

PRIMARY ALEVI INSTITUTIONS
AND
ALEVI-SUNNI ENCOUNTERS
UNDER THE URBAN CONDITIONS

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This study examines the experiences, opinions and feelings of the members of the Alevi community who are currently living in the urban centers concerning the two dramatic consequences of their migration into the urban centers as of the 1950s. These two dramatic consequences are the transformation of the most primary rituals and institutions which form the basis of the socio-religious organization of the traditional Alevism, under the urban conditions as opposed to the rural context, and the unique increase in the possibility of the Alevi-Sunni encounters within the urban context compared to the rural conditions. These two consequences are dealt with not only as mere results of Alevi migration from the rural parts of Turkey into the urban centers, but within a much broader context of the transformation of their traditionally closed, marginal and secrecy-based character as a community into a different one ready to open up to the wider society. This study is based on the existing literature both related to the closed, marginal and secrecy-based character of the traditional Alevi community and their opening into the wider society, as well as on the face-to-face interviews conducted with nineteen members of the Alevi community living in the urban centers. The conclusions reached were that while most of the informants were discontented with the weakening of the primary rituals and institutions of the traditional Alevism under the urban conditions, all of them considered the unique increase in the possibility of Alevi-Sunni encounters within the urban setting as an opportunity to eliminate the prejudices of the Sunni community against the Alevi which were based on hearsay.

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Başlık:

Temel Alevi Kurumlarının Kent Koşullarındaki Durumu ve Kent Ortamındaki Alevi-Sünni Karşılaşmaları

Bu çalışmada, kent merkezlerinde yaşamakta olan Alevilerin, 1950li yıllardan bu yana kente göç edişleri ile birlikte ortaya çıkan iki çarpıcı sonuca ilişkin deneyimleri, düşünce ve duyguları incelenmiştir. Söz konusu iki çarpıcı sonuç, köy ortamına kıyasla kent koşullarında geleneksel Aleviliğin toplumsal ve dini yapısının temelini oluşturan dini tören ve kurumlarda meydana gelen dönüşüm ve Alevi-Sünni karşılaşmalarının yine kır koşullarına kıyasla kent ortamında benzersiz bir biçimde artmasıdır. Çalışmamız kapsamında bu iki sonuç, yalnızca Alevilerin Türkiye'nin kırsal bölgelerinden kent merkezlerine göç etmelerinin birer getirisi olarak ele alınmayıp geleneksel Alevi toplumunun kapalı, marjinal ve gizlilik ilkesine dayalı yapısının dışa açılma sürecine girmesi ile birlikte yaşadığı dönüşüm bağlamında da değerlendirilmiştir. Çalışmamız, geleneksel Alevi toplumunun kapalı, marjinal ve gizlilik ilkesine dayalı yapısına ve bu toplumun dışa açılma serüvenine ilişkin olarak kaleme alınmış literatürün yanı sıra, kent merkezlerinde yaşayan on dokuz Alevi birey ile yapılan yüz yüze görüşmelere dayanmaktadır. Ulaştığımız sonuçlar ise şöyle özetlenebilir: Görüşülen Alevilerin çoğu geleneksel Aleviliğe özgü dini tören ve kurumların kent koşullarında zayıflamasından üzüntü duyuyor olsa da, bu kişilerin tamamı kent ortamında Alevi-Sünni karşılaşmalarında yaşanan müthiş artışı, Sünni halkın Alevi'lere ilişkin olarak sahip olduğu, kulaktan dolma bilgilere dayalı önyargıları ortadan kaldırmak için bir fırsat olarak görüyor.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Since the foundation of the Republic of Turkey, there have occurred many significant developments giving rise to the dramatic transformation of the traditional character of the Alevi community. This transformation process corresponds to a replacement of the centuries-old character of the Alevi community, which may be defined as closed, marginal and secrecy-based, with a completely new one that may be described as ready to open to the wider society. All these significant developments, which will be discussed in detail below, one way or another, have contributed to the opening of the Alevi community to the wider society, both at a physical level and with the sense of sharing their esoteric socio-religious knowledge with outsiders.

The opening of the Alevi community to the wider society has taken place at the expense of the disintegration of Alevis' traditional, tightly-knit socio-religious organization that both constituted the basis of and was being supported by the strictly closed, marginal and secrecy-based character of the rural Alevi community. This character of the traditional Alevi community originates primarily from the physical war which was waged against the Alevis by the Ottoman central authority, particularly during the sixteenth century, and from the defamation strategy pursued against them. This physical war and the defamation strategy not only threatened the very physical existence of the Alevis in Anatolia, but also ended up with their stigmatization in the face of the Sunni majority as immoral heretics who not only violate the rules of Islam and insult its religiously-prominent figures but also engage

in incestuous relationships even following their religious ceremonies. This stigmatization which also will be discussed below has served as the source of various prejudices about Alevi and the Alevi way of life that have persisted into the twenty-first century.

Against the backdrop of such developments, the Alevi were spatially and socially marginalized. To be able to survive physically and to continue their belief system in a hostile environment, they ostracized themselves from the surrounding society, retiring into their own shell, minimizing their connection with the outside world –namely, the Sunni majority and central authority via carrying out all of their religious, legal, marital, economic, etc. issues within the community and drawing upon the strategy of secrecy.

Among the developments that gave rise to the opening of the Alevi community, one significant development comes to the forefront, the migration of the Alevi community from the rural parts of Turkey to the urban areas that started in the 1950s. The Alevi who started to migrate to the urban areas as of 1950s entered a different kind of development process within the urban context where they encountered a social structure which was dominated by the Sunni culture, as opposed to the rural context that served as the cradle for their traditional closed social structure. Prior to their migration into the urban areas, Alevi had tended to live primarily in secluded rural areas that were especially located in mountainous areas which were not easily accessible either by the representatives of the Ottoman central administration or by the Sunni residents of the neighboring villages.¹ Such settlements both led to and strengthened the closed, secrecy-based and marginal

¹ Martin Van Bruinessen, *Kürtlük, Türklük, Alevilik Etnik ve Dinsel Kimlik Mücadeleleri*, trans. Hakan Yurdakul (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1999), p. 12; Nail Yılmaz, *Kentin Alevileri Reşadiye-İkitelli Örneği* (İstanbul: Kitabevi Yayınları, May 2005), p. 182.

character of the Alevi community, which would definitely change following their migration into the urban areas.

Migration brought about two significant phenomena that affected the traditional character of the Alevi community. Firstly, the tightly-knitted socio-religious organization of the traditional Alevi community which had taken shape in accordance with the conditions of a marginal existence received a major blow under the urban conditions since this particular kind of socio-religious organization was compatible with the rural context as opposed to the urban one.²

The primary rituals and institutions that constituted the backbone of the traditional socio-religious organization of Alevism that had come into existence under the conditions of a social structure peculiar to the rural environment mainly include the following: the *Cem* ritual (the basic religious ritual of the Alevi culture that also has its social, legal and informative aspects), the *Dedelik* institution (religious and social leader of the Alevi community who not only hold “the monopoly on possession and interpretation” of the holy texts, but who are also responsible primarily for providing the members of the Alevi community with religious knowledge and whose leadership role is legitimized by their claim that they descended from Mohammed, the Prophet), the *Musahiplik* institution (also referred to as *yol kardeşliği* (religious brotherhood) which may be described as a solidarity institution within the Alevi community that is based on a brotherhood established between two male Alevis, thus between two Alevi families), and the *Düşkünlük* institution (the situation of being alienated by the Alevi community due to a violation

² Fuat Bozkurt, “Aleviliğin Yeniden Yapılanma Sürecinde Toplum-Devlet İlişkisi,” *Alevi Kimliği*, eds. T. Olsson, E. Özdalga, C. Raudvere, trans. Bilge Kurt Torun and Hayati Torun (İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, June 2003), p. 104; Krisztina Kehl-Bodrogi, “Tarih Mitosu ve Kolektif Kimlik,” trans. Tanıl Bora, *Birikim*, no. 88 (August 1996), p. 54.

of the rules which designate the living order adopted by the community as a whole).³ All of these rituals and institutions -one way or another- functioned so as to not only maintain the secrecy of the religious knowledge and religious activities of Alevi, but also consolidated the in-group unity and solidarity of the followers of the traditional Alevism, encouraging cooperation among the members of the community, as well as their adherence to the religious/moral rules which aimed at maintaining their in-group unity and strength in the face of the outsiders, and to ensure that any kind of in-group problem (social, legal, religious, etc.) may well be solved by the actors and rules from within the group in a way to minimize the relations with the central administrative bodies, emphasizing the closed, marginal and secrecy-based character of the traditional Alevi community, again.⁴

According to Élise Massicard, with migration into the cities, rural Alevi communities which constituted the framework of the religious practices peculiar to Alevism were dissolved. The Dede could not carry out their religious duties in the presence of their *talips* (pupil of a Dede) since their talips were scattered all around the country. Moreover, when Dede also participated in the immigration waves, their group of talips were spiritually orphaned, which threatened the transfer and continuation of the religious knowledge.⁵ Similarly, Nail Yılmaz stresses the fact that migration and urbanization caused a kind of disintegration in the social structure of the traditional Alevi community, causing both a geographical and psychological

³ For more detailed information, see Fuat Bozkurt, *Toplumsal Boyutlarıyla Alevilik*, 5th edition (İstanbul: Kapı Yayınları, February 2005), pp. 99-111, 121-126 and 160-164; Murat Okan, *Türkiye'de Alevilik-Antropolojik Bir Yaklaşım* (Ankara: İmge Kitabevi Yayınları, July 2004), pp. 68-83; Nejat Birdoğan, *Anadolu'nun Gizli Kültürü Alevilik* (İstanbul: Kaynak Yayınları, August 2006), pp. 252-271, 322-378.

⁴ Ali Yaman, *Alevilik ve Kızılbaşlık Tarihi* (İstanbul: Nokta Kitap, July 2007), pp. 30-31; Okan, p. 69.

⁵ Élise Massicard, *Türkiye'den Avrupa'ya Alevi Hareketinin Siyasallaşması*, trans. Ali Bertay (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2007), pp. 53-54; Krisztina Kehl-Bodrogi, "Tarih Mitosu ve Kollektif Kimlik," p. 54.

distancing between Dedes and their talips. Additionally, the Düşkünüük institution, which ensured the inward-oriented discipline of the Alevi community, was also negatively effected by urbanization.⁶ Additionally, Murat Okan also touches upon the significance of the primary and face-to-face relations that not only facilitated the internal control of the community by itself, but also constituted the basis of the traditional socio-religious organization of the community described above.⁷

At this point, what should be emphasized is the fact that the primary rituals and institutions underlying traditional socio-religious organization of the Alevi community seem to have been designed for the needs of a community whose members were living side by side in the same place; in other words, these rituals and institutions necessitate a certain level of geographical proximity among the members of the community in terms of their actual effectiveness and functionality. This geographical proximity is compatible with the conditions of the rural context as opposed to the urban one. The geographical distance that emerged among the members of the Alevi community as a result of the migration from the rural areas to the urban centers caused a kind of decline in the validity or feasibility of the rituals and institutions of the traditional socio-religious organization of the community.

The decline in the validity or feasibility of the primary rituals and institutions peculiar to the traditional Alevism may be evaluated in the light of the general differences between the rural context and the urban context, in terms of the general social structure and web of human relations that exist in each of those places. As in the time of İbn Haldun, groups of people living in the rural context and the urban context have been treated basically as two distinctive social units bearing divergent characteristics in comparison to each other.

⁶ Yılmaz, p. 149.

⁷ Okan, p. 69.

From the time of Tönnies and Durkheim, while a group of people living in the rural context has been categorized either as *Gemeinschaft*, mechanical solidarity, closed society, folk society or religious society; a group of people living in the rural context has been described either as *Gesellschaft*, organic solidarity, open society, urban society or secular society. No matter under which one of these categories they are dealt with, the social groups within the rural context, the social structure in which they live and the web of relations they establish are ideally associated with homogeneity, a relatively small population, retirement into their own shell, relative isolation from the world outside, self-sufficiency, a strong in-group solidarity and social cohesion accompanied by a strong feeling of adherence to family, neighbors and community, the predominance of the primary, personal/informal, face-to-face and relatively durable relations, relative conservatism and a social organization based on traditions and religion. All of these function as an effective control mechanism over the life of the individual by the community as a whole, allowing limited contact with foreigners and a strong feeling of distinction between “us” and “them.”

The social groups within the urban context together with the social structure in which they live and the web of relations they establish, on the other hand, are generally associated with heterogeneity (or co-existence of various people who have different backgrounds in terms of such things as their ethnicity, religion, level of education, socio-economic means), a relatively large population, anonymity, rationality, division of labor, specialization, differentiation, change, mobility, autonomy, individuality, predominance of the impersonal, secondary and short-lived social contacts, relative superficiality and standardized formality of relations, liberation of the individual from the control mechanism of the surrounding

community, as well as toleration towards differences and reconciliation.⁸ What should be emphasized at this point is that, as also specified by Celaleddin Çelik, these categorizations are more of “ideal type” abstractions, which are related or compared to each other on the basis of binary opposition, rather than two totally separate and different social realities.⁹

Returning to the issue of the two significant phenomena triggered by the migration of Alevis from the rural parts of Turkey to the urban areas that transformed the traditional character of the Alevi community, in addition to the general weakening of the primary rituals and institutions of the traditional Alevi community, which is the first phenomenon, the second phenomenon may be described as the lessening (even elimination) of the distance –both in geographical and psychological terms- between the members of the Sunni community and the Alevi community and the accompanying increase in the possibility of the direct, face-to-face encounters between the members of two communities to a great extent. This was different from the sixteenth century, when mutual prejudices and taboos which were religiously justified on both sides, minimizing the possibility of social interactions between the Sunni majority and Alevis. Migration to urban areas dramatically enhanced the possibility of encounters between members of both the Sunni and the Alevi populations.¹⁰

⁸ For more comprehensive information on the urban and rural sociology, see Ayda Yörükân, *Şehir Sosyolojisinin Teorik Temelleri Temel Kavramlar, Teoriler ve Problemler* (Ankara: İmar ve İskan Bakanlığı Yayınları, 1968), pp. 9-14 and 19-26; Celaleddin Çelik, *Şehirleşme ve Din* (Konya: Çizgi Kitabevi, August 2002), pp. 31-44; J. R. Mellor, *Urban Sociology in an Urbanized Society* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977), pp. 167-203; Meral Sağır, “Kırsal Kesimde ve Kentte Alevilik,” *Türk Dünyası Araştırmaları*, no. 125 (April 2000), p. 38; Orhan Türkdoğan, *Türkiye’de Köy Sosyolojisi* (İstanbul: IQ Kültür Sanat Yayıncılık, August 2006), pp. 89-111; Peter H. Mann, *An Approach to Urban Sociology* (London: Routledge and K. Paul, 1970), pp. 4-27.

⁹ Ibid., p. 38.

¹⁰ Krisztina Kehl-Bodrogi, “Atatürk and the Alevis: A Holy Alliance?” *Turkey’s Alevi Enigma A Comprehensive Overview*, eds. Paul J. White and Joost Jongerden (Leiden; Boston: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2003), p. 55; Kehl-Bodrogi, “Tarih Mitosu ve Kollektif Kimlik,” p. 54.

According to Kehl-Bodrogi, the physical coexistence of Alevi and Sunni within the urban context did not eliminate the traditional boundaries between the two groups in the beginning. The Alevi tended to continue to draw upon their traditional strategy of *takiye* (concealment of one's religious identity). This strategy became even more salient under the conditions of the cities between 1950s and 1980s. However, as of the mid-1980s, Alevi, for the first time in their history, started to appear in the public sphere and openly express their identities, leaving their traditional, centuries-long strategy of secrecy aside.¹¹ Regarding the same issue, Yılmaz also suggests that during the first decades of migration, the Alevi were hesitant to openly declare their identities in the urban context as a consequence of both the predominance of the Sunni culture and certain accusations against them concerning their alleged immorality (especially in terms of sexuality) based on certain prejudices.¹²

Nevertheless, due to the socio-economic developments that have taken place from the time of the establishment of the Republic of Turkey up until today, both on a local and global scale, which will be discussed below, Alevism, which was treated as a taboo subject by the public opinion until 1980s (with the exception of the 1960s), started to occupy the public agenda during 1990s and 2000s. Parallel to this process, Alevi have become increasingly visible in the public sphere and they have found various channels through which to express themselves. Moreover, the Sunni majority has also started to acquire more knowledge about the Alevi and Alevism, as a whole, thanks to the popular and academic literature on different aspects of the issue, as well as the radio and TV programs, which are prepared in order to

¹¹ Kehl-Bodrogi, "Tarih Mitosu ve Kollektif Kimlik," pp. 54 and 56.

¹² Yılmaz, p. 183.

disseminate information about Alevism and their way of life, and the Internet sites, where information related to Alevism and Alevism, in general, are shared with a wide range of readers. Beside this knowledge acquisition process on the part of Sunnis concerning Alevism and the Alevi way of life thanks to the facilities provided by the printed and visual media, as well as the Internet, the inter-familiarization process between Sunnis and Alevism also has been realized through the establishment of different relations among the members of the two community, such as neighborhood, business fellowship, and school friendships.¹³ Thus, the Alevism have started to feel more comfortable and ready to express their identities within the urban environment in the face of the Sunni majority surrounding them, contrary to the situation before the 1980.

As far as understood from the relevant literature, migration from the rural areas into the urban centers deeply affected the internal organization, religious practices and collective self-consciousness of the Alevi community. It not only brought an end to the spatial and social marginality of the Alevi community, but also paved the way for some kind of a malfunctioning of the traditional rituals and institutions of their community and a degree of erosion of the boundaries that had been drawn by the Alevi community between themselves and the world outside.¹⁴ In addition to these, as a result of the migration from the villages to the cities, Alevism began to share the very same living space with the Sunnis, a case which constitutes a complete contrast with the situation that was valid before the migration phenomenon. This thesis examines how the members of the Alevi community themselves who are

¹³ Tahire Erman and Emrah Göker, "Alevi Politics in Contemporary Turkey," *Middle Eastern Studies* 36, no. 4 (October 2000), pp. 99 and 103; Yaman, p. 141 and 143.

¹⁴ Kehl-Bodrogi, "Tarih Mitosu ve Kollektif Kimlik," p. 54; Massicard, p. 53; Necdet Subaşı, *Öteki Türkiye'de Din ve Modernleşme* (Ankara: Vadi Yayınları, March 2003), p. 100, cited from Kehl-Bodrogi, "Türkiye'de Alevilik – Dini Bir Cemaatin Oluşumu ve Şimdiki Konumuna Dair," trans. Filiz Ang, *Nefes*, no.2 (December 1993); Yaman, p. 131.

currently living in an urban context side by side with the Sunni majority have actually experienced and are still experiencing this opening process of the traditionally closed, marginal and secrecy-based Alevi community.

In other words, the thesis looks at how the members of the Alevi community who were born and lived in different rural parts of Turkey and then migrated to the urban centers during the last four decades of the twentieth century, as well as the children of these new city dwellers who were born or grew up within the urban context, have been experiencing the transformation of the general structure and functions of the traditional rituals and institutions of Alevism under the urban conditions as opposed to the rural context. In addition, the thesis also considers the nature and development process of the relationships established between the Sunni people and Alevis in the urban context in comparison to the rural one, and in which terms and how the close and frequent encounters of Alevis with the members of the Sunni community, along with the observations they make on Sunnis, within the urban environment, have affected them.

The most meaningful and down-to-earth information that could provide the answers of the basic questions of the thesis is delivered by the members of the Alevi community who are living in urban settings at the moment. I knocked the doors of a sample group of nineteen members of the Alevi community who are currently living in an urban setting, namely in the Gebze area of Kocaeli, as well as in the Pendik, Tuzla and Maltepe areas of Istanbul, and conducted interviews with them. It was requested that they reply on the basis of their own experiences and observations as well as their own feelings and ideas, all of which constitute the very essence of the thesis.

At this point, it should be noted that no official statistical data exists regarding the exact number of the Alevi living in Turkey, let alone their number residing in the urban areas. However, academics offer different estimation as to this number and their estimations range from four million to twenty million.¹⁵ Even though a definite official number of the citizens of Turkey who are of Alevi origin is not available, based on the estimations of the academicians and researchers in question, it may be supposed that there are at least four million of Alevi. However, only the experiences and ideas of nineteen of them could be included within the scope of the study. Nevertheless, the data obtained through the field research will be of importance in qualitative terms, since it has the potential to present new information on some new social phenomena which may well have escaped the notice of the parallel research previously carried out or to provide some comparable points to similar research done earlier. The key consideration regarding the selection of the potential informants was to conduct interviews with Alevi who had come from different places and who currently reside in different urban settings, because it was thought that interviewing people who came from the same place and who lived in the same urban area would provide somewhat similar accounts, feelings and conceptions, as a result of which the data collected would have been qualitatively limited and shallow.

The interviewing process was carried out between 10 March 2009 and 25 March 2009. During this process, in-depth and face-to-face oral interviews were conducted with nineteen members of the Alevi community who reside in the previously mentioned urban areas of the cities of Kocaeli and İstanbul. At the beginning of the interviewing process, some of our interviews (actually seven of them) were conducted with my relatives and neighbors. During these initial

¹⁵ Yaman, pp. 60-63; Yılmaz, pp. 74-76.

interviews, I attempted to carry out the interviewing process properly listening carefully to the experiences and evaluations of the informants, but asked the first informants if they could suggest other potential informants so as to enrich the data gathered both in volume and content. Thanks to the fact that they accepted to act as a contact point between me and the persons they advised me to interview -who are, namely, their relatives, neighbors and friends- I did not experience any difficulty with finding or establishing a connection with the new informants.

Direct, in-depth and face-to-face interviews were carried out with the informants through sound-recording by means of a video camera rather than other data collection techniques such as questionnaires, because it was thought that the data collected through direct, in-depth and face-to-face interviews would be much more accurate, detailed and comprehensive since, in that case, the researcher could interfere in any time it was felt that a question was misunderstood by the informant. In addition, when it was thought that a question had been superficially answered, the question was asked some time later in a different fashion to obtain a more satisfying answer.

Besides, I had the chance to see which questions were problematic in the way they were arranged in that they did not directly convey the reason why they were asked; as a result, I was able to rearrange them. In addition to all these advantageous aspects of the direct, in-depth and face-to-face interviews, some new issues that were raised by the informants themselves. These new issues helped in the recognition of a significant point that could otherwise escape our notice.

As for the preparation process of the questions, the first step taken was to get some background information especially related to the basic socio-religious rituals, institutions, traditions and practices peculiar to Alevism. *Yorumlu İmam Cafer*

Buyruğu (Commandment of Imam Cafer with comments)¹⁶, which is said to be the oldest resource of Alevism and assumed to have been written by İmam Cafer-i Sadık, the sixth of the Twelve Imams, gives detailed information on the institutions, rituals, values and beliefs peculiar to the traditional Alevi culture against the backdrop of some legendary religious myths from which those institutions, rituals, values and beliefs are believed to have originated. Besides this most basic resource, Fuat Bozkurt's *Toplumsal Boyutlarıyla Alevilik* (Alevism with its social aspects), Nejat Birdoğan's *Anadolu'nun Gizli Kültürü Alevilik* (Alevism as the secret culture of Anatolia) and Ali Yaman's *Alevilik ve Kızılbaşlık Tarihi* (The history of Alevism and the Kızılbaş) also contributed a great deal to understanding the socio-religious institutions and practices of the Alevi community in general.¹⁷

For the Alevi religious culture and way of life and how it is practiced in different Alevi villages of Turkey together, we drew upon Orhan Türkdoğan's *Alevi Bektaşî Kimliği-Sosyo-Antropolojik Araştırma* (The Alevi-Bektashi identity a socio-anthropological study)¹⁸, which includes data gathered through participant observation and interviews conducted in rural areas mostly in the western parts of Anatolia (17 cities and approximately 45 Alevi villages) where Alevi-Bektashi communities live, as well as the ideas and findings of certain academics or researchers concerning the Alevi culture and history. This book provided some interesting points as to the relationship between Sunni and Alevi-Bektashi communities living in adjacent villages of different parts of Anatolia together with the way they evaluate each other. The book was illuminating even though the main

¹⁶ Esat Korkmaz, *Yorumlu İmam Cafer Buyruğu* (İstanbul: Anahtar Kitaplar Yayınevi, 2007).

¹⁷ For more detailed information concerning the socio-religious particularities of Alevism, see Birdoğan, pp. 239-378; Fuat Bozkurt, *Toplumsal Boyutlarıyla Alevilik*, pp. 97-164; Yaman, pp. 199-262.

¹⁸ Orhan Türkdoğan, *Alevi-Bektaşî Kimliği - Sosyo-Antropolojik Araştırma* (İstanbul: Timaş Yayınları, June 1995).

objective of the author which was to contribute to the unity and the indivisible integrity of Turkish society on the basis of the theses that the historical Alevi-Sunni dichotomies do not belong to Turkish history and hence such dichotomies taking their origins from other historical contexts should not cause divisions in Turkish society in Turkey was diffused into each and every corner of the book.

To be able to obtain some background information as to the recent developments with regard to the situation of Alevism and Alevis, as a whole, in Turkey, Elise Massicard's *Türkiye'den Avrupa'ya Alevi Hareketinin Siyasallaşması* (The politicization of the Alevi movement from Turkey to Europe), Murat Okan's *Türkiye'de Alevilik-Anrtopolojik Bir Yaklaşım* (Alevism in Turkey – an anthropological approach), Lütfi Kaleli's *Alevi Kimliği ve Alevi Örgütlenmeleri* (The Alevi identity and Alevi organizations) and Karin Vorhoff's "Türkiye'de Alevilik ve Bektaşilikle İlgili Akademik ve Gazetecilik Nitelikli Yayınlar" (Academic and journalistic publications on the Alevi and Bektashi in Turkey)¹⁹ were useful.

Thanks to the background information obtained from these sources, a list of questions was prepared. However, the list was rather a long one. Both as a result of this long list of questions and in order to accomplish the objective of collecting data which were as comprehensive, rich and intensive as possible, the informants were asked to spare a relatively long amount of time for the interviews. Therefore, the interviews were carried out in the comfort of their homes. The shortest of the interviews lasted 45 minutes while the longest one lasted more than two hours.

¹⁹ For a more detailed discussion concerning the recent developments regarding Alevis and Alevism both in Turkey and Europe, see Karin Vorhoff, "Türkiye'de Alevilik ve Bektaşilikle İlgili Akademik ve Gazetecilik Nitelikli Yayınlar," *Alevi Kimliği*, eds. T. Olsson, E. Özdalga, C. Raudvere, trans. Bilge Kurt Torun and Hayati Torun (İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, June 2003), pp. 32-66; Lütfi Kaleli, *Alevi Kimliği ve Alevi Örgütlenmeleri* (İstanbul: Can Yayınları, July 2000); Massicard, pp. 69-145; Okan, pp. 115-189.

As a result of the fact that many of the informants were pleased and in fact excited with the sheer idea that Alevism had been chosen as the subject of a post-graduate thesis, in other words, as the subject of an academic study, a point which, according to them, would contribute to the introduction/explanation process of Alevism to society at large, no problems were encountered during the interviewing process. In other words, most of the informants were eager to answer the questions.

However, there also appeared a point that caused some of the informants to assume an unwilling and reserved attitude against the questions, at least at the beginning of the interviewing process. This point was related to the presupposition of such informants that they could not contribute to our research project since they were not knowledgeable enough about Alevism and the “knowledge” they had been referring to was pretty much associated with the historical and religious aspects of Alevism. In order to ensure that this point would not adversely affect the interviewing process, effort was made to explain to the informants the objective of the thesis project much more elaborately, emphasizing the point that what was wanted was not historical or religious facts based on some academic or official resources, but their own experiences, observations, opinions and feelings. Thanks to such explanations, they started to feel much more comfortable and confident during the interviewing process. With regard to this “knowledgeableness” issue, it should be underlined that during the interviews, informants who had read books or who were interested in following the discussions and news related to Alevism on the radio and television appeared to be much more comfortable and confident than the informants who confessed their relative indifference towards the issue.

Two more points should be mentioned in terms of the willingness of the informants to answer the questions. One point may be described as the reluctance of

one single informant to respond to the questions originating from her concern that the career of her daughter, who is studying for her master's degree at one of the long-established universities of Turkey, may be negatively affected by such an interview. In order to relieve this person, she was given a guarantee that her real name would not be included in the thesis. The real name of this informant does not appear in the thesis. For the other informants who did not state any particular concern regarding the inclusion of their names in the thesis, only their first names are given.

The other point is related to the unwillingness of one of the informants to respond to the questions which made itself evident with the short, superficial and involuntary answers given at the beginning of the interview. This unwillingness turned out to have been the result of the fact that this informant had thought the researcher was a member of the Sunni community, which made the informant feel uncomfortable. She explicitly declared that conducting this interview with a member of the Alevi community was preferable to an interview with a member of the Sunni community.

With respect to the general characteristics of the informants, it should be specified that informants are separated into two groups/categories under the titles of older generation and the younger generation. The group/category including fourteen of the informants who were older than 40 (actually one of them was thirty-nine years old) and who had migrated from various rural areas of Turkey to the urban centers predominantly during 1970s -and rarely during 1960s and 1980s- are referred to as the older generation. The group/category including five of the informants who were either born or had grown up in an urban setting even though they were born in the village are referred to as the younger generation.

As far as the gender distribution of the informants who fall within the category of the older generation is concerned, seven of the members of the older generation with whom interviews were conducted were females, while the remaining other seven were males. Four of these informants who fall within the older generation category were from Tunceli, two of them from Erzincan, two of them from Malatya, and another two of them were from Tokat, while the remaining four were either from Gümüşhane, Sivas, Muş or Bingöl. With regard to their current places of residence, four of them lived in Kaynarca district of Pendik, five of them lived in the Esenler district of Pendik, two of them lived in the Cevizli district of Maltepe, one of them lived in the Çamçeşme district of Pendik, one of them lived in the Şifa district of Tuzla, while the remaining one lived in the county seat of Gebze. Concerning the age distribution of the informants, one of them was in her 30s, seven of them were over 40, and four of them were over 50, while the remaining two informants over sixty.

Twelve of the older generation informants were primary school graduates, one had completed a literacy course and received her diploma during her adulthood, while the remaining one female informant had never gone to school, as a result of which she did not know how to read and write properly. All of the male informants had worked as blue-collar workers, in such jobs as construction foreman, steel bender, welder assistant, forklift driver, carpet weaver and cook. All of the female informants, except for one of them who was currently working as a cook and cleaner at a small scale firm, were housewives. Three of the six female informants, including the one working as a cook and cleaner at a small scale firm, had worked at different periods of their lives as babysitters, dish washers and cleaners. The remaining three female informants had never worked.

With respect to the general characteristics of the informants who are categorized as the members of the younger generation, two of them were from Tunceli, two from Tokat, and the remaining one was from Ordu. As for their current places of residence, four of them lived in the Kaynarca district of Pendik in İstanbul, while the remaining one lived in the county seat of Gebze in Kocaeli. As for the gender distribution, three of them were females, while the remaining two were males. All of the informants belonging to the category of the younger generation were in their twenties except for one who was in his thirties. All of the younger generation informants were university graduates; except for one of them who was a secondary-school graduate. All of these informants were currently working, excluding one who was a housewife. The ones who were currently working are employed as a primary school teacher, tourist guide, bank teller and electronic communications expert.

Having described the background of the interviewing process, some information concerning the content of our thesis is needed. In the second chapter of the thesis, the socio-religious background of the closed, marginal and secrecy-based character of the Alevi community from the thirteenth century up until the establishment of the Republic of Turkey, as well as a brief historical background of the opening of this community into the wider society under the Republic of Turkey will be discussed.

In the third chapter, a comparison between the religious experience/practice of the Alevis in the rural setting as opposed to the one in the urban setting will be presented from the points of view of the informants. Additionally, the experiences, observations and evaluations of the informants concerning the general situation of the basic socio-religious rituals and institutions peculiar to the Alevi community

(mainly the Cem ritual, the Dedelik institution and the Musahiplik institution) within the urban context as opposed to their situation in the rural one will be scrutinized.

The fourth chapter deals with Alevis' experiences of the Alevi-Sunni encounters within the urban setting compared to those encounters in the rural environment. First, the experiences of the informants with the members of the Sunni community in the rural context which can be categorized under the titles of no contact with the Sunni people, negative encounters with the Sunni people, and neutral/positive encounters with the Sunni will be presented. Second, their experiences with the Sunni within the urban setting which may be classified under the titles of positive encounters -based on mutual tolerance, assimilation to the Sunni other, or having a self-confident character- and negative encounters due to prejudices of the Sunni people will be described. Third, the replacement of the traditional secrecy strategy with the new strategies of self-expression and self-representation in the face of the negative/questioning approach of the Sunni towards Alevis will be depicted. Finally, the feelings of inadequacy of the informants, in terms of their religiosity compared to that of Sunnis and the knowledge they have regarding their own creed, will be examined.

Chapter five summarizes the historical background of the transformation of the traditional character of the Alevi community, which may be described as closed, marginal and secrecy-based, into a community gradually opening into the wider society, and then presents the general findings regarding the interviews made with the informants concerning the way they experienced this transformation in terms of the disintegration of the traditional institution of the rural Alevi culture and in terms of the increased encounters with the urban Sunni.

CHAPTER II

THE ALEVI IN TURKISH SOCIETY: A BRIEF HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

The Socio-Political Background of the Closed and Secrecy-Based Character of the Alevi Community

It is a widely accepted fact that both during the reign of the Anatolian Seljuks and that of the Ottomans, followers of Alevism were ostracized and disesteemed for quite a long time by the political/religious centers of these states. This corresponded to a process that was accompanied/marked by a relatively apathetic or problematic relationship between the Alevi community and the central authorities of the states in question. According to some authors, this relationship originated mainly from the religious beliefs of the Alevis,²⁰ while, according to some others, it stemmed from some issues that were of a political and economic nature rather than religious.²¹ When we consider such literature, it seems that both explanations are meaningful, but not in their own right. To be more precise, this apathetic relationship appears to have arisen from reasons that were of a primarily socio-economic character at the beginning and that ended up with bearing both a political and religious color, as well, in the course of the centuries that elapsed.

The Babai Uprising, which was started against the political centre of the Anatolian Seljuk Empire in the thirteenth century, constitutes the most drastic example of the culmination of the apathetic relationship between the political centre

²⁰ Yılmaz, p. 19.

²¹ Yasin Aktay, *Türk Dininin Sosyolojik İmkânı İslâm Protestanlığı ve Alevilik*, 3rd edition (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2006), pp. 57-62.

of the Anatolian Seljuks and the followers of the popular Islam that existed in Anatolia of those days which was represented by non-Sunni religious sects of the time whose faiths bore heterodox characteristics. The basic reasons lying behind this historical uprising were related to the socio-economic and psychological discontent of the Turkmen people who had migrated to Anatolia from various places, such as Azerbaijan and Khorasan, in order to escape the Mongolian invasion. The inadequacy of winter quarters and pastures, the humiliation of the immigrant Turkmen by the settled ones, as well as the heavy duties imposed upon the newcomers were among the reasons leading to the uprising. These Turkmen people, who constituted the non-Sunni heterodox groups in Anatolia under the rule of the Anatolian Seljuk Empire which were known by names such as *Yesevilik*, *Vefailik*, *Haydarilik*, etc. back then, are currently referred to as Alevis.²²

As for the apathetic relationship between the political and religious centre of the Ottoman Empire and the members of the Alevi community, it primarily took shape against the backdrop of the general alienation of the Anatolian people from the Ottoman administration. This alienation occurred in parallel to the transformation of the Ottoman Principality into a cosmopolitan empire among whose administrators the ones who were of non-Anatolian origin began to increase in number, as well as to the emergence of some significant socio-economic issues. Meanwhile, it should be noted that during the establishment period of the Ottoman Principality, Alevi tribes and leaders were so active that they were even included among the founding constituents of the principality.

As of the reign of Fatih Sultan Mehmet, the Anatolian Turkmen began to suffer from economic difficulties and social degradation, such as unfair and heavy

²² Okan, pp. 56-57. For more comprehensive historical information regarding the Babai Uprising, see Ahmet Yaşar Ocak, *Babaîler İsyanı Aleviliğin Tarihsel Altyapısı Yahut Anadolu'da İslâm – Türk Heterodoksisinin Teşekkülü*, 3rd edition (İstanbul: Dergâh Yayınları, 2000).

taxations, the confiscation of the property of the Turkmen families, or the fact that both the Ottoman administrators and soldiers were selected from among the non-Turkic constituents of the empire, which originated from the general attitude of the Ottoman administration. As a result, many uprisings were stirred up by the Turkmen living in Anatolia against the administration of the Ottoman Empire during the sixteenth century, including the Şah Kulu Uprising (1510-1511), the Bozoklu Celal Uprising (1517-1518), the Süglün Koca-Baba Zünnun Uprisings (1525-1527), the Kalender Çelebi Uprising (1526-1527) and the Şahgeldi Uprising (1580).²³

Regarding the nature of these uprisings which were primarily led by the Alevi Turkmen, Atilla Özkırmılı writes that they originated primarily from socio-economic issues, adding that they were no examples of sectarian conflicts or any mischief plotted against the Ottoman Empire by Alevi Turkmen.²⁴ Mustafa Akdağ also states that the the *Kızılbaş* (literally redhead) Turkmen²⁵ led and participated in the aforementioned uprisings because of economic problems, though these uprisings appear to have had a more religious character on the surface. He bases his argument on the fact that there exists no instance of a clash between the participants of these uprisings and the Sunni majority and that the ones who were killed or whose

²³ Atilla Özkırmılı, *Toplumsal Bir Başkaldırının İdeolojisi Alevilik-Bektaşilik Araştırma-İnceleme* (İstanbul: Cem Yayınevi, February 1996), pp. 167-170; Fuat Bozkurt, *Toplumsal Boyutlarıyla Alevilik*, pp. 39-41; Yaman, pp. 95-96.

²⁴ Özkırmılı, p. 163.

²⁵ The term “Kızılbaş” was first used during the era of Shah Haydar (1460-1488), the father of Shah İsmail, who founded the Safavid State, to designate the supporters of Shah Haydar who wore red headgears. The term was also used so as to signify the Safavid state, the soldiers of the Safavid State, the area under the rule of the Safavids, the followers of *Safevîye* religious order (founded by Shah Safiyüddin), as well as the Turkish tribes that supported Safavids, namely the Alevi tribes in Anatolia. Irène Mélikoff states that the historical name of Alevis is “Kızılbaş.” Kızılbaş used to designate the Turkmen tribes who supported Shah Cüneyd, Shah Haydar and Shah İsmail during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. These Turkmen tribes used to wear red headgears hence they were called Kızılbaş. However, when the term Kızılbaş started to be used in a pejorative sense, this term was replaced by the term Alevi, instead, as of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. For a more comprehensive discussion of this issue, see Irène Mélikoff, *Uyur İdik Uyardılar Alevilik-Bektaşilik Araştırmaları*, trans. Turan Alptekin (İstanbul: Cem Yayınevi, 1994), pp. 33-34 and 54; Saim Savaş, *XVI. Asırda Anadolu’da Alevilik* (Ankara: Vadi Yayınları, May 2002), p. 23; Yaman, p. 94.

property was plundered in the course of the uprisings were members of the government in general. Additionally, he specifies that the Ottoman authors tended to ignore the socio-economic factors underlying these uprisings, presenting them as merely religious phenomena instead.²⁶ The fact that it was the members of the administration who suffered from the Kızılbaş-led uprisings seems to emphasize that discontent of the rebels with the Ottoman administration rather than any particular problem with the Sunni population.

The third breaking point was the power struggle between the Safavid State and the Ottoman Empire, which culminated in the sixteenth century and left its mark on the course and the character of the relationship between the central authority of the Ottoman Empire and its Alevi subjects. This power struggle was related to the Alevi/Kızılbaş uprisings discussed above.

The Safavid Empire, the history of which dated back to a religious order known as *Safeviye*, which had been founded by Shah Safiyüddin during the first half of the fourteenth century, was actually established by Shah İsmail in 1502 within an area covering Azerbaijan, Eastern Anatolia, Iraq and Iran. The Safavid State owes a great deal to the support of the Anatolian Kızılbaş Turkmen tribes such as Rumlu, Ustaclu, Tekelü and Şamlu in terms of its establishment, as well as the regional power it gained following its foundation process. In turn, the powerful influence of the Safavids over the Anatolian Kızılbaş Turkmen dates back to the first half of the fifteenth century, when Hoca Ali, the leader of the Safavid family and religious order at the time, facilitated the liberation of thousands of Anatolian Turkmen who had been enslaved by Timur, a development which caused these Turkmen to become fervent disciples of the Safavid family. Before this development, Sadreddin Musa,

²⁶ Mustafa Akdağ, *Türk Halkının Dirlik ve Düzenlik Kavgası* (İstanbul: Cem Yayınları, 1995), pp. 120-121.

Hoca Ali's father, had gone to Medina to have one of the leading sayyids there confirm that he was descended from İmam Musa Kâzım, one of the Twelve Imams who are believed to have descended from Mohammed, the Prophet. In the years to come, this point would also bring great prestige to the Safavid Empire among the migrant and semi-migrant Anatolian Kızılbaş tribes, since their belief that the Safavid Shahs descended from Mohammed, the Prophet, would sanctify this family in their eyes.²⁷

In connection with the historical closeness existing between the Safavids and the Kızılbaş Turkmen people in Anatolia in terms of their ethnic roots and religious sensitivities, the Anatolian Turkmen started to consider the Safavid Shahs, especially Shah İsmail, who chose his administrators from among Turkmen people and kept in touch with the Anatolian Turkmen via his agents and with whom they shared the same religious faith, as a "redeemer" in the face of the economic difficulties, as well as the social and psychological degradation they were confronted as previously mentioned.²⁸

As for the actual Ottoman-Safavid conflict, the fact that Shah İsmail organized two expeditions to the territories belonging to the Ottoman Empire in 1502 and 1507 is a clear indicator of the worldly power he was after at the expense of terminating the Ottoman domination in Anatolia. More importantly, Shah İsmail engaged in huge propaganda activities among the people of Anatolia through his agents, who were called "caliphs" or "assignees," not only to provoke the Kızılbaş population residing in Anatolia against the Ottoman administration, which he referred to as the "*Yezit*"²⁹

²⁷ Savaş, pp. 18-20; Yaman, pp. 81-83.

²⁸ Özkırımlı, p. 167.

²⁹ Yezid (Yazid b. Mu'awija—an Ummayyad caliph) was responsible for the murder of Ali's son Huseyin at Kerbela (680) and has become the symbol of injustice and the suppression of the faithful

order,” but to ensure the spiritual and material support of these Kızılbaş people as well. These caliphs or assignees were also effective in the aforementioned Kızılbaş-led uprisings of the sixteenth century, which took place in the name of the Safavid Shahs.³⁰

According to Ali Yaman, during the sixteenth century, the Turkmen tribes who had a feeling of sacred devotion for the Safavid Shahs began to threaten the very existence of the Ottoman Empire. The first measures were taken by Bayezid II, who expatriated the Turkmen tribes who were supporting the Safavid Empire to different places, such as the Morea, which further strengthened the devotion of the Turkmen tribes towards Shah İsmail. It was during the reign of Yavuz Sultan Selim, however, when the Ottoman-Safavid conflict dramatically intensified, and this bitter conflict had its own significant effects on the situation of the Kızılbaş Turkmen of Anatolia.³¹ In the course of his campaign against the Safavid Empire, Yavuz Sultan Selim also started a physical war and pursued a defamation strategy against the Kızılbaş Turkmen in Anatolia due to their suspected closeness to the Safavid Empire. Within the context of this physical war and as part of this defamation strategy, he especially drew upon the fatwas of two influential theologians, Hamza Saru Görez and Kemal Paşazade, where the persecution of Kızılbaş people was being sanctified and their annihilation was declared to be the personal duty of every Muslim. While Hamza Saru Görez described Kızılbaş people as “unbelievers” and “heretics” whose slaughter was “necessary and a religious duty”, Kemal Paşazade depicted them as anti-Muslims and stated that it was the duty of the Sultan of Muslims [Yavuz Sultan

for the Alevis (as for Shi’a in general). This information is cited from Krisztina Kehl-Bodrogi, “Atatürk and the Alevis: A Holy Alliance?” p. 58.

³⁰ Savaş, pp. 20-21; Yaman, pp. 86-87.

³¹ Yaman, pp. 87-88.

Selim] to fight these unbelievers in accordance with the orders of the Kuran. The target of these fatwas were not only the Safavids in Iran, but their supporters in Anatolia, as well. Thanks to the legitimacy originating from these fatwas, Selim pursued a policy of annihilation against the Kızılbaş Turkmen in Anatolia and ordered the massacre of forty thousand Kızılbaş people.³² At this point, Özkırmılı states that due to the massacre of the forty thousand Alevis, as well as owing to the fact that an enmity towards the Alevis on a religious basis was being encouraged by the Ottoman political and religious authorities, the relationship between the Ottoman administration and the Alevi Turkmen in Anatolia was aggravated, dividing society into two.³³

One important aspect of the Ottoman-Safavid conflict is that in the course of this struggle the Ottoman administration, which was a “pious though not fanatic”³⁴ confessor of Sunni Islam started to highlight orthodox Sunnism as their state religion and to treat all instances of religious heterodoxy as political opposition, in the face of Shah İsmail’s Shiism, the state religion of Iran. The Alevi-led uprisings, which were both manifestations of heterodox tendencies and of social protest against financial exploitation and governmental oppression, were bloodily suppressed and a great many Alevis were killed, which was justified as a Holy War against the nonbelievers intending to corrupt the religion of Islam.³⁵ This development must have gone hand in hand with the fatwas of the aforementioned theologians describing the Alevis as heretics whose slaughter was a necessary and religious duty, giving a religious color

³² Adel Allouche, *The Origins and Development of the Ottoman-Safavid Conflict (906-962 / 1500-1555)* (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 1983), pp. 110-112; Özkırmılı, pp. 170-172.

³³ Özkırmılı, p. 173.

³⁴ Kehl-Bodrogi, “Atatürk and the Alevis: A Holy Alliance?” p. 54.

³⁵ Kehl-Bodrogi, *ibid.*, pp. 54-55.

to the apathetic relationship between the Alevi community and the central authority of the Ottoman Empire.

The defamation strategy pursued against the Kızılbaş Turkmen in Anatolia continued during the second half of the sixteenth century, as well, and as part of this strategy, the Ottoman administration made several accusations against the Kızılbaş Turkmen which were related mostly to immorality (especially related to sexual immorality, such as adultery or *mum-söndü* –literally blowing the candle out; the accusation that Kızılbaş people would gather together and engage in sexual intercourse with the wives of each other, an accusation which is brought against the Alevis of Turkey even today), robbery, non-performance of prayers and fasting, enmity towards the first three Caliphs following Mohammed, the Prophet, lack of respect towards the Prophet, enmity towards the Sunni community, calling the “Muslims” Yezit, drinking wine, acting as the agents of Safavids and providing them with material aid.³⁶

The objective of these accusations and the “suppression policy” was to present the Alevis as evil and wrongful in the face of the rest of the society in order to legitimize the use of excessive force against them in the eyes of the majority. As a result of such accusations, the term “Kızılbaş” began to be associated with “non-believer, heretic, rebel, enemy of the state.” Such associations went so far that the term Kızılbaş began to be equated with “the one who couples with his mother or sister.”³⁷ In addition to this deliberative defamation strategy applied by the central authority, the aspersions cast upon the Alevi community by the man in the street due

³⁶ Savaş, pp. 48-67. In this book, Savaş provides us with the details of some examples of *Mühime Defteri* (records of formal decisions taken by the Ottoman Council of State and ratified by the Sultan) belonging to the second half of the sixteenth century which are related to the prosecution of the Kızılbaş Turkmen by the Ottoman administration at the time. For more detailed information regarding the methods of surveillance, entrapment and penalization of the Kızılbaş Turkmen, see pp. 86-118.

³⁷ Fuat Bozkurt, *Toplumsal Boyutlarıyla Alevilik*, p. 51; Savaş, p. 48, Yaman, p. 90.

to his lack of knowledge of a community completely retired into its own shell also could have given rise to the aforementioned accusations made against/slandorous associations brought up related to the Alevi the effects of which are still valid today.³⁸ In brief, during the sixteenth century, the term Kızılbaş began to be widely used in a sense of irreligiousness, atheism and moral weakness so as to defame the believers of the Alevi faith.³⁹

Besides all the other significant consequences, one of the central developments, in terms of this thesis, that was caused by the physical war started and the defamation strategy pursued against the Alevi Turkmen of Anatolia in the course of the Ottoman-Safavid conflict is underlined by Kehl-Bodrogi as the following: As a result of the physical war and the defamation strategy against the Alevi carried out by the Ottoman administration, which also affected the way the Sunni majority considered them, the Alevi, who were forced into spatial and social marginality, felt the need to withdraw to remote areas to escape persecution and they turned into “a community nearly hermetically sealed to the outside.” Since “the vigilance of the state made open recruitment nearly impossible,” Alevi ensured their physical existence by means of “strictly endogamous regulation of marriages,” which resulted in the characteristic that the community allegiance followed the paternal line, and attempted to protect their heterodox teachings as a mystery that should only be disclosed to those born into the community. In other words, they began to draw upon the strategy of *takiye* to be able to survive in a hostile environment which ostracized them as heretics.

In addition, they developed a particular kind of a tightly-knitted socio-religious organization where *Dedes* acted both as the religious and the political authority of the

³⁸ Savaş, p. 48.

³⁹ Özkırımlı, p. 173.

community. In addition to this, on the legal level, they lived by their own norms and values with the help of the Dedes, who also assumed the role of a mediator or a judge, as well. In accordance with the strict rules of this tight socio-religious network, it was forbidden to marry a person outside the community, to cooperate financially with an outsider, to share the same table with a person other than the ones inside the community and to consult the secular courts.⁴⁰

Rıza Zelyut also touches upon the takiye issue stating that takiye became a principle for Alevis, who resorted to it as a means to escape bloodshed.⁴¹ While Kehl-Bodrogi prefers to use the term “marginality” to refer to the situation of Alevism as of the sixteenth century, Soyzer uses the terms “isolation,” “isolated community,” and “cultural islet” to describe the same phenomenon. For him, “isolated community” means a group of people who are not only ostracized by the surrounding society on the basis of the differences in terms of religious beliefs but which, in turn, ostracizes the surrounding society, as well, retiring into its own shell, on the same basis, in that it creates a “cultural islet.”⁴² Concerning the characteristic of keeping the religious teachings, beliefs and practices a secret that can only be shared with the in-group members, Erten also points out the “remarkable discretion” of the Alevi community at the expense of their lives, which, according to this

⁴⁰ Kehl-Bodrogi, “Tarih Mitosu ve Kollektif Kimlik,” pp. 52-53; Kehl-Bodrogi, “Atatürk and the Alevis: A Holy Alliance?” p. 55; Krisztina Kehl-Bodrogi, “Introduction,” *Syncretistic Religious Communities in the Near East, Collected Papers of the International Symposium “Alevism in Turkey and Comparable Syncretistic Religious Communities in the Near East in the Past and Present” Berlin, 14-17 April 1995*, eds. Krisztina Kehl-Bodrogi, Barbara Kellner-Heinkele, Anke Otter-Beaujean, (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill, 1997), p. XII.

⁴¹ Rıza Zelyut, *Aleviler Ne Yapmalı? (Şehirlerdeki Alevilerin Sorunları-Çözümleri)* (İstanbul: Yön Yayıncılık, November 1993), p. 9.

⁴² Yılmaz Soyzer, *Sosyolojik Açıdan Alevî-Bektaşî Geleneği* (İstanbul: Seyran Kitap, 1996), pp. 17-18.

researcher, led to some weird rumors/stories related to their faith among the members of the general public.⁴³

In a nutshell, due to the above-mentioned politics of the central authorities ruling Anatolia as of the thirteenth century which departed from a unsatisfactory point in the face of the Anatolian Turkmen people in general, with Alevis being no exception, to arrive at a rather antagonistic one against the Alevis, in particular, in the course of time, the Alevis gradually turned into a strictly closed community which reduced its connection with the outside world –namely, the Sunni majority and central authority- to a minimum through carrying out all of its religious, legal, marital and economic issues within the community and resorting to the strategy of secrecy in order to survive physically and to maintain its belief system within a hostile environment. Yaman seems to agree with this argument since he describes takiye and the inclination to secrecy as a defense strategy against the possible dangers of the environment in which they lived.⁴⁴ Massicard also refers to this secrecy of the Alevi community who took refuge in places which were not easily accessible as a “preferential defense strategy.”⁴⁵

The other central development, in terms of this thesis, that was caused by the defamation strategy pursued against the Kızılbaş Turkmen of Anatolia during the Ottoman-Safavid conflict is that it caused the majority of the Ottoman society to assume negative attitudes towards Alevis and to label them with some slanderous accusations. Moreover, the fact that the Alevis became a strictly closed community as a result of the oppressive policies of the political/religious authority deteriorated the situation to a further extent since it resulted in not only the reinforcement of the

⁴³ Süleyman Fikri Erten, *Antalya Vilâyeti Tarihi* (İstanbul: Tan Matbaası, 1940), p. 129.

⁴⁴ Yaman, p. 30.

⁴⁵ Massicard, p. 36.

already-existing negative claims labeled upon them, but the mushrooming of new ones, as well. In parallel with this point, Massicard points out that since the Alevis would participate in the Cem ritual with both men and women present, that they played music and danced during their religious ritual, and that some of them drank alcohol during this ritual were looked upon by the outsiders as indicators of a sheer denial and violation of the rules of Islam. Furthermore, the strictly enclosed lives of Alevis which became salient as of the sixteenth century led to the formation of a curtain of suspicion around them, which, in turn, paved the way for the creation of several myths related to their so-called moral perversion.⁴⁶ Similarly, Kehl-Bodrogi suggests that, from the sixteenth century onwards, both the religious establishment and the pious majority considered the Alevis heretics and the Sunni majority unceasingly spread rumors about their “alleged immorality.”⁴⁷

A Brief History of the Opening of the Alevi Community into the Wider Society

Many researchers support the idea that the apathetic or the problematic relationship between the Alevi community of Anatolia and the central authorities which has been crystallized since the thirteenth century, setting the stage for Alevis to develop a special socio-religious organization that is based on strict secrecy and characterized by its retirement into its own shell, was ameliorated with the establishment of the Republic of Turkey. The most underlined point with regard to the rapprochement between the Alevis and the central authority facilitated by the foundation of the Republic of Turkey, being followed by a previous rapprochement during the years of

⁴⁶ Massicard, p. 37.

⁴⁷ Kehl-Bodrogi, “Atatürk and the Alevis: A Holy Alliance?” , p. 55.

the War of Independence thanks to visits by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk to the leading figures of the Alevi-Bektashi community at the time to be able to ensure their support for the national struggle, is that the Alevis regarded the radical secular reforms realized under the newly founded Republic, such as the abolition of the sultanate, the abolition of the caliphate, the closure of the *shair'a* courts and the dissolving of the office of *Şeyhülislam* (chief religious official in the Ottoman Empire), as steps shaking the formerly privileged positions of the Sunni majority and taken to overcome the major institutional obstacles to the equality of the Alevis with the Sunni.⁴⁸ Regarding this issue, Kehl-Bodrogi claims the following:

The secularization of all realms of society led to an opening of the community [Alevis] to the outside and subsequently to a gradual integration of its members into the wider society. Thus Mustafa Kemal... stands for the end of a period which began in the time of Shah Isma'il, when Alevism became a community nearly hermetically sealed to the outside. With his entering the political arena, for the Alevis the reign of *Yezid* seemed to be over. What they had hoped that the *Mahdi* Shah Isma'il would do was now accomplished by Mustafa Kemal: the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire and the disestablishment of the Islamic *ulema*.⁴⁹

In addition, some authors take the issue one step further by presenting the rapprochement between the central authority and the Anatolian Alevis as an example which goes beyond the scope of a mere example of "amelioration" so as to bare the characteristic of "considering the Republican regime as their own," (*sahiplenme*) which manifested itself as Alevis' voluntary assumption of the role of protecting and supporting "all" establishments founded by this regime and as their taking sides with

⁴⁸ Fuat Bozkurt, *Toplumsal Boyutlarıyla Alevilik*, p. 92; Kehl-Bodrogi, "Atatürk and the Alevis: A Holy Alliance?" p. 57; Okan, p. 92; Yılmaz, p. 20, 155 and 180. For a detailed discussion concerning the support provided by Alevis to the national struggle, see Oral Çalışlar, *Aleviler – Vali de Olmak İstiyoruz Genel de* (İstanbul: Doğan Kitap, January 2009), pp. 21-31; Cemal Şener, *Alevilik Olayı Toplumsal Bir Başkaldırının Kısa Tarihçesi*, 25th edition (İstanbul: Ant Yayınları, November 1998), pp. 174-152; Okan, pp. 89-91.

⁴⁹ Kehl-Bodrogi, "Atatürk and the Alevis: A Holy Alliance?" pp. 57-58. *Ulema* means Muslim theologians and scholars.

these establishments against the social constituents suppressed by them.⁵⁰ Thus, they claimed a perfect intimacy between themselves and the central authority of the Republican Turkey.

Nevertheless, the newly founded Republic did not promise a bed of roses to the Alevi community. The legislation of a law on 30 November 1925 which aimed to dissolve the Islamic brotherhoods in Turkey and stipulated the closure of their dervish lodges, convents and tombs, as well as the prohibition of the usage of titles such as sheikh and sayyid, negatively affected the Alevis. Following the issue of this law, Alevis had to continue their Cem ritual secretly by setting watch at different places in their villages, which had been the case under the Ottoman rule, while the Sunnis could still carry out their religious practices openly in the mosques. In addition, it became difficult for the Alevi Dedes to travel around Anatolia in order to visit their talips to continue the practices peculiar to Alevism.⁵¹ Regarding the effects of this law on Alevis and Alevism, Solgun makes the following comment:

Closure of dervish lodges and convents as well as the prohibition of the religious titles mostly and directly effected the Alevis, whereas the Alevis had joyfully welcomed the proclamation of the Republic and the abolition of the caliphate. This joy was of an understandable kind since they had thought that the newly founded regime would officially recognize them and the state would embrace “all” the constituents of the society, contrary to the past when the state was the state of only a certain segment of the society... Nevertheless, with the issue of this law, Alevis became “banned people.” Sunni Muslims could worship in the mosques. Non-religious citizens’ places of worship were remained untouched by this law since they were considered as minority under the Treaty of Lausanne. Yet, Alevis’ dervish lodges were closed down; their dedes and pirs were labeled as “reactionary” and became banned at a stroke. Hacı Bektaş-ı Veli Dervish Lodge, which is the most famous and oldest of all the Alevi dervish lodges, was closed down following this law.⁵²

⁵⁰ Aktay, p. 68.

⁵¹ Yaman, p. 130.

⁵² Cafer Solgun, *Alevilerin Kemalizm’le İmtihanı* (İstanbul: Hayykitap Yayınları, September 2008), pp. 54-55. *Tekke ve zaviyelerin kapatılması, dinsel unvanların yasaklanması, en çok ve doğrudan Alevileri etkiledi. Oysa Aleviler, Cumhuriyet ilanını, halifeliğin kaldırılmasını sevinçle karşılamışlardı. Elbette bu, anlaşılır bir sevinçti. Çünkü yeni kurulan rejimin kendi varlıklarını da tanıyacağını ve devletin artık belirli bir kesimin değil, kendilerini de kapsayacak şekilde ‘herkesin’*

The attitude of the newly established Republican administration towards Alevis can be placed within a much larger framework. That is to say, as a principle, the newly founded Republic imagined its nation as an ethically and culturally homogeneous society (namely, Turkish by race and Sunni Islamic by religion), as a result of which deviant collective identities, both ethically and religiously, were considered to be potential threats to the unity of the nation. In line with this unification principle, the administration of the Republic of Turkey adopted orthodox Sunni Islam as “the only legally recognized” Islamic confession and banned all kinds of manifestations of popular and heterodox religiosity (Alevism being no exception, as stated above). The law, issued in 1925, was nothing but a *de facto* prohibition of the Alevi faith. In other words, similar to the Ottoman administration, the Kemalists, too, ignored the religious distinctness of the Alevis. Furthermore, while the Ottomans had not been too much involved in the internal issues of the Alevi community, the Republican administration frequently trespassed upon the religious gatherings of the Alevis during 1930s and early 1940s, when a more aggressive version of secularism was prevalent, and arrested Alevi Dedes due to their alleged “illegal” religious and “superstitious” activities.

Despite all these disadvantages introduced by the newborn Republican Turkey, the Alevis supported the fundamental principles of the Republic, namely secularism and nationalism, since they regarded these principles as “the best means to overcome their inferior status” and warmed towards the new central authority, as opposed to

devleti olacağını düşünmüşlerdi. Değil miydi ki ‘Milli Mücadele’ yıllarında Alevilerin desteğini almak için Mustafa Kemal, Alevi önderleriyle de görüşmeler yapmış, aynı amaçla Hacı Bektaş’ı da ziyaret etmişti. Ancak bu yasayla beraber Aleviler, ‘yasaklı’ durumua düştüler. Sünni Müslümanlar, camilerde ibadetlerini yapabileceklerdi. Lozan Antlaşması gereği azınlık statüsünde kabul edildikleri için gayrimüslim yurttaşların ibadet mekânlarına da dokunulmamıştı. Ama Alevilerin tekkeleri kapatılmış, dedeleri, pirleri bir anda ‘gerici’ olarak yaftalanarak yasaklı olmuşlardı. Alevi dergâhlarının en ünlü ve eskisi olan Hacı Bektaş-ı Veli Dergâhı da bu yasanın ardından kapatıldı.

the cases in the past, since the new state narrowed the movement area of the Sunni Islam, together with its religious activities and institutions, through banning religion as a whole from the public sphere.⁵³

In addition to this relative rapprochement between the Alevis and the central authority under the Republican Turkey as a consequence of the newly-born state's secularist-based policies which somehow weakened the threats posed by the majority, the facts that the rural areas where Alevis had been taking refuge against the pressures of the central authorities, as well as against the threats posed by the hostile environment they were living in, became accessible thanks to the roads built by the administration, that communication systems were improved and that elementary education became compulsory contributed to the gradual opening of the Alevi community to the world outside, as well.⁵⁴

During the 1950s and 1960s, while Turkish industrial sector was developing, Alevis began to migrate to the urban areas. With their migration to towns and cities during these decades, Alevis, who had been living in hamlets and mountain villages practicing a self-sufficient and closed family economy up until those days, broke into the market and accumulated some small amount of capital. It was during these years that Alevis began to appear as the new competitors as Alevi grocers or Alevi keepers of coffeeshouses in the markets of towns and cities against the Sunni people, who had been the incontestably dominant power of those markets before. Moreover, during the 1960s, among the Turkish laborers who migrated to different European countries were Alevi workers, as well. The Alevi capital which grew due to its internal dynamism during the 1960s further grew thanks to the contributions of Alevis

⁵³ Kehl-Bodrogi, "Atatürk and the Alevis: A Holy Alliance?" pp. 64-65.

⁵⁴ Kehl-Bodrogi, "Introduction," p. XII.

working in Europe; and during the 1970s, Alevi capital broke into the Anatolian market that had been dominated by the Sunnis. Moreover, during the 1960s, the first intellectual Alevi generation got off the ground and a well-educated segment of Alevis began to be included among the bureaucracy. Briefly, during the 1960s, the Alevi community grew stronger in economic, educational and intellectual terms.⁵⁵ These developments also helped the opening of the Alevi community into the wider society.

This gradual opening of the Alevi community that started with the establishment of the Republic of Turkey was accompanied by another significant development that took place during the 1960s: The democratic and liberal atmosphere in the aftermath of the 1960 coup facilitated the visibility or discussion of certain taboo topics, Alevism being one of them. During these years the “Alevi issue” appeared in the public sphere, as the subject of a public discussion participated in by various columnists at the time, with the initiative of the competent authorities back then, which was marked by a document issued by some 50 Alevi students in which the word “Alevi” was explicitly used for the first time. Moreover, the first Alevi associations in the cities were founded during these years with an emphasis of culture and cultural heritage, and the first public Cem ritual was organized by Hacibektaş Turizm ve Tanıtma Derneği (Hacibektaş Tourism and Presentation Association) on December 1963. This was followed by the publication of various Alevi newspapers and journals, including *Cem*. This dynamism of Alevism increased to such an extent that Alevis even established a political party, as well, in 1966. Additionally, the Alevis were transformed into a community that was supported both

⁵⁵ Fuat Bozkurt, *Toplumsal Boyutlarıyla Alevilik*, pp. 92-93; Massicard, p. 64; Şener, pp. 155-156.

by the progressive media and the intellectuals.⁵⁶ However, this gradual opening of the Alevis into the wider society and the relative freedom of movement secured for them did not last long. From the mid-1960s, the Alevi faith was affected by the country-wide reflections of the ideological polarizations which were taking place on a world-wide scale to such an extent that Alevism came to be considered as equivalent to Leftism and to Marxism.⁵⁷ During these years, the question of class differences was prioritized, whereas the discussion of the position of Alevism on a religious axis was considered “reactionary” and thus rejected.⁵⁸

As the Alevis and Alevism became more and more identified with the radical leftist movements in Turkey during the 1960s and 1970s, the Alevis became the target of the radical Islamist and nationalist rightist movements of the time, a process which had begun in the aftermath of the 1961 Constitution. This ended up with assaults against the Alevis between 1978 and 1980 in Malatya, Kahramanmaraş and Çorum.⁵⁹ Regarding this issue, Öner suggests that the fact that, even in the 1970s, “the ultra-nationalist National Action Party mobilized support among the Sunnis with policies that equated anti-communism with anti-Alevism” indicates the persistence of the hostile attitude of the Sunni population against Alevis into the twentieth century.

Since around the end of 1970s, the dynamics of the world economy have been experiencing a deep down restructuring process, paving the way for a “new

⁵⁶ Fuat Bozkurt, *Toplumsal Boyutlarıyla Alevilik*, p. 93; Massicard, pp. 55-57.

⁵⁷ Subaşı, p. 105, cited from Paul Dumont, “Günümüz Türkiye’inde Aleviliğe Bakış,” *Tuttum Aynayı Yüzüme Ali Göründü Gözüme – Yabancı Araştırmacılar Gözüyle Alevilik*, trans. İlhan Cem Erseven (İstanbul: Ant Yayınları, 1997).

⁵⁸ Kehl-Bodrogi, “Introduction,” p. XIII.

⁵⁹ Gencay Şaylan, *Türkiye’de İslamcı Siyaset* (Ankara: V Yayınları, August 1992), pp. 99-101; Massicard, pp. 59-65; Yaman, pp. 132-133. For more comprehensive information on the relationship between the Left and Alevis, see Okan, pp. 93-104. For a detailed discussion of the progress of the Islamist movements in Turkey, see Doğan Duman, *Demokrasi Sürecinde Türkiye’de İslamcılık* (İzmir: Dokuz Eylül Yayınları, September 1999); Oral Çalışlar and Tolga Çelik, *İslamcılığın Üç Kolu* (İstanbul: Güncel Yayıncılık, 2006).

economy,” a process that is called “neo-liberal economic restructuring” or “neo-liberal globalization.”⁶⁰ The rise of this “new economy” has led to the following significant developments on a world-wide scale: First, the social group that has been most negatively affected, economic terms being in the first place, by the rules of the neo-liberal globalization is the working class. Second, nation-states and the representatives of leftist ideologies have come to lose their prestige in the eyes of the working class people, since neither of them can any longer respond to the desperate needs of the workers, although they have previously been identified with redistributive policies aimed at improving the status of the poor and the disadvantaged.

These developments have produced two critical results: The organic and strong relationship between the leftist ideologies and the working class people, which was quite obvious before 1970s, has started to loosen and dissolve; and since consulting their traditional supporters (mainly the welfare state, which had been effective as of the early 1900s until the “new economy era,” and the leftist ideologies) could no longer relieve the burden of the working class people who have been severely hit by the adverse effects of the neo-liberal globalization, there has appeared a great vacuum both in the political/economic space and the spiritual area on the side of these disadvantaged people. This vacuum needs to be filled by a strong element and this element would be provided by such things as ethnicity, religion and gender, each of which constitutes the core of the identity politics.⁶¹

⁶⁰ For more detailed information regarding the characteristics of this new economy in the making and its adverse effects on the working class people, see Lourdes Beneria, “Changing Employment Patterns and the Informalization of Jobs: General Trends and Gender Dimensions,” (Geneva: International Labor Office, August 2001), pp. 1-5.

⁶¹ Haldun Güllalp, “Globalization and Political Islam: The Social Bases of Turkey’s Welfare Party,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 33, no. 3 (August 2001), p. 436; Ziya Öniş, “The Political Economy of Islamic Resurgence in Turkey: The Rise of the Welfare Party in Perspective,”

Regarding this point, İbrahim Kaya suggests that “in terms of identity, the world has been witnessing a shift from social class and nation to race, ethnicity, gender, religion, and so on.”⁶² As underlined by Kaya as well, identity politics refers to a process during which identities, which are defined for political purposes as well as by economic positions and interests and that are formed around nation-states and social classes, are challenged. He quotes from Hall saying that, for the last few decades, social classes, which have appeared as one of the great structuring principles for a long time, have been fractured, fragmented and undermined and makes the following claim:

Assumed and larger stable identities –social class and nation, in particular– that have provided us quite certain ways in knowing who we are have been in question. Therefore, the recent increase in identity politics has come with a shift from a general politics based on ideal universal progress to a politics of identity based on gender, local, religious or ethnic identities.⁶³

Additionally, Ziya Öniş draws our attention to the “postmodern condition,” which he claims to be associated with the acceptance of diversity, the recognition of local and traditional cultures including religion, and the right for multiple perspectives or paths related to modernity to co-exist as opposed to a single conception of modernity associated with the West and the tradition of the Enlightenment. He further claims that “the cultural pluralism associated with the postmodern age also implies a radical shift in the direction of political activity away from the traditional left-right divide to issues surrounding individual identity.”⁶⁴

Third World Quarterly 18, no. 4 (1997), pp. 745-746; Ziya Öniş, “Political Islam at the Crossroads: from Hegemony to Co-existence,” *Contemporary Politics* 7, no. 4 (2001), p. 282.

⁶² İbrahim Kaya, “Identity Politics: The Struggle for Recognition or Hegemony,” *East European Politics and Societies* 21, no. 4 (2007), p. 707.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, same page.

⁶⁴ Ziya Öniş, “The Political Economy of Islamic Resurgence in Turkey” p. 747.

Furthermore, he touches upon the fact that neo-liberal globalization is accompanied by the world-wide dissemination of some values such as material values, consumerism and individualism which are obviously to the advantage of the winners of the neo-liberal restructuring and they do really cause a homogenization in terms of such things as tastes and behavioral norms across various societies around the world; as well as the dissemination of the discourse on such things as citizenship, human rights, liberal democracy, multiculturalism, acceptance of diversity and pluralism. The second group of values disseminated on a world-wide scale with the apparent objective of providing an extended space for the groups or communities to be able to freely express their own identities under the postmodern condition so as to seemingly serve the improvement of democracy and human rights in general, actually serves the benefit of the core actors of the neo-liberal globalization process, since the struggles waged in the name of the aforementioned values actually lead to deep fragmentation within societies (especially among the most disadvantaged and poorest sections of the society on the basis of such things as language, ethnicity, religion, sect and gender).⁶⁵ In other words, the fragmentation of the neo-liberal-globalization-stricken segments of the societies on the basis of such things as language, ethnicity, religion, sect and gender serves the interests of the core actors of the new economy. Such a fragmentation prevents the emergence of any strong opposition against the core actors by the large segments of the societies.⁶⁶

Against the backdrop of all these developments which have been at work since the end of the 1970s, the world has witnessed the rise of religious identities, Islam

⁶⁵ Ibid., same page.

⁶⁶ Zygmunt Bauman, *Community: Seeking Safety in an Insecure World* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001), pp. 89-109.

being no exception.⁶⁷ Having briefly described the unsafe, free-floating and fragmented environment introduced by globalization marked by the concept of “risk society,” Ziya Öniş⁶⁸ states that people whose living standards have deteriorated under the conditions of neo-liberalism and who are forced to live with the reality of “risk society,” long for some kind of certainty in their lives and this need is met by a turning towards religion and tradition.

Parallel to the transformations within the global economy, Turkey also has experienced an economic restructuring in the post-1980 period, a process during which the ISI model was ended and replaced by an export-orientation model. The state-led economy was replaced by a new kind of economy based on a self-regulating market. This period also witnessed the weakening of the welfare state, the decline of social democracy and their replacement by a politics of identity based on religion since the functions of the defunct welfare state and social democratic formations started to be carried out by local religious organizations and foundations working to help the poor in urban neighborhoods. These efforts contributed to the popularity of Islamist political movement in Turkey.⁶⁹

In addition to the socio-economic basis beneath the rise and relatively higher visibility of Sunni Islam in Turkey from the end of 1970s, the military junta, which preferred resorting to Sunni Islam as a source of social cohesion against the “subversive” and “divisive” ideologies of Marxism and Kurdish separatism, an attitude which was carried out by the following civilian governments, contributed to

⁶⁷ Ziya Öniş, “Political Islam at the crossroads: from hegemony to co-existence,” p. 281.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 282.

⁶⁹ Gülalp, pp. 435-442.

the rise of Islam, as well.⁷⁰ As a consequence of all these developments, Sunni Islamist values and actors came to the forefront and became stronger in the political, economic and cultural areas with their own political parties with successful election results, their own businessmen's association, their own labor-union confederation, their own newspapers, TVs and publishing houses.⁷¹ Kaya argues that this rise of Sunni Islam is far from being in pursuit of recognition by the power groups within Turkish society (especially for the case of Welfare Party); to the contrary, the supporters of the rise of Sunni Islam seriously work to colonize the cultural sphere of society and now intend that their values shape or should shape the whole society. They have been quite active in the crucial areas such as production, consumption and the media.⁷²

On the part of Alevis of Turkey, on the other hand, the 1980s could be defined as years during which they were once again marginalized in various terms. Firstly, they were ideologically marginalized by the state that adopted the Turkish-Islam synthesis. This was mainly an argument developed by the rightist intellectuals, based on an image of a national culture depending on Turkishness and Islam, to contest the reflections of the socialist discourse on Turkey so as to ensure the unity of the nation via putting an end to ideological schisms. That is to say, the state doctrine once more focused on Turkishness and Sunni Islam, ostracizing both Kurds and Alevis. Moreover, in the schools, a Religious Culture and Morals course became compulsory from fourth grade until graduation from high school, the content of which was prepared in accordance with the Sunni beliefs and practices, denying the existence of

⁷⁰ Özlem Göner, "The Transformation of the Alevi Collective Identity," *Cultural Dynamics* 17, no. 2 (2005), p. 116.

⁷¹ Gülaıp, p. 433.

⁷² Kaya, p. 712.

Alevism. The capabilities of the Department of Religious Affairs were extended and the construction of mosques gained speed. Alevi villages received their own share of new mosques, as well as of imams appointed by the state. Secondly, they were professionally marginalized through being forced to leave their positions in state offices and municipalities to the conservative personnel. They had been appointed to such positions thanks to the advance of social democracy in the 1970s. Thirdly, they were economically marginalized because the public sector and the working class, in general, in which Alevis were quite high in number, were negatively affected by the neo-liberal economic policies of the 1980s.⁷³

In addition, when the Leftist formations in Turkey fell into a kind of an organizational and structural depression both as a result of the policies pursued by the state and the new economic restructuring process which was at work both on world-wide and country-wide scales limiting the domain of the Leftist discourse following the 1980 military coup, the organic link between the Alevis and the Left loosened. Thus, as of the end of the 1980s, Alevis, who had identified themselves with the Socialist Left during the 1960s and the 1970s felt the need to turn back to their own dynamics.⁷⁴

This process of turning back to their own dynamics has been referred to as the “Alevi awakening.” It is described as a transformation marked by a dramatic change in the Alevis’ self-definition from the supporters of a leftist ideology to the members of a religious community are associated with basically three developments: First, the collapse of the socialist block in Eastern Europe at the end of 1980s caused a loss of significance of the socialist case in the eyes of the young and middle-aged members of the Alevi community, who had been fervent supporters of this ideology before.

⁷³ Göner, p. 117; Massicard, pp. 69-73.

⁷⁴ Ali Murat İrat, *Devletin Bektaşi Hırkası* (İstanbul: Chiviyazıları Yayınevi, 2006), p. 104.

As a result, these Alevis, who had gained organizational experience in the course of their struggle for the socialist case, decided to continue their struggle for justice, equality and freedom as Alevis, instead of Socialists. Second, Alevis felt the need to defend themselves in the face of the strengthening of political Islam or Islamist fundamentalism in Turkey as a result of the global and local developments as already mentioned.⁷⁵

Third, the worldwide effective discourses of multiculturalism and identity politics, which both encouraged the representation of the distinctive groups on the basis of such things as religion and ethnicity under the nation states through expressions of authenticity and identity and forced the states to respect differences, were also influential. Göner suggests that the state of the Republic of Turkey feels the effects of the discourses of multiculturalism and identity politics which is globally influential in today's world through its relations with the EU, claiming that as a result of "EU's discourse of respect for minorities and multiculturalist stance," the Turkish state, in the process of its integration into EU, can no longer continue its "difference-blind exclusionary discourse" and has to experience a "shift from 'repression' to 'expression'."⁷⁶

Against the backdrop of all the aforementioned developments both on the local and global scales, as well as some other disturbing events from the perspective of the Alevis such as the Sivas Massacre on 2 July 1993 and the Gazi Mahallesi Events that started on 12 March 1995, during the 1990s, the Alevis entered an intensive process of organization both outside (primarily in Germany, Austria, England, Switzerland, Denmark, Holland and France) and in Turkey around various religion and culture-

⁷⁵ Reha Çamuroğlu, "Türkiye'de Alevi Uyanışı," *Alevi Kimliği*, eds. T. Olsson, E. Özdalga, C. Raudvere, trans. Bilge Kurt Torun and Hayati Torun (İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, June 2003), pp. 96-97; İrat, p. 105.

⁷⁶ Göner, pp. 126-127.

based associations and foundations, including the Cem Foundation, the Pir Sultan Abdal Association, the Hacı Bektaş-ı Veli Association and the Karacaahmet Association.

This organization process was marked by the *Alevi Manifesto*, which was written and signed by a group of intellectuals, including both Alevis and left-oriented Sunnis in 1989 and published for the first time in February 1990 and in which the following issues were particularly emphasized: the fear of Alevi intellectuals of the rise of Islamic fundamentalism and the need for the recognition of the Alevi identity. The opening statement of the manifesto highlighted the signatory intellectuals' expectation for a positive approach towards the Alevi faith and culture from the public. The manifesto also called for equal representation and opportunities in education, in the media, as well as in receiving their own religious services. Moreover, Sunnis were called to learn about Alevis and get rid of their prejudices.

In addition, the number of *cemevis* (places where the Cem ritual, which is the basic religious ritual of Alevis, as well as various cultural and charity activities are carried out) gradually increased all around Turkey. The historical dervish convents/religious centers of Alevis, such as the Hacı Bektaş Veli Dervish Convent (Nevşehir), the Abdal Musa Dervish Convent (Antalya), the Karaca Ahmet Sultan Dervish Convent (İstanbul) and the Şahkulu Sultan Dervish Convent (İstanbul), were revived so as to serve as *cemevis* or gathering places of the members of various foundations and associations.

The interest of the members of the Alevi community in the Alevi faith also increased, as a result of which courses on different aspects of Alevism started to be offered within the body of the Alevi foundations and associations, as well as *cemevis*. Alevis also have drawn upon the power of both the printed and audio-visual

media with the issues of several Alevi periodicals such as *Cem*, *Alevilerin Sesi* (The voice of the Alevis), *Nefes* (The breath), *Kervan* (The caravan), *Yurtta Birlik* (Unity in the country), *Pir Sultan Abdal*, *Yol* (The path), etc., as well as thanks to the launch of various Alevi radio stations, such as Cem Radyo, Radyo Barış, Yön FM, etc., and TV channels, including Cem TV, Su TV, Düzgün TV and Dem TV, which could be established only at the end of 2005.

In parallel to these developments, the media other than the ones belonging to Alevis, including those who either favored or disfavored Alevism, too, began to discuss the Alevi way of life, Alevi rituals, traditions and habits. Thus, Alevism became a publicly known and discussed issue. In addition, there was an increase in the number of publications, either academic and scientific or popular on issues related to Alevism. As a result of this increased interest in Alevism, various local and international conferences, symposiums and panels were organized in order to handle different aspects of the Alevi issue. Moreover, the Alevis also started to have their own Internet sites, where information related to Alevism and Alevis, in general, is disseminated to a wide range of users group and relevant issues are discussed by them.⁷⁷

At the end of the 1980s, Alevis also started to express their discontent through protest activities in reaction to different events which disturbed them collectively, such as a comment by Güner Ümit, a famous Turkish talk-show host, referring to incestuous relationships among the Kızılbâş people during his TV program in 1994 or Şevket Kazan's, the Minister of Justice, analogy between the "one minute dark for light forever" protests in 1996 -conducted by a large portion of

⁷⁷ Ömer Çaha, "The Role of the Media in the Revival of Alevi Identity in Turkey," *Social Identities* 10, no. 3 (2004), p. 330 and 332; Göner, p. 119; Erman and Göker, p. 102; Yaman, pp. 141-146. For the whole text of the Alevi Manifesto, see Zelyut, pp. 18-24.

the society against the involvement of the state in dark relations- and the traditional accusation upon Kızılbaş people regarding their alleged incestuous relationships claimed to be established following their religious ceremonies. The Alevis also commemorate the Sivas event every year through protests and declarations in the media.⁷⁸

Finally, following the so-called Alevi expansion or opening of the AKP government that started with an attempt to organize a “fast-breaking” meal for the Alevi Dede during the 12 Imams mourning fasting on 11 January 2008, fifty thousand Alevi people, answering the call of the Alevi-Bektashi Federation, marched on 9 November 2008 in Ankara in order to demand rights from the government including equal citizenship instead of discrimination, the abolition of the mandatory religious courses, the abolition of the Directorate of Religious Affairs, giving cemevis a legal status, recognition of the representative Alevi organizations by the government, allowing the Alevi dervish convents to be directed by the Alevi organizations and turning the Madımak Hotel in Sivas into a museum in commemoration of the people who were killed during the Sivas massacre.⁷⁹

As a result of all these developments, Alevism, which had been treated as a taboo by the public opinion before, gradually turned into a subject that frequently occupied the public agenda. The Alevis today have gradually integrated into the wider society and they have become more and more visible in the public sphere since they have found various channels to express themselves. Thus, the Sunni majority have been informed of the Alevi way of life, and such things as their religious teachings, institutions, rituals, folklore, the reasons why they felt the need to hide themselves and the secrets of their faith, demands from the governments, as well as

⁷⁸ Çaha, p. 333; İrat, pp. 135-136.

⁷⁹ Oral Çalışlar, *Aleviler – Vali de Olmak İstiyoruz General de*, p. 16.

from society at large, all of which helped the questioning of the traditional prejudices about them. In addition, the Alevi themselves who do not have access to knowledge about their religious practices and who cannot learn anything related to Alevism in the official education system have been able to acquire the relevant information they were in need of.⁸⁰ As a consequence of these developments, the traditional closed and secrecy-based character of the Alevi community has undergone a dramatic transformation.

As already mentioned, among the developments that led to the opening of the Alevi community into the wider society, their migration from the rural parts of Turkey into the urban areas that started in the 1950s particularly comes to the forefront. This migration has caused two significant phenomena, alongside the others, affecting the traditional character of the Alevi community dramatically. Firstly, the primary rituals and institutions, which constituted the backbone of the traditional, tightly-knitted socio-religious organization of Alevism which was formed both under the conditions of a social structure peculiar to the rural environment and in accordance with the conditions of a marginal existence on the part of Alevi, have taken a major blow under the urban conditions. Secondly, the geographical distance between the members of the Sunni community and those of the Alevi community has decreased and even disappeared within the urban environment, as a result of which the possibility of the direct, face-to-face encounters between the members of two communities has increased to a great extent.

In the following two chapters how the members of the Alevi community living in an urban setting have been experiencing these two significant phenomena, which were brought about by their migration into the cities and which constitute two

⁸⁰ Çaha, p. 334; Erman and Göker, p. 103; Oral Çalışlar, *Aleviler – Vali de Olmak İstiyoruz General de*, p. 13; Yaman, p. 141.

aspects of the dramatic transformation of the centuries-long closed, marginal and secrecy-based character of the community, will be described. In addition, their observations, feelings and ideas concerning these two particular aspects of this great transformation against the backdrop of all the other developments leading to the opening and increased visibility of the community as of the foundation of Turkey as discussed so far will be examined.

CHAPTER III

ALEVISM EXPERIENCED IN THE CITY AS OPPOSED TO ALEVISM EXPERIENCED IN THE VILLAGE

Exploring how the Alevi have been experiencing the effects of migration from the villages as well as those of adaptation to the urban conditions on the primary rituals and institutions of the traditional Alevism necessitates a general overview of the actual practice of Alevism in the rural setting. Such an exploration also requires an overall picture of how the traditional practice of Alevism has changed within the urban environment, in general, from the perspectives of the Alevi. Consequently, the informants of this study were first asked to describe the way Alevism was experienced in the villages they migrated from, as well as the way Alevism is currently being experienced in the urban setting where they have started to live, and then to make a comparison between the two.

A General Picture of Alevism as Experienced in the Village

With regard to the way the traditional Alevi culture and way of life were experienced within the context of villages, the following general picture on the basis of the explanations of the informants has been provided.

The Dede, who can be defined as the religious leader and teacher of the Alevi community managing the basic religious ritual of the Alevi culture, which is referred to as Cem, would come to the villages where his talips were dwelling one or two times a year, especially during the winter months, when there was enough leisure

time both for the villagers and for the Dede himself that could be spared for collective religious activities.⁸¹ Certain lineages within the village were traditionally the talips of different Dedes. This Dede-talip relationship had a long history of hundreds of years.⁸²

One of the informants from Bingöl stated that the reason the Dede visited his talips only once or twice a year originated from the fact that he had to come and visit the villages of his talips secretly hiding his religious functionary identity until his actual arrival in the village.⁸³ However, another informant who comes from Malatya attributed this frequency of the visits by the Dede to the fact that Dedelik was not a professional job from which the Dede could make a living; therefore, the Dede who also had to carry out the routine village activities such as planting, cultivating, harvesting and grazing, to be able to maintain his family, needed to visit the villages of his talips during the times when he did not have to work.⁸⁴

One of the informants from Tunceli said that in accordance with the rules of Alevism, Dedes were paid for the religious services they performed and the payment they received was referred to as *zekât*, a certain part of which needed to be spared by Dedes for their own use and the surplus of which should be sent to the Hacı Bektaş Dervish Lodge in Nevşehir, as well as even to the mausoleum of Mohammed, the Prophet.⁸⁵ Another informant from Erzincan emphasized that the Dedes did not live

⁸¹ Gamze Hanım, interview by the author, video camera recording, Esenler/Pendik, İstanbul, Turkey, 25 March 2009.

⁸² Fatma Hanım, interview by the author, video camera recording, Gebze/Kocaeli, Turkey, 10-11 March 2009.

⁸³ Halil Bey, interview by the author, video camera recording, Esenler/Pendik, İstanbul, Turkey, 24 March 2009.

⁸⁴ Gamze Hanım, 25 March 2009.

⁸⁵ Hüseyin Bey, interview by the author, video camera recording, Şifa Mahallesi/Tuzla, İstanbul, Turkey, 13 March 2009.

on these payments. In other words, the Dedes were not dependent on the money given to them by the residents of villages they visited.⁸⁶

The Dedes would come to the village especially during some religiously significant periods, such as the *Muharram* fasting or *Hızır* fasting times.⁸⁷ They would not only lead the Cem ritual, but also inform their talips about the values pertaining to the Alevi tradition. One of the informants from Malatya discussed the informative/educational aspect of the Cem ceremony in the following words:

Our knowledge about Alevism originates from the Cem rituals conducted by Dedes and the information Dedes provided us with. Since we were pretty young back then [when she was in the village], what I can remember is just the movements [of the participants]. The Dede would tell [about some religiously important matters] verbally, accompanied by the instrument [*bağlama*]. Once the Dede began to tell [about religiously important matters] our elders would cry reflecting the feeling of the Cem more beautifully. We would listen to their words, mimic their movements and conclude that that so were Alevism and Dedelik.⁸⁸

Another informant from Sivas specified that, in the village, both Dedes and the members of the older generation would not only read to them educational books concerning the religious beliefs of Alevism but they would also provide them with information regarding the Cem ritual.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ Sultan Hanım, interview by the author, video camera recording, Cevizli/Maltepe, İstanbul, Turkey, 12 March 2009.

⁸⁷ Muharram fasting is associated with the Kerbela Event in 680, during which Hz. Hüseyin, a grandson of Hz. Muhammed and the son of Hz. Ali, the fourth caliphate of the Islam State, was killed by Yezit, the son of Muaviye bin Ebu Süfyan, the fifth caliphate of the Islam State. Muharram fasting, which is dedicated to Hz. Hüseyin and all Twelve Imams, starts on the first day of the month of Muharram, which is the first month of the Muslim Calendar, and lasts for twelve days. On the thirteenth day, *Aşure* (Noah's pudding) is cooked and distributed to the kith and kin. Hızır fasting, on the other hand, is dedicated to Hızır, who is a saint or prophet signifying profusion and instances of coming to the rescue of the ones who are in need and difficulty. Hızır fasting generally lasts for three days sometime in January and February. For more detailed information about both of these fastings, see. Yaman, pp. 222-225.

⁸⁸ Gamze Hanım, 25 March 2009. *Bağlama* is the traditional musical instrument of Alevi played during the Cem rituals. It has three double strings and is played with a plectrum.

⁸⁹ Zöhre Hanım, interview by the author, video camera recording, Kaynarca/Pendik, İstanbul, Turkey, 11 March 2009.

The Dede would stay in the village where his talips lived for a certain period, during which he would be hosted by one or some of his talips in that particular village. The duration of the time he spent both in the house of a particular talip and in the village would vary in accordance with the hospitality, respect and attention he received. Regarding this issue, one of the informants made the following comment:

They [Dedes] would stay for one week; as a matter of fact, the length of their stay in the village depended on the hospitality and interest showed by the villagers. In other words, Dedes would also pay attention to whether the family [at whose house they were staying] was listening to them carefully or not [in the meaning of attaching importance to what they say]. For instance, we are also having a talk right now and if you listen carefully to me, I will keep on talking, but if you do not listen to what I am saying, then I will simply go away.⁹⁰

Another informant from Bingöl reported that there was no fixed or specifically designated day on which the Cem ritual should take place since the ritual would be performed whenever the Dede could come to the village.⁹¹

In the course of the period the Dede spent in the village, his talips would come to the house where he was being hosted in order to participate in the Cem ritual. In other words, the house of the talip where the Dede chose to stay would serve as the gathering place for the Dede and his talips. According to one informant from Tunceli, since the houses in the village were generally small, the Cem rituals which were performed in the rural setting were not crowded, and the talips of a different Dede other than the one who was present in the village at the time might also attend the Cem ritual which was carried out by the present Dede.⁹² Another informant said

⁹⁰ Gamze Hanım, 25 March 2009.

⁹¹ Halil Bey, 24 March 2009.

⁹² Fatma Hanım, 10-11 March 2009.

that the Cem ritual took place either in the biggest houses of the village or in the village school since they were large enough to allow for such an activity.⁹³

One informant from Tokat described a special kind of Cem ritual, which is referred to as *Görgü Cemi*.⁹⁴ According to her explanations, it was extremely significant and even mandatory to carry out this special kind of Cem before the end of the current year so as to be able to enter the coming year spotlessly clean, in the moral or spiritual senses of the word. Without having the *Görgü Cemi* duly and properly performed, the members of the Alevi community residing in the village from which this particular informant migrated would not even sow seed. During this ritual, all the villagers would come together in a certain place where each lineage within the village would appear both before the public and the Dede. The time a particular lineage appeared both before the public and the Dede, the Dede would ask the public three times whether they were all pleased with and approved of the behavior of the members of the lineage standing in front of them. If the public declared that they were all pleased with their behavior and approved of them uttering the phrase *Eyvallah Dede* (Yes, we do), then the Dede would say the following: “If one subject approves the behavior of the other subject, then we also approve of their behavior.”⁹⁵

However, if there appeared a person from within the public who declared that he/she did not approve of a certain person’s behavior for a specific reason, these two people would be reconciled by the initiative of the Dede, and an animal would be sacrificed for the sake of this reconciliation. That animal would be immolated

⁹³ Cennet Hanım, interview by the author, video camera recording, Kaynarca/Pendik, İstanbul, Turkey, 11 March 2009.

⁹⁴ Emine Hanım, interview by the author, video camera recording, Esenler/Pendik, İstanbul, Turkey, 25 March 2009.

⁹⁵ *Kul, kuldân razıysa; biz de ondan razıyız*. In this phrase, subject means the subject of God.

following the ritual, and the food made with the meat of the animal that had been sacrificed would be eaten by the villagers all together. Thereby, it was not just the person who had offended another person or a group of people within the village who would be purified, but all of the residents of the village would become peaceful, as well, according to the explanations of the informant. Apart from describing the main characteristics and the general procedure of the Görgü Cemi ritual, the same informant talked about the Muharram fasting and the Hızır fasting practices within her village, specifying that at the end of the Hızır fasting, which lasted for seven days in February in her village, they would sacrifice an animal both for the Muharram fasting and the Hızır fasting together.

On the basis of all of the information provided by the informants thus far, it may be concluded that the winter time was spared for collective religious activities within the rural setting, since both the Dede and their talips had to work in the fields during the remaining part of the year. Additionally, there was no specific or fixed assembly place for collective religious activities. The houses of each and every talip could well serve as a potential assembly place for the collective religious activities, which changed within the urban setting, since today's cemevis may be described as fixed gathering places for such collective activities. Besides, the length of the stay of the Dede in a village depended on the hospitality he received.

A General Picture of Alevism as Experienced in the City

Having been provided with a general picture as to the practices and peculiarities of the traditional Alevi culture and way of life within the rural setting, the informants

were then asked to describe and comment on the way Alevism is being practised both by themselves and by the other Alevi in general within the urban environment.

Examples of Proper Continuance of Alevism in the City

Three of the informants said that, from the time they or their parents migrated to İstanbul up until today, they have been continuing the traditional Alevi rituals and practices properly within the urban setting, in exactly the same way as in their villages. Another informant said that she and her family had been properly performing the rituals and practices peculiar to the traditional Alevism exercised in her village, following her arrival in the city during the 1960s until the second half of the 1970s. From their explanations, in general, it seems that the existence of a guiding elder figure within the family arriving in the city before the younger people who was both old enough to have observed and internalized the particularities of the Alevi culture and way of life and who was also dedicated to the continuance of the traditional practices of this culture even under urban conditions, was one of the key factors of this proper continuation of the traditional Alevi rituals and practices. This guiding figure seems to create some kind of a web of relations among the Alevi who lived in the same vicinity where he lives, which gave rise to the formation of an appropriate environment for the continuation of their traditional practices in the village.

It is this appropriate environment into which the young people come and inherit from such guiding elder figures so as to hand it down to their own children, in turn. In the light of the explanations of these four informants, the high population density of a group of people coming from the same village of a certain city seems to have the

potential to play a key role in the open declaration and continuance of the traditions proper to the Alevi culture practiced in the rural setting.

One of the informants who fell within the older generation category and who was from Tokat said that she, together with her family, had been properly continuing the Alevi rituals and practices that had been carried out in her village since the time she migrated to İstanbul up until today. Having mentioned that she came to İstanbul in 1987, she stated that during the first years following her arrival, they were conducting the Cem ritual in the houses of the Alevi who lived in the vicinity because the number of cemevis was insufficient back then. She named some of those then-existent cemevis as Karacaahmet, Şahkulu, Sultangazi and Kartal dervish convents and cemevis and then described the way they continued their religious traditions and practices those days within the urban setting with the following words:

What would we do back then? We would gather together at houses, and the Dede would come. We would summon the Alevi living in the vicinity of ours, not only the ones who came from Kızılelma [their own village], but the ones who came from Almus, Niksar, and from other places, as well [to the house where the Cem would take place]. If the Cem would be performed at my house, for instance, the Dede would also come to my house. On that particular day, we would perform the Cem ritual and cook pilaf. Following the Cem, we would sacrifice an animal and eat pilaf [together with the meat dish prepared from the meat of the sacrificed animal]. The remaining meal would be put into pots and taken home by all of the participants of the ritual.... For example, I have my own relatives and you have your own relatives. We all communicate among each other so as to disseminate the information that an animal will be sacrificed at a certain house [as part of a Cem ritual]. Everybody would work heartily [for the imminent event]. Participating in the Görgü Cemi is our duty; we must appear in front of the community and get their approval.... These rituals had also been conducted by my father-in-law before the time I came to the city.⁹⁶

Having described the way they continued their faith within the urban setting at the end of the 1980s and the first half of the 1990s, the same informant then specified that since the establishment of their village society, which is called the Tokat Almus

⁹⁶ Emine Hanım, 25 March 2009.

Kızılelma Köyü Derneği, in 1996, collective religious activities started to be performed under the leadership of the president of this village society. She added that this fact was also valid for the immigrants who came from other villages into the particular urban area in which this informant currently lives.

From the point of view of this informant, there was no pronounced difference between practising the traditions peculiar to Alevism within the city as opposed to practising those traditions in the village as she believed that within the urban environment where she currently lived, she had been continuing properly whatever she had experienced in the name of Alevism in her village. Let us hear her exact words concerning the issue:

There is no difference between experiencing Alevism in the rural setting as opposed to experiencing it within the urban context, both are same for us. The reason why this is the case is that I have brought up my children with the same values I was exposed to in the village. My daughter is a university graduate and she participated in all of our Görgü Cemi ceremonies, as well as in all our ritual sacrifices. We have postponed the ritual sacrifice of ours that would take place for the establishment of our Musahiplik relation, since my husband wanted our [youngest] child to reach the proper age at which he would be grown up enough to see and remember this event. Our ritual sacrifice would normally take place last week if we had not put it off for this child of ours.⁹⁷

The daughter of this particular informant, who was also interviewed, stated that she had grown up within the cradle of the Alevi culture and way of life thanks to her parents' special efforts to introduce and endear Alevism both to her and her sister and brother.⁹⁸ She specified the religious collective practices they conducted in the name of Alevism as visiting the cemevi at least two times a year -mostly Kartal Cemevi, and sometimes the Karacaahmet and Şahkulu dervish convents, as well as the Sarıgazi and Kaynarca cemevis. The first of these "mandatory" visits is made in order to perform their annual Görgü Cemi ritual, during which people belonging to

⁹⁷ Emine Hanım, 25 March 2009.

⁹⁸ Burcu Hanım, interview by the author, video camera recording, Esenler/Pendik, İstanbul, Turkey, 25 March 2009.

the same lineage appear in front of the Dede and the whole community so as to receive their approval, and at the end of which an animal is sacrificed for God. The second “mandatory” visit is made to perform a Cem ritual once the Hızır fasting is completed. At the end of the Hızır fasting, an animal is sacrificed for God in the name of both their fasting on Muharram and the Hızır fasting. Apart from these “mandatory” visits, they go to the cemevi for such rituals as meals cooked and distributed to the relatives and acquaintances of a deceased person following the funeral ceremony in order to make sure that the deceased will rest in peace, for the votive offerings of the members of their community or for the Musahiplik sacrifice, et cetera.

At this point, a significant detail should be emphasized which is related to the efforts of the family of this particular informant, as well as by other Alevis who lived in the vicinity of their house, to continue their traditions and practices in the urban setting. Although the mother of this informant stated that there was no difference between the rural and the urban setting in terms of continuing the religious traditions and practices of Alevism, her daughter touched upon a memory which had been told to her by her uncle. According to the content of this memory, during the days when her parents were performing the Cem ritual at their houses together with their relatives and Alevi neighbors, the participants of the ritual felt the need not only to draw the curtains, but also to cover the windows of the house with another curtain in order not to be seen from the outside. They also set one or two persons to watch at the gate. In other words, they felt a strong need to hide their religious ritual from the “outsiders.”

This action of hiding by these people well may be regarded as a mere continuation of the secrecy or the confidentiality strategy mentioned by most of the

informants when they attempted to provide a picture of Alevism experienced in the rural area. Emphasizing that this secrecy issue will be dealt with comprehensively in the following chapter, for now suffice it to be content with asserting the point that this need for secrecy within the urban setting seems to be really salient especially during the first years following the arrival of the Alevi immigrants in the city.

Another informant, from Erzincan who fell within the older generation category, also stated that she, together with her family, was continuing the traditions and practices peculiar to Alevism that had been carried out in the village after she migrated to İstanbul in 1963 until the second half of 1970s. She specified that she owed this continuation of the Alevi traditions and practices to her father, who was devoted to the traditional Alevi culture experienced in the rural setting. She described how they continued their traditions within the urban setting after their migration to İstanbul:

Thanks to my father's educational efforts, I am knowledgeable about the Cem ritual, fasting and all other things. My father had a person recite the Koran twice every March up until my marriage. He would fulfill all annual religious obligations of ours such as the ones that should be carried out with relation to the birth of our Prophet, the submerging of Noah's ship, Hızır fasting, Twelve Imams fasting [that is Muharram fasting] et cetera. We went on hosting Cem rituals at our house in Kartal for more than some three or four years following my marriage. There were not many Alevi families in our vicinity; nevertheless, it was possible to summon some [from the adjacent neighborhoods]. During the years to come, our neighborhood started to host some seven or eight Alevi families; however, before that we would generally notify Alevis living in places such as Çavuşoğlu, et cetera [to have them participate in the Cem ritual] and they would definitely come. We assuredly endeavored to continue the traditional practices carried out in the village. Our Dede would come from Dersim, Tunceli. He was my father's Dede. My mother's Dede would come from Sivas. One of these Dede would conduct the Cem.⁹⁹

Having described the days on which they regularly carried out the basic practices of their traditional religious culture within the urban setting following their migration to

⁹⁹ Sultan Hanım, 12 March 2009.

İstanbul, this informant also stated that these regular practices were performed during the 1960s and the first half of the 1970s only. During the last years of the 1970s, they began to discontinue these religious practices due to “left-right causes,” in her own words. That is to say, as the regular participants and performers of such collective rituals and practices became more involved with political issues, they began to lose their interest in religious matters, as a consequence of which these collective rituals were abandoned.

One other informant, this time from the younger generation and from Ordu, similarly expressed that her family was properly maintaining their traditional culture and way of life within the urban setting since the time they had migrated to İstanbul, with no difference and discontinuation.¹⁰⁰ According to the information she gave, her parents, who had been living in Şekerpınar of Gebze since they had first arrived in İstanbul, had been hosting the Cem rituals in their own houses, as a result of which this informant also seems to have grown up within the cradle of the traditional practices of Alevi culture. This fact was confirmed by the informant in her own words. Similar to the explanations of the mother and daughter who were from Tokat, this young informant, too, did not mention any kind of discontinuation as to the regular practicing of their traditional practices peculiar to Alevism within the urban setting.

In addition to this parallelism with the case of the mother and daughter from Tokat, this informant, falling within the younger generation, also said that they had been observing their religious practices secretly, especially until the 1990s. During the 1990s, when their relatives and fellow villagers came and settled in the Şekerpınar district of Gebze, where they have been living since their arrival in

¹⁰⁰ Hasret Hanım, interview by the author, video camera recording, Kaynarca/Pendik, İstanbul, Turkey, 11 March 2009.

İstanbul, and had increased dramatically in number within that particular district, they started not only to express openly that they were Alevi, but to perform their Cem rituals within the knowledge of their Sunni neighbors. According to the information obtained from this informant, their Sunni neighbors have respected the traditional culture and way of life of the Alevi living in that particular vicinity to such a great extent that they helped the day-long preparation of the Alevi for the Cem ritual, such as the preparation of the meal that is eaten following the ritual.

The fact that the parents of this particular informant were living side by side with their fellow villagers within the same district seems to have contributed to their ability to maintain their traditional way of life and to their capability to openly declare their identities. However, this factor of the relatively intensive population of the fellow villagers does not mean that the Cem rituals hosted by the members of this particular group of fellow villagers coming from Ordu exclude Alevi who migrated to İstanbul from different cities of Turkey other than Ordu and started to live in Şekerpinar. On the contrary, according to the explanations of the informant, the Alevi living in Şekerpinar who come from Tokat and Sivas also participate in the Cem rituals hosted by the villagers of this informant despite the existence of some differences in terms of the traditional religious practices carried out in these two cities and the village of the informant, in Ordu.

Similar to the mother and daughter who came from Tokat, as well as the other informant from Erzincan, this young informant from Ordu provided a relatively detailed and lively picture of the way they have been continuing their traditional practices in the urban setting:

Religious activities are more widespread in the neighborhood where my mother lives [as compared to the place where she currently lives with her husband and parents-in-law]. My mother's neighbors are knowledgeable about the peculiarities of the Cem ritual and they will not come to the house

where the Cem is taking place. In terms of the performance of the Cem ritual, conditions in my mother's neighborhood are more convenient than the ones in here. Hence, I always go to my mother's neighborhood in case of a Cem or any other religious event. The Cem ritual takes place at my mother's house. The Dede-talip relationship still continues in the vicinity of my mother's neighborhood, differently from here. The Dede comes from Bağcılar. Our Dede in our village is different from the Dede who conducts the Cem ritual in my mother's neighborhood. That is, we are the talips of another Dede right now, instead of the one who would conduct the Cems in our village.... The Dede gives advice to us. We sacrifice an animal at the end of all our fastings. The Cem is performed at the house of any person who summons the people to his/her house in order to host the whole event including the sacrificing, *lokma* [consecrated meal] distributing and dining activities. The purchase price of the animal that will be sacrificed for the Twelve Imams fasting [that is Muharram fasting] is shared among the households. Preparation for the meal starts the day before the ritual. Our neighbors, including those who are Sunni, come and help us for the preparation. Nevertheless, they [Sunni neighbors] will not join the Cem. In the morning, when the ritual is over, my mother sends some of the remaining meal to our Sunni neighbors, as well, without practising discrimination against them. The thing is Sunnis are just not allowed to join our religious activities.... Within one week or a couple of week's time right after the Twelve Imams fasting, for example, they immediately sacrifice an animal. Following the ritual sacrifice realized at the end of Twelve Imams fasting, there comes the time for the Hızır fasting and we sacrifice an animal in the name of the Hızır fasting, as well.¹⁰¹

It seems that while the existence of a guiding elder figure within the family who migrated to the city before the members of the younger generation, and living side by side with one's own fellow villagers in the same urban vicinity contributed to the continuation of the traditional Alevi rituals and practices in the urban setting, increased involvement with political issues caused instances of abandonment of these rituals and practices.

Examples of Lack of Proper Continuance of Alevism in the City

Five of the informants openly complained either about their failure at carrying out the traditional Alevi rituals and practices within the urban setting or their lack of

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

knowledge about Alevism and Alevi way of life, sometimes severely criticizing both themselves and the Alevis living in the cities, as a whole. Some of them criticized the frequency of their performances of religious activities on the basis of a comparison with that of their Sunni neighbors, while others associated their lack of proper continuance of Alevism in the city with various factors, such as the politicization of the cemevis, paying more attention to bread-winning than fulfilling their religious duties, preventing the children from experiencing a dilemma between the religious education provided at home and the religious education provided at school and any consequent possible instances of humiliation.

One interesting phenomenon within the evaluations of two informants among the five who were of the idea that they had failed at continuing the traditional practices and values in the city was the fact that they seemed to be torn between two different descriptions of Alevism -one of which equated Alevism to leading a moral and honest way of life in general, while the other laid more weight on allocating more time for regular, more frequent religious activities. While these two informants seemed to be torn between these two definitions of Alevism and there appeared to be a positive correlation between their paying more attention to the second description of Alevism and their self-criticism regarding proper the continuance of the Alevi practices and rituals within the urban setting, another group of informants, other than the five we have already mentioned, appeared to assume some kind of a neutral attitude towards the issue of the appropriate practice of the Alevi culture and way of life under the urban conditions. The conspicuous point regarding this neutral attitude of these two informants was the fact that as they attached more importance to the second description, namely the universal/moral values of Alevism, they did not care much about the regular performance of certain religious rituals and practices. Having

presented these general findings, the discussion now turns to the exact experiences and evaluations the informants.

Two of the informants, one from Tunceli and the other from Malatya, seemed to be evaluating not only the religious practices performed in the urban setting, but also those performed within their villages as insufficient or unsatisfactory. The one from Tunceli said the following regarding this issue:

We are Alevis only in appearance since we fail at the practising dimension. We neither perform Cem nor fast properly. As a matter of fact, we do not do anything. So why is this the case? This is the case, because our parents permissively brought us up without making any demands upon us. While I was young, nobody told me anything related to Alevism; and when a person grows up [without being accustomed to certain religious practices], he/she simply does not carry out those practices. My parents were only interested in shuttling between home and the field, toiling and moiling... If we had stayed in the village, we would possibly have acquired knowledge [about Alevism]. We escaped from the village, too; and were left confined in here, which turned out to be no good for us. Both due to my low level of literacy and lack of interest in such matters [I do not have knowledge of Alevism and fail at practising the activities peculiar to it].¹⁰²

The fact that such a sharp example of self-criticism, both towards himself and his parents, came right after a description of Alevism by the same informant as “Alevism is equal to honesty” was interesting because he appeared to be stuck between two different descriptions of Alevism, one of which put more emphasis on leading a moral and honest way of life on the whole, while the other put more emphasis on performing religious rituals and practices as regularly as possible.

Another informant, from Malatya, made some similar comments while she evaluated her Alevism, together with the Alevi way of led by her parents, both in the rural setting and in the urban one, complaining bitterly about the fact that she and her family did not allocate enough time for religious activities. She explained this situation as follows:

¹⁰² Veli Bey, interview by the author, video camera recording, Çamçeşme/Pendik, İstanbul, Turkey, 13 March 2009.

If somebody else had been in our shoes, they would well have performed the Cem ritual even under the limited conditions of a house. However, when we came here [İstanbul], everybody became deeply occupied with struggling to earn a living through seizing the chance of taking a job in any workplace.... Besides, we are always concerned with financial matters. Everybody is in pursuit of money. I take a look at the people living in the vicinity in my house [she refers to her Sunni neighbors] and see they both fulfill their religious duties and work for a living. So, we are the ones who are imperfect.¹⁰³

As can be understood from the explanations above, this particular informant seems to have been evaluating her Alevism on the basis of a comparison with the Sunni community in the neighborhood where she currently lived within in the urban setting. The same situation was also true for the informant coming from Tunceli. This will be elaborated in the next chapter of the thesis.

In addition to this similarity, which may be defined as evaluating one's own performance of the religious practices as unsatisfactory through making a comparison with the performance of the Sunni, the phenomenon of getting stuck between two different descriptions of Alevism -one of which puts more emphasis on leading a moral and honest way of life on the whole, while the other lays more weight on allocating more time for regular, more frequent religious activities- seems also to be influential on the evaluations of both of these informants regarding whether they could properly continue their traditional rituals and practices peculiar to Alevism within the urban setting. The following words of the informant from Malatya clearly exemplify this point:

As I said before, we try not to make mistakes, similar to the deeds of our parents. When we told our parents that we did not know enough about our religion, they would tell us that we should not be worried about such matters. One should not lie, one should not steal anything, one should not look with an evil eye at the daughter or wife of somebody else if he is a bachelor or one should not give an evil eye to the husband of somebody else if she is a woman... These rules are the stones on the sole true path you should be following and they are the real sources of honesty and chastity, they would say. And we followed their advice. They would tell us that lying, stealing or cherishing immoral feelings about another

¹⁰³ Gamze Hanım, 25 March 2009.

person are evil and one should close his/her heart to the evil. I am forty-two years old right now and I thank God for a hundred thousand times that I have neither done anything wrong to anyone nor have I encountered any evil person up until today. And I always pray for the continuation of this situation. In my prayers, I tell God that I do not know anything and that He please forgives all my sins [originating from my lack of religious knowledge]. I pray to Him that He does not either let me do anything wrong or have me encounter any evil person.¹⁰⁴

An informant from Sivas also complained about the fact that religious practices and values particular to Alevism were not properly continued by them. Her view is again marked by a severe self-criticism as well as criticism towards the Alevis living in the urban setting in general:

We are Alevis, but do not attach much importance to Alevism. In fact, we are seemingly Alevis. Nobody properly fulfils the requirements of Alevism. The proper execution of Alevism was a feature of the bygone times, and narratives of our Dedes have nothing to do with the present situation. What we can do in the name of Alevism is limited under the conditions of the metropolis. In the village, we had our Dedes and elders, who would read very useful books to us and provide us with beneficial information about the Cem. These are all forgotten now. In the metropolises, on the other hand, we go to cemevis once in a blue moon. I, personally, do not think that we do properly carry out the requirements of Alevism and would like that Alevism is paid much more attention.¹⁰⁵

An informant from Bingöl approached the issue from a different point of view, stating that the Alevi creed was not sufficiently experienced and continued within the urban setting due to the fact that efforts were being made in many cemevis in the urban environment to instill certain political ideas and motives in the minds of the children who were sent to these places by their parents with the objective of having them become knowledgeable about the particularities of the Alevi culture. He emphasized that this situation disturbed him to a great extent:

Alevism is not experienced properly enough within the city since it has been politicized, just like it was in the past. [In my opinion] Alevism should never be politicized. However, many cemevis in the city are attempted to be used as

¹⁰⁴ Gamze Hanım, 25 March 2009.

¹⁰⁵ Zöhre Hanım, 11 March 2009.

places where our children are politically oriented. People in such cemevis try to influence our children politically, which I definitely do not approve. Such people attempt to influence our children to sympathize a particular political party instead of teaching them the particularities of the Alevi faith. That is, while I send my child to a certain cemevi in order to make sure that he/she acquires knowledge about his/her own faith, people in charge in this particular cemevi mislead them. Most of the branches of the Pir Sultan Association consider Alevism as out of the circle of Islam, but how can we be out of the circle of Islam? On the contrary, it is we Alevi who are the very life and soul of Islam... We know the Koran thoroughly by heart. It is the foreign powers that are at the back of this attitude of the Pir Sultan Associations. In other words, the foreign powers are using the Alevi population. Hence, most of the Alevi associations are not credible to me. Nevertheless, I have respect for the ones which aim at teaching the Alevi faith.¹⁰⁶

One other informant from the category of the younger generation and who was from Tunceli had especially complained about the fact that his parents had not taught him or his sisters anything related to the Alevi culture and way of life. While expressing this fact, he stated that until the age of fifteen, Alevism had been a “secret” for him, a “secret” not in the sense that it was something that should be concealed from the outsiders, but in the sense that its existence and particularities were not explained to him by his parents. Nevertheless, he did not criticize his parents for this and attributed their choice not to teach him and his sisters the values of the Alevi culture to certain justifications on his mind:

Since the time I was born, we have been concealing our Alevi identity here [he refers to the vicinity they are currently living in], which continued until I reached the age of fourteen or fifteen. Our parents have also concealed our Alevi identity. They did not fast, for instance, but without explaining to us the reason why they did not fast. Neither my parents nor we, the children, led an Alevi way of life... Our parents have never exerted pressure on us in terms of religious matters, but they have not introduced us to the Alevi culture, either. They have not taught us anything about Alevism... I am describing the situation that was valid until I reached the age of fourteen or fifteen. I do not remember a single anecdote of my parents telling me that we were Alevi, that our faith included this or that, that we performed our religious exercises in this and that way or that we fast on these and those days. Our Alevi identity was somehow treated as some kind of a secret hidden by everyone, you see. I did not know that I was an Alevi until I was fourteen or fifteen; I

¹⁰⁶ Halil Bey, 24 March 2009.

have not heard about the concept of Alevism, either.... The number of cemevis is very low in comparison to that of mosques. Besides, my parents have not made an effort to continue the Alevi culture. They may have failed at properly carrying out their religious duties due to the struggle to earn a living or the problems of the kids.... There is another aspect, too. If the parents introduce the child to the Alevi culture, then the child may also be faced with a dilemma between his/her parents' religious education and the religious education provided at schools. If the child tells his/her teacher, especially the ones who are similar to the teachers of our time, something different from what is taught at school, the teacher will rebuke him/her, telling that he/she should perform the *namaz* (ritual prayers of Islam), for instance. Parents also tend to not teach their children about Alevism in order ensure that they will not be pressured at school.¹⁰⁷

Still some of the informants, from whose point of view the general moral or humanistic values of Alevism were more significant than practising regular religious activities peculiar to it, did not utter any specific complaint or disturbance with regard to the continuation of the traditional practices and values specific to Alevism within the urban setting. One of them, from Gümüşhane, repeatedly touched upon the “honesty principle” of Alevism, which she defined as being in complete moral control of one's own hands, tongue and loins. She made the following comment within the scope of the education of children:

One should not think that his/her making a profit of fifteen liras on an item that could normally bring five liras of profit will be forgiven the time he/she goes to the mosque or to the cemevi to pray. People should not believe that such things will be solved through praying, and this is what the parents should teach their children. Parents should teach their children the importance of acting honestly and fairly, and that of receiving their rightful share, no more than that, without longing to possess another person's share. This should be taught to the children, I think.¹⁰⁸

An informant from Tunceli shared the idea that if a person abided by the basic rule of being in complete moral control of the self, then that person did not need the guidance of even a Dede or any other person.

¹⁰⁷ Deniz Bey, interview by the author, video camera recording, Kaynarca/Pendik, İstanbul, Turkey, 15 March 2009.

¹⁰⁸ Cennet Hanım, 11 March 2009.

Related to the issue, he said: “In my opinion, everything is hidden inside the character of one’s self and in the hands of one’s own. If you are a good person getting along with everybody, giving everybody their due shares without engaging in any unfair deed towards anybody and if you are in complete moral control of your own hands, tongue and loins, than you are both a real Alevi and a Dede in your own right.”¹⁰⁹

In a nutshell, while some of the informants criticized both themselves and the Alevis in general in terms of the proper continuance of the traditional Alevi rituals and practices within the urban setting, attributing the lack of proper continuance to various reasons, some others did not mention any particular disturbance regarding this issue. Apparently, the ones who seemed to be torn between two different descriptions of Alevism were more sensitive towards the issue of proper continuance of the traditional Alevi rituals, whereas the ones who equated Alevism to leading a moral and honest way of life were more relieved.

A General Urban Picture of the Overall Situation of the Primary Institutions Specific to Traditional Alevism

Having the informants provide us with an overall picture firstly as to way Alevi culture/creed was experienced within the rural setting and then as to how it is currently being experienced within the urban one, next they were asked how they have been experiencing the transformation within the most basic rituals and institutions of the centuries-old socio-religious organization of the traditional Alevism, which both constituted the basis of and was being supported by the strictly

¹⁰⁹ Salih Bey, interview by the author, video camera recording, Cevizli/Maltepe, İstanbul, Turkey, 12 March 2009. *Bence ne ararsan kendinde ara. Eğer sen iyiyisen, herkesle iyi geçinirsen, herkesin hakkını verirsen, hak yemezsen, hırsızlık yapmazsan, eline, beline, diline sadık olursan Alevi de sensin, pir de sensin.*

closed, marginal and secrecy-based character of the rural Alevi community, within the urban environment as opposed to the rural one. The most basic rituals and institutions of Alevism which will be examined below include the Cem ritual (actually a certain aspect or function of the ritual), the Dede-talip relationship and the Musahiplik relationship.

The Cem Ritual – Its Close Supervision Function over the Individual Requiring Geographical Proximity

The most emphasized point regarding the transformation of the Cem ritual within the urban setting is associated with a certain aspect or function of this basic ritual which ensures the moral integrity of the community as a whole through the close supervision and control of the community over the individual. This will be referred to as the close supervision function of the Cem ritual over the individual, hereafter. According to four of the informants, this function of the Cem ritual which was compatible with the conditions of the rural setting had weakened within the urban environment due to the fragmentation of the Alevi community. According to one of them, however, it may well continue to be applied within the city.

After pointing out that Cem rituals within the urban setting are more of a didactic nature in the sense that they were performed mainly to demonstrate the general rules and practices of Alevism, one of the informants, from Erzincan, said that Cem rituals in the rural setting were much stricter than the ones conducted in the city since the ones performed in the village exerted strong impositions and

enforcements upon the individual members of the Alevi community to lead their lives in accordance with the moral rules of Alevism.¹¹⁰

Before describing the reasons why such strong impositions and enforcements were valid for the rural setting, a discussion is needed on the most basic moral rules of Alevism which were summarized by most of the informants as being in complete moral control of one's own hands, tongue and loins. In other words, these most basic moral values of Alevism included avoiding any instances of theft, gossip or snub as well as strictly abstaining from looking with an evil eye on somebody else's wife or husband. The majority of the informants equated Alevism with these three basic moral rules.

Having specified this significant detail, the discussion returns to the explanations of the same informant of ours from Erzincan. After mentioning the strong impositions and enforcements on the Alevi individual which were valid for the rural setting, this informant touched upon the close supervision function of the Cem ritual over the individual, which was closely related to the aforementioned strong impositions and enforcements, describing it as the process of declaration, questioning and judgment of any offence which was committed by a particular individual within the Alevi community in a rural setting.¹¹¹

This declaration, questioning and judgment process took place in front of the whole village community, in other words, the individual was questioned and judged by the public. According to this informant, this function of the Cem ritual, which he believed to constitute an indispensable part of Alevism in that it ensured the creation and maintenance of a faultless and decent community, could no longer be continued

¹¹⁰ Haydar Bey, interview by the author, video camera recording, Kaynarca/Pendik, İstanbul, Turkey, 15 March 2009.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

within the urban setting because carrying this function duly into effect necessitated close social supervision or control of the community on each and every individual, which, in turn, required some kind of a geographical proximity. In other words, the members of the community had to be living side by side within a specific place, which ensured them to be informed about the behavior of each other so that the individual could avoid committing any kind of offence that violated the basic values of the Alevi creed due to his/her concern that some other person from among the members of the community might see or hear about it and inform the whole community about this offence during the Cem ritual. As far as understood from the explanations of the informant, while all these conditions were met within the rural setting where a small community lived all together keeping track of the actions of the other villagers, the urban setting undermined the aforementioned function of the Cem ritual since, contrary to the situation in the village, the people who migrated from their villages had started to live fragmentarily and disconnectedly under the conditions of the urban setting and this phenomenon had annihilated the social and moral supervision of the community over the individual.

Three other informants complained about the fact that people who had committed crimes such as murder, unlawful cohabitation, lying and defamation, violating the basic rules of Alevism could still participate in the Cem rituals that were conducted in the urban setting. According to these informants, the participation of such people in the Cem rituals performed within the rural setting was strictly forbidden.¹¹²

According to one of these informants, who was from Gümüşhane, the whole community in the rural setting would act as a kind of mirror which both observed and

¹¹² Cennet Hanım, 11 March 2009; Halil Bey, 24 March 2009; Salih Bey, 12 March 2009.

reflected good and bad deeds of a certain individual within that community.¹¹³

Although she had appeared to be lamenting the weakening of the close supervision function of the Cem ritual over the individual within the urban setting, she had also come up with a solution for this lack of supervision and control of the community over the individual under the urban conditions. According to this solution, the supervision by the whole community which had been valid for the rural setting could be replaced by the very conscience of the individual himself/herself within the urban setting.

In addition to these evaluations, a totally different view concerning the overall picture of the close supervision function of the Cem ritual over the individual within the urban setting must be presented. As we have underlined before, this function of the Cem ritual, which appears to reach its highest visibility or efficiency within the context of the Görgü Cemi ritual according to the explanations of some of the informants,¹¹⁴ necessitates a relatively small number of people who live in a relatively small area so that it is easy to hear about the actions of the other people as well as the relations of one person with another. Under such conditions, it is difficult for people to make mistakes violating the basic values of the Alevi creed due to their anxiety that other people will be informed about such violating actions immediately and report about them in front of the whole community during the Cem ritual, as a result of which they will be punished by Dede in the name of the community.

According to the sources, this punishment is related to the Düşkünlük institution and appears as the exclusion of the person who has committed an offense both from the

¹¹³ Cennet Hanım, 11 March 2009.

¹¹⁴ Ayhan Bey, interview by the author, video camera recording, Esenler/Pendik, İstanbul, Turkey, 25 March 2009; Burcu Hanım, 25 March 2009; Emine Hanım, 25 March 2009.

Cem ritual, as well as by the community living in the village, for varying periods depending on the nature of the offense.¹¹⁵

Since such close supervision by the community of the individual is difficult to ensure within the urban setting where the members of the Alevi community have settled in a fragmented way, this supervision and control function the Cem ritual was said to have weakened, even disappeared, within the urban environment by four of the informants previously mentioned. However, one informant, who comes from Tokat and who falls within the older generation category, argued that they currently continue this function within the urban setting. For instance, he may hear about the attitudes and behavior of the Alevi people living in his vicinity, especially of those who are his own relatives and villagers, during his visits to the coffeehouse of the neighborhood.¹¹⁶

In brief, while most of the informants specified that the effectiveness of the close supervision function of the Cem ritual over the individual had declined in the urban setting, one informant insisted that it could be continued even under the urban conditions.

The General Weakening of the Dede-Talip Relationship on the basis
of Geographical Distance, and Questioning of the Erudition and
Moral Authority of Dedes

Except for one, all of the informants belonging to the older generation category stated that they could not continue their relationship with the traditional Dedes of their lineage. While some of them had attributed the disconnection between Dedes

¹¹⁵ Fuat Bozkurt, *Toplumsal Boyutlarıyla Alevilik*, pp. 160-164; Okan, pp. 72-74; Yaman, pp. 245-248.

¹¹⁶ Ayhan Bey, 25 March 2009.

and their talips within the urban setting to the physical distancing of Dedes from talips as a consequence of the migration from rural areas to the cities, others ascribed it to the general questioning of the erudition and moral integrity of Dedes. While some of them lamented the weakening of the Dede-talip relationship within the urban setting since they feared this weakening might result in the general erosion of the Alevi faith, others thought one did not necessarily need to have a Dede so as to be able to lead an Alevi way of life.

In addition, whereas some of the informants were of the opinion that the Dedes at cemevis could never substitute their traditional Dedes due to either the existence of various perceptions of Alevism in Turkey, or to the need for a mutual trust between the Dede and talip, which is only valid for the relationship between a talip and the traditional Dede of his/her lineage, others thought that Dedes at cemevis may well substitute their traditional Dedes. Following these general observations, exact experiences and evaluations of the informants will be presented.

One of the informants from Tunceli described the migration process in the following words:

During 1973, when we arrived in İstanbul, most of our villagers had not left their village yet. During that period, Dedes were also still among their talips in their own villages. They would go and visit their talips twice a year so as to pray for them. Following the military coup on 12 September and Özal's taking office in 1983, I guess, terrorist acts became widespread. Terrorist acts accelerated or were accelerated, I do not know. As a matter of fact, neither I nor my fellow villagers have migrated from our village due to such terrorist acts. Actually, my fellow villagers drew inspiration from each other [in their migration process]. The reasons why they migrated from their villages, back in my day, included their eagerness to have their children educated or their desire to work as an insured employee and to be entitled to draw a pension. I do not know why the residents of other villages migrated from their settlements. They may have migrated due to brawls or pressure caused by the state or the terrorists. Nevertheless, both Dedes and their talips left their villages.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁷ Fatma Hanım, 10-11 March 2009.

Only four of the informants stated that they had been informed about the whereabouts of their traditional Dede, following these Dede's migration into the cities. One of these informants, who was from Tunceli, said that both his traditional Dede and the son of this Dede were dead now; nevertheless, he currently attempted to keep in touch with the closest relatives of his Dede, who lived in Bakırköy.¹¹⁸ Another of them, from Malatya, said that their traditional Dede had also died. According to the information she had obtained from some of her relatives, one of the sons of this Dede, who was living in Maltepe at the moment, carried on the mission of his father besides his own professional job, and the talips of this new Dede could go and visit him. However, she did not know if this Dede also performed Cem rituals. She also specified that she had not visited this Dede.¹¹⁹ The third informant, who was from Bingöl, also stated that their Dede had died and his son did not continue his mission.¹²⁰

The fourth informant, who was also from Tunceli, said that their traditional Dede had been living in Topselvi for some time, but he had not received any information about him for a long while.¹²¹ Interestingly, he stated that he had not liked this Dede when they were both living in the village. Not only his wording but his tone of voice while describing his antipathy towards this Dede, as well, seemed proof that the separation and disconnection between this informant and his traditional Dede did not disturb him or create any negative impact on him. Such an expression also somewhat implied that a talip can declare his dissatisfaction with or disapproval of his Dede, which is quite meaningful in terms of the fact that it provides some hints

¹¹⁸ Hüseyin Bey, 13 March 2009.

¹¹⁹ Gamze Hanım, 25 March 2009.

¹²⁰ Halil Bey, 24 March 2009.

¹²¹ Veli Bey, 13 March 2009.

regarding the nature of the religious hierarchical relationships within the Alevi community.

Similar to this point, the informant from Tunceli, who stated that he had tried to stay in touch with the closest relatives of his traditional Dede, touched upon the point that he had developed feelings of alienation towards Dede. He has developed such a feeling of alienation towards Dede, in general, since, in the past, he had witnessed or heard that some Dede would keep the whole of the zekât -money donated by the talips to their traditional Dede in return for the religious services provided- for themselves, despite the rule that they were to send the surplus of the money to the Hacı Bektaş-ı Veli Dervish Lodge in Nevşehir or even to the mausoleum of Mohammed, the Prophet.¹²² This point is an indicator that the attitudes and behavior of the religious leaders within the Alevi community may be and actually are criticized by their talips.

One other example of criticism of Dede was provided by another informant, who was from Tunceli. According to the explanations of this informant, the weakening of the relationship between Dede and their talips may be attributed to the questioning of the Dedelik institution, as a whole, especially by the members of the young generation during the 1980s on the basis of certain problematic issues as to why the members of the Alevi community should be kissing the hands of the Dede and respecting them. Following are her words regarding the issue:

And let me tell you another thing. Our Alevi community began to raise the idea that Dede were also human beings and accordingly questioned the reason why they should go and kiss the hands of Dede so as to have Dede pray for them. This idea appeared mainly following the coup on 12 September and was influential particularly among the youngsters, not among the elders. Some people implanted this idea in the minds of the younger generation. That is, this idea did not just appear out of the blue; it was served [to the public], instead, and passed from person to person. Thereby, both

¹²² Hüseyin Bey, 13 March 2009.

Dedes and their talips stopped visiting each other. While prior to the coup on 12 September, Dedes would visit their talips and talips used to like, trust and respect their Dedes, youngsters started to disrespect Dedes following the coup.... Afterwards, terrorist acts appeared, as well. Both villagers and Dedes left their villages and migrated to the city.¹²³

Three of the informants (who are from Malatya, Bingöl and Sivas) openly expressed that the discontinuation of their relationships with their traditional Dedes upset them to a great extent because they feared that this discontinuation would result in the end of the Alevi culture and way of life.¹²⁴ Contrary to the distress and concern felt by these three informants, another informant from Tunceli put forward the idea that according to his perception or understanding of Alevism, one does not necessarily have to sustain his/her relationship with the Dede in order to be able to live as an Alevi. “We are not continuing our Dede-talip relationship right now. Our Dede does not come to visit us and we do not visit him, either. As a matter of fact, Dede does not necessarily have to come and visit you. What really matters is your own dedication to follow your spiritual path. In that case, you yourself become a Dede, as well.”¹²⁵

Another informant from Erzincan approached the issue from a different point of view and asserted that, according to his understanding of Alevism, a member of the Alevi community could become the talip of a different Dede other than his/her own traditional Dede in case his traditional Dede did not live in the vicinity of his/her current dwelling.¹²⁶

¹²³ Fatma Hanım, 10-11 March 2009.

¹²⁴ Gamze Hanım, 25 March 2009; Halil Bey, 24 March 2009; Zöhre Hanım, 11 March 2009.

¹²⁵ Salih Bey, 12 March 2009. *Şu anda dede-talip ilişkilerimizi sürdürmüyoruz. Dede gelmiyor bizi görmüyor, biz de dedeyi görmüyoruz. Her şey sendedir, her şey insandadır, Dede de sensin. Dede gelmek zorunda değil ki illa ki. İş ki o yolu takip edesin, o yola başını koyasın.*

¹²⁶ Haydar Bey, 15 March 2009.

Contrary to this point of view, two informants, one from Bingöl and other from Malatya, touched upon the fact that they would prefer their own traditional Dedes to the ones who provided religious services under the roofs of the cemevis within the urban setting. When they were asked the reason why they would prefer their own Dedes, the informant from Bingöl emphasized the point that there was no one single understanding of Alevism throughout Turkey and the practices and beliefs of Alevism within Anatolia differ from one region to another, accordingly; hence, he would like to follow the discourse of his own traditional Dede.¹²⁷

The other informant who claimed that her own Dede was preferable to the one in the cemevis in the city emphasized the mutual trust relationship that was established between a particular talip and his/her own traditional Dede as a result of the centuries-old relationship and affinity between the two. Her own wording is the following:

The Dede-talip relationship somewhat resembles the relationship between two neighbors. For instance, my neighborhood relations with Şadiye [this neighbor was also in the room where we were conducting the interview] have a history of twenty years, as a consequence of which I do not fear from her. However, I would act diffidently in my encounters with a new neighbor about whose character I do not have any idea. Our relations with Dedes are also like this. In order to ensure mutual credibility, one should go and visit his/her Dede. However, we cannot succeed in establishing such a relationship since we fail at visiting our Dedes.¹²⁸

The aforementioned trust relationship was put forward by another informant from Gümüşhane with an emphasis on the point that the Dedes who were providing service under the roofs of cemevis within the urban setting should tell the visitors of the cemevi about his past and show them concrete evidence (for example, a document) that demonstrates that he really had enough competence and knowledge

¹²⁷ Halil Bey, 24 March 2009.

¹²⁸ Gamze Hanım, 25 March 2009.

to lead the community there.¹²⁹ According to this informant, if the Dede provided the visitors of the cemevi with some information as to their background, as well as some kind of a document proving his competence, then they would be much more creditable and respectable in the eyes of the guests.

In brief, nearly all of the informants specified that they had not been able to continue their relationship with the traditional Dede of their lineage following their arrival in the city. Some of them also touched upon the weakening of the Dede-talip relationship, ascribing it either to the consequences of migration or to the questioning of the erudition of Dede. Additionally, some of them also expressed their sadness at the weakening of the Dede-talip relationship, stating that this weakening might lead to a general erosion of the Alevi faith.

The General Weakening of the Musahiplik Relationship on the Basis of the Economic Concerns and Geographical Distance

The Musahiplik institution may be described as a brotherhood relationship entered into by two male Alevis, thus by two Alevi families, within the Alevi community that should be approved by the Dede in the name of the whole community during a Cem ritual that is performed specifically for this occasion. It is one of the basic institutions of traditional Alevism, binding the individual members of the Alevi community to each other and ensuring the internal solidarity of the community as a whole.¹³⁰ All of the informants interviewed stated that they attached great importance to this institution of Alevism since the persons with whom they had established such a relationship became closer even than their own brothers and sisters. Some of them

¹²⁹ Cennet Hanım, 11 March 2009.

¹³⁰ Korkmaz, pp. 31-54; Okan, pp. 74-81.

stated that Musahiplik relationships had weakened under the urban conditions due to the physical distancing of the Musahips from each other and the economic inconveniences that prevented them from properly seeing each other.

The following words of one of the informants who comes from Erzincan summarizes the feelings of the majority of the informants about this institution:

From my point of view, Musahiplik means having a [spiritual] brother/sister even though one does not have a biological brother/sister. In case something bad happens to me, I know that my wife and children will not be wretched since my Musahips will take care of them, and vice versa. Musahiplik is quite a rational and significant institution, in my opinion.¹³¹

An informant from Gümüşhane stated that the depth and warmth of the Musahiplik relationship of her father had impressed her to a great extent:

I witnessed the Musahiplik relationship between my father and his Musahip. They were so fond of each other that they were like real brothers. There was no single thing they could not share. ... According to what I observed in my father's Musahiplik relationship, the scope of Musahiplik exceeds the boundaries of brotherhood. My father's Musahip has died, but his wife is alive. The fact that my father still intimately calls his Musahip's wife as sister and that she calls my father as brother moves me emotionally. She shows concern for my father even more than the biological brothers and sisters of my father.¹³²

Another informant from Tokat, a member of the younger generation whose parents had recently established a Musahiplik relationship with another family through a Cem ritual which was performed one week before the interview, stated that as a result of this newly established relationship, she had a second mother, a second father and a second sister from that day on.¹³³ Such a comment about this particular institution tells a great deal concerning its significance in the eyes of the members of the Alevi community.

¹³¹ Haydar Bey, 15 March 2009.

¹³² Cennet Hanım, 11 March 2009.

¹³³ Burcu Hanım, 25 March 2009.

The mother of the aforementioned informant also stated that she and her husband had lived through some kind of a testing period which lasted for seven years before they finally decided that they could form this relationship with their prospective Musahips, and that they had recently appeared in front of the Dede and their Alevi community to “officially” start this relationship. She said:

You undergo a testing period of seven years. If you cannot get on well with each other during this period, you break apart. Once you get under the winding sheet [as part of the traditional ceremony of Musahiplik], you can never and ever terminate the Musahiplik relationship you have started. Similar to the relationship between brothers and sisters or wives and husbands, Musahips also cannot be vexed with each other. You may become low spirited [due to a behavior of your Musahip], but what you need to do is just to forget about it. The same is true for our relationship with our Musahips, too.¹³⁴

In addition to this great value and significance attached to the Musahiplik institution, some of the informants also specified that the rules and requirements of this institution were difficult. One of them, who was from Malatya, said that she and her husband had not yet established this relationship due to its heavy responsibilities:

We do not have Musahips. People [the Dede and their prospective Musahips] really wanted us to start such a relationship; however we had not done that. My husband persistently has avoided establishing a Musahiplik relationship since Musahiplik is a heavy burden. One should first and foremost reach a certain level of maturity before starting such a relationship. There was a Dede who heartily wanted us to be the Musahips of Şadiye [her neighbor of twenty years, as well as her closest friend]. I also desired to start such a relationship with Şadiye, but my husband did not accept this. The reason for his decline was his anxiety about the possible feeling of regret we could have in case we might not duly continue our Musahiplik relationship by breaking each other's hearts. Right now, we are neighbors who get along well with each other, but Musahiplik is a heavy burden. And we if we cannot carry that burden properly, we will be sorry.¹³⁵

Four of the informants openly stated that they could not properly and duly continue the Musahiplik relations they had established as a result of the physical distance

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Gamze Hanım, 25 March 2009.

between themselves and their Musahips following the migration into the cities. One of them, who was from Tunceli, described how his relation with his Musahip had been affected by their migration to different cities with the following words:

I have a Musahip who lives in İzmir at present, but I am not continuing my Musahip relationship with him. We established this relationship by ourselves when we were primary school students, through making a promise with each other. However, we could not even attend the marriage ceremonies of each other. Neither he nor I could go and join the wedding of the other, which arose from our migration to the cities. Following his graduation, he went to Bursa, while I came to İstanbul. Afterwards, we saw each other only once, I guess. We did not even have a chance of seeing each other. Both of us would very much like to keep in touch with each other. As a matter of fact, sometime in the past, our level of communication was quite satisfactory, despite we could not meet face to face. However, following his change of address from İzmir to Bursa, we completely lost contact.¹³⁶

Another informant, from Erzincan whose Musahip lived in the same city where he currently lived, attributed the discontinuation of his Musahiplik relations not only to the distance but also to the economic factors, in the sense that in a huge and expensive city like İstanbul, one has to spend a great deal of money to be able to see each other often:

It is like that, I have a Musahip. My Musahip lives in İstanbul, just like I do. Nevertheless, we cannot duly continue our Musahiplik relationship since living in the same village is different from living in the same city. Under the conditions of the village, both Musahips have to be responsible for each other [and they can actually act accordingly]. However, within the city, you live in different provinces. İstanbul is so vast that it can even be compared to a country in terms of its size. Consequently, you cannot continue your relationship. Economic concerns constitute the primary reason [underlying this miscommunication]. I would definitely like to keep in touch with my Musahip.¹³⁷

Another informant who was from Tunceli also touched upon the negative effects of the economic inconveniences upon the proper continuation of the Musahiplik relations:

¹³⁶ Veli Bey, 13 March 2009.

¹³⁷ Haydar Bey, 15 March 2009.

My Musahip passed away. He was living in the village and did not come to the city.... He could not come [to see me] due to poverty. How could he come to see me under the conditions of poverty? It would have been better if we had been living in the same place, but this could not be possible as a consequence of the living conditions. That we could not see each other frequently makes me sad.... They also say that Musahiplik is very important for an Alevi. I feel sorry about this lack of contact, for sure.¹³⁸

Another informant from Tunceli pointed to a relatively different aspect of the weakening of the Musahiplik relations within the urban setting, stating that this weakening was a reflection or a result of the erosion of human relations, in general, or that of a shift from humanistic-value-oriented relations to materialistic-value-oriented relations:

The social bonds among people [which were strong the village] eroded in the city. In the past, everybody was living in their own places dealing with the work in their own orchards and fields. Everybody knew each other, had a feeling of attachment towards each other and trusted each other. Why did this change in the city, then? Well, in the city, everybody became concerned with the struggle to earn a living. They became preoccupied with how to make money. There are some cases in which even brothers and sisters neglect each other since they only care about how to obtain more personal gains or how to move up [among the social strata], without paying attention to whether their brothers or sisters are poor or do not have a job. The primary reason giving rise to such a situation is financial matters. The relationship among the members of our generation is fairly well anyway; and I am pessimistic at the relationship among the members of the next generation. Bonds among Alevis are not strong, in my opinion.¹³⁹

In short, all of the informants interviewed stated that they attached great importance to the Musahiplik institution. They also specified that their Musahiplik relationships had weakened within the urban setting due to the physical distancing originating from migration, and the economic inconveniences preventing the Musahips from properly seeing each other, as well as due to the general erosion of human relations under the city conditions.

¹³⁸ Salih Bey, 12 March 2009.

¹³⁹ Fatma Hanım, 10-11 March 2009.

CHAPTER IV

ALEVI-SUNNI ENCOUNTERS WITHIN THE URBAN SETTING AS OPPOSED TO THE RURAL SETTING

In the previous chapter, a general picture of Alevism as experienced in the rural setting was given as opposed to the urban one, and the concrete experiences, evaluations and feelings of the informants were reflected regarding the transformation of the primary rituals and institutions of the traditional Alevism under the conditions of urban life. In this chapter, specific experiences of the members of the Alevi community of their encounters with the Sunni within the urban setting in comparison to those in the rural environment will be given. First, encounters of the informants with members of the Sunni community in the rural context will be presented, followed by the Alevi-Sunni encounters within the urban context. Second, the informants' attitudes and reactions vis-à-vis the negative and questioning approach of the Sunni towards them within the urban setting will be discussed. Finally, the feeling of inadequacy some of the informants had in terms of the "adequacy" of their religiosity and religious knowledge compared to that of the Sunni will be examined.

Encounters with the Sunni in the Rural Setting

The narratives of the informants as to their encounters/experiences with the Sunni within the rural setting may be categorized as no contact with the Sunni, negative

encounters with the Sunni/negative conceptions about the Sunni, and neutral/positive encounters with the Sunni.

No Contact with the Sunni People

Three of the informants within the older generation category stated that they had never encountered or heard anything about the followers of Sunni Islamic tradition up until they had migrated to the city since there had been no Sunni people living either within the boundaries of their villages or in the neighboring villages.¹⁴⁰

One of the informants from Tunceli specified, in quite a humorous and lively manner, that she had had no idea as to the distinctive practices or traditions of Sunni Islam, such as Ramadan fasting:

We did not have any idea about Alevism and Sunnism when we first arrived in the city. At least, I myself did not know them. I also did not know what Ramadan was. When I heard the drumbeat for the first time [during the month of Ramadan, Muslim people are woken up by the sound of a drum played by a person during the nighttime, who receives a certain amount of money in return], I thought that there was a wedding feast in the vicinity. I used to hear this drumbeat everyday for some minutes, still thinking that there was a wedding feast somewhere near [my house]. We did not have a television, too, back then. We had a battery-operated radio, instead, which of course did not help us understand what Ramadan was. I used to hear the name Ramadan but did not know who or what this Ramadan was, whether it was a human being or something else since we did not have such a tradition in the village.... Consequently, when we came here in the autumn of 1977, whenever I heard the sound of the drum, I thought there was a wedding ceremony. Once, Uncle Düzgün and Kürt Hüseyin asked Celal [the drummer] to bring his drum and play it so that they would perform *halay* (a folk dance), but Celal declined their request stating that he would play the drum in Ramadan. One of them [it seems that a group of people gathered together while they were discussing the drum issue] wanted Celal not to play the drum there [in that particular street] adding that he could, nevertheless, come and take his allowance when the allowance collection time came. However, the drummer did not show regard to this request and played his drum every night [in that particular street], since he did not have knowledge of Alevism and Sunnism.¹⁴¹

¹⁴⁰ Fatma Hanım, 10-11 March 2009; Salih Bey, 12 March 2009; Veli Bey, 13 March 2009.

¹⁴¹ Fatma Hanım, 10-11 March 2009.

In a different part of the interview, the same informant specified that, following her arrival in the city, she started to hear some new terms such as Yezit, Turk and Sunni:

We first settled in Güzelyalı, when we arrived in İstanbul. We were not familiar with [the concepts of] Alevism and Sunnism, back then. One day, we came across a woman from Çankırı who was grazing her sheep. We asked one of our neighbors whether this woman grazing her sheep was an Alevi or not. Our neighbor replied that she was not and added that she was Yezit. Then, we asked her if this woman was a member of our community. The neighbor said, “No,” adding that she was a Turk. Upon hearing these answers, I felt confused since I did not know what Turk or Yezit meant, because we were newcomers. My sister-in-law was also with me [during the conversation with this particular neighbor] and told me that this neighbor was probably referring to Sunnis as Yezit. I did not know the word Yezit those days. When I was in the village, I did not have any idea about the meaning of the Sunni by any means, either.¹⁴²

Negative Encounters with the Sunni People

The rest of the informants belonging to the older generation stated that although all or nearly all of the villagers who lived in the villages from which they had migrated were Alevis, there were some Sunni villages around their own villages; thereby, they already had some experience with and ideas about the followers of the Sunni Islamic tradition before their arrival in the city where they had started to share the same living space with them. While some of these informants mentioned some negative encounters with the Sunni, others expressed neutral or positive encounters with them.

Two of the informants touched upon some negative and uncompanionable relations with the members of the Sunni community living in the neighborhood of their villages, either originating from the hostile attitudes of the Sunnis towards

¹⁴² Ibid.

Alevis or the Alevis' own preference to keep their distance from the Sunni living in other villages.

One of them from Tunceli stated that during the second half of the 1960s, the Kurdish followers of the Şafii creed who resided in Elazığ were hostile towards the members of the Alevi community and would attack them.¹⁴³ Another informant from Muş, on the other hand, told an anecdote which exemplified a really exclusionary attitude adopted by the members of the Alevi community, towards the Sunni, this time.¹⁴⁴ Having underlined that the Sunni villages located in the vicinity of the village in which she lived were considerably far away from her village, she told an anecdote, according to which whenever a peddler arrived in their village, the villagers would not approach them or buy anything from them since they were Sunni. When these Sunni peddlers drank something from the glasses of the villagers, that glass would definitely be cleaned with some hearth ash. In addition to this, she mentioned that, in the town, the market of the Sunni people and that of the Alevis were separated from each other. Alevis would not buy anything from the shops of Sunnis and vice versa.

In brief, either the unfriendly attitudes of the Sunnis towards Alevis, or the Alevis' own preference to keep their distance from the Sunni people living in the neighboring villages led to negative encounters between the members of the two communities, in the cases of these two informants.

¹⁴³ Hüseyin Bey, 13 March 2009.

¹⁴⁴ Şadiye Hanım, interview by the author, video camera recording, Esenler/Pendik, İstanbul, Turkey, 25 March 2009.

Neutral/Positive Encounters with the Sunni People

Four of the informants interviewed said that they had not had any negative experience with the Sunni people while they were living in the village. Two of these informants specified that while they themselves had not had any bad encounters with the Sunni, they had heard some negative conceptions and stories regarding either the nature of the Sunni or the Alevi-Sunni relations, in general.

According to the explanations of the informant from Malatya, the residents of both her own village and the residents of the neighboring Sunni villages would visit each other, for instance, in such cases as death or disease. In addition, both she and her parents would show extreme respect and hospitality to their Sunni visitors, and had no negative feeling towards the members of the Sunni community.

Our village was an Alevi village which was surrounded by Sunni villages. Both Alevi and Sunni villagers would visit each other in cases of [emergencies, such as] death, disease, etc.... We did not have any negative ideas about Sunnis while we were living in the village. As I said before, we always treated them with respect... They would come and visit our house. Our parents only taught us [the importance of] love and respect [with regard to the visits by Sunnis]. They would tell us that the Sunni [guests] were our elders and we should comfort them, even though they were Sunni. Our parents taught us to behave in a respectful manner when we were hosting an elder person in our house as a general rule. Our Sunni guests would perform namaz when they came to our house. We would wonder what they were doing each time they performed namaz after performing ablution. Since we did not have such a tradition, it was normal that we became curious about that. When we asked our parents [about what they were doing], they would tell us that this was the Sunni way of worshipping.¹⁴⁵

Having emphasized that all the residents of her village were Alevis, another informant, from Gümüşhane, also touched upon the fact that both the dwellers of the neighboring Sunni villages and her fellow villagers would go and visit each other's

¹⁴⁵ Gamze Hanım, 25 March 2009.

community and that she did not remember any extremely negative attitude towards her fellow villagers by their Sunni neighbors:

The name of our village was Tepedan. All the residents of our village were Alevi. I spent my childhood in my village. I did not have much idea concerning the Alevi-Sunni difference because most of the people in the village were Alevi. There were, of course, Sunni villages around our village and people from both Alevi and Sunni villages would visit one another and trade with each other. I did not witness any instance of killing, humiliation or despising both as a result of the fact that I was too young [to take notice of such events] and, at the time, there were no severe problems in the my village [originating from Alevism and Sunnism].¹⁴⁶

The remaining two informants were different from the ones whose experiences have already been mentioned, in that, although these two informants themselves, one of whom came from Sivas and the other from Bingöl, had not experienced any negative encounters with the Sunni while they were living in the village. They had heard about some negative stories or conceptions either regarding the general characteristics of the Sunni or the relationships between Alevi and Sunnis. For example, the informant from Sivas said that in the village, she had heard some negative conceptions regarding the characteristics of the followers of the Sunni Islam from her fellow villagers. Apparently, the Sunnis were extremely conservative. The Sunni women would not appear side by side with a man or they would never talk to men and they would not appear in a large group of people.¹⁴⁷

The other informant from Bingöl told a negative story which had been narrated to him by the elder residents of his village. According to this story, during the 1960s, the residents of the neighboring Sunni villages had been planning to get united in order to to make a sudden attack on the Alevi villages in the vicinity so as to destroy them all; nevertheless, this attack plan had been prevented by the residents of an extremely large village within the region. According to another story narrated by the

¹⁴⁶ Cennet Hanım, 11 March 2009.

¹⁴⁷ Zöhre Hanım, 11 March 2009.

elder residents of his village again, Alevis performed the Cem ritual secretly due to the pressure of the neighboring Sunni villages, especially to that of the Shafii villages.¹⁴⁸

Encounters with the Sunni in the Urban Setting

Having attempted to present a general picture of the informants' experiences with and their evaluations about the members of the Sunni community prior to their migration into urban areas, the focus turns to their encounters with the Sunni in the urban context. When all of the informants who fell within the older generation category migrated to the city, they started to live side by side with members of the Sunni community, sharing the same living space, contrary to the situation within the rural setting where the members of the whole village were Alevis. Thus, within the urban setting, the possibility of establishing direct, face-to-face contact with the members of the Sunni community increased significantly. One of the informants, from Tunceli, described the difference between the rural context and the urban context in this respect with the following analogy:

When you are an Alevi sharing the same living space with Sunnis, you have the chance of acquainting yourself with the Sunni doctrine, as well as their traditions, more closely. If you were living in a place where there were no Sunnis around, you would get to know them only through certain communication instruments. However, in the city, you have the chance of acquainting yourself with them both through the communication instruments and through your own experiences. In other words, you encounter Sunnism directly within the life itself. The primary difference between the village and the city is the fact that you not only look at Sunnism from outside but you yourself are among Sunnis [live in the Sunni culture], at the same time. That is, you are not only a person watching the fish in an aquarium, but you are also inside that very aquarium.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁸ Halil Bey, 24 March 2009.

¹⁴⁹ Erdal Bey, interview by the author, video camera recording, Gebze/Kocaeli, Turkey, 10 March 2009.

As a result of the incomparably higher chance of establishing direct, face-to-face relations with the followers of the Sunni Islam, it may be expected that the Alevi-Sunni relations established in the urban areas –including neighborhood relations, workplace relations, school relations and relations in the military– would be much more versatile, complicated and strong in terms of their reciprocal influences on the members of both communities. When the informants were asked about the nature of their relations with the Sunni in the urban environment, they gave examples of two kinds, positive encounters with the Sunni and negative encounters, based on various reasons.

Positive Encounters with Sunni People

Three of the informants described quite positive relations with their Sunni acquaintances within the urban setting, on the bases of mutual tolerance, assimilation to the Sunni other, or their self-confidence and strong character. One of the informants, from Ordu, described her relationship with her Sunni neighbors solely with positive words. The relations between her parents, who live in the Şekerpinar district of Gebze, and their Sunni neighbors were quite intimate, warm and totally based on mutual respect and understanding.¹⁵⁰ The level of the intimacy and warmth of their relationship was so high that their Sunni neighbors helped them during the day-long preparation of the meal that would be served during the Cem ritual of the next day.

¹⁵⁰ Hasret Hanım, 11 March 2009.

The Alevis, in turn, sent some of the remaining meal prepared for the Cem to their Sunni neighbors. In addition, the members of the Alevi community living in the neighborhood of this particular informant help the preparation activities for the collective religious practices of their Sunni neighbors, too. The only difference between the two communities was the fact that Alevis did not allow their Sunni neighbors to join their collective religious ritual, while they could easily participate in the observances of their Sunni neighbors. According to the explanations of the informant, this situation did not cause a problem between the two communities thanks to the respect paid by their Sunni neighbors.

Another informant, from Tunceli, stated that he had not experienced any difficulty in terms of the relations he had established with his Sunni friends during his childhood years due to the fact that he had grown up pretty much like an ordinary Sunni boy within a completely Sunni culture.¹⁵¹ After emphasizing that he had not known even that he was an Alevi until the age of fourteen or fifteen because his parents did not either continue the practices peculiar to Alevism or teach him anything related to the Alevi culture, he specified that he had taken his Sunni friends as a model for himself and followed their ways in terms of religious practices. Thereby, he resembled his Sunni friends, which seems to have prevented any possible conflicts between them.

We, as the children, never entered into the cultural atmosphere of Alevism and we grew up within the Ramadan or Sunni culture, instead. I attended Koran courses offered in a neighboring mosque for four summer terms, for instance, just because my friends attended them.... My relationships with my friends were free of problems. As I said before, we behaved like a Sunni until a certain age. Until I was fifteen, I attended the Friday prayer, for instance, though not regularly. I attended Koran courses, as well. I do not remember that Alevism was ever part of our life during my childhood.¹⁵²

¹⁵¹ Deniz Bey, 15 March 2009.

¹⁵² Ibid.

Another informant, from Gümüşhane, stated that -let alone not having heard any kind of degrading word from her neighbors or not witnessing any kind of oppressive attitude from them- her family was very much liked by their Sunni neighbors during the days she spent at the house of her father in the Çamçeşme district of Pendik.¹⁵³ Although all of her neighbors in Çamçeşme had moved to different places in İstanbul, they embraced her with a deep feeling of longing each time she came across them. She seemed to attribute such a high level of acceptance by her Sunni neighbors to her self-confident and strong character, originating from the way her parents had brought her up.

As far as understood, mutual tolerance, assimilation to the Sunni other, and having a self-confident and strong character on the part of the Alevis may give rise to positive relations between the members of the Alevi and Sunni communities.

Negative Encounters with Sunni People

The negative encounters of the informants with their Sunni acquaintances seem to have originated basically from the prejudices existing in the minds of the members of the Sunni community, which resulted from the “hearsay knowledge” they had instead of knowledge based on their own experiences.

Examples of negative encounters include the preference of the Sunni to keep their distance from the Alevi once they had been informed about their Alevi identity; the lack of the possibility of establishing cordial and long-term relationships with the Sunni due to Sunnis’ uncompanionable attitudes; some disturbing and coercive

¹⁵³ Cennet Hanım, 11 March 2009.

attitudes adopted by Sunnis to make the Alevi abide by the rules of the religious traditions of the Sunni creed; and encountering various instances of the labeling of Alevis, in general, with certain “slandering” and “degrading” attributes, in the exact wordings of the informants. Having provided these general observations, the focus turns to the experiences, feelings and evaluations of the informants with regard to the issue.

One informant, from Tunceli, complained about the fact that he had encountered many cases in which people with whom he was on the verge of establishing a close friendship would move away from him when they heard that he was an Alevi and that he came from Tunceli. Below are his exact words:

Being an Alevi living in a village whose inhabitants are all Alevi is really different from living in here [the city]. You face all kinds of difficulties here. Until recent times, I have not been able to say that I am an Alevi, to tell the truth. They [the Sunni] would despise us. As a matter of fact, they would not openly show a negative reaction against us, but would keep us at arm’s length. You could not make friends with them. They would chat among each other and attribute a mistake of yours to your being an Alevi. . . . For instance, a chummy conversation would be left half finished once your chat mate heard that you were from Tunceli, and there would necessarily appear a distance between you and him. Upon hearing about your Aleviness, the person who had been warm towards you before would then keep his distance from you. Coming from Tunceli was associated with both being a revolutionist and Alevi.¹⁵⁴

Another informant, also from Tunceli, complained about the fact that because she was an Alevi, during the fifteen years she had spent in her current flat in Gebze from 1994 up until now, no single neighbor residing within the same apartment building she lived in had ever opened her door to inquire after her health.¹⁵⁵ After specifying this, she also drew attention to a totally opposite situation in terms of her relations with her Sunni neighbors which was valid during the years she spent in her squatter house, again in Gebze, from 1977 to 1994. During these years, she had much warmer

¹⁵⁴ Veli Bey, 13 March 2009.

¹⁵⁵ Fatma Hanım, 10-11 March 2009.

and much more intimate relations with her Sunni neighbors. When she was asked why such opposite situations had occurred in these different settings which were pretty close to each other in terms of geographic location, she explained that during the time she was living in a shanty town, both she and all her neighbors had detached houses with gardens of their own. Most of the time, people would sit in front of the door of their houses or in their gardens, which was similar to the situation in the rural setting, as a result of which people had more of a chance to see each other. As a consequence, they could establish more intimate and stronger relations. Nevertheless, she said that she would prefer an Alevi neighbor to a Sunni one since it would be easier and more comfortable for her to visit and spend time in the house of an Alevi rather than that of a Sunni.

Another informant, falling within the younger generation category and from Tokat, also described the relations of her family with their Sunni neighbors within the same apartment building as cold and uncompanionable. She said this originated from the coldness of their Sunni neighbors towards themselves based on either their lack of knowledge about Alevis, as a whole, or from the “hearsay knowledge” they have. Let us hear her own words regarding the situation:

We have been living in this neighborhood for many years. Our neighbors know that we are Alevi and they have never treated us the same way they treat their Sunni neighbors, I think.... We have never developed really intimate relationships. In fact, we have made friends with Sunni people, but we have never been as intimate with them as we have with our Alevi friends. We have been living in here for some thirteen or fourteen years. There were many Alevis residing in the apartment building next to ours. We would often meet these people as a family and they would visit us at our home, too, but we could not develop such intimate relationships with others [Sunni neighbors]. As a matter of fact, we were on familiar terms with the ones who behaved warm towards us. What I mean is that the distance between us and our Sunni neighbors arose from their attitude towards us. There is a general principle that can be described as you behave warm towards a person who acts warmly towards you [which somehow explains our relationship with our Sunni neighbors]. In my opinion, they consider Alevis to be nonbelievers, which arises from the fact that they do not know much about the inner worlds

of Alevis, I think. I do not think that they know what Alevism is and they keep Alevis at a distance due to their hearsay-based knowledge about Alevis.¹⁵⁶

After touching upon the fact that she and her family had not encountered any negative attitude towards them by their Sunni neighbors, another informant who was also from Tokat and who also fell within the category of the younger generation similarly specified that as a result of being the followers of two different creeds, they had not been able to develop cordial relationships with their Sunni neighbors despite the fact that they had been living in the same vicinity for more than twenty years.

Following are her exact words:

We have been living in this neighborhood since I was born, that is we have been living here for many years. I can say that there are no Alevis in this vicinity, except for us. My father's aunt and some other relatives of ours also live in this vicinity, but I do not count them since they are relatives. All our neighbors are Sunni. I have never encountered any negative behavior on the part of my neighbors. It is true that there are certain issues on which we think and act differently. For instance, during the Ramadan, Sunni women recite the Koran and they establish a dialogue among each other. As a result, we do not have much cordial relation with our [Sunni] neighbors, which does not necessarily mean that we have problematic relations with them. We, of course, greet and talk to each other when we run in to them, but there is always a distance between us. They do not often come and visit us, and we do not go and visit them very often. Nevertheless, they do not have any negative attitude towards us. This has something to do with our character, too, I suppose. We have a certain stance, as a family. What I am trying to say is that our neighbors pay regard to our characteristic stance as well as our being an Alevi family.¹⁵⁷

Having emphasized that he had never felt the need to keep his Alevi identity secret both during the years of his military service or within the context of his neighborhood relations, one of the informants from Tunceli mentioned that he had not experienced any significant problem with the Sunni people arising from the fact

¹⁵⁶ Özden Hanım, interview by the author, video camera recording, Kaynarca/Pendik, İstanbul, Turkey, 14 March 2009.

¹⁵⁷ Burcu Hanım, 25 March 2009.

that he was an Alevi.¹⁵⁸ Nevertheless, he told a story belonging to the days of his military service between 1964 and 1966, according to which some of his fellow soldiers who were Sunni disturbed him because he did not fast when the rest of the troop were on fast. In return, he openly told them that he was an Alevi and he would not fast on Ramadan.

Similarly, an informant from Tunceli stated that some of his fellow workers would condemn or disapprove of him due to the fact that he did not fast on Ramadan.¹⁵⁹ For example, in 1975, when he was working at the Pendik Shipyard, his fellow workers attempted to force him to fast on Ramadan by telling the boy who was in charge of bringing the meals of the workers not to bring a meal to him, too, during the day-time so that he would also be fasting with them. However, the informant resisted this attempt and told the foreman that if he would not be given his meal in the shipyard during the whole Ramadan, he would turn off his welding machine and go to Pendik in order to eat his meal in a restaurant, instead. He also added that he was very well aware of the working regulations; namely, he knew that he had the right to behave in such a way under such conditions. Upon hearing this, the foreman warned his fellow workers not to disturb him any more, and his fellow workers did not disturb him any more indeed.

An informant from Tokat, who fell within the category of the younger generation, described another type of negative encounter with the Sunni which originated from overhearing some conversations in which the members of the Sunni community described Alevis, in general, with certain negative attributes.¹⁶⁰ According to the anecdote she shared with us, during the first month of her first year

¹⁵⁸ Salih Bey, 12 March 2009.

¹⁵⁹ Hüseyin Bey, 13 March 2009.

¹⁶⁰ Özden Hanım, 14 March 2009.

at the university, she had overheard a conversation taking place among her roommates in the dormitory of the university. In which her roommates had claimed that Alevis would not fast on Ramadan and they would not perform ablution. Upon hearing these claims, which were described as “insulting” by the informant, she immediately told her roommates that she was an Alevi and asked them whether they had ever made friends with an Alevi or whether they had ever met an Alevi family. She had also wanted to know if they had ever read anything about Alevis and Alevism; in other words, she had inquired about the sources of these claims and conceptions of her roommates about Alevis. They had said they had neither had an Alevi friend nor met an Alevi family. Moreover, they had not read any book on Alevism. These answers seem to have annoyed the informant to a great extent because although her roommates had not met any single Alevi in their lives, they had been talking as if they were “experts” on the issue, with the exact wording of the informant. Furthermore, the fact that the persons who had been making such comments about Alevis with no concrete proof in their hands or without depending their own experience were university students had increased her annoyance since university students were relatively more educated than rest of the society. Finally, it should be noted that a significant point was that the roommates of this informant had designated their parents as the sources of their information, and they also had stated that their parents had cautioned them not to talk to Alevis on the basis of their belief that Alevis were atheists who did not accept the Koran as their sacred book and who would harm them.

One other informant of the younger generation from Tunceli narrated a memory of his in which some of his fellow workers had stated that Alevis did not carry out the ritual ablution of their whole bodies and that they were performing the

act of the so-called *mum-söndü*.¹⁶¹ Describing such thoughts as “abhorrent,” and his fellow workers who made such claims about Alevi as “primitive”, the informant said that when these people learned that he was an Alevi, they admitted that their ideas about the Alevi were wrong and they went on paying respect to him. One important point made by the same informant within the context of this memory of his is that some people in our society still have certain “prejudices about Alevi which have not been destroyed yet,” similar to the aforementioned ones which are all based on the core idea that “Alevi are dirty and unclean”.

Having pointed out that he had not encountered any particular negative attitude towards himself by his Sunni acquaintances at school or in the workplace arising from his being an Alevi, another informant from Tunceli in the younger generation said that he had nevertheless come across some incidents in which Sunni people inquired about whether Alevi were Muslims, and so forth.¹⁶² Having described such people as “impertinent,” this informant claimed that such questions asked by Sunnis indicate the lack of knowledge of Sunnis regarding who an Alevi is, which appeared to disturb him. Nevertheless, he also appeared to be lamenting his own lack of knowledge about Alevi and Alevism, too, as exemplified by the following words:

We could not defend ourselves since we did not have in-depth knowledge about Alevism, to be honest. The fact that Alevism was crumpled and Alevi were not allowed to openly declare their identities during the Ottoman period, as well as the Republican era, had its impact on our lack of knowledge about Alevism. When you always have to act secretly, there gradually comes a point at which you start to drift away from certain of your values.¹⁶³

¹⁶¹ Deniz Bey, 15 March 2009.

¹⁶² Erdal Bey, 10 March 2009.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

The most meaningful word used within the quotation above is the word “defend,” I think, since this word tells a great deal about what exactly the informant felt in the face of the question asked by his Sunni acquaintances whether Alevi are Muslims or not. He seemed to be generalizing the issue of the lack of defense in the face of the questions raised by Sunni so as to cover all Alevi in Turkey and attributed this lack of defence issue to the lack of knowledge of Alevi about their own faith, which, in turn, was ascribed to the enforced concealment of Alevism due to the practices of both the Ottoman Empire and the Republic of Turkey.

In addition to its negative effects on the knowledge of Alevi on their own faith and culture, this enforced concealment suggested by the informant seems also to have adversely affected Alevi’ chance to openly lead an Alevi way of life with all its values and practices, too, as a result of which Alevi have distanced from their own faith. Both the quotation right above and the following comment of the same informant exemplify this idea of ours: “I was not satisfied with the answers of the Dede. As a matter of fact, my dissatisfaction may arise from that we possibly do not know what exactly we should be asking them yet. What will you ask them? What will you tell them?”¹⁶⁴

Apparently, all of these negative encounters of the informants with their Sunni acquaintances stemmed from the prejudices in the minds of these acquaintances of theirs. These prejudices were based on the “hearsay knowledge” they had instead of knowledge based on their own experiences. This fact seemed to be disturbing most of the informants to a great extent and made them resort to different strategies so as to eliminate it, which will be discussed below.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid. *Dedelerin cevabından tatmin olmadım. Belki de daha tam ne soracağımızı da bilmiyoruz, o yüzden. Ne soracaksın ki, ne diyeceksin?*

General Attitude of Alevi vis-à-vis the Instances of Their Negative Labeling by the Urban Sunni: Use of the Strategies of Self-Expression and Self-Representation instead of Secrecy

Examples of negative attributes with which Alevi, as a whole, are associated by the urban Sunni which had been overheard by the informants were already discussed. An examination of all of the interviews conducted yields a long list of them: “Alevi do not perform ablution,”¹⁶⁵ “Alevi are dirty/unclean people,”¹⁶⁶ “the bread of Alevi or the food cooked by Alevi should not be eaten,”¹⁶⁷ “one should not sit down on the cushion of an Alevi,”¹⁶⁸ “one should not be a guest in the house of an Alevi,”¹⁶⁹ “Alevi do not fast,”¹⁷⁰ “Alevi are atheists,”¹⁷¹ “Alevi deify their Dedes, kissing their hands and feet,”¹⁷² “Alevi do not accept the Koran as their sacred book,”¹⁷³ “taking an Alevi girl as a bride is a very meritorious deed on the part of Sunnis since the Alevi girl becomes Muslim through her marrying into a Sunni family,”¹⁷⁴ “Alevi do harm to other people,”¹⁷⁵ “Alevi slaughter humans and cannibalize them”¹⁷⁶ and “Alevi perform the mum-söndü act.”¹⁷⁷

¹⁶⁵ Deniz Bey, 15 March 2009; Özden Hanım, 14 March 2009.

¹⁶⁶ Deniz Bey, 15 March 2009.

¹⁶⁷ Cennet Hanım, 11 March 2009; Haydar Bey, 15 March 2009.

¹⁶⁸ Cennet Hanım, 11 March 2009.

¹⁶⁹ Haydar Bey, 15 March 2009.

¹⁷⁰ Özden Hanım, 14 March 2009.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Halil Bey, 24 March 2009.

¹⁷³ Özden Hanım, 14 March 2009.

¹⁷⁴ Emine Hanım, 25 March 2009.

¹⁷⁵ Özden Hanım, 14 March 2009; Zöhre Hanım, 11 March 2009.

¹⁷⁶ Zöhre Hanım, 11 March 2009.

In addition to these instances of negative labeling, some of the informants mentioned certain questions raised by their Sunni acquaintances wishing to get informed about the peculiarities of the Alevi culture. These questions include “Do Alevi consider Hz. Ali to be God?” “Why do Alevi worship at cemevis?” “Why do Alevi not perform namaz?” and “Why do Alevi not fast?”

In the face of the aforementioned instances of negative labeling of Alevi – which, according to most of the informants, basically originate from some hearsay knowledge and prejudices about Alevi whose sources are fatwas given by the muftis, comments made by the imams and stories told by the elder people within the families– as well as the questions regarding the peculiarities of the Alevi culture, the informants seem to have felt a need to inform their Sunni acquaintances about the “true” nature of Alevi, the Alevi culture and the Alevi way of life, as well as to provide some historical background related to certain historical events which have special significance for Alevi and Alevism in general.

This significant need felt by the informants seems to have caused the replacement of the centuries-old strategy of secrecy of the traditional Alevi community with the strategy of self-expression and self-representation through attempting to inform their Sunni acquaintances of various aspects of Alevism. Through establishing primary, face-to-face relations with them in places such as the neighborhood or the workplace, they introduce them to the “real” Alevi, flesh and blood, instead of the “imaginary” Alevi in their minds based on some hearsay knowledge originating from the aforementioned sources. Both through acting as “natural informants” about Alevi and Alevism in general within the urban setting as well as through the relations they had established with the Sunni people around

¹⁷⁷ Nearly all of the informants stated that they had heard this mum-söndü story being associated with Alevi.

themselves, the informants seem to have contributed to the process of the transformation/change of their Sunni acquaintances' knowledge about Alevis towards being based on knowledge from within the group, as well as on self-experienced relations, which made this knowledge more valid and reliable.

Having specified these general evaluations, first the reasons why Alevis needed the strategy of secrecy within the rural setting from the points of view of the informants will be presented, and then the use of the new strategies of self-expression and self-representation, instead, by the informants within the urban setting will be described respectively.

The Reasons behind the Need for and Strategy of Secrecy

Throughout history, Alevis have been compelled to hide their religious identity and to carry out their religious rituals secretly due to the pressure exerted on them by the central authorities as well as by the members of the Sunni community. This fact was touched upon by most of the informants. Their explanations showed that it was the very pressure Alevis had been forced to live under and the fear with which they had been living that caused the traditional Alevism in the rural setting to resort to the strategy of secrecy. This secrecy phenomenon reflects itself upon the nature of the locations of the Alevi villages, the way Alevis carried out their Cem rituals and even the tasks assigned to the people who were in charge of the procedure of the Cem ritual. Interestingly enough, according to some of the informants, it was this secrecy phenomenon which Alevis were forced to practice which caused the formation of certain instances of slanderous labeling of the Alevi community regarding the alleged sexual immorality of their groups.

Concerning this phenomenon of secrecy arising from the oppression Alevis were under, some of the informants spoke of the locations of the Alevi villages, claiming that the Alevis had had to establish their villages in the old days in secluded and mountainous areas in the middle of nowhere since their very physical existence was in danger as a result of the prosecution of the state.¹⁷⁸ Following are the actual words of one of those informants:

However, you may have also noticed that Alevi villages are generally located in rural places, on the mountain slopes or behind the mountains, since Alevis were under pressure once upon a time. The same is true for the area where our village is located, as well. Alevis felt the need to take shelter in somewhere and hid themselves, since they fought for their lives once upon a time.¹⁷⁹

In addition to the fact that Alevi villages are located in sheltered and secluded places, the existence of a gatekeeper (*bekçi* in Turkish, one who was set as a watch) as a significant actor in or contributor to the Cem ritual was also raised by some of the informants as an indicator of the secrecy-based character of the traditional Alevi culture. One woman also suggested that rumors like *mum-söndü* had been given rise due to the closed and secrecy-based character of their collective religious ritual. One of the informants, from Sivas, spoke with regard to this issue:

Alevis felt the need to take shelter in somewhere and hid themselves out of fright, since they fought for their lives once upon a time. Our Dedes would tell us that they had been unable to comfortably perform their Cems since there had been soldiers at each and every corner.... They were stricken both by a feeling of fright and poverty. My grandfather would say that the time they had performed Cem in the past, they used to have set watch in different places which were far away from the village so that they would have been notified of the possible coming of an outsider.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁸ Halil Bey, 24 March 2009; Hasret Hanım, 11 March 2009; Emine Hanım, 25 March 2009; Zöhre Hanım, 11 March 2009.

¹⁷⁹ Zöhre Hanım, 11 March 2009.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

Another informant, from Tokat, also highlighted the tradition of having gatekeepers when the Cem was being performed in the village, suggesting that this tradition was a reflection of the fear the Alevis felt as a result of all massacres which they had been the victims such as the one at *Kerbela* up until the Sivas events.

When we were in the village, they would set a watch at the entrance of the village so as to prevent a possible sudden attack. People were burned in *Kerbela* and Sivas, you know. The Cem ritual would take place at the biggest house of the village back then. God forbid, but, if a person started a fire during the Cem at a time when all villagers gathered together at one single house, all the villagers would be destroyed then. Hence, they would set a watch not only at the entrance of the house where the Cem would be performed, but at the centre of the village and at the entrance of the village as well. This watchman was in charge of notifying the villagers in case of any sudden attack. We were under a lot of pressure in the past, which has changed today, thank God.¹⁸¹

The following words of another informant who came from Erzincan indicate that the massacres in which Alevis were killed were always fresh in the minds of the Alevi people:

If the state had really recognized the existence of Alevis within this country, events like the ones that took place in Çorum, Maraş or Sivas would have not occurred. If the state officials had really considered Alevis as citizens of this country and granted them their rights, they [the ones who participated in the aforementioned events] would not think that they could perpetrate these massacres. Such massacres have their roots in the past, I think.... The logic behind these massacres has a long history of some three or four hundred years. Today, people could be massacred just because they mention the name of Hz. Ali, who became the fourth caliphate. For me, the perpetrators of the Maraş events share the same logic with the ones who were against Hz. Ali's caliphate a thousand and four hundred years ago.¹⁸²

One of the informants recounted a story which had been told to him by the elders of his village.¹⁸³ During the 1960s, the inhabitants of his village were intended to be killed by the inhabitants of a neighboring Shafii village; fortunately, this intention was prevented by the dwellers of another neighboring village. Having narrated this

¹⁸¹ Emine Hamm, 25 March 2009.

¹⁸² Haydar Bey, 15 March 2009.

¹⁸³ Halil Bey, 24 March 2009.

story to as an example of the pressure put on the residents of his village by the neighboring Sunni villages, he stated that they also felt the need to have a gatekeeper during the Cem rituals performed within the rural setting.

As far as understood from the explanations and memories of the informants above, Alevi felt the need to resort to secrecy as a consequence of the pressure they were under which threatened even their physical existence. Nevertheless, this secrecy strategy resulted in certain negative developments for Alevi, too. The nature of these negative developments will be discussed against the backdrop of the so-called mum-söndü story.

As mentioned before, the issue of the so-called mum-söndü was frequently raised nearly by all of the informants within the context of the instances of negative and slanderous attributes ascribed to Alevi by the Sunni, at large. The story of the so-called mum-söndü, which literally means “blowing the candle out,” was described by the informants as a total aspersion that had been cast on Alevi by the Sunni people, accusing Alevi of engaging in incest relationships when they gather together for their collective religious activity.

One of the informants, from Malatya, stated that the daughter-in-law of her uncle, who was a Sunni, told her that one of the reasons why she hesitated to marry into the lineage of this informant was what she had heard about the so-called mum-söndü practice of the Alevi people prior to her marriage. Below is the narration of this informant regarding the issue:

Afterwards, our daughter-in-law told us that Alevi had been represented to her as people who would play the so-called mum-söndü at home with their brother-in-laws. What the hell is this so-called mum-söndü? I have heard its name from the people who are not Alevi. By mum-söndü, they seem to refer to an event during which Alevi turn all lights off at their houses and have

sexual intercourse with their sisters, brothers and brother-in-laws. I cannot believe the sheer existence of such a mentality.¹⁸⁴

Another informant, from Muş, stated that she had heard the same mum-söndü ascription from her roommates while she was staying in a hospital seventeen years earlier and could not tell them that what were saying was not correct since she was not as brave as today, as she has explained to us.

We used to live in a feeling of fright in past. For instance, I stayed in Göztepe Hospital seventeen years ago. There were six people in my room, including me. My roommates uttered many offensive and slanderous words about Alevis. When I heard their offensive sentences, I got under the bed linens and started to cry. I was definitely hit in my pride. If I knew then what I know now, I would tell them that I was an Alevi. I do not care whether they would kill me. They were saying that Alevis were playing mum-söndü. It was during those days that Güner Ümit made some claims about Alevis and according to my roommates his claims were correct. However, I did not tell them that I was an Alevi since I was afraid that they would do something bad to me during the night time. As I said before, If I knew then what I know now, I would tell them that I was an Alevi since many people breasted great pains to be able to reach the point where we are now.¹⁸⁵

One other informant, from Tunceli, recalled how this accusation, which was by no means accepted by any of the informants, had been uttered by a politician in the past and expressed her disturbance originating from such a labeling:

What was the name of that Minister of Justice? Şevket Kazan... Şevket Kazan said that Alevis were playing mum-söndü. Do you know the meaning of mum-söndü? If you do not know its meaning, then your mother must know it. Why did Şevket Kazan lie to the people by suggesting that Alevis would have sexual intercourse with their sisters and brothers? Is this really the case? Is morality something which is solely pertinent to them? How can my son look at me with such an evil eye? Where in the Koran is there such a reference?... During the “one minute dark for light forever” protests following the Susurluk event, they said the protestors were playing mum-söndü.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁴ Gamze Hanım, 25 March 2009.

¹⁸⁵ Şadiye Hanım, 25 March 2009.

¹⁸⁶ Fatma Hanım, 10-11 March 2009.

Regarding the possible departure point of the stories of the so-called mum-söndü, one of the informants made a speculation, which sounds really significant and down-to-earth. According to this informant, who was from Malatya, as a result of the fact that the Sunni residing in the surrounding villages did not want Dedes to come and visit the Alevi villages where their talips were living so as to inform them about their own creed and to conduct their collective religious ritual, Alevis had had to perform their Cem rituals secretly in the past.¹⁸⁷ Due to this “enforced” secrecy of the Cem and as a consequence of the fact that Alevis had closed their inner world to the outside, the very Sunni people who had obliged Alevis to carry out their Cem rituals secretly began to wonder what Alevis were doing when they gathered together with both men and women together to perform their holy ritual. Because Alevis determinedly carried out their religious collective ritual secretly, without allowing any Sunni person in, the rumor of mum-söndü began to circulate among the Sunni people.

In my opinion, the facts that Alevis perform their religious activities secretly when their Dedes come to visit them and that their [Alevis’] inner world is not open to the outside are the reasons why they [Sunnis] attribute such labels to Alevis. Now, everybody has opened themselves to the outside and I thank God for this. In past, when a Dede came to a village, the villagers would set a watch somewhere so that no one from another village could see that Dede had come. Sunnis did not want Dedes to visit their villages and to teach villagers [about religious issues].¹⁸⁸

Another informant, from Sivas, also touched upon this interesting point, suggesting that it was the members of the Sunni community who both enforced Alevis to act secretly in their collective religious activity and who made some negative ascriptions regarding Alevis’ Cem ritual since this ritual was carried out secretly:

They [the residents of her village] had to hide themselves since other people used to misconceive them. They [residents of other villages] used to wonder

¹⁸⁷ Gamze Hanım, 25 March 2009.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

what all these people were doing together and tell really mistaken things about these gatherings. I do not need to mention these since you also know them. Thank God, we do not have anything we need to hide. Everybody [among us] is a mother, brother or sister to each other.¹⁸⁹

In brief, all of these informants seemed to have suggested that the strategy of secrecy, which Alevis had had to resort to for centuries due to the pressure they had been under, had caused the emergence of various slanderous rumors among the members of the Sunni community regarding their morality.

The Logic behind the Replacement of the Strategy of Secrecy with the Strategies of Self-Expression and Self Representation

In addition to the fact that the phenomenon of secrecy caused the emergence of the instances of defamation regarding the sexual morality of Alevis, the so-called mum-söndü ascription being the par excellence of such instances, according to the informants, the circulation of the slanderous rumors revolving around the alleged negative attributes of Alevis that we listed above resulted from the fact that Alevis were misrepresented by the leading figures of the Sunni community. This misrepresentation also appears to have stemmed from the closed and secrecy-based character of the traditional Alevi community, which have prevented Alevis from speaking for themselves concerning the issues specific to the inner world of their traditional culture and faith.

The majority of the informants, who complained about the fact that all of the negative attributes they had overheard to be associated with Alevis, said Alevis should from this time on speak for themselves. In other words, according to these informants, Alevis should show their Sunni acquaintances the true nature of the

¹⁸⁹ Zöhre Hanım, 11 March 2009.

particularities of Alevism so as to prove the groundless character of the negative attributes with which they had been associated for centuries long. To be able to accomplish this, they needed to abandon the phenomenon of secrecy and open their inner worlds outside both through self-expression and self-presentation.

According to the informants who touched upon this misrepresentation issue, all the negative attributes that were associated with Alevis within the conversations which either had reached their ears or they themselves had overheard and which had generally been considered as “disturbing”, “insulting” and “abhorrent” them were based on some hearsay knowledge. They suggested that it was this very same hearsay knowledge which had given rise to some unchanging prejudices about Alevis among the members of the Sunni community; and the sources of this hearsay knowledge are basically the fatwas given by the muftis, comments made by imams at mosques and the elder members of the Sunni families.¹⁹⁰ One of these informants, from Erzincan, made the following comment, emphasizing that his Sunni acquaintances who delivered opinion or asked questions about Alevis did not have enough information both regarding Alevism and their own creed; hence, they took some hearsay knowledge as their departure points:

Of course, you get to know those people [Sunnis], as well. As you get to know them, you start to think that these people are also ordinary people, just like we are, and they look with an evil eye on us due to different reasons, such as the misconceptions introduced by the former state [Ottoman state], as well as by Arabs, into Islam. They look with an evil eye on us also because of the fatwas given by the muftis and imams. If they did not lack the necessary relevant knowledge, they would possibly not be looking with such an evil eye on us. They even do not have knowledge about their own faith. They regard what is told them by the imam as accurate.¹⁹¹

¹⁹⁰ Burcu Hanım, 25 March 2009; Haydar Bey, 15 March 2009; Özden Hanım, 14 March 2009; Salih Bey, 12 March 2009.

¹⁹¹ Haydar Bey, 15 March 2009.

Another informant, from Tunceli, touched upon the similar issue underlining that the misrepresentation of Alevis by certain leading figures of the Sunni community specifically:

Once, I was working in a factory in 1980 or 1982. The name of the factory was Politaş, which was located in Çayırova. We had our lunch and turned back to work. One of my friends asked another friend of mine whether he was an Alevi. The addressee of the question denied that he was an Alevi. Then, I asked the question-raiser what was the matter with Alevis. The question-raiser replied to me that Alevis would have sexual intercourse with their fathers, mothers and sisters. I got angry with him and he became paralyzed. They misrepresent Alevism. Imams at mosques assigned by the state, as well as the hadjis misrepresent Alevism, which is still valid today.¹⁹²

The following comment made by one of the informants who fell within the category of the younger generation from Tokat, perfectly exemplified the desire of Alevis to introduce their true nature to the members of the Sunni community just to spite the stereotype Alevi image with various negative attributes on their minds formed through some hearsay knowledge:

I have not felt the need to keep my Alevi identity as secret. My parents did not want me to do such a thing, either. On the contrary, we try to declare that we are Alevis in every setting so that it will be understood what kind of people we [Alevis] actually are. We do not think that our Alevi identity is something that should be concealed. We would like to make people see that we are normal people so that they will not have weird ideas about us.¹⁹³

In short, in the face of the slanderous rumors circulating among the Sunni regarding the alleged immorality of Alevis which primarily stemmed from the secrecy-based character of the traditional Alevi community, according to the informants, the informants seemed to have felt the need to show their Sunni acquaintances the true nature of the Alevis and Alevism. To be able to accomplish this, they needed to abandon the strategy of secrecy.

¹⁹² Salih Bey, 12 March 2009.

¹⁹³ Özden Hanım, 14 March 2009.

Examples of the Use of the Strategy of Self-Expression

Some of the informants touched upon their conscious attempts at informing their Sunni acquaintances about the peculiarities of the Alevi culture and way of life, as well as about its religious and historical background, so as to help them form a more real-like Alevi image on their minds. Some of these informants also emphasized that they first had tried to acquaint themselves with the knowledge of the socio-religious and historical characteristics of the Alevi creed and culture and then had drawn upon this knowledge they have acquired to inform their Sunni acquaintances. Some of them also suggested that, thanks to this knowledge, they could easily defend themselves in the face of any accusation made by their Sunni acquaintances on the basis of some hearsay knowledge; in other words, for these informants, knowledge meant power in the face of the groundless negative claims about Alevis and Alevi culture.

Such informants seem to have gathered such information both as a result of their own desire/interest to know who Alevis actually are and as a some kind of a defense strategy/mechanism in face of the inquiries/demands by the Sunni people, since being unable to answer any question raised by their Sunni acquaintances, in other words the lack of knowledge about one's own creed, seemed to be regarded by the informants as a sign of weakness on their side.

In addition to their individual efforts, they also expressed their contentment with the fact that Alevism is currently being discussed in various books, both popular and academic, on television channels and radio programs, since with their individual efforts they could only inform a few people about the Alevi culture and Alevi way of life.

One informant, from Tokat who was included within the category of the younger generation, shared a memory of hers in which she had overheard a conversation about Alevi, as a whole, taking place among some of the students with whom she had been living at a dormitory and most of whom were members of the Fethullah Gülen community.¹⁹⁴ She emphasized that one of the topics being raised was related to the story of the so-called mum-söndü and that what these students were saying about Alevi was completely based on what they had heard from their parents; in other words, they did not know anything about Alevism. Having specified these observations, the informant stated that she had told these students that she was an Alevi and said to them that they could ask her any questions on their minds concerning Alevi and Alevism. The questions they asked included whether Alevi considered Hz. Ali as God and why Alevi worshipped at cemevis. Because of the fact that she had grown up in a family in whose life the traditional Alevi culture and way of life was particularly salient, and that she was keen on reading books on Alevism or doing research about any issue related to Alevism preoccupying her mind through making use of the facilities of the Internet, she had no difficulty in answering the questions raised by these students.

Another informant from Tunceli from the older generation said that during the first half of the 1990s, when he settled in the Şifa neighborhood of Tuzla, he had heard that some of his Sunni neighbors were talking about him and his family as “These people are Alevi. They do not follow the same way as we do. They do not perform namaz and they do not fast.”¹⁹⁵ Upon hearing such utterances about him and his family, he requested that his Sunni neighbors asked him any questions on their minds regarding Alevi and Alevism. The most frequently asked questions were why

¹⁹⁴ Burcu Hanım, 25 March 2009.

¹⁹⁵ Hüseyin Bey, 13 March 2009.

Alevis did not perform namaz and why they did not fast. Since he attached special importance to learning about the historical background of Islam, as well as the religious and social practices during the early years of the Islam State, together with the general rules, practices and values specific to Alevism between 1965 and 1975, he was quite knowledgeable about the issues related to Alevism, according to the explanations of the informant. He was able to answer their questions easily thanks to his knowledge.

When his Sunni neighbors had heard the logical answers given by the informant concerning the questions on their minds with regard to Alevism, no problems remained between him and his Sunni neighbors. According to the explanations of this informant, the fact that he was knowledgeable both about the history of Islam and Alevism, thanks to the books he had read, he could easily declare that he was an Alevi and answer the questions on the minds of the Sunni people around, as a result of which he did not have any serious problem with the members of the Sunni community. Nevertheless, he told a different story belonging to the days of his military service, when he felt the need to hide his Alevi identity due to his lack of knowledge on Alevism.

I experienced many difficulties during my military service due to the issue of Alevism and Sunnism. I was not an experienced person back then and had not read much on Alevism, as a consequence of which I did not have much knowledge about it. Therefore, those days, I could not openly declare that I was an Alevi. Nevertheless, following the completion of my military service, I read many books and never concealed that I was an Alevi. I have never felt the need to hide my Alevi identity after I came to the city.¹⁹⁶

Having pointed out that he had witnessed many cases in which young members of the Alevi community were oppressed and could not even assert that they were Alevis since they did not have enough knowledge about Alevism, another informant, from

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

Erzincan, said that, contrary to the cases of these young Alevi, he had been able to “defend” himself in the face of the questions raised or the negative attitudes adopted by his Sunni acquaintances.¹⁹⁷ He specified the instances of negative attributes he had witnessed to be associated with Alevi such as the claims that the bread of Alevi should not be eaten, one should not pay a visit to the house of an Alevi and that Alevi were engaged in some immoral acts during their collective ritual participated both by men and women. In the face of all these claims, he had been able to “defend” himself due to the fact that he had sufficient knowledge about the Islam and Alevism, thanks to the relevant books he had read by various authors such as Rıza Zelyut and Abdülbaki Gölpınarlı, and the information provided by the Dedes at cemevis – he especially mentioned the names of İzzettin Doğan and Ali Rıza Dede, who was the President of Alevi Religious Services Unit under the Cem Foundation.

This informant also said that when he revealed his own ideas and evaluations based on the books he had read or the information he had gathered from the speeches made by Dedes at cemevis, in reply to a certain problematic issue raised by his Sunni acquaintances with regard to Alevi or Alevism, the ideas on the minds of his Sunni acquaintances related to that specific issue which were considered to be wrong or lacking by the informant could be challenged easily. As a result, those Sunni acquaintances either found themselves in a contradiction and began to question their own ideas, at least, or change their ideas completely in the opposite direction, which seemed to have been quite pleasing for the informant.

Similarly, another informant, from Erzincan, emphasized that since her father, whom she described as a person who was extremely fond of reading and knowledge, so fond that he had habitually collected packs of newspaper clippings by the time he

¹⁹⁷ Haydar Bey, 15 March 2009.

died, was both quite knowledgeable about the content of the Koran and Alevism-Sunnism, as well as other matters, and paid special attention to continue their traditional religious practices within the urban setting throughout the 1960s and 1970s.¹⁹⁸ He had been able to answer any kind of question posed to him with regard to issues related to the Alevi culture. As a consequence, she did not experience any significant problem with their Sunni neighbors.

Apart from these individual efforts of the informants to teach their Sunni acquaintances about the true nature of the Alevi culture and Alevi way of life, most of the informants specifically touched upon their enthusiasm and pleasure originating from the fact that peculiarities of the Alevi culture were being discussed in books and in the media.¹⁹⁹ They argued that the Alevis traditionally had had to resort to secrecy due to the oppression they had been forced to live under both by the central authority of the Ottoman Empire, and that of the Republic of Turkey. They suggest that, as a result of this secrecy, which definitely did not arise from the fact that they had any perverted or corrupt characteristic they were ashamed of being discovered by the Sunni, but from the oppression they endured, and the various baseless rumors regarding their alleged negative attributes started to circulate among the members of the Sunni community. Nevertheless, they hoped that all these baseless rumors would fade away thanks to the dissemination of the knowledge reflecting the true nature of Alevism to the members of the Sunni community.

The reflection of the true nature of Alevism clearly was a relief to the informants, too, since when the Sunni were informed about the true nature of Alevism, which falsified all the negative attributes that had been associated with it

¹⁹⁸ Sultan Hanım, 12 March 2009.

¹⁹⁹ Emine Hanım, 25 March 2009; Fatma Hanım, 10-11 March 2009; Gamze Hanım, 25 March 2009; Halil Bey, 24 March 2009; Hüseyin Bey, 13 March 2009; Veli Bey, 13 March 2009; Zöhre Hanım, 11 March 2009.

for centuries, they would no longer feel any kind of enmity towards the Alevis.

Thereby, the informants would feel more secure.

One of the most interesting explanations made with regard to this issue was as follows:

I attach great importance to this [the fact that Alevism is being discussed on television and radio programs]. We are really happy about that. In the past, I never saw anyone appear on television to talk about Alevism or cemevis. We definitely did not witness such a thing. Today, however, everything [related to Alevism] is being described and discussed on every television channel, which really makes us content. This is a really favorable development. We do not have anything which is hidden from now on. We actually do not have anything we need to hide, thank God.... Realities have surfaced. As the well-educated and enlightened members of our community have talked about Alevism, they [Sunnis] learned about Alevism. They have really understood that Alevism is nothing bad.²⁰⁰

Another informant touched upon the significance of the television and radio programs in terms of the fact that since such programs had the power to reach a vast segment of the society, they were more effective in the process of forming a more real-like Alevi figure in the minds of the members of the Sunni community when compared to their individual efforts made for the same objective:

In my opinion, Alevi culture will be experienced more comfortably in the future because Alevism has currently opened itself to the outside on many platforms, such as television programs. Now, people consider Alevism more positively compared to the past. Sunnis, who did not know what Alevism was in the past, now watch [different aspects of Alevism] on television today. Today, everybody sees the practices of Alevism since it has opened itself. In the past, this was not the case. For instance, they [Sunnis] would misconceive [the practices of Alevis] and say that Alevis were playing mum-söndü during the Cem. Now, they can see how the Cem is being actually conducted. I have some friends who are fervent supporters of the Nationalist Movement Party. They tell me that they watch the Cem ritual on television because they are curious about it. One of them who, one upon a time, would not even look at a person who said that he/she was an Alevi, now tell me that he watches Cem at home since he likes watching it. He tells me that he both watches the Cem and listens to the folk songs being broadcast. He says to me that he is an addict of the folk songs, and since other channels do not broadcast folk songs, he prefers watching Cem tv [an Alevi channel] to listen to folk songs. In my

²⁰⁰ Zöhre Hanım, 11 March 2009.

opinion, the fact that Alevism is now on television is a great advantage for Alevis. You can tell [a Sunni acquaintance of yours] only four or five words [about Alevism] on your own even when you talk to him/her for hours, but these channels reach society, at large.²⁰¹

In a nutshell, most of the informants seemed to regard informing their Sunni acquaintances about the genuine peculiarities of the Alevis, the Alevi culture and the Alevi way of life as a means to form a more real-like Alevi image on their minds. They also appeared to consider being knowledgeable about one's own faith as a kind of a power in the face of the inquiries by the Sunni people. In addition, they were pleased with the profusion of both academic and popular books, as well as television and radio programs related to Alevism since they thought that such books and programs could reach to a large segment of society.

Examples of the Use of the Strategy of Self-Representation through Drawing upon Primary Relationships

Four of the informants also said that through their own experiences and observations within the urban setting, they had noticed that the general characteristics both Alevis and Alevism had been misrepresented to the members of the Sunni community. In the face of this misrepresentation and misinformation phenomena, as well as the painful instances of hearing that Alevis were associated with some negative attributes, they seemed to think that through the face-to-face relations they established with the Sunni in the urban setting, such as neighborhood or fellow worker relationships, they might and actually had changed the negative Alevi image in the minds of the Sunni. It seems that what they wanted from their Sunni acquaintances was to base their ideas of Alevi and Alevism not on some hearsay

²⁰¹ Veli Bey, 13 March 2009.

knowledge that had been circulating among people for centuries, but on their own experiences. The explanations of the informants follow.

One of these informants, from Sivas, stated that during the first half of the 1980s, which were their first years in İstanbul, they had not been able to profess that they were Alevi since, in those days, the external walls of the houses of Alevi living in her neighborhood, namely Kaynarca, would be painted red and the people who painted their walls would write the following: “Alevi will be hanged,” “Alevi will be decapitated.”²⁰² In addition to this, during the same years, university students who did not fast were being beaten or shot. Her first landlord in İstanbul asked her if she was Alevi or not before he rented his apartment flat to her. When the family of the informant denied that they were Alevi, the landlord replied, “If you were Alevi, I would not allow you to rent my flat.” Consequently, during the first three or five years following their arrival in İstanbul, the informant and her family felt the need to hide that they were Alevi. The significant point which was mentioned by this informant was that when the aforementioned landlord had finally come to know that the family of this informant was Alevi after two years, he had told them that they could stay at his flat as long as they had wanted. That is to say, thanks to the neighborhood relations established between this Alevi family and their Sunni landlord, a Sunni person’s negative ideas about the Alevi people were challenged and actually changed.

This informant also shared a second parallel memory of hers. In 1993, when she was living in Kaynarca again, her next-door neighbor would always shut the door on her face each time they encountered each other at the door. One day the informant asked this neighbor why she was behaving like that. The answer given both surprised

²⁰² Zöhre Hanım, 11 March 2009.

her and made her smile in anger: “My husband was told in the coffee house that the people who had moved into our opposite flat were Alevis and that Alevis would slaughter humans and cannibalize them. So do not even salute them!”²⁰³ Upon hearing this, the informant did not know what to say and told her neighbor to take care of herself then in a sarcastic way. Nevertheless, during the following eleven years of neighborhood, the family of this informant established a strong relationship with this neighbor. Their relationship became so strong that the husband of the next-door neighbor expressed his feelings of embarrassment stemming from what he had told his wife which had caused her to shut the door of the flat in the face of the informant, and asserted that the informant was closer to him than his own sister. While the husband uttered these words, the wife said the following: “I have heard and learned about Alevism and Sunnism here in İstanbul and believed in what my husband told me. I have not heard anything like Alevism or Sunnism in my own village. Nevertheless, I came here and I got to know you. If all Alevis are like you, I would sacrifice myself for Alevis.”²⁰⁴

Another informant, from Gümüşhane, also told of a memory in which one of her friends with whom she had been acquainted since they had both worked in the same apartment building as baby-sitters and with whom she had developed an intimate relationship at the end of two years they spent one day shared a problem of hers with the informant.²⁰⁵ Her problem was related to the fact that her father had not given her away in marriage to the two young men who had recently come to their

²⁰³ Zöhre Hanım, 11 March 2009. *Benim eşim kahvede duymuş. Sizin karşı daireye taşınan kişiler Alevi'ymiş. Bunlar adam kesiyormuş, adam eti yiyormuş. Sakın onlara merhaba demeyin.*

²⁰⁴ Ibid. *Ben Aleviliği, Sünniliği burada, İstanbul'da, duydum, öğrendim. Eşim de öyle diyince inandım. Ben kendi köyümde Alevilik-Sünnilik diye bir şey duymadım. Ama geldim, burada sizi tanıdım. Bütün Aleviler sizin gibiyse, ben Alevilere kurban olurum.*

²⁰⁵ Cennet Hanım, 11 March 2009.

house to ask for her hand because both of these young men were Alevi. According to the explanations of the informant, following was the exact wording of her friend: “God damn it! Two men asked for my hand in marriage, but both of them were Alevi.”²⁰⁶ Upon hearing this problem, the informant first asked her friend why her father had such prejudices about Alevi people. The answer was that Alevi were said to not to perform ablution. The informant then told her friend that she was an Alevi, too, which shocked her friend, and finally she asked her friend if she had witnessed any improper behavior of hers, or of her husband, both during the time they had become friends in general, and the time she spent with her sister at the house of the informant. The answer was no. At the end of this conversation, the friend of informant became really sorry about what she had thought and said about the Alevi people and apologized to the informant. Nevertheless, having reminded her friend that she herself had made friends with an Alevi family and had herself seen that Alevi were also “normal” people living “normally,” the informant requested that her friend not apologize, but not to believe solely what she heard from other people.

After emphasizing that he had noticed how Alevi and Alevism were misrepresented among Sunnis on the basis of his own experiences within the urban setting, one of the informants, who was from Malatya, stated that some of his Sunni neighbors in Kurtköy, with whom his relationships were quite intimate and warm at that point, once told him that their elders had misinformed them about Alevi and Alevism. The following words of this informant are significant in this respect:

We [Alevi] have really been misrepresented. I have Sunni neighbors at the moment. In Kurtköy, I also had some two or three neighbors, as well. They do really like us right now and tell us that their elders misinformed them about Alevism. This misinformation [phenomenon] includes defamation and inaccurate information which have their roots in the past. I do not know the first persons that caused this disinformation; however, this defamation

²⁰⁶ *Allah kahretsin. İki kişi istedi. İki de Alevi.*

[phenomenon] has a long history. Nevertheless, as people get to know us, they believe that what they heard about Alevi was inaccurate.²⁰⁷

Another informant, from Malatya, stated that the colleagues with whom she had worked for three years told them that Alevi had been described differently to them as a result of which they had been trying to keep away from them.²⁰⁸ However, thanks to the fellow worker relationship they had established with this informant, they warmed towards Alevi.

Apparently, these informants wanted to help their Sunni acquaintances base the images of Alevi and Alevism in their minds not on some hearsay knowledge stemming from prejudices, but on their own experiences.

Feelings of Inadequacy in Terms of Religiosity and Religious Knowledge

The fact that the informants started to share the same living space with the members of the Sunni community following their migration into the city, which increased not only the frequency of establishing direct, face-to-face relationships with them to a dramatic extent, but also the possibility of making direct observations about a wide range of behaviors of the Sunni, seems to have influenced some of the informants' evaluations regarding the level of their own religiosity, as well as the adequacy of their own knowledge regarding their faith. This development, which may be considered a phenomenon of an increased amount of self-reflexivity that was mainly based on these informants' pondering upon and questioning the sufficiency of their own religiousness and knowledgeableness about their own faith through comparing themselves with their Sunni acquaintances in terms of these two criteria seems to

²⁰⁷ Yusuf Bey, interview by the author, video camera recording, Esenler/Pendik, İstanbul, Turkey, 25 March 2009.

²⁰⁸ Gamze Hanım, 25 March 2009.

have resulted in a high degree of self-criticism on the part of the informants. Having made these general findings, the actual observations and comments of the informants will follow.

One of the informants, from Malatya, stated that she had been suffering from a feeling of “inadequacy” (*eksiklik* was the word she used) each time she looked at her Sunni acquaintances, who managed not only to work in order to attain a certain level of economic welfare, but also to duly fulfill their religious responsibilities. Her feeling of “inadequacy” seems to have originated both from her belief that she was not carrying out her religious responsibilities deservedly enough and she did not have sufficient information as to the rules, beliefs, values and practices peculiar to Alevism. As far as can be understood, she attributed her and her husband’s “inadequacy” in terms of religiosity and knowledge about their own faith to the fact that they had attached more importance to earning a living at the expense of ignoring their religious responsibilities and to that she has not been able to receive an adequate level of formal education. While discussing this issue of religiosity and knowledge, she criticized both herself and her children severely, and her uneasiness arising from her belief that they had failed both at fulfilling their religious responsibilities and knowing the particularities of the Alevi faith was really plain to the eye:

Having graduated from primary school in the village, my husband came here and worked all his life. He worked to bring home a salary and to obtain a footing. I do not know if this is something sinful in accordance with the rules of our religion since we do not know our religion and have not read our [holy] book.... Besides, we are always concerned with financial matters. Everybody is in pursuit of money. When I observe the people living in the vicinity in my house [she refers to her Sunni neighbors], I see that they both fulfill their religious duties and work for a living. So, we are the ones who are imperfect.... In some instances, I have appreciated them [Sunnis] saying to myself that these people can do what we cannot do, and from time to time I have blamed myself. I wish we were more educated and more knowledgeable. My children go to school at present. I wish my children had the enthusiasm I have. I inherited my

enthusiasm from my childhood years during which Dedes would come to our village and teach us about our faith. I remember those days. I wish we had had books related to Alevism back then. My father would bring the Koran and read from it to us. We would listen to what he read. If we had read our own book [book of Alevism] we would have had some relevant knowledge. Now that we do not bother about anything [referring to religious matters]; our children also do not pay attention to such matters. None of my children talks about religion. I personally think that having insufficient knowledge about my own religion and failing to perform my religious activities is bad. A Cem ritual was performed in here Esenler recently. We cooked some food [since it was the end of Hızır fasting] and went to the cemevi. That single day made me feel happy. I was happy on that day. When I came home, I slept peacefully. Afterwards, I told my neighbors that while prior to this Cem ritual I had been feeling sick, on the day I went to the cemevi to join the Cem ritual, I slept with peace of mind. We should be going to the cemevi every day, but our failure to do this originates from us. I wish we could go there more often. I wish I was literate and had more knowledge. It is actually in our power to educate ourselves, but we do not care about such matters.²⁰⁹

Another informant, from Tunceli, stated that he was an Alevi only on the surface since he failed to perform the religious practices peculiar to Alevism.²¹⁰ He attributed his inadequacy to his parents' not having exerted any pressure on him to carry out the religious practices of Alevism during his childhood in the village and that he himself had not attached enough importance to religion after migrating to the city.

We are Alevis only in appearance since we fail in the practising dimension. We neither perform Cem nor fast properly. As a matter of fact, we do not do anything. So why is this the case? This is the case, because our parents permissively brought us up without making any demands upon us. While I was young, nobody told me anything related to Alevism; and when a person grows up [without being accustomed to certain religious practices], he/she simply does not carry out those practices. My parents were only interested in shuttling between home and the field, toiling.... If we had stayed in the village, we would possibly have acquired knowledge [about Alevism]. We escaped from the village, too; and were left confined here, which turned out to be no good for us. Both due to my low level of literacy and lack of interest in such matters [I do not have knowledge of Alevism and fail at practising the activities peculiar to it].²¹¹

²⁰⁹ Gamze Hanım, 25 March 2009.

²¹⁰ Veli Bey, 13 March 2009.

²¹¹ Ibid.

The fact that he had been affected by his observations of the religious behavior of his Sunni acquaintances around him revealed itself while he was evaluating the implied inadequacy of the religious education -both in terms of knowledge and practice- of his children. According to his explanations, since he and his wife, had not “forced” their children to read books related to Alevism or to perform the religious practices peculiar to Alevism when they were young enough to internalize these practices, his children were neither knowledgeable enough about Alevism nor able performers of the religious practices of Alevism. However, the members of the Sunni community did not behave like this as far as the religious education of their children is concerned. They sent their children straight to the mosque the moment they “raised their heads,” according to the informant. He appeared to be appreciating this behavior of the Sunni, emphasizing this point with the proverb “you cannot teach an old dog a new trick.”

If you educate a person to behave in a certain way when he/she is young enough, it will be easier for this person to adopt that particular behavior. When the person is not young enough at the time of education, then it will be harder for him/her to adopt that behavior. We did not perform our religious duties and told my children that it not a problem if they did not pay much attention to these duties, as well, when they were young. I told them that they could learn about and perform these duties when they grew up. However, I have noticed that my advice was not relevant and that they should have adopted these religious habits when they were younger. In the past, they would sometimes fast during Ramadan. When they did that, I used to get angry with them and advised them to fast in Moharram, instead if they wanted to fast. They would respond to me that fasting in Moharram was more difficult since the fasting time was longer.... I am definitely responsible for informing my children about the Alevi faith and setting an example for them. Both parents are responsible for this. As I have just said, if you inform the child about your faith and educate him/her when he/she is young, then that child will grow up accordingly. Since we did not exert pressure on our children [our children fail at performing our religious activities]. For instance, when a child of a Sunni family raises his/her head, his parents want him/her to go to the mosque straight away. Our people, on the other hand, say that our children do not need to be educated in religious matters, since they will anyhow get educated. Summer vacation was long, though. My children could have spare one hour for getting information about religious matters during the vacation. Either they could have read books or I could have educated them on

what Alevism was. True, children should be engaged with their schools and lessons during winter time, but they could have spared one or two hours for this issue on summer days, instead of playing games outside.²¹²

The idea that “you cannot teach an old dog a new trick” was mentioned by another informant from Tunceli.²¹³ The interesting point is the fact that this particular informant, too, touched upon this issue departing from the observations she made on the religious behavior of her Sunni acquaintances within the urban setting. Having stated that the Sunni hold the hands of their children and take them to the mosque once their children reach the age of three or five, the informant regretted that since she had not taken her son to the cemevi when he was younger, her son, who was thirty years old at the time of the interview, did not want to accompany her to the cemevi. She supported the idea if one did not become acquainted with the characteristics, values and practices of one’s own creed at a young age and if the number of such people was high, that particular creed would be faced with the danger of extinction.

The Sunnis hold the hands of their children at the ages as early as three or five and take them to mosques. My child, too, should definitely know and follow my own faith and belief. My son is thirty years old now and when I ask him if we can go to the cemevi to participate in the Cem, he says he cannot come since he cannot kneel down for a long time. This means that one should educate his/her child to behave in a certain way when the child is still young. Both my son and the next generation following my son’s should go to the cemevi and follow our faith. Otherwise, it will vanish. If you do not go to the cemevi and do not witness your own practices, it will vanish. You will not know even what Alevism is. One does not become an Alevi just by saying it. We are gradually disappearing. How do we disappear? One does not disappear only when he/she dies. Failing to go to the cemevis and getting to know your own belief, you gradually disappear. Neither I nor my son has converted to Sunnism, but my son’s child may well convert to Sunnism. When the members of the generation following that of my son’s see that there is nothing done by Alevism, then they will go to the mosque, tagging along after Sunnis.²¹⁴

²¹² Veli Bey, 13 March 2009.

²¹³ Fatma Hanım, 10-11 March 2009.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

As far as understood, sharing the same living space with the members of the Sunni community caused some of the informants to severely criticize the sufficiency of their religiosity, as well as the adequacy of their knowledge regarding their faith, based on the observations they made on the lives of their Sunni acquaintances.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The problematic relationship between the members of the Alevi community and the central authorities of both the Anatolian Seljuk Sultanate and the Ottoman Empire emerged on the basis of some socio-economic and psychological factors in the beginning. However, especially during the sixteenth century, within the context of the Ottoman-Safavid conflict, this problematic relationship started to bare a more political and religious color. As this relationship bore a more political and religious color, the problematic character, which was primarily valid for the relationship between the central authorities and the Alevi community in the beginning, began to be also valid for the relationship between Alevi and the Sunni. Consequently, the Alevi gradually turned into a strictly closed, marginal and secrecy-based community. In addition, they developed a tightly-knitted socio-religious organization that both constituted the basis of and was supported by this strictly closed, marginal and secrecy-based system.

Since the foundation of the Republic of Turkey, there have appeared many important developments leading to a dramatic transformation of the traditional character of the Alevi community which has been marked by the replacement of the centuries-old closed, marginal and secrecy-based character of the community with a completely new one that may be described as open and ready to become integrated into the wider society. The relative rapprochement between the Alevi and the central authority which occurred during the foundation years of the Republic of Turkey,

thanks to the radical secular reforms which were welcomed by the Alevi since they were considered to shake the formerly privileged positions of the Sunni majority. The increase in the accessibility of the Alevi villages as a result of the improvements of the transportation and communication systems also contributed to this transformation process. The growing dynamism of the Alevi capital during the 1960s and the 1970s thanks to Alevi appearing as the new competitors of the Sunni within the markets of towns and cities, and the contributions of Alevi laborers who joined the migration waves of the Turkish laborers into Europe during the 1960s were also influential on their transformation. Another factor was the inclusion of the members of first well-educated Alevi generation into the bureaucracy during the 1960s. Finally, the democratic and liberal atmosphere in the aftermath of the 1960 coup, which facilitated the appearance of the Alevi issue in the public space, as well as the foundations of the first Alevi associations and periodicals, contributed to the transformation.

Although the opening of the Alevi community into the wider society took a major blow within the context of the Leftist-Rightist conflicts in the 1970s and in the aftermath of the 1980 coup, it accelerated dramatically as of the beginning of the 1990s. The collapse of the socialist block in Eastern Europe through the end of the 1980s caused the young and middle-aged members of the Alevi community, who had been fervent supporters of socialism before, to decide to continue their struggle for justice, equality and freedom on the basis of their Alevi identity. This decision was one of the factors which were influential on the acceleration of the opening of the Alevi community. The globally effective discourses of the multiculturalism and identity politics, which both encouraged the representation of the distinctive groups on the bases of such concepts as religion and ethnicity under the nation states and

forced the states to respect differences, also contributed this opening. Finally, the self-defense instinct of Alevis in the face of the strengthening of political Islam or Islamist fundamentalism in Turkey fuelled this opening, too.

The developments which occurred within the context of the gaining speed of the opening of the Alevi community included the issue of the Alevi Manifesto, the establishment of a great many Alevi associations and foundations both inside and outside Turkey and an increase in the number of cemevis. In addition, the foundation of many television channels and radio stations by the members of the Alevi community with the objective of both introducing different aspects of the Alevi culture and way of living to society at large, and to meet the members of the Alevi community with the values of their own culture also contributed to the opening of the Alevi community into the wider society. The profusion of academic and popular books and periodicals, as well as that of the panels and conferences covering different characteristics of the Alevi faith, also played a significant role. Besides, the formation of websites on the Internet disseminating information concerning Alevism and providing a discussion platform related to various issues with regard to Alevism, was also influential. Collective protest activities and commemoration ceremonies organized and participated by Alevis in the face of certain developments which offended Alevis in general were also effective. Finally, the march on 9 November 2008 in Ankara with the objective of demanding certain rights from the government made a major contribution to their opening, too. Under the influences of all these developments, Alevism, which was treated as a taboo by the public opinion before, gradually turned into a subject that frequently occupied the public agenda. Additionally, Alevis became increasingly visible in the public sphere since they found various channels to express themselves.

Among the developments specified as having caused the opening of the Alevi community into the wider society, their migration from the rural areas of the country into the urban centers that started in the 1950s particularly comes to the forefront. This migration factor produced two significant developments which affected the traditional character of the Alevi community to a great extent. Firstly, the most primary rituals and institutions –namely the Cem ritual, the Dedelik institution and the Musahiplik institution– which constituted the basis of and were supported by the strictly closed, marginal and secrecy-based character of the traditional Alevi community, took a major blow under the urban conditions since these institutions had been formed on the basis of the peculiarities of a social structure specific to the rural environment.

Secondly, both the geographical distance between the members of the Sunni community and those of the Alevi community disappeared within the urban environment since they began to share the same living space within the urban setting, which increased the possibility of the direct, face-to-face encounters between the members of two communities dramatically.

Within the scope of our the study, members of the Alevi community who were living in the urban setting were interviewed regarding the ways they had been experiencing the afore-mentioned effects of the migration to the cities, and those of adaptation to the urban conditions on the primary rituals and institutions of the traditional Alevism, as well as the transformation of the traditional character of the Alevi community, which may be described as having been closed, marginal and secrecy-based, into a community gradually opening into the wider society.

In regard to the general situation or the transformation of the primary rituals and institutions of the traditional Alevism within the urban setting, the informants

firstly touched upon the erosion of the close supervision function of the Cem ritual over the Alevi individuals under the urban conditions. This function of the Cem ritual, which includes the declaration, questioning and judgment of any offence committed by a particular individual within the Alevi community and which ensures the moral integrity of the community as a whole through the close control of the community over the individual, had weakened within the urban environment, according to the majority of the informants. The fragmentation of the Alevi community within the urban setting was said to have caused this weakening phenomenon, since this function of the Cem necessitated the geographical proximity of the individuals constituting the community, which was impossible within the urban environment.

Regarding the general situation of the Dede-talip relationship within the urban setting, most of the informants pointed out their disconnection with their traditional Dede following their migration to the city mainly as a result of the physical/geographical distancing that had appeared between them and their Dedes. Others ascribed this disconnection to the general questioning of the erudition and moral integrity of the Dedes. Some seemed to have been disturbed because of the weakening of the Dede-talip relationship within the urban setting since they took it a signal of the possible erosion of the Alevi faith, as a whole, whereas some other did not care much about this disconnection since they thought that one did not necessarily need to have a Dede in order to lead an Alevi way of life. Furthermore, whereas some of the informants supported the idea that Dedes at cemevis could never substitute their traditional Dedes because of either the existence of various perceptions of Alevism in Turkey, or to the need for a mutual trust between the Dede and talip, which was only valid for the relationship between a talip and the traditional

Dede of his/her lineage, others thought that Dedes at cemevis might substitute their traditional Dedes.

Concerning the general situation of the Musahiplik institution, all of the informants stated that their Musahiplik relationships had weakened under the urban conditions due to the physical distancing of the Musahips from each other and the economic inconveniences that prevented them from properly seeing each other. This was an unhappy development for all of them, since, for them, Musahiplik was a precious institution due to the deep and sincere brotherhood bonds it established.

In regard to the increased encounters between the members of the Alevi community and those of the Sunni community within the urban setting, it seemed that sharing the same living space with Sunni people had made the informants aware of the negative image of the Alevi and Alevism existing in the minds of the Sunni. They also seemed to have noticed that this negative image associated with various degrading and slanderous attributes originated from certain prejudices based on some centuries-old hearsay knowledge instead of the experiences of one's own or some concrete and provable knowledge. Additionally, the informants believed that since they had had to hide their inner worlds from the outside for centuries as a result of the pressure exerted both by the central authorities and the society at large and had not been able to speak for themselves, some leading figures of the Sunni community had found the chance to misrepresent them.

Taking all these observations of theirs into consideration, they seem to have been attempting to draw upon this increased possibility of the encounters with the Sunni either through informing their Sunni acquaintances about the true nature of Alevis and Alevism via answering their relevant questions, which was referred to as

self-expression in the thesis, or through setting some kind of a model for the typical Alevi to challenge the negative image in the minds of the Sunni via making use of the primary relations they established with them, which was referred to as self-representation in the thesis. Moreover, they appeared to be quite pleased with the profusion of the books, television programs and radio broadcasts disseminating information regarding the true nature of the Alevi and Alevism to society at large. In other words, they had abandoned by and large the traditional strategy of secrecy, which they considered as one of the reasons giving rise to the negative Alevi image on the minds of the Sunni, and had started to apply strategies of self-expression and self-representation, both of which are compatible with the opening process of the Alevi community into the wider society.

In addition to the preference of using the strategies of self-expression and self-representation, the increased frequency of the Alevi-Sunni encounters within the urban setting brought about another consequence which may be designated as the increased self-reflexivity of some of the informants that emerged as some of the informants questioning the adequacy of their own religiosity and knowledge about their faith compared to the religiosity and knowledge of the members of the Sunni community. These informants were disturbed because they thought that they did not attach enough importance to religious practices and knowledge, as well as the religious education of their children, at least when compared to the Sunni.

In brief, migration to the city caused a dramatic decrease in the geographical proximity among the members of the rural Alevi communities at the expense of the weakening of the basic rituals and institutions of the traditional Alevi culture and way of life since geographical proximity of the members of the Alevi community was the essential condition for the functionality of these rituals and institutions. This

weakening seemed to disturb most of our informants to a great extent because they feared that such weakening could lead to a general weakening and even disappearance of the Alevi faith. On the other hand, while the geographical proximity among the members of the Alevi community decreased to a great extent, the geographical proximity between the Alevi and Sunni communities dramatically increased as a result of the migration to the urban centers. Thanks to the migration, the members of the Alevi community started to share the very same living spaces with the Sunni, as a consequence of which they came directly face to face with the “groundless,” negative Alevi image on the minds of the Sunni which was based on some hearsay knowledge instead of self-experiences or some provable claims. Our informants appeared to designate the reason for the existence of such a negative image as the strategy of secrecy Alevis had been forced to resort to for centuries, which caused “others” to talk about Alevis instead of Alevis themselves, misinforming the society at large about Alevis and Alevism. They seemed to be eager to change this centuries-old strategy of secrecy with the strategies of self-expression and self-representation in order to replace the “groundless,” negative Alevi image on the minds of the Sunni with a more real-like/realistic Alevi image.

When the literature on Alevis and Alevism is considered in general, one realizes that it is either the historical background or the cultural and religious structure of Alevism that has mostly been studied. In these studies, the readers primarily hear the voices of either the academics from various disciplines, such as theology, history, political sciences, sociology, anthropology and linguistics, or those of the leading figures of the Alevi-Bektashi organizations. In other words, in these studies, some theoretical information is provided to the readers for the most part, with the concrete experiences of the “ordinary” Alevis being left aside, and

evaluations and feelings of the “ordinary” members of the Alevi community do not sufficiently come to the fore. We hope that this thesis will serve the making up of this deficiency.

APPENDIX

ORIGINAL TEXTS OF THE BLOCK QUOTATIONS FROM THE INTERVIEWS WITH THEIR FOOTNOTE NUMBERS

87. Dedelerin bize gelip de cem yapması veyahut da kendi geleneklerimizi anlatması, oradan ne kavradıysak odur yani. O zaman küçük yaşta olduğumuz için sadece hareket olarak hatırlıyorum. Dede sazla sözle anlatırdı, sırası gelip anlatınca büyüklerimiz ağlardı, yani cemin duygusunu daha güzel anlatırlardı. Biz de onları dinlerdik. Onların hareketlerinin aynısını yapardık. Demek ki Alevilik, dedelik böyleymiş [derdik].

89. Bir hafta kalırlardı, yani misafirpervanlığa bağlı. Ne kadar ilgi gösterirlerse... Yani dedeler de dikkat ederlerdi, bu aile bizi dinliyor diye. Biz burada sohbet ederken, sen beni dinleyince ben devamını getirmeye çalışırım, dinlemezsən kalkıp giderim.

95. O zaman ne yapıyorduk? Evlere birikiyorduk. Dede geliyordu. Mesela diyelim bizim bu çevrede kaç tane Alevi var, sadece Kızılelmalı değil, Almuslu, Niksar'dan, başka yerlerden Alevileri çağırıyorduk; dede de geliyordu mesela benim evime, o gün burada cem yapılırdı, pilav yapılırdı, cemden sonra kurban kesilirdi, pilav yenir, artanları da herkes kaplarına kor evine götürürdü... Mesela benim akrabam var, senin akrabam var, o ona haber veriyor, o ona haber veriyor, şu evde kurban var diyor. Herkes zaten canla başla... O bizim görevimiz, o bizim görgümüz, oradan geçmek zorundayız... Biz gelmeden önce de yapıyormuş. Zaten ben gelmeden önce kayınbabamla yapıyorlarmış.

96. Aleviliği köyde yaşamakla kentte yaşamak arasında bir fark yok, bizim için aynı. Hiç fark yok. Çünkü ben köyde ne gördüysem burada geldim çocuklarıma da uyguladım. Kızım üniversite okudu, her görgümüze, her kurbanımıza geldi. Musahip kurbanımızı kesmedik, dedi ki benim eşim benim çocuğum da büyüsün görsün (çocuk ilkokula gidiyor). Geçen hafta bizim musahip kurbanımız vardı. Bu çocuğun yüzünden beklettik mesela.

98. Mesela cemi de desen diğer şeyleri orucu falan hepsini dediğim gibi gerçekten babam eğitici olduğu için biliyorum. Ama dediğim gibi mesela ben evlenene kadar martta iki sefer babam Kuran okuturdu. İşte Peygamber'imizin doğuşu gibi, Nuh gemisinin batışını senelik bütün ne dini vecibelerimiz varsa yerine getirirdi. Hızır'ımız olsun, on iki imam olsun. Cem; ben evlendim, evlendikten sonra da üç dört seneden daha fazla da yine evimizde yapılıyordu. Kartal'daki evimizde cem bağlanıyordu. Etrafımızda Alevi aileler yoktu. Ama çağırıyorsun. Sonradan tabi yedi sekiz ev oldu mahallemiz ama. Ama normalde Çavuşoğlu bilmem nerden haber veriyorduk geliyorlardı tabi. Köydeki gelenekleri tabi ki sürdürmeye çalışıyorduk.

Dedemiz Tunceli'den Dersim tarafından geliyordu. Babamların dedesiydi. Annemlerin de Sivaslı geliyordu. Yani hangisi geldiyse o cemi sürdürüyordu.

100. Benim annemin oturduğu yerde ibadetler daha çok yaygın. Komşuları biliyor, ibadet olduğu zaman kimse gelmez. O konuda orası daha rahat buraya göre. Cem falan olduğunda hep oraya giderim. Annelerde oluyor. Dede-talip ilişkisi annemlerin orada sürüyor, burada değil. Dedemiz Bağcılar'dan geliyor. Köyün dedesi ayrı, buranınki ayrı. Şu anda başka bir dedeye bağlıyız.... Dede nasihatler eder. Tuttuğumuz orucun kesinlikle kurbanını keseriz. Kim davet ederse, kim kurbanın kesilip lokmaların dağıtılmasını yemeklerin kendi evinde yenmesini isterse cem o evde yapılır. Mesela On İki İmam orucu için kesilecek olan kurbanın parası evler arasında bölüşülür. Bir gün öncesinden yemek hazırlığına başlanır. Tanıdığımız komşularımız, Sünniler de dahil, gelir yardım eder. Ama ceme girmezler. Annem cem bittikten sonra sabah olduğunda o pişirilen yemekten Sünni kesime de dağıtır. Ayırım yapmaz. Sadece ibadete katılmazlar.... On İki İmam orucundan sonra mesela, biri iki hafta geçirmezler, hemen onun kurbanını keserler. On İki İmamlar kurbanından sonra, Hızır'ı tutarız, Hızır'ın kurbanını keseriz.

101. Biz sadece görüntüde Aleviyiz, uygulamada biz yokuz. Biz ne cem yapıyoruz, ne orucu doğru dürüst tutuyoruz, hiçbir şey yapmıyoruz. Neden? Biz serbest kaldığımız için, bize baskı yapılmadığı için, bizim ailelerimiz bizi baskılı büyütmediği için. Küçükken kimse demedi, büyüdüğün zaman da o işi yapmıyorsun zaten. Anne babam tarlaya gitsin gelsin yeter. İşçilik, hamallık yapsın.... Köyde kalsaydık, belki de öğrenirdik. Biz köyden de kaçtık. Burada da başıboştuk. O nedenle hiç iyi olmadı. Okuma durumum da az olduğu için, kendim de üstüne düşmediğim için öyle şeylerin.

102. Başkası olsa bir evin içinde de olsa kendi cemini yapar. Biz buraya geldik, herkes ekmek davasının peşine düştü. Bir de bir iş yerine girip de çalışma şansı.... Bir de biz hep parasal düşünüyoruz, bugün buraya gidelim, şunu yapalım diyoruz. Herkes paranın peşinde. Buradaki insanlara bakıyorum, adamlar hem dini de yürütüyorlar, onu da yapıyorlar [çalışma anlamında]. Demek ki eksiklik bizdedir.

103. Diyorum ya biz yanlış yapmamaya çalışıyoruz, babamın annemin bize öğrettiği, biz derdik ya biz dinimizi bilmiyoruz, bize derdi ki kızım boş ver, bildiğiniz terk doğru yol yalan söyleme, hırsızlık yapma, bekarsan elin karısına kızına yan bakma, bir kadınsan elin erkeğine yan bakma... Dürüstlük, temizlik budur derdi. Biz de öyle devam ettik. Bize bunları anlatırdı. Kızım yalan söylersen yalan kötüdür, hırsızlık yaparsan hırsızlık kötüdür veyahut da başka türlü düşünürsen o kötüdür. Kötülüğü insan kalbine koymasın. Yüz bin kere şükür, kırk iki yaşındayım, bugüne kadar kimseye bir yanlış yapmamışım, yanlış birine de denk gelmemişim. Her zaman da duam odur. Diyorum ki Allah'ım ben bir şey bilmiyorum, günahlarım ne varsa affolsun, bana yanlış gösterme, kötü insana da denk getirme.

104. Biz Aleviyiz ama Aleviliğe pek önem vermiyoruz. Öylesine, Aleviyiz. Aleviliği kimse doğru düzgün yapmıyor ki. O çok eskilerdeymiş o Alevilik. Dedelerimizin anlatıları ile şimdikilerin hiç alakası yok. Büyük kentlerde ne kadar ne yapabilirsen o kadar yani. Köyde dedelerimiz vardı, yaşlılarımız vardı, çok güzel kitaplar okuyorlardı, cem hakkında güzel şeyler anlatıyorlardı. Artık onlar unutuldu. Büyük

kentlerde ise cemevlerine ayda yılda bir gidersek gidiyoruz. Ben şahsen kendi adıma tam yaptığımızı sanmıyorum. Daha çok önem verilmesini istiyorum.

105. Şehirde Alevilik yeterince yaşanmıyor. Eski zamanlar gibi ona da siyaset koymuşlar. Alevilik'te asla siyaset olamaz. Şehirdeki birçok cemevine siyaset karıştırmaya çalışıyorlar. Oraya giden çocuklarımızı kandırmaya çalışıyorlar. Bu konuya kesinlikle taraftar değilim. İnancı öğretmek yerine siyasi partiye yönlendirmeye çalışıyorlar. Benim çocuğum Aleviliği öğrensin, kendi yolunu öğrensin gayesi ile çocuğunu oraya gönderiyorsun ama çocukları bu şekilde yoldan çıkartıp değişik düşüncelere sürüklüyorlar. Pir Sultan derneklerinin çoğu kendisini İslam dışı görüyor. Biz nasıl İslam dışı olabiliriz? Biz Alevi olarak İslam'ın can damarıyız.... Biz Kur'an'ı yutmuş bir insanız. Pir Sultan derneklerinin böyle yapmasının arkasında yabancı güçler var. Alevi kitlesini kullanıyorlar yani. O yüzden derneklerin çoğunu inandırıcı bulmuyorum. Ama gerçekten inanç üzerine dernek kurmuş olanlara saygım vardır.

106. Biz burada doğduğumuz andan itibaren Aleviliğimizi On dört-on beş yaşlarına kadar gizledik. Hem ailemiz de gizledi. Oruç tutmadılar, bize niye oruç tutmadıklarını da anlatmadılar. Aleviliği onlar da yaşamadı, biz de yaşamadık.... Bizim ailemiz hiçbir zaman dini açıdan baskı yapmadılar ama bize de o kültürü tanıtmadılar. Ailem öğretmedi.... On dört-on beş yaşına kadarki safhalardan bahsediyorum. Biz Aleviyiz, bizim inancımız budur, ibadetimizi böyle yaparız, biz bu oruçları tutarız diye bir anekdot da hatırlamıyorum. Bir şekilde herkesin sakladığı sırmış gibi kaldı. Ben o zamana kadar Alevi olup olmadığımı bilmiyordum ki. Alevilik kavramından haberim yoktu.... Cami gibi her sokak başında bir cemevi yok, ailenin de o kültürü yaşatmaları için uğraştıklarını görmedim. Ekmek kavgası, çocukların sorunu, geçim sıkıntısı derken, belki de kendi açılarından dinlerini aksattılar.... Şu durum da var; aile sana dini öğretse bu sefer okulla çelişeceksin. Öğretmenine söylesen ki bizim zamanımızdaki öğretmenlere hele “Ne diyorsun, öyle şey mi olur, namazını kılacaksın” diyecek. Aile okulda baskı altında kalmamanı sağlamak için de böyle yapıyor.

107. Ben camiye gittim, cemevine gittim dua ettim, şunda benim beş lira kar yapmam gerekiyor ama ben on beş lira kar yaparım, yarın yine gider dua ederim denilmemeli. Mesele bu değil yani. Dua ile bir şeylerin çözüldüğüne inanmamalı insanlar. Bunu anlatmalı çocuklarına. Dürüst yaşa, doğru yaşa. Hakkını al. Başkasının hakkına gözünü dikme. Bu anlatılmalı bence.

116. 1973'te geldiğimiz zaman, köylü kendi yerinde kendi köyündeydi. O dönem, dedeler de kendi yerindeydi, kendi taliplerinin içindeydi. Giderdi, taliplerini senede iki defa ziyaret ederdi. Onlara duasını verirdi.... 12 Eylül darbesinden sonra, Özal'ın başa gelmesinde sonra, seksen üç oluyor galiba, bu terör o zaman yaygınlaştı. Hızlandı, hızlandırdılar. Ben gerçi öyle bir şey yaşamadım, bizim köyden kimse terör zoruyla çıkmadı. Birbirlerine baktılar (örnek aldılar anlamında sanırım). Çocuğum okusun, bir yerde bir işe gireyim, bir sigortam olsun, bir emeklilik olsun... Benim yaşadığım dönemde öyle çıktılar. Diğer köyleri bilmiyorum, belki kavgayla, gürültüyle, baskıyla çıktılar. Artık devlet tarafından mı oldu, terör tarafından mı oldu bilmiyorum. O köyler o şekilde boşaldı. Dedeler de boşaldı.

122. Bir de sana bir sey daha söyleyeyim. Bizim Alevi kesim dedeler de bizim gibi bir insandır, ben niye gideyim onun elini öpeyim, duasını alayım dedi. Bu olay herhalde en çok 12 Eylül'den sonra oldu. Bunu daha çok gençler yaptı, yaşlılar yapmadı. Birileri bir tarihte bu akli bu fikri çocukların aklına koydular. Durup dururken çıkmadı ortaya. Birileri servis yaptı. O, ona söyledi; o, ona söyledi. Ne artık dede gitti kimsenin evine, ne de kimse gitti dedeyi ziyaret etti. 12 Eylül'den sonra gençler dedelere karşı saygısızdı. 12 Eylül öncesine kadar dede talibine giderdi, talipler de dedelerini severdi, sayardı. Saygı gösterirlerdi, inanıyorlardı.... Sonra terör de ortaya çıktı. Köylü de yerinde durmadı, dede de yerinde durmadı, şehre göç ettiler.

127. Sen nasıl bir defa bir komşu yapınırsın, diyelim bu yirmi senelik komşum, ben Şadiye'den korkmam, ama yeni yapılacak komşudan, illa ki insan çekinir, huyunu suyunu öğrenmeden sen korkarsın. Dedeler de öyledir. İnanırcılık olması için gelip gitmek gerekiyor, birbirine güvence vermesi gerekiyor. Buna da bizim gitmememiz sebep oluyor.

130. Musahiplik bana şunu ifade ediyor, öz kardeşinin olmadığı bir yerde bir kardeşinin varlığını hissediyorsun. Bana bir şey olduğu zaman benim çoluğumun çocuğumun meydana kalmayacağını, o insanların onlara sahip çıkacağını, aynı şey onun için de geçerli benim için de geçerli. Çok mantıklı, önemli bir şey diyorum ben.

131. Babamdan gördüğüme göre, babamın da musahibi vardı ve onlar kardeş derecesinde birbirlerini severlerdi. Paylaşamayacakları hiçbir şeyleri yoktu.... Kardeşten de ötedir o, ben babamdan öyle izledim. Babamın musahibi öldü, eşi hayatta. Hala babamın ona içtenlikle bacı deyişi, onun da babama ağabey deyişi beni çok etkiler. Onun babama gösterdiği yakınlığı öz kardeşlerinde görmemişimdir.

133. Yedi sene gözleşiyorsun. Anlaşamazsan ayrılıyorsun. O kefenin altına girdikten sonra dönüşü yok. Evde kardeş kardeşle küsülü durur mu durmaz, eşler birbirleriyle küsülü durur mu, durmaz, belki moralin bozulur ama unutacaksın. Aynı şimdi öyle olduk biz.

134. Musahibimiz yoktur. Çok istediler de olmadık. Benim eşim musahiplikten sürekli kaçındı, çünkü ağır bir şeydir, ağır bir yükür. Onu taşımak için önce kendimizi taşımamız gerekir. Bir dede gelip gidiyordu, çok istiyordu Şadiye ile musahip olmamızı. Ben de istiyordum. Eşim kabul etmedi. Yarın öbür çoluk çocuğumuz olur, birbirimizi kırabiliriz. Burada bir komşuyuz, sohbetimiz muhabbetimiz güzel, o olunca yük ağır olur, taşıyamazsak sonra pişman oluruz, pişman olacağımız şeyi yapmayalım.

135. Musahibim var, İzmir'de. Musahip ilişkilerim devam etmiyor. Biz musahipliği ilkokuldan başlatmıştık, kendi aramızda. Biz kendi kendimize musahip olduk, birbirimize söz verdik. Düğünlerimize bile gidemedik. Ne o benim düğününe geldi, ne ben onun düğününe gittim. Şehre gelmekten dolayı. O, o zaman Bursa'ya gitti, okulu bitirince. Ben İstanbul'a geldim. Ondan sonra bir sefer mi ne görüştük. Görüşme şansımız bile olmadı. İlişkilerimizin devam etmesini ikimiz de çok isterdik. Hatta bir ara birbirimizi iyi takip ediyorduk, ama buluşamıyorduk bir türlü. Ondan sonra ipler iyice koptu adresler değişince. O, Bursa'dan İzmir'e geçti. Daha da uzaklaştık, uzaklaşınca da bitti.

136. Musahibim var gibi. O da İstanbul'da. Şu anda şehir uzak olduğu için yeteri kadar sürdürülemiyorsun. Çünkü köyde olmak ile şehirde olmanın arasındaki fark bu. Köyde olduğun zaman sen ondan o senden sorumlu olmak zorunda. Ama şehirde o başka bir ilçede sen başka bir ilçedesin. Koskocaman İstanbul bir ülke olmuş durumda. Bunun için sahip olamıyorsun. En büyük etkisini ekonomik sebepler olarak görüyorum. Mutlaka devam etmek isterdim.

137. Musahibimiz vardı, Allah rahmet eylesin öldü. Köyde oturuyordu, şehre gelmedi... Yoksulluk oldu mu gelemez. Nasıl gelecek? İkimiz bir yerde otursaydık iyi olurdu ama hayat şartları bırakmıyor ki... İnsan üzüyor tabi. İnsanın aklından çıkmıyor. Öyle diyorlar, Alevi oldun mu musahibin çok önemli. Bu açıdan üzüldüm tabi.

138. Şehirde eski bağ kalmadı. Niye kalmadı? Çünkü, eskiden herkes kendi yerindeydi, kendi işindeydi, herkes kendi bağıyla, bahçesiyle, tarlasıyla... Hepsi bir millet olduğu için, birbirini tanıyordu, birbirine bağlıydı. Birbirine güveniyordu, inanıyordu. Burada niye böyle oldu? Artık, herkes kendi geçim derdine düştü. Para diyim, nasıl bir kazanç sahibi olurum... Bazı yerler var ki, kardeş bile kardeşi unutmuş. Biraz daha çıkar sağlayayım, biraz daha ilerleyeyim. Kardeşi orada fakirmiş, işi yokmuş... Eh, benim de orada bir kardeşim var diyor. En çok da maddiyattan geliyor. Bizim yaşadığımız dönem iyi, belki bundan sonra gelen nesil daha da kötüdür yani. Bu gidişle, öyledir bence. Aleviler birbirlerine bağlı değil.

140. İlk geldiğimizde Alevilik-Sünnilik gibi bir şey bilmiyorduk. Ben kendimce bilmiyordum bunu. Ramazan'ın ne olduğunu da bilmiyordum. Davul sesini ilk duyduğumda düğün var diye düşündüm. Her gün birkaç dakika davul çalıyordu, ben de düğün var sanıyordum. O zaman televizyon da yoktu. Bir tane pilli radyo vardı. O radyo ile de Ramazan'ı ne kadar görebilirsin ne kadar tanıyabilirsin. Adı Ramazan ama kim bu Ramazan ya da ne bu Ramazan bilmiyorduk. Çünkü bizim köylerde yoktu Ramazan, olmadığı için de bilmiyorduk. Ramazan'ın ne olduğunu, insan mıdır nedir bilmiyordum... 1977'nin son baharında geldiğimizde davul çaldığında düğün var sanıyordum. Düzgün amca ile Kürt Hüseyin, Celal dedi getir davulu şurada çal, şöyle güzel bir halay çekelim. Celal de yok yok dedi, Ramazan'da çalacağım dedi. İçlerinden biri bu aradan geçme dedi ama para toplama zamanı gel paranı al dedi, harçlığını götür dedi, ama bizim bu sokaktan geçme dedi. Davulcu dinlemedi, her gece de geçti oradan. Davulcu Alevilikten Sünnilikten anlamıyordu. Anlamadığı için geçti.

141. İstanbul'a ilk geldiğimizde Güzelyalı'ya yerleştik. Sünni-Alevi nedir bilmiyorduk o zaman. Bir gün koyunları olan Çankırılı bir kadın geldi. Koyunlarını otlatıyordu. Bir komşumuz vardı o zaman. Sorduk Alevi midir? Yok dedi Yeziddir. Bizden midir dedik. Yok dedi. Türktür dedi. Bunu ortasını bulamadım. Yezid nedir? Türk nedir? İlk geldiğimiz için ortasını bulamadım. Eltim de vardı. O dedi ki bu komşu herhalde Sünnilere Yezid diyor. Yezid kelimesini de o zaman bilmiyordum. Köydeyken hiç bilmiyordum zaten Sünni nedir.

144. Biz Alevi köyüydük, bizim çevre köylerimiz Sünni'ydi. Birbirimizin ölüsüne, dirisine, hastasına gidip geliyorduk... Köydeyken Sünnilere karşı herhangi bir olumsuz fikrimiz yoktu yani. Diyorum ya, düşüncemiz hep saygıyla... Onlardan

birisi gelince... Bizim ailemiz sadece saygıyı, sevgiyi göstermiştir bize. Yani büyüğünüzdür. Gelince ayakkabısını kaldırın, indirin. Sünni de olsa. Büyük birisi geldiğinde saygıyı bize öğretmişler. Onlar da geldiklerinde tabi gidip namaz kılarlardı. Abdest alıp namaz kıldıklarında biz de merak ederdik ne yapıyorlar diye. Bizde böyle bir şey olmadığı için, başkasını insan tabi merak ediyor. Anneme babama sorunca, onların ibadeti öyledir diyorlardı.

145. Köyümüzün adı Tepedan'dı. Tamamı Alevi'ydi. Çocukluğum köyde geçti, çok fazla Alevi-Sünni ayrımını anlayamamıştım. Çünkü toplumun geneli Alevi'ydi. Tabi çevre köylerde Sünni vardı, gelişler gidişler oluyordu, alışverişler yapılıyordu, ama katledecek, aşağılayacak, hor görecekt derecede bir şey yaşamadım. Hem çocuktum, hem de oralarda çok fazla yoğun yaşamıyordu o dönemlerde.

148. Sünnilerin de yaşadığı bir ortamda yaşayan bir Alevi olmak [neticesinde], onların geleneklerini, Sünni öğretisini daha yakından tanımış oluyorsun. Öteki türlü, sadece iletişim araçları ile tanımış olabilecektin, buraya gelince, iletişim araçları artı deneyimler... Direk uygulamada, direk yaşamın kendisinde bunu görebiliyorsun, bununla karşılaşabiliyorsun. En büyük farkı [köy-kent arasında] onunla yaşamış olmak, sadece bakmak değil, aynı zamanda onun içinde olmak. Yani akvaryuma bakmak değil, aynı zamanda akvaryumun içinde de olmak gibi bir şey.

151. Biz o kültürün içine hiç girmedik. Ramazan kültürü ile, Sünni kültürü ile büyüdük. Ben dört yaz camiye Kuran kursuna gittim. Tamamen arkadaşlarımız gittiği için... Arkadaşlarımızla ilişkilerimizde sorun olmadı. Ama dediğim gibi biz belli bir yaşa kadar Sünni gibi büyüdük. Cuma namazına gittim yani on beş yaşına kadar. Sürekli gitmiyordum ama arkadaşlarım gittiğinde ben de gidiyordum. Kuran kursuna da gidiyordum. Çocukken Aleviliği yaşadığımızı hatırlıyorum.

153. Tamamı Alevi olan bir köyde Alevi olmakla, burada bir Alevi olmak arasında çok fark var. Burada her türlü sıkıntıyı yaşıyorsun. En azından burada çıkıp da açıkçası daha düne kadar ben Alevi'yim diyemiyordum. Hor görüyorlardı. Tepki olarak tam göstermiyorlardı kendilerini ama istediğin kadar ilerletemiyordun samimiyeti. Arkadaşlığın pek o kadar olmuyordu. Kendi aralarında konuşuyorlardı, işte ne olacak, Alevidir, mesela sen bir hata yaptığın zaman kendi aralarında konuşuyorlardı, Alevidir diyorlardı... Tunceliliyim dediğin zaman, adam senle can cana sohbet ederken, nerelisin, Tunceliliyim dediğin zaman, bir duraklıyordu böyle, bir nefes alıyordu, ondan sonra konuşmaya başlıyordu. İster istemez mesafe daralıyordu aradaki. Önceden sana tam yanaşan adam, ondan sonra mesafeyi açıyordu yavaş yavaş, uzaklaşıyordu. Hem devrimci, hem Alevi... İkisi de vardı Tunceli'de. Tuncelili olunca ikisi birden akla geliyordu.

155. Sonuçta biz orada yıllardır oturuyoruz, biliyorlar bizim Alevi olduğumuzu, biliyorlardı yani, birbirine baktıkları gibi bakmıyorlardı diye düşünüyorum... Hiçbir zaman çok samimi olmadık. Arkadaşlarımızda oldu ama kendi çevremizin insanları kadar samimi olamadık. On üç-on dört yıldır burada oturuyoruz. Bizim mesela yan apartmanımızda Aleviler daha çoğunlukta idi, biz onlarla ailecek çok görüştük hani evimize gelip gittiler ama diğerleri ile o kadar ileri bir samimiyet kuramadık ailecek. Biz kendimize daha yakın olanlarla daha samimi olduk. Onlardan kaynaklanıyor tabi. Hani şey olur ya, kim sana sıcak davranırsa sen de ona biraz daha sıcak davranırsın. Önyargılılar, bir de çok sevdiklerini söyleyemem. Bence Alevilere biraz inançsız gibi

bakıyorlar. İlerini ok iyi bilmiyorlar. Ondan diye dşünüyorum. Bence gerekten bilgileri yok Alevilikle ilgili. Hani kulaktan dolma bilgilerle soėuk davranıyorlar.

156. Ben doėduėumdan beri burada oturuyoruz. Uzun yıllardır buradayız. Bu evrede bizden baėka Alevi yok desem de yeridir, bizden baėka babamın halası falan var ama o da akraba olduėu iin saymıyorum. Komėularımız hep Snniler. Komėularımızdan yana olumsuz bir Őeyle hi karėılaėmadım. Ayrıldıėımız noktalar var. Ramazan aylarında mesela kadınlar Kuran falan okurlar, Snni kadınlar kendi aralarında bir diyalog ierisinde. Pek fazla samimiyetimiz yok aıkası o yzden komėularımızla, ama bu tabi kt bir iliėkimiz olduėunu da gstermiyor. Yine grdėümüz zaman konuėup selamlaėabiliyoruz ama arada srekli bir mesafe var. Ne onlar bize ok fazla geliyorlar, ne de biz onlara ok fazla gidiyoruz. Olumsuz herhangi bir tavır yok ama. Bunun biraz da kiėilikle alakalı olduėunu dşünüyoruz, nk biz ailecek de kiėiliėini belli etmiė insanlarız. Babam, annem, iėte babaannem falan olsun... Komėularımız biraz da onunla ilgileniyorlar. Yani Alevi olduėumuzdan ziyade karakterimizi de dikkate alıyorlar.

162. Tabi, biz de Aleviliėi derinlemesine bilmediėimiz iin, iėin aslı, ok fazla kendimizi savunamadık. Ama bunda Osmanlı dneminin de, sonrasının da, Cumhuriyet dneminin de etkisi var ya, o dnemleri dėn, hep rselenmiė, kendini aıklamasına izin verilmemiė, yani hep gizli gizli gizli, bir yere kadar hep gizli gelince ne oluyor, insan belki belli deėerlerden kopmuė oluyor.

178. Ama Aleviler zamanında ok ezildiėi iin hep byle dikkat edersen btn kylerimiz, Alevi kylerimiz hep byle kırsal kesimlerde, daė diplerinde, daė arkalarında. Bizim o taraflarda yle. nk zamanında ancak sadece canlarını kurtarmıėlar. Korkularından bir yerlere sıėınmıėlar. Kendilerini saklamıėlar.

179. nk zamanında ancak sadece canlarını kurtarmıėlar. Korkularından bir yerlere sıėınmıėlar. Kendilerini saklamıėlar. ok eskilerde dedelerimiz anlatıyordu, aėzımızın tadıyla cem yapamıyorduk evlerimizde, nk her kėenin baėına bir asker dikerlermiė... Korku iinde, yoksulluk iinde. Dedem diyordu, mesela cem tutuyorlarmıė. ok uzaklara,  beė yere kiėiler korlarmıė. Bir kiėi geldiėi zaman [haber versin diye].

180. Bekiyi ta kyn giriėine koyarlardı biz kydeyken. Baskın filan olmasın diye. nk Kerbela'da insanlar yakıldı, Sivas'ta yakıldı... Allah korusun o anda kyn halkı toplanıyor nk bir eve. Kylerde de cemevi yoktu. Byk ev kiminse o eve toplanırlardı. Bir tane ateė atsan, tamam iėte o ky yandı bitti. O insanlar mahvoldu, gitti. Onun iin bir kyn giriėini, bir ortasına bir de toplanılan evin giriėine beki koyarlardı. Gelen melen, baskın olursa haber versinler diye. ok fazla baskı vardı. Őimdi ok Őkr yle deėil.

181. Devlet Alevileri sahiplenmiė olsaydı orum olayları olsun Maraė olayları olsun Sivas olayları olsun olmazdı. Devlet gerekten Alevilerin bu lkedeki varlıėını kabullenmiė olsaydı bu olayların hibirisi olmazdı ve devletin kendisi iėte Aleviler de bizim vatandaėımız bunlar da bizim insanımız [diyip] bu insanların da haklarını verseydi, onlar da [Snnileri kastediyor] bizim iin bu Őekilde dėnmeyeceklerdi ve bu katliamların hibirisi olmayacaktı. Gemiėe dayanıyor. Bir insan bir yere geldiėi zaman bazı Őeyleri deėiėtiremez devlet kademesinde. Bu sadece Őimdi deėil, bin 

yüz bin dört yüz seneden beri gelen bir felsefe. Onun bu şekilde devam ettiğine inanıyorum. Bugün düşünün dördüncü halife olmuş Hz. Ali'nin ismini anıyor diye insanlar katledildi. İnsanlar onun yolunda gittikleri için katlediliyorsa, bugün Maraş olaylarını yapan zihniyetle aynı düşünceyi taşıdıklarına inanıyorum ben. Ha bin dört yüz sene önce ha şimdi.

183. Gelin sonradan dedi ki bize böyle böyle söylüyorlardı, Aleviler şöyledir böyledir. Evin içinde kayını ile beraber mum söndürme mi söylüyorlar ne söylüyorlar, mum sönmek neyin nesi, biz dışarıdaki insanlardan duyuyoruz. Mumu söndürüp, bütün ışıkları kapatıp o ailenin içinde bacı kardeş kayın karışık... Böyle bir zihniyet olamaz yani.

184. Eskiden biz korkuyorduk. Mesela on yedi sene önce ben Göztepe'de yatıyordum. Biz altı kişiydik. Onlar Alevilerin hakkında bir sürü kırıcı, karatıcı şeyler söyledi; ama ben çarşafı örtüp üstüme ağladım. Çok gururuma dokundu. Bu aklım olsaydı, şimdi ben diyorum keşke Alevi olduğumu söyleseydim, öldürürlerse de öldürselerdi. İşte Aleviler mum söndü yapıyorlar falan diyorlardı. O zaman ne olmuştu? Hani Turnike yarışması vardı ya. Güner Ümit bir şeyler söylemişti Aleviler için. O zamanlar ben hastanede yatıyordum. Güner Ümit doğru söylüyor, şöyledir böyledir diyorlardı. Ama ben korkumdan demedim ki ben Alevi'yim. Şu anki olgunluğum, aklım olsa derdim ben Aleviyim diye, çünkü bir sürü bedel ödendi bugünlere gelebilmek için. Tek başımdım, bunlar gece bana bir şey yaparlar diye korktum.

185. Şimdiye kadar zaten, Adalet Bakanının adı neydi, Şevket Kazan, dedi bunlar mum söndü oynuyorlar. Mum söndüğünün anlamını biliyorsun? Bilmiyorsun? Sen bilmiyorsan annen biliyor, kalsın o. Niye yalan söylüyor millete? Yani diyor ki Aleviler bacı, kardeş birbirini tanımıyor. Öyle midir? Bir tek onlar mı birbirini tanıyorlar? Benim oğlum beni tanımıyor, ben annesiyim diye [öyle mi]? Bu Kitab'ın neresinde geçiyor, yazıyor?... Mum söndü de ne zamandı? Susurluk'ta çıktı ortaya. Aydınlik için bir dakika karanlık eyleminde onlar dedi mum söndü oynuyorlar.

187. Neden bu tür yakıştırmalar yapıyorlar, Aleviler dedeleri gelince gizli ibadet ettikleri için, her şeyleri açık olmadığı için, ben öyle düşünüyorum. Şimdi Allah'a çok şükür herkes açıktır. Bir dede bir köye geldiğinde o köye bekçi dikerlerdi. Bir başka köyden birisi gelip de görmesin diye. Sünniler istemiyorlardı dedelerin gelip de bir şeyler öğretmesini.

188. Kendilerini saklamışlar. Çünkü yanlış anlıyorlarmış. Kadın erkek hepsi bir arada, ne yapıyorlar bunlar diye çok yanlış şeyler söylüyorlarmış. Bunu benim anlatmama gerek yok. Siz de biliyorsunuz. Çok şükür hiç saklımız gizlimiz yok. Herkes ana bacı kardeş.

190. Mutlaka ki sonuçta o insanları da tanıyorsun. O insanlara diyorsun ki bu da sıradan bizim gibi bir insanlar ama bunlar da kültürlerinden olsun, geçmiş devletin Arap'ın İslamiyet'e sokmuş olduğu yanlışlardan dolayı olsun o insanlar da imamların gerekirse müftülerin vermiş olduğu fetvalarla veya hocalarının vermiş olduğu fetvalarla onlar kötü gözle bakıyor. Belki de o insanlar da o gözle bakmayacaklar yani ama onlar da bu bilgiye sahip değiller. Kendi bilgilerine bile sahip değiller. Hoca böyle dedi doğrudur gözüyle bakıyorlar.

191. Bir gün fabrikada çalışıyordum. 1980 ya da 1982. Çayırova Politaş'ta çalışıyordum. Orada öğle yemeğine gidip geldik. Bir arkadaşım, bir başka arkadaşıma sordu, dedi, "Sen Alevi misin?" O inkâr etti. Ben dedim Alevilere ne olmuş. O da dedi ki, anne, baba, kız kardeş bilmiyorlar. Ben kızdım, adam kupkuru oldu kaldı. Aleviliği yanlış anlatıyorlar kızım, yanlış anlatıyorlar. Hocalar, hacılar yanlış anlatıyor. Devletin görevlendirdiği imamlar böyle yanlış söylüyor. Şu anda da bu aynen devam ediyor, gizli gizli.

192. Alevi olduğumu gizleme ihtiyacı duymadım. Ailem de böyle bir talepte bulunmadı. Biz her ortamda özellikle söylüyoruz ki nasıl insanlar olduğumuz anlaşılın diye. Çünkü saklanacak bir şey gibi görmüyoruz bunu. Sonuçta insanlar bizim normal olduğumuzu görsünler de garip bakmasınlar diye.

195. Askerlikte ben Alevilik-Sünnilik yüzünden çok zorluklar çektim. O zamanlar fazla tecrübem yoktu, fazla okumamıştım, Alevilikle ilgili fazla bilgim olmadığı için askerde kendimi fazla açıkça net söyleyemedim. Ama askerlikten sonra ben birçok kitaplar okudum. Kendimi asla gizlemedim hiçbir zaman. Kente geldikten sonra hiç gizleme ihtiyacı duymadım.

199. Bunu çok önemli buluyorum. Çok hoşumuza gidiyor. Eskiden ben hiç duymamıştım, biri çıkıp televizyona Alevilik hakkında konuşsun, cemevleri hakkında konuşsun. Kesinlikle öyle bir şey duymuyorduk. Ama şimdi bütün kanallarda her şey çok güzel rahatlıkla söyleniyor, konuşuluyor, tartışılıyor. Bu da bizim çok hoşumuza gidiyor. Bunun çok faydası var. Gizli kapaklı hiçbir şey kalmadı artık. Gizleyeceğimiz Allah'a şükür hiçbir şeyimiz yok... Gerçekler daha çok ortaya çıktı. Okumuşlarımız, aydınlarımız, ileri görüşlülerimiz anlattıkça her şeyi artık tanıdılar. Aleviliğin kötü bir şey olmadığını çok güzel kavradılar.

200. Bence bundan sonra daha rahat olacak Alevilik; çünkü, Alevilik artık televizyonda, şurada burada her tarafta açık. Şimdi eskiye göre millet daha iyi bakıyor. Eskiden Aleviliğin ne olduğunu bilmeyen Sünniler televizyonda görüp izliyorlar, daha inandırıcı geliyor mesela. Şimdi izleniyor, açık, herkes görüyor, neyin nasıl olduğunu görüyor. Eskiden öyle değildi. Mesela, cemlerde mum söndü yapıyorlar, bilmem şunu bunu yapıyorlar derlerdi, yanlış yorumlardı. Şimdi cemin nasıl yapıldığını gördükleri için... Aşırı MHP'li arkadaşlarım var. Ben diyor evdeyken Cem tv'yi açıp izliyorum. Cemi de seyredirim diyor, dinliyorum, izliyorum yani diyor, merak ettiğim için yani diyor. Önceleri Aleviyim dediğinde dönüp bakmayan adam, şimdi ben evde izliyorum kardeşim, hoşuma gidiyor diyor. Cemini de seyrediyorum, türküsünü de dinliyorum diyor. Halk müziği hastasıyım ben, bizim kanallarda çıkmıyor, açıyorum Cem tv'yi dinliyorum diyor. O nedenle, ekranda olması çok büyük avantajdır Aleviler için. Senin anlatacağın dört kelime veya beş kelime... Saatlerce anlatsan bile bir kişiye anlatabilirsin. Ama bu televizyonlar topluma anlattığı için...

206. Ama gerçekten bizi çok yanlış tanıtmışlar. Şu anda Sünni komşularım var mesela. Kurtköy'de iki üç tane Sünni komşum oldu. Ama şu anda gerçekten adamlar bizi çok seviyorlar ve de diyorlar ki bizim büyüklerimiz Aleviliği bize çok yanlış tanıtmışlar. Karalama, yalan yanlış şeyler... Eskiden beri gelmiş, artık kimler tarafından söylenmiş, tabi bilmiyorum. Böyle bir karalama yapılmış eskiden

beri. Ama insanlar bizi tanıdıktan sonra gerçekten böyle olmadığına şu anda inanıyorlar yani.

208. Eşim beşi köyde bitirdi, buraya geldi, ondan sonra da hep çalışmış. Çalışıp da ekmek parası kazanalım ki bir yere varalım, şunu yapalım bunu yapalım... Hani günahsa dinimizce, dinimizi kitabımızı bilmediğimiz için... Bir de biz hep parasal düşünüyoruz. Herkes paranın peşinde. Buradaki insanlara bakıyorum, adamlar hem dini de yürütüyorlar, onu da yapıyorlar [çalışıyorlar da]. Demek ki eksiklik bizdedir... Benim onlarla [Sünnileri kastediyor] gurur duyduğum anlar da olmuştur. Diyorum ki bak helal olsun, biz bunu yapamıyoruz. Kendimi suçladığım an da olmuştur. Keşke daha okumuş, daha bilgili olsaydık. Benim çocuklarım okuyor şimdi. Keşke benim hevesim çocuklarımda olsa. Benim çocuklarımda o kadar heves yok. Demek ki bende bu heves çocukluktan kalma, dedelerimizin gelip de bir şey öğretmesi, o aklımda kaldı. Keşke o zaman kitaplarımız da olsaydı Alevilikle ilgili. Babam Kuran kitabını getirir okurdu, biz onu dinlerdik. Kendi kitabımızı da okumuş olsaydık, birazcık daha bir şeyler öğrenirdik. Şimdi biz her şeyi boş verdiğimiz için, çocuklarımız da öyle. Çocuklarımdan hiçbiri dinden bahsetmiyor. Şahsen kendi dinimi bilmemek ve yapmamak kötü bir şeydir. Burada, Esenler'de geçenlerde cem vardı. Biz gittik, lokma yaptık gittik. Hızır lokmasıydı. Güzel bir şey. Bir gün gittim, ama o gün mutluydum. Eve geldim, huzurlu da yattım. Komşularıma da dedim, her gün hastayım, bugün huzurlu yattım. Her gün gitmemiz gereken yer. Ama dediğim gibi, bizden de kaynaklanıyor. Keşke gidebilsek. Dediğim gibi, okumam veya bilgim olsa... Biraz kendi kendini yetiştirmek de bizim elimizde. Birazcık her şeye boş vermişiz.

210. Biz sadece görüntüde Alevi'yiz, uygulamada biz yokuz. Biz ne cem yapıyoruz, ne orucu doğru dürüst tutuyoruz, hiçbir şey yapmıyoruz. Neden? Biz serbest kaldığımız için, bize baskı yapılmadığı için, bizim ailelerimiz bizi baskılı büyütmediği için. Küçükken kimse demedi, büyüdüğün zaman da o işi yapmıyorsun zaten. Anne babam tarlaya gitsin gelsin yeter. İşçilik, hamallık yapsın... Köyde kalsaydık, belki de öğrenirdik. Biz köyden de kaçtık. Burada da başıboştuk. O nedenle hiç iyi olmadı. Okuma durumum da az olduğu için, kendim de üstüne düşmediğim için öyle şeylerin.

211. Bir insan çekirdekten yetişirse daha verimli olur. Sonradan yetişen o kadar değildir yani. Biz yapmıyoruz, çocuklarıma aman diyorum, bir şey olmaz. Büyüyünce diyorum öğrenin ama büyüyünce öğrenilmiyor. Küçükken öğrenmesi gerekiyormuş. Bazen Ramazan'ı tutuyorlardı, ben kızıyordum, diyordum tutuyorsanız bunu tutun [Muharrem], diyorlardı yok, o uzun, o ağır... Alevi inancının çocuklara aktarılmasında bana illa ki görev düşüyor, herkese görev düşüyor. Anneye de düşüyor, babaya da düşüyor. Az önce dedim ya, küçükken onu eğitirsen, söylersen, anlatırsan, o, ona göre büyür. Fakat baskı yapmadığımız için... Mesela, şimdi çocuk kafayı kaldırdığı zaman doğru dürüst camiye git diyorlar. Bizimkiler öğrenmesin, nasılsa yarın öbür gün öğrenir diyorlar. Yaz tatili uzun. Günde bir saatini ayırabilir o işe. Kitap okuyabilir, sen anlatabilirsin. Aleviliğin ne olduğunu kendisine öğretebilirsin rahatlıkla. Tamam, kış günü okuldur derstir diyorsun, ama yaz günü kapıda bol bol oynayacağına bir saat iki saat o işi yapabilirsin.

213. Snniler daha ocuk beş yařındayken, ç yařındayken elinden tutup camiye gtrp getiriyor. İlla ki benim ocuęum, benim yolumu, benim dřncemi, benim inancımı takip etsin, ęrensın. Benim ocuęum gelmiř otuz yařına, oęlum hadi gidek, anne o ok uzun diyor, ben diz st oturamıyorum. Demek ki insan her Őeyi kkken alıřtıracak. ocuk gitsin, onun arkasından gelen, yetiřen nesil de takip etsin gitsin, yoksa kaybolup gidiyorsun. Gitmedin mi, grmedin mi, bilmedin mi yle kaybolup gidiyorsun. Artık Alevilięin ne olduęunu da bilemezsin. Ben Aleviyim demekle Alevi olunmuyor. Yavař yavař kayboluyorsun. Nasıl kayboluyorsun? İlla insan lp de kaybolmak demek deęildir. Gitmedin mi, kendi inancını, kendi dřnceni ęrenmedin mi, yavař yavař... Ben olmamıřım, ocuęum olmamıř, ocuęumun ocuęu Snnileřiıyor artık. O da o tarafa kayıyor. Bakıyor bu tarafta bir Őey yok, o da onun arkasına takılıp o da beraber camiye gidip geliyor. ylece kaybolup gidiyor.

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