



VYTAUTAS MAGNUS UNIVERSITY

FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY

MUSTAFA UGUR CANPOLAT

**CONSTRUCTION OF CULTURAL DIFFERENCES THROUGH  
TRADITIONAL RITUALS AND MUSIC: THE CASE STUDY OF ALEVIS IN  
ADIYAMAN**

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**Supervisor** Jolanta Kuznecoviene \_\_\_\_\_  
(research degree, name, surname) (signature) (date)

**Defended** SMF Dean prof. dr. Algis Krupavičius \_\_\_\_\_  
(Faculty Dean) (signature)(date)

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## ABSTRACT

*The purpose of this research is to explore the construction of cultural differences in terms of traditional Alevi rituals, state policies and music. In this regard, while ethnomusicological methodology is applied to traditional Alevi songs and poems to point out their relationships with the concerned aims, traditional Alevi rituals and practices, on the other hand, are examined to find out the dynamics of socially maintained collectivity and the constructed borders of We-feeling and Others. On the other hand, the effects of the state policies on these social processes among Alevis in Adiyaman are investigated through the socio-historical events.*

**Key Words:** Ethnicity, Alevis, Ethnomusicology

## SANTRAUKA

*Šio tyrimo tikslas ištirti kaip konstruojami Alevi kultūriniai skirtumai tradicinius Alevi ritualus, valstybės politikos ir muzikos požiūriu. Nors etnomuzikologinė metodika taikoma tradicinėms dainoms ir eilėraščiams bei atkreipiamas dėmesys į jų vaidmenį palaikant šį kolektyvą, tradicinius Alevi ritualus ir praktikas. Taip pat nagrinėjami socialiai palaikomos bendruomenės ir sukurtų ribų dinamika „mes“ ir „kiti“. Be to, per socialinius ir istorinius įvykius yra tiriamas valstybinės politikos poveikis šiems procesams tarp Alevi Adiyamane.*

**Raktiniai Žodžiai:** Etniškumas, Aleviai, Etnomuzikologija

## INTRODUCTION

Alevism in Turkey refers a large number of different heterodox communities with quite different beliefs and ritual practices (Shah, 2013; 263). The groups are varied by spoken languages and localities. The population of the people who identify themselves as Alevi has been claimed between 4 million and 30 million which implies 5-30 % over the country according to different sources, scholars and reports (Yılmaz, 2003; 55-57). The reason of this differentiation has originated not only by the lack of sufficient report of the actual population of the community but also it has a potential to use as a political power of the group over the country as well as a particular territory to claim such civil rights. Therefore, while scholar Uzum (1997; 20-23) has claimed that the population of the community is around 4-5 million, some Alevi scholars such as Sener (1998; 138-140) and Zelyut (1993; 9) have reported that the amount of this number is around 20 million (Cetin; 2008, 60). Besides, similar disagreement can also be seen among the foreign scholars as well. To give an illustration, by focusing the censuses before 1950's as migration hasn't been a widespread, Bruinessen (2001; 13) has indicated the population is around 5 million while Andrews's claim regarding to the population of Alevi community is approx. %30 of the country (Cetin; 2008, 60). However, regardless to the actual population of the community, Alevism as a religious affiliation has the biggest amount of the community members after Sunni population in the country as all scholar would agree upon the issue.

Geographically, there are Arab Alewites living in the southern region of Turkey and Hatay city, near to Syrian border and they are considered as the followers of Syria's Alewi community (*Nusayri*) and there are no records for their historical ties with the other Alevi groups in Turkey. (Shah, 2013; 263). There is also Azerbaijani speaking Alevis living in the north-eastern region and Kars city (Shah, 2013;163) Although Kurdish and Turkish Alevi towns are far more expanded among the country and they can be found on Mediterranean, Aegean and European side of Turkey, most of Kurds and Turks Alevis are living in south east of Turkey; Tunceli, Sivas, Elazig, Adiyaman, Erzincan are some cities which relatively large numbers of Alevi people still live in. Though the origin of Alevism in Anatolia has been considered around central and southern parts of the country, today many Alevis have moved from their hometown villages to the big cities such as Istanbul, Ankara and others by the effects of urbanization and modernization of early 1950-1960's on the one hand, the Turkish state's politics on the other, particularly over Kurdish minority as well as heterodox religious communities, which have aimed to maintain ethnic and religious homogenization of its citizens through such policies which have caused deportations for the huge of numbers of Kurdish-Alevi people. As a result, while "Alevi identity has

ethnic/madhhabic origins in rural contexts, it has taken on a multiplicity of forms during the ongoing process of identity transformation which is marked by modernization and urbanization. *However*, Alevi identity in Turkey is communal in nature, which is historically, culturally and politically different from what it means to be Sunni” (Kose, 2012; 576, *italics added*). In general understanding by their definitions, Alevism or ‘Alevilik’ in Turkey refers a mixed belief system and life styles in literature and in practice which include a combination of a historical Islamic sect and local traditions among the Turks and Kurds, originated in Anatolia by the followers of *Haci Bektashi* since 11th century.

Regarding to its origin, Scholar Shah (2013; 264) states that unlike his contemporary Persian Muslim poet Sufi (Rumi) living in Anatolia, *Bektashi* was not theologian and didn’t study in a religious school (madrassa);

*“though Bektaş was a Muslim, he did not renounce the ancient practices and customs of Central Asia. He did not like to pray in mosques but would climb a mountain with his abdals (a religious devotee). That mountain, called Hirkadağ, (the mountain of the cowl), is located near the present village of Hacibektaş and is an ancient volcano. The abdals used to light fires and dance around juniper-trees grown there, performing the semah (ritual dance)”*

Abdals refer to the people who have denied ‘possessions’ and ‘physical wealth’ on earth and whose aim is to access to divine and thus to gain a true love of God. According to scholar Arici and Guray, abdalism tradition is a combination of various belief systems which Anatolian people have encountered in their history including *Kam* character in shamanism, Islamic mysticism, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism and many other various believes within migrant Turkmen tribes. In historical sources, abdals are known as people who willingly choose poverty, survive as beggars and live as a traveler-dervish individual or groups in Anatolia (Arici & Guray, 2018; 234). They are called as *baba* (father in Turkish), *dede* (grandfather in Turkish and dede characterization is still exist in Alevism as we’ll see below), *dervish* and later *abdals* in various times and the latter also refers to identify specifically Bektashi’s followers. Also many scholars agree the analysis that while orthodox dervish orders or cults refer to the groups which are established on Seriate order and are supported by existing institutional power holders, abdals are seen as heterodox people who denied any existing authorities and powers on earth to define the way to access to love of God (Arici & Guray, 2018; Ay, 2014; 28; Emiroglu & Aydin, 2003; 646). Besides, Scholar Oz describes the concept of heterodoxy as ‘developing a religious understanding which public can understand without authority’ and thus he interprets this concept as ‘public Islam’ (Oz, 2001; 142). By examining the differences between the religion concepts of governing (ruler) and governed (ruled), scholar Suvari has claimed that the understanding of religion of governing

implies to the official religion and orthodoxy which is ruled by the authorities such as state or church while the latter implies to public religion and heterodoxy or heretic (Suvari; 2010, 179).

Abdals as people who giving up everything physically on earth are believed to access to absolute truth by the society and abdals as societal personalities are described as a person who help people who are weak, poor and under pressure by authorities and power-holders. (Arici & Guray, 2018). In similar vein, scholars Arici and Guray have reported that they had expressed the displeasures of the groups who are under the pressure of the state authority of Anatolian Seljuk Sultanate and Ottoman Empire and they had been starters of various rebellions (Arici & Guray, 2018; 274). In order to help to visualize abdals on audience' vision, Poet Vâhidî describes the way of living of Anatolian Abdals in his book *Hâce-i Cihân ve Neñce-i Cân* (1522) as;

*‘Abdals, had a lonely tennûre (armless and collarless dress) on their backs, almost half-naked in a way, always barefoot and bareheaded. There was a belt of woolen knit in their waist; [...] a lighter, amadau<sup>1</sup>, [...] marijuana, a yellow wooden spoon and keşkûl (known as dervish bowl) hanging on their belts. Visible burned places in their bodies, tattooed Zülfikar pictures (Ali’s sword and Zülfikar is the most effective used symbol for Alevis today) or Ali’s name, some of them had snake shapes tattoos. They had musical instruments such as tambourine, kudiüm, and horns, and they played them during the dhikr or walking’* (Koprulu F., 2004; 343 – translated by myself from old Turkish language, non-italics are added).

Abdals as followers of Hacı Bektashi have appeared on various parts of Anatolia after the 15-16<sup>th</sup> century by their poems, stories, narratives and they were called as *Kizilbas*, meaning ‘red head’ which refers to red hat on their heads (Olsson, Ozdalga & Raudvere, 1998; 7). Such group of people as followers of abdals are later called as Anatolian Alevis.

Regarding to the importance of Ali and Bektashi on Alevi believes, Suvari (2010; 179 -186) argues that in Alevi belief system, Bektashi is believed to be Ali who had appeared centuries later (Bruinessen, 2001, 186) and Ali is believed to be a man who the God had appeared in human body, and thus he claims that such believes can be seen as a trace of Gnosticism. According to Gnostics, human is an uncompleted and imperfect beings which require to have individual effort to access *gnosis* (Suvari 2010, 186). As Ozbudun (2004, 118) noted, by having these believes after the 1<sup>st</sup> century, Gnosticism has become a protesting heterodox religion by its followers in Egypt, Palestine, Syria and parts of Anatolia against the oppressive Roman State (Suvari 2010: 186).

Various identifications of Alevi people on the following Ottoman records reported by Sener (2002; 12) not only illustrates the group of people as different heterodox identifications by emic perspective such as *rafızı*, (dervish crew) and *ışık taifesi* (light squad) but also agrees upon groups of Alevi people as various heterodox communities than Sunni Muslim majority defined by outsiders: *seyitler*, *zındıklar* (misbelievers), *mülhitler* (transgressors, heretics), *kafirler* (infidels), *ehli-sünnet el cematten olmayanlar* (those who are not Sunni Muslims), *şarap içenler* (wine drinkers), *halife* (followers), *müfsit* (mischief maker), *Cuma namazına gitmeyenler* (those who do not go to Friday prayer), *ehli sünnete harakat edenler* (those acting against Sunni Muslims), *eşkiyalar* (bandits, brigands), *hırsızlar* (robbers). In other words, it will not be misleading that, as scholar Koerbin summarizes, “those who are now understood as Alevi or proto-Alevi, during the formative sixteenth century, may be understood as representing a broad category of heterodox religious and anti-state activities” (Koerbin, 2011; 36).

Since the independence of the Turkish state, the secular republic has been constructed by Atatürk and Alevis have been one of the biggest supporters of secularism within the state since they constantly have had struggles from Sunni Muslim Turkish majority. Most literatures about Alevism emphasize the period as a crucial milestone on its history and their identity representations; the period which is called as ‘*revival of Alevism*’ has reunited and revealed the imagined community which people identify themselves as a part of it (Bruinessen 1996, Camuroglu 1997, Dressler 2008, Kehl-Bodrogi 1996, Massicard 2007, Sökefeld 2008, Vorhoff 1998, 2003). From the very early days of Alevism until this period, Alevism was understood as life styles varying on localizations and related customs, rituals and traditions on particular local regions. Throughout the history, in rural context Alevi tradition has been influenced by Islamic mysticism, Twelver Shiite mythology, Shamanism, pre-Islamic Anatolian traditions and rituals, modern thoughts and ideologies (Dressler 2008, Kose 2012, Irat 2016). By the period of revival of Alevism, however, various Alevi communities around the country has proposed themselves as a member of and identified their community in terms of a particular ethno-political-religious affiliation on their belief system and life styles. The period was pioneered by many Alevi intellectuals, artists, authors as well as various Alevi associations, and it was crucial for the recognition of the community by the others and the formal state institutions. The revival was also supported by other liberal movements of 60-80’s such as feminism, Kurdish movements, leftist-Marxist movements, etc. This transformation process has brought out “an important change in the nature of Alevism, the switch from a secret, initiatory, locally anchored and orally transmitted religion to a public religion with formalized and written doctrine and ritual” (Shah, 2013; 264). Although scholar Shah defines Alevism

as a religion above, it is important to emphasize that there are various concepts of its definition and there are no agreed terms to characterize and to conceptualize this tradition not only among scholars in academic writings but also among insiders and outsiders in practice of daily lives. Some scholars characterize Alevi identity in terms of its religious origins and sources, while some others define through ethnic origins. Alevi phenomena on the contemporary studies have been studied as a '*faith-based collective activism*' (Erdemir; 2004), a '*transnational social movement*' (Elise; 2003, Sahin; 2005, Sökefeld; 2008), an '*ethnic identity*' (Andrews & Benninghaus; 1989, Okan 2004), a '*socio-religious community*' (Dressler; 2012), a '*localist cosmopolitanism*' (Cusenza; 2016) and '*Ideological Positioning (IP) vis-à-vis Religious Positioning (RP)*' (Kose; 2012).

By the results of my empirical data on the fieldwork held on Adiyaman city and Yaylakonak village on the summer in July, 2018, I will argue that all these various descriptions on the current studies reflect the inner controversies for the meaning and characteristics of Alevi identity within the existing Alevi community in Turkey. The debate of being 'in' and 'out' of Alevi community as well as the features and characteristics of Alevi identity are neither pre-described nor commonly agreed among all the members. Since increasing emphasizes on its relational and positional aspects of Anatolian Alevi identity with Sunni Muslim Turkish majority - especially after the transformation process of 'representative Alevi identity' under the effects of urbanization, modernizations, globalization as well as the effects of various institutionalizations of the community - , all these different perceptions can be more visible on people's interpretations and their life stories.

Alevism as a religious affiliation has their own worshiping places called as Cem evi which are practically and functionally quite different than mosques, and both genders may attend worships and ceremonies together unlike Muslims have separation between genders for religious practices. In Cem Evi, Music, ritualistic dance (*semah*) and dialogues (*sohbet* and *muhabbet*) are the main themes of all their religious practices. Dedes are socially respected persons who are pioneering the event on Cem evi and held the speeches through rituals before and after the music and ritualistic dances. On the other hand, it is important to mention that Alevis have traditionally practiced these ceremonies on a member's house, thus there is no requirement for a particular place to gather in Cem evis (Suvari 2002, 2010; Okan, 2004). However, by the effect of urbanization, it has been started to be a common tradition to have the practices in Cem Evis.

On the other hand, as a difference of their practices from Sunnis, they do not pray for daily worships like Sunni-Muslims do (*Namaz* in Turkish). Likewise, Alevis don't have fastening on Ramadan



and don't believe to be necessary to go to Hajj in Mecca since they believe that true pilgrimage is an internal one, which is very similar idea of Sufism as another local tradition in Anatolia and they use and drink wine (not in all geography) on their ceremonies (Baba; 2015, Okan; 2004, Suvari; 2002, 2010). As it might be seen that almost there is no common ground between Alevi and Sunni-Muslims in their religious practices. Today, Cem evi and the Dedes are the central social institutions for Alevi community.

Although today Dedes are seen by most of the members of the community as it is past on rural context and it must be revised by modern needs of the people, the practiced Alevi rituals and traditional Alevi folk songs are still significant practices to illustrate socially shared values, emotions, customs and moral codes and thus they can be fruitful to reveal the representations of Alevi identity formations. Cem Evi has been historically functioning for Alevi as a place not only to have religious rituals and dances, but also is a place where the community is getting together to discuss collectively the current needs, and to share publications and celebrations. Traditional Anatolian Alevi songs and poems are singed communally together with traditional Anatolian musical instrument (*baglama, saz*) during these events and concerning emotions and feelings on the songs and speeches are shared by the community members and thus the whole event can be seen as meaning making practices through rituals. It is worth to mention here that traditional Alevi songs and poems have emphasized the shared common values on the ground of 'internal journey of accessing divine in life', and 'the struggles of people who have experienced religious, ethnic, ideological pressures and their rebels or rebellion' on their respected written times. In this context. there are also few ethno-musicological studies among Alevi songs on the contemporary anthropological studies and they have aimed to discover the representation of Alevi identity through the lyrics and their shared values among the members.

The questions of this research are 1) what is the importance of traditional Alevi rituals on construction of cultural differences? 2) how does music play a role on maintaining of collectivity for those people? and 3) how do state policies affect the construction of this collectivity?

In order to find out the concerned aims, the research will be conceptualized by the analysis of the results of the empirical data obtained through participant observations and semi-structured interviews with informants in the Adiyaman city and by examining traditional Alevi songs using contemporary ethnomusicological methods.

# CHAPTER 1

## 1. Theory

### 1.1. Theoretical Considerations and The Models of Ethnicity and Groupology Studies

Since Barth (1969) has influentially indicated that ethnic is not cultural but social, social interactions within and between the groups have become the main focus in contemporary anthropological studies for ethnicity. By this perspective, the focus on ethnicity studies must be the social processes rather than 'cultural traits' which the former "provides an image of inter-ethnic relationships as dynamic and negotiable" (Eriksen, 1995; 263). In other words, Barth claims that the boundaries which are socially constructed (with a political interests) between groups must be investigated in ethnicity studies (Eriksen, 1995; 263). Since social interactions are the matter, political leadership comes to the agenda on his explanations. As it is the one of the most important insights even today which he has revealed, construction of cultural differences which might be socially, ideologically and politically gained and maintained, its borders and its relational aspects with the other groups are still the main focuses on groupology studies in contemporary anthropological writings. Through the focus on cultural differences, various ways of classification can be found as "markers of cultural difference in interethnic situations – phenotype, language, religion or even clothes" (Eriksen, 1995; 263). Additionally, by pointing out to Barth's concept of ethnicity, Eriksen asserts that social interaction is the must between different ethnic groups even if it is in a minimum level (Eriksen, 1995; 263). As the contributions of both authors to the ethnicity studies in contemporary anthropology are very much related to the concern of this study, how construction of cultural differences is maintained and in which ways social interactions between the groups appear will be outlined on this research.

On the other hand, as Bauman explicitly explains the relationship between ethnicity and blood with a wine metaphor, which wine consists of grapes with a complicated fermentation process which the latter requires a process of human production; ethnicity, therefore, as similar as to wine, requires political and/or economic interests to be able to turn it into construction of socio-cultural differences whose identity representations are based on; even if blood or ancestral relationships within the group exist which implies grapes, though it isn't necessary (Bauman, 1999; 63-64). It must be pointed out that the reverse reading of the metaphor is not always applicable since ethnicity may exist without blood and ancestral relationships which is indeed much more common although wine can't exist without grapes, if the term doesn't imply various fruits like cherry, apricot and such.

## 1.2 Theoretical Considerations and The Models of Ethnomusicological Studies

Culture and Music are inter-related subjects and the music can be studied in various context in cultural studies. First of all, music is a part of symbolic system in culture and, thus it will not be misleading to claim that musical tradition can be defined as “historically constructed, socially maintained and individually applied” (Rice, 2010; 1987). To put in another words, As DeNora (2000; 109) points out, music has a function of creating new spaces for culture by *collective ordering* which organizes separate individuals into a such group of actions which may seem as “intersubjective, mutually oriented, coordinated, entrained and aligned”(Santos, n.d; 28). By focusing its societal aspect, music becomes a way of communication between both individuals and groups.

Maintaining and sustaining of collective identity through music are quite common practices by cultures and subcultures. There might be a claim for a relationship between a particular group and a specific music, and the group can maintain and strengthen their collective identity by using musical expressions. For instance, jazz music and black community in the United States have been known as companions for each other. In the perspective of sustaining collective identity through music, it can connect individuals within the group by forming a group identity and “establish ingroup preference and exclusivity” (Chamorro-Premuzic & Furnham, 2007; 176). However, this group preferences and exclusivity might be seen not only on particular choices of musical preferences of groups, but also, as it will be my main focus on this study, a group identity and its moral codes can also be expressed through music and songs. In this sense, music allows to a group to share a set of symbols and symbolic messages which play a role on social solidarity (Santos, n.d; 30) as well as social inclusion and exclusion processes. Therefore, it will not only express *Our* meaningful worlds, *Our* reality, *Our* past and hence the perceptual borders of *Our* community but also it allows to exchange these social facts within the community members. According to ethnomusicologist Martin Stokes (1994), the function of music is not only to practice collective power but also to create and to strengthen boundaries between groups. On the meantime, as it comes to the surface, it might be intentionally or unconsciously used as a tool to transform the representation of group identities.

Music as a communication can be defined as “a symbolic process whereby reality is produced, maintained, repaired, and transformed” (Martin & Nakayama, 2010; 94) Regarding to creation of social solidarity and comfortable norms, the authors emphasize the importance of similarity and feeling of comfort in which the culture provide us the reality we perceive. Music as a way of communication creates relational bonds and affects *Our* sense of comfort which we see as our reality (Santos, n.d; 25).

The methodology in ethnomusicological studies might be a participant observation which requires an involvement within a group to make an observation by using varying of techniques in order to explore “general immersion to the everyday life, musical performances, and other aspects of the society in which they live” (Stone; 2008, 5). Another method in order to make a research in ethnomusicology might be an archival work which implies conducting a research using various sources from media to articles, newspapers or fields notes of other researchers, records, videos and photographs, and links the related historical events to the subject topics in order to help us to see the world as the insiders see (Stone; 2008, 12). By conducting an archival work, the researcher interprets his collection of data which helps to reinsert “the historical dimension into ethnomusicology” (Stone; 2008, 5).

Since music is commonly used and collectively practiced on everyday life of Alevi people, I intend to make a room for ethnomusicological studies in this dissertation to explore the insights of the meaningful worlds in a broader perspective which Alevi people used to have. I also believe that it will contribute to the vision of Alevi worlds for audience which the research aims to provide.

Though I have often encountered the music on the people’s everyday life during the fieldwork, I will follow the archival work and its principles in ethnomusicology for the methodological model of the study.

## CHAPTER 2

### 2. Explications through Examples of Traditional Alevi Songs

Regardless to the authors whoever write the songs, the most important thing which needs to be emphasized is that all traditional Alevi folk songs are always written in a way to express *we-feeling* and the language is used to mention the singer as either *We* or with the adjectives which are used to imply a person who is in Alevi path such as *abdal*, *Ali* or *Bektashi* lovers, *can* (common used word for Alevi, meaning spirit or life), *asik*, *ozan* (Bard) etc. It is very much crucial to recognize this nuance since all the songs are understood by the audience to express *Us* instead of the author's own world, and thus it has become a powerful tool to share *Our* common feelings, *Our* moral codes, *Our* cultural distinctiveness and *Our* political stances, and thereby it has become the illustration of the borders of *Our* collective identity formation which I aim to discover by this study.

Besides, most of the songs refer to the past and historical figures and myths which are important on Alevi tradition. Therefore, the power of the traditional Alevi folk songs also stems from the construction of the past in present which connects *Us* to our ancestor and all the myths *we* believe. As Friedman clearly indicates that “the past which affects the present is a past constructed and/or reproduced in the present” and while he examines the myths among his study group, he rather prefers to use a phrase *the practice of mythmaking* instead of the realization of the myth (Friedman, 1992; 853).

Before continuing with the examples, it is required to mention that most of the songs are translated only with an intention to keep and to provide the meaning of the context. While a translation of any text into a new language is already a re-production process which neither the contexts of the languages can completely match because of the productions of different societies nor can be considered without the subjectivity of the mediator, an attempt to make this for poems has its own difficulties and thus, there will always be a missing part of *it*.

The following famous and well-known song written by Asik Ibreti in 1996 expresses *Ourselves*, or in another word, Alevi social identity as a religious orthodoxy with Sunni Muslim majority. It emphasizes humanism and inner journey on the meantime to find out the truth without institutionalized religious discourses as well as concerning the current political discussion on the country by illustrating Alevi stances:

Minareye çıkıp bize bağırma

Don't climb up the minaret and cry out to us

Haberimiz vardır, sağır değiliz

We know this stuff, we're not deaf

Sen kendini düşün bizi kayırma

Think about yourself, don't worry about us

Sizlere kavgaya uğur değiliz

We have no mind to quarrel with you

Her yerde biz Hakk'ı hazır biliriz

We know God is present everywhere

Olgun insanları Hızır biliriz

We know the mature human is immortal

Bundan başkasını sıfır biliriz

We know the rest is nothing

Tahmininiz yanlış, biz kör değiliz

Your estimation is wrong, we are not blind

Eğer insanlıksa doğru niyetin

If your good faith is the humanity

Nefsini ıslah et varsa kudretin

Improve your own self if you have the strength

Bize lazım değil senin cennetin

We have no necessity for your heaven

Huriye gılmana esir değiliz

We're not slaves for your houris

Arapça duaya değiliz mecbur

We don't have to have Arabic prayers

İster müslüman bil, istersen gavur

Whether you be a Muslim, or unbeliever

İnsan hor görmek en büyük küfür

The biggest sin is to despise a human

Buna inanmışız, münkir değiliz

We believe that, we are not unbelievers,

İbreti, bu hâle insan acınır İbreti,

İbreti, a man is pitied for this world

Ham sofular bu sözlerden gücenir

Crude fanatics will be hurt by these words

Aslına ermeyen elbet gocunur

The one who is unaware of his true self will take offence

Onu avutmaya mecbur değiliz

We don't have to console him

(İbreti 1996, 23)

(translated by myself)

Construction of *we-feeling* and the illustration of *Us & They* by expressing the social classification of others as seen on the song which are expressed as *We do this* and *You do that* if it is put in simple words. As Eriksen noted regarding to ethnic stereotyping in polyethnic societies, people may have not only stereotypes about others, but also themselves which is commonly “in implicit contrast to other ethnic groups” (Eriksen; 1995, 264). *You Don't climb up the minaret and cry out to Us* refers to *ezan* (call for prayer for Sunnis). *We know god everywhere in present as opposite to your practice by calling Us to a mosque*. In the time when the song is written, there was a debate among the people in country regarding to the language of *ezan*. While some claims that it must be an Arabic as original of language of Islamic pray, some others argue that it must be in Turkish as most people indeed don't know the meaning of Arabic words when they pray since they can't speak the language.

As one of the most famous and influential poets of 1960's, Asik Mahzuni has written more than thousands of songs and has sang them publicly, and has expressed communally shared emotions, thoughts and ideas. A part from the one of his well-known song states as following;

Defol git benim yurdumdan

Get the hell out of my country

Amerika katil katil

America the murderer

Yıllardır bizi bitirdin

You consumed us for years

Amerika katil katil

America the murderer (translation by Aksoy, 2014; 59)

The poet has written the song above in 1970's. His political expressions towards to USA which is publicly understood by Alevi-Kurdish people as the most effective symbol of capitalism and the reason of the wars not only on close neighborhoods in which Kurds have also located together with Arabs in Syria and Iraq but also in Vietnam, Lebanon, Angola and so forth. On an interview, Mahzuni has explained that *I love the people of all nations as much as I love American people. It is not written for public people but of the rulers of America. [...] America has been a reason of the killing of thousands of*

people in Korea, Vietnam, Lebanon, Angola, and many other countries, this is why I call the America as a killer (Aydinlik Newspaper, n.a., 2012, translated by myself).



**Picture 1:** Asik Mahzuni, known as a Pir Sultan Abdal of 21<sup>st</sup> century

Ironically, it is written on the newspaper that Asik Mahzuni is arrested because of the poem that he wrote to Erim. Nihat Erim was the prime minister and he was accused of that 3 young man were executed only by their leftist ideas: Deniz Gezmiş, Hüseyin İnan and Yusuf Aslan. They have become and still are the most influential figures for many people including Alevi as well. While the death sentence is virtually not applied since 1984 and it has been completely removed from the constitution since 2004 in Turkey, their execution day, 6<sup>th</sup> May 1972, is collectively co-memorated for many socio-revolutionist groups.

Asik Mahzuni has written songs on the themes such as class wars, poor people vis-à-vis the state, cruelty, love and Cem rituals, Ali and Bektashi loves and internal journeys. He had been started to call as a Pir Sultan Abdal of 21<sup>st</sup> century and he had become one of the most famous face for Alevi people and had been helpful for their representations on public sphere. Following parts are chosen from the one of his songs which is called as 'Bequest' and the main characteristics of Alevi identity representations are illustrated. The song was:



Üstüme “Bir Ozan Bektaşî” yazın

Write “a Bektashi bard” on my tombstone

Ama yazıları derince kazın

But dig it deeply

[...]

İki fidan dikin selviden olsun

Plant two saplings from cypress

Cemler yapılırken yüreğim dolsun

Let my heart exult when Cem is being made

[...]

Benim sevgiydi dinim imanım

My religion and my faith were the love

Sevenlerim beni böyle bilsinler

Let my lovers know me in this way

[...]

Mahzuni asalet sözüne doydum

I'm, Mahzuni, full of the word of nobility

İnsanlık adına serimi koydum

I put my head on the behalf of humanity

Ben Ali'yi sevdim, Ali oğluydum

I liked Ali, I was a son of Ali

Bütün sevenlerim hoşça kalsınlar.

All my lovers, goodbye.



**Picture 2:** Hacı Bektashi Veli Portrait

The following event is not only crucial for his expression and classification regarding to Kizilbas (Alevi), but also quite self-evident to feel the state policies towards those people. He has faced trial in 2001 because of his public declaration as that ‘‘Thank God, I’m Kizilbas (redhead) and I’m secular. Not me, my seven lineages were Kizilbas. If there is a crime, it was on my grandfather’’ (web.archive.org, 2010; n.a, translated by myself) and he died in 2002 without being absolved.

Another influential *ozan* (poet-singer or Alevi bard) who has lived in last four decades was Nesimi Cimen who had been killed by fundamentalist Muslims in Sivas Massacre (1993) together with thirty-six other Alevi intellectuals in a hotel (Madimak Hotel) where they had gathered for the event to co-memorize famous Alevi poet Pir Sultan Abdal, 16<sup>th</sup> century. Nesimi Cimen had written and sang many songs whose themes were concerning peace, oppressed people and *abdals*. One of his well-known song which was a customization of the poem written by Kaygusuz Abdal from 14<sup>th</sup> century expresses another aspect of having heterodoxy which is an unreligious way of understanding of being an Alevi:

Yücelerden yüce tanrı	Supreme God from everything
Gündüzlerden gece tanrı	Day and the night, you are God
İsmin vardır cismin yoktur	You have a name but not a substance
Sen benzersin hiçe tanrı	You're like nothing.
...	
Ali ile bir olmuşsun	You were with Ali
Bir mektepte okumuşsun	You study in a school together
Ali olmuş hafız kelam	Ali has become a wise man
Sen okursun hece tanrı	You have done nothing
...	
Unuttuk diye namazı	We forgot <i>namaz</i> (Sunni pray)
Bizi ateşe atarsın	You throw us in a fire
Kul yanması abes değil	Burning a man is not a weird
Gel bas kızgın saca tanrı	But come and you walk in a fire

Senin kulların anılır	Your creatures are known
Atası anası ile	With their mothers and ancestors
Senin anan baban yoktur	You have no father no mother
Benzersin bir pice tanrı	You're like a bastard
	(translated by myself)

Although the common expressions may not be seen easily on the first sight when it is looked at the songs, social classifications and stereotyping will be found on each Alevi songs as relational aspect with Sunni Muslims. Such lines as Ali has become a wise man, *You* have become nothing; if *We* forgot praying *namaz*, etc. can be seen as the expression of the group which *We* are involved in it. Besides, the burning tens of Alevi intellectuals in a hotel has been justified as *They* are atheist – which the song may imply - by fundamentalist Sunnis.

As we shall see by the examples of the songs above, there are strict common structures for the representation of We-feeling which are expressed in a relational way which is a being opposition than Sunni Muslims and distinct cultural differences are commonly illustrated. However, as it also appears, while a song represents Alevis in an unreligious way if not an atheist, some others can be seen as a fully religious, and other concerns only politics.

From anthropological point of view, the intention of the focus to the songs is neither to search the believes which any individual or communal Alevis are going to have, nor to look for a conclusion for their belief systems. However, by all the songs which are shared above and many others which I have listened and read on people's speeches, records and books, it seems clear to me that all those written and communally shared songs will be fruitful to reveal the common expression of oppression which is understood for insiders as well as outsiders as what it means being an Alevi within hegemonic Sunni Muslim majority through all their history in which they have lived in.

Although Anatolian Alevi history is used to go back to Bektashi and his abdals in 12<sup>th</sup> century in literature, it is worth to mention that this oppression history of the community extends until prophet Muhammed vis-a-vis his first follower and his groom Ali in 6-7<sup>th</sup> centuries in which the origin of Alevism as a religious affiliation is used to illustrate. As it is mentioned on many songs, Ali is the most important historical character for Alevi people together with Bekthasi and Pir Sultan Abdal. These emphasizes on Ali can be seen not only on the word *Alevilik* or Alevism, which is used to emphasize the name *Ali* in

Turkish and etymologically the meaning of the word is ‘to belong to Ali’, but also it can commonly be observed on people’s speeches, the used symbols such as his portrait pictures, his sword (Zulfikar) pictures, and those tattoos of Abdals as mentioned above and the stories and narratives which are told in Cem Evis regarding to Ali and his life.



**Picture 3:** An inside photo from a Cem Evi [photos on the wall: Hacı Bektashi (on the left), Ali (in the middle), Atatürk (on the right)]

Ali had ruled Islam community as a leader after Muhammed and three other leaders. Most of the literature regarding to Ali and his management of government mention him as fair, faithful, honest, warrior and courage (Meté, 2012). According to the stories, he was a protector of poor, oppressed and modest people and was fighting with tyrants. As Meté documented regarding to one of his letters written to the governors on other regions under his rule, the first task of the governors is that people must have equal rights on the community regardless to their socio-economical position and the second task is that the public must have safety and no one would have a pressure or cruelty without reason (Meté, 2012). On the meantime, as Lapidus (1998) indicates, Ali has disagreed to centralization of capital and argued equal distribution of taxes to each Muslim which they earn. All these policies and his attempts were the quite extraordinary among the people on his time which Muslims haven’t seen it even under the government of Muhammed.

Suvari doesn't underestimate the worldviews of Alevi regarding to Ali and the love towards him and he notes that most of religious songs and phrases mentions his name, Ali; and Alevi, indeed, hope a goodness from Ali rather than the God (Suvari, 2010; 187).

## CHAPTER 3

### 3.1 Historical Background of the Representation and the Construction of Alevism in the Last Century and the Re-Awakening of Alevism in the Turkish State

The construction and the representation of Alevi identity on the discourses are inseparable from Kurdish minority and their representations since the majority of Alevi community is Kurds, although there are Sunni Kurds and Turkish Alevis as well. In the light of this data, there are also effects of the formal institutions on the construction of Alevi identity as a reactionary ideological-political stances by the community since the state insists to not recognize the community as religious-social movement through their practices which the consequences of the state formal practices include directly or indirectly evacuation of those people, closure of some of Cem evis and cancellation for some of their traditional festivals. I have argued elsewhere that since the earlier days of the Turkish state until today, Turkish national identity has always been built under ethnoreligious state policies in Turkey which implies *Turkish way of understanding of Sunni Islam*. It is Turkish (the state) way of understanding of Islam, not a Sunni Islam itself and this might be seen on many examples which public has been encountered. It is ethnoreligious because the state acts as an ethnic to assimilate ‘others’ through Turkification process and acts as recognizing only Sunni-Islam for religion to be a ‘true citizen’ of the state while extracting members of other religions. While the existing of Kurdish minority as *people with distinct ethnic identity* was concerned, the idea of which Kurds are not different than Turks is indeed main ideology of the state and it is used as a tool of assimilation from the early days until recent times in Turkey. Scholar Levent Koker defines the official ideology of the state as “Turks and Kurds have been so inseparably mixed that it is impossible to distinguish one from another. Leaving aside the extreme ‘Turkist’ absurdity that ‘Kurds are, in fact, mountain Turks’, this idea of ‘inseparable mixture’ depends on an interpretation of ‘Anatolian culture’ as one and the same in its basics that, in spite of linguistic differences, Turks and Kurds share the same ‘national (traditional)’ culture” (Koker, 2010, 57). While civil rights of non-Muslims were guaranteed in Lausanne Treaty in the early days of the state, this did not include other existing minorities in the country. Therefore, non-Muslim minorities such as Jews, Christians were excluded from the community and other minorities including non-Sunni minorities such as Alevis or ethnic minorities such as Kurds were systematically assimilated. In the early years of the state, many non-Muslims in the border of the country are evacuated in order to create homogenous community through Islamization process of the society. In similar vein, Scholar Açıkel and Ateş describe that the state’s stance toward Alevism is

“similar to those discourses which perceived the Kurds as ethnic mountain Turks...the religious nationalists implied that the Alevi were in fact ‘mountain Muslims’ who had lost touch with the genuine orthodox Sunni tradition.” (Acikel & Ates, 2013; 756).

I will argue that historical background related with Alevis will be necessary in order to discover a part of these non-recognition of the ethnoreligious policies from the broader perspective. Since 1980’s, there has been presented a developmental plan, so called GAP (the South-eastern Anatolian Project) which includes the constructions of 19 dams around the south east region of the country where mostly Kurds and Alevi people live in. Those hydroelectric power plants are submitted to the society as a ‘national advantages’ in order to save dependency to outside world for energy production such as petroleum, natural gas etc. However, this ‘national’ advantage causes quite disadvantages for the people who live in the planned area. The GAP Projects will directly cause to displacement of thousands of people in which some of them were already evacuated. In Adiyaman for example, where my fieldwork is done, there has been already built the biggest dam of the country, Ataturk dam, in the beginning of 90’s and it has caused evacuation of thousands of people. The local languages in the area are Turkish as well as Kurmanji, which the latter is very particular dialect of those who live in the region as different than Kurdish language. Most of the people did not want to move from their home lands where make alive for their culture, tradition and identity. This is a remark which not only revealed on the interviews with my informants but also can easily be found many news on media and on the articles from those times. Because a socialized territory is not only a space where people live in but is a space where is related to their identities in terms of culture and tradition through all their memories, believes, rituals, songs, mythological and historical ancestors. In all over the world, a socialized land or territory is the part of identity for most of the people on their socio-cultural systems. While the progress practices based on capital accumulation degrades the identity of land to only one value which is ‘economic resources’, for the villagers the space has symbolic meanings which create individual and collective identities and set up intercultural relationships. That one person forcibly leaves own land means that one is deprived of the right to express own identity and the rights to cultural life.

On the other hand, Ronayne states that the region where GAP projects have been issued was a conflict zone and there couldn’t be done any developments in the area without considering Kurdish people and their existing voices (Ronayne, 2005: 21) On the contrary, as Ronayne also agrees, the project has always functioned as an assimilation policies of the state towards to Alevis and Kurdish people (Ronayne, 2005: 36). The projects also attempt to dissolve those people to different places and it therefore would serve as Turkification process constructed by the combination of Turkish nationalism and Sunni-

Islam by destroying those particular cultures and cutting the ties between each other of those people. In this sense, many local people have believed that this is an attack to their culture and their identity. For instance, regarding to the question of ‘why these infrastructural projects are planning to build by the governments’ in an interview having with the local who have lived in Munzur Valley on a website, Yildirim – the local lawyer – states that, “Because we are Kurds and we are Alevis. They want us to leave and forget who we are” (Benanav, M., Cat Cannon & Benjamin Raßbach, munzurvalley.com, 2015). From this point of view, many agencies have warned disruptive impacts of the projects on social cultural life of Kurdish-Alevi minorities in national and international arenas. To give an illustration, UK Defence Forum suggests that “the Turkish authorities have promoted GAP as a tool for altering the demography of the region by means of the displacement of many Kurdish people into large towns in order to exercise more effective control over them, over the terrain and over water resources” (Ronayne, 2005: 37).

Similarly, the state policies towards Kurdish and Alevi minorities have been revealed on scholar Yegen’s study which is concerning the citizenship rights from the early days of the state till 21th century. He shows that the law of officialdom was accepted in 1926, which include the article that state officials have to be ‘Turks’ instead of the citizens of the country (Yegen, 2008). As Yegen has illustrated the documents, the reports of the inspectors on that time have had determinations of that there are more than one million Kurds in south east of the country and the population of Turks is less than quarter in the region (Yegen, 2008; 61). Therefore, the suggestions of the report were catastrophic; to place many Turks to the region, to prevent being landholder for Kurds, to encourage marriage between Turks, Kurds and Alevis and to punish who speak a language other than Turkish in state offices, schools, markets, bazaars or streets (Yegen, 2008: 62).

On the other hand, it is important to emphasize that all these practices which have been done in the early years of the state when Ataturk was the leader has become a reason to create a doubt by Alevi people towards to Ataturk who has been seen a hero by Alevis which constructed secularism and saved the country from the Sunni seriate laws. As scholar Kose (2012) mentions the ambivalence attitudes towards Ataturk among Alevi people in which he is seen as a hero and important figure on the one hand by constructing secularism in the country and helped to dissolve Alevis’ continuous struggle from hegemonic Sunni Muslims and religious *Sharia* laws from Ottoman time as the scholar conceptualizes this perception by *religious positioning* (RP) of Alevis; on the other hand, however such policies mentioned above from his time also shows the other aspects which reveal the origins of the critical attitudes towards Ataturk and Kemalist regime by Alevis as what Kose grouped those perceptions as



*ideological positioning* (IP) of Alevis. To put it together, many Alevis I have seen put Ataturk's picture on the wall of their houses besides Ali picture throughout my fieldwork; and Kemalist regime and thoughts are seen as irreversible truths and realm which the country has encountered and that Alevis are and will be protector/supporter of modern thoughts as he has already pioneered.

Throughout my fieldwork however, I have also conducted interviews with a couple which are more critical to Kemalist regime and don't agree to '*general perception of seeing Ataturk as hero*' as they called:

"I believe that he (Ataturk) did much things to this country and I can't deny that. Maybe we could be still under seriate regime without him, which I wouldn't even breathe in. But there must be a difference between a person and a taboo. Even today, we can't discuss which the things were done and how, on that time, I mean, in the early days. Alevi-Bektashi lodges are closed on his time together with the many other religious places. Maybe it was needed to emerge secularism from Islam. But still, isn't it opposite for liberalization? I don't know." (Irfan)

She had intervened his boyfriend speech and added that;

"I would prefer to have Che Guevara's pictures on my wall instead. (Laughing). It looks much closer to us." (Selcan)

*Do you have any his (Che's) or any similar pictures on here, on your wall?*

"No, we don't. I was more politic and active person when I was younger. Now I don't see any reason to have it any of them. And I don't know, I am feeling anymore which looks that they are also created as a product to sell to you, you know. I love him, I love both of them. But for me, it is enough to know it on my heart." (Selcan)

It is important to mention that according to Zelyut's research, in the early days of the state when the construction of the republic was ongoing, Alevi leaders have warned their members to support Ataturk and who doesn't support him would be excluded from Alevi community (Zelyut, 1993; 56). By considering this report, it would be easier to discover why Ataturk's political party, CHP, which is the most powerful left wing political party has always been called together with Alevi people till last decades (Cetin, 2008; 59) and why Ataturk has been always seen by Alevis as much important as Bektashi and Ali since many people have the tattoos of his name and/or pictures, his photos on their wall etc. Although this positioning maybe was not questioning in the past, however, as the informant reported and other observations are noted from the fieldwork, it might be said that there are ambivalence expressions

towards him. I must mention that some informants have avoided to talk about him since he has been a sort of 'red line' within the country which you may not express your own feelings of oppositions quite loudly till the very recent time, if not now.

In parallel with the state's approach above, the settlement law in 1934 was aiming to Turkification on broader scale; to place who are not Turks to the Turkish regions and to place Turks to the places where majority is not Turks (Yegen, 2008). However forcibly settlement was not the only practice for assimilation. Using a language other than Turkish in education and publication is prohibited since early days of the state (Yegen, 2008). Even today, education in a language other than Turkish as mother tongue is forbidden for citizens of Turkey. Surnames, many names of villages and streets in the Kurdish region are changed and Turkified. Furthermore, prohibiting to give a name to children in Kurdish language was also followed by the same laws and most of them were valid until recent times in the country. In this way, it can be summarized that the main idea of all the process was "the construction of a centrally defined, hegemonic cultural identity as the only legitimate public identity, and the removal of all other identity claims, such as language, culture and belief from the public sphere" (Icduygu, 2004: 41).

On the other hand, how Brubaker (1995: 113) defines that "a national minority is not a fixed entity or a unitary group but rather in terms of that they have competitive positions or stances" with other citizens or groups can be seen very explicitly in this case. There are many segments in the region of Kurds in South East of Turkey. They are differentiated from each other in various ways; through religious views; cults or sects such as Shafi'i, Yazidi, Sunni, Alevi, Shia; through used languages; such as Zaza, Sorani, Gorani or Kurmanji and through tribes (called '*asiret*' meaning a big family which is very similar to patronage phenomenon on Mediterranean studies) which are kinds of groups with having a leader or a landlord, mainly based on economic aspects, and all of them have different political and religious views and, hence, relatively different life styles. However, especially after the war began between PKK and Turkish army at mid of 1970s, most of them started to declare being unifying of Kurds and Alevis in political dimension, not the sense of separatism but the sense of fighting for having rights of Kurdish identity and culture as much as other citizens have.

Although the movements of Kurds had existed in the early years of the state, most of them could not find enough voices in the legal perspective and suppressed by violence. Between 1920-1930 there were 18 rebellions which one of them, Said Rebellion, was extremely big, and it resulted with executions of 47 people and deportation of many Kurds to other areas of the country. After 1950's Kurdish intellectuals and students have started to adopt leftist-Marxist-communist ideas and they were supported

by many other liberal groups in the country. Since 1970's, the growth of social movements has dramatically raised against to the Constitution and Basic Law of the State in social-political environment in Turkey. Many groups such as Alevis, Kurds, feminists, LGBTs, Turkish Communist and Working Parties and many other leftist groups which were under pressure have claimed to change of the basic rights which are seen far from being an equal in practice for citizens. Atacan argued that “these movements claim that, in practice, only some citizens have full entitlement to individual rights” (Atacan, 2016; 4). In other words, indeed their claim was an attempt to change the approach of the state that, how George Orwell defines the animal community in his wonderful book, *Animal Farm*, “all animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others” (Orwell, 1945).

Before the military coup in 1980, the struggles between various leftist groups including Kurdish movements and ultra-nationalist right wing have transformed to street clashes. The Kurdish movement “strongly emphasized the dimensions of identity politics, defined in its most compact form as a demand for the public recognition of the Kurdish identity” (Koker, 2010: 59). Significantly, there were strong effects of PKK (Kurdish Workers Party) on Kurdish Movement in the growth of this ideology among Kurds. PKK has been found in Iraq and has started to be active after 1970's. Its main ideology was to represent all Kurdish people not only in Turkey but also Iraq, Syria and Iran. PKK was spreading its ideas and publishing many papers emphasizing on Kurdish nationalism around the region. Thereby, many people from Turkey and around have joined to PKK. In beginning of 1980's, it has started to arrange many assassinations and armed attacks in Kurdish region. The response of Turkish army was severe and hence the war has begun in the region that it did not finish even today. PKK has declared to establish a single unified independent state, ‘Kurdistan’, among the region including some part of Iraq, Turkey and Syria (Atacan, 2016: 7). After the military coup in 1980, the region has been announced as under the ‘extra-ordinary situation’ for the country and pressure dramatically increased for the people living there. Many villages are evacuated, more than 1 million of Kurds are displaced and daily lives of others have been under army surveillances (Smith, 2005, 467). PKK has been announced as ‘terrorist’ group from the state and it has become one of the main enemies of Turkish army. The war against PKK has been legitimated and supported by Turkish media. Thereby, it has been started to promote the raising of Turkish nationalism around the country. On the other side, in public sphere “it is certainly true that the PKK movement gained not insignificant societal support as even after a protracted armed struggle against the Turkish military and security forces for more than 25 years” (Koker, 2010: 60). However, all in all, the result of the war between PKK and Turkish army is a bloodcurdling in Turkey. According to the formal reports of the state – which is seen far less from the reality-, 7000 of people from Turkish army,

40 000 of people from PKK and 16 000 of people from civils were died in the war between PKK and Turkish army until today. Although economic developments have been promoted in the region, GAP, which is irrigation and rural development plan includes many job opportunities and social welfare since 1970's, many critiques say that it has caused destroying cultural heritages apart from many evacuations as mentioned above. There are many researches among the people living the area demonstrating destructive impacts on Kurdish and Alevi culture of the projects.



**Picture 4:** Sivas Massacre – The fire on Madimak Hotel in 1993 and the fundamentalist Sunni group of people

In this environment of oppression for the marginalized groups after 1980's, Alevi have experienced two significant violent attacks; Sivas Massacre (1993) and Gazi Riots (1995), which have huge impacts on the representation of their ideological and political identity transformations, and memories of these two violent attacks are still crucial on their identity representations. In Sivas, thirty-seven Alevi artists, intellectuals, writers and musicians were killed in 1993 on the hotel where it was set on fire by fundamentalists Sunni group while they were participating to the event of commemorate Alevi poet Pir Sultan Abdal who lived in 16<sup>th</sup> century. Likewise, Gazi Riots has occurred two years later in Istanbul, Gazi district where mostly Alevi people located in. Twenty-three people were killed by gun fire on different locations in 1995 by those attacks. Anthropologist Martin van Bruinessen illustrates an

annotation on his study, which can be seen as an example of the reason of Alevi identity based on anti-state activities today, that “the involvement of local police and civil authorities in the violence was also significant, as was the inability of the central government to neutralize them. [...] many of the police were acting out of aggressive hatred towards the Alevis” (Bruinessen, 1996; 9-10). These two crucial memories play a common ground for Alevi identity politics and Alevi institutionalization in the post-1980 context (Kose, 2012) and regardless to whether Alevism is seen by individuals as a sect of Islam or a completely different religion or as an ethno-politic representation of a group identity, those events are seen by the community members as a part of *Us* and *Our* people who were killed by fundamentalist Sunni Muslims and somehow encouraged (or not prevented) by the imperialist and assimilationist state policies and declarations.

Since there were no written and communally agreed definitions and set of rules of Alevism until the re-awakening of Alevism (or revival of Alevism), *the Alevi Manifesto* is “written collectively and signed by several intellectuals, academics, authors and journalists” and published in 1990 (Erman and Göker, 2000: 102). By the manifesto, Alevism has come out to the political agenda and it has aimed to illustrate ideological and political stances of Alevism in which the letter starts as: *This manifesto aims to make the problems of Alevism, a branch of Muslim hood living in Turkey, known and to inform the public with the demands of Alevis. Alevis see other beliefs as true, beautiful, and sacred. However, they expect a similar positive sense and approach towards their own faith and culture ... The recognition of the Alevi taught will be a source of peace and prosperity for Turkey* (Erman and Göker, 2000: 102).

By all this chapter, I have aimed to provide a summary of history which are seen by Alevi people as crucial and unforgettable memories for their daily lives from the early days of the state till today. It is important to mention here that the given historical background above has been only aimed to illustrate a picture of the past in which most Alevi people in Turkey have used to memorize and have used to articulate. By providing chosen certain policies and cases, I have solely intended for a reader to visualize the world which most Alevi people in the country have voiced parts of this world and thereby, it will be helpful to make such an empathy for their feelings related with the past in order to make an ethnography with a broader perspective. Otherwise, as any written texts related to history and past, this given background may have not enough rooms to provide all events in the state history since it is not my prior focus with this study even if there will be a claim that such text can be exist.

## CHAPTER 4

### 4. Empirical Results and the Analysis of the Findings on the Fieldwork

#### 4.1. Ethical Concern and Methodological View of the Fieldwork

Ethical concern is the one of the main issues on contemporary anthropological studies and I have been aware of its importance to be a participant observer of one's own life. Thus, it was one of the first issues that I was informing to the people about the reason why I was there and what my purposes are. On the other hand, I have informed all the people about anonymity and that all personal information which I have collected will be used as anonymous on my study, as it is already stated, all the names are randomly changed to use those data on this report.

For the methodological view, I have done my plan to make my research through getting information not only by participant observation and my field notes but also by having interviews with informants. I have planned to make semi-structured interviews which require the use of interview guide. As scholar Bernard suggests, "this is a written list of questions and topics that need to be covered in a particular order" (Bernard, 2002; 205). In order to do so, I had prepared my interview guideline before going to the field not only by reading many studies related with Alevis, identity constructions, methodology, anthropological theories but also researching local dynamics through media, history and other resources. Since we, as anthropologists, need to cover the discourses about the subject of the study we research in order to understand and to reflect the dynamics apart from observation notes and interviews, I have collected the discourses through media, social media, documentaries and movies and aimed to reflect both from top-down (politics of identity) and bottom-up (identity politics) discourses. By being aware of the concept of *anthropology at home*, I have been aiming to reflect all the voices which are seen on the field and thereby, I have been eager to be as much as sensitive for the *reflexivity* of the research.

#### 4.2. The Fieldwork

In one of the hottest days in summer time in July, 2018, I have arrived to my fieldwork location, Adiyaman city. Since the city was already my parent's hometown, I have had many close friends and relatives who were living there and it has become relatively easier process for me as an ethnographer to get in touch with the people in the beginning to make my fieldwork comparing with the other studies that I have done since I didn't know much about the location and geography as well as lack of local language

skills abroad. Therefore, by having friends of friends in Adiyaman, first days were passed very much productive and fruitful to find a *right* place and some people who I could keep in touch and who they were very helpful to make this study real.

Adiyaman is a city in southern Turkey, located in one of the most central places in Mesopotamia, whose history goes back thousands of years with the memories of being often a capital and important regional center of Hittites, Assyrians, Persians, Romans, Kingdom of Commagene, Ottomans, Turkish and many others between all. While there might easily be found many historical heritages around the region, today the city is a shared place to live for Alevis, Kurds, Turks and Zazas together with other communities. The population of the city is consisting of 510 000 inhabitants in total and approx. two thousands of the people live in the villages while the rest lives in the central part of the city. As my research subjects, Alevis are approx. %15 of the population as similar as to the assumption of the general demography of the country and the most of them are living nearby mostly in particular towns in the city. Apart from the city, I have visited twice an Alevi village, Yaylakonak, near to the city in order to collect more comprehensive data on the field.



**Picture 5: The distribution of Alevis in Turkey (Adiyaman is in the south-east part of the country)**

During the fieldwork, I have conducted several semi-structured interviews with different informants which have taken approx. an hour for each one. I have aimed to have interviews with the informants from various occupations and different socio-economical statuses. As a result, while villagers were farmers, the people's occupations in the city have had consisting of followings: a doctor, a teacher, an officer, a self-employment, a non-worker and students.

Since Alevis are consisting of Kurds and Turks as it is mentioned in the text, both languages of Turkish and Kurdish or Kurmanji were common among Alevis in the town where my fieldwork has been done. On the other hand, the people living in the city commonly speak both languages on their daily lives and switch the language easily while the villagers who I have interacted mostly speak only Kurdish due to the fact that the majority of the village was Kurds. I have seen many Kurdish people living in the city speak Turkish with their children and parents while they identify themselves as Kurds. Although there might be found few examples of the reverse situation, mostly it wouldn't be wrong to say that most Turks in the city don't know the Kurdish language and thus can't speak the language. However, as it is clearer with the short summary for the linguistic aspects, both two languages are commonly used by Alevi people in the city.

Perhaps it will not be wrong to argue that one of the most common and crucial things that I have encountered on the fieldwork was endogamy practices and its extensiveness. It is sure thing that it was much expected phenomenon before making the ethnography by having preparation process for the life styles of the subjects of my study. However, I was not able to encounter a person with a mixed marriage during my interactions among more than twenty informants. As we'll examine the phenomenon on Alevi rituals chapter below with its relations to the existing social inclusion and exclusion processes, I will state that endogamy practices are commonly on the agenda for Alevi community in Adiyaman. When I have asked these practices to the informants, most of them have indicated that this is the way of *Our* choices which are partly related with the unrecognition of *our* beliefs by Sunni-Muslim majority on the one hand, and it is partly related with *making the life easier for us* as well as *having more comfortable feelings by being with the one within Us*.

*“My parents are Alevis, I am Alevi, my ancestors were Alevi, why my wife must be different? I am very much happy to be with my wife. I am already having troubles with some Sunnis in work places, in a bazaar or in a shop, you know. Why don't I go to mosques on Friday or why don't I have a fastening in Ramadan? This sort of stuff, you understand. I don't want to have the same problems when I come home”* (Mahir)

*“When you decide to marry, you want to be with one he can already understand you. I wouldn't like if my husband asks questions or making a pressure to my parent's way of life even if he accepts me. I can't even imagine if he doesn't accept me as I am. And also, it is our tradition, I mean marrying with someone who is an Alevi. I know it is not very much problem today and we are seeing many mixed*



*marriages around. They can have also good relationships. We don't have a problem with anyone. But still, sometimes somethings can occur. Even for small things.*'' (Selcan).

By examining the people's speeches in order to understand their worldviews regarding to the phenomenon, it might be claimed that endogamy has become a result of not only tradition but also rational choice of the agents, as it is agreed in the contemporary anthropology that the individuals are not only passive subjects of a culture or a tradition but also active agents on their decisions.

*''I don't know, this is the way how it is supposed to be. Alevi marry with Alevi. We have always been only with one partner. Sunnis can wish that they will have more than 1 wife, and they had this before the republic, hasn't it? Even if they can change now, I am sure there will be many people will want it. Did you know any Alevi man with such a willing? It is not acceptable. We don't accept him as Alevi. It is wrong for us''*

Apart from having traditionally endogamy, scholar Unlusoy indicates that the community has historically practiced monogamy as well. While he claims that breaking monogamy is also a reason to be called as a sinner (*duskunluk*) as we'll see this social institution below, he also indicates that there has been reported to be immolated of some sinners who didn't follow these orders in the past. (Unlusoy, 2009, 62).

On the other hand, one of the most significant issues related with marriage practices lays on the realm of ethnic constructions of the borders which define the person as one of *Us* or *They* in terms of blood relations. As all informants have agreed and as scholarly have deeply investigated, indeed the reality of being an Alevi can only be decided and participated by the birth. It is a matter of kinship through blood relations and thus, only a person whose one of his parents is Alevi might be an Alevi.

*''You can't be an Alevi if you didn't born as an Alevi''* (Ozan)

*''A man can be an Alevi only if his parents are Alevi. If not, he can't be an Alevi''* (Ali)

Scholar Cetin (2008; 54) examines the notes of the famous historian Golpinarli regarding to Alevi traditions and it is noted that *''in Alevi tradition, one whose father or mother isn't an Alevi cannot enter the Alevi community. By considering this perspective, exchange of woman from a non-Alevi groups is forbidden in the tradition''* (Gölpınarlı, 1967; 277-278, translated by myself). Similarly, Suvari notes that

“*there can't be an Alevi or Yezidi later. Only, those born from Alevi and Yezidi parents are considered as representatives of those believes. It means that both believes have closed their doors to the outside world. Therefore, the preferred type of marriage is endogamy*” (Suvvari, 2010; 185, translated by myself).

Through these data on ethnographer's hand, it might be claimed that kinship studies can also be effective to analyze such community and their social structures. Although I don't intend to focus to traditional kinship studies which are overemphasizing kinship linages in order to explain whole social organizations, I must mention that there might be found fruitful examples for such concept of studies over Alevi communities. As it is mentioned above, the belongingness to the community as defined with kinship lines over blood relationships. Besides, although the division of labor within the community organized by several social institutions rather than mere kinship principles, it will also be true that kinship has functions as tracking ancestral lineages to be a political leader in the community, and therefore Dede enjoy the political power over the community by the belief that their ancestors are going back until Bektashi or Ali. Hence, their sons have become potential dedes of the future. On the other hand, each dede or *pir* (patriarch) represents the control over the *ocak* which is a territorial smaller unit; and each person called as *talip* (aspirant, desirous) has to belong to a particular *ocak* and its dedes in Alevi tradition. Although each *ocak* has independency on their internal organization, each dede and his controlling unit *ocak* are also a part of wider social unit, and thus each dede has also belong to another dede who has more political power over them. If in a case of such conflict arises between dede and his *talip* in their *ocak* and if the *talip* doesn't strictly accept his dede's decision – for example, such a decision related with the institution of sinner (*duskunluk*) which will cause the complete exclusion from the community not only for the person himself but also for his entire family –, first the conflict is discussed communally with the other members of the same *ocak* in order to make a decision, and if the conflict still exists, then dede asks to his dede in the wider unit to get his opinion and to solve the issue. By focusing only this organization scheme, one may easily argue that such community might be an example of what traditional kinship anthropology studied as the conical clan, “which is hierarchically ordered with a centralized leadership. There is one recognized leader, usually the oldest man of the lineage, at each level, and the clan as a whole has a chief at a higher level” (Eriksen, 1995 104). Though a chief never exist on subject community as far as it is not informed or observed at all. However, I would like to mention that social organizations of the community are much more complex (which are examined on the next chapter) than the given definition of a clan though the given definition as a clan might or not also be claimed in the same way when it is more focused its internal and external relations.

On the other hand, as the contemporary ethnicity studies shows, a system of social classification brings ethnic stereotypings to the table and they mostly include *morally condemning* for other groups while these stereotyping may function to sustain and to reinforce “group cohesion, boundaries and one’s self-perception” (Eriksen; 1995, 264). As Irat has reported, these stereotypings can clearly be revealed on the identification of Sunnis by Alevi people as *gerici* (reactionary), *yezit* (devil), *yabancı* (outsider), and *yerli* (nonnomadic) (irat; 2006, 119). Similarly, Sunnis have also used a phrase as an accusation towards Alevis, which is commonly used until recently, *mum sondu* (candle has blown out). This accusation refers to using a candle during the cem rituals by Alevis and the intended given meaning by the phrase is to imply that Alevis blow out the candles after their ceremony which is held by woman and man and they have sexual relationships together in darkness. According to the myth, the origin of this unfortunate accusation towards to Alevis can be tracked to the suppressed times with violent in Ottoman times or even earlier which they have experienced, and they had to close their lights if they notice any fundamentalist groups will come and they will make a trouble. While those people had to perform their religious ceremonies secretly because of the pressure of Sunnis, using this phrase to imply their actions in a completely opposite way by the same hegemonic group had been felt dramatically by Alevi individuals. Consequently, as it might be seen clearer, accusations from both parties of the groups towards to the other exist and it functions as a labelling of the other. In this way, it provides to see *Ourselves* as good and *Them* as bad; and as it is mentioned, it will not be wrong to say that these perceptions are active and commonly used from the both sides. As Eriksen notes, ethnic stereotyping functions to strengthen our collective identity (Eriksen, 1995; 263).

On the other hand, it is also noted on the fieldwork that many people have tended to show their discomfort regarding to the existing political environments in the country as well as in their city. It is not only related with rising of political Islam which makes their voices to decrease, but also it is noted complaints regarding to injustice which they feel. The former has created very much similar feelings and unconformity also for many Sunni-Turkish majority and it might be easily revealed trough the participant observation since the existing political environment in the country has sharply caused to ingenerate the two distinctive blocks in the country. I was used to heard these uncomfortable feelings as well as injustice form many people from various social groups in the last decade. The main claim on this issue was that people do not feel having a fair on any decisions of the state. However, it was clearly specified that the injustice and deprivation which they feel stem from being an Alevi and Kurd in the Turkish state.

On the next chapter, I will examine the common traditional social institutions of Alevism called as Alevi rituals together with the reports from interviews with participants and I will analyze each

institution and their functions in order to be able to visualize the realms and the worldviews of the community and its members of the research in a broader perspective.

### **4.3 Traditional Alevi Rituals**

#### **4.3.1 The Institution of Companion (*Musahiplik*).**

One of the most important social institutional rituals within Alevi community has been the institution of companion (*musahiplik*). This social ritual refers to have a male companion for each male member of the community and they are obliged to support each other and their families for all their life time. The phenomenon is called as ‘afterlife brotherhood’, ‘fellow brotherhood’, companion etc. (ahiret kardesligi, yol kardesligi) and it has been crucial to function as a social solidarity between the community (Yaman, 2012: 257). According to the practice, two man choose each other and decide that they will be companions from the beginning after their lives. Since the families of each man can’t exchange woman regarding to the applied practice (and it is informed that the rule must be practiced even for seven generations of companions in some other localities), calling this practice as after life doesn’t sound absurd at all. Besides, each man has to get consent of their family members since families will merge together irreversibly and breaking the companionship will cause to the institution of sinner which is exclusion from the community. In this perspective, the decision must be considered by similar positions of the candidates on various aspects such as age, social and economical statuses as well as intellectual levels. (Turkekul, 2016, 165) and when decision made, talips has to come into Dede’s presence to receive acceptance and to make a Cem ritual for companionship. The practice of ritual is reported with different nuances by scholars in which some assert that the men and their wives as 4 persons wear 1 big dress as an originated with a phrase in Alevism *dort can bir bas* ( 4 can [Alevi person] but 1 head ), while some others claim that the ritual is done by covering 4 person with a white shroud as similar as to the death dress (Dedekarginoglu, 2016, 110; Günşen, 2005; 332; alevikulturdernekleri.com/musahiplik-nedir/, n.d). However, the ritual is clear to visualize bounding of two families to each other for life time regardless to the small differences on various localities.

The ritual has been the one of the most significant social practice on Alevi tradition since a man who does not have such companion can’t participate Cem rituals and he will not be properly called as *talip*, a member of the community (Subaşı, 2010, 95; Yılmaz, 2011, 86; Turkekul, 2016, 165; Kehl-Bodrogi, 1997, 62).

As the Dede in Seyit Hasan Village describes on scholar Turkekul's study how the companions have to support each other: *One can't sleep by having dinner while the other has not. One can't consider himself out of the other's own trouble, he must consider it as his owns. Their children can't marry between each other since they are considered as brothers-sisters. If one has a marriage in such cases, two parties are expelled from the community* (Turkekul, 2016; 165, translated by myself).

As I have questioned this phenomenon to my participants in Adiyaman, all of them have stated that they have a such certain companion but it is not practically considered today as the tradition is supposed to be which is described above by the Dede.

“Yes, I have a companion. We were living close before and were together. But now, they moved to Ankara, his daughter has started to study in a university and they followed her. So, now, we just have a talk time by time on phone, we are good but not close much.” (Mahir)

“We are together with Eren since our childhood. Sometimes we go to their house for a dinner, or we invite them. I know everything about him. Our wives also meet sometimes alone. He is like my brother” (Muharrem).

As scholarly agreed, such rituals traditionally function not only to increase social solidarity but also it functions to tie different groups to each other which don't have kinship relationships within community (Subaşı, 2010: 95) by defining certain rules such as unmarrying between the companion's families while defining them as closer than brotherhood. It creates a new room for the improvement of *social interactions* within the community. Hence, although the ritual and its meanings are not as effective as in traditional rural Alevi context; such traditional practices are still exist today, and it is defined socially, not culturally, which is a strategy according to Barth's emphasizes on the most important characteristics of constructing of ethnic borders in which are maintained firstly by very distinct socially separated lines and then it may become cultural (Barth, 1969). Therefore, it functions as a sort of *system of labor* as well as a glue on social solidarity not only between individuals and community but also between different groups.

On the other hand, as we can see from the participant's comments and as we must also expect - in contemporary anthropology, especially after Barth's emphasizes on - individuals are not only *as subjects* who are considered as passive performers of social interactions defined by the social structure but also *individuals as agents* who make decisions and have their own rational choices, and thus some choose not to be closer much while some other as opposite.

### 4.3.2 The Institution of ‘Sinner’ (*Düşkünlük*)

*Duskunluk* is a phenomenon in traditional Alevi life style to call the punishment of social isolation for the sinner participant. In traditional Alevism, a person who act such performances is expelled from the community and such person can neither participate any communal events nor he is greeted or saluted by the other community members. Such performances for this punishment can be listed as followed: murdering, exogamy, divorcing without any ‘exceptional’ reasons, having a sexual intercourse without marriage (Ozbilgin, 2011, 412). As it is clearly seen on listed punishments and as it is very much important on such groupology studies, Alevis have traditionally used to have endogamy on their marriage choices and it has been one of the most important key points on sustaining their own communal togetherness as a minority within various hegemonic communities such as Seljuks, Ottomans, Sunni-Muslims etc. through all their history.

There have been two types of *duskunluk* which are defined according to traditional moral codes: a temporary *duskunluk* and eternal *duskunluk*. If a person has been punished as a temporary punishment, he can still be within the community with certain isolations such as non-participating of Cem rituals and the timeline is decided by the certain group of people pioneering by Dedes. On the other hand, if the person has been punished with eternal *duskunluk*, he can’t survive within the community since there will be no any relationship socially as well as economically by the other community members with him. This punishment will be also applied for his family members who live in the same place and who share economical means with him (Ozbilgin, 2011, 412). Ozbilgin claims that if his children are living in another house by marriage or any other reasons and if they are not economically depended on him, the punishment will not be applied to them. The same application has also been valid for his parents and their dependency situations as well. Besides, as it is very much related with the other social institution, if a person has a punishment of being a sinner (*duskunluk*) and if he has already have a companion whose Cem is already made by Dedes, his companion will equally be punished and hence, his companion will also be isolated from the community regardless to his companion’s village or location (Ozbilgin, 2011; 412).

Many scholars who study in Alevi traditional rituals agree that such structural social practices have played crucial roles to maintain the social order and traditional communal continuity (Yılmaz, 2011; Subası, 2010, Turkekul; 2016) within oppressed environments which they have used to encounter and it has directed the community to be self-enclosed in order to avoid assimilation by having mixed marriages with Sunni-Muslims as wells any ‘others’.

Since urbanization and modernization have taken their places on the agenda in the last century and they have transformed rural-traditional life styles together with their own moral codes, this phenomenon has neither been practiced nor been considered by most of the community members today. As several participants have mentioned that the practice only shows the tradition which had lasted on the past:

“I never heard that one became a sinner. How can it be practiced today anyway? Even if they want to expel a person from the group. No one is living like before. I mean in small villages. Maybe it could work in the village, but not in cities. Also, everyone uses phone and internet, right? Just think, I can tell you that I am not greeting him but then I can do all my business with him and you wouldn't even heard it at all. Also, why I must do not talking with you only because you married with a woman you love. Who cares if she is Sunni or whatever! Or why it must be someone's business except you?” (Mahir)

“Yes, we have told that there has been such a thing from my father, or grandpa. But we have a civil law and that's it. It must be like this. My wife is Alevi, we were living in neighborhoods. But if she could be not an Alevi, it would be okay, I don't know. I think like this. We are good. My daughter's boyfriend is not an Alevi now, what am I supposed to do? You tell me...I have seen many people and pressure before, I think the person and his family are important. You know. If they are such people, and if they don't respect my way of living, my choices, there is a problem. I may say that 'no' if it is like that you know. If my daughter can't live with her beliefs with that my family, for sure I don't want it. Actually, people are, because of this, wishing to be with the person with the same religion. And you see that, some people say that they are not Muslim for us. But we are. But because of only those people, I will not have such biases for my daughter.” (Ozan)

Through symbols, myths, rituals and their practices, societies don't have only meaning making process but also having social order in terms of social inclusion and exclusions. As Mary Douglas has claimed in her book, *Purity and Danger* (1966), to show the phenomenon of social orders and social inclusion and exclusion processes particularly focusing to the people's understandings of 'purity' and 'pollution'.

I draw a comparison between this punishment of having an exogamy of a person in the group as a strictly defined social exclusion process and the well-known metaphor of Mary Douglas, *shoes on the table*. Having a marriage with a one who is out of *Our* community has become the one of the biggest parts of *Our* “omnibus compendium which includes all the rejected elements of ordered system” (Douglas, 1966; 44) and therefore, the punishment of this action of 'polluting' the community by a

member had been traditionally practiced by the most terrifying penalty for a social creature in any community (especially if it is already a self-enclosed one) in order to sustain *Our* 'purity', which the latter, by another words *culture as tradition*, must be read together with historically ongoing assimilation processes upon them.

“Shoes are not dirty in themselves” but it is a “matter out of place” (Douglas, 1966). It is certainly not in terms hygienic but in terms of social order which implies the moral attitudes upon the subjects of topic. By examining Douglas’ claim on purity and pollution referring to moral attitudes on social order, Arbuckle writes that “There is a moral quality to reality that renders the issue of classification, and misclassification as a matter of right and wrong” (Arbuckle, 2017; 44).

All in all, social order through inclusion and exclusion process might be visible not particularly only on exogamy which is more focused on this study but the existence of whole rituals of social institution of sinner (*duskunluk*) in a broader perspective. Besides, I would like to also emphasize the existence of its temporary and permanent statues which might potentially be used as a tool to organize social interactions within the community and to border the moral codes of the community by specifying what is right and what is wrong, what it can be fixed by time and what it can not. By having a temporary statute of social exclusion, a member may have an opportunity to stand up before the judge and thus may have a re-inclusion to all social life.

#### **4.3.3 Cem Rituals**

Cem rituals in Alevism refer to certain religious practices and performances held on Cem evis. In the past, the rituals have been performed on one’s houses, however, today it is mostly used to be in Cem Evis as various sources and the participants have agreed. Dede is the most important person for a such group of people and he manages the performance apart from his roles to play the traditional Anatolian musical instrument (*baglama*) and sings chosen traditional Alevi songs and poems on the events. There are some other people who are chosen on certain roles to ensure the ritual is ongoing as it is supposed to be during the events. Although today, these roles are not effective much, those roles have been crucial in order not only to have the proper performances but also to ensure the group is in safe. There is a role of a chosen person who look out the door, not allowing to enter and to leave from the place during the event and he has used to inform the group to stop the performance and to hide themselves if necessary within a such oppressed atmosphere which had been experienced by such violent attacks of fundamentalist Sunni Muslims.



There are various categories of Cem rituals which aim and function to solve different social issues in the community: *Gorgu Cemi* is considered one of the most important ones which is held on a winter time and all the community members who are allowed to participate must participate to the event since its function is to re-consider of one's own last year actions and to clean himself/herself spiritually from her mistakes and to be recognized for the next year as a member of the community. Dedes are having a meeting with people and discussing their own past years before the event and decisions are shared within the community. Another cem ritual is the cem of institution of companion (*musahiplik cemi*) which is to connect 2 men and their families together eternally and to declare these companions to all members of community. The third one is *Abdal Musa Cemi* which is the cem ritual commonly held once a week on Thursdays. However, if any events on the community occurs which may need to gather the people to inform and to discuss such issues such as making a peace between two members or teaching traditional knowledge to young members, this cem ritual may have been performed on a random date (Özdemir; n.d; 2). Historically, only Alevi people are allowed to participate to cem rituals except such decision of allowance for an individual has been made by Dedes ([munzurvalley.com](http://munzurvalley.com), n.d). These situations of non-allowance of 'other' participants to such communal events have been used for a reason of accusations by hegemonic Sunni-Muslims which it is mentioned more on the previous chapter. However, it will be update to say that today there are some cem rituals which are open to any participants.

When we focus to the event itself, it must be mentioned that woman and men participate to these religious events together and there are no strict rules on their clothing to enter and to act in the place. Woman may be a headscarfed or a bareheaded as they wish. Participants have a sit on rug and cushions by circle shape around Dede. The middle of the room will be empty which will be used by the performers during *semah* (a ritual dance performed by woman and man together with the songs). The dance performance, *semah*, takes approx. half an hour and it can be seen as a group of performers turn around a circle of the group as well as around herself by the rhythm of the music with certain figures.

On the other hand, as it is stated above, it is also important to mention the symbolic meanings of such ritualistic performance, *semah*. The ritual refers to religious dances in Alevism and most of the sources specify that it is only performed during Cem rituals and it refers to a state of enthusiasm of the performers by aiming to lose material connections to physical world (Turkecul, 2016; 174, [alevitentum.de](http://alevitentum.de), n.d). It is reported that some of the figures during the performances represents general insights of Alevi thoughts related with the triadic notion of 'God, Nature and Human' and it is illustrated as turning of earth in universe, flying like a bird, receiving the wisdom from the God and realizing himself as a reflection of the God ([aabf-inanc-kurumu.com](http://aabf-inanc-kurumu.com), [aregem.kulturturizm.gov.tr](http://aregem.kulturturizm.gov.tr), n.d). According to

Yaman, it is a performance of a combination which is historically maintained of the traditions of middle east Turkmen tribes as well as Islamic figures (Yaman 2012: 294).

According to Dede Ozturk recorded by Turkekul, ritualistic dance *semah* is explained as following: “Anyone who wants to perform it can turn *semah*; *Semah* is a state of love. *Semah* is spirit; there is no differences between woman and man. There is only one message to be given in *semah*. This message is to receive from the God and to distribute it to the public. In other words, all kinds of goods and knowledge acquired by human are given by the God, and yet you have to share it with the public” (Turkekul, 2016; 174, translated by myself).

When one watches this holistic performance as an outsider by willingly attempting to make an empathy to be able to see the vision which the performers and all the event may have intended to have; or to put in another way, when one is making an ethnography on such performances by having the focuses in his mind to reveal the constructions of differences and similarities between the community which he studies and various other communities, and their meaning making systems through such rituals, this ritualistic performance might be interpreted to track the path of the origin of Alevi tradition as it is described in the beginning whose the origin has been indicated not only by scholars but also by its members as *a harmony* (if it is a right word to call the phenomenon as such) of various traditions including Shamanism and Islamic mysticism, etc. on the one hand; the performance provides rich symbolism which are used during the performance such as the body movements and the songs - through their expressions and explanations by the members in order to realize *Our* meaning making systems – in which the latter helps to remember that the symbols are not given or ascribed but are attributed to meanings (Turner; 1968) by agents - by explaining 'our own' reality in which *We* are involved, on the other.

If we would like to consider Turner’s definition of ritual in order to examine the shared values of *Our* realms through such practiced performances and its embedded meanings; ritual is "a stereotyped sequence of activities involving gestures, words, and objects, performed in a sequestered place, and designed to influence preternatural entities or forces on behalf of the actors' goals and interest” (Turner 1977; 183). In another words, scholar Deflem examines the Turner’s view of ritual on his essay and he states that “rituals are storehouses of meaningful symbols by which information is revealed and regarded as authoritative, as dealing with the crucial values of the community (Turner 1968; 2)” (Deflem, 1991, n.p). As it is related with my particular focus on Turner’s view on ritual, I would like to borrow his definition of *the notion of fields* as he distinguishes this topic as *social and cultural fields* in which rituals

takes place and thereby, I would like to emphasize the cultural field of the notion in this subject. “In the cultural field, ritual symbols are regarded as clusters of abstract meanings. The dominant symbols are studied in each ritual performance and in each of its phases. The cultural field encompasses the ritual within the totality of Ndembu rituals and within the cultural realm of Ndembu religious beliefs (Turner, 1968a:14-15)” (Deflem, 1991, n.p). To summarize whole given ideas and its relations with the cem ritual as explained above, I argue that the performance of cem ritual and all its embedded symbols might be fruitful to have an interpretation of discovering the representations of traditional Alevi realms and communally shared values. If it is remembered all discussed realms and representation of Alevism among these papers, traditional Alevi thoughts are based on being heterodox groups within Sunni-Muslim majorities and heedless to any other powerful claimed authorities – such as nation-states, empires or religious authorities - although one may differ than the rest of others within those groups. Through the re-awakening of Alevism, it is also represented as a sharp distinct ideological opposition towards imperialist powers and their formal or informal representatives and they are mostly even illustrated by Marxist-communist ideologies of egalitarianism. As one of the participants has reported that the meaning of the body movements through the ritual dance *semah*, the position of hands represents the meaning of receiving from the God to give them to public needs in which one hand stand towards to up while the other looks down or located on heart. Similar but slightly different meanings are also found on some other sources<sup>1</sup>. If this representation is read together with the explanation of Dede Ozturk which was that “there is only one message to be given in *semah*. This message is to receive from the God and to distribute it to the public. In other words, all kinds of goods and knowledge acquired by human are given by the God, and yet you have to share it with the public”, it might be a room to agree Turner’s definition of ritual on cultural field which is that the rituals are *the clusters of abstract meanings* which help to reveal *Our* realms and *Our* ‘worldviews’ to read as a text by the ethnographer. By paraphrasing the word *worldviews* here, I intend to use it with the same meaning as Verdery explains that it must be understood not as ‘ideas’ in a cognitive realm alone which especially non-anthropologists are used to limit this view, “rather they are inseparable from action in the world, they are beliefs and ideas materialized in action. [...] People’s sense of a meaningful universe in which they also act in” (Verdery, 1997; 34). I believe that this distinction of the meanings of *Our* realms, *Our* worldviews is necessary to imagine any subject group which we are studying.

It is very much important to emphasize that Cem evis are not only used to perform such religious events, and it has historically functioned as a place to gather community members; to discuss and to solve existing problems of the community; to have a juridical judgments and decisions for the members

(remembering the institution of sinner) and to teach and to share tradition and common knowledge to each member (Özdemir, 2011, 264; Turkekul, 2016, 3). Today, many Cem evis serve to have various courses such as teaching to play musical instrument *baglama* or to learn how to perform *semah* dance and, as scholar Turkekul indicates, these courses are the commonly interested by many young members (Turkekul, 2016, 3). As it is related with the focus of this study, it might be concluded that these choices may have been shown the importance of music on Alevi daily lives and on the way of expressions of their cultural identity which we have focused on a previous chapter.

#### **4.4 Used Symbols – Photos, Pictures, Sculptures**

It is commonly said that most of Alevis have various pictures and photos related with their beliefs on their homes and it can be usually seen some pictures of Ali, Bektashi, Ali's sword *Zulfikar* on the walls. As participants have reported, these mentioned pictures and drawings are either exist on their own houses or they have used to see it on their parent's houses. The most significant issue on having these religious symbols is that it has become one of the most visible differences between Alevis and Sunni Muslim since orthodox Islam has clearly drawn a border to not having such religious symbolism which refers to pictures of Muhammed. Therefore, different practices of life styles can be seen also on these details as well.

## CONCLUSION

Traditional Alevi rituals are examined through the research, and the importance of traditional rituals on social organization is emphasized. Social institution of sinner function for social inclusion and exclusion processes and in this way, moral codes of the community is sustained over generations, and thus cultural distinctiveness and ethnic separation from the outside world are kept alive and emphasized through rituals and existing social institutions. In this way, Cem rituals, the institution of dede, institution of companion and institution of sinner, as the emphasized Alevi rituals in this study, have traditionally functioned of enhancing social solidarity and fostering a sense of unity (*birlik*) and love (*muhabbet*) among community members (Koçan and Öncü 2004: 475). Apart from above, rituals help to link individuals with society by such practices which are performed and/or experienced. Besides, another important insight of rituals is that it connects past, present and future (Kertzer, 1988) and thus the tradition and all myths and stories *We* had heard becomes alive in a world which *We* are in.

Endogamy as an extension of traditional Alevi rituals is one the most significant dynamic to maintain and sustain the collectivity and belonging to such community. Traditional concept of '*duskunluk*' is relatively effective even today to keep endogamy and transmitting the moral codes, narratives and rituals to new generations in order to sustain being *Us* and its borders although Alevi traditional life style is transformed by the mass migration to the capital cities by the effects of urbanization and globalization on the one hand, by the homogenization policies of the state towards Kurdish minority and non-Sunni Muslim minorities (such as Alevis) on the other.

On the other hand, as it is emphasized on previous chapters, the condition of required kinship relationships in order to be a member of the community - as that it is the only accepted way to be Alevis is to be born with it – is not only understood for a reason of having an endogamy but also illustrated that the construction of cultural differences is also maintained through blood relations. In this way, it can be summarized that the concept of cultural differences is seen as an ethnic affiliation gained by birth.

Besides, according to the myth, the ancestors of dedes are believed to have blood relations with Bektashi or Ali and thus the social institution of dede (*dedelik*) has been gained from father to son. While blood relations are important to be a dede, entire social organization of the community is organized by the complicated social institutions, rather than mere lineage relations as examined through this study. Each member of the community as *talip* is belong to an *ocak*, a smaller territorial unit, as well as to a particular dede on the same *ocak* institution. The other insight of the study is that social institution of

companion connects the members to each other without kinship and it is believed as more important than brother-sister gained by blood which the ritual helps to tie between disparate individuals to an eternal connection.

Music has become one of most of powerful used tools among Alevi community through shared values and meaningful worlds of communal identity and the *imagined community* as unity. By its social functions, music plays a significant role to maintain and sustain group identities. Through music, separate individuals may gather together and have a set of actions which bond them to each other. On the meantime, music might be experienced as a space which allows us to exchange our world views to other and to perceive theirs. In this way, by using the music collectively which Alevi community used to do through their traditional rituals, the group has strengthened the ties between each other by sharing the moral codes, life styles and world views which are embedded on the music itself not only in terms of the language which is often used as *We* but also myths, stories and symbolism by referencing to historical events, stories and figures. Though it is sure thing that ethnomusicological studies are based on interpretations of ethnographer over the collected data as Rice explicitly emphasizes, it will also be agreed that what an individual will receive through music will only be a matter of his own perception in *his* own meaningful world and it might be more an interest to research for humanitarian or psychological studies. As the focus of anthropology, however, has always been people as social and their culture rather than a person or individual choices, *music as communication* has helped us to reveal shared values among Alevi. As it is underlined through the analysis, music helps to exchange process of maintaining *We*-feeling within the group and the constructed sociocultural differences are strengthen with the using music as an active and productive tool.

The state policies over Alevi and Kurdish minorities whose relations are corelated and inseparable from the formal perspective have been examined. In this respect, the cases on the state history which Alevi people concern have been highlighted. Consequently, as a reactional response to top-down assimilation policies of the state as *identity politics*, the community has procreated the process of re-awakening of Alevism from bottom-up as *politics of identity* which has functioned to make their voices to be heard on public dimension, thereby political interests of the community has been exchanged and shared within the community, thus *imagined community* has been built since 1980's. In this way, the emphasizes on cultural differences and ethnic stereotyping of the group have been built as an opposition towards to the state policies. Although it hasn't been such report on the fieldwork regarding to having ideological positioning of Marxist-leftist ideas of the informants which the re-awakening of Alevism has been often used to represent, political opposition to the existing right-wing and Sunni government is

loudly emphasized and it has been also commonly mentioned to afraid of raising of Sunni Islam around the middle east and also in the country. Besides, many participants have also reported that they can't be considered independent from secularist approaches and they support to sustain secular regime which there is a need more than anytime on current days on emic perspective.

By the result of the analysis, the collectivity can be described under a category of how Don Handelman suggested a classification of degrees for ethnic incorporation in order to conceptualize the political power and interests of ethnic groups (Eriksen; 1995, 268). These degrees are as followings; *ethnic category* which implies to identical category maintaining over generations by kinship relations, endogamy and myth making; *ethnic network* is defined as “an interpersonal system of interaction accompanied by a flow of value, which follows ethnic lines” (Eriksen; 1995; 268). In this level, the relationships go beyond kinships and social interrelationships are emphasized (Eriksen; 1995; 268). The third one is *ethnic association* which the members are organized by common purpose of the collectivity; and the last one is *ethnic community* which the emphasize of this degree of collectivity lay on territorial base apart from all above (Eriksen; 1995; 268). In this sense of classifications, Alevism as a communality with a socially maintained culturally distinctive features might be called under the degree of *ethnic network* since the social relationships are complicatedly organized and members are connected with cross-cutting ties with the existing social institutions. Besides, there is no such orientation among the community members in Adiyaman - through the context of this research- to make an interpretation of Alevism as an *ethnic association* with a goal-oriented by the given definition to classify it as a broader degree of ethnicity.

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## APPENDICES

Picture:1 <http://www.mahzuniserif.com/sayfa/basindan0.htm>

Picture 2: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Haji\\_Bektash\\_Veli](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Haji_Bektash_Veli)

Picture 3: <http://gaziantepdenge.com/haber/araban-baspinar-cemevi-torenle-acildi--haberi-6686.html>

Picture 4: <http://m.krdnews.net/news/turkiye/hdk-madimak-hala-yangin-yeri>

Picture 5: <http://intizar.web.tr/guncel/haber/290/turkiye-de-alevi-ve-caferi-nufusu#.XOtCj4gzblU>

Interview with poet Mahzuni: aydinlik newspaper. <https://www.aydinlik.com.tr/arsiv/amerika-katil-katil>

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### Dip Notes:

1 - Amadou: It is also known as the "tinder fungus" and is useful for starting slow-burning fires:

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amadou>

2 - *Keşkül* is known as the dervish bowl. It was one of the most important items of the dervishes in the old period. These bowls have been used for jobs such as drinking soup, water - Bektashi dervishes also used to drink for wine – begging and asking for charity by dervishes:

<https://edebiyatvesanatakademisi.com/edebiyat-terimleri-mazmunlar/keskul-keskul-i-fukara/55182>