden çekiniyor. Ama senden tepki çekinirsem ilerleme meydana gelmez. İlerlemenin olması için her türlü aykırı düşüncenin, şiddeti öven hariç, konuşulması lazım. Alevilerin arasında problemler var... Mesela bir tane örnek vereyim, bir tane milletvekili var AKP’den, Reha Çamuroğlu, o diyor ki “bu sistemde yer almamız lazım,” Başbakan’ı davet ediyor [Alevi faaliyetlere] diğer Aleviler diyor ki, sen düşkünsün...”

³⁷ Because of the perceived injustices within the Turkish political system, some Alevi youth have been attracted to militant organizations over the years. Martin van Bruinessen relates that some Kurdish Alevis played an important role in the foundation of the PKK, though the majority of radical Alevis in Tunceli today tend to support TIKKO/TKP-ML, a Maoist organization that had nationwide influence during the 1970s. Cf. Martin van Bruinessen, “‘Aslımı inkar eden haramzadedir!’ The Debate on the Ethnic Identity of the Kurdish Alevis,” in *Syncretistic Religious Communities*, 15. In urban areas, the Revolutionary People’s Liberation Party/Front (Devrimci Halkın Kurtuluş Partisi/Cephesi – DHKP/C) draws support from Alevis in quarters such as Gaziosmanpaşa and Okmeydanı. Cf. Massicard, *L’autre Turquie*, 261. While not an everyday occurrence, the DHKP/C has been known to carry out suicide bombings. Cf. Shankland, *The Alevis in Turkey: The emergence of a secular Islamic tradition*, 168.

Çamuroğlu, in searching for some form of reconciliation with the Turkish state.³⁸ In both cases, his criticisms of internal Alevi tensions illustrate his larger point: For too long, Alevis have remained fractured and unable to discuss their commonly held problems. Balcı, though a non-Alevi, recognizes the need for a reconceptualization of the Alevi problem; unlike those in the AKP that demand Alevi agreement on a commonly held self-understanding before proceeding onto larger concerns that effect the relationship between the community and the state, Balcı suggests that the solution to recurring Alevi problems lies in the medium of increased discussion.

More important for many Alevis, however, is the sense that a positive presentation of the community within the public sphere is necessary for the purposes of improving the group's status in Turkey. The theme of "introducing" (*tanıtmak*) Alevilik to the wider Turkish populace has been a recurrent one since the early 1990s. In a 1993 interview, Irène Mélikoff shared her opinions on the imperatives facing the community with *Nefes*, an Alevi journal. For her, many non-Alevi Turks still did not have a sufficient understanding of the nature of Alevilik:

In the minds of these people, Alevilik is associated with *mum söndürme* (ritual incest). Because of this, we need to acquaint people with Alevilik with all means at our disposal. To refute these negative perceptions, we need to be open. Our method of worship, our lifestyle, and our customs must be accessible to the outside world. If we do this, those that smear our name will not be able to denigrate us any longer.³⁹

The obligation Mélikoff perceived in opening the doors of the faith to the outside world reflects the context of the time; indeed, the process of reconceptualizing Alevilik and articulating the community's demands was still nascent at the beginning of the 1990s. This notwithstanding, the language Mehmet Ersoy (*CEM Vakfı* Erzincan) used to identify the imperatives facing the community in 2008 indicates that Alevis had only been partially successful in presenting their faith during the preceding fifteen years:

³⁸ Reha Çamuroğlu, whose works and opinions have a prominent place in this study, became the first Alevi MP for the Islamist AKP. Because of his political leanings, he has been dismissed as *düşkün* by many Alevi organizations that believe there can be no reconciliation between the community and the Turkish government, so long as there is no progress on Alevis' most crucial demands. The fact that the AKP is Islamist (regardless of its professed moderation) only increases the vigorous denunciations of Çamuroğlu on the part of many Alevi organizations. While it remains beyond the scope of this study, this deployment of the notion of *düşkünlük* (excommunication) in a contemporary setting warrants more scholarly attention, since it indicates a profound reinterpretation of the role of this disciplinary practice in a contemporary, urban setting.

³⁹ Ali Toprak, "İrène Mélikoff ile söyleşi" [A conversation with Irène Mélikoff], *Nefes* 1, 1 (Nov. 1993), 29. "Alevilik onlara göre 'mum söndü' işlemi ile özdeş sayılıyor... Bu yüzden Alevilik'i her tür araç ile tanıtmak lazım. Bu olumsuz düşünceleri kaldırmak için açık olmalıyız. İbadetimiz, yaşam biçimimiz, örfümüz dışa açık olmalıdır. Böyle olunca iftiracılar iftira edemezler."

Because we haven't had any money, we haven't been able to progress greatly in the mediatic sphere, *nor make ourselves known. Because of this, we haven't been able to express ourselves much.* But now, because our youth are studying and because of our many businessmen, we're better able to express ourselves. [In so doing,] we'll slowly start to see more support from Sunni citizens. Some of them think we're right and have thus come to our *cemevis* to learn about Alevilik. But because we haven't had the chance to properly explain ourselves [until now], we've misunderstood each other in the past. But now they see us in our *cemevis* and our TV channels, and we can express ourselves. Have we been completely successful? No, we haven't unfortunately.⁴⁰ (*Italics mine*)

Ersoy's appraisal of the contemporary situation for Alevi requires no repetition here. Apart from demonstrating the continuity between Mélikoff's time and his own, his evaluation of Alevilik's contemporary situation is significant in that his preoccupation with "expressing" the community to Sunni citizens further corroborates this chapter's main contention, namely that the public proclamation of Alevilik cannot be made independently of *Sunnilik* as a reference point. Given the fact that the characteristics of an Alevi self-understanding are frequently posited as a negation of those perceived to be held by Sunnis, the inextricability of Alevilik from the shadow of Sunnism is unsurprising. Ersoy, however, adds a level of ambiguity to the general discussion: While the usage of the aforementioned "universalist" principles as identifying terms for contemporary Alevilik is largely designed to demonstrate a moral superiority over Sunnis, there is little attempt to demonstrate moral superiority in this instance. Though he is still preoccupied with highlighting Alevi difference through the various technological, financial, educational, and mediatic avenues available to the community, Ersoy appeals to Sunnis for a greater understanding towards his community. In this example, Sunnis – or, at least, some of them – are presented not as oppressors whose qualities are to be negated, but rather as potential fellow travellers in reinforcing Alevilik in the contemporary Turkish Republic. Regardless, however, of whether or not Alevi discourse depicts Sunnis in a favourable or unfavourable light, the proclamation of the Alevi worldview cannot be easily disengaged from an intimate relationship with *Sunnilik*.

In discussing the articulation of Alevi difference and the methods by which this can be attained, Necdet Saraç outlines the stakes involved with such a process: "In the interests of

⁴⁰ Mehmet Ersoy, interview by author, Yeşilçat, Erzincan, Turkey, 26 July 2008. "Paramız olmadığı için medyatik yönde pek ileri gidemedik, kendimizi pek tanıtmadık. O yüzden kendimizi fazla ifade edemedik. Fakat şimdi gençlerimiz okuyor, iş adamlarımız var... iyi bir şekilde kendimizi ifade edebiliyoruz. Kendimizi ifade ettiğimiz zaman Sünni vatandaşlardan da yavaş yavaş destek görmeye başlarız. Onlardan da bizi haklı görenler var, Alevilik'i öğrenmek için cem evlerimize gelenler var. Biz kendimizi yeterince anlatma şansı bulamadığımız için geçmişte yanlış anlaşıldık. Ama şimdi cem evlerimizde bizi görüyorlar, televizyonumuz var kendimizi ifade edebiliyoruz. Tam edebiliyor muyuz? Hayır, edemiyoruz maalesef."

creating a democratic Turkey in which everyone can live together in fraternal and peaceful conditions, it is incumbent [upon the state] to recognize Alevi identity, the community's organizations, and the right of these organizations to sit at the table when solving the [Alevi] problem."⁴¹ Indeed, Saraç illustrates the conjuncture of a number of issues and problems, namely that of the state's non-recognition of the country's Alevi reality, the necessity of Alevis organizing themselves, and the creation of a more "democratic" Turkey. Alevis, regardless of political inclination, have argued that organizing the community is imperative for the realization of the group's difference and most important demands. Viewed contextually, the related struggles for the ability to claim difference, form associations, and realize demands constitute an important aspect of the community's relationship with a rapidly changing Turkish state and society. For most of its historical trajectory, the failure of the unitarist Turkish state to acknowledge the diversity of the country's cultural makeup accounted for much of the non-realization of these Alevi desires. However, recent changes in Turkish society have begun to usher in a modicum of greater access to the public sphere for these marginal groups. These changes, thus, have occasioned the increasing reformulation of the conception of the Alevis' place in the Turkish nation. These changes, while of utmost importance for Alevis, have had a profound effect on all cleavages within the Turkish state and its society.

In this chapter, I have sought to provide an indication of how Alevis manage various strategies of discursively claiming difference within the contemporary Turkish state as well as some of their practical techniques for achieving greater legal recognition. In following the first line of inquiry, I demonstrated that Alevi perceptions of the community's traumatic history have influenced the development of a discursive practice in which "universalist" qualities have been deployed to claim difference vis-à-vis the country's Sunni majority. In this, the discourse that accentuates their difference is not drawn from any heterodox religious tenets, but rather the ideals of the European Enlightenment. The goal of these semantic tools, however, is not to include all members of society, but rather to distance the Alevi community from an antagonistic, Sunni other – thereby publicly highlighting Alevilik's compatibility with modernist discourses. The individual reasons for such a practice may vary among the community's diverse viewpoints, yet a shared perception of oppression at the hands of successive states that, according to the norms of

⁴¹ Necdet Saraç, "Bu Aleviler ne istiyor?" [What do these Alevis want?] *BirGün*, 15 October 2004. "Herkesin eşit koşullarda, kardeşçe ve barış içinde bir arada yaşayacağı demokratik bir Türkiye'nin yaratılması için, Alevi kimliği ve kurumları yasal düzeyde bir taraf olarak tanınmalı ve sorunların çözümü için Alevi kurumlarıyla masaya oturmalıdır."

this discourse, were Sunni-led polities guilty of repressing Anatolian Alevilik has certainly been instrumental in creating the semblance of a discursive and antagonistic dichotomy.

In addition to these discursive practices aimed at claiming an Alevi difference within a semantic field, one observes more practical strategies designed to ameliorate the condition of the community within the contemporary Turkish state. In this, Alevis have utilized the discursive space left vacant by the Turkish state in its refusal to collect census data on the populations of marginal cultural groups to their advantage. By providing inflated population numbers (insofar as most scholarly studies are concerned), Alevis can emphasize the significance of the community to a society that has previously ignored its presence. On a more prosaic level, this chapter has sought to present some of the debates surrounding the formation of Alevi organizations. Ultimately, many of the causal factors compelling Alevis to both discursively claim difference and seek an improvement in their legal status in this fashion stem from the strictures imposed by a unitarist framework that have provided little discursive room for marginal social groups to accentuate their difference within the public sphere. It is to the nature of this unitarist framework that I shall now turn my attention.

4: BECOMING A TURK: THE PARTICIPATION OF ALEVIS AND OTHER MINORITIES IN THE TURKISH NATION

In the aftermath of the War of Liberation (May 1919-September 1922), envoys of Turkey's new republican government and representatives of Britain, France, Greece, and Italy convened in Lausanne, Switzerland to set the terms of a peace settlement that would replace the 1920 Treaty of Sèvres concluded between the defeated Ottoman Empire and the victors of World War I. At the conference (November 1922-July 1923), the question of minorities within the new Turkish state became a point of major tension, drawing this assessment from Rıza Nur Bey, one of Turkey's chief negotiators:

The Europeans have three concepts of minorities: Racial minorities, linguistic minorities, and religious minorities. This is very alarming for us, a great danger. It is amazing how deep and well these men are able to think when it comes to acting against us ... With the racial interpretation, they will group the Circassians, the Abkhaz, the Bosnians and the Kurds together with the Greeks and the Armenians. With language, they will include those who are Muslim but speak another language. And with religion, they will turn some pure Turkish, but Türkmen [Alevi] tribes into a minority grouping. In the end, they will [simply] cut us up and divide us.¹

While Turkey had agreed to recognize the country's *gayri-Müslümanlar* (non-Muslims) as minorities – the Greek Orthodox, Armenians, and Jews – as official minorities, it steadfastly refused to extend this status to any other group on the basis of ethnicity, language, or sectarian affiliation for fear that such categories could be used to weaken the nascent Turkish state.

This unwillingness to accord groups like the Kurds and Alevis minority status has importance beyond the fear of foreign domination, however. By classifying social groups according to religious background at the outset of independence, the nascent state created a situation in which non-Muslims were incapable of becoming Turks, since Turkishness was associated with being Muslim.² Such categorization, in turn, set the discursive boundaries for determining which social groups could publicly participate within the Turkish nation. As we

¹ Levent Ürer, *Azınlıklar ve Lozan tartışmaları* [Minorities and debates on Lausanne] (Istanbul: Derin Yayınları, 2003), 254. “Frenkler ekalliyet diye üç nevi biliyorlar: Irkça ekalliyet, dilce ekalliyet, dince ekalliyet. Bu bizim için gayet vahşi bir şey, büyük bir tehlike. Aleyhimize olunca şu adamlar ne derin ve ne iyi düşünüyorlar.. Irk tabiri ile Çerkez, Abaza, Boşnak, Kürt... Rum ve Ermeni'nin yanına koyacaklar. Dil tabiri ile Müslüman olup başka dil konuşanları da ekalliyet yapacaklar. Din tabiri ile halis Türk olan bazı Türkmen boylarını da ekalliyet yapacaklar. Yani bizi Hallaç pamuğu gibi dağıtıp atacaklar.”

² Ahmet Yıldız, *Ne Mutlu Türküm Diyebilene: Türk ulusal kimliğinin etno-seküler sınırları (1919-1938)* [How happy is the one who can say “I am a Turk”: The ethno-secular boundaries of Turkish national identity] (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2001), 137.

shall see, however, the nation's "true" citizenship is not accorded on a Muslim/non-Muslim basis, but instead revolves along a centre-periphery axis that privileges Hanefi Sunni Turkish citizens to the exclusion of groups that cannot conform to this ideal type. Exploring the questions of citizenship in the contemporary Turkish Republic is thus the central concern of this chapter. In so doing, I begin with a brief discussion on how members of the Hanefi Sunni Turkish community have come to constitute the nation's "real" citizens before examining the impact of the Lausanne Treaty on Alevi relations with both the country's pre-eminent social group as well as other marginal social groups. In the end, I suggest that the special conception of "minorities" produced by the Treaty and later crystallized through both popular and official discourses within Turkey has engendered a situation in which non-Hanefi Sunni citizens of the Republic cannot fully participate in the Turkish nation while publicly claiming their difference.

During the War of Liberation, Mustafa Kemal and the other nationalist leaders drafted the National Pact (*misak-ı millî*) in which they appealed to the common brotherhood of Muslims in Anatolia and Thrace in the fight against the foreign invaders – a call to arms which conspicuously excepted the non-Muslims peoples of the Ottoman Empire. Following victory, these Muslim peoples became the human foundation upon which the new Turkish Republic was constructed. Settlement in the nascent state was contingent upon religious background: Bosnians, Circassians, Albanians and other Transcaucasian or Balkan Muslim groups were welcome to immigrate to Turkey (despite an inability to speak Turkish), yet the Gagauz (a Turkish-speaking, Christian-Orthodox people) were not.³ Beginning in 1922, the governments of Greece and Turkey undertook an exchange (*mübadele*) of hundreds of thousands of citizens between the two countries. Based entirely on religious affiliation, the exchange had the effect of homogenizing each state other than small numbers that, in the Turkish case, were permitted to continue living in Istanbul and other major cities.⁴ Thus, the Lausanne Treaty officially recognized "minorities" that were, to a large extent, no longer present within Turkey: Millions of Greeks had lived in the

³ Fuat Keyman and Ahmet İçduygu, "Türk modernleşmesi ve ulusal kimlik sorunu: Anayasal vatandaşlık ve demokratik açılım olasılığı" [Turkish modernization and the problem of national identity: Constitutional citizenship and the possibility of democratic evolution], in *75 yılda tebaa'dan yurttaş'a doğru* [From subject to citizen in 75 years], 177.

⁴ Yıldız, *Ne Mutlu* [How happy], 132. Because the exchange was organized purely on a religious basis, one witnessed the curious examples in which Anatolian Orthodox Christians were deported to Greece despite speaking only Turkish. Likewise, some Western Thracian Muslims were transported to Turkey despite knowing only Greek.

Ottoman Empire before the War of Liberation, yet only 111,000 remained in 1923.⁵ The newly drafted Turkish Constitution granted all nationals citizenship under the rubric of “Turk,” yet, as Ali Soner suggests, this inclusive understanding of being a “Turk” has been limited solely to the Turkish-Muslim population and did not effectively extend to the small numbers of non-Muslims who remained after independence.⁶

Though the settlement policies of the Turkish Republic favoured (amorphously defined) Turkish Muslims to the detriment of non-Muslims, the Kemalist perception of the nation as a culturally homogenous entity ensured that questions of “true citizenship” extended beyond the dichotomy outlined above. Despite the Kemalists’ secular reforms, the nation was imagined as Turkish in ethnicity and (Sunni) Muslim in religion. Krisztina Kehl-Bodrogi argues that the result of such a conception of the nation was that “deviating collective identities, [of either the] ethnic or religious [variety], were regarded as threats to the nation’s unity and treated as separatism.”⁷ Leyla Neyzi brings such tension into sharper relief: Examining the case of the Sabbateans,⁸ an officially Muslim group of Jewish descent – though one frequently described as Crypto-Jews – she argues that true rights have been granted solely on the basis of Sunni Muslim ethnic descent.⁹ Neyzi suggests that despite enthusiastic support for Atatürk and his secular reforms, the community was targeted in connection with the Turkish government’s attempt to increase state revenue during World War II by forcing the country’s non-Muslim minorities to pay a disproportionate share of the newly introduced wealth tax (*varlık vergisi*).¹⁰ Sabbateans, though officially Muslims, were discriminated against as much as non-Muslims. Groups that could not conform to this ideal of the new Turkish citizen were, at a minimum, compelled to

⁵ Prodomos Yannas, “The Human Rights Condition of the Rum Orthodox,” in *Human Rights in Turkey*, ed. Zehra Kabasakal Arat (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 62.

⁶ Ali B. Soner, “Citizenship and the minority question in Turkey,” in *Citizenship in a Global World: European questions and Turkish experiences*, eds. Fuat Keyman and Ahmet İçduygu (London: Routledge, 2005), 297.

⁷ Kehl-Bodrogi, “Atatürk and the Alevis,” 64.

⁸ Known popularly as *dönmes* (converts), Sabbateans have attracted suspicion throughout the years due to their continuation of secret rites and endogamy. Overwhelmingly secular, most Sabbateans enthusiastically supported Atatürk and attempted to publicly present themselves as reliable Turkish nationalists, yet have continued to arouse the suspicions of many of their compatriots into present times. Cf. Marc Baer, “The Double Bind of Race and Religion: The Conversion of the Dönme to Turkish Secular Nationalism,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 46, 4 (2004), 682; Baskın Oran, *Türkiye İnsan Hakları Bilançosu: 2005 İzleme Raporu* [The balance sheet on Turkish human rights: Observation report for 2005] (Istanbul: TESEV Yayınları, 2006), 45.

⁹ Leyla Neyzi, “Remembering to Forget: Sabbateanism, National Identity, and Subjectivity in Turkey,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 44, 1 (Jan. 2002), 138.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 145. I will discuss further the effects this wealth tax had on non-Muslim minorities later.

“[adapt] to the Republican regime by ... performing ‘Turkishness’ in the public sphere.”¹¹ Because of this compulsion in publicly conforming to the unitarist ideal of Turkishness-cum-Muslimness, any articulation of a self-understanding beyond the categories accepted by the discourse of Turkish nationalism was likely to warrant severe censure. As Ethem Mahçupiyani indicates, Alevi were also unsuccessful in “performing” a public role that adhered to the state’s ideal citizen of Sunni Turkish heritage:

[Thus], the aim [of the modernizing Kemalist state] was the creation of a citizen who would be secular in the political sphere, but Sunni in the cultural one. It was as if Alevilik disappeared immediately. Together with the closing of the *tekkes*, the state expected Alevi to subsume themselves under a rubric designated for ‘secularists and Turks’ and assimilate within this new community. Of course, political identities that are imposed from above cannot possibly act as a substitute for cultural identities that have entrenched historical roots. But this is what Alevi [were forced] to experience...¹²

Whether for Sabbateans, Alevi, or other groups, the near impossibility of assimilating to the post-independence conditions Mahçupiyani outlines has ensured little opportunity to fully participate in the ideals of Turkish citizenship. In the end, though the Turkish Constitution extends legal citizenship to all nationals regardless of religion or ethnic background, reality is perhaps better reflected by the remark made by an MP from Çanakkale during the 1924 ratification of the document in Ankara: Notwithstanding other groups, “[everybody knows that] our real citizens are Turkish-speaking, Hanefi Muslims.”¹³

Alevi and Lausanne: Understanding “Minorities” in Turkey

Faced with an intransigent political culture that refused to officially recognize many of the Alevi’s demands and their claims to difference, an exasperated Cemal Şener selected an article in *Nefes* to share his discontent with the *status quo*: “Do we have to [scream from] the mountaintops for Turkey’s Alevi reality to be recognized? Or to gain minority rights should we first become Christians *en masse*? I wonder really, what do we have to do to become ‘first class

¹¹ Leyla Neyzi, “Fragmented in Space: The Oral History Narrative of an Arab Christian from Antioch, Turkey,” *Global Networks* 4, 3 (2004), 286.

¹² Ethem Mahçupiyani, “Siyaset İmkani” [Political Possibilities], *Taraf*, 16 January 2008. “Böylece siyasi olarak laik, ancak kültürel olarak Sünni bir vatandaş tipolojisi hedeflenmiş oldu. Alevilik ise sanki bir anda buharlaşmıştı. Tekke ve zaviyelerin kapatılmasıyla birlikte, devletin beklentisi Alevilerin giderek ‘laik ve Türk’ şablonuna oturacağı ve bu yeni cemaat içinde devlete asimile olacağıydı. Ne var ki tepeden gelen siyasi kimliklerin, tarihin derinliklerinden beslenen kültürel kimliklerin yerine geçmesi mümkün olmuyor. Alevilik de yaşadı ...”

¹³ Quoted in Kemal Kirişçi, “Disaggregating Turkish Citizenship and Immigration Practices,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 36, 3 (Jul. 2000), 18. “... bizim öz vatandaşımız, müslüman, hanefiyülmezhep, Türkçe konuşur.”

citizens?’”¹⁴ The despondent comparison he draws between his community and Turkey’s Christians is indeed a crucial one; as “minorities,” the nation’s most important Christian communities (the Greek Orthodox and the Armenians), along with the Jews, received constitutionally guaranteed special rights according to the stipulations of the Lausanne Treaty and the Turkish Constitution.¹⁵ While members of these communities possess both Turkish citizenship and the rights offered to all nationals of the Republic, articles 39-45 of the Lausanne Treaty granted them further rights to education in languages of their choosing, the freedom of religion, the legal recognition of their places of worship, and an exemption from compulsory religious classes.¹⁶ Given the various constitutional amendments protecting the non-Muslims’ rights, it is unsurprising that Şener would desire a similar legal framework guaranteeing the rights of his community. After all, the prospect of acquiring constitutional sanction for crucial Alevi demands such as the recognition of *cemevis* and an exemption from compulsory religious education is attractive to many Alevis who lament their inability to both realize these demands and effectively claim difference within a unitarist discursive framework that constantly delegitimizes their requests.¹⁷ Though the changes of the 1980s opened many opportunity spaces for Alevis within the public sphere, the lack of constitutional recognition of their difference

¹⁴ Cemal Şener, “Hacı Bektaş’tan Hacibektaş’a” [From Hacı Bektaş to Hacibektaş], *Nefes* 1, 10 (Aug 1994), 8. “Türkiye’de Alevi Gerçeğini kabul etmek için illede dağa mı çıkmak gerekiyor? Veya azınlık haklarından yararlanmak için topluca Hristiyan filan mı olmak gerekiyor? Acaba ne yapsak da ‘birinci sınıf vatandaşı’ olsak?”

¹⁵ Ürer, *Azınlıklar ve Lozan tartışmaları* [Minorities and debates on Lausanne], 300.

¹⁶ Soner, “Citizenship and the minority question in Turkey,” 295.

¹⁷ The triadic relationship between Alevis, Turkish non-Muslims, and religious classes is illustrated by a story Necdet Saraç recalls from his childhood. In it, he demonstrates the apparent advantage Greek and Armenian children had in comparison to Alevi children, since the former did not encounter the same sort of “neighbourhood pressure” (*mahalle baskısı*) to enroll in the religious classes at the school. Saraç’s story indicates that though religious education was optional before 1980, the pressure on Alevis to conform to the dominant norms was intense. “When I began middle school in Istanbul’s Kurtuluş district during the 1970s, the religious classes weren’t mandatory, they were optional. My father didn’t register me for the classes, so I didn’t attend. The majority of Kurtuluş’s population was Greek and Armenian in those days, while the minority were Turks. Of course, that’s changed a lot now. Anyways, I was Turkish, and I was one of the few Turks who didn’t attend the religious classes. For those of us who didn’t go to those classes, our classmates used to ask really difficult questions: ‘Aren’t you guys Muslims? Why aren’t you going to the religion classes?’ We didn’t really know the answer to this question; at first we stuttered, but gradually, we were able to answer it by rote... We’d hide behind the lie and say, ‘Thanks be to God we’re Muslims, but our parents just didn’t sign us up.’” Tr. “1970’lerin başında İstanbul Kurtuluş Ortaokulu’na başladığımda, din dersi zorunlu değildi, seçmeliydi. Babam, beni din dersine kayıt etmemiş ve ben de din dersine girmiyordum. Bilenler bilir, Kurtuluş o dönemlerde Türkler’in azınlıkta, Rumlar’ın ve Ermeniler’in çoğunlukta olduğu bir semtti. Şimdi değişti. Oysa ben Türktüm ve din dersine girmeyen az sayıda Türkten biriydim. Din dersine girmeyen bizlere en zor soruyu sınıf arkadaşlarımız sorardı: ‘Siz Müslüman değil misiniz, niçin din dersine girmiyorsunuz?’ Sorunun cevabını bilmiyorum, önceleri kekeliyor, sonrasında da ezberimizi konuşturuyorduk... ‘Elhamdülillah Müslümanız, ama bizimkiler yazdıramamış’ yalanına sığınuyorduk.” Necdet Saraç, “Aleviler, hep sorunlarla gündemde” [Alevis are always on the agenda with problems], *BirGün*, 7 October 2004.

ensures that the community's efflorescence is somewhat tenuous. "Being like the Christians," thus, at first sight appears to provide Alevi with certain privileges.

Despite the apparent attraction in acquiring the same status and rights as the non-Muslims, few Alevi would voluntarily choose to become an officially protected "minority" as defined by the Turkish Constitution. Indeed, it was indicative of Şener's desperation that he suggested that Alevi stood to benefit more from sharing the same rights as non-Muslims as they did as "full Turks," given the discrimination Lausanne minorities have suffered and the infrequency with which they have been able to exercise their constitutionally guaranteed rights. Indeed, members of these official minorities have suffered from discriminatory measures that enshrined their second-class status: Starting in 1928, the government supported the "*Vatandaş: Türkçe Konuş!*" (Compatriot: Speak Turkish) campaign to prevent minorities from speaking their mother tongues in public; non-Muslims, meanwhile, were further prevented from applying to both military schools and positions in the civil bureaucracy.¹⁸ These measures have occasionally been compounded by far more injurious events: During World War II, the government charged non-Muslims a disproportionately high wealth tax (*varlık vergisi*) in an effort to destroy them economically.¹⁹ Conditions worsened in 1955 when thousands of Greek houses, shops, churches, and schools were damaged in pogroms conducted with the tacit support of the Menderes government, thereby precipitating a massive exodus of Greek Orthodox from the country.²⁰ Though these non-Muslim communities possessed *de jure* citizenship, their status as minorities ensured that, in addition to being regarded with constant suspicion, they were occasionally subjected to physical attack.

Given the discrimination that Lausanne minorities have suffered, it is surprising that Şener would suggest that such a status would be more preferable to the one currently held by his Alevi community. Because of this, his quotation opens a larger area of exploration regarding the Turkish state's attitude towards marginal group issues. The framers of the discourse on Turkish nationalism did not accept the existence of Muslim minorities within their conception of the new Turkish citizen. For them, the only permissible minorities were those non-Muslims who officially acquired the designation of "minority" according to the terms of the Lausanne Treaty.

¹⁸ Yıldız, *Ne Mutlu* [How happy], 275, 286-7.

¹⁹ Alexis Alexandris, *The Greek Minority of Istanbul and Greek-Turkish Relations, 1918-1974* (Athens: Center for Asia Minor Studies, 1983), 219.

²⁰ Yannas, "The Human Rights Condition of the Rum Orthodox," 62.

In addition to the granting of official minority status to the non-Muslim minorities, articles 39-45 of the Treaty had further extended the right to use any language in private intercourse, commerce, religion, the media, public meetings, and before the courts to *all* Turkish citizens, regardless of religion, ethnic background, or language.²¹ In so doing, many articles of both documents implicitly implied a civic understanding of belonging to the Turkish nation. Far from providing a unitary and monist understanding of the nation, the texts provided discursive and practical opportunities for the exercising of rights for all, regardless of one's official status. As I shall discuss in the following section, however, the legal provisions guaranteeing marginal group rights (when not expressly contradicted by the discriminatory laws listed above) were superseded by state practices that sought to maintain the pre-eminence of a unitarist Turkish nationalism within the public sphere to the exclusion of marginal groups – whether unprotected ones like the Alevis, or protected ones like the non-Muslims.

A Centre-Periphery Paradigm for the Turkish Nation and its Margins

Despite evidence detailing the violations of the terms of the Lausanne Treaty, there remain important unanswered questions regarding the process by which this discrimination is conducted: First, what historical factors have contributed to a situation in which the constitutional articles granting minority rights are regularly ignored by the state? Second, on what axes does the discourse of Turkish nationalism relate to the challenges posed by the various “threats” represented by groups as diverse as the Armenians, Greek Orthodox, Alevis, and Sabbateans? On the first issue, I suggest that the silencing of marginal voices in the public sphere is the result of a fear that such activities could take on a *bölicü* (separatist) quality and thus lead to the eventual destruction of the Turkish nation-state. On the second, I argue that the discourse of Turkish nationalism relates to various marginal groups on a variety of axes, not simply on a religious or an ethnic one. This section, duly, seeks to elaborate upon these issues.

At the founding of the Turkish Republic, citizenship was granted to all nationals, yet the early republican state differentiated between Muslims and non-Muslims. While those groups considered Muslims (including Sabbateans and Alevis) had the privilege of legitimately labelling themselves “Turks,” non-Muslims were adjudged to be “foreigners” (*ecnebler*),²² “half citizens”

²¹ Baskın Oran, “The Minority Concept and Rights in Turkey: The Lausanne Peace Treaty and Current Issues,” in *Human Rights in Turkey*, 40-1.

²² *Ibid.*, 51

(*yarım vatandaşlar*), “visitors” (*misafirler*), or merely “legal Turks” (*kanun-u medenî Türkler*).²³ Despite being “full Turks,” Ali Soner suggests that Alevis and other Muslim minorities were similarly prevented from full participation in the nation:

The full-fledged scope of citizenship was largely identified with ethno-cultural membership of the Turkish nation. This Muslim-inclusive nationality provided legal equality for Turkish-Muslim citizens irrespective of their sub-national characteristics. But, since the uniform designation of national citizenship denied public expression of the Muslim population’s ethno-cultural distinctions, the socio-political and legal ramifications of equal treatment were reflected in an understanding and practice of unanimous treatment.²⁴

For Baskın Oran, the increasing conflation of territorial unity (*birlik*) and cultural monism (*teklilik*) in the state-sponsored discourse of Turkish nationalism is responsible for this unanimity in the public sphere.²⁵ Because of this conflation, discursive challenges to the monist identity of Turkey have been perceived as a direct, *bölücü* (separatist) threat to the very territorial unity of the state itself. In the post-1980 era, marginal groups have begun to challenge this monist understanding of the nation – seeking, in effect, to recapture the inclusive, legal definition of being “Turkish.” Though greater challenges to this monist ideal have not resulted in the loss of territorial integrity, many interests in Turkey (comprised of both state and non-state actors) fear that acknowledgement of the country’s cultural diversity will result in the inevitable dismemberment of the nation. In this, Oran argues, they continue to exhibit symptoms of the “Sèvres Syndrome,” a paranoia that anticipates a Great Power-backed plot to divide the Turkish nation through the manipulation of the country’s various ethnic and religious groups.²⁶ Such paranoia becomes somewhat more understandable given the context in which the Turkish Republic was formed: Not only did the August 1920 Treaty of Sèvres call for the territorial dismemberment of the rump Ottoman Empire, but the early republican reformers’ experience of the end of the empire was coloured by Greek and Armenian attempts to seize land at the expense of the region’s Muslim inhabitants.²⁷ The fear of dismemberment present at the establishment of the state has been maintained until the present day in the form of a lingering paranoia. Because cultural monism is inextricably associated with questions of national security, intransigent actors

²³ Yıldız, *Ne Mutlu* [How happy], 290.

²⁴ Soner, “Citizenship and the minority question in Turkey,” 297.

²⁵ Baskın Oran, *Türkiye’de Azınlıklar: Kavramlar, Teori, Lozan, İç Mevzuat, İctihat, Uygulama* [Minorities in Turkey: conceptions, theory, Lausanne, national legislation, case law, implementation] (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2004), 131.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 149.

²⁷ Erik Jan Zürcher, “Young Turks, Ottoman Muslims and Turkish Nationalists: Identity Politics 1908-1938,” in *Ottoman Past and Today's Turkey*, ed. Kemal Karpat (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2000), 175.

within the Turkish state and society have been loath to extend rights to various cultural groups who do not publicly conform to the ideal Hanefi Sunni Turkish ideal of Turkish citizenship. Because of this, all marginal groups – whether Lausanne minorities or others – have been effectively barred from proclaiming their self-understandings in the public sphere.

While being a Muslim was the primary criterion for (continued) settlement in Turkey, religion was not the only axis upon which Turkish nationalism and its discursive “other” pivoted. As we have seen, the discourse of Turkish nationalism excludes a multifarious collection of marginal groups from proclaiming their self-understandings in the public sphere by using a variety of axes, including hidden religious practice (Sabbateans), religious (non-Muslims), and sectarian (Alevi). In addition to these three cases, the Turkish nationalist discourse has also used the ethnic axis to exclude Kurdish nationalism in the public sphere – either through suppressing rebellions in the 1920s and 30s or through the ongoing battle against the PKK.²⁸ Because of the diversity of these groups, no common characteristic unites them apart from their shared marginality. As such, I borrow the concept of the centre-periphery dichotomy from sociologist Şerif Mardin²⁹ as a useful tool for understanding the various ways in which Turkish nationalism silences marginal challengers. In this dichotomous relationship, the ideal citizen imagined by the discourse of Turkish nationalism constitutes the centre, namely an individual who supports the Kemalist conception of the pre-eminence of Turkish language and culture along with the nation’s indivisibility. Though this prototypical citizen maintains a secularist outlook, Leyla Neyzi reminds us that the ideal citizen possesses a Hanefi Sunni background.³⁰ This centre, in turn, is opposed by multiple groups that share no common characteristics apart from their peripheral nature. Thus, the discourse of Turkish nationalism may emphasize its Muslimness to silence Armenian demands for rights, its Turkishness to silence Kurdish militancy, or its Sunni character – especially by means of the DİB – to delegitimize Alevis. In all these cases, Kemalist Turkish nationalism maintains its centrality while excluding otherwise unrelated peripheral actors.

²⁸ In 1925, Şeyh Said attempted a Kurdish uprising in southeastern Turkey. There were later uprisings around Mt. Ararat (1930), as well as the aforementioned Dersim Rebellion of 1938. For more on these rebellions and the Kurdish question in general, see the following titles: David McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2000); Martin van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State: The Social and Political Structures of Kurdistan* (London: Zed Books, 1992); Ömer Taspınar, *Kurdish Nationalism and Political Islam in Turkey: Kemalist Identity in Transition* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

²⁹ In a seminal article from 1973, Mardin suggested that much of Turkish politics and history can be understood as a struggle between central elites and their primarily rural, peripheral antagonists. Cf. Şerif Mardin, “Center-Periphery Relations: A Key to Turkish Politics?” *Daedalus* 102, 1 (Winter, 1973): 169-190.

³⁰ Neyzi, “Remembering to Forget,” 138.

“Minority” as an Exclusionary Term: An Armenian Test Case

As the quotation from Rıza Nur Bey indicated above, Turkish negotiators at the Lausanne Conference steadfastly refused to extend special recognition to any marginal groups apart from the country’s non-Muslims. In so doing, the republican founders chose not to apply the commonly accepted international definition of “minority” to their various non-Sunni Turkish communities. According to Geoff Gilbert, this definition includes groups that are (generally) numerically smaller than the rest of the population, in a non-dominant political position within the country, possess citizenship within that state, differ from the surrounding population on the basis of religious, ethnic, or linguistic factors, and, importantly, “perceive” themselves to be different from their compatriots.³¹ Out of a fear of *bölücülük* (separatism), however, the nascent Turkish state chose to extend minority status only to those communities for whom there was an Ottoman precedent for such rights: Indeed, the Greek Orthodox, Armenians, and Jews had already possessed their own, autonomous legal structures under the Ottoman *millet* system following the Tanzimat Reforms in 1839.³² For all other groups, however, there was no official status: Only those officially recognized minorities would be legally entitled to special rights.

Despite the wording of the various legal documents that provided space for greater plurality for the official “minorities” (*azınlıklar*) these non-Muslim communities have led a precarious existence throughout the history of the Republic. Leaving aside the discriminatory legislation and violence suffered by these minorities that I mentioned above, the concept of “minority” within the Turkish context has become a subject of stigmatization within both official and popular discourse. According to Baskın Oran, “the concept of the term minority is inevitably perceived as being contradictory to the ‘homeland’s indivisible integrity.’ [Wherever you go in Turkey], from the man in the street to the judge of the Supreme Court in Ankara, this is the mentality.”³³ While the textual bases of the Turkish Republic promote a discourse of equality for all citizens, societal practice, at both an official and popular level, is vastly unreflective of this ideal. Like those groups of non-Turkish heritage that were subsumed under the rubric of Muslim at the beginning of the republic, the *de facto* unitarian understanding of the Turkish nation on the

³¹ Geoff Gilbert, “Religious Minorities and their Rights: A Problem of Approach,” *International Journal of Minority and Group Rights* 5 (1997), 104.

³² Oran, *Türkiye’de Azınlıklar* [Minorities in Turkey], 56. Later, other religious groups such as Protestants and Catholics would also receive this protected status, yet the three communities listed above constituted the core of these non-Muslim communities.

³³ *Ibid.*, 132. “Kaçınılmaz olarak, azınlık kavramı ‘ülkenin bölünmez bütünlüğü’ne aykırı sayılmaktadır. Sokaktaki vatandaşın Ankara’daki yüksek mahkeme yargıcına kadar, zihniyet budur.”

part of powerful actors within both the state and society precludes the exercising of marginal group rights within the public sphere. Though all citizens hold rights that entitle them to publicly claim their difference, everyday practice has not permitted such publicly advertised difference since such action would result in government sanction along the various axes listed in the previous section.

For the official minorities, their classificatory difference made them an easier target for charges of *bölücülük* (separatism). In effect, their status left them at a disadvantage on two levels. On one hand, these minorities were regarded with suspicion for historical reasons: Under the terms of capitulations granted by Ottoman rulers to various European powers since the sixteenth century, subjects of Western European countries enjoyed legal and fiscal extraterritoriality when within the empire – a right these countries increasingly extended to local non-Muslims by issuing them certificates of protection (*berat*). As a result, the nascent bourgeoisie of groups like the Armenians and the Greeks were able to benefit financially from this relationship with Europe while their Muslim neighbours were not. With such income disparity, non-Muslims were often viewed as potential fifth-columns of European imperial powers.³⁴ In addition to this, the imperial expansion of Christian empires in the Balkans and the Transcaucasus throughout the nineteenth century forced a wave of Muslim refugees (*muhacirler*) to seek shelter in the Ottoman Empire. The arrival of these refugees inflamed religious tensions since many had become embittered following ill treatment at the hands of Christian armies and civilians in their former homes.³⁵ The disadvantages non-Muslims encountered were not restricted to the examples above: Though the founders of the Turkish Republic could delegitimize all claims of difference from non-Sunni Turkish Muslims within the public sphere with comparative ease, the chances of freedom of expression for the official minorities were remarkably less. The state silenced equally both the country's "legal Turks" (non-Muslims) and "full Turks" (Alevi, Kurds, Sabbateans), yet the gradation of the official minorities' exclusion from the body of the Turkish nation was higher precisely because they were perceived as an element more "foreign" to the nation than those groups who could be subsumed into the "full Turk" category. As such, the implementation of a unitarist understanding of the nation forcibly

³⁴ Çağlar Keyder, "The Political Economy of Turkish Democracy," *New Left Review* 115 (May/Jun. 1979), 7.

³⁵ Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History*, 117.

silenced the non-Muslim minorities from proclaiming their own self-understandings in public and left them as *personae non gratae* in the country to a degree greater than other marginal groups.

Regardless of whether the stipulations concerning cultural, linguistic, or religious difference have ever been adequately applied in Turkey, most commentators agree that the provisions of the Lausanne Treaty are quite dated. Indeed, the document itself reflects the social and historical context of the 1920s, yet no subsequent attempt has been made to update its terms in accordance with international standards regarding minorities. In fact, Oran argues, the Turkish state has utilized the document as a means to restrict discussion on the minority question, since its limited scope functions as a useful institutional obstacle towards greater public plurality.³⁶ Despite the restrictive and imperfect nature of the Lausanne Treaty, however, European Union progress reports have consistently demonstrated that the rights of other, non-recognized minorities do not even equal the rather lower level set by the 1923 document.³⁷

In effect, the limited fashion with which the Turkish state understands minority issues and its failure to fully implement the terms of the Lausanne Treaty suggest that it, far from desiring the continuation of a multi-ethnic and multi-religious Turkey, would prefer the disappearance of social groups that complicate the realization of a mono-cultural and mono-religious state. For the late Turkish-Armenian journalist Hrant Dink,³⁸ the strictures placed on the official minorities in contravention of the terms of the Treaty were the result of the state's "deep" (*derin*) interests: "The minorities had to be prevented from [becoming too comfortable]." Beyond the mass killings and deportations of Armenians in 1915, "there has been a concerted effort to reduce [groups like the Armenians] from a four thousand year-long national existence [in Anatolia] to a miniscule religious community."³⁹ Dink likened these efforts to a broken faucet: While traumatic events such as the 1942 wealth tax and the 1955 pogroms would occasionally "gush forth," the "drip-drip" of bureaucracy-ordered land confiscations during periods of tension

³⁶ Oran, "The Minority Concept and Rights in Turkey: The Lausanne Peace Treaty and Current Issues," 36.

³⁷ Nebiler and Cengiz, "Alevilik kuşatma altında" [Alevis under siege], *BirGün*, 15 August 2004.

³⁸ Before he was assassinated by Turkish fascists in January 2007, Hrant Dink had been both a columnist for *BirGün* and the director of *Agos*, a half-Armenian, half-Turkish language newspaper that sought to mediate the troubled waters between Turkey, its Armenian citizens, the Armenian Republic, and the Armenian diaspora. While much loved by liberals and the left, he had been vilified by fascist circles after being charged and given a suspended sentence for "insulting Turkishness" in 2005.

³⁹ Hrant Dink, *İki Yakın Halk, İki Uzak Komşu* [Two near peoples, two distant neighbours] (Istanbul: Uluslararası Hrant Dink Vakfı Yayınları, 2008), 25-6. "Azınlıklar çoğalmamalıydı... 4 bin yıllık kadim bir millet varlığını dinsel minik bir cemaate indirilmiş haliyle yaşatmaya çabalamaktadır."

centred upon ASALA,⁴⁰ the Nagorno-Karabakh War between Armenia and Azerbaijan (1988-1994), and the Kurdish problem⁴¹ made life difficult for his community.⁴² In the end, minorities in Turkey have neither gained the rights promised to them in the Treaty of Lausanne, nor been granted the notion of citizenship described in the Turkish Constitution. Whether a group had membership in one of the protected minorities or not, the erasure of publicly constituted difference has remained one of the state's overriding concerns.

Despite their status as an official minority, however, their difficulty within the Republic is not *sui generis* among the other marginal groups within the country. While the Alevi's greater proximity to the ideal type of the Turkish citizen ensured that they have been perceived as less of a "foreign" threat to the Turkish nation-state than have Armenians, they, too, have been subjected to societal pressures. Many have frequently been prevented from publicly acknowledging their Alevilik in the interests of not arousing the suspicion of their neighbours⁴³ or have been forced to participate in Sunni activities like performing Friday prayers (*Cuma namazı*) and fasting during *Ramazan*.⁴⁴ Alevi's may not have been compelled to emigrate in the same way as Armenians, yet they face many of the same strictures in attempting to publicly live their lives as Alevi's.

For Dink, the hegemony of the discourse that privileges an ethnic understanding of the Turkish citizen has ensured that few others who are not Sunni Hanefi Turks can realistically participate in the life of the nation. Publicly, members from these minorities would receive constant reminders of their "foreignness." As Dink asks, "if every day someone curses you, if every day someone insults you, how can you not remain Armenian? ... The pressure of others makes you remain Armenian."⁴⁵ In the end, he emphasizes the inability of Armenians to publicly identify themselves as such even when such opportunities abound for Turks:

⁴⁰ ASALA (The Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia) was a terrorist organization that aimed to force Turkey to recognize the mass killings of 1915 as genocide. It was responsible for attacks against Turkish citizens (especially diplomats) in Turkey and around the world, especially during the 1970s and 1980s.

⁴¹ During the PKK's insurgency, some unidentified Turkish newspapers claimed that there were secret links between the Kurdish organization and Turkey's Armenian community. Cf. Nouritza Matossian, "Let's talk about the living: An Interview with Hrant Dink," *Index on Censorship* 36, 2 (2007), 33.

⁴² Hrant Dink, *İki Yakın Halk, İki Uzak Komşu* [Two near peoples, two distant neighbours], 26.

⁴³ Mustafa Kirman, "Denizli'de kadınlar cemaat çemberinde" [Denizli women in the grip of religious communities], *BirGün*, 5 March 2009.

⁴⁴ Mustafa Kirman, "Gül'ün resmini asmayana belediyeden para cezası" [Individuals fined by municipality for not hanging picture of Abdullah Gül], *BirGün*, 3 March 2009.

⁴⁵ Matossian, "Let's talk about the living," 38-9.

... [The state] wants us to feel like Turks. Maybe I'd do so out of fear, but my becoming Turkish out of fear benefits no one. There are Armenian Turks, Jewish Turks, and Greek Turks. That's fine, but when speaking about a Turk, are we going to speak of Turkish Turks? ... You would like the Turks of Bulgaria to proudly proclaim their Turkish identity; that's legitimate and natural, but when Armenians defend their own identity, you say "no" – This is hypocrisy.⁴⁶

In essence, the Lausanne Treaty has had several negative effects. Not only has the wilful contravention of the treaty's provisions angered those supposedly protected by the document, the appearance of a situation in which the term minority has become inextricably linked with non-Muslims only has meant that meaningful debate on the subject of minorities within the country is immediately short circuited. Because of a paranoia rooted in traumas caused by the Ottoman Empire's breakup and the resultant Treaty of Sèvres, Turkish nationalism has delegitimized alternative discourses by invoking the need to uphold the nation's "indivisible unity." In the end, these convictions and a crystallized understanding of the term "minority" has ensured that there is little discursive space in which to discuss matters of difference and allow for their public practice. Instead, the logic of Turkish nationalism has sought either to assimilate marginal groups that can (realistically) conform to its ideal type, or, contrastingly, completely exclude those that cannot be assimilated into the body of the nation. Regardless of the matter, the crystallization of the term "minority" within official and popular discourse has ensured that the concept no longer has much utility as a device for discussing the evolving relationship between the Turkish state and its marginal groups in the post-1980 era. In fact, as I shall discuss in the next section, the problems that have arisen because of the term's synonymy with non-Muslims have had a profound effect on Alevi attempts to participate as full members in the nation during the last ten years.

“We’re Alevi, we can’t be minorities!” The Debate over the Republic’s “Foundational Elements”

Though negotiations between Turkey and the European Union regarding the former's potential accession to the body have been progressing for many years, the 2004 report of the European Commission was particularly important for the nation as a whole. In it, the EU agreed

⁴⁶ Dink spoke to *Radikal*'s Ertuğrul Maviöğlü. Cf. Ertuğrul Maviöğlü, "Ermeni Sorunu" [The Armenian problem], *Radikal*, 13 February 2006. "... istiyorlar ki biz kendimizi Türk gibi hissedelim. Korkudan belki yaparım ama beni korkutarak Türkleştirilmemin kimseye faydası olmaz. Türk Ermenisi, Türk Yahudisi, Türk Rumu diyorlar. Peki Türk'ü tarif ederken Türk Türkü mü diyeceğiz? ... Bulgaristan'daki Türk'ün kendi Türk kimliğini haykırmasını isteyeceksin, bu meşru ve doğal olacak ama Ermeniler kendi kimliklerini savundukları zaman 'Hayır' diyeceksin. Bu ikiyüzlülüktür."

to begin accession talks subject to the harmonization of Turkey's legal system with EU standards. More important for my purposes, however, was the commission's attitudes toward the country's marginal groups. In addition to a discussion of the various "Lausanne Minorities" and other disadvantaged communities, the EU criticized the Turkish state's non-recognition of the Alevis as a minority.⁴⁷ While many Alevis appreciated foreign recognition of their plight, the EU's call for the recognition of Alevis as minorities, in fact, drew sharp criticism from Alevi organizations across the political spectrum. In the period immediately preceding the commission's 2004 report, major Alevi organizations like the ABF, the AABK, and the PSAKD had conducted a conference in Ankara in which they argued that Alevilik was not Islamic. In reaction to both the Alevi organizations' declaration of a non-Muslim Alevilik and the EU's classification of Turkey's Alevi population, Ali Rıza Selmanpakoğlu (the mayor of Hacıbektas), along with several Kemalist nationalist figures organized a conference of their own. In it, they announced that

Alevis are the foundational elements and the safeguard [of the continuation] of a secular Turkish Republic. Alevis can never become 'minorities' and these attempts to create artificial minorities are symptomatic of conspiracies being played upon Turkey. According to Lausanne, [only] the Armenians, Greeks, and Jews are minorities. For these purposes, it is evident that to be recognized as a minority, the criterion is one's non-Muslim status. Thus, when one considers that those Alevi organizations who propose an Alevilik that is outside of Islam have established contacts with the EU, it becomes plainly evident that they are aiding [this EU declaration of Alevis' minority status.]⁴⁸

Despite this Sèvres Syndrome-induced nationalist perspective that perceives Turkey's accession to the EU as an imperialist plot to divide the nation, what is indicative of a pan-Alevi discourse is the reference to the community's status as one of the country's "foundational elements." According to this discourse, Alevis cannot be labelled "minorities" because they form one of the essential ingredients of the Turkish nation-state. Not restricted simply to Turkish nationalist circles, it is an argument that also resonates among leftist Alevis, as demonstrated by Haydar

⁴⁷ Commission of the European Communities, *2004 Regular Report on Turkey's Progress Towards Accession*, 6 October 2004, 166.

⁴⁸ Hacıbektas Belediyesi Resmi Web Sitesi, "ABF ve AABK ne yapmak istiyor?" [What do the ABF and the AABK want to do?] 28 August 2007, http://www.hacibektas.bel.tr/portal/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=83&Itemid=2. "Laik Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'nin asli unsuru ve teminatı olduklarını Alevilerin Asla azınlık olamayacağını, Türkiye üzerine oynanan oyunların bir parçası olarak Türkiye'de yeni yeni yapay azınlıklar yaratılmak istendiğini belirten görüşler sunuldu. Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Devleti'nin yeni bir devlet olarak kabul edilmesinin belgesi olan Lozan Antlaşması'na göre Türkiye'de azınlıkların Müslüman olmayan Ermeni, Rum ve Musevi yurttaşlarımız olduğu açıkça belirtilmiştir. Burada azınlık kabul edilmesi için temel öğenin Müslüman olmamak olduğu bilinmektedir. Alevileri Müslüman değildir diyen bu Alevi kuruluşlarının AB ile temaslarını sürdürmekte oldukları dikkate alındığında bu konudaki hizmetleri apaçık görülmektedir."

Samancı's criticism of the EU's classification of the community: "The European Union recognized us as a minority. [Following the announcement], we in various Alevi organizations discussed this at length ... [We weren't happy with this outcome], because, according to this decision, we are not one of the foundational elements of the country ... I think [the EU] is quite wrong in this respect."⁴⁹

Given the Alevi community's longstanding wish to receive recognition of their difference, what explains this criticism of an external actor's acknowledgement of this speciality? As Bedriye Poyraz relates, Alevis do not condone the association of their community with the term "minority" since the latter has such a strong connotation with the Lausanne minorities and the suspicions of *bölücülük* (separatism) that surround these groups.⁵⁰ Thus, despite the Alevi fulfilment of the internationally accepted criteria for minority status (namely their numerical minority, their non-dominant status, their Turkish citizenship, their differing religious practices, and their consciousness of difference), the popular association of the term "minority" with *bölücülük* (separatism) means that Alevis have striven to gain recognition for their difference through avenues that do not lead to the "trap" of "minority" status. Because of the stigma with which the term is associated, avenues for meaningful discussion on the issue of marginal group rights have been truncated: For the Turkish state, there is less reason to acknowledge the country's cultural diversity, since the only official minorities in the country are the non-Muslims. Through this, the difference of all other non-Hanefi Sunni Turkish groups is rejected – a practice evidenced by the state's categorization of the Kurds as "Mountain Turks" (*Dağ Türkleri*) beginning in 1938.⁵¹ The stigma of the term, meanwhile, has led Alevis to posit themselves as one of Turkey's "foundational elements" (*aslî unsurlar*) instead of minorities: The claiming of such foundational element status is symptomatic of an attempt to achieve a sense of "belonging" to the Turkish nation-state. It is, however, an attempt conditioned largely on the Alevis' position within the hierarchy of various groups within the discourse of Turkish nationalism; the very logic of proclaiming oneself as a "foundational element" within the system entails that other groups –

⁴⁹ Haydar Samancı, interview by author, Varto, Muş, Turkey, 28 July 2008. "Avrupa Birliği bizi azınlık olarak tanıdı. Biz, Alevi örgütlerinde çok tartışma yaptık ... çünkü bu karara göre bu ülkenin esas unsurları değildik ... Bu mantıkla bence çok yanlış yaptılar."

⁵⁰ Bedriye Poyraz, "The EU Minority Perspective and the Case of Alevilik in Turkey," *European Union Institute – Working Paper 24* (2006), 9.

⁵¹ McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*, 210.

namely officially recognized “minorities” – are conspicuously excluded from being essential national ingredients due to their non-foundational status.

In the end, Oran notes, the insistence with which groups like the Alevi and Kurds insist upon their status as foundational elements stems from the legacy of the Ottoman Empire’s treatment of its marginal groups; there, the *millet* system was used only for the empire’s non-Muslim population. As Karen Barkey remarks, however, while these groups were “separate and protected,” they were also “unequal.”⁵² Official laws forbidding non-Muslims from building houses taller than Muslim ones, from riding horses, or constructing new houses of worship emphasized Muslim superiority as the sovereign community – even if these laws were not always implemented in practice.⁵³ While the Turkish Constitution theoretically granted equal citizenship to all, the crystallization of non-Muslim difference with the Lausanne Treaty and the resultant stigmatization of the term “minority” engendered an Alevi wariness regarding the category. Alevi occupied a discursive place that was in closer proximity to the notion of the ideal Turkish citizen according to various ethno-religious discourses than the country’s non-Muslim minorities, yet they have had no success in achieving more rights for their community. Despite this, the suspicion with which official “minorities” are regarded in official and popular discourses ensures that proclaiming oneself a foundational element – and, thereby, demonstrating one’s participation within the extant myths of the creation of the Turkish state – is much more favourable for most Alevi than risking increased discrimination due to the acceptance of the “minority” label. On this subject, Baskın Oran provides a cogent conclusion: In his exploration of Turkey’s minority policy, he criticizes those Alevi who utilize this “foundational” status to advance their community’s standing within the nation, yet to the exclusion of others:

What is the sin of the Greeks and Armenians that came centuries before us Turks to establish a state? The state was formed, [the action of founding the state] ended, and now eighty years or so have passed... An individual who lives in this country is a founding element... However many different elements there are in this country, that is how many groups are this country’s main element. Because when you say [that you are] ‘*aslı*’ (first class), it means that you suppose that there is one or many ‘*talî*’ (second class) classifications of citizens. In the end, there is one name for this, and it is *bölücülük* (separatism).⁵⁴ (Emphasis in original)

⁵² Barkey, *Empire of Difference*, 120.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 120.

⁵⁴ Oran, *Türkiye’de Azınlıklar* [Minorities in Turkey], 182-3. “Bu topraklarda biz Türklerden asırlar önce devlet kurarak yaşayagelmiş olan Rumların ve Ermenilerin ne günahı var? Devlet kurulmuş, bitmiş, aradan seksen küsur yıl geçmiş. Bu ülkede yaşayan milletin bir bireyi, kurucu unsurdur... Bu ülkede ne kadar farklı unsur varsa, hepsi birlikte bu ülkenin ana unsurudur. Çünkü ‘aslı’ (birinci sınıf) dediğiniz

This chapter has sought to demonstrate how Alevis are not a *sui generis* community within the contemporary Turkish Republic, but are, instead, one of many groups that have struggled to gain rights that would allow them to more openly claim their difference from others. In this, however, they have not been successful. During the Lausanne Conference, the Turkish negotiators separated the country's social groups based solely on religion: Non-Muslims were classified as the nation's only official minorities, while all others were subsumed under a Muslim-Turkish rubric that, as both primary and secondary sources have suggested, entailed the pre-eminence of Hanefi Sunni Turkish citizens. Constituting the "centre" of the discourse of Turkish nationalism, this Hanefi Sunni Turkish self-understanding has maintained a multifarious collection of discursive others – whether on religious, sectarian, ethnic, or descent-based levels.

In the end, debates about minorities in the country are obstructed on both official and popular levels due to the legacy bequeathed by the Lausanne Treaty. Signed in 1923, the document's provisions have rarely been fully implemented and, even then, its limited purview has ensured little amelioration of the conditions for any of Turkey's marginal groups. Instead, the Treaty has served only to crystallize the association of "minority" with unpatriotic, suspicious, foreign, and potentially treasonous activity. Meaningful debate on marginal group issues is thus very difficult since the stigma attached to the concept compels groups like the Alevis to deny the speciality of others while "competing" to portray themselves as one of the limited number of "foundational elements" within Turkey. Authors such as Baskın Oran and the assassinated Hrant Dink have proposed the substitution of the exclusionary identification "I am a Turk" (*ben Türküm* – signifying an association with Hanefi Sunni Turkishness) with the more inclusionary "I am from Turkey" (*ben Türkiyeliyim*),⁵⁵ yet it remains to be seen whether such pluralistic suggestions will gain wider currency. In the meantime, however, the restrictions on debate created by the ways in which the terms of the Lausanne Treaty have been interpreted continue to obstruct the discursive and practical ability of marginal groups like the Alevis to publicly act out their difference.

anda aynı zamanda bir veya birkaç 'talî' (ikinci sınıf) yurttaş grubu varsayıyorsunuz demektir ve bunun adı bal gibi *bölücülüktür*."

⁵⁵ Oran, *Türkiye'de Azınlıklar* [Minorities in Turkey], 182-3; "Dink'in birlikte yargılandığı arkadaşı: 301'den beraatine şaşırılmışı" [From the friend who was tried along with Dink: He was surprised to be acquitted on Article 301], *Hürriyet*, 20 January 2007.

CONCLUSION: THE ALEVI CASE AMONG OTHERS

At the beginning of June 2009, the Turkish government invited over thirty-five Alevi organizations, including the PSAKD and the *CEM Vakfı*, human rights groups, intellectuals, journalists, and members of the DİB for an “Alevi Workshop” (*Alevi Çalıştayı*) in Ankara. For Necdet Saraç, one of the invitees, the workshop offers a chance “for the community that has received the ‘stepchild treatment,’ been subjected to discrimination, had its children forcibly taught Sunnism, been massacred for its beliefs, had mere knowledge of its population numbers obstructed [by the state] – even though it claims millions of adherents – to sit down at the table and discuss its problems.”¹ Not all Alevis, however, share his hopeful tone: Ali Yıldırım, a prominent community commentator, accuses the workshop organizers of not wanting to “open” up to Alevis (*Alevi açılımı*), but rather to play a “trick” on them (*Alevi çalımı*) in the hopes of assimilating them to the AKP’s style of Islam.² The workshop seeks to provide an opportunity for Alevis to present matters of critical import to them – most notably, the DİB, compulsory religious education, and the status of *cemevis* – yet it is unclear whether the conference will succeed in attaining any solution to the “Alevi problem.” Regardless of the outcome, the continued debate indicates once more the unresolved nature of the Alevi issue in Turkey. The societal changes of the 1980s laid the groundwork for the reconceptualization of Alevilik. Along the way, events such as the 1993 Sivas Massacre left an indelible mark on the community, yet the continued importance of the three aforementioned issues, as well as the difficulty many in the community encounter in publicly identifying themselves as Alevis speaks to the ongoing nature of the issues affecting the community.

This study has attempted to grapple with these ongoing issues. In so doing, I have primarily attempted to provide a new account of how Alevis find unity. Education, media-savvy, and greater access to financial resources has allowed for more objectification of Alevilik, yet these increasingly codified forms of Alevilik do not find pan-Alevi acceptance. Despite this, I contend that Alevis do have a “common consciousness” that manifests itself in a discursive unity

¹ Necdet Saraç, “Alevi Çalıştayı” [Alevi Workshop], *BirGün*, 30 May 2009. “... Üvey evlat muamelesi gören, ayrımcılığa tabi tutulan, çocuklarına zorla Sünnilik öğretilen, inançlarından dolayı katledilen ve sayılarının bile tam olarak bilinmesi engellenen ama milyonlarla ifade edilen bir toplumla sorunları konuşmak üzere masaya oturuyor.”

² “Yıldırım: AKP’nin yaptığı Alevi açılımı değil Alevi çalımı” [Yıldırım: What the AKP is doing is not an ‘Alevi opening,’ but a trick against Alevis], *Milliyet*, 1 June 2009.

centred on three crucial issues, namely that of the *Diyanet*, compulsory religious education, and the status of the Alevi *cemevi*. While other scholars have discussed an Alevi unity centred on the performative aspects of the annual Hacibektaş Festival, I suggest that ongoing political problems between the municipality and Alevi organizations have shifted the locus of unity elsewhere. In this, technological advancement and economic changes implemented by the government of Turgut Özal allowed for more opportunity spaces in which Alevi print, radio, television, and internet-based networks came to play a crucial role in continually reiterating the critical import of these issues for the community. While Alevi organizations of various political backgrounds might differ in their desired outcomes to these issues, I identify concern for these three main issues as the most central focus of Turkey's contemporary Alevi community.

The Alevi demands on these crucial issues are inextricably linked with further attempts to carve out a discursive space within the contemporary Turkish state that would permit the community the freedom to both proclaim their difference and claim greater rights. As I have demonstrated, however, such efforts are constrained by a unitarist framework that permits little opportunity for public self-identifications that advertise specific sectarian difference. I have further suggested that many aspects of the Alevi self-understanding have been constituted in terms that are largely antagonistic to an ill-defined Sunni other. Thus, in accordance with the constraints of Turkey's unitarist framework and the dichotomous worldview outlined above, I argue that the Alevi self-understanding revolves around a repertoire of terms that connote a particular conception of "civilization," of which "humanity," "secularism," "modernity," and "gender equality" occur most regularly. By deploying these discursive tools, Alevis simultaneously accomplish two objectives: On one hand, such usage highlights Alevis' affinity with the "universal" concepts of the European Enlightenment and, on the other, it paradoxically serves as a boundary-marker separating Alevis from Sunnis. Though such a discourse is essentialist, it is the product of a perception among many Alevis that successive Ottoman and Turkish states have continually repressed the community.

Beyond a simple attempt to improve rights, the Alevi struggles in the post-1980 period are just one facet of the larger question of who can claim "full-fledged" citizenship in the contemporary Turkish Republic. While the state officially accords all nationals the same citizenship rights, the discourse of Turkish nationalism has privileged those with Hanefi Sunni background over all other groups. The Turkish Constitution extended minority rights solely

based on religion, yet suggesting that it is on this axis that the nationalist discourse relates to its challengers is false. This study, instead, has sought to demonstrate that while religious difference as enshrined by the Lausanne Treaty is an important facet of the relationship between Hanefi Sunni Turkishness and others, it is only one of many axes of differentiation. Most importantly, however, this thesis has suggested that the Lausanne Treaty has retarded the discussion of marginal group rights in Turkey because the crystallized association of the term “minority” with the country’s “foreign” (non-Muslim) nationals has meant that the term has become a “taboo” in the eyes of many Turks. Because of this, the Turkish state has effectively ignored the country’s cultural mosaic, while, at the same time, marginal groups like the Alevi are forced to bypass the “minority” debate by presenting themselves as “foundational elements” that are higher class citizens than other groups in the country. As a result, the Alevi search for rights remains ongoing.

This study has regrettably been limited to a discussion of the above-mentioned topics, yet there are many more vistas to explore on the subject of Alevi in the contemporary Turkish Republic. Simply in relation to this thesis’ subject matter there are many more areas of possible research: For one, it would be useful to conduct anthropological studies to see what, if any, effects compulsory religious education and the construction of mosques have had on individual Alevi. While organizations talk about assimilation, there are no firsthand accounts available. There is further need for new research on the effect *cemevis* are having on the present reconceptualization of Alevilik. Such a project would necessarily encompass findings on the continued “congressionalization” of Alevilik while also touching on questions of Alevi usage of physical space. Equally important, meanwhile, is further study on the commodification of Alevilik: While there has been research on the relationship between commodification, Islamism, and secularism,³ there has not been a similar investigation for Alevi in the post-1980 period. Scholarship on Alevilik would benefit enormously from increased research in these and other areas.

This said, this present study has sought to make a contribution to both the literature on Alevi in particular, and the literature on post-1980 Turkey in general. In fact, the case of Alevilik provides one of the most cogent subjects of analysis for an exploration of marginal

³ See, for example, Lael Navaro-Yashin, “The Market for Identities: Secularism, Islamism, Commodities,” in *Fragments of Culture: The Everyday of Modern Turkey*, eds. Deniz Kandiyoti and Ayşe Saktanber (London: I.B. Tauris, 2002), 221-253; Esra Özyürek, *Nostalgia for the Modern*; Jenny B. White, “Islamic Chic,” in *Istanbul: Between the Global and the Local*, ed. Çağlar Keyder (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999), 77-91.

societal groups in the contemporary Turkish Republic. While subjects like the Islamic Trend in Turkey and Kurdish nationalism might receive more scholarly, as well as journalistic attention, the difficulties Alevis have faced in “trying to be Alevi” in the public sphere are far more nuanced than those of either the Islamists or the Kurds: In the case of the former, the militant secularism of Kemalism – in spite of its dilution since 1950 – swiftly delegitimizes any societal movement that takes Islam as its basis. In the second instance, the discourse of *böölücü* (separatist) Kurdish nationalism has been continually delegitimized by the unitarist conception of the Turkish nation-state since the Şeyh Said Revolt of 1925. Alevis, however, pose a deeper problem for Kemalism: Given the community’s overwhelming claims of secularism, Alevilik in the public sphere does not threaten the officially secular bases of the state in the same fashion that political Islamism does. Moreover, outside of a few, fringe examples,⁴ the community has not mobilized along ethnic lines. As such, the roots of its public delegitimization lie beyond such superficial justifications of anti-secular or anti-nationalist activities. Alevilik, instead, highlights the contradictions of the Kemalist discourse since it is due to its non-Hanefi Sunni Turkish nature that the community encounters difficulty in publicly striving for its rights. As I discussed in the case of the Sabbateans, sectarian and descent-based factors remain important in the allocation of rights. Though there is little legal or textual basis for the importance of these factors – other than the Sunni-based *Diyanet* and compulsory religious education – belonging to the “correct” school of Islam (Sunni) and possessing the “correct” ethnic descent (Turkish) is of critical importance for the exercising of rights in the public sphere. While the case of the Sabbateans is effective in illustrating these contradictions, Alevis perhaps provide a better indication as to how these processes work in the contemporary Turkish Republic given their numerical size in comparison to Sabbateans. The Alevis comprise the largest non-Lausanne, non-ethnic marginal group in Turkey and, as such, the exploration of their status within Turkey is invaluable in understanding the country’s present treatment of minorities and, more generally, the nature of the Turkish state.

As Turkey continues along the path of EU integration, the status of the Alevis will continue to provide a litmus test for the Turkish state’s accommodation of ethnic, religious, and sectarian minorities. In the process of legal harmonization, the speciality of groups such as the Alevis might eventually become enshrined into law. In the event that such an eventuality does not occur, however, Necdet Saraç suggests that Alevis still have many things to be proud of

⁴ See, for example, *Semah* [Alevi ritual dance] magazine. The successor to *Çağdaş Zülfikar* [Modern Sword of Ali] magazine, the journal is a PKK organ and is thus written with a distinct Kurdish flavour.

during the post-1980 period: “The more Alevis have become aware of their own power, the more they created their own *de facto* reality and a renewal of their tenets. Despite the fact that Alevis have not attained any sort of official recognition in the past 15-20 years of their drive towards organization, they have, at least, begun to achieve a ‘*de facto* recognition.’”⁵ In the absence of any legal amelioration of their status, Alevis have, at least, succeeded in carving out a space for themselves within the public sphere of the contemporary Turkish Republic.

⁵ Necdet Saraç, “Alevilik kalıplara sığmaz” [Alevilik does not fit into categories], *BirGün*, 14 October 2005. “Aleviler kendi güçlerinin farkına vardıkça fiili durumlar yarattılar ve sürekli olarak öğretilerinde olduğu gibi bir yenilenme içinde oldular. Alevi hareketi modern tarzda örgütlenmesinin üzerinden geçen 15-20 yıldan sonra halen ‘yasal olarak yok sayılsa da’ her alanda ‘fiili olarak var sayılmaya’ başlandı.”

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** Please note: Names have been organized according to Turkish language rule of alphabetization. Thus, Ç follows C, İ follows I, Ö follows O, and Ü follows U. (e.g. Çamuroğlu follows Coşkun, Şahin follows Starrett, etc.)

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