

ALEVI POLITICS OF RECOGNITION:
TRANSFORMATION OF ALEVISM AND
TWO KINDS OF RECOGNITION POLITICS

Thesis submitted to the
Institute for Graduate Studies in the Social Sciences
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts
in
Political Science and International Relations

by
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Boğaziçi University
2009

Alevi Politics of Recognition:
Transformation of Alevism and Two Kinds of Recognition Politics

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September 2009

Thesis Abstract

Bengü Aydın, “Alevi Politics of Recognition:
Transformation of Alevism and Two Kinds of Recognition Politics”

This study scrutinizes how the dominant political discourse on religion effects the transformation of Alevism and the Alevi politics of recognition. It attempts to demonstrate the constituents of this dominant political discourse on religion towards Alevism by mainly using the debates sparked by the AKP’s Alevi Opening in order to present the positions of those holding political power and of the prominent Alevi organizations within the Alevi movement. Although the emergence of Alevi movement beginning from the 1990s has already led to the formalization and standardization of traditional Alevism which we can trace in three examples of core elements of Alevism, *cem* ceremonies, *semahs* and *dedelik* institutiton, certain examples of the reproduction of Alevism have accomodated to a version of Alevism which might be delineated as “acceptable” with respect to the conditions imposed by the dominant discourse on religion. This thesis also examines the two kinds of politics of recognition within the Alevi movement as represented by the Alevi Bektashi Federation and the Alevi Foundations Federation. Besides, these organizations are analyzed in terms of their priorities, self-definition of their institutions, their views about the Alevis’ demands and about the implementation of laicism in Turkey.

Key Words: Alevism, politics of recognition, Alevi Bektashi Federation, Alevi Foundations Federation, AKP, laicism.

Tez Özeti

Bengü Aydın, “Alevi Tanınma Siyaseti:
Aleviliğin Dönüşümü ve İki Tür Tanınma Siyaseti”

Bu çalışma din üzerindeki egemen siyasal söylemin Aleviliğin dönüşümü ve Alevi tanınma siyaseti üzerindeki etkisini incelemektedir. Siyasal gücü elinde tutanların ve Alevi hareketinin önde gelen örgütlerinin pozisyonları hakkında gerekli bilgiyi sağlaması için ilk olarak AKP'nin Alevi Açılımı'yla hareketlenen tartışmaları kullanarak Aleviliğe yönelik din üzerindeki bu egemen siyasal söylemin nelerden oluştuğunu göstermek amaçlanmaktadır. Her ne kadar 1990'larla başlayan Alevi hareketi geleneksel Aleviliğin şekilleşmesi ve standartlaşmasına neden olmuşsa da, ki bunun en önemli üç örneğini cem törenlerinde, semahlarda ve dedelik kurumunda görebiliriz, Aleviliğin kimi yeniden oluşturulma örnekleri, din üzerindeki egemen söylemin koyduğu şartlar itibarıyla Aleviliğin “kabul edilebilir” bir türüyle uzlaşmaktadır. Ayrıca bu tez Alevi Bektaşî Federasyonu ve Alevi Vakıfları Federasyonu tarafından temsil edilen iki ayrı tanınma siyasetini incelemektedir. Bunların yanı sıra, bu federasyonların altındaki seçilmiş altı örgütün öncelikleri, kendi kurumlarını tanımlayışları, Alevilerin talepleri ve Türkiye’de laiklik uygulamasına yönelik düşünceleri analiz edilmektedir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Alevilik, tanınma siyaseti, Alevi Bektaşî Federasyonu, Alevi Vakıfları Federasyonu, AKP, laiklik.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I cannot fully express how much grateful and indebted I feel for the generous support of Assist.Prof. Ayşen Candaş-Bilgen. She was always more than a thesis advisor. Not only she helped to develop my horizon with her valuable criticism, but she also manifested the courage of believing both in the strength of this project and in my capability to manage it. By spending her most precious times on giving me feedback, she demonstrated superhuman efforts. None of this would have been possible without her.

I also want to express my gratitude to Assist.Prof. Markus Dressler. He was always there when I needed his support. Besides, the sessions with our reading group with him endowed me with a number of significant theoretical debates. I also owe thanks to my other jury member Assist.Prof. Cengiz Kırılı for his helpful comments.

Although I did not have the chance to study with him I am also grateful to Assoc.Prof.Ayhan Yalçınkaya from Ankara University. His books and our discussions with him have been a valuable inspiration and encouragement for me. Moreover, I owe indebted to the academicians whom I found thanks to the Alevi Institute in Ankara, especially Ali Murat İrat, Mustafa Şen, Akyan Erdemir since our discussions with them have also contributed to enlarge my horizon.

I am also thankful to TÜBİTAK for their financial support which eased the economic burden of thesis writing process.

I am also grateful to the personnel of Bogazici University for their generous efforts to help in general but especially to those working in the Near East section of the library, the secret heroes of the graduate students.

I am especially indebted to Senem Öner, my dear room mate who diligently edited my draft in her limited time. But beyond that, I feel thankful to her because she accompanied me in the long nights of writing this thesis, shared my excitement about it, and helped me improve my thinking with her precious comments. I am also thankful to Ertürk Demirel who helped the editing of the thesis draft despite the difficult conditions he was in. That has been a moral support for enduring the hard days.

I feel so much lucky to have a real friend in my life, Çiçek İlengiz. She was always the only one who could share the boring and unpleasant moments of this period of writing thesis.

My sister Yelda Aydın and my brother Ercan Aydın have been the sources of joy and a feeling of home during our telephone conversations. I am lucky to have them.

I also thank to my dear friends who gave their valuable comments and shared the difficult moments with me: Onur Atılğan, Selin Karana, Ercan Cinkaya and Evren Aydoğan.

Finally, I have to thank my interviewees; Ali Balkız, İzzettin Doğan, Doğan Bermek, Fevzi Gümüş, Ercan Geçmez, Aziz Aslan, my friends with which I met thanks to occasions at the Şahkulu Sultan Foundation in İstanbul, and the inhabitants of the Tekke village in Antalya.

*To Ekrem and Şengül Aydın,
With Love and Gratitude*

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The last weeks of 2007 witnessed a bunch of interesting news spread out in Turkey. The İstanbul deputy of the AKP government (Justice and Development Party), Reha Çamuroğlu, who is of Alevi origin and a respected intellectual in the Alevi-Bektashi press, announced that the AKP would initiate a dialogue for the resolution of the Alevi demands from the state. The project suggested a new institution to be found under the office of prime minister, with a separate budget for the religious personnel that would subsidize the Alevi *dedes*, the traditional leaders of the Alevi community (*Milliyet*, 23 November 2007). Following this news, it was also announced that Reha Çamuroğlu and the representatives of the Abdal Musa Foundation were working on the organization of a fast-breaking dinner in the month Muharram¹ in order to bring the Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and the representatives of the Alevi community together. The deputy Çamuroğlu emphasized the historical importance of this initiative claiming that the prime minister was hitherto the first one to make such a historically important political decision. Furthermore, he maintained that although it was too early to implement the necessary legal structure, demonstration of the intention was the crucial step, which was the half of the success in this regard (*Ntvmsnbc*, 25 November 2007).

¹ Muharram is the first month of the Islamic lunar calendar. For Alevis, it is believed that the martyrdom of Imam Hussein, the son of the Caliph Ali and one of the Twelve holy Imams, at the battle of Karbala, corresponds to the tenth day of Muharram (Netton 1997: 177). This is why the month of Muharram is accepted as the 'Month of Mourning' and during this month Alevis break their fasts with simple dinners including no dairy products or water during this month.

However, this endeavor by Çamuroğlu was received quite critically and a widespread protest from the prominent members of the Alevi community such as the Alevi-Bektashi Federation (*Alevi-Bektaşî Federasyonu*, hereafter ABF) and the Federation of Alevi Foundations (*Alevi Vakıfları Federasyonu*, hereafter AVF), and thus did not live up to his expectations. Besides, in a joint press conference, twelve Alevi *dedes* declared that they would resort to the excommunication and denounce as “fallen” (*düşkün*) their co-sectarians who would attend the Muharram dinner organized by Çamuroğlu and Abdal Musa Foundation, on the grounds that the attendees would become a partner in this violation of rights of their own community (*Turkish Daily News*, 11 January 2008).

On the other hand, those *dedes* that declared the attendees as “fallen” were criticized both by some actors within the Alevi movement and some liberal Islamist columnists who stated that this harsh punishment was very intolerant and revealed their authors’ political orientations misusing the religio-communal sanctions of Alevism (*Alevilik*) (Aksoy 2008, Akyol 2008). According to the writers who criticized the *dedes*, the Alevis who supported this declaration by the *dedes* were abusing the hierarchical power of the religious leaders, hence damaging the image of Alevis who are constantly proud of their democratic traditions, liberal attitudes, and secularity.

To make sense of the story at least three questions need to be asked. Why did the other prominent members of the Alevi community boycott the dinner while the Abdal Musa Foundation, a newly-established foundation (in 2007) shouldered the organization of the dinner? What was the point of those *dedes* in making such harsh statements? And lastly, why should one consider this attempt by the government to be a historically-important political decision in Alevis’ political inclusion? These questions will be answered in the third chapter where I will try to shed light on a number of subjects such as the hegemonic Sunni discourse

on Alevism, ongoing internal conflicts within the Alevis, the Turkish political culture on laicism and the fusion of religious and political aspects with regard to Alevism.

Poyraz (2005) and Massicard (2005) demonstrate that there were efforts of incorporation of the Alevis at the state level already before the AKP. Beginning from the rise of political Islam and then after the army-sponsored campaign against Islamism, in the post-February 28 period, Alevis have been deemed as the ‘guarantors of laicism’ by the state officials. This state attitude towards Alevism which has been designed to recognize Alevism in cultural terms, an attitude indicated by the visits of the politicians to the Hacı Bektash Festival each year, although the problems of Alevis have never been discussed in the political arena.

For the supporters of the AKP’s initiative towards Alevis, this has an historical and symbolic importance because the party base represents an Islamist-conservative tendency.² Considering the fact that the essential reason for the suppression of Alevis before the Republic was the non-secular politics legitimated by the religious law of Islam and its oppressing discourses such as blasphemy, heresy and incest; the importance of the initiative might be comprehended if this is to be a true initiative.

On the other hand, there have been certain Alevi circles that have deep suspicions about the AKP’s initiative. The bruises in their collective memory prevent them from trusting the party. There are two important incidents rendering them suspicious about the AKP. The first reason is embodied by the Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan himself. When he was the mayor of İstanbul from the Refah Party (RP), he caused great troubles to the Alevi community. On the night of September 7, 1994 he ordered the destruction of the historical lodge of Karacaahmet, which is claimed to be the most crucial historical site in İstanbul for

² Gülalp claims that it is difficult to define the AKP as an Islamist political party as also emphasized by the party officials although it originally came from an Islamist movement, *Milli Görüş* (2003). However, he acknowledges that the fact that the heads of the party bearing their Muslim identity publicly have attracted the party base.

Alevi spirituality (*karacaahmet.com*). The volunteers standing as guards prevented the bulldozers from the destruction of the lodge. The rationale for its destruction of the lodge was its illegal construction although İstanbul is full of illegal constructions. Furthermore, Erdoğan made a statement like “If Alevism is the love of Ali, then I am an Alevi too” in a TV program on October 6, 2004. This has also resulted in grievance among the Alevis for it implies an explicit ignorance of Alevism by reducing it to the love of Ali. Second reason was Şevket Kazan’s existence in the Refah Party. He was the Minister of Justice of the Refah-Yol government formed in 1996. At the court case of the Madımak Massacre in which thirty seven innocent people³ who had come to Sivas for the commemorative festival of Pir Sultan Abdal were burned by an arson attack of reactionary people in a hotel, he was the lawyer of the defendants. As a Minister of Justice being the advocate of the defendants of a massacre was severely criticized by the Alevis. All these experiences have led Alevis to approach with deep suspicion to the politicians with Islamist tendencies.

Moreover, the Alevis who denounced the attendees of the Muharram dinners as *düşkün* pointed to the threat of assimilation by the AKP that seeks to recruit its own Alevis who would accommodate to the conditionality⁴ imposed by the Sunni circles. Why do I call this as conditionality? First of all, the Alevi organizations that were considered the defenders of an Alevism outside Islam by the officials were not even invited to the dinners. The Alevis who could negotiate with the government have been those who accepted the condition of comprehending Alevism within Islam. The excluded organizations on the other hand

³ There were one Christian and two Sunni people among the decedents.

⁴ The concept of ‘conditionality’ has been used to express the existence of conditions in the areas of international development, international relations and international political economy especially within the areas such as the IMF and the EU for the matters of membership, financial aid, debt relief, and enlargement. Though it might sound having a far meaning, the reason I am using it in the present debate is to underline the fact that Alevis have to meet a number of criteria in order to have proclaimed legitimate demands during the process of politics of recognition, namely the acknowledgement of being part of Islam, living of Alevi religiosity and being political only for the cause of the religious movement of Alevism.

demanded the recognition of Alevism without disputing it in theological terms, claiming that the insistence of discussing Alevism within Islam demonstrated the limited nature of laicism in Turkey. In the presence of the state institution Diyanet, which decides whether the demands of Alevis such as granting legal status to *cemevis* should be recognized or not, Alevis have been forced to define their demands according to a Sunni interpretation of Islam. Besides, that some AKP deputies reproduced this discourse even in the ongoing process of the Alevi Opening also led the opposing Alevis to boycott the Muharram dinner. Moreover, they have been disparaged by certain pro-AKP columnists on the grounds that they are not even religious Alevis and have affiliated with a Marxist ideology. They have been recommended to engage in a politics through which they can articulate their demands on the basis of freedom to religion.

In this thesis, I mainly search whether the conditionality imposed on the Alevi actors in the Alevi movement manages to render Alevism, the “what” of which has been reproduced constantly, into a strictly defined belief system. The Alevi movement that has emerged in part as a reaction to the difference-repressing policies of the Kemalist state like other difference-based movements such as Islamism and Kurdish nationalism had to construct a collective Alevi identity. Although traditional Alevism has been the ground of this identity, a new Alevism was being reproduced, an Alevism reminiscent of “reinvention of tradition” of Hobsbawm (1992). However, as Sökefeld notes, “if identity is not only a vehicle but also the very purpose of the movement, differences that intersect with this particular identity become obvious and may turn this identity into an object of contention instead of an instrument for solidarity” (2008: 255). This is exactly what has happened in the Alevi movement. Besides, how the actors in the Alevi movement come to define Alevism has determined their very demands from the state.

Although the dissolution of the Alevi traditions due to the urbanization already has an influence on the standardization and reproduction of Alevism, I would also like to question whether the Alevi actors' reproduction of Alevism has been influenced by certain frames. Besides the significance of a 'unitarist frame' (Massicard 2006) in legitimizing the claim-making process of difference-based politics, I interrogate whether the factor of Sunni version of Islam, as the 'other' of Alevism, has given a twist to the development of Alevi traditions in the new setting. The problems with Turkish laicism underlying the demands of Alevis from the state which constitute the Alevi recognition politics will also be touched on by seeking whether the terms of Turkish laicism have determined the way the actors of the Alevi recognition politics articulate their demands. In the final picture, I aim to draw attention to what extent the Alevi recognition politics with all its internal disparate voices can contribute to the discussions on laicism in Turkey. Although the recent AKP initiative might lead a possible transformation of difference-blind and difference-repressive Turkish laicism in terms of religious pluralism, the fact that the existing conditionality, which has theologically-defined borders instead of a equality-oriented citizenship, forces the Alevi recognition politics to be formed accordingly might result in a difference-selective laicism.

This study will focus on the period between 2007 and August 2009 because of the AKP's Alevi Opening. It is important to demonstrate a political context in which a political party backed by a Sunni religious base has pioneered to put the Alevi issue on the agenda of politics in Turkey. Given the fact that Alevis have almost always supported the social democrat parties especially the CHP (Republican People's Party) due to the Alevis' secular concerns although none of the social democrat parties have managed to produce a concrete solution to any of the problems of the Alevis up to now, the AKP initiative is noteworthy. Schüler, having demonstrated this faithfulness to the social democrat parties in the elections, offers a striking advice to the Alevis:

To attain their goals, they need to forge alliances far beyond the domain of the social democrat parties. They also need to enter into more impartial discussions with the Sunni groupings within political Islam, who would struggle alongside Alevi for the incorporation of Islam into civilian society, and would also have to accept the code of conduct of a newly defined secularism (2000: 246).

However, whether all the Alevi actors within the Alevi movement would desire “the incorporation of Islam into civilian society” is also another theme of this thesis.

In the thesis, I mainly use a qualitative research method. First of all, I have made semi-structured in-depth interviews with the presidents of the prominent Alevi organizations. Given that there are too many organizations having different political discourses on Alevism, the significance of selection can be understood. I have selected six organizations which represent two disparate discourses on Alevism that I can categorize into two groups: the ABF (Alevi-Bektashi Federation) and the AVF (Alevi Foundations Federation) groups. So my interviewees are composed of as follows: for the ABF group, the president of the ABF, of the Hacı Bektash Veli Anatolian Culture Foundation (hereafter HBVAKV), and of the Pir Sultan Abdal Culture Association (hereafter PSAKD); for the AVF group, the president of the AVF, of the Republican Education and Culture Center Foundation (hereafter Cem Foundation) and of Kartal Cemevi Culture Education and Social Solidarity Foundation (hereafter Kartal Cemevi Foundation). Each federation has member organizations which move together and adopt similar political positions on any issue, which, I think, shows one of the features of mobilized recognition politics.

Two criteria helped me select and categorize the groups into two. First was the enormity of the organizations in terms of engaging productive activities and their mobilization capability. Then I considered at the types of their activities. For example I categorized them - in the fifth chapter - by how they defined their institutions, i.e. as ‘service institutions’ and ‘democratic mass organizations’. While the former (AVF group) engages with providing the Alevi community with the religious services such as *cem*, funeral, courses on *dedelik* and

Alevism; the latter (ABF group) is more occupied with street demonstrations, court appeals, and protesting actions. With all those activities, both groups have managed to legitimate themselves and reached a respectable prestige in the public opinion. Although these two groups do not represent all Alevis in Turkey, it can be estimated that the AVF group⁵ bears quite less representative authority among the Alevis than the ABF group⁶ due to its type of foundation and the number of branches of the foundations in total.

The other important factor for the categorization is their discursive and differences with regard to political action they have posited in three subject areas; the demands from the state, the attendance to the Muharram dinner organized by the AKP and the participation to the November 9 March for 'Equal Citizenship'. While the ABF group demands the abolition of the Diyanet, the AVF group prefers to obtain representation within it. Or, on the compulsory religious courses, while the former insists on either the elimination of the courses totally or the change in its compulsory nature, the latter group insists on the inclusion of Alevism to the course books. To the Muharram dinner which was claimed to signal a symbolic first step to the AKP's Alevi Opening, the ABF group was not invited, instead the other prominent Alevi organizations were welcomed. However, the Muharram dinner debates have been crucial to recognize which side has been closer to the AKP's Alevism definition.

⁵ The AVF consists of nine foundations; Adalar Cem Foundation (Burgazada), Anatolian Science Culture and Cem Foundation (Ümraniye), Cem Foundation with its around forty branches and seventy cemevis, Ehl-i Beyt Faith Education and Culture Foundation (İzmir), Erenler Education and Culture Foundation (Esenyurt), Eskişehir Hacı Bektash Veli Anatolian Culture Foundation, Hacı Bektash Veli Culture Research and Advocacy Foundation (Kayseri), Hacı Bektash Veli Gazi Cemevi Foundation/ Gazi Cemevi (Gaziosmanpaşa), Haydar Eren Culture and Education Foundation/ HAK-EV (Tuzla). Interview by the author with the president of the AVF Doğan Bermek. Tape recording. June 23, 2009. İstanbul. Because the AVF has no web page and the recent changes to find out the total number of the branches and cemevis on the various web pages might be deceptive, I preferred to cite Bermek's figures.

⁶ The ABF consists of twenty two foundations and associations, the most important of which are Alevi Culture Association Headquarter and its seventy three branches, HBVAKV Headquarter and its twenty six branches, PSAKD Headquarter and its forty eight branches, Ankara Cem Culture Houses Construction Association, Seyit Garip Musa Sultan Culture Association, Hubyar Sultan Alevi Culture Association, Hüseyin Gazi Association. Available online at (last accessed 21 September 2009): http://www.alevifederasyonu.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=222&Itemid=258

Final important issue is the November 9 March. Although the meeting was led only by the ABF group, it has a great significance for the mobilization of the Alevi movement. Since it was the first meeting occasioned only by a demand of egalitarian citizenship, not by a commemoration of a massacre.⁷ Let alone not participating to the meeting, the AVF group made derogatory statements about the meeting (*Zaman, Yeni Şafak*, 9 November 2008).

Although the questions I asked during the semi-structured interviews have had to vary in some cases such as according to the organization type and the president's role in the institution, I have stucked to a number of core questions ranging from their demands from the state, activities of the organization, rationale for those activities, state-religion relation in Turkey, their views about other Alevi organizations, to their views about the AKP's Alevi Opening.

Apart from the semi-structured interviews made with the high representatives of those organizations constituting the core data of the thesis, I also talked to Alevi people (ranging from the Alevi *dedes*, the women to the youth) on the occasions of a *cem* ceremony in the Cem Foundation in Yenibosna, two *cem* ceremonies during the Abdal Musa Festival in Antalya, a panel organized in Erikli Baba Lodge Cemevi in İstanbul, a visit to the Karacaahmet Sultan Association in İstanbul, two visits to the Şahkulu Sultan Foundation in İstanbul one of which covers the Youth Days organized by the Foundation's Youth Commission. Despite the fact that I tried to make use of all the data I collected, some of them could not be referred throughout the thesis but provided me general information about the matters I discussed in the thesis.

This thesis also covers a literature survey about the emergence of Alevi movement, traditional Alevism, contemporary debates about the evolution of Alevism, its new forms on

⁷ Fevzi Gümüş, the president of the PSAKD noted the importance of the meeting that, in the past they used to gather following a bad incident Alevis faced or for the commemorations of the massacres like Madımak and Gazi neighborhood. Interview by the author, tape recording, May 14, 2009. Ankara.

cem ceremonies, *semahs*, *dedelik*, and the Alevi recognition politics. Moreover, newspapers and web sites of the period of the last months of 2007 and August 2009 such as *Zaman*, *Yeni Şafak*, *Taraf*, *Radikal*, *Milliyet*, *Hürriyet* and *Cumhuriyet* were browsed.

With the present introduction chapter being Chapter One, this thesis consists of six chapters. Chapter Two presents a theoretical framework consisting of two sections. Firtsly, I look at the debates on the secularization thesis, secularism and laicism. Here, I plan to build my conceptual preference on laicism which refers to one of the most important arguments of this thesis. After presenting the discussions about secularism and laicism, I will touch upon the limited nature of laicism in Turkey. Then, I will provide the recent discussions on the rise of identity politics and certain citizenship theories which aim to produce tenable answers. This theoretical discussion is crucial to demonstrate the simultaneous existence of citizenship and politics of recognition debates in the world besides Turkey.

Chapter Three is devoted to the debates on the AKP's Alevi Opening. As already mentioned, the first Muharram dinner led certain Alevis to denounce the attendees as *düşkün*, who were criticized for being not secular, democratic and tolerant in return. While discussing the issue of *düşkünlük*, an archaic definition of *düşkünlük* for Alevism will be given and the symbolic meaning of this sanction in the present debate will be elaborated on. In doing so, whether Alevism refers to a religion or a politics will be interrogated. The aim of the chapter is to present the position of officials of the government and the Diyanet on Alevism and also the views about Alevi recognition politics of the pro-AKP circles. I use the concept of conditionality to refer to their criteria for the recognition of Alevism in a legitimate language of politics, the borders of which are defined according to a Sunni vision of Islam. Afterwards, I will touch upon the November 9 meeting about which there have been lots of marginalization efforts against the Alevis engaging with such an equality-oriented recognition politics because of the accusations of separationism. Then, I will present the positional

changes of certain Alevi organizations towards the invitation of Muharram dinner in order to show their relatively good relations with the government. Finally, as probably the first concrete step of AKP's Alevi Opening, I will look at results of the ongoing sessions of the Alevi Workshop.

Chapter Four examines the reproduction of Alevism in the ongoing process of the Alevi movement. Since the very terms of an identity movement depend on the discourse of the identity, the Alevi movement too has had to “reinvent the tradition” of Alevism. Presently, a new set of forms of Alevism is being formulated according to the needs of Alevis posed by modernization and urbanization factors. While trying to demonstrate the unavoidability of the transformation of Alevism through the standardized applications of *cem* ceremonies, *semahs*, and *dedelik* in the contemporary era, I will also give some striking examples of this standardization which might also run the risk of turning into a Sunnified Alevism. I will question whether the hegemonic discourse on the “what” of the religion has an effect on the formalization of this new Alevism. The last section of this chapter deals with the accusation of “politicized” Alevism by the AVF group for the other Alevi organizations. In doing so, I will try to shed light on how they tend to essentialize Alevism and acknowledge only a certain kind of politics to be mobilized for. This will provide us not only with the three different meanings ‘politics’ take, but also will help us understand how a “politicized” Alevism is justified.

In Chapter Five I focus on how the Alevi organizations categorized as two groups, the ABF and the AVF groups, interpret the state-religion-society relation in Turkey. This chapter will answer the following questions: How do they situate themselves within the picture of the Alevi movement, how do they legitimate their activities? What do they think the problems of Alevis are? What do they offer for the solution of the two basic topics, namely compulsory religious courses and the Diyanet? How do they conceptualize laicism in Turkey? How do

they view the AKP and its Alevi Opening? How do they think about the freedom of religion for non-Alevis? Are they following a recognition politics based on positive discriminatory group rights or an equality-oriented recognition politics? In the final picture, I will be able to evaluate what kind of laicism their way of recognition politics offer.

Chapter Six concludes the arguments of the thesis which were discussed in the previous chapters.

CHAPTER II
GLOBALIZATION, RETURN OF THE RELIGIOUS
AND IDENTITY POLITICS

Emerged in the late 1980s, the Alevi movement corresponded to a global phenomenon what is called as the rise of identity-based political movements. Although most of the problems of Alevis constituting the ground of the demands of Alevi organizations in the movement from the Turkish state were long on the surface, the timing of articulating those problems with a focus on an “Alevi identity” cannot be considered separately from the rising discourse of identity worldwide. Alevis affiliated with the left politics between the period of 1960s and 1980, were proclaiming their identity in the public for the first time due to a number of factors the most important of which was the rise on the discourse of identity. Globalization, neoliberalism, and nationalism play important roles in this context, as I will try to demonstrate in the following pages.

Besides, the religious resurgence beginning in the 1980s in almost every part of the world is another striking factor for the Alevi revivalism resulting from a number of reasons. Firstly, for religion has been evaluated as a crucial part of one’s identity, the demands on the ground of one’s religious identity for the recognition by the state constitute one part of the identity-based political movements. Excluded from the citizenship conception of the Turkish Republic and subjected to the policies of assimilation and discrimination, the Alevis have begun to announce their difference from the “Sunni citizen” the Republic has attempted to delineate although it should be noted that the Alevis holded on the Republican regime in its

founding years due to the laicist policies. Secondly, the rise of political Islam in Turkey led the Alevi to feel threatened.

Since I argue that the main reason of persisting conditionality over the recognition of the demands of Alevi in the movement is the limited nature of laicism in Turkey, in the first section I need to elaborate on the debates of secularization thesis, secularism and laicism. The reason of why I am doing this is that while in Turkey we are still debating on the forms of laicism, the necessity of the existence of a secularist state has been being discussed especially in the post-industrial European countries. In doing so, I will have clarified my preference for the conceptualization of laicism and discuss it in terms of Turkish context. Then, I aim to shed light on the rise of identity-based political movements, their external motives such as globalization, neoliberalism and nationalism, and the responses of the respective political theorists to the challenges of cultural demands in a manner of reviewing theories on citizenship. Besides, in this section I will also mention the significant concepts of politics of recognition and redistribution for our study.

Secularization Thesis, Secularism and Laicism

As used in the sociological tradition, “secularization” meant generally “the process by which sectors of society and culture are removed from the domination of religious institution and symbols” (Berger 1967: 107). The classical sociological theory, as found in the works of Durkheim and Weber, delineated secularization as an essential part of the process of modernization. According to this secularization thesis religious beliefs disappear or become privatized or marginalized with the differentiation of religious and nonreligious institutions (Köse 2006). Though the origins of the thesis might be said to date back to the nineteenth

century philosophers' thinking, the thesis was defended in the 1960s and 1970s by scholars Peter Berger (1967) and Brian Wilson (1966).⁸

Habermas tells on which grounds the secularization thesis rests upon (2008). He believes that it has three aspects to consider as the necessary factors for the loss of religion. The first is the progress in science and technology in the modern age which would result in a "disenchanted world". The second is the "functional differentiation of social subsystems" such as the churches and religious organizations because they no longer function as the authorities having control over law, politics, public welfare, education, etc, by making the exercise of religion as a private matter. The last is the transformation from agrarian to industrial then to post-industrial societies with the increased level of welfare and larger social security and thus decreasing the needs of people to believe in a better world as promised by the metaphysical power of the religion.

Steve Bruce, being almost the only defender of the secularization thesis recently, asserts that there is a considerable decline of Christianity because of social change (1996, 2002, and 2003). By looking at the church affiliation and attendance, Bruce identifies three reasons for the decline of Christianity; social fragmentation, the end of community and rationalization as brought about by the emergence of modern society (2003).

However, revising the sociological tradition that presumed a unilinear, inevitable and irreversible evolution from religious belief to rationalization resulted in the questioning of the secularization theory. Against the secularization thesis, sociologists like Peter Berger (1996), Rodney Stark (2000), Daniel Bell (1977) and Jeffrey Hadden (1995) claimed that it was not true that religion and modernity were incompatible. For them, modernization did not necessarily lead the religion to fade away. Besides the two opinions on the secularization, a third one emerged among the scholars such as Conrad Ostwalt (2003) and Jose Casanova (1994) who asserted that religion and modernity mutually influence one another. Also, the

⁸ I have to note that Berger later revised their claims on the secularization thesis (1996).

severe distinction that is posed between religions and the modern secular spheres is not that sharp, and the process of secularization does not demolish religious viewpoints, but rather it leads religion to change its form.

Casanova coins the term “public religion” in order to explain the existing phenomena that arised in the 1980s stating that religion did not lose its influence by referring to two meanings of “public”. Firstly, religion became public in the sense that it gained publicity, in other words religion became more visible in the mass media, and intellectuals, politicians and the “public” in general started to bring religion to the public sphere. Secondly, being no longer confined to the private sphere, religion “had thrust itself into the public arena of moral and political contestation” (p.3). Casanova detects four developments giving religion this publicity: “the Islamic revolution in Iran, the rise of the Solidarity movement in Poland, the role of Catholicism in the Sandinista revolution and in other political conflicts throughout Latin America, and the public reemergence of Protestant fundamentalism as a force in American politics” (ibid.). The most striking argument of Casanova’s work which is confirmed everywhere is that religious activists and organizations might be important actors for the realization of the social issues at the public level and thus might have crucial support in the struggles for liberation, justice, and democracy all over the world. In other words, they might help to produce the necessary public sphere in which the social, moral and political issues are discussed and likely to be resolved. Religion, as shown by Casanova, can play a positive role in modern society.

For Habermas, there are three interrelated factors helping to produce the impression of a global religious resurgence: “missionary expansion, fundamentalist radicalization and political instrumentalization of the potential for violence innate in many of the world religions” (2008). Although Habermas benefits from a relevant data showing that there is still a huge number of people defending the secularization thesis, he is discontent about it due to

the “rash interferences that betray an imprecise use of the concepts of ‘secularization’ and ‘modernization’”. Yet, he maintains that all those revising of the secularization thesis pertain “less to its substance and more to the predictions concerning the future role of ‘religion’”.

The critiques of the secularization thesis mainly claimed that the influence of religion did not fade away with the modernization and individualization processes, and/or religion has acquired different forms that have accommodated to the modern needs. However, none of them in fact touched upon the concept of ‘the secular’. Talal Asad remarkably draws attention to the discursive construction of the terms of ‘the religious’ and ‘the secular’ (2003). By following the deconstruction method of post-structuralism, Asad focuses on the dichotomy between the two concepts. He perfectly diagnoses that it is the power relations that determine the discourses on ‘the religious’ and ‘the secular’. For him, the Power “constructs” the religion through various discourses and practices. Therefore, he pays attention to the historically contingent situation for the creation of concepts such as ‘the religious’ and ‘the secular’ which means that those concepts are not fixed, constant and universal. This is because when the power relations begin to change; those previously acknowledged concepts and worlds of meaning might be replaced with others. Thusly, he asserts that we have to historicize the concepts and then to grasp the power relations determining the meanings for those concepts.

Asad’s brilliant undertake of the issue of secularism lies in his argument on how the secular is formed. He basically suggests “the concept of the secular cannot do without the idea of religion” (p.200). The secular is formed through “ideas of myth and the sacred, through concepts of moral agency, pain, and cruelty” (p.181). This is also because while deciding on what is inside and what is outside of the particular religion in order to solidify the sphere of the secular, one falls in the trap of a theological definition. Besides, Asad also calls attention to the relation between the nation-state and the drawn division between the spheres of the

religious and the secular. He basically maintains that the nation-state needs for clear-cut divisions: “the space that religion may properly occupy in society has to be continually redefined by the law because the reproduction of secular life within and beyond the nation state continually affects the discursive clarity of that space” (p.201).

Another criticism directed at secularism comes from Partha Chatterjee (1998). Chatterjee mainly disputes the campaigns made by the left-democratic actors in India on the grounds of a more secular state against the challenges posed by the majoritarianism of the Hindu right which oppressed the religious minority. He argues that a defense for secularism to challenge the Hindu majoritarianism is neither adequate nor appropriate.

More importantly, he demonstrated the anomalies of the secular state. Before discussing those anomalies, Chatterjee firstly counted the characteristics of the secular state three principles of which are often mentioned in the liberal-democratic doctrine (p.358). Those principles are liberty (the state allows the practice of any religion), equality (the state does not prioritize any religion), and neutrality (the state does not prefers the religious to the non-religious). By reminding that the principle of liberty can “be limited only by the need to protect some other universal basic right, and not by appeal to a particular interpretation of religious doctrine”, Chatterjee offers that it was not the case in India (p.359). He claims that by interpreting religious doctrine on religious grounds, the legislature and the courts came to involve with a number of debates which were religious in character. Thus, he concludes that the state in the name of secularism indeed violated the principle of secularism. By initiating “a process of rational interpretation of religious doctrine”, the anomaly of the secular state in India shows itself in the use of state legislation to achieve the “modernist purpose” of reforming the religion for it is in contradiction with “another modernist principle that is the freedom of religion” (p.360).

Unlike the widespread tendency to use the concepts of laicism and secularism interchangeably, Parla and Davison (2008) argue that laicism is not the equivalent of secularism in the French context; rather it is a narrower term since they conceptualize secularism as a fully nonreligious, irreligious or even antireligious outlook, state of affairs or a policy. They define the condition for the realization of secularism as follows:

For secularism to exist in full, religion must be removed not only from the institutions of public life but also from the realm of individual conscience and theoretical consciousness. Not only the institutions of religion but also the idea of God must have been removed (p.63).

The conceptualization of secularism by Parla and Davison is crucial to underline the conceptual differentiation of secularism from laicism. For Parla and Davison, laicism does not negate the ideas of religion and God. Besides, they claim that there are three connotations of laicism each of which corresponds to a different level of laicization. These are the separation of religion and politics, the control of religion by the state and the disestablishment of religion in various spheres of social and political life.

Similarly, Laborde conceptualizes laicism as a political doctrine of separation of religion and politics (2005). The state and public authorities should be neutral, and the state should abstain from religious affairs because state neutrality is required as part of egalitarian justice. Inspiring from the application of the French *laïcité*, Laborde concludes that there are a number of principles derived from this doctrine: *libertarian, egalitarian, agnostic* and *individualistic principle, principle of fairness, homogeneous public identity, and independent public ethic* which are reminiscent of the three principles (liberty, equality and neutrality) of the liberal-democratic doctrine as mentioned by Chatterjee. As for the libertarian principle, religious belief is considered to be a private affair and the state should neither promote nor prevent any religious viewpoint. Being egalitarian, laicism grants no public privilege to any religion, and cares that equality is achieved between believers of all faiths. This means that

state institutions keep an equal distance to all religions, all sects and all spiritual beliefs as well as to the atheists and agnostics. Thus being institutionally neutral and agnostic, the state's ideology tends to be perceived as neutral for it neither favors nor disfavors any religion, sect or irreligiosity. As for the individualistic principle, laicism assumes that the group membership to a religion does not ensure differential treatment to individuals by the state so that the primacy of individual rights over group rights is supported. Moreover, for differential treatment not to occur, the state should avoid from collecting statistical information about religious groups especially if it is using such data to compensate for the historical injustices these groups might have experienced. Principle of fairness is that the state is solely responsible for accommodating the necessary conditions so that the religious affiliations can be freely developed in the private sphere. For the homogenous public identity, the state ensures that laicism is a kind of formative project thanks to which citizens can see themselves as 'citizens' in the public sphere, while they can be religious believers in the private sphere. And finally, for the independent public ethic, laicism aims to create a citizenship ethic that is established free from and independent of religion, but is rather based on reason and conscience and collective social goals.

In their evaluation of laicism in Turkey, Parla and Davison maintain that Kemalists not only subordinated religion to the state, they also used and manipulated the religion according to the correct Kemalist Sunni orthodox version of Islam which would function to provide the social cement along with nationalism to bind the community together (2004, 2008). Thus, in view of the control account, creating the Diyanet for example might be said to be a laicist practice, while in view of the separation account with the state showing partiality toward religion it can hardly be said to be laicist. Therefore, Kemalist laicism has neither separated religion and politics nor removed the control that religion has within the state. Therefore, Turkish laicism did not oppose the religion itself, but instead tried to “rescue” and

to “purify” one true version of Islam. However, in the early years of the republic, the principle of populism and laicism were in contradiction due to the fact that the new regime had to change the situation of people's adherence to the state with religious symbols besides the transformations such as the abolition of the caliphate (Tunçay 1999: 211). A precondition for exercising the freedom of religion and conscience was that one had to accept the Kemalist “laicist republic”, and possibly also its re-interpretation of Islam (Parla and Davison 2004: 116). Thus, the principle of freedom of religion and conscience that could be implemented relied on the acceptance of a Kemalist laicism, which is a limited version of laicism they claim.

With the aim of defining and dispersing the true version of Islam, and to support the education of the “Good Muslims”⁹ of Turkey, the Kemalist regime established the Directorate of Religious Affairs in 1924. Despite the strong Kemalist commitment to the principle of laicism, Kemalists did not think that laicism contradicted with the continuing control over religion and the existence of a religious apparatus within the state mechanism (Azak 2007).

Parla and Davison claimed that the principle of laicism served for three transformationist objectives of the Kemalist ideology: “expulsion of religion from certain spheres of governance and social life, reconstitution of education according to the presuppositions and aims of positive sciences and establishment of uniform, nonreligious laws of a centralized administration that would serve all citizens of Turkish Republic” (2004: 100).

Taha Parla, in his book *Türk Sorunu*, touches upon the two kinds of laicism. In the Turkish context, the first one implies that the Kemalist regime did not want any religious leader in politics while the second one shows us that the “laicist”-Kemalist regime sees itself the sole authority to engage in the politics of religion through the existence of the Diyanet, obligatory column of religion on identity cards and obligatory courses on religion which have

⁹ Mahmood Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror* (New York: Pantheon, 2004).

made him to call it as a sign of “state-clericalism” (2007, p.76). Then, he mentions about a third definition of laicism, which is total displacement of religion from state, politics, and the public sphere; however, he claims that in such context where the threat of reactionism is still feared¹⁰ it is far from Turkish experience yet.

Throughout the thesis, I plan to follow mainly the conceptualization of laicism drawn by Parla and Davison because I will rather focus on the limited nature of laicism in the Turkish context, instead of the debates on secularism.

Globalization, Identity Politics and Citizenship

David Harvey in his remarkable book titled *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (2007) touches upon the rise of neoliberal policies beginning from the end of 1970s in the US and Europe and the social and political mechanisms that neoliberalization applied for the achievement of public consent to the adoption of neoliberalism. Although Harvey acknowledges that neoliberalism as an economic theory was already on the agenda of economists, he asserts that the consolidation of neoliberalism as “a new economic orthodoxy” occurred in the year of 1979 both in the US and Britain by ending the Keynesian fiscal and monetary policies which were considered the underlying reasons of stagflation by those countries (p.22-23). In that year, the US Federal Reserve Bank under President Carter adopted a very harsh policy “designed to quell inflation no matter what the consequences might be for employment” (p.23). In the same year, Margaret Thatcher came to power in Britain and began to dispose the institutions of the social democratic state by challenging the power of trade unions, all forms of social solidarity, giving up the commitments to the welfare state, etc. With such a brutal transformation to neoliberalism for the side of the economically marginalized classes, the neoliberalist authorities had to gain public support for those policies.

¹⁰ Umut Azak asserts that fear is the underlying characteristic of secularism in Turkey (2007).

By drawing attention to the worldwide political upheavals of 1968 which demanded greater personal freedoms and the amelioration of the social justice system as its initial political objective, Harvey points out that individual freedoms and social justice might not be always compatible (p.41). He claims that neoliberal discourse benefited from the sensitivity of individual freedoms of the people in the process of consent construction. Both the activists of 1968 and the neoliberals could agree upon the intrusiveness of the state which should be reformed as they thought (p.42). Harvey rightly maintains: “by capturing ideals of freedom and turning them against the interventionist and regulatory practices of the state, capitalist class interests could hope to protect and even restore their position” (ibid.). Thus, “the construction of a neoliberal market-based populist culture of differentiated consumerism and individual libertarianism” proved compatible with the cultural impulse called ‘postmodernism’.

Identity politics has been criticized mainly because instead of traditional bases of political alignment, such as those of class and citizenship/nationality, they accumulate solidarity around the categories of religion, ethnic and/or linguistic background, gender, etc. One of the critiques of identity politics is Marxist historian Eric Hobsbawm. In his outstanding essay titled “The Cult of Identity Politics” (1996), he basically argues two things. Firstly, identities are not constant and fixed, based on multiple and changing allegiances. Secondly, identity politics might be exclusionary by entailing the struggle for recognition solely in its name (religion, ethnic or gender, etc) and thus has the potential to challenge the other group/identity. This is because they are deprived of the generality of class politics, for Hobsbawm.

Bauman explains that the quest for identity in the contemporary era is quite appropriate for the realities of a globalized world (2001:188). According to him, the quests for acquiring identity are the products of the pressures of globalization and individualization.

Instead of impeding the trend towards globalization, the quests of identity rather help the globalization to operate in a better way (p.189).

Castells similarly presents a picture of how globalization and its interrelated factors result in the development of certain defensive mechanisms of the group identities which augment the level of disintegration at society (1997). For him, “religious fundamentalism, cultural nationalism, territorial communes are by and large defensive reactions” (p.65) against three interconnected threats: globalization, increase in networking and flexibility, and the crisis of patriarchal family. In a nutshell, Castells claims that threatened by the enormity of the world social actors feel the need to “shrinking at back to their size and reach” (p.66).

Therefore, with the pressuring demands of globalization from above, the issue of national citizenship has interrelatedly come to be undermined. Not only influenced by globalizing pressures (liberalism) but also by localizing ones (nationalism), the idea of citizenship has been subject to a great threat (Beiner, 1995). Even though the global era is said to have turned our world into a global village, the spread of globalization is accompanied with new forms of resistance, struggles and demands. Or if we say it differently: “Global integration is proceeding alongside sociocultural disintegration, the resurgence of various separatisms, and international terrorism” (Benhabib 2002, viii). As a result of globalization, multiculturalism appears to be a challenging phenomenon for the multicultural liberal democracies in such a time when the legitimacy of nation-state as the primary model of political organization signs of an erosion. Rousseau’s ‘*common good*’ seems that it no longer satisfies people at general. On the other hand, ethnicity and/or religion based nationalist movements result in the political consequences whose effects can be felt worldwide. That’s why the process of establishing liberal democratic institutions in Eastern European and Third World countries is still often subjected to a suspension due to unending violent national conflicts within their boundaries.

According to Habermas ([1990]1996), there have been *three* historical movements influencing the relationship between citizenship and national identity: a) the East Central European states that emancipated from the Soviets, b) the negative implications of economic integration of European states on the relation between nation-state and democracy, c) the immigration issue from the East and South, and also problem of asylum seekers, which brings about the contradiction between universalistic principles of constitutional democracy, and the particularistic claims to keep the integrity of their existing life forms.

Habermas suggests the solution to be come from the principle of “constitutional patriotism” (2001): the majority culture has to free itself from its historical identification with a general political culture, and if all citizens can identify on equal terms with the political culture of their own country, constitutional patriotism will take the stage on. But if, this is not realized, the collective collapses into the subcultures that seal themselves off from one another (p.74).

The other effect of globalization is that it creates a single world culture, generated by mass consumption, mass communication, the same fashioning everywhere; this in turn results in the weakening of the strongest local traditions. On the other hand, some believe that new forms of cultural differences emerge as well. For them, this implies a degree of *individualization* and *cosmpolitan identities*, which is already seen in post industrialist societies.

He used the term social welfare state to indicate the core function of state, *redistribution*. He claims that due to the economic globalization, the social budgets of OECD countries reduced generally since the mid-1970s. Therefore, he concludes that the fiscal basis for social policies has steadily decreased, and that state increasingly lost its capacity to steer the economy via macroeconomic policy. This is one of the reasons that nation-state has been withering away its power and thus cause the society to disintegrate in a large manner.

Unlike Habermas' "constitutional patriotism", according to communitarian political theorists such as Taylor (1994), Young (1990), and Kymlicka and Norman (1995), the identity of the individual cannot be considered irrespective of their membership/affiliation to any group or community because the identity of an individual cannot be imagined without their cultural identities. Besides, they underline the politics of recognition of their cultural differences through means of participation. Thus, we may say that there are basically three elements of communitarianism: identity, cultural particularism, and participation. They think that the disadvantaged/minority/marginalized groups of people in a multicultural society must defend their rights of inclusion. Because they do not benefit the system of rights in the same level with the majority culture, they find the *struggles for recognition* (Taylor 1994) or *identity/difference movements* (Young 1990) or *movements for cultural rights and multicultural citizenship* (Kymlicka 1995) the only way to make themselves equalize with the majority culture in terms of rights.

Since the communitarians stress that disadvantaged minorities are not given the equal chance to benefit from the universalist system of rights, they imply that they do not believe in the neutrality of law. Therefore, they claim that the state should be responsible for equalizing the conditions of the minorities with the majority. In other words, they favor a set of positive discriminatory rights for the disadvantaged groups.

However, they have been criticized in many ways. First of all, by highlighting the importance of difference, they tend to naturalize those differences, and be essentialist in a sense. Barry criticizes multiculturalist policies in that the politization of group identities or multiculturalist policies are "not well designed to advance the values of liberty and equality" (2001:12). He discusses that negative and positive policies should be differentiated. And when the equal status is reached, positive discriminatory rights should be halted (for example, women's rights).

Benhabib also criticizes the tendency of the communitarians to treat the culture with an essentialist manner (2002). She basically argues that cultures should not be taken as delineable wholes. Being a social constructivist, she suggests a dynamic view of culture that recreate itself constantly, and through narratives. Even though she thinks that a strong universalist position and sensitivity to the politics of culture are reconcilable, she does not approve the cultural essentialists. If a cultural group desires to gain equal respect, then they should engage in the practical tools of a deliberative democracy. On the other hand, Benhabib stipulates that these pluralist structures should not violate three normative conditions; *egalitarian reciprocity, voluntary self-ascription, and freedom of exit and association*” (2002; 19) each of which is necessary to guarantee the individual freedom of the member of the group.

In a similar manner, Castells demonstrates how identities might shift according to the changing conditions of the power relationships (1997). By conceptualizing three different social construction of identity namely *legitimizing, resistance* and *project identities* according to the power position of that certain identity, he asserts: “identities that start as resistance may induce projects, and may also, along the course of history, become dominant in the institutions of society, thus becoming legitimizing identities to rationalize their domination” (p.8).

If to go back to the criticism directed at communitarianism on the grounds of cultural essentialism, Benhabib (2002: 68) believes that a politics of recognition which does not necessarily lead to essentialism has been demonstrated most persuasively by Nancy Fraser. Fraser in her distinguished book *Justice Interrupts: Critical Reflections on the “Post-Socialist” Condition* (1997) points out that the politics of redistribution and recognition in the post-socialist age might not be mutually exclusive although the claims of the two correspond to distinct *paradigms of justice*. While the politics of redistribution addresses the injustices

resulting from socioeconomic deprivation, the politics of recognition aims to bring the cultural injustices to the political agenda. The brightness of her work stems from her effort to produce tenable claims for social equality and economic justice and the recognition of difference at the same time. It has been crucial to show that the politics of redistribution and politics of recognition are not necessarily incompatible. Therefore, Fraser's move has been a response both to the defenders of identity politics who prefer to exclude the socioeconomic injustices in the post-socialist societies by prioritizing the cultural injustices and to the defenders of orthodox Marxists who underestimate the importance of cultural injustices since they think that the framework of solidarity within the identity movements supplant the class solidarity.

In this theoretical framework, in the following sections I will try to present examples to demonstrate the limited nature of laicism in Turkey. And in the fifth chapter, by discussing and analyzing the discourses of the representatives of the Alevi organizations, I plan to evaluate them with the theoretical framework of recognition politics and citizenship which I elaborated on in this chapter.

CHAPTER III

AKP'S ALEVI OPENING

[The matter] is that...while this conception of faith is quite 'mystical', their members can espouse with 'atheism'; they can be both 'believer' and 'Marxist', or both 'sufist' and 'laic'(Albayrak 2008).¹¹

Before the news about the organization of a Muharram dinner to bring together the Prime Minister with the Alevi community, the name of the Abdal Musa Foundation¹² had already been heard. The president of the foundation at the time, who was also the mukhtar of the Tekke village, Ali Tören announced that they had been in contact with the president Abdullah Gül on a project to establish an Alevi institute (*Alevi Haber Ajansı*, 9 January 2008) in the Tekke village that would meet the needs of Alevi people to train modern *dedes* and to teach the youth Alevism.¹³ He explained that the organization of the dinner was undertaken by their foundation and not by the deputy Çamuroğlu and his party. However, it was quite interesting that a foundation which has just been established and which had an ongoing trial with the inhabitants of the village due to an allegation of fraud (*Radikal*, 11 January 2008)¹⁴ was said

¹¹ [Mesele], bu inanç tasavvurunun kendisi gayet 'mistik' iken, müntesiplerinin 'ateizm'e gönül verebilmesi; her nasılsa hem 'inançlı' hem 'marksist', hem 'tasavvufi' hem 'laik' olabilmesi.

¹² The full name of the Foundation is Abdal Musa Kültürünü Araştırma ve Koruma Vakfı (*Foundation for Research and Protection of Abdal Musa Culture*) which took its name from the tomb of Abdal Musa, who is one of the most important religious figures of the Alevi-Bektashism, born in late thirteenth century, placed in the Tekke village of Antalya. The foundation has fourteen members in the executive committee, eight of which are mainly from İstanbul, and not from the Tekke village.

¹³ With the increase of the urbanization and modernization process, the Alevis have encountered the difficulty of continuing their religious practices in the urban life especially after the 1960s. Therefore, the problem of overcoming the fact of urbanization and modernization has long been on the agenda of the Alevi intellectuals. However, the issue of teaching and upbringing Alevi religious leaders (*dedes* and *babas*) in line with modern educational methods is a highly disputed one by various voices within the Alevi community. This will be dealt with in the following chapters.

¹⁴ This was also revealed during the interviews I made with the inhabitants of the village including Mustafa Zeybek who is among the founders of the foundation, June 19-21 2009, Antalya.

to finance the dinner taking place in the Bilkent Otel of Ankara which would cost such a small foundation a great fortune.

The founding names of the Abdal Musa Foundation include both those that had left the Cumhuriyetçi Eğitim ve Kültür Merkezi Vakfı (*Republican Education and Culture Centre Foundation*, hereafter Cem Foundation) sometime ago which might be due to internal disputes, the Cem Foundation itself, Tekke Köyü Abdal Musa Kültürünü Araştırma ve Yaşatma Derneği (*Tekke Village Association for Research and Sustenance of Abdal Musa Culture*) and three inhabitants of the village (*Official Gazzette* 2007, no.26406). Because of the fact that Abdal Musa is the second most important spiritual site for the Alevi community in Turkey, after the site of Hacı Bektashi Veli in Nevşehir, the annual commemoration of Abdal Musa in the Tekke village in Antalya brings thousands of Alevis together from every corner of Turkey. If one considers the fact that the annual commemorative festival of Hacı Bektashi Veli which is organized by the local state authorities sparkles a number of political debates around the Alevi organizations often witnessing boycotts and provocations, the strife of Alevi organizations for hegemony over the important Alevi spiritual sites is quite expectable as those sites bear a significant power of public space. An inhabitant of the Tekke village, who is also among the founders of the foundation and of the association, explained the situation in the following way: “Other organizations are trying to have an authority [in the village through the organization of the festival]. They are jealous”. He further said that it was “not a field of politics, but a field of faith”¹⁵.

Briefly put, the Abdal Musa Foundation was established with the support of the Cem Foundation for future projects either on the Abdal Musa mausoleum in the Tekke village or on a dialogue with the government. Despite that, the president of the Cem Foundation İzzettin

¹⁵ Diğer örgütler burada söz sahibi olmaya çalışıyorlar. Kıskançlar... Burası siyaset meydanı değil inanç meydanı. Interview with by the author, tape recording, Mustafa Zeybek. June 21, 2009. Antalya.

Doğan was among those who did not attend the dinner organization. However, his excuses were rather different than the other boycotting Alevi organizations.

First of all, he made perfectly clear that they were not against the idea of the dinner with the Prime Minister and had decided to attend at first (*İhlas Haber Ajansı*, 11 January 2008). Doğan is widely known as a leading figure that has close relations with the state representatives since the early days of the establishment of the Cem Foundation because he spread the interpretation of Alevism as a Turkish interpretation of Islam, with his wording “Alevi Islam” as the Turkish interpretation of Islam, which is exactly in line with the state discourse on the religion’s place in Turkish socio-political life, if one recalls the doctrine of Turkish-Islam Synthesis (*Türk İslam Sentezi*) that was introduced especially during the post-September 12 of 1980 period by the military officials.

According to Doğan, the prime minister had had to guarantee with a few words long before the dinner that their long-awaited rights would be granted to Alevi citizens. He stated that he would not have refrained from attending the dinner, only if this condition had been provided. Besides, he said: “This ‘opening’ is just to get Alevi votes; because there is not a single project”.

Although it is strange that the Abdal Musa Foundation, the establishment of which was realized with the direct support of the Cem Foundation, was in the actor position in organizing the dinner occasion while the Cem Foundation declared its abstention to the dinner; Doğan was right to expect a serious and determined explanation by the government considering his institution’s public prestige because other deputies of the AKP made contradictory statements with Çamuroğlu’s views later on. For example, regarding the *cemevi* (gathering places of worship and socialization of Alevi) issue, while Çamuroğlu acknowledges *cemevis* as “places of worship” and that their status as such had to be “officially recognized”, another AKP deputy Hüseyin Tuğcu declared: “*cemevis* cannot be

counted as places of worship and cannot be alternative to mosques” (*Radikal*, 16 January 2008), and the AKP’s Yozgat deputy Mehmet Çiçek said: “at mosques, people do daily worship (namaz), but at *cemevis* people perform *semah*”. The AKP’s İstanbul deputy İbrahim Yiğit who is also of Alevi origin and among the organizing team of the dinner, shared the same discourse with Çamuroğlu on the belief that they would resolve the Alevi Question, he said:

We are going to solve this issue. The AK Party¹⁶, *too*, looks positively to the issue. We made regular meetings. The last one was on December 17, at the party headquarter. We gathered with the instruction of the prime minister under the chair of Egemen Bağış. I and Reha Çamuroğlu made a presentation by briefing the top personnel of the party on the problem. These meetings will continue. We are seeking the answer to the question whether an institution shall be founded under the Directorate of Religious Affairs or under the state ministry.¹⁷ (emphasis added)

In the first line of the Yiğit’s speech, the use of ‘too’ gives us some clue on how the idea of the initiative turned up. It appears that Çamuroğlu and Yiğit somehow decided to put the Alevi issue on the AKP agenda. Then the party (obviously only some important names within the party) was informed of this idea on the Alevi issue because another AKP deputy Hüseyin Tuğcu, who is of Alevi origin stated that there was only an ‘opening’ made by a foundation, and there was not a decision accepted by the party (*Radikal*, 16 January 2008). Besides, he was against the idea of *cemevis* to obtain legal status, he said:

There is no *cemevi* in any of the historical sources. This word has been used later on. Despite this reality, with the condition of not dynamiting the foundations of the state,

¹⁶ The shorting of the Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi) is the AK Party as mentioned in the founding regulation (tüzük) of party, and thus used as such by both the party officials and the pro-AK Party circles, though the ‘AKP’ is still widely used by the media. However, the president of the party, prime minister Erdoğan has been offended by the use of ‘AKP’ more extensively in the media. The lying ideology behind this obsession will be elaborated in the following chapters.

¹⁷ Toplantıyı 17 Aralıkta genel merkezde yaptık. [Egemen Bağış](#)’ın başkanlığında Başbakan’ın talimatıyla toplandık. Ben ve Sayın [Reha Çamuroğlu](#) bir sunum yaptık. Partinin en üst düzeyindeki insanlara sorunu anlattık. Bu toplantılarımız devam edecek. Devlet Bakanlığı’na mı Diyanet’e mi bağlı bir kurum oluşturulacak bunun yollarını araştırıyoruz. Available online at (last accessed 21 September 2009):

<http://www.haberler.com/akp-li-yigit-alevi-acilimina-aleviligi-islam-disi-haberi/>

cemevis are necessary. I warned the Prime Minister Erdoğan but due to Erdoğan's insistence I attended the dinner.¹⁸

In the third sentence of Tuğcu, what he means by saying “dynamiting the foundations of the state” is one of the most used in the ongoing state discourses. It implies a permanent fear on harming the territorial integrity and social harmony of the country dating back to the early republican era. State elites have always tended to see the giving a group/community any kind of right as a harmful act on the total integrity of the country. Historically, non-Muslim communities as in the first place, radical Islamists, then leftist-communist groups, Kurdish people, and finally Alevis have become the object of the state discourse on separatism. For the demands of Alevis such as *cemevis* to be recognized as an official place of worship of Alevis, this deputy of the AKP uses the same discourse by arguing that recognizing *cemevis* as such would dynamite the foundation of the state. This sort of perception towards the Alevi issue is very much related to the Kurdish issue in Turkey. The state officials have quite been aware of the fact that one of the important factors of the Alevi revival was the rise of Kurdish politics due to the considerable proportion of Kurdish Alevis in the total Alevi population (Çamuroğlu 1998: 80).¹⁹ Furthermore, the state's first labeling on the Alevi issue as an element of separatism in such an overt way corresponds to the statements of Abdülkadir Sezgin, who was the chief inspector in the Diyanet (Directorate of Religious Affairs) with extremist nationalist beliefs, to the effect that “There are Alevi groups who have territorial demands from Turkey. They want to found a state named ‘Alevistan’. It is the second separatist threat after the PKK for Turkey” (*Milliyet*, 21 July 2001). To put it briefly, Alevis have been standing right at the centre of this hegemonic discourse on particularities as elements of separatism which

¹⁸ Tarihi hiçbir kaynakta cemevi yoktur. Sonradan bu kavram kullanılmıştır. Bu realiteye karşın devletin temeline dinamit koymamak şartıyla cemevleri gereklidir. Başbakan Tayyip Erdoğan'ı uyardım ancak Erdoğan'ın ısrarı üzerine iftara katıldım.

¹⁹ However, the Kurdish Alevis mostly define themselves first as an Alevi, then as a Kurd (Bruinessen 2000: 128). Çamuroğlu argued that Alevis, when faced with the Kurdish nationalism they leaned with “the principle of unity and stress their religious identity and affiliation as Alevi” (1998: 80).

inevitably shapes the content and form of the discourses of Alevi themselves. This issue is going to be elaborated in detail in the following chapter. I just want to emphasize for now that since the legitimate political language is structured by the fear from the harm to the territorial integrity; every political argumentation seems to have to give assurances as to the security of the territorial integrity.

Having examined the differing statements of the deputies of the AKP, we might claim that contrary to the effort to create an image of an ‘Alevi Opening’ in the public opinion, the AKP’s attitude within the ranks of the AKP towards the Alevi issue was not so clear or positive during the initial phase of the debate.

On the other hand, it has to be noted that there was a meeting between the deputy Çamuroğlu and İzzettin Doğan before the announcements on the dinner as also declared by the president of the Abdal Musa Foundation, Ali Tören. He thought that the reluctance of Doğan to attend the dinner might be resulting from his personal opinions regarding the question of why the Abdal Musa Foundation was on the centre of this initiative instead of the Cem Foundation (*Alevi Haber Ajansı*, 9 January 2008). Moreover, he said that they did not have different demands from the state than the demands of the Cem Foundation. Even though Doğan refrained from attending the dinner, he did not approve the stance of the twelve *dedes* who boycotted the dinner by declaring the attendees as “fallen” from the Alevi society. He claimed:

I find that the denouncement of the attendees as ‘fallen’ is very inappropriate. This is not an Alevist attitude. There is an institution of excommunication but since it corresponds to a very harsh punishment it has serious norms. And the decision that those criteria or norms have been disregarded is made by *dedes* after the defenses and accusations are listened before the *cem* community (*İhlas Haber Ajansı*, 11 January 2008).

Nevertheless, the question remains whether the so-called initiative of the government to resolve the Alevi issue that is said to aim at bringing the prime minister and the Alevi

community together addressed the prominent organizations of the Alevi community by sending each of them an invitation lies on the surface. Having presented the stand of the Cem Foundation on the subject let me now provide the arguments of other Alevi organizations in boycotting the dinner organization.

Predictably, the Federation of Alevi Foundations²⁰ (*Alevi Vakıfları Federasyonu*, AVF), which the Cem Foundation is affiliated with shares similar views on the Alevi ‘Opening’. The president of the AVF Doğan Bermek agreed with Doğan that there was not yet any determined Alevi policy as campaigned by Çamuroğlu and Yiğit and that it was just to win the Alevi votes and not sincere in its claims (*Birgün*, 9 December 2007). He stated that the reason of the AKP’s engagement with this policy was the pressure resulted from the gains of the Alevi movement such as the case at the ECHR that was decided in favor of Alevis and the trials opened against the prime ministry and the Ministry of National Education and from the fact that the problems of Alevis had yearly been pushed to the front by the Progress Reports on Turkey by the European Union. Moreover, he declared that if the Sunni religious staff were given a share from the state budget, the same should be applied to the Alevi ones as well.

²⁰ Under the roof of the AVF, there are nine foundations among the most respectables of which are the Cem Foundation with its over forty branches, Gazi Cemevi and Kartal Cemevi foundations. Since the necessary number of members to establish a foundation is relatively far less than the one of an association, the quantitative public force of the AVF is not big.

The president of the Alevi-Bektashi Federation²¹ at the time, Turan Eser, agreed with Doğan and Bermek that the so-called ‘Alevi initiative’ discourse had not been embraced by the AKP government officially given the contradictory statements of the AKP deputies. Furthermore, he criticized the organizers as: “In dealing with this issue they do not make policies by listening to the addressees directly, and they want to generate a Sunni-oriented policy and to bring Alevism under state control by alienating it from its traditional and authentic identity” (*Birgün*, 9 December 2007). Eser mainly criticized the organization team by not calling the full spectrum of addressees of the Alevi issue. Despite the fact that the Alevi-Bektashi Federation lodged in a petition to the government for an appointment to talk about the problems constantly, they were never responded positively. For this occasion of the dinner, they were not even invited. Additionally, Eser claimed that the ruling party had to explain the dark past both to its public base and to Alevis since Alevis still carried the collective memory of horrible events triggered by the fact that political Islam obscured the life of Alevis. Besides those horrible incidents such as the Madımak, Eser also referred to the discriminatory, exclusive and contemptuous speeches of the officials that the AKP never happened to criticize and apologized for. As the president of the Alevi-Bektashi Federation, he assured that on the basis of finding a solution to the problems of Alevis they would never avoid negotiating with the AKP.

²¹ The Alevi-Bektashi Federation has twenty associations and two foundations. The most important ones among them are the Alevi Culture Associations with its seventy three branches, the Hacı Bektash Veli Anatolian Culture Foundation with its twenty six branches and the Pir Sultan Abdal Culture Associations with its forty six branches (alevifederasyonu.com). With those, the Alevi-Bektashi Federation constitutes the biggest Alevi organization in Turkey in quantitative terms. Here, I am not claiming any of the Alevi organization cited throughout the thesis bears the power of a true representation of the Alevi community in Turkey in general. This is both because the Alevis in Turkey affiliate rarely with Alevi organizations and because the representation is a debated issue due to the undeterminable criteria for a legitimate Alevi organization in terms either of Alevi religious services such as cem, funeral and instruction. Nevertheless, after presenting the discourses and practices of respectable Alevi organizations in the following chapters, I shall provide a naive suggestion to the organizations with regard to these debates in the concluding chapter.

Eser made clear that their solution-based approach was crucial because the pro-AKP milieus accused the boycotting organizations on the ground that those organizations with Marxist line were just against the idea of the AKP's solutions to the Alevi problems due to the fear of losing their power over Alevis since they just harbor a particular kind of politics and ideology behind the appearance of Alevi organizations (*Aksiyon*, 8 January 2008).

Furthermore, Eser mentioned the path this 'so-called initiative' took. According to him, the reason why the AKP initiated for a fast-breaking dinner in that month was to cover the problems of Alevis waiting to be solved in the legal area, adding that the mourning and the fast in the month of Muharram rejected any luxury and could not be turned into a political show. This was also one of the reasons why the twelve *dedes* proclaimed the attendees as 'fallen' to the Muharram dinner. Lastly, Eser stressed that the subject of debating the religious values of Alevism on theological, historical and sociological terms should be left to the religious leaders of Alevis by referring to the continuing statements of the officials of the party and of the Diyanet on what Alevism was about.

Among the factors leading the AKP to launch such an initiative for Alevis, the president of the European Confederation of Alevi Unions (*Avrupa Alevi Birlikleri Konfederasyonu, AABK*) Turgut Öker regarded the Alevi platform that often brought the Alevi problems to the table at the international level (*Birgün*, 9 December 2007). He also mentioned that the party could no longer avoid the *de facto* acknowledgement of *cemevis* as places of worship given the attendance of the AKP mayors to the opening ceremonies of many *cemevis*. Thus, he claimed that the fact that the AKP was approaching to solve the Alevi Question did not stem from their good intentions towards Alevis but from an obligation. On the other hand, he emphasized that although in the past it was the Alevi society that had been slaughtered, at the moment it was Alevism since Öker thought that they wanted to Sunnify Alevism at the table because the AKP was in an act of intervening into the problems within

the Alevi society. He offered that instead of attending to an Alevi fast-breaking dinner, the prime minister had better go and see how the Madımak Otel was turned into a grill house.

A similar comment but a slight difference came from the Pir Sultan Abdal Culture Association (*Pir Sultan Abdal Kültür Derneği*, hereafter PSAKD). The president of the association at the time, Kazım Genç pointed out as well that the so-called Alevi ‘opening’ did not exist (*Ibid.*). Additionally, Genç claimed that the reason why the AKP kept silent was because the party officials were only watching what had been told about it. For him, the AKP did not want to involve in the debate yet since the things that were then being said at the public opinion level would differ quite much from the things the party would say when it became involved in the issue. He further stated that the demands of Alevi had been submitted to the state authorities for years and that they should give up the denial of the Alevi faith which was a belief system of Anatolia in its own right. Moreover, he maintained that the reason for AKP’s interest in the Alevi problems was nothing but the political concerns to get Alevi votes because Alevi constituted a significant part of the population.

Although the respective Alevi organizations such as the PSAKD, the ABF, the Cem Foundation and the AVF all agreed that the so-called Alevi ‘opening’ directed mainly at getting Alevi votes for the AKP and thus did not approve of the dinner call, as a result of which there were only a small proportion of Alevi in the dinner. On the other hand, the Alevi organizations such as the ABF and the PSKAD which were said to perceive Alevism as outside of Islam by the orthodox Sunni intellectuals and theologians were not even invited. In this case, the ‘opening’ of the AKP was strikingly conditional on certain assumptions one can trace in an interview made with Reha Çamuroğlu in *Yeni Şafak* (Aksoy, 17 June 2007), a conservative Turkish daily, before the occasion of a fast-breaking dinner was heard.

To the interviewer’s question on whether the statement of the AKP members that “If Alevism is to love Ali, I am also an Alevi” was enough for Aleviness, Çamuroğlu proposed to

read it as a way to feel close to Alevis and acknowledged the tendencies of Alevis to perceive this discourse as an initiative to assimilate them due to the time-honored fears. Besides, as a member of the AKP, he said: “The AK Party did nothing positive with regard to Alevis in four and a half years. But it did nothing negative as well. But did any of the previous governments do anything? No...”.²² Here Çamuroğlu implied that there had been a continuing state policy towards the problems of Alevis for the solution of which none of the previous governments did anything. In doing so, he gave clues about how he perceived the to-be initiative of the AKP towards the Alevi issue. Like the members of almost any political party, Çamuroğlu was also proud of being the first person who brought the Alevi issue to the party agenda. As he presented this approach in his talks on the Muharram dinner, he presented the Alevi ‘opening’ as the first example of a government in attempting to solve the Alevi problems. Nevertheless, there was an interesting message in this sort of approach. It was as if the AKP’s Alevi ‘Opening’ was a gift or act of grace to the Alevi people, rather than the achievement of the efforts of the Alevi movement. This once again implies an asymmetry between Alevis and others, Sunni big brother distributing gift or grace to the little brother out of his goodwill.

For the reaction of the Alevi community to his joining to the AKP, he was well aware that some Alevi associations were against it because, Çamuroğlu claimed, they thought their routines would be disturbed. Moreover, Çamuroğlu declared that if he was given an opportunity to do a service and to realize changes on certain issues, those associations would be heavily affected by naming the PSAKD. In other words, he pointed out that the *raison d’être* of the associations he mentioned depended on the fact that the Alevis’ problems were not ever solved. It is to say that the unsolved Alevi problems make those associations’ existence sustainable. In a way, he might have been right since the main reason of the

²² AK Parti 4,5 yılda Aleviler konusunda olumlu hiçbir şey yapmadı. Ama olumsuz da hiçbir şey yapmadı. Peki, bundan önceki iktidarlar yaptı mı? Hayır...

mergence of Alevi associations in the 1990s was to pursue an Alevi social movement which would strive for the elimination of discrimination, subordination and assimilation of Alevis (Ayata 1997; Massicard 2005). Nevertheless, what Çamuroğlu indeed implied is that the persons within those associations were just afraid of losing power if the Alevis' problems were solved. The same comment about the associations boycotting the Muharram dinner came also from the Prime Minister Erdoğan. When he was asked about the claims of those associations, he said:

They cannot decide whether or not I should accept this sort of dinner invitation. We are not a representative of a certain sect or of an ethnic element. We are the assurance of all. There might be some who want to make this a tool of speculation. But we have stopped feeding them on their baby food and now they are upset at that (*Akşam*, 11 January 2008).²³

Besides, Çamuroğlu claimed that if we were unable to see an Alevi problem in the streets, this was because Alevis and Sunnis were integrated at the social level. However, the recent research of Toprak (2009) has demonstrated that there is a discontent expressed by the Alevis for the humiliating and/ or discriminatory attitudes of the Sunni in various social areas in Turkey. Among the most horrible experiences of the Alevis by the Sunni people, there is the Madımak Massacre. Although today the underlying motives of the massacre have often been speculated to be the deep state's operation rather than the act of the Sunni in certain circles, it has to be noted that the Madımak incident has become the core ground of the Alevis' initiation for organizing within the Alevi movement bearing in mind the historical slaughters and mistreatments the Alevis had been through due to the religiously excused policies.

Çamuroğlu asserted that there had been a systematic program over Alevis by the Alevi organizations both at the national and the international level. As he noted, these groups maintained three claims: 1. Alevism is out of Islam, 2. Alevis should be given quota in the

²³ Böyle bir davete gidip gitmeyeceğimin kararını onlar verecek değil. Bir mezhebin, etnik unsurun temsilcisi değiliz. Hepsine güvenceyiz. Bunu spekülasyon aracı yapmak isteyenler olabilir. Ama biz mamalarını kestik, kesince de rahatsız olanlar var.

National Assembly and 3. General Directorate of Religious Affairs should be abolished.

Çamuroğlu believed that those were easy to demand but impossible to realize. Furthermore, he declared that the organizations within Turkey wanted Alevi to be non-Muslims basing on two reasons. He revealed important insights:

There are some Alevi rooted in the state that think if they return to their beliefs they would get Shiitized. And they are concerned by that this return can be used by the Turkey's great Shiite neighbor (meaning Iran). The other one [concern] is that if Alevi get Sunnified or if they give up defending the laicism so strongly, they think that the Islamist side will get strengthened. Those groups within the state see Alevi to be non-Muslim or irreligious and they consider that as a good thing. That those modest associations and organizations are so loud is thanks to these groups. And these groups within the state have relationships with those associations and organizations.²⁴

I find this statement of Çamuroğlu very striking. That he announced that there are some groups within the state helping the Alevi movement have their voice heard and not wanting Alevi to be religious or Muslim is crucial to recall the period when the political Islam reached its peak under the Refah Party in 1998. During that time, Alevi were flattered by the state officials in their speeches presenting Alevi as the “guarantors of laicism” in Turkey against the threat of political Islamism (Kahraman 1998). From that period on, Alevi were often accused of as collaborators of military coups due to their enmity for political Islam. This tendency of Alevi can be illustrated by an interview made with the president of Karacaahmet Sultan Association, Muharrem Ercan, who is also an Alevi *dede*. He expressed his satisfaction for the ‘February 28’ post-modern coup as:

We are thankful to our military due to the February 28. The state has understood that the Alevi society is the assurance of democracy and laicism against reactionism. When this has been understood, the tolerance has begun towards us but we have plenty of problems (Cited from Çakır and Yılmaz 2001).²⁵

²⁴ Devletin içinde odaklanmış bir grup Alevi, inançlarına dönerlerse Şiileşeceklerini düşünüyor. Bu dönüşün, Türkiye'nin büyük Şii komşusu tarafından kullanılabileceği endişesi içindeler. İkincisi ise Aleviler Sünnileşirse ya da laikliği bu kadar güçlü savunmaktan vazgeçerlerse, bu sefer İslamcı cephenin güçleneceğini düşünüyorlar. Devletin içindeki bu gruplar Alevilerin gayri-müslim ya da dinsiz olmasını iyi bir şey olarak görüyor. Kendi halindeki bu dernek ve kurumların bu kadar güçlü ses çıkarmaları, devlet içindeki bu gruplar sayesinde oluyor. Devlet içindeki güçlerle, bu dernek ve kurumların ilişkisi de var.

Although it is impossible to reject the state agency in shaping the discourses and practices of the Alevi movement especially if the Cem Foundation's receipt of money from the discretionary fund and the financial support for building the great building of the Hacı Bektaş Veli Anatolian Culture Foundation in Ankara during the Çiller government (Massicard 2005), a claim as the one of Çamuroğlu serves to underestimate the agency role of the Alevi organizations and the people affiliated to those organizations in determining the acts of the Alevi movement. Moreover, by declaring that some associations and organizations wanted Alevis to be non-Muslim or irreligious, he implied his opinion that Alevism 'in fact' belonged to Islam, and thus Alevism essentially signifies religiosity.

The Fusion of Religion and Politics as Alevism

Let me continue the discussion of the fusion of religious and political spheres through the case of the *düşkünlük* declaration. The declaration of the twelve Alevi *dedes* in denouncing the dinner attendees as 'fallen' (*düşkün*) was only supported by the ABF and its constituents, but it was also highly criticized by the president of the Cem Foundation İzzettin Doğan as mentioned above. On what grounds were those *dedes* excommunicating the attendees from the Alevi community? Now, let me first provide the arguments presented in the declaration, and then I can discuss the criticism directed to it.

At a press meeting organized by the Pir Sultan Abdal Culture Association, on January 9, 2008 two days before the Muharram dinner, on behalf of the twelve *dedes*, an Alevi *dede* Mehmet Beydilli read the speech stressing mainly that those who support the AKP's dinner for their personal interests would harm not only their Alevi identity but also create an image

²⁵ 28 Şubat'tan dolayı ordumuza teşekkür ediyoruz. Devlet anladı ki, Alevi toplumu, irticaya karşı Türkiye'de demokrasi ve laikliğin sigortasıdır. Anlayınca bize karşı hoşgörü başladı, ama dertlerimiz çok.

that the Alevi society could fall into a position of “identity-less, self-seeking, unscrupulous, disregarding their values for extra income” (*Radikal*, 11 January 2008). In other words, because *dedes* thought that the attendees would harm the image of Alevis in the public opinion by sitting at the AKP’s table, they decided to apply the depravity sanctions.

The speech was also submitted to the media institutions with a written declaration expressing the intention of *dedes* more clearly, signed by Ali Yıldırım, the president of the Centre for Research on Alevism. The declaration revealed five basic statements. First of all, the struggle of the Alevi organizations for the abolition of discrimination against Alevis has achieved its goal such as the successful case of the Alevi parent vis-a-vis the state at the ECHR on the manner in which the compulsory lessons in religious culture and ethics were taught and the yearly reports of progress on Turkey of the EU demanding from Turkey to resolve the Alevis’ problems. At that point, the AKP government could no longer continue its policy of denial vis-a-vis Alevis. Thus, the declaration claimed that the AKP’s attempt to initiate a certain policy of Alevis stemmed from the external pressures that the organizational struggle of the Alevi movement created.

Secondly, it stated that the AKP, after its denial policies on Alevis did not work out, intended to produce a type of “Alevis of the AKP” by destroying the fundamental religious, cultural and political values of Alevis through the efforts of those Alevis as part of the plan of Alevi ‘opening’. However, the declaration pointed that the AKP members even from the beginning demonstrated that they were unaware of the basic values of Alevism, by referring to the luxury organization of the dinner making the fast-breaking dinner of a political show.

Thirdly, the authors of the declaration noted that there was a big difference of mentality between the AKP that followed a politics with religious references and Alevis. According to the declaration, the AKP not only did not care about the essential religious

values of Alevi, but also the principles that Alevi perceived as their existential fundamentals such as laicism, democracy and republicanism that were the AKP's most problematic areas.

Fourthly, it was stated that Alevi were well aware that their problems resulted from the anti-laicist and anti-democratic stirrings within the country. The declaration furthermore expressed that Alevi wanted not privileges or capitulations, but only the end of the discriminatory policies against their identity. In this respect, they did not have any undue expectations of benefits from the state apart from the egalitarian application of the constitutional rights.

Finally, the authors of the declaration found the *dedes'* judgment of excommunication on the attendees very right. And they reminded that when the Alevi society denounced the five Alevi *dedes* who gave vote of confidence to Demirel in 1970 as 'fallen', and they were excluded from the society since then. The declaration overtly warned the prospective attendees not to fall into the trap of the AKP's plans. It further stated that the table the attendees invited to was the table of Hızır Pasha, and those Alevi should act like Pir Sultan. There, the authors of the declaration referred to the mythological story between Pir Sultan Abdal and Hızır Pasha. According to the story, Pir Sultan Abdal does not want Hızır to go to the centre since Pir Sultan thinks he might change there and start to serve to the sultan. But he goes. When he returns from the centre, Hızır has already become the pasha of Sivas, and organizes a dinner for Pir Sultan. Pir Sultan finally accepts to go to the dinner but not for eating something but for talking. He says to Hızır Pasha that the dinner is not lawful, and the table is corrupted, adding that even his dog will not eat anything. Then Hızır serves a good looking dish to the dog, but it does not eat it. They both leave without eating anything. Finally, Hızır Pasha has him have death penalty (Balım 1950; Gölpinarlı 1995; Albayrak 2001; Avcı 2004).

On the other hand, what is the meaning of *düşkünlük* for Alevism? Although there are other protest mechanisms than the denunciation of *düşkünlük*, which seems to be a religious sanction at first since it came from the part of *dedes*, the religious guides of Alevis, what made this declaration a warning? According to the *Dictionary for Encyclopedic Alevism-Bektashism Terms* (Korkmaz 2003: 125), *düşkün* (fallen) is “a person who acts against the ethics of the path”. In Alevism-Bektashism, *cem* is not only a ritual of gathering for religious purposes, as Korkmaz notes. *Cem* is both a place for spiritual renewal, and for a place for making social and individual judgments. Especially during the Ottoman era, *cem*s worked as “people’s courts” for proto-Alevis²⁶ that did not accept the legitimacy of *shari’a* (Islamic law) practically (Dressler 2006). Suppressed by the religion-based governance throughout the history but especially since the Ottoman era, proto-Alevis developed certain protective measures for their community which made them quite introverted and endogamous. The fact that they never had good relations with the authorities led them to live in closed communities due to the fear of subordination and assimilation. Their relative isolation as a group and collective decisions ensured self-protection and survival of the community. It is very possible to trace this tendency in the philosophy of their rituals. *Düşkünlük*, as one of the most important institutions of the Alevi doctrine serves this goal. I argue that there are two basic tenets of this institution. One is the protection of the order and peace in their closed community without going to the Shari’a courts. Among the punishments they exercise within these local “courts”, *cem*s, are the sanctions against the crimes such as murder, adultery, robbery or insult which directly affect the members of the community. The other is the protection of the ethics of the Path, i.e. the fundamental moral values making of Alevism, which indirectly affects the members of the community. Therefore, as probably the harshest

²⁶ By following Dressler (2003, 2008a), I use ‘proto-Alevi’ for the pre-twentieth century religious groups having different names such as Abdals, Çepnis, Kızılbashs and Tahtacıs but having common rituals and practices since ‘Alevi’ is rather a modern concept and thus must be used as an umbrella term.

punishment of the community, *düşkünlük*, means the social exclusion of the person who breaches the ethical norms of the community because of the crimes that might be either murder or untruthfulness or deceit to the confidentiality of the community. Here, it is essential to note that the community at hand is the one that aims to protect itself from the possible forms of domination and assimilation. Thus, the underlying mentality is the quest for the survival both of the community and of the doctrine.

Düşkünlük sanction is applied not by the single personal decision of the *dede*, the religious guide of the community, but by the approval of the community unanimously (not in the sense of listening to each member but in the sense of silent approval probably) before the *cem* community only with the arbitration of the *dede* in reminding the ethical norms and in handling out the hearing the voices of the complainant and of the accused. *Düşkünlük*, according to the type of the crime, can be removed after a certain time period. But only the *dede* of the community, or in his absence, another *dede* from the same *ocak* can remove the punishment (Korkmaz 2003: 126).

That is how the *düşkünlük* sanction is applied traditionally. In the case of the dinner attendees in the urban life where one can hardly speak of the prevailing of the community rules, it bears more of a political character by using the symbolic power of the religious norms of the community. On the other hand, a claim like “the twelve *dedes* are misusing Alevism for their political orientations” would be overlooking the fact that the seemingly religious-ethical norms of Alevism have political connotations. At this point, one should recall the philosophy underlying the emergence of those practices of Alevism. As mentioned above, one of the concerns for *düşkünlük* sanction to be applied is the protection of the community and of the Alevism doctrine from the domination and assimilation policies.

The declaration in this sense conveys a message about the fear of the assimilation of Alevis by the AKP’s Alevi policy. In the urban setting, the punishment like *düşkünlük*

denunciation obviously cannot bear a religious sanction on those attendees, who come from different *ocaks* where the twelve *dedes* are not authorities as in the traditional usage of *düşkünlük*. Since the prior cause of the Alevis' subordination throughout the history has resulted from the pro-Sunni policies, as a political party regarded to be the defender of moderate Islam, the AKP has been seen as the major actor of threat for Alevis by the Alevis that signed the declaration. In other words, the allegation of *düşkün* for the attendees is overtly political but with the intention of protecting Alevis due to the fear of assimilation.

If to summarize what I deduce from the sanction of *düşkünlük* for the case of the Muharram dinner and the arguments of the protesting declaration, the AKP's Alevi move led the twelve *dedes* and their supporters in the Alevi organizations at hand to protest it because of the style of the AKP dinner with its all luxury and lavishness is in disharmony with the traditional way and its meaning. Furthermore, they wanted to protest it through the religio-political language of Alevism on the grounds that the AKP preferred to have a meeting with a small group of Alevi organizations with which the party might share closer opinions on Alevism, as a different interpretation of Islam but definitely within Islam, and did not even invite those Alevi organizations who were said to "politicize" Alevism and to want Alevis to be non-Muslim. In this framework, the AKP's Alevi move was perceived as to include only a certain type of Alevis, the AKP's favored Alevis.

Alevism in the Grip of Conditionality

The repercussions of this declaration and of the AKP's Alevi 'Opening' around the pro-AKP intellectual circles manifested a number of striking insights about the view of "politics" and "freedom" of those circles in general and "laicism in Turkey" in particular. Despite the social sensitivity and responsibility they have been trying to develop vis-a-vis the problems of

Alevis, instead of an approach of denial or ignorance as it was experienced in the past, their suggestions to Alevis on the topics such as how to do “politics” or on how to get “free” need to be critically analyzed in order to understand their efforts for a claim-making politics through the use of a discourse based on religious rights and freedoms that long awaited to be given by the state. Even if that shows an important development towards the incorporation of a language of rights and freedom to the civilian society, when interrogated it critically revealed the conditionality of the recognition of Alevism hidden beneath rises to the surface due to the very fact that the Sunnism is the hegemonic religion of the politics in Turkey whereas Alevism is inevitably the subordinated one. I will demonstrate this tendency of the pro-AKP intellectuals through a critical discourse analysis on one article published in the *Aksiyon* weekly magazine, four articles published in the daily *Yeni Şafak*, and one article in the *Today's Zaman* discussing of the Muharram dinner.

The news give a general insight about the way the fast-breaking dinner is organized from the menu to the participants of the dinner (*Aksiyon*, 7 January 2008). It makes the purpose and the conditionality of the dinner perfectly clear by stating that the groups which see Alevism as non-Islam and which do not count the Muharram fast as worship were not invited because the dinner was organized by the Abdal Musa Foundation. Additionally, it was claimed by *Aksiyon* (2008, January 7): “There is not any single effort by those groups among themselves in regard to the Muharram fast”.²⁷ It overtly insinuates that the excluded groups are not ‘appropriately’ religious.

Moreover, the magazine labels the protesting Alevi organizations for the AKP’s Alevi opening as “a small group with a Marxist origin”. It reflects the concerns of those organizations for an assimilation as the concern of “losing their seats” when they oppose every suggestion of the AKP for Alevis without presenting alternative solutions, by adding:

²⁷ Bu kesimlerin kendi aralarında da Muharrem orucuna ilişkin bir çabası bulunmuyor.

“[B]ecause when the problems of Alevi citizens are solved, there will be no word left to say to those associations and foundations which are lost in the politics and ideology. And many Alevi, even if they do not vote for the AK Party, support these openings” (*Ibid.*).²⁸ In other words, as the deputy Çamurođlu declared also about the Alevi organizations’ reaction, *Aksiyon* magazine was unwilling to understand the protests of the Alevi organizations for the AKP’s Alevi opening. Even if these pro-AKP circles’ attitude can be expected, it is notable to state that it highly underestimates the agency role of those organizations in voicing the Alevi demands systematically. Furthermore, by putting the emphasis on their Marxist origin, they aim to remind that “Marxists are atheists” to their readers. Thus, the political affiliation of one group when they express their grievance with a certain policy over a religious group becomes irrelevant and insignificant if it is thought this political affiliation is against religiosity. This brings the implication that only if a group’s members are religious enough can their opinions be noteworthy. Let me trace this conditionality on the representation of Alevism further in the articles published in *Yeni Şafak*.

Murat Aksoy, after the first news about the AKP’s Alevi ‘Opening’ when the most Alevi organizations protested it, penned an article titled “It’s the turn of Alevi to be democrats” [Demokratlık Sırası Alevilerde] (*Yeni Şafak*, 25 November 2007). Aksoy argued that the AKP’s Alevi opening had a bigger symbolic value than its practical value. The practical importance was the acknowledgement and the acceptance of the Alevi identity on the state level while the symbolic importance was that such a move came from a government the roots of which were in the Islamist tradition and highly representative of the Sunni-Muslim identity. In doing so, the AKP, though within the state, paved the way for an oppositional line against the policies the state followed until then. He claims: “I think it is safe to say that this

²⁸ Çünkü Alevi vatandaşların sorunları çözüldürse, siyaset ve ideoloji içinde kaybolmuş bu tür dernek ve vakıflara söyleyecek söz kalmayacak. Birçok Alevi ise AK Parti’ye oy vermese de bu açılımlara destek veriyor.

opening for the first time paves to a way of politics for Alevis ”.²⁹ Then he listed his seven observations about the distance Alevis kept to with “politics proper”. Besides the claims like that Alevis had always affiliated with the leftist parties and seen themselves as the guarantor of the laicist Turkey and that the Alevi organizations who did not have a legitimate representational power for the Alevis in Turkey did not refrain from turning their community into the tool of political rent during the elections, only one of his observations is noteworthy to analyze.

He asserts that those Alevi organizations in the opposition prioritized only their freedoms with regard to the issue of the expansion of fundamental rights and freedoms. First of all, Aksoy ignores that the main cause of establishing a particular association or a foundation is to protect and to develop their rights and freedoms at first. Prioritizing its rights and freedoms pertaining to its founding organizational identity is a default character of any kind of civil society organization. Aksoy is wrong to label all Alevi organizations as the promoters of solely their rights and freedoms because as I will try to demonstrate in the following parts, certain Alevi organizations made more inclusionary statements about the politics by linking sources of Alevis’ problems to the larger picture. However, his call to the incorporating others’ rights and freedoms is to link the subordination of Alevis and of the Islamist women, for example, to the same state mentality.

He continues to give advises to Alevis by saying: “the only need of Alevis is becoming free and politicized”.³⁰ As for the recipe to politicize, he counts two things; first of all, instead of rights and freedoms to be granted to them, Alevis themselves have to act to publicize those demands, in other words, they have to participate in the decision-making processes as the political subjects and to articulate those demands. And the manner of this

²⁹ Bu açılım Aleviler için ilk defa siyasetin yolunu açıyor dersek sanırım yanlış olmaz.

³⁰ Alevilerin tek ihtiyacı özgürleşme ve siyasallaşmadır.

politicization is defending the rights and freedoms of all differences. In this regard, Alevis, for Aksoy, have to defend the freedom to headscarf or the right to conscientious objection, besides the demands like the one on *cemevis* or on the abolition of compulsory religious lessons. As a consequence, Alevis have to question critically the definition of citizenship and Kemalism, Aksoy maintains.

Although there was no initiated policy at the time but only the news about that there was going to be an Alevi opening by the AKP members, Aksoy was quite hopeful and confident about the AKP's Alevi opening, as he wrote: "[T]he AK Party is determined to break one more taboo for the issue of Alevis... The AK Party's opening is a big step towards democracy. And now it is the turn for Alevis to be democrats".³¹ Then he concludes his article by presenting the duty to be a democrat which is to defend rights and freedoms of others too:

Whatever the topic debated, both Sunnis and Alevis have to defend positions on the issue of "rights and freedoms" which are not excluding one another but which are supporting each other... [I]t is of vital importance to be a democrat to suggest the establishment of a collaboration among all the social parties and the disadvantaged that are left outside of the cultural identity of the state and that aim the state's control and arbitration – in other words its democraticness.³²

Here, Aksoy attempts to underline that both Sunnis and Alevis are the social groups excluded from the state-defined cultural identities. In other words, he comes to say that Sunnis and Alevis are both the aggrieved of this unfair system of the state, and they are both a subordinated group. In other words, since the cause of their subordination is one and the same thing, they should develop solidarity and struggle together. However, while articulating the

³¹ AK parti Aleviler konusunda bir tabuyu daha yıkmaya kararlı... AK Parti'nin açılımı demokratlık yönünde büyük bir adımdır. Ve şimdi demokratlık sırası Alevilerde.

³² Tartışma başlığı ne olursa olsun gerek Sünnilerin gerekse Alevilerin "haklar ve özgürlükler" konusunda birbirini dışlayan değil, birbirini destekleyen pozisyonları savunmaları gerekiyor... [D]evletin kültürel kimliği dışında kalan; devletin denetimini ve hakemliğini yani demokratikliğini hedef alan tüm toplumsal kesimlerin ve mağdurların işbirliği yapmasını önermek demokratlık açısından hayati önemdedir.

need of Sunnis and Alevis for struggling alongside of each other he tends to assume Sunnis with a holistic approach. This approach misses the fact that Turkish laicism has not been an anti-religious one or even an irreligious one (Parla and Davison 2004, 2008; Davison 1998, 2003). Rather, the state's religion has overtly been the Sunni-Hanefi version of Islam when considered all the institutions and regulations of Turkish Republic such as the Diyanet and the compulsory religious lessons. Aksoy should have made his emphasis more clear, because the Sunnis he referred to in this article are evidently the Sunnis who foreground their identities through their Sunniness, religiosity and affiliation with the freedom to headscarf.

The suggestions of Aksoy for Alevis might have been significant since he made a call to both Sunnis and Alevis about understanding each other's problems and to develop solidarity in terms of the politics of recognition of their basic rights and freedoms. However, his article following the declaration of *düşkünlik* by the Alevi *dedes* for the attendees of the Muharram dinner manifested his lack of respect towards certain Alevis and conditionality to accept Alevis as a whole. In a nutshell, he offers again to Alevis that instead of denouncing some people as *düşkün* they should better seek "the ways to discover the politics" (*Yeni Şafak*, 12 January 2008). In his use of "politics" (2007b), he openly refers to the recognition politics through which Alevis can articulate their demands directly to the government, as a major actor in resolving their problems. Therefore, he does not count the experiences of the Unity Party of (Turkey)³³ (*Türkiye Birlik Partisi*) and (Democratic) Peace Party (*Barış Partisi*) as the politicization efforts of Alevis although the party did never become an Alevist party in the sense of prioritizing solely the Alevis' problems and of gaining the votes of all Alevis in Turkey (Ata 2007). By stating so, he does not take Alevis as an apolitical group because he already acknowledges in his former article that Alevis have historically affiliated with the Republican People's Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, CHP*) and been loyal to the

³³ For a detailed analysis of the Unity Party of (Turkey) experience, see Ata (2007), Ertan (2008), Yümlü (2008).

principle of laicism. Rather, he underlines that Alevis for the first time in the history of the Turkish Republic have come in front of the door of the “politics”, i.e. the reelpolitics in which they could negotiate their demands in terms of rights and freedoms with the government but only if they could meet the condition of participating to the processes directly by being political subjects. Aksoy appears as a defender of participatory democracy in which the citizens are the actors of deliberate decisions. Even though the proposal Aksoy made is what the democracy needs in Turkey, when continued the article, his points become more problematic.

With regard to the *dedes'* *düşkünüük* denunciation, Aksoy stresses that nobody or no institution can claim full authority to their interpretation on religion presuming that their interpretation of the religion is the truest. Therefore, he maintains that since an authoritarian order following a certain religious interpretation cannot be established, there must be different interpretations of Islam, in other words, a pluralism must hold sway in the religion. As a consequence, he continues by including Alevism undoubtedly as a different interpretation within Islam that there are naturally different interpretations of Alevism within Alevis. Thus, he emphasizes the necessity of pluralism within the religion. However, he overlooks the fact that when the debated issue is Alevism there appears to be not only different interpretations but also consequently different representations of Alevism each of which tends to prove the one they represent as the single truest representation and thus the definition of Alevism. Moreover, he himself falls into the trap of proclaiming the single truth on Alevism. He notes, “[t]he institutions hosting the Committee of *Dedes* reveal their essential positions by defining Alevism as ‘non-religion’”.³⁴ It is not clear that how Aksoy how became confident about the view of *dedes* on Alevism as to define it in non-religious terms because in the press conference they did not make such a statement about Alevism. But their request to treat

³⁴ *Dedeler Komitesi'*ne ev sahipliği yapan kurumlar Aleviliği ‘dindışı’ tanımlayarak esas pozisyonlarını ortaya koymaktadırlar.

Alevism not through the lenses of Sunni-Islam but through the effort to understand Alevism as either a culture, or a sect, or a cult, or a religion, or a philosophy, or anything in its own right probably led Aksoy to conclude that they perceive Alevism as out of religion due to the fact that what Aksoy obviously understands from 'religion' is the orthodox Islam.

He concludes his article by stating: "The addressee of the rights, demands and freedoms with regard to Alevism for Alevi is not the state but politics".³⁵ Here is where Aksoy makes clear about what he refers to as "politics". First of all, he depicts "politics" as a different sphere of affairs from the state which is to imply the government as the addressee of politics vis-a-vis Alevi. Secondly, he delineates the political system in Turkey as if the state and the government have no institutional bounds. To sum up, Aksoy advises Alevi to engage in active politics which can find its response in the governmental policies in order to achieve their rights and freedoms as a *religious* community.

A columnist from *Yeni Şafak*, Özlem Albayrak criticizes also the *düşkünlik* denunciation and the team that composed it (2008). After reminding the boycotting Alevi that the CHP the Alevi are loyal to aimed to gain the Alevi votes as well if they reject the AKP's opening on the grounds of that suspicion, she maintains that the AKP's Alevi move could have been lead a social cohesion between Sunnis and Alevi because she claims that the primary grievance of Alevi is at the social level rather than the state level. Then, she brings the issue to the *düşkünlik* and those Alevi's rejection of the AKP's opening. She diagnoses the problem inherent within this issue as:

The matter is...the reluctance of a political paradigm coming out as 'Alevism' to reconcile with 'the religious' in the personality of the AK Party which obtained votes from the religious masses, no matter what proposal you present. It is also while this conception of faith is quite 'mystical', their members can espouse with 'atheism'; they can be both 'believer' and 'Marxist', or both 'sufist' and 'laic'.³⁶

³⁵ Aleviler için Aleviliğe yönelik hak, talep ve özgürlüklerin muhatabı devlet değil siyasettir.

³⁶ Mesele... 'Alevilik' adıyla açığa çıkan bir siyaset paradigmasının varlığı ve bu paradigmanın mütedeyyin kitlelerden oy almış AK Parti şahsında 'dini olan'la uzlaşmaya, ne teklif götürürseniz götürün yanaşmamaları. Bu inanç tasavvurunun kendisi gayet 'mistik' iken, müntesiplerinin 'ateizm'e gönül verebilmesi; her nasılsa hem 'inançlı' hem 'marksist'; hem 'tasavvufi' hem 'laik' olabilmesi.

Albayrak perfectly diagnoses the seemingly paradoxical character of Alevism. The tenets of Alevism allows its believers to prefer various interpretations out of it which provides a pluralistic view with different representations all of which might be both in contradiction and in conformity with Alevism depending which interpretation one chooses. In this sense, it is expected that Sunnis with literalist tendencies of the dogma of Islam would interpret what religion must mean from within the restricted and nonpluralistic angle of their paradigm and find Alevism with its pluralist inner complexity to be incompatible with what religion must mean.³⁷

Then she continues counting the paradoxes she has found about in the issue of Alevism. She argues that while the followers of this faith (Alevism) tend to a perspective of faith and worship mystical and somewhat “irrational”, the same faith, she says, wanders around the laicism that eliminated the dervish lodges, and also around atheism and Marxism. She concludes her observation as: “[t]he Alevi associations which do not attend the fast-breaking dinner and which denounce the attendees as ‘düşkün’ have nothing whatsoever to do with Alevism in terms of its religious aspect”.³⁸ In other words, Albayrak finds the stands of those Alevis as contradictory and finds herself authoritative enough as a Sunni to declare AKP-opposing Alevis as “non-Alevis” since the ‘Alevi’ is supposed to correspond to a religious affiliation while they constantly stress their loyalty to the laicism and seem like atheists, thus irreligious, and also Marxist. By claiming that one cannot be both religious and laicist, she overlooks two things. One is that some persons might live their faith in the privacy

³⁷ For an interesting work on the Alevi poetry demonstrating the merging of religious and political identities within Alevism, see Dressler’s article titled “Turkish Alevi Poetry in the Twentieth Century: The Fusion of Political and Religious Identities” (2003). Dressler perfectly shows how Alevism might pertain both to a religious and a political affiliation.

³⁸ ...iftar davetine katılmayan, katılanları 'düşkün' ilan eden alevi derneklerinin Alevilikle inanç boyutunda ilgisi olmadığına...

of their conscience, and might be disturbed from publicizing it due to either spiritual, cultural, or political reasons. The same persons, who might well strongly believe and follow religious traditions might also acknowledge plurality of faiths and their equivalence and thus might desire state institutions to be stripped of religious affiliations. In this example, one can be both religious and laicist at the same time because the principle of laicism requires the state institutions to be areligious not anti-religious or irreligious, as noted in the previous sections. Secondly, in fact what she means by 'laicist' in its contradictory content with religiosity is 'secularity' because a secular person is the one who hardly ever lives according to the tenets of the religion, in other words, in whose life the influence of the religion is highly decreased (Parla and Davison 2004, 2008). Besides, by labeling the members of those Alevi associations as atheists or Marxists, she evidently stirs up the existing social tension (Toprak 2009) between Sunnis and Alevis through reproducing the binary oppositions such as religious/laicist, religious/ atheist, religious/ Marxist instead of eliminating them.

Another striking article came from Ümit Aksoy. In fact, although the gist of his article resembles the one of Murat Aksoy in the way that they both draw attention to the Alevis' stance preferring to remain outside of politics and advise that Alevis should hear the call of politics (Aksoy, Ü. 2008). There were two interesting claims in his article. Firstly, he argues that Alevis, even though they suffered from serious degrees of subordination, sustain this language of grievance by reproducing and thus legitimizing it. As Murat Aksoy proposed, he underlines that Alevis prefer to remain introverted and outside of the politics. But he distinguished the kind of politics that those Alevis engage with and the politics that has the potential to produce solutions to the Alevis' problems. According to him, Alevis constantly code themselves as aggrieved, and undervalue the Islamic belief in a proudly manner. He argues that by saying to their counterparts "You are not the only owner of the religion!" Alevis come to reproduce the same reception by reacting to the attendees of the fast-breaking

dinner with a denunciation of *düşkünlük*. Aksoy might be right by pointing out the intolerance of the boycotting Alevi circles towards the attending Alevis. However, the boycotting Alevis were basically irritated by the fact that Alevism was being used as a tool for softening the tension between the state and the Alevis by presenting the AKP's Alevi opening as a historical break. One can hardly escape from relativism in this debate because if the Alevism of the attending Alevis is their interpretation of Alevism, then the boycotting Alevis can claim that their reasoning for the denunciation is also due to their own interpretation of Alevism. If nothing, the manner of the protesting Alevis probably served to bold the existing and known political distance between their interpretation of Alevism and that of other Alevis.

Secondly, Aksoy points out that Alevis, by preferring espouse with Kemalism and laicism, and by distancing themselves from the language of the religious, prevent a probable politics and thus the language of religion with this fake language of religion. In other words, he criticizes Alevis on the grounds that although they use the language of religion since they denounced the attendees as *düşkün* they avoid of being reached out by the language of religion which is reflected in the *Reelpolitik* of the AKP. Therefore, he suggests that Alevis should have met Sunni Muslims with whom they share the same religious basin instead of ignoring their presence in terms of the religion. However, Aksoy explains this “paradoxical” situation of Alevis with their continuing self-perception as the aggrieved. Due to this perception, they reject all sorts of invitation to the political solutions of the problems. He claims:

As far as Alevis distance their existence from the religion which is the unique source of their existence they will not be able to proclaim their existence...[t]hat the Alevis who reduce themselves to the existence of a politics with small ‘P’ escape from a truly actual politics will mean nothing but escaping from themselves.³⁹

³⁹ Aleviler kendi varlıklarını varlıklarının yegane kaynağı olan dinden uzaklaştırdıkları oranda, kendi varlıklarını bir türlü ortaya koyamayacaklar...[k]endilerini neredeyse küçük harfle siyasetin varlığına indirgemiş Alevilerin, gerçekten sahici bir siyasetten kaçmaları ise bir kez daha kendilerinden kaçmalarından başka bir anlama gelmeyecektir.

Thus, he declares that since Alevi are a religious community because Alevism pertains to the religious doctrine, the only way they should follow is the acknowledgement of their Alevi identity as a religious one and attempts for the solutions of their problems vis-a-vis the state in terms of this religious discourse. For this purpose, they can easily cooperate with Sunni Muslims who demand certain rights from the political system since the two are both religious community. On the other hand, his accusation of Alevi's rejection of giving into the strategies of *Reelpolitik* by basing it on the Alevi's self-perception as the aggrieved⁴⁰ points to the ignorance of Aksoy about the existing power relations between the two groups' members when considered the Sunni-promoted state laicism. Finally, he finishes his article by concluding that not the attendees of the fast-breaking dinner but the non-attendees are morally the *düşkün* ones since Aksoy asserts that the dinner could have been a start for a politics needed for the solution of the Alevi's problems.

The last article manifesting the mentality analyzed above comes from Bülent Keneş in *Today's Zaman* (14 January 2008). Keneş attempts to find the common grounds between Sunnis and Alevi especially through their love for Ali, the Prophet Muhammad's nephew and son-in-law. He posits the difference between them as the difference of interpretation influencing the lifestyles of both. His conceptualization of Alevism highly represents the one reflected in the statement of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan as: "If Alevism is to love Ali, then I am Alevi too" in a TV show on October 6, 2004. As Yalçinkaya perfectly finds out, there are two important institutions in the Alevi doctrine: *tevilla* and *teberra*. *Tevilla* is to love Ali and his followers, whereas *teberra* is to hate the enemies of Ali and their followers. Thus, if Erdoğan and Keneş aim to find commonalities between Sunnis and Alevi with regard to the two's love for Ali, they have to be reminded of the existence of *teberra* institution as well (Yalçinkaya 2005: 220). Moreover, this tendency of reducing Alevism to

⁴⁰ Aksoy's observation reminded me of another intellectual, Yasin Aktay because of their common view on Alevi sustaining the politics of grievance (*Türk Dininin Sosyolojik İmkani*, 1999). For a fair critique on Aktay's work, see Yalçinkaya (2004, 2005: 45-63) and Tuğal (2001).

the love of Ali and also to the feeling of the grievance embedded in the story of Karbala, as Keneş stated, bears the intention of ignoring the Alevism with all its richness.

Furthermore, like the authors did in *Yeni Şafak*, Keneş also acknowledges Alevism only if it is taken as an interpretation within Islam which inevitably makes him criticize the version of Alevism that those left-leaning Alevi organizations represent, as he puts it. By underlining that the Alevi identity is a religious affiliation taking its bound from the figures of Muhammad and Ali, he notes:

It is quite meaningful that some marginal leftist organizations have been trying to manipulate Alevis as a group that has roots in religion, even though these leftist organizations have no affiliation with the religion at all and are atheists. The groups and associations who come under the influence of such leftist organizations have no possibility of remaining Alevi and their claims have no validity at all. Just as a Sunni can never be an atheist, Alevism without Islam or with atheism is out of the question.

In fact, the most concrete reason of these authors for criticizing the boycotting Alevi organizations on the grounds that they represent a version of Alevism which is out of Islam dates back to a declaration of the Alevi-Bektashi Federation in 2004 on the issue of their case for putting ‘Alevi’ instead of ‘Islam’ in the section of religion on the identity cards following the court’s rejection depending on the decision of the Diyanet as “Alevism is an interpretation of Islam” (Yalçinkaya 2005: 223). However in the declaration, they did not propose that Alevism is something outside of Islam. All their intention was to underline the fact that Alevis have different practices and beliefs of worship than the ones of Sunni-Islam with the concern that the representatives of various state officials such as the president of Diyanet Ali Bardakoğlu often avoid by defining Alevism as a distinct belief system and thus do not accept the necessity of acknowledging *cemevis* as the places of worship of Alevis since they argue that *cemevi* cannot be the alternative to a mosque”. Bardakoğlu reports on Alevism:

Alevism is not out of Islam. Alevism is either a cultural disposition or a cult within Islam. Shi’a and Alevism are not the same things. Besides, the opposition of Alevism is not Sunnism. Alevism is a cultural cult containing elements within Islam. It is so difficult even to classify it as a sect (*Yeni Şafak*, 6 October 2004).

How the Federation defined Alevism as opposed to the Diyanet in response to Bardakoğlu is as follows:

It is not possible to consider Alevism, which existed far before Islam, within Islam. Because Alevism differing from Islam takes the human as its centre, being special to Anatolia, expresses itself as a unique philosophy, belief, way of life, culture, doctrine, ... a social fact...[B]y being affected by Islam lastly, it adopted the guidance of Hak-Muhammad-Ali...[A]levism is outside of Islam and distinctive. Alevi live their beliefs with their own norms and traditions (Cited from Yalçınkaya 2005: 223-224).

As can be understood clearly, the Federation's statement on Alevism is an oppositional move against the Diyanet's policy of denial of the Alevi demands. Besides, they do not claim Alevi are not Muslim, they only underline the pre-Islamic sources of Alevism making Alevism a distinct system having different rituals and practices than that of Islam. This stand is to challenge every kind of effort of the authority to fit Alevism into a single definition and makes it impossible to define it solely as religion or as Islam.

After the Muharram dinner took place with its small representation of Alevi lacking the prominent Alevi organizations despite all the discussions evolved, the AKP did not make any further opening to reach out Alevi for a long period of time. By realizing this unwillingness to make a move on the side of the AKP in general and the undervaluing statements of certain AKP members regarding the Alevi opening and the status of *cemevis*, Çamuroğlu declared his resignation from the post of consultancy of the prime minister even though he continued his duties as a deputy (*Ntvmsnbc*, 12 June 2008). He pointed out the statements of İstanbul Mufti Mustafa Çağrıç as “*cemevis* are not possible according to the religion” (*Haber34*, 10 June 2008) and the incident of Karakoçan as the factors leading him to rethink the AKP's efforts towards the Alevi issue.

The incident in Karakoçan, a district in Elazığ begun when the twenty eight girls staying in the dormitories were harassed on their way back from the school located at a four-

kilometer distance (*Haber24*, 3 June 2008). Requesting the allocation of a vehicle from the director of Karakoçan District National Education, students were responded, as it was claimed: “If one has money, then she can go to school, if not, they would better get married”⁴¹. Then the AKP Elazığ deputy Fevzi İşbaşaran called the district governor of Karakoçan Erdinç Yılmaz, and wanted him to solve the problem of the students. As his response, it was claimed that Yılmaz said: “Mr. Deputy, twelve of the twenty eight students are Alevis. You already know their view about the state”⁴². Upon this conversation, the deputy called the Minister of Internal Affairs Beşir Atalay about the responses of the district. İşbaşaran was demanded to write a petition to make the issue investigated by the Minister. Then, İşbaşaran told the event to some other members of the party during the AKP’s camp in Kızılcahamam and finally felt lonely due to their indifference. Çamuroğlu refers to this pathos of the party in general about the matters of Alevis.

Following the resignation of Çamuroğlu which reflects his disappointment about the AKP on the Alevi issue, the Alevi circles commented on it as “We had told you!” (*Bianet*, 13 June 2008). The president of the Cem Foundation İzzettin Doğan revealed that he had told that the prime minister could not achieve this opening because the DRA would not let it. The president of the ABF Ali Balkız noted: “He went, he saw and he returned. It was obvious that he would get this result. The AKP wants the democracy for itself. The freedom to belief is a mask to reach a Turkey it desires. If Reha failed to make it, nobody can do it”. And the president of the PSAKD Fevzi Gümüş said: “Probably, he saw through the intention of the AKP”.

Despite everything, Çamuroğlu would continue working within the AKP and work for realizing the projects he had in mind about Alevis.

⁴¹ Parası olan okusun, olmayan evlensin.

⁴² Milletvekilim, yirmi sekiz öğrencinin on ikisi Alevi. Bunların devlete bakışını zaten biliyorsunuz.

November 9: March for “Equal Citizenship”

More than fifty thousand people coming from different provinces of Turkey marched to the Sıhhiye Square in Ankara for the “Equal Citizenship” meeting organized by the Alevi-Bektashi Federation (*Bianet*, 9 November 2008). Among the placards carried, some were “Equal Citizenship against Discrimination”, “Abolish Compulsory Religious Lessons”, “Cemevis are the places of worship” and “Madımak will turn into a Museum” which reflect the central demands chanted during the meeting. Besides the various Alevi organizations attached to the ABF such as the PSAKD, Hacı Bektash Veli Anatolian Culture Foundation (*Hacı Bektaş Veli Anadolu Kültür Vakfı*, HBVAKV), Alevi Culture Associations (*Alevi Kültür Dernekleri*), AKD there were also worker unions, civil society organizations, professional organizations and some representatives from the political parties such as the CHP (Republican People’s Party), the ÖDP (Freedom and Solidarity Party) and the DTP (Democratic Society Party) supporting the meeting. The declaration of the meeting submitted to the press contained a number of striking points to note here.

The declaration penned by the president of the ABF Ali Balkız starts with “*This call is just for equality*” (ABF 2008). Although he acknowledges the general denial of the Alevi identity as the state policy, he stresses especially their unrest with the anti-laicist and anti-democratic exercises increased since the AKP rule. The main problems of Alevis as he poses in the declaration are the compulsory religious lessons in which Alevi pupils are used for the Sunnification, *cemevis* which are not given legal status, and the DRA, which feeds the reactionism, with its great budget by serving only to the members of the Sunni belief.

Furthermore, he points out that although thanks to the struggle of their organizations the PSAKD⁴³ won the case vis-a-vis the Turkish state on the compulsory religious instruction

⁴³ The counsel of Hasan and Eylem Zengin was Kazım Genç who is the former president of the PSAKD.

at the European Court of Human Rights, the AKP government still does not reflect the court decision to the national education system accordingly (ECHR 2008).⁴⁴ By arguing that the AKP does not apply the court decision and thus does not recognize the rule of law as the Turkish state is bounded by the decisions of the international courts to which it accepted in the past, he emphasizes that the AKP's carelessness attitude towards the rule of law is concerning all parts of the society.

Then he makes the most striking argument throughout the declaration:

The demands at hand are not only the demands of Alevi but also the demands of all parts who want democracy, freedom and equality. There are millions of families who do not want their kid to take the compulsory religious lesson even though they are of Sunni origin. And these families are too as disadvantaged as Alevi.⁴⁵

It is striking because although as the president of an Alevi organization which is supposed to be defending the rights and freedoms of Alevi at first instance, he perceives the problem as resulting from an unjust application also for the other parts of the society who do not want their children to attend those classes due to their political views, convictions or non-convictions. Accordingly, the call of the declaration addresses not just Alevi but also worker unions, democratic mass organizations, leftist political parties in order to challenge, Balkız claims, "the wave of reactionism" and "the lawlessness the party manifested in almost all areas".

However, other prominent Alevi organizations which are not institutionally attached to the ABF did not officially attend the meeting except individual participations. The principal justification of them for not attending was the revealed support of the DTP, which represents

⁴⁴ ECHR, *Case of Hasan and Eylem Zengin vs. Turkey*. Application no: 1448/04, Final Judgment: 09.01.08. The Court decided that there was a violation of the second article of the First Protocol of the Convention by basing its judgment to "a problem related to implementation of the syllabus for this class and the absence of appropriate methods for ensuring respect for parents' convictions" (No.84 of the Final Judgment).

⁴⁵ Söz konusu talepler sadece Alevilerin talepleri değil, demokrasi, özgürlük ve eşitlik isteyen tüm kesimlerin talepleridir. Sünni kökenli olduğu halde çocuğunun zorunlu din dersi almasını istemeyen milyonlarca aile vardır ve bu aileler de Aleviler kadar mağdur olmaktadır.

the pro-Kurdish politics, to the meeting. As mentioned above, besides the members of the DTP there were also representatives from the CHP, the ÖDP, and the SHP. Although the proportion of the DTP's members within all the members of the political parties was indeed not any bigger than those of other political parties the fact that the DTP attended the meeting with the deputies Sırrı Sakık, Sebahat Tuncel, Aysel Tuğluk and Hasip Kaplan drawn the attention of the media so that the headlines on November 9 throughout the newspapers included "Sivas ve Gazi'yi Planlayan Eller Yeni Oyun Peşinde" [The forces who planned the Sivas and Gazi incidents are looking for a new game] (*Zaman*), and "DTP'nin Oyununa Gelmeyin" [Dont be deceived by the DTP] (*Yeni Şafak*). İzzettin Doğan, the president of the Cem Foundation boycotted the meeting on the grounds that the meeting would serve to the mobilization of the Kurdish movement in the same way the kids were being provoked in the Southeast (*Yeni Şafak*, 9 November 2008). Likewise, the president of Hasandede Alevi Bektaşî Kültür Derneği (*Hasandede Alevi Bektashi Culture Association*) Özdemir revealed: "Those are of a PKK-based formation". Doğan criticized the organizers of the meeting also for being not religious enough to be Alevis since, as he claimed, they do not go to cemevis, or not recognize neither Koran nor Muhammad (*Zaman*, 9 November 2008). Similarly, the president of Dünya Ehl-i Beyt Vakfı (*World Ehl-i Beyt Foundation*) Fermani Altun said: "First they should learn Alevism, and then they can claim the rights of Alevis" (*Ibid.*).

Another interesting allegation came from the president of Anadolu İnanç Önderleri Derneği (*Association of Anatolian Religious Leaders*) Hıdır Bulut (Hıdır Dede). He argued that those Alevi organizations marching to Ankara would ruin the unity and the solidarity of Alevis and would not be effective to solve the problems of the Alevi society (*Yeni Şafak*, 9 November 2008). Moreover, he claimed that the march was the tactic for eroding the influence of the AK Party in the Southeast before the local elections.

During the meeting, there was no propaganda of the DTP observed as it was claimed in those newspapers. Accordingly, the headlines of those newspapers had to change, but still representing the same mentality, into “Aleviler Oyuna Gelmedi Miting Sakin Geçti” [Alevi were not deceived, the meeting was silent] (*Zaman*, 10 November 2008), for example.

Second Muharram *İftar*

The AKP, as part of its Alevi opening, continued to organize the Muharram *iftar* a second time in January 7, 2009. Obviously, the party was finally determined to sustain its policy. Actually, there were few changes in the debates evolved from it resembling the ones of the previous year. The biggest difference was probably the scale of participation of the prominent Alevi organizations to the dinner. While the ABF went on boycotting the exercise of the party on the grounds of assimilation of the Alevi by the AKP (*Cumhuriyet*, 27 December 2008) and again they were not even invited because they were said to represent Alevism as out of Islam, the other prominent Alevi organizations which had boycotted the previous dinner decided to attend this time. What made this happen was a meeting organized between the Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and the Minister of State responsible from Religious Affairs Said Yazıcıoğlu and only certain representatives of the Alevi organizations in the office of Dolmabahçe on December 06, 2008 (*Zaman*, 7 December 2008).

This meeting was crucial because it was revealed that the Alevi opening of the AKP was the subject of the meeting to which the president of Cem Foundation İzzettin Doğan, the general director of the Cem Foundation Hadır Akbayır, the president of the Directorate of

Alevi Islam Religious Affairs⁴⁶ Ali Rıza Uğurlu, the president of the AVF Doğan Bermek were invited only (*Zaman*, 26 December 2008).

Doğan, by emphasizing that since the meeting would be thought as part of the election campaign of the AKP the party would not make the necessary legal changes for the realization of the Alevi demands before the elections, since they agreed to continue to have meetings on the Alevi demands (*Turkish Journal*, 7 December 2008). Besides, he declared that they conveyed their demands to the government officials as follows; giving legal status to *cemevis*, the representation of Alevism within the Diyanet and thus the distribution of some portion of the national budget to the Alevi communities, giving Alevi *dedes* the same government benefits as Sunni *imams* such as salary, social security benefits, and health insurance, giving Alevis the opportunity to broadcast on state-owned radio and televisions, and the insertion of relevant information about Alevi Islam into the books that are used for the compulsory religious courses. Lastly, he claimed that there are twenty five-thirty millions of people adopting Alevi Islam, of which they, i.e. the Cem Foundation, are the representatives in Turkey.

As can be seen, in the meeting hosted by the government to which other prominent Alevi organizations such as the members of the ABF were not invited, the problems and the demands of Alevis were discussed reflecting the group of the Cem Foundation's position towards them. As a result, the group of the Cem Foundation decided to support the AKP's Alevi opening following the pledges taken during the meeting.

Alevi Workshop

⁴⁶ This institution is attached to the Cem Foundation, and its central duty is to organize regular courses for training the religious personnel, *dedes*, and to send those *dedes* to the relevant *cemevis* in different regions needing *dedes*. In a nutshell, it is the Cem Foundation's version of the Diyanet with an Alevi Islam focus.

Although the Muharram ‘iftar’ did not manage to gather all the Alevi organizations again, there were some important developments. First of these was the broadcasting about Alevism during the month of Muharram on the state-owned television, TRT. There were programmes made in other national TV channels as well which manifested the achievements of the Alevi organizations such as the ABF (*Cumhuriyet*, 27 December 2008) and the Cem Foundation in this respect. The other development was the beginning of the Alevi Workshop as the first concrete step of the AKP government with regard to its discourse of Alevi Opening begun to be used since the first Muharram dinner. The workshop targeted to discuss the Alevis’ demands and problems within totally seven stages to be taken place intermittently. The workshop serials have been being organized by the leadership of the State Minister Faruk Çelik with Professor Necdet Subaşı⁴⁷ being the moderator of the sessions.

Here, I will only be able to convey up to its third session during the writing period of this thesis. But to put it briefly, it has to be noted that each session of the Alevi workshop has been planned to gather different voices having a say on the Alevi issue and Alevism. In the first session the sides from the Alevis representing different discourses on Alevism have been listened while the academicians studying on the Alevis issue and Alevism have been invited to the second one. In the third one the representatives of the Diyanet and the theologians have been listened.⁴⁸ In the fourth one the journalists and intellectuals, in the fifth one the civil society organizations, trade unions, professional organizations; in the sixth one those politicians either of Alevi origin or of Sunni origin but being knowledgeable on the Alevi issue are going to be listened. And the final stage is going to that a committee with the

⁴⁷ He is a respected academician, also among the Alevi circles, mostly noted for his studies on the Alevis’ problems due to modernization factor.

⁴⁸ When the program of the Alevi workshop was first announced to the public, the third section did not target to *listen* the representatives of the Diyanet and theologians, they were supposed to be invited to the fifth meeting. For the first program announced see Taha Akyol’s article “Alevi Açılımı Hızlanıyor” in *Milliyet* (26 May 2009).

leadership of Professor Subaşı is going to prepare a final report to present the overall conclusions derived from the opinions of different sides to the government. This is to say that the Alevi workshop is preliminary for the solution of the Alevi problems upon which different voices have come to produce different discourses up to now.

The first session of the workshop taken place on 3rd and 4th of June addressed the Alevi organizations covering a wide range of discourses on Alevism. Professor Subaşı revealed that for the purpose of the research they intended to invite only different discourse groups notwithstanding the matter of organization (*CNN Turk*, 3 June 2009). What those organizations were supposed to do is to present their position on the demand of Alevis manifesting once again the different definition of Alevism by those organizations.

The opening statements of the minister Çelik were quite promising for the future of the Alevi Opening with his acknowledgement of the past bad experiences of the Alevis:

As the government, we absolutely do not appropriate the ignoring approaches with regard to the problems and demands of our Alevi brothers. Our government appropriating the issue with a supra-political and supra-party approach is determined to use initiative for finding perpetual solutions and evaluating the demands. Let's not charge the tomorrow with the problems of the past and of the present. Let's carry our country, which is our common identity and value to the tomorrow more strongly (*Taraf*, 5 June 2009).⁴⁹

While the productive and solution-oriented approach of the minister Çelik was appreciated by the organizations in general, the fact that only in one session of the overall serials of workshop has been reserved to the Alevi organizations led to criticism. The president of the Alevi Culture Associations (Alevi Kültür Dernekleri) Tekin Özdil expressed that they were listened only in the first meeting and that they were excluded from the

⁴⁹ Hükümet olarak Alevi kardeşlerimizin sorunları ve talepleri konusunda ihmalkar yaklaşımları kesinlikle benimsemiyoruz. Konuya siyaset ve partiler üstü yaklaşan Hükümetimiz sorunlara kalıcı çözümler bulunması, taleplerin değerlendirilmesi noktasında inisiyatif kullanma kararlılığındadır. Gelin dünün ve bugünün sorunlarını yarının sırtına yüklemeyelim. Ortak kimliğimiz ortak değerlerimiz olan ülkemizi çok daha güçlü bir şekilde yarınlarımıza taşıyalım.

following meetings and developments. He maintained that they wanted to be informed about the discussions in the following meetings.

The president of the HBVAKV Ercan Geçmez noted that they cared about this opening but they found the existence of some of the attendees to the first meeting ‘inappropriate’ by referring to the theologians and politicians which were supposed to attend the workshop in the following sessions.

In this first session, the representatives of the Alevi organizations and some prominent Alevi dedes agreed upon five basic demands from the state (*CNN Turk*, 4 June 2009). Those are granting the cemevis legal status, removing the compulsory character of the religious courses, transforming the Madımak Otel into a museum, terminating the policy of building mosques to the Alevi villages and returning the administration of the Alevi lodges such as Hacı Bektash to the Alevi organizations. However, there were some points upon which they could not agree such as the abolition of the Diyanet⁵⁰ and giving the Alevi *dedes* salary from the state budget.

In the second session held on July 8 2009, a number of distinguished academicians such as Levent Köker, Ferhat Kentel, Ahmet Yaşar Ocak, Ali Murat İrat, Bekir Berat Özipek, Aykan Erdemir, and Fuat Bozkurt who work either on Alevism or on the issue of freedom to religion in general were listened. While the whole session passed expectedly, only the statements of Mümtazer Türköne drew criticism (*Birgün*, 9 July 2009). He claimed during the session that because Alevis were minorities and thus thought that they would not be able to come to power, they tended to support the defenders of coup d’état. However, he was both criticized by other academicians during the session and the president of the PSAKD Fevzi Gümüş later on. Gümüş stated that Alevis, having harshly experienced the military coups of

⁵⁰ As can be estimated, the opposing side to the abolition of the Diyanet has been the Cem Foundation group. Instead, they wanted the representation within it. This position defended mainly by İzzettin Doğan was praised as a ‘reasonable’ decision by Islamist circles. For one example, see Yasin Aktay’s article in *Yeni Şafak* (8 June 2009).

March 12 and of September 12, had always showed their opposition to the coup (*ANKA*, 11 July 2009).

In the third section taken place on August 19 the representatives from the Diyanet and certain theologians were invited. Even this attitude of the government gives us important insights about the level of laicism in Turkey and how much powerful position the Diyanet has. Why do some authorities which are endowed with theological knowledge have to be asked for their opinions with regard to the demands of Alevi? Why do we always have to handle the Alevi issue in theological terms notwithstanding how the Alevi themselves perceive their Aleviness?

The president of Religious Affairs High Council (*Din İşleri Yüksek Kurulu*) of the Diyanet Aktan, while noting that concrete demands were not talked, expressed their views as the Diyanet: “With regard to the concrete demands of Alevi, the Diyanet has no negative attitude” (*CNN Turk*, 19 August 2009). Despite that, he revealed that they are against the acceptance of *cemevis* as the place of worship.

To sum up, an Islamist-conservative political party, the AKP has initiated a project called Alevi Opening in which it claims to solve the problems of Alevi. The reaction to the Alevi demands from the state has always been caught in a grip of conditionality, i.e. criteria for the incorporation of Alevi. While this conditionality on the Alevi might consist of being laicist in one political context for example in the post-February 28 era, it might be composed of being religious, Muslim (perceiving Alevism within Islam), and critical to the difference-blind and difference-repressive Kemalism of the state elites in the present context. Although the AKP, as a party which is in pursuit of realizing the freedom of religion for its party base especially, might be effective to conduct a newly defined laicism for the incorporation of religious freedoms, it has overtly some conditions to struggle alongside with the Alevi in order to transcend the Kemalist laicism and to reach a more liberal laicism. As can be seen in

the statements of pro-AKP circles, Alevis, if they want to be recognized, should comprehend Alevism as a religious affiliation within Islam which can get along with the Sunni version of Islam. Besides, their demands from the state can only be legitimate if they articulate them by using a discourse of recognition politics which defines its collective identity in religious terms instead of a leftist political worldview (Dressler 2008b). Thus, Alevis are in a situation that they can hardly be freed from this conditionality for their recognition which indeed proves the limited nature of laicism in Turkey in all aspects.

However, within all its plurality, there are certain voices in the Alevi movement that can easily accommodate this language of recognition politics, although there are some others who prefer to perceive the problems of Alevis in a larger picture pointing to a deficit of democracy and truly laicism. In the fifth chapter, I will look at the discourses of those Alevi organizations in legitimating their institutional identity and engaging a recognition politics that inevitably touch the issues of democracy and laicism. But before coming to that, I need to present the context the Alevi movement was emerged, and evaluate how Alevism evolved into a new form in the ongoing process of constructing a collective identity to legitimate the movement. In doing so, I will be shedding light on the question whether this reproduction of Alevism has been influenced by the dominant actors' conditionality I have tried to describe.

CHAPTER IV

THE REPRODUCTION OF ALEVISM

“How sad is that the belief aspects of Alevism have never been touched during the sessions”⁵¹ said the *dede* of the Erikli Baba⁵² Cemevi to the microphone.⁵³ Though hardly anyone cared about his discontent and most of the people left the building instantly, I still heard some elderly people talk among themselves while the crowd was dispersing: “Neither the religion nor the prophet they have anymore”.⁵⁴ It was interesting to hear those comments, because the purpose of the meeting was indeed not to discuss the religious aspects of Alevism, but to deliberate on the problems and the demands of Alevis from the state authorities.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, the fact that, instead of a conference hall, the panel took place in a historical lodge which made the panel participants surrounded by the religious symbols pertaining to Alevism such as the pictures of Hz. Ali and Hacı Bektashi Veli on the walls seemed to be a deliberate choice of the organization.

On the one hand; the *dede* is given the position of a religious guide of the community who can lead the *cem* community depending on a standardized interpretation of Alevi rituals. On the other hand, this role of the *dede* as someone who conducts the religious services of the community is a subordinated one since it is the *cemevi* administration that decides on the appointing of the *dede* to the community. Furthermore, as the anecdote shows, there has been an observable opposition to the newly invented Alevism stripped of its religious basis to a large extent from the side of the elderly people to the transformation of the traditional types of

⁵¹ Oturumların hiçbirinde Aleviliğin inanç boyutuna değinilmemesi ne kadar üzücü.

⁵² Erikli Baba Cemevi, located in İstanbul is one of the important historical sites for the Alevi community due to the figure of Erikli Baba.

⁵³ From the notes I took during a panel organized in Erikli Baba Cemevi by the Association for Liberal Thinking (Liberal Düşünce Topluluğu) titled “The Alevi Question in the Framework of Human Rights”. May 9 2009, İstanbul, Turkey.

⁵⁴ Ne din kalmış ne peygamber bunlarda!

⁵⁵ Reha Çamuroğlu, AKP’s İstanbul deputy who has pioneered the Alevi opening, was also among the panelists.

Alevism that thrived in the rural areas. The anecdote gives us two insights both for those people and for the Alevi movement in general. While they are unsatisfied with the practices the traditional Alevism has been transformed through the increasing organizational structures within the Alevi movement, the fact that they have dared to express their discontent about the irreligiosity or the secular content of the panel programme might – conversely - point out at the possibility of the increasing religiosity among the Alevi community, encouraged by the very actors of the movement based on an identity formation.

In the previous chapter, I have presented introductory information about how the discourses of the state officials and of Islamist circles have been produced on the definition of Alevism together with the role of the Alevi organizations in reproducing and challenging those discourses. Following that, I find it necessary to elaborate on how the traditional Alevism has been evolved into a new form of Alevism in the process of Alevi movement. This newly invented Alevism has come to establish a sum of standardized rituals of Alevism by ignoring the variety of practices among the old traditional forms of Alevism experienced in different regions of Turkey. My main research question in this chapter and thus my point of connecting it to the argument of the whole thesis is how the discourses on Alevism and on the religion in general by the actors of the dominant culture have impacted the way this new form of Alevism has been developed, and thus whether any of the actors of the Alevi movement has come to construct a certain definition of Alevism which would be in line with the hegemonic discourse on the religion both discursively and practically. Therefore, given the discourses of the dominant culture on those subjects, in this chapter I will search for their effects on Alevism experienced through the urban phenomenon. I will be also looking at whether the actors of the Alevi movement either with their discourses or with their practices on Alevism bear a strong truth claim over the definition of Alevism when considered the pluralist picture of the Alevi organizations. Therefore, this chapter which is composed of three

sections mainly concerns with how the transformation of Alevism has been directly passing both through the agency of the Alevi actors and indirectly through the legitimate languages of politics that are current in Turkey. Before going in detail about the transformation of Alevism, I believe it is necessary to present in which political context and due to which factors the Alevi movement has emerged.

For this purpose, I will present the process of transformation of Alevism by discussing the *cem* ceremonies, *semahs*, and the courses of *dedelik* under the section of “New Forms of Alevism”. In order to do that, besides benefiting from the existing literature on those issues, I will try to enrich the narrative by inserting my own observations during the field research and the interviews with the Alevi organizations and Alevi people. In this section, while demonstrating the process of transformation, I will also discuss the arguments of some voices within the Alevi movement accusing others of “assimilating” Alevism into the Sunni Islam which will remind us the discussions on *düşkünlük* in the previous chapter. In discussing the transformation process that Alevism has been passing through, I will inevitably have touched the fundamental characteristics of Alevism with respect to its form, content, and the relationship of both.

In the last section titled “‘Politicized’ Alevism”, I will basically touch upon the critiques directed at the organizers of the November 9 March in particular for “politicizing” Alevism. In this section, the meanings that the word “politics” take for the case of Alevism will give us important insights both about the political culture in Turkey in general and the hidden fears of those Alevis which come to the surface when they tend to lean with the hegemonic language of politics more in particular. Moreover, the question of whether Alevism might pertain to a religious and/or a political affiliation will be debated.

Emergence of the Alevi Movement

The dissolution of the traditional Alevism already begun with the widespread urbanization in the 1960s. For the Alevis, the challenge to preserve their distinct identity came both from the urbanization and thus modernization problems, and from the influence of the Sunnification of the state. Although the Kemalist modernization project that targeted a homogenized society by ignoring the religious, ethnic and linguistic differences with the policies such as the establishment of the Directorate of Religious Affairs in 1924 and the abolition of the dervish lodges (*tekke* and *zaviyes*) in 1925 which affected the Alevi society badly to sustain the institution of *dedelik* around the lodges, the Alevis still did not lose their attachment to the republic and holded on the principle of laicism introduced by the new republic so that Alevis almost mythologized the figure of Atatürk as the liberator (Kehl-Bodrogi 2003). Since the 1950s when the center-right government of the Democrat Party⁵⁶ gave importance to the religious activities in its party propagations so as to promote the domination of Sunni practices in the public sphere, the threat of Sunnification of the state was begun to be highly felt by the Alevis (Ayata 1997: 66).

With the effect of urbanization, the Alevis could no longer remain secluded from the Sunni communities as they had been in the rural areas. The urban life made the members of both communities to come into interactions more and more which might be exemplified in the increase in the mixed marriages. Therefore, the Alevis who used to live traditionally in the rural areas within closed communities following an esoteric knowledge of the religion by allowing them a sum of highly differing religious interpretations in terms of issues such as the

⁵⁶ Mardin (1981) and Kara (2004) claims that contrary to the common belief that the activities of the DP threatened the laicist regime, the DP governments did indeed pay attention to protect the laicist structure of the state while they only benefited from the social gap the CHP remained insufficient to fill in terms of the social and religious culture of the people.

forms of worship and the place of women had to overcome the problems of urbanization, of the state's Sunnification policies and of the interactions with the Sunni people.⁵⁷

Feeling unsafe and incredulous due to their minority status, Alevi when they flowed to the big cities because of socio-economic concerns began to question their situation. They were living in the outskirts of the cities. And the traditional institution of *dedelik* and *cem* rituals could no longer continue in the city life (Erdem 2001, Çamuroğlu 2000, Bozkurt 2006). Thus, due to the fact of migration, in the 1960s⁵⁸ and the 1970s Alevi especially the Alevi youth started to feel alienated to their Alevi background as a religious-cultural identity. Young Alevi tended to re-interpret their religious heritage and cultural identity in terms of historical materialism (Vorhoff 2003: 95), and they affiliated themselves with the anti-imperialist, socialist and Marxist movements. They started to view Alevism "both as a revolutionary ideology and a practiced communism" (*ibid.*).

Due to their affiliation to the left and to the Alevism, Alevi were subjected to severe attacks and atrocities in the events of Kahramanmaraş in 1978 and of Çorum in 1980. While many people died in the political fight in those events, the state did not present itself with a neutral position. Rather, the governments at the time helped provoke the political atmosphere against leftists instrumentalizing the concern of the threat of Communism.

After the military coup of 1980, the state ideology was reformulated by using the conservative discourse of the governments in 1960s and the "Turkish-Islamic Synthesis" was

⁵⁷ The spreading of the slanders about perversion in the name of *Mumsöndü* accusations for the Alevi is part of this interaction, even though the history of sexual slandering resulting from the political and thus religious contestations between the orthodox and heterodox groups dates back to the eleventh century (Köprülü 1999).

⁵⁸ Despite the fact that it is hard to speak of an identity movement of Alevi during this period, the declaration of 1963 by about fifty Alevi university students marks the importance of mentioning the 'Alevi' word firstly in a public declaration. The declaration was written with the purpose of protesting the derogatory speeches of the Diyanet officials and the articles of conservative press members following the proposal of the İnönü's coalition government to establish a Denominational Department (*Mezhepler Dairesi*) in which all the denominations in Turkey would be represented as part of the Diyanet (Şener and İlknur 1995: 81).

constructed. The Constitution of 1982 put a new article that established the compulsory course of religion in the schools. The construction of unwanted mosques in the Alevi villages also corresponded to this new state ideology.⁵⁹ The *Turkish-Islamic Synthesis* basically claimed that Turkishness and Islam when brought together were the inseparable element of the unitarian nation in order to dispel the Communist tendencies that ethnic and religious cleavages had affiliated themselves with.⁶⁰ Thus, with this new ideology, a sense of unity and togetherness was aimed to get inserted into the minds of the people. But the oppositional movements were already highly repressed by the coup's undemocratic and violent repressive practices.

When it came to the late 1980s, Alevis were now reclaiming their identity. Alevi religious practices and social institutions which were deeply affected by the urban phenomenon were being remembered and reproduced. But why did Alevis suddenly start to hold on their Alevi identity? If it was because of their fear of losing their distinct culture due to the urbanization, why did not they begin in the 1960s to search for ways to preserve traditional forms of Alevism? There are a number of significant factors triggering the Alevis to follow an identity politics beginning from the late 1980s. In order to understand the present conditions Alevism has been passing through, I need to present a summary of the underlying factors for the emergence of the Alevi movement.

Among the political factors affecting the Alevi revival, Çamuroğlu sees the collapse of the Soviet Union which made socialism to become no longer an option for the Alevis (1998, 2000). Socialism that had gathered the Alevis around for twenty years as an alternative ideology lost its past importance. The Alevis who engaged in the political activities during the 1970s and thus established many respectable social networks began to describe themselves

⁵⁹ The exact number of the mosques constructed to the Alevi villages cannot be known.

⁶⁰ Bruinessen argues that the state's attitude towards Islam since the 1980s represents the greatest break from the Kemalist tradition (2000: 121).

again as Alevis. When they looked retrospectively they realized how wrong it was to hold onto socialism by neglecting Alevism (2000:15). They re-discovered Alevism as a more equitable and egalitarian ideology than socialism.⁶¹

Besides the collapse of the Soviet Union, there is another international factor influencing the Alevi revival in a large extent which might be defined as “transnational context and global discourse of identity as right” (Şahin 2005: 477). Thanks to the European Parliament’s decision to grant subsidies to the immigrant associations for the facilitation of engaging in politics at the European level in 1986 (Soysal 1994), those immigrant associations were able to link their home countries and form umbrella associations depending on their identity as a human right discourse widely acknowledged by the UN, UNESCO and EU (Soysal 1997). Thus, Alevis benefited from this discourse of ‘identity as right’ and established associations accordingly. Being the first open indication of the onset of the Alevi movement, the *Alevilik Bildirgesi* (Manifesto of Alevism) was written and got published by the Hamburg Alevi Culture Center in 1989.⁶² The document gives insights about the Alevis⁶³ tracing an identity politics based on the principle of human rights, and thus adhering to the global discourse of ‘identity as right’ (Şahin 2005: 478). In the manifesto, it is stated that:

Even today Alevis experience fear because they are Alevis. This is not necessary. These people must be able to say openly “I am Alevi.” It is one of their natural human rights. We appeal to those conceal their being Alevi due to political or material anxiety to give up that attitude and to claim their culture. It is a human right that every human being should be able to express his or her identity freely. To stigmatize this identity as “sectarianism” or “chauvinism” is a lack of respect for a basic human right.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Cemal Şener’s work titled *Alevilik Olayı: Toplumsal Bir Başkaldırının Kısa Tarihçesi* (Alevism Incident: A Short History of a Social Uprising, 1989) is the first example of this type of perspective. *Alevilik Olayı* has been one of the most printed books among the Alevis with its ten editions in only one year. Another influential work was Atilla Özkırmırlı’s *Alevilik-Bektaşılık: Toplumsal Bir Başkaldırının İdeolojisi* (Alevism-Bektashim: An Ideology of a Social Uprising, 1990).

⁶² Though the original version of the Manifesto was published in October 1989 as part of the “Alevi Culture Week”, its second version was published in the daily *Cumhuriyet* on May 6, 1990 (Sökefeld 2008: 16).

⁶³ Among the signers of the Manifesto, there were also non-Alevi writers, journalists, and artists.

⁶⁴ The whole translation of this quotation is directly taken from Sökefeld (*ibid*).

Similar to Şahin, Sökefeld also claims that the Manifesto reveals the opting of the Alevis for a discourse that is based more on the principle of human rights (Sökefeld 2008: 17).

Furthermore, he highlights that with this declaration it was demonstrated that “the Alevi question of identity is not simply a ‘quest for identity’” but rather is “the demand for the *recognition* of that identity...as a distinct community in a particular, nonstigmatizing way” (*ibid*).

Ayata maintains that the identity politics in the 1990s in Turkey became the ground of expressing opposition against “both increasing inequalities and social, political and cultural domination” (1997: 60). For her, international politics provided those oppositional voices to enter into “a discourse of identity rather than an economic struggle” (*ibid*). Moreover, she mentions the Alevis’ problem with the downward mobility since the 1980s (p.67). She argues that the Alevis began to lose their power in the central government and the municipalities they had throughout the 1970s. Additionally, their economic status deteriorated due to the fall in the wages together with the decreasing significance of the unionized working class. The same observation is shared by Massicard arguing that the Alevis started to get marginalized both politically and economically due to the liberalization policies in the 1980s (2005: 71-73). However, this was still not enough to engage with an identity politics rather than solidarity gathered around in the name of social justice with its multiple dimensions. Together with the international factors mentioned above, we need to discuss some others as well.

Massicard also acknowledges that the role of the pioneering persons or leaders is undeniable for the mobilization of the Alevi movement. They were the people who had organizational experience during the 1960s and 1970s but were rarely from the leadership cadres of those leftist organizations (pp. 78-84). Besides, they could maneuver in the political arena through the identity ‘aperture’ more easily than the leftist organizations which would be

a lot more dangerous in the political context of the post-1980 coup. Having wide networks within the various organizational circles and endowed with the necessary intellectual knowledge, those people offered their existing opportunities and demonstrated a social sensibility to undertake the issue of mobilization for the Alevi movement (p.81). Furthermore, the village associations had important role for supplying both the local solidarity and the financial support needed for the Alevi movement also thanks to the strength of the family bonds. In fact, they had also helped collecting the necessary funds for the spreading of the movement since the Alevi community did not contain a social class that might be described as a bourgeoisie.

Another important factor influencing the Alevi revival is the Kurdish problem because a remarkable proportion of Alevis are Kurds, estimatedly 10 to 20 percent of the Alevi population (Çamuroğlu 1998: 80). Bruinessen argues that a significant part of the Kurdish Alevis define themselves first as Alevi, then as a Kurd by hanging on the state's discourse that claimed Alevism to be contained by pre-Islamic Turkic beliefs (2000: 128).⁶⁵ Çamuroğlu highlights that Alevis when they are confronted with Islamism, they leaned with the principle of "secularism"; when they are faced with the Kurdish nationalism they leaned with "the principle of unity and stress their religious identity and affiliation as Alevi" (1998: 80). Besides, the Kurdish movement sided against the Alevi revival in its initial phase (Bruinessen 2000: 117).

Among all the factors influencing the emergence of the Alevi movement, the most effective one is the rise of political Islam in the world in general and in Turkey in particular. Remembering the bad historical experiences due to religion-excused politics, Alevis perceive the rise of political Islam as a threat to their survival (Çamuroğlu 1998: 80). Furthermore, the

⁶⁵ Though, there were also significant works by the Kurdish writers defending that Alevism contained strong elements from the old Iranian religions. For the most influential work following this argument, see Bender's *Kürt Uygarlığında Alevilik* (1991).

Alevis felt encouraged by the secularist elements of the state as their natural allies against the rise of political Islam (Bruinessen 2000: 123) and started to see themselves as their existence as the “guarantors of laicism” in Turkey.⁶⁶

Although those factors mentioned already existed, the Alevi movement took its strongest lead with the horrible arson attack to the Madımak hotel in which 37 people who had come to Sivas for the Pir Sultan Abdal cultural festival were burned by the reactionary people in 1993. The explicit indifference of the police forces to the attack and of the government at the time led the Alevis to question both their relationship with the state, which was indeed never so good to them, and with the political Islam. Massicard stresses that the actors of the movement had to define a *frame* of injustice needed to politicize the Alevi question by making lots of publications in that direction (p.85). For her, the need for establishing a *frame* was unexpectedly met with the horrible events of Madımak in 1993, followed by the massacre in the Gazi neighborhood in 1995.⁶⁷ These events organized against the Alevis resulted in strong feelings of anger and therefore led to a widespread organization effort among Alevis. Those bigoted attacks reminded Alevis the historical massacres against Alevis such as the Battle of Karbala in 680, slaughters especially since the reign of Yavuz Sultan Selim (1512-1520) during the Ottoman era and strengthened their feeling of aggrievedness vis-a-vis the Sunni.

New Forms of Alevism

It was neither the traditional Alevi institutions nor the religious elite that initiated the Alevi revival, but rather “a new, Western-educated elite, via modern media and secular forms of

⁶⁶ This belief has become highly common among the Alevis.

⁶⁷ Massicard here uses the ‘moral shock’ concept of James Jasper (1998).

organization; associations, foundations, concerts, staging of the traditional rites, public conferences and, last but not least, the huge mass of publications on Alevism” (Vorhoff 2003: 97). They mostly tended to deliberate on what Alevism was like. The process of producing discourses on Alevism through various kinds of media was so speedy that we can speak of a phenomenon that Alevism has “gone public” and gained “publicity” from then and on (Şahin 2005). A belief system that remained dependent on the oral culture and an esoteric knowledge of the religion was being brought to the public sphere with a process of formalization. Şahin sees the scripturalization of Alevism as a crucial step to make it a “public religion” which has inevitably resulted in “a fixing of the tradition” (p.479).⁶⁸ The claim-making process depending on a socio-religious identity required the manifestation of that identity publicly and therefore needed to be defined in solid terms. Göner claims in this respect: “because of the dominance of an authenticity and difference-based political discourse, Alevis, who had already been searching for identity in their new urban settings, increasingly defined themselves in terms of an authentic Alevi culture and religion” (2005: 124). However, she maintains that those transformations did not result in “the authenticity of tradition, but rather that of ‘invented tradition’”(ibid.).

Similarly, Vorhoff argues that those who wrote about Alevism in various sources such as books, magazines, and pamphlets attempt “not only try to revive but at the same time to reformulate and reshape this culture as well as the collective and personal identity of its bearers” (Vorhoff 2003: 97).⁶⁹ Likewise, Ellington asserts that the forms that cem rituals, semahs, the emergence of the cemevi phenomenon and dedelik institution take were not the

⁶⁸ Şahin borrows the concepts “to go public”, “to gain publicity” and “public religion” from Jose Casanova (1994).

⁶⁹ Vorhoff furthermore draws attention to that many Alevi spokesmen often refer to ‘our culture, values, ancestors’ in the formation of ‘our identity’ and contrasting this to ‘theirs’ which is that of the bigoted and intolerant Sunnis, Arabs, etc. She argues that those kinds of statements bear “a clear ethnic bias” in a process of remindingly forming an ethnicity (2003: 106).

old traditional forms of Alevism, but it points to the revival of Alevism in a modern urban Turkey in which a developed form of Alevism that is “distinct from its traditional rural origins, but quite compatible with a modern and secular environment” (2004: 370).

In this section, I will discuss the formalization and thus standardization process of traditional Alevism in terms of *cem* ceremonies, *semahs*, and *dedelik* through the practices of various Alevi organizations and the criticisms of “assimilation” directed to them.

Cem Ceremonies

I asked whisperingly to the elder woman sitting next to me in the *cem* ceremony which is organized by the Cem Foundation every Thursday evening: “Were you sitting as separated from men in the *cem*s of your village too?” She looked at my face for a moment and said: “No, daughter, we were sitting so as to touch our knees to each other’s”.⁷⁰ I asked her why it was then so, she replied to me: “We should be graceful even for this!”⁷¹ She was participating every Thursday to the *cem* ceremony there for almost ten years, and was quite aware of its difference from the *cem*s in her village. However, despite the incongruity with the *cem* in her village, the reappearance of *cem* in the urban setting was met with her grateful expression showing how the realizations of the Alevi rituals in the urban area were long being awaited, and now met with a high demand by the side of the Alevi people. She might think that the transformation of the rituals in the urban life so as to have a different form and thus necessarily a diluted socio-religious content within the rituals was a necessary tradeoff for participating in the *cem*s after a long period of humiliation, discrimination and thus having to conceal one’s Alevi identity.

⁷⁰ “Yok kızım, böyle diz dize otururduk”. July 9, 2009. Yenibosna, İstanbul.

⁷¹ “Buna da şükür yavrum!”. I am aware that I might not be able to find in English the exact equivalence of what she said in Turkish.

The *ayin-i cem*, *cem* ceremony, or *cem* for short is a fundamental ritual practice for the Alevis in Turkey. There are a number of basic functions *cem* provides for the community: “as a rite of initiation for adolescents, as a rite of commemoration for revered figures in early Islamic history, and as site for the adjudication of social disputes between members of the community” (Tambar 2009: 3).

Yalçinkaya argues that one can hardly talk about that *cem* is the way of worshipping (*ibadet*) – in the sense of obeying the God’s orders and worshipping (*tapınma*) to God – for the Alevis (1996: 74). He asserts that this does not mean that there is not a connection between the human and his/her God; this relation can be observed in the act of *niyaz* in which the members of the *cem* community return their faces and bodies to each others’ and hail. But in order to understand the meaning of *niyaz* and its bond with God, one should comprehend the essential theological character of Alevism. According to the esoteric belief of Alevism, there is the mystic principle of *vahdet-i Vücut* (Unity of the Body), the human is part of God and God reflects its appearance in the world through humans but which does not mean that the human is the God. In fact, all the creatures are the appearance of God, yet the human is considered as the highest one. We can trace how Alevism gives importance to the human in terms of the capability of cognition. This can be seen in the example of Koran, the holy book of Islam, in the following lines of *Aşık* (singer-poet) Daimi (1932-1983):

*I am the mirror of the cosmos
Since I am a human
I am the ocean of existence of God
Since I am a human
Human is in the God, God is in the human
If you look for it, it is in the human
Human is full of merits
Since I am a human
I can write the Torah
I can arrange the Bible
I can conceive the Koran
Since I am a human⁷²*

⁷² “Kainatın aynasıyım/ Madem ki ben bir insanım/ Hakk’ın varlık deryasıyım/ Mademki ben bir insanım/ İnsan hakta Hak insanda/ Arıyorsan bak insanda/ Çok marifet var insanda/ Mademki ben bir

Thus, the human being is given great importance within the Alevi theology. From this point of view, I think it is easier to comprehend the meaning of *cem*.

Yalçinkaya further argues that *cem* is not an independent period of time and space from the daily activities of the human (1996: 75). Human is morally responsible for her actions to the people she encounters during a day. Among one of the most crucial functions of *cem*, I counted the adjudication of social disputes between the members of the community. That the members of the community are responsible from their daily activities and their relations with the other people is brought to the room of the *cem* and any existing conflicts among the members are tried to be resolved. This sort of communal hearing is realized during the *görgü cemi* or *cem of the forty* (Kırklar Cemi) and the *musahiplik* (Path-brotherhood, or *Yol kardeşliği*) *cemi*.⁷³

Yalçinkaya points that the divinity does not come out of the *cem* itself, it is the participants, the members of the community that would give it to the *cem*. For this, he exemplifies the fact that *cems* are often realized in an appropriate house (both warmth and size are important) of the village during the winter nights⁷⁴, which is to say that there is hardly ever found a prescribed, certain *cem* house in the village. Besides the condition of not accepting the *düşkün* to the *cem*, there is the strict condition of being the member of the community. In other words, foreigners and outsiders are not accepted to the *cem*; and during the *cem*, all the members of the *cem* community by deleting the socially ascribed identities such as husband, wife, single, child, elder, is assumed as *can*, i.e. brothers and sisters

(Yalçinkaya 1996, Kaygusuz 2004). Keeping this condition in mind, all of them can be insanım/ Tevratı yazabilirim/ İncil'i dizebilirim/ Kuran'ı çözebilirim/ Mademki ben bir insanım" (Aydın 2008: 66-67). I apologize for the almost literal translation of the poem.

⁷³ To neither of these *cems*, the people who are denounced as *düşküns* are accepted. They are totally expelled from the community during the period of punishment.

⁷⁴ They do *cem* in winter because then it is more difficult for the outsiders especially the authorities to come and visit the village. They do it at night; because the day is reserved for the daily work.

gathered in the *cem* house and participate in the *cem* ceremony. However, this is not enough. There is the condition of getting the consent (*rıza*) of the members of the community from each other. Everybody should give their consent to all. If any single one from the community expresses her problem about someone from the community including the *dede*, the religious leader of the community conducting the *cem* rite, *cem* cannot be started without solving the problem and finally having her consent. Because of that principle, as I have made clear above, those participating to the *cem* should be careful about their daily activities and encounters with other people in line with the moral values of the community. In this respect, Yalçinkaya perfectly articulates it:

It is not possible to reach the truth by secluding oneself in Alevism. On the contrary, if the person is in pursuit of the truth, she would come to the *cem*. She would first see herself in the mirror of the *cem*, and measure herself on the balance of it. This means that she opens not her beliefs but her daily life to the social surveillance (1996: 79).⁷⁵

I have tried to present what kind of fundamental principles and practices the traditional Alevism have although there are many regional differences with respect to them.⁷⁶ As I will demonstrate with some striking examples, one can easily talk about the dissolution of traditional Alevism in the urban life. First of all, there is the *cemevi*⁷⁷ phenomenon for meeting the social and religious needs of the Alevi people now mostly living in the urban areas.⁷⁸ Now, *cemevis* offer a wide range of activities ranging from *cem* ceremonies *kurban*

⁷⁵ Alevilik içinde inzivaya çekilerek hakikate ulaşılmaz. Aksine, kişi hakikatın peşinde ise ceme gelecektir. Öncelikle kendini cemin aynasında görecek, cemin terazisinde kendisini tartacaktır. Bunun anlamı ise, inançlarını değil, tersine gündelik yaşamını toplumsal denetime açmasıdır.

⁷⁶ For example, the *cems* of Tahtacı for example, a sub-group under the umbrella term of ‘Alevi’ are different from the ones of Abdals despite the fact that there are still common characteristics merging them all under the term ‘Alevism’. I will try to reflect those similarities as far as I can while mentioning traditional Alevism throughout the thesis.

⁷⁷ *Cemevis* still do not have legal status. However, they continue their activities *de facto* either because the local administration has to give support to the Alevi population or because *cemevis* function as such under the organizations of Alevi village associations, foundations, associations established under the name of protection of historical sites or culture centers.

⁷⁸ I should note that it is difficult to claim that *cemevis* are meeting only the religious needs of the Alevi in the cities because on the other hand *cemevis* also function as the new public spaces in which

and funeral services, charity sale, panels, conferences, to *semah*, *saz*, Alevism, *dedelik* and literacy courses. For the Alevi population is mostly intensified in the metropol cities, *cemevis* are often built in there. Şahin claims that the construction of *cemevis*, as becoming the official religious centers to practice religion is part of the formalization process of Alevism (2005: 479). By that, “Alevism becomes transformed into a ‘congressional’ religion”, she maintains.

Being realized only few times in a year, mostly in the winter, in the rural areas, *cem* ceremonies are now available once (mostly on Thursday evening) in a week, in some *cemevis* three times (Thursday, Friday and Saturday evenings) in a week. Those *cems* offered at the weekend obviously target the working people who cannot participate the *cem* on Thursday. So, *cems* are restructured according to the needs of the speedy life times of the cities. I want to give two examples from the *cems* I participated during the field research in order to give the extent of the risen religiosity among the Alevis, the formalization of the rituals and last but not least the accommodation of the *cems* to the dominant view of the religious ritual of the Sunni Islam.

One of them was organized by the Şahkulu Sultan Foundation (of İstanbul) and took place in the last day of the Abdal Musa Festival in the Tekke village in Antalya.⁷⁹ During the festival, there were so many *cems* conducted by the *dedes* of various Alevi associations and foundations that some of them had to overlap. Although the visitors of the festival were allowed to participate in any *cem*, the participants mostly consisted of those from the community of the responsible organization of its own. Yet, since the festival lasted only three

the Alevis can now act more freely as a community and thus discuss their problems resulted from the modernization and the state’s supressing policies. Besides, it can also be possible to claim that after the construction of *cemevis* for the organizational purposes as to constitute a public space, the religious needs and therefore the religiosity of the Alevis have increased. The reason of why I defined as such in the text is to underline the official reasoning of the founders of certain *cemevis*, as can be exemplified in the statements of Aziz Aslan, the president of Kartal Cemevi Foundation (interview by the author, tape recording, June 25 2009, İstanbul) and of İzzettin Doğan, the president of Cem Foundation (interview by the author, tape recording, July 8 2009, İstanbul).

⁷⁹ Personal observation. June 21, 2009.

days, and there were lots of Alevi organizations participating, and also because the nights were reserved to the open-air concerts; there was a clear time limit for them to conduct their *cem*.

At the beginning of the *cem*, the *dede* Veli Akkol announced that they have the problem of time pressure and therefore they had to do a short *cem*. During this accelerated *cem*, some parts of the *gulbanks*, i.e. the songs of Alevi religious poems, had to be skipped. And Akkol was reiterating constantly which parts they are skipping. The time pressure also stemmed from the fact that they had to depart for İstanbul before the noon. Although the *cem* community was a little nervous for being so fast, they soon adapted to the mood during the course of the *cem*. Probably with the concern of inserting a strong religious sensitivity to the *cem*, the *dede* read a long series of *mersiye* (laments), i.e. poems for mourning the tragedy of the Battle Karbala, to the *cem*. It was just before the noon of a hot summer day, and thus the sun was just above the *cem* community. Even though the women having scarves on their heads were covering for the purpose of protecting from the sun, almost all of the community members were affected by the sun which made them highly impressed from the ongoing ritual because they were at the same time mourning for the Karbala. A young man who was also serving among the Twelve duties was so impressed by the *cem* that he lost his consciousness and started to move forth opening his arms to the sky and burst into tears by crying out the name of Hz. Hussein. While some others tried to calm him down, there was a great scale of emotionality felt among the community, which could be easily detected. When the ceremony finally ended, all of the participants were hugging each other with tears in their eyes. A woman said to me: “I was sweating a lot because the sun was burning too much. But then I said to myself, they [Hz. Hussein and his followers] remained waterless at the Karbala for days, why cannot I endure just a little?”

When the fact that the participants of this *cem* ceremony mostly came from Şahkulu Sultan Foundation's group who also came from different neighborhoods in İstanbul is considered, it is not difficult to grasp that they are neither relatives nor close friends; the importance of the religious level of the ceremony as to influence the sensitivity levels of those participants is remarkable. After the ceremony, when I asked some women in the *cem* about the young man who lost himself, they expressed they had never witnessed such thing in their lives, but still found him impressive. However, Şahgülü, a young girl from the Youth Group of the Şahkulu Foundation noted that those behaviors do not really correspond to the tenets of Alevism.⁸⁰ She claimed: "It is an affectation; I mean it is totally assimilation. Alevism is not this; this is something like a show-off".⁸¹

Another *cem* ceremony is the one of the Cem Foundation in Yeni Bosna.⁸² Actually, the fact that the Alevi practices gained a new publicity marks the *cems* of the Cem Foundation to a large extent. Before the *cem*, I introduced myself to the *post-dede*, the *dede* conducting the *cem*, that I am researching on Alevism, and asked whether I could participate in their *cems*. They greeted me with an explicit respect and showed me one of the seats which they said is reserved for the foreigners to watch the ceremony comfortably, which is an indicative of they are accustomed to the outsiders, and give primary importance to introduce their rituals as clear as they can. I can admit that this one was the most striking *cem* organization I had ever seen. First of all, there are two gates of the *cem* hall each of which are designed for the entrance of men and women separately. The crowd are divided sharply into as men and

⁸⁰ Interview by the author, tape recording. July 5, 2009. İstanbul.

⁸¹ Gösteriş yani tam bir asimilasyon. Yani Alevilik bu değil, gösteriş mahiyetinde bir şey.

⁸² July 9, 2009. İstanbul.

women. And almost all women were wearing headscarves⁸³ though not in the *tesettür* style but in the villager women's style.

Before the *cem* started, a man called *Gözcü*, who was performing as such as part of the Twelve Duties (*On İki Hizmet*), announced "Our committee of *dedes* are coming. Please stand up, and salute them", then the crowd stood up, and then revered. One of the *dedes* was the *post-dede*, the other three were the vice-*dedes* sharing the praying of the *cem*. Afterwards, during the *cem*, I observed that the community already learned by heart the timing of the prayers and the movement they are supposed to do in response to the orders of the *dede*. They were not even hesitating about the sequence of each action. Then again, the *dede* of the Cem Foundation was conducting the *cem* so speedy that his words could be hardly selected unless one did not know anything about the *cem* ceremony which made me feel that I was in another accelerated *cem*.

There was a little girl sitting next to me who came there with her grandmother. The grandmother was constantly telling the timing and the short meanings of the movements and of the reverences to the girl during the *cem* which was making a little noise indeed. The *gözcü* angrily and speedily approached the girl and shouted at her threateningly: "Don't you make any more noise little, or I'll chuck you out!"; and also at her grandmother: "I'll chuck you out too!". Although the respect is crucial in those places requiring a full concentration, it was not a pleasant attitude which manifested the increase in the sacredness of a *cem* ceremony since the girl was not behaving improperly but just trying to learn something she saw for the first time in her life.

⁸³ But the colors and the patterns of those scarves were so similar that it reminded me some people's claim (Youth Group of the Şahkulu Foundation that I interviewed during the panel of "Alevism in the Grip of Assimilation" [Asimilasyon Kısılcacında Alevilik] on July 5 2009, İstanbul) that they are distributed at the entrance of the hall before the *cem* starts. For I missed that part, I cannot claim that the scarves were distributed by the administration of the foundation, the scarves were signalling to be as such.

After the *cem*, I had the opportunity to talk to three young people. The opinions of young Alevis on Alevism are important because most of them are the second or third generation of those who came to the cities, and thus most of them might not have seen any *cem* in the rural area. They are taught about Alevism by practices within the *cemevis* and by reading literature on Alevism.⁸⁴ Two young women expressed that up to then they did not question the separation of men and women in the cems of the Cem Foundation. They were living in the neighborhood, therefore the Cem Foundation was offering the closest *cem* to them. One of the women articulated about the separation of men and women in the *cem*:

It is more comfortable this way. In the villages, everybody knows each other. So, it's not a problem there. But here, we cannot know about people. So, it is a lot more comfortable. I wouldn't like to sit as close as such to the men I don't know.⁸⁵

By responding to me this way, they indeed tried to find a reasonable answer to the question I asked they had never thought about before. Then, they called a young man of around twenty years old whom they thought could give me more direct answers. This young man expressed that he had close bonds with the Directorate of Religious Services of Alevis, the Cem Foundation's Diyanet, and said: "They do not find *even* this appropriate on the grounds of that woman and man can worship face to face" (emphasis added).⁸⁶ He was obviously referring to the Diyanet and/ or those graduates from the Imam Hatip schools that bear the strict conditionality of the Sunni theology towards Alevism.

However, this young man implied with the word 'even' that the practices of the Cem Foundation as can be observed during the *cems* are more likely to be appropriated by the strict

⁸⁴ They cannot learn about Alevism from their parents because mostly their parents think that their knowledge on Alevism is limited. This is also because of the lost period between the 1960s and 1980s about Alevism during which Alevis remained far from the Alevi traditions in the metropol cities. By the way, I should note that there are also young Alevis who are totally indifferent to Alevism.

⁸⁵ Böyle daha rahat. Köyde herkes birbirini tanıyormuş. O yüzden orada sorun yok. Ama burada, insanları tanıyamayız. Yani daha rahat. Tanımadığım adamlarla öyle yakın oturmak istemem. From the notes I took afterwards.

⁸⁶ Kadınla erkek yüz yüze bakar mı diye buna bile hoş bakmıyorlar. From the notes I took afterwards.

Sunni mentality. This tendency of presenting Alevism to the illiterate eyes about Alevism who come to conceive the religion with the dogmas of the Sunni Islam and thus sustain their prejudices about Alevism through various slanders carries in itself the risk of losing one's own principles and therefore of accommodating to the hegemonic perception about the how the religion should be. At the end, what we have before our eyes is a "tamed" even "Sunnified" Alevism.

Interesting thing is that the existence of *cemevis* which offer the non-Alevis the opportunity to participate in the *cems* is presented by the presidents of some prominent Alevi organizations as an opportunity to self-defense of Alevis. For example, the president of the Cem Foundation İzzettin Doğan advised to his "Sunni brothers" to go and see the *cems* in one of his speeches: "I want our Sunni brothers go to a *cemevi* and see that there is not anything called 'mumsöndü', and that the people over there say Allah, Hz. Muhammad, Hz. Ali *too*, and watch their *semahs*" (emphasis added) (*Zaman*, 4 February 2005). As can be seen, Doğan benefits from the existence of the same religious figures both in Alevism and Sunni Islam and attempts to reflect Alevism as a close belief to the one of the Sunnis. Besides, although after so long period of humiliation it is important to recount one's identity to the other in the name of eliminating the prejudices, adjusting that identity so as to resemble the other's rituals evidently transcends its original purpose and from then on starts to become something different than the reassertion of the identity itself.

Furthermore, about the broadcasting the *cems* of the Cem Foundation every Thursday via Cem TV⁸⁷, he notes:

We did it so that people can overcome their complex of inferiority, and in order to make the entire world say that this is the *cem* of Alevis, this is their worshipping.

⁸⁷ Those *cem* ceremonies broadcasted via Cem Tv every Thursday are the ones that are recorded on the important days such as during the Muharram month in the various *cemevis* of the Cem Foundation throughout the country. But, even recorded in various *cemevis*, the similarity of the formalization of the *cems* is striking.

Everybody can hold their heads high. Now nobody can claim about mumsöndü. He who wants to see it can watch Cem TV on Thursday.⁸⁸

Similarly, the president of Kartal Cemevi Foundation Aziz Aslan asserts that cemevis are a great opportunity for the Alevi in their attempts to tell about Alevism:

Now, our Sunni citizens also come and go. They've started to know about us. Why? There is an example, a place lived in. We meet with a reaction from them as 'We knew wrongly'. Because Alevism is not something that can be told instantly, one has to enter into the place.⁸⁹

Moreover, Aslan finds the young Alevi lucky: "If he shows the mosque to you, now you have the possibility to invite them to see the cemevi. Thus, Turkey needed these places because they set the balances, those wrong images are corrected here".⁹⁰

I argue that despite the fact that those Alevi organizations especially the Cem Foundation were established with the intentions of bringing another face of Islam as different from the Sunni sect and of illustrating the Alevi beliefs and rituals correctly, they have come to resemble their counterpart in their way of presenting Alevism through *cems* of the Cem Foundation in which men and women are separated, or women are obliged to wear scarves that can never be found in traditional *cems*. Certain critical eyes evaluate those new forms of Alevism as "assimilation". For example, the 8th Youth Days by Şahkulu Sultan Foundation was organized around the theme "Asimilasyon Kıskaçında Anadolu Aleviliği" (Anatolian Alevism in the Grip of Assimilation) during one week between June 28 – July 05, 2009 in

⁸⁸ O bile başlı başına bir olaydır. Onu yaptık ki insanlar aşağılık komplekslerini yensinler diye, bütün dünyaya aleviyse Alevilerin de cemi budur, ibadetleri de budur dedirtmek için tüm dünyaya. Herkes başı dik, şimdi kimse diyemiyor ki mumsöndü, şu oldu bu oldu, görmek isteyen perşembe günü izler Cem TV'yi. Interview by the author, tape recording. July 8, 2009. İstanbul.

⁸⁹ Sunni vatandaşlarımız da artık gelip gidiyor, bizi tanımya başladılar. Niye? Bir örnek var, yaşanan bir yer var bu yaşanan yerler görününce geldiğinde aa biz yanlış biliyorumuz diye bir şeyle karşılaşıyoruz çünkü ayak üstü anlatılacak bir durum değil Alevilik bir de mekanın içine girmek lazım. Interview by the author, tape recording. June 25, 2009. İstanbul.

⁹⁰ Sana camiyi gösteriyorsa sen de gelin size cemevini göstereyim deme imkanına sahipsiniz şu anda. Onun için bu mekanlara Türkiye'nin ihtiyacı vardı çünkü bu mekanlar denge kuruyorlardı, o yanlış imajlar burada düzeliyor.

İstanbul. The leaflet signed by the Şahkulu Sultan Foundation Youth Commission begins with “We are against!”. From the seventeen clauses of the leaflet, I will only mention four of them that are directly related to the criticism of assimilation. They maintain:

- There is no woman or man in Anatolian Alevism but there is *can*. We are against that *cans* are seated as separated as woman and man in the *cems*,
- We are against that our women are forcibly distributed headscarves at the entrance of *cems*,
- It is essential that our worshipping is done in the language we understand. Therefore, we are against that praying is made in Arabic during *cems*,
- The assimilation in a culture or in a belief begins primarily in the language. We are against that words and terms belonging to Anatolian Alevism are distorted (*dua*, literally praying, instead of *gölbank*; kurban *kesmek* (cutting) instead of kurban *tığlamak*, ‘leader of faith’ instead of *dede* or *baba*)...⁹¹

Ali Murat İrat, a newly prominent Alevi academician, spoke during the Youth Days of the Şahkulu Foundation on July 5, 2009. He mentioned the formalistic transformation of Alevism and also touched upon the application of the Cem Foundation on the separation of women and men during the cem. He said: “There, both woman and man are sexless. There, everybody is a *can*. If you cannot trust each other, then don’t you ever enter into the *cem*!”. Following this sentence, the audience applauded him enthusiastically, which might demonstrate that there is a discontent about this application of the Cem Foundation by the side of the Alevi.

Massicard introduces the concept of “strategic mimetism” (2005: 177). She claims that while on the one hand the reconstruction of Alevism in terms of religion highlights its distinctive signs, on the other hand its claim of difference is formed according to the Sunni model. Thus, she argues that there is the strategic mimetism under all the process of

⁹¹ Anadolu Aleviliğinde kadın-erkek yoktur. Can vardır. Cemlerde Canların kadın ve erkek diye ayrıştırılarak oturtulmasına... Cemlerde girişlerde kadınlarımıza zorla başörtü dağıtılmasına... İbadetimizin anladığımız dilde yapılması esastır. Bu esastan dolayı Cemlerde Arapça duaların okunmasına... Bir kültür veya bir inançta asimilasyon önce dilde başlar. Anadolu Aleviliğine ait sözcük ve terimlerinin (gölbank yerine dua; kurban tığlamak yerine kurban kesmek; dede ya da baba yerine inanç önderi gibi) değiştirilmesine... Karşınız!

Alevism's rebuilding the religion. And she concludes that this situation can be seen in the inventions of new ceremonies that clearly mimic the rituals and ceremonies of Sunni Islam.⁹²

Nevertheless, I argue that the *cem* performances in the Cem Foundation go even beyond the strategic mimetism. As I have mentioned in the previous pages, the administration of the Cem Foundation is already prepared for the outsiders, there are even reserved seats for them. And they record the *cem* ceremonies in order to show off how they conduct their ritual. Here, I sense more than just legitimating its identity according to the widely accepted terms of religion. It is almost total accommodation to the form of the dominant religion. If it only consisted of bringing some modifications into the traditional Alevism, which is quite hard to sustain in the urban life, according to the pragmatic needs of urban life, it would have been tolerated at least. But this kind of modification unavoidably reminds the conditionality the Sunni religious circles including the Diyanet's statements ignoring Alevism as a distinct belief system.

Semahs

The same kind of formalization applies to the *semah* as well but works a little differently. *Semah* constitutes a significant part of the *cem*. It is one of the *On İki Hizmet* (literally twelve duties) (Yalçınkaya 1996: 80). *Semah* is made up of the rhythmical movements to the music devoted to the revered religious figures and is the highest point of the expression of love and joy. According to the religious myth, it depends on the ascension of the Prophet Muhammad to heaven and his encounter with the other thirty nine saints (composed of Ali, his family

⁹² To give some more examples, we can count the invention of *Bayram cemi*, the *cem* conducted in the morning of the first day of Ramadan Festival (Bayram), it is noteworthy because Alevis do not fast during the Ramadan month; and also the invention of celebrating *Kutlu Doğum Haftası* (Week of Prophet Muhammad's Birthday Celebration) basically organized by the Diyanet during the week including the 20th of April (Ünlü 2008, April 28). Also see the Cem Foundation's Diyanet, the DRSA's web page: <http://www.aleviislamindhizmetleri.org/>

members and the twelve Imams) and finally their whirling *semah* (*semah dönme*) so as to constitute the assembly of the forty (*Kırklar Meclisi*). This is accepted as the first and exemplary *cem* (Kieser 2002).

The role of the mythological story about the place of Muhammad in this *semah* is crucial to understand the Alevis' perception of Muhammad and every kind of power mechanism. Most Alevis interpret the egalitarian vision of Alevism by basing their argument on this story. According to the story, Muhammad knocked at the door of the *Kırklar Meclisi* by saying his name, however he was refused to enter. He tried to be accepted as a second time by saying that he was the Prophet Muhammad, but he was again refused. Then he found the solution of defining himself as the guest of God (*Tanrı misafiri*), and he was accepted finally. Kieser claims that this does not show the humiliation of Muhammad but shows that only humble people stripped of those prestigious careers can enter into the place of *cem* (2002).

The publicization of *semah* first began in the Hacı Bektaş Festival of 1964, yet under the name of Hacı Bektaş folk dance because the local authorities did not let the festival committee to schedule *semah* in the programme (Salman 2005: 50). But the *semah* staged in those years did not become a folklorized element with a uniformity that can be observed in the costumes, and the choreographic movements. Then, in the early 1970s, Durmuş Genç, an Alevi tea maker (*çaycı*) working at Boğaziçi University had the role of transforming the *semah* into a folk dance with the members of Boğaziçi University Folklore Club (BÜFK) (Öztürkmen 2005). He taught *semah* and also Alevi songs he had in his repertoire to the non-Alevi members of the club, and after a long period of rehearsal, *semah* started to be staged in BÜFK until 1986 and thus became included in the repertoire of "Turkish folk dance". Nevertheless, Genç, after he entered so much into the work, tried to enlarge his music repertoire and to learn more kinds of *semahs* that are performed in different parts of Turkey.

Yet, it was impossible to reflect some authentic versions of *semah* on stage and they had to be standardized inevitably.

Later, in the 1990s, Genç and his brother Abbas Genç became among the founders of the association of Karacaahmet in İstanbul. Once Durmuş Genç had problems with the *semah* group they were taking to the Hacı Bektaş Festivals due to the randomness and the arbitrary attitudes of the group members, he missed his students' rehearsals and their serious attitudes in the BÜFK, and decided to constitute a solid professional *semah* group. Therefore, he initiated *saz* and *semah* courses at Karacaahmet. Most of the young Alevi living in the urban İstanbul learned the *semah* by attending these courses. Today, almost all the Alevi associations, even the less religious ones, offer *semah* courses to its members.

In the village *cems*, those who whirl *semah* are the elderly and it is performed with their daily ordinary clothes. However, in the urban *cems* and the *cems* performed at cultural activities, festivals, the performers wear uniform costumes, and the dance has a standardized choreography and is rehearsed by the adolescents who would perform it. Now, *semah* is folklorized to a large extent. Massicard claims that *semah* is accepted “as the bearer of a single Alevism within all its plurality” (2005: 227). More importantly, she points: “shared symbols cover the lack of consensus concerning the nature of Alevism, since the assertion of Alevism and of one's identification with it are more important, in this context, than the definition of its context” (2003: 130).

Massicard argues that *semah* groups today serve a number of functions. Firstly, *saz* and *semah* groups aim at the Alevi youth not having a religiosity for drawing them into the organizations and organizing (2005: 228). Secondly, applying to the cultural characteristics that are standardized and symbolized provides a more positive image to the outside and reaches a bigger public. Thirdly, she finds it similar to the folklorization process of early Republican era because presenting the *semah* as a cultural element provides a kind of

consensus with the official nationalist ideology (p.230). When the importance of folk dance for the national feelings is considered (Öztürkmen 2003), the issue of how *semah*'s becoming publicized through being staged deserves interest.

Sinclair-Webb elucidates that “the use of folklore as a trope within public ritual events renders the communal form ‘safe’ and ‘mute’, naturalized within the national imaginary” (cited from Tambar 2009: 26).⁹³ In his work on pluralism in Turkey in which he studied the transformation of the ritual aesthetics of *semahs*, Kabir Tambar argues that although the Alevism’s becoming a ‘public religion’ points to the index of pluralism in Turkey, through the concerns of aesthetics for the ritual dance of *semahs* in terms of clothing, music, choreography, and sites have come to denote that the *semah* has been easily incorporated into the homogenizing project of state ideology (Tambar 2009). In other words, once the Alevi rituals are publicized in those forms, they have not been to serve “a pluralist politics that challenges the nation-form in Turkey” because rendering the *semah* public and standard practically served to “de-politicize the communal differences” (p.6).

Lastly, I need to present another example of bringing new forms to the Alevi rituals as in the case of *cems* I discussed for the *semah* performances. One of the recent changes has been the one that is presented as the *Birlik Semahı* (Semah of Unity) which is composed of the simultaneous staging of the Alevi *semah* and the Mevlevi *sema* in the same occasion. This application has been realized mostly⁹⁴ under the leadership of the Cem Foundation (Devrim 2004; *Yeni Şafak*, 23 September 2004). *Mevlevilik*, known as a Sufi sect and the philosophy of Mevlana is spread throughout the world and political authorities has had almost no problem

⁹³ For I have not been able to find the article of Sinclair-Webb, I had to cite directly from Tambar. But see, Sinclair-Webb’s “Pilgrimage, Politics and Folklore: The Making of Alevi Community,” (1999), *Les Annales de l’Autre Islam*, 6, 259-274.

⁹⁴ There is one exception which was organized by the İzmir Müftülüğü but with the collaboration of İzmir Ehlîbeyt Foundation which is the member of the Alevi Foundations Federation, within the programme of Kutlu Doğum Haftası (*Zaman*, 22 April 2007).

with *Mevlevilik* throughout the history. I argue that the Cem Foundation's organization of *Birlik Semahı* aimed at benefiting from the positive public image of *Mevlevilik* and utilized the occasion for legitimating Alevism as *Mevlevilik*'s close relative. However, I have not encountered any theological source that approves such a *semah* called *Birlik Semahı* in which the Mevlevi *sema* and the Alevi *semah* are whirled simultaneously.⁹⁵ İzzettin Doğan, the president of the Cem Foundation highlighted that despite their efforts for years there were still misunderstandings and to correct them they organized the event. He said: "We are doing *cem* publicly in order to answer those" (*Vatan*, 27 September 2004). Again, Doğan is in pursuit of introducing the Alevi rituals to those who have "wrong" ideas about them and his intention is to show that their belief does not contradict with the dominant religion.

For the event called "Gelin Canlar Cem Olalım" organized on September 25, 2004 in Abdi İpekçi Sports Hall to which thousands of people attended, both *semah* and *sema* groups made their rituals. Thus, in a way they were again stage performances, because there was the audience and professional performers. On the other hand, the Directorate of Religious Services of Alevis of the Cem Foundation criticized a *semah* group that participated in a folklore competition in TRT on the grounds that *semah* is an important part of the Alevi belief and worship and it can only be whirled during the *cems* with the purpose of worship (Ünlü 2008, July 5). Additionally, the DRSA ordered all of its branches not to allow realizing *semahs* outside of the *cems*. That the Cem Foundation is applying an intense standardization and formalization into the Alevi rituals with the examples of broadcasting *cems* via TV channel, and separating women and men, etc. but at the same time their opposition to the

⁹⁵ The staging of *semah* and *sema* at the same time has been criticized during the Youth Days of the Şahkulu Sultan Foundation. In the leaflet they distributed I mentioned in previous paragraphs, there was also an article expressing their opposition of the simultaneous staging of *sema* and *semah* and defining it as part of assimilation. Following that, Ali Rıza Uğurlu, the president of the DRSA in his article titled "Is Mevlevi Semah an assimilation?" criticized those youngsters of illiteracy about Islam and Alevism (2009).

folklorization of the *cems* might point to the Cem Foundation's prioritization of religious sensitivity. But it does not evade their paradoxical position.

Dedelik

In the previous chapter, while discussing the *düşkünlik* sanction in traditional Alevism, I already mentioned the role of *dede* for the community. For the subject matter of this chapter, I will touch more upon the dissolution of the *dedelik* institution in the urban setting. Unlike the rural life, now Alevis have a difficulty of finding their *dedes*, since *dedelik* is an institution that depended on kinship and lineage bond; moreover, the knowledge of *dedes* is no longer accepted as sufficient for the community members. *Dedes* are expected to accord their knowledge on the belief to the secular sources of knowledge (Dressler 2006).

Moreover, beginning from the 1990s the establishments of Alevi associations also affected the authority of *dedes* because then and on those Alevi organizations which are administered by non-*dede* Alevis started to organize the urban Alevis around Alevism and actual problems of Alevis, which resulted in that *dedes* became just the religious guides of the *cem* community by no more having a social authority on Alevis. Because of the concern for the survival of traditional Alevisms, the protection of *dedelik* institution is crucial.

Debating the question of how to overcome the survival of *dedelik* institution in the urban area, Dressler argues that there are two sides; traditionalist and modernist Alevis. While the former suspects that the modifications of the institutions of Alevism would result in the distortion of the tradition and thus lead to its dissolution, the latter perceives the reformulation of the institution of Alevism can be developed so as to introduce a number of objective criteria to declare someone *dede* in addition to the criteria of descent.

The president of the Cem Foundation İzzettin Doğan and the president of Kartal Cemevi Foundation Aziz Aslan belong to the second group, the modernist Alevi. Within the activities of the Directorate Religious Services of Alevi (*Alevi İslam Din Hizmetleri Başkanlığı*) of the Cem Foundation, every year the courses on *dedelik* or ‘leader of Faith’⁹⁶ (*inanç önderi*) are opened.⁹⁷ Those courses take almost seven months in which the candidates are given general lessons on history of religions, Islamic theology, and the Alevi *erkanı* (institutions and practices of Alevism). Those who complete the courses can then become one of the ‘leaders of the faith’.⁹⁸ The presidents of Cem Foundation and Kartal Cemevi Foundation think that there is a great need for well-educated *dedes*. Aziz Aslan desires their *dedes* to be graduates from the university like a priest. But emphasizing that those having the descent of *seyyid* does not suffice to guarantee their *dedelik*, Aslan finds the solution of “encouraging our youngsters. We are going to put them on a salary so that they’ll earn money”. That is why, he asserts, they demand from the state to give salary to *dedes*. However, if their demand is accepted by the state, he does not trust the *dedes*, because then everybody would claim themselves as *dede*, and they would not be able to deal with them. The practical solution, for him, would be giving the funds of salaries of *dedes* to the Alevi organizations and then the organizations would distribute the salaries to the *dedes*. I believe this example

⁹⁶ It is noteworthy to underline that they prefer the use of ‘*inanç önderi*’ rather than ‘*dede*’. I will not argue that this is a part of assimilation. Rather, I regard it as a strategy to reflect a wider concept of leadership with the word ‘faith’ because in this way they can encompass all the leadership types inherent in the Alevism, Bektashim, Mevlevism, *Nusayrilik (Hatay Aleviliği)*. In other words, to attain a larger support within the public by gaining legitimacy, they coined ‘leaders of Faith’. It can also be observed by clicking the section of ‘Leaders of Faith’ on the web page of the DRSA: http://www.aleviislamdin Hizmetleri.com/inanc_onderlerimiz_onsöz.asp

⁹⁷ For example, there is a present announcement dated of August 19 of 2009 on the web page of the DRSA that the courses on *Dedelik*, *12 Hizmet*, *Zakirlik*, Funeral Services will begin on December 6, 2009: http://www.aleviislamdin Hizmetleri.com/haber_devam.asp?id=98 (Last accessed 21 September 2009).

⁹⁸ To be eligible for the courses on *dedelik*, one has to meet the criteria of descent (believed to have ancestors as the grandsons of Hz. Ali, *seyyids*). However, I am not sure that they are really searching for the descent of the person because it is not so easy to find it out without a serious work.

strongly demonstrates how the Alevi organizations became the focus of debates that search for ways for the survival of the Alevi traditions.

Like Aslan, Doğan also believes that some *dedes* are not capable to satisfy the needs of the people in the metropolitan cities but there lies the obstacle of the criteria of descent, and traditionally every Alevi is bond to their own *ocak* which is the holy lineage which the *dede* represents. Thus, Doğan argues that they should “train more competent and more knowledgeable *dedes*. And anybody who wills to participate in their *cems* should be allowed. It would be more practical, more rational and more qualified, and it would be more right in terms of the conducting, expressing the belief”.⁹⁹ Dressler evaluates this tendency to modernize *dedes*:

[T]he creation of the modern *dede* as part of a reformulation of Alevism as a *religious* tradition, in the process of which authority is differentiated. The modern *dede* seems to become a kind of Alevi priest, a religious specialist whose authority is defined by his knowledge and services in the field of ritual (2006: 293).

Yalçinkaya offers rather a different perspective to the reading of the *dedelik* institution (2005). He argues that in the traditional role the *dede* is assigned to, the discriminatory rights and the authority of the *dede*, which the dominant view on *dedelik* as a hierarchical relation bearing discriminatory rights, might be read as “a service or a responsibility, a duty” to the members of his community. With such a reading, the *dede* is positioned by the community from an angle of “egalitarian exclusion”. That is to say it is the community itself that lives up their daily lives according to the moral values of the Alevi tradition, and the *dede* who visits them in an unexpectable time in the winter is from outside of the community. When the *dede* comes, he mediates with his authority of an outsider as a judge to the problems of the community but with the consent of the community in the *cem*.

⁹⁹ Daha kamil daha bilgi yüklü dedeler yetiştirmemiz lazım ve de onların cemine de her isteyen gelip girebilmeli hem daha pratik olur hem daha rasyonel olur hem daha kaliteli olur inancın ifadesi, icrası açısından hem daha doğru olur.

Similar to Dressler, Yalçınkaya identifies the proposals on the training of *dedes* would be serving to construct a clergy who is endowed with religious and ritualistic knowledge after a period of education and has a diploma in the end. He argues that those proposals like the standardization of *dedelik*, opening university departments on *dedelik*, giving them a salary would result in the creation of a “moss-grown” (*küflenmiş*) Alevism since it would no longer be “the name of an egalitarian experience”.

‘Politicized’ Alevism

In the third chapter, I have laid out the emerging criteria that are being posited for the politicization of Alevi problems. If Alevism is the name of a religious movement, it is expected that its members should be religious and perceive Alevism within Islam. Among the people who think this way, there are Sunnis as well as Alevis.

I can illustrate an article written by Şenol Kaluç at *Star* daily in this respect.¹⁰⁰ He is the director of Center on Alevi-Bektashi Studies (*Alevi-Bektaşî Araştırmaları Merkezi*) within the Association for Liberal Thinking (*Liberal Düşünce Topluluğu*). He warns the Alevis:

Alevis should see that they are becoming atheist and irreligious while they are afraid of Sunnification. If becoming atheist is a conscious preference, it has to be respected

¹⁰⁰ I am exemplifying this because Kaluç is of Alevi origin too.

definitely. But, every preference has its own cost, like the impossibility of being both Alevi and atheist at the same time.¹⁰¹

As can be easily comprehended, Kaluç confines Alevism to a religious affiliation, and overtly sublimates religiosity. He also implies that the Sunnification of Alevis might be a more desirable position than their being atheist and irreligious. Actually, this warning is reminiscent of the words attributed to Iranian Molla Shariat-Madari to the president of the Diyanet, at the time Süleyman Ateş (1976-78), as: “Mr. President, Turkish Alevis are becoming atheist. Either you deal with them and Sunnify, or let us Shiitize them”.¹⁰²

When the subject matter is Alevism, the discourses and claims on it compete with each other. For example, the president of the HBVAKV Ercan Geçmez stresses one of the core principles denoted in Alevism is against the effort of broadening Alevism into a single definition:

There is the principle of ‘The Path is one, its forms are thousand and one’ in Alevism, and Islam has such a character as well. It is a pluralist religion. They are trying to see the phenomenon only by looking from the Sunni view rather than that of pluralism. And those who want to remember this pluralism are almost denounced as traitor.¹⁰³

While some voices within the Alevi movement legitimize themselves by essentializing Alevism, some others build their legitimacy by being against that essentialism.

Ali Balkız, the president of the ABF too represents the latter position. He claims:

“Alevism is not one thing at least. A number of things”.¹⁰⁴ However, the president of the Cem

¹⁰¹ Aleviler farkında olmadan Sünnileşmekten korkarken, ateistleşmekte ve dinsizleşmekte olduklarını görmelidirler. Ateistleşmek, eğer bilinçli bir tercihse, elbette buna saygı duyulmalı. Ancak her tercihin bir maliyeti var. Hem Alevi hem ateist olamamak gibi. *Star*. February 9, 2009.

¹⁰²Sayın Başkan Türkiye Alevileri ateistleşiyorlar. Ya siz ilgilenin Sünnileştirin, ya da bize bırakın Şiileştirelim. *Pir Sultan*. (1998). Vol.1, no.1.

¹⁰³ Aleviliğin ‘yol bir süre bin bir’ özelliği var ki İslamın da öyle bir özelliği var. Çok çeşitli bir din o. O çeşitliliğin içinden bakmayarak sadece Sunni penceresinden olayı görmeye çalışıyorlar. Bu çeşitliliği hatırlatmak isteyenler de nerdeyse vatan haini durumuna geliyorlar. Interview by the author, tape recording. May 15, 2009. Ankara.

¹⁰⁴ Alevilik en azından bir şey değil, bir çok şey. Interview by the author, tape recording. May 14, 2009. Ankara.

Foundation İzzettin Doğan claims that it is quite possible to define it and criticizes those who misinterpret it:

They hear a few things from here and there. They mix a little bit Marxism. But Alevism is a very pure, close to the idealist philosophy, system of thought expressed with symbols... Sociologically, Alevism is the Turkish tribes' understanding of Islam. Kurdish Alevi are the same. Kurdish Alevi are not so much. For Alevi, Turkish-Kurdish division is not important. For Alevism, being human is important. It absolutely rejects racism.¹⁰⁵

He criticizes the people writing on Alevism for not knowing Alevism and mixing it with some other systems of thought like Marxism. Besides, although Doğan tries to emphasize the humanistic aspect of Alevism, he overtly appeals to the nationalist discourse and reduces Alevism to the Turkish tribes' understanding of Islam.

The debates around the November 9 march under the name of "Equal Citizenship" have already been given in the third chapter. The Alevi Bektashi Federation (ABF) and its member institutions gave support to the march while the other Alevi organizations primarily the Cem Foundation criticized and refrained from participating with the concern of instrumentalization of the demonstration for political purposes, especially by the DTP (Democratic Society Party) representing the pro-Kurdish politics. However, the demonstration passed as it was planned, and the concerns of those organizations came out to be illusory.

The president of Kartal Cemevi Foundation Aziz Aslan explains why they did not join the demonstration:

If this is a meeting, and its name is Alevi, you cannot put a political party into it. Why? It will transform from the belief level, right, into a political level... Our friends, the "roof associations", they do not have even cemevi, begin to do Alevism. I say no, you are not doing Alevism, you are doing *politics*... There were political parties, they wanted to have speech. What's Alevism got to do with this? They said we came here

¹⁰⁵ Sağdan soldan bir şeyler duyuyorlar, biraz Marksizm karıştırıyorlar, ama Alevilik oysa ki çok pure, idealist felsefeye yakın, sembollerle ifade edilen bir düşünce sistemidir. Sosyolojik olarak, Alevilik türk kavimlerinin İslam anlayışıdır. Kürt Alevileri de aynıdır. Kürt Alevileri dediğin çok bir şey değildir. Aleviler için Türk Kürt ayrımı önemli değildir. Alevilikte aslanan insan olmaktır ırkçılığı kesin bir biçimde reddeder.

with 1500 buses as the Kurdish people. What's the relation of this to it?¹⁰⁶ (emphasis added)

As manifested, the participation of the DTP to the meeting caused discontent among those Alevis. Nevertheless, he misses the point that Kurds constitute a remarkable proportion of the Alevis in Turkey. Therefore, the DTP's existence is crucial not only for the support given by a political party to a political cause, but also because it is a pro-Kurdish political party having the freedom and the legitimacy to support the Alevi meeting that is mainly focused on the Alevis' demands from the state.

Massicard demonstrates that the difference-based claims since the 1980s are considered illegitimate and stigmatized (2006). Therefore, she argues that Turkish nationalism still constitutes "the legitimizing frame for claim-making, even more so for movements seeking recognition" (p.82). Massicard's argument can be exemplified by Aslan's accusation of the organizers of the meeting for doing 'politics'. This gives us important insights about how Aslan accommodates the official state ideology in perceiving the politics in the case of Kurdish issue as an illegitimate sphere of struggle. Besides, Aslan in this way is far from perceiving the politics as a sphere of struggle for gaining rights and liberties and as a process of showing off their will to change something in favor of themselves.

However, there is one more frame inherent in his arguments. Before that, it has to be given a selected part from the statements of Doğan Bermek¹⁰⁷, the president of the AVF which will be included in my argument on both presidents. He criticizes some leftist groups of trying to pull Alevis into their cause:

¹⁰⁶ Bu bir mitingse bu ismine Alevi şeyi koyuyorsanız, bir siyasi partiyi içine sokamazsınız. Niye, o inanç boyutundan çıkar artık değil mi, siyasi boyuta taşınır... Çatıda dernek olan arkadaşlarımız, çatıda dernek, cemevi bile yok, kalkmış bu Alevilik yapıyor. Hayır diyorum siz Alevilik yapmıyorsunuz siyaset yapıyorsunuz... Siyasi partiler var orada, onlar konuşmak istedi. Bunun Alevilikle ne ilgisi var kardeşim. 1500 otobüsle geldik buraya kürt halkı olarak, dedi. Ne ilgisi var bunun?

¹⁰⁷ Interview by the author, tape recording. June 23, 2009. İstanbul.

There is a will to draw Alevi into the left, there is such a side... It is not possible to *make the people you define with a belief system militants for a political movement*. Forget about it, such thing cannot be possible. But Alevi will probably always support the social democrat politics. But this does not mean they will be the leaders of the left politics.¹⁰⁸ (emphasis added)

Similar to Aslan, Bermek defines Alevism as a religious affiliation. Due to the fact that Alevi supported left wing politics between the period of 1960s and 1980s and that with the 1980 military coup the left got a big blow leaving those Alevi disappointed, Bermek seems to be satisfied with the existing revival of Alevism as it is part of the remembrance of the value of Alevi traditions. However, the use of ‘militant’ for the members of a political movement is quite a loaded term because in this context it overtly connotes the extreme left wing politics. Reminding the Sunni circles’ accusation of the ABF group on the grounds of being Marxist and inevitably atheist and thus having nothing to do with Alevism, Bermek rejects the possibility of being a ‘militant’ for a leftist political movement and an Alevi at the same time. In doing so, Bermek like Aslan assigns Alevism to a sacred level by distinguishing it from that kind of ‘politics’.¹⁰⁹ This ‘politics’ is the one that challenges the authority, is thus oppositional.

On the other hand, there is a second use of ‘politics’ Bermek and Aslan apply which is highly noteworthy to mention. Bermek believes that there have always been people who attempt to pull votes by ‘politicizing’ Alevism besides the ones politicizing Sunnism. For him, ‘politicizing’ Alevism serves two things: “First, it serves to divide Alevi. Second, it decreases the probability of Alevi to weigh in the *politics* in Turkey” (emphasis added).

¹⁰⁸ Sola Alevileri kazanma isteği var, böyle bir kesim var...Bir inanç sistemiyle tarif ettiğin adamları bir politik harekete militan yapabilmek. Mümkün değil. Unutun yani öyle bir şey olmaz olamaz. Ama Aleviler bugün de yarın da büyük ölçüde sosyal demokrat politikalara destek vereceklerdir. Kendilerinin sol siyasetin önderliğini üstlenecekleri anlamına gelmez.

¹⁰⁹ For the works criticizing the ‘politicization’ of Alevism for ideological purposes, see T.Tatar’s “Kutsalın Siyasallaşması ve Alevilik” (2008), and İ.Engin’s “Aleviliğin/ Alevilerin İdeolojikleştirilmesi, Marjinalleştirilmesi” Çabalarına Bir Örnek: Radikal Bir Alevi Kadro Hareketi ve Dergisi ‘Kızıl Yol’” (2004).

From that, I might grasp that Bermek is indeed not against the idea of ‘politics’ for Alevis, rather he is only against certain kinds of politics.

If to count them all, one can realize that ‘politics’ or ‘politicization’ has been used in three different meanings: as an oppositional, ideological activity, as a rent/ interest-seeking activity and finally as a demonstration of the will to have rights and liberties in terms of one’s identity. While the former two are considered illegitimate, the latter is valued most by Bermek and Aslan. However, one’s demonstration of the will to have rights and liberties in terms of one’s identity, the religious identity for Alevis in this respect, is legitimate only if it remains within the sphere of a politics of recognition with the condition of defining Alevism as a religious affiliation that is quite similar to Sunni Islam in terms of its beliefs and rituals. The interpretation of ‘politics’ in this respect is in the same with what the Sunni Islamist circles have advised for the Alevis in the Alevi movement to do; they have been recommended to hold on the ‘politics’ that would ‘free’ them and help them ‘be themselves’ by engaging with a politics of recognition of a religiously-defined identity.

With the Alevi revival since the 1990s, the long-forgotten tradition of Alevism started to be reinvented. With the urbanization factor, the dissolution of traditional Alevism had already begun in the 1960s. The Alevi movement in its peak in the 1990s had to bear the elements of an identity and thus the actors within it helped the rituals of Alevism to come onto the public arena. The beginning of constituting a formalized and standardized system of Alevism lead to inevitable consequences. From then on, what we have seen in the metropolitan context is a new form of Alevism, a restructured and a reformulated one that is accorded to the needs and the dynamics of the urban life but also to the legitimate lines of politics in Turkey. As a difference-based movement, the Alevi movement has had to lean with the existing frames within the Turkish politics. Massicard has mentioned the significance of Turkish nationalism in legitimating the claim-making for Alevism. The concern for trying to

be away from the separatist activities has been the ground of the abstention of aforementioned Alevi groups from for example the November 9 March for “Equal Citizenship”. However, there has been another frame which is getting stronger in the recent years in addition to the unitarist frame, which is the conditionality of being in the sphere of belief, a belief that more and more resembles the Sunni belief. Engaging with ‘politics’ for Alevis has been legitimate only if they do it under the name of a politics of recognition in which they would strictly define Alevism in religious terms (Massicard 2005, Dressler 2008b). In an environment that the urban Alevism is getting to have belief aspects more and more by stripping off its political tendencies, a “tamed” Alevism is desired. This would provide the members of Alevism perceiving it as a religious affiliation and the members of political Islam to align for the same political purpose, i.e. to attain the freedom to religion, only if Alevis manage to agree to meet the criteria that Alevism is within Islam and that they are its religious members. But for this to be achieved, everybody has to walk all over one of the very principle of Alevism which is ‘Yol Bir, Sürek Bin Bir’.

CHAPTER V

TWO KINDS OF RECOGNITION POLITICS

The exercise of laicism in Turkey not only determines the relations of Alevis with the state but also intervenes into an internal problematic of Alevis which is about what Alevism is or how Alevis should sustain their traditions against the threat of urbanization.

In fact, the demands of Alevis are highly significant when the fact that on the one hand they are often pointed as the “guarantors of laicism”¹¹⁰ and self-claimed laicist/secular citizens of the country (Çarkoğlu and Toprak 2006), and on the other hand, their demands underline

¹¹⁰ In the previous chapter, I had already demonstrated that context-bound approaches of the state authorities towards Alevis have resulted to create this discourse, especially since the rise of political Islam in the mid 1990s.

the problems embedded in the laicist regime in Turkey. However, as manifested during the debates of the Alevi Workshop, the Alevi organizations still propose different solutions to the Alevis' problems according to the different interpretations they draw from the problems of Alevis and of the laicist state.

In this chapter, I will mainly deal with critically analyzing the discourses revealed by the representatives of the prominent Alevi organizations depending on the semi-structured in-depth interviews I made in a framework of religion-state relations in Turkey focused on Alevi problems. My central question here is while those organizations are engaging with a politics of recognition in which they proclaim a number of demands from the state, and in the way they articulate their demands whether they reflect the increasingly legitimized discourse of politics in Turkey such as politicized religion so that their demands could be counted as 'reasonable' by the state authorities.

In their efforts to legitimize their cause, I will be searching in what ways they come to ground their claims and which political stand those claims correspond to, since the language of religion which might be very much in line with a political movement something like political Islam has been attempting to suffuse the politics in Turkey. That is to say that certain voices in the Alevi movement inevitably might be attached to the language of religion during the process of claim-making by not being able to evade the theological arguments on Alevism. I will argue that the remarkable increase in the use of the language of religion by necessarily defining Alevism in religious terms and thus defining Alevis as a religious community by the actors of the Alevi movement has stemmed from the hegemonic language of religion as reflected by the conditions of recognizing Alevi demands which I have shown throughout the statements of the state officials and the writings of the Sunni intellectuals in the third and fourth chapters.

The case of Alevi in Turkey has been the exemplar of the intertwining of religious and political aspects due to a number of historical reasons, which can be easily traced in the discourses of the interviewees. In documenting the interviews I conducted, it will be shed light on the situation that the Alevi engaging with a politics of recognition have had to legitimize their claims on the basis of religious terms which demonstrates the existence of a conditionality in order to be taken into serious consideration both by the public and the state. Highly influenced by the experiences of the near past and of the present, two topics, namely “politicization” (particularly in the left side of the spectrum) and “separationism” (affected from the social antagonism between Kurdishness vs. Turkishness stemming from the power of the Kurdish movement) constitute the ground of the accusations directed to the voices who dare to evade from the language of the religion as much as possible in order to propose a more equality-oriented recognition politics. Since the word ‘Alevi’ has an alleged primary meaning connoting a religious affiliation with the important figures for Alevism such as Muhammad, Ali, Hacı Bektash Veli, taking the Alevi case out of a religious basis and even taking it out of the context prepared by the sameness or common denominator signified by Islam has been highly marginalized by the hegemonic language of politics in Turkey. In a nutshell, I will emphasize the inevitability of falling into the theological defenses which would have to be in line with the theological interpretations of the authorities that base their arguments on the tenets of the Sunni Islam. Thus, my conclusion will not be upon the unavoidability of the theological grounding for a politics of recognition in a secular system¹¹¹, rather I will point the fact of this unavoidability due to the limited laicism in Turkey which promotes particularly

¹¹¹ Thus, here I am not referring to the intimate relation between ‘the religious’ and ‘the secular’ as noted by Talal Asad. As can be remembered he argues that the dichotomous concepts of the religious and the secular are in fact mutually constitutive. For example, ‘the secular’ depends itself upon the definition of ‘the religious’ and thus cannot be freed from theological arguments because it always has to define the borders between the religious and the secular (Asad 2003). See Dressler’s “Religio-Secular Metamorphoses: The Re-making of Turkish Alevism” (2008b) for a work using Asad’s theoretical framework on ‘the secular’ to understand the making of Alevism in Turkey.

the Sunni interpretation of Islam as manifested through the exercises of the Diyanet. Moreover, by benefiting the theoretical framework drawn by Fraser (1997) which was provided in the second chapter, a comparison will be made between the two groups, the Alevi Bektashi Federation group and the Alevi Foundations Federation group in terms of politics of recognition they represent.

With these intentions, I categorize the discourses of the presidents of the Alevi organizations into four topics: self-definition of the institutions, problems with the implementation of laicism including the Diyanet and compulsory religious lessons, their view about the AKP, and finally freedom of religion and conscience for non-Alevis. Although I interviewed with the members from other Alevi organizations, my central comparison in this chapter will be between the two umbrella organizations namely Alevi-Bektashi Federation (with its two constituents, PSAKD and HBVAKV) and the Federation of Alevi Foundations (with its two constituents, Cem Foundation and Kartal Cemevi Foundation) because of three reasons. Firstly, they have the biggest public force within the organized Alevi society. Petition campaigns, taking the unjust exercises to court, meetings and street protests all have come from these organizations.¹¹² Secondly they are the core actors of the debates beginning from the early days of the AKP's Alevi opening. Lastly, they have strikingly different attitudes towards the state with the ABF representing more of a critical stance while the AVF tending to lean with the state with its more moderate demands, as manifested even when the government only invited the representatives from the AVF to the second Muharram dinner to which the ABF was not invited on the grounds that they represent an Alevism out of Islam.

¹¹² Those organizations remain more at the level of solely spiritual sites such as Foundations of Şahkulu and Karacaahmet which result from also being historical spiritual sites of the Alevis (dervish lodges) although they often organize seminars, panels, conferences on Alevism which I argue also show the existence of a political attitude within themselves. But they are more in between institutions which are influenced by the changing political environment in Turkey for the politicization of the Alevi demands. In the last chapter, their practices and services will be given more space.

Self-Definition of the Institutions:
'Democratic Mass Organization' or 'Service Institution'?

As part of the condition of being the representative of the prominent organizations, all of the interviewees attempt to legitimate the works of their organizations even though they differed in the way they define the *raison d'être* of the organizations. How they articulate the function of their organizations interests me due to three things. Firstly, the definition might point to the kind of organizational works and actions they tend to engage with. Secondly, the definition gives insights about their interpretation of which gap they could fill in for the well-being of the Alevi movement and/or the sustenance of Alevism in the urban area. This is to say that the definition demonstrates what has been needed because the existence of those organizations is to meet those needs. Thirdly, by defining what their organizations are, they also point to what their organizations are *not* either implicitly or explicitly. Therefore, this allows us to grasp how they view both their organizations and other organizations which might manifest the internal disputes between Alevi organizations. For these purposes, I will first look at how they picture the power of representation, the importance and the primary missions of their organizations.

Ali Balkız, the president of the ABF¹¹³, defines their organization explicitly as a 'democratic mass organization' in which people with various dispositions come together although they are the ones who already agree upon the foundational principles of the organization.¹¹⁴ Therefore, he is against that a democratic mass organization should define Alevism and promote this certain definition for Alevism in its actions because if it does prefer a certain definition of Alevism it might lose a significant proportion of its members which

¹¹³ Alevi-Bektashi Federation was established in 2002 although it formerly served under the name of Alevi ve Bektaşî Kuruluşları Birliği Kültür Derneği (*Cultural Association of Union of Alevi and Bektashi Organizations*, ABKB) which was founded in 2000 in Ankara.

¹¹⁴ Ali Balkız, interview by the author, tape recording. May 14 2009, Ankara.

would harm the very basic goal of a mass organization. He further claims that their federation constitute the ninety five per cent of the organized Alevis in Turkey which correspond approximately to 250-300,000 of Alevis.¹¹⁵

Believing the problems of Alevis are related to the problems of laicism and democracy in Turkey, Balkız also asserts that they are the only organization that is interested in the problems of the country besides the ones of Alevis. Thus, he reminds one of their mottos put on the periodical of PSKAD in 1992: “Democracy first!”. He argues:

None of the problems is independent from each other. These are all system-based problems. If the system was humanly, reasonable, laicist and democratic, most of the problems would be eliminated. The Kurdish problem, the gender discrimination, and even the class discrimination would be eliminated. This is why we claim laicism and democracy.¹¹⁶

Fevzi Gümüş, the president of the PSAKD¹¹⁷, shares a similar line with Balkız in this regard.¹¹⁸ Although he claims that their organization has almost 100,000 members, he believes that their social legitimacy does not come from the quantitative force but from the perception of the Alevis on the representation of the PSAKD for them. Thus, he asserts that they have a representational power. Like Balkız, Gümüş argues that lack of democracy in Turkey creates the basis of Alevis’ problems as the ones of others: “Besides the actual political problems, we are an organization interested in the other matters of Turkey. The problems of Alevis are neither different nor independent from the democratization problems of Turkey in general. And it is our line of struggle”.¹¹⁹ Despite the fact that he acknowledges the significance of

¹¹⁵ According to a brochure of the ABF published in 2002, it is 400,000.

¹¹⁶ Hiçbir sorun diğerinden bağımsız değildir. Sistemden kaynaklı sorunlardır bunlar. Sistem insani olsa, makul olsa, laik ve demokratik olsa birçok problem ortadan kalkacaktır. Kürt sorunu, cinsiyet ayrımcılığı, hatta sınıf ayrımcılığı ortadan kalkacak. Biz onun için laiklik ve demokrasi diyoruz.

¹¹⁷ It should be reminded that founded in 1998 in Ankara, Pir Sultan Abdal Culture Association is one of the constituents of the Alevi-Bektashi Federation (ABF).

¹¹⁸ Fevzi Gümüş, interview by the author, tape recording. May 14, 2009. Ankara.

¹¹⁹ Güncel siyasi sorunların yanı sıra Türkiye’nin diğer meseleleriyle de ilgili bir yapıyız biz. Zaten Alevilerin sorunları bir bütün olarak Türkiye’nin demokratikleşme sorunlarından farklı değil onlardan bağımsız değil. Mücadele çizgimiz de odur.

cemevis and associations for the religious and social needs such as cem ceremonies and funeral rites, he underlines the importance of doing something for the inequalities in Turkey:

At the same time, there is poverty in the country, it might be needed to do a work for it *as well*. It is needed to support the demands of workers, laborers more. It is needed to develop a sensitivity for the inequalities women experience due to gender discrimination or to side with more democratic, more peaceful solutions oriented for the cohabitation on the Kurdish issue.¹²⁰ (emphasis added)

By claiming so, Gümüş maintains that the problems of the country are all due to the democratization¹²¹ problem the solution of which could bring about a number of improvements for laborers, women, Kurdish people besides Alevis.

Ercan Geçmez, the president of the HBVAKV¹²², also maintains their foundation takes the problems of Alevis as stemming from the problem of ‘equal citizenship’ in Turkey in general.¹²³ For that purpose, Geçmez tells how much their efforts together with the ABF such as petition campaigns and the 9 November Meeting throughout of which they emphasize the issue of ‘equal citizenship’ drawn the public attention.

Mentioning that their foundation organizes panels, conferences, talks, symposiums and allows various social activities within the building, Geçmez emphasizes that they have twenty eight branches and forty culture centers of the HBVAKV in which there are *cemevis* because

¹²⁰ Aynı zamanda memlekette bir yoksulluk var, bu yoksulluk konusunda da bir çalışma yapmak gerekebilir. İşçilerin, emekçilerin daha fazla hak talebine destek olmak gerekir. Kadınların cinsiyet ayrımcılığından dolayı yaşadıkları eşitsizliklere bir duyarlılık geliştirmek, ya da Kürt sorununda bir arada yaşamayı esas alan daha demokratik daha barışçıl çözümlerden yana tavır almak gerekir.

¹²¹ One can trace this sensitivity for democracy in the second article of the founding regulation of the PSAKD defining the goals of the association: “to do social and cultural activities in line with the life and the philosophy of Pir Sultan Abdal; to sustain, improve and spread all cultures, primarily the Anatolian Alevi culture; protect the values such as Democracy, Laicism and human rights” (pirsultan.net).

¹²² Hacı Bektash Veli Anatolian Culture Foundation was established in 1994, in Ankara with the support of the Alevi Culture Associations (formerly Hacı Bektas Veli Culture and Tourism Associations).

¹²³ Ercan Geçmez, interview by the author, tape recording. May 15, 2009. Ankara.

they are institutionally against the idea that the building is only used for its *cemevi* in order to evade “the fact of communitarianism” (*cemaatleşme olgusu*). He maintains that using the space just for *cem* ceremonies is a luxury, and the doctrine of Alevism is also against that. He asserts:

We don't want to give the spaces an immunity shield in the eyes of people. We think only if people use those spaces they are valuable. One time, *cems* can be performed there, one other time conferences, theatre troops can use them or schools can do their activities. It only gets its meaning and coalesces with the human by this way. Otherwise, it will be too formalist, and Alevism itself too is very much against formalism.¹²⁴

In fact, when I went to interview with him, there were ornaments and decorations on the stairways of the building. And the sounds of kids were reaching to my ears while I was ascending the steps. Then I was shown that there was a celebration for the first-year primary school kids who just learned how to read. Except that, yet, unlike the picture Geçmez drawn, the atmosphere of the building was a little bit cold reminding me of state buildings. First of all, you have to ascend the difficult sharp steps to enter into the building which was constructed I believe according to modernist architecture. Although there is a local dispensary just attached to the main building, the building looked really empty and deserted as if the habitants of the neighborhood did not show any interest.¹²⁵ Besides, there were pictures of Hacı Bektash Veli and Atatürk at every corner, and maybe a few of Hz.Ali. Here, it has to be noted that the foundation was laid by the president of the time Süleyman Demirel (Massicard 2005: 301) which lets me deduce that the HBVAKV might be more a state-affiliated organization although it sides with the ABF in their actions for the realization of the Alevi

¹²⁴ Mekanlara insanların gözünde dokunulmazlık zırhı vermek istemiyoruz. İnsanların ancak oraları kullandığı sürece kıymetli değerli olabileceğini düşünüyoruz. Yeri geldiğinde cemler yapılsın, yeri geldiğinde konferanslar, tiyatrolar, yapılsın, okullar etkinlikler yapsın. Bu, bu şekilde anlamlaşıyor, insanla bütünleşiyor. Yoksa diğeri çok şekilci olur, Aleviliğin kendisi de çok şekilciliğe karşı.

¹²⁵ When considered the fact that the same eight-storeyed building located in Dikmen, Ankara, hosts the headquarter of the ABF, of the Alevi Culture Association, of the Alevi Institute, and of Yol TV besides the one of the HBVAKV, the emptiness of the building is really noticeable.

demands.¹²⁶ Nevertheless, the stand of HBVAKV is crucial for they present an organization which prefers to present a complex of less religion-oriented services to the neighborhood residents but to offer a cultural complex for the improvement of social activities.

As manifested above, the ABF and its two prominent constituents, the PSAKD and the HBVAKV tend to delineate an institutional identity that prefers to take the Alevi issue in a larger perspective relating it with the other problems of the country and thus to believe its solution in the amelioration of the democracy in Turkey which makes them less affiliated with the religious aspect of Alevism even though they never ignore the significance of it.¹²⁷ This is why they give more importance to the concrete actions for the Alevi demands such as petition campaigns, street demonstrations and litigations both to the national administrative courts and the ECHR.

On the other hand, the stand of the Federation of Alevi Foundations (AVF) and its two constituents highly differs from the ABF group. They basically define their institutional duty as to provide the Alevi religious services that Alevi are in need of.

The president of the AVF, Doğan Bermek explicitly defined the scope of their federation.¹²⁸ There are three essential conditions of the federation for the member foundations which make the membership to the federation highly difficult, he asserts. The first condition is to provide religious services such as *cem* and funeral. After counting the nine foundations their federation constitutes, he expresses it as:

¹²⁶ Despite the state support the HBVAKV took during the process of its establishment, I will demonstrate how Geçmez can be strikingly critical about the exercises of the state in the following pages.

¹²⁷ Here, I have to note that especially the Hacı Bektash Foundation pays attention to organize the conferences, symposiums and panels which often open to discuss the cultural and religious studies on Alevism-Bektashism in a national and international scales since 2000. Furthermore, in 2008 the HBVAKV supported the establishment of the Alevi Institute (Research, Documentation and Application Institute of Alevism) for which many prominent academicians studying on Alevism-Bektashism voluntarily work within its Science Board.

¹²⁸ Doğan Bermek, interview by the author, tape recording. June 23, 2009. İstanbul.

The number of the foundations that can become our member is quite limited. To become our member, it has to be serving. There are some foundations in Turkey which do their work in a space of 16 square meters. First of all, it has to provide *cem* services, and also funeral services. I mean we do not accept those doing Alevism in such offices with spaces of 8-10 square meters. Since our conditions are too heavy, there are not so many foundations to become our member.¹²⁹

Having stated the strict religious oriented prerequisites for membership in their federation, Bermek also underlines that the member foundations should stick to other two principles of the federation. He exemplifies two foundations the memberships of which the federation cancelled due to two different reasons. One of them is the Abdal Musa Foundation the role of which I mentioned in the previous chapters during the first Muharram dinner. Bermek states that they removed the Abdal Musa Foundation from the AVF on the grounds that it has been drawn too much into the line of the AKP.¹³⁰ The other one is the Hüseyin Gazi Foundation in Ankara. Bermek explains the reason of the membership cancellation as:

Because we can never agree with their discourses we removed them from the federation. While their president says Alevism is within Islam, the vice-president says Alevism is outside Islam. We cannot deal with these kinds of discourses. We said to them, only if you come after you solved your own problems, we can enroll you again.¹³¹

As can be seen, the other condition is to acknowledge institutionally that Alevism is within Islam. Yet, even if the member foundations should promote Alevism as within Islam, they are not wanted if they affiliate explicitly with the AKP.

¹²⁹ Bize üye olabilecek vakıf sayısı çok sınırlı, bize üye olabilmesi için hizmet ediyor olması lazım, şimdi Türkiyede bir takım vakıflar var, bunlar vakıf, 16 metre karelik bir yerde Alevi vakıflığı yapıyorlar. Yani bir kere mutlaka cem yapıyor olması lazım, mutlaka cenaze hizmeti yapıyor olması lazım, yani böyle 8-10 metre karelik büroları açıp da o büroların içerisinde Alevilik yapanları biz almıyoruz şeye. Koşullarımız ağır olduğu için bize zaten öyle üye olabilecek vakıf da yok fazla.

¹³⁰ I suppose this is because the federation took the public criticism against the AKP's Alevi opening into consideration, and was perhaps concerned about the loss of their social support.

¹³¹ Çünkü onların söylemlerinde bir türlü uyşamıyoruz, federasyondan çıkarttık. Şimdi bunların başkanı Alevilik islamin içinde diyor, ikinci başkanı Alevilik islamin dışında diyor. Yani bizim şimdi bu tür söylemlerle filan uğraşacak halimiz filan yok, siz meselelerinizi çözün gelin, o zaman kaydederiz dedik bıraktık.

Similar to Bermek emphasizing the membership condition as ‘to be serving’, the president of the Kartal Cemevi Foundation Aziz Aslan defines their institutional goal as “to help the Alevi society in Kartal sustain their religious and cultural activities of funeral services, in other words, to provide the realization of those activities according to their traditions”.¹³² He argues that due to the phenomenon of urbanization, the need of Alevi people in the aspect of belief has emerged. Thus, he determines their first mission as to provide the necessary religious services to the Alevis in the neighborhood. Besides, he underlines that they have “undertaken a role of public institution” since they are the greatest complex among other *cemevis* presenting also the funeral services thanks to which they can serve to four to five funeral in a day. He reminds “the ritual of Alevism is not only cooking rice and serving *ayran*”, by drawing attention to the importance of funeral services they provide. Furthermore, he is overtly proud that the foundation has nine women *hodjas*¹³³ who can be taken to the other regions for the funeral service when the demanding village has no woman preacher.

İzzettin Doğan, the president of the Cem¹³⁴ Foundation, too maintains that it was needed by Alevis to sustain their traditions in the urban area which made him develop the idea of establishing the foundation.¹³⁵ For this purpose, he declares that a pioneering movement was required, and this movement had to be carried out without interfering into politics and should be taken “as a supra-political and non-political, and as a completely sociological,

¹³² Kartaldaki Alevi toplumunun inanç boyutunda ve cenaze hizmetlerinde kültürel faaliyetlerini sürdürmesi, yani bu faaliyetlerin kendi örf ve adetlerine göre gerçekleştirilmesini sağlamak için. Aziz Aslan, interview by the author, tape recording. June 25, 2009. İstanbul.

¹³³ The training of these women *hodjas* serving for the funerals of the women is realized through a course the foundation gives.

¹³⁴ Despite the fact that within the regulations of the foundation, not a single word connoting either Alevi or Bektashi can one find except “tasavvuf kültürü” (culture of sufism), Cumhuriyetçi Eğitim ve Kültür Merkezi (*Centre for Republican Education and Culture*) has been able to use the short name, Cem, in order to refer to the *cem* ceremony. This trick was to escape from the Turkish Civil Code prohibiting any religious symbols in the name of the foundation (*cemvakfi.org*).

¹³⁵ İzzettin Doğan, interview by the author, tape recording. July 8, 2009. İstanbul.

theological movement".¹³⁶ Although he emphasizes the significance of taking the issue in a *supra-national* and *non-political* manner, he did not stick to this founding reasoning of the foundation afterwards. Doğan is widely known with his collaborations with the political party members just before the election time.¹³⁷

However, the essential reason for establishing the foundation was different. For Doğan, it was "a result of a deeper analysis". Fearing from the rise of political Islam following the Khomeini Revolution in 1979 and of the religious/sectarian conflicts after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Doğan thought that those developments in the world could influence Turkey terribly because of its neighbors. And the only way to get out of this was to rejuvenate Turkish Islam Sufism which is "a humanist Islamic view that is open, modern and has the appropriate essentials accorded to the necessities of the age against the Arabic Islam view, the dogmatic Sunni view".¹³⁸ Apparently, Doğan established the foundation to challenge the threat of political Islam by introducing another interpretation of Islam. So it was indeed founded upon neither *supra-political* nor *non-political* base.

Furthermore, the mentality of providing necessary 'religious services' was laid beneath his establishing of Alevi İslam Din Hizmetleri Başkanlığı (*the Directorate of Religious Services of Alevi Islam*) against the existence of the DRA. Doğan explains the unequal situation within the Diyanet as "the DRA does not give Alevis religious services in the way they understand Islam" and "the DRA should be restructured so that Alevi religious

¹³⁶ Siyaset üstü ve siyaset dışı, tamamen bir sosyolojik teolojik bir hareket olarak...

¹³⁷ One of the recent examples of this was that he claimed that in general elections Alevis would support the political parties which could help the laicist Republic sustain, by giving the political party names such as the CHP, the MHP, the GP and HYP as opposed to the AKP. That speech was probably made with the influence of the 27 April warning of the military to the ruling AKP on the grounds that the party was threatening the laicist regime with its activities (*Zaman*, 18 July 2007).

¹³⁸ Arap İslam anlayışına karşı, dogmatik Sunni anlayışına karşı açık, modern, yani her çağın gereklerine uygun esaslara sahip bir humanist İslam anlayışı...

leaders can be given state personnel status to give people their religious needs” since the state collects taxes from Alevis as well, for the DRA.

The common discourse within the ABF and its two member organizations about being ‘service institutions’ (*hizmet kurumu*) is notable. The word ‘service’ (*hizmet*) is here used primarily for benefits or help given to Alevi people as cultural service such as religious services. This is what the citizen shall be granted by a civil agency. It is the first meaning of the word. On the other hand, I believe there is another meaning of the word connoting directly one of the most crucial rituals of Alevism: *On İki Hizmet* (Twelve Functions, literally ‘Services’). Twelve persons, also representing the mythical Twelve Imams, are responsible for organizing and carrying out of the *cem* ceremony in an order with twelve duties. These are *dede* (leader), *rehber* (guide), *gözcü* (watchman), *çerağcı* (lighting the candle), *zakir* (singer/poet), *ferraş/süpürgeci* (sweeper), *sakka* (serving water), *kurbanacı* (sacrificer), *pervane* (semah dancer), *peyik* (announcer), *iznikçi* (caretaker of the *cemevi*) and *bekçi* (guard) (Yalçinkaya 1996: 78). All those duties with the necessary theatrical staff are visualized during the *cem* ceremony. It might be possible then to infer that there is a similarity between one of the most significant rituals of Alevism, *On İki Hizmet*, as of bearing obviously a religious meaning and the services that those foundations provide to the Alevi society such as *cem*, funeral, *kurban* (sacrificial rite). Here, the transitivity of ‘*hizmet*’ from its public/secular meaning into a religious one or vice versa is symbolically crucial to note that these organizations aim to legitimate their works by making use of the religious language of Alevism with its symbolic power over the community. Thus, it highlights that they indeed lean with an overtly and implicitly religious line of Alevism.

To sum up this section, I have demonstrated how the AVF group tends to define themselves more as ‘religious service institutions’ by opting for an Alevism within Islam, while the group of the ABF does give more importance to the politics of claims-making

engaging with petition campaigns, street demonstrations and trials and take care in not imposing any type of interpretation on Alevism by following a pluralist picture of it. Furthermore, while the AVF is more occupied with supplying of the religious needs of Alevis in the urban area, the ABF perceives the problems of Alevis resulting from the undemocratic system in Turkey which influences many parts of the society badly in Turkey.

Problems with the Implementation of Laicism

All of the interviewees reveal that there are obvious problems with the implementation of laicism especially due to the exercises and the budget of the DRA. The interviewees criticized the Turkish laicism for three aspects; intervening into the belief by designating it, privileging a certain belief system, and denying the existence of certain belief systems. They all demand equality within the laicist system and seek to become equals to the Sunnis. So they want the equal redistribution of the sources from the state. Nevertheless, the recognition of the group difference of Alevis might endanger the redistributionist character of the original claim by acquiring a privileged status as a recognized community vis-a-vis the other members of the society who do not identify themselves neither with the dominant culture nor with the recognized community. We can observe this tendency in the claims-making process of Alevis as well although not all of them in the movement adhere to this sort of recognition politics with the awareness that otherwise it would harm the feeling of solidarity within the society in general. In this section, I plan to compare and contrast the discourses of the presidents of the Alevi organizations at hand with respect to their demands related to the implementation of laicism. In doing so, I will argue that the ABF group demands the state to withdraw from the

sphere of religion and expect it to be neutral towards all religious/non-religious groups while the AVF tends to demand the group-differentiated rights to have the equal opportunity within the DRA, for example by ignoring the existence of people not adhering to any of the recognized group but paying the taxes at the same time.

The president of the ABF, Ali Balkız argues that the state should not discuss what Alevism is and that it should not impose a certain interpretation of Alevism to Alevis, and he says: “The state divides us within ourselves”¹³⁹ because Balkız believes “Alevism is not a single thing. A number of things”¹⁴⁰. He refers to the state’s insistence on that Alevism is within Islam. Balkız perceives this attitude of the state as intervening into the religion which is against the laicism principle. He asserts:

In a laicist state, the state cannot intervene into the religion. The state is immune to the religion. It cannot invest in the religion, it cannot organize the religion, it cannot use the religion, and it cannot benefit from the religion. But it cannot be against the religion either. Neither can it oppose the religion, nor can it ignore it. No body has the right to interfere into the relation between the believer and the believed. The state cannot decide how to believe or how to worship, it cannot design it either. Through the DRA, the state intervenes into the private spheres of the citizens. This is against the thing called ‘laicism’. It can only create the appropriate environment for the citizens to practice their beliefs. And it accepts the existence of the people with different beliefs. It does not privilege any of them. It perceives them all equally.¹⁴¹

After delineating how a laicist state should be, Balkız thus concludes that the Turkish state is not a truly laicist state due to the existence of a state institution like the DRA. From that statement of Balkız, I can deduce two interrelated conclusions on the problems of Alevis within the limited laicism of the state. Through the Diyanet, the state attempts to designate a

¹³⁹ Devlet bizi içimizden bölüyor.

¹⁴⁰ Alevilik en azından tek bir şey değil. Bir çok şey.

¹⁴¹ Laik bir devlette devletin dine müdahalesi olamaz. Devlet dine bağışiktir. Dine yatırım yapamaz, dini örgütleyemez, dini kullanamaz, dinden yararlanamaz, dine karşı da çıkamaz. Dini karşısına alamaz, onu yok da sayamaz. İnananla inanılan arasına hiç kimsenin girmeye hakkı yoktur. Nasıl inanacağıma, nasıl ibadet edeceğime devlet karar veremez, devlet bunu dizayn edemez. DİB aracılığıyla devlet yurttaşların manevi alanlarına müdahale ediyor. Laiklik denilen şeye terstir bu. Olsa olsa yurttaşların inançlarını yaşayabileceği ortamı yaratır. Ve farklı inançtaki insanların da varlığını kabul eder. Kimi inançları kendine yakın kimileri uzak görmez. Hepsine eşit bakar.

single type of Alevism. And by preferring the acknowledgement of this certain interpretation of Alevism, the state does not recognize the demands of Alevis as a distinct belief group than Sunnis and continues to privilege the Sunni-Hanafite approach to Islam.

Being also a lawyer, the president of the PSAKD Fevzi Gümüş points out what the principle of laicism, which was designed in Article 2 of the Constitution as such, refers to in Turkey can be comprehended by the following implementations of the DRA and compulsory religious lessons. He maintains:

If a constitutional amendment is to be made in Turkey, the constitution has to be amended with a pluralist and liberal approach so that the state will be withdrawn from the religious sphere, and the constitution will only refer to the inspectory role of the state with the target of protecting the religious pluralism in the society.¹⁴²

Gümüş argues that neither compulsory religious lessons nor a state institution like the DRA should exist in a laicist state. Here, he emphasizes the compulsory character of those lessons. Comparing the Turkish model to the other truly laicist states elsewhere, he concludes that the lessons are given only upon the approval of the parents. Besides, there is no institution like the one of the DRA which is funded by the state and which gives fatwas in laicist states, he adds.

Views on Compulsory Religious Courses

Ali Kenanoğlu, the vice-president of the ABF, won a leading case at the İstanbul 5th Administrative Court in order to exempt his son from the compulsory religious lessons (*Hürriyet*, 25 November 2006). The court decision of 12 October 2006 as “compulsory religious lessons are inconsistent with the freedom of faith” was based on the decision no. 1 of

¹⁴² Türkiye’de anayasal bir düzenleme yapılacaksa, zorunlu din derslerinin konulduğu 24. maddeden başlayarak, devletin dinsel alandan çekilmesini sağlayacak, sadece denetleyici rolüne gönderme yapan, toplumun içindeki inançsal çoğunluğu korumayı hedefleyen dolayısıyla çoğulcu, özgürlükçü bir yaklaşımla düzenlenmesi lazım.

9 July 1990 of the Supreme Council for Education (*Eğitim ve Öğretim Yüksek Kurulu*) for the exemption of the pupils who belong to the Christian or Jewish religions. That decision became a leading case in favor of the Alevi parents on the exemption of their children from the compulsory religious lessons. Later in 2008, upon the application of an Alevi parent about the implementation of compulsory religious lessons, the European Court of Human Rights concluded that “the Turkish educational system, which, with regard to religious instruction, does not meet the requirements of objectivity and pluralism and provides no appropriate method for ensuring respect for parents’ convictions” (ECHR 2008, No.84). The Court decision held that the violation of the second sentence of Article 2 of Protocol No. 1 referring to the applicants’ rights originated “in a problem related to implementation of the syllabus for this class and the absence of appropriate methods for ensuring respect for parents’ convictions” (*ibid.*).

Nevertheless, the Governorship of İstanbul took the case, which was decided in favor of the exemption, to the 8th Court of the State Council (*Danıştay*) for appeal. By rejecting the request of the Governorship, the Council approved the decision of the İstanbul 5th Administrative Court unanimously. In the justification of the decision, the Council draws attention, similar to the justification of the ECHR decision, to the fact that “although the name of the education is religious culture and ethics, as of its content it is obviously impossible to accept it as religious culture and ethics... There is no compliance with laws to have the course of Religious Culture and Ethics compulsory with the present content”.¹⁴³ Following this decision, however, the Minister of National Education Hüseyin Çelik declares that both the decision of the ECHR and of the State Council depended on the two cases in 2005 related to the old syllabi of the courses, and thus those decisions cannot be applied because in the new

¹⁴³ ... öğretim adının din kültürü ve ahlak bilgisi olmasına rağmen, içerik olarak din kültürü ve ahlak bilgisi öğretimi olarak kabul edilemeyeceği açık olduğundan... Din Kültürü ve Ahlak Bilgisi dersinin bu içeriği ile zorunlu tutulmasında hukuka uyarlık bulunmamaktadır (AA, 3 March 2008).

syllabi there are subjects on Alevism (*Zaman*, 9 March 2008). He further claims that as long as the Article 24 exists in the Constitution on the compulsory character of religious courses, “it is not possible to remove the compulsory character of the Religious Culture and Ethics course with the decision of *one court or another*” (*Ibid.*).¹⁴⁴ Besides his language depreciating the legal value of the Council decision, which in a way underestimates the significance of the right to appeal, Çelik underlines that any change about the courses can only be realized through the amendment of the Constitution. Moreover, he believes that the recent changes in the syllabi of the course can meet the demands of the Alevis.

Yet, examining the new content of the courses Eğitim-Sen (*Education and Science Workers Union*, Eğitim ve Bilim Emekçileri Sendikası) demonstrated that the courses still concentrates on Islam and its Sunni interpretation in particular (*Bianet*, 15 September 2008). The president of the Union, Zübeyde Kılıç revealed that only some sections of the syllabi in the 7th, 8th and 11th grades were rewritten, and that the one within the 12th grade’s syllabi was designed firstly (after the recent decision which rendered the upper secondary school four years). Kılıç underlined that the rewritten parts including Alevism-Bektashism reflected a Sunni interpretation of Alevism-Bektashism which were depicted as a Sufi interpretation (*tasavvufi yorum*) implying that the Alevi belief was an order (*tarikât*) within Sunnism. Besides, in the 7th grade course book under the title of ‘Ramadan and Fasting’, the Muharram fasting that Alevis follow was not mentioned. Also, among the places of worship *cemevi* was not referred (*Eğitim-Sen*, 2008 December 9). Due to that, the Union demanded the abolition of compulsory religious courses.

When all the legal developments and institutional examinations on the implementation of religious courses are considered, the problematic of the actual situation is obvious. Despite the fact that the chance of exempting from the lessons by writing a petition to the school

¹⁴⁴ Din Kültürü ve Ahlak Bilgisi dersini şu mahkemenin, bu mahkemenin verdiği kararla zorunlu olmaktan çıkarmak mümkün değil.

directorates basing on the recent successful cases has been legally opened, these are awaiting drawbacks. First of all, because the Turkish state has not yet amended the syllabus of the compulsory lessons in line with the ECHR decision, it is still up to the individual applications¹⁴⁵ of the parents to pursue their case. Pursuing case in court in turn means that they would have to reveal their convictions which still bear the violation of fundamental human rights according to Article 24 of the Turkish Constitution and to Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights. Furthermore, exempting the child from compulsory religious lessons while other children still continue to take them might create a social pressure on the child resulting in the increase in the existing tension between Sunnis and Alevis on religious matters, and might lead the child to question her relation with her parents and the school. In other words, the exemption might not promise a salutary solution on the problem with the compulsory religious lessons in a society like Turkey where the respect for the beliefs of others is still in dispute.

As Balkız and Gümüş claim, Ercan Geçmez, the president of the HBVAKV, thinks that the compulsory character of the lessons should be removed. Besides, he argues that independent universities, academicians should determine the content of the syllabi of compulsory religious lessons while the actual situation in Turkey is that “they have the wrong people do it”.¹⁴⁶ He implies here that the authors of the books for compulsory religious lessons are not impartial. Then, he proposes that neither Sunnis nor Alevis should write the books. Rather, the content of the books should be based on a history of religions so that children can question the religions themselves, and discover their own within a comparative perspective. Therefore, Geçmez thinks that religion courses should be prepared by academics and the syllabus must mainly focus on the history of religions which should be written by the independent academics. Besides, he claims the courses should be elective.

¹⁴⁵ For a more recent successful case on the exemption, see *Yeni Şafak* (24 February 2009).

¹⁴⁶ Interview by the author, tape recording. May 15, 2009. Ankara.

Doğan Bermek, the president of the AVF, reveals his opinions about the compulsory religious lessons with a style as if he speaks on behalf of Alevis which can demonstrate his claim for representational power:

In education, Alevis want an education that is distanced equally to all beliefs. They want an educational order that is not a missionary of a certain education. Once this sort of educational order is established, Alevis will not have any problem with the education.¹⁴⁷

Moreover, he draws attention to the absence of schools to train Alevi theologians or Alevi religious staff contrary to the existence of four hundred *İmam Hatip* (preacher) Schools. He explains that they want the establishment of schools for the training of *dedes* and *zakirs* (singer and *saz* player during *cem* rituals) both in the secondary and higher education like the examples of İmam Hatip High Schools and Faculties of Divinity but in proportion to the population. Yet, he adds: “But, of course, we do not want them to be in hundreds. I mean, we have more rational demands”.¹⁴⁸ Thus, Bermek points out the privileged position of Sunni Islam within the religious education such as Imam Hatip Schools and Faculties of Theology on the grounds that their education and activities do not include the religious aspect of Alevism which can help the Alevi religious staff to be trained.

Likewise, the president of the Cem Foundation, İzzettin Doğan acknowledges the first need of Alevis as the issue of religious courses. He depicts it as: “It is to include Alevi Islam properly within the course books and to train the right staff to teach those courses”.¹⁴⁹ As can be seen, neither Bermek nor Doğan is totally against the idea of compulsory religious courses. They do not articulate a demand for the abolition of compulsory religious courses. Rather,

¹⁴⁷ Eğitimde Aleviler bütün inaçlara eşit uzaklıkta bir eğitim isterler. Herhangi bir eğitimin misyoneri olmayan bir eğitim düzeni isterler. Bu eğitim düzeni kurulabildiği zaman Alevilerin eğitimle ilgili sorunu kalmaz.

¹⁴⁸ Tabii öyle yüzlerce filan istemiyoruz. Yani daha rasyonel istekler.

¹⁴⁹ Alevi İslamın doğru bir biçimde ders kitaplarına konması ve doğru dürüst adamların da o dersleri vermesi ve o kadroların yetiştirilmesidir.

they want to change the content of the courses in a way that would include ‘Alevi Islam’ *properly*. Besides, İzzettin Doğan finds his foundation as the necessary institution to help the state change the content of the course books after he announced that they were working on a project of including Alevism in the course books of the each grade collaboratively with the ‘experts’ of Alevism some of whom are Sunnis (*Ntvmsnbc*, 12 May 2009).¹⁵⁰ In other words, the demands of the AVF group on the compulsory religious courses are closer to the solution the state has been thinking on as can be comprehended from the statements of the Minister of National Education, which is to include Alevism in the course books. On the other hand, the demands of the ABF group for the compulsory religious courses remains a little more marginal to the position the state has taken. Let me now discuss the disparate arguments of the two federations on another controversial topic, the Diyanet. After that, I will present their views about laicism in a larger perspective.

Views on Diyanet

The two most articulated character of the Diyanet by all the interviewees are its giant budget corresponding to the sum of many ministries and the privileged position of Sunni-Hanafite sect within it. The president of the AVF Doğan Bermek claims that the greatest tourism company in Turkey is the Diyanet because it is the only institution organizing the hadj tours through which the Diyanet collects a remarkable source of funding. And he further stresses that the budget of four hundred İmam Hatip Schools in which only Sunni-Hanafite Islam is taught is allocated from the Ministry of National Education. Thus, he stresses the injustice

¹⁵⁰ Doğan’s such claim created a great scale of criticism on the side of the ABF. Following the news of ‘Alevi course book’, Ali Balkız was lots of times seen on the TV screen, revealing that such a project was unacceptable both because the project was carried out by one side, the Cem Foundation; and because it would harm the character of Alevism allowing pluralist interpretations. I will discuss this in the following chapter.

resulting from the implementation of the religious education in Turkey. Bermek reveals their demands from the state by drawing on the issue of distribution:

If this state is going to allocate a fund for the beliefs, but there is the condition of ‘If in this statement, because if the state does not allocate a fund, then Alevi do not have any demands on that. But if the state is going to allocate a fund, Alevi want a share from that fund too.’¹⁵¹

Bermek further adds: “These demands are unique to Alevi...there are also Shafiis, even though they are Sunni, in Turkey, they don’t get service from the Diyanet, neither”. Thus the fundamental problem for Bermek is that the Diyanet only serves to the belief of Sunni-Hanafite branch of Islam. If the Alevi belief system is recognized in the Diyanet, and thus the religious services are to be given in line with the Alevi rituals and philosophy, then there will be no problem, Bermek implies. As if the whole citizenry of Turkey is destined to have some kind of belief, Bermek does not have any problem with the fact that the citizens being either agnostic, deist or atheist still continue paying taxes allocated to the budget of the Diyanet. The issue of injustice in the distribution of an enormous fund to the Diyanet Bermek firstly and rightly touches upon becomes meaningless after he claims the demand of recognition of Alevism within the services of the Diyanet.

How the president of the Cem Foundation İzzettin Doğan has perceived his establishment of Alevi İslam Din Hizmetleri Başkanlığı (*Directorate of Religious Services of Alevi Islam*, hereafter DRSA) as a protesting act against the injustice presented by the existence of the Diyanet reflects a similar kind of recognition politics to that of Bermek. After he tells how his requests on the change in the working of the Diyanet as to include the Alevi belief were rejected, he emphasizes the political power of the Diyanet against which none of the governments can stand:

¹⁵¹ Eğer bu devlet inançlar için para harcayacaksa, ama eğer lafı var bu işin içerisinde. Eğer devlet para harcamıyorsa Alevilerin bir talebi yok. Ama devlet para harcayacaksa devlet o paradan Aleviler de pay ister.

The Diyanet will always continue leading the Turkish political life. 117,000 people, whom you can call *militants*, are working in these 24-hours open mosques. Because of that work, all the political parties come to the power thanks to votes. If you gain hegemony over the people with 117 thousands of people, no civil democracy can challenge this organization. Turkey today experiences that. Even Erdoğan who looks so powerful gets silent before the president of the Diyanet. And it is the Diyanet being the obstacle to the Alevi opening of the government. (emphasis added)¹⁵²

Depicting the religious personnel working in the Diyanet as ‘militants’, Doğan points to the political affiliation of the Diyanet personnel who have a great political power influencing the decisions of the governments. In other words, he does not believe that those working under the Diyanet which is a state institution can be neutral to the political dispositions. Understood that his demands would not be met by the state due to the mentioned reasons, Doğan explains his decision for the establishment of the DRSA, and define his act of establishment as a protesting attitude:

If so, I said, then I will establish my own Diyanet, and I established the Directorate of Religious Services of Alevi Islam. And I am proud of it... In fact, establishing the Directorate of Religious Services of Alevi Islam was a goal for protesting. It was a protest action.¹⁵³

Obviously, Doğan as a leader of an organization which was established for the recognition of Alevi Islam attempts to legitimate his decision for the establishment of the DRSA on the basis of providing the needed religious services to the Alevi society. From that, one can deduce that the primary concern of Doğan was to supply to Alevis their religious needs thanks to the DRSA by subordinating the concern for the realization of the equal redistribution of the sources. This is because although he established the DRSA, an institution donated with the

¹⁵² Diyanet sürekli olarak Türk siyasal yaşamını yönlendirmeye devam edecektir. 24 saat açık camilerde 117 bin insan, militan diyebilirsiniz, burada görev yapıyor bu görev nedeniyle de, bütün siyasi partiler oylarla iktidara geliyorlar, halkın üzerinde 117 bin insanla siz bir hegemonya kurarsanız hiçbir sivil demokrasi o örgüte kafa tutamaz. Türkiye bugün onu yaşıyor. Öyle çok güçlü görünen Erdoğan bile Diyanet İşleri başkanının karşısında sus puster. Yani alevi açılımına hükümetin engel olan Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı’dır.

¹⁵³ Onun için de öyle mi ben de kendi Diyanetimi kurarım diyerek Alevi İslam Din Hizmetleri’ni kurdum, iyki de kurmuşum... Aslında Alevi İslam Din hizmetlerini kurmak bir protesto amacıdır. Bir protesto hareketidir.

missions similar to that of the Diyanet but with a focus on Alevi Islam allowing the Alevi people in need of religious services to benefit from them to some extent, the existence of the Diyanet still remains there with all the injustice it apparently bears within its structure from the perspective of Alevis. Besides, although the DRSA might be responding to the religious demands of Alevis, like the every citizen of the Turkish Republic, Alevis still continue to pay their taxes a high quantity of which are allocated to the Diyanet. In other words, although Doğan claims that founding the DRSA was an act of protest, it has not resulted in the solution of the problems of Alevis due to the Diyanet. It is because neither the founding of the DRSA has helped the Alevis to free from the taxational burden nor the DRSA pushes the government to make it happen.

Similar to Bermek and Doğan, the president of the Kartal Cemevi Foundation Aziz Aslan agrees with the necessity of a change to be made in the Sunni-focused working of the Diyanet. Aslan does not believe that granting the salary of the religious staff by the communities autonomously, which would mean the abolition of the Diyanet, can produce a promising solution in today's conditions. He argues, "abolishing the Diyanet would result in chaos, it is not of primary importance for these days, but only if they set the balance well".¹⁵⁴ Depending on the fear of chaos and the threat against the status quo, Aslan thinks that the Diyanet is necessary and crucial in the present conditions.¹⁵⁵ He perceives the institution of Diyanet as a shelter mechanism to protect Turkey from the community structures:

Who will set the balances when the Diyanet is abolished? In what scale will the issue of religious communitarianism increase in Turkey? Will the shariah be established or not? We have to question all this very well. For, there are great divisions in the Sunni

¹⁵⁴ Diyaneti kaldırmak kaos yaratır, bugünler için önem arz etmiyor, yeter ki dengeleri iyi kursunlar.

¹⁵⁵ This point of view reflects just the same justification of the state for the Diyanet. It seems paradoxical to hear such a discourse from a leader of an Alevi organization as if speaking from within the language of the state. However, this again can tell us how the state-religion relation is problematic in Turkey. Yet, I have to note that Aziz Aslan used to work for the state as a clerk before his leadership in the Kartal Cemevi Foundation.

milieu such as sects or some orders. Will the state be able to control that? In some issues those communities agree with you in the mosque, but in other issues they are trying to underestimate the people like me or you. They still continue that pressure.¹⁵⁶

He opts for the inclusion of the Alevi belief within the Diyanet system in a new setting by underlining that Alevis should get a share from the budget they contribute to. And the way it can be achieved is the redistribution of the resources transmitted to the Diyanet budget as to grant the *dedes* a monthly salary and social security system, but only if the *dedes'* salary are to be distributed through the agency of prominent Alevi organizations. Such a system recognizing the *dedes* as the official Alevi religious personnel in the state via the help of the recognized Alevi organizations for the distribution of the fund to the *dedes* would result in the rise of power of those Alevi organizations. Because they would be the agency to determine the *dedes*. Otherwise, everyone can come up with the claim of being *dede* to the state since it depends on the kinship lineage. Therefore, Aslan demands that the Alevi belief should be recognized by the state, and it should get represented within the Diyanet in the same way Sunni-Hanafite belief is recognized and represented which can allow the Alevi *dedes* to have a share from the general budget of the Diyanet through the mediatorship of the Alevi organizations.

That the Diyanet has a big budget and a big political power is also mentioned by the ABF group. The president of the PSAKD Fevzi Gümüş stresses that the present Diyanet has transcended the original rationale of its founding:

The Diyanet is originally designed [in the Constitution] as an institution monitoring the religious sphere but not intervening into it. However, it has *de facto* become an authority in which over a hundred thousands of personnel work with a hundred

¹⁵⁶ Diyanet kalktığında, o dengeyi kim kuracak? Cemaatleşme olayı Türkiye’de acaba hangi boyuta çıkacak. Şeriat gelecek mi gelmeyecek mi tehlike var mı yok mu. Bunları iyi sorgulamamız lazım. Çünkü Sunni kesimde de müthiş ayrışmalar var. İşte mezhepler bazı tarikatlar. Bunu kontrol altına alabilecek mi devlet? Bakıyorsunuz o cemaatler bazı konularda camide bir oluyorlar, ama diğer konularda senin benim gibi insanları ezme çabası içindeler. O baskıyı halen sürdürüyorlar.

thousands of mosques, and has a strict and powerful position demanding to be asked its opinion on the legal and political subjects by giving more fatwa's.¹⁵⁷

Gümüş thus underlines the situation that the PSAKD demands the abolition of the Diyanet since the existing position of the Diyanet is no longer limited to its inspecting role. Since it has become so big with all its thousands of staff, now the Diyanet corresponds to one of the most powerful political actors in Turkey. For a recent example for the Diyanet needing to be asked its opinion on the legal and political matters Gümüş refers to, we can recall the speech of the president of the Diyanet Ali Bardakoğlu following the decision of State Council on that compulsory religious courses with the present content are in conflict with the present constitution (*Milliyet*, 7 March 2008). Bardakoğlu criticized the State Council for not asking their opinion before the decision:

I have serious doubts on the decision of the judiciary deciding on which is religion or not depending on what kind of scientific data, university view, or report. The highest authorized institution revealing how the religious education is given, how it is taught, which knowledge the orthodox knowledge of Islam is, and which one the knowledge of sect within Islam is, shall be the Directorate of Religious Affairs.¹⁵⁸

It seems that the Diyanet sees itself as the greatest authority to decide on the religious matters. Let alone discussing to what extent the works of the Diyanet can be deemed to be 'scientific' and 'impartial,' even the courage of the president of the Diyanet to make such a declaration can give us important insights about the place the Diyanet occupies in the Turkish politics today.

The president of the HBVAKV, Ercan Geçmez also touches upon the enormous size and power of the Diyanet calling it 'one of the biggest corporations of Turkey'. He further

¹⁵⁷ Diyanet sanki dinsel alanı denetleyen ama ona müdahale etmeyen bir kurum olarak tasarlanmış ama fiilen bakıyorsun memlekette 100 bin tane caminin, 100 binleri aşan personelin çalıştırıldığı katı, hatta yeri geldikçe devletin hukuki siyasi konularında kendisinden görüş alınmasını talep edecek kadar güçlü bir pozisyon teşkil eden, daha çok fetva veren makam konumuna gelmiştir.

¹⁵⁸ Yargının da neyin din olduğu, neyin din olmadığı hakkında karar vermesinin hangi bilimsel veriye dayandığı, hangi üniversite görüşüne, hangi rapora dayandığı konusunda ciddi kuşkularım var. Türkiye'de bir din eğitimi nasıl verilir, öğretimi nasıl yapılır, hangi bilgi [İslam](#) dininin orta bilgisidir, hangi bilgi İslam dininin içinde kalan bir mezhebin, grubun bilgisidir, bu konuda herhalde en yetkili kurum Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı olmalıdır.

claims: “This corporation has to be nourished. How? From those Koran courses, İmam Hatip schools. It is that holding managing all. Unless anyone interferes with that corporation, nothing can be abolished, neither the religious courses nor the faculties of theology”.¹⁵⁹ Moreover, he draws attention to the incidents¹⁶⁰ of discrimination and humiliation of the Alevi pupils by the school teachers who are the graduates from the Faculty of Theology.¹⁶¹ He believes that school teachers coming from the institutions of the Diyanet discriminate the children by humiliating the Alevi belief or by forcing them to learn the Sunni worships by heart. However, for him, this stems from the fact that they feel themselves obliged to act as such because they internalize the view of the state in the Diyanet. Because of that, he explains, they do not approve the *dedes* to have a monthly salary from the state budget within the Diyanet. He claims: “If a *dede* begins to get a salary, he will not be himself any more. Like an imam, he will probably read the sermon he is given to. And Alevism will get hurt a lot”.¹⁶² Thus, in order to remain independent, he does not want the *dedes* to obtain a salary from the state since it would cause the *dedes* to recite the official opinions of the state on religious matters.

¹⁵⁹ Bu holdingin beslenmesi lazım. Nasıl besleniyor, bu kuran kurslarından, imam hatip liselerinden. İşin başı o holding, o holdinge kimse dokunmadığı sürece hiçbir şey kalkmaz, ne din dersleri ne İlahiyatlar.

¹⁶⁰ For some examples, see *Gerçek Gündem* (18 January 2008), *Haber24* (3 June 2008). Moreover, Binnaz Toprak’s recent research contains many examples of discrimination against Alevi people (2008).

¹⁶¹ Here, he is referring to the two kinds of school teachers discriminating Alevi children. The first group is composed of the teachers of compulsory religious courses. The other is the group of teachers who are not the teachers of compulsory religious courses but of various courses including Mathematics, Social Knowledge, or Scientific Knowledge who have become as such after a two-year pedagogy education. However, both groups of teachers are the graduates of Faculty of Divinity in this case. Besides, there are some teachers, though very few, who are not the graduates of Faculty of Divinity, but of Imam Hatip Schools and graduated from the related departments of their instruction. The reason of the fewness of those teachers result from the fact that the graduates of Imam Hatip Schools are disadvantaged to apply for the other faculties than the Faculty of Divinity through the system of *katsayı*.

¹⁶² Dedeler maaş alırsa artık kendi olmayacaktır, imam gibi kendine gelen hutbeyi okuyacaktır, Alevilik çok büyük yara alacaktır.

Although similar questions on the problems of Alevi and Alevism in certain aspects led the interviews, I have observed an interesting disposition of my interviewees which divides them into two, which are in fact the groups I have already defined earlier. On the one hand, the ABF, the PSKAD and the HBVAKV, that I call briefly as ‘the ABF group’, mentioned the concepts such as ‘laicism’ and ‘laicist’ a number of times, and tended to delineate explicitly the concepts which manifested their view that the problems of Alevi are resulted from the problems with laicism in Turkey. On the other hand, the AVF, the Kartal Cemevi Foundation and the Cem Foundation, that I call briefly as ‘the AVF group’, hardly referred to the concept of ‘laicism’ and ‘laicist’ while preferring to perceive the problems of Alevi as the limited nature of freedom of religion and conscience in Turkey. That has been striking because the principle of laicism and freedom of religion and conscience are neither the different names for the same phenomenon nor are they mutually exclusive concepts. But why then was there this overt preference of one over the other concept?

Having discussed already the arguments of Ali Balkız and Fevzi Gümüő on the problems of Alevi resulting from the limited nature of laicism of the state, now I want to present the view of Ercan Geçmez on laicism. For the two, a laicist state cannot intervene into the religious sphere and cannot fix the interpretation of religion. It can neither privilege any of the religions, nor can it ignore the existence of a religion. The state should be neutral and stand within equal distance to each religious group. Despite the fact that Geçmez agrees with these statements, he furthers the argument so as to criticize the hypocritical/pragmatist/paradoxical attitude of the state during its use of the discourse on laicism. About the freedom to headscarf¹⁶³, Geçmez criticizes the state’s ban on headscarf on the ground of laicism. Yet he does not go so far as to say that the headscarf should be free in any and every context. He just draws attention to a paradoxical situation the state puts itself in. He points out that on the one hand, there are the Diyanet, compulsory religious courses, Koran courses,

¹⁶³ I will discuss that in a larger manner in the last section of this chapter.

Faculties of Theology, Imam Hatip Schools all of which promote the Sunni-Hanafite branch of Islam; on the other hand, headscarf is forbidden in the public sphere and in the universities. He underlines that the state legitimizes all those activities and legal decisions on the grounds of laicism. However, for him, the state should be laicist before intervening into the private sphere of its citizens: “First, the state itself should be laicist. People cannot be laicist. The state should be laicist. It is a state that formed itself according to the Hanafite-Sunni sect”.¹⁶⁴

Therefore, the ABF group is critical about the state’s discourse on laicism although they still hold on the principle of laicism. They assert that they want the amelioration of Turkish laicism not only for the well-being of the Alevi society but for each citizen of the Turkish Republic. Thus, even though this sort of view inevitably includes the significance of the freedom of religion and conscience; it designates a larger and more solidaristic citizen conception. In other words, the fundamental problem is not only that the basic freedoms of Alevi are not given but also the guaranteeing of the freedoms of both? Sunnis or Alevi at the same time. This can be traced in their demands for the abolition of the Diyanet and of compulsory religious courses.

On the other hand, the AVF group names the Alevi’s problems as resulting from the constraints of their freedoms. For example, the president of the AVF Doğan Bermek defines the underlying reason of Alevi’s problems:

What we call the Alevi issue is in fact not a matter of Alevi problem, it is to bring the matter of freedom of belief to agenda in Turkey. You will grant rights to Alevi, then will the Shaafi¹⁶⁵ yell behind? You? I mean, if something is being changed in the aspect of belief and of belief services, this change should be done so as to include all the belief systems living in Turkey.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁴ Önce devletin kendisinin laik olması lazım. İnsanların laik olması diye bir şey mümkün olamaz. Devletin laik olması lazım. Kendisini Hanefi Sünni mezhebine göre biçimlendirmiş bir devlet.

¹⁶⁵ Shaafism is one of the four theological schools of Sunni Islam.

¹⁶⁶ Alevi sorunu dediğimiz şey gerçekte bir Alevi sorunu meselesi değil, bu Türkiye’de inanç özgürlüğü meselesinin gündeme getirilmesidir. Siz Alevilere hak vereceksiniz, sonra Şaafiler mi bağırırsınlar arkanızdan? Yani eğer bir şey yapılıyorsa artık inanç konusunda inanç hizmetinde diyelim inanç politikalarında bir değişiklik yapılacaksa bu değişiklik türkiyede yaşanan görünen bütün inanç sistemlerini kucaklayacak biçimde yapılmalıdır.

As can be seen, Bermek offers the recognition of Alevism as a belief system in a new setting that is to cover the needs of all belief groups. However, I have to remind that Bermek and the members of his federation demands the state to include Alevism in the Diyanet because they think the Diyanet is too powerful to be abolished. Therefore, according to them, it might be better if Alevi, as a belief group could be granted their rights. Moreover, Bermek demonstrates the way of solution for the issue as: “It is necessary to remove the obstacles rather than to solve the problems because if you remove the obstacles, then the problem will be eliminated”.¹⁶⁷

Bermek’s argument is reminiscent of the “negative conception of freedom” coined by Isaiah Berlin (1958). By taking the problems of Alevi as the existence of the obstacles to their freedoms, Bermek seems to engage with guaranteeing Alevi an autonomous cultural space. Yet unlike those who favor negative liberties, he does not generalize his call for negative liberty to other belief and nonbelief groups and wants to exempt Alevi. This is a sort of recognition politics focusing solely on guaranteeing the freedoms of Alevi and in this it falls short of and does not cohere with the idea of negative liberty, which is usually generalized to all groups and persons.

The president of the Cem Foundation, İzzettin Doğan traces a similar line. He identifies the problems of Alevi as a matter of inequality: “I saw Alevi were not given fundamental rights, they were deprived of fundamental freedoms, and due to that they were disparaged by the others. I mean, the discrimination stems from the fact that they do not have equal rights”.¹⁶⁸ Despite that revelation as stated above DRSA demands the state to include

¹⁶⁷ Sorunların çözülmesi değil de engellerin kaldırılması gerekir. Engelleri kaldırırsan sorun da kalkar ortadan.

¹⁶⁸ Alevilerin temel haklarının verilmediğini gördüm, temel özgürlüklerinden yoksun bırakıldıklarını gördüm, böyle olunca da diğerlerinin onları aşağı gördüklerini. Yani ayrımın nedeni eşit haklara sahip olmamalarından kaynaklanıyor.

the Alevi belief within the Diyanet as well as within Islam. Equal rights to him seem to mean ‘parity with Sunni Islam’ rather than freedom of conscience for everyone as would be the case in an equal rights scheme.

Aziz Aslan, the president of Kartal Cemevi Foundation, is the only one from the AVF group who used the word ‘laicist’ in the interviews. As I already mentioned above, Aslan does not defend the abolition of the Diyanet because the present condition of Turkey is not convenient for it due to his fear of religious communitarianism. Furthermore, he does not believe in the possibility of communities to gain autonomy from the state which can let the members of each belief group to transfer their taxes to their communities:

It is very easy in the countries that adopted the laicist system as in Europe. Those communities can take from the assigned taxes, and the services can be given accordingly. However, in Turkey, it has been a Sunni-state mentality for centuries. The Turkish Republic did not provide Alevis with those opportunities. They said there was one belief, and this belief was only worshipped in mosques.¹⁶⁹

So, Aslan claims that because Turkey is not laicist enough the belief groups cannot gain their autonomy while he demands the recognition of Alevis as a belief group by the state. To my question “what if it would lead the other belief groups to claim the same demands from the state when Alevis are recognized in that way,” he replied:

On the demands, there is the Shaafi issue only, but their rituals are not different as ours [than the Hanafite]. But let the state give to them too, but they do not differ so much. As long as the integrity of this country is preserved within the Turkish Republic there isn’t any problem because we all have to internalize the laicist system very well.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁹ O Avrupa gibi, artık laik sistemi benimsemiş özümsemiş ülkelerde çok rahat oluyor.. Şimdi o cemaatler o zaman aidatlarından keser öder hizmet de ona göre verilir Ama bu gelelim Türkiyeye, cunku bu asırlardır sunni devlet anlayışı, mevcut türkiye cumhuriyeti Alevilerine o fırsatları tanımamışlar, demişler ki bir inanç var, bu inanç da ancak camide yapılır.

¹⁷⁰ Şimdi talep derken Şaafi olayı var sadece, onlarda da pek değişiklik yok bizim kadar. Ama versin ona da versin, onlarda pek bir şey yok ki o kadar. Türkiye Cumhuriyeti çerçevesi içinde bu vatanın bütünlüğü korunduğu müddetçe hiçbir sorun yok, çünkü laik sistemi çok iyi özümsememiz lazım hepimizin.

Aslan bluntly carries a discourse that is very much in line with that of the state because he argues that the integrity of the country should be preserved no matter what happens.

Therefore, although the AVF group seems to articulate that Turkey is not laicist enough or the freedom of belief is constrained in terms of Alevi; they are not for a substantive or structural transformation within the state so as to allow for new and fairer state-religion relations in Turkey. Rather, they attempt to find possible ways within the existing structure through which they can achieve their demands. They seem to give a high priority to preserve the status quo. They do not see any problem with being granted a sum from the state budget to their dedes in return for the religious services the dedes would provide. Because of that, they support more of a “freedom for us” position by overlooking the fact that the unequal distribution of the sources still continues for other belief groups as well as nonbelievers. However, this is an inevitable part of recognition politics and part and parcel of the politics of religious communitarianism.

Views about the AKP

As I made clear in the previous chapters, the main actors on behalf of the Alevi organizations during the AKP's Alevi opening have been the ones that are the subjects of this chapter. Although the interviews I reported were quite clear in portraying what these organizations think about the ongoing developments, I suppose it is necessary to discuss them briefly again in this section because there are a number of discourses reiterated about the AKP that are related to democracy, human rights and freedoms in Turkey. There are three sorts of dispositions of the interviewees when it comes to the underlying reasons of the AKP's initiative and the solutions to be brought by it.

First one is the significance of external pressures, especially from the European Union.

Within the yearly Progress Reports of the EU for Turkey, there is always an article about the difficulties Alevis face in terms of freedom of religion. Besides the successful case at the ECHR in favor of an Alevi parent, in the progress reports there were clear statements about the problems of Alevis in Turkey (*hubyar.net*). In the Progress Report of 2007, *cemevis* were defined as the places of worship of Alevis, by pointing that “cem houses are not recognized as places of worship and receive no funding from the authorities” (p.17). Furthermore, the report underlining the ECHR decision on the *Case of Zengin vs. Turkey* (application no: 1448/04) reminded the Court’s warning to Turkey “to bring its educational system and domestic legislation into conformity with the ECHR” (*ibid.*). Moreover, there were also visits from the representatives of the EU in order to monitor the reforms and the existing situation (*Turkish Daily News*, 29 November 2007; *ABHaber*, 31 January 2006).

Secondly, while emphasizing the significance of the EU pressure on the Turkey’s accession process, the Alevi organizations are well aware of their contribution to publicize their demands either by street demonstrations, or by petition campaigns, or by appealing the cases to amend inequalities. Furthermore, the interviewees also stress that the AKP as the ruling party since 2002 had to do something after so much public pressure, although all of them believe that the problems of Alevis are not merely government-related but of state-related which can lead them to conclude if so, then the AKP might be an actor that has initiated a change with regards to the problems of Alevis.

Thirdly, there is a great doubt whether the AKP will continue making reforms as part of its Alevi opening. However, here again the AVF and the ABF groups differentiate with respect to their line of doubt. While the doubt of the AVF is more about the abilities of a ruling party attempting to solve such a problematic issue, the one of the ABF is more about the political affiliation of that party which aims to deal with the issue so as to produce a certain benefit to its religious party base.

For example, the president of the AVF, Dođan Bermek does not have any problem with the attendance of the people from the Diyanet to the first session of the Alevi workshop. Besides, he expresses his confidence to the respectful attitude of the State Minister Faruk Çelik who was responsible for the Alevi opening. Concerning his opinion about the workshop to produce any solutions to the Alevi problems, Bermek does not believe it will. However, he thinks that since the AKP has demonstrated a will to deal with the issue by the opening, this will lead other political parties in the Assembly like the CHP and the MHP to support the agenda since the Alevis in Turkey constitute a big potential for votes. Lastly, Bermek perceives the present situation as a great opportunity: “I think, this is an opportunity to rearrange the belief policies of this country. I cannot say whether or not it will use this opportunity rightly”.¹⁷¹

The president of Kartal Cemevi Foundation Aziz Aslan also believes that the AKP, since it has been on the power for seven years, has been in the most beneficial position to solve the problems. Nevertheless, he does not see a constitutional amendment as a must in the solution of the problems. He says: “We have claimed our demands. For God’s sake, what those demands have got to do with the law! The issue of electricity is a problem to be solved by an instruction. For example, we’ve solved the water problem”.¹⁷² It seems Aslan prioritizes the legal status of *cemevis* as only one demand among other demands. Also, his approach is a little too simplistic by leaving the solution of the problems to the arbitrary decisions of the local administrations.

Lastly, the president of the Cem Foundation İzzettin Dođan reminds the principle of “procedure engag  ” in the public law by implying that since the AKP has already initiated a

¹⁷¹ Bana kalırsa bu  lkenin inanç politikalarının yeni bařtan d zenlenmesi iin bence bir fırsattır, bu fırsatı dođru deđerlendirir mi yanlış deđerlendirir mi, bir řey diyemem.

¹⁷² Taleplerimiz dedik, saydık, o taleplerimizin kanunla ne ilgisi var Allah ařkına, bir elektrik olayı talimatla  z lecek bir sorun. Bak su sorununu  zd k.

reform policy it is difficult to step back. Moreover, he emphasizes the EU pressure behind the AKP: “They will probably do certain things because of the pressure from [the EU]. But if they don’t, it is inevitable for widespread demonstrations in Europe or elsewhere to emerge. I mean it will cost Turkey a lot”.¹⁷³

The reaction of the ABF group about the AKP firstly addresses the Cem Foundation’s closeness to the party. The president of the ABF Ali Balkız criticizes the Doğan’s call to the Alevi to vote for the AKP on the grounds that the AKP “is a party that has become the focus of anti-laicist activities by the decision of the Constitutional Court, a party that has done many things to ignore Alevi and Alevism”.¹⁷⁴ Subsequently, I asked him about the Ergenekon case¹⁷⁵ since he was one of the names for whom the assassination plans¹⁷⁶ were organized by the members of the Ergenekon terror organization (*Bianet*, 13 January 2009). He is quite suspicious about the ongoing judicial case:

They have made it so as to benefit the AKP. Although they claim they are liquidating the deep state and the anti-democratic illegal structures in the country, we think that they are creating their own deep state. But it is a fact that there is a structure named Ergenekon.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷³ Ondan çekinerek bir takım davranışları yapacaklardır. Ama yapmazlarsa da bundan sonra Avrupa’da orada burada gösterilerin gidere artması kaçınılmazdır. Yani Türkiye’ye ağıra mal olur.

¹⁷⁴ Anayasa Mahkemesi kararınca laikliğe karşı eylemlerin odağı olmuş bir parti. Alevileri ve Aleviliği yok saymak için bir sürü şey yapmış bir parti.

¹⁷⁵ “Ergenekon” is the name given to a Kemalist ultra-nationalist, alleged terror organization in Turkey. The alleged members constituting over a hundred people which include generals, politicians and academicians have been indicted on charges mainly of organizing assassinations and promoting social unrest. Since July 2008, they have been questioned, and the hearings started on October 20, 2008.

¹⁷⁶ Indeed, the fact that Balkız was in the assassination list of the terror organization has been very important especially for the Islamist circles since they were always criticizing the Alevi to support the Kemalist milieu unquestionably.

¹⁷⁷ AKP’nin işine yarayacak hale getirdiler. Bir taraftan derin devleti tasfiye ediyoruz, ülkede anti-demokratik illegal yapıları dağıtıyoruz derlerken diğer yandan da kendi derin devletlerini yaratma içindeler gibi geliyor bize daha çok. Ama Ergenekon diye bir yapının olduğu da bir gerçek.

Ercan Geçmez, the president of the HBVAKV, has also doubts about the discourses on ‘deep state’ of the ruling party. He claims: “But, the question of whom the deep state represents should be asked”.¹⁷⁸ However, he acknowledges that the deep state has been using the elements of the society against each other in order to discipline them.

The president of the PSAKD Fevzi Gümüş also evaluates the AKP’s initiative as “a little move in the flawed laicist order”. He claims that the party is turning its ignorance of Alevism into a discourse of its recognition. But he asserts: “And how are they doing it? According to their Sunni perceptions”.¹⁷⁹ Thus he is criticizing the way of the AKP to recognize Alevism.

Ercan Geçmez, the president of the HBVAKV, either does not believe the solutions to the problems will come from the government’s initiative unless the Constitution and the mentality of the state, the essential elements of which are the Diyanet and the Presidency of General Staff for him, towards Alevis are changed. Furthermore, he defines the AKP as a religious community/political party. Assuming that the AKP desires a number of changes within the system, Geçmez criticizes the party for collaborating with the Alevi groups that are aiming first and foremost the preservation of the status quo for Alevism, implying the Cem Foundation. Thus, Geçmez declares: “because eventually an opening for Alevism would bring the openings for other religious orders (*tarikat*) in Turkey. Their concern is in fact not us, it is theirs”.¹⁸⁰

Freedom of Religion and Conscience for Non-Alevis

¹⁷⁸ Peki derin devlet kimi temsil ediyor, onu sormak lazım.

¹⁷⁹ Onu da nasıl yapıyorlar? Kendi Sunni algılayışlarına göre.

¹⁸⁰ Çünkü eninde sonunda Alevilik yönündeki bir açılım, Türkiye’deki diğer tarikatların de açılımını beraberinde getirecektir. Aslında dert biz değiliz, dert kendi açılımları.

Alevi have been highly criticized for not supporting the rights of the Sunni people in the case of headscarf, as I have shown in the third chapter, and for not mentioning¹⁸¹ the grievances of the Sunni in the case of Başbağlar Massacre¹⁸² for example. For the sake of pointing the possibility of producing social peace among the Sunni and the Alevi, I have a responsibility as well to elaborate on the discourses of my interviewees regarding the headscarf issue and the social interaction between the two groups.

Neither of the interviewees claims that the problems of Alevi result from the attitude of the Sunni society, thus none of the organizations studied are reducing the problems to an essentialist approach. They all articulate state's systemic preference for a Sunni-based intervention into creating the Alevi's problems in general and the Sunni-Alevi conflict. However, interviewees differentiate again in their critical stance to the discourses produced by the actors privileging the Sunni approach to Islam vis-a-vis the Alevi.

İzzettin Doğan, the president of the Cem Foundation, underlines the Alevi's attitude towards the tragic events of Maraş, Çorum and Madımak:

Throughout the history, there has not been any Alevi-Sunni conflict. I know, and all of us experienced that certain political parties attempted to instigate the people according to the political conjuncture. But it couldn't go beyond the history of those parties. We've come through the Maraş and Çorum massacres, they were one-sided. I mean Alevi have never perceived it as an action made by the Sunni against themselves.¹⁸³

¹⁸¹ As claimed by some panelists at the Erikli Baba Lodge Cemevi organized by Association for Liberal Thinking (May 9 2009, İstanbul).

¹⁸² Just after two days of the Madımak Massacre, a nearby village called Başbağlar, known to be predominantly religious Sunni was attacked at night leading to the death of 33 innocent people. The terrorists, that are believed to have a connection with the Ergenekon organization had left a note as "the revenge of the Madımak has been taken" which could have caused a Sunni-Alevi conflict as in the 1970s.

¹⁸³ Tarih boyunca hiçbir dönemde bir Alevi-Sunni çatışması yaşanmamıştır. Bazı siyasi partilerin siyasi konjonktüre uygun olarak kendilerine göre uygun buldukları dönemde halkı tahrik etmeye çalıştıklarını biliyorum hepimiz gördük yaşadık. Ama o siyasi partilerin tarihinden öteye gidemedi. Mesela Maraş katliamını yaşadık tek taraflıydı, Sivas katliamını yaşadık tek taraflıydı, Çorum da öyle. Yani Aleviler hiçbir zaman bunu kendilerine Sunnilerin yaptığı bir hareket olarak algılamadı.

Although it is a fact that the ‘deep state’ structures together with the political parties at the time had their hands in the incidents, claiming that “there has not been any Alevi-Sunni conflict” is an expression we can hear from a Turkish state representative who would try to sustain the unity and integrity of the country by minimizing the tremendous ease with which Sunni citizens could be played by the deep state against the Alevi communities. Doğan’s statement, though intended as such, might not be amenable to produce social peace among the two groups. This is to ignore the role of the agency of the Sunnis who realized the Madımak Massacre. Despite the undeniability of the ‘deep state’s role in provoking those incidents, one needs to answer the question of why it is always the Sunnis who were provoked against. This is obviously nourished from the settled prejudices of those Sunnis against Alevis such as heresy and blasphemy.

Emphasizing the system-rooted problems on laicism and democracy in Turkey, the president of the ABF Ali Balkız claims that the realization of their demands will disburden the Sunni as well. He believes: “Let’s create the conditions we claim for all together, we are dreaming of a world. And there, there will be neither a problem of headscarf nor will there be a problem of Alevism”.¹⁸⁴ Thus, he maintains that the issues of headscarf and Alevism stem from the limited nature of the laicism and democracy and makes a call to everybody to develop the solidarity needed to solve all those problems embedded in laicism and democracy. However, he is suspicious about the eagerness of those defending the freedom to headscarf for the realization of the Alevi demands:

Let those struggling for the headscarf oppose compulsory religious courses, or the existence of the Diyanet, and say that cemevis are the centers of worship of Alevis, we cannot interfere! Can they say? They understand democracy, freedom of religion and conscience for themselves. If something exists for them, it is good”.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁴ Bizim dediğimiz koşulları birlikte oluşturalım, biz ister istemez bir dünya tahayyül ediyoruz, orda türban sorunu diye bir sorun olmayacak, Alevilik diye bir sorun olmayacak.

¹⁸⁵ Haydi türban için mücadele veren çevreler zorunlu din derslerine de hayır desinler bakalım Diyanet’in varlığına da hayır desinler bakalım, cem evleri Alevilerin inanç merkezleridir biz karışmayız desinler haydi! Diyebiliyorlar mı? Demokrasiyi, din ve vicdan özgürlüğünü kendileri için

Balkız expresses his suspicion for those defending the freedom to headscarf by pointing to their strategic discourse on democracy and freedoms.

Similar to Balkız, the president of the HBVAKV Ercan Geçmez interprets the ongoing developments to lead the expansion of freedoms of religion. However, contrary to him, Geçmez takes the issue other way around but by still conserving their comprehensive perspective of ‘freedom for everybody’. He claims:

Unless the freedoms in every aspect are brought in Turkey, it’s meaningless that we have got the freedom. In Turkey, they try to show as if the Alevi and the Sunni are opposed to each other. I disagree with it. That is why I underline the freedoms of the Sunni. Otherwise, they will always try to make [us] conflict.¹⁸⁶

Likewise, he understands their demand for the abolition of the Diyanet as part of the protection of freedoms of others than religious Sunnis:

This is not only our problem. In Turkey, there are not only Alevis and Sunnis; there are also atheists and a lot of people with various beliefs. They are too the citizens of this country. They pay taxes as well. That’s why we are against the Diyanet.¹⁸⁷

Moreover, he does not oppose the headscarf totally and sees the state’s attitude as ‘disrespectful’ after all the policies implemented by the state itself:

You remove the courses like philosophy, history and art history on the grounds of being bawdy or harmful. You have the children sent to the Koran courses after they are six years old. Beginning from the fourth grade, compulsory religious courses... Then in the university, you say them to open their heads. This is a very disrespectful way of attitude. This is something to fight with your citizen.¹⁸⁸

anlıyorlar. Kendileri için varsa bir şey iyidir.

¹⁸⁶ Türkiye’ye her alanda özgürlükler gelmezse bize özgürlük gelmiş fark etmez. Türkiye’de Alevi-Sünni karşıtmış gibi göstermeye çalışıyorlar. Kesinlikle ona karşıyım. Onun için Sünnilerin özgürlüklerini ısrarla söylüyorum. Yoksa sürekli çarpıştırmaya çalışacaklar.

¹⁸⁷ Bu sadece bizim sorunumuz değil, Türkiye’de sadece Aleviler Sünniler yaşamıyor, ateistler var Türkiye’de, ondan sonra Türkiye’de çok fazla inançta insanlar var. Bunlar da bu ülkenin yurttaşları, onlar da bu ülkeye vergi veriyorlar. O anlamda biz Diyanete karşıyız.

¹⁸⁸ Felsefe, tarih, sanat tarihi gibi derslerin hepsini müstehcen veya zararlı diye kaldırılıyorsunuz, çocuğu 6 yaşından itibaren kuran kursuna göndertiyorsunuz, 4.sınıftan itibaren zorunlu din dersleri, ondan sonra üniversitede yay başını açacaksın diyorsunuz. Bu çok saygısız bir davranış şekli. Bu yurttaşınla kavga etmek için yapılan bir şeydir.

We can grasp that Geçmez, although he thinks the cause of headscarf wearing is the flaws in the education system which shows that he does not indeed approve the idea of headscarf in general, nevertheless supports the freedom to headscarf relying on the importance of this freedom as a human right. Furthermore, he mentions the collaboration of their foundation and the Public Education Center in organizing some courses for the inhabitants of the neighborhood including the Sunnis as well. He tells the possibility that women with *tesettür* style headscarves have been attending to the reading classes (65 of totally 78 people) that are provided by their foundation:

That those people wearing headscarves or not is none of our business. When I asked only whether they have any complaints about us, forty eight of those sixty five women told me that they had sworn their husbands for they had told wrong things about here.¹⁸⁹

Underlining his preference for ‘mutual understanding’, he expresses his dislike for the word ‘tolerance’. He opposes the widespread discourse about ‘Sunnis should tolerate Alevis’ by finding it dangerous because it might lead to a social tension between people. He claims: “I find ‘tolerance’ as a grace. No one should bestow no one nothing. A person has rights because s\he is human and should be equal because of that”.¹⁹⁰ Actually, Geçmez is thinking in the same vein with some prominent political theorists who argue that tolerance entails a sense of superiority and contempt by the side of the dominant culture, thus there has been a number of theoretical works criticizing ‘tolerance’ and recommending ‘mutual respect’ (Taylor 1994; Gutmann 1994; Habermas 1994, 2008).

¹⁸⁹Bu insanların başlarının açık veya kapalı olması bizi asla ilgilendirmez. Sadece bizden ötürü sıkıntıları var mı yok mu diye sorduğumda çok ilginçtir, o altmış beşin kırk sekiz tanesi yaklaşık, kendi kocasına küfretmiştir, burayı bana yanlış anlattın diye.

¹⁹⁰ Hoşgörüyü lütuf olarak görüyorum. Hiç kimse kimseye bir şeyi bağışlamamalı, insan insan olduğundan ötürü haklara sahiptir ve bu haklar bağlamında eşit olmalıdır.

The president of the AVF Doğan Bermek as well underlines the importance of recognizing the demands of other belief groups other than Alevi:

Those demands are the demands of a Shaafi, a Jew, or a non-Hanafite Sunni. I mean there are Shaafis though Sunnis in Turkey, and the Shaafi cannot get services from the Diyanet either. The neutralization of the Diyanet and providing the religious services according to the society's rituals are also their demands.¹⁹¹

Articulating the significance of freedom of other belief groups is an important sign of the search for equal rights for all. However, Bermek contradicts himself while on the one hand claiming that the demands of Alevi are the demands of other belief groups than of the Hanafite-Sunni, on the other hand demanding *dedes* to be granted official status of religious personnel within the state.

In conclusion, when the ABF and the AVF groups are comparatively analyzed in terms of their priorities, self-definition of their institutions, their views about the Alevi's demands and about the implementation of laicism in Turkey, it is possible to detect two different kinds of politics of recognition. Fraser's theoretical framework about the difference between an identity politics and a politics of recognition that might not be mutually exclusive with a politics of redistribution has constituted the ground of this categorization. While the AVF tends to represent a politics of recognition that might be similar to an identity politics since they often essentialize Alevism, demand group-differentiated rights and help the injustices stemming from the laicist system to sustain; the ABF might represent a politics of recognition that might collaborate a politics of redistribution because rather than demanding group-differentiated rights to redress the grievances of the Alevi they want the amelioration of the existing laicist system due to which a more just system would be provided not only to the Alevi only but also to the people of other belief or non-belief groups. This chapter has

¹⁹¹ Bu istekler bir Şafinin bir Yahudinin, Hanefi olmayan herhangi bir Sunninin de isteği. Yani Sunni olduğu halde Şafiler var türkiyede, şafiler de diyanetten hizmet alamıyor. Onlar için de diyanetin tarafsızlaşması ve diyanetin hizmetlerinin topluma uygun veya toplumun inançlarına uygun erkan içinde, kurallar içinde verilmesi onların da talepleridir.

also demonstrated that the conditionality imposed by those in the political power that produce the dominant discourse on the religion only works for the AVF group.

CHAPTER VI
CONCLUSION

In this thesis I have tried to examine whether the dominant discourse on politics for a difference-based movement the identity of which is considered religious in Turkey has been influential on the Alevi recognition politics. The recognition of the Alevi movement to make legitimate claims from the state has been caught in a grip of conditionality, the criteria of which is bordered by a certain definition of Alevism. These conditions are basically to consider Alevism within Islam, to be religious Alevis, and to “politicize” their demands in terms of their religious identity. Besides, Alevis are expected to take a critical position to the difference-blind Kemalism. However, by conditioning the Alevi demands through a theologically-defined framework on Alevism, they have demonstrated how an illusory transformation from a difference-blind laicism to a difference-selective one is possible, which has strikingly pointed to the limited nature of laicism in Turkey.

The thesis has elucidated that the conditioned attitude of the hegemonic culture and its representatives within the state vis-a-vis Alevis tends to affect the way the Alevi actors within the movement shapes their recognition politics. The manifestation of this tendency can be traced in the new forms Alevism has taken.

Acknowledging though the presumption of a concrete identity for the solidarity and mobilization which eventually brings in the stabilization and standardization of that identity is a necessary part of a recognition politics, this thesis attempts to draw attention to how much the recognition politics loses its original claims on the identity when the actors of the recognition politics have come to make exclusionary statements towards other interpretations of that identity. In the case of Alevis, the very principle of Alevism as “Yol Bir, Sürek Bin Bir” (“*Path One, Forms Thousand and One*”) tends to lose its meaning with certain Alevi voices attempting to essentialize Alevism and turning it into an object of contention.

However, Alevi recognition politics cannot be reduced to a single Alevi group’s politics. As I have demonstrated, there are two core groups, the discourses and practices of

which constitute Alevi recognition politics: the Alevi Bektashi Federation group and the Alevi Foundations Federation group.

The ABF group in its process of claim-making deliberately abstains from defining what Alevism is. By opposing the trap of definition, they demand equality for Alevis in a framework for a newly defined laicism and a consolidated democracy. Thus, they defend the principle of disestablishment for the case of the Diyanet, for example. They do not claim positive discriminatory group rights; rather they want the state to be neutral to all belief groups and a fair redistribution of the resources. Because of their having a wider perspective to cover the problems of democracy and laicism in Turkey, and therefore their tendency to link the Alevis' problems to the democracy and laicism problems of Turkey in general, they have been criticized both by the AVF group and the conservative Sunni circles on the grounds of "politicizing" Alevism.

Indeed, the fact that their cadres are composed of people who used to affiliate with left wing politics in the period of 1960s and 1970s, it is expectable that they prefer a recognition politics having a tone of a politics of redistribution. Both their transformation from engaging with left wing politics to an identity politics, and the marginalization efforts by other actors against them are indicative of a paradigmatic shift from a politics of redistribution to a politics of recognition in the world since the late 1980s. Nevertheless, the ABF group has been the exemplary of exhibiting that a recognition politics and a politics of redistribution are not mutually exclusive. Still, they might need to nourish from the doctrine of Alevism more in order to back their demands since the hegemonic discourse requires Alevi recognition politics to stick to its collective identity to which the ABF group might contribute by referring to the oppositional character of Alevism.

On the other hand, the AVF group defines Alevism in terms of a belief system within Islam, called "Alevi Islam" and therefore delineates Alevis on a communitarian basis. This is

reflected in their formalization of Alevism in a number of new settings that tend to transform Alevism into an orthodox system that can get along with Sunni Islam easily. That they meet three primary conditions of the hegemonic language of politics by defining Alevism within Islam, being religious Alevis and “politicizing”, i.e. mobilizing for obtaining the cultural rights of Alevis, on a religiously-defined communitarianism, their prioritization of providing Alevis with religious services has been met with an increasing appreciation by Alevis. Due to these reasons, the AVF group might be more effective on the Alevi recognition politics in the following years despite its relatively small representational power.

Nevertheless, there was one more condition: being critical to the difference-blind Kemalist laicism. By demanding group rights such as the representation of Alevis within Diyanet from the state, the AVF falls short of showing the necessary effort to transform the difference-blind laicism into a laicism that would recognize all the belief groups notwithstanding their definition of religion. Furthermore, as Aziz Aslan, the president of Kartal Cemevi Foundation, claims, if the Diyanet is abolished in such a country like ours the balances might be disrupted, which implies his fear from reactionary orders. In other words, they do not have any problem with the system, they just want their rights. All in all, one can grasp that they are content with the status quo that controls the state-religion relations in Turkey.

Respecting the freedoms of others, besides guaranteeing that one’s own freedoms are respected is a key to unite at a common belief for democracy. This is necessary to provide social peace and justice. For such a society to be realized, every citizen has his/her own responsibility, both of the people belonging to the dominant culture with regards to the respect for the minority cultures and of those belonging to the minority with regards to not reiterating the injustices they are subjected to for the members of other disadvantaged groups and to not

reproducing the binary oppositions they suffer from. Only if everybody shoulders their own responsibility, a society of peace and justice can be possible.

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