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Special Issue Alevi Kurds: History,
Politics and Identity
Guest Editors Umit Cetin,
Celia Jenkins, and Suavi Aydın

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Editorial: Alevi Kurds – History, Politics and Identity

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Abstract

This special issue brings together scholarship on Alevi Kurds by focusing on their ethnic, linguistic, religious, political, cultural and social specificity including a range of articles from the disciplines of anthropology, history, politics, linguistics and sociology. The first part focuses on Turkey, exploring the roots of Kurdish Alevism and how Alevi religious identities intersect with ethnic and national identity and political representations, and the second focuses on Alevi Kurds and their creation of a transnational religious identity and their mixed experience of settlement in the UK diaspora.

Keywords

Kurdish Alevism – assimilation – transnational migration – diaspora – community

Introduction

In the editorial of the first issue of *Kurdish Studies*, Martin van Bruinessen (2013) wrote that “Kurdish studies have, in the past few decades, come to be established as a respectable field of academic investigation and publication, after long having been as marginal in academia as the Kurds themselves were in the politics of the Middle East” (van Bruinessen, 2013). The same can be said for the emerging field of Alevi studies, although it has taken longer (*cf.* Jenkins et al., 2018). Gultekin (2019) dates international academic interest in Alevism and Kurdishness back to the Alevi revival in the 1990s, whilst interest in Kurdish Alevism did not develop until the 2000s. Gezik and Gultekin’s (2018) book on Kurdish Alevism is one of the first to appear in English. In fact, this is the first time that *Kurdish Studies* has published articles on Kurdish Alevism. Just as Martin Van Bruinessen introduced the first issue of *Kurdish Studies* in 2013, there is a sense of history in his opening this special issue with an interview. When we approached him for an interview to be included in this special issue on Alevi Kurds, he said that it provided him an opportunity to reflect on how his understanding of Alevism and Alevi identity has evolved over the thirty years in which he has written about these issues. This late development of Alevi studies reflects the fact that the largest group of Alevis, those in Turkey, have experienced generations of assimilationist “Turkification” and “sunnification” policies that has rendered them officially invisible, whilst in the diaspora it has been assumed that they are Turks and therefore Muslim (Jenkins et al., 2018; Cetin, 2014; Aydın, 2018; Gezik & Gultekin, 2018). The term “Alevi” is itself contested as it is generally seen as an umbrella term for groups that are found mainly in central Turkey but also scattered elsewhere in the Balkans and the Middle East, along with diasporic communities largely in Europe (Dressler, 2013; Özkul, 2019; Aydın, 2020; Karakaya-Stump, 2020). Kurdish Alevis live in several eastern and central provinces of Turkey such as Dersim, Malatya, Kayseri, Sivas and Maraş. They have diverse religious rituals, customs and practices and speak Kirmanci and Zaza languages. They have diverse historical backgrounds, belong to various identities and have different experiences of multiple citizenships. Gultekin (2019) offers the most recent formulation of “Kurdish Alevi identity”, which does justice to its complexity. He suggests that its “cultural sphere creates a unique cultural identity, in that both identities gain new socio-political and ethno-religious aspects” (Gultekin, 2019).

Historical scholarship offers diverse interpretations of the religious identity of Alevism, demonstrating that it is a source of controversy with tensions also emerging in the political context in terms of whether it can be linked to Shia

Islam, Sufism, Zoroastrianism or Shamanism or whether it is seen as an entirely distinctive syncretic religion (see Aydın and Karakaya-Stump, this issue). What all writers appear to agree on is that Alevism had a political dimension historically in relation to both the Ottoman and Iranian Empires although much less consideration, until recently, has been given to their place in the modern political world. However, it is the politicisation of Alevi identity, and its association with leftist political movements and secularism, which has been such a notable feature of Alevism that emerged in Turkey towards the end of the last century (Tekdemir, 2018, Gunes, this issue).

Despite the fragmented and heterogeneous nature of Alevi communities, there is increasingly a sense of a transnational community, albeit one which is imagined as much in terms of who they are not as much as who they are (Emre-Cetin, 2018). With this in mind, it is not surprising that this collection of articles, all with their focus on some aspect of Kurdish Alevism in Turkey and the UK diaspora, draws on a multidisciplinary scholarship ranging across a variety of topics. The articles on Turkey concentrate on the historical context of Kurdish Alevis and Alevism, while those on the UK diaspora focus on more contemporary issues and alliances. Nevertheless, the possibilities for Alevi communities and the Alevi movement to be active in Turkey are becoming more and more marginalised with the increasing Islamification of the Turkish state (Karakaya-Stump, 2018). However, the opposite is the case for Alevi communities in the diaspora. Both Turkish and Kurdish Alevis have migrated to Europe since the 1960s, with the greatest numbers heading to Germany, where there are an estimated 700,000¹ Alevis. Although scattered across Germany, they have more established communities, community centres and greater rights and state recognition than in Turkey itself (Sökefeld, 2008). However, the majority of Alevis in Germany are Turkish Alevis, so it does not disrupt the “twice minority” status of Kurdish Alevis. Alevi settlement patterns in the UK are different for a number of reasons. Firstly, the UK is one of the newest European countries of settlement for Kurdish Alevis, who migrated in the late 1980s as asylum seekers and now there is an estimated population of 300,000 (BAF).² Secondly, the majority are concentrated in London (Jenkins and Cetin, 2018). This concentration of Alevis in London can be put into perspective when compared with the province of Dersim population (officially known

1 German Alevi Federation <https://alevi.com/en/about-us/> (Accessed: 24/4/2020).

2 British Alevi Federation http://www.alevinet.org/SAP.aspx?pid=About_en-GB (Accessed: 24/4/2020).

as Tunceli), which has an estimated 84,660³ Alevi (predominantly Kurds). Thirdly, London boasts the largest concentration of Kurdish Alevi in Europe and possibly even the rest of the world. They constitute the largest segment of the UK Kurdish community which gives them a much greater sense of empowerment and community (Demir, 2012). In other words, the UK is the only country where Alevi Kurdish migrants constitute the majority of the migrants from Turkey.

What has been different in the migration experience of Alevi in comparison with Kurds is that for the first time, they are able to express their religious identity openly (Cetin, 2014). This Kurdish Alevi dynamic is evident in the significant shift from a Kurdish to an Alevi identity since the early 1990s in the UK, which is partly explained by them comprising the majority of the Kurdish community in the UK and also as a response to “deturkification” (Demir, 2017). The shifting attention to a religious identity is characterised by the opening of Alevi community centres with a view of Alevism as a distinct religion and the provision for worship and Alevism lessons (Jenkins, this issue; Jenkins and Cetin, 2018). The work of the community centres and the increasingly well organised Britain Alevi Federation offers an example of “religion-building from below” (Gultekin, 2019: 3).

This special issue is divided into two parts: the first focusing on Turkey, the roots of Kurdish Alevism and their political representations, and the second focuses on Kurdish Alevi transnational identity and experience in the UK diaspora. In the first part, Suavi Aydın assesses the significance of “Kurdish Alevism” within “Anatolian Alevism” through a close examination of the historical roots and development of the faith and community and explores the similarities and differences between Kurdish Alevi groups in Turkey. Whilst missionary reports are a common source for tracing Kurdish and Alevi history, Ayfer Karakaya-Stump compares different versions for inconsistencies between them to better understand the historical (Kurdish) Kizilbash identity and religiosity at the time of the initial encounters with Protestant evangelists. Cengiz Gunes discusses the changing political representation of Alevi Kurds since the 1950s. In particular, he focuses on alliances with the Turkish socialist movement and political parties associated with the secular republican regime as well as the impact of the rise of Alevi and Kurdish movements on Alevi Kurds.

In the second part, the theme of the connection between Alevism and socialism continues to define the relationship between Kurds and Alevi in the

3 Türkiye İstatistik Kurumu <http://www.tuik.gov.tr/HbGetirHTML.do?id=33705> (Accessed: 24/4/2020).

UK context. Tuncay Bilecen analyses the discourses shaping this relationship in the magazine *Kavga/Kervan* throughout the 1990s. Cemal Salman conducts a detailed analysis of the annual British Alevi festival in an attempt to demonstrate how the UK Alevi movement is reconstructing a homeland identity and creating a new medium of traditionalism through the institution of the festival. Birgul Yilmaz undertakes the first analysis of the differences between Bohtan and Maraş Kurmanji and attitudes towards them which identify Bohtan Kurmanji as “good” and Maraş Kurmanji as “bad”. She analyses these attitudes of Kurmanji speakers in the UK in relation to their religious affiliation. The final articles by Celia Jenkins and Umit Cetin explore the context of migration and the experience of Alevi Kurds in the UK. Jenkins focuses on the aspirations of first-generation parents for their children to do well at school and how they experienced the British education system and adapted over time. She highlights the particular role of the Alevi community centres in supporting this transition. Umit Cetin focuses on the anomic social consequences of the marginalisation and invisibility of Alevi Kurds for the second generation, especially boys, and their engagement with gangs as they stake out an identity for themselves in the UK.

This special issue aims, in part, to address the relative invisibility of Kurdish Alevis by focusing on their ethnic, linguistic, religious, political, cultural and social specificity including a range of papers from the disciplines of anthropology, history, politics and sociology. We hope in this way to have contributed to a neglected dimension of both Kurdish and Alevism studies. In this spirit, we are also organising a biennial conference on Alevi Studies at the University of Westminster in July 2021 to bring together scholars and encourage further research and debates around this complex issue about the different aspects of the ethno-religious and socio-political identity of Kurdish Alevis.

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Erratum

For the article "Theorising women and war in Kurdistan: A feminist and critical perspective" which was published in 2018 (*Kurdish Studies*, 6(1), 5–30). The article did not mention that Hamelink's project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement No 753935. Hamelink was able to work on this article due to the received funding.

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Alevi Kurds: History, Politics, Migration and Identity: an Interview with Martin van Bruinessen

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Abstract

This interview with Martin van Bruinessen records his personal and intellectual engagement with Alevis in Turkey and the Netherlands for over fifty years. Initially, his interest was in Anatolian Alevi culture and he began exploring the religious dimension of Alevism in the 1970s at a time when Alevis were more preoccupied with left-wing politics. He charts the emergence of Alevism studies since the 1980s and links it to the religious resurgence and reinvention of diverse ethno-religious Alevi identities associated with urbanised and diasporic communities. He further examines the relationship between Kurdish and Alevi movements and Alevism and Islam.

Keywords

Alevism – Alevism – Alevi movements – Alevi politics and identity – Alevism studies

Introduction

Q. When and why did you become interested in Alevism?

Forgive me if this becomes a long answer. For almost as long as I have been interested in Turkey and the Kurds, and that's about fifty years, Alevis and Alevism have been present in my mind as background music even while I was focusing on other subjects. I began travelling in Turkey in my summer holidays when I was a student, in the second half of the 1960s. The 1971 military coup and the trials against leftist students and Kurdish activists that followed made a deep impression on me, and I joined a solidarity committee, through which I met the first Turkish political refugees who took asylum in the Netherlands. There were only three of them, quite unlike the thousands who came in later years, and they returned to Turkey after the amnesty of 1974. We have remained friends through the years, however. They were the first people who helped me to make sense of the news coming out of Turkey, and it is partly through them that I initially bought into the romantic view of Alevi communities as more open, tolerant, democratic and inclined to gender equality. One of these friends, though not an Alevi herself, had been hiding from the police in an Alevi village in Malatya. I also gathered from her that among the student left, Alevis were probably over-represented.

My growing interest in Turkish and Middle Eastern politics was probably one of the reasons why I decided to do a PhD thesis in anthropology of the Kurds. I carried out some two years of fieldwork in Iran, Iraq, Syria and Turkey (1974–76). My main interest was in tribes and the beginnings of nationalism, and I mainly stayed among Sunni Kurds, but I couldn't help hearing and reading about Alevis, because they were often the significant other of Kurdish Islamists and nationalists. Studying the backgrounds of the Sheikh Said uprising, I found that the mutual mistrust between Alevi and Sunni tribes appeared to be a major factor. This played again a part in the events in Dersim in 1937–38, about which I wrote later. No Sunni Kurds came out in support of the Dersimis, and the Dersimis did not even attempt to flee to nearby Sunni districts (van Bruinessen 1992; 1994).

I left the Kurdish region from time to time for Ankara, where I was in contact with students deeply involved in what they called people's culture: village

literature (*köy edebiyatı*), folklore, the songs of popular *aşık*, such as Aşık Mahzuni and Ali Ekber Çiçek. The annual Hacı Bektaş festival was a celebration of people's culture, and I went there two or three times in the 1970s. It was a manifestation of counter-culture then, a joyful gathering of progressive people, not all of them Alevis, I believe. (After 1980, of course, it was brought under control by the state and its character changed.) In those years, Alevism was for me primarily associated with authentic Anatolian culture and progressive politics, and that was how many young Alevis also saw it. The Alevi pogroms of Malatya and Kahramanmaraş in 1978, where Sunni mobs attacked Alevi neighbourhoods, strengthened that association of Alevism with the political left and Sunni Islam with the political right.

Very few of my Alevi friends and acquaintances then were interested in Alevism as a system of beliefs and rituals. I spent some time in an Alevi village in Erzincan and later visited relatives of Alevi friends whom I knew from Holland, but even the older men I interviewed appeared to know rather little of the belief system, or were reluctant to speak about it. The communal ritual, the *ayin-i cem*, had not been celebrated in those villages for many years, they said. The German anthropologist Peter Bumke, who carried out research in Dersim around the same time, had the same experience and observed, with some exaggeration, that Alevism was “a religion that is not practised” (Bumke, 1979).

My curiosity about the religious dimension of Alevism was first aroused when I spent two brief periods among the Guran Ahl-i Haqq in South Kurdistan, in 1975 and 1976. By some stroke of good luck, I was welcomed by the community, and their spiritual leader, Seyd Nasreddin, gave Ka Kerim, one of the oldest *kelamkhan*, the experts who know the religious poetry and legends, permission to answer my questions. Ahl-i Haqq theology and cosmology is more developed and more systematised than anything I later found among Alevis, but there are some striking similarities. Ka Kerim was in fact the first person who pointed this out to me. He told me a myth that connected Hacı Bektaş with the divine spirits of the Ahl-i Haqq pantheon, and he claimed that Alevism was just another version of the Ahl-i Haqq religion. That made me curious about Alevi myths and legends that I could compare with the complex Ahl-i Haqq mythology. The young Alevi activists whom I met had little interest in those things, and even the few older men with whom I spoke in Alevi villages remembered only vaguely bits and pieces of such legends. But I discovered that there was much of interest to be found in the older literature that I read to complement my field research – folklorists, anthropologists and missionaries of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. That was my first encounter with folk

narratives and myths recorded in rural Central or East Anatolia. And yet later I discovered the hagiographies of Alevi saints (*menakibname* and *velayetname*) as an important genre that was rich in myths and legends reminiscent of those of the Ahl-i Haqq.

The political repression that followed the military coup of 1980, and the efforts to impose a conservative version of Sunni Islam on Alevi communities had an unintended consequence: many former leftists became interested in Alevism as a cultural and religious formation. This was especially noticeable in the diaspora – Germany and Sweden – where the first Alevi associations were established. By the mid-1990s, quite a few people whom I had first come to know as leftist political activists, Kurds as well as Turks, were playing roles in Alevi associations, organising *ayin-i cem* rather than political demonstrations, and discussing how to define Alevi identity. The 1990s were also a period of hectic publishing activity: hundreds of books about Alevism and Alevism came from the press in Turkey and found an eager readership.

One of the first, best-informed, and most influential books was *Alevism: The Hidden Culture of Anatolia (Anadolu'nun Gizli Kültürü Alevilik)* by Nejat Birdoğan, which was published by the Alevi Cultural Centre of Hamburg in 1990. Birdoğan was an interesting figure – I met him in 1994 or so, and I think I should mention him among the people who stimulated my interest in Alevism. He was from Iğdır and originally a Twelver Shi'ī but had decided to become an Alevi (although conversion to Alevism is very uncommon) and a strong advocate for Alevism as the true religion of Anatolia, different from Islam. He had spent many years studying the traditions of the various Alevi communities of Turkey and was perhaps the most knowledgeable person in Turkey, as well as one of the most opinionated. After the 1980 military coup he had been prosecuted and sentenced to one and a half year in prison under the notorious article 163 of the Penal Code, which dealt with attempts to establish a state based on religious principles – the only Alevi ever to be prosecuted under this article.

Q. What importance has been given to the study of Alevism in Turkish and Kurdish studies? Has it in any sense been neglected?

Irène Mélikoff, who was professor of Turkish studies in Strasbourg, was a leading expert on Alevism, and it is largely thanks to her that the study of Alevism became an important aspect of academic Turkish studies. Her doctoral student, Ahmet Yaşar Ocak, who was originally a theologian, played a similar role in Turkey: he published editions of many important manuscripts of the *menakibname* type and trained many younger scholars. Mélikoff herself was

in turn influenced by an earlier generation of Turkish nationalist Turcologists, and like them she took for granted that Alevi beliefs and rituals were rooted in pre-Islamic Turkish religion. She allowed herself to be persuaded to overlook or even hide the Kurdish/Iranian elements in Alevism; only towards the end of her life, in her last great book, did she hesitatingly acknowledge the Kurdish aspect (Mélikoff, 1998, 2001).

Since the 1980s there has been an enormous production of academic studies of Alevis and Alevism, in Western Europe as well as Turkey. A large conference on Bektashis and Alevis, in Strasbourg in 1986, gave a strong push to Alevi studies (Popovic and Veinstein, 1995). In Germany, the anthropologist Krisztina Kehl-Bodrogi was a pioneer, who wrote on many different aspects of Alevi communities, institutions, and identity struggles (Kehl-Bodrogi, 1988; 1993). Presently there are several research groups in German universities that focus on Alevism and similar heterodox communities. In Turkey several universities have in the 2000s opened departments of Alevi or Bektashi studies, which tend to be dominated by Turkish nationalist views, but many young academics in other departments have written more critical studies. Some of this output was published by the quality publisher İletişim.

We certainly cannot say that Alevism is still being neglected in academic studies; much work of high quality has been done in the past few decades. But studies of Alevism remain largely Turkish-centred, if only because the language of most sources, *menakubname* and *deyiş* (religious poetry), is Turkish. Kurdish or Zaza-speaking Alevis and their distinctive traditions have received relatively little attention from academics (with Peter Bumke, Krisztina Kehl-Bodrogi and myself as the main exceptions) (Bumke, 1989; Kehl-Bodrogi, 1999; van Bruinessen, 1997). I should also mention the journal *Berhem*, published in Swedish exile in 1988–93 by Mustafa Düzgün and friends, which had many interesting articles about Kurdish Alevi history and culture (besides other subjects).

Within the field of Kurdish studies, there have been many more publications on the Yezidis than the far more numerous Kurdish Alevis. But in the past two, three decades young intellectuals of Kurdish Alevi background have been doing very interesting research, interviewing old people and writing down the last remnants of oral tradition. The musicians Metin and Kemal Kahraman recorded almost forgotten songs and narratives. The journal *Munzur* has since 2000 published many fascinating essays on folklore, material culture and religion of Dersim. Some of the most interesting research was recently published in English in a book edited by Erdal Gezik and Ahmet Kerim Gültekin (Gezik and Gültekin, 2019). Most of this work has concerned Dersim; we do not yet

have comparable studies of Kurdish/Zaza Alevi communities elsewhere (Varto, Malatya, Kahramanmaraş).

Q. In looking at the intersection of ethnicity (or national identity) and religion in Turkey, does the Alevi movement and/or Alevism produce a common identity between Turkish and Kurdish Alevi (or between Kurds and Alevi-Kurds) or does ethnicity cut across and weaken a sense of common identity?

In the 1970s it was possible to think of Alevi as one single ethno-religious community, squeezed in between Sunni Kurds to the East and Sunni Turks to the West, but there was not much of an Alevi movement yet. As soon as an Alevi movement got organised, in the 1990s, internal differentiation also immediately became visible. The Cem Vakfı, the Hacı Bektaş and Pir Sultan Abdal cultural associations appealed to different constituencies, had different relations with Turkish nationalism and different views on accommodation with the state.

Most of the intellectuals who led the Alevi resurgence of the 1990s and tried to define Alevism for the recently urbanised Alevi were committed Kemalists and believed in the essential Turkishness of Alevism. Many Kurdish or Zaza speakers had also been convinced, by more than a half century of indoctrination, of their Turkish origin and of the importance of seeking protection from Islamic fundamentalism under the banner of the Kemalist party. But there were undeniable differences between, say, the village Bektashis of the Kızılırmak region and the Kızılbaş of the Euphrates basin; they had quite different traditions. That coincided only partially with the ethnic dividing line; among the Kızılbaş there were Turks as well as Kurds and Zazas.

In the beginning, the Alevi associations in the big cities and in the European diaspora succeeded in bringing people of various regional backgrounds together in the newly established *cemevi*, community centres where the *ayin-i cem* ritual can be performed. The fact that many people had very little knowledge of their religion made it possible to reinvent shared religious ideas and common rituals, but even so a single community did not emerge. Most of the *cemevi* came to serve more or less distinct sub-communities. In the mid-1990s, when many were hoping that all Alevi might unite in the struggle for recognition and equal rights, I visited the famous Alevi town of Narlıdere, near Izmir, and found, somewhat to my surprise, that the two main Alevi communities there (Turkmen Tahtacı and Kurdish or Turkish Alevi from Erzincan) lived in absolute isolation from one another even though they lived surrounded by a Sunni Muslim majority.

Q. How do you understand the relationship between Sunni Islam and Alevism. Why do you think that some Alevi can describe themselves as Muslim while others deny any connection?

To put it very simply, Sunni Islam, and the Hanefi *mezhep* (school of Islamic law), was the religion of the Ottoman state and remains that of the secular Turkish Republic. Where the state strengthened its control, it built mosques and sponsored Islamic education. Entire tribes and districts that used to adhere to Alevi-like traditions became Sunni. Among the Kurds this can perhaps be seen more clearly than among the Turks: Sunni Kurds usually belong to the Şafii *mezhep*, but there are, especially on the Western periphery of Kurdistan proper, various groups of Kurdish-speaking Hanefis. It is likely that these people's ancestors were Alevi, who were Islamised by the state.

The process of Sunnicisation is continuing, partly as a result of deliberate policies of the state and partly because families want to get rid of the stigma of being Alevi and try to pass as Sunnis. An early Yılmaz Güney film, *Gelin (The Daughter-in-Law)*, is set in an Alevi village where people perform prayers and go on the hajj. When I first saw it I thought that was a mistake on Güney's part, but I later understood that there are many such part-Sunnicised communities in Central Anatolia.

The interesting question is what this means for the future of Alevi identity. Will Alevi communities gradually be absorbed into, and assimilated to, mainstream Sunni Islam? Or will they constitute a stable and distinct different religious community, either as an alternative form of Islam or as a non-Muslim religion? It is interesting that Alevi theology is finding a place in a number of European universities, and Alevi religious education has become an optional part of the school curriculum in several counties in Germany. Whether some comparable form of institutionalisation of Alevism will also take place in Turkey will depend on the outcome of a long process of negotiation between Alevi civil society and the state; it is unlikely to happen soon. And the lack of unity among Alevi is not helping either.

Those who claim that Alevism has nothing to do with Islam are a small minority, though they are strongly committed to their view. They can point to remnants of nature worship and other pre-Islamic practices, but they overlook the overwhelming evidence of a millennium of interaction with Islamic civilisation, which is very clear from the religious poetry. Alevism as a religion is not thinkable without the religious specialists, the *dede*. And the religious ideas of the *dede* are strongly informed by a Sufi version of Islam.

Q. How has the Alevi movement been influenced (positive and negatively) by the Kurdish movement (PKK and other Kurdish organisations)? To what extent has this influence shaped the direction of the Alevi movement in Turkey and the diaspora? More generally, how do you see the relationship between Alevism and leftists movements. Has it been an advantage or disadvantage?

Turkish Alevi, or those who opted for Turkish identity, were not influenced by the rise of Kurdish nationalism except negatively, as a threat to the Republican social order that protected them. Especially Cem Vakfi tended to associate itself with the Turkish nationalist response. When İzzettin Doğan, the leader of Cem Vakfi, visited Germany, he accepted invitations from *ülküçü* associations (the “Grey Wolves”), which alienated many Kurdish Alevi from him. Kurdish and Zaza-speaking Alevi have been quite divided in their response to the Kurdish movement.

It is important to realise that the Kurdish movement, as a mass-based social movement, emerged some 25 years before the Alevi movement, and many young Alevi were deeply affected by it. In the late 1970s, I heard stories of young Alevi (whom I believed to be Turkish by origin) deciding to identify themselves as Kurds, as an act of protest against the Malatya and Kahramanmaraş pogroms. Kurdish identity then amounted to a denial of Turkish state ideology, and the entire Kurdish movement was, or pretended to be, socialist. Among the early leaders of the Kurdish movement there were in fact many Alevi; that was especially noticeable in the Özgürlük Yolu group and the PKK. Especially the PKK has been insisting on the primacy of Kurdish identity and the Kurdish struggle. But you did not have to give up your Alevi identity when becoming a Kurdish activist. They did claim, however, that Kurdish Alevism was different from Turkish Alevism, helped by intellectuals who attempted to demonstrate the Zoroastrian roots of Kurdish Alevism.

But the Alevi's deeply rooted distrust of Sunni Kurds did not disappear, and many have stayed aloof from the Kurdish movement or have been hostile to it. Identity struggles have perhaps been most intensive in Dersim, which is different from all other Alevi regions. Many Dersimis feel neither Turkish nor Kurdish and now also reject the label of Alevism in favour of the term *Raa Haqi*: of all subgroups of Alevi, they have perhaps the most strongly developed sense of distinct identity. Most of those who focus their activities on Dersim, incidentally, have a background in the radical left. Or to put it differently, some of the radical left movements – I am thinking especially of TIKKO and Halkın Kurtuluşu – have seen their following in most parts of the country dwindle

since the 1980s, and many of their former members became Alevi activists and have competed with the PKK for the hearts and minds of Kurdish Alevi, most clearly so in Dersim.

Q. Looking back on your years of research on Kurds and Alevi, what has most intrigued and excited you?

Both Kurdish and Alevi identity have been stigmas in Turkey, and from my student days, I have been attracted by the struggle of subaltern groups for recognition and equal rights. My years of fieldwork in Kurdistan have, in a way, made me the person I am today, and friendships with individual Kurds and Alevi have remained important throughout my life. And yes, it has been fascinating to observe the shifting terms of the debates on identity, and the rediscovery of histories and religious traditions that had long remained hidden under the official modernist discourse of Kemalist Turkey.

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BRILL

A Survey of the Roots and History of Kurdish Alevism: What Are the Divergences and Convergences between Kurdish Alevi Groups in Turkey?

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Abstract

This article focuses on the generic form of Alevism, commonly referred to as “Anatolian Alevism”, asking how ethnic and tribal divergences occurred, their interrelationships and the basis of the differences and similarities. It assumes that the beliefs and practices known collectively as “Anatolian Alevism” constitute a “wholistic structure” that refers to the joint possession of a common set of ritualistic and mythic attributes and characteristics. In this context, “Anatolian Alevism” presents a distinctive attribute compared to other beliefs thought to be similar or connected to which Alevism is related in some ways although it is also the product of a different history and belief pattern. The central concern is to provide an understanding of the historical establishment and interrelationship of Kirmanjki and Kurmanji speaking Alevi tribes and their similarities and differences compared to Turkish/Turkmen Alevism despite their strong structural associations.

Keywords

Alevism – Kurdish Alevism – Upper Euphrates Alevism – Bektashism – Dersim

Nêrînek li ser reh û dîroka elewîtiya kurdî: Cudatî û wekheviyên di nav komên elewiyan kurd li Tirkîyeyê

Pirsa serekî di vê gotarê de ew e ka “elewîtiya kurdî” xwedanê cihêkî taybet û dîrokeke xwe ye li nav wê bawerîya ku wek “elewîtiya Anatolê” tê zanîn. Ji bo vê armancê, gotar li rehên dîrokî û geşedana bawerî û cemaeta ku em dibêjinê “elewîtiya kurdî” dinêre, û wekhevî û cudatîyên di navbera komên elewî yên kurmançî-ziman û kirmanckî-ziman dinirxîne. Gotar li ser wan pirsan hûr dibe ku dikevine nav şiklê berbelav ê elewîtiyê, ku bi rengêkî asayî wek “elewîtiya anatolê” tê zanîn, û dikeve dû pirsra ka cudabûnên qewmî û eşîrî çawa pêk hatin, çi têkilî hene di navbera wan de û çi heye di bingehê wan cudatî û wekheviyan de. Gotar hizreke ne-bingehger dide pêş li ser têgihîştina damezrandina dîrokî û têkiliyên navxweyî yên eşîrên elewî yên zaza (kirmanckî-ziman) û kurmançî-ziman, û wekhevî û cudatîyên wan gava mirov ligel elewîtiya tirk/turkman dide ber hev sererayî manendiyên wan ên binyadî yên bihêz.

Rumallêkî rîşe û dîrokî kurdanî ‘elewî: cyawazîyekan û nzîkbûnewekanî nêwan grupekanî kurdî ‘elewî le turkya

Em babete terkîz dexate ser forme giştîyekey ‘elewîzm, ke beşêweyekî baw wek “elewîzmî enadoll” amajey pêdedrêt, deprisêt çon cyawazîye etnîkî û hozîyekan û peywendîye nawxoyekanîyan we payey cyawazî û lêkçunekaniyan rûyadawe. Twêjîneweke waydadênê ke ew bawerr û praktîsaney begşîtî wek “elewîzmî enadollî” nasrawe “sitraktorî giştî” (grîmaney serekî pesendikraw lelayan cvakî ‘elewî le turkya) pêkdênêt, ewey ke amaje dedat be bûnî komellêk sîfet û taybetmendî nerîtî û efsaneyî hawbeş. Lem çwarçêweyeda, beberawrid legell bawerrekani tir ke wa debînren be corêk le corekan legell ‘elewîzîmda hawşêwen yan peywendîyan pêkewe heye “elewîzmî enadollî” sîfetî cyakerewey heye herçende berhemî mêjû û şewey bîrkirdnewekeyşî cyawaz bêt. Krokî babeteke destebarkirdnî têgeyîştinêke derbarey bunyad û pêwendîye xobexoyekanî hoze axêwerekani kirmançekî û kirmançîye ‘elewîyekan we cyawazî û leyekçunekaniyan legell ‘elewîye turk/turkmanekan sererray sitraktorî behêzî komellekanyan.

Derheqê ristim û tarîxê elewîyîya kurdan de cigêrayîş: Tirkîya de cîyayî û nêzdîbîyayîşê grûbanê elewîyanê kurdan

Na meqale formê elewîyî yo pêroyî ke sey “elewîyîya Anadolîye” name bena, aye ser giranî dana. Pers beno ke cîyayîye etnik û eşîrkî, pagirêdayîşê înan û bingeyê cîyayî û yewbînanromendişî senî ameyê ra. Ferz beno ke bawerî û urf û adetê ke bi hewayêko pêroyî sey “elewîyîya Anadolîye” nas benê, ê “awanîyêka pêrogire” anê pê ke wayîrîya hempare yê komsifet û taybetmendîyanê adetî û mîstîkan qesd kena (no qeneato umûmî yo ke hetê komelê elewîyanê Tirkîya ra qebl beno). Herçiqa ke goreyê bawerîyanê bînan ê ke texmînan ra gore nêzdî yan zî girêdayeyê elewîyî yê û herçiqa ke elewîyîye qalibanê tarîx û bawerî yê cîya-cîyayan ra yena pêra, la bi tewirêk ancî ê bawerîyanê bînan de têkildar a, ancîya na çarçewa de “elewîyîya Anadolîye” wayîra sifetêkê taybetî ya. Eleqeya bingeyêne a ya ke hem derheqê pagirêdayîş û awanîya tarîxî yê eşîranê elewîyan ê ke kirmanckî û kurmanckî (kirdaskî) qesey kenê de, hem zî, goreyê elewîyîya tirke/tirkmene û duştê heme nêzdîyîya xo ya awankîye de, derheqê cîyayî û yewbînanromendişê înan de îzahat bêro pêkêşkerdene.

Introduction

Martin van Bruinessen’s assertion in a prominent article about Alevism makes a striking statement for an introduction:

The existence of Kurdish- and Zaza-speaking Alevi tribes, who almost exclusively use Turkish as their ritual language, and many of which even have Turkish tribal names is a fact that has exercised the explanatory imagination of many authors (Bruinessen, 1997: 1).

Almost all traditional sources in Turkish historiography and its nearby companions acknowledge Alevism as a Turkish/Turkic system of belief;¹ even though there are Alevi communities in Turkey that speak Kurmanji (Northern

¹ Many academic studies start from this assumption. Its origin can be found in Köprülü’s writings (1919). Also see Mélikoff (1982, 1993); Roemer (1990).

Kurdish) or Kirmanjki (Zaza) and that recognise themselves as “Kurd” or “Zaza”.²

In this context, Alevism refers to a specific faith that is different from the Shī’a and is shared by various ethnic groups restricted to communities of Asia Minor who have a common liturgy, norms and cults. Nevertheless, despite their affinity, it is uncertain whether or not each of these various ethnic groups has its own ethno-religious identity. This uncertainty is compounded by the intertwining and assimilation of groups. This is also valid for those Alevi peoples from communities who speak Iranic languages; there are Kirmanjki speaking as well as Kurmanji speaking Alevi people. Besides, there are also Turkish speaking Alevi communities who have lost their original Kirmanjki languages but still maintain their affiliation with the Alevi community due to their former *ocaks*.³

Here a noteworthy question arises. How is it possible that a common religious belief with the same liturgy, dogmas and rituals, and the same oral traditions, is adhered to by three different socio-cultural and language groups, namely Kurmanji, Kirmanjki and Turkish? The most common, but one-sided, explanation is that Alevism is originally a Turkic belief, a syncretism brought to Asia Minor from central Asia and Iran by Shamanist Turks and Turkmen who converted to Islam. According to this view, the Kurmanji and Kirmanjki speaking Alevi peoples were originally Turks who became “Kurdified” in eastern Turkey through contact with native Kurds. Another equally one-sided explanation is that they were originally Kurds who became Alevi under the influence of Turkmen. According to a counter argument, Alevism is an original Middle Eastern syncretic belief which the Kurdish and Zaza communities adopted or transferred to other communities. Here, central Asian influences are trivialised and the Turkmen are said to have adopted Alevism after they migrated to the Middle East, where they were influenced by this Middle Eastern faith. Another explanation, which we may characterise as Zaza essentialism, views Alevism as an original Zaza belief (of Kirmanjki speakers) and suggests that there was a split between the Alevism of Dersim and that of the other regions to which Iranic speaking Alevi groups spread. Here Alevism is presented as a

2 See Dressler (2013); Markoff (1986); Beşikçi (2016). For the language of Dersim’s Alevs, see Bruinessen (1997: 6).

3 Its fundamental meaning is hearth. It means “the family around that hearth”. According to Andrews and Temel (2010: 287), “in the sense of a large family, it is used for subdivisions, that is communities, among the Alevi ...”. Every particular *ocak* recognizes a lineage that is descended from the Prophet Muhammad’s grandson Huseyn (known as *as-sayyids*).

“Dersim phenomenon” which overrides the question of whether groups spoke Kurmanji or Kırmanjki, considering Alevism as the essential culture of the Dersim region which had a widespread power and influence because of the Dersim-based *ocaks* that spread well beyond the boundaries of that region.

Roughly speaking, the Upper Euphrates basin⁴ was the core region of Kurdish Alevism. At the same time, this region was the area where the Safavid-Ottoman conflict was at its most violent and the Safavids were at their strongest in Asia Minor. The presence of Kurdish and related groups in this vast area has long been a well-known fact.⁵ It is baseless, therefore, to claim that the Kurds and related communities appeared after the Turkic domination of the east of mountainous Asia Minor, from Erzurum to Mosul, and that the speakers of the Kurmanji and Kırmanjki languages are Kurdified or Zazafied Turks, as some Turkish nationalist historiographers do. At the same time, in Dersim, which is considered to be the core region of Kurdish Alevism, the fact that those who describe themselves as Turks or those whose mother tongue is Turkish are generally Sunni-Hanafi⁶ is another observation that not only weakens the hypothesis of generic Turkishness which is attributed to Alevism, but also emphasises not the generic but the contingent character of religious processes in the region. With this in mind, the thesis that it is the Turks who brought Alevism to the Upper Euphrates basin is groundless. Although it contains some belief elements particular to the Turkmen community,⁷ Alevism should be seen as a belief that exceeds Turkishness and is shared by a variety of groups in Asia Minor, Kurds as well as Turks.

The Development of Belief Sources and Their Geographical Distinction

Alevism relates to a belief system which is separate and dissenting from the traditions of orthodox Islam due to political and religious disputes. This

4 Please see the map at the end of the article which clearly shows the boundaries of the Upper Euphrates basin.

5 This is, for example, shown on the famous map of Mahmūd Qashgārī's *Dīwān-ı Lughāt al-Türk* written between 1072 and 1074, where the Kurdish regions are indicated as *Arḍ-ı Ekrād* (lands of Kurds), and situated between today's Iraq and Azerbaijan.

6 See Gültekin (2013: 144).

7 For the most serious study on the emphasis of pre-Islamic elements, see Ocak (1983); Köprülü (1929); Esin (1985); Karamustafa (1994).

syncretisation pathway for heterodox groups⁸ (different sects and orders) from the eighth century onwards reaches a visible and distinctive form with the combination of different *zāwiyahs*.⁹ The development of Alevism has not only been different from that of orthodox Sunni Islam but has also exhibited a unique place among the different forms of heterodoxy and the heterodox positions of some communities that coalesced after they became enemies of the Ottomans.¹⁰

From the thirteenth century until the beginning of the sixteenth century, a variety of different orders and communities following the ways of several *murshids* appeared. Although Bektashism was only one of them, it spread faster than the other groups. However, the direction of Bektashī expansion was towards the west (the Balkans) after the Janissaries were included in the order, partly after the emergence of Ottoman state rule. Dervishes such as Otman Baba and Sarı Saltuk were influential in the west, and their followers (Otman Babacılar and Sarı Saltukçular), but also the Jāmīs (Cāmīler) and even the *ocak* of Sayyid Battal Ghāzi, which is considered as the centre of the Rūm Abdals (the Dervishes of Anatolia), would be assimilated later into Bektashism. (Karamustafa, 1994: 77).¹¹ In the first quarter of the sixteenth century, Bektashīs were not the only “mystical anarchist group” in Ottoman society nor was it the largest (Karamustafa, 1993: 128). In the east, the influence of Ibn Arabī, the community of Barak Baba, the dervish of the Sarı Saltuk, and Jamāladdīn Savī, Savī’s and Cavlakī’s followers (Qalāndārī, Hayderī, Malamatī, Hurūfī, Wefāī movements), and the extremist interpretations that emerged in the Shī’a (such as Ismā’īliyya) were more dominant. And like their followers (*tālīb*s), these movements had diverse sources.¹²

8 Heterodoxy and syncretism concepts are criticised in the post-Köprülü paradigm. For debates on concepts and anti-Köprülü positions, see Dressler (2013, Ch. 5).

9 *Zāwiyah (tekke)* is a monastery or shrine of dervishes where Sufi/mystic teaching and worship take place.

10 Next to Kizilbashs, also some pantheist groups such as Bedreddīnīs and Melāmātīs were declared unbelievers and heretics by Ottoman rulers (see Ocak, 1998). Before the sixteenth century, during the reign of Mehmed II and Bayazid II, some Hurūfīs and Qalāndārīs who were declared heretics were executed (Ocak, 1998, *et al.*; Gölpınarlı, 1987: 149; İnalçık, 1993: 32–33). Some others were executed and deported on the grounds that they were under pro-Safavid influence. See Aşıkpaşazāde, *Menākub-ı Âli Osman*, Bāb 23, 268 (original text and its transliteration: Öztürk, 2013).

11 However, as mentioned by Karamustafa, despite the absence of sufficient evidence for the stages of these transformation, it is true that there was a “gradual submersion in the growing and stronger network of the officially accepted Bektāşīye” at least since the beginning of the sixteenth century (Karamustafa, 1994: 77–78).

12 For detailed descriptions of these sources, see Karamustafa (1994).

At the beginning of the sixteenth century, the military expansion of the Safavid state threatened the Ottomans through its “Kizilbash ideology.” The ideology had profound effects on the many scattered and independent mystical groups living in Anatolia. While Bektashism was rising in the Ottoman camp in the west, the “Kizilbash ideology” was institutionalised in the Safavid camp in the east, where it affected and absorbed all heterodox groups, including the Bektashīs. Thus the heterodoxy of the Anatolian Turkmen, and other heterodox groups such as the Qalāndāriye, Hayderiye, Hurūfiyye, Wefai’ye, and Yasaviye, came under Safavid influence. In addition, the Halwatīs and Mavlawīs who had left Tabriz to take refuge in Anatolia, were also influenced by the Safavids (Koç and Tanrıverdi, 2004: 224–226; Konur, 2000: 115–118).

Shah Isma‘il’s Influence and the Formation of Alevism in the Upper Euphrates Basin

Twelver-Imamism¹³ and the practice of *Kerbala* mourning (or mourning of *Muharram*) became part of Alevism on the Upper Euphrates through Shah Isma‘il’s obvious influence on the regional heterodoxy. Bektashism later also adopted these religious practices (Ocak, 1996: 208–209). Despite Safavism having lost its political influence, there is much evidence supporting the fact that the Kizilbash ideology remained alive and that the Shah’s message survived.¹⁴

Shah Isma‘il Safavī, under the pen-name of “Hatāyī”, created an ideological mysticism in his poems which encompassed Anatolian and Iranian heterodoxy in line with his political goals.¹⁵ As a matter of fact it is the *halifes* (messengers) of Shah Isma‘il who put together the *Imam Cafer Buyruğu* (usually referred to as the *Buyruk*, considered to be the manual of Alevism), and who spread it to Asia Minor. Meanwhile the initiatives of some Safavid agents immediately after Shah Isma‘il also played a role in the dissemination of the

13 Before the Safavid influence, especially in Balkan heterodoxy, there are strong traces of seven- and eight-Imamist faith instead of Twelver-Imamism. See Karamustafa (1993: 123–124; 1994: 83); Bahadır (2000); Birdoğan (1999: 20); Şahin (2007); Tanman (1994); Kiel (1994: 143); Engin (2004: 46); Mélikoff (1992).

14 The most important evidence for this is the mystic poems (*deyishs*) of Pir Sultan Abdal who was killed in 1589 or 1590. Despite 70–75 years after the definitive Safavid defeat and 50 years after Shah Isma‘il’s death, Pir Sultan repeats the “Shah’s call” from his poems. In these sayings, the Shah is now the expected mahdi.

15 For the poems of Shah Isma‘il (Hatāyī), see Ergun (1956: 43–44).

Buyruk.¹⁶ Bektashism and the Bektashī *tekkes*, that had spread to Anatolia and the Balkans, did not remain indifferent to these new ideas which had influenced the whole of western Asia in the sixteenth century, and their mysticism became integrated into the “new heterodoxy” establishing the ritual and mystical foundations of the beliefs of the Alevī-Bektashī order.¹⁷

However, the efforts at religious integration and at political domination of all the Bektashī *tekkes* should be seen as separate. Without the merging of Bektashism with Safavid Kizilbashism, it would not have been possible for the Bektashīs to penetrate the post-Kizilbash heterodoxy that dominated the Upper Euphrates basin.¹⁸ The crucial role of Shah Isma‘il himself, and his image, was central to this integration. Shah Isma‘il combined the dual meaning of the title Shah by being both a secular political leader as well as a *murshid* in the religious sense. He added the term *ghāzi* among his attributes through the chivalrous character that he depicted on the battlefield and thus: “The roles of king and holy man converge in Isma‘il, and he was also a hero on the battlefield and crusader (*ghāzi*) for the faith” (Babayān, 2002: xxviii). Likewise, Kathryn Babayan emphasises that Shah Isma‘il’s esoteric and divine identity inspired the Kizilbashs to sacrifice themselves entering battle without arms. He was regarded as immortal, as a spiritual guide (*pīr*, *murshid*, *murshid-i kāmīl*), and as having miraculous powers for whom believers would sacrifice themselves as is mentioned in the Kizilbash battle cry: *Qurbān oldigim pīrūm mūrshidim* (“My spiritual leader and master, for whom I sacrifice myself”). He wanted his adherents to become dedicated *sūfis* (Roemer, 1983: 214) for which he provided enormous inspiration and an attraction that transcended

16 There are two sources of the *Buyruk*. The first is *Menākībūl Esrār* which is composed of Shah Hatāyī’s, Kul Himmet’s and Kul Mazlūm’s lyrics, and the maxims of Safiyuddin Ardebilī, the founder of Safevīsm. The second *Buyruk* is attributed to Sheikh Sāfi. Gölpinarlı says that the main source of opinion of the *Buyruk*, which was spread by the *halifes* of Shah Isma‘il, was the *Menākīb’ü-l Esrār Behcet’ü-l Ahrar*, compiled by Bisatī during the time of Shah Tahmasb. However, according to oral tradition the *Buyruk* derives from the sixth imam Cafer Sādiq. In the Alevi tradition, the *Buyruk* attributed to Cafer Sādiq is called the *Büyük Buyruk* (“Buyruk the Great”). The *Küçük Buyruk*, on the other hand, includes a narrative of the Mahdi, referring to Shah Isma‘il. The dates of the *Küçük Buyruk* manuscripts that are attributed to Sheikh Sāfi are placed at the beginning of the seventeenth century at the earliest. The existence of Shah Isma‘il’s *deyişs* written under the Hatāyī pen name, as well as the *deyişs* of Pīr Sultan, Kul Mazlūm and Kul Himmet found in the *Buyruk* indicate that the *Buyruk* was arranged after Shah Isma‘il and possibly his successors (see Gölpinarlı 1987: 178–180; also see Kutlu 2006 and 2010).

17 See Karakaya-Stump (2015: 13).

18 For Bektashī lodges and their influence in the Upper Euphrates basin and Iraq, see Ayfer Karakaya-Stump (2006: 118; and 2011).

his ethnic (Turkic) identity. Therefore, it cannot be said as claimed by Roemer that the “overwhelming majority of İsmâ‘îl’s militant supporters belonged to Türkmen tribes” (Roemer, 1983: 214). Indeed, as Babayan, who reads the *Dîwan* from a different perspective, emphasises, the Iranian mythic components of his poetry shows us that İsmâ‘îl furnished his *Dîwan* with Iranian mythology (Babayan, 2002: xxviii–xxx).

Those dervishes directly connected to Shah İsmâ‘îl, regardless of their ethnicity, were intensively active in the Upper Euphrates and Kızılırmak basins and the Central Taurus region. The Upper Euphrates basin was the most sheltered region in Ottoman lands for those who entered into the Kizilbash faith, except those who had been forced to go to Iran under heavy pressure during the reign of Selim I (1512–1520) and Suleiman I (1520–1566). However, in the south of the Upper Euphrates basin, the Sunni Kurdish *mîrs*, who had entered into a kind of vassal relationship with the Ottoman Empire and were thus not under direct Ottoman influence, kept these groups at a distance. Their tribes consisted of ethnic Turkmen, Kurmanji and Zaza.

In addition, we know of the existence of some Turkmen tribes and emirates in the Upper Euphrates basin since the twelfth century. According to the *Sharafnâme*, the Melkişan rulers of Çemişgezek in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries were Turkic. Among their subjects were Turkmen tribes as well as Kurds. The *Sharafnâme* indicates that in the sixteenth century a thousand households from the Melkişans were enlisted into the Safavid army, and this group became the guards of Shah İsmâ‘îl. According to the *Sharafnâme*, their countries of origin were known as “Kurdistan” despite their Turkic origins (Bozarslan, 1990: 189–191).¹⁹ Therefore, some of the Kurdified Turkmen and Sunnified Turks of the Upper Euphrates basin should be seen largely as remnants of these Melkişans subordinated to their own emirate.

From the middle of the sixteenth century onwards, after the defeat of Shah İsmâ‘îl, Kizilbash groups, Sunnis and Christians who lived in the Upper Euphrates basin continued to live together, now administratively belonging to the regions of the *sanjaq* begs of the Ottoman Empire. Within the Empire they were recognised for their power and influence. During this period, although the *sanjaq* begs seemed to be “Sunni”, they were also open to cooperation with

19 According to *Sharafnâme*, after the Battle of Çaldıran (1514), Pîr Huseyin, son of the Rustem Beg who was affiliated with the Shah, declared his loyalty to Selim I and, in return, the Çemişgezek emirate was assigned to this dynasty again. Pîr Huseyin Beg, who went to his old land upon the order of the Sultan Selim I, evicted the Kizilbash from there (Bozarslan, 1990: 194).

Shah İsmā'īl at the time when the influence of Shah İsmā'īl was intense; actually they followed a bilateral policy towards the Ottomans and Safavids.

Shah İsmā'īl's politics had lasting consequences and his influence continued also after his defeat. His legacy provided the character and identity of the Dersim region. The majority of sheikh families who were active in the Upper Euphrates basin, and who were loyal to Shah İsmā'īl under their own leadership, are the origin of today's ocaks. The dervishes establishing ocaks, and the Qalāndārī and Wefā'ī sheikhs who had *siyadetnāmes*²⁰ distributed by Shah İsmā'īl, were recognised as sayyids in Kurdish Alevism (Ocak, 2009: 51). After Shah İsmā'īl's intervention in the region, it is generally accepted that the ocaks were rooted in these sayyids and dedes (Ocak, 2002b: 49; 2011: 67; Yaman, 1998: 27–28) and it can be said that the ocaks were sanctified by Shah İsmā'īl himself. It is known that Nūr (Tür) Ali Halife, one of his halifes, was leading these activities (Uluğ, 1939: 28; Yolga, 1994: 96). The local ocaks, which started to be institutionalised through the *sayyid* genealogy, were shaped around the rituals carried out within the framework of Imam Ali, the Twelve-Imams and the Karbala Cult. *Sayyids*, according to the genealogical sequences, were descended from Husayn, grandson of Prophet Muhammad; and the mother tongue of most of them was Turkish, or they used Turkish in their rituals and worship because of their absolute affiliation to the Shah İsmā'īl canon. Their *murids* and *tālīps* were Turkmen, as well as Kurmanji and Kirmanjki speaking Kurds.

In short, it would be an incomplete interpretation to say that only Turkmen, such as the Qalāndārīye, Wefā'īye, Hayderīye, Hurūfiye and Yasaviye, came under the influence of the various sources of Alevism, from the last years of the fifteenth century to the beginning of the sixteenth. It would also be incomplete to say that it was only groups who were included in the anti-Ottoman and pro-Safavid masses that could be called “Kizilbash”. These orders influenced not only the Turkmen, but neighbouring groups as well, who shared similar ways of life with the Turkmen. Similar beliefs were influenced not only by the indigenous peoples but also by some of the Iranian and central Asian communities who had fled or were driven away by the Mongols. It is rumoured that Celāleddin Harezmsah died in Dersim as the last stop on his escape from the Mongols. Also, there was a reverse movement: under the rule of Shah Abbas (1588–1629), some Dersim tribes were dispatched to the east of Iran to resist Sunnī Uzbek and Turkmen attacks and it is assumed that some of these tribes

20 These are *sayyidism* documents showing the *pürs* and sheikhs as descendants of the Prophet Muhammad's grandsons Hasan and Husayn.

returned to Dersim after the Qajar-Uzbek wars ended.²¹ Because of this history, some scholars have connected the claim that “Alevis come from Khorasan”, which forms the basis of their own cosmogonies, with this concrete event (see Bayrak, 2004: 200). The most important of these tribes was the Çemişgezeklu (known as Zhaferanlu in Iran), which also played a role in the establishment of the Safavid state (Sümer, 1999: 53). Other examples are Turkmen tribes such as the Şahsevens and Aşars, as well as the Qaramanlu, Pulkanlu, Memiyanlu and Sufiyanlu tribes of Dersim origin (Temo, 2018: 198).

Other Sources of Upper Euphrates Alevism: the Wafā'īye and Saltukism

As in Anatolia, the mainstream tradition that established heterodoxy before Safavism in the Upper Euphrates basin was the Wafā'ī order. Even when Bektashism, a sect that broke away from the Wafā'īye long ago, was fully established with all its institutions further west, the dominant sect in the Upper Euphrates basin was still the Wafā'īye. Sheikh Dilo Belincān, one of the founding *dedes* still blessed in Dersim, was one of the greatest *sūfīs* of the eleventh century and a follower (*tālīp*) of Es-Sayyid Abu'l Wafā who founded the sect of the Wafā'īye. Sheikh Belincān came to Dersim on Abu'l Wafā's instruction and lived in the village of Pilvenk until his death. His followers established themselves as “*Şih Delil-i Berhicān/Belincān Ocağı*” and carved a large area of influence in Pertek and further south with the help of Kurmanji-speaking followers. From a genealogy belonging to Sheikh Belincān, it appears that he came to Dersim and communicated the path of the Wafā'īye in the pre-Manzikert period (before 1071) at the very beginning of the eleventh century (Yar and Yalgın, 2014: 13). The aforementioned genealogy states that Sheikh Belincān was sent as the deputy of Abu'l Wafā, specifically to guide the Kurdish tribes. In a remarkable passage of the genealogy, Sheikh Imaduddīn Suleimānī, who sent Sheikh Belincān to this region, says: “This is my will for the Kurdish communities” (Yar and Yalgın, 2014: 24, 28, 29). Additionally, a second genealogy lists the names of forty-two Kurdish tribes whom Sheikh Belincān was authorised to guide (Yar and Yalgın, 2014: 29–30). In the same manner, the genealogies of *ocaks* such as Cemal Abdal, Ağuıçen, Pirbad, Battal Gazi, Mineyik (Zeynelabidin), Dede Kargin in Malatya, and Üryan Hızır in Pertek also start from Abu'l Wafā. Thus, we can distinguish two sources for the disciples who

21 For an extensive research on the Dersim originated Kurds in Khorasan, see Temo (2018); see also van Bruinessen (1992: 134).

spread Alevism in the Upper Euphrates basin: Abu'l Wafā's personal dervish pupils, and missionary *dedes* sent to the region by Shah İsmā'īl Safavī. It can be argued that these two sources were merged with indigenous sacred beliefs – some of them replaced older beliefs or incorporated indigenous elements, or they were combined with native beliefs by their followers, leading to the emergence of the syncretism unique to Upper Euphrates Alevism.²²

As one of the successors to Abu'l Wafā, Sheikh Hasan, who was one of the sons or brothers of Sheikh Ahmed, was another prominent *pīr*. Sheikh Hasan had gained the allegiance of tribes around Malatya. The tribes from this *ocak* are called “Şihhasanlı” or “Şihhasanan”. In a decision (*hüküm*) addressed to the *qadi* of Malatya, it is written that the village of Şeyhhasanlı in Malatya as well as the hamlets of Çivril, Üçbölük, Erdek and Şelo are affiliated to the waqf of the Sheikh Abu'l Wafā Tekke located in Malatya's “Meşar” village; that the waqf was assigned on the basis of a visit by Sheikh Ahmed Tavi, whose grave can be found in the village of Şeyhhasanlı; and according to an edict dated 1656/57, that the *reaya* of these waqf villages would be exempt from paying taxes.²³ Sayyid Riza, who was hanged in the Dersim Operation in 1938,²⁴ was one of the *pīrs* of the Sheikh Ahmed Dede *ocak*. This *ocak* from Malatya had joined the Abbasan tribe, and although they were not part of that tribe, they were known and venerated as “*Aşira Babu*” and “*Ezbeta Babu*”. Nowadays, Abbasans are known as Sayyid Riza's tribe. In their *cems*, guides are called “*rayber*” and some *raybers* are related to the *pīrs* of Şeyhhasanlı. The Ferhatan tribe in Hozat is also a follower of the Sheikh Ahmedli/Şeyhhasanlı *ocak*. Ferhatans were the tribe of Diyap Agha who was the representative of Dersim in the Assembly that was held in Ankara in the 1920. The *raybers* differentiated themselves from the Şeyhhasanlı *pīrs*; although still loyal to the *ocak*, they lived in villages where they also ruled.

The Ağuiçen *ocak* also goes back to Abu'l Wafā (Birdoğan, 1992: 152; Güler, 2010: 158; Çakmak, 2012). The first centres were located in Sün village within the borders of present-day Elazığ. The Kurdish (Kurmanji) Sinemilli tribe was completely affiliated to the Ağuiçen. The sons of Sayyid Temiz, founder of the

22 Especially in Dersim, the ancestor cult and a special hierarchy (*raybers*, *pīrs* and *murshids*) were far advanced. *Ocaks* (and “two sources” – the Wafā'ī and Shah İsmā'īl's – that construct them) have a big role in this. Also the emphasis on nature worship in Dersim gives an idea of the transformation and adaptation of old beliefs that were adopted by Alevism (for a detailed work about this symbolism and hierarchy, see Deniz, 2012; Gezik, 2013).

23 İE.EV. 23/2725, 5 Jumādā al-Ākhirah 1102/6 March 1691.

24 This article does not take into account the effects of the Dersim Operation of 1938 which, although a significant milestone, comes after the considerations here.

ocak, were scattered in Dersim and Erzincan as well as surrounding areas. Sayyid Mençek maintained the *ocak* in the village of Bargini (Karabakır) of Hozat where his grave is located. As for his other sons, they maintained the *ocak* in the villages of Sivas, Erzincan and Harput.

The Sarı Saltuk *ocak* has a special status. This *ocak* is a form of the Balkan based Qalāndārī-Babaī *murshids* that managed to maintain its presence and establish itself as a permanent *ocak* in Anatolia. The view that the cult of Sarı Saltuk was a form of Bektashism that came from the Balkans to the Upper Euphrates region in the sixteenth century or later is dubious. The link between Saltukism's epic of "seven sarcophagi – seven tombs" and Seven-Imamism makes it certain that the cult predates Twelver-Imamist Bektashism. In the *Saltuknāme*, the epic of Sarı Saltuk takes place in the Danishmend region (central eastern Anatolia) and tells a different story from that of the figure of Sarı Saltuk in the Bektashī tradition (Ocak, 2002: 38–41). This narrative, which takes place in the Erzincan-Amasya-Sivas triangle, gives us a strong idea about the source of the Sarı Saltuk cult in Dersim. The existence of the Sarı Saltuk *ocak* in Dersim, a fact agreed upon by both those who argue that the true burial place of Sarı Saltuk is at the present-day *ziyaret* in Dersim-Hozat and those who argue that the place of pilgrimage is only "representative/symbolic" (Çakmak, 2012: 94–95), shows us that the Qalāndārī-Heydarī way appeared before the establishment of Bektashism. The fact that various genealogies of the *ocak* deviate from Twelver-Imamist genealogies, on points of origins between the third and ninth imams, also confirms this situation (Çakmak, 2012: 85–89). The establishment of a genealogical relationship that extends to Sarı Saltuk through Battal Ghāzi shows an adherence to the tradition of the *Danişmendnāme* unique to the Upper Euphrates basin. The Sarı Saltuk narrative of the Upper Euphrates differs from that told in the Balkans.

On the other hand, it is also claimed that Sarı Saltuk's descendant Sayyid Nesimī brought the cult of Sarı Saltuk to Dersim. Sayyid Nesimī's grave can be found in the village of Agveren (Akören) as are the graves of his father and brother. It is rumoured that the person buried here is the same person as the Hurūfī bard Seyyid Nesimī, who was executed in Aleppo in 1418. There are also symbols indicating that the cult of Sayyid Nesimī was Twelver-Imamist, unlike the cult of Sarı Saltuk. Furthermore, the cult of Sarı Saltuk in Dersim has been continued and transmitted to this day by the descendants of Sayyid Nesimī (Çakmak, 2012: 97–100). Thus, the Sarı Saltuk *ocak* is the sole order in the Upper Euphrates basin with disputed origins. However, the link between Sarı Saltuk and Bektashism, like many others, appears to be established only later. Although Sarı Saltuk was a figure who joined Dersim Alevism later, in the

early fifteenth century at most, if his relationship to Sayyid Nesimî is correct, it is possible that he entered the region not through Bektashism but through Hurûfism.

Ocaks and Tribes

Tribalisation can occur through *ocaks* which often have supra-ethnic authorities and networks of *tālîps*. The Aġuiçen, Kureyşan and Pilvenk tribes were formed by this process. In the following paragraphs I will explain more about the development of each of these tribes. Thus, different groups became a “tribe” through their relationship to an *ocak*. Conversely, there are cases of different tribes bonded to the same *ocak*. Both Kurmanji-speaking Koçğiris and Kirmanjki-speaking Abdalans, Şavalans and Balabans are subject to the Baba Mansur *ocak*. There are also smaller *ocaks* as well as bigger ones, such as the Aġuiçen (Karadonlu Can Baba), Baba Mansur (Bāmasur), Şihhasan (Şeyh Hasan), Derviş Cemal (Seyyid Cemal), Kureyşan, Sarı Saltuk, Şih Belincan (Delil Berhican), Şih Çoban and Sultan Hızır (Üryan Hızır/Hıdır). There is no competition between these *ocaks* (Gezik, 2013: 8). No matter to which *ocak* they are affiliated, Alevis respect them all and visit their graves. With the exception of Sarı Saltuk, the mentioned *ocaks* are of Upper Euphrates origin. The fact that the *pîr* families of *ocaks* regarded themselves as *sayyids* formed the basis of the Ottoman administration’s approach to them. The Ottoman administration adopted and approved these *dedes*, not as leaders of the Alevi faith but in terms of their sayyidism.

The Kureyşan *ocak* has influenced Dersim tribes (especially in Pülümür and Mazgirt) as well as the tribes and villages of Bingöl, Varto, Hımıs, Karhova and Kiğı. The Kureyşan *ocak* was connected to the supreme Baba Mansur *ocak*. There is a hierarchy among the tribes, tribal *pîrs* and some *ocaks*. For example, in terms of *pîr-murshid* relation between Baba Mansur and the Kureyşans in Pülümür and Mazgirt, the Kureyşans consider Baba Mansur, based in the Nazîmiye Zeve village and concentrated in the Muhundu parish of Mazgirt, as their own *murshid*. The Bahtiyar tribe in Hozat is bonded to the Kureyşan *pîrs* (Çakmak, 2012: 115). Derviş Cemal are *pîrs* of the Şeyhhasanlı tribal confederation. Among the confederation, there are the Karaballı Uşağı, Ferhatuşağı, Abbasuşağı and Koçuşağı tribes. There is an important place of pilgrimage for them in Derviş Cemal (Mezra) village (see Ali Kemali, 1992: 155; Sevgen, 2003: 186; Birdoğan, 1992: 155; Dersimî, 1997: 118; Saltuk, 2009: 157; Kaya, 2010: 142, 150–51; Çakmak, 2012: 121).

Kurmanji speaking Ağuiçen *dedes* have a large network of influence (Dersimi, 1997a: 117; 1997b: 73; Güler, 2010: 157). The Ağuiçen present a good case of multi-ethnic affiliation. The followers of the Diyarbekir branch of the Ağuiçen *ocak* are Turkmen (see Akın, 2014), while followers of the Dersim branch are predominantly Zaza speakers. Among those in the Divriği branch there are Kurmanjis as well as Turks. The Ağuiçen *pîrs* are the leaders of both the Ağuiçen tribes and the Sinemillis (Gezik, 2013: 6, 9). The *dedes* of Ağuiçen trace their roots to Imam Zeynelabidin from the Wafāī path and distance themselves from the Hacı Bektaş tradition. Like many other *ocaks*, the *dedes* of Ağuiçen also trace their past from before Hacı Bektaş and have genealogies supporting these claims. The aforementioned *ocak* is based on four *murshids*. Most of the Dersim Ağuiçens subordinate themselves to Sayyid Mençek; *dedes* in Elazığ's Sün village and Hozat's Bargini (Karabakır) village come from the branch of Koca Sayyid. The others are Köse Sayyid and Mir Sayyid who are considered to have settled in the Karpan Mountain. Bektashīs accept the Ağuiçen as the second *murshid ocak* after Hacı Bektaş.

The centre of the Şeyh Hasan *ocak*, a large *ocak* whose influence is spread over a wide area and developed around the Euphrates River, is Şeyhhasan village in the Baskil district where the *pîr's* tomb is also located. The "Kizilbash Şeyhhasanlı tribes" (Yılmazçelik, 2012: 15) populating this region until the early eighteenth century appear to have headed towards western Dersim around these dates (Halaçoğlu, 1988: 49–50). According to a complaint sent by inhabitants of the Çarsanjaq district (the present-day Mazgirt region) to Istanbul in 1726, the Şeyhasanlıs roaming in this region for around two decades could not be removed and were pillaging. The documents dated 1732, 1736, 1751 and 1762 also report that Şeyhasanlıs together with the Dersim tribe continued to harass the inhabitants of the Çarsanjaq and Keban districts (Yılmazçelik, 2012: 13–14). The Şeyhasanlıs appear to have settled in western Dersim in the first half of the eighteenth century and became locals in the region. By the middle of the nineteenth century, the Şeyhhasanlıs had spread as far as Pülümür and Kiğı.²⁵ They occupied some of the Armenian villages in the region and caused Armenian peasants (*reaya*) to emigrate as well as making some of them their sharecroppers.

Speaking about Dersim, it can be concluded from surveying the documents of the period from the beginning of the eighteenth century, that two big tribes (or tribal confederations) dominated the Dersim region. The Şeyhhasanlı tribe

25 See C.DH. 76/3766, 29 Zū al-hijjah 1255/4 March 1840. At the end of the nineteenth century there is now a "Şeyhhasanlı *Nahîye*" (parish) added to the Pülümür District (see Y.MTV. 171/81, 20 Sha'bân 1315/14 January 1898).

dominated western Dersim, while the Dersimli tribe dominated the eastern part (also called Central Dersim). Other tribes were generally confederated under these two umbrella tribes.²⁶ The Şeyhhasanlı tribe was mostly an alliance of Kurmanji speakers, while the Dersimli was an alliance of Kirmanjki speakers. However, over time, groups following the Şeyhhasanlı tribe also penetrated central Dersim.

The Relationship between Upper Euphrates Alevism and Bektashism

But how are Alevism and Bektashism related in the Upper Euphrates region? For Dersim, the Anatolian Alevi-Bektashī tradition created a similar narrative as elsewhere, which places Hacı Bektaş as the *ser-çeşme maqam* (*pîr of pîrs*) from the beginning. This interpretation of Dersim is an ethnocentric one asserting that Hacı Bektaş was in Dersim together with Sarı Saltuk, and that the original centre of the Bektashī order was Dersim (Çakmak, 2012: 101–102). However, the *ocaks* in Dersim and the upper Euphrates basin were not included in the Bektashī *Vilāyetnāme* tradition, which shows that these *ocaks*, as we mentioned above while explaining their origins, are rooted in a different order than the Bektashīs and that they emerged from local developments. The only exception is the Sarı Saltuk *ocak*. The inclusion of Sarı Saltuk in the *Vilāyetnāme* tradition at a later date and the appropriation of it into Bektashism probably happened after the Sarı Saltuk *ocak* settled in Dersim. In the Dersim narrative, the inclusion of Seyyid Nesimī into the story, and even the placement of him at the beginning of the Dersim story or Sarı Sultan being Sarı Saltuk in the nineteenth century, confirms this chronological difference in both cases.

The violent policy of Mahmud II (1808–1839) to eliminate the Bektashī order temporarily caused pressure on and weakened the traditional local centres of Alevism. Even though the *dergāh* in Hajibektaş town was also affected by Mahmud II's violent policy, the *dergāh*'s power in central Anatolia recovered by

26 In Ottoman documents of the second half of the eighteenth century, members of both confederations are referred to as “bandits” and as people who do not pay taxes. Both tribes are mentioned together in the documents. This means that they shared the region (see AE.SMST.III, 299/23900, 29 Zū'a-l Hijjah 1177/29 June 1764 and C.DH. 304/15158, 29 Rajab 1213/6 January 1799). Also, in Dersim, idioms that compare these two confederations with each other are still used: such as “*Dersim Bese Gawo Şexse Lese Gawo*” (“If Dersim is the forehead of the ox, Şeyhhasanlı is the ox's body”). For a detailed history and local tradition about the confederations, see Yıldırım (2012).

the decreasing pressure on Bektashism after Mahmud's reign. The Naqshbandī *postnişîns* who took over the lodge, therefore, could not rule there for long. The *babas* of the *dergâh* having been exiled to Amasya were also forgiven by the Ottoman authorities.²⁷ Eventually, at the end of 1849, Ali Dede from the Bektashī community was appointed as the “tomb keeper” (*türbedâr*) of Hacı Bektaş. The Hacı Bektaş *ocak*, which was again offered protection under the Ottoman regime, moved towards establishing a Hacı Bektaş *dergâh*-centered Alevism, something which eventually was to bring the Hacı Bektaş *ocak* to the hierarchical top of the all *ocaks* in the second half of the nineteenth century. The Tahtaji *ocak* and the Kurmanji and Kırmanjki (Zaza) speaker's *ocaks* were the last to participate in this development.

While the Hacı Bektaş *dergâh* emerges as an “Ottoman institution”, the eastern regions subjected to the “Kizilbash” tradition bypass the Bektashī tradition and date their past to the pre-Ottoman era through the *murshid ocaks* centered on Dersim and Malatya. The Ottoman-Islamic policy of Abdulhamid II, which followed an integration policy within the Ottoman domain, was not a strategy that only used Sunni Islam. Abdulhamid II's administration did not avoid using Bektashism to subject eastern *ocaks* to the imperial centre. Within this scope, the Bektashī *dedes*, too, were mobilised over the eastern *ocaks*. Although spreading Sunni Islam was the main target in the policy of Abdulhamid II, the Bektashization of the Alevi Kurds and the removal of the Alevi communities from the “Kizilbash” tradition were the secondary goals.²⁸ According to British consul Taylor, before Abdulhamid II, the Bektashīs only opened a lodge in Arapgir in 1866 (Taylor, 1868: 312). Fifty years later, another British official counted the shrine in Hacıbektaş town as among the *ziyarets* of the Dersim Alevis (quoted by Gezik, 2000: 155).

The first *ocak* in the Upper Euphrates basin that the Bektashīs came close to was the Ağuışen, one of the strongest *ocaks* in the region. In the words of Nejat Birdođan, the Malatya Ağuışen *ocak* was the first to subject itself to Hacı Bektaş. Birdođan calls them “apostates” (“*dönmeler*”). Thus, the Ağuışen ensured the recognition of Hacı Bektaş and the introduction of the Turkish Bektashī mantras to the *cems*. Another missionary was Cemaleddin Efendi from the Çelebi branch of the *dergâh*. Cemaleddin had been sent to the region by the İttihad-Terakki administration, which ruled between 1908–1918, on the

27 For the forgiveness of Hamdullah Efendi who was exiled to Amasya see i.HD. 32/1518, 18 Zü al-hijjah 1856/10 February 1841.

28 The most important accusation against the different communities that suffered during the reign of Abdulhamid II was that they were “on the way to Kizilbash” and were preparing to rebel to revive the Kizilbashism (see Çakmak, 2019).

eve of the First World War to organise the Dersim tribes against the Russian threat. According to Cemaleddin Efendi, the Dersim Alevis no longer followed the commandments of the dervishes sent to them by Hacı Bektaş himself centuries ago and had fallen away from the path (Dersimî, 1997b: 113–114, 115–116). Cemaleddin Efendi also tried to influence the Dersim Alevis through the Sayyid Aziz of Sivas Ağuışen (Dersimî, 1997b: 108–109, 113).

Through this process, the main structure that became prominent and maintained its hierarchical structure until today outside of Dersim is the lineage known as the “Çelebi *ocak*”. The Çelebi *ocak* today has asserted its hierarchical influence all over Turkey and validated an Alevi framework based upon the personality of Hacı Bektaş Velî.²⁹ However, this influence in the entire country does not go back to before the nineteenth century. That is to say, it is necessary to find other dynamics which come before this “integration” and are the source of all these breaks and divergences and to see the differences and similarities by taking into consideration the historical process. But the claim that the glorification of Hacı Bektaş and his heirs (the Çelebis) is to be found in all Upper Euphrates *ocaks* is a dubious one even today. Some *dedes* see a crucial difference between their pro-Bektashî Alevism and Upper Euphrates Alevism. Hüseyin Solmaz from Çorum, one of the *dedes* of the Imam Rıza *ocak*, summarises this relationship in the following way:

The Alevis in eastern Anatolia do not adopt much Hacı Bektaş Velî, they say our *ocak* is superior, however, Alevis of this region – our central Anatolian provinces, Çorum, Amasya, Tokat, Sivas – are dedicated to Hacı Bektaş Velî. (quoted by Erdem 2013: 263)

Although it is accepted that there were *ocaks* before the Hacı Bektaş *ocak*, it is believed that the *ocaks* in Anatolia were combined together with Hacı Bektaş. In a way, it is accepted that the roots of all the *ocaks* in Asia Minor are related to Hacı Bektaş.³⁰ The Bektashîs see most of the *ocaks* as a kind of corruption and associate this plurality with the disintegration after Mahmud II. Again, in Solmaz Dede’s own words:

29 Today, the Çelebis, carrying the Ulusoy surname, protect their holy places in all the *ocaks*. For instance, Hüseyin Solmaz, one of the *dedes* of Imam Rıza *Ocak* in Çorum, calls Ulusoy, with whom he met in Hacibektaş town, “*efendi*” (master). Solmaz also talks about Çelebi Cemaleddin Efendi as “my *efendi*” (see Erdem, 2013: 260).

30 From the interview with Şahin Pertek Dede, one of the *dedes* of the central Anatolian Imam Rıza *ocak* (see Seven, 2010: 360).

Until 1826 permitted *ocaks* from the Haci Bektaş *dergāh* were limited in number. But later this way got slack. A Naqshbandi sheikh was placed in the *pīr* house. And that Naqshbandi sheikh randomly established a tradition ... You know what happened, while being *baba*, the man became *dede* ... (cited in Erdem, 2013: 264)

Therefore, the real *pīr* house (the *maqam*) belongs to Haci Bektaş and others are dubious or self-appointed structures. This dominant narrative has no validity in relation to the Upper Euphrates basin. The Alevis who spread over this area were until recently clearly distinct from other Alevi-Bektashī groups. The two different ways – Alevism under the effect of Bektashism and eastern Alevism – still function in the construction of Alevi social memory and constitute a certain “cultural border”. Nur Yalman, in field research conducted in a Kurdish-Alevi village following the Ağuiçen in Nurhak-Maraş, observed that the village’s *pīr* (Doğan Dede) claimed to be at the same level as Haci Bektaş and that the village never established marital relationships with the nearby “Bektashī” village (Yalman 1969: 57). Until recently, the Ağuiçen *dedes* in Sün village regarded themselves as separate and more superior to the Bektashīs (Türkdoğan, 1995: 286–288).

The Expansion of the Kurdish Tribes and Sunnification³¹

From the seventeenth to the nineteenth century, the main conflict of “eastern Alevism” was not with the Ottoman government itself. Conflict mostly occurred between the tribes and *mīrs* but not on ethnical or religious grounds. This is why the assumed argument about the main difference and conflict between Alevi and Sunni Kurdish peoples does not do justice to the facts. According to this dubious argument, the main reason for the ongoing conflict is the Sunni acceptance of submission to the Ottoman government while the Alevi population always kept their distance from the Ottoman government and periodically had conflictual relationships with it. In fact, the dependence of the Sunni Kurdish population, which was organised in tribes, on the Ottoman government was through local authorities in autonomous structures via the *yurtluk-ocaklık* and the *hükümet* systems. It would not be wrong to suggest that the only real direct contact of the Sunni tribes with the Ottoman government

31 The information about the tribes and districts mentioned in this article is obtained from my field work between 1999–2019 and based on direct observation and interviews.

was during the *Hamidification* period.³² Therefore, it is illogical to try to explain the differences, conflicts, and problems between Alevi and Sunni Kurdish peoples in terms of their relationships with the central Ottoman government.³³

Kurdish *mīrs* and rulers, basing their legitimacy on an extreme Sunni-Shaf'i ideology, developed negotiable and sometimes independent relationships with the Ottoman government and, on the other hand, tried to have control over the tribes within their regions. In general terms, the tribes moving south from the upper part of the Euphrates basin had gone through Sunnification or had split into Sunni and Alevi parts. Most of the Sunni tribes in the south have a "sibling" of the same name in the north and vice versa.³⁴ The stronger and larger tribes (tribal federations) that had gained power on their own succeeded in managing to keep the Alevi and Sunni tribes together in their own structures. The most striking example of this is the Rişvan federation.³⁵ But the Sunnification of the pastoral-nomadic tribes was always seen as a "false Sunnification" until they were incorporated into organised religion after permanent settlement.³⁶ Therefore, a symbiotic and tribal way of life did not cause a great religious problem among the pastoral nomads.³⁷

The Alevi tribes expanded to include Dersim as their centre, to Erzincan, to western Erzurum, to the northern highlands of the Murat River, and to the south eastern parts of Sivas. It is also a fact that, especially around Dersim, the Ottoman government was trying to create a Sunni zone through its *san-jaq* begs. This indicates a vague cultural border of a "minority" that can be

32 *Hamidification* is an operation under the rule of Abdulhamid II that organised the Kurdish tribes in the form of light cavalry regiments and thus directly connected them to the Ottoman administration since 1894 (for details, see Klein, 2016).

33 Sunni Kurds always kept a distance from the Ottoman government and lived within their traditional social and political order, including religious practices. For a comprehensive reading, see van Bruinessen (1992); Özoğlu (1996, 2004); Aydın et al. (2019).

34 Certain tribes such as İzoli, Dimili, Atmanki and Milli that dispersed to south and became a part of the Sunni Kurdish world preserved their Alevi cultures and traditions in the north. Milli tribe members in Amasya-Tokat are still Alevi today. While the southern part of the İzoli tribe whose villages spread from Malatya to Urfa is Sunni, the İzoli in Dersim have preserved their Alevism and remained bound to the Baba Mansur *ocak*.

35 According to the *Mühimme Defterleri* published by Colin Imber, the Rişvan tribe was one of the *Kızılbaş* tribes that followed the "false İsmâ'îl" ("*Düzmece İsmail*") who rebelled under the name of Shah İsmâ'îl Safavî in the *sancak* of Malatya in 1578 (see Imber, 1979: 252).

36 H. Christoff argues that the pastoral-nomadic way of life based on livestock breeding poses a great obstacle to the practice of Sunni doctrines (see Christoff, 1935: 50).

37 Even today, the Şavak tribe speaking Kurmanji consists of Sunni and Alevi parts. In times of transhumance, this difference seems to disappear within tribes moving together (see Gültekin, 2013).

called “Dersim Sunnism”. Certain tribes (for example, the Şavaks) were partly Sunnified, and it is known that there were villages of Sunni populations within the domains of the *sanjaq* begs. Moreover, there were fully Sunni tribes such as the Barmaz. This tribe expanded towards the Çemişgezek and Pertek villages, that is, the southwestern parts of Dersim near the Sunni zone.

The area between Malatya and Bingöl was a zone of high mobility. We can observe the tribes’ mobility in this area within a three-hundred-year time span approximately since the seventeenth century. The Alevi tribes of the upper part of the Euphrates basin, for example the Haydaran tribe, expanded to Kiğı and Tercan, the northern parts of Bingöl, and on the east to Varto of Muş, as is the case with the Hormek and Lolan tribes (see Aytaş, 2010). From the end of the nineteenth century onwards, Maraş and the eastern parts of Kayseri were included in this movement zone. The most sheltered area among all the regions is still Dersim. This is why especially those who were oppressed on the western part of the Euphrates moved towards Dersim and the northern parts of Bingöl. Similarly, the dense mobility towards Dersim resulted in the tribes moving towards Erzincan, the eastern parts of Sivas and the southern parts of Erzurum.

One consequence of this expansion was the movement of the Koçgiri tribe, one of the biggest tribes in the western parts of Dersim, the population of which speaks both Kırmanjki and Kurmanji, towards Sivas and Erzincan.³⁸ Apart from rural Erzincan where the tribe began to spread at first, the first area it moved into was the Divriği region due to the weakening of the Kösepaşa dynasty at the beginning of the nineteenth century and the insecurity of the region as a result of the liquidation of the *ayāns* in the middle of the century (Sakaoğlu, 1984: 209). The wide zone the tribe expanded to remained within the administrative domain of the Dersim *sanjaq* towards the mid-nineteenth century (Kızıldağ-Soileau, 2017: 157–158, 161).

Another important tribe expanding from the upper part of the Euphrates basin towards the south was the Sinemillis. The expansion period beginning within the first decade of the eighteenth century continued towards Elbistan, crossing through Malatya.³⁹ At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Sinemilli expanded to Pazarçık and Gölbaşı, especially after the deportation of the Ottoman Armenians. Similarly, households that belonged to the Pilvenk, Atmanki and Alhas, which were originally from Dersim and Malatya, were observed to settle in the villages in Sarız (Kayseri), Elbistan, Göksun, and Afşin

38 The Ginni and Çarek branches of the tribe speak Kırmanjki, while the Canbeg, Kurmeş and Direjan branches speak Kurmanji (see Baran, 2011: 134).

39 For a comprehensive historical evaluation of the Sinemilli tribe, see Karakaya-Stump (2006b).

(Maraş). World War I, including the Koçgiri Rebellion and the Turkish War of Independence, caused the tribes of Dersim and Malatya to expand towards the west and the south and to settle especially in the villages, hamlets and pasturelands vacated by the deportation of the Armenians.

Following the repression of the Koçgiri Rebellion in 1921,⁴⁰ certain groups of the Koçgiri tribe moved towards Maraş and Kayseri in the west, and towards Tokat and Amasya in the northwest. The Koçgiri scattered around Maraş and Kayseri, many settling in the villages and pasturelands vacated because of the deportation of the Armenians. The Canbegs, a part of the Koçgiri confederation, were also seen to move towards the northwest and settle in the villages of Zile in Tokat and Göynücek in Amasya; while those who moved towards the west occupied the land between Ankara and Konya and towards Aksaray. The tribes moving towards the northwest preserved their Alevism, while the ones settling in central Anatolia were Sunnified. The north western Canbeg people are still loyal to the Ağuiçen *ocak*.

Conclusion

Alevism developed along a different path away from the Bektashī influence in the eastern parts of the Euphrates. The Alevism here is to a great extent Kurmanji-Zaza (Kırmanjki) Alevism – “Kurdish Alevism” in other words. It was organised through *ocaks* and was a result of the Twelver-Imamist formation following the Safavids in the east of the Ottoman Empire. Indeed, Twelver-Imamism is the link between pre-Safavid heterodoxies and later Safavid ones. The Twelvers in the western Ottoman lands appear at the beginning of the sixteenth century when Balım Sultan reorganised the Bektashī order. It was in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that the Kurdish Alevi tribes moved to the western parts of the Euphrates and expanded towards the west once again. Under the influence of the Safavids in the sixteenth century, Turkish developed into a liturgical language in Kurmanji and Zaza Alevism, whereas Bektashism became influential in Kurdish Alevism in the nineteenth century. Kurmanji and Zaza Alevism preserved their networks of *murshids* in the upper part of the Euphrates basin, whereas in the west, after the second half of the sixteenth century, the Hacı Bektaş *dergāh* began to adopt other *dergāhs* into its hierarchy. When Kurdish Alevism expanded from the upper part of the Euphrates basin, these networks of *murshids* also spread. This seemed to decrease to a certain extent when the Bektashī effect increased towards the

⁴⁰ For the Koçgiri Rebellion, see Kızıldağ-Soileau (2017: 157–343).

east in the second half of the nineteenth century. Although there was a dichotomy between the eastern networks of *murshids* and the Alevism based on Hacı Bektaş, at least until the beginning of the twentieth century, on the basis of the common liturgical language, rules, dogmas, rituals and conventions connecting the two centres lies the uniting effect of the Twelver-Imamism of Shah İsmâ'îl Safavî at the beginning of the sixteenth century.

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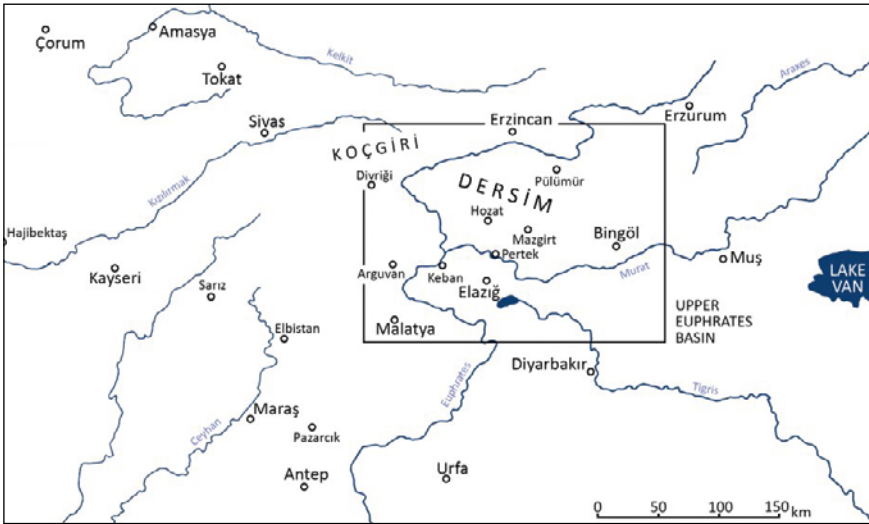
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Appendix





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Reflections on the 19th Century Missionary Reports as Sources for the History of the (Kurdish) Kizilbash

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Abstract

Missionary reports are the earliest modern records to explicitly mention the Kizilbash, and the “Kizilbash Kurds” in particular. Therefore, they have been utilised relatively extensively by researchers in the field, sometimes at levels disproportionate to their reliability and usefulness. This article develops my previous work on the perils of the missionary reports’ utilization without sufficient critical scrutiny of their inherent biases and limitations, and highlights, on the basis of an original missionary letter, the editorial process that they were likely subjected to before publication. It argues that the real significance of these sources lies not in their broad and biased speculations concerning distant (Kurdish) Kizilbash origins, but in the casual observations and incidental details they unwittingly supply.

Keywords

Alevi – Qizilbash – Dersim – American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions – G. W. Dunmore

Hizrên li ser raporên mîsyonerî yên sedsala 19an wek çavkanî ji bo dîroka Qizilbaşan (ên kurd)

Raporên mîsyonerî qeydên modern ên ewil in ku bi eşkereyî behsa Qizilbaş an jî “kurdên Qizilbaş” bi taybetî dikin. Lewra, ew ji teref lêkolînerên li sehayê nisbeten bi berfirehî hatine bikaranîn, carna jî di asteke ne li gor bikêrhatî û ewlebûna wan de. Ev gotar li ser xebatên min ên berê ava bûye ku di wan de behsa talûkeya sûdwegirtina ji raporên mîsyoneran bêyî lêkolîneke rexneyî ya li hember pêşdarazî, sînorkirin û balkişandinên wan ên esasî tê kirin; û gotar bal dikêşîne ser bingeha nameyêke mîsyonerî ya orîjînal, pêvajoya edîtorî ya muhtemel a berî weşandina ku ev name tê re derbas dibin. Gotar, nîqaş dîke ku girîngiya rastîn ya van çavkaniyan ne di pêşqebûlên wan ên berfireh û alîgir yên di derbarê kokên (kurdên) Qizilbaş de ye lê di çavdêriyên wan ên rojane û teferuatên tesadufî de ye ku wan bêyî zanebûn gihandine.

Raman le raportî mizgênîderekaniê sedey 19 wek serçaweyek bo mêjuy (Kurdî) Qzilbaş

Raportî mizgênîderekaniê kontirîn tomarî serdemî ke be raşkawî nawî qzilbaşekaniê hênabêt û betaybetîş “qzilbaşê kurdekan”. Leberewe, be rêjeyekî frawan û hendêkar ta astî neguncan legell bawerrpêkrawî û sûdmendî ew serçawane, lelayan twêjeraniê ew bware sûdyan lêwergîrawe. Em wtare leser bnemay karêkî pêşûtrim bunyadinrawe ke derbarey metrisîy bekarbirdnî raportî mizgênîderekane bê ewey wku pêwîst hellsengandinêkî rexnegrane bikrêt bo layengîrîy zigmakîyane û snurdarêtî ew mizgênîderane, we leser bnemay nameyekî esllî mizgênîderêk, tîşk dexate ser prosey paknuskirdin ke pêdeçêt mizgênîderekaniê pêş blawkirdnewe rûberrûy bûbnewe. Miştumrî ewe dekat ke bayexî rasteqîney em serçawane le xemllandinî giştî û layengîrîyaneyan lemerr rîşey dûrî qzillbaşî (kurdî)ewe nayet, bellku lew serince labela û zanîyarye xelletênerane daye ke ewan beanqest dawiyane.

Sey çimeyanê tarîxê (kurdanê) qizilbaşan, raporê mîsyoneranê seserra 19. ser o tefekurî

Qeydê modernê tewr verênî yê ke bi hewayo eşkera qalê qizilbaşan û bitaybetî qalê kurdanê qizilbaşan kenê, raporê mîsyoneran ê. Coka nê raporî hetê cigêrayoxanê nê warî ra hetê nîsbetî ra hende ameyî xebitnayene ke ge-gane goreyê bawerbarî û feydeyê înan sînorê qebulî ra zî vîyartêne. Na meqale xebata min a verên a ke mi derheqê tehlukeyanê xebitnayîşê raporê mîsyoneran yê bê rexnegirîya tehqîqê cidî yê terefgirî û sînorarîya înan de kerdbî, aye ser o virazîyaya. Na meqale pê bingeyê mektubêka mîsyonerêk a orîjînale bale ancena prosesê înan ê edîtoryalî ser ke bi ihtîmalêk weşanîyayîş ra ver pêro nê prosesî ro vîyartêne ra. Na xebate nê fikrî dana munaqeseyî ro ke girîngîya nê çimeyan a raştikêne, pêardîşanê înan ê hîra û terefgîran derheqê ristimê (kurdanê) qizilbaşan ê dûrî de nîya, la observasyonanê eleladeyan û teferuatan ê ke mîsyoneran bi tesadufî dayî, înan de ya.

Introduction¹

For historians of such marginalised groups as the (Kurdish) Kizilbash,² the dearth of sources is an unfailing problem. It is, therefore, not entirely surprising that the mid-nineteenth-century reports of the American Protestant missionaries mentioning the (Kurdish) Kizilbash have received a significant degree

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- 1 The Kizilbash (Turkish, Kızılbaş) were the forefathers of the modern-day Alevis, who constitute the second largest faith community in Turkey. Together with the kindred Bektashi order, they make up about 15% of the country's population.
 - 2 There is an ongoing debate concerning the boundaries of the Kurdish identity, with the main issue revolving around the question of whether or not to subsume Kirmanjki/Zazaki speakers under that category. Without weighing in on one or the other side of this divisive debate, which has clear political implications, I will use Kurdish-ness in two senses here: as a linguistic category and as an ethnic identity. As a linguistic category, Kurdish, specifically its Kurmanji dialect in the case of the Kizilbash, is separate from the Kirmanjki/Zazaki language that is spoken by the majority of the Kizilbash in the Dersim region (where Kurmanji Kurdish is the second most spoken language). However, despite their linguistic distinctiveness, Kirmanjki/Zazaki speakers are often identified as ethnic Kurds by outsiders, and some in fact also self-identify as such. Reflecting this tendency, the missionary reports concerning the broader Dersim region, which this piece primarily focuses on, make no differentiation between Kurmanji and Kirmanjki/Zazaki speakers, all being categorised as "Kizilbash Kurds". In this article, therefore, whenever "Kurdish" is used in the sense of an ethnic identity (as opposed to a linguistic category), it is understood as including both Kurmanji and Kirmanjki/Zazaki speakers.

of attention by researchers in the field, especially since the Alevi Cultural Revival of the late 1980s and early 1990s, sometimes at levels disproportionate to their reliability and usefulness.³ In an earlier article, I commented on the perils of the missionary reports' utilisation without sufficient critical scrutiny of their context and content, highlighting various inherent biases and limitations within them as they appeared in the *Missionary Herald* (hereafter "MH"), the official bulletin of the Boston-based American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (hereafter "ABCFM"). Focusing on the story of Ali Gako,⁴ a Kurdish Kizilbash tribal chief in the Dersim region who allegedly converted to Protestantism, I warned against treatments of the relevant reports as if they were deposits of raw facts. Far from being neutral or accurate, these reports, I argued, ought to be understood as textual constructs fraught with many distortions, and critical omissions and additions reflective of the missionaries' own religio-cultural assumptions and evangelistic interests.⁵

What prompted me to write this follow-up is a hand-written copy of one of the earliest samples of these reports, dated 1858, of which I became aware only recently. The report, or letter, in question has been preserved in the American Board Archives in Istanbul.⁶ Its author, G. W. Dunmore, was the American missionary who first "discovered" the Kizilbash (Kurds), and who was also the most enthusiastic proponent of proselytising among them. About him and his missionising efforts, including his interactions with Ali Gako, I spoke relatively extensively in my aforementioned article. Dunmore's letter in question, the original and transcription of which is included in the appendix, is interesting in that, when read in comparison to his published reports, it throws light on the (extra-authorial?) editorial interventions the latter apparently were subjected to prior to publication. This issue, which I could not adequately address

3 To the best of my knowledge, the first researcher to use the missionary reports in the wake of the Alevi Cultural Revival was Mehmet Bayrak, who published some excerpts from them with little critical analysis in his *Bayrak* (1997). Another researcher to make extensive use of the missionary reports without subjecting them to adequate criticism is Kieser (2011). For a more recent example of the use of missionary records in Alevi studies, see Çakmak (2019: Chapter 3).

4 The word transcribed as "Gako" by Dunmore and other missionaries is not a name, but a term of respectful address for men older than the addresser. It is derived from the root *kāk* or *kak*, meaning "older brother;" in Kurdish (Chyet, c.2003). A derivative of this same root, "Keko", was also used in the past as a term of respectful address for Alevi dedes, which also seems to be the case here with "Ali Gako".

5 Karakaya-Stump (2004); originally published in Turkish (Karakaya-Stump, 2002).

6 Dunmore (1858). I thank Gültekin Uçar for informing me of this letter, a digital copy of which is available online from the Salt Research website. Uçar himself makes use of it in his book (Uçar, 2019).

in my first article that relied exclusively on the printed reports from MH, will serve as a point of departure for revisiting the hazards of taking the missionary accounts of the (Kurdish) Kizilbash at face value without proper contextualisation and judicious analysis.

Such critical considerations are, of course, in different ways true for all accounts, and do not automatically render the missionary reports immaterial for Kizilbash history; they are simply to underscore the necessity of keeping a duly critical eye when using them as historical sources. When utilised properly, these reports are useful, most obviously, for shedding light on the 19th century encounters between the Protestant evangelists and the Kizilbash, and other historical developments that these encounters catalysed or reflected (Karakaya-Stump, 2004). Additionally, and more importantly for purposes of this article, the missionary reports are significant in that they are the earliest modern records to explicitly mention the Kizilbash, and the “Kizilbash Kurds” in particular. Given the rarity of sources on the subject otherwise, it is a worthwhile exercise to test the potential of these reports for supplying useful insights about the (Kurdish) Kizilbash beyond their encounters with the missionaries, especially regarding their mode of religiosity, which is what the latter mainly focused on in their field reports. Thus, besides highlighting the editorial process that the missionary reports were apparently subjected to before publication in MH, another aim of the present article is to explore this possibility, namely the degree to which reading them closely and “against themselves” might contribute to an understanding of the historical (Kurdish) Kizilbash identity and religiosity at the time of their initial encounters with the Protestant evangelists. In doing so, I will try to show that the missionary reports’ real significance for historians of (Kurdish) Kizilbash history lie not in their broad and biased speculations concerning distant Kizilbash origins, for which they are typically cited, but in the casual observations and incidental details they unwittingly supply.

Contextualising the Significance of the Missionary Accounts for the History and Historiography of the (Kurdish) Kizilbash

In mainstream historiography, Kizilbashism is typically perceived as an essentially Turkmen phenomenon. This is so despite the fact that a substantial portion of the present-day claimants of the Kizilbash heritage, namely the Alevi, are Kurdish or Kirmanjki/Zazaki speaking.⁷ One reason for this incongruity

⁷ A common estimate in the literature puts the percentage of Kurdish and Kirmanjki/Zazaki speaking Alevi at around 15–20% of the Alevi population; my personal impression in the

between the historians' (mis)conception of a chiefly Turkmen Kizilbash milieu and the ethno-linguistic plurality of present-day Alevis is, no doubt, early-twentieth-century Turkish historian Fuad Köprülü's influential theory of Kizilbashism/Alevism (together with that of the kindred Bektashi order) as the quintessential manifestation of "heterodox" Turkish folk Islam in Anatolia, the roots of which Köprülü placed in some distant past in Turkic Central Asia (Karakaya-Stump, 2012–2013; Dressler, 2013).

Besides the influence of Köprülü's thinking, which for long has obscured for historians the presence of non-Turkmen Kizilbash, there is yet another reason for this discrepancy that involves various shortcomings of the conventional sources that has so far received much less attention, and that therefore requires further elaboration. Both the Ottoman and Safavid imperial sources, on which historians typically rely, present a top-down perspective of the Kizilbash phenomenon, and so are also restricted in terms of their thematic, chronological, and geographical coverage. Focusing mainly on the acute phase of the Ottoman-Safavid conflict during the first half of the sixteenth century, these imperial sources speak of the Kizilbash primarily in connection to two issues: one, the challenge they posed to Ottoman rule in Anatolia through their various uprisings, which for the most part occurred in southwestern and central Anatolian provinces; two, the support they supplied to the early Safavid religio-political enterprise by forming as they did the Safavids' initial fighting force. In both contexts, the sixteenth-century Ottoman and Safavid sources tend to bring to the fore the role of a set of Turkmen tribes or tribal confederations, such as the Tekelü, Şamlu, Rumlu, and Ustaclu, with little if any explicit references to Kurdish or Kirmanjki/Zazaki-speaking Kizilbash groups (Sümer, 1992; Reid, 1983).⁸

The virtual absence of Kurdish and Kirmanj/Zaza Kizilbash populations in the conventional imperial sources from the sixteenth century, in which the Kizilbash otherwise occupy an important place, has to do with the fact that, unlike the Turkmen Kizilbash, their Kurdish and Kirmanjki/Zazaki-speaking coreligionists were concentrated mostly in the eastern half of the Anatolian peninsula, a region that came under Ottoman control only in the years and decades following the Battle of Çaldıran in 1514. They were, in other words,

field, however, suggests a higher percentage. This impression is indeed supported by a survey carried out by Ali Aktaş in the late 1990s at Şahkulu Dergahı in Istanbul and during the annual Hacı Bektaş Veli Memorial Celebrations in Nevşehir. Of those surveyed, 18.05% and 13.37% self-identified respectively as ethnically Kurdish and Zaza; however, when asked about languages spoken in their families, 15.16% of the respondents cited Kurdish, and 40.30 cited Zazaki (Aktaş, 1998).

8 It is, of course, possible, in fact likely, that at least some of these tribes or tribal confederations were polyethnic, even if with a predominantly Turkmen presence.

not yet Ottoman subjects when such major Kizilbash uprisings as the Şahkulu and Nur Ali Halife, which are extensively treated in the primary and secondary literature alike, took place. Furthermore, some of these eastern provinces, most importantly Çemişgezek, were initially granted a semi-autonomous status by the Ottoman state, as were other predominantly Kurdish eastern provinces (Özoğlu, 1996: 16–20; Ünal, 1999: 19–26). Their later incorporation into Ottoman domains and partial autonomy, and better sheltered geographical location distant from the imperial centre most likely facilitated the preservation and resilience of the dissentient religious identities of the Kizilbash in these provinces more efficaciously than among their counterparts in west and central Anatolia, who suffered the most under the state's repressive measures through the course of the sixteenth century. Ironically, however, the same factors seem to have kept the Kizilbash in the eastern provinces beyond the purview of the sixteenth-century official Ottoman sources (not to mention their Safavid counterparts, which, for all periods, exhibit little interest in the Kizilbash outside of Safavid territories).

In the following two centuries, from about the early seventeenth century onwards, when the intensity of the Ottoman-Safavid rivalry subsided, and the Ottoman state shifted emphasis in its policy towards the Kizilbash from persecution to accommodation and situational toleration, the Kizilbash as such virtually disappear from the Ottoman official registers and from the written record in general (Karakaya-Stump, 2019: 292–295). They would eventually re-appear in the historical record in the nineteenth century; this time, however, more as objects of fascination and controversy in regards to their religious and ethnic origins than their role in the Ottoman-Safavid conflict. Therein lies the basic significance of the missionary reports: the first to “(re)discover” the Kizilbash in the nineteenth century were the American Protestant missionaries, whose initial encounter with the Kizilbash occurred circa the middle of the century in eastern Anatolian provinces, including the broader Dersim region, Sivas, Maraş, and Malatya.

It was on the basis of some relatively sporadic encounters in these regions, spanning less than 50 years, between 1855 and 1892, and mediated mostly by local converts of Armenian origin, that the Protestant evangelists developed various bold claims concerning the religious and racial origins of the Kizilbash. Excited about the possibility of extending their proselytising efforts beyond local Christians to also include this newly discovered “peculiar people” and eager to supply moral and legal justification for doing so, the Protestant missionaries portrayed the Kizilbash in their field reports as crypto-Christians who had been made Muslim in name only through the force of the sword. They accordingly described the Kizilbash religion as a syncretistic composite of

Christian and pagan elements overlaid with an Islamic veneer, and its adherents as people ready to embrace the Christian faith. However, while the missionaries' interest in these communities rapidly diminished in tandem with their dwindling hopes of a possible Kizilbash conversion, their framing of the Kizilbash religion on the basis of the notion of syncretism would make a far-reaching impact on the perception of Kizilbashism in popular and scholarly literature alike.

To make better sense of this point, we have to note that the missionaries' ideas concerning the Kizilbash religion, which were to be picked up and repeated by a number of early Western travellers and scholars, also spurred a revival of interest in these communities among the contemporary Ottoman political and intellectual establishment (Karakaya-Stump, 2004: 348–350). The latter were well aware of the missionaries' activities in the empire's territories, and, in all appearances, followed closely their interactions with the Kizilbash. It is for this reason no coincidence that soon after the formation of first contacts between the Protestant evangelists and the Kizilbash, during the second half of the nineteenth century, the Kizilbash would also re-enter the state's spotlight. This was a time when the Ottoman officials were growing increasingly suspicious of its non-Muslim and non-Sunni subjects as potential fifth columns in the face of ever greater internal and external challenges to its territorial integrity, with their main anxiety at that moment revolving around the empire's eastern provinces. The Kurdish Kizilbash in these regions were a particular source of distress for the state: For, besides the missionaries' proselytising efforts among them, the Kurdish Kizilbash in the eastern provinces were also (although mostly unduly) suspected of cooperating with the rebellious Armenian groups. Driven by such concerns, and in an effort to reinforce the Islamic fabric of the Ottoman polity, the state hence initiated a number of counter-measures, including its own missionary program, conceptualized in official Ottoman discourse as “the rectification of beliefs” (*taṣḥīḥ-i i'tikād*), that aimed at bringing such “deviant” groups as the Kizilbash in line with Sunni normativity (Deringil, 1998: chapter 5; Akpınar, 2015: 215–225).

The efforts of the Ottoman state to assimilate the Kizilbash into the fold of Sunni Islam produced few tangible results. On the other hand, the missionaries' and other westerners' attribution of non-Islamic and non-Turkish provenance to the Kizilbash elicited a reaction with more enduring consequences among the proto-nationalist Ottoman intellectuals affiliated with the Young Turk movement, who now set out to generate their own narrative of Kizilbash history. The result was a new nationalist construct of Kizilbash origins that claimed the peculiar Kizilbash beliefs and ritual practices, which Western writers variously connected to Christianity or to pagan traditions of Anatolia, to be

remnants of ancient Turkish religions rooted in Central Asia, specifically shamanism.⁹ This Central Asia thesis, which was thus formulated in part to counter and replace missionaries' Christian-centric depictions of Kizilbashism, would find its most sophisticated and influential formulation in the works of Fuad Köprülü.¹⁰ Köprülü's ideas on the subject would soon acquire a paradigmatic status in the field in both the Turkish and international scholarship alike, and remain unchallenged for most of the twentieth century.

It was only in the wake of the Alevi cultural revival in the early 1990s, when debates on Kizilbash origins were rekindled after a long hiatus, that alternative narratives of varying scholarly quality critiquing and contesting the Köprülü paradigm were put forward. It was during the same period that the long-forgotten missionary reports on the (Kurdish) Kizilbash would be unearthed and used by individual researchers in the emerging fields of Alevi and Kurdish studies, in part as ammunition against Köprülü's ideas. Among these counter-narratives are, for instance, ones foregrounding the Kurdish-speaking Alevis that accordingly locate the source of various Kizilbash beliefs and ritual practices in ancient Mesopotamian and Iranian religions. Others connect Alevism to different repressed Christian "heresies" of Anatolia, or to a set of humanist and socialist values with no religious dimension of any kind.¹¹ Interestingly, however, Köprülü's Central Asia thesis, as well as the various recent counternarratives disputing it, share in common some fundamental features that are carried over from the mid-nineteenth-century missionaries' accounts of the Kizilbash religion. Not only do all of these accounts seek the roots of Kizilbashism/Alevism outside of Islam, as did the missionaries, but they all rely on the same problematic conceptualisation of the Kizilbash religion as a 'mixture' of some inherently incongruent components borrowed from diverse traditions. They, in other words, seem unable to break free from a fixation on primordial origins and essences in their treatment of the Kizilbash tradition, or forsake approaches based on such tenuous and malleable notions as syncretism and survival theories, two hallmarks of the missionaries' skewed thinking on the subject-matter (Karakaya-Stump, 2019: 8–14).

As this brief overview demonstrates, the missionaries' approach to the Kizilbash phenomenon has had a formative influence on current scholarly and

9 For complete collections of the relevant articles by Baha Said, Yusuf Ziya Yörükkan, and Hilmi Ziya Ülken that appeared in various periodicals in the 1920s, see Said Bey (2000); Yörükkan (2002); Ülken (2003).

10 Köprülü's most important and relevant works include Köprülü (repr. 1991); Köprülü (repr. 1993); Köprülü (repr. 1996).

11 For examples of such counter-narratives, most written by non-academic researchers and lacking in scholarly rigor, see Bender (1991); Çakmak (2013); Bulut (2007); Çınar (2007).

popular debates on Kizilbash identity and religion, framed largely in essentialist terms. Without a doubt, such debates, whether in the late 19th century or today, are important in and of themselves for offering insights into contemporary politics surrounding the Kizilbash identity. They are, however, of little help if one seeks to understand the experience of the Kizilbash phenomenon as a whole, and from an internal perspective. It is with this concern in mind that I will attempt below a close reading of Dunmore's letter. My aim in doing so is twofold: One, to expand further on my earlier efforts to deconstruct the missionary accounts of the Kizilbash religion by attending to their internal tensions and strategic silences; and two, to explore if, and to what degree, the various secondary details the missionaries supply in their reports may in fact help to elucidate features of the traditional (Kurdish) Kizilbash identity and religiosity prior to the onset of modern identity politics.

Mr. Dunmore's Letter: an Exercise in Reading against the Grain

There is no single report published in MH that overlaps with Dunmore's original letter from the year 1858 in its entirety (Dunmore, 1858; hereafter "Letter-1858").¹² There is, however, one appearing in the MH in 1857 (Dunmore, 1857; hereafter "Report-1857"), part of which corresponds closely in terms of content to the letter under consideration here.¹³ Two related themes are discussed in both of them, namely the religious and ethnic/racial origins of the Kizilbash (Kurds). Given their approximate dates and the overlaps in terms of their coverage, these two texts, both undersigned by Mr. Dunmore, lend themselves to an interesting comparison for purposes of showcasing the degree of editorial amendments these reports likely underwent before their appearance in MH.

It would be useful at this point to quote in full the relevant part of Report-1857 published in MH, which will subsequently be compared with Dunmore's original letter, Letter-1858:

12 Since there is no date on the original letter, it might be that 1858 is only an approximate dating by the archivist.

13 Just as this article was being sent in for publication, I became aware that several other original reports by Dunmore were made available online on the SALT research website, one of which appears to be Report-1857. Due to the lateness of this "discovery" I was unfortunately unable to study it for comparison with its published version.

And here allow me to give a few facts which I have culled from the many sayings respecting this peculiar people. I am satisfied, first, that they are descendants from a Christian stock, made nominal Moslems by the sword. For, although they are called Moslems, and in the presence of Turks declare themselves such, they have no sympathy with them, but on the contrary feel a deep hostility towards them. They do not receive the Koran, nor Mohammed as a prophet from God; but they do receive the gospel, and Christ (usually under the name of Ali*) as the Son of God. They do not observe any of the Moslem fasts and feasts, nor do they use Moslem prayers, nor practice their ablutions. Indeed they have nothing in common with the Turks, except when with Turks whom they fear. But they have a large book, called the *Bouyouruk*, which, as nearly as I can learn, is an eclecticism from the Old Testament scriptures, interspersed with their own traditions. They have also a book called *Yusef Bitab* (sic), book of Joseph, which, I am assured, contains portions of the New Testament. Beside their books, they have at least one of the Christian ordinances, viz., the Lord's supper, which they celebrate at stated periods, with more propriety, and by far more nearly in accordance with its original design, than the Armenians. Their sayists (sic) correspond to elders in evangelical churches, and they have a *Raiber*, or Bishop, invested with more than apostolic power.

[*footnote*] *Ali, they affirm, is only another name for Christ, and to elude the Turks.

This passage, compared to Letter-1858, is quite concise; naturally so, for it must have been edited and abridged before appearing in print. The two, however, are similar to one another in their basic characterisation of the Kizilbash as descendants of some ancient Christian groups in Anatolia who were forcefully, and only nominally, converted to Islam. Notwithstanding this commonality, a close look at the two texts reveal some seemingly minor but still meaningful differences, both in tone and in content, that go beyond a simple case of abridgment.

Most importantly, one discerns a discordance between the verdict of the Kizilbash as crypto-Christians in Dunmore's published report, and the relatively more ambiguous and tentative picture emerging from his original letter regarding the nature of their religion. A noteworthy aspect of Letter-1858 in this regard is the degree of Dunmore's genuine puzzlement, lurking below the surface of a general demeaning rhetoric, in the face of what he perceived as an unrelenting complexity/confusion of the Kizilbash religion and identity. Dunmore wrote:

The Kuzulbash are 1st Moslems; 2nd they are Christians; 3rd they are heathenish idolators; 4th they are eclectics of all religions; and 5th they have no religion!

How absurd as this seems, and ridiculously absurd as it really is, it is true, in a relative and qualified sense, as will appear in the sequel.

Compared to Report-1857, which emphasises Christianity as the single most formative component of Kizilbashism, and accordingly dismisses its Islamic aspect as no more than a facade, Dunmore in the above quoted introduction to Letter-1858 puts forward additional, seemingly mutually exclusive propositions to describe it, including its “Moslemism” and “eclecticism,” among others, each of which he then goes to discuss in greater detail in the rest of the letter.

Needless to say, Dunmore’s ultimate goal in Letter-1858, as in Report-1857, was to convince his readers that the Kizilbash are essentially a group of primitive Christians who profess to be Muslim only in the presence of the Turks. This was crucial for the missionaries to justify, morally and politically, the expansion of their proselytising efforts beyond the local Armenians to also include the Kizilbash. Such a justification was necessary for ensuring the support of the upper echelons of ABCFM, and that of the American and British governments, whose diplomatic backing the Protestant evangelists would need for the protection of their Anatolian mission in the likely scenario of the Ottoman state’s adverse reaction against such a move (Karakaya-Stump, 2004: 339).¹⁴ Despite that, in Letter-1858, Dunmore discloses certain observations that, inadvertently, complicates the very idea of the Kizilbash being Christians by heart, and Muslims by appearance only. For example, following his remarks on how the Kizilbash snubbed and never observed the formalities of normative Islam, he concludes the section of his essay concerning the “Moslemism” of the Kizilbash as follows:

[A Kizilbash individual’s] Moslemism consists in saying – “*La illaha il Allah, Mohamet Resul Allah*” – “No God but God and Mohamet is the Prophet of God”: or – “*Elhamder (sic) Allah Mussulman im*” “Thanks to God I am a Mussulman.”

...

14 While the *Islahat Fermani* (Imperial Reform Edict), promulgated in 1856, expanded religious freedoms, the Ottoman government interpreted it such that it would still not sanction Muslims changing religion, and tried to convince Western diplomats of the same interpretation (Deringil, 1998: 115–116).

The question naturally arises, if the Kuzulbash are not Moslems why are they called so? And why do they profess faith in the false prophet and his book?

These interesting details in Dunmore's letter, that the Kizilbash embraced and recited the *shahada*, that is the Islamic declaration of faith, and "profess[ed] faith in the false prophet and his book", logically weakens the idea of the Kizilbash as crypto-Christians, for they indicate the Kizilbashes' self-identification as (some kind of) Muslims even when not necessarily "in the presence of the Turks." The idea that the Kizilbash performed religious dissimulation simply to dodge the Turks also runs contrary to Dunmore's observation of their stigmatisation as "Kafir Kuzulbash" [infidel Kizilbash] by their neighbours. He remarks on this point when trying to construe the origins of the Sunni Kurds, who apparently in some places inhabited the same villages as their Kizilbash counterparts:

And we sometimes find Koordish villages thus divided between the two sects, a part having yielded to the pressures, and for the sake of expediency have become orthodox, while others adhere to the peculiar notions of their fathers, and prefer to hear the opprobrious name "*Kafir Kuzulbash*" rather than hypocritically keep the fast and repeat the stupid and tedious prayers of Turks.

The notable absences of these and similar elements in the published reports suggests the possibility of a deliberate effort to edit out (possibly by someone other than Dunmore himself) such contradictory data before their appearance in MH. The same concern seems to underline the insistence in Report-1857 on the feeble contention that Ali (Arabic, 'Ali; cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammed and the first of the Shi'i Imams), whose unmistakable centrality in Alevi devotion apparently did not escape Dunmore, was simply another name of Christ. Explaining away this key Islamic component of Kizilbashism was apparently deemed so important that a special footnote was added to the relevant passage from Report-1857 cited above, reiterating and reaffirming the assertion that Ali was "only another name for Christ" used "to elude the Turks."

In a similar vein, one discerns a telling incongruity between Report-1857 and Letter-1858 in terms of their respective characterisation of *Buyruk*, which Dunmore calls a "book," but which is in fact the name given to various overlapping collections of Kizilbash/Alevi religious texts (Karakaya-Stump, 2012).

In the above excerpt from Report-1857, Dunmore describes *Buyruk* as “an eclecticism from the Old Testament scriptures, interspersed with [the Kizilbashes’] own traditions.” He further adds that “[the Kizilbash] have also a book called *Yusef Bitab* (*sic*), book of Joseph, which, I am assured, contains portions of the New Testament”. In contrast to Report-1857, his comments on the subject in Letter-1858 are overall much more dismissive, with no mention of an alleged link between the *Buyruk* and the Bible:

They have no books except the *Bouyourook*, which I have never been able to get hold of; and though I have had the permission of its perusal, a great many times, I could never find the man in actual possession of it. Whenever I went wher[e] it was, it was always sure to be somewhere else. Such a book is in existence, however, for I have seen a man who has seen it. One of our native helpers who has read it assures me that it contains little else than jargon(?) [and] a collection of myths and fables. He says – “it is altogether *bosh*.” It is a small book, written in the Turkish character, and kept with the greatest possible care from the hands of Turks.

The most conspicuous difference in their characterisation of the *Buyruk* between Report-1857 and Letter-1858 is the lack of reference in the latter to the Old Testament as one of its sources, and the absence of any mention of a second book, “the book of Joseph” (the existence of which we cannot confirm) that allegedly contains portions of the New Testament. In Letter-1858, Mr. Dunmore rather states, based on some unidentified person’s testimony, that “[the *Buyruk*] is altogether *bosh*” that is, “empty” or “worthless.” Also notable here is his additional remark that it is a text written in Turkish (characters), a fact potentially complicating the claim of its origins in the Christian Bible, which therefore might have been left out in Report-1857.

Such discrepancies and contradictions between Report-1857 and Letter-1858 that are easily detectable serve to highlight the ways in which the editorial process they were likely subjected to shaped the final reports in the MH that aimed, most obviously, at trivialising the Islamic aspect of Kizilbashism. When combined with various other incidental details and observations supplied by Dunmore in his original letter, they also, unwittingly, affirm the basic Islamic framework within which traditional Kizilbash/Alevi identity was perceived by those who claimed it.

Focusing on the remainder of Letter-1858, we gain further insights into the Kizilbash people’s own perception of their religious tradition circa the mid-19th century. In this regard, Mr. Dunmore’s remarks concerning the “liberal

eclecticism” of the Kizilbash is most interesting in that they supply clues about certain distinctive aspects of Kizilbashism which set it apart not only from mainstream Islam, but also from Christianity.

For Dunmore, the Kizilbash had “a very extensive faith that can take in all religions”. It was this lack of exclusivity that rendered their tradition as less than a proper religion in the eyes of Dunmore. This undue “inclusivity” of the Kizilbash religion is conveyed, among other things, by their reverence to, not to mention divinisation of, all the Prophets:

It is evident that, while they profess to believe the prophets, they believe that each is, or was in his day, a manifestation and real personification of God. For they say – “Moses was God – and David was God – and Christ was God – and Ali was God – and Mohamet was God”! They have a favorite sort of conflict that shows rottenness in the foundations.

Still more, the Kizilbash held such blasphemous beliefs as the “transmigration of souls and even annihilation”:

Thus they have every thing [sic] like religion, with every shade of infidelity with transmigration of souls and even annihilation; and having every thing they really have nothing. As a system they have no religion at all: and thus by being too religious they became destitute of religion; and perhaps the name – Red-Head – is quite as appropriate as any by which they could be called.

For a self-righteous evangelist like Dunmore, such “inclusivism” by definition suggested a confused mix of incongruent elements from different traditions, and was, therefore, deemed as utterly problematic. The root cause of this predicament of the Kizilbash, according to Dunmore, was their state of ignorance which allowed them to “be driven about, as they are, by every wind of doctrine”:

such a people ... in being destitute of learning, destitute of schools and places of worship; destitute of books, and whose teachers, the priests themselves are not able to read, for none but the *Peer*, the *Rahiber* and a very few *imams* can read at all, should be destitute of any religious system, and be driven >about<, as they are, ~~about~~ by every wind of doctrine.

But what appeared to Dunmore as inauthenticity and a lack of consistency in thinking might well have had an internal logic of its own within the “profoundly

mystified philosophy and religion” of the Kizilbash, which he passingly notes at the outset, but explicitly avoids expanding on:

Without venturing on any speculations concerning them, or any vain attempts to explain, or to understand their profound mysteries, and their profoundly mystified philosophy and religion – which their learned ones assure us is quite hair-splitting, and even finer than a hair – we must content ourselves, for the present, with a few facts gathered from them by personal intercourse, and through others who live among them.

What were these “profound mysteries” of the Kizilbash, which, according to their “learned ones [were] even finer than a hair”? While Dunmore chooses not to engage with them directly, evidence, both internal and external to the text, allow us to conjecture that these included beliefs and ideas reflective of the heavily mystical and esoteric underpinning of Kizilbashism that, when looked closely, betray their provenance within the broader Sufi tradition.

To begin with their acceptance of all Prophets; this belief, to the extent it involves the acknowledgment of all Abrahamic prophets is, of course, part and parcel of the Islamic teaching that all Abrahamic religions share a common divine origin and contain a core belief in the same God. According to Dunmore, however, the Kizilbash also regarded Ali as one of the Prophets, and, moreover, attributed divinity to all of them. While Dunmore’s depiction of Kizilbashism in such simplistic terms as some sort of crude polytheism is in part intended for comic effect, it is also demonstrative of his facile understanding of the mystical dimensions of the Kizilbash faith. It is true that Ali is the central figure in Kizilbash/Alevi religiosity. However, the emic perception of Ali (which, ironically, is claimed to be another name of Christ in Report-1857), and in particular of his relationship with the Prophet Muhammad, draws on the esoteric doctrine of *nur Muhammadi*, according to which Ali and Muhammed are a single unified entity emanating from the Divine. This doctrine, as well as notions of “sainthood” and “sacredness” as projected by various Kizilbash beliefs and practices, are fundamentally informed by a monistic understanding of monotheism, which conceives of God as being pervasive throughout all creation. It is this image of the Divine as immanent and all-encompassing which underlines an array of specific Alevi teachings and maxims, such as the idea of the Perfect Man (*insan-ı kamil*) and Ali in particular as the locus of Divinity (*Hakk ademdedir*), the immortality of souls (*ölen tendir, canlar ölmez*) and the possibility of their transmigration from one body to another (*don deđiřtirmek*), and the kindred notion of *cyclical existence* (*devir*). Such a monistic interpretation of

monotheism conflicts with the common understanding in Islam that God is ontologically separate and independent from the world. Nonetheless, although considered by the orthodox-minded as highly suspect, even outright heretical, for its blurring of the boundary between Creator and creation, this monistic view of being has been present in Sufism, in one form or another, since its inception.

It is from the same “esoteric” angel, that one ought to understand one of the most interesting parts of Dunmore’s letter as a historical source: a Kizilbash maxim that he cites in its original Turkish to demonstrate their vision of God:

It runs thus Allah-

Bin yakadan bash geusterde, (*Bin yakadan baş gösterdi* / He revealed himself in different guises)¹⁵

Choku saldee geumana: (*Çoğu saldı gümana* / Throwing many into doubt)

Bir yakadan bash geuslesek(?), (*Bir yakadan baş gözlesek(?)* / If s/he instead had revealed himself/herself in a single guise)

Choku gelir imana! (*Çoğu gelir imana* / Many would come to believe [in God])

Dunmore’s interpretation of this maxim as an indication of the alleged Kizilbash belief that God made a “great mistake by sending so many prophets” is clearly off the mark. This maxim, different versions of which one can occasionally hear still today from older members of the Kizilbash/Alevi community in reference to Ali, instead communicates the esoteric reality that the unity of God is veiled from common human understanding due to the plurality of its manifestation in this world. As a corollary, it also imparts the idea that only a select group of people, such as the Kizilbash, can discern the essential unity of the “Universal Reality” (*Hakk*) amidst the multiplicity of earthly life, thus reflecting the view the Kizilbash held of their own uniqueness as true unitarians.

The same “universalist” mindset that comprehends all religions as different parochial expressions of the same ultimate “Reality” seems to have also shaped the perception of Protestantism on the part of at least some of the Kizilbash. The reaction of an unidentified Kizilbash person to Protestantism recorded by Dunmore is quite remarkable in this regard. Although the exact wording of the exchange, or perhaps the exchange itself, is, at least in part, likely a fabrication,

¹⁵ All translations are the author’s own.

it is still noteworthy as an explanation for why a Kizilbash person at the time would not consider converting to Protestantism:

One of their number once said to a Protestant – “you know that our religion is made up of all the religions in the world: And we thought that we could put your Protestantism into our dish – (meaning their religion) – without losing anything of our own; but when we put it in, **Protestantism** (sic) all our old religion spills over: Your Protestantism is entirely too exclusive for us!

Dunmore’s aim in relaying this exchange was no doubt to highlight, once again, the exclusivity of Protestantism, which for him was a *sine qua non* of any proper religion centred on a book. But reading from the other end, that is from the perspective of the Kizilbash speaker, one can derive from it a very different meaning: that the exact same quality, namely its exclusivity, which for Dunmore proves the superiority of Protestantism could also be seen as its parochialism, hence as its main flaw. This exchange is noteworthy for showing how the Kizilbash tradition could theologically hold its own in relation to other, more institutionalised religions. It is also interesting for suggesting that the often referenced “inclusivist” teachings of the Kizilbash were not simply a side-effect of an unintentional absorption of influences from any “wind of doctrine” that came their way. Rather, these teachings were clearly underscored by a fundamental belief that different religions are little more than particular expressions of the same universal essence. This esoteric wisdom, it would seem, enabled the congruous coexistence within the same tradition of what to Dunmore, as to many other outsiders, seemed to be contradictory elements.

While the Kizilbash religion was the main concern of Dunmore, he was also interested in making sense of its intersection with Kurdish identity. As mentioned earlier, the Protestant evangelists’ field of activities in Anatolia overlapped to a significant degree with areas of high Kurdish and Kirmanj/Zaza Kizilbash concentration (where the local Armenians, the missionaries’ main clients, also happened to live), with smaller Turkmen Kizilbash groups dispersed among them.

There are a few notable points regarding the ethnic/linguistic plurality of the Kizilbash as reflected in Dunmore’s letter. For starters, Dunmore does not distinguish between Kurdish and Kirmanjki/Zazaki-speaking Kizilbash, which suggests that there was perhaps no such overt differentiation on the ground between the two groups. Furthermore, the fact that most Kizilbash he encountered, including the alleged Protestant-convert Ali Gako, were Kurdish, led him to suspect, erroneously, that all Kurds were originally Kizilbash, and

that all Kizilbash were originally Kurdish. The latter, in turn, were purported to be “descendants from the ancient Carducians” mentioned in *Anabasis*, the most-well known work of the ancient Greek historian Xenophon composed in the fourth century BC.¹⁶

Dunmore, thus, postulates, by way of explaining away the Turkish-speaking Kizilbash, that those “found near cities and large towns, or who have become owners and tillers of land ... have exchanged their mother tongue [i.e. Kurdish] for the Turkish”. Dunmore’s conflation of Kizilbash and Kurdish identities also had to do with the intense animosity that he observed between the Kizilbash and the “Turks,” not realising, of course, how “Turkishness” at the time was closely intertwined with the Sunni-Muslim identity in popular imagination, though more so in certain parts of the empire than others.¹⁷ Whatever Dunmore’s misunderstandings and sweeping generalisations concerning the ethnic identity of the Kizilbash, it is clear that most of his observations concerning the Kizilbash religion arose from his interactions with groups and individuals whose native language was Kurdish or Kirmanjki/Zazaki. Despite that, however, virtually all the indigenous Alevi terminology and maxims that he cites are in Turkish, including the name that the Kizilbash purportedly gave to their religion, “‘the sweet vine’ – *tatlu tevek*” (which actually makes little sense, and is thus probably a misunderstanding). While this might in part be a result of the fact that Dunmore and his guides communicated with the local people exclusively in Turkish, it is still noteworthy in so far as it aligns with a common idea that Turkish has been the primary liturgical language of all the Kizilbash, including those of Kurdish and Kirmanj/Zaza background.

16 As with the Kizilbash, the missionaries were among the first in modern times to speculate about the origins of the Kurds, typically on the basis of ancient Greek historical narratives, and Xenophon’s *Anabasis* in particular. Their various claims, including a direct connection between the Kurds and the Medes (a group also mentioned by Xenophon), would later also be picked up, and to some extent internalised, by Kurdish nationalist circles. For the missionaries’ claim that the Kurds are descended from the Medes, see, for example, “For Young People: The Koormanji Koords” *Missionary Herald*, January issue, 1902: 46.

17 It is worth noting in this regard that Mr. Richardson, a fellow missionary and contemporary of Dunmore based in Arapgir, makes the exact opposite observation concerning the ethnic/linguistic background of the Kizilbash: “It is quite certain that the Kuzzel-bash are not Koords, since they do not use the Koordish language, and are very much hated by them”. “Arabkir. Letter from Mr. Richardson, July 14, 1856” *Missionary Herald*, October issue, 1856: 298.

Conclusion

The 19th-century missionary accounts, by virtue of being the first known written sources on the (Kurdish) Kizilbash in the modern period, carry an intrinsic value for researchers in the field. While using them, however, one has to bear in mind that these field reports were written primarily for ABCFM in Boston with the goal of conveying to the church members at large the achievements of the missionaries. They are, therefore and naturally, distorted by missionaries' own religio-cultural assumptions and evangelistic interests. They often miss or ignore the actual focus of Kizilbash religiosity and identity, or contain only superficial, if not entirely inaccurate, accounts of their specific beliefs and rituals which minimise their usefulness for scholarly reconstructions of the Kizilbash tradition. Despite that important caveat, the various incidental and secondary details the missionary reports supply, especially when these are combined and cross-checked with internal Alevi sources, can help debunk some misconceptions about, and enrich our understanding of, traditional Kizilbash identity and religiosity prior to the commencement of large-scale urbanisation and modernisation processes in the mid-twentieth century.

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Appendix: Transcription and Facsimile of Letter-1858

The Kuzulbash

(Pg. 1) The Kuzulbash are certainly a very peculiar people. To give anything like an intelligent, definite and correct idea of them or their religion would be about as difficult a task as was ever undertaken by a sane man. For they embody more contradictions and absurdities, probably, than any other people or sect of religionists in Turkey; and perhaps more than all others together. As a people, they are the most wild, ferocious, and warlike and cruel; and the most kind and humane; they are the greatest thieves and robbers, and the most honest, honorable and noble; they are the most ignorant, and the most intellectual; the most religious and the most destitute of religion; in a word they are the best and the worst class of natives that I have found in Turkey. They are so much like the cracked kettle of worldwide fame, that one can’t avoid the comparison – which the lawyer proposed to make good by proving 1st that the kettle was whole when his client returned it; 2 it was cracked when he borrowed it; and 3 he never had the kettle!

The Kuzulbash are 1st Moslems; 2nd they are Christians; 3rd they are heathenish idolators; 4th they are eclectics of all religions; and 5th they have no religion!

How absurd as this seems, and ridiculously absurd as it really is, it is true, in a relative and qualified sense, as will appear in the sequel.

Without venturing on any speculations concerning them, or any vain attempts to explain, or to understand their profound mysteries, and their profoundly mystified philosophy and religion – which their learned ones assure us is quite hair-splitting, and even finer than a hair– we must content ourselves, for the present, with a few

facts gathered from them by personal intercourse, and through others who live among them.

(Pg. 2) 1st: Who and what are the Kuzulbash?

Our knowledge of them is very imperfect. They are a sect of nominal Moslems – as a people *sui generis* – scattered over an extensive region between the Taurus range and the Black Sea; and for the most part found in the vicinities of Kharpoot, Arabkir and Sivas.

The opprobrious name Kuzulbash, or Red-Head, is applied to them by Turks, probably, on account of the color of their turbans, which are quite uniform, and for the most part red. They reject this name, however, and call themselves “the sweet vine” – *tatlu tevek*.

Of their ancestry we have no positive knowledge. There is some evidence however that they are of Persian origin; and it may yet turn out that they are the same with the Persians in nationality and religion. Thin tall, athletic and noble frames, their manly and marked features, their peculiarly dignified mien, together with their heterodox Mohammedanism, are all in favor of this conjecture. In their language also – which is for the most part Koordish – the Persian descent is prominent if not predominant. Indeed we are assured by one who is regarded as a good Persian scholar, that the language of the Kuzulbash Koords is little else than the Persian modified and corrupted: and probably the same is true of Koordish generally. The Turks, moreover, say that the Persians are all Kuzulbash, and these are a part of them. Perhaps they are descendants from the ancient Carducians mentioned in Xenophon's *Anabasis* as most uncomfortable foes, and who, as Gibbon assures us “occupied the large mountainous territory east of the Tigris, and preserved for many ages their manly freedom in the heart of the despotic monarchies of Asia, and whose posterity, called Curds, (Pg. 3) acknowledged the nominal sovereignty of the Turkish Sultan”. The Kuzulbash of Turkey are Koords, or plainly of Koordish origin. Indeed the majority, I think, are nomadic tribes, for the most part occupying mountainous regions, in summer dwelling in tents and tabernacles, as their fathers did, and wintering in villages of crude huts, built mostly of stone and wood. Their chiefs however, often have large and respectable *konaks*.

They live in tribes very much like the North American Indians, and preserving a distinct nationality, they never intermarry with Turks or any other people.

Many of those found near cities and large towns, or who have become owners and tillers of land to any considerable extent, and in their habits made a respectable approximation to civilization, have exchanged their mother tongue for the Turkish, while others still retain it. But it is plain, I think, that the Turkish is not their vernacular, or at least not the language of their fathers. There is something in it that distinguishes them from Turks, though they seem to have perfect command of it. We sometimes find Kuzulbash villages near together, the one using Koordish and the other one using Turkish.

That they are not the original Turks is plain, I think, from the deadly hatred always everywhere existing between them and the Turks – more deadly and deep rooted than is found between any other people. The Turk shows his estimate of the Kuzulbash by declaring that he is outside of all religions and worse than a Jew, while the Kuzulbash Koord would not relish his favorite meal of bread yoghoort (*sic*) and onions half so much as a good chance to dispatch a Turk.

They say – “we have Abraham to our father, through Ishmael who was the *Korban*, and not Isaac; and they thus claim unbroken lineage from the father of the faithful; and doubtless – (Pg.4) they might add – “though Abraham be ignorant of us, and Israel acknowledge us not”.

Whether the Koords were all Kuzulbash originally or not, it is impossible to determine satisfactorily. The fact that but few of them observe the Moslem rites, and the most orthodox are loose and careless in their religious performances, is evidence, so far as it goes, in favor of this conjecture. Moreover, we sometimes find whole villages in Kuzulbash regions that have gone over from them to the orthodox Moslems, under pressures of fear and straitened circumstances within a comparatively short period. And we sometimes find Koordish villages thus divided between the two sects, a part having yielded to the pressures, and for the sake of expediency have become orthodox, while others adhere to the peculiar notions of their fathers, and prefer to hear the opprobrious name “*Kafir Kuzulbash*,” rather than hypocritically keep the fast and repeat the stupid and tedious prayers of Turks.

2(?) *Their Religion*: While they are nominal Moslems, and from fear of the Turks they profess faith in the Koran and its author, they perform none of the rites or ceremonies of Mohametans. As for fasts, they ridicule them and never find time to observe them, and the feasts, they care nothing for. The only rite that they observe in common with Turks is that of circumcision; which, of essence, is no more Mohametan than it is Jewish or heathenish. True, when they live in near proximity to Turks, they sometimes have a mosque in their village to accommodate their orthodox neighbors when they happen to be burdened with them, but they never, or almost never go to that place of prayer themselves: and I don't believe that one Kuzulbash of a thousand could, for his life, go through with the orthodox genuflections of a Moslem, much less with the prayers. (Pg. 5) His Moslemism consists in saying – “*La illaha il Allah, Mohamet Resul Allah*” – “No God but God and Mohamet is the Prophet of God”: or – “*Elhamder (sic) Allah Mussulman im*” “Thanks to God I am a Mussulman.”

It is evident that, while they profess to believe the prophets, they believe that each is, or was in his day, a manifestation and real personification of God. For they say – “Moses was God – and David was God – and Christ was God – and Ali was God – and Mohamet was God”! They have a favorite sort of conflict that shows rottenness in the foundations. It runs thus Allah-

Bin yakadan bash geusterde,
 Choku saldee geumana:
 Bir yakadan bash geuslese(?),
 Choku gelir imana!

The import of this is that "Allah made a great mistake in sending so many prophets; for the result is that the mass of men are left in doubt as to which is the true (*sic*); whereas if he had sent but one, they would have believed him!

They have no books except the *Bouyourook*, which I have never been able to get hold of; and though I have had the permission of its perusal, a great many times, I could never find the man in actual possession of it. Whenever I went wher[e] it was, it was always sure to be somewhere else. Such a book is in existence, however, for I have seen a man who has seen it. One of our native helpers who has read it assures me that it contains little else than jargon(?) <and> a collection of myths and fables. He says – "it is altogether *bosh*." It is a small book, written in the Turkish character, and kept with the greatest possible care from the hands of Turks.

(Pg. 6) The question naturally arises, if the Kuzulbash are not Moslems why are they called so? And why do they profess faith in the false prophet and his book? In Washington Irving's "Mohamet and his successors", we find the following: – "Beside the Koran or written law, a number of precepts and apologies which casually fell from the lips of Mohamet were collected after his death from ear-witnesses, and transcribed into a book called the Sonna or oral law. This is held equally sacred with the Koran by a sect of Mohametans thence called Sonnites; others reject it as apocryphal: these last are termed Schiites. Hostilities and persecutions have occasionally taken place between these sects almost as virulent as those which between Catholic and Protestants have disgraced Christianity. The Sonnites are distinguished by white, the Schiites by red turbans; hence the latter have received from their antagonists the affectation of Kuzilbashi, or Red-Heads."

How it may be that the Kuzulbash found in Turkey are the same as those mentioned by Irving; that the Sonna has since received the name *Bouyourook*, and the Schiites were what are now called *Sayits*. There are other facts however that favor the opinion that the Kuzulbash are descendants from a Christian stock – from superior independent tribes who had embraced Christianity and were brought under the Mahometan sword: and once nominal Moslems, the sword drawn over their heads has kept them in partial subjection. Except in the presence of Turks, whom they evidently fear more than they fear God, they are free to declare their faith in Christ as the Son of God, and the Saviour of the world. They believe in his incarnation, crucifixion (*sic*) and atoning death. On this point I have been particular to sound them as much as possible, and am inclined to think that they have quite as near an approximation to actual belief as they have in any other Christian doctrine. True many of them say that Ali too was

(Pg. 7) the Son of God; but they also say that Christ and Ali are one and the same, and that they use the latter name to delude the Turks; a thing not very improbable, when we consider that their lives were constantly in peril, and that as Ali was Mohamet's son in law and intimate friend, by such a shift they might avoid the vengeance of their merciless foes without a complete abandonment of their Soul. They say – “we love all the prophets, but we love Ali most of all.” And if they are asked who Ali is, they reply – “he is the Son of God”. ‘But who is Christ?’ “He is the Son of God.” But they do not affirm this of any of the prophets. They predicate of Christ or Ali, above miraculous conception and Divine Sonship: and yet they say of all the prophets that they were “God manifest in the flesh.” On this great mysterious doctrine – God in Christ – their ideas are evidently confused and they multiply words without knowledge, in which they are not alone. They assent to, or profess to believe all the fundamental doctrines of the Gospel; and that the New Testament is the most authoritative of all books, and the *Bouyourook* is next to it! They hold that the teachings of Christ's 12 Apostles – called *imams* – are authoritative, and moreover that their own ecclesiastics (*sic*) are not only endowed with authority by Apostolic succession, but they have it by lineal descent! And not only so, but they have all the distinct sects which such superiority and distinction would naturally if not necessarily secure to them. While one says – “I am of Paul and another – I am of Apolus”;¹⁸ they are carnal and walk as carnal men. They preserve these distinctions with remarkable carefulness, so that ecclesiastics (*sic*) often have to travel a long distance to attend to their flocks. Their ecclesiastics (*sic*) consists of three distinct classes or grades. The head of all is called the *Peer* and lives near Sivas: the second rank is called the *Rahiber* and resides in the Dersim Mountains, 10 hours from Kharpoot: the 3rd class are the *Sayits* or common priests, and are found in great numbers everywhere, and sometimes come from the eastern villages.

(Pg. 8) The people commonly call them *Dedeh* – a name so nearly like that applied to the Armenian priests – *Derder* – that I am inclined to believe that it is one and the same, as their office so nearly corresponds to theirs. But what the particular business or office of the *Peer* and *Rahiber* is I have never been able to ascertain. Whether they are designed to correspond to the Bishop and Archbishop or the Patriarch and Catholicos of the Armenians; or to the Pope and cardinals of Rome, or to all these together with the Sheikh-ul-Islam of Moslem faith, if known at all is known only to themselves. Like most other parts of their mysterious religion, this is kept so far as possible, a profound secret.

18 Quote from the Bible, 1 Corinthians 3:4.

Another thing in favour of the supposition that they had a Christian origin is the interesting fact that they celebrate the Lord's Supper. This is done, as I am assured with even more than primitive simplicity. They come together at one of their houses, both males and females, quietly seating themselves in perfect order, inclining their heads forward remain sometime in silent meditation; after which their priests pass around with bread giving to each a piece or *lokema*, and this is followed by the cup containing wine, when they have it, otherwise water is used instead. After the distribution of bread and the cup, they pass silently out one by one, having eaten as they suppose the very body, and drank the very blood of the Son of God, and thus become one with him! They thus have transubstantiation substantiated in themselves, with the additional absurdity of having become deified in the mystical process!

But who are admitted to this pact of love as they themselves call it? Not everyone (*sic*); but only such as are counted(?) worthy. If one has a quar[r]el against any, the parties must first become reconciled. If any has committed theft or robbery, or has wronged his brother, he must make confession to his priest, and perhaps make good the injury. It is quite evident that they have something like the (Pg. 9) Confessional, and their *Sayits*, like the Armenian Papal priests are paid for exercising their apostolic power of binding and unbinding the sheep and the goats of their flocks. But their feast of love is obscured with closed doors, so guarded that none but their own fraternity can possibly enter; and an attempt to force an entrance would be rewarded by certain death. And yet love is the fundamental principle in their religion; and "charity covereth a multitude of sins."¹⁹ They will sit and hear you discourse on love as many consecutive hours as you please to entertain them; and I am decidedly of the opinion that they really cherish and manifest more love among themselves, and less of deception and intrigue, than any other Oriental sect or people, except those who have been brought under the influence and power of the Gospel. Though they are desperate and merciless to their enemies, they are true and magnanimous as friends. It is an essential part of their religion to defend and protect their friends even to the death. And I would not ask for a truer friend or a more reliable protector than I have found among the wild Kuzulbash Koords. They say – "a man who does not protect his friend, and is not willing to lay down his life for a brother, does not love God."

They have more sympathy with, and love for Christians than they have for any others. As Moslems, of course, they must detest the worship of pictures and of all other created things; but we are assured that they do sometimes go into Armenian churches and prostrate themselves before these church idols: and more than this, they are known to worship sticks and stones, and especially huge trees. They say that some prophet or saint has doubtless sat beneath that tree, and therefore it is sacred! And with their remarkable notions of deified prophets, it would not be strange if they fancy

¹⁹ Quote from the Bible, Peter 4:8.

that by contact, they actually impart of their celestial nature to the old tree. I have been assured also that they worship the sun: and if they worship pictures and rocks and old trees, as I doubt not they do, it is no more remarkable that they worship the sun also, and even the moon and stars.

(Pg. 10) So much for their Moslemism, their Christianity and their heathenish idolatry: let us move then for a moment to their still more liberal eclecticism. Surely they are the most liberal religionists to be found anywhere. With their Mohametanism, Christianity and idolatry, you find mixed up and interwoven and conglomerated, atheism, pantheism, materialism, and every other absurdism (*sic*) that the benighted mind of mortal man is capable of inventing. One of their number once said to a Protestant – “you know that our religion is made up of all the religions in the world: And we thought that we could put your Protestantism into our dish – (meaning their religion) – without losing anything of our own; but when we put it in, Protestantism (*sic*) all our old religion spills over: Your Protestantism is entirely too exclusive for us!”

Thus they have every thing (*sic*) like religion, with every shade of infidelity with transmigration of souls and even annihilation; and having every thing (*sic*) they really have nothing. As a system they have no religion at all: and thus by being too religious they became destitute of religion; and perhaps the name – Red-Head – is quite as appropriate as any by which they could be called.

Why then, it may be asked do we hear so much of religious interest amongst the Kuzulbash? A native helper at Arabkir once said to me – “I have seen a great many Kuzulbash and have preached the Gospel to a great many; and I have not found so great faith, no not in Israel, as I find among them.”

And surely, we may say, it must be a very extensive faith that can take in all religions! But he was sincere and partly right, in making this assertion. Surely it is not strange that such a people – such outcasts (*sic*), whose hand is against every man's, (Pg. 11) while every man's hand is against them; being destitute of learning, destitute of schools and places of worship; destitute of books, and whose teachers, the priests themselves are not able to read, for none but the *Peer*, the *Rahiber* and a very few *imams* can read at all, should be destitute of any religious system, and be driven \langle about \rangle , as they are, about by every wind of doctrine; having no hope, and without God in the world. The marvel is rather, that we find among them so much mind, so much nobility of character, and so great freedom from the low vices of Turks and nominal Christians too, with such a readiness to listen to the truth, as we find among the Kuzulbash. For, among all the different religious sects of Turkey I have not found such readiness to hear the Word, with so little opposition, as amongst this strange and benighted people. They are the only people that have never refused me lodgings, and have never failed to welcome me to their houses, when they knew that I came to preach the Gospel to them. Nominal Christians often insult the preacher and deride his preaching; the Kuzulbash never. Uniformally (*sic*), when we go to their villages, they give us the best accommodations, and the best of every thing (*sic*) that their place affords; and it is sure to be

more abundant, cleaner, and better in every respect than we find elsewhere among filthy orientals. And after they have done all in their power for our comfort they gather about us and listen respectfully to the reading of God's Word and preaching; and when prayer is offered they are seen to observe silence, and often bowing the knee with us, at the close respond a loud amen!

In the regions of Sivas, Arabkir and Kharpoot, a goodly number of this people have heard the truth and have already become partially enlightened: Some are reading and searching the Scriptures for themselves, and have openly, boldly, and perhaps, sincerely and intelligently professed Protestant Christianity. And for this, some have been (Pg. 12) beaten, imprisoned, put in chains and driven into exile; while others have been shorn and shaven of their beards, have had their property confiscated, and have literally suffered the loss of all things, professedly for Christ's sake and the Gospel's.

One of their noblest chiefs – Ali Gako – after having entreated us more than three years without success, to send him a man to teach the youth of his village and preach the Gospel to himself and his people, when such a teacher was found for him, received him to his own house, furnished him with a room and all necessary accommodations for school and religious services, with the additional compensation of board and 100 piasters per month; and taking his place beside a dozen lads, he began to learn his alphabet!

Many interesting facts might be added, and indeed a volume might be written filled with interesting facts respecting this remarkable sect – this peculiar people.

The conclusion of the whole matter is, that the Kuzulbash are a very peculiar, benighted, doubtful, interesting and hopeful people, ready to listen to the Gospel, while some are ready to receive it gladly. Some are more in need of it, and of the earnest, "effectual prayers of the righteous which availeth much."²⁰ The work among them must be a work of faith, and in a sense, for a time at least it will be an experiment. It may require long continual and patient labor in breaking up the fallow ground and sowing in trees. But already we are cheered by the sweet words of the Lord, echoed from the dark mountain homes of Dersim – "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation."²¹ And in answer to any who may think the Kuzulbash almost a hopeless people for subjects of the Gospel, God says – "*He that goeth forth and weepeth bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing bringing his sheaves with him.*" "*Let God be true and every man a liar.*"²²

On behalf of the mission (signed) G. W. Dunmore

20 Quote from the Bible, James 5:16.

21 Quote from the Bible, Isaiah: 52:7.

22 Quotes from the Bible, Psalm 126:6 and Romans 3:4.



BRILL

Political Representation of Alevi Kurds in Turkey: Historical Trends and Main Transformations

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Abstract

This article explains the process of change in the political representation of Alevi Kurds in Turkey since the country held its first competitive election in 1950. It applies process tracing methodology to identify the dominant trends in Alevi Kurds' political representation and highlights how the mode of their political participation and representation evolved over time. The discussion presented here develops an explanation that connects the effects of key events and processes that have been shaping the outcome of this complex political phenomenon. The strong appeal among Alevi Kurds of the Turkish socialist movement and political parties associated with the secular republican regime is discussed before assessing the impact of the rise of Alevi and Kurdish movements on the Alevi Kurds' political representation. The barriers Turkey's restrictive political and legal order place on Alevi Kurds' political representation are also highlighted.

Keywords

political representation – Alevi movement – PKK – HDP – pluralism in Turkey

Temsîliyeta siyasî ya kurdên Elewî li Tirkîyeyê: Meylên dîrokî û veguherînên esasî

Ev gotar proseya guherîna temsîliyeta siyasî ya kurdên Elewî li Tirkîyeyê, ya ji wexta hîlbijartina ewil ya pêşbazîdar a 1950an heta îro, rave dike. Gotar, rêbaza şopandina prosesê tetbîq dike ku meylên serdest ên di temsîliyeta siyasî ya kurdên Elewî de rave bike û li ser disekine ka şêwaza beşdarî û temsîliyeta wan bi demê re çawa vediguhere. Nîqaşa ku li vir hatiye diyarkirin ravekirineke wusa dike ku tesîra bûyerên û proseyên girîng yên ku şiklê didin encama vê fenomena sîyasî ya tevlihev bi hev ve girê dide. Daxwaza xurt a di nav kurdên Elewî yên di nav tevgerên sosyalîst ên tirk û partiyên siyasî yên têkilî rejîma komarî ya sekuler de tê nîqaşkirin berî nîrxandina tesîra bilindbûna tevgerên Elewî û kurdên li ser temsîliyeta siyasî a kurdên Elewî de. Herwiha, bal hatiye kişandin ser astengiyên nîzama qanûnî û siyasî ya sînorker a Tirkîyeyê ya ku li ser temsîliyeta kurdên Elewî bi cih dike.

Nwênerayeti siyasî Kurdanî 'Elewî le Turkya: rehende mêjûyekan û werçerxane serekîyekan

Em wtare proseya gorrankarî le nwênerayeti siyasî kurdanî 'elewî le turkya, lew satewe ke wllateke yekem pêşbirkêy hellbjardinî le sallî 1950 encamda, rûndekatewe. Wtareke mîtodî proseya şwênpê becardênêt bo dyarîkirdnî araste serekîyekanî nwênerayeti siyasî kurdanî 'elewî we eweş rûndekatewe ke çon şêwey beşdarîkirdnî siyasîyan û nwênerayetiyan legell katda geşey senduwe. Ew giftugoyey lêreda amadekrawe raveyek geşepêdedat ke karîgerîyekanî rudawe serekîyekan bew prosanewe debestêtewe ke derhawîştekanî ew dyarde syasiye allozey arayîşdawetewe. Berle hellsengandinî karîgerî serhelldanî cullanewey 'elewî û kurdî leser nwênerayeti siyasî kurdanî 'elewî, tawtiwêy penabirdnî begurî kurdanî 'elewî bo cullanewey soşyalîstî turkî û parte syasiyekanî hawaheng legell rjême komarîye skîwllarekeda dekrêt. Herweha tîşk dexrête ser ew berbestaneş ke sistemî siyasî û yasayye le qallderekey turkya deyxate ser nwênerayeti siyasî kurdanî 'elewî.

Tirkîya de temsîlkarîya kurdanê elewîyan a sîyasîye: Meylê tarîxî û vurîyayîşê serekeyî

Na meqale Tirkîya de weçînişê reqabetinê verênî yê serra 1950î ra nat prosesê vurîyayîşî yê temsîlkarîya kurdanê elewîyan îzah kena. Tede metodolojîya taqîbkerdişê prosesan yeno bikarardene ke wina meylanê serekeyan yê temsîlkarîya kurdanê elewîyan a sîyasîye bêrê diyarkerdene. Ancîna, na meqale bale ancena ser ke usûlê beşdarbîyayîş û temsîlbîyayîşê înan senî bi wext ra şîyê aver. Munaqeşeyo ke tîya de pêşkêş beno, tesîrê serebût û prosesanê serekeyan ê ke şekil danê netîceyê nê fenomenê sîyasîyê kompleksî, înan îzah keno. Verê, cazîbeya xurte ke mîyanê kurdanê elewîyan de seba tevgerê sosyalîstanê Tirkîya û partîyanê sîyasîyanê rejîmê komara sekulere esta, a munaqeşe bena. Badê, temsîlkarîya kurdanê elewîyan ser o bandura berzbîyayîşê tevgeranê kurdan û yê elewîyan bena mewzû. Astengê ke awanîya sîyaset û huqûqê Tirkîya ya sînorkerdoxe verê temsîlkarîya kurdanê elewîyan de nana ro, ma înan ser o kî vîndenîme.

Introduction

This article develops a historical explanation and analytical account of political representation of Alevi Kurds since Turkey's transformation to multi-party electoral democracy in 1950. Throughout its history, Turkey has had a troubled relationship with its minorities, members of whom were targeted by systemic persecution and episodic mass violence. This has been the case, not only for the ethnoreligious minorities that are officially recognised, such as the Armenians, Greeks and Jews, but also for those groups whose identity and difference has not been formally recognised in the country, such as the Alevis and Kurds. Despite the official view that Alevis and Kurds were part of the Turkish and Muslim dominant majority, both groups faced widespread discrimination and had to conform to the dominant cultural and religious norms in Turkey's homogenised public space.

Being both Kurdish and Alevi, Alevi Kurds have been experiencing a double exclusion in republican Turkey: "While the Turkish Alevis can stress their Turkishness, and Kurdish Sunnis their religious bond with the contemporary Republic, neither route is available to the Kurdish Alevis in any straightforward way" (Shankland, 2003: 19). Their religious and ethnic difference set them apart from the dominant Turkish and Muslim majority; while being Kurdish made them a minority within the Alevi community, the majority of which is

Turkish, being Alevi made them a minority in the Kurdish society that mostly adheres to Sunni Islam (Güler, 2019: 15).

The lack of official figures on Turkey's ethnoreligious makeup prevents us from stating with certainty the exact number of Alevi or Kurds in the country and consequently, it is almost impossible to know the exact number of Alevi Kurds. It is estimated that 20 per cent of Turkey's 80 million population is Kurdish (Gurses, 2018: 1; Gunes, 2019a: 2). Scholars cite a figure of 12 million or 15 per cent of Turkey's population when estimating the Alevi population (Dressler, 2013: xi; Shankland, 2003: 20). Alevi Kurds are estimated to constitute 20 per cent of the Alevis in Turkey and the majority of them speak the Kurmanji dialect of the Kurdish language with the minority speaking the Kirmanjki dialect (also known as Zazaki). Many Alevi Kurds self-identify as Turkish or of Turkmen origin, which creates further difficulties for estimating their population. Historically, the Alevi Kurdish population was concentrated in the provinces of Adyaman, Bingöl, Dersim/Tunceli, Elazığ, Erzincan, Erzurum, Kayseri, Malatya, Maraş, Muş and Sivas. During the Ottoman rule, some Alevi Kurds were forcibly displaced to central Anatolia (Gezik and Gültekin, 2019: xix). Since the 1950s, many Alevi Kurds have been migrating to western Turkey and European countries, which has decreased the concentration of their population in their historical homelands.

The secularisation reforms the state carried out soon after the proclamation of the republic in 1923 significantly weakened the power of the Kurdish Alevi religious leaders and facilitated Alevi Kurds' assimilation. In 1925, after the enactment of the 'Law for Closing the Dervish Lodges and Shrines' (Law No. 677), Alevi worship and learning centres, such as *dergahs* (religious lodges) and *ocaks* (hearths), were closed and Alevi religious leaders were prohibited from providing religious services (Bayır, 2017: 175–6). Accessing Alevi holy sites (*ziyarets*) was restricted and, in effect, these reforms dismantled Kurdish Alevi religious structures and weakened their ability to lead collective action or resistance against the Kemalist assimilation policies that the state began to pursue. Consequently, the role that Alevi *dede* (member of the *ocak* families), *mürşit* (guide/teacher), *pir* (saint or holy man) and *rayber/rehber* (guide and *pir's* helper) played in the community's life gradually decreased, leaving the community without a guide and source of knowledge of their religious traditions and practices. On 10 June 1949, article 1 of the Law 677 was amended to further restrict Alevi religious practices by enabling the exiling of Alevi religious leaders who offered religious service. This article remained in force until 13 July 1965 and the emphasis on the key Alevi institution of *ocaks* in the government's justification for the law showed that Alevis were one of its main targets (Bayır, 2017: 176).

Turkish nationalists sought to integrate Alevi Kurds into the Turkish nation by constructing Alevism as *essentially* Turkish and Islamic; Alevism was described as a heterodox Islamic belief and tradition that originated from Central Asia and its resemblance to ancient Turkish Shamanistic traditions was highlighted to argue that it was an *authentic* Turkish tradition. The state popularised this narrative and used it as the framework to assimilate Alevi Kurds, which influenced “the practice of writing about” and “the production of data on” the Alevi religion: “The application of such a modernist religiographic framework to Kızılbaş-Alevism had enormous implications on the academic and popular discourses established on it since the early 20th century, and also impacted on indigenous knowledge formations of Alevism” (Dressler, 2013: 9).

According to Dressler (2013) and Karakaya-Stump (2012), the works of Turkish historian Fuad Köprülü published in 1920s and 1930s are central to the attempt to conflate Alevism with Turkish identity. In Köprülü’s narrative, Islamic movements, which he described as “heterodox”, “popular” and “syncretistic”, “are reasoned to have functioned as major carriers of Turkish traditions and sentiment, the origins of which are traced back to Central Asia” (Dressler, 2013: 19–20). In the past decade, this dominant narrative on Alevism has been challenged by new scholarship which attempts to develop an alternative narrative that located Alevism in Anatolia and connected it to “various Sufi circles and itinerant dervish groups who joined together under the spiritual and political leadership of Safavid shahs” (Karakaya-Stump quoted in Dressler, 2013: 12). However, despite the opposition it faces from the Alevi community, the Turkish nationalist narrative on Alevism continues to be championed by the state and some Alevi organisations.

Apart from the dismantlement of their religious structures, Alevi Kurds’ tribal ties also weakened in the first half of the 20th century, which further eroded the social bonds that held the Alevi Kurdish community together. In Dersim in 1937–38, a massacre against Alevi Kurds was carried out with more than 10,000 people killed and many more exiled to western Turkey (Kieser, 2011; Aygün, 2011). As the main centre of Kurdish Alevi culture, the destruction of Dersim significantly weakened the Alevi Kurdish social organisation. Furthermore, Alevi Kurds’ traditional way of life was undermined by the socio-economic transformation and the rural-to-urban migration that began in the 1960s and continued throughout the 1970s and 1980s (Massicard, 2013: 25; Ertan, 2019: 932).

In addition, there were frequent attacks by Turkish nationalists and religious fundamentalists that targeted Alevi Kurds in general and Alevi Kurds in particular. On occasions, the oppression of Alevi communities took the form of massacres and pogroms committed by Turkish nationalist and Islamist fundamentalists,

such as the Maraş massacre in December 1978, which resulted in the death of 100 people, and the Sivas massacre, which took place on 2 July 1993 and resulted in the death of 35 Alevi intellectuals and community leaders after the hotel they were staying in was set on fire by a Sunni fundamentalist mob (Zürcher, 2017: 267, 295).

The Alevi challenge during the past three decades seems to have brought about a limited recognition of Alevi identity. This policy, described by Derya Bayır as “selective recognition”, involved minor steps towards recognition of diversity in Turkey but is far from being developed into a new policy that recognises and protects Turkey’s ethnocultural diversity: “despite the changing political discourse and political recognition of the existence of some of the non-Turkish-speaking population in Turkey, the political and legal discourse on diversity and protection of minorities has not changed much” (Bayır, 2016: 3). This is because the state’s recognition of diversity in Turkey is “conditioned upon the compatibility of their [ethnoreligious groups’] differences with the majority’s perception” and this logic is most evident in the debate around the non-recognition of Alevi *cemevis* as places of worship (Bayır, 2016: 3). More importantly, the selective recognition of Alevi identity has, rather than lessening the Alevis experience of discrimination and marginalisation, coincided with a deepening of their disenfranchisement “under the AKP [Justice and Development Party] and its accelerated top-down Islamization of broader Turkish society” (Karakaya-Stump, 2018: 54).

With the intensification of the public debate on the position of the Alevis and Kurds in Turkey during the 1990s, the multiple forms of discrimination and exclusion that these groups experienced and their attempts to realise their rights and political demands began to receive more sustained academic interest (Shankland, 2003; White and Jongerden, 2003; Massicard, 2012; Gunes, 2012; Dressler, 2013; Bayır, 2016; Jenkins et al., 2018). The academic debate has also focused on the tensions that exist between the different segments of these groups and highlighted the specificities of repression that those at the intersection of these marginalised identities experience (Deniz, 2019; Weineck and Zimmermann, 2018a; Jongerden, 2003). However, the existing studies on the Alevi and Kurdish mobilisations in Turkey have not sufficiently explored the complex trajectory of the political representation of the Alevi Kurds since Turkey’s transformation to multi-party electoral democracy in 1950, which opened new channels for Alevis and Kurds to engage with the institutions of the state. While democratisation created opportunities for political representation, both groups found it very difficult to advocate their political demands and cultural rights because the barriers the Kemalists placed on

the representation of ethnic and religious groups were maintained. Since the 1960s, Turkish socialist groups and parties and political parties associated with the republican order had a strong appeal among Alevi Kurds but in recent decades, they have been increasingly mobilised by the Alevi rights and Kurdish national movements.

The article uses process tracing methodology, which provides “analysis of evidence on processes, sequences, and conjunctures of events within a case for the purposes of either developing or testing hypotheses about causal mechanisms that might causally explain the case” (Bennett and Checkel, 2015: 7). Causal mechanisms are defined as “causal processes that are triggered by causes and that *link* them with outcomes in a productive relationship” (Beach and Pedersen, 2019: 30). However, rather than the theory testing or theory-building variants, it uses the explaining-outcome process tracing approach, which is “a pragmatic strategy for capturing the multiplicity of causes and linking them to outcomes that produce particular historical outcomes” (Beach and Pedersen, 2019: 283). Therefore, it examines within-case evidence to make inferences about causal explanations of that case (Bennett and Checkel, 2015: 4). The dominant trends in the political representation of Alevi Kurds since 1950 need to be identified first before the causal mechanism behind the process of change in their political representation can be elaborated.

Political Representation of Alevi Kurds Since 1950

Political representation refers to “the activity of making citizens’ voices, opinions, and perspectives ‘present’ in public policy making processes” (Dove, 2017). This definition is based on Pitkin’s seminal study, *The Concept of Representation*, which has made a major impact on the subsequent discussion on the topic. The academic literature on minority representation draws attention to two distinct understandings of political representation: “descriptive” and “substantive”. Descriptive representation refers to a situation where representatives share a descriptive likeness with the represented and in the debate on the representation of minorities, this often refers to similarities in terms of ethnic, religious or cultural background (Pitkin, 1967: 61). In contrast, substantive representation is based on the notion of representation as “substantive acting for” others and here the importance of representatives advocating the “best interest” of the represented is emphasised (Pitkin, 1967: 115). These two views of representation are distinct, but they are not mutually exclusive and in many ways are connected to, and impact on, each other. For example, an

increase in descriptive representation of a group often enhances the substantive representation of that group's interests "by improving the quality of deliberation" (Manbridge, 1999: 628).

Pitkin's account of representation has been critiqued by Michael Saward on grounds that it does not sufficiently consider the non-electoral forms of representation as well as the issue of the contestability of political representation. For Saward (2010), representation is something that is claimed by actors involved and is framed as an "ongoing, dynamic process in which a great variety of actors and organizations take part, electoral actors through elective process and other actors through other processes" (43-4). Saward (2006) sees representation in politics as a two-way process: "the represented play a role in choosing representatives, and representatives 'choose' their constituents in the sense of portraying them or framing them in particular, contestable ways" (301-2). Hence, non-elective and self-authorized forms of representation can enjoy strong legitimacy and support among a constituency and need to be considered when thinking about political representation.

It is often assumed that Alevis have been highly supportive of Kemalism and the Kemalist secular republic. Hamit Bozarslan (2003: 9) challenges this assumption in an insightful piece which unpacks the complex relations between Alevis and Kemalism:

One can neither suggest that Kemalism had an organic link with Alevism or that it was particularly interested in this group. A report prepared as late as 1949 testifies that Kemalist party was not rooted in the Alevi areas and the Kemalist elite knew very little about Alevis and Alevism.

In fact, during the early years of the republic, Alevi Kurdish opposition was a significant concern for the state, which passed a special law in 1935, the "Law on Administration of the Tunceli Province", to pacify the Dersim region, one of the main Alevi Kurdish heartlands. This law combined with the 'Resettlement Law' of 1934, enabled the state to intensify its efforts to Turkify Dersim and culminated in the massacre of Alevi Kurds in 1937-8.

The political competition that Turkey's transformation to multi-party electoral politics introduced created more room and avenues for Alevi Kurdish voters to take part in political processes and raise their political demands and concerns. The patterns of political participation among Alevi Kurds during the 1950s and 1960s resembled those that were experienced elsewhere among the Kurdish population in Turkey. At the 1950 and 1954 elections, Alevi Kurds voted mainly for the Democrat Party (*Demokrat Parti*, DP) led by Celal Bayar and Adnan Menderes (Güler, 2019: 17; Massicard, 2013: 26). In 1950, in provinces

with a significant Kurdish Alevi population, it was only in Malatya, Erzincan and Bingöl that the Republican People's Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*, CHP) outperformed the DP (YSK, 2019). In the subsequent elections during the late 1950s and 1960s, the Alevi Kurdish vote was split between a number of parties including the CHP, New Turkey Party (*Yeni Türkiye Partisi*, YTP), Justice Party (*Adalet Partisi*, AP) and the Worker's Party of Turkey (*Türkiye İşçi Partisi*, TİP). The YTP was a centre-right political party and it managed to obtain 13.73 per cent of the national vote in the 1961 general elections, winning 54 seats in the parliament and serving as a junior coalition partner in the government between 1962 and 1965. The TİP was founded by 12 trade unionists in 1961 as an independent socialist party promoting a parliamentary and evolutionary route to socialism, and Alevis became one of its key target groups. It was keen to challenge the discrimination Alevis faced in Turkey and its party programme, accepted in 1964, openly mentioned the need to ensure Alevis benefit from equal citizenship rights. Alevi songs and folk poetry were widely used in the TİP's election campaign in 1965 and this attempt to mobilise Alevi voters had a strong resonance among Alevi Kurds, with TİP winning a seat in the province of Malatya (YSK, 2019). In the 1969 general election, the TİP's electoral support decreased nationally but it increased its share of votes in provinces and districts populated by Alevi Kurds, such as Dersim, the Varto district of Muş province and the Akçadağ district of Malatya province (Güler, 2019: 28).

The strong association between Sunni Muslims and the centre-right parties, coupled with the CHP's inability to challenge the dominance of centre-right political parties during the 1950s and 1960s, triggered a search by Alevi political actors for a political party to represent them. This search led to the establishment of the Unity Party (*Birlik Partisi*, BP) in 1966, under the leadership of Mustafa Timisi. The BP was a centrist political party and worked closely with the Alevi cultural groups, such as the Hacı Bektaş Veli Lodge (*Hacı Bektaş Veli Dergahı*), and advocated religious freedoms and equality for Alevis, including the recognition of Alevism and the representation of Alevis at the Religious Affairs Directorate (*Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı*, DİB) (Çiçek, Aydın and Baran, 2017: 31). It also constructed its programme closely around Kemalist principles of the republic, such as promoting Turkist policies in the cultural sphere, and the use of the Turkish language in religious instructions and worship, and did not manage to win significant support from the Alevi Kurds (Bayır, 2017: 189; Güler 2019: 16). The party won 2.8 per cent of the vote and 8 seats in the parliament at the 1969 general election (Massicard, 2013: 27). It changed its name in 1971 to the Unity Party of Turkey (*Türkiye Birlik Partisi*, TBP) and adopted a more leftist programme to broaden its appeal and possibly as a reaction against the TİP's popularity among the Alevis (Çiçek, Aydın and Baran, 2017:

40). It obtained 1.1 per cent of the votes and won one seat in the parliament in the general elections held in the 1973, but could not consolidate its electoral base in the polarised political environment of the 1970s.

During the 1970s, Alevi Kurds voted in great numbers for the CHP. The politicisation of Islam and its instrumentalisation in politics by the centre-right political parties seems to have played a key role in Alevi Kurds' gradual turn towards the CHP (Güler, 2019: 26; Grigoriadis, 2006: 455). The CHP was closed down following the military coup in 1980, and during the 1980s and early 1990s Alevi Kurdish voters mainly supported the Social Democratic Populist Party (*Sosyaldemokrat Halkçı Parti*, SHP) and then returned to the CHP following its re-establishment in 1992. In provinces where a significant Kurdish Alevi minority exists such as Erzincan, Maraş, Kayseri, Malatya, Tunceli and Sivas, a high percentage of Kurdish Alevi voters still tend to vote for the CHP. The CHP has a notable Kurdish support base also among the Alevi Kurds living in the urban centres in the west of Turkey.

In addition to formal political channels, starting in the early 1970s, a significant section of Kurdish Alevis have been taking part in politics through clandestine left-wing political organisations (Leezenberg, 2003: 198–9). As Elise Massicard (2013: 4) states, the early instances of Alevi political mobilisations took place within “overarching frameworks” such as the left in Turkey and the left’s message of equality had a strong resonance among Alevi Kurds. Socialist groups frequently made references to historical instances of Alevi resistance in their discourse and situated their struggle as part of Alevis’ long history of resistance: “For the leaders of the left, adopting Aleviness amounted to inventing themselves a genealogy anchored in local culture, providing them with an indigenous base” (Massicard, 2013: 30).

According to Mehmet Ertan (2019: 934), the Alevis’ strong association with the left was due to the overlapping of the “dissolution of traditional Alevism” and the needs of the socialist movement to embed itself within a popular base. The Alevis’ long history of rebellion, and the central role of these rebellions in “the historical evolution of Alevism on a large scale”, meant that Alevis’ political culture was highly receptive to a mobilisation by the left: “As a result of Kemalist influence, both the people the socialists went to and the local origins the socialists needed had to be secular. In this context, the Alevis became the people to whom the socialist organizations went” (Ertan, 2019: 935–936).

The trend of Alevi Kurds voting for the CHP continued into the 2000s and 2010s. The analysis of the recent election results provided by the Istanbul based polling company KONDA Research and Consultancy indicates that a significant section of Alevi Kurds still support the CHP. In the June 2015 election, Alevis constituted 18 per cent of the CHP voters and 71 per cent of Alevis voted for the

CHP (KONDA, 2015: 68–9). In the June 2018 election, 69 per cent of Alevis voted for the CHP (KONDA, 2018: 40). The CHP's current leader, Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, is an Alevi from Dersim and influences the choices of Alevi Kurdish voters, particularly the older generation. In addition, several other Alevi Kurds were active in the CHP, including Kamer Genç and Hüseyin Akgün. Despite this support from the Alevis, the CHP has not been very vocal in articulating particularistic Alevi cultural demands. For example, in its 2011 election manifesto, Alevis as a group are mentioned only once: "We will realise the equal citizenship demand of our Alevi citizens in all spheres" (CHP, 2011: 18). The manifestos for the 2015 and 2018 general elections did not mention any Alevi specific group demands. However, in the past two years, the CHP has been more willing to voice Alevi political demands to strengthen its support base among Alevis. In 2018, it attempted but failed to introduce parliamentary legislation that could pave the way towards the recognition of Alevi *cemevis* as places of worship. On 13 January 2020, the CHP held Izmir Metropolitan Council accepted 7 *cemevis* in the city as places of worship (T24, 2020). During the past two decades, the AKP has been the dominant political party in Turkey but except for Ibrahim Yigit (2007–2015) and Reha Çamuroğlu (2007–2011), it did not have any Alevi MPs. According to the above mentioned reports, between 1 and 3 per cent of the Alevis voted for the AKP.

The increase in the descriptive representation of Alevis in the CHP and their political participation in Turkey's political institutions has created a platform for the articulation of demands for Alevi substantive representation and as the next two sections discuss in greater detail, political representation of Alevi Kurds is contested by the Alevi and Kurdish movements, both of which attempt to include them within the political constituencies that they seek to construct around the Alevi and Kurdish identities respectively. Both movements have succeeded in mobilising Alevi Kurds but face challenges in addressing their specific demands.

Alevi Identity Politics and the Alevi Kurds

During the past 30 years, there has been a significant increase in the public expression of Alevi identity in Turkey. This came about as a result of the socio-political changes in Turkey and within the Alevi community, especially migration to western Turkey and European countries. The relative freedoms that Alevis found in Europe enabled them to build an extensive network of cultural and community organisations, especially in Germany, which played a central role in the re-emergence of the Alevi movement in Turkey during the

1990s: “Alevi who organized in Europe financially and ideologically supported their networks in Turkey to organize as Alevi to build *cemevis* and organize as Alevi” (Özyürek, 2009: 240). Hence, from the late 1980s onwards, stronger attempts to mobilise Alevi as *Alevi* and around the recognition of Alevi religious and cultural identity began to be made.

A major Alevi cultural organisation is the Istanbul based Republican Education and Culture Centre Foundation (*Cumhuriyetçi Eğitim ve Kültür Merkezi Vakfı, Cem Vakfı*), which was established by İzzettin Doğan in 1995 and continues to function as a platform for the promotion of Alevi identity and culture. Another significant Alevi organisation is the Pir Sultan Abdal Cultural Association (*Pir Sultan Abdal Kültür Derneği*), which is named after the fifteenth century Alevi poet Pir Sultan Abdal and was established in 1988. The organisation has grown over the years and currently has over 75 branches across Turkey. The Hacı Bektaş Veli Anatolian Cultural Foundation (*Hacı Bektaş Veli Anadolu Kültür Vakfı*) was established in 1994. The Alevi-Bektaşlı Federation (*Alevi-Bektaşlı Federasyonu*) was established in 2002 as another representative organisation for Alevi community centres and associations. A new organisation with a mainly Kurdish-Alevi membership, the Democratic Alevi Associations (*Demokratik Alevi Dernekleri*) was established in 2008 and has been active in the past decade through its 35 centres across Turkey. Also, many *cemevis* and cultural centres that offer Alevi religious service have opened in Turkey and in western Europe since the late 1980s. Currently, several Alevi organisations are active in the Diaspora in Europe and have created representative bodies that lobby for Alevi rights in Europe and in Turkey. Their effort began to bore fruit in 2002 when Alevism was recognised as an official religion by the local government in Berlin and since then several other state-level governments in Germany have recognised Alevi as a distinct religious community (Özyürek, 2009: 241–2).

Festivals, such as the Munzur Culture and Nature Festival (*Munzur Kültür ve Doğa Festivali*) organised annually since 2000 in Dersim, and other cultural activities have further strengthened the ties among Alevi communities (Sözen, 2019). Media and television broadcasts by Alevi groups have become part of the repertoire of Alevi mobilisations in the past decade and strengthened the sense of Alevi identity (Emre Cetin, 2018). In recent years, in addition to channels that cater for the Turkish Alevi community, such as Cem TV and Yol TV, in 2011 TV10 was established in Istanbul to cater for the Kurdish Alevi community and it regularly broadcasted in the Kurmanji and Zazaki dialects of the Kurdish language. In 2016, as Turkey’s authoritarian turn accelerated, TV10 was closed-down by a government decree (DİHA, 2016). A news agency, Pir Haber Ajansı (PİRHA), was established in November 2016, which provides

regular news reports on issues affecting the Alevi Kurdish community. In 2019, a new channel, Can TV, with the same mission as TV10, began its broadcasts in Germany.

Although the above-mentioned organisations are cultural associations and provide religious service, they have facilitated the articulation of Alevi political demands, which have mainly centred on the recognition of Alevi identity by the state, ending compulsory religious education in public schools, recognition of *cemevis* as places of worship and removal of barriers preventing Alevi religious practice. These demands have been continuously refused by the state and any attempts to recognise the Alevi identity has been conditioned on the imposition of a standardised notion of Alevism as a Turkish and Islamic practice. In fact, Alevism has emerged as a site of contestation and Alevi Kurds have resisted the attempts at homogenising Alevi beliefs and interpreted this as an assimilationist attempt and the *sunnification* of Alevism (Weineck and Zimmermann, 2018b: 31–5).

In 2009, the AKP launched the so-called “Alevi opening” that had the objective of broadening the rights of the Alevis and involved workshops with representatives of Alevi organisations and community leaders. However, rather than meaningfully engaging with the demands that the Alevi representatives were making and addressing the concerns of the Alevi community, it turned into an attempt to define Alevism (Balkız, 2014). The “*cemevi*-mosque project” that was initiated and championed by the followers of the cleric Fethullah Gülen during the early 2010s can be highlighted as another example of the attempts to standardise and homogenise Alevi beliefs and frame Alevism as part of Islam. The project was supported by Alevi organisations that have a close ideological affinity with the state and Turkishness, such as Izzettin Doğan’s *Cem Vakfi* (T24, 2013).

In contrast, Alevi Kurds tend to dispute the conceptualisation of Alevism as an Islamic belief and have argued for the need to retain the diversity prevalent within the Alevi community in Turkey (Cumhuriyet, 2015). With the rise of the Kurdish political struggle in Turkey during the 1980s and 1990s, Alevi Kurds have increasingly challenged the Alevi movement’s silence on Kurdish rights and the movement’s ignorance of grievances related to being Kurdish. Moreover, Alevi Kurdish voters cannot be considered a single bloc brought together around Alevi cultural demands. As the next section discusses in greater detail, in the period under discussion, increasing numbers of Alevi Kurds have been mobilised around Kurdish political demands and in the past decade, the pro-Kurdish political parties have provided a platform for their descriptive and substantive representation. While advocacy by Alevi organisations has succeeded in creating a platform for cooperation around specific

political demands, tensions generated by attempts at homogenising Alevism have prevented the emergence of an overarching Alevi political identity. In 1996, the Peace Party (*Barış Partisi*) was established to represent Alevi but it failed to create a popular base and an unsuccessful attempt to form another Alevi political party was made in 2010. Such failed attempts show the difficulties associated with uniting the Arab, Turkish and Kurdish Alevi communities under the Alevi identity.

Kurdish National Mobilisation and the Alevi Kurds

The numbers of Alevi Kurds taking part in Kurdish nationalist political activities in Turkey are substantial. One of the leaders of the Koçgiri rebellion of 1921, Nuri Dersimi, continued his strong association with Kurdish nationalist organisations throughout his life. Following the Dersim massacre, he escaped to Syria and continued his activities from there until his death in 1973. The leader of Kurdish resistance in Dersim, Seyyit Rıza, was an important Alevi religious figure and was executed in 1937. Alevi Kurds' activism continued during the 1960s when the Kurdish national movement began to re-emerge. One of the leading figures of the 1960s Kurdish activism in Turkey, Sait Kırmızıtoprak, was an Alevi Kurd from Dersim. He was one of the leaders of the Kurdistan Democrat Party of Turkey (*Türkiye Kürdistan Demokrat Partisi*, TKDP) and was killed in Iraqi Kurdistan in November 1971. The veteran Kurdish political activist and leader of the Socialist Party of Kurdistan (*Partiya Sosyalîst a Kurdistan*, PSK), Kemal Burkay, is also an Alevi Kurd from Dersim.

The Kurdistan Workers' Party (*Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê*, PKK) has been the dominant force in Kurdish resistance in Turkey since the early 1980s and many of its leading cadres were/are Alevi Kurds. These include Mazlum Doğan (1958–1982) and Sakine Cansız (1958–2013), Ali Haydar Kaytan (b.1952), Mustafa Karasu (b.1950) and Rıza Altun (b.1956). The current co-chair of the executive council of the Union of Kurdistan Communities (*Koma Civakên Kurdistan*, KCK), the body established by the PKK in 2005 to organise and bring together Kurds in self-governing communities within the existing nation-states in the Middle East, Bese Hozat (b.1978), is also an Alevi Kurd (Gunes, 2019b: 259).

As far as the late 1970s, Alevi Kurds were identified by the PKK as one of the key groups to be mobilised. This is evident from its choice to select provinces with a significant Kurdish Alevi population as localities to carry out its initial organisational work during the latter part of the 1970s. A pamphlet analysing the Maraş massacre published in December 1979 remains the PKK's earliest text on the Alevi (Serxwebûn, 1979). In this text, rather than treat the

massacre as an isolated incident of violence between the right- and left-wing, as was the case with many leftist analyses of the event, the PKK was keen to highlight the systemic and widespread oppression that the Alevis Kurds historically suffered in Turkey and interpreted the massacre as a sign of the intensification of repression to be unleashed in order to suffocate the nascent Kurdish movement, towards which many Alevi Kurds showed sympathy. The PKK was also keen to present itself as a defender of the Alevi community in Turkey and targeted Turkish nationalists in the Elazığ district who were involved in the Maraş massacre (Cansız, 2018: 298–9). The PKK's appeal among Alevi Kurds increased from the late 1980s onwards after the Turkish socialist groups that drew considerable support from Alevi Kurds began to decline due to the devastating impact of the *coup d'état* of 1980 and the difficulties the Soviet Union experienced.

In that period, the PKK channelled much effort into mobilising Alevi Kurds. This was initially done as part of its efforts to mobilise the religious sectors of Kurdish society, which were strategised in a pamphlet prepared by its leader Abdullah Öcalan in 1989 titled *Din Sorununa Devrimci Yaklaşım* (A Revolutionary Approach to the Problem of Religion). In this pamphlet, Öcalan developed a critique of the position on religion adopted by many communist parties in the Middle East and emphasised the need to overcome the common view that equated religion with backwardness (Öcalan, 2008: 12). As a practical step, an organisation called *Kürdistan Dindarlar Birliği* (The Union of the Religious of Kurdistan) was created in 1989 as part of the PKK's political front, the National Liberation Front of Kurdistan (*Eniya Rizgariya Netewa Kurdistan*, ERNK). In 1993, separate organisations for different religious groups were established, including the Islamic Movement of Kurdistan, the Union of Alevis of Kurdistan and the Union of Yezidis of Kurdistan (Gunes 2012: 110). The Union of Alevis of Kurdistan published a monthly political magazine *Zülfikar* for the Alevi Kurdish community between 1994 and 2002, with the publication changing its name to *Semah* in 2002. Several Alevi Kurdish community associations were also established in Europe, mainly in Germany, and these continue to be active and were subsequently brought together under the Democratic Alevi Federation (*Federesyona Demokratika Elewi*, FEDA).

Another outlet for the political participation of Alevi Kurds has been provided by the pro-Kurdish democratic movement that came into being with the establishment of the People's Labour Party (*Halkın Emek Partisi*, HEP) on 7 June 1990. Arif Sağ, a popular Alevi musician and community leader, was a founding member of the HEP and Alevi political demands have been articulated by HEP and other parties that subsequently represented the pro-Kurdish democratic movement as part of demands for equality and democracy in

Turkey. Their effort to voice Alevi political demands continued throughout the 2000s and a symbolic milestone was achieved when a *cemevi* supported by the Diyarbakir Metropolitan Municipal Council was opened in Diyarbakir, the main city in the Kurdish populated Southeast Turkey, on 26 December 2011 (Bianet, 2011). Since its opening, it has become a centre of Alevi culture in Diyarbakir providing religious service to the city's Alevi community and hosting many cultural events to promote cultural coexistence and understanding.

Many Alevi Kurds have been active within pro-Kurdish political parties, some even at a leadership level. An important figure in pro-Kurdish politics is Gültan Kışanık who worked as a journalist with pro-Kurdish newspapers during the 1990s before being elected as an MP for the Diyarbakir province in 2007 and Siirt province in 2011. She was the co-chair of the Peace and Democracy Party (*Bariş ve Demokrasi Partisi*, BDP) between 2009 and 2014 and on 30 March 2014, she was elected the co-mayor of Diyarbakir Metropolitan Municipal Council. She served in this position until her arrest on 24 October 2016 and remains in custody at the time of writing (Bianet, 2016). Other prominent Alevi Kurds within pro-Kurdish political parties include Sebahat Tuncel who was an MP for the Istanbul province between 2007 and 2015.

The Democratic Alevi Association is a founding organisation of the Peoples' Democratic Congress (*Halkların Demokratik Kongresi*, HDK), which is a pro-Kurdish organisation established in October 2011 to bring together representatives of diverse ethnic and religious groups in Turkey and is the umbrella body that initiated the formation of the current representative of the pro-Kurdish democratic movement the Peoples' Democratic Party (*Halkların Demokratik Partisi*, HDP) in 2012. Alevi political demands have been articulated within the discourse of the HDP which advocates the abolishment of Turkey's Religious Affairs Directorate on grounds that the existence of such an institution leads to the domination of religion by the state and repression of religious diversity. Instead of the strict application of republican *laïcité*, as has been done throughout much of the republican rule, the HDP advocates the full separation of the state and religion and calls for rebuilding the relationship between the state and religious authorities according to a new model of secularism that is pro-diversity and protects the freedom of religion (HDP, 2015: 19; HDP, 2018: 18). Within this overall framework, the HDP campaigns for ending compulsory religious education in the national curriculum and officially recognising Alevi *cemevis* as places of worship:

All the Alevi places of worship, especially the *cemevis*, will be recognized as 'places of worship'. Barriers to closed dervish lodges and similar places

of worship will be removed and initiative will be given to local governments in this regard (HDP, 2015: 19).¹

In fact, in recent years, the HDP has emerged as the main political representative of Alevi Kurds and the main advocate of Alevi rights more broadly. The HDP has also worked closely with Alevi community organisations to identify Alevi political representatives for its electoral lists and consequently, several Alevi community leaders were elected to parliament in the 2015 general election. These include Turgut Öker, who was the President of the Federation of Alevi Community Unions in Germany (*Almanya Alevi Birlikleri Federasyonu*) and Ali Kenanoğlu, who held various leadership positions at the Hacı Bektaş Veli Anatolian Cultural Foundation, both elected in Istanbul province. Müslüm Doğan, who was a former president of the Pir Sultan Abdal Cultural Association was elected in Izmir province. In addition, several Alevi Kurds active within the pro-Kurdish democratic movement were elected as MPs, such as Alican Ünlü in Tunceli province.

The practice of selecting candidates among Alevi community leaders continued in the 2018 election. In addition to Turgut Öker and Ali Kenanoğlu, who were re-elected in Istanbul, Alevi rights activist Kemal Bülbül, who was a former president of the Pir Sultan Abdal Association and a former general secretary of the Alevi-Bektaşî Federation, was elected to the parliament in Antalya province. As mentioned above, the great majority of Alevis vote for the CHP but since 2015, a significant number have voted for the HDP. The analysis of the HDP's voter profile provided by KONDA for the June 2015 election revealed that Alevis constituted 7 per cent of HDP's voters and 12 per cent of all Alevis voted for the party (KONDA, 2015: 68–9). According to the analysis of the 2018 election, 16 per cent of Alevis voted for the HDP (KONDA, 2018: 40). It is likely that the majority of the HDP's Alevi voters are Kurdish and these figures suggest that the majority of Alevi Kurds now vote for the HDP but it is difficult to state the exact proportion. Also, the HDP has created a notable support base in provinces with a Kurdish Alevi presence, such as Malatya, Adiyaman and Erzincan where it obtained 6.7, 15.3 and 5.3 per cent of the vote in the 2018 general election respectively (Secim.Haberler.com, 2018).

While throughout their history the pro-Kurdish democratic political parties have had many Alevi Kurds amongst their ranks and Alevi political demands have been articulated in their discourse, after the establishment of the HDP,

1 Author's own translation.

efforts to form closer relations with the Alevi community intensified leading to the increase in both descriptive and substantive representation of Alevis and Alevi Kurds within the HDP. The HDP's desire to represent a cross-section of Turkish society, and its need to create a larger support base necessary to pass the 10 per cent electoral threshold, has necessitated the closer cooperation with the Alevi community. The HDP's advocacy of a plural and democratic Turkey and its attempts to represent all of the marginalised groups in Turkey has facilitated the integration of Alevis into its ranks.

Conclusions

Turkey's transformation to democracy in 1950 created opportunities for Alevi Kurds to increase their engagement in state institutions but the restrictive legal and political order that prevailed in the country prevented the substantive representation of Alevis and Kurds. The rise of right-wing populist parties and their instrumentalisation of Islam in politics became a key concern for the Alevis who feared that Islamist encroachments would target their way of life. Consequently, they rallied around the CHP and saw Turkey's secular order as a protective shield. During the 1970s, a significant number of Alevi Kurds began engaging with leftist political groups and parties. The widespread discrimination and repression Alevi Kurds faced, both as Kurds and as Alevis, created many grievances among them which the left in Turkey was able to utilise. The left's message of equality resonated with a large section of Alevi Kurds, particularly those who had migrated to western Turkish cities.

In recent years, with the rise of the Alevi and Kurdish movements, the number of political actors vying to represent the Alevi Kurds has increased. The decline of the left after the military coup of 1980 left a void in the political life of Alevi Kurds, many of whom began to organise around Alevi rights, which led to the emergence of the Alevi rights movement in Turkey and Europe. Alevi rights organisations have succeeded in creating a network of community organisations that play an important role in the social and cultural lives of Alevi Kurds. However, the tensions that exist within the Alevi movement show the difficulties they face in creating an Alevi political constituency that is sensitive to the ethnic differences that exist within the Alevi community in Turkey.

Many Alevi Kurds were mobilised by the PKK as part of its struggle for Kurdish rights and a significant number continue to be active in the PKK in rank-and-file roles and at leadership levels. The pro-Kurdish political parties' project of unifying the left and extending its appeal to a larger section

of Turkish society has facilitated the participation of Alevi Kurds in these parties. In fact, in the past five years, we have witnessed the emergence of the pro-Kurdish movement as a key political avenue for the descriptive and substantive representation of Alevi Kurds in particular and Alevis in general. Many of the organisations and Alevi religious leaders active within Kurdish Alevi communities have been supporting the HDP in recent elections and several Alevi community leaders have been elected as MPs in the HDP's list, which has further strengthened the relations between the Alevi community and the HDP. However, the repression that the HDP has been experiencing since the acceleration of Turkey's authoritarian turn in 2015, has decreased its ability to effectively campaign for the rights of the groups it represents, even though the realisation of Alevi rights has become one of its key political demands.

The recognition of Kurdish and Alevi identities and the associated rights require major changes in Turkey's identity as a state, but the public debate in Turkey on the recognition of Turkey's ethno-cultural diversity reveals the ideological rigidity of Turkish nationalism and its hesitation in accepting the legitimacy of the political demands and rights of Alevis and Kurds. Without the constitutional recognition of Kurdish and Alevi identities in Turkey, it is difficult to address the discrimination and inequality that Alevi Kurds face and to initiate steps or policies to effectively accommodate their political demands.

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BRILL

The Struggle to Unite Diaspora Alevism and the Working Class: Alevism in the Kavga/Kervan Magazine

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Abstract

Kavga/Kervan is a magazine published by the London chapter of the Turkish Communist Party between 1991 and 1998. Rıza Yürükoğlu, the editor is credited as the main architect of the magazine's intellectual structure. This article will use discourse analysis to examine the relationship between Alevism and socialism as postulated by the magazine and its editor. It aims to analyse the efforts of the magazine as a platform to unite Alevism and socialists in Turkish socialist history even if the magazine may not have had as much impact on the Alevi and socialist collectives in Turkey and abroad.

Keywords

Kavga/Kervan magazine – Rıza Yürükoğlu – Alevism

Têkoşîna gihandina Elewîyên dîasporayê û çîna karkeran: Elewîzm di kovara Kavga/Kervanê de

Kervan/Kavga kovareke e ku ji teref beşa Londonê ya Partiya Komunîst a Tirkîyeyê di navbera salên 1991 û 1998an de hatiye çapkirin. Rıza Yürükoğlu, edîtor, weke avakerê esasî ya pêkhatêya entelektuel a kovarê hatiye nîşandan. Ev xebat, wê tehlîla vegotinê

bi kar bîne bo nirxandina têkiliya di nav Elewîzm û sosyalîzmê de, weke ji teref kovar û edîtorê wê hatiye ferzkirin. Ev gotar armanc dike ku hewlên vê kovarê tehlîl bike, ya ku weke platformeke Elewî û sosyalîstên di dîroka sosyalîst a Tirkîyeyê de bigihîne hev, digel ku kovar xwedî vê tesîrê nebe jî li ser Elewî û kolektîfên sosyalîst ên li Tirkîyeyê û derve.

Xebat bo yekgirtinê ‘elewîyekanî dayespora legell çînî krêkar: ‘Elewîzm le govarî kavga/karvan

Karvan/kavga govarêke le lenden lelayan lqî lendenî partî komonîstî turkî le nêwan salleanî 1991 we 1998 derdekra. Rıza Yürükoğlu sernuser krêdîtî endazyarî serekî sitraktorî roşnibîrî govarekey pêdedrêt. Em twêjîneweye ravey gutarî bekar dênêt bo hellsengandinî peywendî nêwan ‘elewîzm û soşyalîzm bew şêweyey ke govareke û sernuserkey daynawe. Em wtare deyewêt ew hewllaney govareke wek sekoyek bo yekgirtinê ‘elewîyekan û soşyalîstekan le mêjuy soşalîstî turkî rave bkat tenanet eger govarekeş hênde karîgerî leser têkrray ‘elewî û soşyalîstekan le Turkyâ û derewe nebûbêt.

Lebata yewkerdişê elewîyanê dîyaspora û sinifa karkeran: kovara Kavga/Kervan de elewîyêye

Kervan/Kavga kovarêk a ke mabênê serranê 1991 û 1998î de hetê beşê Londra yê Partîya Komunîstan a Tirkîya ra weşanîyaye. Edîtorê ci, Rıza Yurukoglu, sey mîmarê bingeyênî yê awanîya kovar a zihniye hesabîyeno. No cigêrayîş do pê analizê diskûrsî têkiliya mabênê elewîyêye û sosyalîzmî de ke hetê kovare û edîtorê ci ra ferz bena, aye tehlîl bikero. Hedefê na meqale yo ke lebata kovare ke a tarîxê sosyalîzmê Tirkîya de bibo platformê yewbîyayîşê elewîyan û sosyalîstan, aye analiz bikero – herçiqas ke elewî û sosyalîstanê zere û teberê Tirkîya ser o tesîrê kovare zaf çin bî zî.

Introduction¹

In recent years, there has been a boom in studies of Alevism within the social sciences, with many political and international reasons to explain this increasing interest. Even though the discourse on the ontology of Alevism is beyond the scope of this study, it is necessary to examine and provide a brief overview of the literature. There are many classifications of the Alevi faith within the literature.² In addition to considering Alevism/Alevis as a sect within Islam, others interpret it as an un-Islamic, self-proclaimed religion. This is because Alevism expresses an ethnic, political and sometimes diasporic identity that is too broad to be contained by religious discussions alone. Massicard (2013: 18) aptly describes this complicated case: “we are facing an identity movement with an unknown identity, which is full of contradiction!” Alevism is an identity crosscutting ethnic origin, language and other identities (Hopkins, 2011: 448; Ertan, 2015). This multi-layered identity is a result of the history of the Alevi movement. While Sunni theology has been formed by religious and doctrinal jurisprudence, Alevi cosmology has been shaped by political revolts. Thus, a discussion of Alevism naturally includes politics as much as culture and religion. Referring to the Alevis in Turkey, Kehl-Bodrogi (1996: 52) asserts that they comprise the second biggest community after the Sunnis, approximately 15 to 20% of the population. He further explains that although most of them are ethnically Turkish, there is a large group of Alevi Kurds speaking the Zazaki (also Kirmanjki) language and a small community of Kurmanji speakers. Since

1 Dr Bilecen has received a research grant from The Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey (2219 Postdoctoral Study Abroad Scholarship).

2 For example Tekdemir (2017: 7) divides Alevism into four forms: traditional religious Alevism, modernist secular Alevism, opponent leftist Alevism and dissociative ethnical Alevism. Erman and Göker (2000: 105) also divide it into four: Leftist-Alevism interpreting it as a “liberation theology” like the Marxists influenced by Catholicism in Latin America; Mystical-Islam Alevism organised around the Haji Bektash Veli Foundations which emphasise love; Central Alevism represented by the Cem Foundation and Shia-Oriented Alevism interpreting Alevism within the 12 Imam Doctrine. For Shankland (1993: 85–86) “The Sunnis define Islam mainly by literal belief in the Koran, praying in the mosque, and the “five pillars”. The Alevi minimise the importance of these criteria, saying that they possess ‘Alevi conditions’ of Islam. (...) ‘Be master of your hands, tongue and loins!’ These conditions are not exclusively Alevi; they are present throughout Turkish culture as a whole, in the mystical or Sufi side of Islam, where they are known as *edep*. But the Alevi have raised them to a jural level, so that they are the defining characteristic of their form of Islam, at the expense of, rather than as an accompaniment to the “five pillars.”

Alevi have had an isolated existence, being marginalised both geographically and politically, they have been characterised by endogamy (intra-family marriage), which, along with discrimination and exclusion, forced them to live as an “invisible community” for a long time. Thus, the preservation of their traditional values and the social solidarity typical of their belief system enabled them to protect their Alevi identity (Soner and Toktaş, 2011: 421). According to van Bruinessen (1996: 47), migration to the cities and the political polarisation of the 1970s made the Alevi more visible in Turkey. Here, we need to consider the transitivity between Kurdish ethnic identity and Alevism. Çamuroğlu (2010: 105) associates the rise of Alevism with the collapse of real socialism, the rise of Islamic fundamentalism and the Kurdish revival. Some Alevi emphasise their identity and belonging as Alevi against a rising tide of Kurdish nationalism.

Alevism as a political identity emerged simultaneously in Turkey and Europe in the late 1980s. Here, the rise of Alevi-Leftist reaction against the combined Turkish-Islamic doctrine of the 1980 military coup and the prominence of cultural, ethnic and religious identities following the end of the Cold War played a crucial role. After keeping their identities and religious rituals secret for a long time, the fact that Alevi began to proactively self-organise can be interpreted as a reaction to the rise of Sunni Islam in Turkish politics and increasing religious Sunni events being held in Germany. The Alevi were uniting against a perceived threat during a period that witnessed a rise in identity politics and ensured that this increasing level of Alevi organisation would eventually become an independent movement (Bora, 2017: 712). Alevi concerns about the predominantly Sunni-Islam discourse in Turkish politics led to the development of the Alevi movement both inside and outside the country:

Alevi organisations were established, and these organisations attracted many young people which had formerly participated in the forefront of various leftist and Kurdish organisations. The members of some small leftist organisations were Alevi; and after that time, they, along with their Marxist-Leninist identities, started to emphasise their Alevi identity and demonstrated a tendency of considering Alevi as a nation by mentioning Alevistan as their own country. These movements abroad have evoked the Alevi revival in Turkey where the religious and social establishment of Alevi organisations was possible thanks to a gradual political liberalisation (van Bruinessen, 1996: 47).

For Shankland (1998), the discourse on Alevism remained on the agenda during the 1990s due to Alevi migrating from isolated rural areas to the cities, as a

result of Turkey's industrialisation and modernisation coupled with an eagerness to learn about their own roots. During this period, cultural studies focused on the essence of Alevism; *cemevis*³ were opened in Alevi areas in Turkey and the diaspora, whilst the number of religious and intellectual publications increased. Erol (2012: 836) states that Alevism has become visible thanks to the associations, foundations and *cemevis* established by Alevis living abroad. Considering the formation and size of the Alevi diaspora, one can easily claim that their tendency to migrate outside Turkey is significantly higher when compared to Sunni Turks. The *dede*⁴ had an important role in establishing Alevi associations in Germany, and in 1990, the European Alevi Communities Federation was established there. The recognition of Alevi identity in Germany, which later expanded to other European countries, enabled Alevi immigrants to rediscover their identities.⁵ The Alevi associations in Europe provided financial support for the Alevi associations in Turkey and, as a diasporic power, made the resolution of the Alevi question a condition of Turkey's accession to the EU (Soner and Toktaş, 2011: 422). Moreover, the European Union progress reports and the verdicts of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) contributed to greater international recognition of Alevism. The EU reports have drawn attention to the Alevi question since 1998 (Massicard, 2013: 348) and in its 2004 report, Alevis were, for the first time, defined as a "non-Sunni Muslim minority" (Zırh, 2015: 83). In 2014, the ECHR ruled that compulsory religious education lessons in Turkey discriminated against Alevis (Massicard, 2013; Coşan Eke, 2015: 93). As a result, the Alevi question has become a case with political ramifications, monitored by international institutions.

The *Kavga/Kervan*⁶ magazine published 71 issues in Turkish between 1991–1998, at the height of the Alevi revival. It was published by the oppositional wing within the Turkish Communist Party (TKP) in London which published the newspaper *İşçinin Sesi*⁷ under the leadership of Nihat Akseymen also

3 Prayer hall of the Alevis.

4 Religious community leaders are called "dede" in the Alevi tradition.

5 Gül (1999: 92) suggests that Alevis from Turkey living in Germany perhaps had the opportunity to experience a cem for the first time in their lives thanks to this rapid organisation.

6 Started publication as *Kavga* and from 22nd issue and thereafter published as *Kervan*.

7 The *İşçinin Sesi* magazine, which published 473 issues between 1974–2000 under the leadership of Rıza Yürükoğlu, brought the issue of Alevism onto the agenda of socialist discussions especially at the beginning of 1990s. After the publication of the book *Okunacak En Büyük Kitap İnsandır* (The Greatest Book to Be Read Is Man) in which Yürükoğlu established historical bonds between Alevism and socialism, Alevism featured in almost every issue of *İşçinin Sesi*. The book *Okunacak En büyük Kitap İnsandır* was first introduced in the 388th issue of *İşçinin Sesi*, dated 5 February 1990. This book was then kept on the agenda constantly. Kerim Bal, a writer for *İşçinin Sesi*, expressed at the Haji Bekhtash Veli Festival in 1990 that

known as Rıza Yürükoğlu.⁸ *Kavga/Kervan*, having begun during the Alevi revival, aimed at bridging the gap between Alevism and socialism by claiming that these religious and political movements are not intrinsically separate. Adapting Alevism to socialism with an assertion of an “indigenosity and cultural element” was the main purpose of the magazine. At this point, the Turkish left was criticised by the magazine in two ways: firstly for ignoring the Alevi question and humiliating it as traditionalism; secondly for ignoring a historical movement with revolutionary roots native to Turkey. According to the magazine, incorporating Alevism into Turkish socialist ideology and encouraging Alevi to participate in the struggle was a historical, dialectical and class necessity.

Alevism in the *Kavga/Kervan* Magazine: Where Does Alevism Fit in Islam?

From its very first issue, the magazine published articles discussing Alevism, covering a broad range of subjects such as news on community organisations, festivals and commemorations, interviews with notable people and dedes and analyses of important actors in the history of Alevism. Whilst many articles mentioned the problems faced by Alevi in Turkey and abroad, others attempted to define Alevism. Interestingly, the articles offer different perspectives on the history, culture and politics of Alevism, rather than a single discursive unity. From this, one can deduce that various positions on Alevism are present in the journal, that some authors might have changed their positions over time, and that the journal’s position on Alevism as a whole was unsystematic and dependent on social conjuncture.

Rıza Yürükoğlu’s book had the same effect on the Alevi as the effect of Lenin’s *What’s to be Done?* in Russia and that this book can be used as a guide for the organisation of Alevi with socialists.

8 Nihat Akseymen became a TKP member after participating in the 1968 students’ movement and moved to London as a result of political conflicts. Although he joined the Central Committee (CC) of TKP in 1974, his membership was dismissed due to lack of discipline (Babalık, 2003). He later formed a splinter group named “TKP-İşçinin Sesi” (Bora, 2017: 644) which declared itself as an independent body, claiming that they were “the party” in 1979. The party’s agenda was to democratise Turkey, bringing peace and equality. After the significant influx of migration of political refugees from Turkey in the late 1980s, Akseymen realised the importance of Kurdish/Alevi’s participation in the socialist movement and therefore started to publish magazines that targeted these groups in London.

In the first issue of the magazine, the differences between Alevism and Sunnism were clearly explained in an interview with Ali Özsoy Dede. He explained why Alevis do not fast, pray or go on pilgrimages, with the core difference being that Sunnism is based on the five pillars of Islam whereas Alevism is more focused on controlling human physicality; or the debasing impulses defining human existence. At its core, Alevism is based on an individual's control over their 'hands' (i.e. not to steal), 'tongue' (i.e. not to lie) and 'loins' (i.e. not to fornicate). Regarding his point of view on the subject of Alevism as a philosophy or religion, Özsoy Dede (1991[1]: 14), argued that Alevism is a major philosophy, containing a significant number of Sufi beliefs while using Ali as the vessel of this philosophy in the region.⁹ The editor, Yürükoğlu, separated Alevism from Islam completely. According to Yürükoğlu, Alevism exists within the sphere of Islam but is independent of its rules and expectations. Haji Bektash and Alevism try to enhance people's insights and help them to reach the truth of existence and consciousness at higher spiritual levels (1992[1]: v).

Yürükoğlu highlighted the Sufi aspects of Alevism while separating it from Islam. He gave many examples that emphasise this separation.

Which ones of you goes to the mosque? I think you do not go. Because your Kaaba and mosque are human. You sit head to head and that's enough ... Music is actually forbidden in Islam. (...) However, in Alevism, it is everything. Painting is also forbidden in Islam. But it is not in Alevism. Women cannot pray with men in the mosques. But in the *cem*¹⁰ it is not forbidden for women to pray (Yürükoğlu, 1992[1]: v).

We can say that the magazine consistently separated Alevism from Islam: "Until quite recently, the ones giving fatwas saying 'Alevis are not Muslim; it is obligatory to kill them', today say, after some political manoeuvring, 'Alevis are Muslim; they are our brothers'" (1992[19]: 19). Though Alevism is considered a branch of Islam, there are different interpretations too. According to Pehlivan (1992[19]: 17) there are some Islamic traces in Alevism; but it is actually an original philosophy, worldview and way of life. It is a synthesis of Central Asian and Anatolian cultures.

According to the magazine, the most important difference between Alevism and Islam, in addition to their diverging rituals, is the human perception of Alevism. The primary reason for this is that Alevism has become integrated in

9 To remove confusion, references to the magazine will be given by firstly indicating the date and then the issue number.

10 Praying ritual of the Alevis.

Anatolian philosophy. In fact, Anatolian Alevism is a modern amalgamation of Islam with the traditions of central Asia and the civilisations of Anatolia. That is to say, although Alevism is not at the core of Islam, they both mutually affect one another to the extent that they cannot be perceived as two completely discrete belief systems (1993[26]: 17).

While drawing a distinct line between Alevism and Sunni Islam, there were also many articles putting some distance between Shia beliefs and Alevism. Most notably Gazioglu (1994[44]: 19), in his article for *14 Masum Magazine* published by a group of Shias, claims that Alevism cannot be conceived without *dergâh*,¹¹ *dede*, *cem*, *saz*,¹² song and *semah*.¹³ He adds that it is impossible to force Anatolian Alevis to follow the Shia mollah mosque prayers.

In the magazine, the philosophy of Alevism was associated with materialism, especially in the articles by Ismail Kaygusuz (1996[58]: 14; 1998[70]: 3–4). The magazine had, from time to time, a modernist and positivist attitude in the definition of Alevism, whereby Alevism was no longer a religion but a scientific truth beyond a philosophy. In his article “Real Walls Do Not Fall”, Ali Haydar Dede spoke about the necessity of establishing a scientific institution of Alevism (1992[20]: 15). Many titles of the articles reflected this preoccupation with science, including: “We are the ones to marry science” or “Only the stars are in the sky” (1991[10]). For example, in an interview, Aşik Nezir Erdal says: “Alevism is not a religion. It is an institution having emerged within Islam. It is a product of thought, a philosophy and school of thought” (1993[27]: 18). This materialist definition of Alevism also reveals its historical and class revolutionary character, which is fed by the mythological history of Alevism. According to Cem Aydın: “Alevism is unique and special for the land of Anatolia. It has always been on the opposition side, and therefore, has always been regarded as progressive and revolutionist” (1991[2]: 2).

The influence of Yürükoğlu on the Alevis attracted the attention of the contemporary popular press in Turkey. For example, the magazine *Aktüel*, published an interview with him. It was featured on the cover of the 44th issue of the magazine with the heading “Alevism is within Islam”. Here Yürükoğlu defined Alevism “as a mystical thought and belief system affiliated to the sectarian Imam Cafer; represented by Bektashism, which has appeared by combining the Shia thoughts of Islam with esoterism and as a Sufi interpretation of

11 Religious lodge.

12 A musical instrument used in cem ceremonies.

13 The semah performed during the service (cem) as required by Alevi and Bektashi belief is a means of reaching God through mystical and aesthetic movements executed in harmony with the rhythm of music and song accompanied by a saz.

Islam”, adding that “I absolutely refute that Alevism is non-Islamic.” (1994[44]: 4). These quotes featuring in the popular press of that period demonstrate the occasionally ambiguous attitude of magazine writers, with many other articles classifying Alevism as distinct from Islam.

The Relationship between Alevis and Official Ideology according to Kavga/Kervan

The Alevi tragedies in Turkey strengthened Alevi solidarity and were very influential in creating a political consciousness and will to self-organise based on a common purpose. The incidents in Maraş (1978), Çorum (1980), Sivas (1993) and Gazi (1995) were the turning points for Alevi organisations both inside and outside Turkey (Gül, 1999: 111; Ata, 2015: 133, Zorlu, 2015: 150; Massicard, 2013; Coşan Eke, 2015: 94). As the magazine was continuing circulation during the period of the Alevi revival, it bore witness to many acts of social violence targeting Alevis. The magazine published commentaries on them and took every opportunity to remind its readership of former Alevi traumas and encourage the establishment of an identity around common sorrows with an ultimate solution proffered in the class struggle. In regular interviews with Alevi dedes under the heading “Dedes Speaking”, the historical massacres targeting the Alevis were frequently mentioned. Bringing up the continuous oppression of the qizilbash¹⁴, the conclusion is drawn that these struggles must be communicated broadly and that Alevis should be educated about them if a positive outcome was to be reached in Turkey (1991[10]: 19).

The Alevi massacres were mentioned in nearly every issue of Kavga/Kervan: “Ottoman inquisition showed one of its mass and extensive cruelties against Alevi-Bektashi belief during the period of extermination of Bektashi Dergahs. Hundreds of unarmed and unguarded people were investigated, oppressed and killed just because of their beliefs not complying with sharia” (Yıldırım, [61]: 9). In this respect, the magazine defined Ottoman history as a history of cruelty against the Alevis. By reminding readers of the execution of Sheikh Bedreddin, Pir Sultan Abdal and the massacre of Alevis during the Jalali Revolts, this narration established a sorrowful narrative of Alevi identity.

14 Kizilbash, (“Red Head”), any member of the seven Turkmen tribes who wore red caps to signify their support of the founders of the Şafavid dynasty (1501–1736) in Iran. The name was given to them by Sunni Turks and was applied later to the followers of a Shia sect in eastern Asia Minor as a term of abuse.

Although the magazine's attitude towards the Ottoman period is clear, it is indecisive about Republican Turkey. The writers of the magazine predominantly maintained the status quo of supporting Kemalism against "fundamentalists". However, they also emphasised that Kemalism did harm Alevi and claimed that responsibility for the injustices and massacres during the Republican period lay with a state dedicated to Kemalist ideology. Though it appears contradictory, this narrative emphasised that the Alevi are not historically aligned with the state but reluctantly supported the Kemalist state for adopting secularism.

In the first issue of the magazine, the noted Article 163¹⁵ of the Turkish Penal Code on reaction was opposed. The heading of the magazine article proclaimed "Article 163 should not be retracted" (1991[1]: 8) with the subheading reading "163 is perhaps the most democratic article". In the article, the author claimed that the "abrogation of Article 163 will be a death blow for more than 20 million Alevi citizens¹⁶ living in Turkey. Governing the state by religious laws means being governed by Sunnism. If this happens, it is not difficult to estimate the extent of cruelty against Alevi citizens". Then the author raised the question whether "we are at the same point with the Kemalists on some aspects of secularism" to which the answer was: "There is no reason for us to take offence at this. Our attitude is a part of an integrated truth and it is possible for it to coincide with the attitudes of other groups on various subjects. We, without hesitation, can say that we are in agreement with the Kemalists on the secular nature of the state and the attitude against religious fundamentalism" (1991[1]: 8). Yürükoğlu, the author of this article reiterated these opinions in an interview featured in *Aktüel* magazine:

We take no offence. Whether Kemalist, social democrat or democrat. What is important is to be secular; to support democracy, that much or this much. One's perception of democracy and secularism can be more limited or extensive than ours, which is not a matter of separation. All powers supporting democracy, secularity, republicanism should come together (Yürükoğlu, 1994[44]: 5).

15 Article 163 had outlawed politically motivated religious activity and prohibited the establishment of religious organizations or political parties aimed at creating an Islamic republic.

16 Although it is not clear from where this number was taken, the magazine writers always wrote about an Alevi population of 20 million; and at times even claimed more than this.

The same subject was emphasised in Birgül Değirmenci's article "Neither Reconciliation nor Fight!" in the 4th issue of the magazine (1991[4]: 4): "The abrogation of Article 163 aims at institutionalising and thus increasing the religious-reactionary oppression and the reactionary attacks against Alevi society." Another example of the magazine's alignment with the "status quo" was revealed in the articles pertinent to the closure of the Refah Partisi (Welfare Party). A title in the 36th issue of the magazine even proclaimed: "Sharia follower party should be closed". The heading of another article was "Closure or 'bite the hand that feeds you?'" (Turan, 1994[41]: 15). Yürükoğlu (1994[36]: 5), in his article entitled "Why nobody says the sharia follower party should be closed?" said: "We are addressing the secular majority of Turkey. Isn't the definition of a secular state the separation of religion and state affairs?" And he added: "The party supporting sharia contradicts the principle of secularism. It should be SHUT DOWN!"¹⁷

According to Soner and Toktaş (2011: 421) the secular reforms introduced by the Kemalist state have transformed Alevis into one of the most loyal groups of the Kemalist modernisation project. The magazine writers, adopting the secularity principle of Kemalism to a large extent, had no doubt on the Turkish Republic being organised around Sunni-Islamic beliefs. Yürükoğlu aptly summarised this matter stating that the history of Alevism is full of sorrow. Underlining the lack of education on Alevism, Yürükoğlu (1992[11]: 17) suggests that Sunnism prevented peace within the country whilst Alevis faced persecution by the state. Whereas Sunnis received education in both schools and mosques, Alevis were regarded as "illegal". This prevented a large number of them from familiarising themselves with their own beliefs.

For example, the Kemalist closure of dervish lodges and zawiya was widely regarded as adversely affecting Alevis (Yürükoğlu, 1993[23]: 12) with the magazine later calling for the law in question to be repealed (1993[29]: 21). According to the magazine, Sunnis could pray in their mosques, transfer their knowledge via the compulsory religious education lessons and reach even the most remote villages through the Directorate of Religious Affairs (*Diyānet İşleri Bakanlığı*). However, the wounded Alevi identity could not find any channel to express itself because of the law, prejudice and oppression.

17 During this period, the psychology of the Sivas massacre and the discontent of Alevi society after the triumph of the Welfare Party (*Refah Partisi*, RP) in Ankara and Istanbul in the local elections were also reflected in the magazine, which organized campaigns under the "Secular Front on Duty! Sharia Party must be Closed" slogan. Articles on this subject were entitled, for instance, "The Shariah-follower RP must be closed", (Erdilek, 1994[37]: 5) or "Call for secular-democratic front" (1994 [39]: 5).

Another subject that was consistently covered by Kavga/Kervan during its publication was the necessity of closing the Directorate of Religious Affairs. The fact that some Alevi organisations were affiliated to the Directorate of Religious Affairs, receiving economic assistance, including salaries for dedes, was strongly criticised by the magazine. Those organisations were accused of discrediting the history of Alevism and were labelled as disgraceful traitors and the “Hizir Pashas among us”. The authors who defined the inclusion of Alevi in the Directorate of Religious Affairs as a “state trap”, defended the abrogation of this institution and repeatedly demanded the cancellation of religious education lessons.¹⁸ It can be said that the magazine followed a radical secular line, for it not only refuted the inclusion of Alevi in the Directorate of Religious Affairs but also argued that all religious matters must be separated from the state.

The murder of Alevi intellectuals and artists during an arson attack on the Madımak Hotel in Sivas on 2 July 1993 alerted Alevi both in Turkey and abroad. The events following this massacre were very influential in the creation of a diasporic Alevi identity. A traumatic exit from the homeland (Safran, 1991: 83–84; Griffiths, 1999: 33; Cohen 2008) is one of the characteristics widely referred to in the literature on Alevi diaspora. The past experiences of Alevi/Kurdish communities who had to leave Turkey via regular and irregular migrations and the incidents experienced abroad have led to more intense relationships with their homeland, which has contributed to the formation of diasporic communities (Bilecen, 2016).

Such traumatic incidents coupled with the social indignation caused by the assassinations of journalists and writers such as Metin Göktepe, Uğur Mumcu, Onat Kutlar and Turan Dursun were also influential in creating awareness and the will to self-organise. In this regard, the magazine focused greatly on the Sivas massacre, defining a “group within the state” as the “mastermind, the executor and the chief actor of the massacre”. Yıldırım, (1993[30]: 14–15) wrote that “sharia and state are one within the Turkish Republic in a fake secularism” and supported the idea that “without holding the state to account, it is not possible to reveal those responsible for the massacre and to learn from it”. The same writer drew attention to the responsibility of the state the massacre in his article “Planned and Programmed Massacre” (Yıldırım, 1993[31]: 14). The Gazi

18 In an announcement advertised by Alevi organisations in the 26th issue of the magazine, the announcement of Alevi federations and associations organised in Turkey and Europe, which came together on 27–28 March 1993 in Ankara, was published. The first article of the announcement was about the need for the abrogation of the Directorate of Religious Affairs ([26]: 18).

Incidents were evaluated similarly by the magazine contributors. In the article “Gazi massacre was countered by the power of people” (Güven, 1995[47]: 2), the author stated: “The sharia-follower Islamist movement responsible for the massacre is one of the arms of the fascist state. This is very clear in people’s minds. Shouting the ‘murderer state, murderer sharia’ slogan is the proof of it”.¹⁹

The massacres and murders of notable Alevis during the publication life of the magazine caused the relationship between Alevism and official ideology to be questioned and there were numerous articles challenging the religious and oppressive actions of the state. However, despite the longstanding articulation of Sunni-Islamic beliefs within official state ideology, the magazine did not abstain from supporting the secular implementations of Kemalist ideology.

Despite its ambivalent position on Kemalism, the magazine writers differ from the official ideology regarding the Kurdish issue. The Kurdish issue, like Alevism, was discussed within the context of the struggle of oppressed nations in the publications and congress resolutions of the TKP. The magazine *İşçinin Sesi* approached the Kurdish movement from this perspective and supported the independence struggle of Kurdish people. For example, in an article “The Working Class is with the Kurdish People”, it was stated that “the working class advocates the self-determination of Kurdish people including their right of separation and supports the Kurdish people” (Can, 1986: 3). Also, at the fifth party congress, the Kurdish issue was evaluated within the context of “the self-determination of nations”.

Respect for the self-determination of nations is obligatory for the democratisation of society. (...) Turkish Kurdistan is the internal colony of Turkey. (...) The Kurdish problem is the key problem for a revolution in Turkey. The enemy is common. The only option is to unite the powers in a revolutionist movement (*İşçinin Sesi*, 1986: 8).

Yürükoğlu (1996: 5–6) perceived the Kurdish people as a vanguard preparing Turkey for a revolutionary state. In this respect, according to him what the revolutionists had to do was to support the struggle of the oppressed people

19 Following the Gazi protests, the magazine faced increasing legal pressure for its clearly anti-governmental editorial line. The magazine was heavily fined, its editor-in-chief was imprisoned for two years and numerous issues were forcibly withdrawn from sale, which eventually forced the magazine to cease publication altogether. When the magazine started to be published again, their new focus was on presenting the historical, mythological and belief-related dimension of Alevism after the 67th issue, but had to finish its publication life after a short time.

whilst avoiding any nationalist behaviour. Therefore, the Kurdish problem could only be solved with a socialist revolution. However, there was no consistency within the magazine on the Kurdish issue due to the changing political agenda and the different ideas of different writers.

The Religious Organisation of Alevi in the Kervan/Kavga Magazine: Dede, cemevi, dergâh

Kavga/Kervan magazine was also a channel for discussing the religious organisation problems of Alevism. In a period of rapid increase in the number of Alevi associations in Turkey and abroad, the primary agenda of the magazine was to attract the attention of those associations with a Leftist-Alevi line. In this regard, the three main goals of the magazine were to attach importance to and modernise the dede institution; gathering around the holy dergâh and to increase the number of cemevis.

The viewpoint that the dede institution was outdated was popular amongst young Alevi who participated in the socialist movement during the migration period to the cities in the 1960s and 1970s, and caused such religious dignitaries to lose most of their authority. "The young generations considering the dedes as the ones 'stupefying' and 'exploiting' the people, rejected following them" (Kehl-Bodrogi, 1996: 54). In this respect, rehabilitating the dede institution and adapting it to a modern context was given special importance in Kavga/Kervan. For this reason, from the start, the dede institution was highlighted on every possible occasion and a regular feature called "Dedes Speaking" featured interviews with dedes living in Turkey and abroad.

The magazine's drive to revive the dede institution was underpinned by what they regarded as the loss of traditional Alevi values during the urbanisation process of the 1960s and 1970s. According to Yürükoğlu (1990: 274), Sunnism is institutionally present in even the most remote villages due to its historic inseparability from official state ideology. However, Alevism has no such official presence. With the progress of urbanisation in Turkey, the dede institution regressed and lost its main function of uniting and connecting Alevi society.

In his article "Today the dede institution requires modernisation" (1991[4]: 20) Yürükoğlu outlined the importance of the dedes' role, but added that it had not kept up with the times. Yürükoğlu idealised the dede as a religious leader, guide and fully equipped intellectual. This approach of the magazine writers was both romantic and modernist. According to Yürükoğlu, "An Alevi dede should know about Bach, listen to Negro spirituals, watch opera and learn about other cultures in the world." "A dede should be equipped with literature,

saz, music, philosophy, economy etc., which contributes not only to Alevis but also to the whole of humanity” (1991[4]: 20). In one of the “Dedes Speaking” interviews with Ali Haydar Celasun (1991[6]: 11), Celasun presented an intellectual dede profile as knowledgeable about history, medicine, music and law: “Each dede should read at least 3–4 newspapers a day and 1–2 books in a month. If someone comes and asks ‘Dede, who is that?’, ‘Dede, what is feminism’ etc., and if the dede cannot give a satisfactory answer, then, he/she will go and learn it from somewhere/one else.”

The positivist approach taken by the magazine led to content suggesting moves that could potentially revive the dede role, which included the initiation of specific programmes in universities and establishing a Dede Training Institution. Another subject discussed in the magazine was whether the dede title should follow a line of descent. Initially, Yürükoğlu suggested that there was no need for this, nor indeed was there any need to have Alevi heritage to be an Alevi (Yürükoğlu, 1993[24]: 11).

One of the prerequisites for adapting the dede institution to modern times were the cemevis. Yürükoğlu stated in a conference hosted by the Alevi-Bektashi Association in the Netherlands that Alevis cannot only be organised through associations: “If cemevis are opened everywhere around Turkey and in Europe, the dede institution will adapt to the conditions of the century” (1992[21]: 13). According to this idea, there is no Alevism without dedes and there will be no Alevi organisation without cemevis. The cemevis will provide the civil organisation function for Alevis in terms of being a place not only for fulfilling religious rituals but also for socialising and holding cultural events.²⁰

The magazine published the news of the foundation of cemevis in Turkey and abroad, emphasising that they are a necessity for the Alevi community with article titles such as “We will found our cemevis everywhere” (1993[27]: 23), “Let’s found our cemevis wherever Alevis are” (1994[36]: 13), “A cemevi in every district and a cem every week” (1995[45]: 16), “Let’s bring our youths to the cem and to the cultural centre” (1994[36]: 14). The development of Alevi organisations after the second half of 1990s made the Alevis more visible in public and political arenas. In his article entitled “Cemevis and Alevi Organisations” Aslan (1998[67]: 14) claimed that “Alevi associations etc. have

20 With the initiative of the Workers’ Union in London in January 1993, the Alevi Society performed their first cem with the participation of Dertli Divani, a Turkish Alevi troubadour, born in 1962. This event was greatly appreciated by the magazine and regarded as an opportunity for opening a cemevi in London. The magazine proudly presented the news about the first cem: “Brothers! Together; to God! Let’s take our gloves off and have a cemevi in London. And pave the way with cem in our cemevi!” (1993[24]: 17).

been organised in many regions during the last five years and the foundation of cemevis has accelerated". "Cemevis are important for the Alevi and also historically important in ensuring Alevism is perpetuated in future associations and foundations. What Alevi need is to 'unite'".

According to Yürükoğlu, gathering Alevi around the dergâh is the way to revive the dede institution and to ensure that cemevis are at the centre of Alevi life. This is a necessity for the centralisation of Alevi and for transferring their values to the next generation. He pondered how best to revive and organise Alevism for the Alevi working class and ultimately for the whole of society. He found the solution in the Haji Bektash Veli dergâh and went on to suggest a holy bureaucratic mechanism similar to the vilayat-i faqih²¹ in Iran (1992[21]: 13).

Yürükoğlu continued to promote his ideas on dergâh consistently in his speeches abroad. For example, at a conference in Australia he increased the number of his conditions on the organisation around dergâh from three to ten. Among these conditions he included opening cemevis, modernising the dede institution, not giving a salary to the dedes, ratifying the dede position through an education institute affiliated to the dergâh and gathering all associations in Turkey and Europe under a general coordination board (Yürükoğlu, 1993[23]: 14).

Yürükoğlu, in his speech at the 74th foundation anniversary of the TKP (later published in Kavga/Kervan), clarified his thoughts on dergâh:

First of all, let's talk about why unity can only be organised around the dergâh: i) Alevism is a belief system. It has institutions that have developed over centuries. If you ignore them, you eradicate this society. The primary one of these institutions is the dergâh. And then cem, dedes, babas. If there are none of them, there is also no Alevism. ii) A practical reason: today, the dergâh rules over approximately 2/5 of Alevi society. The remaining 3/5 is scattered and separated incomprehensibly" (1994[42]: 12).

21 Rule or guardianship by a jurist. The concept gained wide currency in the Shia world when it was used as the title of a published series of lectures given by Ayatollah Khomeini in 1969. It became the form of Islamic government in Iran when Khomeini came to power in 1979 and became the supreme arbiter of all matters of government in Iran. The concept derives from the historical understanding that the exclusive right of interpretation of Islamic law belongs to religious scholars (<http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com>).

To critics who held that he suggested “the ‘theocratical’ government of the postnişin and wanted to create a clergy in Alevism” he replied: “I think the one saying this does not understand the philosophical practical tendencies of Alevism. Was there any ‘theocratical’ government during the period of unity of Alevi society around the Dergah?” (1994[42]: 13).

The magazine’s dergâh opinion was actually a reply to the “Alevi Party” opinion in that period. Efforts to establish an Alevi party in Turkey were strongly opposed in the magazine. In this respect, raising the Alevi party initiative in an interview with Veliyettin Ulusoy, the representative of the Haji Bektash Veli dergâh, was important. Ulusoy stated that “founding an Alevi party is contrary to the principle of secularism that we believe in and support.” (1995[53]: 18). The interview was published under the headings “An Alevi party cannot be founded. I don’t approve of it” and “An Alevi party will be the party of the system”. The magazine published numerous articles on the issue of an Alevi party being formed, mainly arguing that the initiative was a betrayal and a trap. The magazine’s writers also spoke about the issue at the Haji Bektash Veli Festival and distributed a brochure entitled “Yes to the organisation of Alevis; but no to an Alevi Party!”

The arguments used by the magazine writers to promote key concepts of Alevi organisation, summarised as the dede, cemevi and dergâh, are inconsistent and have a problematic relation with reality. The religious and social guide, the dede, was also expected to be an organic intellectual, continually improving himself in every field. Intellectuals interested in Alevism from other nations and societies could become a dede and would need to be educated at the Education Institute. The magazine, on the one hand, tried to combine science and logic with Alevism, emphasising their interconnectedness; on the other hand, it envisaged a holy organisation model whose framework was set within the strict lines of the dergâh. This vision of an organisational structure which included a hierarchical clergy gathering around a holy place was arbitrary and inconsistent. From time to time, Yürükoğlu attached new components to this organisation type and sometimes changed some of them. Moreover, a hierarchical organisation type, supported by the magazine, was contradictory to the core of the Alevi belief. Alevism has not constituted a canonical unity at any time during its history and Alevi religious knowledge has been passed down verbally in specific families considered to be holy (*ocak*). According to Kehl–Bodrogi (1996: 53) “these families gain their legitimacy from their imaginary kinship with Ali or the Twelve Imam paternity.” Therefore, it would be an inconsistent and fruitless initiative to stereotype a structure operating traditionally for hundreds of years into a strict and randomly planned organisation. On the other hand, we can agree with the magazine’s claim that

the establishment and dissemination of cemevis could ensure the organisation of Alevi as this has been the case when we consider diaspora Alevi. The Alevi societies in both Turkey and abroad have adopted their beliefs and cultural values and sometimes been introduced to these values for the first time. This situation ensures, especially for Alevi living abroad, that they can be a political power (Bilecen, 2016).²²

The Fraternity of Alevism and Socialism in the Kavga/Kervan Magazine

In his article “Human is both the Subject and the Aim” published in the 405th issue of *İşçinin Sesi*, Yürükoğlu (1990: 4) stated that “for us, the ancestor of communism is Alevism. (...) We have much to learn from Alevism. (...) I can clearly say that we haven’t benefitted sufficiently from Alevism yet. So long as we discuss Alevism, our comrades think about bringing the Alevi who are open to the left into the communist movement”. When the issue of Alevism became part of Turkey’s agenda in the 1990s for various reasons, the TKP’s *İşçinin Sesi* started to give wider coverage to it. At that time, Kavga/Kervan asserted that Alevi and socialists were inherent allies for historical and class reasons. Another reason for their proximity was the organisation of the Alevi population in Europe which the magazine compared to the immigration of Alevi to cities in Turkey. It is no coincidence that during a period in which Yürükoğlu focused on Alevism and published Kavga/Kervan, a wave of Kurdish/Alevi migration from Turkey to England was taking place.

The most important aim of the magazine was to reunite Alevi and socialists, with the objective of creating a fraternity amongst two groups connected from a historical, dialectical and class perspective. The aim of Kavga/Kervan was to align Alevi and socialists. From the magazine’s viewpoint Alevi had witnessed that at its core, Alevism was not inconsistent with socialist ideals and the socialists comprehended the revolutionary side of Alevism, which they had previously shunned as a traditional and feudal religion. Moreover, the history of Alevism has been a leverage for Turkish socialists to surpass the “nativism problem” because the class revolts and revolutionaries of this history are the native source vital to socialism in Turkey.

22 Particularly the cemevis organised by German and English Alevi Federations in various areas of those countries contribute to the religious and cultural gatherings of Alevi and play an important role in their political organisation, the creation of a diasporic identity as well as lobbying activities in Turkey and the countries they live in (Bilecen, 2016).

According to *Kavga/Kervan* magazine, “Alevism, with its communal values and class sense, has been the philosophy of the oppressed communities revolting against the dominant classes throughout history. Values such as labour, respect, equality and solidarity defended by socialism today have also been defended by the Alevis as early as 1000 years ago” (Ertan, 2015: 54). Yürükoğlu expressed continuously that the ТКР became the representative of the Alevi left. “What do we say about Alevism? Alevism is the ancestor of communism in Anatolia. And if Alevism does not approach the working class and its history, it will deny its own honourable place in history. And these are the native roots of the left.” Yürükoğlu opposed the claim that Alevi ideology would absorb the socialist ideology. “On the contrary: firstly, the socialist ideology involves the profound heritage, the thought, attitude and wealth of Alevism in the concrete conditions of Turkey, and secondly, it puts it under the microscope of dialectical and historical materialism” (1994[42]: 12). Yürükoğlu received criticism of producing ideas that associate a religious movement with a political one. His response was “in Alevism the value given to people reflects their cultural wealth. Therefore, if we incorporate this understanding into our belief system, we can fulfil a deficient part in ourselves” (Yürükoğlu, 1994[44]: 4).

Yürükoğlu (1990: 265) defined the history of Alevism as a history of revolt against the dominant classes. He anachronistically named it an “anti-feudal, democratic peasant movement”. According to Yürükoğlu, the duty of today’s working class was to absorb this movement of Anatolian peasants into the revolutionary tradition and to find ways to rely on it. Through this process, native roots would be discovered. Leftists in Turkey, speaking French, performing their revolutionism utilising foreign concepts and not analysing their own history would find the true revolutionary spirit through a consideration of Alevism’s history.²³ According to Yürükoğlu, values such as “companionship, sharing, democracy, women’s rights, anti-exploitation movements, social justice etc.” which are generally championed by the left, play a crucial role in Alevism (1994[44]: 5). Alevism is, at heart, a communal life plan and for this reason, the understanding of “not yours; not mine; but all wealth belongs to God”. Yürükoğlu was insistent that the native source he found for socialist

23 Criticising the alienated leftist intellectual prototype, Yürükoğlu, (1994[42]: 12), wanted to bring the Turkish left and important characters of Alevi’s history together: “The Marxist formation of Turkey has mostly been superficial. It has performed socialism with French colours. However, the Marxist movements of every country should be based on their own country, history and society. If a communist in Turkey is not affected when hearing about Hüseyin, Nesimi, Mansur, Haji Bektash Veli, Bedrettin and Pir Sultan, then, what kind of a communist is he or she? When we hear about Luxemburg, we are affected. It’s okay. But the former one is similarly obligatory.”

thought, often accused of having foreign roots, played an inseparable part in the history of class struggle. He visited Cuba with such a mindset. In his article “The Unbelievable Cuba” (1997[65]: 12), he claimed that “theory is painted with the colours of its country” and asked whether Alevism was not “the native pattern of Turkey’s socialism”. For Yürükoğlu the participation of Alevi society in the political struggle with the socialists meant “a politicisation suitable for its core and consistent with the notions created by its own revolutionism in history” (1995[53]: 7). In his article “Marxism, Atheism and Alevism”, Sabri Yücel (1998[67]: 32) argued that there has always been a natural alliance between the Marxists and the Alevis claiming that the labour-based history of the Alevi struggle developed the basis of this alliance.

The notion that Alevism and socialism are the same at heart has from time to time caused the depiction of a world that we can say is a leftist-Alevi utopia. For example, in the article “Workers and Alevis, shoulder to shoulder, to establish the city of consent”, the “city of consent” in Alevi mythology was, through the ideas of Marx, More and Campenalla, depicted as “an utopia without property where money is not used and everything is made with consent” (1995[55]: 9). Turkish folk music singer Musa Eroğlu in an interview said that “after the law of Alevism is established, there will be no need for borders or passports” (1991[7]: 14). As can be seen, the magazine writers were in a romantic, revolutionary mood while trying to reunite socialism with Alevism.

The ideological affinity between Alevism and socialism was not only emphasised through historical examples but also current political developments. For example, the topic of the panel held by the magazine on 10 September 1993 was “Alevis-workers are together at heart”. It proposed that “Alevis and workers are companions” (1991[7]: 4).²⁴ On many occasions, the magazine writers called for Alevis to participate in the socialist struggle, framing this as a historical and dialectical class necessity and an obligation: “Today, the only political platform for the Alevis is the leftist idea” (1998[67]: 7). The Kavga/Kervan magazine was criticised both by the leftists and by various Alevi organisations. Among those criticisms were the exploitation of Alevism and instrumentalisation for “gaining men” to the socialist movement. Yürükoğlu, expressing that he found socialism through Alevi songs (1990: 9), replied to those criticisms:

24 The emphasis on making the working class companion (fraternal of the way [what does this mean?]) with Alevis was a slogan frequently reiterated in Kavga/Kervan magazine. It was at such a point that even the music cassettes advertised in the magazine were promoted as a “humble step for working-class and Alevi brotherhood”.

First of all, they should show us which thoughts, suggestions or practical attitudes of ours deserve these criticisms ... Whilst many of the intellectuals and progressivists within the Alevi society consider the dedes as a reactionary institution, we were the ones who supported them. While everyone was chasing “modern” dreams of reuniting with this or that association, we were the ones saying, “unity must be created with the descendants of Haji Bektash”. (...) So, I ask, where is our political agenda, here?” (1994[42]: 12).

Conclusion

The *Kavga/Kervan* magazine began its publication at a time of intensive mobilisation of Alevis in Turkey and abroad, with the aim of unifying Alevis with the socialist struggle, offering examples from the history of Alevis, showing that solidarity, humanitarian values and practices of struggle were hidden in their history. The magazine, through its anachronistic behaviour, tried to reveal the history of Alevism and the revolutionary characters in it.

The *Kavga/Kervan* writers were influential in the organisation of Alevis abroad, especially in London, and affected the Alevi communities living there. In conferences held in England, Germany, Holland and Australia, Yürükoğlu tried to bring the Alevis into the fold of the socialist struggle and supported the idea that Alevis should be organised in the triangle of dede, cemevi and dergâh. He visualised the ideal Alevi organisation as a “modern” basis for the dede institution, an organisation around the cemevis instead of other associations and reuniting these synergies under a holy roof (dergâh). However, the ideas expressed by Yürükoğlu and the magazine writers were not always holistic and consistent. The contributors interpreted Alevi history and Turkish policies with a melancholic and often unrealistic romantic viewpoint. For example, with the rigidity of the magazine after the Gazi incidents, its attitude switched from “there isn’t a revolutionary condition; there is counter-revolution in Turkey” to “there is a revolutionary condition in Turkey”, which made it more radical. This radicalisation led to issues of the magazine being pulled from the shelves and writers being imprisoned. Therefore, during its final years, the magazine lost the momentum it had achieved at the beginning of 1990s and was closed because of political pressures and the deterioration of Yürükoğlu’s health.

Kavga/Kervan was criticised by Alevis and leftists alike during its publication period. It could address neither the Alevi community living in Turkey and abroad nor the socialists, with the exception of the ones living abroad. Despite

having a weak influence, Kavga/Kervan gained a unique place in the socialist tradition and deserves to be remembered for its efforts in bringing socialist thought and Alevi beliefs together.

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Diasporic Homeland, Rise of Identity and New Traditionalism: the Case of the British Alevi Festival

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Abstract

Historically, amongst Alevis traditional festivals have not been widespread and deep-rooted but this has changed over the last fifty years as a result of migration, urbanisation and the reconstruction of identity. By taking the Ninth British Alevi Festival as an example, this study looks at the building and functioning of Alevi identity in the diaspora through such a public event using mainly participant observation data collected at the festival in 2019. The festival functions to reflect the historical roots of the community by projecting a conception of the homeland in the diaspora that mirrors the perceived traditions, values and desires of the homeland. It also provides a means for Alevis to gain a footing, recognition and public visibility in their new homeland while mobilising local relationship networks, strengthening political connections and consolidating bonds within the community. It can be seen as an “invented tradition” within the new diasporic homeland.

Keywords

diasporic identity – homeland – (invented) tradition – Alevism – festival

Welatê ji diasporayê, peydabûna nasname û edetgeriyeke nû: Nimûneya Festîvala Elewî li Ilgiltereyê

Berê di nav elewîyan de festîvalên edetî/nerîtî gelek berbelav û cîgirtî nebûn lê di nav pêncî salên dawî de ev yek di encama koçberî, bajarîbûn û jinûve sazkirina nasnameyê de hatiye guhertin. Li ser nimûneya Nehemîn Festîvala Elewî li Ilgiltereyê, ev lêkolîn li avakirin û karkirina nasnameya elewî bi rêya çalakiyeke cemaewerî ya wisa li diasporayê dinêre. Lêkolîn xwe dispêre daneyên ji çavdêriyan û yên li festîvala 2019an hatî berhevkin. Festîval rehên dîrokî yên cemaetê dide nîşan bi rêya pêşxistina têgihiştineke welatî li diasporayê ku beramberî edet, nîrx û daxwazên welatî ne. Herwiha îmkânê dide elewîyan ku li welatê xwe yê nû bibin xwediyê bingehekê, venasînekê û berçaviyeke giştî li rex wê yekê ku torên têtikîyên deverî çalak dike, girêdanên siyasî saxlem dike û pabendiyên di nava cemaetê de cîgirtî dike. Mirov dikare vê yekê wek îcadkirina an dahênana nerîtê li welatê nû yê diasporayê bibîne.

Nîştmanî dayespora, hellkişanî nasname û tradîsyonî nwê: keysî vîstîvallî 'Elewîy Berîtanî

Lerûy mêjûyyewe, lenaw 'elewîyekanda vîstîvallî tradîsyon leser astêkî frawanda bllaw nebotewe û rîşey danekutawe bellam ewe le dwa penca sallda behoy koçberî û şarîşînî û bunyadnanewey nasname, gorrânî beserdahatuwe. Be wergirtinî noyem vîstîvallî 'elewîy berîtanî wek nmûne, em twêjîneweye sernic dedate bunyadnan û karkirdî şunasî 'elewî le dayespora le rêgey rudawêkî giştî awa û be şeweyekî serekî bekarhênanî datay kokrawe leser sernicî çawdêran le vîstîvallî 2019 da. Fisîvalleke le rêgay arastekirdnî çemkî nîştman le dayispora ke rengdanewey nerît, behakan û xwastî nîştîmane wek rengdanewey rîşe mêjûyye cvakîyekan kardekat. Herweha hoyekîş bo 'elewîyekan desteber dekat ta cê pêyek, danpêdanan û derkewtinîyan le fezay giştî nîştmane tazekeyan bedest bînan û leheman katîşda mobalîzey torî peywendîyekan û ptewkirdnî bondekan lenaw cvakda deken. Ewe dekrêt wek dahênanêkî tradîsyon lenaw nîştmanî tazey dayesporada bbînrêt.

Welatê dîyaspora, averşiyayîşê nasnameyî û tradîsyonalîzmo newe: Nimûneyê Festîvala Elewîyanê Brîtanya

Tarîxê urf û adetanê elewîyan de festîvalî vilabîyaye û kokxorînî nêbîyê, la nê pancas serranê peyênan de semedê koçkerdiş, şaristanijbîyayîş û neweraawankerdişê nasnameyî ra no vurîyayo. Pê nimûneyê Festîvala 9. ya Elewîyanê Brîtanya, no cigêrayîş bi rayîrê inasar fealîyetêkê rakerdeyî qayîtê awanî û fonksiyonanê nasnameyê elewîyanê dîyaspora keno û seba ney zafane dayeyanê observasyonê beşdaranê festîvala 2019î xebitneno. Fonskiyonê festîvale no yo ke ristimanê komelî yê tarîxîyan wina nîşan bido ke dîyaspora de fikrê welatî yo ke rîayetê urf û adet, qîymet û hêvîyanê welatî yê hisbîy-ayeyan keno, pêşkêş bibo. Ney ra zî wet, festîvale seba elewîyan îmkan o ke hem welatê xo yo newe de bibê wayîrê statuyêk, xo bidê naskerdene û rayapêroyî de biasê, hem kî eynî dem de torranê têkilîyanê çayîyan mobilîze bikerê, îrtibatên siyasîyan xurt bikerê û komelî mîyan de bêrê werê. Merdim eşkeno welatê dîyaspora yo newe de festîvale sey viraştîşê tradîsyonî bivîno.

Introduction¹

The Ninth British Alevi Festival took place in London between 25 May and 2 June, 2019. This event served as a significant research environment in which I could make observations on the form of relationships that Alevis establish with the homeland, space, memory and politics when in the diaspora in a festival where the reconstructed Alevi identity manifests itself and becomes visible.

¹ This article arose from my post-doctoral research project on “The Effect of External Migration on Social Memory, Belief and Cultural Identity” that was financially supported by the Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey (TÜBİTAK) and hosted by Prof. Ruth Mandel, Department of Anthropology, University College London. In this regard, I owe them all a huge debt of gratitude. Additionally, I would like to thank the members of the British Alevi society for their helpful cooperation and dear Seda Kurt for her significant contribution to the language of the text. Dr Umit Cetin, Department of Sociology, University of Westminster deserves special thanks as I would not have seen this article to fruition without his patient support and encouragement. Finally, I would like to thank the reviewers and *Kurdish Studies* editorial team for their constructive comments.

The Alevi collective memory often cites a long history of suffering and massacres. For this reason, in rural Alevism, days of mourning and commemoration are more prominent than periodical festivities commonly celebrated by the whole community. It is difficult to come across festivities or festivals peculiar to Anatolian Alevis, except for certain celebrations such as *Nevroz*, *Hızır*, *Gağand*, and *Gadir Hum* that are also celebrated in similar forms by other communities settled in Anatolia and its surroundings. While the *ziyaret* rituals (pilgrimages to sacred places or objects)² in rural Alevism might correspond somewhat to Foucault's (1984) mode of festivals as heterotopias, they are, however, more for prayers and rituals than a festival. What we might now describe as a festival culture, which historically has not been widespread or deeply rooted in Alevi tradition, can be seen as the product of the last fifty years, a period in Alevi history marked by migration, urbanisation/modernisation and the reconstruction of identity. In this sense these relatively recent festivals can be seen as part of an "invented tradition". As Hobsbawm (2000: 1) remarks, the term invented tradition "includes both 'traditions' actually invented, constructed and formally instituted and those emerging in a less easily traceable manner within a brief and dateable period – a matter of a few years perhaps – and establishing themselves with great rapidity". In this context, the festival corresponds to a new state in Alevi culture, which was previously dominated more by a "traumatic memory" (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2012), and stands as a new type of "invented tradition".

The two longest-running cultural activities in recent Alevi history in Turkey were initiated in 1964 and 1978 as "commemoration ceremonies" for Hacı Bektaş-ı Veli and Pir Sultan Abdal, two great and symbolic figures of Alevism. The first notable event for European Alevis was the Alevi Cultural Week held in Hamburg in 1989 while later in the United Kingdom the British Alevi Festival was founded in 2011. The British Alevi Festival stands as one of the most important cultural instruments for uniting the Alevi community in the UK after twenty-five years of struggle and adjustment. In this context, this study, by using the example of the Ninth British Alevi Festival, focuses on the notions of home, projection of homeland and rebuilding identity in the diaspora with reference to locality, sense of belonging, designing a heterotopia and relationships with the host society.

2 The *ziyaret* in Anatolian Alevism is not only a place or site, but is also reminiscent of Durkheim's (1995: 35) definition of the sacred, thus objects such as a stone, a water spring, a tree, a stick or a *saz* (*bağlama*) also may be regarded as *ziyaret*.

Methodology

This study is based on qualitative data gathered in two interwoven researches. For general information on the British Alevi community, I utilised data derived from my ethnographic observations and interviews with leaders and members of Alevi organisations, religious representatives, intellectuals and individuals not belonging to any organisation during my postdoctoral research project. This research on the Alevi diaspora in Britain was conducted between August 2018 and August 2019 with the financial support of the Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey (TÜBİTAK) and with the collaboration of the Department of Anthropology at University College London. However, the main data for this study has come from participant observation, field notes, conversations with agents, festival attendants and participants, news from local media, and social media pages of Alevi organisations during the Ninth British Alevi Festival in London.

Home, Homeland and Diasporic Identity

The term diaspora has been defined in various disciplines using different concepts and in many different ways (Vertovec, 1997). Instead of seeking to provide a fully exhaustive definition of diaspora, it would be useful for our discussion to focus on certain primary attributes that can be used to assess a community or group within the context of the diaspora. With this in mind, Cohen (2008), expanding on Safran's (1991) model, lists some features of diasporas which are relevant here, such as: a home or homeland symbolising a collective history; a forced, often traumatic, migration story from this homeland; a collective sense of unity with fellow migrants and with co-ethnic members in other countries or back in their homeland; a vision of co-existence and of a common future with the host country and society; and an idealisation of the homeland. Home or homeland, whether real or imagined, is then one of the key features of the diaspora. Home, in this context, would be far from having a singular meaning, especially for communities living in the diaspora for an extended period of time. On the one hand, home is conceptualised as the land of pre-migration, a land of origin, to which the diaspora community feels a sense of belonging or attachment. On the other hand, home is also the current locus of daily-life experiences, a specific location, an abode, that incorporates social relations. (Brah, 1996; Sales et al., 2011). As noted by Toivanen (2014) in her work on young Kurds in Finland, the attachment of community members to their land of origin or homeland varies from one member to another, and especially from one

generation to another, depending on different personal and life experiences. Thus, for the diaspora, home is an intricate, complex and versatile concept (Raj, 2014).

The complex nature of the concept of home can usefully be explored through an analysis that draws on Foucault's (1984) idea of heterotopias. For Foucault, heterotopias are places that "are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality" (2–3). Two out of the six principles that Foucault lists to describe heterotopias are useful to clarify the ideas of home or homeland in the context mentioned above. One of them, the third principle, is that "the heterotopia is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible" (6). The other one, the fourth principle, addresses heterotopias linked to the accumulation or slices of time. The latter, the "absolutely temporal [*chroniques*]" heterotopia is "linked to time in its most flowing, transitory, precarious aspect, to time in the mode of the festival" (7). For these heterotopias, he gives the example of fairgrounds that teem with people once or twice on the outskirts of cities. Modern "traditional" festivals of Alevis, in this sense, especially in the diaspora, can be considered as heterotopias that juxtapose the projection of homeland and the new home of community on to the festival ground during the transitory time of the festival days.

When the attachment to home or homeland is directed towards a concrete physical abode, it becomes linked to a specific place or location. This link may also be established through imparted life experiences, history, narratives, myths or similar stories. Here, it is possible to observe another feature of diasporas as listed by Cohen: possessing a collective memory or myth about the homeland. Hall (1990) states that cultural identity is not immutable, essential, universal, absolute or transcendent; on the contrary, it is a product of history, of everyone's own history. It is always built upon "memory, imagination, narratives and myths" (226). As a cultural identity, a diaspora is also built upon the same foundations. As we often find in studies on the topic, diasporic memory is not simply based on a lyrical, nostalgic, mythical narrative of a homeland. That is because, as underlined by both Safran and Cohen, dispersal or expansion from the homeland often occurs as a result of "traumatic" incidents or events. Numerous examples, such as the cases of African slaves, the Holocaust victims, Palestinians, Irish workers, Iranians following the Islamic revolution, Kurds from Iraq and Turkey, Turks from Bulgaria and more recently Syrian refugees, demonstrate that the diasporic memory is filled with trauma and memories of exile. In this sense, as discussed by Lacroix and Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (2013), we can suggest that the diaspora identity is, in some aspects, built upon the "exilic memory".

From Alevi Lands to Alevi Diaspora: the Appearance of Alevism in Britain

Although geographically and historically there are a number of communities that share similar basic belief systems, the community presently identified under the name of Alevi has its roots in Anatolia. Strong in the community's self-perception, and recognised in much of the literature, is a conception that because their beliefs, culture and social order were regarded as a threat to Sunni orthodoxy, Alevis were persecuted, oppressed and excluded during the Ottoman Empire and also the early period of the Turkish Republic (Cetin, 2016). After living in hard-to-reach mountainous and secluded regions of Anatolia for centuries, they began to migrate to the big cities for the first time in the 1950s as part of the wave of urbanisation experienced in Turkey. This had become a mass migration within the following twenty to thirty years. A significant section of this migration was to places abroad with people from Alevi villages also participating in the wave of labour migration from Turkey to Europe experienced as a result of the bilateral labour agreements signed with Western European countries such as Germany in the 1960s. The foundation of the Alevi diaspora in Europe was created by migrations triggered primarily by economic factors, although there were also socio-political reasons. Today, Alevis are settled and organised in many Western European countries. Leaving aside inflated numbers and combining the estimates of official institutions, academic research and Alevi organisations, it can be assumed that the Alevi population settled in Europe is currently around one million (Eke, 2014; Haug et al., 2009; AABF, n.d.).

After sporadic migrations as part of labour agreements in the 1960s and 1970s, Alevi migration to Britain increased dramatically in the 1980s and the 1990s (Geaves, 2003; Sirkeci et al. 2016; İ. Erbil,³ personal interview, 10 January, 2019). Besides socio-economic factors and expectations, three major factors also triggered this mass migration to the UK: organised attacks and massacres by ultra-nationalist and Islamist groups on Alevi neighbourhoods in some provinces in Turkey such as Maraş, Malatya, Çorum, and Sivas; the 1980 military coup; and the increased security concerns resulting from the conflict between the Turkish Armed Forces and militants of the PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party, *Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê*) in the south eastern provinces of Turkey (Massicard, 2010; Zırh, 2008). The vast majority of those who came to

3 İsrail Erbil is the Chair of the British Alevi Association.

Britain were classified as “asylum-seekers” based on the aforementioned reasons for migration.

In the early years of migration, the organisational focus for Alevis in Britain was through leftist political groups. The London based Halkevi (People’s House) and Kurdish Community Centre were structures that both received support from, and provided wide-ranging support for, the first-generation migrants. Reflecting the Sivas-Madımak Massacre in 1993, the England Alevi Cultural Centre and Cemevi-EACC (Alevi place of worship) was established in north east London (Geaves, 2003; Sirkeci et al., 2016). Despite this step that now highlighted Alevi identity, political organisation remained the most prominent form within the community until the mid-2000s. The first-generation migrants’ efforts to gain their footing and survive in this country meant that economic concerns ultimately overshadowed a sense of identity. But the next generation, experiencing low educational attainment and a problematic relationship with their families, schools and peer groups, faced a crisis of identity. As well as such problems as gang formation and substance abuse, there were fifty recorded cases of youth suicide within the Alevi-Kurdish community in London alone after 2003 (Cetin, 2016 and 2017). All these, combined with the recurrent problems in Turkey associated with the state’s treatment and attitudes towards Alevis and issues of settlement in the diaspora, directed Alevis to enhance their self-organisation and promote the Alevi identity (İ. Erbil, personal interview, 10 January, 2019; Akdemir, 2016). The British Alevi Federation (BAF) was founded in 2009; Alevism lessons were started in a London school in 2011 under the Alevi Religion and Identity Project (Jenkins and Cetin, 2018) and have now expanded to include around twenty schools in London and thirty across the rest of the country; the BAF and Alevi Cultural Centres and Cemevis (ACCS) were recognised and registered as charities by the Charity Commission of England and Wales in 2015; the All-Party Parliamentary Groups for Alevis was established “to ensure that British Alevis are represented in Parliament” (UK Parliament, 2017); and as at the end of 2019, eighteen ACCs, an Alevi Education and Art Centre, an Alevi Sports Academy, a Funeral Fund, an Alevi Youth Federation and an Alevi Women’s Union have come into existence under the umbrella of the BAF. In addition to the Federation, Alevis also participate in hometown associations, independent organisations and political groups mainly located in London. It is difficult to estimate the full size of the Alevi community in Britain as there are no statistical data on the topic, but figures from some research and estimates by community leaders puts the range from between 150,000 to 300,000 people (Turkish Consulate, 2008; UK Office of National Statistics, 2011; Sirkeci et al., 2016; and İ. Erbil, personal interview, 10 January, 2019). At least three-quarters of the Alevis in Britain are settled in

London, residing in the boroughs of Enfield, Hackney, Haringey, Islington, Waltham Forest and Croydon. The rest of the population is scattered in other parts of the UK such as Essex, Edinburgh, Manchester, Glasgow and Sheffield (CLG, 2009; Sirkeci et al., 2016; 13).

From Traditional Festivals to a Festival Tradition

Alevi collective memory positions the persecution of Alevis in Anatolia within a history of massacres and suffering beginning with the Battle of Kerbela (680 AD) and continuing through the Kızılbaş massacres of Selim I in the sixteenth century to the Dersim and Madımak massacres in the twentieth century (Massicard, 2013). Reminiscent of Foucault's mode of festival, Alevi communities have had temporary, transitory and nomadic festivities such as a gathering at a *ziyaret* for a sacrifice ritual, oblation or a prayer for abundance once or a few times a year. These rituals (known in Turkish as *ziyaret*, *birlik kurbanı*, *adak* and *bereket duası*) are experienced as both festivals and a form of worship by the rural community (Yıldırım, 2018). Mélikoff (2011) cites three festivals celebrated by Anatolian Alevis in January, February and March: Kagant, Hızır and Haftamol. According to the author, these festivals have similarities to Christian, Cehelten, Azeri, Yarsan and Kurdish celebrations in or around Anatolia. Other sources conceptualise these Alevi rituals by different names such as fasting, *cem* (the Alevi worship ritual), festival or celebration (Yaman, 2012; Bodrogi, 2012). All these events are either local or uncharacteristic and it is difficult to find periodic festivals peculiar to the entire Anatolian Alevis. Therefore, it would seem that the festival culture now developing among Alevis is a very recent phenomenon and is, I would argue, the product of the urbanisation process over the last fifty years (Soileau, 2005).

The oldest festival that has become an Alevi phenomenon in Turkey in recent history is the Hacı Bektaş Veli⁴ Commemoration Ceremony, the first of which was held in August 1964. The ceremonies started on the occasion of the re-opening of the Hacı Bektaş Dervish Lodge as a museum, thirty-nine years after its closure in the early Republican era. The ceremonies were held for many years in the form of official public ceremonies and in line with a Hacı Bektaş profile, fitting the official historical narrative⁵ (Massicard, 2003;

4 Hacı Bektaş Veli is recognised by many Alevis as an Alevi philosopher and saint who lived during the thirteenth century.

5 The official ideology of the Turkish Republic establishes Hacı Bektaş as a Sufi figure of the Turkish-Islamic Synthesis. Most Alevis recognise Hacı Bektaş as the second most

Soileau, 2005; and Norton, 2013). Another important event of the recent period is the Pir Sultan Abdal⁶ Commemoration Ceremony or the Banaz Festival. The festival started in 1979 in the Banaz Village of Sivas, the birthplace of Pir Sultan Abdal, one of the most significant figures of Anatolian Alevism. After an eight-year suspension following the 1980 military coup, the festival was resumed in 1988 and was relocated to the Sivas city-centre in 1993. However, in 1993, the Madımak hotel, where intellectuals, artists and guests participating in the festival were staying, was set on fire by Islamist/ultra-nationalist groups after Friday prayers and thirty-three intellectuals and two hotel staff were burned to death (Soileau, 2005). This incident which went down in history as the Madımak/Sivas Massacre and the Pir Sultan Abdal Festival became another mark of persecuted suffering in the Alevi collective memory.

In Germany, where the Alevi diaspora first emerged and mobilised, Sökefeld (2008) attributes a crucial role to the Alevi Cultural Week organised in Hamburg in 1989 as a constituent step that virtually determined the next direction of the Alevi movement. Citing prominent anthropologist Veena Das, Sökefeld states that this successful cultural event can be considered as a critical moment that re-defined traditional categories and paved the way for new models for future action. Some other large-scale cultural events, such as *Bin Yılın Türküsü* (The Saga of the Millennium) in Cologne (2000) and in Istanbul (2002), as well as concerts and festivals became widespread in Turkey and the diaspora throughout the 2000s (Massicard, 2013; Sökefeld, 2008). It is possible to say that festivals, as a reflection of the public visibility of Alevis, have increased in quantity and grown richer in content in the last twenty-five years.

Being organised by Alevi *derneks* (associations), the publicising and performance of Alevi culture, political messaging and developing political networks, strengthening the sense of identity, referencing holy figures or lodges, and emphasising their ties with tradition are some common features of recent Alevi festivals (Soileau, 2005). With all of these features and functions, Alevi festivals provide important opportunities and platforms for Alevis to find their own voice in their cities and countries of residence, to increase their public visibility, and to express the fundamental principles of Alevi thought along with Alevi identity as a whole. Even though the festival culture does not have

important holy figure after Imam Ali, and some even believe that he was the transfiguration of Ali. Contrary to the official narrative, Alevis do not place Hacı Bektaş in a nationalised or orthodox-Islamic context.

6 Pir Sultan Abdal was a popular Alevi poet during the sixteenth century. His rebellious stance led him into conflict with the Ottoman establishment and he was hanged on the orders of the Ottoman governor Hizir Pasha.

a common, clear and well-known place in “traditional Alevism”, “modern” or recent Alevism has invented a new tradition through the festival culture.

A Case Study: the Ninth British Alevi Festival

Aside from the cultural activities of various communities, there are certain events in Britain that are organised by other Turkey-based groups and organisations other than Alevis, such as the DayMer Culture and Art Festival, the Newroz Festival and the Anatolian Cultural Fete. Some of these celebrations have been taking place for over thirty years (Demir, 2012; Sirkeci et al., 2016; Eskioglu, 2019). It is possible to read the Alevi Festival within the context of an interaction with these similar events. But, along with this interaction, it is also possible to argue that the British Alevi Festival must be seen in association with those large-scale events that had an effect on the building of the Alevi diasporic identity in continental Europe, notably in Germany. Alevi migration to Britain became significant in the 1980s, as it was in the 1960s to Germany. Thus such issues as the problem of identity in the second generation (see Portes and Zhou, 1993) and the Alevi revival and organisation that occurred on the continent in the 1980s were not experienced by British Alevis until the late 2000s. During this time, as a means to overcoming the social problems within Alevi society, British Alevis adopted steps focussed on emphasising Alevi identity, such as expanding and strengthening Alevi organisations, introducing Alevism lessons in schools and associations, and promoting the recognition of Alevi belief and culture. The festival was born out of an intensification of these cultural steps. As it was in other areas, British Alevis followed the experience of Alevis in continental Europe in developing cultural events. In this regard, I can suggest that the major Alevi events that began in Hamburg in 1989 and spread across Germany and other European countries where Alevis lived were precursors to the British Alevi Festival.

In the declaration brochure of the First Alevi Festival UK, held in 2011, it was underlined that despite the first *cemevi* opening in Britain in 1993, it had taken a number of years to reach the point of organising a festival. One of the fundamental aims of the festival was not to be limited to the existing achievements concerned with institutionalisation, publication and education. The declaration states other aims under the Alevi motto of “*Bir olalum, iri olalum, diri olalum*” [“Let’s be one, let’s be huge, let’s be lively”] such as unifying the community, inculcating a sense of belonging to young generations, publicising Alevism and encouraging Alevis to acquaint themselves and engage with British society and other cultures living in Britain. Based upon all these goals

“a mass gathering, open air Alevi Festival” was needed (EACC, 2011). Besides all the aforementioned functions, the festival was seen as a symbol of Alevis becoming a society that celebrates its achievements and not only one associated with massacres and their commemorations (Release of EACC Youth Branch, cited in Akdemir, 2016).

The Ninth British Alevi Festival was held between 25 May and 2 June, 2019. Despite smaller versions in Edinburgh and Sheffield, the main event of the festival took place in London. Since the Alevi community in London represents a large section of the total Alevi population in Britain, London is the centre for Alevi activities in Britain and the festival in the capital is distinguished in terms of participation, content and impact. For this reason, it would not be incorrect to say that almost all observations on Alevis and the Alevi Festival in London may be generalised to apply to the Alevi community in Britain as a whole. The festival has several meanings for the Alevi community in Britain in terms of the expression of identity and increased visibility, the reproduction of local networks, the embodiment of a contemporary political discourse transferred from the land of origin, and a reflection of the longing for the homeland. In considering these we need to consider the process of organisation, the profile of the participants, the activity and programme schedule, the dominant discourse, the political context and the spatial organisation.

Space-Object-Performance: Projections of Homeland

One of the features of heterotopias is their ability to bring multiple spaces or locations that seem incompatible together in one single real place (Foucault, 1984). The places of worship (for example, *cem*), rituals (for example, *ziyaret*) and where daily and social life occurs (for example, the *ocak* network) in Anatolian Alevism have always been intertwined with something else that may have been transformed and have had particular meanings for the community (Yalçınkaya, 2005). This practice, serving as a sort of protective shield for the community in the rural setting, has been transferred to the cities, to metropolitan life and to the diaspora in different ways and forms (Salman, 2019).

The festival ground is an example of this. Although some events were held at the *cemevi* and the concerts on the last day of the festival took place several miles away in a park in Hackney, the main part of the festival took place at the Churchfield Recreation Ground, Enfield, North London, a 5,000 square metre field thousands of kilometres away from the homeland of Alevism. The buildings standing at the entrance to the field were used as a degassing and purging centre during the Second World War but currently are the headquarters of the Alevi Federation whose doors were open throughout the entire festival. The grounds and buildings served as one big “home” for the participants of the

festival, a home or homeland where they felt at ease, where they could express themselves, where they felt that they belonged and where they felt that it belonged to them. By the row of stands on the right of the field, there was a large *kulçadır*⁷ decorated with authentic rugs, stools and sofas by the Göksunlular Association from Maraş (see Figure 1). Both in front of this tent and other stands, including those of particular hometown associations, throughout the festival grounds there were signboards and queues for indigenous dishes such as *gözleme*, kebab, *halka tatlısı*, *ayran*, Turkish coffee and *çay*. Children and the young put on performances of Turkish and Kurdish *halay* (folkdance) music and bilingual announcements invited people to join in with them. Throughout the festival, many *deyiş* (songs and poems specific to Alevism) were played on the stage and people performed the *semah* (ritual Alevi dance) in bare feet. All of these were parts of a heterotopia complete with objects, symbols, figures and performances organised in a space in a diaspora that existed in a different geographical environment far from their place of origin.

Many similar sights could be encountered during the festival. However, one of the most unequivocally impressive site was the *dem* or *muhabbet* that was set up on the stage after the activities ended on the evening of the sixth day of the festival.⁸ The stage, which was covered in authentic Anatolian rugs and was reserved for various activities during the day, transformed into a *cem/dem* circle in the evening. A few *zakirs* (Alevi bards) came and sat down. A *ziyaret* (in this case, an old *saz* or *bağlama*⁹) was placed in front of the main *zakir*. Those who partook in the *dem* took off their shoes and sat in a circle after respectfully greeting the *ziyaret* and the *zakirs*. The *zakirs* continued to recite Kurdish-Turkish *deme*, *nefes*, *duaz* (types of Alevi poems and songs) into the late hours of the night. Sometimes, some participants were “carried away” (*aşka geldi* in Turkish, a “collective effervescence”, a loss of individuality and unity with the group, in the Durkheimian sense) as they performed the *semah* on the stage with bare feet.

This scene as a whole indicates the fact that the Alevis at the festival could still organise a social space to invoke a memory in an appropriate and intimate

7 An Anatolian *oba* (nomad) tent made of goat's hair cloth.

8 *Dem* is literally used for moment, time, breath, alcoholic drink in Turkish. *Muhabbet* literally means conversation and metaphorically love, fondness. Combining all these literal and metaphorical meanings, *dem* or *muhabbet* is used for a type of small-scale, symbolic *cem* ritual accompanied by Alevi songs and *semah*.

9 In Anatolian Alevism, the musical instrument *saz* is referred to as the “stringed Quran” that gives a voice to holy poems or songs. Referring to it as *bağlama*, and thus as *ziyaret*, is a manifestation of its sacredness.



FIGURE 1 Large Nomad Tent, Göksunlular Assosication
SOURCE: AUTHOR

way to reflect the experiences of their land of origin. The festival grounds and the organisation of the festival as a whole reflected the Alevis' efforts to make/establish/gain a place for themselves within an heterotopic space in the diaspora. Here, the effort to transform space into a place and to attribute a history and a sense of community to that space was also the projection of a desire to transform the diaspora into a homeland experienced by those who were exiled or driven away from their lands of origin for whatever reason.

Locality within Locality

The Alevis settled in London represent three intertwined forms of locality. The first one emerges out of the inner fractioning of the community tied to a person's place of origin. The majority of the community today is organised around a hometown association (*dernek*; abbreviated as *-der* in Turkish). These associations are founded on the basis of a locality (province, town or village in Turkey) or on the basis of a tribe (*Elbistan Community*, *Bozca-der*, *Paz-der*, *Dersim-der*, etc.). Secondly, the Alevis in London represent a community with their own local characteristics within the broader European Alevi diaspora and within the Alevi community as a whole. Very similar to workers associations (*landsmanshafts*) founded by the Ashkenazi Jewish migrants in the early twentieth century (Gidley, 2013), the Alevis in London, while being organised under different associations and institutions, have a feeling of solidarity among themselves and with Alevis in the European diaspora and in Turkey. Third and

lastly, with a network composed of hometown associations, *cemevi*, the BAF, other Alevi organisations, political groups, small and large-scale businesses, art centres, and so on, Alevis have created a local community of businesses, trade, education, arts and politics within the host society comparable to other migrant communities in the north east of London.

The British Alevi Festival is one of the meeting points where all three forms of locality come together or become intertwined. Preparations for the festival start months in advance of the event. During these months of preparation, there are regular announcements on the BAF social media account about the businesses that sponsor the festival. Almost all the sponsors are businesses operating in districts of London which have a high population originating from Turkey and are either established or co-managed by people from Turkey. In this way, on the one hand, the firms are able to convey a message to their target group by supporting the festival and engaging in self-promotion both before and during the festival. On the other hand, the Federation receives financial support and expands its network of recognition. This is an example of an ethnic economy established at the local level, especially through small businesses (Bilecen, 2016; Eroğlu, 2018). Hometown associations constitute the other branch of this network. Although they are not within the institutional structure of the BAF, the target audience of the Federation are also members of these associations. Naturally a section of members or executives of these associations take part in the preparation and organisation of the festival and all the associations had a tent in the festival grounds. Moreover, one or more associations are included in the festival schedule with a specific event almost every day. These associations either draw their members to the festival or act as a meeting point for their members during the festival. They not only generate income for themselves through the sales of food, beverages and indigenous products, but they also contribute to the organisation of the Federation in terms of renting booths, providing publicity and attracting participants.

The layout of the festival grounds, with regional associations on the left, Alevi businesses on the right and with certain political groups sprinkled throughout, resembled a miniature re-creation of the local network of Alevis settled in London. This re-creation brought together, in one place but on different planes, all the actors that have played a significant role in the formation, development and rise of the Alevi identity in the diaspora, reflecting all of its progress from hometown associations to transnational actors.

Identity, Adaptation, Sense of Belonging

As featured on festival posters, the theme for the Ninth Festival, which had previously made references to saintly Alevi figures such as Seyyid Nesimi, Yunus

Emre and Pir Sultan Abdal, was the motto of Hallac-ı Mansur:¹⁰ “truth lies in humanity, humanity is the truth (*insan hak'ta, hak insanda*)”. Sufi Mansur is one of the most prominent figures in Alevi thought and literature. The theme “On the path to *En-el Hak*, everything is going to be great” brings together the millennia-old philosophy of Mansur with a recent popular political slogan and constitutes, as underlined by Soileau (2005), a perfect example of establishing links with tradition. It is also possible to observe this emphasis on tradition in the festival manifesto and speeches (Haber Newspaper, 2019), where general concepts such as unity and solidarity are often brought together with the beliefs of Alevism such as *cem olma* (being together), *çerağ uyandırma* (symbolic illumination), *yol bir sürek binbir* (the path is one, practices are a thousand and one), and *rıza şehri* (city of compliance).

As previously mentioned, the Alevi community in Britain had sought solutions to the disengagement and crisis of identity experienced in particular by their second-generation youth in the 2000s. In this period, Alevi identity served as a cement for the unifying and restorative formation that was being built. Steps, such as the increase in Alevi cultural centres, the establishment of the Federation and the introduction of classes on Alevism in schools, yielded results in a short period of time (İ. Erbil, personal interview, 10 January, 2019). It is possible to assess the role of the festival in preserving culture and in constructing identity within this context. For the generations born in the diaspora and raised in a different cultural world with a different language, this effort at preserving and transmitting Alevi culture to the next generations not only had importance but also contained tensions. To illustrate using a concrete example, the language spoken at home¹¹ for second- and third-generation Alevis (roughly under the age of thirty) is English but the languages of the festival were largely Turkish, Kurdish or Zaza. But most of the Alevi individuals under the age of twenty whom I met at the festival preferred to communicate primarily in English when possible. In this situation, it is not surprising that there is a difficulty in transferring the concepts of the Anatolian Alevi terminology to a generation born and raised in the capital city of the UK and then expecting them to be the bearers of Alevi culture.

10 Hallac-ı Mansur, also known as Mansur Al-Hallaj, was a Persian mystic born in 858 AD. He was brutally executed in 922 CE for his political views.

11 By “home” in this context is meant the closely defined neighbourhoods in which Alevis live in London.

From conversations in the festival grounds with younger generation Alevis, it is clear that they, in particular, are caught in the middle in terms of their diaspora identity, being integrated in the culture of the host society whilst simultaneously feeling a sense of belonging to the Alevi culture. During these conversations some young festival-goers said that they felt good in the atmosphere of the festival, that they loved being with their friends from Turkey, participating in folk dances and in the *semah* and that they wished that there would be more of these cultural activities. But, there were also those who questioned the cultural boundary on which the community stands, including the festival, referring to the desires of the middle-aged and older generations to preserve their culture and identity:

Is this a cultural festival or a kebab festival? There are folksongs, folk-dances, food and beverages ... it's all very well but how long can this continue? How many British people are there here? How many people from other nations are there here? We all already live in the same places (in the city). We all see the same people. It is no difference here. (F. K./woman, 26 years old, personal conversation, 28 May, 2019).

On the other hand, this festival opened up opportunities for assessing the sense of belonging, citizenship and attachment to other migrant communities and minorities besides the issue of cultural integration into British society. The traumatic socio-political background of Alevi migration to the diaspora and seeking asylum status in the UK have shaped the conceptions of homeland, citizenship and the Alevi sense of belonging in this country. During my conversations on the festival grounds, I noted numerous statements similar to the following:

Look, here we practise Alevism freely. Nobody asks us anything at school, at work, on the streets, nobody looks at us. The municipality allocated this space and in the middle of this square we are playing our folk songs and performing the *semah* in another country. I wish this was the case in our own homeland too. (Personal field notes).

Here, it is possible to observe how the conceptions of belonging-otherness expressed through the words “our own” and “another” become intertwined and transformed into each other. The migrants, who had to migrate to the diaspora as a result of being marginalised in the country they think they belonged to, also have a sense of belonging to another country.

Political Sympathies, Critical Contacts

The need for, and the act of organising, an Alevi festival for whatever reason is in itself political due to the historical background of Alevism. Alevi festivals have always been political because of the Alevis' attitude towards the state (whether in Turkey or abroad), the ideology of the coordinating organisations and representatives, and the messages that are conveyed. The spirit of the British Alevi Festival is no exception. On the basis of voting preferences both in the UK and Turkey (London Council, 2019; YSK 2015–2019), and on my own data from general observations and interviews with Alevi organisations' leaders and individuals, it is clear that Alevis in Britain, as in Turkey, support social democratic, left-wing or socialist policies. The high number of votes for the Peoples' Democratic Party (*Halkların Demokratik Partisi*, HDP) and the Republican People's Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*, CHP) in Turkish elections and the visible support for the Labour Party in certain boroughs of London where there is a high Alevi (Turkish-Kurdish) population is clear evidence of this. The scene at the festival confirmed this. Although there were local representatives of other political parties and groups present, the dominance of the Labour Party in this area of London was clearly reflected at the festival. This demonstrates their support for what they see as a political discourse in the UK that is sympathetic and in tune with their struggle for survival and recognition as a migrant community in British society (and more generally in Europe). The political bonds forged are also a means of improving Alevis' relationships with the host community and local political actors.

The festival also encompassed a second important political message, one concerning the impact of current Turkish politics on the diaspora. The most prominent political figure in the festival grounds was Ekrem İmamoğlu, the candidate for the Istanbul mayoral elections that were to be held on 23 June, 2019, accompanied by his campaign slogan "Everything is going to be great". Despite his initial win in March of that year, he had been forced to rerun the election as a result of political intervention and he had become highly popular during the process. From my observations at the festival, people rarely talked about the current affairs of the host society or about British politics; rather at tables, food queues, meetings, in the front of stands and during personal interactions, all conversations revolved around the Istanbul elections. Posters, banners, signboards, and balloons carrying İmamoğlu's slogan were everywhere, both on the stage and in the festival grounds.

Lastly, it was also possible to observe the political cleavages and factions within the Alevi community itself at the festival. For example, on the one side of the field, by the tents of hometown associations, there were associations

connected with certain leftist groups and with the Kurdish movement in Turkey. On the other side there was the CHP (Turkey's main opposition party) positioned between the *cemevi* and executive stands. This reflects the fact that for some time now diaspora Alevi have been in disagreement amongst themselves on a number of topics, such as the definition of Alevism, its place within Islam, and the representation and political position of Alevi. This has meant that certain Alevi organisations have come to advocate different positions in terms of such issues as Kurdish-Turkish nationalism, regionalism and so on and, as a result, certain sections of the Alevi community have sought to dissociate themselves from these organisations or at least not to become involved with them. However, for now, the Alevi community in Britain seems to have arrived at some sort of compromise on the superordinate identity of being Alevi in the diaspora. The overall scene at the festival demonstrates that Alevi identity is open to the creation of a common ground that goes beyond regional-ethnic-political cleavages and also meets the expectations of those Alevi in the diaspora who do not belong to any organisation. However, in the long-term, the political atmosphere in Turkey and the trajectory of the Alevi movement and of the diaspora will have a significant impact on this.

Conclusion

Alevi in Britain, whose migration background is based on violent and traumatic experiences in their homeland, faced not only economic and political problems but also issues of cultural integration and identity during the early years of migration. The search for a solution to the crisis of identity experienced, in particular, by the second generation resulted in a consolidation around Alevism. In addition to the steps that took place at the end of the 2000s towards formal institutionalisation, education, recognition, and intra-community organisation, the efforts to reinforce religious-cultural identity also gained momentum. The British Alevi Festival, organised for the first time in 2011 and with its ninth event constituting the main case study for this analysis, was one of the important means for increasing the visibility of Alevi culture and identity in Britain.

As in previous years, the main theme of the Ninth British Alevi Festival centred on fundamental aspects of Alevism. With its symbols, prayers, rituals, *deyiş*, *semah* and instructional activities, the programme offered opportunities not only for introducing and transferring Alevi cultural memory and identity to the younger generation but also bringing middle-aged and older generations together around common values. The organisation of the space, the food

and drink served during the festival, the objects on sale, the symbols used in decoration, the music, folk dances and the performances created a scene from Anatolia within the British Isles. It thus was an attempt to create projections of the homeland within the diaspora. In this way, the festival mirrored the traditions, values and desires transferred from the homeland and reflected the historical origins of the British Alevi community. However, despite its emphasis on tradition, the festival itself was not yet ten years old. But as an ongoing event it plays a significant role in the Alevis' efforts to gain their footing, recognition and public visibility in this new homeland. The festival contributes to the mobilisation of local relationship networks, the construction of multifaceted political connections and the consolidation of the bonds of belonging within the community. In this sense, it is possible to perceive the festival as an invention of tradition for building a future in the new homeland of the Alevi diaspora.

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Language Attitudes and Religion: Kurdish Alevis in the UK

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Abstract

In this article I report on results of a Matched Guise Tests (MGT) study investigating attitudes towards Bohtan (BHKr) and Maraş Kurmanji (MRKr) spoken among the UK diaspora. I focus on BHKr, which I use to refer to the Kurmanji that is identified as “good Kurmanji”, also referred to as “academic”/“proper”, and MRKr to refer to the Kurmanji that is referred to as “bad Kurmanji” by Kurmanji speakers in the UK (Yilmaz, 2018). The MGT, and questions pertaining to perceptual dialectology such as respondents’ perceptions of region, religion, gender and class in this study, show that attitudes towards what is perceived as BHKr and MRKr differ significantly. By concentrating on language attitudes towards Kurmanji which have never been studied in the UK context before, this paper investigates negative and positive evaluations of both BHKr and MRKr in relation to religious affiliation.

Keywords

language attitudes – religion – matched guise tests – Kurdish-Kurmanji – Alevis

Helwêstên zimanî û dîn: Kurdên elewî li Ingiltereyê

Di vê gotarê de encamên taqîkirineke bi rêya testa “matched guise” li ser helwêstên beramber kurmanciya Botan û ya Mereşê li nav endamên diasporaya Ingiltereyê hatine pêşkêşkirin. Her du devokên kurmanciyê yên Botan û Mereşê hatine nixandin,

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ku li nav axêverên kurmanciyê li Ilgiltereyê (Yilmaz, 2018) devoka Botan li beramber “kurmanciya baş” an jî “akademîk” tê danîn û kurmanciya Mereşê jî wek “kurmanciya xerab” tê danîn. Testê û pirsyarên li ser devoknasiya sehkî (perceptual dialectology), wek seh û nezera beşdar li ser dever, dîn, cinsiyet û çînê di vê xebatê de nîşan didin ku sehên axêveran derheq kurmanciya Botan û Mereşê bi rengekî girîng ji hev cuda ne. Bi rêya hûrbûna li ser helwêstên zimanî beramber kurmanciyê, ku heta niha qet nehatiye vekolîn li Ilgiltereyê, ev gotar berê xwe dide tehlîla nîrxandinên erênî û nerênî yê li ser devokên Botan û Mereşê di warê aîdiyeta dîni de.

Hellwêstî zmanî û ayîn: ‘Elewîye Kurdekan le Şanşîne Yekgirtuwekan

Lem wtareda ew twêjîneweye radegeyem ke Matched Guise Testis (MiGT) î bo lêkolînewe le hellwêstî Kurmancî axêwerekani Bohtan (BiHKir) we Maraş (MiRKir) le naw dayesporay şanşîne yekgirtuwekanda. Min terkîzm xistote ser BiHKir, bo amaje dan bew kirmancaney becardênim ke be “kurmancî baş” nasrawn, herweha wek “ekadîmî”/“lebar” amajeyan pêdrawe, we (MiRKir) bo ew kurmancaney ke be “kurmancî xrap” lelayen kurmancye axêwerekani şanşînî berîtana amajeyan pê dedrêt (Yilmaz, 2018). (MiGT) legell pirsyarekani peywest be pey birdin be zansitî zarawekan, bo nmûne sernicî wellamgokani naw em twêjîneweye bo nawçe, ayîn, regez û çîn, ewe pişandeden ke hewlliwêstekan derbarey ewaney ke be (BiHKir) û be (MiRKir) debînrên zor cyawazn. Be terkîz kirdne ser hellwêste zmanîyekan derbarey kurmancî ke hergîz pêştir le şanşîne yekgirtuwekan dîrase nekrawe, em babete lêkolînewe le hellsengandne erênî û nerênîyekanî heryek le (BiHKir) û (MiRKir) le peywend be întîmay dîni dekat.

Tewrê ziwani û dîn: kurdê elewî yê Qiralîya Yewbîyayîye

Ez na meqale de netîceyanê cigêrayîşê Testanê Seypêkerdeyan ê Guiseyî (MGT) ke derheqê tewranê ziwani yê kurmanciya Botani (BHKr) û Mereşî (MRKr) yê ke diya-sporaya Qiralîya Yewbîyayîye de qesey benê, înan analîz kena. Ez girani dana BHKr ser ke hetê qiseykerdoxanê kurmanci yê Qiralîya Yewbîyaye sey “kurmanciya rinde”

yan zî “kurmançîya akademîke/raşte” hesibnîyena, û MRK ser ke sey “kurmançîya xirabine” hesibnîyena (Yilmaz, 2018). MGT û persê ke derheqê dîyalektolojîya îdrakîye de yê, sey dîyayîşê îdrakkerdoxan yê herêm, dîn, cinsiyet û sinife ke na meqale de ca girewto, ê musnenê ke tewrê înan ê hemverê BHKr û MRK yewbînan ra zaf cîya yê. Pê giranîdayîşê tewranê zimanî yê hemverê kurmançî ser, ke heta nika ê tewran ser o Qiralîya Yewbîyayîye de qet cigêrayîş nêameyo kerdene, na xebate erjnayîşanê BHRr û MRKr yê pozîtîf û negatîfan goreyê têkilîya xo ya dînî analiz kena.

Introduction

Sociolinguistic studies have dealt with social factors such as social status, gender and age (Labov, 1966), and the ways in which these are intertwined with change and variation (Eckert, 2012). However, religion has not been taken into account as a social variable in terms of group identity, ideology/beliefs about language and language maintenance (Omoniyi and Fishman, 2006), although it has been recognised as a significant factor in language use (e.g. lexical borrowing, Zuckermann, 2006). In recent years there has been a growing interest in carrying out research in the area of intersection of language and religion in sociolinguistic studies (Yaeger-Dror, 2014; 2015; Yaeger-Dror and Cieri, 2013) that focuses on “volatile sectarian and political communities” (Yaeger-Dror, 2015: 69) such as certain communities found in the Middle East and North Africa (Germanos and Miller, 2015). The linguistic and religious diversity among Kurmanji speakers make them an important case in the investigation of language and religion. Therefore this paper focuses on language attitudes (Garrett, 2010; Ryan et al., 1982), namely participants’ evaluative reactions towards two varieties of Kurmanji in order to investigate the interrelationship between language and religion. Language attitudes show how religious affiliation could “have an effect on one’s social networks” (Baker and Bowie, 2015: 116) and also how “religious group preferences can impact on speech” (Yaeger-Dror, 2015: 69). Based on these, I argue that religion, alongside regional affiliation, needs to be considered in theorisation of language attitudes.

The term MRKr is often used as a derogatory term that refers to the type of Kurmanji spoken in Alevi populated areas such as Maraş, Sivas, and Malatya in the south of Turkey; and the term BHKr is used to refer to a variety spoken in Sunni populated areas such as Şirnak, Siirt and Batman in the southeastern parts of Turkey. Alevi Kurds often make comments such as “they [BHKr speakers] speak good Kurdish”, attributing positive values to BHKr. By contrast they make comments such as “our Kurdish is not proper”, attributing negative

values to MRKr (Yılmaz, 2018). Phonetic variants such as [a:] ~ [ɔ:] and [ɛ]/ [æ] ~ [a:] that MRKr and BHKr speakers use are evaluated as good or bad Kurmanji.

Alevis are often defined as “heterodox” and “kızılbaş”¹ (red head) both of which have pejorative connotations. Alevis in Turkey have been subjected to systematic religious and linguistic assimilation policies (Zeydanlıoğlu, 2012) as well as bloody attacks which took place in Çorum, Elbistan, Maraş, Malatya, Sivas and Yozgat at the end of the 1970s. Many Alevis live in geographically remote rural places and mountainous areas such as Maraş and its surroundings in order to avoid conflict with the Sunni population. Oppression by the state and by Sunni religious groups forced many Alevis to migrate to western cities in Turkey and Europe and currently, many of these rural areas have been abandoned due to mass internal or external migration. Alevis differ from Sunni Kurds in their rituals, for example, they go to *cem* houses as opposed to *mosques*, they also fast during *Muharrem* as opposed to *Ramadan* (Keles, 2014). Alevis are mainly stereotyped as “atheists”, “leftists”, “communists”, “anarchists” (Keles, 2014) as well as “promiscuous”, “alcoholics” and in my personal encounters they were also referred to as “modern”, “Kemalist”, “educated” and “CHPli” (Republicanists) (see Okan, 2017). They are also referred to as *Kızılbaş/Qizilbash* (redhead) in a negative pejorative sense (Yılmaz, 2016). This term has pejorative connotations not only today but historically as well:

For a long time, the *Kızılbaş* had no definite name. In the Ottoman documents, they are called *zındık*, heretic, *râfizi*, schismatic, and also “shî’ite”, *mülhid* and atheist. Later on they will become known as *Alevi*. *Kızılbaş* is their historical name. [...] *Kızılbaş* means “red head”. [...] In the Ottoman documents, *Kızılbaş* has the meaning of “heretic” and “heretic rebel”. That pejorative meaning was the reason why the name *Alevi* took place of *Kızılbaş* and became that of the heterodox groups in Turkey (Olsson et al., 2005: 7)

Sunni Kurds on the other hand follow two schools of Islam, namely Shafi’i and Hanafi. The majority of Sunni Kurds follow the Shafi’i school of Islam. The differences between the two schools relate to prayer, fasting and other practices such as marriage and divorce. Van Bruinessen (1991: 2–3) argues that:

1 All translations are the author’s own.

Most of them follow the Shafi'i mazhab (school of Islamic jurisprudence), which distinguishes them from their Turkish and Arab Sunni neighbours, who generally follow the Hanafi school. To some Kurds therefore the Shafi'i mazhab has become one of the outward signs by which they assert their ethnic identity. [...] Shafi'is perform, for instance, the morning prayer at an earlier time than Hanafis, they keep their hands in a different position during prayer, and have different rules for what disturbs ritual purity. Such minor details in behaviour have at times been deliberately used by Kurds to distance themselves from Turks and Arabs.

As well as these religious differences among Kurmanji-speaking Alevi and Sunnis (also Shafi'is and Hanafis), there are also linguistic differences which bring another layer of complexity to the ways in which Kurmanji speakers align themselves differently in relation to their regional identities. Many Alevi and Sunni Kurds live in separate geographical locations in Turkey. In other words, religious affiliation predetermines the locations where Alevi choose to live. Geaves (2003: 60) argues that "Alevi ethnicity has developed by creating a clear boundary between itself and that of Sunni Muslims who function as the definite 'other.'" Giles (1979: 253) defines an ethnic group as "those individuals who perceive themselves to belong to the same ethnic category". I argue that Kurmanji variation and attitudes towards MRKr and BHKr are contextualised in the framework of speakers' religious and regional identities which mark the boundaries between the two groups.

Kurmanji and Variation

Classified under the "Western Iranian group of the Indo-Iranian branch of the Indo-European family" (Thackston, 2006: vii), Kurdish has two major varieties: Kurmanji and Sorani. Kurmanji is spoken mainly in Turkey, Syria, Armenia and Azerbaijan and in some small parts of Iraq and Iran. Thackston (2006: viii) argues that due to historical and political reasons the Kurmanji variety of Kurdish is far from being "unified, normalised, or standardised" whereas Sorani, which is spoken by the Kurds of Iraq and Iran, has been the second official language of Iraq since WWI. Although Kurmanji variation is not very well documented, Öpengin and Haig (2014: 147–148) categorise Kurmanji in Turkey under five regions (see figure 1). BHKr broadly corresponds to the Southern dialect region and MRKr corresponds to the Northwestern dialect region. I will use these terms only when necessary otherwise I will use the terms Bohtan and Maraş since it was these that were used by participants during my ethnographic fieldwork.

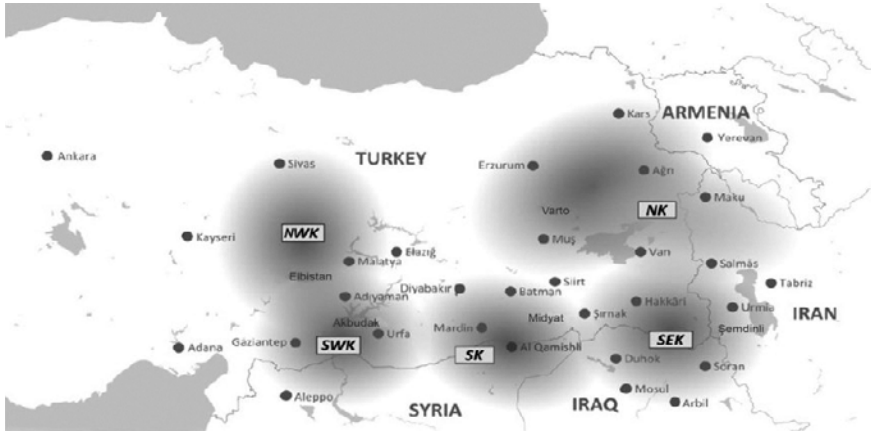


FIGURE 1 Map of major regional dialects in Kurmanji
SOURCE: ÖPENGİN AND HAIG (2014: 148)

Southeastern dialect region (SEK): this region includes the Hakkâri Province of southeastern Turkey and the Duhok Province of Iraq Kurdistan, and includes what is traditionally called the Badini dialect.

Southern dialect region (SK): this region includes the central-southern section of the Kurmanji speech zone, including the Kurmanji of the Mardin (Kr. *Mêrdîn*) and Batman provinces in Turkey, as well as sections of Şırnak (Kr. *Şîrnex*), some districts of Diyarbakır (Kr. *Diyarbekir*) and the Şanlıurfa (Kr. *Riha*) provinces in the Kurdish region in Turkey as well as in Hasaka Province in Syria and the region of Sinjar in Iraq.

Northern dialect region (NK): this dialect is commonly referred to as “Serhed” Kurdish, and in Turkey includes the provinces of Muş (Kr. *Mûş*), Ağrı (Kr. *Agirî* or *Qerekilîs*), Erzurum (Kr. *Erzerom*) and some districts of the provinces of Van (Kr. *Wan*), Bitlis (Kr. *Bilîs/Bedlîs*), Bingöl (Kr. *Çewlig*) and Diyarbakır.

Southwestern dialect region (SWK): this region includes Adıyaman (Kr. *Semsûr*), Gaziantep (Kr. *Entab*) and the western half of the Şanlıurfa provinces of Turkey as well as the northern section of the Aleppo (Kr. *Heleb*) Province in Syria.

Northwestern dialect region (NWK): this region includes the Kurmanji varieties spoken in Kahramanmaraş (Kr. *Meraş*), Malatya (Kr. *Meletî*) and the Sivas (Kr. *Sêwaz*) provinces.

TABLE 1 Sound correspondences in Kurmanji (based on data from Öpengin and Haig, 2014)

Bohtan Kurmanji			Maraş Kurmanji	
a [a:]	agir	fire	[ɔ:]	ɔ:gir
e [ɛ]/ [æ]	dev	mouth	[a:]	da:v / (æv/ æw)
[i:]	īro	today	[h]	huro:
VbV [-b-]	hebū	there was	[-w-]	hawu
Xw	xwē	salt	[x ^w e:]	xwe

MRKr shows highly divergent features, lexically and phonologically, from BHKr, and it is the most stigmatised [variety] among all the Kurmanji varieties (Öpengin and Haig, 2014). This stigma is assigned in all levels of Kurdish society because MRKr is stereotyped as a mixture of Turkish and Kurdish and hence identified as a “contaminated” variety. Although Kurmanji in all of Turkey shows “many traces of Turkish influence” (Haig, 2006: 283), the Kurmanji of Alevi populated areas such as Maraş is stigmatised by its own speakers as well as by others who are classified as speaking “pure” Kurmanji. The stigma of course has no empirical ground but it is related to how Alevi and Sunni Kurds identify themselves differently.

Sounds are realised distinctively in BHKr and MRKr. For example, the vowel [a:] in BHKr, is realised distinctively in MRKr as a mid-low back rounded vowel [ɔ:] (Özsoy and Türkyılmaz, 2006) e.g. ɔgir ~ agir and kavir ~ kevir in BHKr (Öpengin and Haig, 2014).

Özsoy and Türkyılmaz (2006) suggest these vowel changes are connected to a Turkish influence. Turkish influence on MRKr is taken for granted and its influence on BHKr is often dismissed in scholarly work. The differences could be related to factors such as convergence/divergence due to migration or historical or social changes, e.g. Alevi Kurds prefer to live in neighbourhoods where they can co-exist with Turkish Alevis rather than living with Sunni Kurds.²

2 Many Turkish Sunni settlements were transplanted in Kurdish Alevi areas such as Malatya and Maraş after the establishment of the Turkish state in the 1920s in order to systematically convert Alevi Kurds into Sunni Turks. Van Bruinessen (1996) argues that this assimilation process was voluntary as Alevi Kurds and Turks were both in support of secularism in this period. However, through endogamy and other strategies such as the kirve tradition, a

Language and Religion

A significant study was carried out by Baker and Bowie (2010), who investigated whether religious affiliation among English speakers who identified as Mormons (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints) in comparison to non-Mormons correlated with vowel contrasts (hot-caught, pin-pen, bag-beg, fail-fell, and pool-pull-pole) in Utah County. Two groups of informants were used in the study. One group provided recorded instances of Utah English and the second group provided perceptual information. The participants who provided the recorded data were age and gender matched participants from Utah County. All the participants had lived all or a majority of their lives (immigrating to Utah before the age of 5) in Utah County, Utah (Baker and Bowie, 2010: 3). Next, participants unfamiliar with Utah English were asked to judge which of the two vowels in a vowel pair contrast was produced by the speakers. Their findings showed evidence of differences based on self-described religious affiliation for several of the vowel mergers, and those who self-described as Mormons exhibited considerably different linguistic behaviour from those who described themselves as non-Mormons. Further the study showed that religious commitment was a key factor in the formation of social networks which led to linguistic differences between Mormons and non-Mormons (Baker and Bowie, 2010).

There are Sunni-*Zaza* (also *Zazaki*) and/or Kurmanji speaking Kurds, Alevi-*Zaza*/Kirmancki (Kurds of Dersim refer to *Zaza* as Kirmancki) and Kurmanji speaking Kurds as well as Sunni Kurds whose religious practices are mainly in Arabic (since it is believed that the Qur'an should be read in its original language). In the same vein, the religious ideological orientation of Alevi Kurds involves distinctive linguistic dynamics in their faith-based organisations. For example, the London *Cemevi*, an Alevi house of worship, carries out rituals in Turkish, with Kurdish playing hardly any role in this particular setting. In my personal encounters and visits to *Cemevis* both in Turkey, Germany and the United Kingdom, Kurmanji (and also Kirmancki) were not used during the *Cem* ceremonies. As an anecdote one of my participants who often visited the *Cemevi* in London said "We were not allowed to speak Kurdish in the *Cemevi* in the 80s". This is partly because Kurmanji was banned in Turkey via the 1982 Constitution (Zeydanlıoğlu, 2013: 167) and partly due to the assimilation

ceremony for the circumcision of boys, Alevi Kurds distance themselves from both Sunni Turks and Kurds. The *kirve* tradition prohibits marriage between the families, both family members of the circumciser and the circumcised. Dinç (2015) maintains that "From the moment the *kirvelik* relationship has developed between the two families, the members of these have absolute prohibition to marry". Therefore it is difficult to establish that the distinctive vowel differences between BHKr and MRKr (as opposed to other Kurdish dialects) are merely due to Turkish influence.

policies that Alevi Kurds underwent in the 1980s and also their secularist aspirations, where the Kurdish language is associated with being backwards (see Zeydanhoğlu, 2012). The national identity of Alevi Kurds is defined as “ambiguous” especially when they define themselves as Alevis without mentioning the word Kurdish. While Aydın (2018: 19) argues that Alevism is a contested identity and difficult to define, he suggests that Alevism is an ethno-religious identity where “unity has been established, not over language but in terms of the hearths and their positioning against the ‘other’”. It is often argued that Alevis should assert their national identity first over their religious identity. Van Bruinessen (1997: 1) argues that:

The existence of Kurdish-([Kurmanji] – my emphasis) and Zaza-speaking Alevi tribes, who almost exclusively use Turkish as their ritual language, and many of which even have Turkish tribal names is a fact that has exercised the explanatory imagination of many authors. Both Turkish and Kurdish nationalists have had some difficulty in coming to terms with the ambiguous identity of these groups

All these factors in the intersections of linguistic, national and religious affiliations demonstrate the complexity inherent in the study of language attitudes in the context of Alevi Kurds in the UK. Many Alevis claimed asylum in the UK at the end of the 70s, after the ethnic and religious persecution they experienced in Sivas, Malatya, Maraş and surrounding areas (McDowall, 2004; Demir, 2012), as well as during the armed conflict between the The Kurdistan Workers’ Party (*Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê*, PKK) and the Turkish armed forces in the 1990s. Alevis in the UK (see Jenkins and Cetin, 2017; Cetin, 2017) are mainly Kurdish but there are Turkish Alevis too, however, many Alevis do not categorise themselves as either Kurdish or Turkish and many Kurdish nationalists do not like the terms Alevi and Sunni Kurds. Their dis/loyalty to Kurdish and Alevi identities as well as their relationship with the Kurdish movement in Turkey is usually interpreted as ambivalent (Bhabha, 1984) or ambiguous.

Presently, Alevis are demanding that Alevi children be exempted from religious education classes in Turkey. Alevism has been recognised as a distinctive belief in the UK since October 2001. It is taught as an optional course as part of RE lessons in Germany and in the UK (Cetin and Jenkins, 2014). Material for these lessons is prepared in Turkish and not Kurmanji. The present developments in the UK diaspora have increased the visibility of the Alevis and of scholarly work on Alevis, however their language practices and attitudes towards Kurmanji have remained unexplored. In the next section I give an overview of the language attitudes which inform the theoretical ground for this paper.

Language Attitudes

Language attitudes are “any affective, cognitive or behavioural index of evaluative reactions toward different language varieties or their speakers” (Ryan et al., 1982: 7). Attitudes are often influenced by the process of standardisation (Garrett, 2010). Many languages are believed to have a standard variety (ibid) even if most do not. Ideological predispositions which regulate concepts of “standard language”, “dialect” or “regional accent” result in positive or negative evaluations, and these have social implications in terms of who are discriminated against, favoured or disliked. This seems to happen as a top-down normative and prescriptive practice carried out by states or state-like institutions, and also found in grammar books and the teaching material produced by Kurdish institutes in Paris, Istanbul and Brussels. Although Kurds lack a unified state, they do have grammar books, dictionaries and institutions which regulate, legitimise and distribute linguistic standards. These could be interpreted as an endeavour to legitimise the “languageness” (Jaffe, 1999) of Kurmanji through books, literacy and institutions, such as the Kurdish institutes. Here, there is a concept of “standard/proper Kurmanji” among Kurmanji speakers which is associated with “correct” grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation and so on (see Milroy and Milroy, 2012 for standard language ideology).

The active distinction between good vs bad Kurmanji among Kurds in the UK is a strong indication of power asymmetries in intra-group relations. A variety that is associated with high status is one that is often perceived as prestigious, as in having overt prestige (Trudgill, 1972 and 1974). Overt prestige refers to the positive evaluations of a variety on the status level and is often associated with dominant varieties such as Received Pronunciation (RP). On the other hand, a variety that is evaluated highly on the solidarity dimension is one that “elicits feelings of attraction, appreciation and belongingness” which is typically the case for the language/variety of one’s family life and intimate friendships, as this “acquires vital social meaning and comes to represent the social group with which one identifies” (Ryan et al., 1982: 9). Such varieties are argued to have covert prestige: for example, regional varieties are often evaluated positively on the solidarity dimension (Trudgill, 1972).

Matched Guise Tests

The MGT is an indirect method that investigates perceptions of linguistic varieties through pre-recorded speech stimuli. The MGT “could be used to look at how a language, dialect, or linguistic variable affects what social characteristics are attributed to the speaker” (Drager, 2014: 61). The experiment was first

introduced by Lambert et al. (1960) who asked research participants to listen to and rate the same speaker in an English and French bilingual situation in Montreal. The participants were asked to rate the speaker(s) on solidarity (e.g. likeability, sociability, warmth) and status-related traits such as intelligence, education, and leadership. In this study I also investigate moral qualities such as religiosity (Bentahila, 1983). Lawson and Sachdev (2004: 1347) argue that varieties associated with the dominant groups are ranked higher on the status dimensions, and regional varieties tend to be ranked higher on the solidarity dimensions.

The MGT was criticised by Bradac et al. (2001: 139) as follows: “respondents’ evaluative reactions to dialect versions, for example, may be falsely attributed to the dialects themselves when in fact they are a product of idiosyncratic differences in speaker fluency”. Although MGT were found to yield data which were statistically significant, another criticism in the 1980s was that this type of data collection did not shed light on the real language situation and that data should be obtained by “ethnographic” means (Joseph, 2004: 71).

Although researchers may have their recorded speech samples “validated” by a pilot group of judges prior to using the samples in their main study (for example, see Drager, 2014) they typically do not ask the judges themselves to state where they believe the voice is from, even though there has been increasing attention to careful characterisations of input in MGT research (Preston, 1989: 3). Preston says: “Though this seems a simple technique to add to attitude surveys, it is rarely done, and language attitude results are made extremely difficult to interpret because the respondents’ areal taxonomy and identification of regional provenance of the voice samples are not known.” My inclusion of this question (where respondents believe the voice is from) fills this gap in this particular study. The MGT is an effective method for measuring attitudes towards language and its relationship with identity. Although the MGT singles out the “real” intergroup differences in communication, it is a useful technique when investigating large scale social categories such as ethnicity, gender and social class.

Speakers

The speakers recorded for the MGT that I carried out were from Maraş, Turkey and had been speakers of MRKr as well as BHKr Kurdish for many years, but identified MRKr as their first language. Both speakers learned BHKr as adults through their involvement with the Kurdish movement and were self-taught acquirers. The male speaker (42) lived in Turkey, had a degree in

Public Relations, and worked as a journalist and translator, mainly of books, plays, TV series, cartoons and documentaries. The female speaker (49) lived in London and worked as an interpreter and as a “Life in the UK” instructor in a London-based college and was completing her degree in Turkey. During the pilot study, I asked the respondents whether or not the speakers were competent, and they stated that they could understand what was said. The respondents were confident about the speakers and the quality of their voices when asked after the pilot study. The audio recordings were randomised so that the same speakers were not heard consecutively by the listeners (Kircher, 2016).

Procedure

Audio recordings of the two speakers telling a children’s story in two varieties, BHKr and MRKr, were produced. The speakers were asked to listen to four different stories which were audio recorded (and broadcasted on YouTube) and then narrate the stories in both varieties. As the speakers said that they were self-conscious and it took them some time to adapt to each variety, they were recorded narrating the stories for five minutes each. Then I used *Audacity* to edit and capture one-minute segments of speech where the speakers were most fluent and relaxed. This was also helpful to prevent the listeners getting bored by listening to the same story. Although this may have affected the choice of wording and speech rate, participants in the pilot study did not realise that the same speakers were narrating the stories. The stories narrated were ideologically and politically neutral, though still related to Kurdish culture. However, it should be noted that one of the shortfalls of this approach is that no story is entirely ideologically free or neutral. The lexical items preferred by the speakers differed, and this, I would argue, might have affected the listeners’ perceptions.

A 5-point Likert-scale was used for each speaker in order to elicit the extreme opposites of the traits tested and to be consistent with previous studies such as those carried out by Kircher (2016). Questions that pertained to solidarity traits related to politeness, sense of humour, warmth, likeability, and sociability. Traits that pertained to status were intelligence, dependability, ambition, leadership qualities and intelligibility. These traits “represent the social group with which one identifies” (Ryan et al., 1987: 9) or not. Ryan et al. (1987: 1073) argue that the dimensions of status and solidarity are considered to have “a universal importance for the understanding of language attitudes.”

In addition to the Likert scale, where solidarity and status traits were evaluated, at the bottom of the page three qualitative questions were asked of

the participants: (1) Where do you think the speaker is from? (2) What is the speaker's occupation?; (3) Do you think the speaker is Alevi or Sunni? These questions were asked in order to find out firstly with which dialect region the speakers were associated; secondly, which social class the respondents attributed to the speakers. As there is a lack of research on the details of how social class categories are determined among the Kurds that I am aware of, I used the traditional system in the UK on the grounds that my participants live here. While determining the categories I use in this study, I took education and occupation into consideration and labelled my categories as high, middle and low level occupations. Higher professions involve occupations such as writers, doctors and dentists; intermediate professions pertain to teachers, nurses and small businesses; and lower professions refer to jobs such as waiters and shopkeepers. These categorisations were not asked through multiple choice questions, rather participants were free to write the occupations as they perceived them. The last question was asked in order to find out which belief (Alevi or Sunni) was associated with BHKr and which with MRKr. This question aimed at discerning whether or not the dichotomy of "our" language vs. "their" language may be related to religion aside from the geographical factors. The answers were coded and categorised.

Response Sheet

Participants were informed that they would hear four different speakers (two male and two female) and that they should rate their personality traits on the basis of how the speakers spoke. Initially, a semantic differential scale (SDS) which had bipolar adjective scales, such as educated-not educated was prepared. A pilot study was run in order to see if participants had any difficulties with the response sheet which showed that respondents found the SDS difficult to understand when evaluating the speakers. A second response sheet with a Likert-scale that had five intervals (5 = agree strongly, 4 = agree mildly, 3 = don't mind, 2 = mildly disagree, 1=disagree strongly) was prepared for the actual study. Friborg et al. (2006: 873) argue that a drawback of the SDS format is "the increased cognitive demand, hence introducing new errors in scores". Participants found the Likert-scale easier to use for rating than the SDS. The response sheet was prepared in three languages, Kurmanji, Turkish and English.

Statistical Procedure

Demographic data about the 84 participants, regarding their age, sex, location, level of education and years lived in the UK were entered into SPSS, statistics software package for statistical analysis. Variables such as ethnicity and religious affiliations are presented in univariate analysis through bar charts which indicate the percentage of people belonging to each categorisation. Responses to questions such as “where do you think speaker #1 is from?” are presented in bar charts using Microsoft Excel 2010.

Secondly, analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were performed using SPSS in order to determine whether or not gender and regional variation as two independent variables had an effect on respondents' evaluations. This time the data was recoded before the ANOVAs were performed.

The ANOVAs were followed by t-tests. Paired t-tests were carried out using SPSS. The p-value for statistical significance was $p < 0.05$, for ten personal traits between BHKr female and MRKr female; BHKr male vs MRKr male; BHKr male vs BHKr female and MRKr female vs MRKr male speakers. The t-tests were aimed at finding out whether or not there was a statistically significant difference between the paired populations.

Respondents

The majority of respondents were aged between 26–40 (53%) and 41–55 (35.1%). The number of participants aged 18–25 (7.2%) was significantly low. Although equal numbers of female and male respondents were invited to the study, the majority of participants were male (74%), and females comprised 24% (2% missing) of the experimental group. 20 female and 62 male participants.

The majority of respondents had either a university degree (24.1%) or a diploma of higher education (23.3%). The study then looked at the employment of the respondents, using classifications adapted from the National Statistics Socio-economic classification.³ After their responses were coded and then categorised, the majority of participants had higher (34%) or intermediate professions (29%) and a very small number of them had lower professions (15%).

3 <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/classifications/current-standard-classifications/soc2010/soc2010-volume-3-ns-sec--rebased-on-soc2010--user-manual/index.html#5> (last accessed on 20 October 2015).

49% of respondents identified as Alevi and only 15% as Sunni. However, 26% identified as Shafi'i or Hanafi. The rest identified as other. This could be interpreted as the division between schools of Islam becoming clear in participants' self-identifications. As this research focuses on the Alevi and Sunni beliefs, the division between Hanafi and Shafi'i schools of Islam needs further investigation. The rest of the respondents identified as Zoroastrian, Christian or as having no religion.

Attitudes towards BHKr and MRKr on the Solidarity Dimension

Repeated measures analysis of variance (ANOVAs) were conducted in order to find out whether or not the independent variables of gender, region and the interaction of gender and region affected the participants' evaluations of BHKr and MRKr. The ANOVA results show that the gender of the participants affected how they rated female "ambition". The region of origin of respondents affected their ratings of male "politeness" and male "intelligence". The combination of gender and region affected the ratings of female "intelligibility". These results were statistically significant on a <0.05 level. For the purposes of ANOVAs, the regions were grouped as south corresponding to BHKr and northwest corresponding to MRKr.

In order to examine how these traits were rated in terms of solidarity and status, paired t-tests were conducted. The next section deals with how Bohtan versus Maraş Kurmanji was rated considering the effects of gender and region on participants' ratings.

TABLE 2 Paired sample t-tests of the evaluations of the female and male speaker in BHKr and MRKr on the solidarity dimension

	Female speaker		Male speaker	
	Bohtan	Maraş	Bohtan	Maraş
politeness	3.67	3.78	4.02	3.77
humour	3.18	3.76*	3.61*	3.23
warmth	3.85	4.10	3.92	3.69
likeability	3.38	3.83*	3.69	3.49
sociability	3.52	3.75	3.78*	3.33

* score is higher and statistically significant ($p < 0.05$)

Table 2 shows the respondents’ evaluations of the female and the male speakers in two different guises on the solidarity dimension. The evaluations of these traits were calculated on a $p < 0.05$ level. The mean values show that the MRKr female speaker was rated significantly more favourably than the BHKr female speaker on “humour” and “likeability” traits. Whilst the BHKr male was rated more favourably overall than the MRKr male, only traits pertaining to “humour” and “sociability” were rated significantly higher.

Attitudes towards BHKr and MRKr on the Status Dimension

Although the mean values show that the BHKr female speaker was rated more favourably on “dependability”, “education”, and “intelligibility” than the MRKr speaker, and lower for “intelligence”, “ambition” and “leadership” traits, paired t-tests on the status dimension show that **none of the traits were statistically significant** on the $p < 0.5$ level. However, the BHKr male speaker was found to be more intelligent, educated, ambitious and was overall rated higher for the leadership qualities.

Figure 2 shows how the participants responded to the speakers’ social class on the basis of how the speakers spoke. As demonstrated, the BHKr male speaker was affiliated with the higher professions as opposed to the female BHKr speaker. The female speaker was evaluated to have low profession jobs

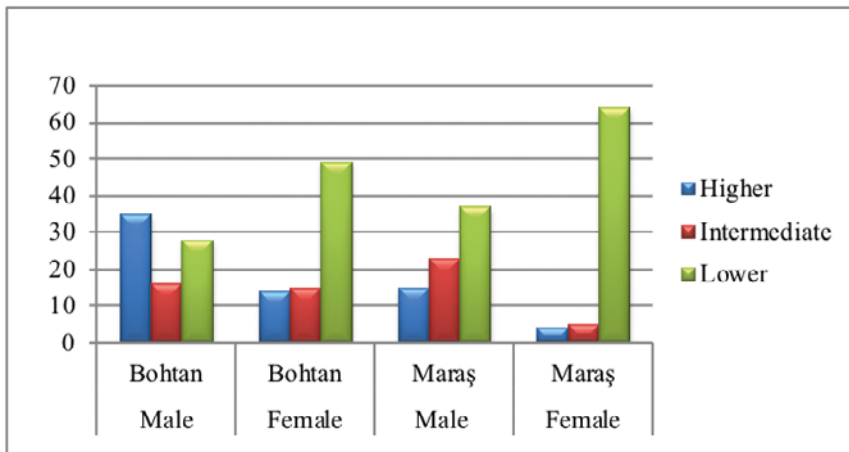


FIGURE 2 What is the speaker’s occupation?

TABLE 3 Paired sample t-tests of the evaluations of the female and male speaker BHKr and MRKr on the status dimension

	Female speaker		Male speaker	
	Bohtan	Maraş	Bohtan	Maraş
intelligence	3.56	3.59	3.89*	3.44
dependability	3.76	3.71	3.53	3.55
education	3.08	2.86	3.57*	3.11
ambition	3.17	3.32	3.17*	2.81
leadership	3.10	3.28	3.36*	2.76
intelligibility	3.91	3.78	3.86	3.73

TABLE 4 Paired sample t-tests of the evaluations of the BHKr female and male and MRKr female and male on the solidarity and status dimensions

	BHKr	BHKr	MRKr	MRKr
	Female	Male	Female	Male
politeness	3.67	4.01*	3.79	3.77
humour	3.16	3.61*	3.74*	3.22
warmth	3.82	3.94	4.06*	3.69
likeability	3.39	3.70	3.86*	3.50
sociability	3.51	3.78	3.66*	3.34
intelligence	3.54	3.90*	3.59	3.42
dependability	3.75	3.53	3.67	3.57
education	3.05	3.55*	2.89	3.09
ambition	3.13	3.16	3.28*	2.81
leadership	3.06	3.40	3.30*	2.76
intelligibility	3.93	3.89	3.82	3.74

* score is higher and statistically significant ($p < 0.05$)

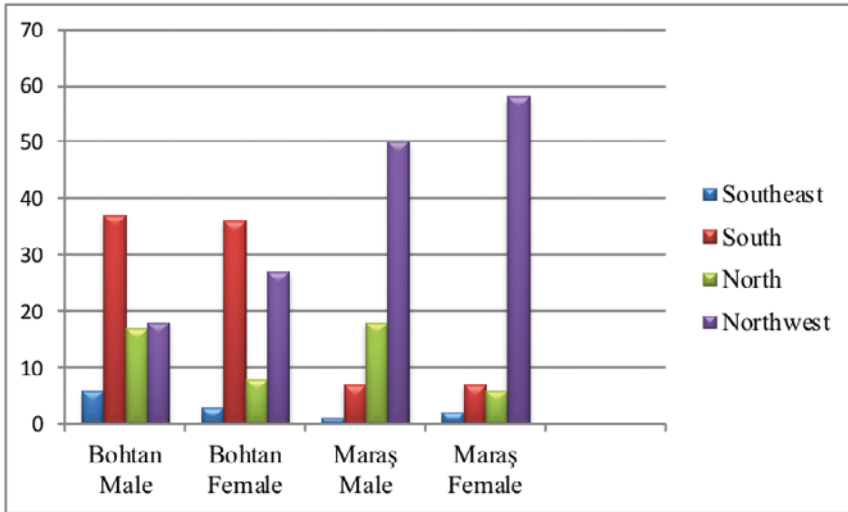


FIGURE 3 Where is the speaker from?

both in her BHKr and MRKr speaking. On the contrary, the male speaker was assessed to have a low profession only in his MRKr speaking. This might be interpreted as the ingrained gender prejudices in Kurdish speakers manifesting themselves in actual speech performance.

Table 4 shows that on the solidarity dimension, ratings for only two traits were significant. The BHKr male scored higher than the female BHKr speaker on “politeness” and “humour”. Furthermore, the BHKr male speaker also scored higher on status traits, i.e., “intelligence” and “education”. As for the MRKr variety, the female speaker scored higher than the male speaker on solidarity traits such as “humour”, “warmth”, “likeability” and “sociability”, as she also did for “ambition” and “leadership” on the status dimension. The BHKr male speaker was rated more favourably than the BHKr female speaker. The MRKr female speaker was rated more favourably than the MRKr male speaker. This could be because most participants were male in this study and they rated the BHKr male speaker more positively than the MRKr male speaker because he was also evaluated to have a lower job. Other studies show men prefer more nonstandard forms. This contradicts with other studies. However, they seem to do the opposite with the female speaker. This may be because the BHKr male speaker was associated with power and prestige while the MRKr female was rated more highly on most solidarity traits than on status traits. Further female and male speakers were rated differently on the status dimension: while “intelligence” and “education” were rated significantly differently pertaining to the

BHKr speakers, “ambition” and “leadership” were rated significantly differently in relation to the MRKr speakers.

The respondents were asked to identify where the speakers might be from. This question was asked in order to find out whether or not the respondents could categorise the speakers regionally according to the varieties they spoke. Although both speakers were from the same town and the same dialect region, namely the northwest dialect region in Turkey (as outlined by Öpengin and Haig, 2014), the respondents evaluated the regions differently:

When asked about where each speaker was from, both the Bohtan male and female were evaluated as Southern by the majority of the respondents. In the same vein both MRKr male and female speakers were evaluated as MRKr. Considering the results pertaining to the urban vs. rural traits, it could be concluded that BHKr speakers who were evaluated to be Southern were also evaluated as more urban than the MRKr speakers. In the actual study I asked the respondents to write the name of a city where they guessed the speaker was from. I categorised these regions on the basis of Öpengin and Haig (2014). Drawing on the perceptions of the listeners, BHKr corresponds to cities such as Mardin, Batman, Sırnak and Urfa. MRKr corresponds to cities such as Malatya, Sivas and of course Maraş. Beal (2006) argues that regional varieties are a strong marker of regional identities. Lippi Green (1994: 165) argues that “accent is how the other speaks. It is the first diagnostic for identification of geographic or social outsiders”. This suggests that attitudes towards specific geographic locations determine who the insiders and outsiders are.

Religion is another identity marker, and language “may be used as a major tool for religions and cultures to maintain or form their identity” (Zuckermann, 2006: 237). The paired t-tests pertaining to the binary opposition of religious vs. not religious were evaluated by the participants very differently.

Both the BHKr female and male speakers were evaluated as being more religious than the MRKr speakers. Furthermore, paired t-tests pertaining to the BHKr female vs. MRKr male in Table 5 show that the BHKr female was evaluated to be more religious than the male speaker. Neither the MRKr female nor the MRKr male was found to be religious, indicating that Alevi are not perceived as religious, which is also a common stereotype. This is illustrated in figure 4. Figure 4 shows that the BHKr male speaker was evaluated as Sunni whereas the MRKr male was evaluated as Alevi. By contrast, the BHKr female was evaluated as Alevi by the majority of the respondents.

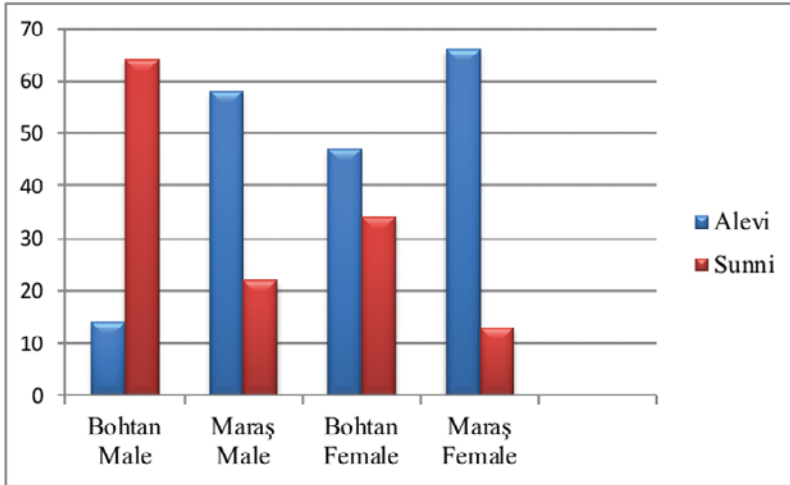


FIGURE 4 What is the religious affiliation of the speaker?

TABLE 5 Paired sample t-tests of the evaluations of female and male speakers on religious/not religious

Region	Female Speaker		Male Speaker	
	Bohtan	Maraş	Bohtan	Maraş
	2.72*	2.46	3.04*	2.41

Discussion

The paired t-tests that compared BHKr and MRKr on the solidarity dimension present different results in regards to gender. While the MRKr female speaker was rated significantly more favourably in relation to the solidarity traits than the BHKr female speaker, the BHKr male speaker was rated more favourably than the MRKr male speaker in relation to the solidarity traits. This could be interpreted as a male bias towards the out-group since 43% of the participants were from Maraş and its surrounding areas as opposed to the 12% Bohtan, where the MRKr male speaker was believed to be from. This contradicts what several theorists claim: Edwards (1977), Edwards and Jacobsen (1987), Giles

(1973), and Lambert et al. (1960) found that while speakers of a standard variety are rated more favourably along the dimensions of status, speakers of non-standard varieties received higher evaluations on the solidarity dimension. Secondly, paired t-tests on the status dimension show that none of the traits concerning the female speaker either in BHKr or in MRKr were statistically significant at the $p < 0.05$ level. However, there is considerable difference in how the male speaker BHKr and MRKr were rated. This contradicts what several theorists claim: Edwards (1977), Edwards and Jacobsen (1987), Giles (1973), and Lambert et al. (1960) found that while speakers of a standard variety are rated more favourably along the dimensions of status, speakers of non-standard varieties received higher evaluations on the solidarity dimension. Secondly, paired t-tests on the status dimension show that none of the traits concerning the female speaker either in BHKr or in MRKr were statistically significant at the $p < 0.05$ level. However, there is considerable difference in how the male speaker BHKr and MRKr were rated. While the comparison of BHKr vs MRKr female showed nothing significant, ratings of the BHKr vs MRKr male show that the MRKr male was rated more favourably.

Other studies such as Giles (1970; 1971) and Hiraga (2005) show that people rate standard varieties of English higher in status traits but lower in solidarity traits. Furthermore, the follow-up question also confirms that the female speaker was associated with lower professions in both speakers, whereas the Bohtan male speaker was associated with higher professions. This could again be due to male bias and the large number of males in the sample.

In order to answer the second question pertaining to gender on solidarity and status dimensions, paired t-tests were conducted to compare the BHKr female with the MRKr female and the BHKr male with the MRKr male. The BHKr male was evaluated more positively for intelligence and education both of which are status traits. No ratings pertaining to the BHKr female were statistically significant.

Other studies have shown that the speaker's gender has an influence on the attitudes of the listeners. In New Zealand, Wilson and Bayard (1992) and Street et al. (1984) found that female speakers were rated lower on all traits. However, Van-Trieste (1990) reported that the highest ratings were given by female participants to male speakers and the lowest by male participants to male speakers among Puerto Rican university students. It was also found that there was no significant difference in ratings given to female speakers by either the male or female participants. It could be concluded that the gender of the speakers and listeners definitely plays a role in the perceptions of BHKr vs. MRKr and the way in which the listeners evaluated the female and male speakers.

As for the third question pertaining to region, both the BHKr male and female speakers were evaluated to be more urban than the MRKr speakers. The responses to the follow-up question, which asked participants to identify where the speakers might be from, show that both the BHKr female and male speakers were evaluated to be from the southern region. This shows that folk beliefs (beliefs held by nonlinguists) about region are prevalent in this sample. As discussed above, region is an important indicator of social identity and attitudes toward regional variation determine who is an insider and who is not.

The responses to the question on religion show that both the BHKr female and male speakers were evaluated as religious, whilst both the MRKr female and male speakers were identified as non-religious. The responses to the question that was asked about whether the speakers were Alevi or Sunni demonstrate that both MRKr speakers were evaluated as Alevi and the male BHKr speaker to be Sunni. While the BHKr male speaker was identified as Sunni, the BHKr female (who was the same person who produced the MRKr speech sample) was identified as Alevi. Kircher (2009) (also Fuga, 2002; Genesee and Holobow, 1989) found that the speakers who spoke third were evaluated consistently differently from the other speakers. This seems to be a methodological issue that needs to be tackled in future studies. Nonetheless, drawing on these results it could be concluded that religious affiliations among Kurmanji speakers who identify as Alevi and Sunni have different linguistic features. This is interconnected with geographical location that is itself a result of religious affiliations.

Conclusion

This paper has shown that gender and regional identities affect how participants evaluate BHKr and MRKr speakers. Although the sample for this study is too small to make generalisations, it demonstrates that there is a significant distinction in attitudes towards BHKr and MRKr in the UK. Whilst the BHKr male speaker was rated higher on the status dimension, the MRKr female speaker was rated higher than the BHKr female speaker on all of the solidarity traits. This shows that there is a clear bias on the listeners' side when evaluating these two varieties of Kurmanji.

More specific implications of the MGT are the notions of "us" and "them": the sample shows that there is a clear dichotomy between the MRKr versus BHKr in terms of regional and religious identity as well as attitudes towards class and gender. The way in which individuals categorise themselves and others, the negative and positive values they attach to the speakers, favouring one group against another, are important aspects of social identity. Tajfel (1978;

1974) and Tajfel and Turner (1986) argue that in-group identifications lead to stereotyping and prejudice against out-groups.

It could be argued that in-group and out-group identities affect language choices and language use. Although many MRKr speakers learn what is identified as “academic” or “proper” Kurmanji, that is, BHKr, their strong affiliations with the region and with the Alevi religion help them to form a distinctive Kurdish Alevi identity that affects their attitudes towards BHKr vs. MRKr Kurmanji.

The results of this study demonstrate that BHKr is associated with the Bohtan region and MRKr is associated with the Maraş region. Although one cannot conclude that Alevis speak differently at this stage, it seems very likely that both region and religion have an impact on the way in which Alevis diverge in terms of phonological and lexical differences.

The MGT results show that women and men are perceived differently. Although the sample in this study is too small to make generalisations and the fact that women and men have different voice qualities that can contribute to evaluations and perceptions of their production of BHKr and MRKr, the implications of the results could be summarised as: linguistic sexism seems to be relevant in Kurdish society, similar to the US and Russian contexts (Andrews, 2003; see also Hassanpour, 2001 for patriarchy in the Kurdish language). Although folk beliefs about women's and men's speech are often dismissed by linguists, as Preston (1999) argues, these beliefs have a great impact on social interaction, language attitudes and the status of women and men in the Kurdish community in the UK. Although women hold high-status jobs (Yilmaz, 2018), the results of the MGT show that both BHKr and MRKr female speakers were perceived to have low-status-jobs. Given the fact that these attitudes do not reflect women's real life professions, the implications of these attitudes are that the place of women in Kurdish society continues to be subordinate.

Alevi identity is depicted as highly ambivalent and problematic in connection with their national identity. The results of the MGT shows that BHKr Kurmanji speakers were perceived as more religious than the MRKr speakers. While the BHKr male speaker was evaluated as Sunni, the BHKr female speaker was perceived as Alevi. This not only means that MRKr speakers are seen as non-religious but also helps us to understand the controversies around Alevis. This demonstrates that BHKr is affiliated with dominance and MRKr is associated with subversiveness, which is often dismissed in Kurdish political discourse.

Finally, the investigation into attitudes among minority groups is important since attitudes play an important role in revitalisation, intergenerational transmission, survival of a variety and more importantly group identities. This study

indicates that MRK_r in the UK diaspora is in a fragile situation. When asked, many respondents (42%) stated that they wanted their children to learn all languages (Kurmanji, Turkish and English) and 23% wanted their children to learn Kurmanji only. These results were followed by Kurdish + Turkish (19%) and finally 3% of respondents wanted their children to learn English. These numbers indicate positive attitudes towards multilingualism and a strong desire to transmit Kurmanji to the next generation. However, throughout my fieldwork (Yilmaz, 2016), children dropped out of Kurmanji lessons and were not eager to attend.

Finally, studies concerning the intersection of language and religion in relation to language attitudes among Kurmanji speakers in the UK have been hitherto non-existent. Further analytical studies are needed to determine the sociolinguistic situation of regional varieties of Kurmanji in the UK as well as their interrelationship with social factors such as region, religion, gender and class.

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Appendix A: Matched Guise Test Questionnaire

MGT (English)

Respondent code: _____

Please listen to the tape and circle the number that indicates your rating of the speaker 1, 2, 3 & 4 and answer the following 3 questions.

5 = agree strongly 4 = agree mildly 3 = don't mind 2 = mildly disagree 1 = disagree strongly

polite	5	4	3	2	1	not polite
intelligent	5	4	3	2	1	not intelligent
good sense of humour	5	4	3	2	1	no sense of humour
warm	5	4	3	2	1	cold
dependable	5	4	3	2	1	not dependable
likable	5	4	3	2	1	not likable
educated	5	4	3	2	1	not educated
ambitious	5	4	3	2	1	not ambitious
sociable	5	4	3	2	1	not sociable
has leadership qualities	5	4	3	2	1	has no leadership qualities
intelligible	5	4	3	2	1	not intelligible
religious	5	4	3	2	1	not religious
urban	5	4	3	2	1	rural

1. Where do you think the speaker is from? _____
2. What is her/his occupation? _____
3. Is the speaker Alevi or Sunni? _____

About you

Please circle the answer that best fits your situation.

1. What is your age?

1 = 25 or under

2 = 26-40

3 = 41-55

4 = 56 or older

2. What is your gender?

1 = Female

2 = Male

3 = Other

3. How long have you lived in the UK?

1 = 5 years or under 2 = 6–10 years 3 = 11–15 years 4 = 16 or more

4. Where do you live?

5. What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed?

1 = No education 2 = Primary 3 = Secondary 4 = High School
5 = Bachelor's degree 6 = Master's Degree 7 = Doctoral Degree 8 = Other _____

6. How would you describe your ethnic identity?

1 = Kurdish 2 = Turkish 3 = British Kurdish 4 = Other _____

7. How would you describe your religious affiliation?

1 = Alevi 2 = Sunni 3 = Non-religious 4 = Prefer not to say

8. Which language(s) do you identify yourself most with?

1 = Kurdish 2 = Turkish 3 = English 4 = Other _____

9. What language would you like your children to learn?

1 = Kurdish 2 = Turkish 3 = English 4 = All three

10. What is your first language/mother tongue?

1 = Kurdish 2 = Turkish 3 = English 4 = Other _____

11. Do you speak Kurdish? _____

12. What is your level of Kurdish? _____

13. Where were you born? _____

14. What is your occupation? _____

15. What do you believe this study was about? _____

This experiment is anonymous. However, if you would like to talk to the researcher about any of the questions, please feel free to contact her by putting your name, address or phone number here. Please write any other comments you have.

Thank you!

Name:

E-mail/Telephone number/Address:

MGT (Kurmanji)

Beşdar No: _____

Ji kerema xwe guhdariya qeyda dengî bikin û axivkerî (1,2,3,4) hun di pîvekê de li ku cih bikin wê numerayê gilover bikin.

5 = Ez bi temamî pejirîn im 4 = Pişkî pejirîn im 3 = Ez ne arîxen im 2 = Ez pişkî ne pejirîn im 1 = Ez qet na pejirîn im

pir kubar e	5	4	3	2	1	qet ne kubar e
pir aqilmend e	5	4	3	2	1	qet ne aqilmend e
henera wî/ê ya heneka	5	4	3	2	1	henera wî/ê ya heneka qet tune
pir xwîngerm e	5	4	3	2	1	qet ne xwîngerm e
pir pêbawer e	5	4	3	2	1	qet ne pêbawer e
pir xwînşîrîn e	5	4	3	2	1	qet ne xwînşîrîn e
pir perwerdekirî ye	5	4	3	2	1	qet ne perwerdekirî ye
pir bi hêrs e	5	4	3	2	1	qet ne bi hêrs e
pir civakî ye	5	4	3	2	1	qet ne civakî ye
taybetîyê wi/ê yê derîkeşîyê pir e	5	4	3	2	1	teybetîyê wi/ê yê derîkeşîyê qet tune
pir fehmbare	5	4	3	2	1	qet ne fehmbare
pir oldare	5	4	3	2	1	qet ne oldare
pir şaristanî ye	5	4	3	2	1	qet ne şaristanî ye

1. Li gorî we axivker ji kuderê ye?
2. Li gorî we karê axivker çiyê?
3. Li gorî we axivker sunî ye an jî elewî ye?

1. Temenê we?

1 = 25 an jî jêr 2 = 26–40 3 = 41–55 4 = 56 an jî jor

2. Zayenda we?

1 = Jin 2 = Mêr 3 = Din

3. Hûn çiqase li Brîtanya dijîn?

1 = 5–10 sal 2 = 11–15 sal 3 = 16 an jî pirtir

4. Hûn li kîjan bajarî dijîn? _____

5. Dibistana herî bilind a hûn jê mezûn bûne?

1 = Min perwerde nestandîye 2 = Dibistana seretayî 3 = Dibistana navîn 4 = Lîse
5 = Zanîngeh 6 = Lîsansa bilind 7 = Doktora 8 = Din _____

6. Hûn nasnameya xwe ya etnîk çawa binav dikin?

1= Kurd 2= Tirk 3= Brîtanî-Kurd
4=Din

7. Hûn xwemaliya xwe ya olî çawa binav dikin?

1 = Elewî 2 = Sunî 3 = Şafî/Hanifi 4 = Ne oldar 5 = Naxwazim bêjim
6 = Din _____

8. Hûn piranî xwe bi çi zimanî terîf dikin?

1 = Kurdî 2 = Tirkî 3 = Ingilîzî 4 = Kurdî-Tirkî 5 = Tevde

9. Hûn dixwazin zarokên we çi zimanî hîn bibin?

1 = Kurdî 2 = Tirkî 3 = Ingilîzî 4 = Kurdî-Tirkî 5 = Tevde

10. Zimanê we yê zikmakî kîjan e?

1 = Kurdî 2 = Tirkî 3 = Ingilîzî 4 = Kurdî-Tirkî 5 = Tevde

11. Hûn bi kurdî diaxivin?

1 = Erê 2 = Na

12. Hûn kurdî di çi astê de diaxivin?

5 = Pir baş 4 = Baş 3 = Navîn 2 = Xerab 1 = Pir xerab

13. Hûn li ku hatine dinê?

14. Karê we?

15. Li gorî we ev xebat derheqê çi de bû?

16. We di çar qeydên dengî de tişteke neasayî ferq kir?

Di vê lêkolînê de navê we nayê bikaranîn. Lê belê tişteke ku hebe hûn ji lêkolîner bipirsin an jî bixwazin bêjin ji kerema xwe navê xwe û melûmatên xwe yê danûstandinê li vir binivîsin.



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“Aspirational Capital” and Transformations in First-Generation Alevi-Kurdish Parents’ Involvement with Their Children’s Education in the UK

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Abstract

With a focus on the London Alevi-Kurdish community from Turkey, the aim of this article is to analyse changes in parenting and home-school relations of two cohorts of first-generation parents arriving in the nineties (Nineties parents) and the noughties (Millennial parents). Against a backdrop of national data showing that “Turkish” children persistently underachieve in schools across Europe, this exploration of differences within the first generation challenges deficit models of home-school relations. Through adding “differences within a generation” to intersectional analyses of home-school relations, it facilitates the exploration of parents’ migration context, ethnicity, religion and community. Additionally, the article addresses migrant parents’ access to different forms of capital in navigating the education system. This includes the contributions of children, the community associations and local schools which have made a difference to Nineties and Millennial parents’ relationships with schools. Finally, the analysis demonstrates how community activism can have much more powerful effects than parents acting alone.

Keywords

Alevi Kurds – first-generation parents – parental involvement – transnational migration – cultural capital

“Sermiyanê armanckirî” û guherînên li ba dêbavên elewî-kurd yên ji nîfşê yekem li ser perwerdeya zarokên wan li Ingiltereyê

Ev gotar li ser cemaeta kurdên elewî yên Londrayê hûr dibe û guherînên di kiryarên zarok mezinkirinê û têkiliyên mal-dibistanê de tehlîl dike li nav du komên dêbavên ji nîfşê yekem, yên li salên nodan û li dor du hezaran (mîlenyal) hatî. Li ser paşxaneya daneyên neteweyî, ku nîşan didin ku zarokên “tirk” li seranserê Ewropayê kêrkerî ne li dibistanê, ev tehlîl û pêdeçûna cudatîyên di nava nîfşê yekem li dijî “modêlên kêmasiyê” yên têkiliya mal û dibistanê radibe. Bi rêya zêdekirina “cudatîyên di nava nîfşekî de” li tehlîla têkiliyên mal û dibistanê yên li ser bingehê navber-beşî (inter-sectional), ev lêkolîn rê vedike bo destnîşankirina rola fakterên wek şert û çarçoveya koçberiya dêbavan, qewmîyet, dîn û cemaeta wan. Zêdebarî vê, gotar berê xwe dide îmkânên dêbavan di warê sermiyanên cihêreng de gava di nav sîstema perwerdeyê de. Di nav vê yekê de karîgeriya zarokan, komeleyên cemawerî û dibistanên meheli hene ku cudatîyeye mezin durist kirine di têkiliya dêbavên ji salên nodan û du hezaran ya ligel dibistanê de. Dawiyê, ev xebat nîşan dide ka çawa çalakvaniya cemawerî dikare tesîreke gelek mezintir bike ji hewldanên bi tenê yên dêbavan.

“Sermayey temah” we werçexan le beşdarbûnî newey yekemî bawanî ‘Elewye-Kurdekan le xwêndinî mindallekanîyan le Şanşîne Yekgirtuwekanda

Be terkîz kirdne ser rwewendî ‘Elewîye-Kurdekanî Turkyaya le Lenden, amancî em wtare şikarîkirdnî allugorre le bawanêti û peywendîyekanî mall-xwêndinge lenaw dû taqmî bawan lew newey-yekemane ke le deyey newetekan (bawanî newetekan) we le deyey sifîrda (bawanî hezare) geşîştûn. Lehember paşxanî datayekî nîştûmanî ke kem twanayî berdewamî zarokî “turkî” le xwêndingekanî sertaserî ewropa derdexa, em gerane be naw cyawazyekanî na newey yekemda teheday modêlî kurtihênan dekat le peywendîyekanî mall-xwêndinge. Be ziyadkirdnî “cyawazîyekan lenaw neweyekda” bo şikarîyekanî peywest be têkhellîkîşbûnî peywendî mall-qutabxane, em babete asankarî bo dozînewey çwarçêweyk bo koçberêti, etnikî, aynî û çvakî bawanekan dekat. Herweha, babeteke basî dest pêrrageyîştinî bawanî koçberekan be şêwe cyawazekanî

sermaye dekat bo rêdozî kirdin le sistemî perwerdeda. Emeş beşdarî mindallan, komelle cvakîyekan û qutabxane nawçeyyekan deqrêtewe ke cyawazîyekyan bo bawanî deyey newetekan û dûhezarekan drustkird. Lekotayîda, ravekan ewe pişandeden ke çon çalakî cvakî detwanêt rollî zor behêztirî le çalakî tenyay bawanekan hebêt.

“Kapîtalî waştîx” û Qiraliya Yewbîyayîye de vurîyayîşê têkilîyanê perwerdeyê domananê may û piyanê kurdanê elewîyan ê neslê verênî

Bi giranî para komelê kurdanê elewîyan ê Londra rê, hedefê na meqale yo ke vurîyayîşê mayûpiyîye û têkilîyanê keye û mektebî yê di cematane may û piyanê neslanê verênan ke serranê 90an de (may û piyê 90an) û serranê 2000an de (may û piyê 2000an) ameyê, înan analîz bikero. Bi zidiya dayeyanê dewlete ke musnenê ke domanê “tirkan” mektebanê Ewropa de hende ke înan ra pawîyeno serkewte niyê, no kifşê ciyayîyanê mabênê neslê verênî modelanê kêmasîyan ê têkilîyanê keye û mektebî rê îtirazêk o. Îlawekerdîşê “ciyayîyanê miyanê yew neslî” bi analîzanê têkilîyanê keye û mektebî yê pêresayeyan, cigêrayîşê kontekstê koçkerdişê may û piyan, etnisîte, dîn û komelê înan keno asan. Tepîya, na meqale de sistemê perwerdeyî miyan de îmkananê may û piyanê koçberan ra behs beno ke ê xo senî resnenê formanê kapîtalî yê ciya-ciyayan. Ancîna, tede serzêdeyê domanî, dezgehê komelî û mektebanê cayîyan estê ke pêrunê têkilîyanê mabênê may û piyanê 90an û 2000an û mekteban de ferqêk viraştî. Peyniye de, no analîz musneno ke bandura aktîvîzmê komelî bi senî hewa goreyê kerdişanê may û piyan ê ferdîyan ra bena hêzdarêre.

Introduction

This article captures the transformations in home-school relations occurring within the first generation of the transnational Alevi-Kurdish migrant community in London.¹ It explores the intra-generational differences between first-generation parents arriving from Turkey in the 1990s (who I describe as Nineties parents) compared to first-generation parents who arrived from

1 Whilst there has been migration to the UK of both Turkish and Kurdish Alevi, this article focuses specifically on the Kurdish-Alevi community in London, which comprises the majority of Alevi arriving since 1989 (Wahlbeck, 1998). Henceforth, I will use the term “Alevi” to describe them and capture their distinctive ethno-religious identity.

Turkey in the Noughties (Millennial parents). It highlights how education is a crucial site of struggle and engagement for migrant communities and a key motivating factor for their migration. All migrant parents bring to their country of settlement what Yosso (2005) describes as “aspirational” capital, the desire for their children to have a better education than they had and for education to provide the route to a more hopeful future life for their children.

A key aim of the article is to analyse generational shifts in parenting and home-school relationships but only within the first generation of parents arriving directly from Turkey rather than between generations. With a combination of secondary and primary qualitative data, this research explores how the first-generation parents have adjusted their expectations of British education to what the education system expects of parents and “navigated” their way through their children’s education. The theoretical framework loosely draws on the Bourdieusian and intersectional framework of home-school literature (Ball et al., 1997; Vincent, 2010; Crozier and Symeou, 2017). This focuses on parental choice of schools and involvement in children’s education, mindful that policy discourse treats “parents” collectively whilst the responsibility usually devolves to mothers (Reay, 1998; Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson, 2013). Like the home-school literature, critical race theory also counters a deficit approach to minority ethnic communities and captures how they have drawn on a variety of forms of capital to engage with the education system (Yosso, 2005; Posey-Maddox, 2017). Of particular interest is how minority ethnic communities support their children’s education using these different forms of capital through involving family members and community centres, which have a more powerful influence than parents acting alone. Also, it extends an intersectional analysis of home-school relationships by including the role of minority ethnic community centres.

The Alevi-Kurdish Community in Turkey and London

Portes and Zhou (2003) argue that the context of departure and settlement affects migrants’ adaptation patterns and outcomes. The Turkish/Kurdish-speaking Alevi ethno-religious community² in the UK is normally defined more generally in the literature (and official government statistics) within

2 Alevi from Turkey can be ethnically Turkish or Kurdish. The UK Alevi population is predominantly Kurdish but for the purposes of this paper, Alevi will be used to refer to them. However, the majority of them see their Aleviness as their preferred or primary identity while some resist being identified through ethnic differences (see Aydin, 2018).

the category of Turkish migrants, although in fact they have very different life trajectories from Turks both in Turkey and the UK. Despite being the second largest ethno-religious community in Turkey with an estimated population of fifteen to twenty million (Aydin, 2018), the Alevis' experience of state persecution since the sixteenth century has led to a significant proportion migrating either internally to cities (where they often conceal their Alevi identities) or externally abroad (predominantly to Europe) to escape such persecution (Erol, 2012). What makes the Alevi-Kurdish community a distinctive case from other Turkish or Kurdish migrants is its long history of "persecuted exclusion" on both ethnic and religious grounds, living as a marginalised community (Sokefeld, 2008; Massicard, 2010; Cetin, 2014). Alevi-Kurds have experienced generations of assimilationist Turkification policies as the Turkish state aimed to "Turkify the Kurds" and "Sunnify the Alevis" (Yeğen, 2011; Demir, 2017). This has also generated a transnational effect because despite its estimated size of 300,000 (British Alevi Federation, BAF),³ the Alevi community is relatively invisible in the UK. They are assumed to be ethnically Turkish or Kurdish and religiously Muslim and, as in Turkey, there is no official recognition of their identity in national demographic data.

It is against this background that second-generation children became a cause for concern due to inhabiting what the Chair of the Federation (Interview July, 2011) described as a "negative identity".⁴ This is reflected in the way that parents (including some Millennial parents) who, not wanting to risk their children experiencing discrimination at school, would state their national identity as Turkish and their religious affiliation as Muslim when enrolling them. A case in point is Fatma,⁵ a Millennial mother, who explained that she ticked Muslim for the religious category because she was worried her children "might get into trouble at school if they called themselves Alevi" (Interview July, 2018). Further, the pupils described themselves as "sort of Muslim" because they did not know enough about their religion to explain it otherwise. In this respect, although for different reasons than the persecution of Alevis in Turkey, this lack of acknowledgement of Alevi identity exacerbated the marginalisation experienced by second-generation Alevi pupils in British schools, contributing to the institutional erasure of their ethno-religious identity and the

3 http://www.alevynet.org/SAP.aspx?pid=About_en-GB (last accessed on 1 March 2020).

4 The consequences of a negative identity for the second generation were explored by Cetin (2014) in his ethnographic research to examine the higher than expected male youth suicide rate for second-generation young Alevi men which had sparked widespread alarm amongst parents and the wider Alevi community.

5 Fatma came from a village near Elbistan in 2004 to join her husband and has three children. All names have been changed.

second-generation's sense that they did not belong in school. (Jenkins and Cetin, 2018).

The Nineties generation of “Turkish” migrants were predominantly Alevi-Kurds seeking asylum in the UK (Wahlbeck, 1998) who spoke little English and largely came from the same towns and villages. At first, they were mostly married men who arrived in the late 1980s or early 1990s in response to worsening conditions in Turkey following the massacres of Alevis and the 1980 military coup. On arrival most settled in north London where, because they spoke little or no English, they worked predominantly in the segregated ethnic labour market, mostly in the textile industry (Demir, 2012). They kept strong transnational kinship, cultural and political ties with their homeland. Alevi women mainly came afterwards through the family reunification rights in the early 1990s and would either work in the textile factories or do piecework at home (Cetin, 2014). Initially, the Alevis joined established Kurdish community centres that mobilised around left-wing and Kurdish politics (Demir, 2012) until the London Alevi Community Centre and Cemevi (LACCC) opened in 1993 to provide religious, cultural, political and educational functions. This reflected a reversal of the position of Alevis as a “twice minority” in Turkey to becoming a majority among the London Kurdish community (Demir, 2017). Demir explains this transition to an Alevi identity as a shift in self-definition to reposition themselves primarily in terms of a religious identity rather than their Kurdish ethnic identity. Moreover, a key feature of first-generation settlement in the UK was the ability to practice their religion openly for the first time. Thus in this article, using the term “Alevi” reflects how the community now describe themselves, but it is interchangeable with Alevi-Kurds.

Like the Nineties migrants, Millennial Alevis were also likely to originate from the same towns and villages and arrive in the UK speaking little or no English. They maintained strong transnational kinship and cultural ties with Turkey and were still likely to integrate into the ethnic community and labour market. In contrast, however, to the Nineties migrants, the Millennial first generation was better educated in Turkey and more likely to be economic migrants or came to join spouses or family members. This is not, however, to draw an absolute distinction between the Nineties and Millennials as having political and economic reasons respectively for migrating. As Demir (2017) usefully points out, these reasons can intersect as some of the early migrants came mainly for economic opportunities “albeit having suffered at the intersections of economic, ethnic and sectarian exclusions” (278). However, the Millennials arrived into a much more established Alevi community with kinship networks available and new community centres opening up across London and the UK following more dispersed patterns of settlement. This is an important

difference because, as Portes and Hao (2004) argue, community centres provide vital support for migrant communities. Given that the LACCC was not set up until the early Nineties, it was not sufficiently established to provide much support to the Nineties first generation (Interview, Chair of BAF,⁶ July 2018).

Migration and Educational Engagement in the Country of Settlement

Most parents want their children to do well in school to enhance their future prospects but, as Vincent (2017) argues, ensuring success is an uncertain process. Migrant parents cite improved educational opportunities for their children as one of the key factors in their migration decision, especially when compared to their own often limited educational opportunities in their country of origin (Haw, 2011; Araujo et al., 2015). However, analysis of achievement data shows that too often their aspirations are not realised. For example, Heath et al.'s (2008) research across eight countries in 2007/8 found that, contrary to their parents' aspirations, second-generation children of immigrants are likely to underperform in relation to the majority ethnic group. Similarly, Schnell and Crul (2014), who draw on cross-national European studies, single out the children of migrants from Turkey (and North Africa) as more likely to underachieve, to drop out of school, and to have significantly less chance of progressing to higher education. However, to explain the wide cross-national variation in outcomes for second-generation Turkish children, they adopt an integration context approach, examining the interaction of family and institutional factors. They argue that analysis of migrant children's achievement should examine the interaction between parental background, the characteristics of the immigrant ethnic community they join, and the structure and organisation of the education system in the destination country to seek explanations and solutions to their persistent underachievement (Schnell and Crul, 2014).

In turning attention now to the importance of the integration context in England, migrant parents' anticipation that education could be safely left to the schools stands at odds with the massive escalation of parental roles and responsibilities being introduced in government policy. Since the 1980s,

6 During the research the Alevi community set up new community centres in London and elsewhere. The British Alevi Federation (BAF) was launched in 2013 and has been based at the new Enfield Centre since 2018. The Chair of the LACCC became the first Chair of the BAF so his title changes over the research, but he is the same person.

home-school relations have revolved around increasing expectations of parental involvement in their children's education and outcomes (Brown, 1990; Crozier and Symeou, 2017) which as Reay (1998) argues disadvantages working-class parents because they are unlikely to generate the same amount of economic, social, cultural or emotional capital to secure equivalent outcomes for their children as the middle classes. Further, parental involvement usually pertains to mothers, which Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson (2013) identify as a "fourth shift", with mothers doing educational work in addition to paid work, domestic labour and childcare. Equally, Vincent and Maxwell (2016) describe how parents, usually but not exclusively middle-class mothers, are going to ever greater lengths in the "concerted cultivation" of their children through extra-curricular activities, private tutoring, attending cultural events and so on to equip them for a competitive school environment.

Pinson et al. (2010) argue that asylum-seeking and refugee children have received the least attention from policy-makers and educators and yet they are amongst "the most socially and economically deprived and discriminated-against groups in society" (4). In a recent review of the home-school nexus, Vincent (2017) claims that relatively few sociological accounts exist of how minority ethnic parents and migrants choose and interact with schools. However, one such account is Posey-Maddox's (2017) research on Black fathers' engagement with schools in America where she found that teachers sometimes made detrimental assumptions about their parenting skills and ability to support their children's education and treated them as exceptional parents if they showed an interest. Moreover, teachers had different expectations of pupils' abilities based on their class, gender, ethnic and other significant subjective identities. More generally, Yosso (2005) has criticised the deficit approach to communities of colour in which it is assumed that the children lack the cultural capital (knowledge, skills and abilities possessed by privileged groups) to succeed and their parents do not value or support their children's education. As Gillies (2006) also argues, within this parental deficit approach it then becomes the responsibility of the family to acquire the right kind of cultural capital and for the children to learn to fit into the institutional habitus of schools. Using a "critical race theory" approach, Yosso (2005) criticises the notion of "cultural capital" as the possession of dominant groups. Instead, she claims communities of colour possess multiple strengths derived from their "cultural wealth" which she describes as "an array of knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts possessed and utilised by communities of color to survive and resist macro and micro forms of oppression" (77). She identifies six forms of capital used by such communities – aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational and resistant.

In relation to the above, this article draws on a Bourdieusian, intersectional, critical race theory approach (Yosso, 2005; Crozier and Symeou, 2017; Posey-Maddox, 2017) which is sensitive to other identities within classifications of home-school relations, in particular generation, migration/settlement, religion, ethnicity, gender and community. The comparison of first-generation Alevi parents' engagement with schools will explore their context of departure and settlement, their use of different forms of capital in their aspirations and navigation through British schools, all factors identified as critical to migrant children's educational success (Faas, 2008; Portes and Hao, 2004; Pinson et al., 2010). This study further adds to extant literature on home-school relationships to include the role of children (familial capital) and ethnic community centres (linguistic, social and navigational capitals) in supporting children, families and schools because their influence is much greater than parents could achieve alone (D'Angelo, 2008, Araujo et al., 2015).

Methods

This research was driven by community activism in response to the Alevi community's request for help in countering what they described to me as the negative identity of the second generation. I would describe the research as participatory research falling broadly within interpretative approaches associated with an anti-discriminatory framework (Daneher et al., 2013; Cohen-Mitchell, 2000). Whereas action research is more hierarchical in bringing in experts to solve a problem, participatory approaches work more collaboratively, recognising our respective contributions in an atmosphere of mutuality and respect.

For this research, I draw on four main sources of data:

- 1) *Cetin's (2014) ethnographic research* on second-generation male Alevi youth suicide which explored family, school and peer influences. I draw entirely on Cetin's published research as secondary data for the analysis of the Nineties first-generation parents but I have heard similar stories from other members of the community. As he was an insider and had already conducted extensive interviews with fifteen parents, including five couples, who came to the UK before 1995, it made sense to use his rich data as illustrative of my analysis rather than conduct new interviews.⁷

⁷ All other interviews and focus groups described in the article were conducted by the author unless otherwise attributed.

- 2) *The “Religion and Identity” participatory action research* that aimed to find solutions to the negative identity of the second-generation Alevi youth (Jenkins and Cetin, 2018). Arising from a request by Alevi youth members for Alevism lessons in Religious Education (RE), a collaboration began between two local schools, the Alevi community centre (LACCC) and the University of Westminster. Working over a period of three years, we designed, trialled and evaluated Alevism lessons in Religious Education at Key Stages 1 to 3.⁸
- 3) *Research on Alevi parents*. Focus group interviews with parents were held at the Prince of Wales Primary School in Enfield from April 2016 to February 2017.⁹ Each was attended by approximately 15 to 20 parents although only mothers came. Two mothers from these groups (Zeynep¹⁰ and Fatma¹¹), whose experience chimed with other mothers, were interviewed again in July 2018 in order to capture data to describe the Millennial first-generation parents’ experience, at least from the perspective of mothers. The Chair of BAF and the deputy head of the school were also interviewed to explore their perceptions of the changing relationship between parents and schools (July, 2018).
- 4) *Community perspectives*. Much of the analysis presented here is distilled from informal conversations with parents and community members at meetings or festivals at the community centre or from presenting our research at national events and regional groups, rather than from recorded interviews. A similar approach applies in ethnographic and other research, demonstrating the legitimacy of using opportunistic data to add to our understanding of parent’s experiences in this way (Alexander, 2000; Cetin, 2014).

This research is relatively small-scale and qualitative, using a small number of cases to identify differences between two cohorts of first-generation parents – the Nineties and Millennials. This is not to suggest that all Nineties or Millennial parents are the same, sharing the same characteristics identified in

8 The Religion and Identity Project, which won the 2014 British Education Research Association/Routledge prize for a unique collaboration between a university and school for the second phase of the research, led to the development of Alevi lessons at Key Stage 3 in a local secondary school. See Jenkins, C. and Cetin, U. (2014) “Minority ethno-faith communities and social inclusion through collaborative research” *BERA Insights* 9.

9 This is the real name of the school which is used with their permission. The focus groups were jointly organised by the school and the author.

10 Zeynep came to join her husband in 2001 at the age of 19. She completed *lise* (sixth form) in Turkey. Her daughter is 15 and her son is 7.

11 Fatma came from a village near Elbistan in 2004 to join her husband and has three children.

the analysis that follows. Where possible, I have identified some heterogeneity within the cohorts or overlap between them in order to show that they are not watertight categories. Nevertheless, as Polit and Beck (2010) suggest, my familiarity with the community allows me to generalise these distinctions beyond the small number of actual interviews covered and to use them as a device to drill into the experiences I have heard described on numerous occasions.

The Nineties Generation: "Local Choosers"¹²

In deconstructing the family-school nexus, I identify four main stakeholders – parents/extended families, children, the community centre and schools, all of whose influence changes across the intra-generational divide.¹³ Schnell and Crul's (2014) analysis of underachievement of migrant Turkish children in European destination countries, examined the interaction between family and institutional factors rather than parental deficit. The intention here is to explore qualitatively this interaction between the Nineties Alevi parents' background and experience with the British education system to understand the reasons that their children underachieved. Typically, Nineties parents came from rural areas in central and south-eastern Turkey where they lived in an "environment of insecurity" (Sirkeci, 2003) mainly due to the war between the Turkish state and Kurdish guerrillas. Although education was compulsory to the end of the primary stage in Turkey, in practice attendance was patchy. Only primary education was provided in the villages and relatively few reached the secondary stage. Boys might attend secondary education in the nearest towns if they could stay with relatives but rarely girls, many of whom received no formal schooling. Those parents who had advanced beyond primary schooling had experienced ethnic and religious discrimination at secondary school from teachers and peers and they feared for their children's future if they stayed in Turkey.

Nineties parents repeatedly said that their children's education was a crucial reason for the family to migrate. They had high hopes for their children to get a good education abroad and at least find a white-collar job regardless of their own educational background. As one father of seven children put it:

12 I draw here on Ball et al.'s (1997) concept of working-class locals which describes the choice processes of working class parents.

13 As already noted, in the absence of primary data from the perspective of schools receiving the Nineties Alevi pupils and also with the community centre just in the process of formation in the early Nineties, this section draws on Cetin's (2014) research which captures what parents and children reported about home-school relations during that period.

We had a dream, I mean we thought we are now in Europe and our children can now have a good education, at least get a degree. [...] I always reminded my children that we did not have the opportunity to go to school in Turkey (Hasan in Cetin, 2014).

Once in the UK, Nineties parents sent their children to school and expected them to do well, such was the reputation of British education. Yosso (2005) admires such “aspirational capital”, the belief that their children could do well in school despite the institutional barriers which impeded their progress. In this respect, they were “good” parents, caring about their children’s education and encouraging them to work hard but not otherwise involved. One father, (Zafer),¹⁴ spoke for many when he said, “my biggest goal was to see my children have a good education” while Ali¹⁵ expressed his regret at spending so much time earning money that he had so little time with his children and their education. Those few Nineties parents who did not leave education entirely to the schools, had been better educated in Turkey and spoke better English. It was their children arriving in the Nineties and entering the British education system at a young age who were more likely to realise their parents’ dream by graduating with degrees and assimilating into white collar or professional employment, but they were the exception.

Whilst Alevi second-generation children consistently underachieved in schools, some of the Nineties children claimed that they had done well at primary school but then found the work too difficult at secondary school. For example, Raci¹⁶ left school with no qualifications and explained how his achievement began to slide once he reached secondary school. His story was typical of his peers:

I was trying my best but still struggling with my homework – most of the time I was copying from my friends. My Mum could not help me with my school work because she could not understand a word in English. She does not know how schools function here. She only learnt about my performance when she was called to the school for my troubles ... but then it was too late (Raci in Cetin, 2014).

14 Zafer is in his 60s. He came here in 1989 and applied for asylum. He brought his six children to join him after four years when he was granted indefinite leave to remain in the UK. He has only had a few years of formal education at primary school level.

15 Ali is in his forties. He is a successful businessman and father of three children. His wife had been through the British education system hence could speak English when they got married. Two of the children are university graduates and Ali suggests this was mainly because his wife was able to help them throughout their educational journey.

16 Raci is a second-generation young man with no GCSEs.

Inevitably, most Nineties parents were severely restricted in the help they could provide for their children due to their own limited education. Both parents were working long hours often in the textile factories and/or bringing home piecework. Mothers managed their work around their children's education by either going to work when their children were at school or home-working. They realised that it was hard for their children to have to start school without speaking any English and felt powerless to help them. Fathers in Turkey were the breadwinners and assumed that it was the mother's responsibility to look after the children and help with their school work, but they had received even less schooling than their husbands (Interview, Chair of BAF, 2018).

Nineties parents mostly did not speak English and were dependent on their children to interpret for them in official contexts, such as with schools, health professionals and benefits officers. This meant their children often missed school to help out which could lead schools to think the parents did not care about their children's schooling. One boy, for example, had a fifty per cent absence rate due to interpreting for his sick mother (Kadir¹⁷ in Cetin, 2014), which adversely affected his academic achievement. Importantly, this can be seen as a situation of role reversal where parental responsibilities are handed over to the children. In cases such as Kadir's, Yosso (2005) would see this as children acquiring linguistic capital, "cultural wealth" or "navigational capital" in stepping up to help their parents find their way around institutions and bureaucracy and had schools been aware this was the reason for his absence, they might have been supportive too. However, Portes and Rumbaut (2001) see this "taking power over parents" as a key contributory factor in some children's descent into the "rainbow underclass".¹⁸ The boys and girls who were in trouble at school took advantage of their parents' lack of English by deliberately mis-translating letters home. The Chair of the British Alevi Federation confirmed that parents would be unaware that the school had requested a meeting to discuss their child's behaviour until more drastic measures were taken and then it was too late to do anything about it (Interview, July, 2018).

The Nineties parents did not have already established social or community networks which could help them engage with their children's education. Moreover, policy expectations demanded greater involvement of parents by choosing the best schools, attending parents' meetings and helping with

17 Kadir is a second-generation young man in his twenties with no GCSEs.

18 The "rainbow underclass" refers to an existing underclass made up of different ethnic minorities within a situation of permanent poverty and anomie. This class is characterised by disorientation, lack of belief in the education system and underachievement at school. This leads towards a downward assimilation trajectory, blocking their chances of social mobility (Portes and Zhou, 1993).

schoolwork. Without the support of the extended family which they had depended on in Turkey, parents relied on other Alevi parents who could speak some English to help them out with adjusting to life in the UK. The type of neighbourhood and quality of schools is an important aspect of the social milieu that also affects children's educational outcomes and life trajectories.¹⁹ Assuming that all schools were equally good, the Nineties parents sent their children to the nearest school, similar to a working class Local's pattern of school choice (Ball et al., 1997). Hackney and Tottenham, where the Nineties Alevis lived, had some notoriously bad neighbourhood schools with a reputation for gangs and inter-ethnic conflict. Moreover, as outsiders, Alevi youth were jockeying for power in relation to peers from other disadvantaged ethnic groups, especially Black youth, who had already lost faith in education as a route to social mobility (Zhou, 2001). In addition, some of the Alevi youth were bullied for their appearance in cheap clothes or not behaving like practising Muslims and their negative sense of identity was a further contributory factor in their disaffection with schooling.

The Nineties first-generation of parents had much to contend with as they settled into their new life in the UK. In an interview (July, 2011) the Chair of LACCC said parents would complain that their children were out of control, staying out late with their friends and taking drugs and that they needed help before it was too late. He recognised that parents were too busy working, often left their children home alone, and used the language barrier as an excuse not to get more involved in their children's activities. He remarked that the parents paid greater attention to material wealth and tried to compensate with material possessions to make up for not being there; a result of them having had so little money in Turkey. Inevitably, the dream of life in the UK providing a place of safety and a bright future for the family was not borne out by the reality, especially not in the beginning. Alevis were experiencing poverty and constant fear of deportation so they worked hard to save some money for the family just in case they were sent back to Turkey. Moreover, the Chair of LACCC felt that parents had placed too much trust in the education system and not enough in their children when they told their parents something was wrong:

Many families did not want to believe it when people said something bad about the schools or the police. This is where we failed as a community as we lost trust in our children. [...] We were losing our youth. (Ali, July, 2011)

19 See Cetin in this issue for a more extended discussion of the effect on life trajectories.

In summary, I argue that relations between parents, children and schools for this Nineties generation were evolving, messy and contradictory rather than simply either “positive” or “negative”. All parents possessed aspirational capital, encouraging their children to do well and provided for their material needs whilst adjusting to their new life. They assumed that it was the schools' responsibility to deliver educational success if their children worked hard and behaved themselves. Given that at the time, the greater policy emphasis on parental choice and active supervision and support of their children's education (Ball, 2010), the Nineties parents fitted the profile of working class, minority ethnic “bad” parents in a deficit model of schooling (Gillies, 2006). More specifically, blame was targeted at “bad” mothers whose children under-achieved (Crozier and Davies, 2007; Vincent et al., 2010).

On the other hand, the accounts of Alevi parents suggest that they tried their best despite their limitations and the material conditions in which they lived. The children themselves had to contend with their lack of English when they started school, being left home alone whilst their parents worked long hours and having no one to help with their homework. However, these children were much more agentic than analysis of home-school relations normally gives them credit for, including the power they held over their parents through learning English and their navigational skills in negotiating with officials. Similarly, the neighbourhood schools they attended were often constructed as “bad” schools and could be blamed for not intervening sooner, having low expectations of their ability, blaming parents for not getting involved and excluding those involved in gang violence, and so on. Some schools did try to contact parents about their child's underachievement, truancy and risk of exclusion. However, this was thwarted by the parents' inability to speak or read English and their children's manipulation of home-school communications.

The Millennial Generation: “Cosmopolitan Choosers”²⁰

The discussion of the Nineties generation provides the basis for comparing the similarities and differences in the integration contexts of the Millennial first-generation parents and their new second-generation children.²¹ It also

20 Cosmopolitan choosers are described by Ball et al. (1997) as more middle class with a wider range of strategies for choosing schools.

21 The new second generation are the children of the Millennial first-generation parents, mostly born here and going through the British education system themselves.

expands the normative configuration of parent-school relations through successful collaborations between the Alevi community, parents and schools working together in the best interests of the new second generation. Whilst some of the first-generation Millennial parents originated from similar villages and towns to the Nineties generation, they were more likely to have migrated from the towns and were generally better educated. The majority of mothers in the focus group completed the secondary stage of education in Turkey, a contrast to the Nineties generation who had largely missed out on formal education. When Zeynep, a typical Millennial mother, was interviewed, she explained her situation:

I came to the UK when I was 19, through marriage. My partner arrived in 1995/6 and we decided to live in the UK together once we got married. [...] In Turkey, I was in education until college. [...] We always remember our personal experiences growing up and think about the lack of opportunities we had. As parents we make a great effort to ensure that our children are not deprived in the same way we were and work to make sure they have a good education (Zeynep, July, 2018).

However, like Zeynep, most Millennial mothers we knew, had faced discrimination in Turkey and stressed that their children's education was a key factor in their migration decision. They too had plenty of "aspirational capital" and ambitions for their children to go to university.

Like the Nineties parents, the Millennial parents lived precarious lives when they first arrived waiting to establish their migration status which limited their opportunities to find employment or learn English. Their choice of primary school for their first child still reflected the "Local choosers" practice (Ball et al., 1997) of the Nineties parents. However, whilst proximity remained a key factor, parents became more discerning in their choices for their second and subsequent children. The Millennials benefitted from family and/or more established Alevi communities who could provide advice and support. They also settled in more suburban areas such as Enfield, some through choice and others by being allocated council housing there. They could rely on the local grapevine for what Ball and Vincent (1998) describe as "hot knowledge" or gossip from other parents about local schools. For example, Fatma said that she chose the closest school for their first child but for the younger child it was a more informed choice based on what she had learnt from other Alevi parents about the Prince of Wales Primary School in Enfield, where we conducted the Religion and Identity Project. Mothers at the focus group (April, 2016) also knew other Alevi children at the school and were attracted by the Alevism

lessons. Fatma described the difference between the schools her children went to like this:

The schools used to ask us if we were Muslim and I used to hesitate to respond as we are Kurdish Alevi. At this new school, the school reassured me that they knew what Alevism was (Fatma, July, 2018).

Here can be seen an element of the “middle-class cosmopolitan chooser” (Ball et al., 1997) entering into the choice of school, which suggests this generation has greater knowledge about the education system. Zeynep explained her choice process, relying on both “hot” and “cold” knowledge (official information published by schools) (ibid.) about local schools:

I researched for both children. I looked at the league tables and asked friends who had children in the schools for their experiences. I then weighed up my options and made a decision based on this. For my younger child, it was a more informed choice. We knew more about scores and better education. I am very happy with my choice. This school ensures our needs are met. For meetings, they arrange interpreters and we are sent off fully satisfied (Zeynep, July, 2018).

This comparison with the previous schools that Millennial mothers had sent their children to was far more consistent with the Nineties parents' experience of schools as dismissive of them for not speaking English. With far more support available to them, the Millennial generation were much more in command of their children's education and were far less likely to experience role reversal in parental responsibilities, thereby strengthening their parental authority. Whilst it was not possible to establish how many of the Millennial mothers were in paid work, those attending the school meetings were full-time mothers, actively supporting their children's education in a way that the Nineties mothers could not. Whilst the Nineties fathers commented that the mothers were not educated enough to help their children, this generation of mothers were taking ever greater responsibility to support their children's education with evidence of acquiring the “cultural capital” so highly valued by middle-class mothers (Vincent and Maxwell, 2016). The focus group mothers (April, 2016) described the “educational work” they performed at home (Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson, 2013). For example, they played games with their children, and taught them how to write their names so that they would not start nursery without any English language skills. Whilst some fathers helped out, they mostly left education to the mothers. At the focus group

meeting (April, 2016), mothers asked the school for help to get fathers more engaged with school life.

Conversations with Millennial children or information provided by the Deputy Head of the Prince of Wales Primary School, also confirmed that it was mainly mothers who helped with homework, at least during primary school, although two said their fathers helped a lot. Fairly typical is the Year 6 girl who said that she spent two hours a day revising for her SATs with her mother (Year 6 Alevi pupil interviews by the Deputy Head, 2015). This was harder at secondary level so mothers enlisted older siblings or extended family members who had attended school here to take on that responsibility. This meant that almost half of the Year 6 children had siblings helping them with their homework, an example of “familial capital” (Yosso, 2005). In addition, over half had private tutors like Zeynep’s daughter. Zeynep explained that she felt guilty that she could not help her daughter as much as she wanted to and so once she had exhausted support from cousins and other family members, she hired a tutor for her even though she was doing well at school (Interview July 2018).

Millennial mothers were corresponding to “responsible parenting” and acquiring cultural capital which is more associated with the white middle classes. As is evident, Zeynep was leaving nothing to chance even though her daughter was doing well at school. However, it was her daughter who was now helping her younger son and so siblings and extended family members were enlisted to help, utilising familial capital. Millennial mothers also sent their children to booster classes or after-school clubs. In relation to their Alevism, they went to *saz* classes (a plucked musical instrument), joined *semah* dance sessions (part of the Alevi religious ritual) or attended Turkish lessons at the LACCC. They acquired “cultural wealth” to keep in touch with their linguistic, cultural and religious heritage. Vincent and Maxwell (2016) define these activities as the “concerted cultivation” of children, normally encouraged by middle-class mothers who intensively prepare their children for the future. Millennial mothers partially fit this description although they remain predominantly working class. Whereas the Nineties parents spent money on material goods for their children, partly to compensate for not being there or not being able to support their children’s schooling, the Millennial parents spent it on supplementary educational and extra-curricular activities to enhance their children’s chances of success. Undoubtedly, Millennial mothers were much more agentic than the Nineties mothers and were making most of the decisions about their children’s schooling whilst keeping the fathers informed. This suggests a shift in power relations between parents and a re-establishment of parental authority over the children’s education and a much more positive home-school relationship.

A further crucial area of difference between the groups is that the LACCC was much more established when the Millennial first-generation parents arrived and together they took steps to address the problems of the second-generation Alevi youth and actively engage with local schools. Direct actions included arranging meetings in schools to build relationships with Alevi parents. The Religion and Identity Project collaboration with local schools and the university to introduce Alevism lessons in local schools is the best example of the collective strength of the community which made a far greater impact on the schools than if individual parents had requested them. The Chair of the Britain Alevi Federation said with considerable pride:

In the early stages we were approaching schools and trying to encourage them to put Alevism lessons into their curriculum. Now it is schools who approach us. They want to know more about it and they want to teach the Alevism lessons (Interview, July, 2018).

This fits Yosso's (2005) description of a community passing on their "cultural wealth" to empower, build resilience and achieve positive outcomes for Alevi parents, pupils and the schools.

Schools have also played their part in improving home-school relationships and Millennial first-generation parents reported that they were much more welcoming and proactive towards integrating and supporting their children. Most schools work hard to create an inclusive community but research by Barron (2007) and Crozier and Davies (2007) demonstrates the minefield of misunderstandings that can sometimes arise when schools attempt to integrate minority ethnic pupils. As the deputy head of the Prince of Wales Primary School explained in our first interview (July, 2010), the school was unaware that their 82 "Turkish" pupils were Alevis before the project began and had concerns about their underachievement, poor behaviour and the lack of involvement of Alevi parents. However, she transformed this lack of awareness into her commitment to the Religion and Identity Project. She hosted a meeting of Alevi parents (July, 2011) to gain their support for the Alevism lessons and played a crucial role in preparing age-appropriate materials, organising and supporting the lessons for Key Stages 1 and 2 and evaluating them. Given that much of the school's work is focused on building good relationships with parents, raising aspirations for pupils and building resilience to the many challenges that families face, the Religion and Identity Project is an excellent example of fostering a "community of practice" on many levels (Barron, 2007). It was the impact of the Alevism lessons that helped raise the profile and achievement of the Millennial Alevi pupils, bringing parents into school

and giving Alevi pupils a sense of belonging.²² The many achievements of the project are documented elsewhere (Jenkins and Cetin, 2018) but most importantly, in both pilot schools, it empowered Alevi youth. As one of the Highbury Grove²³ Secondary School pupils said

Everywhere we Alevis are a minority, people don't know about us but when they learn about Alevism, they accept it and you get a lot more respect (Cem,²⁴ Focus group, Highbury Grove pupils, April, 2017).

Whereas before the lessons, other students had not heard about Alevism, the lessons conferred legitimacy on Alevi pupils' identity while creating a dialogic home-school relationship (Vincent, 2017) which connected the new second-generation's outside world with the interior world of the school. Moreover, the exchange of knowledge between the LACCC, school and home gave Alevi children an opportunity to teach their parents what they have learnt about Alevism²⁵ and to discuss their religion more openly at home. It also made them more agentic in sharing information with their parents, teachers and peers instead of always being on the receiving end of information.

Conclusion

This intra-generational study of Alevi parents, particularly mothers, in London confirms that education is an important site of struggle and engagement for migrant parents if they are to realise their aspirations for their children to succeed in the country of settlement. The value of this comparative analysis is to challenge deficit models of first-generation parenting in migrant communities; to open up an intersectional analysis to reveal the significance of generation in home-school relations and apply Yosso's conceptualisation of different

22 From the first year Alevism lessons were introduced in the school, the Year 6 Alevi pupils performed better in the national SATs (Standard Attainment Tests) at Key Stage 2 than teacher expectations and their results have continued to improve.

23 This is the real name of the school which is used with their permission.

24 Cem is a Year 13 pupil at Highbury Grove school and one of the first cohort to experience Alevism lessons.

25 Due to the suppression of Alevism in Turkey and the oral tradition of transmission of the religion, many Alevis did not know much about their religion and tended not to discuss it with their children.

forms of capital used by minority ethnic communities. This analysis shows how Nineties and Millennial first-generation parents draw on a different range of familial and community resources than are traditionally recognised to support their children's education. The research shows how significant transformations in home-school relations have occurred within the first generation in the space of a decade.

Key differences between the Nineties and Millennial parents were that the latter were better educated in Turkey, more mothers could speak English, they were less likely to be either working or working full-time, they settled into a more established community so that they understood the demands of schooling, and knew better how to choose schools and get more involved in their children's education. In terms of parental involvement, mothers were expected to take responsibility for their children's education and mostly they did, but there was some limited involvement of Millennial fathers (a matter which should be addressed in future research). Also, the community centres played a leading role in supporting parents both through providing lessons to affirm cultural and religious identities and also through working with schools. It is doubtful that the Alevism lessons would have gone ahead if the suggestion had solely come from parents. This suggests future educational research with migrant communities should include the role of community centres as important stakeholders in the mainstream home-school nexus and to bring the "cultural wealth" of minority ethnic communities into schools.

Finally, what is distinctive about this research is the highlighting of the importance of religion and identity for both parents and children in terms of their ability to integrate into the school community. The Alevis were persecuted in Turkey for their religious identity and were invisible in the UK as their country of origin led them to be identified as Turkish and Muslim rather than Kurdish and Alevi, generating a negative identity for the second generation. The Religion and Identity Project is an example of where the community took the lead in tackling this problem and collaborating with the schools to find solutions. As a result of the project introducing Alevism lessons into the RE curriculum, there has been a significant improvement in the children's sense of belonging, achievement and behaviour in both schools. Alevi youth have experienced more self-confidence and pride in their Alevi identity to the extent that one secondary school child could now describe himself as a "full Alevi". Importantly, the project has effects beyond the confines of the school to positively impact on the identity of the community as a whole.

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Unregulated Desires: Anomie, the “Rainbow Underclass” and Second-Generation Alevi Kurdish Gangs in London

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Abstract

This article offers a case study of the adaptation strategies of a section of second-generation young male Alevi Kurds in London and the social conditions which make some of them more prone to join gangs and to reject mainstream institutions in their search for instant material rewards. It is instructive to use Durkheim's analysis of society's integrative and regulative functions and particularly his concept of anomie to understand a situation where the legitimate means in the pursuit of material wealth and comfort are out of balance with the demand, calling into question the legitimacy of the institutions which provide these functions. Those who cannot compete through existing institutions are more likely to seek alternative means to achieve these ends. Durkheim identified youth as more vulnerable to such unregulated desires, and I argue that his approach offers valuable insights into the anomic pressures confronting second-generation migrant young men in particular.

Keywords

Alevi Kurds – anomie – Durkheim – ethnic gangs – rainbow underclass – transnational migration – youth gangs

Arezûyên tenzîmnekirî: anomie, “jêrçîna keskesorê” û bandên kurdên elewî yên ji nifşê duyem li Londrayê

Ev gotar xebateke waqî'eyê ye li ser rê û rêbazên parçeyeke nifşê duyem ê xortên kurdên elewî li Londrayê û li ser sertên civakî yên ku hindek ji wan pal didin ku bikevine nav bandan (çeteyan) û dezgehên damezrandî red bikin di lêgerîna xwe ya destkeftên maddî de. Bicî ye li vir ew tehlîla Durkheim bê bikaranîn ya li ser fonksiyonên civakê yên aîdkirin û tenzîmkirinê û bi taybetî têgeha wî ya anomie (bêhêvîti) ji bo famkirina wan rewşên ku rê û amrazên rewa yên bidestxistina dewlemendiya maddî û rihetiyê ne hev kêş in ligel xwastê (telebê), ku bi vî rengî rewayiya wan dezgehên van fonsiyonan bi cî tînin dikeve jêr pirsyarê. Ewên ku nikarin bi rêya dezgehên heyî bigihine destkeftan dê bi ihtimaleke mezintir ji kesên asayî li rê û rêbazên alternatîv binihêrin ji bo gihiştina bi wan armancan. Durkheimî destnîşan kiribû ku xort hesastir in beramber arezûyên wisa tenzîmnekirî û ez îdia dikim ku ev boçûn rê dide têgihîştineke kûrtir li ser zextên bêhêvîtiyê yên li ber ciwanên koçber ên ji nifşê duyem.

Arezûy narêkixraw: rîzperî, “çînî xwarewey pelkezêrîne” we bandî newey-duwemî Kurdî ‘Elewî le Lenden

Em wtare dîrasey keysî sitratîjîyekanî xoguncandîni beşêk le newey duwemî lawe ‘elewey kurdekanî lenden dexate rû legell ew barudoxe komellayetyaneşda ke wa dekat hendêkîyan le gerranyan bedway deskewtî maddî henûkeyîda zyatir meylyan bo peyustibûn be bandekan û retkirdnewey damezrawe giştîyekan hebêt. Ravey Durkheim bo çalakî yeksixistin û rêkxistinê cvakîyekan sudbexşe bo bekarhênan, betaybetî çemkî rîzperî yarmetîdere bo têgeyîştin le barudoxêk ke têyda rêga yasayîkan bo gerran bedway saman û asûdeyîda legell xwastekeda na hawsengin, emeş şer’îyetî ew dezgayaney ke em erkane desteber deken dexate jêr pirsyarewe. Ewaney ke natwanin le çwarçêwey damezrawekanda pêşbirkê bken zyatir egerî eweyan heye bedway rêgay bedîlda bgerrên bo geşîştin bew amancane. Durkheim genc wa pênase dekat ke zyatir amadeye bo ew core arezuwe na rêkixrawane û mnîş miştumrî ewe dekem ke têzekey ew têgeyîştinêkî benrix bo ew fşare rîzperyaney ke cîlî-duwemî pyawe gence koçberekana rûberûy debnewe, pêşkeş dekat.

Waştîşê bêkontrolî: Anomî, “binsinifa keskûsûre” û Londra de çeteyê kurdanê elewîyan ê neslê dîyinî

Na meqale derheqê bikardardîşê stratejîyanê qisimêkê xortanê kurdanê elewîyan ê neslê dîyinî yê Londra de xebata nimûneyî pêşkêş kena. Na xebate kî qayîte şert û şurtanê xortan ê komelkîyan kena ke nê şertî tayîne rê benê sebeb ke semedê çip dîyayîşê xelatanê madîyan ra nê xortî bibê beşdarê çeteyan û dezgehanê pêroyîyan red bikerê. Seba ke fehm bibo ke çira îmkanê lejîtmî yê dozkerdîşê rehet û maldarîya madîye hemsencîya waştîşê xo de nîyê û çira naye de meşrûiyetê dezgehanê resmîyanê têkildaran pers beno, fayde beno ke merdim analizê Durkheimî yê fonksiyonanê komelî yê tekûzdar û tenzîmkeran û bitaybetî konseptê ey ê anomî bixebitno. Êyê ke nêşkenê pê dezgehanê estbîyayeyan xo têver bierzê, bi ihtîmalêk ro îmkanê alternatîfan gêrenê ke wina biresê hedefê xo. Durkheimî dî ke xortî waştîşanê bêkontrolan ê winasîyan rê hîna zaf hîşgêr ê û ez musnena ke hewayê ey ê ewnîyayîşî derheqê tengijîyayîşanê anomîkan de, bitaybetî seba xortanê maciran ê neslanê dîyinan, fehmkerdîşê erjayeyî pêşkêş keno.

Introduction

This paper, using Durkheim's concepts of anomie, regulation and integration, explores how underlying social structures within a transnational and cosmopolitan context operate to produce conditions in which some young Alevi Kurds are more prone to join gangs and to reject mainstream institutions (Cetin, 2016). During my fieldwork on suicide within the Alevi Kurdish (AK) community,¹ members related how they believed that some of the suicides were linked to involvement with gangs, whose activities ranged from petty crime to more serious offences such as drug dealing, armed robbery, bribery and murder. Both the suicides and gang membership, although confined to a small group of young Kurdish Alevi men, were of increasing concern to the community which had otherwise successfully settled in London

1 I have been doing research with the Alevi Kurdish community since 2010 when I began to conduct research for my PhD thesis on suicide amongst the second generation young men within the UK Alevi community.

where the community flourished.² The severity of the issue manifested itself in murders involving two rival Alevi gangs, the Tottenham Boys and the Bombers (*Bombacılar*) that operate in the Tottenham, Haringey and Hackney areas of London (Summers, 2010). In response to these events the Alevi, Kurdish and Turkish community centres in London organised several panels and demonstrations demanding action by the police to stop the gangs from recruiting any more young men (Café, 2014; Smyth, 2013; Summers, 2010). The severity of the gang-related violence for the AK community had been fuelled by the recent stabbings and killings of young members of the community (Telgraf, 2019; BBC, 2019).

In my previous research, I identified Durkheim's anomic suicide as the type which best explained the social causation of the suicides amongst the second-generation young men, and this also informs the analysis of the data on gangs. This is justified because it is a symptom of the same stresses associated with suicide, namely the impossibility of achieving material wealth and cultural goals (status, prestige, and respectability) through legitimate means and the lack of regulation provided by the family and the school.

Decker et al. (2009) suggest that in order to understand gang formation it is necessary to link structural factors to the social context in which they occur and the group processes and activities associated with them (*cf* Bourgois, 2003). Hence, this paper begins by outlining Durkheim's concept of anomie and its application to street crime and more specifically to the processes of gang formation, which is then linked to the migration context in order to provide a theoretical framework to apply to the case study of second-generation Alevi-Kurds living in London. It will explain how a segment of the young men ended up in the "rainbow underclass" (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001), an anomic social position in which they formed gangs as an alternative means to achieve culturally/socially valued goals that they could not hope to attain through legitimate means, and the social and cultural consequences of their involvement.

2 It is not the intention of this paper to contribute to the racist and xenophobic discourses and representations which criminalise ethnic minority groups, but the level of violence and reality of the problem cannot be denied and hence requires sociological investigation. Indeed, it may well be the case that other gangs, of any ethnicity, are also formed in response to situations of anomie. For an extended defence of this position see Bourgois (2003).

Durkheim, Anomie and Gang Formation

Anomie is Durkheim's most enduring and widely applied concept, especially in the field of criminology (Cloward, 1959; DiCristina, 2015). In *The Division of Labour* (2014[1893]), and further developed in *suicide* (1996[1897]), Durkheim uses the concept of anomie to describe a state of society characterised by a sense of normlessness, a lack of regulation and integration, where the relationship between the individual and society has become disturbed.³ Durkheim argues that individual desires and drives are regulated by the social forces that are generated by collective social life. For him society constrains individuals in two ways: firstly, through integration by instilling a commitment to the values and social norms of the group to which they belong; and secondly, by defining specific goals and the means to attain them and thus controlling what would otherwise be unlimited human desires and aspirations. To achieve and maintain a healthy social order, there must be an equilibrium between the individual and society in order for the individual to internalise a clear sense of achievable goals and the legitimate means to achieve them; otherwise, a state of anomie emerges where the individual no longer knows what is possible and what is not, "what is just and what is unjust", and which claims and expectations are legitimate and "which are immoderate" (Durkheim, 1996[1897]: 253).

As DiCristina (2015) suggests, in contemporary criminology, a Durkheimian perspective continues to underpin the theorising of crime. Durkheim argues that "an act is criminal when it offends the strong, well-defined sentiments of the collective consciousness" (Durkheim as cited in DiCristina, 2015: 318) and uses the concept of anomie to broadly characterise "insufficient regulation", in particular in *suicide* to the insufficient regulation of human desires and the prompting of "violence by increasing competition in the struggle to satisfy desires" (cited in DiCristina, 2015: 321). At the extreme, this violence can be turned against the self through suicide or against others through murder. Interestingly, Durkheim also made a brief reference to youth crime in *The Division of Labour*, something relevant to this analysis of gangs as he saw youth as more spontaneous and less able to exercise self-constraint or to respond to their family's efforts to control them. It follows, therefore, that because the

3 Strictly speaking a lack of integration refers to egoism rather than anomie, however, whilst appreciating Durkheim's theoretical distinction between integration and regulation and between egoistic and anomic egoistic suicide, in practice it is difficult to make a clear distinction between the two. Indeed, Durkheim himself wrote that egoism and anomie "have a peculiar affinity for one another ... We know that they are usually merely two different aspects of one social state; thus it is not surprising that they be found in the same individual" (Durkheim, 1996[1897]: 288).

regulation of young people's desires is less active, there is an increased likelihood of young people seeking to gain a competitive advantage in pursuing their desired goals without regard to the legitimacy of the means, including the use of violence.

DiCristina concludes that Durkheim's analysis of juvenile crime "may be the one type of deviance for which anomie is the central explanatory variable in his overall criminological perspective, although he never made this explicit" (DiCristina, 2015: 325–326). Without the integration and regulation of individuals, there emerges a state of disorder in a society which produces certain "pathologies" such as gangs and high suicide rates (Cloward, 1959). This structural analysis underpins most contemporary theorising of the structural causes of gang formation (Decker et al., 2009; Bourgois, 2003).

Decker et al. (2009) adopt the Eurogang Research Project's definition as a basis for global comparisons: "A gang is any durable, street-oriented youth group whose involvement in illegal activity is part of their group identity" (Klein, 2005 as cited in Decker et al., 2009: 397). In the context of the UK, the definitions of what constitutes gangs have been controversial with critiques generally drawing attention to the negative impact of the definitions and their media representations on Black Minority Ethnic (BME) communities.⁴ Equally, however, it must be recognised that the Eurogang Research Project's minimum definition does echo the use of the term "gang" within the Alevi community and by the participants interviewed for the research. While acknowledging the danger of using the term "criminal gangs" and their exaggerated prevalence, as Samota (2008: 3) argues: "For families who have either lost a loved one to gang-related violence or whose children are at its sharp end, the idea of a 'gang' is certainly not mythical".

Despite contesting definitions, there has been a remarkable consistency in theorising the social, cultural and structural conditions of gang formation through social disorganisation theory. Messner and Rosenfeld (2007) argue that "responding to anomie or strain is one of the important causes of gang formation" (cited in Decker et al., 2009: 328) and Decker et al. (2009) suggest that the problem arises in societies "imposing a consistent definition of success and limiting the opportunity structure to obtain that success which creates a set of unrealistic success goals" (398). From this Durkheimian perspective, the mismatch between the culturally defined goals and access to legitimate means to achieve them plays a key role because gangs are predominantly formed as an alternative to blocked opportunity structures at a time when juvenile desires

4 For a critical approach to the definition and representation of the gang see Alexander (2008).

are unregulated. According to Decker et al., what also must be incorporated into gang analysis, and very relevant for the analysis presented in this paper of a transnational community, although it is not its focus, are the transnational cultural influences on gang formation of media glamorisation and representations of mafia-style gang life which serve as a model for real-life gangs.⁵ This is evidenced when second-generation migrants are influenced by popular cultural aspirations of achieving an American-style dream of material wealth and comfort but which are portrayed in the media as being achieved through illegitimate means such as gangs (Nightingale as cited in Decker & Winkle, 1996: 273).

Finally, in order to understand the formation of Alevi-Kurdish gangs in London, it is necessary to address the transnational context of their migration and assimilation because, as Decker et al. (2009) point out, most criminological studies on immigration document that the history of gang formation is linked to the arrival and settlement of new immigrant groups. However, whilst immigration, ethnicity and culture are important components in understanding gang formation, the structural and social conditions present in the place of the settlement are crucial in order for gangs to form. These include urban processes in certain parts of cities associated with ethnic succession, few job opportunities, poverty, disadvantage and social disorganisation (Portes, 2010; Bourgois, 2003). In this context, social disorganisation theory emphasises the rapid social change brought about by migration in which gang activities are the products of the weakened social control of the adults of immigrant groups over their youth, or of a mismatch between immigrant social organisation and life in Western society. This social disorganisation perspective sees gangs as arising from the breakdown in social order within immigrant groups. "Gangs may also be seen as providing an alternative form of social order in the face of the inadequacy or loss of traditional social controls" (Bankston iii, 1998: 37). It is widely agreed that there is a close relationship between gangs and migration because gangs mostly emerge out of underprivileged migrant neighbourhoods where there are no future prospects and fewer job opportunities in the ethnic and mainstream labour market (Portes, 2010). However, it must be noted that the similar context can provide conditions for white working-class youth to become involved in similar activities such as resisting mainstream values and gangs (Bourgois, 2003; Mares, 2000; Willis, 1977).

5 One of the participants, who was also an ex-gang member, Burhan, said "if you go to the tea houses, where these gangs usually go, you will see that the members act like characters out of Turkish mafia series such as the *Kurtlar Vadisi*/Valley of Wolves or recently *Ezel*".

To summarise, following Decker et al. (2009), this paper proposes a Durkheimian influenced framework for gang analysis which draws on social disorganisation theory and a macro-level structural analysis of a transnational migrant community and its second-generation youth. However, to this will be added an analysis of the micro-level neighbourhood context of gang formation and group processes derived from ethnographic observations to demonstrate the relevance of the societal causes of anomie to an understanding of its effects at the individual/group level (*cf* Bourgois, 2003). To do this, it is necessary to outline the relationship between particular forms of adaptation taken by migrant communities in order to provide the social context for the analysis of gangs.

Transnational Migration, Segmented Assimilation and the Anomic “Rainbow Underclass”

In this vein, the concepts and perspectives used to analyse the adaptation modes of migrants have undergone significant revision (Alba and Nee, 1997; Heisler, 2008). Portes and Zhou (1993) have criticised classical assimilation/integration theories for predicting that new migrants would follow a unidirectional trajectory, abandoning their ethnic and cultural traits to assimilate or not into the mainstream society. This they see as inadequate because while new migrants did assimilate, they assimilated into different layers of the mainstream society. Hence, they offer a “segmented assimilation” model that identifies three possible assimilation patterns for new immigrants and their children dependent upon a set of “individual-level factors and contextual factors” (Zhou, 1997: 984). One of the assimilation paths conforms to the “upward mobility pattern” where immigrants enter into the mainstream middle-class through acculturation followed by assimilation (Portes and Zhou, 1993: 82). Another trajectory is the economic integration of the immigrants into middle-class Western society through acculturation while maintaining a strong attachment to their own ethnic cultural norms and values. The last one is “the downward-mobility pattern” which produces acculturation and assimilation into the “rainbow underclass”, that is an existing underclass made up of different ethnic minorities in permanent poverty (Portes and Zhou, 1993: 82). In this respect, one segment of transnational society and its adaptation patterns identified by Portes et al., namely the “rainbow underclass”, closely resemble an anomic context as defined by Durkheim (see above). It is in this location that a section of the second-generation Alevis ended up where they formed gangs. But first it is important to provide a clear description of the context in which

the journey into the rainbow underclass starts; in other words to explain what factors contribute to one's direction into the rainbow underclass. According to Portes and Zhou (1993) the journey to the underclass is shaped by the set of resources, or lack of them, that migrants can draw on when tackling the obstacles they face in the country of settlement. These include their social, economic and cultural capital, the government's migration policies at the time, racism, available opportunities in the labour market, mobility ladders, and settlement in poor neighbourhoods with limited job opportunities. The negative effects of these key factors can push migrants towards the rainbow underclass (Portes and Zhou, 1993). While Portes and Zhou identify these as risk factors, nevertheless they argue that it is possible to avoid falling into the oppositional culture of the rainbow underclasses if there are support and resources at the community and family level available to the second generation.

Conscious of the criticism that the concept of the "rainbow underclass" is in danger of oversimplifying the diverse experience of ethnic migrants by putting them into a single category of "the underclass" (e.g. Massey, 1993; Cameron et al., 2012: 23; Waldinger and Feliciano, 2004). This paper uses the concept not as some monolithic undifferentiated underclass but rather as a device to capture the interplay between the structural processes and individual attributes which produce inequality for the second-generation Alevi Kurds, some of whom end up in gangs.

Method

Data for this paper is predominantly derived from my previous research (Cetin, 2014) and the on-going collaboration with the UK's Alevi community through the Religion and Identity Project (Jenkins and Cetin, 2018).⁶ More specifically, it uses data gathered from interviews with eighteen second-generation⁷ Alevi Kurds associated with peers who were involved in postcode⁸ gangs, four of whom self-identified as ex-gang members (Burhan, Münir, Kadir, Bahri)⁹ and

6 This collaborative research involving the university, community and local schools was started in 2010 to address youth issues and their negative identity. Since then, lessons on Alevism have been taught in local schools to help Alevi pupils feel a greater sense of belonging.

7 As an operational definition, the term "second generation" refers to the children of Alevi who were born in the UK or brought to the UK before adolescence.

8 The nature and formation of postcode gangs are discussed later.

9 For ethical reasons, all of the names are changed, and the age of the participants is deliberately omitted.

had served some time either in prison or youth offender institutions. The data gathered from the interviews provided an understanding of the significant events and relationships which underpinned the processes by which they or their peers had abandoned school and ended up in gangs. Interviewees were accessed by using a snowballing technique, and the interviews were conducted in places determined by the participants. Only a few of the interviews were tape-recorded as the majority did not allow any recording device to be used, however detailed notes were taken. The data from the interviews were supplemented by data gathered through participant observation, and by participating in panels and cultural events organised by the Alevi, Kurdish and Turkish community centres around the same issue. Media coverage and informal conversations with the community spokespersons and members of the community also provided a rich source of information for this paper.

The First-Generation Alevi Kurds

With a population estimated at between fifteen to twenty million in Turkey, Alevis are the second largest religious group after Sunni Muslims. While the majority of Alevis are ethnically Turkish, around twenty per cent of them are ethnically Kurdish, Kurds being the second largest ethnic group in Turkey. Due to their religious and ethnic difference from Turks and other Kurds, Alevi Kurds, who are the subject matter of this research, shared a marginal socio-economic and political position prior to their migration to the UK, a migration that began largely in 1989 (Cetin, 2017). Their peculiar history and ambiguous relationship with the Turkish Republic make Alevi Kurds a “twice minority” (Gold, 1992) because of their religious and ethnic marginality.¹⁰ It is this marginality and history of persecution and exclusion that recurs in Alevi Kurdish history, reconstructing and sustaining the social boundaries of their collective identity as a distinct ethno-religious community separate from those surrounding them such as Sunni Turks and Kurds, as well as Alevi Turks. This also functioned as a reason to migrate to western countries.

The first generation of Alevi Kurds were mainly asylum seekers escaping persecution in Turkey (Jenkins & Cetin, 2017; McDowall, 2002). When they arrived in the UK, they followed a pattern of settlement which Morawska (2009: 18) terms “an ethnic-path adaptation within their own communities”.

¹⁰ For a detailed account of the concept of “persecuted exclusion” of the Alevi Kurds see Cetin (2017).

As in Portes and Zhou's first and third patterns of segmented assimilation, the migrants placed a high value on upward social mobility through hard work, however, this entailed their economic and social integration within the boundaries of their own ethnic community. This was made possible in part by housing policies that accommodated them in the same areas that already had established community centres which could cater for them, thereby allowing the maintenance of a strong sense of community. Moreover, there was employment available in the local ethnic labour market, predominantly in the textile and service industries, which established strong transnational engagements with their home country.

Furthermore, their lack of English made it difficult for them to transcend the boundaries of their ethno-religious community to acculturate into mainstream society. These factors created a self-sufficient and internally integrated community that provided an effective integrative and regulatory mechanism for the first generation who on the whole had flourished in their new environment. There were, of course, exceptions and some of the first and second generation were educated in the UK and followed the third assimilation trajectory of upward mobility into the mainstream labour market although still maintaining strong community ties. However, some of the second generation educated in the UK experienced the second assimilation trajectory of downward mobility towards "a new rainbow underclass" (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001: 45) with a consequent lack of legitimate opportunities for material advancement leading some of them to seek alternative means to achieve their desired goals, one of which was through membership of gangs.

Second-Generation Alevi Gangs in London: the Risk Factors Tipping Youth into the "Rainbow Underclass"

To understand the second-generation Alevis' descent into the "rainbow underclass", it is necessary to identify the risk factors associated with it and their engagement with gangs as a result of changes in their family circumstances and their failure at school. Drawing on the Durkheimian derived framework of Decker et al. (2009, 2013) elaborated above, the analysis explores the formation of gangs, and their types, and the social consequences of engagement in them.

One of the first changes identified by the second-generation participants was a change in family structure from an extended to a nuclear form. Coming mainly from rural areas of Turkey (Maraş, Kayseri, Malatya, Dersim and Sivas), they were used to living with an extended family, but on settlement in the UK, they were offered separate accommodation in nuclear family units.

We were about twenty people in the same house when we were in the village [...] here we were given a house in Ilford. It was the first time we were alone in one house only as members of my family. I mean dad, mum and brothers, sisters. (*Münir*)¹¹

This quote illustrates how in the process of settlement, the traditional family and kinship ties were gradually being transformed through a process of “nuclearisation” (Rubinstein, 1992). In this more intimate home environment, parents alone had to deal with the “unfamiliar” challenges that it and urban living created, such as a conflict between parents and children over lifestyle and diverse future trajectories that were not always compatible with the parents’ culture and expectations (Rubinstein, 2002). In such a situation, parents wanted to provide a “good future” for their children, by which they meant a good education and eventually a well-paid job. Children were constantly told that they must study to get good qualifications because their parents had not had the same opportunities in Turkey and had migrated to give their children a better future.

Although most participants reported success at primary school, this harmony between parental expectations and children’s performance was disturbed when the students progressed to secondary school where they found it harder to keep up academically and felt the huge pressure of fulfilling their parents’ ambitions.¹² Despite the parents’ best intentions towards their children’s education, difficulties arose when a dramatic “role reversal” within the family sphere took place once the children had learnt some English (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001: 193).¹³ As many parents had poor English, they came to rely on their children in dealing with the bureaucratic necessities of living in London, such as dealing with the local authority, the health service and other agencies. This participant’s experience was typical:

At the age of ten or eleven, I became the interpreter of the family. I was filling in the forms; I was taking my mum and dad to the doctor, council, job centre, etc. Everything in the family falls upon you. You are responsible for everything in the family. I was going to the family appointments

11 Unless otherwise stated, all translations are the author’s own.

12 For an extensive analysis of the relationship between parent, school and Alevi children in London see Jenkins (2020 in this issue).

13 Role reversal refers to the reallocation of the responsibilities normally associated with parents, which in the process of settlement in the UK are reassigned to children. This bears similarities to Durkheim’s concept of domestic anomie discussed earlier whereby parents cannot fully meet their children’s needs.

instead of going to my school. I was missing at least one day a week.
(*Tayyar*)

This role reversal created various unintended and unforeseen consequences, including the loss of parental control over their children (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). The parents' poor English and lack of understanding of the education system in the UK were the two main reasons for this.¹⁴ Children were able to manipulate their parents through their superior understanding of English, so, for example, whenever a report or letter arrived from school regarding absenteeism, trouble or underperformance, the children either mistranslated them or destroyed the correspondence altogether, especially if they were about to be excluded from school. Burhan and Raci describe the situation clearly:

One day I came home, and there was a letter from the school to inform my parents that I was expelled from the school for a few days. I translated this to my mum that the school is taking us on a trip for a few days and I need to take thirty pounds with me. She said OK and gave me the money.
(*Burhan*)

The school was sending letters to my mum about my absenteeism or when I had been excluded or involved in trouble. I was waiting for the post and sometimes destroying the letter without telling my mum. If she found the post before me, I was just making up a different story or telling her that it's nothing. (*Raci*)

The data revealed that all the participants were involved in anti-school formations before finally being permanently excluded from their secondary school.¹⁵ The problem started when they progressed into secondary school and started "disliking" school for various reasons. One of the most important was a change of school due to changes in their housing situation, which meant that they were moved away from their friends.

14 Alevi parents told me that they believed their children would get the best possible education in England and just sending their children to school was enough and never anticipated any issues like racism or discrimination. Even when parents wanted to assist with their children's school work, they lacked the requisite skills and knowledge to do so.

15 A few participants described being temporarily excluded a few times before being permanently excluded. However, even these temporary exclusions made them lose interest in education and led them not to re-engage with it. Once permanently excluded, of course, they stood little chance of receiving much formal education.

I was doing OK [at school] until we were given another council flat and had to move to another school. As soon as I entered the new classroom, the teacher made me sit next to another Turkish speaking Alevi student and told me to copy from him. The teacher did not have any intention of helping me nor teaching me anything. I never had any support from that school. It was only copying from the friend. A couple of months went like this, and when the other student did not show me his work for me to copy, I found it impossible to do it myself. It was not possible; I could not do my work myself. (*Munir*)

As the quote above illustrates a further factor was the relationship with teachers and whilst most participants remembered that some teachers had been really helpful, more often they felt that teachers had been unfair to them, explaining this by attributing to the teachers' racist attitudes. This produced what Alexander (2000: 91) calls an "atmosphere of distrust". Nine of the students were excluded for violence against their teachers and two of the participants (Nahit and Burhan), who were excluded for attacking their teachers, believe that they had been victimised by "racist" teachers.

When I started secondary school, the science lesson was delivered in Turkish. The majority of the students in the school were also from Turkey (Alevi, Kurdish, Turkish). But the new headteacher came and [...] just cancelled the lesson [...] The headteacher was a racist Asian woman. (*Nahit*)

I was expelled permanently from the school because I had beaten up my Turkish teacher. He was a racist ... he insulted and bullied us, he was hating us [Kurds and Alevis]. (*Burhan*)

The respondents were convinced that school did not treat them fairly because, as they perceived it, whenever there was a fight between them and other students (especially black students) the school protected the latter even though they were to blame. Most of the participants considered themselves to be victims of a system against which they had no power except to use physical violence, despite knowing the consequences. Here the boys' masculine identity also became important as they tended to "correct a wrong" by using physical violence as an expression of that masculinity. In the case of these young people, Durkheim's link between anomie and youth crime is highly relevant, but his idea that the desires of youth can be regulated through education (DiCristina, 2015) must be regarded as overly optimistic in thinking that this

regulation could be provided by the school. As Portes and Rumbaut (2001: 60–61) argue, such children, see the school and teachers as an “instrument of racial oppression and of education itself as incapable of bettering their situation”. Durkheim’s solution of replacing family authority with that of the school to regulate young people was doomed to failure in this case once the participants had lost faith in the education system. At this point, education loses its integrative and regulative functions and ceases to be seen as a legitimate means for the Alevi Kurdish youth to achieve the culturally valued goals to which they and their parents had so aspired.

Disengagement from school was closely related to problems arising from the ethnic divisions at school which all participants confirmed as the basis for fights between Alevi and black students, and was the starting point for many of them joining school gangs (a term used by respondents, parents and children). Echoing Alexander (2000), the boys used the school context to challenge the “dominance of blacks” although this was due in part to the prejudices of the parents who believed that they had been marginalised and victimised by the black population when they first arrived in the UK. Initially, these school gangs, an early mode of gang formation, were primarily formed for protection purposes but there was the potential for their confrontational activities to escalate as ethnic groups formed their own gangs beyond the school.

When I was in secondary school, I was told that I should always stick to the Turkish¹⁶ area; otherwise, I would be attacked and robbed by blacks. I did not want to be involved in any fights, anything like that. One day I saw two Indian (Asian) boys coming toward me, and they demanded that we leave the area for them. That time we fought but the fight got bigger. Indians and blacks came together, and we decided to fight in the park – Highbury. The Turkish group [Kurds and Alevis] was thirty people with sticks, knives, hammers, chains, etc. (*Çetin*)

In many ways, the conflict between the black and Alevi students can be seen to have originated from the social context in which the Alevi Kurds had first settled in the ethnically diverse and disadvantaged neighbourhoods of London characterised by ethnic conflict and a counter-school culture. As Clarke et al.

16 Almost all the second-generation Alevi and Kurdish youths initially used the term “Türkler” (Turks) when they talked about their groups in the schools as opposed to others especially “blacks”. They started to use “Kurd” or “Alevi” when they started to talk about their Turkish teachers and when they started talking about other ethnic groups separately (Somalis, Jamaicans, Kosovans, etc.).

(2006: 5) put it “each group makes something of its starting conditions [...]. Groups which exist within the same society [...] to a certain extent share each other’s ‘culture’”. The ethnic tension often resulted in violent fights that not only led to the exclusion of the Alevi students from school but also pushed them towards membership of gangs who could offer them protection. The participants relate how fights were often over the control of respective territories and proving “who is the boss” (see below). They also claimed that the black youth had at some point, insulted and humiliated them by demanding obedience to their rules both inside and outside the school through the use of physical and verbal violence. The Alevi students involved in these fights saw gangs as a necessary group formation to counter the threat posed by black youth, and according to the Alevi youth interviewed, it was this background of violence that forced them to unite and challenge the black dominance and gain control of the territories that were once controlled by black gangs.

Burhan: When our people first came here, they suffered a lot from the physical and verbal violence that came from the blacks. For this reason, my family has always told me that I should keep away from them because they can be very brutal. This created a negative image of the blacks in my head ... In fact, my first mobile phone was taken away from me by the black boys, they beat me up badly. I never forget that; I am not racist, but I still have that hate against those black boys.

Q: Who were you fighting with?

Munir: Of course, the blacks in Hackney, Dalston ...

Q: Why?

Munir: You are walking along the street; you look at them they look at you, and that’s it. You just find yourself in a fight. Maybe we were trying to gain some respect for ourselves.

Q: What do you mean by respect?

Munir: I mean it was like ‘look I am not scared of you any more’ kind of thing. It was a war to gain control of the area because everyone was talking about how strong blacks [gangs] were, and we just wanted to defeat them and show them who the boss is.

This has strong parallels to the situation of the Bengali boys in London described by Alexander (2000: 105) who justified their group formations as a means to “stand up for themselves” against the pre-existing black gangs who were seen, until then, as the dominant group on the streets and in the schools. In this sense, the “gang” becomes a replacement for social and physical resources and also functions, as we shall see, as a regulative mechanism

and central reference point for these young people. Many of the participants describe how they and their friends joined school gangs for protection and whilst for some it was their only engagement and did not necessarily derail their educational achievement, for others, the taste for violence and fighting and the consequent trouble at school consolidated their anti-school feelings and often led to them to be permanently excluded from school and more fully engaged in gang activities (*cf* Kinnear, 2009). The gangs were formed in part to imitate and contest the “hegemonic masculinity” (Connell, 2002) of black youth and so, by engaging in physical conflict with these black youth, sought to transform their “marginal masculinity” into a more “respected” one.

Postcode Gangs

The anti-school groupings and activities described above were defined as “gangs” both by the participants and the community and can be seen as the first stage of gang formation amongst Alevi youth. The second type of gang formation is the “postcode gang”. This type of formation seems to be more consistent with both the academic and everyday common-sense definition of gangs (Decker et al., 2009). While the school and postcode gangs share some common features (in terms of ethnicity, territory and age), these two formations also show marked differences, one of the most important being the orientation of the organisations. The school gangs are usually organised for protection and to fight for dominance between black and Alevi youth over physical and symbolic territory, whereas the postcode gangs are entirely profit-oriented organisations with conflict centred on maintaining a physical territory (postcode) for the distribution of drugs. With their rigid hierarchical structure consisting of only a few people at the top and about fifty low-ranking members or “soldiers” at the bottom, the postcode gangs have a rigid internal division of labour. According to the participants, the “soldiers” are organised into groups or cells of four and are used to distribute low-grade drugs such as marijuana and cannabis, which they do all day within their postcode. Although the desire to participate in a hedonistic lifestyle seems to be an important motivation in becoming associated with a postcode gang, membership, as with the school gangs, can still fulfil the need for protection. Indeed, three of the former gang members state that the main reason for their participation was fear over their safety within their own locality although, as the next quote shows, this did not preclude recognition of other benefits in terms of the associated material and status benefits. Interestingly, there is also a strong expression of belonging to a larger community. This hints at an alternative regulatory regime as discussed by Durkheim, provided not by the school, however, but by the gang.

I was expelled from the school permanently. I had no plans for the future at that moment. I did not care about anything; I was not the boy who came from the village; I lost connection with my community values, family values. I was a different person. The only thing we were doing was to drink, club, drugs and fight with the blacks. (*Munir*)

Mine was purely about protection. When we had a fight, by making one call, we had so many people behind us. No one could touch us after. [...] It is something like you are untouchable in your ends [postcode]. (*Bahri*)

Gang Life as a Future Trajectory

The four former gang members interviewed confidently asserted that it is not difficult for the postcode gangs to recruit “soldiers”. School children who want to smoke and drink cannot purchase these things with the pocket money they receive from their parents and the easiest way to get the money is through the gangs (Kinnear, 2009). The postcode gangs target school children both as a population to whom they can sell drugs and as a population from which to recruit new members. Those who decide to drop out of school, or who have dropped out already tend to put recreation first (Kinnear, 2009; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). Since these activities cannot be financed with pocket money from their parents, and given that they are unlikely to get a job due to their lack of qualifications and experience as well as how they present themselves to potential employers because of their appearance (tattoos, hairstyle and style of dress code, attitude towards regular employment) and way of speaking, local gangs can appear to be an attractive alternative.

You either go and rob people on the street or do other things; the money had to come from somewhere. The pocket money mummy gave was not enough anymore. (*Munir*)

According to the participants, most of the members joined gangs because they wanted to make a living without doing the “donkey work”, that is employment offered in the ethnic labour market. According to many participants, Alevi Kurdish children are brought up in a context in which “being rich” is an idealised goal, but since they believe that they cannot achieve this through education and legitimate employment they turn to gangs as an alternative means of achieving their material goals (*cf* Cloward, 1959; Merton, 1968; Kinnear, 2009; Van Gemert, 2008). A clear description of a situation of Durkheimian (and Merton) anomie where there is a mismatch in society’s ability to regulate the balance between goals and means:

We can't apply to good jobs because we don't have the qualifications. I knew it was risky, but I did not care because if the police caught me with some marijuana, I would serve a maximum six months in prison [...] I don't care about the criminal record because I knew I would never work for a big firm [formal institution]. (*Serdar*)

At this point, it is useful to examine more closely why the second-generation youth interviewed saw the ethnic labour market as unable to meet their needs (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Portes & Zhuo, 1993). Apart from two of the respondents, the rest ended up in paid employment within the ethnic labour market, exactly where they did not want to be working for the rest of their lives. They had their first experience of such work during weekends and holidays, or when their parents realised they were not doing well at school to show them just how hard-working life would be if they did not study. However, by that stage of secondary school, they had already lost faith in education as a route to upward mobility into the mainstream labour market as these two respondents demonstrate.

There were so many people who had university degrees but were still gambling and spending their time in those places like us because they could not find a job. That time I told myself that what is the point of studying and spending money if I am not going to find a good job? I thought I'd better find a job and start to earn money as soon as possible. (*Raci*)

I thought instead of going to school to waste my time and money, I'd find a job and earn money. I left the school without doing my GCSEs. (*Çetin*)

During secondary school, the participants could not wait to start paid work, understanding better than their parents that they had little chance of succeeding academically because they lacked the requisite social and cultural capital (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). However, almost as soon as they started working in the ethnic labour market, they felt disappointed and disengaged because the nature of the jobs they were doing and their earnings could not deliver the lifestyle they expected. In Durkheimian terms, they had set themselves unrealistic goals and the means for achieving them, leading to disillusionment with what might be seen as the legitimate means for achieving material advancement.

I went to Wales to work in a kebab shop. But soon I realised that it was unbearable. All your time, even your day off is spent at the shop because you don't know anywhere/anyone. That job makes you lose your brain

believe me. I could only stay there for five months and came back to London. (*Nahit*)

An off-licence was my first job. I was excited too. I was working sixteen hours a day, six days a week. After a while, it gets on your nerves. (*Raci*)

Raci and Nahit's negative experiences echo Durkheim's description of the abnormal division of labour (Durkheim, 2014[1893]) where work is something imposed and out of the worker's control (a forced division of labour) and also isolating, dull and repetitive (an anomic division of labour). However, despite being disengaged and alienated from almost all aspects of their work, they were also aware of the fact that better jobs were beyond them.

Of course, I want to buy the kebab not cut it and sell it on Friday or Saturday nights after coming out from the clubs and bars with my friends. But we don't have a chance to find a job in good firms because we don't have appropriate qualifications. I am now working in a kebab shop. I am going to work like a donkey till I am thirty-five and then buy a few houses and rent them out to travel wherever my wife and I want to. (*Serdar*)

Nevertheless, they too had aspirations like their parents, however unrealistic. Even Serdar's assertion that he would buy a few houses when he reached thirty-five was unachievable because his weekly wage did not leave him anything to save. It is these working conditions that a section of the Alevi youth resisted having seen their parents doing these jobs too, and thus sought an alternative means to achieve their material and immaterial goals of money, status, fame and protection by joining gangs (*cf* Cloward, 1959; Decker & Winkle, 1996; Merton, 1968–1938; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Van Gemert, 2008).

Struggling to Move Higher in the World of Gangs

The participants stated that membership of a postcode gang is relatively short-lived as it can only provide sufficient income for the top-ranking leadership to achieve the desired lifestyle. Some of the postcode gang members aspire to move up and join the bigger organisations despite knowing the dangers involved. The third stage of gang formation is thus much more serious, modelled on the Mafia it refers to highly organised criminal gangs run predominantly by Alevi Kurds namely the Tottenham Boys and the Bombers, well known by the community due to their continuing violence and criminal activities in north London (BBC, 2010). There is a general view amongst the participants and confirmed by the four ex-gang members, that initially these organisations were formed by Alevi schoolboys to fight with the black students

in a Hackney school. Later, they were pulled into the drug business by an international Kurdish drug baron (Atay, 2002; Pettifor et al., 2015; Thompson, 2006), and it is to this level that some Alevi youth in the postcode gangs aspire. The following extended quote from one of the former members gives a taste of what it was like being at this level of gang involvement:

When you reach your twenties, you want to earn real money. Then you try to climb up and enter the higher stage [...] because you can't get into the world of fathers¹⁷ easily. So when you want to live a life like this, you have to prove yourself. For example, you have to down a few men [shoot or stab] to be trusted by them [...]. Money, status and fame. Nothing else. I asked everyone [Alevis] in prison and found out that they all began that journey for the same reasons: for a Range Rover, for a BMW, for an X5. Or they were in love with a rich girl, and the poor guy wanted to make a hundred K to have their wedding party and open his own shop and give up. Since it was impossible to earn that sum by working, they began to sell drugs. (*Bahri*)

Membership offers material rewards, but it also provides a regulatory system that provides a sense of community and even family as reflected in terms such as “big brothers” and “real fathers”. Paradoxically gang membership is both an expression of anomie in the form of an unregulated desire for material rewards along with a lack of regulation by the community, the family and the school, but also an answer to it, not only in providing access to the means of achieving desired goals but also in providing integration into a community, a regulatory system that provides both guidance and a sense of belonging. For these reasons, however, once the individual gets into such a circle, and only a few succeed in reaching leadership levels that pay for an extravagant kind of lifestyle,¹⁸ it is extremely difficult to leave (Decker & Winkle, 1996). At this point, members can feel trapped, and if they try to leave, they are often subject to violence, or their families or girlfriends threatened. Some even take their own lives as the only way out while those who are successful in leaving may experience a sense of disengagement and disorientation (a consequence of anomie) that itself can lead to suicide (Cetin, 2014, 2016).

17 This was used to refer to big bosses, mafia leaders who control the smaller groups. (something wrong with the size of this footnote)

18 For the Alevi Kurdish youth in the UK, having an expensive wedding party/ceremony is a platform where they can display their economic and social status. The wedding industry is one of the fastest growing in London.

Conclusion

This article has applied Durkheim's concept of anomie in explaining the involvement of the Alevi Kurdish youth in gangs and the social consequences for them of transnational migration. The examination of the diverse assimilation trajectories followed by the first- and second-generation Alevis directly illuminates how the social organisation of the community functions, or does not function, as a regulative and integrative mechanism for individuals, particularly in relation to the achievement of material goals. The integrative and regulative influence of the relatively tight-knit community established by the first-generation Alevis, linked to their persecuted exclusion in Turkey, became weakened for a segment of second-generation young men. A number of risk factors affecting the second generation became associated with the settlement in new communities and the pressure from parents for their children to fulfil the aspirations that they had for them. As a result, some young men distanced themselves from mainstream institutions such as their families, school and the labour market and joined various forms of gangs. This trajectory can be characterised as downward assimilation into a "new rainbow underclass" (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001), a social position that in itself is characterised by a high state of anomie manifest through ethnic tensions, gang activities and even suicide. Following Portes and Rumbaut (2001), it can be seen that the second-generation Alevis started their journey of adolescence almost alone having detached themselves from both parental and societal regulative and integrative mechanisms, thereby making themselves vulnerable to risky choices such as dropping out of school and joining gangs, a risk other studies of ethnic gangs confirm (*cf* Gemert et al., 2008; Bourgois, 2003; Clarke et al., 2006; Willis, 1997).

Whilst the gangs give access to illegitimate means to achieve culturally valued goals that are not possible to achieve through legitimate means. They also provide a sense of identity that integrates the individual into the group and which, in a sense, offers Durkheim's alternative regulation of youthful desires (one he assigned to the education system). Having no chance of attaining their material goals through participation in the mainstream labour market, as they lack the required resources, skills and qualifications, young Alevis' dependence on gangs appears inevitable for some given their rejection of the hard and unstimulating work in the ethnic labour market (*cf* Portes & Zhou, 1993; Bourgois, 2003; Clarke et al., 2006). In an attempt to fulfil their dream of material wealth and status some try to climb the ladder within the gang. However, only a few succeed and the consequences are not always positive with prison or even suicide as an end result. For those who wish to leave the gang, suicide may sometimes appear to be the only form of escape while those who

do manage to leave end up in jobs they did not aspire to in the ethnic labour market (Cetin, 2014).

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BRILL

Book Reviews



Michael M. Gunter (ed.), *Routledge Handbook on the Kurds*, London and New York: Routledge, 2019, 483 pp., (ISBN: 9781138646643).

Within a short time of each other, three large edited volumes were published that purport to represent the state of the art in Kurdish Studies and to stand as major works of reference for years to come. The first of these, Gareth Stansfield and Mohammed Shareef's *The Kurdish Question Revisited* (London: Hurst, 2018) was reviewed in the previous issue of *Kurdish Studies*. Most recently, Faleh A. Jabar and Renad Mansour's *The Kurds in a Changing Middle East: History, Politics and Representation* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2019) saw the light. It is, regrettably, the last of Faleh's numerous valuable contributions to the field. The volume under review here appears in the *Routledge Handbooks* series and was edited by Michael M. Gunter, who is himself probably the most prolific of today's scholars of Kurdish politics and who persuaded over thirty colleagues to contribute chapters. A fourth broad overview, focusing on history of the Kurds and edited by Hamit Bozarslan, Cengiz Gunes and Veli Yadirgi, is due out at Cambridge University Press soon.

The fact that major publishers are interested in bringing out such inevitably costly books indicates, I believe, not so much the maturity of *Kurdish Studies* as an academic enterprise as the publishers' perception that there is potentially a large non-academic readership for such broad overviews. The Kurds have become significant actors in the Middle East who can no longer be ignored, especially since the rise of ISIS. Many politicians and policymakers, humanitarian workers, asylum lawyers, journalists, the hydrocarbon industry and other investors as well as, who knows, missionaries and tourists must feel the need for reliable, up-to-date, clear and comprehensive information on the Kurds.

In books that address this need, one would not so much expect the presentation of major new research but instead competent and judicious summaries of the state of the art and a balanced coverage of all aspects that could be

relevant to stakeholders – including impartial discussion of contentious issues that keep the Kurds divided. Considerations such as this were apparently also on the editor's mind, for in his Introduction he speaks of the “strong need for [a] multidisciplinary Handbook” that will stand as “a definitive overview of as much of Kurdish Studies as possible,” and among his contributors we find authors sympathetic to the struggle of the Kurdish movements they studied as well as more sceptical voices.

The volume does cover much ground, both thematically and geographically. Gunter has organised the contributions into twelve sections, of which the first contains overviews of North American and European scholarship on the Kurds. This is followed by clusters of chapters dealing with history up to the 1920s, Kurdish culture, political economy, religion, geopolitics, travel, and women. Together these take up the first half of the book. The second half has a geographical focus, with sections dedicated to the “Kurdish situation” in Turkey, Iraq, Syria and Iran, and the Kurdish diaspora.

Most of the authors contributing to this volume are well-known through earlier publications (and several of them also have chapters in one of the other recent overview volumes), but besides established scholars we find also a number of younger scholars still in early stages of their academic careers. Political science is the dominant discipline, but there are also contributions from history, political economy, cultural and literary studies. Although Gunter is himself based in the USA, most of his contributors are not, and besides a large number of UK-based scholars, he appears to have sought a representative geographical distribution. About a third of the authors have a Kurdish background, which reflects the increasing role of Western-educated young Kurdish scholars in the field. Women, however, are under-represented, both among the authors (with only four contributors) and in the chapters, of which only one explicitly addresses gender relations and women's participation in politics.

The volume opens with concise and helpful overviews of the history and current state of Kurdish Studies in the USA and Europe, by Michael Gunter and Vera Eccarius-Kelly, respectively. Gunter's chapter is a long list of persons – academics, journalists and Kurdish politician-activists – with brief descriptions of their background and their main publications. The outstanding roles of Wadie Jwaideh and Vera Saeedpour are acknowledged but their names are almost drowned among the many lesser figures mentioned in the interest of comprehensiveness. Of himself, Gunter writes that he was “possibly the first and only Western scholar to meet Abdullah Öcalan (...)” and mentions that the notorious former CIA station chief in Ankara, Paul Henze, had asked him to discover that the PKK was “controlled by the Soviet Union and communist internationalism” and had rejected Gunter's conclusion that the PKK was “mostly

motivated by Kurdish nationalism” (15). Eccarius-Kelly focuses more on institutions and structural factors inhibiting or stimulating the development of Kurdish Studies as an academic enterprise. Due to difficulty of access, there has been no recent field research in Turkish or Iranian Kurdistan, whereas the Kurdistan Region of Iraq and to a lesser extent Rojava have allowed researchers freedom of movement, which is obviously reflected in the subject matter of recent publications. Through endowed chairs and scholarship programs, the Iraqi Kurdish parties have moreover made a significant contribution to the institutionalisation of Kurdish Studies in Europe (as well as the USA).

The historical section begins with an overview, by Michael Eppel, of the autonomous Kurdish emirates that flourished and were centres of Kurdish arts and literature during the first centuries of Ottoman rule and their demise in the nineteenth century when the empire began to modernise. Eppel discusses Bitlis and Baban as different examples of autonomy, and summarily sketches the events that led to the final defeat of Soran and Botan. Questioning the significance of this history for the later national movement, he suggests that the emirates had on the one hand “constituted a potential nucleus for statehood” but on the other hand due to the perseverance of tribalism and rivalries between emirates were “fundamental obstacles to the dawning of a supra-tribal and supra-emirate Kurdish national sentiment” (45). Hamit Bozarslan reviews some of the same developments – Ottoman modernisation and the demise of the emirates – in his chapter on the nineteenth century, drawing attention to the rise of religious brotherhoods and a new intelligentsia that came to represent Kurdish interests. Ahmet Serdar Akturk continues the narrative with a discussion of the first Kurdish associations and mobilisation of Kurds in the first uprisings in Republican Turkey. The last-named two articles are also useful for their referring to much recent research (unlike Eppel, who neglects mentioning some of the most relevant recent literature). Together, the chapters provide an informative survey of major developments among the Kurds of the Ottoman Empire. One aspect of history sorely missed here is an overview of Persian-Kurdish relations during the Safavid and Qajar periods. The developments in the post-World War One period are discussed country by country in the second half of the volume, but as we shall see below, the Kurds of Iran remain seriously understudied.

The next section, Kurdish culture, is a mixed bag, with two articles on literature, one on cinema, and a quaint plea for linguistic engineering by Michael Chyet (who proposes mutually consistent choices to be made in standardising the Kurmanji and Sorani dialects). Other major aspects of culture such as oral tradition and music are not covered. Michiel Leezenberg contributes an analysis of what is arguably the most important work of Kurdish literature, Ehmedê

Xanî's *Mem û Zîn* (completed in 1693), the reception of this work by Kurds and its elevation to the status of the Kurdish national epic. Leezenberg, who has for years been working on a Dutch translation of *Mem û Zîn*, knows his Xanî and makes apt comments on aspects of the work, notably the mystical dimension, that have been neglected by most earlier scholars. He also provides a helpful overview of scholarship on Xanî and his work, text editions and translations. I noticed one minor lapse here: he does not mention the recent facsimile edition of the oldest extant manuscript (dated 1752) published by Tehsîn Îbrahîm Doskî, *Mem û Zîna Ehmedê Xanî – danaya `Ezîzê kurê Şîrbarê Mamzêdî ewa li sala 1165 koçî hatiye nivîsîn* (Duhok: Spîrêz, 2008), which will be of importance to all future Xanî scholars. Hashem Ahmadzadeh follows up with a broad overview of the development of Kurdish literature from the classical period (16th–17th centuries) to the modern age, tracing the thematic and stylistic changes in poetry and the emergence of new genres. He points at different developments in Kurmanji and Sorani literature and the differential impact of cultural policies of the states controlling parts of Kurdistan, and he draws attention to the crucial role of the diaspora in developing modern Kurdish literature. This is also one of the few chapters in the book to pay explicit attention to the situation of Iranian Kurdistan.

Bahar Şimşek concludes this section with a pioneering article on Kurdish cinema, discussing the specific difficulties of a non-state people to develop a “national” film culture, which have made international festivals and Kurdish film festivals in Europe and North America even more significant as venues. Yılmaz Güney's *Yol* (The Way, Turkey 1982) and Bahman Ghobadi's *Zamane Baraye Mastiye Asbha* (A Time for Drunken Horses, Iran 2000), both international award-winning films, initiate an impressive list of forty major films in some variety of Kurdish that reached international audiences. In addition, the government of Iraq's Kurdistan Region has begun producing movies, mainly for the internal market, and Şimşek lists the first eighteen products (completed in 2009–2017) of this initiative to establish a properly Kurdish film industry.

The section on political economy, a relatively neglected subject in Kurdish Studies, consists of an informative article by David Romano on the oil factor in Iraqi Kurdish politics and an analysis of regional inequality and “de-development” of Turkish Kurdistan by Veli Yadırgı. Romano discusses the dependence of the Kurdistan Region's rentier economy on oil income, the complex issue of shared control of oil and gas resources between central and regional government (with the distinction between “existing” and “new” fields, the KRG claiming that the Constitution grants them control of the latter), the pipelines that allowed the KRG to export its own oil and gas but also made it highly dependent

on Turkey, and the impact of the painful sanctions imposed by Baghdad once the KRG began exporting oil. This chapter is one of very few good overviews of this all-important issue and its international political ramifications. Yadirgi provides a historical overview of Turkey's economic policies in Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia from the establishment of the Republic until 1980. Unfortunately he does not extend the narrative and analysis to more recent years; Özal's neoliberal reforms in the 1980s, the rise of an Islamic bourgeoisie, also in the Kurdish region, and the policies of the AKP, which sought to solve the Kurdish question by bringing economic growth.

In the section on religion, we find no general overview or in-depth treatment of Islamic traditions or Islamic movements among the Kurds, but four articles focusing on specific, narrow aspects only. Mehmet Gurses discusses the various ways in which the state of Turkey has used Islam – Islamic discourse, religious institutions and official religious education – as a weapon against Kurdish nationalism. Christopher Houston takes a new look at Muslim attitudes towards the Kurdish question in Turkey, as reflected in the press, he compares his reading of three Islamist newspapers in 2017 with similar observations in the 1990s, when he could distinguish between “state Islamist”, “Islamist” and “Kurdish Islamist” discourses and actors. He notes, unsurprisingly, that the critique of state policies and acknowledgement of the Kurdish question he found in the Islamist press two decades ago have given way to uncritical endorsement of the government and condemnation of Kurdish claims as terrorism. Of the changes in Kurdish Islamist discourse and activism, especially after 2015, which would be of most interest to readers, he fails to say anything meaningful.

Mordechai Zaken writes on the Kurdistani Jews and their relations with the Kurdish chieftains who protected and exploited them. This is mainly a summary of his 2003 dissertation on the subject (published by Brill in 2007). Zaken sketches a less idyllic picture of the conditions with which Jews had to cope than we find in some of the earlier literature, and his terse account of the final emigration of virtually all Kurdistani and Iraqi Jews is entirely without nostalgia.

In the most remarkable chapter of this section, and the only one to actually deal with religion, Tyler Fisher and Nahro Zagros discuss the Yezidi ritual of baptism (*mor kirin*) and the relevant beliefs concerning the sacred spring Kaniya Spî in Lalish. Against this background, the authors discuss the ritual purification by rebaptism of women who escaped from capture by ISIS. This is a very interesting paper that presents new, original field research, usefully supplementing the studies by Kreyenbroek and Omarkhali on Yezidi ritual. It

might therefore have been published more profitably in a journal or a more specialised book. The more general overview of religion and its role in Kurdish society that one would expect here, on the other hand, is unfortunately lacking.

The section titled “Women” has only one chapter, by Anna Grabolle-Çeliker, who provides a capable overview of the earlier literature on gender relations and women’s activism, supplementing this with judicious observations on more recent developments in women’s activism in all parts of Kurdistan including the increasingly prominent role of women in armed struggle. This is exactly the sort of overview a reader would look for in a book like this. Nonetheless, one would have wished for more than this single chapter, in order to cover certain aspects of women’s roles in more depth.

In the country-by-country part of the book, three chapters are devoted to Turkey and Syria each, four to Iraq, and one to Iran. Gunter has made an effort to juxtapose different viewpoints in each section, some chapters being sympathetic with the Kurdish movements described and others more critical. Cengiz Gunes writes on the travails of the successive “pro-Kurdish” legal parties that have existed since 1993, with an emphasis on the latest of them, the HDP, its remarkable successes in the 2015 elections and the renewed repression to which its leading politicians were exposed. Joost Jongerden and Ahmet Hamdi Akkaya contribute an article on the crucial decade of the 1970s, when the PKK was only one, though the most violent, among a large number of Kurdish parties or associations. They make some interesting observations about the multiple scissions in those other movements, which made them ineffective even before the military coup of 1980 delivered the fatal blow, but they do not appear to appreciate the significant role those movements played in raising public awareness of Kurdish history and identity and in the revival of Kurdish language and culture. They appear to have taken their PKK informants’ narratives at face value and to be unaware of the memoirs and studies that throw a very different light on the period, including recent publications by the Ismail Beşikçi Foundation. Bill Parks finally focuses on the trans-border dimension of Turkey’s Kurdish conflict, noting the importance of Iraqi Kurdistan as a base from which the PKK launched operations in Turkey and the high proportion of Syrian Kurds among the PKK’s guerrillas, as well as Turkey’s numerous military incursions into Iraq and confrontation with Syria.

The section on Iraqi Kurdistan is introduced by a wide-ranging but somewhat rambling essay by Francis Owtram on how the Kurds ended up in a state they do not own: the break-up of the Ottoman Empire, the quest for oil, tribal rebellions, the Barzani uprising, Baathist oppression and the Anfal, international intervention, the safe haven and the establishment of the Kurdistan Regional Government, the rise of ISIS and the referendum on independence.

In a more focused chapter, Liam Anderson discusses various aspects of the so-called disputed territories, the ethnically mixed and oil-rich zone located between the recognised Kurdistan Region and the Arab-majority part of Iraq. He summarily describes the impact of the rise of ISIS, which occupied much of these territories, and the subsequent defeat of ISIS by Kurdish forces (with international support), which seemed to place the KRG in a favourable position regarding the future control of the territories. (The chapter ends before the referendum on independence and the central government's renewed control.) Michael Rubin contributes a chapter on the rampant corruption in the Kurdistan Region. Rubin, who is one of very few Western observers to have written quite elaborately on this embarrassing but important subject before, gives detailed examples involving the Barzani and Talabani families and their close associates. Corruption is acknowledged as a grave problem by the KRG, reforms and prosecution of perpetrators have been announced but, as Rubin insists, the measures remain symbolic and well-connected people retain immunity from prosecution even in the worst cases. Kirill Vertyaev concludes this section with an overview of Russian and Soviet scholarship on the Iraqi Kurds and the Kurdish movement as well as the historical relations of the Soviet state and post-Soviet Russia with the Kurds, from Barzani's exile in the Soviet Union to Rosneft's recent investment in oil and gas exploration in the KRG.

Jordi Tejel contributes an adequate and balanced overview of the Kurdish struggle in Syria, from the French Mandate through the various Arab nationalist regimes to the period of PYD-controlled "democratic autonomy." From a perspective sympathetic to the "Apoist" parties PKK and PYD, Michael Knapp sketches the latter's efforts at grassroots organisation and the establishment of self-administration. Too dependent on a small number of interviews with activists of the PYD and affiliated associations, the article remains rather superficial and unsatisfying for the reader who wants to know how "democratic autonomy" works in practice. Eva Savelsberg takes a less enthralled look at the experiment in Rojava and the methods by which PYD achieved and maintained hegemony. She points at refusal to co-operate, let alone share power with the other Kurdish parties (united in the Kurdish National Council in Syria, supported by the Iraqi KDP) and grave human rights violations. Acknowledging the remarkable military, administrative and diplomatic successes of the PYD, she soberly observes that these owed much to US support and restraint by the central government, neither of which was to outlast the defeat of ISIS – an observation that soon proved to be prophetic.

The Kurds of Iran remain the most under-researched; especially the developments on the ground since around 1983, when the leadership of the two major nationalist parties went into exile, remain largely unknown. That situation is

reflected in this book. Nader Entessar's chapter here provides some information on events during the Iranian revolution and the views and policies concerning the Kurds of the consecutive Iranian governments, as well as some summary information on internal conflicts and scissions in the KDP-Iran, but remains silent on social, economic, cultural and political developments inside Iranian Kurdistan.

The final section of the book focuses on the diaspora, with a general overview by Östen Wahlbeck, and chapters specifically focusing on the Kurds in Germany and the UK by Vera Eccarius-Kelly and Desmond Fernandes, respectively. These chapters look at patterns of Kurdish migration (labour migration, family reunion, political asylum), self-organisation and political activism. Looking at another aspect of diaspora-homeland relations, Barzoo Eliassi investigates the perceptions and attitudes of Kurds in Sweden and the UK towards the semi-independent Kurdistan Region in Iraq. Eccarius-Kelly's chapter also pays attention to the evolving German attitudes towards the Kurds, and those of Germany's Kurds towards political processes in Turkey. Together, this section offers much food for thought about the increasing role of the diaspora in Kurdish cultural revival, identity politics and impact on developments on the ground. To which one might add the increasing participation of the diaspora in Kurdish scholarship.

The almost five hundred pages of this volume contain a wealth of information on the Kurds, but the chapters are of uneven scope, depth and quality. The history of the Kurdish movement, from the early twentieth century until the defeat of ISIS, is well covered and there are interesting though partial observations on changes in the political economy and social organisation of Kurdistan. In spite of some very good chapters on culture, religion and social relations, there is little internal coherence in the relevant sections. This makes one wonder for which audience this would be the appropriate book. Kurdish scholars will find a few chapters that provide significant new information or analysis but may already be familiar with much of the material covered in the other chapters. Non-specialists who consult it as a work of reference may find it helpful for contextualising news reports, but those who are in search of a readable introduction to Kurdish history, society and culture may be disappointed by the fragmentary and uneven presentation of basic information.

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Kardo Bokani, *Social Communication and Kurdish Political Mobilisation in Turkey*,
Balti, Republic of Moldova: Lambert Academic Publishing, 2017, 252 pp.,
(ISBN: 978-3-330-33239-3).

In his admirably readable book on the rise of the Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK), Kardo Bokani calls upon Karl Deutsch's conceptual framework of social communication to argue that processes of national identity formation require a dense network of social communication and physical interaction through which to integrate the individual members of a prospective community or nation into a coherent, existing one. Although heuristic, the author thus relegates the insights of such other leading scholars on nationalism as Ernest Gellner's modernisation and high, shared cultures; Benedict Anderson's imagined communities; and Ernest Renan's daily plebiscite, among many others. However, Deutsch's model does illustrate successfully how a network of communication can be generated through a top-down process directed by states, or through a bottom-up one initiated by other institutions such as mass movements. Furthermore, Bokani also commendably treats what could have been an almost impenetrably complex subject into an understandable and valuable exposition.

The author begins his analysis by asking four basic questions. 1. Why did a coherent and unified Kurdish national movement only emerge so recently despite its ideational origins reaching back into the late 17th century in the writings of Ehmedê Xanî, who had lamented Kurdish divisions? 2. Why did so many earlier waves of Kurdish mobilisation have so little impact both politically and militarily? 3. The first two queries notwithstanding, why were the Kurdish people largely able to resist efforts by the Turkish state to assimilate them? 4. Why was the PKK able to overcome these earlier patterns of failed Kurdish mobilisation? What distinguished the PKK from previous Kurdish groups in terms of its internal structure and the environment in which it operated? Bokani then proceeds to answer all of them thoroughly and accurately.

In Chapter 1, Bokani presents Deutsch's social communication model of national identity formation to explain how "a developing transport and communication infrastructure helped the Kurdish population overcome the social and cultural divisions that had previously frustrated the processes of national identity formation" (11). The construction of a nation demands a thick network of social communication and material transaction among individuals to make them ready for inclusion in an overall national construct.

In Chapter 2, the author shows how although the Kurds possessed almost all the attributes of nationhood such as territory, language, history, and culture,

among others, geographical isolation and divisions prohibited their convergence into nationhood. Until very recently, primitive transportation infrastructures inhibited Deutsch's necessary social communication between the many isolated Kurdish communities. Although true, sole stress on this attribute, ignores how contemporary Kurdish nationalism also rose as a simple reaction to slightly less current Turkish, Arabic, and Iranian nationalisms' attempts to assimilate the Kurds after World War I.

Chapter 3 delves into how Kurdish divisions from the failed revolt of Sheikh Ubeydullah of Nehri in 1880–1881 to Sayyid Reza's unsuccessful Dersim uprising in 1936–1938 failed because of Kurdish fractionalisation. Thus, even the golden opportunity presented by the collapse of the Ottoman Empire after World War I failed to bring about a unified Kurdish nation. The Turkish state's successful divide and rule precepts readily took advantage of this situation, which only began to alter slowly with the rise of modern modes of social communication. Thus, Chapter 4 investigates, among others, how the PKK shifted radically from the classical guerrilla army structure of operating in each member's own locality to clusters of fighters from different areas joined into the same units where they learned about their peers' local cultural particularities and thus to connect better with each other. Successful PKK organisation and leadership also helped overcome traditional Kurdish divisions.

Chapter 5 explains how by the early 1990s, the PKK developed from its mountain highlands and rural areas bases into a mass movement mobilising popular uprisings and celebrations like Newroz in urban areas through clusters of more modern networks of dense communicative events. The Turkish government's brutal destruction of rural Kurdish villages and deportation to western urban centres in an attempt to assimilate them failed in many cases because so many ethnic Kurds remained isolated from mainstream public life and subject to constant prejudices from majority ethnic Turks. In addition, there were just too many minority ethnic Kurds separated by their linguistic and cultural cleavages and the PKK's strong and continuing campaign of Kurdish ethnic awareness and demands for the state to succeed in its assimilationist campaigns.

Chapter 6 explores the various ways the PKK has extended its collective and communicative activities beyond the Middle East into the Kurdish diasporic community in Europe and elsewhere. The Kurdistan Communities Union (KCK) – described as the PKK umbrella organisation bringing together numerous affiliated organisations structured according to different levels of PKK control and involvement – counts literally tens of thousands involved in the Kurdish cause to one extent or another. Med-TV and social media also represent a communicative process that revolutionised and strengthened the

Kurdish cause overcoming physical barriers and energising the politically passive.

The following Chapter 7 details how these unprecedented modes of communication spread awareness and sympathy against Turkey's capture of the PKK's leader Abdullah Öcalan in February 1999 not only to the Kurdish community and diaspora but also to the entire world. The PKK's persistence on these matters has created a virtual Kurdish nation far beyond its original, tenuous borders in the Middle East. Thus, the final Chapter 8 concludes that any actual solution to the Kurdish issue in Turkey less than some type of genuine internal or external self-determination would fail to solve the Kurdish problem. The author suggests that for the present, the PKK's borderless, confederal model with consociational features constitutes the most viable resolution as it would strike a balance between Turkey's determination to maintain its borders, while granting its ethnic Kurdish population who so desire an avenue for their demands. However, by emphasising that this only represents the most viable solution for now, Bokani implies that it would be the slippery road to possible independence, which in today's world at least would be totally unacceptable to Turkey.

Furthermore, given the failure of a mere advisory referendum on independence held by the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in Iraq in September 2017, the apparent US desertion of its de facto Syrian Kurdish allies in favour of Turkey in October 2019, and Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's continuing and increasingly harsh crackdown on the PKK both within and outside of Turkey, one wonders whether the present author is being too optimistic in his projections for the future. On the other hand, given the enormous progress the PKK has made in furthering the Kurdish cause, one cannot easily gainsay Bokani's optimism. Time alone will tell.

At the beginning of his work, the author also offers his readers a short, but useful list of terms in both their Kurdish and Turkish equivalents. A longer such list as well as another one of acronyms would have been even more informative. This reviewer could see little difference between the two maps of Kurdistan in the Middle Ages and contemporary times. Bokani ends his study with a large, informative bibliography, but lacks an index. He writes well and has only a minimal amount of typos. His book offers scholars, policy makers, and the interested lay public an informative analysis of the Kurdish problem in Turkey through the lens of theoretical and communicative insights.

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Emel Elif Tugdar & Serhun Al, eds., *Comparative Kurdish Politics in the Middle East: Actors, Ideas, and Interests*, Cham: Palgrave-MacMillan, 2018, pp. 235, (ISBN: 978-3319537146).

“Comparative Kurdish Politics in the Middle East” aims to unpack political dynamics in the Kurdistan region in nine contributions, which have to provide the reader insight in Kurdish political affairs across Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Syria from a comparative perspective. The first chapter “Iraqi Kurdistan’s Statehood Aspirations and Non-Kurdish Actors: The Case of the Turkomans” by Emel Elif Tugdar considers the position of Turkomans in state building in the Kurdistan Region Iraq. The close relation between Turkey and Turkomans is mentioned as a possible obstacle, yet Turkey’s interest in successful state building in the Kurdistan region creates opportunities. The position of the Turkomans in the process of state-building in the Kurdistan Region Iraq will depend on how Turkey will use its bargaining power with the Kurdistan Regional Government, a power which is used to advance economic trade more than politics. In “Kurdish Political Parties in Syria: Past Struggles and Future Expectations” Bekir Halhalli gives an overview of Kurdish political parties from the establishment of the Syrian Kurdistan Democratic Party in 1957 to the political landscape today. The author concludes that Kurdish politics in Syria is organised around two blocks dominated by the PKK and KDP, and that struggles between these blocks have weakened the struggle for democracy by Kurds in Syria.

The two chapters are followed by “Human Security Versus National Security: Kurds, Turkey and Syrian Rojava” in which Serhun Al discusses nationalism as a security provider for both states and ethnic groups. Focusing on Turkey mainly, the author argues that pro-Kurdish claim making has posed threats to the territorial integrity and national unity of Turkey. A rights discourse around language and identity, which the author refers to as cultural security, has created a Kurdish comfort zone, yet is perceived by the state as a threat to national unity. “Kurdish Nationalist Organizations, Neighboring States, and ‘Ideological Distance’” by Michael Wuthrich analyses extra- and cross political relations between Kurdish political parties and heads of neighbouring states. Referring to the concept “ideological distance”, the author argues that there is an unparalleled similarity between the ideologies of Erdoğan and Barzani. Both leaders’ perception of the PKK as a threat to their interests has cemented collaboration. This collaboration between Turkey and the KRG, however, is based on interactions between the heads of state, Erdogan and Barzani, and change in leadership may bring important changes in interactions between Turkey and the KRG. Cenap Çakmak’s “Statehood, Autonomy or Unitary Coexistence”

discusses the approaches of various political organisations to self-determination. The author makes a division between three groups of actors and distinguish them from one another on how they define self-determination. First, “Barzani and his aides” (129), who are considered most enthusiastic in promoting an agenda of self-determination, second, “pro-Öcalan HDP” (129) dedicated to the idea of democratic-autonomy and democratic-confederalism, and third the Islamist HÜDA-PAR which promotes rights and freedoms it refers to as “God-given entitlements that do not have to be endorsed by the state” (130). Peace building efforts in Turkey are discussed by Ina Merdjanova in “Islam and the Kurdish Peace Process in Turkey (2013–2015)”. The initial hypothesis of the author was that Islam in Turkey can provide a powerful foundation for a state-driven top-down peace process. However, the author’s findings lead to a different conclusion, namely that the peace process needs to be pursued in a “holistic” way and address all minorities in Turkey through equal rights and inclusive citizenship.

“Ethnic Capital Across Borders and Regional Development” takes a political economy perspective. In this chapter, Serhun Al and Elif Tugdar use the ethnic capital as a potential mechanism in the development of cross-border trade and a cross-border labour market. Umut Kuruuzum discusses the synchronisation of politics and economy in “In Search of Futures: Uncertain Neoliberal Times, Speculations, and the Economic Crisis in Iraqi-Kurdistan”. The author identifies a tension between Kurdish nationalism and neoliberal policies, arguing that a political agenda for independence has been undermined by an agenda of neoliberal entrepreneurship, which made it impossible to create an economically self-sustainable polity. In “The Stateless and Why Some Gain and Others Not: The Case of Iranian Kurdistan” Idris Ahmedi brings us back to the issue of self-determination, analysing the Kurdish national movement in Iran. The author argues that there has not been a genuine recognition of Kurdish rights, and Kurdish aspirations have only been accommodated when the state was relatively weak and suppressed again when the state was strong.

The attractiveness of this edited volume is its interdisciplinary character. To study political dynamics in Kurdistan, the editors have brought together contributions from the field of political sciences to that of political economy. This results in contributions discussing the main political parties, to that of ethnic capital and cross-border trade, and the role of non-Kurdish groups in state building. However, some of the more challenging propositions remain under-discussed. For example, the idea that effective state-building in the KRI is in the interests of Turkey (chapter 1), and how this relates to the argument that relations between Turkey and the KRG are built around Erdoğan and Barzani,

hence not constructed around institutions, but persons (chapter 4). Another one is how the argument that ethnic capital contributes to the development of an extra-border political economy of Kurdistan relates to the argument of spaces of economic insecurity and uncertainty, or how the argument about the KRI as an economic powerhouse (chapter 7) relates to the boom reversed to a bust with the 2014 financial crisis and the emergence of ISIS (chapter 8). Also, the statement that the demography of the KRI offers an advantage to full independence (chapter 5) needs clarification against the background of the discussion about Kirkuk (chapter 1). In addition, fascinating quotes beg for explanation, such as the statement by a Turkoman politician: “Wherever Kurds are, Turks exists as well”.

Occasionally, the book moves from challenging thoughts to questionable claims, such as the one that the AKP initiated the peace process, or that the AKP’s Islamic Brotherhood project helped to advance the party’s position in the southeast, or that the high ranking of KRG in Turkey’s export lists consolidates ethnic-capital development (169). At times, the narrative is unbalanced, such as the claim that the ENKS is the most inclusive and comprehensive umbrella organisation of Kurdish political parties, while TEV-DEM is cornered as “close to the PKK” (40), or that the political demands of the PKK are reduced to linguistic and cultural rights for the Kurds in Turkey.

“Comparative Kurdish Politics in the Middle East” offers some interesting insights and challenging thoughts, however the editors could have highlighted these ideas, the contradictions and questions that emerge from these contributions in their introduction and bring the authors in a conversation with one another.

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Christoph Markiewicz, *The Crisis of Kingship in Late Medieval Islam: Persian Emigres and the Making of Ottoman Sovereignty*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019, 364 pp, (9781108684842).

The establishment of Kurdish Studies as a distinct field has served as a useful antidote to different forms and gradations of political and methodological nationalism that have long informed Turkish, Arab, and Persian Studies, and to the long-standing marginalisation of the Kurdish experience; but precisely because of this newly gained autonomy, it risks institutionalising its marginal status, and staying aloof from wider perspectives. Within Kurdish Studies, in turn, history, and in particular the history of premodern and early modern past, occupies a relatively marginal position. The focus of most work lies on the modern and contemporary periods, and on the political dimensions of Kurdish nationality.

For these and other reasons, the early modern chronicler and statesman Idrîs Bidlîsî (1457–1520 CE) has not quite received the attention he deserves, even though his historical importance is beyond doubt. As already described in Martin van Bruinessen's *Agha, Shaykh, and State* (1992), it was Bidlîsî who, more than any other actor, persuaded the Kurdish princes in the Ottoman-Safavid marches to pledge allegiance to the Ottomans. Bidlîsî, however, is not only an actor but also a chronicler of this period, having authored, most importantly the voluminous *Hesht behesht* ("Eight Paradises"). Although earlier twentieth-century commentators dismissed the "extravagant elegance" of this work, Charles Melville has more recently stated that Bidlîsî's chronicle "represents a watershed in Ottoman historiographical production, with no match in terms of comprehensiveness or epistolary style" (see e.g. in Lewis & Holt, 1962: 198; Melville, 2012: 483–495). Despite its obvious importance for early modern Ottoman historiography, Bidlîsî's main work has not been published yet. Hence, among scholars of early modern Kurdish history, Idrîs is rather less well known than his late sixteenth-century townsman, Şerefxan Bidlîsî, whose *Şerefnâme* is the most obvious, and the most widely used, primary source for the political history of the region.

Our knowledge of Idrîs and the cultural environment from which he emerged now takes a major leap forward with Christoph Markiewicz's study, *The Crisis of Kingship in Late Medieval Islam*. This is a revised version of the author's PhD dissertation, which was guided by prominent Ottoman historian Cornell Fleischer, and which received MESA's Malcolm Kerr dissertation award in 2016. It zooms in on the important juncture in early modern times, in which an unstable constellation of local dynasties that replaced each other in quick

succession was replaced by three supra-regional empires that were universal in their claim to rule: the Ottoman, Safavid and Mughal dynasties; and one may add (and Markiewicz does indeed add) the Timurid dynasty in Central Asia. The Ottoman would prove to be by far the most enduring of these. Markiewicz traces a number of convergences and common developments in these empires, placing his study in what has been known as “connected history:” it systematically explores the transregional connections within a wider shared cultural space that had Islam as the dominant religion and Persian as the dominant language of literate communication and literary education.¹ Perhaps Markiewicz slightly overemphasises the Islamic character of this space, but that is a minor quibble. Such global or connected approaches operate on a rather larger geographical scale than that of the individual state or empire; as a result of this upscaling, they risk dissolving human agency, a risk that has been countered by the rise of “global microhistory,” which focuses on individuals at the interstices of political or civilisational units. Markiewicz, too, locates his study within the latter discipline: a focus on individual intermediaries, he argues, helps us in tracing, and explaining, precisely when and why these interconnections were established and how they functioned.

Bidlîsî was born into a family of scholars with close links to the Messianic Sufi movement of Muhammad Nurbakhsh. There were many such movements active in the region during this period (the Safavî movement, obviously, being the most famous and politically most successful of them). In their use of Ibn ‘Arabî’s monism and in their veneration of Imam ‘Alî, these movements displayed a “confessional ambiguity” (4) that blurred the distinction between Sunnîs and Shi‘ites. As a result, political loyalties did not necessarily match sectarian affinity or identity. Markiewicz adds that Bidlîsî, despite his probably Kurdish ethnicity, is “unlikely to have embraced a distinct Kurdish identity”, but rather “viewed himself and the groups around him through the contrasting identities of Turk u Tajik” (32). The latter distinction, he rightly notes, did not really mark an ethnic background: it is neither an ethnic one between population groups or a linguistic one between predominant languages (at this time, for example, the Ottoman Sultan Selim was writing in verse in Persian while his Iranian rival Shah Isma‘il composed propagandistic poems in Turkish); rather, it marks a political and geographical opposition between the Ottoman dynasty in the West and Safavids in the East; but even in this sense, the terms seem rather ambiguous.

¹ For a brief introductory statement of this non-Eurocentric “connected history,” see Subrahmanyam (1997).

In 1502, following Shah Isma'îl's entrance in Tabriz, Idrîs left for Istanbul, without any of his relatives. He himself subsequently depicted Isma'îl as the personification of tyranny and disorder; Markiewicz interprets this flight in slightly overly psychologising terms, interpreting Bidlîsî's rather conventionally expressed statements of longing for his loved ones as an indication of a "crisis of conscience" (74), or even a "midlife crisis" (75). Bidlîsî's stature at the Ottoman court grew rapidly; soon he started work on the *Hesht behesht*, which had been commissioned by Bayezid II. Reportedly, however, the Sultan was not happy with the result, and subsequently had another court-affiliated scholar, Ibn Kemal, better known as Kemalpaşazade, compose another chronicle, in Ottoman Turkish this time. In disillusionment, Bidlîsî withdrew to the Arab peninsula, from where he tried to court Selim's great rival, Shah Isma'îl, with a panegyric. After Bayezid's son Selim's accession to the throne, Bidlîsî returned to Istanbul. The years between 1514 and 1516 were, as Markiewicz rightly observes, the "pinnacle of his professional career" (126). Because of his intimate knowledge of Eastern lands, Bidlîsî became one of Selim's most important counsellors in the expedition against Shah Isma'îl, and following Selim's victory at Çaldıran, he became the Sultan's envoy to co-opt the various Kurdish rulers in territory that was now more firmly under Ottoman control. For Kurdish historiography, this period is of particular importance because it marks the incorporation of the majority of Kurdish emirates into the Ottoman Empire, mostly in the form of semi-independent hereditary principalities (*hükümet*); for better or for worse, this constellation remained largely intact until the centralising Tanzimat reforms of the mid-nineteenth century. Bidlîsî was richly rewarded for his services, but was never formally appointed to any government post. He died in Istanbul while working on a versified history of Selim's rule, the *Selim Şah-Nâme*.²

The second part consists of a more conventional intellectual history of Bidlîsî's ideas on sovereignty and legitimacy. This section builds, among others, on Vural Genç's pioneering writings, most of which are unfortunately available in Turkish only.³ Here, Markiewicz aims at a "connected history of political ideology" (291), arguing that Bidlîsî, despite his roots in the Kurdish-inhabited marches, and despite his longstanding residence in and work for the Ottoman empire, drew on a far wider intellectual network. This is less innovative than it may seem; earlier works on Islamic intellectual history have long emphasised

2 Published in Turkish translation by Kırlandıç (2001).

3 See in particular the published version of Genç's 2014 dissertation, *Acem'den Rum'a Bir Bürokrat ve Tarihi İdris-i Bidlîsî (1457–1520)* (2019a); the appendix to his work contains a translation of part of the *Hesht Behisht*. In English, see Genç (2019b).

the supra-regional influence of, among others, Ibn ‘Arabî’s mysticism, Jalâl al-Dîn al-Dawâni’s ethics, and Ibn Khaldûn’s theory of history. What is new, however, is Markiewicz’s attempt to trace and explain the early modern rise of a new ideal of sacral kingship and universal empire that cannot, or least not entirely, be reduced to the traditional concepts and norms of caliphate and ummah. In late medieval political writing, he argues, new representations and legitimations appear of the ruler as *sahib-qiran* (“lord of auspicious conjunctions”) and *khalîfa-yi ilâhî* (“viceregent of God”).

Importantly, this part also discusses the literary dimensions of the historiography of this period as much as political ideas in the strict sense. Although Bidlîsî’s flowery style was already criticised by near-contemporaries like Mustafa ‘Ali, the *Hesht behesht* must have been quite popular, judging from the large number of manuscripts that have been preserved. The ornate register of Ottoman Turkish that became the norm under Sultan Süleyman the Magnificent, Markiewicz argues, was shaped by Bidlîsî’s Persian chancery style (239), and by his use of the Timurid vocabulary of sovereignty (237). Only much later was this style eclipsed by Turkish-language chronicles in a rather simpler register. One of the many merits of this book is that it poses many new questions, and more emphatically restates others. How did the changing legitimation of universal empire interact with the more mundane if not sordid vicissitudes of patronage (with which Bidlîsî was only all too familiar), and with the legitimation of local rulers? Why and how did Persian remain the main language of courtly correspondence for such a long time, and the main language of literary education for even longer?

Two topics, in particular, would have merited more attention, especially from the perspective of Kurdish Studies: the precise character and development of Bidlîsî’s contacts with various Kurdish princes, and his possible role in the persecutions of Qizilbash following the Ottoman victory at Çaldıran; the ferocity of these policies gained Selim the nickname Yavuz, “the grim.” Markiewicz is conspicuously silent about these aspects, even though Bidlîsî’s *Selimşâhname* seems to be the origin of the oft-repeated (and undoubtedly hyperbolic) claim that on Selim’s orders, forty thousand Qizilbash were identified and massacred (For an earlier study, see Sönmez (2012)).

Another question that remains open concerns the experience of marginal and/or subaltern individuals and groups. Of necessity, perhaps, Markiewicz’s narrative focuses on the ruling elites and the literati aspiring to be near them; but this focus still leaves room for a greater and more systematic attention for provincial rulers, the learned men in the smaller towns and in the countryside, tariqa members, and peasants – not to mention women. Global microhistory,

that is, may yet be fruitfully complemented by a connected social history. Such a social-historical global perspective would be particularly appealing, and promising, for those scholars with a historicising interest in the Kurdish experience.

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Thomas Schmidinger, *The Battle for the Mountain of the Kurds: Self-Determination and Ethnic Cleansing in the Afrin Region of Rojava*, Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2019, 192 pp. (ISBN: 978-1629636511).

The timeliness and importance of Thomas Schmidinger's *The Battle for the Mountains of the Kurds* cannot be overstated. The book's quick production illustrates the immediacy and urgency of assembling such an important text in the midst of national campaigns against Kurds across Turkey, Syria, Iraq, and Iran. As a result, the book will inform a wide audience of governmental, political, educational, scholarly, and non-governmental actors. With the on-going occupation of the Afrin region of Rojava (Syrian Kurdistan/Northern Syria/Western Kurdistan), Schmidinger's book captures the contemporary moment while providing an expansive, thorough, and compelling historiography of the region. *The Battle for the Mountains of the Kurds* foregrounds the complexity, contradictions, and messiness of historical, social, political, economic, and cultural life in Afrin. Through a multidisciplinary methodology, the readers are made aware of the particularity of socio-political life in Afrin as a window to understanding Kurdish histories.

Thomas Schmidinger offers a capacious historiography that underscores the regional Kurdish specificity in the Afrin region of Rojava. The very organisation of this book speaks to an intellectual and political commitment to showcasing the heterogeneity of the Afrin region through ethnicity, religion, language, gender, and governmentality and relation of Afrin to Turkish state-violence. Instead of creating mythical accounts of Rojava and Afrin, this book captures the ways that Afrin was a site for the incredible movement of ideas, goods, and people. Through the case of the Dumi, who are related to the European Roma, Schmidinger disrupts any essentialist readings of the Dumi, Kurds, Turks, and Arabs. Through the critical evaluation of Dumi languages, as Schmidinger shows us on page 5, he extrapolates the cross-pollination between Dumi languages and a wide assortment of Kurdish, Turkish, and Arabic loanwords in the Dumi language, "which is evidence of a long cohabitation with the speakers of these languages in the region." Therefore, we already are witness to how fluid Kurdish languages and identities are by studying thoughtfully this region.

The chapters on "Population and Language," "Religious Communities," and "History" provide a wider socio-historical analysis of the region with specific attention given to the multiplicity of ethnic, religious, and historical actors. Schmidinger illustrates early on the changing forms of governance from prominent tribes to colonial mandates/protectorates to post-colonial nations. Therefore, we are now privy to the constantly changing forms of governance

in the area. Such a deep historiography proves important in enhancing our understandings of belonging and rights that shifted from feudal relations to relations of race and ethnicity managed by the nation-state. Additionally, Schmidinger acknowledges the religious and linguistic diversity in the region that operate as a *modus operandi*, which differs from how the national family is often constructed through exclusion (McClintock, 1995). Therefore, we witness the presence of Yezidism, Alevism, religious minorities, and various sects of Islam (especially Hanafi-influenced Islam). Instead of just showcasing multi-ethnic and multi-religious presence, the book successfully explains how the forms of Kurdish governance provided religious rights and minority protection that the *Baathist* government failed to provide, especially to Yezidis.

After providing readers with a rich, sophisticated social-history of the Afrin region, Thomas Schmidinger launches into the current socio-political climate through the chapters on “Democratic Confederalism in the Canton of Afrin,” “Development of the Canton of Afrin from 2012 to 2018,” “Kurdish Enclaves in the Afrin Area,” and “The War against Afrin.” Through these chapters, Schmidinger highlights the origins of Kurdish nationalism in the early 1900s as well as the formation of the major Kurdish parties, their relationship to the Syrian state, as well as ISIS violence and Turkish state violence in Rojava.

Schmidinger further discusses the specificity of political consciousness in the Afrin region. A vibrant Kurdish community emerged since the area was not handed over to Arab settlers like other parts of the region and other parts of Kurdistan. I found it very interesting, refreshing, and useful the analysis that the Kurds in Afrin were not as connected to other Kurdish movements outside of Afrin. Such points emphasise the need to use anti-essentialist paradigms to understanding Kurdish communities. Therefore, we witness how the Party of Democratic Union (PYD) addressed particularly Syrian Kurdish concerns; the PYD did not have the same political goals or principles as the Kurdistan Worker’s Party (PKK) in Turkey. Since 2012, Schmidinger explains, the PYD has taken on the obligations of the Syrian state by replacing it while embracing decentralisation. Through such a political shift, we see how democratic confederalism involved instituting various councils/co-councils to include women, Alevis, Yezidis, and Arab Emriti and Bobeni tribes (page 50).

While vying for sovereignty, decentralisation, and regional-local control of affairs, the PYD and its military units (the YPG and YPJ) had to work under the auspices of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in order to receive western military support in the fight against ISIS. These important points in the book underscore the unreliable structures of western support where one’s existence and legibility as a nation-state is crucial to secure global, especially

western, support. Stateless or internally displaced persons have little political might and support in the global arena. Rather, western states have used the case of Kurds for their own political aims while refusing to meet the needs of Kurdish communities. This was especially evident with Schmidinger's mention of the constant German arms sales to Turkey. With such fickle, unreliable western support of the Kurdish case for sovereignty and land, the Turkish state has started to amplify its strategies for Kurdish erasure. In this instance, Schmidinger showcases how the Turkish discourse and language of repatriation of "Arab lands" back to Arabs is evidence of settler-colonialism and internal colonialism (Soleimani and Mohammadpour, 2019).

As the horizon in Kurdish Studies expands, I pose some questions to think about where we could take theoretical leaps from *The Battle for the Mountain of the Kurds*: Here are those questions for the next generation of scholars to tackle: What would a critique of racial hetero-patriarchy tell us about the relationship between nation-states and Kurdish communities? What types of social organisation in the Afrin region both contest and appropriate state forms? How does western colonialism and Arab and Turkish colonialism impact both the language of the state and the language of resistance in Rojava? The ԿՐԵ (female protection units) grace the cover of the book. How are the figures and iconicity of the female Kurdish fighter used by Kurdish parties and by the larger imperial and humanitarian-industrial complexes? How does the language of "terrorism" and the "global war on terror" give extra-judicial and military power for Turkish onslaught of Kurdish areas, such as Afrin? What Thomas Schmidinger has produced, as a scholarly monograph and a political act, is a text that will be a central piece for those studying Kurdistan, Kurdish history, Kurdish ethnographies, and Kurdish diasporas. The book challenges essentialist representations of Kurds by highlighting the multiple relations vertically and horizontally to other ethnic, religious, and national actors. With the growth of Kurdish Studies, the book will draw interest from both a scholarly and lay audience. As an anthropologist of Kurdish diasporas, I left feeling very enriched and will use this text as a key resource and teaching tool in my undergraduate classes.

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Special Issue Alevi Kurds: History, Politics and Identity
Guest Editors Umit Cetin, Celia Jenkins, and Suavi Aydın

Editorial

Umit Cetin, Celia Jenkins, and Suavi Aydın, *Alevi Kurds – History, Politics and Identity* 1

Interview

Umit Cetin, Celia Jenkins, and Suavi Aydın, *Alevi Kurds: History, Politics, Identity, Migration and Identity: An Interview with Martin van Bruinessen* 8

Research articles

Suavi Aydın, *A Survey of the Roots and History of Kurdish Alevism: What are the Divergences and Convergences between Kurdish Alevi Groups in Turkey?* 18

Ayfer Karakaya-Stump, *Reflections on the 19th Century Missionary Reports as Sources for the History of the (Kurdish) Kizilbash* 46

Cengiz Gunes, *Political Representation of Alevi Kurds in Turkey: Historical Trends and Main Transformations* 75

Tuncay Bilecen, *The Struggle to Unite Diaspora Alevs and the Working Class: Alevism in the Kavga/Kervan Magazine* 97

Cemal Salman, *Diasporic Homeland, Rise of Identity and New Traditionalism: The Case of the British Alevi Festival* 122

Birgul Yilmaz, *Language Attitudes and Religion: Kurdish Alevs in the UK* 145

Celia Jenkins, *“Aspirational Capital” and Transformations in First-generation Alevi-Kurdish Parents’ Involvement with Their Children’s Education in the UK* 177

Umit Cetin, *Unregulated Desires: Anomie, the “Rainbow Underclass” and Second-generation Alevi Kurdish Gangs in London* 202

Book reviews

Michael M. Gunter (ed.), *Routledge Handbook on the Kurds*
Martin van Bruinessen 229

Kardo Bokani, *Social Communication and Kurdish Political Mobilisation in Turkey*
Michael M. Gunter 237

Emel Elif Tugdar and Serhun Al (eds.), *Comparative Kurdish Politics in the Middle East: Actors, Ideas, and Interests*
Joost Jongerden 240

Christoph Markiewicz, *The Crisis of Kingship in Late Medieval Islam: Persian Emigres and the Making of Ottoman Sovereignty*
Michiel Leezenberg 243

Thomas Schmidinger, *The Battle for the Mountain of the Kurds: Self-Determination and Ethnic Cleansing in the Afrin Region of Rojava* 248
Stanley Thangaraj

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