ALEVIS IN BRITAIN: EMERGING IDENTITIES IN A TRANSNATIONAL SOCIAL SPACE

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and Burak Sönmez. Our "short" coffee breaks that easily turned into two hour conversations were the salt and pepper of my routine days.

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Abstract

Since the late 1980s Alevi identity has become increasingly visible in a transnational context. Alevis in Turkey and across various European countries have contributed to this process through active involvement in local, national and cross-border activities. From the 1980s on, mainly Kurdish and Alevi people from Central and Eastern parts of Turkey have migrated to Britain, established cultural centres and places of worship (*cemevi*) and gained cultural rights and public visibility. Through ethnographic research conducted mainly in London and partly in Istanbul, I explore Alevi identity building in Britain within a transnational context in which they strive to gain recognition both in Britain and in Turkey through equal citizenship (*eşit vatandaşlık*).

My research contributes to Alevis' visibility in academia and sheds light on the concepts of transnationalism and identity through empirical evidence. Alevi identity is a central motivation for mobilising Alevis and they construct their identity in a dynamic process that involves links with Turkey, symbolic attachment to homeland based identities and their new experiences in the receiving country, engaging in various cross-border practices on the supranational and transnational levels. The two levels interact; a universal human rights discourse and the institutions that promote it strengthen Alevi claims on the transnational level in both their interactions with the Turkish government and translocal activities. They not only use this human rights discourse instrumentally in their claims-making but also argue that it is a component of their belief system. In both private and public spheres, Alevis continue to express their identity in opposition to, or difference from, the Sunni majority in Turkey through emphasising morality over religious practices, liberal gender attitudes and claiming their inherent compatibility with the host society's norms. By

integrating these principles into their communal activities, Alevis in Britain also construct

their identity as one that is progressive, inclusive and in opposition to assimilation.

List of Abbreviations:

AABF: Avrupa Alevi Birlikleri Federasyonu (Europe Alevi Unions Federation)

BAF: Britanya Alevi Federasyonu (Britain Alevi Federation)

CEM Foundation: Cumhuriyetçi Eğitim ve Kültür Merkezi Vakfı (Republican Education and Culture Centre Foundation)

DayMer: Dayanışma Merkezi (Solidarity Centre) Turkish and Kurdish Community Centre

DRA: Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı (Directorate of Religious Affairs)

EACC: England Alevi Culture Centre and Cemevi

ECHR: European Court of Human Rights

JDP: Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (Justice and Development Party)

PRP: Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi (People's Republican Party)

PSAKD: Pir Sultan Abdal Kültür Dernekleri (Pir Sultan Abdal Cultural Associations)

TKP/ML: Türkiye Komünist Partisi/ Marksist Leninist

Alevi Terminology:

Aşure is a dessert dish that is made of cereals, fruits and nuts. It is served during the first month of the Islamic calendar, *Muharrem*.

Ayin-i cem (*cem*) can be regarded as the most significant spiritual ceremony in Alevi belief. Many other rituals within their communities reflect the elements of the *cem* ceremony. *Cem* literally means gathering, consists of prayers and several duties and is conducted when the participants' consent is ensured.

Cemevi, literally gathering house, refers to the place where the *cem* ceremony is conducted. Originally it was the largest house in a village. The modern *cemevi* is a public space specially designed for the ceremony but also functions as community centre, offering educational and cultural activities.

Dede, literally grandfather, is the spiritual guide of an Alevi community belonging to a holy clan called '*ocak*'. Every Alevi is the *talip* (follower) of a particular dede and *dedes* are *talips* of higher spiritual leaders called *pir* or *mürşit* in some Alevi settings. *Dedes* are believed to descend from the twelve Imams' lineage.

Halk mahkemesi, people's tribunal, resembles a part of the *cem* ceremony, (originally called '*görgü*' or '*dara çekmek*'), where the dede asks the participants of the ceremony if they are content with each other and solves conflicts among his followers. This has been transformed in the diaspora context.

Muharrem is the month when Imam Ali's children and supporters were killed in the Battle of Kerbela in 680. It is a time for mourning and some Alevis (mostly dedes) may choose to fast during *Muharrem*. The rules and rituals of the *Muharrem* fast (*Muharrem orucu*) are different from those practised in Sunni Islam.

Musahiplik refers to a sacred bond between two married men and their households. This bond is believed to come from the spiritual brotherhood between Muhammed and Ali and is reckoned to be as strong as a kin tie. The individuals who have this bond are called *musahip*.

Rıza Şehri, literally town of consent, is the utopian society which is organised according to the principle of consent in Alevi belief.

Talip is a relational term. It refers to the follower of a particular *dede*.

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1. Introduction

Massive migration and advancement in communication and travel technologies made the world smaller in the twentieth century. The mobility of people, goods, and ideas accelerated with the help of technological developments affecting how people relate to each other and their identities. The interconnectedness of different parts of the world involves many areas of life pertaining to economic, social and political structures such as systems of production, consumption, culture, religion, political organisations and social movements. With the advancement of human rights and the wider acceptance of the ethnic, racial and religious identities of minority populations and immigrants, identities traverse the borders dividing localities with more ease and spread to transnational spaces.

Turkey has been affected by this increasing mobility, which began with internal migration from rural to urban areas in the 1950s, expanded to European countries in the form of labour migration in the 1960s and 1970s, and subsequently took the form of asylum-seeking in various Western European countries from the 1980s onwards. It is now estimated that 5 per cent of Turkey's native population lives abroad (Caglar 2006, 7). This population is diverse in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, religious affiliation and level of education, reflecting Turkey's diversity.

In recent years the ethnic and religious diversity of Turkish emigration has begun to be acknowledged. The activities of the Kurdish diaspora, in particular, are reported in Western media. Alevis, however, are largely invisible to the European public and are rarely mentioned in media reports even though approximately 25 per cent of Turkish emigrants are estimated to be Alevi (Rigoni 2003, 163). A study of Alevi immigrants in Britain sheds light on the diversity of the Turkish migrant experience and adds to a growing body of literature on this topic. However, more importantly, the Alevi ethos of moderation and peaceful struggle distinguishes them, in their eyes, from the majority Turkish Sunni

population and many Alevis believe this also allows them to adapt to life in Western Europe with greater ease. Alevi settlement in countries such as the UK has allowed many Alevis to express their identities with increased openness and confidence. This, in turn, has had an effect on Alevi communities in Turkey. The case of the Alevis offers an important example of how transnational links can be used to express identity and gain recognition in *both* the sending and receiving countries.

Unlike Alevi migrants in continental Europe, the majority of Alevis in Britain arrived as seekers of asylum. They are particularly concerned with human rights issues and even though many of them reported that being Kurdish was their main justification for asylum, it is in the UK that they have been able to develop their Alevi identity. This raises the issues of supranational and transnational ties as they engage with both supranational institutions as well as maintaining links with Alevis in Turkey and other countries. The two are intimately connected since a personal concern for family members in Turkey often pushes overseas Alevis to organise protests or lobby international organisations. Their demands are shaped in dialogue with Alevi communities in Turkey and Europe across borders. These two axes and the process of identity building form the main theoretical framework of the thesis.

In my research I specifically look into Alevi identity and its construction in private and public spaces in Britain within the broader context of transnational social space. I answer the following research questions:

In which context have Alevis' cross-border practices developed and what kind of cross-border activities do Alevis in Britain practice?

How do various Alevi actors manifest their Alevi identity in the private and public spheres in this context?

Alevis are the second largest belief community in Turkey after Sunni Islam and the word 'Alevi' is used as an umbrella term to refer to the various heterodox belief communities in Anatolia (Erdemir 2005). Alevis gained public visibility in Turkey as well as the countries of immigration from the late 1980s. In Britain the first Alevi organisation was founded in 1993, much later in comparison to Turkey and continental Europe, and evolved into a federation spanning the regions of Britain by 2014.

My personal interest in the subject comes from the discrepancy between attitudes towards Alevis I observed in different social circles. In a neighbourhood dominated by the secular minded Turkish Sunni population in Istanbul, I realised that Alevis were gradually gaining some visibility yet they were not dominant in public spaces. The Alevis that we knew were usually newly migrated families from Anatolian towns or villages and their hometowns could be surmised from their dress codes and accents; their children, nonetheless, were adapting to an urban way of life. Some people were hiding their Alevi background (some neighbours eventually 'came out' later in the 2000s and were received neutrally), while some were known as Alevi due to knowledge of their hometown, and visible signs such as dress code and certain first names. In these cases their Alevi background was known to the other neighbours but it was not spoken about on a personal level. In this social milieu, if people discussed Alevis at all then they spoke of their honesty and adherence to Kemalism (until recently the dominant state ideology in Turkey, which relies heavily on state controlled secularism and nationalism) in a positive way. Secular minded Sunnis perceived the growing influence of political Islam in the 1990s as a threat and regarded Alevi people as secular Muslims that have a democratic or socialist worldview, thus as an antidote against political Islam. Despite the air of silence surrounding discussing Aleviness on the personal level, in the 1990s it emerged as a hot topic in the media due to their increasing visibility in urban areas and also due to attacks on them such as those in Sivas in 1993 and Istanbul's Gazi neighbourhood in 1995.

Due to the affinity between secular Sunnis and Alevis, in my social milieu Alevis were regarded positively. In the media they were also gaining visibility in different ways[1]; at that time, Alevis founded their own media, including radio and television channels, and their music especially was appearing more on national television. This image served to totalise Alevis as a group in-and-for-itself yet depicted them only through folkloric elements, particularly their traditional music[2]. During the 1990s and early 2000s, Alevis were completely invisible in school textbooks. The more I learned personally about the recent history of Turkey from alternative sources, I realised the biased nature of history teaching, the politics of collective memory and the ambiguity towards the Alevi.

Although I was informed about the discrimination and violent attacks in history that targeted Alevi communities, it was only after starting my fieldwork that I could understand less visible forms of inequality and reflect on my own position as somebody from an unmarked social background. As I delved deeper into research, I began to realise for example the limits of talking about Alevis in public in Turkey. Certain aspects of Alevism were accepted more easily such as cultural elements, poetry and Alevi music even though the name Alevi was not mentioned openly. This situation was internalised also by some Alevi individuals and organisations. Words such as *cemevi*, Alevi, lodge are still not used openly by some Alevi associations. More neutral terms are used instead, such as *dernek* (association) or *vakıf* (foundation) and there is an emphasis placed on cultural activities (these spaces are usually referred to as *kültür derneği* / cultural association). Another limit

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[1]   In 1995, a TV show host made a joke referring to the incest accusations about Alevi community, which will also be elaborated in Chapter 4. After this incident a protest was made by Alevi communities against the host and the TV channel.

[2]   Alevi music carries the characteristics of Turkish folk music and can be recognised by the content of the lyrics or some distinct techniques in playing the *bağlama*, a traditional instrument with seven strings. It is enjoyed widely by both Alevis and non-Alevis.

to speaking about Alevism lies in the public / private distinction; Alevi homes may be filled with many symbols of their faith, books about Alevism and the interviews I conducted could easily be carried out, yet the same people were reluctant to talk about Alevism openly in public spaces. The annual *Hacıbektaş* Commemorative Festival and the newly founded *cemevi* and associations were the legitimate places to talk about Alevism and to experience Alevi rituals; however, in other social spaces there were invisible barriers.

The best term that can describe Alevis' visibility in Turkey is ambiguity: it is not entirely forbidden, however it is framed instrumentally by various political agendas. For instance, Alevism is instrumentalised as a positive identity in certain social and political contexts such as being an antidote to political Islam (Erdemir 2005) or dividing and pacifying the Kurdish movement (van Bruinessen 1996); nonetheless, discrimination continued and resulted in violent attacks. Consequently there are limits to manifesting Alevi identity and it is framed in multiple ways not only by Alevis themselves but also by the Sunni state elites. Observing the everyday experiences of Alevi individuals provides an insight into this ambiguity. An Alevi couple that I met in Istanbul back in 2012 at the beginning of my fieldwork kindly agreed to meet me again for an interview. Throughout the time I spent in their home they were confident and very vocal about their belief system, providing all the information they could and explaining the finer points. They were happy that a non-Alevi was interested in researching their belief community. After our interview, my host's husband offered to take me to the bus stop by car so that I would not have to walk a long distance in a neighbourhood I was unfamiliar with. While he waited with me for the bus, I thanked him and told him that he did not have to stay until the bus arrived because it would be too much hassle (*zahmet*). He said 'For us, Alevis, a guest is important, it is not a hassle at all to wait' but whilst saying this he lowered his voice noticeably. If he had uttered the same sentence loudly it was unlikely that we would have been attacked; however, 'Alevi' has become reduced to a term that can only be talked about in certain

ways, in certain social spaces and that particular bus stop was not an appropriate place. Seeing the confinement of Alevism to private spaces and the few public spaces, such as *cemevi* or cultural festivals once a year, I realised how it touches something deeper than a minority psychology but rather has manifested a more systematic subordination and violence over the years.

Historically, Alevis have experienced (combinations of) discrimination, stigma and invisibility causing them to retreat into their own small communities in rural areas and to continue to practice their belief and rituals. In recent years, these practices have been affected considerably by urbanisation and modernisation, so there the need arose to adapt and revive this identity in the modern urban contexts. Alevis' demands have been formulated as equal citizenship in Turkey and they seek official recognition of their places of worship, an end to discrimination in public and recognition in education and media: yet few of these demands have been fulfilled in a way that has satisfied Alevis.

A transnational gaze is necessary in order to understand Alevism's transformation into a public identity, because although the abovementioned demands are concerned with Turkey, the Alevi revival occurred in a complex transnational setting and the links between migrant and non-migrant Alevi communities in various nation states have been crucial. Even attempting to understand only British Alevis is impossible without seeing their links to supranational institutions, beyond Turkey, and their support to and from Alevi institutions in other European countries. The nation states and borders are neither entirely challenged nor lose their significance, and rights and policies are regulated within the nation states; however human rights and relevant institutions facilitate the claims for recognition. Moreover, the EU accession of Turkey is an important leverage for Alevis as tolerance for minorities has become an integral part of European Union identity and a criterion for the would-be member states (Citrin and Sides 2004; G. Jenkins 2004). Therefore, Turkey needs

to deal with its minority populations within these norms which would constitute an opportunity for Alevis as well as other ethnic or belief communities to frame their demands and attain their goals through peaceful negotiation.

Identity and recognition have been important frames for Alevis' activism on a transnational scale in Europe. Asserting Alevi identity through transnational links is a reaction against assimilation in Turkey and their understanding of the concept usually does not refer to assimilation into British culture. In my fieldwork, I observed that the word 'assimilation' had a negative connotation for many Alevi individuals and referred to the Turkish state's assimilation policies towards Kurds and Alevis. The more positive or neutral word 'integration' is preferred when referring to their relations to British culture, which does not require complete loss of the homeland culture. In Turkey, Turkish-Islamic synthesis (*Türk İslam sentezi*) was the state policy in the years following the military coup in 1980 in order to eliminate identity based differences and claims, especially those of Kurds, and to create unity around Turkish and Sunni identities. The promotion of this view brought with it authoritarian policies and aimed social control in the post-coup period when there were tremendous social and economic changes (Akin and Karasapan 1988). The Turkish-Islamic synthesis affected how other groups were to be perceived and how they related to the state. Kurdish Alevis, for whom the two salient identities merge, were oppressed twice by this ideology. State policies to eradicate ethnic and religious identities other than Turkishness and the secular-Sunni version of Islam were perceived as assimilation and the transnational links to combat these emerged as an opportunity.

The invisibility of Alevism and hiding belief in the public sphere assimilated the community to a certain extent or confined it to private spaces which served to reduce it to a mere whisper in public spaces. Therefore transnational relations aimed at reviving and protecting Alevism and the striving for recognition of Alevi identity implies a reaction to

assimilation in Turkey, not necessarily a reaction to integrating into British society. Moreover some of the transnational practices provided a chance to enhance integration to Britain through familiarity with British political institutions and cultural dialogue on the institutional level.

There are different constellations of Alevism which is itself perceived not only as a religious identity regulating individual relationships with God or the spiritual realm, but also as a worldview that encompasses relations among people and how they relate to society. Alevis in Britain mainly emphasise the latter aspect and argue that Alevi belief is a human centred worldview. Therefore many Alevis I met explained Alevism primarily as a culture, and only then in religious terms if at all. Despite the differences in the framing of Alevi identity, all agreed that Alevism includes respect for other beings and nature, and promotes egalitarian social relations. Since it is understood largely as a worldview that can be integrated with other secular identities, people tend to see it as a saviour that will fill the identity gap in youth and solve immigrants' problems by making them aware of their cultural heritage in order to defy assimilation. It is seen as a way of life both with differences and cultural richness and compatible with British values. Therefore adhering to Alevi identity is frequently associated with resisting assimilation in Turkey and protection from cultural erosion and isolation in a foreign country by many Alevi individuals as well as the organisations' leaders.

There has been increased interest in Alevi belief and culture and its political implications both in the media and in lay and academic research since the late 1980s. This interest also extends to Alevis residing in Western European countries and their relations with other Alevi communities. Alevi identity has evolved from small communities' internal connections to become an umbrella term describing imagined communities that feel belonging to each other on the basis of some or all of the following points: having descended from Alevi

families, adherence to the common pillars of Alevi belief, common culture, sense of victimhood and discrimination due to being Alevi. This way Alevi identity can stretch from the local to transnational. This has also had an effect on academic work on Alevism and made it impossible to disregard the transnational aspect of their contemporary identity. Since Germany has the largest number of Turkish immigrants and an established and active Alevi population, academic research on Euro-Alevis has been mainly on Alevis living there (Kosnick 2011; Sökefeld 2008; Zirh 2008).

Since the 1970s, Britain has emerged as a relatively new destination for Turkish immigrants and Alevi organisations are still in the process of formation. This factor limits the amount of empirical studies on them. I aim to fill this empirical gap by exploring Britain's Alevi community that is composed mainly of political migrants and ethnic Kurds; factors that cause them to be even more sensitive towards human rights violations. Having two salient identities, both of which have been largely oppressed in Turkey, one may expect this community to use the liberal environment in Britain as a foundation for mobilising their resources in order to gain rights and recognition. In my research I explore how Alevis engage in transnational practices on different levels in order to manifest their identity and gain recognition both in the sending and receiving countries.

I also aim to explore Alevi identity both in the private and public spheres as previous research on Euro-Alevis has mainly dealt with the organisational level and public Alevi identity (Massicard 2007; Sökefeld 2008; Zirh 2008; Zirh 2012). By sampling among both organisations' leaders, attendees and non-affiliated Alevis, I had the opportunity to explore how Alevi identity is understood and manifested by various people who have limited power in shaping public discussions. Being a female researcher gave me a further opportunity to access domestic spaces more easily and helped me observe Alevi people's ordinary lives both in and outside of the organisations. Personal identities constitute the base for potential public identities and mobilisation for rights and recognition and are also

influenced by public identities; therefore I found it important to explore Alevi identity on both levels.

Furthermore, my findings contribute to the study of transnationalism by providing an interesting insight to a community that utilises various practices and links in their mobilisation and strivings for recognition. I believe that the Alevi case is a prime example for illustrating the interplay between different levels of transnational engagement, since human rights discourses and supranational institutions' decisions provide a basis for their relations with their translocal and transnational relations.

First, I provide a review and discussion of the main concepts that direct my research; transnationalism and identity. I employ these concepts 'in such a way that they give a very general sense of what to look for and act as a means for uncovering the phenomena to which they refer can assume' (Bryman 2012, 388). At the close of this chapter I discuss my methodology, sampling and data collection and reflect on the research process. In the chapters that follow I answer my research questions. In chapter two I provide the historical background that illuminates the history of Alevis and their role in international migration; more specifically to Britain and the recent governmental proposals for an Alevi opening. The background is intended to situate my findings in a wider context of immigration, Alevi identity and current affairs. I then present my findings: in chapter three I discuss the cross-border practices and links of Alevis in London with the wider community in Turkey and elsewhere. I look into both supranational relations with above-state level institutions and universal human rights discourse and transnational relations with state and below levels institutions. The fourth chapter deals with Alevi identity in the private sphere; I explore how Alevi identity is manifested through boundary making and difference from other identities (particularly from Sunni Islam), the role of gender in constructing that difference, the role of ethnic identity and Alevism's alleged compatibility

with the Western culture. In chapter five I explore Alevi identity manifestations in the public sphere in order to grasp how the political activities and religious rituals are conducted in order to maintain a distinct Alevi identity that struggles against the erosion of their belief system in Turkey and abroad. Finally, in the sixth chapter I conclude by summarizing my main findings and address those points that need further clarification and research.

1.1. Transnationalism

Transnationalism has become a useful concept for understanding contemporary immigrants' experiences. Border-crossing practices such as regular or occasional communication with, and travels to, the sending country; watching satellite TV, establishing hometown associations, being subject to more than one state's rights and obligations through dual citizenship have deeply affected immigrants and their social world. Migrants do not necessarily cut off all contact with the sending country and assimilate entirely to the receiving state, but continue their relations with the homeland through the practices mentioned above. In addition, national, ethnic or religious belongings still matter for personal and collective identities; they help people situate themselves in the social world, make alliances, social networks and influence their interactions with other group members. Early researchers in the nineteenth century were able to detect the fact that immigrants have brought their own identities to the United States (Bradatan, Popan, and Melton 2010). Immigrants' assimilation is not an inevitable path and in certain cases not preferable; as Schiller et al (1995) have found in their empirical research, immigrants find integration to the host country either undesirable or impossible and sustain relationships with the sending country.

Immigrants are no longer understood as uprooted individuals; there is growing acceptance for keeping sustained ties with the homeland and their full assimilation is not

expected. In addition, even those who assimilate may maintain contacts with the sending country. Therefore, the actual conditions of contemporary immigrants and the empirical findings necessitated a new lens to understand this phenomenon. Basch et al's (1993, 6–7) studies showed that migrants' daily practices that link networks and activities in more than one country are becoming significant phenomena. This is not a coherent theory but a lens (Faist, Fauser, and Reisenauer 2013, 10) which serves as a guiding concept in researching social phenomena that do not overlap with a single nation state's territory.

There have been various attempts to theorise and define transnationalism and explain under which conditions it occurs. The prefix 'trans' means 'on or to the other side of, across, beyond' ("Trans," n.d.) and transnational refers to relations and links across or beyond nation states. The term gains meaning when it is compared and distinguished from similar concepts: for instance internationalization refers to states' and their agent's cross-border activities and globalisation refers to a bird's eye view of the globe and relations, while transnationalisation refers to 'sustained ties, events and activities across the borders of several nation states' (Faist, Fauser, and Reisenauer 2013, 10). Basch et al define the concept similarly as 'the process by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement' (1993, 7). The defining feature of transnationalism is that its actors can be individuals, hometown associations or nongovernmental organisations.

Transnational actors and their intentions may vary. Smith and Guarnizo differentiate between transnationalism from above and below; they demonstrate that this categorization 'aims at capturing the dynamics of power relations in the transnational arena' (1998, 29). While less powerful, grassroots social actors may strive for recognition, improvement of their situation or social equality, bigger corporations or organisations may wield more power from above that affects a broader range of people. At this point,

transnationalism has the potential of challenging the nation state from different positions. Alevis' use of transnationalism can be classified as transnationalism from below since it entails small scale community centres and individuals who aim to transform the Turkish state and its policies regarding secularism and the equality of their belief community. Some transnational practices, however, have a much more limited scope and aim to maintain connections with friends and relatives back in the sending country.

As an outcome of globalisation, physical place loses its importance and pluri-local social spaces have emerged (Pries 2013); moreover these multiple physical spaces can form across nation states. In my study I look at the links and activities that cross both physical and symbolic borders. Therefore, I use transnational social space as the unit of analysis; such spaces include not only material goods' and people's mobility but also 'the configurations of social practices, artifacts and systems of symbols that are characterized and defined by their density and importance in time and geographic space' (Pries 2013, 21).

Such a broad perspective on transnationalism allows one to see the influence of identities across borders. The understanding of identity as a right has become more accepted across many nations. Soysal (2000) argues that rights and identities have decoupled, with the former becoming more abstract and not necessarily limited to national citizenship. Moreover, the particularistic claims made by minority or immigrant groups are legitimized by universalistic discourses. With the immense social transformations due to migration, citizenship, residence and social identity are not necessarily linked to the same country and this challenges borders, orders and identities (Vertovec 2004).

In the emergence and prominence of the transnationalism concept, different views have emerged regarding the nation state's role and extent to which it is being challenged; for instance Levitt and Khagram refer to transnationalism as 'an optic or gaze that begins with a world without borders, empirically examines the boundaries and borders that

emerge at particular historical moments, and explores their relationship to unbounded arenas and processes' (2008, 5). This suggests an imagination without borders to human interaction since the borders are human-made and constructed, yet human activities can operate across these borders as identities are fluid (Bradatan, Popan, and Melton 2010), religions spread to different nations (Levitt 2003), and new forms of political membership question the power of nation states (Soysal 1994).

Moderate views on transnationalism also exist. These acknowledge the continuing power of the nation states: for instance the borders and the migration controls empower the nation state in regulating human flow and reposition it as a strong actor in the international arena (Basch, Schiller, and Blanc 1993, 11) and national citizenship still matters (Joppke and Morawska 2003). Koopmans and Statham (1999) also gathered empirical evidence on Germany and Britain's immigrant groups and demonstrated that the nation state is still an important frame of reference for identities, claims and organisations of migrants and ethnic minorities. In addition, there are individual restrictions that keep some people from developing extensive transnational practices and networks; sustained transnational practices are not the norm, but rather the enterprise of a handful of elites (Guarnizo, Portes, and Haller 2003; Portes, Guarnizo, and Landolt 1999). Consequently, nation state borders apply differently to different individuals: those with social and economic capital can move freely and enjoy more extensive transnational connections, while those immigrants who are low on economic and social capital – and asylum seekers – do not have the same opportunities and have less power to challenge nation states' policies.

Furthermore, the directions and aims of transnational links and practices help us to classify them. Morawska (2011) states that transnationalism has been studied on vertical and horizontal levels: vertical transnational practices refer to those that are *above*

territorial state-/nation-level memberships such as universal human rights claims, political memberships and its relevant organisations and are mainly studied by political scientists whereas horizontal transnationalism refers to the links that reach *across* nation state borders and are mainly investigated by sociologists. Morawska's classification is useful for demonstrating the different forms that cross-border activities may take, however these concrete metaphors do not capture the interactions between the two levels. I will use, instead, the concepts of 'supranational' and 'transnational' to be able to show the possible interactions between different forms of cross-border practices that Alevis engage in. The relations with the institutions above nation state are classified as supranational while those with state and below level actors are classified as transnational.

I demonstrate that Alevis' cross-border connections include a range of practices which interact with each other. Alevi community not only maintains symbolic ties and identities but also strives for their rights by making use of supranational structures. The universal human rights discourse and supranational organisations appear as global conditions for the transnational practices of Alevis both in Turkey and abroad. The human rights discourse diffuses into Alevis' activism and enables them to emphasise the human-centred views in their belief system. Moreover the ECHR decisions in favour of Alevis and the EU criteria regarding minority rights strengthen Alevis' claims in their transnational practices.

1.1.1. Assimilation – transnationalism axis

Assimilation has remained a dominant concept extensively elaborated by migration scholars in the understanding of the behavior patterns of immigrants (Morawska 2005) and widely used in public debates on migration. The term refers to 'the process by which immigrants become similar to natives – leading to the reduction (or possibly the disappearance) of ethnic differences between them' (Bartram, Poros, and Monforte 2014,

15). Its core measures are: the change of cultural patterns to those of the host society, taking on large scale primary group relationships, large-scale intermarriage, development of a sense of peoplehood exclusively based on the host society, absence of prejudice and discrimination and finally the absence of value and power conflicts (Gordon 1964, 69–71). Gordon argues that when two or more social groups meet, assimilation may occur to differing degrees. Also, immigrants integrate to the different social organisations of the host country on varying levels. It may take a couple of generations until the ethnic differences are reduced to a minimum or disappear entirely, while diasporic identities may persist over generations (Bauböck 2003).

Furthermore, research shows that there are different trajectories of assimilation for immigrants' children; for instance they might assimilate into the immigrants' culture or within their own ethnic group rather than adopting the majority's cultural values and norms (Portes and Zhou 1993). In this case, the assimilation process has been segmented and the second generation may assimilate into different segments of society. Certain barriers to assimilation in the receiving country, the reluctance to assimilate into the mainstream culture and the lack of opportunities for social mobility make it more feasible for immigrants to assimilate into their own minority culture in the receiving country. Since 'immigrants who join well-established and diversified ethnic groups have access from the start to a range of moral and material resources well beyond those available through official assistance programs' (Portes and Zhou 1993, 86), it may be more convenient to assimilate within their own ethnic group. Demireva (2011, 640) points to the differences in social networks for immigrants from different ethnic backgrounds; so, for instance, those immigrant groups with well-established communities have wider networks and resources in the receiving country.

Another significant point is that not all immigrants assimilate into the mainstream culture; this is especially unlikely for the first generation (Bartram, Poros, and Monforte 2014, 16). They may retain their old culture, can form hybrid combinations or retain minimum contact with the host society. Morawska (2003b) demonstrates through her comparative study that immigrants in the USA experience different constellations of transnationalism and assimilation and that these two concepts are concurrent. They form different combinations and can even influence one another (Morawska 2011, 180).

As explained above, when referring to their accession to British society, Alevis use the term 'integration' which refers to gaining social membership and participation in the key institutions of the receiving country (Bartram, Poros, and Monforte 2014, 83). The word 'assimilation' bears a negative meaning due to experiences in Turkey whereas integration is a more neutral or even a positive term implying that Alevis are capable of adapting to the social and political institutions of the receiving country; adjust well into the job market and participate in the cultural and political matters of the host society. Therefore, transnational practices and integration can occur simultaneously; for example, as I explain in more detail in chapter three, in lobbying for their rights in Turkey and Britain, Alevis become visible in public in London, develop relations with British politicians and integrate into the political institutions of the host country.

1.1.2. The novel aspects of contemporary transnationalism

Immigrants' connections with their homeland and involvements in various social, cultural, political and economic issues across borders are not a recent phenomenon. Although since the 1990s immigrant transnationalism has become a prominent research area, immigrants and non-migrants' lives were affected by this phenomenon long before. Old immigrants also retained their ethnic or religious identities and practiced cultural activities, maintained their interest in the homeland politics, read newspapers of the

sending country, became involved in political campaigns regarding the homeland and sent remittances and letters back home. While it has been argued that transnationalism is not an entirely new phenomenon (M. P. Smith and Guarnizo 1998; Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002) , contemporary transnationalism has some novel aspects (Morawska 2011; Portes 2003; Vertovec 2009).

Morawska (2011, 34) compares present day and turn of the twentieth century transnationalism and concludes that the transnational practices of contemporary migrants display the following novelties: the links span larger distances, are more frequent and intense, more diverse in form and content, and women begin to appear more in public and in traditionally male spheres. Vertovec (2009, 14–6) also argues that there are distinct characteristics of contemporary transnationalism: these are the extent, intensity and speed of contact, contribution to other processes of cultural, political and technological globalization, a normative transnationalism in the sense that immigrants are more aware of what is going on in the sending country and vice versa, increase in the scale of remittances, more intensive political engagement, increase in hometown associations and their activities, new government programs that recognize immigrant transnationalism, and finally a positive climate where immigrants are at ease with their transnational identities and practices.

Today, immigrants and non-migrants alike are affected by such border-crossing relations that are cheap and quick. No longer just the privilege of elites, participation in such activities is now possible for a wider range of people and with more ease. In addition, different policies towards citizenship and associated rights enable people to identify with more than one state and to use these rights and public facilities selectively across borders; such as having the right to vote in both countries or using the healthcare system of the

more developed receiving country and spending summers in the sending country – thus having connections in multiple places.

1.1.3. Transnational perspectives on different research fields

Transnational links and practices can be observed in different areas of migrants' lives such as the social, political, economic, cultural, and religious spheres; therefore a multidisciplinary approach and the collaboration of different disciplines is needed (Morawska 2003a). Transnational links may affect each other and a transnational practice in one area can enhance transnationalism in another.

On the social level, immigrants bring with them the cultures and mentalities, norms and values of the sending country when they migrate. These may also influence the receiving society. The norms, values and styles of everyday conduct may have transformative effects on non-migrants as 'ideas, behaviors, identities and social capital' flow from the receiving to the sending country communities, which are known as social remittances (Levitt 1998, 927). Social remittances can also be on a collective rather than individual basis (Levitt and Lamba-Nieves 2011). The receiving society's life-orientations and styles of everyday conduct are transmitted to the sending country if migrants maintain sustained contacts with the home country (Morawska 2011, 184). This way the ideas and ways of conduct cross borders, create new identities in both countries and have transformative effects on non-migrants as well. In addition, social capital and networks before and after migration allow people to form alliances based on common identities and use these links in times of mobilisation for claiming rights or for better integration to the job market within their own ethnic communities.

Transnational links are also mobilised for political goals: the actions of individuals, grassroots organisations and supranational institutions make this possible. After World War

II, citizenship and national identity have decoupled: with more migration there are people who identify with one nation and reside and/or naturalise in another; or those who have multiple attachments and political memberships (Soysal 1994; Soysal 2000; Vertovec 2004). In addition, the role of international law and transnational agreements is growing and increasing the interdependency of nation states. Benhabib (2009) argues that these have a potential of jurisgenerativity yet she also recognises the need for local contextualization of cosmopolitan norms such as universal human rights.

Bauböck offers a definition of political transnationalism as 'overlapping memberships between territorially separated and independent polities' (2003, 720) and argues that the sending country's attitudes towards issues such as human capital upgrading, remittances and lobbying should also be considered. In addition, social movements and political identities crosscut the borders of nation states. Porta and Tarrow state that people undertake '"transnational collective action" - that is coordinated international campaigns on the part of networks of activists against international actors, other states or international institutions' (2005, 2–3). Therefore, it is also necessary to understand and recognise the role of non-state actors. Some studies also focus on the role of minorities and anti-government groups in challenging policies in the homeland such as Kurds and Turks in Germany and Tamil, Sikh and Alevi diasporas (Østergaard-Nielsen 2003; Sökefeld 2006). These have the potential to challenge nation states from below.

Economic transnationalism, on the other hand, deals with the flow of money, labour and goods across countries. There is a relationship between freedom of movement, global migration and its political economy (Jordan and Duvell 2003). In the early years of migration to Britain from Turkey, job opportunities were a significant motivation for migrating to Britain. Also, migration to other countries from Turkey were initiated and encouraged through labour migration to Western European countries that had industrial

production. Since production is now in decline in the receiving countries, immigrants turn to their own social networks and ethnic communities (Portes and Zhou 1993) and use their language skills and insider knowledge of both markets for economic activities. Faist et al (2013) define such transnational social space as 'relatively stable, lasting and dense set of ties reaching beyond and across the borders of sovereign states' and include kinship groups, transnational circuits and transnational communities. Transnational circuits define economic transnationalism and refer to cross-border economic relations; these form through exploiting the insider knowledge of markets, language proficiency and also social networks in both countries. Alevis in Britain also use this space for improvement in their economic situations by establishing business and importing goods from Turkey: in particular food and restaurant businesses. The flow of money through remittances is significant for contemporary immigrants; they send money to their family members or contribute to the development of their hometowns. The current volume of remittances exceeds $300 billion per year globally (Vertovec 2009, 15).

Cultural elements also cross the borders of nation states and people identify with these more easily and such factors help to attract people into community centres and become involved in the homeland activities. Kaya (2007) argues that cultural transnationalism includes 'border-crossing cultural reproduction, capital accumulation, political engagement, hyphenated identities and cultures in fluidity'. While economic and political transnational activities are undertaken by a smaller number of people, cultural activities are easier to participate in and require less capital, commitment and effort. Cultural activities regarding the homeland bring people together in the countries of immigration and help create a sense of community. For instance, Sökefeld (2008) demonstrated that cultural activities in Alevi organisations attracted many Alevis' attention in Germany and played a key role in mobilizing people. The Alevi Culture Week which was organised in Hamburg in 1989 was a turning point in the public manifestation of Alevi

identity. This festival lasted for five days and included seminars on Alevi culture, concerts and *cem* ceremonies with the participation of artists and researchers from Turkey (Sökefeld 2008, 58–63). The significance of this event was that Alevism was established as a public identity and provided a platform to connect people who shared the same cultural heritage. It transformed Alevi identity from being individual and hidden into one that was collective, with a public space to share and celebrate it.

Finally, religion challenges the borders of nation states and helps create cross-border identities. Levitt (2003) argues that the sending state's influence, global culture and the availability of institutions have an impact on migrants' religious transnational attachments. Rudolf (2005) questions the possibility of a universal religiosity grounded in the principle that there is truth in all religions and argues that this would only be possible as a shared project with the consent of all rather than the coercion of certain nation states and religions. Religious identities in the migration context also interact with and decouple from national identities. Adamson (2011) argues that second generation Muslims in Britain have a different understanding of Islam compared to their parents' generation and their Muslim identity is more politicised. Novel religious identities emerge, which are not necessarily rooted in a specific place (Jacobson 1997). Also, the language of religion may contribute to eradicating national differences; when people use the language of the host society in prayers they can connect despite national differences.

1.1.3. Critical perspectives on transnationalism

The advent of eased communication and transport as well as the multicultural policies of Western European countries facilitate immigrant transnationalism to a great extent. However, in addition to the perspectives that celebrate the opportunities of transnationalism, issues arise as to how the concept is perceived and used, to what extent

immigrants take part in them and the consequences of these practices for the less developed sending countries.

First of all, although it has been defined and used by many migration scholars in the literature, the term 'transnational' does not carry a fixed meaning. In political debates and receiving states' political agendas, the term transnational migrant can have a positive or negative meaning depending on the context. Faist and Ulbricht (2013) argue that in public debates 'national' refers to integration while 'transnational' connotes disintegration; however, upper class immigrants' transnationalism is regarded as an asset and is perceived positively. For the highly educated and middle class elites, being a transnational migrant means being multilingual, having knowledge of both cultures and a fluid identity (Bradatan, Popan, and Melton 2010). Yet the labour migrants' and asylum seekers' transnationalism is regarded as the opposite of assimilation or integration. Consequently, Faist and Ulbricht (2013) point to this lack of consistency in the usage of the term, especially in the German media and public debates regarding immigrants' integration.

Another conceptual challenge for transnationalism is the research participants' lack of familiarity with the term. It is not a self-ascribed term but rather used by social scientists to refer to immigrants' cross-border activities. None of my research participants, except for a few who were highly educated in the social sciences, had heard of the term 'transnational' (or the Turkish equivalent *ulusötesi*). In the Turkish public debate on migration especially, the term is not as widespread. After I had provided a brief definition, when they asked me what my research topic was about, participants interpreted it positively as defying assimilation and asserting their identity.

Furthermore, the scope of transnational practices can vary widely. Portes (2003) argues that not all migrants are transnational and Faist et al (2013, 43–4) state that involvement in transnationalism may be limited or selective. Certain factors make it more

probable for immigrants to engage in transnationalism; men with higher education and social networks are predicted to be more engaged in transnational activities (Guarnizo, Portes, and Haller 2003). This can empower such individuals; however, it may leave the rest of the communities in a disadvantaged position or not benefit them at all. Lack of education and access to institutions and traditional gender roles in public can be limiting factors for transnational involvement.

Finally, some transnational activities may have unintended consequences; especially in terms of economic transnationalism. Vertovec (2004, 985) argues that it creates dependency in developing countries. Also, world systems theory draws attention to the possible dependency created by remittances from the industrialised West. On the other hand, Morawska (2011, 182) argues that the positive effects of remittances can be seen in the long term through factors such as education of children and systematic investment in the home country's economy.

1.2. Identity

1.2.1. History and definition of the concept

Similar to the concept of transnationalism, although the phenomenon has by no means emerged only recently, identity has attracted growing academic interest since the 1960s. Belonging to clans, families or religions, having symbols, norms and values that reflect these belongings affect people and their social relations. Among these affiliations, racial, ethnic and national identities have especially attracted more scholarly attention. Identity has now become an established research field in social sciences and an important factor in political claims and activities of social groups outside of academia.

Cohen (2010) explains the paradigm shift that led to the increasing significance of identity in social sciences through these three accounts: first, Eriksen (2010) contributed to

research on identities by expanding it from psychology into sociology; Berger and Luckmann (1991) then developed social constructivism; and Anderson's (1991) study of nationalism and imagined communities illuminated research on nation and subnational identities. These developments emphasised the constructed nature of identities and opened new areas for researching different identities, minorities and migrants. In addition, the fall of communism in many countries and increasing ethnic and cultural conflicts within rather than between nation states increased the importance of studying identity academically.

There are multiple identities that people affiliate to and a vast literature on national and ethnic identities. The term 'nation' has been used before to refer to ethnic groups in today's sense or even to religious groups, for example in the case of the Ottoman Empire *millet* system, but it gained its contemporary meaning with the emergence of the nation state. Nationalism emerged in the eighteenth century and displaced the expectation of loyalty from the lord or monarch to the nation (Berdún, Guibernau, and Rex 2010, 4). Smith (1991) offers a historical sociological perspective to understand the concept of nation and differentiates between Western and non-Western versions of this phenomenon. While the Western concept of the nation relies on 'historic territory, legal-political community, legal-political equality of members, and common civic culture and ideology', the non-Western version of the concept relies on descent, native culture, genealogy and vernacular languages (1991, 11). The Western concept of national identity rests on civic political membership and shared symbols and common goals. However, the extent to which this membership applies to different groups within a nation in real practice can be challenged. For instance, Wacquant states that 'citizenship is not a status achieved or granted once and equally for all, but (…) must continually be struggled for and secured anew' (2006, 12). Especially in those states with high levels of diversity and immigrants, other identities or

social categories such as ethnicity, religion and class challenge the notion of equal citizenship and create lines of inequality in modern societies.

While national identity helps people to locate themselves in the world, attempts have been made to deconstruct the naturalness of the nation and nation state. Anderson (1991) argues that political belongings and social groups' loyalties have not always been to nations; as such it is a recent concept and the result of an imagined belonging to a community. He argues that print languages laid the base for national consciousness through 'unified fields of exchange and communication' (Anderson 2010, 62). Through such exchange people sharing the same language could be imagined as a collective, belonging to the same group regardless of physical proximity.

Another form of identity that has been widely studied is ethnicity. Since the latter half of the twentieth century, ethnic identities emerged as significant social categories that could be explained by a number of factors: decolonization, anti-colonial and anti-racist arguments, immigration to Western Europe and the fall of communist regimes (Berdún, Guibernau, and Rex 2010). As societies became more diverse due to migration and as human rights developed to be more comprehensive in the Western world of the post-World War II era, minority identities and ethnic groups became more visible and acceptable in the public sphere. In addition, globalisation and rapid social change make us question our identities more widely (Tilley 2006, 8). The concept needs to be situated in relation to other identities, especially to that of the nation. While the Western concept of nation refers to civic-political aspects and closely connected with the political entity, 'ethnic' is usually used in referring to minorities, immigrants or native populations (Eriksen 2010).

Particularly in the early twentieth century, nation states became more homogenous. After World War , the Treaty of Versailles recognised the territorial integrity and independence of all members (Goldstein 2002, 38). In the transformation of empires

into nation states, ethnically and religiously plural societies became more homogenous. This made the First World societies regard themselves as 'nonethnic' social formations, increasingly homogenous and unified, as *gemeinschaftliche* relations founded on ancestry, region, and culture gave way to instrumental affiliations based on interest, occupational specialization, and the functional imperatives of a complex technological economy (Wacquant 2006). Both Marxist and structural-functionalist perspectives underestimated identities and predicted the eventual disappearance of ethnicity and race: Marx argued that it was false consciousness while Durkheim was more interested in the distinction between traditional and modern societies rather than group identities (Wacquant 2006). Among the early sociologists, Max Weber took an interest in ethnicity and defined it as 'those human groups that entertain a subjective belief in their common descent because of similarities of physical type or of customs or of both, or because of memories of colonization or migration' (Berdún, Guibernau, and Rex 2010, 2). With this definition, Weber recognised not only the similarities and affinity of people from the same ethnicity but also their subjective interpretation of these as constitutive elements of a common identity.

Different perspectives on how ethnic identities are felt and shared by people exist. Morawska (2009) discusses the primordial, circumstantial and constructed aspects of Jewish ethnic identity and concludes that all these elements were expressed at different times. The primordial perspective treats identity as given and manifests itself in issues such as common ancestry and customs. Also called essentialist, this understanding of identity is 'relatively fixed in time-space, stable and immutable, a precipitate of the past experiences and expressions of previous generations, picked up in childhood' and carried to the present through traditions. Such understanding predicts invariance within cultures and strong boundaries with other identities (Tilley 2006, 9–10). Another of its components is being dependent on circumstances such as situations and instrumental usage of identity; so for example one aspect of one's identity might become more relevant depending on the

circumstances. The third component is the constructed argument: this is different from circumstantial as it is more enduring than the demands of the given moment (Morawska 2009). Goldstein (1997) for example, discusses Jewish identity in Hungary and argues that it is constructed as a cosmopolitan identity and that even without having strong identification themselves, Jewish individuals were labeled as such by others.

Wimmer (2008) aims to go beyond the primordialist and constructivist divide in studying identities and explains why different ethnic groups vary in terms of their social closure, political salience, cultural distinctiveness and historical stability. He argues that institutional order, distribution of power and political networks determine the boundary making of ethnic groups.

The content and subjective meaning of identities are neither fixed nor static but are actively constructed (such as emphasising being humanist and gender-egalitarian for Alevis and cosmopolitanism for Jews in Hungary). Therefore, identities are not necessarily about homogenous groups with a number of common features. This is particularly the case with the advent of a post-structuralist approach that deals with identity as plural, constantly changing and in process and open to new formulations (Tilley 2006, 8). The fact that we have multiple identities complicates their study. For instance, Smith points out that in addition to national identity, people have family, territorial, class, religious, ethnic and gender identities (1991, 4). Brubaker (2010) deals with the concept of social groups and also stresses this multiplicity within groups: he suggests that the concept 'social group' is used as if it is internally homogenous and externally bounded, which is not the case. A more sophisticated way of thinking about identities would be to recognise that people possess multiple identities and grasp these in relation to one another rather than in isolation (Eriksen 2010) and as 'relational, processual, dynamic, eventful and disaggregated terms' (Brubaker 2010, 36).

The idea that identities are socially constructed and not fixed in time and space is an interesting starting point to understand contemporary identities. Bauman (1996) argues that modern identity was concerned with the construction and maintenance of a solid identity whereas in post-modern society the avoidance of fixation and keeping options open form the basis of identity. This explains why contemporary identities require constant reflection. Consequently, it is better to think of the construction of identities not as once and for all but rather in continuity.

Religious identity is also a source of identification for many people; a meaning system, sense of belonging around which people organise their lives in terms of belief, values and practices (Verkuyten and Yildiz 2007). Religious affiliations have been important historically and many societies were divided along religious communities before nation states emerged. Even after homogenous nation states were founded, national and ethnic identities overlapped with religious/sectarian belonging and created ethno-religious communities (Smith 1991). In the modern world, religion has preserved its place. Since religions usually have a more substantial content, such as holy scripts or set of rules to follow and clear-cut boundaries, they seem less problematic than other identities such as ethnicity or nation. Religions are understood as a timeless and unitary phenomenon in an essentialist notion; however, even when the holy books or institutions remain relatively unchanged, the social meaning and context changes, causing members of the same religion to develop different understandings of their belief across time and space. McGuire points out to this misconception and argues that in fact 'not only do religions change over time but also what people understand to be "religious" changes' (2008, 5).

It is possible to see this in empirical studies on religiosity in contemporary Western countries. Migration and rapid social change also impact religious experiences; for instance the way Islam is experienced is decoupled from its national content for second generation

immigrant youth (Jacobson 1997; Verkuyten and Yildiz 2007) and women also participate more in institutionalized forms of religiosity after immigration (Guveli 2014). Similar to the other identities I have discussed religious identity along with its meaning and practices in everyday life change with time and in tune with social context.

Alevism is described first and foremost as a belief system; however, it is framed in various ways and people identify with it even in the absence of belief and practices. Therefore, the combined insights from studying ethnic, national and religious identities and boundary-making help the understanding of Alevi identity. Alevis conceptualise their belief *vis-á-vis* the Sunni majority in Turkey; they use the word 'religion' when referring to Sunni Islam and describe their belief as a 'path' (*yol*). In order to differentiate themselves from the Sunni majority, they put forward mainly secular characteristics that they believe their community possesses; such as socio-political views, being liberal and humanist and sometimes descent (being born from Alevi parents, although conversion is possible). These make it challenging to frame Alevi identity. Furthermore, Alevis describe their own identity in multiple ways. Sometimes they express it in essentialist and primordial terms: such as emphasising the importance of endogamy and descent. They are aware of their ethnic identity when it is explicitly asked (such as Turkish or Kurdish); however, the boundaries of Kurdishness and being Alevi blur. As I will demonstrate in chapter four, some research participants even use 'Turks' as the opposite of 'Alevis', because they are also Kurds and their Alevi-Kurdish identity becomes linked. To understand how Alevi identity is constructed it is necessary to use insights from ethnicity and other identities and not merely from religion. For instance, the way ethnic boundaries emerge can be similar to how religious boundaries form and create us-them divisions.

1.2.2. Boundaries and identity:

Identities, whether ethnic, national or religious, are difficult to define through universal elements. The primordial expressions of identity assume that people belong to groups that are felt naturally and possibly related by blood, such as race. However, modern genetics challenges this argument since people classified in the same race can have very little in common, and hereditary physical features do not follow clear boundaries (Eriksen 2010, 46). As to the common social customs and traditions, there can still be internal variations within the group or significant similarities across different groups. So it is not possible to draw clear conclusions about the content of any given identity due to both internal variations and similarities with other social groups. Therefore, self-ascription and the boundaries with another group embody a group as a solid entity. Lamont and Molnar (2002) differentiate between symbolic boundaries (conceptual distinctions) and social boundaries (objectified forms of difference and groupings) and argue that these interact and form the basis of group differences on many aspects such as race, ethnicity, nationalism, gender and professional identities.

The essentialist arguments on identity are deconstructed with the advent of a post-structuralist approach and academic interest falls mainly on how people construct these identities with the help of boundaries to others (Barth 1998; Brubaker 2010; Eriksen 2010; R. Jenkins 2014). Social scientists can still study these themes without necessarily believing in the coherence of these concepts (Eriksen 2010) because 'socially constructed' does not mean that these identities are false. They can still be meaningful and empowering for ordinary people (Tilley 2006, 15) or can produce inequalities, separation and discrimination.

Identity is discussed in terms of its limits and boundaries to others. Barth (1998) has studied ethnic identities from an anthropological point of view finding that previous literature explained ethnicity as biologically self-perpetuating, sharing fundamental cultural

values, making up a field of communication and interaction and membership which is distinguishable from other categories of the same order. Barth (1998) argues that the maintenance of boundaries must be problematized since ethnicity does not emerge in isolation but rather in relation to other identities and that ethnic identities depend on the maintenance of a boundary.

Social psychology and empirical studies have also contributed to a similar understanding of group identities that acknowledge the relations between social groups. Henri Tajfel (2010) studied social groups and developed the 'in-group' and 'out-group' concepts; the boundary between them may be applied to a number of identities beside ethnicity, such as religious, subcultural and gender identities. The in-group / out-group differentiation is not one that is neutral; it exalts the in-group and might be antagonistic to the out-group. Turner states that 'where some social category contributes to defining the self, the need for positive self-esteem should motivate a desire to evaluate that category positively' (2010b, 33); so by exalting the defining features of one's own group, people create positive identities for themselves. The common characteristic in the boundary making of these various identities is the need for an 'Other': as Edgell et al (2006, 231) state '(t)he work on symbolic boundaries and moral order suggests, however, that the creation of the other is always necessary for the creation of identity and solidarity'.

The in-group membership can be based on long term identities such as ethnicity, nation, gender or a situational and temporary group formation such as co-workers or people struggling for the same cause. Deschamps demonstrates that 'the characteristics of a group (…) acquire their significance only in relation to perceived differences from another group and evaluation of the differences' (2010, 85). He also argues that minorities have a higher awareness of their social identity (Deschamps 2010); this can be due to the impositions placed by the majority in order to maintain the differences or due to resistance

to assimilation. A need then arises to develop positive qualities and to honour the in-group through the emphasis of these qualities. This is explored in more detail in chapter four; Alevis argue that certain features of their belief and culture such as the lack of strict gender segregation or importance of humanism and education make them inherently more progressive and compatible with the West.

Another aspect of boundaries is the limitedness of them by definition. Anderson (2010) discusses the nation as an imagined political community that is inherently limited and sovereign. Being limited implies that a nation never claims to include the entire humanity as its members. The other nations make 'our' nation matter. Hall (1996) also points to a similar argument with the concept of the 'Other', which helps define the self in opposition to what one is not. The constitutive outside makes a particular identity meaningful. Hall claims that 'it requires what is left outside, its constitutive outside, to consolidate the process' (1996, 3). The boundaries may be soft or hard and shift over time and in relation to context; however, they are important in drawing the lines of identities.

Boundary making matters for religious identities as well. McGuire argues that this is a political and sociohistorical process and the boundaries pertain to people's sense of group identity, which are frequently linked to political identities and shaped in relation to religiopolitical others (2008, 22–3). For Alevi identity the belief system, written and oral sources and practices are carried from the past and have a content that people share beyond their immediate communities (despite regional variations and the changes in rituals in modern societies). However, these internal features are not the only defining elements of Alevi identity. Identification as Alevi can happen in the absence of all these elements, as a resistance to assimilation or a reaction against the discrimination of Alevis in Turkey and elsewhere. Some real or perceived differences from the majority group, Sunni Muslims in Turkey, also serve to influence in-group/out-group relations. The constitutive outside is

usually the Sunni majority but can also be a small section of other Alevis or other religious or ethnic groups that they encounter, especially after international migration, which suggests that boundaries are not fixed and may shift over time. Migration is a significant factor that complicates people's relations with various identities brought from the sending country and those they encounter in the receiving country. Lamont and Molnar argue that 'the literature is in need of greater systematization, particularly when it comes to specifying boundary processes, ranging from symbolic boundary work to how social boundaries are transported by immigrants from one national context to another' (2002, 175). For Alevis in Britain, it would be necessary to examine how existing boundaries are affected by migration and how new boundaries emerge.

1.2.3. Implications of identity

The implications of identity fall beyond categorising people along the lines of nationality, religion or ethnicity. These categories can become the basis for discrimination, create hostility, may overlap with other forms of identities and cause complex forms of social inequality. Likewise, collective identities can empower people and serve as the social glue for organising in public and demanding rights. They actually play important roles in our social lives and *do* things.

One of the areas where identity is important is in the new social movements. Habermas (1981) showed that the new social movements are substantially different from the old social conflicts and that the new social conflicts are about cultural production, rather than the problems of distribution. The new social movements focus not so much on class struggle but on identities, local communities and lifestyles. They help people to voice their demands due to these differences, such as places of worship for believers of various world religions or bilingual education in ethnically diverse regions.

Social identities have political implications and require substantial changes in law and various institutions. For instance, national and ethnic identities challenge the unitary nation states and provide the basis for separation or autonomy claims; multiple ethnic and religious groups' massive immigration to Western European countries necessitates changes to accommodate demands for political representation. Recognition of these identities is important because it is the prerequisite of political demands for any group of people. Honneth (1996) argues that identity formation depends on self-respect and self-esteem; the former refers to those characteristics that are unique to a group of people, while the latter refers to equal status and treatment. For an identity to flourish both aspects are needed. This is seen in the core of Alevis' demands; they strive for the recognition of a distinct belief system and cultural practices, yet they also demand equal status in the public sphere and the end of discrimination.

Identities are actively used and framed in certain ways so as to make political claims. Collective identities are a central component of social movements and facilitate their development (Jamison and Eyerman 1991; Melucci 1989; Touraine 1981). Sökefeld emphasises the role of frames, 'interpretive schemes and ideas that are employed to motivate collective action', and argues that Alevi identity is the principal frame of the Alevi movement: through identity 'claims could be conceived and articulated in novel ways' (2008, 62).

In addition to the social actors that are struggling for recognition, identities can also be political impositions from above. For example, Mamdani (2009) argues that colonial rulers enforced the political identities of Hutu and Tutsi in Rwanda, the boundary to these identities was actively managed by the state and enforced by law, eventually causing ethnic conflict. He argues that colonial authorities encouraged difference and fundamentalism. Tilley (2006, 12) also argues that colonialism treated ethnicity as a primordial form of

identity and made the once fuzzy boundaries rigid and bounded. Identities can be adopted not only subjectively but can also be imposed objectively by political entities.

1.2.4. Multiculturalism

As a result of diversity in contemporary Western societies, there is an increasing interest in identities and the methods of dealing with cultural pluralism. In addition, individuals possess multiple identities and the social categories divided along the lines of ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation or race are complex entities that interact with each other. In this context, multiculturalism has been a widely debated issue that has found both academic and popular interest and equally strong adherents and opponents.

Different cultures, especially those of immigrant groups, are gaining acceptance by host societies promoting the celebration of such identities rather than their gradual loss. There are different approaches to deal with immigrant and minority identities; laissez faire multiculturalism exercised in the US is a hands-off approach whereas in Canada, Australia and Sweden multiculturalism is applied as a government policy (Berdún, Guibernau, and Rex 2010, 213–4). Faist (2000b), on the other hand, differentiates between passive and active multiculturalism: the former being the ability to express difference in the private realm and the latter referring to freedom and equality as prerequisites of participation in public life. In his view, 'opportunities to exercise multicultural rights and a liberal political environment can also further transnational activities and a border crossing collective consciousness' (Faist 2000b, 200). Morawska and Joppke (2003) refer to the relaxed attitude of democratic countries as de facto multiculturalism and this has already become a means of dealing with diverse populations in many Western European countries.

Multiculturalism can be defined through the following principles: 'the cultural embeddedness of human beings, the inescapability and desirability of cultural plurality, and the plural and multicultural constitution of each culture' (Parekh 2010, 239). The social and

political context is significant for the development of multiculturalism: instead of a traditional society where kinship and morality governs human activity, multiculturalism requires a modern society (Rex 2010, 221) and a political collective so that various groups can enjoy a shared sense of commitment (Parekh 2010).

In many Western countries, due to religious wars and sectarian conflicts in the past, the role of religion has already been minimized and there is tolerance for minority groups to practice their religions (Rex 2010, 225). Consequently there were few barriers in incorporating the immigrants' religions, such as Islam or Sikhism. In this context, Islam especially has become more and more visible in European public spheres and has become the centre of multiculturalism debates questioning its compatibility with Western secular laws and culture.

Modood, a key supporter of the multiculturalism idea, argues that there has been a shift in the equality concept from individualism and cultural assimilation to a politics of recognition (2003, 105). He says that the collective project of multiculturalism is not blind to gender/colour/sexual orientation, is beyond mere categorisations and demands a place for these social groups in public space (Modood 2010). As a result of this turn, multiculturalism is more than mere tolerance for difference but also concerned with the right to be different and even the demonstration of pride in one's unique identity. The once discriminated groups now demand more than tolerance for their identity in the private sphere and actively seek respect in the public sphere, taking pride in their identity. Modood (2010) argues that Muslims, who have become more assertive since the early 1990s, do not pose a challenge to multiculturalism but rather their demands and identity politics mirror other groups' arguments, such as gender and ethnic equality.

However, there are also counter perspectives on multiculturalism and Islam is at the centre of these debates. Kundani examines the anti-multicultural discourse in Britain

and argues there is an underlying assumption 'that Muslims are inherently at odds with Western values, into which they need to be forcibly integrated' (2012, 162); and that the category of Muslim is racialized through prejudiced ideas applied to the conservative discourse of Muslims' incompatibility with the Western world. There is a general agreement that each social group should be held morally accountable for how they treat their members and extreme forms of conduct (such as child abuse, physical violence etc) are not acceptable in any way; yet less extreme matters divide the opponents and adherents of multiculturalism as to where to draw the line of tolerance (Murphy 2013). Muslims' increasing public visibility in the West prompts such discussions.

Schlesinger (1998) also criticizes the supporters of multiculturalism in the US context and argues that multiculturalism 'abandons historic purposes, replacing assimilation by fragmentation, integration by separatism. It belittles *unum* and glorifies *pluribus*'. Despite the anti-multicultural discourse, there is no problem regarding the teaching of different cultures at schools or allowing churches and various places of worship and bilingual education in many Western societies. Through laws that secure individual freedom and groups' rights, de facto multiculturalism is already enacted to a certain extent. Problems arise when the immigrant/minority groups' values are in open conflict with those of the majority group.

In Britain multiculturalism was challenged deeply by the London bombings on 7 July 2005 and the riots across England in 2011. Meer and Modood (2012) argue that despite the critique of not only the conservative wing but also the central left against multicultural policies, and although the term is politically damaged, the policies and the discourse that support multiculturalism still remain in place. There are different positions regarding immigrants' and minorities' civic integration and they argue that these are not dichotomous or contrary to multiculturalism; civic integration and multiculturalism can be synthesised.

1.3. Methodology:

In this section I provide details of the data collection process, the adopted methods of the study, how these methods address the research questions and finally reflect on my personal experiences in carrying out social research. The main objective of this study is to understand the Alevi community within the transnational social space that emerged as a result of international migration and their identity building in the private and public spheres in Britain. This intention to elaborate various aspects of transnational social space and identity channelled my research towards the use of qualitative data. In order to understand Alevi identity from the Alevis' perspective as accurately as possible, ethnography was the most suitable approach of data collection as it provides an understanding of the research participants' world within their social context. I had the opportunity to observe their daily lives as well as special occasions such as cultural festivals, protest marches and funerals wherein they manifest Alevi identity more openly. I could also gain access to private spaces and communicate with people about their identity or about the topics that are harder to observe such as past experiences or attitudes. Moreover, I collected written materials such as leaflets of the events, press releases and announcements in community centre websites.

My goals were to identify 'general patterns and relationships' and interpret 'culturally or historically significant phenomena' and to give these voice (Ragin 2010, 32–3). My first two research questions address this aim as I attempt to discover which transnational activities Alevis in Britain carry out, the context where these have developed and how the community builds and manifests Alevi identity. These questions guided my research in identifying the transnational social space and Alevi identity in this wider social context. Finally giving voice to the Alevi community motivated my research and I achieve this by answering the second part of my research question on identity. Alevis, both in Turkey and Europe, have established their institutions and are already voicing their demands actively. I

had the opportunity to contribute to this process by addressing their struggles. It was particularly important to collect qualitative data and present research participants' experiences and opinions through their own words.

Ethnography has 'a close resemblance to the routine ways in which people make sense of the world in everyday life' (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007, 2). It is sometimes considered synonymous with participant observation and entails immersion in a culture for extended periods of time (Bryman p: 432). Most often, ethnography involves multiple methods in addition to observation such as asking questions, conducting surveys and reading local documents (Asad 1994, 58). Ethnography was traditionally used by anthropologists in order to understand non-Western cultures; however, today the method is also used for studying urban Western populations. Thick descriptions, that is understanding a social phenomenon within the social context where it is situated and interpreting it with the help of great detail, is a crucial aspect of ethnography (Geertz 1973). As I have shown in the literature review, identity has many dimensions and is manifested in complex ways; therefore it is crucial to understand it in its particular context and in ethnographic detail.

A social constructionist perspective has guided my research. Primarily, the literature review process prior to data collection focused heavily on the idea that identities are constructed in the institutions and in social interaction rather than being essentially embedded in individuals or social groups. Second, the data collection process itself revealed that people's understandings of Alevi identity are not static and are in relation to other identities, being constantly defined and redefined in a dual process affected by both the sending and receiving country's cultures and political climate. The social constructionist perspective is interested in meaning; it aims to understand human activities, locates this in social interactions, specific times, places and it uncovers essentialist arguments (Lock and

Strong 2010, 6–8). This makes it necessary to pay attention to the interactions with and among my participants and share their ordinary lives and experiences. Ethnographic fieldwork gave me the opportunity to do this by asking questions and listening to people, having longer discussions and, on several occasions, talking with the same person multiple times. Having access to research participants' own words rather than standard answer options allowed me to generate meaning from their answers.

Also, the way interview questions are formulated is important in social research because the researcher may unintentionally introduce bias and prompt respondents to give certain answers. For instance, Emmison and Western (1990) argue that the discursive availability of a single identity in the research design makes the responses biased. Therefore, I used open ended questions and ensured that my interview partners could express their identifications with other identities although the focus of the research was Alevism.

On entering the field, I initially used my personal connections. My father has several Alevi friends who are our neighbours to our summer house on the West coast of Turkey. This is a diverse place with local people (both Alevis from the mountain villages and non-Alevis mainly originally from the Balkans who were settled in the nearby towns) and people who live elsewhere for the most of the year but spend their summer holidays there. Among the second group there were also many Alevis. Through a friend of my father, I reached the personal phone number of a *dede* in Istanbul. In January 2012 I visited the association where this particular *dede* is the chairman and participated in a *cem* ceremony. Back then, I conducted some initial observations and asked for more research contacts in Istanbul. I visited several Alevi associations there and conducted the first part of my fieldwork in Istanbul during the 2012 Easter and summer holidays. In addition I visited the annual *Hacıbektaş* Commemoration Ceremony in August 2012, which takes place in Nevşehir,

Central Anatolia. On this occasion I carried out observations, participated in the panels, *cem* ceremonies and conducted interviews.

In May 2012, I telephoned the London Alevi Culture Centre and *Cemevi* in Dalston, London for the first time and spoke with İsrafil Erbil, then the chairman of the organisation. I travelled to Cambridge with them to attend a seminar on Alevism where I met the chairman in person and many volunteers at the cultural centre. Following this, I went to the summer festival in early June 2012. While I was conducting fieldwork in Turkey, I stayed in touch with the London community through Facebook. From September 2012, I focused on fieldwork in London. Through snowball sampling and contacting other community centres I was able to reach many research participants in London. I began recruiting research participants from the organisations since it was public and easier to gain access, also an added factor was that transmigrants construct a public face in organised activity (Basch, Schiller, and Blanc 1993, 183).

Since I aimed at establishing the types of the Alevi community's transnational practices on various levels and their private and public identity manifestations, I used several methods to generate data. The first phase of my study was in Turkey; I conducted fourteen interviews with organisations' leaders and *dedes* in order to gain insight on the Alevi belief system and culture, modern *cemevi*, the organised Alevi movement and their political demands. This allowed me to make better sense of my findings on the British Alevi community since it provided me with the background information on the cultural codes, history of the community, and the pillars of their demands for recognition. My main phase of data collection took place in London; I conducted forty-two interviews; eleven of these were with organisational leaders, *dedes* or people visiting *cemevi* from Turkey or elsewhere

and thirty-one were with the attendees of community centres or non-affiliated people. Twenty-two of my interviewees were men and twenty-four were women[3].

These interviews explored different aspects of my research questions, although these are analytically not mutually exclusive. The interviews with the organisational elite mainly provided information on the supranational and transnational links and revealed how Alevi identity is publicly manifested. These interviews covered various topics such as relations with supranational institutions and British politicians, their demands and organised activities. The interviews with the attendees and non-affiliated people were helpful to highlight transnational practices and the manifestations of Alevi identity on the private level. These explored topics such as experiences of being Alevi before and after migration and their links with Turkey or other countries in the framework of Alevi identity.

In addition, participant observation was a crucial part of my fieldwork experience and helped me unravel aspects of identity that are harder to discover in interviews: such as being able to witness Alevi rituals in the original setting, interactions among community members or discussions that occur simultaneously. These observations and the fieldnotes I generated helped me understand how Alevi identity is constructed on a public level with organisations and the members. I also supported these observations with the documents (either hard-copy, audio or online) that I collected throughout my research. These reveal valuable information about transnational engagements and identity on the public level and were helpful in recording factual information and important dates. These multiple sources were useful in obtaining in-depth data on the Alevi community.

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[3]   I have listed my interviewees in Appendix 2 (Turkey) and Appendix 3 (Britain). The lists include some basic background information and the interview numbers, which are chronological.

In ethnographic research the processes of data collection and initial data analysis occur in tandem (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007; Scott-Jones and Watt 2010). Before entering the field, I had some vague ideas about what to look for; in addition, the first stage of data collection in Turkey provided me with new ideas and more concrete questions to ask in London. Both literature review and initial phases of data collection guided the next steps for further data collection. I conducted all interviews in Turkish, except for one young participant who answered a few questions half in Turkish and half in English. I transcribed the interviews as soon as I was able and typed them in Turkish. I translated the relevant sections into English when I used them in my chapters. This helped me to maintain as much information as possible and not allow them to be lost in translation.

I wrote my fieldnotes in two steps; I first jotted down a few words after my visits to community centres as I returned home. I refrained from taking notes openly so that people would not feel uncomfortable. Although my role as a researcher was known to the community members, I decided that it would be better not to take notes openly. The second step was typing up the notes in more detail. Writing fieldnotes is by definition very selective since it is impossible to capture every detail (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 2011). Therefore, I focused on the activities and conversations that were most relevant to my research questions. Some themes emerged as I collected the data, but the actual analysis began after having collected all the material. After reading them all, I employed a thematic analysis, by finding themes in the data and making sense of them (Scott-Jones and Watt 2010).

I interviewed and talked with migrant Alevis as Bradatan et al (2010) claim that transnational connections are observed more widely among the first generation immigrants in migration research while the second generation usually assimilates rather than engages in transnationalism. My subsequent focus was on those who had migrated rather than

those who were born in Britain. Moreover, migration from Turkey to Britain is relatively new therefore the second generation is too young to be involved in transnational identity building. I decided that involving the second generation would pose challenges and I limited my sample to the first generation. I also paid attention to the ethnic composition of my sample. Since the majority of Alevi people in Britain are of Kurdish origin, I included mainly Kurdish Alevis in my sample. I also had some Turkish Alevi research participants from places such as Nurhak (Maraş) and Mersin.

I carried out the research by adhering to the ethical principles outlined by the British Sociological Association. I have conducted all my research overtly and informed my research participants about my research aims in order to gain their informed consent prior to the interviews. In presenting the results I changed not only their names but also some other details in their stories such as names of places or used a broader location name (the name of the town instead of specific village). This way I assured my informants' anonymity. I have used real names where the respondent wished and provided express permission to do so in the written consent forms. The administrators of community centres and dedes were especially keen to allow their real names to be used in my thesis and further publications.

The content of our conversations did not involve information that could be considered overly sensitive or any information that may potentially cause harm to me or my informants; however, I was careful to keep the latter anonymous. At the outset of the research I informed my research participants formally and asked them to fill in forms before the interviews but soon realised that this type of consent generation is more suitable for highly educated people. Written consent forms made the majority of my research participants nervous and made our interaction unnecessarily formal so I switched to verbal consent and additionally informed them after the interviews, talked about the research and

revealed as much information about myself as possible to make them feel comfortable about my role as an independent researcher.

Besides the ethical concerns, there are other issues that arise in qualitative research due to the intense levels of human contact and intimacy. Despite the commitment to factual matters and reflecting the nature of phenomena being studied, complete neutrality and objectivity in research process are questioned (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007). The researcher is not detached from research. Particularly in the case of personal topics such as identity, not only the participants' but also the researcher's identity is revealed, defined, and negotiated (Andrade 2000). Furthermore, this is not done once and for all, but is a continuous process throughout the data collection and social interaction in the field (Merino and Tileagă 2011). My identity was also part of the discussions with my informants from time to time.

In ethnographic literature, the researcher's role of being either insider or outsider has been widely discussed and the boundary between the two has been challenged (Ergun and Erdemir 2010; Goldring 2010; Merton 1972; Özkul 2014). In this research I was both insider and outsider since my identity also has many facets. On the one hand, as somebody coming from Turkey I was an insider; I speak Turkish and am familiar with the customs and ways of conduct. On the other hand, coming from a Sunni (and Turkish) background made me an outsider. However, I noticed that there were other forms of being an insider; for example compatible worldviews, emotions and gender can bring people closer. My personal identity helped me on many occasions yet it also posed some challenges.

In the research process I realised that the boundary between insider and outsider is constantly changing and one should not assume that being from the same ethnicity, religion or gender automatically creates affinity among people. On the contrary, identities are complex and are negotiated and performed in social interaction. Being Alevi could have

eased the field entry; however, it is not sufficient to build rapport for every researcher. For example during my fieldwork there were other researchers visiting the *cemevi* and one particular researcher from Yozgat, a Turkish town in Central Anatolia, was offered help in finding research participants and her Alevi background enabled this. One of the volunteers in the centre offered to call her mother and ask if she would accept to be interviewed by the researcher from Turkey. However, being from an Alevi background is not sufficient in some other cases; for instance a group of academics from Turkey visited the *cemevi* in order to establish relations for their academic journal and establish international affiliations. Before their arrival, the *cemevi* administers became suspicious of the journal's content as it depicted Alevism within Islam and the content of the articles in previous issues were heavily focussed on the theological aspects of Alevism, situating it within Turkish culture. Eventually, the London *cemevi*[4] gave some academic support to the journal but did not want their name to appear as a collaborating institution. Accordingly, although primordial identities and connections are important in initial contacts, they are not sufficient to establish relationships of trust with the community.

Throughout the research I presented a worldview that has no conflict with Alevis or Kurds and showed empathy for my research participants, especially in relation to the discrimination they have experienced when living in Turkey. Performing identity did not involve lying; however I was aware of the possible challenges as a non-Alevi so I ensured that the things we had in common were emphasised. I was using Facebook as an effective tool as it eased reaching some research participants, kept me up to date about the local news of the community centres and helped me build a positive image. Through posting news clips, newspaper columns and pictures that portray a social democratic image, my

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[4]   England Alevi Culture Centre and Cemevi (EACC); I will shortly refer to it as London *cemevi* or just *cemevi* for the sake of simplicity.

Facebook profile would communicate by proxy and present me as somebody whose worldview is not antithetical to that of most Alevis. As Özkul (2014) explains, being witness to the injustices and violence against these populations from the media gives one a certain understanding of the community. Coming from the unmarked majority, I had not experienced the same discrimination myself but expressed awareness to their problems in order to overcome this lack of experience.

In the research experience, class, ethnicity and hometown played a complex role in the interaction with my research participants. Although speaking Turkish eased access to the participants, most of whom are not competent in English, my accent-free Istanbul Turkish revealed my urban, middle class, educated identity. During most of the initial encounters with people, they would 'guess' that I was neither Alevi nor Kurdish from the way I looked and talked. But then they would say: 'not that it matters to us. We look at seventy-two nations with the same gaze' quoting from thirteenth century mystic poet Hacı Bektaş Veli. I could feel that being Alevi and Kurdish could have facilitated my research in some aspects yet these categories were not so straightforward. Özkul (2014) argues, for instance, that differences in the acceptance of state ideology Kemalism and the role of Alevism *vis-á-vis* Islam were important divergences within the community. In some contexts these mattered more than ethnic or sectarian belonging *per se.* I tried to communicate with diverse people who held various views regarding these matters. I noticed that the views on these matters do not fully overlap with any other social categorisation such as ethnicity, hometown, class background or gender. On these sensitive matters I refrained from stating bold arguments and when somebody specifically asked my opinion, especially about the roots of Alevism, I would say that my knowledge is limited since I am not researching Alevism from a theological point of view.

I tried to discover further common ground to build rapport depending on the gender or age of the respondent or chatting about news regarding Turkey. Some of my research participants also made an effort to find a commonality; usually by asking about my family's origins. When they asked where I came from, I would first say Istanbul but this never satisfies someone from Turkey since Istanbul is very diverse with people from all over the country. I would then say that my mother's father came to Istanbul from Skopje and that my father was born in Ulukışla, a small town in the north of the Taurus Mountains. Some people would suggest that my father's hometown was originally populated by Alevis and they became Sunni only recently in the last century due to pressures. They comment about the *Bektaşi* order in the Balkans and would say that my mother's origins may be Alevi. They also asked about my parents' opinions on Alevis; I would simply say that they have positive views both on Alevism itself and my interest in researching the Alevi community. These conversations both served as ice breakers and helped create affinity. They also balanced the power relations between me, the researcher, and the researched, allowing the participants a chance to ask me questions rather than merely providing information passively.

In terms of class background, I noticed a difference between myself coming from a middle class urban environment and most of the community members coming from rural areas or the urban working class. In order to minimise the differences I dressed modestly and emphasised those things we had in common. For instance, when somebody asked where I was from, instead of only saying that I was born in Istanbul, I would also mention my father's hometown. Although it is not a town populated by Alevis, the rural background of my father decreased the socio-cultural distance. Furthermore, having familiarity with the community's culture helps to establish rapport (Andrade 2000, 280). For instance, my knowledge of local saints or Alevi folk music could impress my participants in small talk. In

addition the people that I already knew in the community could be references for me in the search for new research participants.

Being a woman eased my entry to domestic spaces and I could build closer relationships with Alevi women from different age groups. The conversations and interviews in people's homes usually provided in-depth information. Ann Phoenix argues that in the 1980s, with the advent of feminist research, it became clear that research participants enjoyed qualitative interviews and found them 'therapeutic' (2010, 163). Indeed, talking to women participants created such a result; some said that they were happy to talk about and reflect on the issues that they do not think about every day. Some even said that it felt like a therapy and thanked me for the opportunity.

Finally, there have been some limitations in the research process: for instance the migration histories of my research participants were brief and were lacking in detail. Most respondents were reluctant to discuss this since the topic may involve illegal activities such as smuggling. As I will discuss in chapter four, the details of the asylum seeking process were either not mentioned at all or were told as impersonal stories experienced by others. I could fill in these kinds of gaps through observation and talking to the key informants who would provide general information about the community. A further limitation concerns access to male dominated spaces such as the coffee houses called *kahve* (literally 'coffee'), where men spend long hours. Since I could find enough participants from other associations and among the non-affiliated people, this was not a significant limitation.

Researching identities in transnational social spaces can be challenging as it is difficult to limit the research site to particular places. Social spaces go beyond the physical places and this challenges even research on non-migrant cultures; the clear-cut here and there is no longer valid (Zirh 2012, 6). Zirh (2012) argues that the emergence of Alevi public identity is difficult to limit to one locality because it takes place in multiple locations

simultaneously. One of the ways to deal with this is through the use of travelling researchers; however, this can be costly and time consuming so the technologies that affect transnational migrants' lives should be adopted by the researcher in order to ease communication and data collection. Moreover, by focusing on social space, one can capture the ideas, emotions and social/political movements that operate across the nation state boundaries. Using social media, the alternatives of face-to-face communication and online materials helped me to overcome these challenges. I used social media to keep in touch with research participants and the EACC's website to access information about events that I did not have a chance to participate in, such as meetings with high level politicians.

2. UK Alevis, migration and Alevi identity in transnational context

This chapter addresses the first part of my research question and explores the context in which Alevis' transnational practices have developed. I present the history of Alevis, their belief system, and their migration experiences. I situate Alevi history in the context of ethnic and religious communities in Turkey and explain social changes such as internal migration, urbanisation, upward mobility through education and political participation prior to the military coup of 1980. I also examine the so-called Alevi revival (or Alevi awakening) beginning in the late 1980s within the growing global context of identity politics. The chapter then turns its attention to international migration and Alevi organisations in countries outside of Turkey, focusing on London, and provides demographic information based on literature alongside my ethnographic data, drawing primarily on my observations and selected interview materials. This is crucial in understanding the Alevi community since migration has been a central experience that dispersed them to various places (in Turkey and elsewhere) yet provided the opportunities to accumulate the social, cultural and economic capital that they later used to mobilise for rights. Lastly, I discuss the Turkish context and the current government's Alevi policies, as these have created many debates and protests on a transnational level. I will explain the Alevi opening (*Alevi açılımı*) that was proposed by the Justice and Development Party government and briefly explain its relations with Alevi communities.

2.1. Understanding Alevis in the Turkish context

Modern Turkey continues to struggle with the heavy baggage of unresolved conflicts following the transition from a multiethnic, multi-religious empire to a nation state. Mardin (2006) argues that there is a strong divide between the centre and periphery in Turkish society and this has been maintained during the modernisation process from late

Ottoman to Republican times. While Sunni-Turkish identity constituted the centre, Alevis occupied an ambivalent position, usually remaining on the periphery and Alevis' relations with the state do not follow a linear model (neither constant oppression nor gradual freedom). At different points in time they cooperate and are accepted as safeguarding secularism and the progressive state agenda. At other times they challenge a monolithic state structure that does not recognise differences. Alevis are the second largest belief community[5] in Turkey after the Sunni majority and constitute fifteen to thirty per cent of the total population according to varying estimates (Vorhoff 2003, 94). The population census in Turkey does not consider Alevism as a separate religion so exact numbers are unknown. The estimates vary so widely due to the possible assimilation of some Alevi villages into the Sunni sect and some Alevis' entirely secular and non-religious lifestyle; the generous estimates take these into account, while the narrow estimates consider only self-identified practicing Alevis.

Alevis come from central and eastern Anatolia as well as some mountain villages in the Aegean region and in the south (See Appendix 1). The term Alevi is used as an umbrella term and refers to many groups that cross-cut ethnicity (Erdemir 2005); it comprises mainly Turkish, Kurdish and Arab identities. Originally Turkish Alevis lived in the mountainous regions of central Anatolia and the Western and Southern areas of Turkey, while Kurdish Alevis mainly live in the East and Southeast of Turkey. Arab Alevis come from the towns in the south near the Syrian border. However, due to migration many Alevis now reside in Turkey's metropolitan areas such as Istanbul and Ankara as well as European countries.

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[5] I take the concept of community as a construct rather than a natural consequence of primordial identities. It is problematic to approach the concept uncritically and assume that people who share the same ethnicity or religion automatically form a community (Alleyne 2002). Among Alevis there are internal differences regarding ethnicity, class, political affiliation or hometown in addition to level of identification with Alevism.

Alevi principles are mainly expressed as aiming to reach moral maturity through human-centered understanding of the universe, a culture of sharing (which is interpreted by some community members as proto socialism) and egalitarian values. Alevis' moral path to maturity is called the four gates and forty stations (*Dört kapı, kırk makam*) and the person who enters the path of seeking truth evolves as s/he progresses through these steps. These four gates, which are also known in the practice of Sufism, are called *şeriat*, *tarikat*, *marifet* and *hakikat*. Shankland explains them as such: '*Şeriat*, they say, is to respect and follow the orthodox tenets of Islam, but, at the same time, to remain on the surface of existence; *Tarikat* is to look below everyday reality to the depths which lie below; *Marifet* is to have begun to acquire knowledge; *Hakikat*, to become one with God, to reach unity with divine reality' (Shankland 2003, 85). The conditions for the gates and steps to maturity constitute the norms that govern Alevis' daily life and ethical conduct.

Debates exist around Alevism's roots, which are defined in multiple ways; as a heterodox form of Islam that diverges from both Shia and Sunni Islam's teachings, or as a teaching separate from Islam (Sökefeld 2008, 1). According to the syncretism argument, Alevism carries the traces of the many preexisting belief systems Turks practiced before they converted to Islam (Ocak 2000; Okan 2004). In Turkey, these diverse opinions on Alevi faith exist side by side; I observed that the majority of my informants regard Alevism as a tolerant interpretation of Islam while some argued that it is a separate belief carrying elements from other religions such as Shamanism, Christianity or Zoroastrianism. Some other research participants perceived this syncretism argument as an insult, counter-arguing that Alevis represent true Islam untarnished by the Muaviye[6] mentality.

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[6]   Muaviye became the caliph after Imam Ali after having fought against him with his son. Alevis, who believe that Alevism is the heart of Islam, argue that Muaviye changed the Quran in favour of his own personal interests.

The public debate on the origins of Alevism was further fueled when publications on Alevism mushroomed in Turkey. The Alevi intellectuals that emerged in the late 1980s had some academic or higher education and contributed to research on Alevism both with popular and academic books and through the extensive use of modern media (Vorhoff 1998, 34). These publications claimed to reveal the original roots of Alevism and had diverse explanations, some of which are 'heavily influenced by ideological preconceptions, present-day interests and subjective perceptions' (Vorhoff 1998, 39).

The general consensus on Alevism situates it in the framework of Islam due to mutual symbols such as Muhammed and Ali; therefore, Alevis occupied a different place from that of the legally recognised non-Muslim minorities in Turkey. The citizenship issue and Turkish laicism need to be unpacked in order to understand the Alevis' position as formally equal citizens, as long as they do not demand the official recognition of their identity, yet unequal in practice.

The social transformations in the late Ottoman and early Republican periods have fostered secularism, which had important consequences for Alevis. Göle (2010) argues that there are multiple secularisms for different countries' policies so secularism and the Western experience should be decoupled. Secularism can function differently in various nation states: it 'can foster liberal pluralism or authoritarian nationalism; it depends on the trajectories of the nation-building process' (2010, 44). In the Turkish case, French-influenced laicism has been one of the pillars of the Turkish Republic and was highly controlled by the state, which aimed to create a homogenous society through the eradication of non-Muslim groups and the assimilation of Kurds and Alevis (Dressler 2010; Göle 2010).

The Kemalist regime did not use traditions and conventional symbols to rule Turkish society but rather aimed to create novel ones and in the first years of Turkish Republic a

series of reforms were undertaken in order to secularise and modernise the country rapidly (Ahmad, 2002). Among these were the abolition of the sultanate and caliphate and the closing of all shrines and dervish lodges (Zürcher 2004, 173). The reforms were aimed at secularization and the state's control over religious activities (Gözaydin 2008). The abolition of the caliphate in 1924 was one of the principal steps towards secularism; however, the Directorate of Religious Affairs (DRA) replaced it essentially standardising the discourse on religion (i.e. Sunni Islam). It became the authority figure that decides what counts as proper religion and what is cultural or pseudo religion (Dressler 2011), rendering Sunni Islam as the unmarked overarching religious identity. The DRA not only denied recognition to Alevis, but also promoted a Turkish version of Sunni Islam. Issues that concerned Alevis were decided based on the DRA's opinion rather than secular law; this confused the political and theological realms rather than securing religious plurality and atheism (Dressler 2010, p; 133).

The role of religion was important in the Turkish nation building process (Bozarslan 2003): as Çetinsaya (1999) argues 'nationalism and religion are inextricably linked in many parts of the world.' The initial years of the Republic were a period when the boundary between ethnicity and religion became blurred. Previously, the Ottoman Empire dealt with its heterogeneous population through the *millet* system which was organised on the basis of religious confession rather than ethnicity and allowed non-Muslims to practice their religions under their own ecclesiastical heads (Abu Jaber 1967, 212). The recognition was based on religion or sect and the Muslim population was treated as a united *ummah*. The Republic, however, was founded as a nation state yet the definition of 'Turkish' implicitly included being Muslim. The blurred boundary between ethnicity and religion can be seen in the example of population exchange after the Treaty of Lausanne. The treaty was signed in 1923 after the War of Independence between Turkey and a number of European countries and which set the current borders of modern Turkey (Zürcher 2004, 161). The Turkish

delegation insisted on a narrow interpretation of minority and recognised this status only for non-Muslim minorities, the Jewish, Armenian and Greek communities (Kaya and Baldwin 2004; Oran 2011), and granted them rights such as retaining their own schools and churches, yet these were subject to restrictions. Under the provision of the Lausanne Treaty some of Turkey's Greek Orthodox population and Greece's Muslim Turkish population were exchanged. In this population exchange (*mübadele*) the immigrants' religion was more important than the language they spoke (for instance the Turkish speaking Orthodox population was sent to Greece) (Yeğen 2004, 57; Zürcher 2004, 164). The minority relations reveal that religion has been an important component of defining ethnic boundaries and of nation state building.

The question of citizenship is also important in understanding ethnic and religious (in)equality across Turkish society. Yeğen (2004) explores the description of Turkish citizenship in the Constitutions of 1924, 1961 and 1982 and argues that there is no strong consensus on whether Turkish citizenship is ethnically or civically defined. He claims that it is a matter of textual expression in the constitutions; citizenship is framed differently in these texts, either as an ethnic issue or as a matter of civic community. He finds that '[w]hile it is sometimes suggested that Turkish citizenship, especially at the time of its original constitution, signifies a political-territorial definition of Turkishness instead of an ethnic one, many works have acknowledged the traces of both a political and an ethnicist logic in the very definition of Turkishness' (Yeğen 2004, 54). Kirişçi (2000) also notes that there has been a gap between the formal and substantive citizenship practices in Turkey and that the state elite favoured Turkish ethnicity and language.

A homogenous understanding of national identity affected the recognition of minorities. The situation of Alevis and Kurds was ambivalent: they were denied recognition for the sake of unity and equality because the new state rejected not only the Ottoman and

Islamic but also the liberal perceptions of the nation (Jongerden 2003, 76). However, nor did they enjoy complete acceptance as equal citizens. The new republic appealed to Alevis due to its secular tendencies and their formal citizenship status was equal to a Sunni Turkish citizen. Nevertheless, when they claimed any rights such as the recognition of their belief system or place of worship (*cemevi*), these were denied 'because such recognition is seen as a violation of the principle of a united and homogeneous Turkish nation' (Sökefeld 2008, 231). Subsequently, Alevis either became invisible or practiced their rituals in secret. In the meantime, those Alevi communities living in rural areas away from the centre could preserve their traditions within their closed communities.

2.2. Rapid urbanization, Alevis in political life and violence

Internal migration has had an impact on the Alevi community in Britain. Most of my interviewees and observees had experiences of rural to urban migration before their arrival in Britain. Internal migration has affected the existing social organisation of Alevi life, yet has helped them establish new social networks and provided them with social and economic capital which they later used for mobilisation. First of all, the search for a communal Alevi identity and the realization that one is Alevi is linked to migration and confrontation with the Other (Göner 2005, 120). From the 1950s onwards, mass migration from small towns and villages into urban centres began to affect Turkey. Alevis were affected more deeply: after migration to cities Sunnis could practice their religion in anonymous settings and simply by going to mosques, while Alevis were torn from their immediate communities and from their holy lineages (*ocak*) and spiritual guides (*dede).* Therefore, they hid their belief and practiced rituals either under limited conditions or abandoned them altogether, until the so-called Alevi revival of the 1990s.

Internal migration increased Alevis' opportunities for entering educational institutions and gaining economic power in different sectors. Alevi teaching emphasises the

principle of equality of all people and the importance of sharing and is believed to be inherently carrying egalitarian elements which eased their engagement with leftist and secular ideologies (Ayata 1997; Massicard 2007; Sökefeld 2008). By the 1970s, Alevis had gained power in the central government and municipalities (Ayata 1997, 67). Also, the mass killings they had suffered and the religious verdicts (*fatwa*) against them during the Ottoman Empire made secularism a critical issue for them in order to protect themselves against massacres and discrimination, which explains the large support for Kemalist principles. Yet the Ottoman and Republican periods should not be treated as homogenous long terms regarding state-Alevi relations (Bozarslan 2003). For instance, most of the Kurdish Alevis I met in London defended the modernizing reforms of the early Republic yet were critical of the state's Kurdish and Alevi policies. This was especially the case with the Dersim massacre of 1938, in which 10,000 people were killed for not submitting to the authority of the Republic (Leezenberg 2003, 198), complicating the Kurdish Alevis' position between approving the modernising reforms and criticizing the state's Kurdish and Alevi policy.

In 1960s and 1970s' Turkey, the framework for political activities was class-based, hence Alevis' small scale organisations and publications did not evolve into an identity movement at that time (Şahin 2005). In this phase there are few examples of activities that were exclusively concerned with Alevism. One that does stand out, however, is the *Hacı Bektaş* Festival which has been celebrated every August since 1964. The tomb and lodge of the thirteenth century mystic was shut in 1925 when all dervish lodges in Turkey were closed by the state; however, it maintained its importance as the centre for the Bektaşi order. With the relaxation of the anti-religious drive and the pressures of the local initiative, the lodge was restored in 1958 and a museum was built in 1964 (Massicard 2003, 126). *Hacı Bektaş Veli* has been commemorated every summer since then with the festival visited by public figures and is an area of Alevism's acceptance as a distinct culture.

In the 1960s and 1970s, Alevi political activities and organisations were small scale and did not openly emphasise their Alevi roots. These were the first examples of Alevi social networks as a direct result of urbanisation. They refrained from openly using the word Alevi; for example the *Birlik Partisi* (Unity Party) was founded by Alevis in the 1960s and carried the Alevi symbols of a lion and twelve stars, yet was not an Alevi party. Although the party gained some seats in parliament, it was not generally successful in Turkish political life (Leezenberg 2003, 198). The Alevi votes were distributed across political lines rather than based on ethnic or religious affiliations. These early attempts at political organisation were the result of urbanization and social networks in the metropolitan areas of Turkey and in Europe. For example, Alevi workers in Germany established the *Türk Ameleler Birliği* (Turkish Workers Union) in the 1960s and had close ties with *Birlik Partisi* (Şahin 2005, 472).

By the late 1970s, the global student protests and youth movements' reflections on Turkey became violent. The political climate was becoming even tenser and armed conflicts were resulting in deaths every day (Zürcher 2004); 5000 people died in the violence between 1975 and 1980 (Massicard 2007, 59). The political violence was caused by the National Action Party (*MHP; Milliyetci Hareket Partisi*) and its militant youth group called *ülkücü* (idealists) (Jongerden 2003, 83). Alevi youth was mainly on the political left in this conflict and being socialist was at the fore rather than being Alevi. Okan (2004) argues that at the time the socialists and Alevis were in a dialogical relationship; the Alevis borrowed socialism and lent particular symbols such as their poetry (and its themes of injustice, poverty and the miseries of the folk), the musical instrument *bağlama* that accompanies the poetry, and men's wearing of moustaches.

The upward social mobility of the rapidly urbanizing Alevis began to worry the conservative and nationalist groups and turned into violence at the turn of the decade. In various towns such as Sivas, Çorum and Malatya, anti-Alevi sentiments became violent

conflicts. The most violent and traumatic of these took place in Kahramanmaraş between 21 and 26 December 1978.

Kahramanmaraş is in the southeast of central Anatolia and has a mixed population of Turkish, Kurdish, Alevi and Sunni people. According to my research participants, most of whom came from several districts of Maraş, in the 1970s the region became richer and the value of Alevi land increased due to agricultural development in the region. The improvement of Alevis' economic prospects irritated the conservative Sunnis. Moreover, the *ülkücü* youth was able to mobilize the anti-leftist sentiments of the conservative section of the Sunni population against Alevis. The unrest began with the shooting of two leftist school teachers and the protests that prevented their funeral ceremony from taking place. Also during the screening of an anti-communist propaganda movie, *Güneş Ne Zaman Doğacak* (When Will the Sun Rise?) a sound bomb that had been placed in the theater by the *ülkücü* exploded – its planting had been intended to suggest that the leftists had been the perpetrators of the attack (Sinclair-Webb 2003, 222–3). Overall, in the period of unrest 111 people died, more than 1000 people were wounded, 552 houses and 289 workplaces were destroyed (Jongerden 2003, 84). According to Sinclair-Webb (2003), the media portrayed the events on a right-left axis, yet the testimonies in the martial law court afterwards showed the religious motivations behind the killings. In addition, Alevi organisations in Turkey and Europe argue that the violence was directed mainly against Alevi people during the incident. The Maraş massacre continues to have a traumatic effect on Alevis no matter if they directly experienced it or found out about it through the media or other witnesses. Because the perpetrators were not sufficiently punished and commemorations prevented by the security forces, Alevi spokesmen usually refer to the necessity of commemorations so that similar incidents will never recur.

2.3. The 1980 Military coup and its effects on Alevis:

In Turkey, political and social unrest reached its climax in the late 1970s. This culminated in one of the most brutal and traumatic events to mark Turkish political life until today; the 1980 military coup. On 12 September 1980, the military declared they were seizing power because the state organs had ceased to function (Zürcher 2004, 287). The coup aimed at depolitisation by closing political parties and organizations, imprisoning politically involved people (Massicard 2007, 69) and torture became widespread in prisons (Zürcher 2004). Besides these restrictions, a Turkish-Islamic synthesis was actively encouraged by the state in the years following the coup (Vorhoff 2003, 95). Islam was promoted as an antidote to socialism while nationalism was promoted against Kurdish separatism[7].

In the late 1980s, the military regime became relatively relaxed and Alevi identity found itself a place in the emerging civil society. Alevis' previous social networks that had been established in the wake of urban migration finally became fruitful in the social context where other identities were also gaining visibility. The rise of political Islam was perceived as a threat to the secular minded and Alevis particularly began to promote their own culture. In this period many publications about Alevism appeared, Alevi associations were founded and there was a growing interest in Alevi culture in the media. The associations or publications still omitted the word Alevi in their names for legal reasons but widely used Alevi symbols. This turn was not initiated by the traditional Alevi institutions (*ocak*) or the religious guides (*dede*) but by a new, urban and educated elite using modern media and secular forms of organizations (Vorhoff 2003, 97).

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[7] It can also be argued that Turkish Islamist synthesis is not an entirely new phenomenon and that Islam and Turkish nationalism were linked from the late nineteenth century onwards, with the exception of Kemalist era from 1925-45 (Cetinsaya 1999). However, it was more obvious in the post-coup period.

The other significant identity mobilisation was the Kurdish armed struggle as well as the increasing visibility of Kurdish people in urban spaces due to both economic and forced migration from Eastern provinces. As stated above, Alevism crosscuts ethnic identities and a section of the Alevi population is ethnically Kurdish. Identification with Kurdishness and Alevism may differ, although people carry both of these discriminated identities; being a Kurdish Alevi means double discrimination in public most of the time. Furthermore, the key actors who mobilized Alevi masses differed in their political opinions and worldviews. Jongerden (2003, 81) argues that Alevi identity was politicised into three different directions at this time: a Kemalist discourse, a leftist discourse and a Kurdish nationalist discourse. These discourses developed different relationships with existing political parties and evolved into various organisations in subsequent years.

The Kurdish movement and the armed struggle of the PKK (Kurdish Workers Party) against the Turkish army found support among some Kurdish Alevis. Bruinessen (1996) argues that the state was concerned about Alevi Kurds' support for the PKK and therefore promoted Alevi identity and cooperated with the Alevis' conservative wing in order to create an alternative public identity to the Kurdish movement. While the governments promoted *cemevi* construction and cultural expressions of Alevis (as an antidote to radical Islam and Kurdish separatism), they remained suspicious of Alevis due to their inclination towards leftist politics. On the one hand, the expression of Alevi culture (as secularist and modern) was encouraged and Kemalist Alevis were supported in the 1990s, on the other hand, the left-wing Alevi associations were viewed as suspicious and in cases of physical attack against Alevis state officials remained indifferent.

Compared to Kurdish identity, Alevi identity has been less conflictive, so it appealed to many Kurdish Alevis as a peaceful side of their identity and a means of integration with the Turkish middle class through common ideals such as secularism and modernism. During

times of armed conflict, embracing Kurdishness was more difficult. For instance, Erman and Göker argue that 'Being a Kurd today bears the stigma of being a separatist, a collaborator of the "enemy", frequently mentioned in the media as the murderer of babies. Under these circumstances, Kurdish Alevis have turned towards the religious elements of their ethnicity, stressing their Aleviness in public discourse' (2000, 100). This explains why some Kurdish Alevis would want to emphasise Aleviness rather than Kurdishness in order to avoid this stigma. There are indeed Alevi people who support the PKK, especially among the Kurdish Alevi community, yet the support for the Kurdish cause does not overlap completely with one's ethnic origin; i.e. not all Kurdish Alevis support the Kurdish armed struggle and not all Turkish Alevis are against it.

In this social context the European Union has been a key institution in demanding the recognition of identity as rights. Turkey's accession process to the European Union had an impact on the civil society and human rights claims in general (Citrin and Sides 2004). Keyman (2006) argues that the Copenhagen criteria for the development of human rights and democracy in Turkey strengthened civil society in Turkey and increased its importance and he predicts that civil society will contribute to this development. Massicard (2007, 349) also suggests that the EU has gained significance for Alevi activists as a frame of reference. Although transnational activism does not always make a direct contribution to transforming Turkish society, Alevi organisations in Turkey and Europe used this framework in their claims-making.

Besides the cultural demands and recognition issues, economic factors and conflicts arising from distribution need to be taken into account. The 1980 coup and the subsequent neoliberal turn had economic consequences for Alevis. Previously they had gained power through education and employment in the public sector including the central government and municipalities in the 1970s; yet after the coup they experienced downward mobility

both politically and economically (Ayata 1997). The gap widened as the job market discrimination against Alevis in the public sector continued (Toprak et al. 2009, 72). EU progress reports of recent years also confirm the discrimination as will be elaborated in the next chapter. Another area of distributional conflicts is the budget allocated to the DRA which is maintained through all tax-paying citizens, including Alevis although they do not use their facilities. Regarding this conflict, the state-friendly Alevi associations argue that the abolition of DRA, which had gained immense power in the recent decades, is impossible and consequently Alevis should demand the reallocation of its budget so as to include Alevis. The left-wing Alevi organisations, nonetheless, argue that this institution has no place in a secular state so should be abolished.

2.4. Ritual aspects of the Alevi revival and the transformation of the *cem* ceremony:

The main actors in the Alevi revival of the 1990s in Turkey were *araştırmacı-yazar* (researcher-writers) and spokesmen of associations rather than religious authorities. As the Alevi organisations became more active and as modern Alevism shifted to urban spaces, Alevi rituals transformed from rural and private to urban and public (Langer et al. 2011). The common practices had to be revived and standardised with spokespersons emphasising that the Alevi community is 'united by one faith, one ethical system and even by one basic ritual practice' (Vorhoff 2003, 100). The role of *dede*s was reconsidered as their spiritual guidance was needed. Sökefeld argues that 'Alevi worship […] does not focus on a fixed sequence of words and movements, but is rather established upon specific social relationships and networks which cannot easily be relocated' (2002b, 170). The transformation of *ayin-i cem* illuminates how migration impacted social relations within Alevi communities.

The *cem* ceremony is the central religious ritual for Alevis fulfilling the spiritual, legal and social needs of small Alevi communities. *Cem* literally means gathering and this

ritual is supposed to take place with the participation of those from the same *ocak* (holy lineage) being *talip* (followers) of the same *dede* (spiritual leader). Regarding the origins of *cem* and *semah* (an ecstatic dance which is performed at the climax of the ceremony), the community relates to these in a timeless manner, implying they have existed since the beginning of humanity (Markussen 2005). In one part of the ceremony, *miraclama*, the Islamic story of *mirac* (Muhammed's elevation to God) is told from a very different point of view, presenting Ali as the central figure of the story and Muhammed as one among equal participants of the gathering[8]. The ritual connects the historical and the contemporary issues that concern Alevis; their victimization is told in a continuity beginning from Kerbela and continuing with more recently experienced sufferings (Zirh 2014).

Figure 1-2. *Cem* ceremony

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[8]   According to the Alevi version of the legend, Muhammed knocks on the door and first identifies himself as prophet but the *cem* participants do not accept him. Then he tries again by introducing his family name but they still will not accept him. They let him into the *cem* only after he identifies himself as an ordinary person stripped of his titles.

Figure 3-5. Semah

.. www.alevi.org ...
Foto: Selahattin S.

The ceremony regulates the worldly matters of the participants through *halk mahkemesi* (people's tribunal) where the *dede* solves internal conflicts in addition to offering spiritual guidance. Men and women can sit side by side and the lack of gender segregation is interpreted as a sign of their egalitarian and progressive lifestyle. The *cem* is composed of twelve services which are conducted by the *dede* (directing the ritual), *rehber*

(assisting the dede), *gözcü* (in charge of order and silence during the ceremony), *delilci* (lighting candles), *zakir* (playing the string instrument, *bağlama*), *süpürgeci* (in charge of cleanliness), *saka* (distributing water), *kapıcı* (watchman), *lokmacı* (in charge of food), *semahçı* (dancers of *semah*), *iznikçi* (guarding the participants' shoes), and *peyik* (in charge of announcing the ceremony) (Sökefeld 2008, 148).

As a result of migration the *dede-talip* relations were weakened and it became difficult to conduct the ceremonies in traditional ways (Sökefeld 2008). The c*em* used to be conducted in the living room of the largest available house in a village with participants that are connected to the same particular *dede*. In this revival period, the newly founded Alevi culture centres and even sports halls became the new sites of *cem* ceremonies. Since it is difficult for *dedes* to find followers amongst those now dispersed across the different cities of Turkey or elsewhere and conduct *cem* with them, it is more convenient to conduct *cem* in an anonymous setting with a larger number of participants. This has resulted in changes in rituals that normally have a dimension of regulating interpersonal conduct. A remark made by one *dede* caught my attention during a *cem* ceremony during the Hacı Bektaş Veli Commemoration and Culture Festival in 2012 and it unravels the modifications to the rituals. In the beginning of the ceremony the *dede* said that he would not conduct all twelve services. Afterwards I asked what he meant and he explained the variations in the *cem* ceremonies they conduct nowadays:

> Well this is the duty of twelve services; when we say twelve services, they are all the duties on that day. First of all we say *pir* (master), *mürşit* (mentor), *rehber* (guide), these make judgements, they get together with the people of the village and the *musahip* (spiritual brothers) stand in the square and explain everything they have done throughout the year […]

> If the *mürşit* is giving that service, he should know them very well. […] Now if I don't know those people well, if I don't know whether they are in the confession, if I don't know whether they divorced their wives or violated someone's rights, how can I give the prayer? Its responsibility is on my shoulders. Here we do educational *cem*. (Interview 4, Istanbul)

Due to anonymity in *cem* ceremonies, it has become difficult to regulate the interpersonal matters through *halk mahkemesi* (people's tribunal), whereby the *dede* solves conflicts. It has either been abandoned altogether or turned into a merely rhetorical question nowadays. *Cem* ceremonies played a central part in the solidarity and religious socialization of the communities, nowadays most *cemevi* in Turkey offer weekly *cem* ceremonies and have a regular *dede* to conduct them. *Dedes* also travel in order to meet their followers and conduct *cem* in various parts of Europe.

2.5. Sivas and Gazi: attacks and visibility

In the revival years of Alevi culture, two attacks against Alevis had a massive impact on raising awareness. These are the Sivas Madimak Hotel fire in 1993 and the Gazi uprisings in Istanbul in 1995. They can be seen as the result of the gaining of power by political Islam and the integration of right-wing politics into state structures, and their response to the increasing visibility of Alevis. These more recent incidents have a vivid place in the collective memories of the younger generation as well.

In Sivas in 1993, a cultural festival was organised to commemorate Pir Sultan Abdal, a sixteenth century holy Alevi poet known for his opposition to unjust rule and who was eventually hanged. Secular intellectuals (both Alevi and non-Alevi) were among the participants in the festival and one of them, Aziz Nesin, a writer who had previously announced that he would publish Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* in Turkish was already on the target list before the festival started. On July 2 1993 the mob, which was composed of fundamentalist Islamists, set the Madimak Hotel on fire, where the festival participants were staying and killed thirty-seven people (thirty-three festival participants, two hotel staff and two attackers). The police were ineffective; according to communications on police radio which were later leaked to the press, the police received orders not to stop the mob (van Bruinessen 1996). Not only the incident itself but also the legal process that followed

was problematic for Alevi communities. The case continued for long years and finally in 2012 reached a verdict of lapse of time.

Two years later in 1995, another attack occurred in Istanbul's Gazi neighborhood which has a large Alevi-Kurdish population. The incident began with a random shooting at a coffee house and the ensuing neighborhood residents' protest. The police aimed directly at the protestors and shot several dead. The death toll was nineteen according to the Human Rights Foundation of Turkey (Jongerden 2003). The security forces were again either ineffective or in cooperation with the attackers against Alevis. After the riots over 100 people were charged by the courts for illegal demonstration and almost two dozen police officers were charged for shooting at protestors (Marcus 1996, 26). Later the police officers' charges were greatly reduced (Jongerden 2003) and the case was closed. Both these events reveal the degree of hostility against Alevis and the state's anti-Alevi bias. As Jongerden argues 'the violent events in Sivas and Gazi made it once again clear that part of the state apparatus is siding with the extreme right and is clearly anti-Alevi, as it is also anti-Kurd' (2003, 86)

These incidents occurred once Alevis had begun to mobilise in public and paradoxically did not decrease Alevis' activities but gave them momentum. For instance, many Alevi spokesmen I met (in Turkey as well as in London) told me of the centrality of the Sivas massacre for Alevi mobilisation and that they realized the necessity of establishing institutions and struggling for recognition. Commemorations are still held both in Turkey and in European cities each year.

2.6. Migration to Europe:

As Alevism gained more visibility in Turkey, there was a parallel struggle for recognition among Alevi immigrants from Turkey residing in Europe. In the 1960s, a migration flow began first to Germany and then to other European countries that needed a

workforce and as a result there is now a significant Turkish population in European countries. The population of Turkish citizens was 2.8 million in 1995, 2.7 million in 2005 and then finally rose to three million in 2010 (Icduygu et al. 2013).

Migration from Turkey was initially thought to be temporary and men migrated first, leaving their families behind. After the 1973 economic crisis and increasing controls over immigration, paradoxically many workers invited their families and a new migration wave started due to family unification because they did not want to miss the chance of migration (Zirh 2005). After family unification and the settling of immigrants, issues of integration began to appear more in European countries' agendas. For instance, in Germany the authorities initially regarded immigrants as guest workers (*Gastarbeiter*) but as their stay became more permanent the integration of this population into German society became a central issue (Sökefeld 2008).

Emigration had impacts on the economic as well as social and political aspects of Turkish life. Particularly the liberal attitudes and multicultural policies in European countries promoted the expression of 'different' identities such as being Kurdish or Alevi. As the immigrants settled in the countries of immigration, they began to organise networks of solidarity such as HTAs and identity-based community centres[9]. Alevism gained visibility in this context in Germany in the late 1980s. The Hamburg case is very interesting since it demonstrates how the multiculturalist discourse of the host society and the formal and informal networks of Alevi people initiated mobilization around Alevi identity (Sökefeld 2008). They first organised a culture week event in Hamburg and in the following years these social networks expanded and helped them form Alevi organisations in many cities and towns across Germany.

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[9]   Alevis have been involved in other organisations for political solidarity but Alevism did not play a significant role in these early organisations (Massicard 2007, 316).

One of the key activities of the Hamburg Alevi Culture Group was the *Alevilik Bildirgesi* (Alevi Declaration) in 1989. In this public manifestation issues were raised and demands voiced such as recognition of the pressure experienced by Alevis and that Alevis should be able to say 'I am an Alevi' without fear. Other issues raised included the demand that Sunni families should change their opinion about Alevis, enlightened people should defend Alevis' rights in the context of human rights, Turkish media should address Alevi culture, TRT (Turkey Radio Television Institute) should take Alevi existence into consideration, the building of mosques in Alevi villages should be stopped, Alevi teaching should be recognized in schools, the government's standpoint on Alevism should be changed, Alevis are one of the guarantees of the laic state, the institution of *dedelik* should be restructured in a modern sense, urgent programs for the Alevis abroad are a must, Alevism and Iranian Shiism today bear no relation (Alevi Declaration) ("Alevilik Bildirgesi" 2014). The same declaration was then published in a Turkish newspaper, *Cumhuriyet*, in 1990 with the signatures of intellectuals and artists – both Alevi and non-Alevi. This manifesto is significant because for the first time in Turkish history a belief community other than those recognised by the Treaty of Lausanne strived for cultural rights (Celik 2003, 149).

The rise of Alevi identity politics, both in Turkey and abroad, developed simultaneously and in dialogue with each other, but they followed the procedures of the legal context of the nation states in which they developed. Gradually, Alevi organisations were established in other immigration countries such as Austria, Belgium, the UK, Denmark, France, Netherlands, Switzerland, Sweden and more recently the USA and Australia and their functioning depended on the specific countries' immigrant policies, institutional regulations and agendas (Massicard 2007, 313). The nation states influenced the way the Alevi movement operated in these countries; for instance in Germany the Alevi Unions Federation gained the status of a corporate public law institution (*Körperschaft des*

öffentlichen Rechts), the highest legal recognition that a non-state organisation can achieve (Sökefeld 2008). German-Turks 'simultaneously engage with multiple states and public spheres to express their identities, and confront exclusions and discrimination at multiple scales' (Ehrkamp and Leitner 2003, 127). In Britain, they formed institutions and gained recognition through integrating Alevism into textbooks for religious education classes, while in Austria the 'Alevi Islam Belief Community' was recognised by the Ministry of Culture.

There is now also cooperation and formal and informal links between different countries' organisations and federations because Alevism is imagined as transcending the boundaries of an immediate community, but rather involves millions of people living in different countries. The European Alevi Organisations Confederation was established over twenty years ago with the purpose of strengthening relations. It is not a legally binding institution and is based on voluntary cooperation among the Alevi federations of various European countries.

2.7. Immigration to Britain

Migration from Turkey to Britain started in the 1980s. Düvell (2010) studied Turkish migration (from Turkey and Northern Cyprus) to Britain and pointed to the very different estimates of the number of people from Turkey in the UK; he estimates that 'there are at least a quarter of a million Turks residing in the UK'. On the other hand, İsrafil Erbil, former chairman of EACC and current chairman of BAF, estimates that there are at least 300,000 people from Turkey in Britain[10] and that nearly eighty per cent of this population lives in London.

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[10]   The exact numbers are unknown. This generous estimate belongs to Erbil, who was informed by the Turkish embassy about the number of immigrants from Turkey. This

Immigrants from Turkey who reside in Britain are very diverse in terms of their ethnic and religious backgrounds, gender and immigration status, reflecting the phenomenon 'superdiversity' which refers to the 'new, small and scattered, multiple-origin, transnationally connected, socio-economically differentiated and legally stratified immigrants who have arrived over the last decade' (Vertovec 2007, 1024). Ethnic and religious identities are particularly crosscut, adding to the Alevi community's inner diversity.

Although Turkish and Kurdish migration to Britain had multiple origins, the legal basis was political and the majority of Alevi immigrants were asylum seekers. A bilateral agreement was signed between Turkey and the UK in 1970, yet the number of people who migrated through this agreement to the UK was limited (Erbas 2008). The majority of immigrants from Turkey arrived after 1980. The proportion of those who migrated to study or work as professionals is relatively small among the first wave of immigrants who arrived in the late 1980s (statistical data on the reasons for migration are not available but my observations and key informants' statements confirm this). In order to obtain refugee status, human rights violations in Turkey against Kurdish and/or Alevi people were reported. In the asylum seeking process, being Kurdish has been more prevalent than being Alevi especially given that the late 1980s and 1990s was a peak time of armed conflict. In addition, being members of radical left groups such as Dev-Sol or TKP/ML and living under the threat of detention and torture were the main reasons for obtaining refugee status. The role of smuggling is also significant in migration from Turkey to the UK: approximately 100,000 people from Turkey were smuggled to Britain (Bennetto 2005).

Economic concerns were another key motivation in addition to political hardship in Turkey. The political and economic hardships after the military coup and the state pressure

estimate is based on the premise that the number of Alevis predominate the number of Sunnis (from Turkey) in the UK.

against Kurdish and Alevi groups in Eastern regions are important causes. Bauböck (2003, 709) argues that emigration countries also have certain motivations to encourage emigration: these are human upgrading, remittances and the political lobbying of the receiving-country governments. The Turkish state expected to gain remittances and improve the technical skills of workers and to have qualified personnel (Martin, Midgley, and Teitelbaum 2001). However, the political lobbying of Kurdish and Alevi immigrants was not supported; on the contrary, it was considered as dangerous to Turkey's national unity. The ideal of creating a homogenous population could be added to Bauböck's model. Some of my informants claimed that the Turkish state oppressed the Kurds and Alevis and turned a blind eye to their illegal emigration in order to 'get rid' of them and even encouraged human trafficking since the emigration of Kurds and Alevis would eventually make the country's population more homogenous.

Social exclusion and discrimination experiences have motivated many to migrate and search for better lives in Western European countries, with economic and political hardship being the main reasons for migration to Britain as illustrated in the following quotations. The interviewee, Halil, is a Kurdish Alevi man in his late thirties, works in irregular jobs and lives in North London with his brother's family. Although he did not have a prosperous life in Britain, he does not consider going back to Turkey either.

Halil: I arrived in the year 1998.

A: Why did you come to England? To find a job or for other reasons?

H: Well, of course (long pause) economic dimension, also the exclusion that we experienced in Turkey. I mean, for being Kurdish Alevi. Because of these reasons.

A: Did you seek asylum?

H: Yes.

A: Can you tell me a bit more about that process?

H: Well, the time I came from Turkey to here was the time of a dense conflict. Of course with time, there have been steps for democratization to a certain extent but it is not on a solid ground yet. Well, in this country, I personally did not have a pleasant colourful life, if I say I did, it would be a lie. I didn't. I did not achieve anything. Economically speaking, this is what we came here for, and there is the other dimension as well.

A: So we can say both economic and political reasons.

H: Yes because of both reasons (Interview 9, London).

Another research participant, İsmail, gave similar reasons for migration. He is also Kurdish Alevi and working as a taxi driver in North London. He migrated for political reasons and to escape the dangerous situation he faced due to being politically involved in pro-Kurdish organisations in Turkey. I interviewed him and his wife in their home in Enfield. While his wife Meryem emphasised the economic dimension of migration, İsmail stated that social conditions and liberties are important factors affecting migration and the decision to return:

İsmail: What Meryem told you is different, I mean… My understanding is very different. Living in this country is not just about the economic conditions, it is also the social conditions. Here 210 languages are spoken but in none of these 210 languages, is anybody superior to another. (…) In Turkey there is pressure in the street, there is the pressure of the state. Going back… neither Kurds, nor Alevis, nor Sunnis, nor Turks would go back.

The migration pattern from Turkey can be understood as chain migration and the first immigrants 'encourage and facilitate the subsequent migration of family members and friends' (Bartram, Poros, and Monforte 2014, 26). The first immigrants learned the system of the immigration country and their social and economic rights so those who followed could adapt more easily. People who already had relatives or fellow townsmen in London possessed the social capital and found courage to immigrate in large groups. According to both my own observations and the spokesperson's statements, the majority of the Alevi immigrants came to Britain from Maraş, Sivas, Tunceli (Dersim) and Kayseri. The British

state responded to the increasing asylum application from Turkish nationals by implementing visa regulations in 1989 (Cohen 1994, 83).

Chain migration explains why large numbers of people migrated from a few regions. The early migrants were able to learn the know-how about life in Britain (such as job opportunities and social benefits) and through communication with their fellow townsmen back in Turkey this kind of information could be exchanged, resulting in migration from the same villages and towns. For example, in London there are nearly 3000 people from Tilkiler village in Maraş (fieldnotes 11.12.2012) and around 750 families from Kırkısrak village in Kayseri (fieldnotes 04.06.2013).

For most of my research participants the existence of a family member was a decisive factor in determining their destination country. A middle aged Kurdish Alevi woman, Feride explains how her father migrated from Elbistan, Maraş, to London. She later migrated and obtained a residence permit through family unification:

> Feride: My father used to have a coffee shop; he worked there all his life. When the economic situation was bad, also at that time he had a nephew here, you know when one person migrates all the rest follow. He arrived, then all the others came here. Their reason for arriving here was economic, not so political at all (UK Interview 10, London).

Also relatives who had migrated earlier provide them with practical information about the country they want to migrate to. For instance Can, a political migrant in his forties whom I met in the *cemevi*'s theatre group gave similar reasons about choosing where to seek asylum:

> C: I arrived in England in 2000 from Kayseri.
>
> A: Why England?
>
> C: My siblings were here. Because it is the country in Europe which gives the best rights to refugees… The first reason is because my siblings were here, the second reason was that (Interview 20, London).

In addition, personal connections and communication through letters, phone calls and videos of weddings, showed non-migrants the more pleasant aspects of life in Britain and encouraged them to migrate. Usually people gather information about the possible destination countries before they make the decision to migrate (King, Thomson, Mai, & Keles, 2008, p. 15). One of my research participants, Zeynep, explains how she was influenced by her brother who had migrated to Britain before her. Zeynep migrated with the hope of finding a better job and economic and political factors are both present in her decision. She has been living in London since 1995, does not attend the community centres and is only loosely affiliated with the *cemevi*. She was a political migrant and when I asked her why she specifically migrated to Britain, she told me about the videotapes of weddings that the earlier immigrants had showed her and the other non-migrants back in Turkey. Her relatives' wedding videos attracted her to England where she thought she would have a wealthier and more liberal lifestyle. She explains the reasons for seeking asylum and the events that led to her migration:

> Zeynep: I gave my testimony mainly on Alevism, it was right after the Gazi and Sivas incidents. I told them what I personally experienced. I went to *cemevi* a couple of times. One time when I went there, I left half an hour earlier, but my friends were inside, they were all kept. That day if I hadn't left half an hour earlier I would have been detained. Those young girls have been through massive torture. Although I hadn't experienced that myself I explained what happened to my friends. The police had found some magazines there, *Özgür Gazete* (Free Newspaper) or whatever. They kept those young people by showing this as evidence. They were in jail for 3-4 days only but when they were released… you should have seen. Eventually those young people who had nothing to do with anything turned into fierce militants (Interview 38, London).

The migration destination was decided on the basis of the host country's opportunities; the asylum policies of the receiving countries and the availability of social benefits have an impact on immigrants' choices. For example, most of my interview partners had connections in Germany, which is a popular destination. However, after comparing the advantages and disadvantages, they either did not prefer Germany or tried

to migrate to Britain after staying in Germany for some time. The detention centres are reported as the factor that makes Germany an unpleasant destination. For instance a research participant in her late thirties, Gaye, reported:

> In the first years here there were more rights. I stayed in Germany for six months. They put you in a *Heim*, like a huge hotel with bath and toilet in the same place. They put you in a room with four to five other people. The dirty ones and good ones, pardon my language, but people from all walks of life are there. They serve sausages in the morning, noon and evening. They give you food but no bread with it. Eat it or not, nobody cares. When you go out, you show your ID. They don't provide houses. Here it wasn't like that. This country had more advantages. (Interview 18, London)

Seeking asylum is a lengthy process that requires social networks and economic capital and which involves many dangers. Although my participants were generally reluctant to reveal information about this, the topic was discussed in some of the interviews. Here I will present examples from one Turkish Alevi man and one Kurdish Alevi woman who entered Britain illegally. Mehmet is a Turkish Alevi from Nurhak, Maraş. He is in his forties and living in London with his family. He has been in England since 1999.

> A: When did you arrive in England?
>
> M: 99.
>
> A: From which city or town?
>
> M: From Istanbul… no I arrived directly. We left the village, we came to Germany. In Germany they put me in jail for 23 days, we got caught.
>
> A: Did you come here illegally?
>
> M: Yes we came illegally. From there we arrived here.
>
> A: With your family?
>
> M: Yes with my wife. We didn't have children back then. Our children were born here.
>
> A: It must be difficult.
>
> M: 99 percent of the people who came here migrated this way. Very rarely… The Ankara Agreement or student visa system started recently. Previously everybody

came here illegally. In the earlier times, nobody knew that England had such an easy… that there was the possibility of coming here and seeking asylum. People realised that very late.

A: When they did, they started visa regulations.

M: (laughs) From our village, I know about 3 people who arrived like this, coming here without a visa and then obtaining the right to stay here. The others who arrived later all came here illegally with the *şebeke* (network).

A: Do you remember how much you had to pay for that?

M: It was around 8-9 thousand… Sterling.

A: Per person?

M: No for the two of us. It's a lot of money (laughs).

A: Yes a lot of money and a huge risk.

M: Well yes.

A: Was your main wish going to Germany?

M: No it was to come here. My sisters were here, they encouraged us. I didn't think about Europe, I didn't want to go. But they insisted that we should come. That's how we arrived.

A: How did you apply for asylum? Which problems in Turkey did you show as evidence?

M: About being Alevi; and also radical left, being sympathisers of DHKPC, TKPML. We prepared a statement like this, and they accepted.

A: What was it like to get a residence permit?

M: It was very difficult. Very difficult, we could obtain it in like 5 years or so. And they found out something about me, when I first sought asylum, we didn't say we arrived from Germany. They ask about that in your testimony, 'where did you come from? How did you arrive?' If there is any inconsistency, they send you back. At that time they found out that I sought asylum in Germany and that I was in prison for 23 days there. They were going to send me back but when I proved that I stayed in prison in Germany, they didn't send me back. They evaluated my asylum application. It was like this.

A: I see. And until they reached a decision, they kept your passport and you couldn't leave?

M: I didn't have a passport at all, when I first arrived. I came without a passport.

A: You can't leave the country, you can't go anywhere else.

M: You can't do anything. There is a dream that 99 percent of the people here have seen. They go to Turkey from here, at that time when they have no residence permit. They all have had this dream, everybody tells it to each other. Now we laugh about it. They go from here to Turkey in their summer holiday. Then, when it is time to go back, such despair! Why did I come here, I don't have a residence permit, how am I going to enter that country again? Everybody has had this dream. Everybody! I have talked to so many people, they all had this dream; they go back to Turkey and cannot return. It must be some psychological pressure.

A: Yes, I have met people who were not able to go back for 10 years or longer.

M: Yes.

A: Now you can travel freely.

M: Yes. Now a friend of mine is married to my uncle's daughter. He went last week for the first time, after 15 years… well. A very difficult situation. We could go after 8 years.

A: How was it?

M: Everything was different. An 8 year old child is now 16 years old. Your childhood friends are all married with children, they have responsibilities now. There is no more the joy and fun that you used to have in the old days. It is definitely difficult when you go back for the first time (Interview 33, London).

However, those who lacked a work permit and skills (language, occupational training) were vulnerable in the job market; the working conditions were hard and involved working extra hours. The early experiences are portrayed in a play written and performed by the EACC drama group and based on immigrants' letters sent from London to their hometowns. I watched the rehearsals many times and had the opportunity to interview some of the group; they then offered me the chance to appear in one of the play's scenes. The play was staged in a local theatre in Enfield on 19 June 2013 and one of the sketches in the play is set in a textile factory. While they are working in the factory (which is decorated with fabric and sewing machines on the stage), different issues such as family problems due to cultural differences at home and their new living conditions, language problems, communication difficulties and long working hours are discussed using elements of comedy. The comedic scene is interrupted by actors in the role of control officers who

arrest the illegal workers and their boss. This little sketch relates the economic activities typical of first wave immigrants.

The advantages and job opportunities that were available in the initial years gradually declined. For example, in the early 2000s the textile sector collapsed 'due to the competition from cheaper imports' (Düvell, 2010: 6)

Immigrants from Turkey established their own workplaces ranging from small to large shops and restaurants to hairdressers and accounting or law firms. Those who arrived later in the 2000s mainly used the Ankara Agreement[11] to start their own business (King et al. 2008). Also, according to Düvell, some refugees used their cultural capital in order to find jobs in the public sector, 'occupying posts in public, health and education services as managers, teachers, and nurses' (Düvell 2010, 6). In addition, I have observed that some younger immigrants acquired cultural capital through education and used it for upward mobility. Another impact of migration is the shrinking of family size; more and more families choose to have two children, which makes it easier to adapt to the urban life and provide for the children's needs more efficiently.

After immigration the living standards of Alevis did not decline overall, if anything they became better. In London after the first phase of working in the textile factories (from the late 1980s to mid-1990s) they were able to accumulate some money, invest in real estate and open their own businesses. The economic conditions of Alevi immigrants from Turkey reflect contemporary capitalist societies. On the one hand, businesses have emerged and some people gained cultural capital, economic assets and local political power. Migrants from Turkey, despite their small number and despite having arrived only

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[11]   The agreement was signed in 1963 and aims to ease Turkey's accession into the European Economic Community. The applicants need to show proof of some capital in order to do business and they are granted initially five year, then ten year residence permit.

twenty or thirty years before, are very visible in certain areas, particularly in London. In addition to owning shops and businesses, there are people involved in local politics who are extremely entrepreneurial (Düvell 2010, 6). On the other hand, there are still many people receiving social benefits and experiencing economic difficulties. For instance, the neighborhoods populated by immigrants from Turkey are considered among the poorest boroughs of London, suffering problems such as a 'high level of deprivation, housing needs, high levels of unemployment (up to 40 %) and educational failure' (Düvell 2010, 4). My observations also suggest that there is vast inequality in terms of the economic prospects of Alevi migrants from Turkey.

These problems can be linked with the age structure/demographics of immigrants from Turkey and their low labour participation rate. Demireva, who looks into the job market integration of new immigrants in Britain, has found that those from Turkey, along with those from Middle Eastern and Eastern European countries, 'remain the most disadvantaged in terms of their probabilities of being active and of being employed compared to White British men and women' (2011, 645). She also predicts fewer chances of improvement for the future (Demireva 2011, 652). Statistics assembled by the BBC demonstrate labour participation by immigrants from different countries: settled immigrants from Turkey have a labour participation rate of 48.11 per cent, whereas the rate for new immigrants is 41.61 (*BBC* 2005). Compared to other countries, this is one of the lowest rates of participation along with immigrants from Somalia, Korea and Bangladesh. The highest labour participation rates come from immigrants from New Zealand (93.56 per cent) and Australia (90.57 per cent). European and North American immigrants labour participation rate varies between 82 per cent (Canada) to 49 per cent (Greece). Turkish immigrants' low participation rate could be explained by their overall aims of migration (mainly as political migrants rather than economic entrepreneurs), their

age (the old and middle aged people over forty to fifty years old find it harder to adapt to working life in Britain) and also undocumented work they may have engaged in.

Furthermore, immigrants' ethnic backgrounds should be taken into account when predicting their socio-economic prospects. Ennelli et al's (2005, 14) non-representative survey compares ethnic Turkish and Kurdish people from Turkey and Cyprus and reveals that 74 per cent of Cypriots, 32 per cent of Turks and 10 per cent of Kurds were home owners; and 26 per cent of Cypriot Turks, 20 per cent of Turks and 10 per cent of Kurds held A levels. Though not a representative sample, this suggests both the marginality of immigrants from Turkey and the marginal position of Kurds within them. Enneli et al argue that 'the Kurds, as the newest migrant group, suffer the highest levels of disadvantage in their lives' and 'the longest settled group, the Turkish Cypriots, are the least disadvantaged' (Enneli, Modood, and Bradley 2005, 48). The statistics usually treat all immigrants from Turkey as one category or in some cases only the ethnic origin of the participants is taken into account; therefore, it is difficult to draw conclusions regarding Alevis. Future works need to consider migrants' religious background.

2.8. The Rise of Alevism in Britain:

Since most Alevis in Britain are also of Kurdish ethnic origin and sought asylum mainly through their Kurdish identity[12], the homeland politics of the newly migrated people were initially organised around the Kurdish identity (Wahlbeck 1999, 158), rather than Alevi. There were people who joined the Kurdish armed struggle after their involvements in

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[12]   Few of my research participants expressed that they included discrimination due to being Alevi as a justification for their refugee application. The majority had fear of detention/ persecution due to being Kurdish and/ or being member to illegal political organizations.

the Kurdish community centres of London, according to my research participants' accounts. The armed conflicts between the Kurdish and the Turkish army affected the lives of many people in the region, including those who were not directly involved; it was therefore a justification for seeking asylum. Community centres in London, in addition to providing 'advice on welfare, housing and asylum issues, language and training courses as well as various social and cultural activities' to the immigrants from Turkey, also promoted Kurdish identity (Wahlbeck 1999, 156).

The organisation around Alevi identity in Britain began in the 1990s due to specific factors. First of all, the global trend in identity movements dominated class-based struggles and from the 1960s and 70s onwards 'conflicts have developed in advanced Western societies that, in many respects, deviate from the welfare state pattern of institutionalized conflict over distribution' (Habermas 1981, 181). The so called new social movements became more sensitive to human rights, minority problems and environmental issues. Gradually identity began to be considered as a right (Soysal 2000) and this turn influenced immigrant groups and minorities to demand cultural rights. Alevi migrants in Britain first organised around their Kurdish and socialist identity in the 1980s, yet gradually came to need community centres that provided solidarity around Alevi identity and fulfilled their practical need for funeral services. They began actively defending their rights to culture or to express being Alevi once there was a legal, political and cultural framework that enabled it.

There is no systematic discrimination towards Alevi or Kurdish people living in Britain, which is a significant factor that facilitated the emergence of Alevi identity here. Although some participants reported individual incidents of discrimination and harassment after their arrival in Britain, they state that this is rare and not a state policy. They can freely express being Alevi, Turkish or Kurdish if they chose to do so. Below I present the examples

of two cases. Firstly Nazan, a middle aged well educated Turkish Alevi woman says that she was never asked about her religion nor did she experience any discrimination due to being Alevi in Britain. Then Yusuf, a middle aged Kurdish Alevi from the EACC administration, argues that they were even encouraged to express their identity freely after they arrived in Britain:

> Ayşegül: Have you ever experienced any discrimination due to being Alevi in Britain?
>
> Nazan: No, it never happened, nobody asked me anything about my religion here, people would ask where I come from but they ever ask about religion. Because there is equality here, human rights and places where you can report if you are discriminated against. But in Turkey, nobody cares (Interview 32, London).

> Yusuf: People here are interested in learning about you; they want to get to know you. They notice your innocence, and that you're hiding something. They create funds and equipment and they want to contact your institutions, want to meet your families. For example my teacher visited my home. We were selected with a few other families, like a… we were selected as a sample for a project about the lifestyle of refugees. This makes you happy, it makes you proud, makes you confident. I mean you come from a much hidden life and meet the exact opposite, I'm not saying it is not supposed to be like this but it is more than you wish for (Interview 29, London).

The two experiences differ because Yusuf arrived in London in the 1980s with his family to seek asylum and was encouraged to freely express his once hidden and persecuted identity. Nazan, however, came to Britain as a student and decided to stay after she met her British partner. In conclusion, they both state that there is no discrimination whether people choose to express their identity or wish to keep it to themselves.

The so called Alevi revival in Turkey and Germany also influenced the Alevi population in Britain and in 1993 they founded the Alevi Culture Centre and *Cemevi* in London. Various other Alevi culture centres in different parts of Britain followed suit. These centres have various functions such as conducting funeral services and *cem* ceremonies, offering public education and cultural activities. The Sivas incident which occurred shortly

before sharpened Alevi awareness and membership to the London *cemevi* increased rapidly. EACC's former chairman, İsrafil Erbil explains:

> The opening of the Alevi Culture Centre is mainly connected to the Madımak Massacre in 93. With the Madımak Massacre, previously there were few organisations but afterwards within the first 3 months for example 80 *cemevi* were opened in Turkey. This of course was directly reflected in Europe too. (…) There was a protest march with the support of the existing community centres and of course it was mainly the Alevi people. But it wasn't done through the organisations; it was mainly with the participation of the people. It is a very big shortcoming that we don't have the archives of that event, neither a photograph nor a leaflet from that day. In July this massacre took place, from September on the *cemevi* was founded (Interview 31, London).

His early experiences reveal the conditions of both other migrants and the early years of the Alevi mobilisation in Britain. In our first interview I asked Erbil to introduce himself. He did this by referring to both personal issues and those that concern other Alevi migrants that had arrived around the same time:

> We are one of the families that migrated to England in 1986 with the big wave of migration. Originally I was born in Kütre village of Afşin, Kahramanmaraş, I completed elementary school there, then I completed secondary school in Göksun, and after the secondary school we moved here to London. Especially after the first half of the 1980s, mostly in 4 provinces Sivas, Maraş, Kayseri and Malatya and with the neighboring provinces, England received a serious wave of migration. The reason why these people migrated was to some extent the massacres against Alevis and the problems related to that; for example, it started with '77 Malatya, then in Maraş in '78, in Çorum in '80 and after that the 12 September '80 military coup, this became a very serious political problem. Of course, when economic problems add to that, those lands turned into a prison for these people. And the only reason why England was chosen was because Germany and other European countries had visa regulations due to the previous migration. So they were not able to go to these countries and England did not require a visa back then.

> A: Really? When did that start?

> İ: There was no visa regulation until June '89. From the beginning of '89 they began to announce it and in June they began to implement it. Until June '89, after people found out that there would be visa regulations, there was a lot of... I mean we would go to the airport to pick up 50 people, 100 people, 20 people and host them. When I arrived in '86 as a 13-year-old boy, because of our economic situation and since my parents were old, I started working at a textile factory. I worked for nearly

a year, then I went to Hackney College in Stoke Newington in order to register for evening classes to learn English. They said that I should attend the regular college instead of the evening college which is for adults. I was 14, almost turning 15 at that time. I started education at Hackney College. That was aroun '87-'88. After a 6-month intensive course, there were not many people who could speak English after the dense migration in that region. When I went out of the college building, there would be around 10 people waiting for me to do interpretation. Either to go to the airport, or to go to the hospital or housing section etc etc. Because people had such difficulties since they had just arrived. All those problems about settling and about migrating were new and there were tons of things to do, from going to health and help centres to going to schools for the children's education and of course the appointments with the lawyers about the asylum applications and all kinds of official applications etc. All of these of course required interpretation since nobody could speak English. Since there were no people in the British institutions who could speak Turkish and there were only a few people who could speak both Turkish and English. Although at that time my English was not good, it was still better than none. In that school year I was absent for 94 days because I had to help people with interpretation. Despite this it was better than my classmates because you practice a lot while you do interpreting. That's why the school administration turned a blind eye. They knew that I wanted to help people. That was such a time period of course. In terms of jobs, there were textile factories, working conditions were hard. The first generation had to leave their children with baby-sitters or neighbours or another family member and go to work. Children were returning from school to home on their own and actually the problems we encountered later such as the gang involvement of the youth, drug abuse, suicide, jails, these all go back in those days and we would find this out later.

A: Were there many community centres back then?

İ: No there weren't, right. The England Alevi Culture Centre was founded in '93. Especially after the Madımak Massacre because of the dense emotions and the need for organising. In addition it was a serious process and required a lot of effort to settle and live in this country, to learn English and adapt to this country. Some opened their own business with time, some got retired. Towards the 2000s those people who invested in real estate, at least those who bought their own houses, because the market was booming in England, found themselves really well-off economically in the 2000s. It was never in the history of England, exactly when people from Turkey migrated here, in that historical period, real estate prices increased five times. The people who noticed that with an entreprenerial mind and with feelings of solidarity they either bought their own house or bought another for investment and this became an opportunity. Because the English economy went through a serious crisis in '89, the real estate prices went down. So our people bought those houses for the lowest price possible. Naturally when it went up again those investments gained value.

Of course by the 2000s, around 2005, we had become a community that was economically free from problems, that could speak English more or less, had its own institutions and could use the social and legal opportunities of the English state. But at this time other problems emerged. The biggest problem was ignoring the children at that time because earning money and settling in here were the priorities back then. Because of this children were disconnected from their families and from the first generation culturally, they had their own lives and had other friendships outside. These were naturally not positive but rather negative, such as gangs. There are many gangs composed of children who are originally from Turkey but grew up here. Thousands are using drugs, more than 2000 are in prisons, more than 40 ended up killing themselves because of involvement in these relations, many died because of car races or mafia-gang relations. Of course this is because of the disconnection between the first and second generations. Naturally since 2005 there is a growing need to connect the second generation youth with their families and their past. We did some work on that. As EACC, one of the biggest steps we took was the inclusion of Alevism into the English education system (Interview 3, London).

Currently the EACC has over 3000 members and ten branches in Britain, which was united under the Britain Alevi Federation in 2014. The newly founded Britain Alevi Federation is also a member of the European Confederation and would like to pursue these relations and cooperate to achieve their common goals.

2.9. Alevi opening and the JDP - Alevi relations

Alevis in Europe reside in a liberal environment where they can mobilise for recognition and are not directly affected by policies in Turkey; however, they remain interested in homeland politics and its consequences for Alevis in Turkey. Since its electoral success in 2002, the Justice and Development Party (hereafter JDP) has prompted public debates and policies about the Alevi issue in Turkey, and these have stimulated diverse reactions in the Alevi community both at home and abroad. Therefore the JDP's Alevi discourse and their proposal of an 'Alevi opening' are worthy of examination.

Through populist policies and discourse coupled with economic neoliberalism and social conservatism, the JDP appealed to a large section of the Turkish population. As Heper (2005) argues, the military and other secularist groups were suspicious of a hidden Islamist

agenda due to some party members' Islamic background. Being a country that already embraces conservative values, there is a concern among many Alevis as well as secular minded Sunnis that the JDP government would transform Turkish society into an even more conservative one. Esmer's (2012) study on social values[13] in Turkey demonstrates that Turkey is the most religious country in Europe and is highly supportive of conservative values as criteria that measure religiosity, political views and attitudes towards gender. Consequently, Alevis and secular Sunnis alike became cautious of the rise of a conservative political party.

Previous governments did not deal with Alevis' or any other belief community's demands systematically. Although some budget was provided for *cemevi* construction in the 1990s (Şahin 2005), and politicians participated in cultural events such as the Hacı Bektaş Commemorative and Cultural Festival, they failed to recognise the *cemevi* as a place of worship. In its initial years, the JDP signaled plans for introducing some rights for Alevis, and in 2007 an 'Alevi opening' (*Alevi açılımı*) was announced. Reha Çamuroğlu, a parliament member from the JDP and himself an Alevi, suggested reforms such as founding an administrative unit for Alevis connected to the Prime Minister, founding an Alevi Institute, defining the status of the *cemevi*, subsidizing the *cemevi*'s water and electricity expenses, providing wages to Alevi *dedes*, the abolition of mandatory religion classes and making relevant changes in school textbooks for religion and ethics classes. After a series of workshops very few of these demands could be realized. The workshops and Alevi opening did not solve Alevis' problems and this caused further complications such as hyper visibility and their becoming media targets. By 2012, one-off attacks and insults against Alevis

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[13]　His study also indicates regional differences about these attitudes; while the Western parts of Turkey and Istanbul are more liberal, the religious and nationalist influence is much higher in the central and eastern parts of Turkey.

increased; according to one media report, nine attacks occurred against various Alevi individuals' homes and *cemevi* in 2012 alone (Zirh 2013).

Alevis' increasing public visibility in Turkey over recent years did not translate into the gaining of rights. The JDP's attempts to control the discourse over what real Alevism is and their division of good (cooperating) and bad (not cooperating and critical) Alevis eventually blocked communication channels (Akdemir 2015). Even the first phase of JDP-Alevi relations was not positive or neutral to begin with since Alevis regard the right-wing politicians as being responsible for the violent attacks against them[14]. Relations became tenser in the following years of JDP rule since, as Özkul (2015) argues, the state's discursive claims of democratization did not necessarily result in democratic mechanisms.

Many Alevi institutions' representatives in Turkey were highly critical of the government's Alevi politics. For instance, Hüsniye Takmaz, chairwoman of the Alevi Associations Federation, argued that the opening failed because the JDP was insincere and only aimed to fulfill the EU pressured-demands:

> Why did it [the opening] fail? Because they weren't sincere to begin with. If you do something just to fulfill someone's demands, you can't succeed. You have to believe in the change that you are making. (Interview 6, Istanbul)

Doğan Bermek, from the CEM Foundation that represents a central right position, was also critical of the government's attitude but argued that the workshops consolidated Alevis' unification. He stated that:

> [I]t was not clear why the workshops were held. But still something grew there. For example, it occurred that these Alevis although they seem to be fragmented and fighting amongst each other, when they sat at that table they were one voice. That

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[14]   For instance, after the Sivas massacre in 1993, Sevket Kazan, who served then as the Minister of Justice in the coalition government of the Islamist Welfare Party, volunteered to be the perpetrators' defense lawyer (Şahin 2005, 481).

maybe was the biggest disappointment for those who organised the workshops. (Interview 5, Istanbul)

The aftermath of the opening was a difficult time because the *cemevi* was still not recognised as a place of worship and other Alevi demands regarding the end of discrimination were not addressed. An additional difficulty at this time has been the war in Syria and the sectarian cleavages in the Middle East and especially sectarian insecurity, which ties the Alawites of Syria to the regime (Goldsmith 2011). Turkey's Alevis are mainly against the war and concerned about the increasing power of the Syrian opposition which received support from the Turkish government. Alevis' worries about the sectarian violence and its possible infection of the Turkish side of the border was interpreted by the government as Alevis' alleged support for the al-Assad regime (Phillips 2012). For instance, Hüseyin Çelik, an MP from the JDP and former Minister of Education and Culture, implied such a link between the Syrian government, Turkey's Alevis and the opposition party leader, Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu who is Alevi:

> Why do you defend the Baath regime in Syria? Actually some other bad things come to my mind. The Baath regime in Syria is based on a fifteen per cent population. Is Mr Kılıçdaroğlu protecting Syria due to sectarian affinity? This comes to our minds too.

Following this statement, the Alevi Bektaşi Federation demanded an apology from Çelik and the JDP and invited them to, 'instead of giving democracy and equality lectures to the Middle East, practice this in their own country' (*Bianet* 2011).

The summer of 2012 was an eventful time due to an attack on Alevis in Malatya and an interview with then Prime Minister, Erdoğan, created further reactions from many Alevi organisations at the time of my fieldwork in Istanbul. In the interview Erdoğan discussed the illegal construction of a particular *cemevi* in Istanbul and expressed his views on Alevi faith and its relations to Islam. He stated that the *cemevi* did not have a construction permit and was built as a 'freak' (*ucube*) – words that created much grievance amongst the Alevi

public. In the same interview he stated that Alevis are not unified on whether they are Muslim or not and he argued that if Alevis are Muslims their place of worship should be the mosque. He continued:

> There are some who say Alevis are Muslims. Some say they are not. At the same time there are atheists among them. If we are Muslims as an Alevi, then Muslims' place of worship must be one. I do not say I am against *cemevi*. For example Turcoman Alevis go to the mosque.

These words are indicative of the Turkish state's strategy that so far denies Alevis' recognition or rights; if they are Muslim they do not need an additional place of worship, the *cemevi* may remain as cultural centres; but if they are non-Muslim they should declare it. Since neither of these is sought by the community members, the *cemevi* issue remains unresolved.

3. The transnational social space of Alevis in London

In this chapter I examine the transnational activities practiced by Alevis in Britain. My findings reveal that a transnational lens is crucial to the understanding of contemporary Alevi identity since its components have been assembled from Turkey and being Alevi emerges as an imagined community that extends to immediate contacts. Thus, migrant Alevis still express a concern for the Alevi community who remain in Turkey. In addition, migration experience helps Alevis to compare their rights in the sending and receiving countries. The opportunities and networks that emerged as a result of international migration help them be more vocal about their identity. Consequently, their cross-border relations comprise both transnational and supranational links, which this chapter sets out to map. In addition it is necessary to see the interactions between the two levels; Alevis' symbolic ties and homeland based identities motivate them to be active in defending human rights and to engage in relevant political organisations through lobbying and filing lawsuits. Moreover the supranational institutions' support strengthens Alevis' claims on the transnational level.

Alevism, which is promoted by the EACC and many others among the Alevi community in London, is not only a spiritual path for the individual but also regarded as a guideline for egalitarian and peaceful living in society. It therefore has political implications such as solidarity with other oppressed groups and a stance against injustice. They promote Alevism as an encompassing equality ideal that transcends one's own group and extends to humanity as an integral part of their faith. Their continuing engagement with the problems of Alevis worldwide can be explained through this. Furthermore, the transnational social space is not only a bridge between the UK and Turkey as to a lesser extent it involves relations with other European countries such as Germany and France, which have substantial Alevi populations. However, these extended relations including more than two

nation states are limited to the community centres' organisational elite and to the *dedes* who have followers (*talip*) around the world and travel frequently to conduct *cem* ceremonies.

While previous research on Euro-Alevis from a transnational point of view focused mainly on the organisational level (Massicard 2007; Sökefeld 2008), in this study I am interested in both institutions and individuals. Therefore, I see Alevis' transnational social space as shared and made possible through the participation and imagination of both the organisational leaders and ordinary community members. In addition, I have sampled among people who take part in transnational activities to varying degrees or not at all. This way I aim to draw a more accurate picture of the transnational social space of Alevis.

3.1. Defining transnational social space

Seeing society as synonymous with the nation state limits our understanding as nowadays many social issues such as social inequalities, environmental problems, international migration or the flow of capital, people and culture occur in a global scope and require a broader perspective. Both migrants and non-migrants take part in 'sustained ties of persons, networks and organisations across the borders across multiple nation states ranging from little to highly institutionalised forms' (Faist 2000b, 189) to varying degrees. It is particularly important for persecuted minority groups, such as Alevis, to make use of the resources gained after international migration in order to improve their rights. In this transnational search for identity and rights Alevism exceeded the boundaries of a small geography and owes much to migration and the social networks it fostered.

Alevis in European countries engage in diverse transnational practices and have ties with Turkey as well as other countries of immigration (Zirh 2008). Predominantly, human rights violations and domestic politics in Turkey continue to be great concerns for Alevis; these problems are addressed by the numerous organisations founded by migrant Alevis, in

addition to expanding their rights and public visibility in the countries of immigration. Therefore, it is a fair assumption that methodological nationalism cannot explain recent trends in migration and the transnational approach that calls for the 'de-naturalization of categories such "nation" and "space"' is more useful (Amelina and Faist 2012, 1708).

I assert that understanding ordinary people's participation in transnational activities and how they give meaning to the Alevi identity is important, yet I found that individuals' actions are limited in their transformative potential: they are merely about keeping in touch with family and friends or are composed of irregular economic connections or personal and symbolic ties. On the other hand, organisations' activities (mainly those of EACC and recently BAF) have further transformative potential to improve the Alevis' situation in Turkey because they are more systematic. Individuals participate in these on varying levels or not at all. As a persecuted minority, Alevis' organised transnational activism is motivated by the aim of social transformation. The transnational practices and links are the social spaces for Alevis to reflect on and manifest their Alevi identity (and possibly other identities).

Diagram 1 – UK Alevis' supranational and transnational links
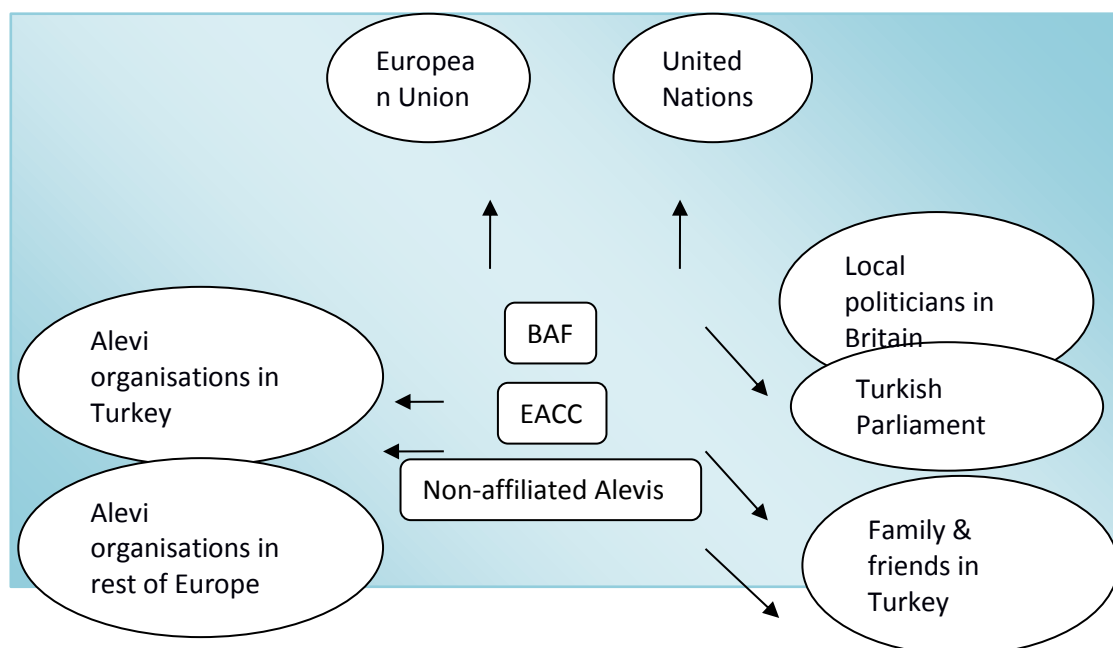
Diagram 1 shows UK Alevis' relations with various supranational, national and local actors (official institutions, organisations or individuals). The vertical arrows demonstrate the links with above-nation state institutions such as the UN and EU, whereas the horizontal arrows point to the transnational links on a national level and below, such as those with the Turkish parliament or local Alevi organisations in Turkey. These two levels are separated for the purpose of simplicity; however in practice they interact with one another. The human rights discourse that is embraced by the supranational institutions is also promoted by the Alevi community and used in their relations on the transnational level. The experiences of having lived in Britain, political engagements and being a double minority provide the community with an awareness of human rights, more so than many other Alevi groups in Turkey who share the same discourse of rights yet have fewer opportunities to connect with the supranational institutions. UK Alevis not only strategically use this framework and organisations but also actively incorporate it in other levels of their transnational links that they use in order to gain recognition and cultural rights. Identity is at the core of their mobilisation; Alevis employ a human rights discourse and emphasise the principles of democracy and egalitarianism, which they claim to be inherently present in their belief system and culture. This factor causes the two levels to interact.

3.1.1. The supranational level

Alevis in Britain retain symbolic and actual connections with the homeland and still possess ethnic and religious identities derived from Turkey. They are concerned about their family members back in Turkey, which motivates a desire to enhance rights and recognition for the Alevi community. The activities and links that involve creating awareness of violations of human rights suffered by Alevis, campaigning about their current demands, lobbying on the European Union level to realise these demands, filing lawsuits to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) and turning to supranational institutions such as

the EU and the UN at times of political conflict are among Alevis' supranational engagements. Immigrants' activities usually have a small territorial scope that consists of national and homeland-based relations (Koopmans and Statham 1999), yet Alevis use a broader set of links that include supranational institutions.

As a consequence of the decoupling of rights and national identity, human rights regimes became universally more available and include migrants and minorities in developed countries **(Soysal 2000).** Euro-Alevis actively used this opportunity. The organised Alevi movement increased Alevis' public visibility in the receiving countries. Alevis gained rights which are compatible with the legal system and multiculturalism policy of the particular country. In Germany, for instance, Alevis' demands for religious expression and freedom are handled locally on the level of each federal state (*Bundesland*), while in Austria Alevis are recognised under the name of the Islamic Alevi Congregation. In Britain, Alevis have their community centres and have achieved representation in the curriculum of religious education classes in the elementary and middle schools of North London where they mainly live. In addition to immigrant politics and gaining recognition in the receiving countries, Alevis in Europe make use of their opportunities in order to translate their recognition in the immigration countries to Turkey. British Alevis have certain assets that they can use in their organised activities across borders: for instance, the community centres' leaders can speak English which is an international language. Also the community members' background in Kurdish and/or leftist politics back in Turkey allow them to be familiar with human rights and supranational institutions and provide them with the know-how that can be translated into actual practice. Another crucial asset is the dual citizenship that many of the community members benefit from. British citizenship or residentship rights enable them to travel freely and use political, social and cultural rights in Britain. İsrafil Erbil explains:

Those people who arrived here between '80 and '90, almost 99.9% of those are citizens. Dual citizens, I mean nobody gave up their Turkish citizenship. Among those maybe some did not register their children who were born here for Turkish citizenship but I have never heard of anybody erasing their existing Turkish citizenship. A small minority within the people who arrived between '90 and 2000s experience residence permit problems, status problems. This is because the asylum seeking process has changed here. Seeing the experiences of Germany, England began to take some measures. Maybe 10% of those who arrived between '90 and 2000 experience uncertainty, or they were rejected and then appealed and therefore are still waiting. Those who were accepted after the 2000s as refugees, it can't be more than 10%, these are mainly through marriage or the Ankara agreement (Interview 41, London).

3.1.1.1. Involvement in immigrant politics and lobbying

Euro-Alevis mobilise for various causes in the migration countries. For instance, Servet Demir, previous chairman of France Alevi Federation, explains the two main areas of activity for Euro-Alevis. He was visiting Turkey at the time of my fieldwork and in our short interview shared his experiences of Alevi communities in Europe. He argues that Euro-Alevis are active in both gaining recognition and visibility for Alevi identity and strive for more general rights such as social, cultural and political rights for immigrants (Interview 14, Istanbul). British Alevis also fit into this pattern; in addition to working at improving Alevis' rights in the host country and in Turkey they are also involved in immigrants' and working class rights.

The EACC regards British politicians as potential allies for raising awareness of the Alevis' situation among the wider European public and their political institutions. Therefore, public relations with the British and other European politicians are of utmost importance; the EACC invites local politicians to community centre events and informs them about Alevi culture and the conditions Alevis experience in Turkey. The transnational links therefore contribute to the community's integration to the host society's political institutions (Morawska 2011, 180). As Ehrkamp and Leitner (2003) argue, citizenship should be

understood as an active practice of civic engagement rather than passive membership. A small number of Alevis in Britain, the organisational leaders, actively use political membership in multiple states and engage in the receiving society's political community.

An example of this was the Hacı Bektaş Youth Festival in London in October 2012. Meg Hillier, Labour Party MP for the London Borough of Hackney, was invited by the EACC to the event in order to give a speech. Hillier addressed the problems of Alevi people in Turkey and stated that the Turkish government has to deal with discrimination against Alevis urgently if it wishes to become an EU member state (Fieldnotes 13.10.2012, London). Furthermore, the annual Alevi summer festival in Hackney opens with a reception at Parliament and in 2013 MPs Meg Hillier and Diane Abbott hosted the EACC representatives. In their speeches they supported the Alevis' cause and stated that they recognise Alevis' cultural rights.

The EU has become a crucial framework for Alevis' demands so far, since Turkey has been trying to become a member state and needs to fulfill certain criteria such as tackling human rights issues and issues relating to minority populations (Citrin and Sides 2004). The European Commission progress reports frequently mention Alevis among other ethnic and belief communities in Turkey. Issues such as mandatory religious education and the state's lack of recognition and support for *cemevi* are reported elsewhere ("ECRI Report on Turkey" 2011). The European Commission report in 2010 presented a sign of hope due to its timing when the ruling Justice and Development Party had just started a democratic initiative concerning minority issues which also included Alevis. However, later reports suggest that Alevis' rights had not improved. The 2011 and 2012 reports discuss similar concerns in addition to the problems of the marking of Alevis' houses and job market discrimination. For instance the 2013 report explains Alevis' condition in detail:

No concrete steps have been taken to follow up the opening in relations with the Alevi community in 2009. Cem houses were not officially recognised as places of worship and Alevis experienced difficulties in establishing new places of worship. The Turkish Presidency of Religious Affairs (Diyanet) took the view that mosques are the only place of worship in Islam. This view was repeated by senior Turkish officials and used in courts. Alevi groups have been critical about the information on Alevis in the revised religious culture and ethics textbooks. Alevis' perception is that they are discriminated against, including in the civil service and the education system. There were clashes surrounding the decision to co-locate a mosque and a cem house in one area of Ankara. ("Turkey 2013 Progress Report" 2013)

İsrafil Erbil, the former chairman of the EACC, commented on these reports and said that the teaching of Alevism in school textbooks was problematic and other problems persist.

We of course didn't want that. It took place in the EU progress reports in 2012 as well. This is not the kind of Alevism that Alevis want. Apart from that the *cemevi* is still not legal, it is still not accepted as a place of worship and this is approved on the basis of some information given by the Directorate of Religious Affairs to the Supreme Court which is supposed to be independent and compatible with the international legal norms (Interview 3, London).

Erbil's comments indicate the links between Alevi organisations and supranational institutions. His statement is interesting because of the manner in which he frames the problems and solutions. First of all he is aware of the European Union's progress reports on Turkey and the sections that specifically pertain to Alevis. This awareness itself reveals a link with the supranational institutions. Second, the awareness that stems from the supranational connections shapes the demands for the recognition of Alevis' rights on a transnational level when communicating with the Turkish state. Erbil argues that they demand that Alevis' rights are dealt with in a secular, legal framework rather than being based on the statements of Diyanet, which is, in many Alevis' eyes, biased in favour of Sunni Islam. Subsequently, British Alevis not only mention the EU progress reports as leverage against the Turkish state but also incorporate this framework in voicing their expectations of the Turkish state (expecting the Supreme Court to be free from DRA's influence, reach decisions independently and comply with international law).

3.1.1.2. Legal battles for identity cards and cemevi

Alternative political memberships challenge the nation states' legitimacy and sovereignty. Soysal argues that 'the individual transcends the citizen' (1994, 142) and transnational arrangements which are grounded in human rights discourse proliferate (1994, 149). This has developed in the post-war European context and the 'supranational institutions and discourses have an impact on nation state citizenship' (Faist 2000b).

The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) is one of these transnational reference points for claiming human rights once domestic law is exhausted. It deals with human rights violations when the domestic laws fall short of protecting individuals. Two significant issues for Alevis in Turkey have already been taken to the ECHR: the case of Işık vs Turkey regarding ID cards in Turkey and the case of Zengin vs Turkey regarding the abolition of/exemption from mandatory religion classes at schools. Both decisions were made in Alevis' favour. These transnational activities are conducted by non-migrants yet the court decisions strengthen Alevis' demands worldwide because they show that Alevis' demands on the Turkish state are in harmony with international law.

The links with supranational institutions can be conducted from different places and help the Alevi communities to demand cultural rights and recognition from the Turkish state but are limited to only a few Alevi organisations. Doğan Bermek from the CEM Foundation explained the details of a case in which he struggled to use both the domestic law and ECHR in order to gain funding for the electricity expenses of a *cemevi*. He demonstrated the importance of cooperation and taking action:

> There is no one in the public who says 'let's not give anything to Alevis'. Maybe only the cruelest parts of Sunnis who benefit from this system… They want to continue oppressing Alevis. Well, we say, if you give (rights), give them to everyone, if not, don't give them to anyone. But we, Alevis, were not able to follow our rights. We are afraid. Don't be fooled by all those Alevi organisations, when you ask someone to file a lawsuit, they are scared. In 2008 there was a law, the Law on Regulating the

Energy Market. In the last minute they added an article to it. The Directorate of Religious Affairs pays the electricity expenses of places of worship where people conduct communal prayers and which are free to enter. I told all *cemevis* by founding an Equal Rights Commission and organising meetings in Malatya, Elazığ, Eskişehir, Sivas and Istanbul, we told them that you have such a right. Go and apply to the Religious Affairs. They will probably deny your right. This is a legal right. Then immediately go to the nearest court and tell them this is your right. Maybe some courts might decide in our favour. You know, not even one of them applied for this. Only the Yenibosna Cemevi that belongs to the CEM Foundation, now this case is in the European Court of Human Rights. If the others had applied with me when I told them, we would have 20 cases in the ECHR. Or maybe we wouldn't have needed that at all, maybe one judge somewhere in Turkey would decide in our favour. Alevis are in a silly situation where they don't get the rights that they actually can (Interview 5, Istanbul).

Supranational institutions' decisions made in favour of Alevis are put forward as evidence that the Turkish state should grant Alevis' rights. Moreover, this struggle for rights is seen as an integral part of being Alevi, therefore there is an expectation that the other Alevi organisations must also strive for their rights. In such discussions, respondents usually quote the words of Imam Ali: 'If you remain silent to injustice, you lose your dignity along with your rights'. Alevi terminology and theology is also blended with the activism.

Moreover the problem with identity cards in Turkey is a transnational problem for those holding Turkish passports either as dual citizens or as Turkish citizens residing abroad. The problem stems from the mandatory expression of one's religion on the ID cards. In Turkey, for every newborn the parents need to apply to the authorities and issue an ID card. On these cards there is a section for religion and it is automatically filled as 'Islam', except for the legally recognized minorities (Jewish and Christian people).

Figure 6. Turkish ID cards (sample)

The Sinan Işık vs Turkey case highlights the ID cards problem and their enforced declaration of religion section. Işık, who is a resident Turkish citizen had filed a lawsuit in the ECHR in 2005 demanding to have Alevi written in the space for religion on his card: he eventually won the court case. In addition to deciding in favour of Işık, the court also highlighted an important issue about the freedom not to disclose one's religion:

> The Court held that there had been a violation of Article 9 of the Convention, which had arisen not from the refusal to indicate the applicant's faith (Alevi) on his identity card but from the fact that his identity card contained an indication of religion, regardless of whether it was obligatory or optional. The Court underlined that the freedom to manifest one's religion had a negative aspect, namely the right not to be obliged to disclose one's religion. ("Freedom of Religion" 2015, 2)

However, the decision of the ECHR was not implemented by the Turkish authorities; the space for religion on the identity cards can be left blank upon request but being registered as Alevi is still not possible. Yusuf, a middle aged Kurdish Alevi living in North London, who is also on the administrative board of the London *cemevi*, explains his discontent about the practice in Turkey and how he tried to change his ID card:

Y: I wanted them to write Alevi, it was rejected for example.

A: Was it something that always bothered you or after you lived abroad for a while?

Y: After I became aware of my identity, it did. Why would they without the permission of my family… almost like being stamped, honestly I felt like a commodity. I don't want to be stamped […]' (Interview 30, London).

Yusuf told how he had visited the Turkish embassy in London and the local registration office in Turkey, in order to have the word 'Islam' replaced with 'Alevi'. He was informed that he first needed to file a lawsuit. He is now organizing this with other Alevi people in London who also wish to change the wording on their identity cards. He has so far found fifteen people to support his cause and is looking for more people to file a lawsuit against Turkey and is planning to take it to the ECHR if necessary. He argues that there are more people who would like to change their ID and that collective action will be more powerful.

3.1.1.3. The Syrian war, Turkish domestic politics and the Alevi position:

Although the EACC is mainly interested in issues pertaining to Alevi people and to Turkey's domestic politics, the civil war in Syria attracted huge public attention among Alevis in Britain. As the war broke out, Turkish foreign policy towards Syria changed from a decade of peaceful cooperation to conflict (Sax 2013). It escalated in four stages: 'trying to persuade Assad to reform; cutting diplomatic ties; supporting regional and international political solutions; and, supporting and aiding Syria's political and armed opposition' (Phillips 2012). In this conflict the Alawite[15] identity of the Syrian president Bashar al-Assad and the fact that the majority of the opposition to his regime is Sunni resulted in sectarian tension. The Arab Alevis in Turkey, living close to the Syrian border, have an affinity with Syria's Alawites; there are ethnic and religious connections between Turkey's Arab Alevis

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[15]   I use the term *Alawite* to refer to the group in Syria as it is often used in literature to distinguish them from Turkey's Alevis.

residing near the border and the Alawite population in Syria. In addition to this historical connection, secular Alevis are concerned that the fall of the secular al-Assad regime will empower the Islamist groups in the Middle East and embolden JDP's conservatism in Turkey (Phillips 2012). In Turkish domestic politics Erdoğan's discourse presented Alevis as natural allies of Assad due to sectarian affinity and as internal enemies, although Alevis are against the war but not necessarily supporting the Syrian government[16] (Phillips 2012; Zirh 2013).

British Alevis had similar concerns about the sectarian tone of the conflict and its reflection in Turkish domestic politics. The topic was discussed frequently by the community centres' attendees who maintained an anti-war position, although I did not observe them displaying any sympathy or support for the Assad regime. My research participants expressed their anxiety about the Syrian opposition and the sectarian violence and accused Erdoğan and his government of being too tolerant of the violence against Alevis. In addition, there had been several attacks on Alevi individuals or *cemevi* at this time (such as marking their doors with an X, which resembles the attacks prior to the Maraş massacre). Consequently there has been a set of protests in Turkey and several European cities starting in 2012 in order to protest against the situation and raise awareness of the violation of Alevis' rights.

These issues were the subject of protest in a large rally that took place during my fieldwork on 16 February 2013. Following a series of large scale demonstrations in other cities such as Istanbul, Ankara and Berlin since 2012, the Alevis in London with the cooperation and,

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[16]   According to Syria news aggregator Syria Deeply's poll among a small number of protesters later at Gezi Park, the protestors expressed negative thoughts on Erdoğan's Syria policy and "demographically, Erdoğan's most vocal opponents are Alevis, relatives of Syria's Alawites, who view the opposition as hijacked by extremists and the survival of the Assad regime as the lesser of two evils" (Sax 2013, 51).

although limited, participation of Alevis from elsewhere gathered in Trafalgar Square, London, to demand equal citizenship. They addressed various issues and called for the recognition of their places of worship in Turkey, the cessation of public discrimination against them and stopping the government's support for the Syrian opposition which includes radical Islamist groups. The intentions of the protest could also be read from the banners that declared 'we want democracy', 'no war', 'equal citizenship', and 'no to assimilation' and were aimed predominantly at the Turkish state. The protest was organised by the EACC and many non-affiliated Alevi people while other community centres (such as hometown associations and Kurdish community centres) also participated. Approximately 1000-2000 people gathered in the square and it was symbolically important in its getting people out of the neighborhoods of North London, where they mainly live, and encouraging them to go to the city centre in order to gain more public visibility. Such forms of protest enable the community to move geographically and motivate them to engage more with the receiving society. By moving out of their social enclaves, they aimed to raise awareness on a larger scale. Eventually the protest was covered by one of Turkey's biggest newspapers, *Milliyet*. The news report repeated the Alevis' demands mentioned above and reported Erbil's words, who said that Erdoğan denies Alevism and does not know the facts about Alevism **(Çam 2013)**.

Figure 7-9. Trafalgar Rally

In addition to the protest, the Britain Alevi Federation (BAF) later sent an open letter to the United Nations Security Council on 17 February 2014 to express their concerns about security due to the frequent attacks in the region and the responsibility of the Turkish government. The letter reads:

> Alevis and all Alevi organisations residing in different countries around the world are witnessing the massacre and murder of Alevi people residing at the village of Maan, near the city of Hama in Syria in the hands of Islamic fundamentalists and Sharia supporting terrorists. Similar massacres were also carried out by these terrorists supporting jihad at Latakia Alevi villages previously. It is not a secret anymore that these jihad supporters are given all back up by Turkey. ("AleviNet İngiltere Alevi Kültür Merkezi ve Cemevi" 2014)

In this letter the BAF also demanded that 'action must be taken against the current government and its leader Recep Tayyip Erdoğan on the basis of providing weapons and ammunition to Al-Qaeda and Al-Qaeda connected terrorist organisations in Syria' and they 'requested that 'the United Nations Security Council attain prosecutors to begin the relevant investigations'.

The UN framework provides opportunities for oppressed groups to raise demands from states when the nation states are not sufficiently responding to their problems or when the latter are seen as the very cause of the problems. In this document, the BAF refers to the specific laws that are binding for Turkey and claim that action must be taken against the Turkish government. A concern for the welfare of fellow-Alevis on the border, and in the middle of the conflict zone, is the motivation that mobilises UK Alevis to demand the protection of this population. Certain assets that British Alevis have such as speaking English, coming from a political background, and knowledge of the organisational struggle for rights facilitate their connections with the UN. Rather than just protesting against the war, the community leaders take a proactive position and contact supranational institutions.

In a follow up interview in September 2014, I asked Erbil if anything had been achieved as a result of their letters and official complaints; he expressed his disappointment in there being no reply from the UN and that the NATO countries have been ineffective in resolving the conflict.

> There was no reply; we had had an application there. Now, for example, these days NATO countries, leaders of sixty-six countries are coming to Newport, on the third, fourth and fifth of September we will go there and we will have a protest tent, we will camp there. There will be leaders of sixty-six countries including Erdoğan and Obama. [...] Our claim is that now in the Middle East, ISIS, Al Qaida, Al Nusra which are massacring Alevis, are fed by these (NATO) countries, have been used as gendarmes for themselves. (Interview 41, London)

This response is interesting as it challenges not only Turkey's policies but also the Western countries' position *vis-á-vis* the conflict. Another transnational activity that British Alevis participated in was a conference held in the EU parliament on 20 February 2014; this was an opportunity for Alevis residing in European countries to make their voices heard on a higher level than Turkish or British parliaments. The Alevi Federations of Britain, Belgium, Germany, France, Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden, Switzerland and Austria participated in

the conference, which was hosted by Helen Slautre, Head of the Turkey-European Parliament Relations Joint Commission, and Maria Eleni Koppa, Vice Chair. As I argued previously, each Alevi federation is bound by the laws and regulations of the specific nation state where they are established; however, such instances of supranational engagements enable links among Alevi organisations across Europe. These links also provide the opportunity for collective action and cooperation across borders. İsrafil Erbil voiced his opinion of the meeting afterwards on the EACC's website and repeated their demands for recognition and representation in the EU:

> We expressed that from now on Alevis must be known by their Alevi identity, be valued, and that the European administers must recognise and describe us over this identity. Moreover we said we would like to be represented in the European administrative cadres proportionate to our population ("AleviNet İngiltere Alevi Kültür Merkezi ve Cemevi" 2014)

> In addition, he once again addressed the problem of Syria, arguing that Alawites in Syria are stuck between the Assad regime and terrorist groups. In this activism the framework is the supranational organisations and the discourse of universal human rights. Alevis (either as individuals or as institutions) base their demands on this framework and struggle for their rights. The right to security and the representation of identity are at the centre of this activism.

3.1.2. The transnational level

The transnational links are immigrants' engagements with the nation state and below level actors across two or more nation states such as travelling and communicating, organising social and cultural events and economic activities that span different countries. More and more people, either immigrants or not, are involved in such transnational social spaces, whereby their experiences are shaped by multiple nation states.

3.1.2.1. Maintaining ties with the sending country:

Maintaining contact with family and friends living in the sender country is practiced by many migrants and is by no means a completely new phenomenon (Vertovec 2009); however, in recent decades this has been facilitated through the development of digital communication and cheap air travel. These connections have different functions for individuals. Morawska argues that keeping in touch with people in the country of emigration has two functions; 'first they fulfil immigrants' emotional needs and, at the same time, take care of the material or economic interests of the involved parties' (2011, 159). My research participants also had a different combination of these factors in addition to the motivation of gaining recognition for Alevi identity.

Cheap phone calls and air travel facilitate contemporary immigrants' opportunities for travelling and communication. Among thirty-nine of my respondents who reside in Britain, two reported that they exchange phone calls every day with Turkey (the chairman and a newly migrated young woman whose immediate family resides in Istanbul). The remainder of respondents said they sometimes (nearly once a week) or occasionally (once a month, or when something significant happens) call family members in Turkey. Those with close relatives or family members still living in Turkey make phone calls more frequently. Internet use is limited to using social networks and preferred by younger migrants.

Sending remittances is not a very regular activity for Alevis in Britain: many respondents said that they only do so when there is an urgent need from their relatives in Turkey, and that since the cost of living in Britain is too high, they have barely enough money to send home. Some of my participants also stated that they used to send money back to relatives more often in the first years of migration in order to cover their debt or to pay back relatives who had helped them financially to emigrate, but these practices had gradually faded.

The low frequency of sending remittances can be explained through chain migration; many immigrants arrived in the UK either with their immediate families or were eventually followed by them. The traditional family structure in Turkey and the expectations surrounding family life influence chain migration and family unification. During my fieldwork I did not encounter any women who left their husbands and children in Turkey in order to migrate to the UK. However, it is socially acceptable for married men to leave their families behind to look for jobs abroad. Even in this case, after a few years they bring their families to the country of immigration. Since the families are eventually united, there is less need for personal contact with Turkey. They call their extended families sometimes or occasionally using cheap phone cards or keep in touch using new technologies such as free applications in smart phones or social media.

The frequency of visits to Turkey, on the other hand, is connected to the economic wellbeing of the individuals since the travel costs are especially high for large families. Most people express a longing for their hometowns and some even plan to return in order to spend their old age in their villages. Among the thirty-nine migrant Alevis in my sample, thirteen said they visit Turkey once a year. Fourteen people did not report such frequency but mentioned they had returned to Turkey since they arrived in Britain. Five people said they go once every few years and only six have never returned to Turkey; two had arrived recently and four of them had ongoing court cases in Turkey and were concerned about the threat of detention. Migrants' legal status and economic well-being influence their chances to travel back and forth. For example Mehmet's case which I presented in Chapter two is very indicative of the early years of asylum experience, during which the applicant's mobility is limited. The chairman of the EACC was an exception in travelling frequently to Turkey and elsewhere for either personal reasons or to participate in the Alevi organisations' events around four or five times a year. He stated that he had travelled to other European countries over thirty times since 2009 and keeps in touch with the other

European Alevi organisations daily or every few days via telephone and email (Interview 31, London).

3.1.2.2. Commemorative events:

In the UK, local involvement comprises a large portion of Alevis' transnational practices. The transnational social space is the enactment of different ties and practices that connect various places and these do not necessarily involve the nation state at large (Olwig 2003). As I will demonstrate below, transnational links may not be directly with Ankara/parliament or with Turkish society in general but with the local Alevi organisations and local people in a particular region. These commemorative events stem from the need to raise awareness about the violence that Alevi community has faced in the past and to prevent such incidents from happening again. The demands of human rights and equal citizenship constitute a basis for such activism.

With time and repetition these activities have become standardised in both European countries and Turkey. As Langer et al argue: "These rituals derived their standardized elements and general layout largely from mediatized sources, including magazine reports, radio and television broadcasts, Internet home pages, and YouTube representations of the commemoration ceremonies. Media representations of large commemoration festivals organized by the German and European Alevi Federations served as a source for designing commemoration rituals in the local European communities and back in Turkey" (2011, 113).

One of these events is the annual commemorations of the Maraş massacre in which over one-hundred people were killed in 1978 (Sinclair-Webb 2003). Remembering the Maraş massacre is important for Alevis in Britain because a large section of them migrated from Maraş. Commemorative events can be carried out in Britain easily because there is no restriction on non-violent demonstrations. In Turkey, however, similar commemorations

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are restricted by local authorities. The EACC initiated the commemorations and cooperate with the local organisations in Turkey to carry out the protests.

On 28 November 2012, thirty-four years after the massacre, some fifty to sixty people attended the commemoration program in the *cemevi* to hear news of the commemoration in Maraş. A group of EACC administers including the chairman have visited Maraş every year since 2010 and actively campaign for holding the commemorations in the town centre. Previously the commemorations took place in a distant district of Maraş, called Narlı. The local governor only permitted demonstrations there as Narlı district has a high Alevi population and there would not be counter-protests. However, it is important for Alevis to take the protests to the town centre where the massacre took place and where the majority of the Sunni Turkish population is reluctant to directly face past atrocities. Since 2010, through the initiatives of İsrafil Erbil and the local Alevi activists in Maraş, the commemorations have been held in the town centre[17]. Such cooperation between Alevi organisations in Turkey and abroad makes an interesting case because it made an actual difference for Alevis living in Turkey and pushed the local authorities to acknowledge the protests.

Commemorations are held in various locations each year with activities such as panels and screening of movies/documentaries in the community centres. In the commemoration event in London the *cemevi* administers, *Dede* Mehmet Turan, and a witness to the events shared their sentiments and experiences on the incident and the meaning of remembering Maraş. The *dede* stated that:

> We will continue to commemorate so that new Maraş incidents, Çorum incidents, Gazi, Dersim, Roboski incidents won't happen. We will continue to commemorate

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[17]   The security forces and the local administers continue to restrict the protests though.

so that people will not be killed. We will continue to commemorate, so that they [the victims] will always be in light. (Fieldnotes 28.11.2012)

With these words, he connects the various moments of victimisation in Alevi history to the incident of Maraş and points to the continuity. Interestingly, he mentions the Roboski[18] (Uludere) massacre as well, although its victims were not Alevi. The Alevi identity that is presented in these commemorations expands to allow a comprehensive understanding of state violence against various social groups. Demands for human rights and equality are therefore extended to other oppressed groups beyond Alevis. The *dede*'s speech received applause and I was able to hear the panel attendees talking; they were pleased that he mentioned Roboski, which had received very little media attention at the time.

At the end of the panel session, chairman Erbil thanked all the attendees and stated that their participation made the commemorations meaningful. He said that he regards attendance to such panels and seminars in the same vein as actually going to Maraş and resisting there. This suggests that Alevi transnational social space is imagined beyond physical spaces. The people who do not have the time or resources to travel to Maraş can still commemorate the event in London and their participation is actively encouraged by the organisations.

As Vertovec puts it '[w]hile not bringing about substantial societal transformations by themselves, patterns of cross-border exchange and relationship among migrants may contribute significantly to broadening, deepening or intensifying conjoined processes of transformation that are already ongoing' (2004, 972). Such activities have direct

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[18]   On 28.December.2011 the Turkish army bombed civilians due to a faulty intelligence and thirty-five smugglers lost their lives. The original Kurdish name of the town (Roboski) had been changed to Uludere; the *dede*'s choice of the Kurdish name over the official Turkish name also indicates his political position.

consequences for the situation in the country of emigration. Although the value of the Alevi movement in Turkey is undeniable, the initiatives instigated by Alevis in Britain accelerated the process of gaining permission to commemorate the victims in Maraş town centre.

After the commemoration events in Maraş, EACC's administers emphasised the legal and non-violent approach of their protests and the extension of their cooperation to democratic and revolutionary[19] groups:

> We applied officially 3 months ago to condemn the Maraş massacre and to remember our souls who died. As a result of this application, the commemoration took place in Maraş on 19th December 2010. There were nearly 3000 Alevis, revolutionaries and democratic people in the meeting place. [...] From the beginning of the event, there were noises of drums and sounds of tekbir[20] near the square where the event took place. Police could hardly stop those people who were carrying sticks and who wanted to attack the protesters from the streets that led to the square. These murderous people wanted to kill the protestors the way they killed hundreds of innocent people 32 years ago. All this is proof that Alevis' demands are so right and the vanguards of the Maraş murderers are still not punished. ("AleviNet İngiltere Alevi Kültür Merkezi ve Cemevi" 2014)

The commemorative activities are justified by the idea that they remain victims and still suffer the threat of violence and intolerance in small towns far from the centre. Many community members I observed are aware of the pressure placed on Alevis back in Turkey and now that they have more resources, such as organisations and economic capital, they want to use this in order to improve the Alevi situation.

The EACC plans to build a *cemevi* and culture centre in Yörükselim neighbourhood on the site of a house that was burnt down in 1978 and which is remembered as one of the symbols of the atrocities. Not all local people cooperate with Euro-Alevis in the same way in

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[19]   Revolutionary (Tr. *devrimci*) is frequently used by community members when referring to people who have socialist views.

[20]   *Tekbir* literally means one God and is heard in the protests of Islamist groups, they shout '*Allahu Ekber'*, meaning God is great.

this demonstration of transnational support to Maraş: some local people are reported to be concerned and worried about being stigmatized for allying with the external powers according to visitors' accounts. Alevis in Turkey's small towns still experience pressure so did not wish to be seen with the Alevi group from Britain when they visited Maraş (Fieldnotes, 28.12.2012).

The chairman of the *Pir Sultan Abdal Kültür Dernekleri* (PSAKD) Maraş branch, Salman Akdeniz, also confirms people's fear and suspicion of transnational help. He states that:

> The commemorations sometimes appear from the outside: the local cooperationists and our friends who come from Europe or England, they are perceived as people who come from outside to spoil the game. Actually we are not separate/other than the associations here [in Britain], we are us. This might be an institution on an international level, founded on the basis of the laws here but its reason of existence is our reason of existence there [in Turkey]. (Interview 23, London)

This perspective that views Alevism through human rights and democratic values also determines collaborations. For instance, the partner institution in the Maraş commemorations is the PSAKD, which is known for its socialist outlook. The last sentences of Salman Akdeniz's statement are particularly significant as they highlight the common goals of Alevis residing both in Turkey and elsewhere. Alevis in Britain do not only struggle for recognition in Britain but have also created an identity which transcends its borders and aims to improve their fellow believers' rights in the sending country. Soysal (1994) argues that rights are decoupled from nation state citizenship and become more abstract and, in the Alevis' case, in addition to this the claim of rights is extended to all Alevi people, beyond the scope of a single nation state. This explains the fact that activism extends beyond the borders of the nation states.

In a follow up interview, when I asked Erbil about the Maraş *cemevi* project he explained what had been completed so far:

> We obtained the deed for that; it is a 1100 square meter area. The massacre had taken place in Yörükselim neighbourhood; symbolically we bought the land in that neighborhood. […] Apart from that, for the first time after thirty-five years this summer on 6th August the victims got together in Maraş, under the name of the Yörükselim Festival. The friends who were torn apart thirty-five years ago met. (Interview 41, London)

With regard to the commemoration protests, Erbil states that the tension continues and the illegal commemorations that had been taking place over the previous five years will again be conducted despite the absence of official permission.

Turkey and European countries are different in terms of tolerance for such activism and my research participants in Turkey are also aware of this. When they compare Alevis' activism in Turkey with that abroad, the majority often suggested that 'everything is more relaxed there' referring to Western European countries and argued that basic rights are guaranteed equally for everyone, whereas in Turkey organizing the very same protests or using the same language may threaten someone with the possibility of detention. The organizational elite I interviewed during my fieldwork in Turkey believe that the degree of freedom in European countries helped Euro-Alevis express their identity and mobilize in Europe. Dr. Ali Yaman, a *dede* and also a professor of international relations whom I had a chance to interview during my stay in Hacıbektaş Alevi Culture Festival in Nevşehir, Turkey, explained that the state-religion relations in European countries facilitate Alevis' activism:

> In Europe, there's the *gurbet* factor[21], closeness to the traditions and no state oppression. In terms of state-religion relations, it is left to the communities. Let's take Germany; they have the largest Alevi population. Communities are in charge of religious instruction, the state doesn't interfere. It doesn't give them money.

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[21]   *Gurbet* means any place which is away from home. In this context by *gurbet* factor he means having nostalgic feelings about the sending country.

Because the communities carry out this, Alevis can speak more freely there. Because of that there is a different structure, I mean we can say that Alevis in Europe are more comfortable. But in Turkey there is more assimilation, neighborhood pressure[22] (Interview 3, Nevşehir).

Ahmet Kömürcü, a visiting *dede* who has lived in Germany since 1961, also outlined the facilitating role of the European context in the emergence of public identities based on belief and culture. He suggested that people are connected to both countries. The connections and comparisons influence migrants' understanding of freedom of belief and shape their demands on their country of origin:

Inevitably people here are connected to there: like a tree's roots, they are also connected to here. And although... we have freedom here, for instance since I arrived in Germany I don't pay any church or mosque tax. Because it is separate; if you believe, whichever church you belong to, you pay taxes for them. If you don't believe, you don't pay; you have the freedom of belief. It's not like this in Turkey. As I said before, they allocate money for the DRA which is close to the budget of 5-6 ministries. We don't get anything from that. What else can I say? (Interview 4, London)

Consequently Euro-Alevis can be more vocal in their demands from the Turkish state and are allowed to express their identity in public spaces more easily and more than once a year. For instance, in London a statue of Pir Sultan Abdal was built in Hackney in 2011("Bianet : Madımak Şehitleri Anıtı: Londra'da Bir 'Bellek Noktası'" 2011). Through this statue the sixteenth century mystic poet, one of the seven holy poets of Alevis, is remembered and it is important for the publicly display of Alevi symbols. Now, each year on 2 July the Sivas massacre is commemorated close by the statue. This makes it possible to move the commemorations from the community centres to other public spaces and celebrate the culture in more freedom.

Figure 10. Pir Sultan Abdal Memorial / Stoke Newington, London

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[22]   Neighborhood pressure (*mahalle baskısı*) became a popular term first suggested by Turkish sociologist Şerif Mardin, then became generally accepted to refer to the social pressure against lifestyles which are different from the majority.

3.1.2.3. Petition campaign about the new Constitution:

During my fieldwork one of the large scale activities of the EACC was a petition campaign to raise awareness of the preparation of a new constitution in Turkey. The current constitution was set in place in 1982, two years after the military coup, and reflected the militaristic views of the time. Since then its various articles have been revised several times (2013)

> Secular, social democrat, egalitarian, pluralist… we don't demand that the word 'Alevi' should be mentioned in the constitution, we are not saying that. We're saying that life is made difficult for all those who are not Turkish and Sunni, we are talking about a Turkey where everybody outside of Turkish-Sunnis have to live by hiding themselves. Turkey will shatter this understanding. We are talking about a Constitution that will include people other than Turks and Sunnis, it will include everybody regardless of their ethnic identity, language, colour or gender and will internalise this. It is not possible to say 'add Alevis next to Sunnis and we don't care about the rest'. But as Alevis when we go out to the streets with these demands, we are saying no to a Constitution that is prepared without considering Alevis' sensitivities, we have to say this. But as Alevis, we are not speaking on behalf of Armenians or Roma people; we don't have the right to do that. When we say 'no to a Constitution without Alevis', we say no to a Constitution that denies all cultural differences and ignores them (Interview 31, London).

The EACC raised awareness of this issue with a protest that took place in Manor House, London, and which lasted nearly a month from the end of April to late May. Approximately 7000 petitions were collected in a tent by volunteers who remained there night and day. Later, İsrafil Erbil and some other members of the EACC visited the Turkish parliament to present the signatures to the authorities. Erbil expressed the same demands in his speech to the parliament press chamber on 15 August 2013. He argued that even though Alevis represent a very small minority in England, they have the freedom to establish their institutions on the basis of citizenship or residentship rights. For example, the inclusion of teaching the Alevi faith in British schools (as a pilot project in a few schools in North London) is a big step for Alevis whose similar demands have been ignored in Turkey[23]. Erbil stated his views in the press chamber to some of the Turkish parliament members:

We carried out a petition campaign in a tent, which is something that Alevis in Britain had not done until now, in order to say again in the Turkish parliament that we would like to live as equal citizens in Turkey, which accepts the Universal Human Rights Declaration. […] We, as 250,000 Alevis living in Britain, constitute the .03% of the population numerically. But the fact that we are .03 does not mean that our rights in Britain on the basis of state-citizen relations are violated. Our gains as Alevis living in England for 30 years; our *cemevis* are legally accepted as places of worship. If somebody makes a donation to our *cemevi*, they can deduct it from tax. Each year we organise a reception at the English parliament and present our *semah* in the program. (…) Every soul [*can*] who is connected to the state with the citizenship bond should be able to live with their own values. The new Constitution must guarantee, along with Alevism, all beliefs and their places of worship in the framework of human rights and liberties (*Aleviler, Anayasal Hak İçin TBMM'de* 2013).

By conveying the demands of Alevi people from Britain to Turkey, the EACC not only carries the documents that show a transnational link but also uses the discourse of rights

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[23]   Since the 2011-2012 school year, the Alevi faith is taught in Turkish schools as a short chapter as part of the religious education and ethics class, which predominantly teaches the Sunni version of Islam. The way Alevism is taught is far from Alevis' demands and does not overlap with the Alevi experts' opinions that were taken in the preparation of the curriculum.

arising from citizenship. Erbil frames the Alevi community's demands within the Universal Human Rights Declaration which indicates the awareness of supranational mechanisms to claim rights. In addition he argues that regardless of their population, they have rights as citizens. This is a challenge to the majoritarian understanding in Turkish politics. The acquisition of this discourse is a result of absorbing European political norms and a consequence of transnationalism. The experiences of living in a liberal context and being able to mobilise for identity and rights has become normal for British Alevis; this perspective reflects on their activism regarding Turkey. The fact that Alevis in Britain, even as a much smaller minority group, enjoy cultural rights is normalized and juxtaposed to the situation in Turkey, where they are denied the same rights even though they are a significant population. As Faist (2000b) argues, the multicultural rights in the receiving country further transnationalism and collective consciousness. The availability of rights regimes that protect minorities and other oppressed groups contributes to particularist rights claims. In the above example, Alevis' specific claim for the inclusion of the constitution making process is supported with the liberal ideas and experiences they encountered as a result of migration.

Although people with a strong sense of Alevi identity usually become members of community centres and support their activities, a strong identity does not always require people to actively participate in transnationalism. Research on transnational migration focuses on people and institutions that do organise and/or take part in such practices; however, it is important to understand those who do not take part in these activities despite their collective identity.

The opinions of individuals and community centres regarding Alevism may conflict; in this case they would not participate in the activities under the flag of that particular organisation although they identify with Alevism. The more educated people in my sample

especially appear more critical of the community centres. For example Akın, a highly educated Kurdish Alevi man from the Kırkısrak Culture Centre argued that he is selective in participating in the activities of the EACC. For instance he was critical of the petition campaign's motto: 'No to a Constitution without Alevis', and argued that they should demand a Constitution free from all religions, instead of demanding the inclusion of Alevism in the Constitution[24]. Such individual opinions have a role in sympathizing and collaborating with the community centres. Highly educated people can be more critical of the community centres and act individually while those who lack other forms of social networks go to the community centres more often and support their activities.

3.1.2.4. Symbolic ties:

A transnational social space includes, in addition to an active core group of people, many others who seldom or never join in the mobilisation and collective activities but maintain symbolic ties with the sending country's culture. Faist describes symbolic ties as referring 'to collective identity without necessarily being part of a rather coherent system of practices and meanings of a "whole way of life"' (2000b, 213). Collective Alevi identity and sense of belonging are the core motivations for Alevis' transnational activities. In order to demand political rights such as freedom of expression, the right to build places of worship and seeking protection against discrimination, there needs to be a collective identity for whom these claims are made (Tarrow 2011). It is however difficult to pin down which comes first: does identity affect peoples' mass mobilisation on a transnational level or do the ongoing transnational activities and networks strengthen identities? A collective

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[24] The motto of the campaign was "*No to a Constitution without Alevis*". Erbil said that they do not demand the inclusion of Alevism in the Constitution, but they want secularism and equality for all. There seems to be a lack of consensus on the slogans of campaigns and the community centres did not clarify their demands sufficiently in the slogan.

identity or framework is necessary to help people organise for a cause or for solidarity to be established. However, as in the example of Alevi people, identity is strengthened as there are more opportunities for mobilisation and to build transnational links through community centres and media channels.

Persecuted groups have a stronger sense of community and they struggle for their group's recognition or independence and this may attract the attention of even the next generations or those people who migrated when they were too young to remember the home country. My research deals with migrant Alevis; however, I observed that if the parents are involved, their children inherit a strong sense of persecuted identity. As Bauböck argues 'while transnational political practices in most cases will be limited to the first generation of immigrants, diasporic identities can persist over generations among descendants of nations fighting for independence and international recognition' (2003, 711).

While the more active transnational practices require economic, social and cultural capital and are conducted by a smaller number of people, symbolic ties are more widespread. It is possible to maintain homeland identities and customs without physical mobility and immigrants may have different levels of attachment with the sending and receiving countries. Consequently, their interest in the sending country may develop some time after migration. Faist shows that this is not a linear process and argues 'unlike language, which changes in a linear fashion – the longer you stay, the better you tend to speak it – collective self-identities vary significantly over time' (2000b, 212). Immigrants' identification with the countries of immigration and emigration does not necessarily follow a linear line of gradual decline or increase. An immigrant may gradually assimilate into the host culture, they might identify with the homeland more as they find integration difficult or their interest in homeland culture and politics may increase years after migration. This

explains how identification with Turkey does not gradually lessen for first generation Alevi immigrants, but may strengthen after immigration due to certain key events in the sending country or due to the availability of community centres in the host country. During my fieldwork, among all those I encountered, I could identify only very few who were not at all interested in Turkish domestic politics. The words of Can, a political migrant in his forties exemplify the symbolic attachment of immigrants to homeland politics. Although he had been away from Turkey for thirteen years because of his ongoing asylum process, he was still very much interested in Turkish domestic issues. He related how:

> No matter how long we live here, we still feel close to society in Turkey. We still live the way we would live among them. We think of their problems as our problems. Maybe we don't go there but we aren't cut off from there. […] All the problems in the world concern us. We cannot follow the entire world but we can easily follow something that is in our native language. We also try to follow some global political events. We follow the peace talks or the processes of legalization of Alevis' rights. (Interview 20, London).

Another research participant, Halil, who sought asylum in Britain in 1998 explains why he is still interested in the developments in Turkey. The language of human rights and the supranational institutions' activities are known by the Kurdish Alevi public in Britain and this gives them a strong hand in their activities. Halil visits the *cemevi* frequently and it can be seen that the community centres' political awareness is infiltrated by the ordinary people. He explains how these institutions monitor Turkey:

> Actually in that country because of being discriminated against, I decided to come to England. But if I were in a position where I am loved and respected, why would I come here? My village wasn't burnt but there were others that were. Yes, and it's not just 1 or 2 villages, it is about 4-5000 they are talking about. It is because of the intense war conditions that have been going on in the South East. It is such a wreck. I know this from the weekly reports of the European Parliament, they all mention it. They know it better than you and I do (Interview 9, London).

Interest in the home country's domestic issues is not peculiar to Alevis. In a study conducted by the Home Office where different refugee groups in the UK were compared, it was revealed that the problems in the country they fled from are still a concern. The study

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shows that among the different causes of stress for these refugees, 'events in the home country' is the most common answer (70 per cent) followed by unemployment (27 per cent), future in the UK (18 per cent), and financial problems (14 per cent) (Carey-Wood, Duke, and Karn 1995). This substantial interest in the sending country can be because they migrated due to political reasons and possibly due to their persecuted identities. Most first generation Alevi migrants share this concern for the homeland and are interested in Turkey's domestic politics even if they do not actively take part in any cross border activities. While these developments are highly important for Alevis in London, they do not necessarily activate their physical transnational practices. The interest in homeland politics can remain emotional and symbolic.

For UK Alevis, regular transnational practices are limited to a small group yet the symbolic attachment with Turkey is strong. As an unrecognized belief community in Turkey, they have strong feelings about Turkish domestic issues and follow the news regularly through the Turkish media. A large spectrum of television channels is now available in Turkey and these also broadcast to European countries. Aksoy and Robins (2000) argue that the diversity of Turkish media in European countries does not simply create ghettos for Turkish migrants but provides them with the opportunity to actively contemplate their identities and think across spaces, delinking from a single national reference point. Alevis also have a wide range of media channels available to them and their choices reflect their political positions and worldviews. The Alevi channel YOL TV for instance was considered to be more truthful in representing the news, with a particular focus on Alevi culture and political news relating to Alevis. In addition, anti-government channels such as Halk TV (despite its Kemalist tone) were watched widely in the community centres to gain more insight about the latest developments in Turkey.

3.1.2.5. Gezi Parkı urban revolts:

A very central event during my fieldwork was the Gezi Parkı resistance, which increased interest in Turkish politics for many people. It started in Istanbul as an urban revolt and quickly spread to the rest of the country. The revolts began as a peaceful protest to protect Istanbul's Gezi Park from demolition and the proposed construction of a shopping mall in its place. Police violence and provocative remarks made by Erdoğan, the Turkish Prime Minister at the time, and the rest of the cabinet caused the revolts to escalate (Göle 2013). During these protests eight people died, seven of whom were Alevis. Although it was not an Alevi uprising, as the police violence in deprived Alevi neighbourhoods was harsher it resulted in the killing of more Alevi people than others.

The Gezi Revolt was censored in its first days in the Turkish mainstream media and people were constantly informed through foreign channels and social media. Immigrants from Turkey supported the revolt and took part in demonstrations in London with people from different social groups participating. These were mainly Alevis, intellectuals, students, Kemalists from a Sunni background and to a certain extent Kurds. Community centres in London such as the Alevi Culture Centre and *Cemevi* and *DayMer* supported the revolt and protested against the police violence in Turkey through demonstrations in Trafalgar Square. When Berkin Elvan[25] a fifteen year old boy was hit by a tear gas canister fired by the police and lay in a coma, *DayMer* volunteers collected money to be sent to the child's family to cover the hospital expenses and also contacted the EACC for collaboration.

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[25] Berkin Elvan was a poor Alevi family's son living in Istanbul. After being shot he remained in a coma for 269 days and lost his life in March 2014. Almost a year after the initial revolt, Berkin's death aroused another set of protests against the police violence and against the government.

Figure 11. Gezi Parki Protest

Besides the active support among London Alevis who were already involved in transnational activism, the Gezi Park Revolt strengthened emotional ties with Turkey, giving people hope for the new generation and providing support for democracy in Turkey. Even those who previously lacked interested in Turkey now developed a strong interest in Turkish domestic politics and stated that they had begun to watch the news on social media to learn of the recent developments in Turkey and the consequences for Alevis. This interest in homeland politics, however, did not translate into activism for many of these formerly non-active people. However, it did become a symbolic means of relating to Turkey and homeland identities.

For instance, Derya and Neşe, two sisters in their mid-thirties whom I met in London, explained to me how their interest in Turkey suddenly increased (Fieldnotes

24.06.2013, London). I met them in the *cemevi* when their father was there exhibiting his paintings. During the exhibition I chatted with the family and the daughters invited me to their place. Shortly after our meeting I accepted their invitation and visited them in their house. They were atypical in their lifestyles compared to the majority of Alevi people in North London: living in an upper middle class suburban area of London rather than the Turkish/Kurdish neighborhoods of Hackney or Enfield, speaking English very well even though they migrated as adults and had not been involved in community centres. Neither sister was interested in the Alevi movement or any other political issues and their only remaining ties with Turkey were their parents in the south of the country who often visited them in London. Neşe told me that their parents raised them without a strong sense of Alevi or Kurdish identity because having witnessed the consequences of political involvement in Turkey they wanted to protect their daughters. Consequently the two women were not involved in politics and led a middle class suburban life away from the Turkish/Kurdish population and activism in North London.

When I visited Derya and Neşe it was at the peak of the Gezi Revolts in Turkey. They were watching the developments through Facebook and YouTube and were very enthusiastic about the revolts showing me the various Facebook posts of their friends. They told me that their Alevi identity, which had not been very strong up to that point, gained significance although the protests were not connected to an Alevi uprising. They stated that they regarded Alevism mainly as a culture and a progressive identity. For them, in this context, being Alevi meant being supportive of the protestors, being against the police violence and standing up to injustice. After long years of disinterest in politics in Turkey, the Gezi protests caused them to become interested in their homeland once again. The protests further served to increase not only their awareness of the social change towards conservatism in Turkey, but also of Alevis' oppression. During the time I spent with them, we hardly talked about anything else because the topic was so profound for them. Later I

asked if they participated in any demonstrations or petition campaigns, they stated that they did not, although they had heard the demonstration in Trafalgar Square when they took Derya's daughter to the National Gallery, which is adjacent to the square. In this sense, the ties can remain symbolic and despite having strong feelings about homeland politics in turbulent times, these may not evolve into activism at all or participation in protests may be a one off.

3.2. Global interests and transnationalism beyond Alevi identity:

As I have argued above, Alevi people can belong to other identity categories; in addition to promoting Alevis' recognition and rights, the same people may act upon their Kurdish, Turkish, socialist or democratic identities at different times. Their commitment to these political and social events remains limited mainly to 'particularistic' ethnic and religious feelings of solidarity. Except for raising their voices against the war in Syria and against the Turkish government's role in it, the activism is mainly based on the religious and ethnic identities of the community.

Alevis describe their faith as one that 'looks at seventy-two nations with one gaze' which means seeing all humans as equal no matter what nationality they are and they promote the equality of ethnic and national groups as well as other belief communities. Politically involved Alevis particularly argue that true Alevism requires them to be in solidarity with all those oppressed[26]. Such an interpretation of Alevism makes it possible to move from particularist views and become more involved in global issues. However, acting upon this ideal is limited, especially due to language barriers following immigration. In my observations, I came across people who identified strongly with socialism and consequently embrace various issues regarding the oppressed on a global scale. But the way they took

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[26] This is an opinion highly supported by Ayhan Yalçınkaya in academia and by left-wing Alevi organisations in Turkey and in Europe (2005).

action was through the community centres established by the people from Turkey. Only four of my interview partners, for instance, said that they participated in more global events, giving specific examples such as supporting the student protests in Brazil, protests against austerity measures in Greece, or anti-war protests in London. Awareness and participation in these forms of protest requires a certain cultural capital. As the educational level and English proficiency increases, the level of interest with global matters also expands. For the vast majority, however, the immediate issues they face as immigrants or issues regarding Alevis are more salient and need to be addressed primarily.

Lately, direct involvement by the EACC led to the protest against the Islamic State's massacres of the Ezidi population, a Kurdish speaking ethno-religious group. A platform 'Democratic power unity, Britain' founded by a number of community centres in London, including HTAs, political associations and Britain Alevi Federation, issued a joint press release in the *cemevi* on 1 September 2014 and asked for support in order to help the Ezidi people. They condemned the massacres against Alevi, Kurdish, Turcoman and Ezidi people and started a donation campaign in order to help the victims. Ethnic (Kurdish) and religious (Alevi) sentiments play a role in this interest and activism beyond Turkey; however, as the educational level of community members and engagement with British society increase, their interest extends to non-Alevi and non-Kurdish populations.

3.3. Assimilation and transnationalism:

Assimilation and transnationalism have been two key perspectives in migration research and explain contemporary immigrants' experiences on both institutional and individual levels. These concepts are not mutually exclusive and can occur to varying degrees in the lives of immigrants (Faist 2000a; Morawska 2005). The coexistence of assimilation and transnationalism is linked with immigrants' multiple identities. Homeland identities may lose their significance over time or may become important due to political

developments in the homeland. These influence immigrants' identification with the homeland identity and how much they absorb the culture and norms of the country of immigration.

In order to understand Britain's Alevis, it is necessary to grasp the meaning of the word assimilation (in Tr, *asimilasyon*) in the social context. Assimilation has a twofold meaning for Alevis: on the one hand it refers to blending into the majority Sunni and Turkish culture in Turkey; on the other hand it refers to incorporation into British culture in the international migration context. The negative connotation of the word assimilation mainly comes from the first meaning because Alevis experienced the forced building of mosques in their villages and mandatory religious education classes at schools, which they interpret as assimilation. In this context, transnational practices for the recognition of Alevism and holding onto Alevi identity become forms of resistance from below against assimilation in Turkey.

Regarding the second meaning of the term, the Alevi community in Britain prefers the word 'integration' (in Tr, *entegrasyon*) and argues that it does not require complete denial of their homeland culture. Integration is a more positive term for them as the cultural elements of identity brought from the home country can be preserved while being respectful to British laws and norms in public life. The first generation sees integration as a positive concept and believes that Alevis' integration to Britain is relatively unproblematic. Their integration pattern can be understood as segmented assimilation, where they '[melt] into majority cores in some fields of life while retaining old or developing new forms in others' (Faist 2000a, 318). Alevis are not at odds with Western values or the secular state and they attempt to integrate into the job market either by opening their own workplaces or by taking employment in public and private sectors. In the cultural realm, however, it is

important to protect homeland culture and especially stigmatised identities such as being Alevi and Kurdish.

For the second generation, which was either born in Britain or immigrated with their families at an early age, assimilation is a different process. Although I focus on the first generation, I was also able to observe their children. The second generation is mainly bilingual and some communicate in English more easily than Turkish with most using a mixture of English and Turkish among themselves. Their experience of British culture may allow hybrid cultural forms or push them into clusters with similar people.

Assimilation is regarded as a matter for the second generation while transnationalism is associated with the foreign born (Bradatan, Popan, and Melton 2010). Migrant Alevis do not try to assimilate completely or become British as they completed their socialization process in Turkey and identify fully or mainly with being Turkish or Kurdish. The second generation, however, can potentially assimilate since they have further contact with British society through speaking accent-free English and attending schools/universities in Britain. Assimilation is a more conceivable phenomenon for them in this case. Although they do not experience overt discrimination, they sense that their appearance is a barrier to assimilation and feel excluded in social contexts where the majority is white British. For instance Ceren, who migrated with her family around the age of eleven or twelve, thinks that most of the young people in her situation experience an identity crisis and do not fully belong to either country. She is now in her early twenties and thinks that physical appearance, such as having dark hair and skin colour, and language are barriers for complete assimilation. She says:

> I can't use my Turkish very well; I can't use English very well either. At the moment I am very stressed, as I am speaking […] Because your Turkish is good, I constrain myself.

She then talks about belonging to Turkey and Britain and argues that certain parts of London are more alien to her:

C: In Zone 1, well you are whiter than me so maybe you can blend in and have no problem with the colours.

A: But they understand when I speak.

C: I don't know. I never felt I belong to Zone 1. Maybe because of this or for some other reason, I don't like hanging out there. I like the buildings and stuff but when I look down at the people, I don't like. Whatever happens, an English person looks at you as a foreigner. I never experienced any racism though. (Interview 25, London)

Earlier in our conversation, she mentioned that she had mainly Turkish and Kurdish friends at school and did not care about the 'blond English girls' who excluded them. While there is no overt discrimination, friend groups and socialization occur among people who come from a similar background (immigrants from Turkey or other immigrant/minority groups). Vertovec (2007) argues that increased diversity causes new patterns of inequality and prejudice and necessitates new definitions of whiteness due to the prejudice against white populations who arrived recently (such as Eastern European and Gypsy immigrants). The new immigrants groups may experience prejudice from the White British or from the long existing minorities or they may have prejudice against these minorities. Being Alevi has no overt role in assimilation. Indeed, my research participants consider assimilation as a problematic concept and do not aim for it. Integration, on the other hand, is perceived more positively and many Alevis regard their culture as facilitating the integration process to Britain.

3.6. Conclusion:

Alevi identity gained public visibility in Britain in the 1990s as a parallel development to mobilisation in Turkey and Western European countries. Gradually their institutions transformed into a federation across Britain. This has occurred in a transnational social space that connected local communities in Britain, Turkey, and other

European countries, Alevi populations as well as supranational institutions and the universal human rights discourse. Alevis have been active in a wide range of transnational activities and strive to improve their rights in Turkey as well as gaining recognition for their belief system and culture in the host country. A strong sense of Alevi identity motivates these relationships; on the one hand, it encourages participation in transnational and supranational activities, whilst on the other activities that emphasise human rights are promoted by the community centres and these influence more people to identify with Alevism as an egalitarian and positive side of their identity. These activities and links are also sites to observe how Alevi identity is constructed and which elements of it are emphasized. Transnational and supranational activism enables the construction of Alevi identity by negotiating cultural heritage, the contemporary conditions Alevi people live in and the other aspects of their identities such as being Kurdish (for the majority of Alevis in Britain) and holding left-wing views (a spectrum that includes social democratic, progressive and socialist groups).

Alevis in Britain connect with supranational institutions, local Alevi organisations, federations and Turkish and European political institutions across the several nation states. There are many occasions when the supranational and transnational levels interact. Having to hide their identity, or being subject to varying levels of discrimination in Turkey, Alevis in Britain are aware of their opportunities and links that can help them work on improving their rights. As I had expected, Alevis in Britain (particularly organisation leaders) benefit from the human rights discourse and the institutions that support this in their struggle for recognition.

In their homeland-based activism, Britain's Alevis use the slogan 'equal citizenship', which has been formulated by the ongoing Alevi movement. This is also affected by their comparison with their current situation (of being able to express their identity, recognition

for their *cemevi* and incorporation of their teaching in schools) with their experiences in Turkey. The lived experience of expressing Alevism in a liberal context and the support of supranational links reflect their demands on Turkey. For instance, Alevi organisations in Turkey also refer to human rights, but a small number of these organisations actively campaign on a transnational level and use a comprehensive human rights discourse that includes other social groups[27]. Britain's Alevis draw on direct experiences and relations; the supranational organisations' support on the basis of human rights gives them the feeling of entitlement to certain rights and they actively strive for these. This shapes their demands and activism regarding national and local attachments with Turkey.

Transnational activities and the emergence of a cross-border Alevi identity do not undermine the nation state *per se*. They do challenge, though, a monolithic notion of the state that is 'difference blind' in principle but favours the majority in practice. Alevis' transnational attachments, as a case of persecuted minority group, suggest that transnationalism does not have to conflict with the concept of nation state and it can promote ideas of diversity and universal values (democracy, human rights, separation of state and religion and equality of all). Conflict occurs only when the national identity does not correspond to the universal values and excludes diversity.

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[27]   I observed among the various *cemevi* in Turkey that they mainly conduct religious and educational activities. The left leaning organisations such as PSAKD are more active on political matters.

4. Alevi identity formation and manifestations in the private sphere

In this and the following chapters, I aim to focus on the manifestations of Alevi identity and explore how various Alevi actors manifest their identity in the private and public spheres in the transnational context. In the present chapter, I deal with the private level of identity construction and manifestation by exploring various aspects of contemporary Alevi communities in Britain drawing on the qualitative interviews I conducted and my fieldnotes based on participant observation. The experiences of discrimination before and after migration, boundaries with Sunni Islam, boundaries and relations with Kurdish identity, the role of gender and class, and contact with British society reveal how Alevi identity is constructed and manifested by Alevi migrants in Britain. Identity building on the ceremonial and public level will be discussed in the next chapter. Because the ceremonies and rituals mainly take place in public spaces and constitute the occasions to construct and manifest Alevi identity collectively, they will be addressed as part of identity in the public sphere. Spirituality and morality aspects of Alevi belief and personal attitudes will be explained in this chapter.

I analyse the construction of Alevi identity and its relations to other identities as private and public; however, the two areas interact and influence each other. Because people build boundaries and assume certain self-representations in their everyday lives in their interactions with others, the public-sphere dimension of their identity has a base to embed itself within and draws symbolic references from these self-representations.

Alevi identity on a personal level in Britain can be seen as an area of negotiation between what is carried from Turkey (such as memories, homeland ties, traditions passed on from family), what is constructed through the community centres after migration to Britain and the transnational links with Alevi communities in Turkey and elsewhere through

actual contacts and media. Alevis have both historical and contemporary references to Turkey and many elements of culture are assembled from there by migrants. It is produced and reproduced by many actors in relation to their environment as well as their memories of and links with Turkey; they generate meaning from being Alevi through a complex set of relations with the in- and out-group. Due to the syncretic elements in Alevism, the internal demographic differences within Alevi communities in Turkey and individual differences, Alevi identity in Britain is manifested in heterogeneous patterns.

I have established that Alevi identity is in constant formation in relation to other identities, therefore it is better to treat it as relational and processual rather than a static entity (Brubaker 2010). Alevis in Britain manifest their identity in relation to or in difference from other identities that surround it; this is mainly in opposition to / difference from mainstream Sunni Islam. I am not suggesting that Alevism or any religious affiliation is only about boundaries; there are elements of a shared culture as well as distinct rituals that have been carried through an oral tradition from one generation to the next (Shankland 2010). However, identification with Alevism occurs for many community members even in the absence of these rituals or despite their lack of knowledge about Alevi theology. It is frequently expressed in terms of difference from 'Sunni' Islam. The differences are produced and reproduced through actions and discourse.

The boundaries between 'us' and 'them' are very central to the understanding of modern identities. Barth's studies on ethnic groups and boundaries reveal an insight to this issue. He argues that distinct cultures, in his case ethnic groups, are maintained not in isolation but through having contact with the 'Other' (1969); its characteristics acquire their significance through the differences from other groups (Deschamps 2010, 87). Since Turkey remains a significant reference point for migrant Alevi in Britain, this dialogue is a transnational one: boundaries are influenced by their experiences in Turkey before

migration, actual and symbolic attachments with Turkey after migration and new experiences in Britain.

On a personal level, the Sunni-Alevi difference is important and maintained through the perceived or real differences not only in terms of being born from Alevi or non-Alevi parents but also in terms of rituals, worldviews, centrality of human versus God and gender relations. Therefore, the boundary is contextual and flexible. For example, my position as a non-Alevi researcher is an example of this flexibility; although I am a 'Sunni' in their description, having liberal views and not conflicting with the community's values are interpreted positively and despite being non-Alevi, I am not entirely an 'Other'. The differences that come from birth (being born from Alevi or Sunni parents) diminish considerably when the worldviews are non-conflicting.

4.1. Discrimination before and after immigration:

A majority of Alevis in Britain maintain symbolic or actual ties with Turkey. Some still have family members and friends there; they therefore continue to be concerned about their living conditions back in Turkey. In addition, most Alevis have a further concern for other community members beyond their immediate contacts as part of an imagined community. Although Alevis in Britain are not directly affected by discrimination in Turkey, they either have memories of discrimination which have shaped their experiences of being Alevi or certain conflicts that have been carried over to the migration context and they still experience discrimination to a lesser extent. The actual or mediated experiences of discrimination are important because they shape how they think about Alevi identity. These experiences of being a persecuted minority group become more noticeable in comparison to the liberal social context of Britain, where they openly manifest their identity. I use the term 'minority' as a sociological concept when referring to Alevis although they are not recognised legally as such. The term has negative connotations in the Turkish context and is

mainly used for the non-Muslim groups; therefore, Alevi activists seldom use the term minority in Turkish (*azınlık*) (Özdalga 2008). Nevertheless, Alevis in Britain do sometimes use the term.

Tajfel (1992, 3) defines minority groups as 'self-conscious units of people who have in common certain similarities and certain social disadvantages'. He argues that the in-group identity of minorities is created as a result of certain conditions: 'a. common identity thrust upon people from outside, b. an existing group that wishes to preserve its differences and c. an existing group that wishes to dilute differences but meets resistance'. For Alevis, the conditions change across time and social situation and all three categories apply to them at different times in history: (a) it is a common identity thrust upon them, when they were called Kızılbaş[28] (red head) due to their red turbans in the sixteenth century; (b) they want to preserve their ritual practices through their struggle against assimilation into mainstream Sunni Islam; and finally (c) they would like to be treated equally and dilute differences in the public sphere.

Alevis have been on the periphery both in the Ottoman Empire and Turkish Republic and have faced varying degrees of assimilation and discrimination. The Alevi people I met in Britain were no exception and all reported that they had experienced hostility while they were living in Turkey and/or felt threatened either by discrimination or a general conservative climate when they visited Turkey on holidays. As a response to this stigma and discrimination, they developed 'new constructive dimensions of social comparison' (Tajfel 1992, 18) on certain self-ascribed moral and spiritual qualities such as hospitality, respect to all other beings, gender equality and being progressive.

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[28]   Historically the word 'Kızılbaş' acquired a pejorative meaning.

For many Alevi people the discrimination they experience now is linked with the atrocities of the past and constitutes an important aspect of their identity. For instance, during a conversation with some elderly men in the *cemevi*, one of them, Hüseyin, related how Alevis had experienced oppression since the Seljuk and Ottoman Empires, and also in the Republic up until now. Another man, Ali, interrupted and asked the others for confirmation: '[In Turkey] we couldn't say that we are Alevi, we were afraid, weren't we?' (Interview 6, London). Having lived in various small towns of Turkey with mixed populations, their experiences of being Alevi were mainly shaped through conflict and discrimination.

In addition to the systematic refusal of recognition by the central and local state apparatus, Alevis also report having faced discrimination on a day to day basis. The experience of discrimination strengthens the Alevi-Sunni boundary. My research participants both in Turkey and in Britain report such incidents in Turkey and that discrimination makes one notice the Alevi-Sunni difference. For instance Hüsniye Takmaz, the chairwoman of Alevi Bektaşi Associations Federation, told me of how she could begin to understand the hostility towards Alevi people and could become aware of her identity. She grew up in rural Erzincan, in eastern Turkey, and migrated to Istanbul at the age of 11, where she became more aware of her Alevi identity:

> When you are a child, you don't know; you are not in a position where you can compare yourself with others. But after we came to Istanbul, when I was 11, after a few years when you see that other people discriminate against you and you notice these things, then you question more (Interview 6, Istanbul).

Fear of persecution and hiding one's identity dominate the early experiences for many research participants. Yusuf Çiçek is a Kurdish Alevi living in London and is a Labour member of Enfield Town Council. He grew up in Trabzon where the vast majority is Sunni:

Yusuf: We had difficulties about being Alevi, we definitely did not say outside to our neighbours, to our environment, that we are Alevi. During Ramadan my mother used to shut the curtains first and then give us food.

A: In Trabzon?

Y: In Trabzon yes. At that time we used to eat in secret during the Ramadan, at school we did not show that we were not fasting. We were living on the first floor, in the early hours we used to shut the curtains and then eat. My mother used to clear the dinner table but she wouldn't wash the dishes. She would wake up for *sahur*[29] at night and she would wash the dishes at that time so that the neighbours would assume that we are fasting (Interview 14, London).

One of the ways in which Alevis were discriminated against was through rumours of incest during their *cem* ceremony. Historically, this rumour was used against Alevis to accuse the community of lacking morals. Although there is no evidence of where this originated, some sections of Sunnis accused Alevis of incest and illicit sexual behavior during their religious rituals. The fact that they conduct rituals secretly due to threats of persecution caused further rumours to flourish (Karolewski 2008, 443): if they conducted their rituals publicly there was a risk of being attacked, whereas if they prayed in closed groups, these kinds of rumours would spread.

The implications of this continue even today. In 2008, a popular TV series in Germany, *Tatort* (*Crime Scene*) aired an episode depicting the suicide of a girl in an Alevi immigrant family. At the end of the episode it was revealed that the girl had been sexually abused and threatened by her father. Such representations of Alevi people in the German media prompted large scale protests in Cologne attracting the participation of 30,000 Alevis (Kosnick 2011). Although it may be purely a coincidence that the incest issue was thematised in the context of an Alevi family, the Alevi community in Germany regards it as reinforcing the discrimination due to the incest myth which they have suffered from for

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[29]   In the Ramadan, people who fast may wake up at night and eat before the sunrise. The time when they are allowed to eat right before the dawn is called 'sahur'.

centuries. The episode was so powerful that even some of my research participants in England had heard of it and regarded it as insulting. İbrahim, an elderly Kurdish Alevi man I met in *DayMer*, mentioned this particular episode in an entirely different context. He criticised a theatre play shown at the EACC which contained some improper jokes about Sunnis. He declared that it is wrong to insult another belief while trying to glorify your own and gave the example of the same German TV show, *Tatort*. He said that no matter which group discriminates, caricaturizing another belief can hurt the members of that community (Interview 15, London). It is an interesting example to illustrate the far reaching effects of a rumour, the power of the media and the Alevi diaspora's symbolic ties to their identity.

Identity is not a static component of one's self; it is negotiated, changed, and expressed in multiple ways. As a result of migration and the experiences of living in a liberal context, Alevis in Britain are more vocal about their identity. Discrimination in personal interactions may continue to a lesser extent in Britain but they do not accept this passively, neither do they feel that they have to hide their identity but rather become more assertive about being Alevi. This transformation can be explained through the demographics of the community in Britain (because they outnumber Sunni migrants from Turkey) and with reference to religious freedom. Moreover, the influence of an established and organised Alevi movement in Turkey and Europe has contributed to the personal identification with, and manifestation of, Alevism.

4.2. Boundaries with Sunni Islam and positive self-presentation

Modern day Alevis' degree of practice and belief is complicated by a set of external (state oppression, migration), internal (the role of *dedes* and community leaders) and individual factors. The boundary with Sunnis and sense of victimhood consolidate Alevi identity. Alevism is an umbrella term which denotes subgroups historically and even today the internal differences in the interpretation of Alevi belief and its relations with Islam and

other religions can be seen. What is common to these different conceptualizations is the fact that Alevis construct their religious identity in opposition to, or as different from, Sunni Islam. When they try to explain their belief, rituals and moral principles, they do so mainly in relation to Sunni Islam, which is the unmarked religious identity in Turkey.

Dressler argues that secularism is 'deeply implicated in the making of religion in the context of the nation state' (2011, 187) and that the Turkish nation state (and its institutions such as the DRA) distinguishes between appropriate religion and 'cultural' pseudo-religion (2011, 192). By creating dichotomies between the two, Alevism has been framed by the Turkish state as culture; therefore, it was deprived of the religious rights that Sunni Muslims possessed[30].

Although Alevis' rituals and cultural heritage are diverse, their boundary with Sunni identity and victimhood are the social glues that consolidate Alevis as an 'imagined community'. This includes all Alevis as part of a collective without necessarily having immediate contact with each and every member of the community. This identification strengthens symbolic transnationalism with the homeland and real attachments with other community members across other states. The Alevi-Sunni differences are manifested in everyday interactions. For Alevis in Turkey, 'the other' is the Sunni population in Turkey. For the Alevis living in Britain, it is still, to a large extent, Sunni immigrants from Turkey and to a much smaller extent the other ethnic and religious groups that they encounter in London; such as Christians, Jews, and Muslims from other countries. Due to limited contact with these other groups this boundary is not as salient as the one with Sunnis from/in Turkey.

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[30] The Turkish state's attempts to shape religion in public had also consequences for Sunni Muslims, such as the banning of headscarves for civil servants and students until 2013 and the ban on Islamic dress except for religious officials.

The boundary between Alevis and any other religious group is the very point where we can recognise how Alevis understand and explain their faith. The most frequently occurring themes are ethical conduct, gender equality and compatibility of Alevism with today's modern values. The in-group identity is portrayed very positively. Turner explains this need for positive identity of social groups: '[t]he most immediate point is that where some social category contributes to defining the self, the need for positive self-esteem should motivate a desire to evaluate that category positively' (2010a, 33). Hospitality, sound morals and treating out group members equally/ with dignity appear as such categories that help to define the self. The following examples illustrate not only positive self-presentation but also these qualities' power to transform social relations.

In my observations I noticed a genre of stories in which the narratives begin with discrimination against Alevis but end peacefully. All follow these steps: first Alevi and Sunni families or individuals have close social contact with each other, then Sunni people discriminate against Alevis because they are affected by the prejudices and rumours that they have heard concerning Alevis; in the next step they confront the prejudices, finally the Sunni individual or family realizes that the rumours are false and feel ashamed for their previous behavior. I came across the same plot with different settings and people during my interviews and observations both in Turkey and in England. One of them was particularly interesting.

Aygül, a woman in her forties whom I met in the EACC, told me of an experience she had back in Turkey a long time ago. When she was a student, she had to take a central exam to enter high school. During the exam, the invigilator treated her differently than other students, even helping her by telling her the correct answers. After the exam the teacher asked her some questions about her father and told her that he knew him from a village where he had previously worked as a teacher. Aygül discovered the connection

between this teacher and her family: many years ago the Sunni teacher was appointed to a village school and he arrived there with his family. Due to lack of accommodation in the village he had to stay in the house of a local family, which happened to be Aygül's. At the beginning of their stay there was no apparent conflict but the teacher and his family did not get involved with their hosts to any great extent. After they had stayed for a while, Aygül's family noticed smells of urine coming from their guest's room but did not know how to ask about it without embarrassing their guests. Finally, they discovered that the teacher's family had heard such negative stories about Alevis that they were scared of their hosts. They were so worried the Alevi family would kill them at night that they could not leave their room even to take their little child to the toilet when needed. Following this confession, the Sunni teacher and his wife realised that their fears were unfounded and that the Alevi family was very hospitable and friendly to them. They felt ashamed of their prejudice and eventually became good friends.

This genre demonstrates Alevis' belief in the possibility (or even inevitability) of eliminating discrimination once Sunni people have closer relationships with them and get to know them better. They assume that once Sunnis become more familiar with Alevis, their prejudices will be erased. In addition, it shows the possibility of living side by side without major conflict. Indeed, some of my research participants stated that they experienced no or minimal conflict over Alevi-Sunni difference when there was no political intervention or key events such as the 1978 Maraş massacre or 12 September 1980 military coup. These were exceptions that triggered antagonism. According to this perspective, governments' intense focus on identities can be divisive. For instance, Hatice, whom I met in *DayMer*, says that she did not experience discrimination deriving from Alevi-Sunni conflict in her daily life until the Maraş massacre occurred (however, their village was not affected by the incident). She is a middle aged Alevi woman who is originally from Maraş but lived in Mersin before migrating to Britain. She stated that she mostly identifies with Alevism as a culture,

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especially the emphasis on women's role in society. She expressed that the state is triggering divisions in society at certain times, but in daily experiences ordinary people were not hostile to each other and she did not experience discrimination. She argues that the Alevi-Sunni clash did not exist in her childhood:

> We learned about Alevi and Sunni later, in my childhood, I never knew… This is after 12 September. After the incidents in Maraş… I learned about Alevism back then. These governments always divide us […] Crossing Alevis' doors and stuff… In Mersin that didn't happen but we see on the TV, this is happening elsewhere and it's not nice. With this, what do they do? Alevism becomes a bigger thing. Alevi people embrace Alevism more; they awaken more (Interview 16, London).

I should note that the word 'know' is used in a different meaning in this sentence, referring to experience or seeing. She means that she did not experience overt problems with Sunni neighbors and the Alevi-Sunni differentiation became sharper after violent events and the military coup. According to this opinion, it is governments that are divisive while ordinary people do not have serious problems with one another. If they discriminate at all, it is explained by their lack of education and misinformation on Alevi belief.

4.1.1 Food taboos, *helal* and *haram*: an alternative interpretation

Boundary making is a significant part of the identity construction process which manifests in mundane areas of life. Sharing food is an important aspect of Anatolian culture and also significant for Alevis. In community centres in Turkey and Britain, people frequently offer each other food and this practice provided me with an opportunity to open conversations and observe daily life. Particularly due to some Sunnis' refusal of Alevi people's food, I was careful not to refuse any food offered to me. One such case was the fast breaking in the month of Muharrem, when they commemorate Ali's sons Hasan, Hüseyin and their followers' death in the battlefield in Kerbela (present day Iraq) in 680. This is one of the most significant events in the collective memory of Alevis and Shia

Muslims when the followers of Ali were betrayed, and has marked the beginning of victimisation ever since.

In one of my visits to the *cemevi* in London, during Muharrem, I met an old woman from Maraş, Aunt Zehra and a man in his sixties, Cemil, whom I later interviewed. They were about to break the fast at sunset. The woman, Zehra, insisted that my friend and I should eat with them but I was hesitant since we were not fasting. She realised my hesitation about eating food that I didn't deserve because of not fasting. She gave an example from an Alevi legend, *miraç*, in which prophet Muhammed joins a *cem* ceremony with forty people including Imam Ali who are known as *kırklar*, and distributes a single grape to all of them. In the legend, as he crushed the grape and mixed its juice to water, it increased in abundance:

> [She] said we should eat with them, we said we didn't earn it because we were not fasting. She said 'it doesn't matter to us; Muhammed divided one single grape and shared it among forty people. We like to share our food.' Then she turned to me and said 'it doesn't matter to us if someone is Alevi, Sunni, Turkish or Kurdish. We look at seventy-two nations with the same gaze'. She was very friendly and insisted that we should stay for the fast breaking. (Field notes 24.11.2012).

Since Alevis do not conform to a number of required practices in mainstream Islam, some strict Sunnis refuse to eat the food offered by Alevis arguing that it is not '*helal*'. '"*Helal*," that which is obligatory or permitted, is opposed to "*haram*", that which is forbidden' (Mandel 1989). In more common usage of the term in Europe, the distinction is about the kind of food which is prepared according to Islamic rules. The topic was frequently mentioned in my interviews with the community members, especially when discussing their relations with Sunni neighbours and friends in the context of home visits and eating together.

Meral's story indicates how much prejudice still exists towards Alevis. I met her at another Alevi woman's house in Tottenham, where I had gone to interview her. She was

visiting my interview partner at that time and turned out to be more talkative and participated in our conversation. This middle aged woman who had been living in Britain for twenty-two years told me a story about her friends' ignorance of and prejudices towards Alevis. She said that a Sunni friend of hers in London was not sure about eating the food offered by Alevis and asked Meral to get confirmation about something she had heard from her mother-in-law: her friend asked Meral if it is true that Alevis spit on the food, before they serve it to somebody. She was offended and could not understand how someone, especially a close friend, could believe such a thing. I wanted to know if her friend's attitude was only directed towards Alevis or a more generalized principle of Islamic code of eating. I asked her if those people she mentioned eat in British restaurants or in chain restaurants such as McDonalds. She replied 'of course, they do, is there anybody who doesn't ever eat in McDonalds here? Everybody does! They eat in McDonalds but they don't eat my food!' She did not comment on this afterwards but her facial expression signaled her resentment. Following this anecdote she remarked:

> There is a lot of injustice against us Alevis. A faithful person should not comment about another person without knowing him. That is not accepted by God. Alevis have conscience and they are democratic. We don't interfere with their fast or prayer, we respect so they shouldn't interfere with us. (Interview 35, London).

These conflicts are those instances wherein people express the characteristics that are believed to be the defining elements of their identity. The above excerpt demonstrates the emphasis on democracy and respect for others. Meral argues that they demand the same tolerance from Sunni people for their own belief and practices. At this point her demand to have respect from other religions and to be democratic is in line with their transnational identity making.

Conflicts and symbolic boundaries are carried from the homeland to the migration context; however, the conditions they live in are not entirely the same so these boundaries are negotiated within a transnational context. Respondents who told similar stories about

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discrimination from Sunni Turks in Britain argued that they are more assertive in Britain and can speak up against discrimination. Their experiences in Britain account for this assertiveness; they usually state that in Britain nobody interferes with other people's religion and it is, ultimately, a personal matter.

4.1.2. Honesty as a moral quality

Although it is much easier to express Alevi identity in Britain without the fear of Sunni neighbours' possible reactions, latent conflicts in friendship and neighborhood relations may continue. Social conflicts rooted in Turkey are carried to Britain and influenced by their new social context. For example Neriman, a woman in her late thirties and a mother of two children living in North London, told me of a situation she experienced with her Sunni friend in London. I met her in Nurhak Culture House (a hometown association in Enfield, North London) when I visited the community centre for the first time and there were nearly ten people invited by the chairman of Nurhak Community Centre so that I could meet and talk to as many people as possible. After I introduced myself and explained my research, they were so eager to talk to me about the discrimination they had been experiencing that I did not have to ask many questions.

Neriman told me that she has a Sunni friend in London and they frequently visited each other's houses to eat together. One day the Sunni friend asked an imam if she may eat at her Alevi friends' house. The imam told her that she may offer food to an Alevi but could not eat any food offered by Alevis. Her words were not about pork or Islamic slaughtering of helal animals (such as beef or lamb) but a general refusal of Alevis' food. After this incident the Sunni friend stopped eating at her house, which Neriman found very upsetting. She expressed her frustration at her friend by explaining further: she argued that the food she had bought with her honestly earned money was *helal*, even if it were pork. This strong argument is interesting because Alevis have a mainly negative opinion on pork. Eating pork

is a contested area for Alevis; those who identify only as a political or moral identity express that they do not have a problem with eating pork. However, in the community centres, restaurants or homes, I have never seen pork being served or eaten. Alevis who regard Alevism within Islam share the Sunni opinion on pork and think it is clearly *haram*. Generally pork is not a widely consumed type of meat; it has not been a part of the traditional Turkish cuisine therefore is not popular among Alevis in Britain either. With this controversial example she reverses the mainstream Islamic code of *helal* vs *haram*, which clearly forbids eating pork and suggests that honesty and deserving what you earn is more important than following strict rules. Against the Islamic code of *helal* and *haram*, she introduced the category of honesty, which she finds more important than avoiding pork, as a 'new constructive dimension' (Tajfel 1992) that exalts her in-group identity.

This focus on the honesty aspect and ethical values over observing the bans and rituals of religion can be understood as a defense mechanism against discrimination. Alevis realise that Sunnis may discriminate against them for their lack of religious practices such as not praying the *salat*, not fasting in Ramadan and not going to Mecca. Alevis argue that the moral qualities of being human are more important. Many say that they might not be conducting those rituals but at least they stay away from more serious sins such as violating somebody's rights or stealing. A great emphasis is placed on the importance of morality rather than rituals. Many research participants argued that, for Alevis, being a good person is more important than following Islamic or any other religion's code strictly. They argue that Sunnis prioritise rituals but not all of them are as sensitive to morality.

For example, Zeynep, a Kurdısh Alevı woman already mentioned in Chapter 2, provided great detail about the contrast between her Sunni neighbour's judgment on Alevis and their own way of life. She identifies fully with Alevism and believes that she is a good Muslim. She finds it unfair when her faithfulness is questioned because she is Alevi, while

other people who steal or cheat on their wives or deceive people in trade are still accepted as Muslim. She tells me 'Okay, maybe I don't pray *salat* five times a day, but I don't even go near any of the bad things these people do. Whatever they may say about us… I believe I am a good Muslim' (Interview 38, London).

Similarly, a *semah* teacher from Istanbul who was visiting London constructs Alevi identity through the differences from Sunnis in terms of the importance given to religious rituals. He explained that Alevis differ from Sunni people in terms of practicing religious rituals and emphasises the importance of morality over practicing religion:

> They say for example 'you are a very good person, you are very nice but you have a flaw'. I ask them: 'what is my flaw, tell me'. He says 'I wish you would pray *salat* 5 times a day'. I raise my hands above [he raises his hands as if he is praying] and I say 'My God please don't make me a man who prays *salat*. If I do, I'm going to become like you!' (Interview 21, London).

The denial of the right of self-definition creates frustration for some Alevis. Regardless of how they regard and express their belief, they argue that they comply more with the ethical codes of Islam, even more so than some pious Sunnis, who judge them. The characteristics of the in-group acquire this importance in relation to another social group (Sunnis in this example) (Deschamps 2010) and following moral codes is put forward as a significant aspect of being Alevi.

Another example is regarding honesty and gender relations in a small town in Turkey. Ibrahim, an elderly man whom I met in *DayMer* community centre, tells me about how they were treated back in Turkey and the difficulties he experienced due to being a socialist as well as his Alevi background. I asked him if he experienced any discrimination in England and he responded by telling me of his experiences in Turkey:

> No, here I never experienced anything like that but for example in Kayseri when I was working at the factory, we were harassed about being Alevi. We even had problems when we were meeting up in *Halkevi* [People's House]. Because of the honesty that being Alevi leaves on us, we could not accept the fact that some of our

friends were both going to the mosque and then verbally harassing the women who work there. [We were saying] what you do is not right, you're doing wrong. (Interview 15, London).

While Alevis place great emphasis on the moral principles of Alevism, the lack of regular religious practices is another important aspect of modern day Alevism that were identifiable in my research. Forced assimilation into mainstream Sunni culture in Turkey as well as internal and international migration destroyed the community's tightly knit structure and left them without regular rituals, so adhering to moral principles guide Alevi communities. For example Lale, a middle aged Kurdish Alevi woman whom I met in the HTA of Kırkısrak in North London, told me that the conducting of rituals had already been weakened in her parents' and her own generations. When I asked her if she grew up in an Alevi village in order to understand her background she answered;

> L: Alevi. Alevi but, to be honest, it was not a village that observed the rules of being Alevi. For example this twelve Imam fast, *Hızır*[31] fast, our ancestors did it but my generation doesn't.
>
> A: Your parents?
>
> L: No neither my mother nor my father do. They are even a bit like atheists, they only believe in the existence of God but it is a village that has nothing to do with the prophets and books. (Interview 19, London).

On a personal level, this is the experience of many Alevis today; many know little more than the fact that they are Alevi. On a collective level, Alevi organisations regard the lack of practice as erosion of Alevi belief and try to compensate this with public ceremonies, which will be elaborated in the next chapter. The *dedes* I spoke with both in Turkey and in Britain especially agree that migrant Alevis who spent most of their lives in urban centres had limited opportunities to observe Alevi practices.

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[31] Hizir is a holy figure in Alevism, he is believed to be a saint who helps people in difficult times. There are various opinions about the real identity of Hızır. Türk (2010) claims that he is believed to be the same person as Ali.

Identification with Alevism varies for different regions and different time periods, which cannot be generalized to a certain pattern. Although state oppression, violence and migration are factors that influence the application of Alevi rituals, there are also Alevi actors who shape their communities' practices and belief. For instance, some informants from Kırkısrak and Sivas provinces mentioned the group called *Hakikatçılar/Hakikatlılar*[32], which represents the last level of four gates in Alevi teaching of 'four gates forty levels' to spiritual maturity. Akın, from Kırkısrak HTA, told me more about this section of Alevis. He has been living in London since 1996, has a sociology degree and is interested in studying Alevism as a social phenomenon rather than its religious aspects. He suggested that those who reach the last stage of spiritual maturity are exempt from ordinary people's obligations such as praying and fasting and in the recent history of Kırkısrak region, these men quarreled with the conventional *dedes* and caused them to leave their village (Interview 13, London). Although their opposition was not to the institution of *dedelik*[33] *per se*, they were critical of certain symbolic practices such as kissing the *dede's* hand, because they believed in the equality of all humans. They focused their attention on inner strength and spirituality in the Alevi belief, leaving the region without guidance on rituals and practices. This explains the above example of Lale and also some other participants' lack of knowledge on rituals.

4.2.2. Compatibility with the West

Alevis regard compatibility with modern universal values of democracy and humanism as a pillar of their group identity. They believe that their emphasis on secularism

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[32]   *Hakikat* means truth, and also the name of the last gate in the belief of "four gates forty levels" as a path of spiritual maturity. The word "*hakikatçı*" can be translated as one who seeks the truth.

[33]   The suffix –lik makes a noun from an adjective or from another noun and its meaning is similar to the suffixes –hood or –ness in the English language.

makes them more compatible with Western societies in comparison to mainstream Muslim immigrants. Secular and religious identities are created in a transnational space (Göle 2010, 47) where encounters with the Other make us question the limits of these identities. In the post-World War II era, Western Europe has gained a significant Muslim population and recently 'Muslim' became a salient political category used by both Muslims and state authorities while addressing their political mobilization in and incorporation to Western European countries (Adamson 2011). These prompted debates about their integration as well as the recognition of their belief and accommodating their specific needs. Alevis in European countries have joined in this multicultural trend in order to establish their *cemevi* and gain recognition as a belief community; yet they also emphasise their differences from mainstream Islamic belief and rituals and claim to be inherently compatible with the countries of immigration in terms of respecting secular law, education and democracy[34].

This opinion is shared widely among Alevis both in Turkey (Massicard 2007; Vorhoff 2003) and in European countries (Sökefeld 2008). Also, some of my interview partners in Turkey underlined the fact that migration to European countries has presented opportunities to Alevis. For instance, during my visit to one of the oldest Alevi temples on the Anatolian side of Istanbul, Şahkulu, I came across this opinion. The person I interviewed, Fuat, evaluated migration very positively:

> Migration from Turkey to Europe is an opportunity for Alevis… If they stayed here, we could have suffered more, we could have been isolated from Europe, from the world… We benefited from the world, from its law. European lifestyle is especially very suitable for Alevis. Both in the legal dimension and the social dimension… Alevi society is compatible with Europe, therefore it is an opportunity. (Interview 1, Istanbul)

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[34] I should note that the category of Muslim must not be taken as a homogenous one. There are many internal variations among Muslim immigrants and they may or may not act within the liberal state policies (Adamson, 2011).

The moderate and progressive views in Alevi teaching are regarded by the community members as a potential asset that can help them integrate to European society and also a factor that helps them realise their demands more easily. We see that the discourse of human rights, which has become one of the defining characteristics of modern interpretations of Alevism both in Turkey and Europe, is reflected from the organisational elite and *dedes* onto the ordinary members of the community.

A *dede* in another Alevi association argued that Alevis are more progressive than Europe: 'Alevism is more advanced than Europe... even before the printing press, Hacı Bektaş Veli said "educate your women"' (Interview 4, Istanbul). His words show that Alevis give importance to education and gender equality. They do not see Alevism being influenced by Europe but rather being even more liberal to begin with.

In Britain, I noticed a similar opinion on Alevism's resemblance to contemporary European values. Humanism in Europe and human centered understanding of Alevi faith are considered to be similar. The more educated members of the community quoted Edip Harabi, a nineteenth century mystic poet as an indicator of Alevism' human centered vision. The following stanza of a longer poem explains the human-God relationship:

Before Allah and the world came into being
We created it in an instant and announced it
Before God had any worthy habitation
We took him in and became his host

In Alevi belief, God is not external to the human; on the contrary, God, human and nature are in unity and God manifests itself in the very essence of the human (Dressler 2003, 113). Due to having this holy essence, all humans should be treated with love and respect. These lines demonstrate the narrowing distance between God and humans, even

giving centrality to humans rather than to God. Also the concept of *Enel Hakk*[35] (literally 'I am God') can be understood as a basis for humanist thought in Alevism. Since God and the human are unified in belief, to break other people's hearts is condemned, and being fair to others is a central moral value. The word '*hak*' (literally 'right') and many other phrases derived from this word mean justice and '*hak*' must be respected in other people. '*Hak yemek*' (violating someone's right) is considered wrong. Seen from this perspective, my research participant Neriman's words can be better understood when she argues that earning your meal honestly, without violating someone's right (*hak yemeden*), is more important than avoiding pork as a religious requirement.

Being raised with Alevi values is important for both believers and non-believers in maintaining a positive self-identity. The moral principles of Alevism can be found in other belief communities and furthermore, not all people who are born of Alevi parents follow its moral code. Consequently a good person is not necessarily born of Alevi parents; as they usually say '*being a human comes first*'. When I asked what it means for them to be Alevi – or how they would describe it to somebody who does not know a thing about Alevism, they mostly employ secular concepts such as democracy, humanism, respect for women, being modern and not fundamentalist and being progressive. These are secular principles that comply with other worldviews and even non-believers can identify with them. The holy poets and Islamic figures are also mentioned in the interviews and conversations; however, the most salient representation of Alevism was through these moral principles.

The description of Fatma, a female interviewee in her thirties from Sivas, is very similar to many other Alevis' descriptions: 'being progressive, democracy, freedom, respecting opinions'. Another respondent, Aykan, a well-educated professional, says he is

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[35]   Tenth century thinker and poet, Mansur el Hallac argues that he is one with God (referring to the spiritual unification with God) and is eventually killed by torture for heresy.

interested only in the cultural aspect of Alevism. For him, being Alevi is the opposite of being fundamentalist; it means being more tolerant, almost a source of pride when saying it to other people. He searches for an example in order to explain to me the sense of pride he feels:

> Studying at the Boğaziçi University is a distinct thing, it has always been known as a good university, I am sure you also have a pleasant feeling when you tell people you are a graduate of Boğaziçi (Interview 39, London).

He finds it important to highlight the positive characteristics in Alevi belief when explaining it to foreigners: in terms of liberalism, importance of education, not being close-minded, and gender equality, at least in principle.

The secular aspects of Alevism are regularly mentioned by many research participants. Among my interview partners five out of forty-two – and also the visiting *dede* – mentioned the relationship between science and Alevism and said that they find Alevism very progressive. They argued that Alevism does not contradict modern scientific developments; on the contrary, it is open to grasping the world through scientific explanations. Although Alevism would be categorized as a religion or spiritual teaching from a sociological perspective, for my respondents it was closer to science and philosophy. The word religion is associated with mainstream Islam as unchangeable dogma, while Alevism is explained as a way of understanding the universe, human relations and society. It is regarded as open to new interpretations since it is not fixed and orthodox.

The traditional dichotomy of religion versus science is ineffective at this point. It makes sense to look at the context in order to understand why Alevis regard themselves in secular terms. Since Alevis are confronted with Sunnis as the 'Other', in their perception of religion their reference point is Sunni Islam. For many Alevis, the 'Other' is still Sunnis and they highlight the differences between a fluid and flexible Alevi belief which does not

contradict with scientific interpretations in understanding the world, and Sunni dogma. *Dede* Mehmet Turan explained his vision of Alevism in the modern world to me:

> An Alevism that never parts with science, it is thought of as a belief that is immersed in science, which can modernize itself… Alevis in Europe are trying to make their own understanding of Alevism meet with European mentality; that is the mentality of the country they live in (Interview 5, London).

Alevis in Turkey also express the positive qualities in their belief system similarly. Being immigrant is a significant factor in the British context. Having migrated from a different country, they are a minority in a different sense in Britain and feel the need to distinguish themselves from other immigrant groups who came from the same geographical region. To say that one is Alevi means being not-that-different from the West for them. One of my younger participants, Ezgi, thinks that they did not experience discrimination because Alevis in Britain look unmarked as opposed to Sunnis. She has been living in London for fifteen years and has obtained a university degree in London. Since she has a more diverse social circle, she can compare attitudes towards different migrant groups:

> Maybe because we don't wear a headscarf, my mother doesn't wear a headscarf, I think that's the reason we didn't have any problems. Because here in general there is a negative thing against Muslims… (Interview 40, London)

She believes Muslim immigrants carrying religious symbols experience Islamophobic reactions in Britain whereas few Alevis carry visible symbols[36] of their belief so they do not encounter such overt discrimination. My respondents reported very few cases of ethnic discrimination but all agree that this is not a state policy but rather individual assaults and they have trust in the institutions where one can report such cases.

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[36] These are the *zülfikar* sword shaped necklaces or ornaments people use or the way some women cover their hair. But these are not overt symbols and not used by all Alevis.

4.2.3. Gender as an area of manifesting difference

The most visible differences between Alevis and Sunnis are manifested through gender relations. Alevis, both in Turkey and Britain, stress the importance of gender equality and the relatively better position of women in Alevi society. This takes on an additional meaning for the Euro-Alevis since they want to emphasise their harmony with the receiving society's norms.

Alevis in London, who mainly came from Turkey's rural areas where traditional gender patterns dominate, had a chance to compare the cultures of Alevis, Turkey and the host society after immigration. In the everyday life of London, the differences are more noticeable for women than for men. For example, one can observe the participation of women in the public life, working in paid employment (although this is lower than men's labour force participation[37]), driving cars and going to community centres to socialise.

In the early years of migration both women and men worked in the textile sector but nowadays small scale shops dominate the economic life of immigrants from Turkey and these are mostly owned by men. Female participation in the workforce and being paid employees for the first time in their lives is empowering yet the long working hours and poor working conditions serve to exploit them. Since economic conditions improved once their husbands had businesses, many women indicate that instead of working in labour intensive and unskilled jobs it was a more attractive option to stay at home and take care of their children. Their economic activities were mainly working in textile factories in the first years of migration, now they are mainly consumption oriented. In a group interview with three women of the Kırkısrak Village Association in Enfield, one explained how she and many other women she knew spend their time:

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[37] I have no statistical data regarding this; however, I have observed that there are more men than women in labour force and my informants' opinions also support this.

Everyone here has a car; we take the children to school in the morning, including me, then we come home, cook, clean. If we do at all [laughs]. But, for example I really love working but I can't find a job suitable for myself. I don't like sitting idle. But now I got used to it, sitting idle is comfortable. I stay at home doing nothing and I think it is comfortable. But I wish there were nice jobs and we, all women, would work. But it's not convenient. Instead we tour around Wood Green, Edmonton, Enfield Town (Interview 18, London).

Masculine identities do not seem to be challenged or deeply affected by migration. However transnational migration has more to offer to women. Living in Britain means more freedom in social life. Their lack of gender segregation and lack of Islamic dress code are not problems; on the contrary these are what they have in common with the host society.

The debate surrounding gender equality is more striking for non-Alevi researchers. For instance Mandel, who has carried out research on Sunni and Alevi immigrants from Turkey in Germany, states that 'many, if not most, of the anti-Alevi allegations revolve around morality and women, and purport a moral differentiation between the two communities' (1989, 35) . Gender roles for Alevi men and women are not exempt from patriarchy; however, certain aspects of Alevism promote gender equality: for example accepting everybody equally as 'souls' (*can*) during the *cem* ceremony, the lack of strict gender segregation and the aphorism of Hacı Bektaş Veli saying 'Educate your women'. I came across these points frequently, when community members explain the advantaged role of women in the Alevi teaching. Alevi individuals describe their faith and culture as being more respectful to women, especially in comparison to Sunnis. In the Alevi-Sunni differentiation most Alevis associate mainstream Islam with the oppression of women.

The headscarf is a symbol for the external difference between Alevis and Sunnis; young and urbanite Alevi women do not wear the headscarf at all and elderly Alevi women cover only a part of their heads, while women who dress according to the mainstream

Islamic dress code cover all their hair[38]. Regarding the headscarf issue and the role of women in Sunni culture, Alevi community's views vary. Berger and Luckmann (1991, 46) argue that when social interaction moves away from face-to-face communication, typification of others becomes more anonymous and we tend to interpret other's conduct as resulting from their typification. Similarly, informants from rural areas of Turkey who had less contact with Sunni people from various backgrounds tend to totalize the Sunni community as being oppressive to women and interpret the visible differences such as headscarves as symbols of inequality. Alevis from urban and educated backgrounds state that the Sunni-Alevi differences diminish and their worldviews are not very different from middle class educated urbanite Sunnis. In this context the Sunni-Alevi boundary loses its salience in personal identification.

For instance Hatice, a Kurdish Alevi from a rural region of Maraş says that she argues with her Sunni friends over the headscarf; while more educated urbanite Alevi women evaluate this issue as a personal issue and as a right. She explains her discussions with her Sunni neighbours:

> Hatice: I say to them 'Alevism is beautiful, you, all right the headscarf is good but you are oppressed'. They tell me 'no, we are fine'. I mean the way they dress; they are covered outside and open at home. I ask them why and they say that they don't show themselves to the outside, they open themselves only to their husbands. I think it is wrong. I don't do everything for my husband, but they are not like that (Interview 16, London).

On the other hand, Selma, a university graduate research participant who grew up in Istanbul has more liberal views on the headscarf issue; for her it is a personal issue and a right. When I ask her under which conditions she would consider going back to Turkey, she tells me that democratisation for all groups is necessary:

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[38]   The style of wearing a headscarf reveals the Sunni-Alevi differences, hometown and even different religious affiliations among Muslims (Mandel 1989).

Selma: Whoever they might be, people must have the right to be themselves and the respect for this should be ensured. If people are still oppressed because of their identities, I mean this can be wearing the headscarf or not, if people are living this and still conflicts occur, this is scary for me (Interview 37, London).

Even though the respondents express their respect for Sunni people wearing headscarves, it becomes a problem when it is enforced to Alevi women in the *cem* ceremonies. In addition to becoming a marker of Alevi – Sunni difference, it is now also a marker of progressive – traditional differentiation within the Alevi organisations. The headscarf is widely worn by traditional Alevi women with rural backgrounds as part of their regional clothing. The criticism arises when the headscarf is made mandatory to the urbanite Alevi women who do not cover their hair. In some *cemevi* in Turkey, the female participants of *cem* are offered headscarves at the entrance if they did not bring their own. While some *cemevi* administers and *dedes* only provide some extra headscarves without making it mandatory to wear them, in some *cemevi* the women who do not wear headscarves are gently warned to don one. This situation is criticized by Alevis who position themselves as progressive both in Turkey and in England. In Şahkulu Sultan Derneği, for instance, the youth branch coordinator argues that this is an attempt to assimilate Alevis from within:

We say to our female friends, our sisters, when they offer you headscarves, ask them: 'are women and men equal in Alevism?' They are equal. Then you should say '(if) men wear headscarves, we wear headscarves too', just say it and then see what reaction you get. It is really becoming backward (Interview 10, London).

The modern camp of the Alevi organizational elite in Turkey regards this enforcement as a strategy to assimilate Alevism into mainstream Islam. Also, the EACC in Britain has a similar concern about this strict dress code in the *cem* houses in Turkey and do not enforce wearing headscarves for women during the *cem*; if the women choose to wear headscarves, they keep it during the ceremony. Otherwise it is not enforced neither by the *dede* nor by EACC administers.

Most of my respondents argued that strict gender segregation and lack of women's participation in social life cause gender inequality. Both male and female participants emphasise this point in the interviews. In a conversation with Turkish Alevis from Nurhak region, one of the men, Hasan, told me that in his opinion women should protect Alevism most of all:

> We were looking on the internet the other day, there is a convention about women in Egypt, among thousands of people there is not a single woman. They are going to make decisions about women and there is not even a single woman in that meeting! What kind of a belief is this? That's why our women should hold on to Alevism. Because it keeps you in the front, how can you be in the back? You are a human being too, you are only physically different, but your heart is the same. Then why would you stand behind me, I don't understand that, you are human too (Interview 27, London).

The importance of gender relations for Alevi identity can be observed in marriages and the concern for Alevi women marrying into Sunni families. I have not observed many cases of intermarriage (between an Alevi and non-Alevi) in the community; however, there is acceptance for such cases, particularly for Alevi men. The other option, Alevi woman marrying a Sunni man is met with more suspicion. For instance, Meral (41), a housewife who has been in London for twenty-two years, explains how intermarriage can have different consequences for Alevi men and women:

> When foreigner (yabanci) girls come to our families, they never experience oppression but those who go from us are forced to fast and pray, they are oppressed. My brother's wife is a foreigner and her parents still don't talk to her because she married an Alevi. (Interview 35, London)

I must note that in the above quotation the word '*yabancı*' literally means stranger or foreigner in Turkish. I was surprised many times and have mistaken the word *yabancı* for foreigner (for example English or from an immigrant group in Britain): but it means Sunni and Turkish. Migration has not affected family values and marriage patterns. There is a general concern about not marrying from outside the group, even from outside the village

community. Also cousin marriage is not rare. For instance Lale similarly explained her marriage with an Alevi Kurdish man who comes from another town and still regards him as *yabancı*:

> My husband is from Malatya, among nine siblings only I married a foreigner. I say foreigner but I mean from another town. Alevi, Kurd. We are from the same nation. [He's] from the village where Kırkısrak people first shoot out (Interview 19, London).

Alevi-Sunni marriage is not a taboo yet it is more acceptable for Alevi men since it is assumed that they can preserve their culture after marrying a non-Alevi whereas the risk of women's assimilation to Sunni Islam is perceived to be much higher. Since the Alevi-Sunni differences are understood mainly through gender relations and symbols such as the headscarf, the community is sensitive about women marrying non-Alevis. They are more accepting towards Sunni women who enter their families. For instance Özge told me about her brother and his Sunni wife. Özge is an Alevi woman in her 30s. Originally from Sivas she grew up in Istanbul and has been living in London since 2011. The woman that her brother wanted to marry was forced by her own family to marry a Sunni man and had a son from her first marriage. Eventually she got divorced and married Özge's brother. Özge's family accepts the Sunni bride but there are some cultural differences:

> We do our *cem* in the *cemevi*, she comes to the *cemevi* too but she does not pray because she is not Alevi and she wants to live by her own faith. My sister-in-law's son doesn't like the fact that she wears a headscarf. He was a little boy, 7-8 years old and even then he wanted her to take it off. But my sister-in-law, because she experienced all that with her own family, she wanted to keep it like a symbol. I don't know if she really wants to wear a headscarf or if it is because her family uses this completely. Or maybe, like, people would think like she got married and took off her headscarf, I don't know. But the point is she is very good, very respectful to my family, to my parents she is very considerate. In her marriage she is very constructive and very thoughtful. Most important of all, they are happy in their marriage and we feel like she is family. My parents are very humane people, maybe they wouldn't want her to wear a headscarf; indeed they didn't want it in the beginning. We never had any arguments about this, only sometimes, we, they would say 'we'd like it more if you didn't wear it'. And my nephew doesn't want it

either. But she for example sends him to *cem*, although she doesn't participate (Interview 17, London).

Ezgi, a young research participant I met in the *cemevi*, also told me about her brothers' wives who are British. She argues that they adapted to their family easily because Alevi culture is compatible with their way of life:

Ezgi: They can adapt very quickly because our way of life is so close to the West. Because it's not oppressive, they like it and they know it right? They wouldn't adapt if they didn't want to, right mom?

Sakine: They speak Turkish.

E: Our food, our culture. For instance they would take this [showing a tea glass], I don't know how much this shows something, it is a small example but they would take it to the kitchen and they wash their own dishes. They adapted to our way of living very quickly. I think this is because of our values, because we are not oppressive (Interview 40, London).

Traditional family values still continue in the Turkish-British transnational social space. Most of my research participants often claimed that Alevi culture is already progressive so they do not experience a broad cultural difference. They compare themselves mainly with Sunnis rather than British society. On the other hand, the highly educated female research participants are more critical of gender issues: for instance, two women in my sample were critical of the traditional family structure in Turkey and of the lack of individuality. Both these women were married to British men after migration. One of them, Nazan, said that when she was in Turkey she was suspicious of marriage, having seen the traditional marriages in Turkey where she thinks women are oppressed. Both of these highly educated female participants expressed that Alevi women enjoy more freedom in comparison to Sunnis, yet the patriarchal culture has consequences for both Alevi and Sunni women.

Those research participants with higher education level can compare Alevi and Sunni communities more accurately since they take into account other factors such as urban/rural background and class differences. For instance Selma explains the differences

in her childhood in a shanty town in Istanbul inhabited by rural people versus her own social circle in her adulthood in terms of the Alevi/Sunni boundary:

> We used to have a lot of guests in our house; there was a difference in terms of gender that I could observe. At that time the Sunni people who lived there were covered (*kapalı*[39]) therefore this and their relations with men were striking. Men could come to our house very easily, but in their houses when the woman was alone, men would not go in, but this wasn't the case in our house. Or as a girl, no other girl at my age could walk on the street with a boyfriend but I could, with my friends either from high school or from the university. But that difference was because they were Sunni people who came from Anatolia but I didn't necessarily have big differences from the Sunni people I met in my own social life. There wasn't much difference from the urban Sunnis whose Sunni identity is not significant (Interview 37, London).

There are ambivalences surrounding the principles and practices of gender relations. In the Alevi community, women enjoy freedom to participate in social life; however, there are also counter examples of gender equality. Lack of education and the feudal structure in eastern Turkey are held to account for this gap between the discourse of equality and the actual situation of women's inequality. On the one hand, the positive difference of Alevis and the phrase 'Our women are always one step ahead' are recurring themes in my interviews, observations and informal chats with the people in the community centres; they describe Alevi culture through gender equality in the Alevi teaching. On the other hand, there are examples that challenge the idea of equality and these negative events are either not mentioned or reported as exceptions that stem from lack of education and from a feudal mentality that still affect people.

One of these negative examples was about the murdering of an underage Alevi girl from Maraş and of her Sunni boyfriend. The woman who told me the story, Nazan, is a

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[39]   The word she used was *kapalı*, which literally means closed but it can also refer to women who cover their hair.

middle aged well educated Turkish Alevi woman and has been living in London for twenty years. She said:

> This is because of lack of education and ignorance. A few years ago an honour killing occurred here. A man from Maraş… his daughter, fifteen year old daughter is dating a factory owner Sunni man in his thirties. They didn't accept it, they had arranged an Alevi person to marry her, they didn't accept the man. They trapped them and killed them (Interview 32, London).

I did not hear about honour killings[40] among the Alevi community in London and it is telling that this particular incident never came up before in any of the interviews. This shows that the community does not consent to the killing and want to detach themselves from the incident. Although Alevi people are not exempt from patriarchy in Turkey or elsewhere, such extreme forms of gender inequality and violence are not practiced widely and when such cases do occur, they are treated as exceptions and not consented. In addition, it is possible that the concern for positive presentation of in-group identity makes people censor such incidents and ignore them. Nazan told me this story and concluded that it happened because of the family's ignorance. Although there is no consent in the community for honour killings or violence against women, this kind of one off event can easily be ignored and go unmentioned. The negative events within the Alevi community regarding gender can be relativised by comparing it to an imagined or real Sunni culture; this prevents identifying problems and developing gender egalitarian practices.

Another challenge to gender equality is the way male and female children are treated. Both sons and daughters are supported in their study and work; they also

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[40]   The term 'honour' can be expressed by (at least) three different words in the Turkish language: *onur* (derived from French) and *şeref* refer to a general moral quality. The other word *namus*, on the other hand, is mainly used when referring to chastity or proper sexual conduct of men and women yet in practice it is about controlling the sexuality of women. In this context the original term that was translated into English as 'honour killing' is called *namus cinayeti* (lit. honour homicide).

participate in public life. However, whilst having a son is important for a family, having no daughters is not an issue yet in some families the absence of a son is. I did not observe overt discrimination or unequal treatment of boys and girls yet an interesting aspect of gender is revealed when I observed the reactions of female research participants concerning my own family. Andrade (2000) argues that in qualitative research, the researcher's identity is also revealed and negotiated in the interaction with the research participants. During our informal conversations, the respondents asked me if I had any siblings and I could read the surprise from their faces when I said that I have only one elder sister. Some were surprised that my parents did not want to have a son after I was born. An old woman from Maraş, Auntie Güle, wanted to find out more about me and my family. On hearing that I have one sister and no brothers, she said sympathetically: 'Ah, wish your poor mother had a son!' Another research participant, Zeynep, summarises this commonly held view: 'It is nice that your father did not insist on having a son'. Although in the younger generations this idea of male children as the bearer of the family name is changing, this transformation is slow.

The discourse on Alevi women being forward and more liberal is incomplete when it is not supported by the necessary practices. For instance, in the administrative roles of the EACC, although men dominate numerically, there is a tendency to encourage more women to take administrative roles in the centre, so that gender equality is promoted with actual practices. Similar actions need to be taken in order to identify the problems and deal with them effectively. As was explained in the previous chapter, there is a gendered division of labour in the transnational activities and through a more balanced participation of both genders, the public events can empower women.

4.3. Ethnic identity

Social identities are plural (Tilley 2006) and ethnic belonging is a salient aspect of the self. The Alevi community in Britain identifies with being Alevi, Turkish or Kurdish and these vary in different social contexts. The majority of Alevis in Britain come from central-Eastern and Eastern parts of Turkey; they say they are of Kurdish ethnic origin and some speak Kurmanci or Zaza[41] as mother tongue or as a second language after Turkish. Kurdish identity has been suppressed in the Republic and since the armed conflicts between Kurdish and Turkish forces identification with Kurdishness bears a massive stigma in social life. For the majority of Alevi people in Britain who are also Kurdish, ethnic identity is important and is the first motivation for organising publicly and carrying out transnational activities to raise awareness of human rights violations in Turkey. This knowledge and awareness has prepared the conditions for many other community centres and has been a crucial asset for the community when organising around different identities. While Kurdishness has political implications, Turkish ethnic identity is less problematized and for Turkish Alevis the religious aspect of their identity is more salient.

Kurdish people live in a broad geography that includes Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Syria. In Turkey, the estimates of Kurdish population vary widely from three to fifteen million[42] depending on the political agendas of those who make such estimates (Mutlu 1996). Speaking Kurmanci and Zaza languages is an important emic and etic marker of Kurdish identity and, based on this criterion, Mutlu (1996) estimates that there were seven million

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[41]   As Mutlu (1996) argues, there is no consensus on what constitutes Kurdish language. The most common languages/dialects spoken in the Kurdish region are Zaza and Kurmanci.

[42]   This wide variation is due to the different political agendas that either overdraw the Kurdish population's ratio or depict it as minimal and insignificant.

Kurdish people in Turkey in 1990. Since the census in Turkey does not recognise ethnic differences within Turkey's Muslim population, exact numbers are not known.

Kurdishness or Aleviness are manifested as both primordial and situational identities in people's narratives. Ethnicity is understood as a natural part of their selfhood; however, they are given different meanings as a social identity in situational ways: one may become a more salient identity than the other, depending on the wider context. Particularly migration changed their salience over time due to the symbolic attachment with homeland and its politics. As previously discussed, in the first years of migration to Britain in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the justification of asylum applications was mainly the discrimination and the threat of imprisonment due to involvement in Kurdish and /or socialist political movements and organisations in Turkey or simply being Kurdish. Except for a small number of Turkish Alevis (mainly from the Nurhak region), the majority of British Alevis experienced ethnic discrimination in Turkey and the armed conflict in their region was a decisive factor in the asylum process, although most have not been directly involved. Turkish Alevis, on the other hand, justified their asylum application by citing discrimination against Alevis and/or the threat of detention due to their involvement in socialist organisations in Turkey.

I noticed that my respondents were reluctant to talk about their asylum seeking process, even when the recorder was off. Although it is not the central topic of this thesis, I wanted to explore the justification of the asylum applications in order to understand the role of being Alevi and Kurdish in their migration process. Since the topic is sensitive and may involve illegal activities such as smuggling, people did not share details. Stories of smuggling and some refugee statements that magnify the dangers of being Kurdish in Turkey were told about other people in an impersonalized manner, yet nobody admitted to having been involved.

The brief answers to the questions about migration and asylum seeking process reveal the reluctance to talk about this topic. The below quotation from a research participant, Haydar, also shows this. Haydar is a 70 year old Kurdish Alevi man from Kayseri. He arrived in London in 1989 from Bandirma (a small town in Western Turkey) and worked for a long time in textile factories. He explains how he arrived in Britain giving minimum detail:

> Haydar: In my time there was no visa [requirement], I came here when there was no visa. After I arrived they started visa regulations, before that it was free.
>
> A: Did you arrive with your wife, with your family?
>
> H: No, I brought my family later. I brought my family and children 6 years later.
>
> A: Did you seek asylum or did you benefit from the Ankara Agreement?
>
> H: Those who arrived first… There was no Ankara Agreement back then.
>
> A: Did you seek asylum?
>
> H: Well it's something like that. [laughs] As a refugee.
>
> A: What was the reason, the justification?
>
> H: Well, the way everybody else came from Turkey, at that time the situation of Turkey… Ours is the same. (UK Interview 12, London)

Interestingly, one single person's initiative can be important in migrants' lives. For example, I came across the name of a volunteer in the community centres, Mehmet Sarı, who had helped many asylum seekers from Turkey in the 1980s and 1990s. He came to England as a refugee himself in the 1980s and became involved in immigrant rights in Britain. He helped new immigrants from Turkey in the *Halkevi* (literally People's House) which was then a powerful community centre hosting newcomer Turks and Kurds from Turkey in its large building in Dalston, London. An interviewee, Feride, related the significance of Sarı in the lives of political immigrants. She believes that the reason for many people's immigration was mainly economic; however, ethnic discrimination against the Kurdish population and armed conflicts in Turkey became a justification for seeking asylum.

She explains: 'Have you heard of Mehmet Sarı? He's a lawyer. He was writing all the testimonies, this and that happened.' She told me that she did not have to give testimony because her parents migrated before her and she obtained a residence permit through family unification.

In order to follow up this issue, I talked to people I had built closer friendships with during my fieldwork and asked them why people speak so reluctantly about the asylum process. I was told that they are still feeling insecure and might be worrying that their residence permit could be cancelled, if there is any inconsistency in their statements. Although not all asylum seekers were highly involved in Kurdish politics and the armed struggle against the Turkish army, being Kurdish and Alevi were reasons for them to face discrimination, arbitrary violence and detention. Since 'there may be a high correlation between ethnicity and class' (Eriksen 2010, 49), Kurdish people from the Eastern and South Eastern provinces are more likely to have experienced economic marginalization in Turkey. Their reasons for migration reveal the connection between economic and political factors.

In addition to the above remark by Feride, the theatre play presented by the EACC drama group in London in June 2013 gave me an insight to the multiple motivations for migration to Britain. This was the topic of the opening sketch in their play and since it did not refer directly to specific individuals, it was bold in portraying details such as smuggling and paying thousands of pounds to smugglers or 'şebeke' (literally network) as they call it. The sketch was set in the back of a lorry and portrayed people being smuggled from Turkey. The characters in the play all share the same hope of a better future in London. In the final scene when they are caught by the police, one by one they raise their hands above their heads and say in English 'I am Kurdish', 'I am Alevi I seek asylum' or 'I am oppressed, I seek asylum'. The police officer answers them in Turkish and says that they could not make it even to the Greek border. Interestingly, economic factors seem more important for

migration rather than political involvement in the play. Until the very last scene of the sketch when they declare that they seek asylum, they do not mention political involvements in Turkey. These identities are meaningful for individuals' daily lives to varying extents but they gain importance in such critical times.

Jenkins argues that 'there is a direct relationship between the distribution of resources and penalties in society and social identity: identity is a criterion for distribution and is constituted in terms of patterns of distribution' (2014, 26). Also, Shankland (1999) points to the inequality of ethnic and religious groups in Turkey and argues that Kurds and Alevis have been less successful in developing their rural communities into towns or municipalities. This explains why economic factors matter so much in the decision to migrate; being Kurdish and Alevi not only causes discrimination but also limits the allocation of resources and economic well-being in Turkey and affects their socio-economic status.

Identification with Kurdishness and its significance as a collective identity to mobilize people is context dependent. For example, it is argued that first of all London has been geographically divided in terms of activism: Dalston and lately inner London are the scenes for Alevi activism, while Harringay is the centre of Kurdish protests. When the armed conflict between the Turkish state and Kurdish forces was at a peak in the 1990s, demonstrations on the Kurdish issue were more frequent. I heard from my participants that in the 1990s and early 2000s, every weekend people used to march to demand freedom for Öcalan[43] in the streets of Harringay. The armed conflict has deescalated in the last few years due to the peace talks and the demonstrations decreased. Due to both the relevance of the Alevi rights movement in Turkey and conflicts between Alevis and the current

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[43]   Abdullah Öcalan is the leader of PKK, Kurdish Worker's Party, who has been serving a prison sentence in Turkey since 1999.

government, there is space for political mobilization based on Alevi identity. In addition, people who were previously mobilised only for the Kurdish cause began to go to the *cemevi* and take part in their activities because the EACC embraced a more inclusive approach, as will be discussed in the following chapter.

The symbolic attachment to homeland also influences which identity becomes more salient after immigration. Key events in Turkey such as the Gezi Revolt, or an attack on a *cemevi* in Turkey trigger the sentiments of Alevi people in Britain. The community centres respond to the political developments in Turkey. Demir (2012), who studied the Kurdish population in Britain argues that they battle with *memleket* (homeland); on the one hand, they struggle with Turkey regarding human rights violations and discrimination, whilst on the other, they have close ties and symbolic attachment to Turkey. Demir found that Kurdishness is experienced in personal life through practices such as giving Kurdish names to children, learning the Kurdish language, celebrating the spring festival *Newroz* or supporting a more universal struggle by joining the UK left and that the patterns of battling and belonging are contingent on developments in Turkey.

On the organizational level, there is competition over mobilising people on Kurdish or Alevi issues and the two identities are clearly separated. In addition, people from certain regions are generally known for supporting Kurdish identity (such as Pazarcık[44] or Kırkısrak) while others such as Sivas and Dersim are known primarily for their Alevi identity. An everyday conversation between the administrators of the EACC demonstrates this:

> Aygül said she was surprised that Kerem [a student in London who visits *cemevi* frequently] is from Pazarcik because they think that people from Pazarcik are mostly involved in Kurdish politics and they are not involved with Alevi identity very much. Another man, Ibrahim, said jokingly they suffered from Pazarcik people a lot, they were playing football together, the Alevi centre's people were wearing head

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[44]   Pazarcik is one of the districts of Maraş and has a mainly Kurdish population.

bands with "Ya Ali" written on it, the Pazarcık people were wearing head bands with the colours of the Kurdish flag [red, green, yellow] (Fieldnotes, London, 05.06.2013).

The EACC approaches Alevism as an identity that crosscuts different ethnicities and welcomes people from all backgrounds. Individuals prefer to attend the community centres that appeal to their ethnic and religious identities; people who identify more with Alevism attend the *cemevi*, while those who embrace Kurdishness prefer pro-Kurdish political organisations. There may be latent conflicts between these two identities; however, the EACC tries to be inclusive to all Alevis while maintaining distance from illegal organisations at the same time. In times of emergencies the different community centres may even cooperate; such as establishing a platform to protect the youth against gang involvement or starting campaigns to help war victims in the Middle East.

On a more personal level, ethnicity and hometown (belonging to a certain town or village) influence people's social relations to a great extent but do not cause sharp divisions. Kurdish and Turkish identities do not overlap with different understandings of Alevism; both groups (Turkish Alevis and Kurdish Alevis) are heterogenous in terms of their relations with the EACC. Although there is no overt conflict between the Turkish and Kurdish Alevis, they tend to socialise separately. For instance Alevis from Nurhak are Turkish and they state that they do not mix with Kudish Alevis. They get together with Alevis from other regions for instrumental purposes:

> Cem: Our aim is the youth, keeping them away from the streets. You know in England in each 100 square meter there is someone smoking marihuana or heroin, or whatever. So we want to educate our youth with our own values and Alevism. We think that if we manage this, they will be on the true path like us. This is our first aim, secondly people of Nurhak don't adapt to the environment very much, because we are Turkish. There aren't many Alevi Turks. We don't have a problem with the Alevi Kurds but we don't mix very well.
>
> Hasan: At some point it gets stuck, they say nationalist things.
>
> Cem: They speak in Kurdish and you don't understand at all.

However on another personal level identities seem to be naturally intertwined to a point that causes slips of tongue, which I elaborate on below. The lines between religion and ethnicity blur when discussing being Alevi, Turkish and Kurdish, even causing confusion for some research participants. Although it is clear for social scientists or community centres' organizational elite to categorise Kurdish as ethnic and Alevi as religious belonging, these categories may have flexible meanings and usage, changing according to the context for ordinary people. For example, in a discussion on being Alevi, the 'Other' is expected to be Sunnis, because the discussion topic is religion. However, the interviewee may refer to the other as 'Turks' instead of saying 'Sunnis'. In my first days of fieldwork in London, I met a man in his late thirties, Murat, who volunteered to answer my questions and told me of his experiences of being Alevi in Turkey and in Britain. Before I had to ask, ethnicity issues also emerged:

> Let me tell you openly, in Turkey I never knew if I was Alevi or Sunni. I mean I didn't experience anything like that. Because when I went to school, nobody asked me 'are you Alevi or Turk?' When I came to this country, in this country I found my identity (Interview 1, London).

Because he was only ten years old when he arrived in England, he had no ethnic or religious awareness and could not explicitly identify with either Alevism or Kurdishness. I tried to explore this issue by asking him further questions and discovered that these categories are related to the demographic structure of Adana, a big city in the south of Turkey, where Murat grew up. I asked him what he means by Sunni or Turk and he explained to me that the Sunni people in their region happened to be Turkish. The Alevi people in the region were not locals but migrants from the eastern parts of Turkey; therefore, they spoke Turkish with a particular Eastern accent which is different from the local accent. His family's Alevi background could be identified due to the Eastern accent when they spoke in Turkish, although being Kurdish and being Alevi do not necessarily go

hand in hand. From their accent and hometown, Turkish Sunnis were able to identify their Kurdish as well as Alevi origins.

In this example subjection to discrimination stems from both ethnicity and religion and it is difficult to locate where one ends and the other begins. Being a double minority causes confusions and slips of tongue which signal the intertwined state of the two identities on a personal level.

In addition to such confusion it can also be a deliberate choice to say I am Alevi, rather than disclosing other identities such as ethnicity as a reaction to nationalism. For example, a highly educated fifty-five year old research participant, Mustafa, told me that when he is asked about his ethnicity or even hometown, he replies that he is Alevi. He explained this as a reaction against nationalism:

> I am not religious at all. Well I say I am Alevi, as a name. Even when somebody asks 'where are you from?' I say Alevi. Some people from Turkey get annoyed, they say 'I am asking you where you are from or are you Turkish or Kurdish?' I always answer Alevi (Interview 26, London).

Another example of deliberate identification with Alevism reveals the differences between two community members in their understanding and expression of the terms 'Alevi' and 'Kurd': both are Alevi and Kurdish women in their early forties and live in London. When I visited the HTA of Kırkısrak in North London, they became interested in my research and agreed to talk to me. One of them said that being Alevi is the most significant identity for her, but then at some point used Turk and Sunni interchangeably. Her friend objected and said that the two are different things. The discussion began when I asked if she had got married in Britain.

> Saniye: I was twenty-three or twenty-four and single, after two or three years I got married to my husband. My parents were saying 'my daughter, be careful, people of Kayseri are neither Kurdish nor Alevi'... My father never wanted me to marry a Turk. He always wanted me to marry an Alevi. They made some inquiries, [they said] they never heard that there are Alevis in Kayseri. Then I said ‚father don't worry'. I got

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married here and had three kids… But now we argue with my husband, he says, you're Kurdish', I say I'm not Kurdish I am Alevi, ok I am Kurdish, there is Kurdishness in my roots but if they ask me if you're Alevi or Kurdish, I say I am Alevi.

Gaye: But it's a mistake to ask if you are Kurdish or Alevi, because Alevism is a religion.

S: I understand. But still… I, for example in forms…

G: For example there are Alevi people among the Turks. Do they say 'I am not Turkish, I am Alevi'?

S: I see, ok, I know but in the forms for example they ask me, right? Turkish-Kurdish? What do you write? You write Kurdish (saying to her friend, Gaye). I write Turkish for example.

Zeliha: Why do you write Turkish?

A: Do you find Alevism closer to Turkishness?

S: Yes, I think so. It is more supportive of Atatürk [*Atatürkçü*], you see. I mean Alevis are more Atatürk supporters, more nationalist (Interview 18, London).

As we can see from the quotations above, identities are dynamic and can be understood in relation to other identities. Being Alevi is sometimes associated with overcoming the ethnic differences and at times as a more modern identity, which replaces or challenges ethnicity. Interestingly in Saniye's narrative, being Alevi is the other of being Turkish ('my father never wanted me to marry a Turk. He always wanted me to marry an Alevi') and closer to Turkishness ('in the forms for example they ask me, right? Turkish-Kurdish? What do you write? You write Kurdish. I write Turkish for example') at the same time. The slip of tongue which equates Alevi and Kurdish shows the primordial bond of the two, whereas the deliberate choice of identifying as Turkish although she is Kurdish shows the constructedness of these identities. Being Alevi is associated with urban Kemalist Turkish culture. Saniye is a high school graduate, speaks with a flawless Istanbul accent and differentiates herself as a modern urban Alevi from the rest of the Kurdish Alevi population, which mainly comes from Turkey's rural areas. By emphasizing Aleviness over Kurdishness she constructs a more positive and less conflicting identity. As Erman and Göker (2000)

argue, Kurdish identity bears too much stigma and the positive qualities of Alevi identity (being progressive and modern) are emphasized by some research participants.

In addition to the stigma, there was no legitimate ground for manifesting Kurdish identity in the urban middle class and educated settings in Turkey before the 1990s. Kurdishness was associated with backwardness, rural communities and conflict. Even parents encouraged their children to learn Turkish rather than speak in their mother tongue. For instance, Selma, whose family migrated from Sivas to Istanbul when she was five, told me the following anecdote:

> People were hiding their Kurdishness, not speaking the Kurdish language would make you superior. I think, for instance, this is the reason why I forgot Kurdish and why I was good at Turkish. As an educated person I was better adjusted to that society. […] For example, when I spoke Kurdish with a Turkish accent, [they] would tease me but I would also notice that I would feel as if I am privileged. This is what I now realise, it was not a good thing to speak that language. […] When you are a Kurdish Alevi you experience a double dead end. But at that time I didn't perceive it as Kurdish identity (Interview 37, London).

Moreover, many Alevi people I met in the community centres, including Kurdish Alevis, try to set a difference between themselves and Sunni Kurds. They argue that Kurdish Sunnis are mainly from the Şafi sect of Sunni Islam which they see as the most strict and opposite to Alevis. Özkul (2014, 122) also identified this in her research in Germany and argues that some Alevis, although their native language is Kurdish, do not identify themselves as Kurdish due to this perception. For instance, one of my interview partners in Turkey said the majority of Kurdish Sunni people in Turkey belong to the Şafi sect while the more urban Turkish population is mainly from the Hanefi sect of Sunni Islam, which she found more tolerant, compared to Şafi Islam. She said:

> They [Şafis] have more strict rules and their leaders in the past are the ones who gave the negative *fatva* against Alevis and they are very much under the influence of these. Apart from that their customs are also… they have *fatvas* about sheikhs. Not only about religion. They have a feudal structure (Interview 6, Istanbul).

Ethnicity, religious identity and attachments to the land form the basis of a primordial identity for many elderly community members. The sense of past and ancestors' memories tie people to the particular land and enforce symbolic attachments, while being abroad causes them to feel uprooted from their lands. For instance, an elderly man in a group interview explained his connection to Elbistan, Maraş, where he originally comes from:

> I will say this, well, I have been living in that country [Turkey] for a thousand years. My father, my grandfather, his father, these are the ones I know, Mehmet, Ali K… [undeciphered word], Memedo, Ali, there has been a couple of generations. We left that land of ours, our places, our country. We came to this country through asylum (Interview 6, London).

In conclusion, ethnic background is significant for Alevi people's identification and conceptualization of self and group identities. The salience of ethnic and religious identity may take different forms and combinations. The way it is experienced and manifested is very situational and depends heavily on the symbolic attachments with Turkey, current developments in Turkey and affiliation with organizations in Britain after migration. While the symbolic ties with the local communities and hometowns are nostalgic, the relations with Turkey on a national level are more problematic and conflictual (I. Demir 2012).

4.4. Class and Alevi identity

Class background and individual characteristics, such as coming from urban or rural environments, educational levels and involvement in any political movements prior to migration[45] have an impact on how people understand and experience Alevism: it is

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[45] Political involvements are important because they may compensate for the lack of formal education. In London I encountered many Alevis who had only primary or secondary school diplomas but were autodidacts due to their involvement with left ideology.

perceived as a primordial identity by the people with rural backgrounds with limited education, while those from more educated, upper class and from urban backgrounds treat it as culture that is important insofar as it relates to their worldview. Geertz explains primordial identities as ineffable and argues that 'one is bound to one's kinsman, one's neighbor, one's fellow believer ipso facto; as the result not merely of personal affection, practical necessity, common interest, or incurred obligation, but at least in great part by virtue of some unaccountable absolute importance attributed to the very tie itself' (1973, 259). A critical stance on Alevi belief is more prevalent among the more educated while other community members who have less education and no involvement in political movements tend to accept Alevi belief as given and are less critical of its practices and institutions.

It has been argued that modernity will eliminate the need for primordial sentiments and chosen attributes such as class or political affiliation would become more important in people's self-definition as they become more individualistic (Bolaria and Hier 2006, 37). I have observed in the Alevi community that as people urbanized and became more middle class they had further possibilities to identify with and as they are able to relate to cosmopolitan ideas their need for solidarity through primordial identities decreased. Also, for instance the visible symbols of Alevism such as *zülfikar*[46] and certain ways for elderly women to cover their hair are observed more often among the lower class with rural backgrounds. On the other hand, the middle class, educated and/or politically involved have access to various social spaces and do not carry such overt symbols of Alevi belief, although they may continue to identify as Alevi. They manifest their identification with Alevism by reading books and articles about it, going to seminars and similar intellectual activities.

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[46]   This is the two edged sword of Imam Ali and it is a popular pattern for necklaces and accessories among Alevi youth.

Figure 12. Zülfikar

There is no linear relationship in which Alevi belief is gradually abandoned as people become more middle class. However, the content of their identification with Alevism does alter as Alevi individuals achieve a middle class, urban status; it becomes a matter of choice rather than a given belief system into which people are born. As Giddens argues, traditions are not imperatives for identity but are negotiated; he claims that 'traditions only persist in so far as they are made available to discursive justification and are prepared to enter into open dialogue not only with other traditions but with alternative modes of doing things' (1994, 105). Alevism is also understood in this flexible, reflexive manner by the younger generation who does not strictly follow all traditions and rituals but identify with them selectively. They experience Alevism in a flexible way, at times critical of those aspects which are incompatible with their worldview. For instance Özge, a young research participant I met through the theatre group in the *cemevi*, told me that she did not practice all rituals of Alevism. She said that some rituals are impossible to conduct in an modern urban setting such as not washing during the ten day fasting in the month of *Muharrem*:

> I don't practice everything in Alevism maybe, some things are superstition to me, I don't like living in the past. I mean I think that [it] needs to be blended with our present day (Interview 17, London).

In addition, many other middle class research participants who had been living in urban and metropolitan areas in Turkey and Britain express Alevism through certain elements that matched with their worldviews. They mentioned its compatibility with science, Western values and being modern. In their identification with Alevism there is an element of choice.

On the other hand, the members of the community that have limited education and less contact with urban ways of life are less critical of Alevi belief, practices and organisations. In their personal identification, being a member of a community and complete submission to belief are more important than personal choice. A middle aged mother of four children, residing in North London, explained how she feels about her belief:

> Well, I believe very much, there is no little, middle or end of it. I believe fully, I don't know, when these topics are [discussed] in the *cemevi* I get carried away. My belief is complete; it's not half or anything. We're open about our belief, we're not hiding it. I fully trust. Since I believe, I trust in everything (Interview 40, London).

For her, it is important to conduct the rituals as much as possible, while her adult children are not obliged to do the same. For instance, her university graduate daughter expresses her identification with Alevism through cultural elements and being modern. The choice of expressing the attachment with belief varies according to the availability of other identities.

The environment and conditions where religious identity is revived influence the individuals' relation to religion. For instance, Göle (1996) argues that the religiosity of the newly urbanite women who appeared more in the public sphere after the 1980s was not entirely the same as traditional religiosity; there were different symbols of clothing and a reliance on modern education, reading and researching religion, as opposed to previous generations that held to a more traditional acquisition of religious values. In addition, international migration influences religious experiences. Güveli (2014) compared first and second generation immigrants from Turkey with non-migrant Turks and found that while

individual religiosity and practices declined for the immigrants, identification with Islam and participation in communal prayers increased in order to build a communal identity. These examples suggest that social transformation such as urbanization and migration affect people's approach to their religious identities.

In addition to these differences in the identification with and manifestation of Alevism, there is a strong influence of leftist terminology and a repertoire of contentious politics on modern day Alevism. This can be explained by the fact that in the revival years of Alevism, the community centres' leaders were mainly composed of people formerly involved in leftist politics and their influence was higher than that of the religious guides, the *dedes*. The strong attachment with working class identity can be seen especially among the politically motivated members of the community and they interpret Alevism from this point of view. For instance, an older respondent, İbrahim, argued that Alevism is a form of primitive socialism and that egalitarian living is deeply rooted in the Alevi way of life. He expressed his gratitude to the English working class for the welfare state but also said that he found it difficult to integrate into British culture since this integration is aimed at through middle class values:

> Today although my face is here, my heart is still in Turkey. [...] Yes in terms of life, it is different here but I never felt I belong there. But from a socialist point of view, the working class has no country. I mean adjusting to here... I can adjust to the working class. I can't adjust to the bourgeoisie here, just like the way I didn't adjust to the bourgeoisie in Turkey. Now they impose integration to here through the bourgeoisie. In a moral sense, in a cultural sense (Interview 15, London).

The common sense explanations of Alevis' compatibility with Western culture should not be accepted at face value. In a wider context, when class differences are considered, the economic marginalisation of some Turkish and Kurdish migrants and their reaction to capitalism in the host society become more visible. They evaluate the lack of discrimination and the freedom of expression in the host society very positively, yet can still

be critical about the shrinking social rights, neo-liberal attitudes and as in the above case the imposition of integration through middle class values.

4.5. Alevism as a politicised identity

Alevi identity is becoming visible through the political activities both in Turkey and in the European countries. A collective Alevi identity connects Alevis in Turkey, Britain and other countries of immigration. In both supranational and transnational activism this collective identity was crucial and manifesting and maintaining this identity is regarded by the community members as a basic human right. This influences how people see Alevism and how they transmit its values to their children. At this point, two kinds of narratives can be seen which may also conflict; one arguing that Alevis have always been in opposition to the unjust rulers and to the state, the other portrays Alevism as a peaceful teaching which does not tolerate violence. These two conflicting motives are negotiated as nonviolent opposition.

Physical attacks and history of stigma have consolidated Alevi identity as primarily political, while the ritual aspects of Alevism have been eroded. Most of my research participants explain Alevism as a victimized identity. The majority of the people I met during my fieldwork expressed their lack of knowledge on religious matters and advised me to talk to the *dede* or chairman if I wanted to research Alevism. After explaining that I was interested in how the ordinary people understand and give meaning to Alevism, they would provide generic information on the roots of Alevi belief and continue with political problems and experiences of discrimination. Most middle aged and younger people are not confident in their knowledge of Alevi theology and rely on the *cemevi* and their courses if they intend to educate their children about Alevism. The boundaries between the private and the public are blurred at this point; the Alevism courses in EACC, which are offered free of charge, are aimed at filling this knowledge gap and providing children with the kind of

knowledge that is approved and consented by different Alevi actors (both the modern and the traditional wing).

In addition to teaching Alevism in the community centres, some parents want to promote political awareness to their children and take them to protests as part of teaching them about Alevism. The children learn Alevis' political demands through the slogans that they hear from their parents in rallies. For example, in one of the interviews we explored this topic when discussing how children are taught about the Alevi faith. Zeynep is a housewife with two children and lives in Enfield, where I interviewed her. At some point in our conversation, I ask her if she teaches her children about Alevism in order to find out if belief and rituals are transmitted to the next generation. To my surprise, she spoke about the political aspect of Alevi identity and said that she and her husband take the children (who were around eight or ten years of age at the time of the interview) to political demonstrations. Their children want to know about the slogans they hear in these protests and Zeynep explains to them:

> The kids were like […] 'Speak up, if you don't, you'll be the next' 'We are Alevi, we are right, we will win.' They asked 'Mummy, what are we going to win?' I tried to summarise it shortly: so that all suffering ends without discriminating whether the people are Sunni or Alevi. What else can you say to the children? (Interview 38, London).

Many Alevi people who are influential in the organisations (such as leaders, volunteers and *dedes*) argue that Alevi belief not only deals with spirituality but also regulates the relations among people; therefore political engagement is an essential part of it. The above quotation indicates this issue and I have also observed this tendency among other participants. In addition to the construction of Alevism as a political identity, the refugee experience causes the community members to become sensitive about political issues and mobilisation. Going to demonstrations is already in the community's political repertoire, so at times of conflicts in Turkey regarding the Alevi population, people mobilise

easily and rapidly in London. Also, the slogans are interesting; some were formulated in Turkey, for instance 'Speak up, if you don't, you'll be the next' comes from 1990s' protests against corruption in Turkey and was not originally an Alevi slogan but has been carried into the transnational context and adopted in Alevis' protests. These demonstrate the level of political engagement for ordinary members of the community.

Similar views are expressed widely. An elderly man from Kırkısrak HTA, Haydar, also explains Alevism through secular aspects and human rights. The last words especially underline the importance of justice, which is a statement that has political implications:

> Well, as for religion, for me there's no such thing as religion. There is humanity, there is honesty. If you can do these, this is religion, otherwise, if you show off with other things and wear it like a signboard and deceive people, this is not religion for me. Religion is truth, honesty, human rights and law (Interview 12, London).

For the politically motivated Alevis, it is crucial to be aware of the rights' violations so that the pain will not be in vain and the situation for Alevis in Turkey will be improved. As Yıldız and Verkuyten (2011) argue, the distinction between 'us' and 'them' is created through the cultural representation of trauma; one does not need to experience it directly since it can be made collective through education or media. The children and young adults learn about the suffering of Alevis in the past through their parents, the community centres and the media. This is especially the case with the sources on recent history now available: people who did not directly experience the trauma can learn about it and in turn be affected by it. In addition, the younger generation expresses that they have an interest in the political aspect of Alevi identity rather than religious matters. Ezgi, for instance, says she became more interested in Alevism in recent years and wanted to learn more about the political history of Alevi communities rather than its theology. For many younger people, Alevism is non-practice or not practicing certain tenets that mainstream Muslims follow. I asked Ezgi when she became interested in Alevism:

I think it's more like now, regarding the political process in Turkey; they [Alevis] are louder. Then you question yourself, what am I, we are not Sunni, we don't go to mosque, then what am I, I am Alevi. Then you wonder, what is Alevism? You want to research and learn further (Interview 40, London).

For instance, those people who did not know anything about being Alevi, except for the fact that they are Alevi, began to fill the gaps of their underrepresented identity after they had immigrated. One of my respondents Meral articulated this:

Here we live freely; I can say I am Alevi out loud. Until I came here I didn't know anything about Alevism. Here I went to *cemevi*, I listened to my friends, I read, analysed my opinion (Interview 35, London).

Şirin also expressed the difficulty of being Alevi and Kurdish in her hometown Sivas. She lived there until she graduated from high school, then she moved to Istanbul. Since 1995 she has been living in London and volunteers in the *cemevi*. She compares the situation in her village in rural Sivas to London:

It was an Alevi village... actually we are both Alevi and Kurdish. […] We never said we were Alevi, because we knew there would be pressure.[…] My mother used to say to us 'We are Kurdish, all right they know this but never tell them we are Alevi'. There were question marks in my head at that time, if we told them, how much more pressure would they exercise on us? (Interview 2, London).

When asked about the effects of immigration on Alevi belief and practices*,* she answered:

It didn't affect us much, actually we lived Aleviness here more, I can say. Our meetings, sharing our *aşure*[47] in Trafalgar Square or in Dalston Junction, these are all good things… Things that cannot be done in Turkey (Interview 2, London).

Traditions transform and turn into public events to manifest culture and gain support from the British public. For instance, although sharing *aşure* with neighbours and friends is a common practice in Turkey among both Alevis and Sunnis, it is unusual and

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[47]   *Aşure* is a sweet soup which is cooked together and shared with as many people as possible at the end of the Muharrem, month of mourning and fasting.

indeed new to share it in public spaces with strangers. The migration context necessitates public spaces and transforms old practices. Something pertaining to the private sphere such as *aşure* can become a way of manifesting Alevi identity. While the belief aspect and spirituality becomes more personal and private, Alevi identity as a political category becomes a collective identity that mobilises large numbers of people.

4.6. Dual belonging and British culture as rights culture

Being a persecuted minority in the home country influences the patterns of belonging to Turkey and challenges the view of nation as a homogenous unity. Dual attachments and loyalties form the basis of the transnational practices; symbolic and real attachments between Turkey, UK and elsewhere. Alevi migrants have carried their cultural elements mainly from Turkey and continue to have symbolic and real attachments. Their loyalties are not directly to a nation state but rather to the specific places in Turkey that they came from and they have a problematic relationship with the idea of the 'national', this is especially so for Kurdish Alevis.

While the concept 'assimilation' has many negative connotations, for Alevis, 'integration' is regarded as a more viable term. Their relations to British society can be understood as integrating into certain sections of society such as the job market and the political structures while preserving their culture (either entirely maintaining it or making hybrid combinations with the host society's culture) in the private sphere.

Despite the problems with the Turkish state, most of my participants identify with Turkey/or their hometown in Turkey rather than Britain. This can be explained with the recency of migration from Turkey to Britain and with the cultural differences that make it difficult to adapt entirely. Slightly more than half of my participants (twenty-two out of forty-two) expressed that they feel more belonging to Turkey or to their hometown. This is the case regardless of the length of time they have spent in Britain. This is particularly the

case with elderly immigrants who cannot speak English and who have a limited social network other than their family members and co-ethnics and therefore express more belonging to Turkey. Those who did not work after migration (or only worked in Turkish/Kurdish workplaces) and did not have any friends outside of their family and hometown social circle express no or limited belonging to Britain, whereas higher educated people who have foreign partners and/or living in a mixed social circle feel stronger belonging to Britain or to both countries.

In terms of personal belonging, the emotional ties with Turkey are strong. This is also very visible in the decorations of homes and community centres; pictures of the mountains and landscapes from Turkey, pictures of people considered important are found everywhere in the *cemevi* and in the other community centres. This is very similar to Christou and King's (2010) findings on second generation Greek migrants in Germany; the landscapes of real and imagined homeland are still very important for migrants' identities, and particularly the feeling of being uprooted from one's land makes them nostalgic for the homeland.

Besides nostalgic feelings about the homeland, certain aspects of Britain are evaluated very positively by Alevi migrants. My respondents identify the positive aspects of life in Britain such as economic wellbeing (better job opportunities or having social benefits as a form of economic security) and *rahatlik* (which literally means comfort or being relaxed). This second phenomenon refers to being able to express liberal lifestyles and is particularly important for women in terms of dressing as they wish and participating in the public sphere without being harassed by men.

The question 'Do you ever think of moving back to Turkey? If, yes, under which circumstances?' revealed interesting results about the perceived political problems in Turkey and personal choices and lifestyles. The ideas about moving back to Turkey or

staying in Britain demonstrates that strong emotional attachment still exists towards Turkey, while the economic rights and liberal environment in Britain are crucial pull factors. I frequently heard from my research participants that benefits and social rights were important advantages of living in Britain.

Nazan, who is a highly educated woman, declares 'I know my rights'; she expresses that in Britain she knows how to defend her rights, whereas the very possibility is absent in Turkey (Interview 32, London). On the other hand, she thinks British society is too individualistic and the sense of community is lacking. She finds the solution by staying in Britain but becoming more involved in the community centres in her private life as many other immigrants do. Also, other research participants express similar ideas about the protection of individual rights and liberties in Britain. The relatively better economic and political opportunities in Britain are very important for a discriminated minority group. An elderly research participant from Maraş, Ali, reported that:

> Here [In Britain] the state does not owe you even a penny; you get back what you deserve to the penny. In Turkey if you want to defend your right, they beat you up (Interview 6, London).

When experiences in Turkey and Britain are compared, the state institutions' transparency and systematic working in Britain is positively evaluated. My respondents' experiences in Turkey are more problematic because they argue that there is corruption in Turkey in general and bias towards Alevis in particular. Given that *hak* (right, justice) is an important concept with which Alevis describe their morality, the just and systematic functioning of public institutions creates affinity between Alevi moral principles and Britain.

The identification with the British culture usually remains on the level of rights and entitlements. For instance, Sales explores the Muslim community in Britain and argues that:

> Britishness was crucial for them not as an identity but as a source of rights. Britishness and Englishness were seen as racialised identities, while citizenship as

an identity was not. Those born in Britain felt that citizenship is their 'natural right' but did not feel part of a common culture, first language or robust set of values shared by British citizens *(Sales 2012).*

Similarly Alevi migrants in Britain do not identify with many components of Britishness (such as language, common history, culture, lifestyle) and have not yet created hyphenated identities such as Turkish-British or Kurdish-British. However, the rights and entitlements rising from being residents or citizens strengthen their political identification with Britain.

As a contrast to viewing Britain as a place of political and economic rights, Turkey is portrayed as a place with serious democracy issues. When discussing the conditions for returning to Turkey, democratization seems a must; that is equal rights for Alevis and a peaceful solution to the Kurdish question. The demands of equality, entitlement to cultural rights and the vision of a multiculturalist society has infiltrated from the Alevi movement's organisational elites to ordinary Alevi individuals. Universal human rights, multiculturalism and the support of the supranational organsations support Alevis' particularistic demands for recognition from the Turkish state. Different research participants' words indicate this view. For instance Sevim, a Kurdish Alevi woman in her 40s arrived in Britain in the early 1990s as an asylum seeker and says that she would not consider moving back to Turkey, unless the political conditions change.

A: Under which conditions would you consider moving back to Turkey?

S: If they respect humanity and opinions, if there are human rights. In this country at least we are not harassed, we have an identity. In Turkey there are no human rights. I would go back if the journalists are not put in prison (Interview 35, London).

In addition, Can, a Kurdish Alevi man who has been actively involved in Kurdish and socialist movements argues that these rights must be defended for all oppressed groups:

If we want to achieve not demands but rights from the Turkish state, not just for Kurds to conduct education in their own language and legalising this, we should ensure that all language [groups] in Turkey can receive their education in their own languages. If a language wants to [be recognised as] official in its region, it should

be accepted. A country may have more than one official language. The official correspondences may be in Turkish, that's not a problem. There is Zaza, Kurmanci, Assyrians, their languages should be accepted. I mean languages and religions should be accepted within a country's Constitution. They should have the right to freely live themselves. Either 10 people or 100 people, it doesn't matter. Having a multi-structured culture is the richness of that country. It develops the country (Interview 20, London).

And Ceren a 25-year-old woman who volunteers in DayMer explains what she wants from the Turkish state:

Personally as a Turkish citizen I will tell you very simply, first of all in Turkey at schools they teach only Islam, I would like Alevism to be taught equally. I want the massacres in the past to be recognised and they need to have their rights, as much as the Muslims have their rights. And I don't know what else to say (Interview 25, London).

While being Alevi or having a more secular and liberal lifestyle is welcomed in Britain, the same differences may create problems in Turkey. Particularly the more educated participants and women prioritize individual liberties and lifestyles. Aykan, a forty-seven year old professional who has been in London for twenty-three years explained his concerns about everyday life in Turkey:

If I know I have a chance to live in a more liberal environment… especially after living here for a long time, the dangers became scarier. Things that everybody experiences there [in Turkey] are a few times harder for me. […] I would go back, if I had a chance to live in Cihangir[48] [laughing]. I wouldn't live anywhere else in Istanbul. I would go back, if my economic situation gives me the opportunity to live in Cihangir (Interview 39, London).

The British culture is incorporated limitedly to the identity building of the first generation Alevi immigrants from Turkey. Rural background and cultural differences and the lack of language proficiency create barriers to the integration of the first generation. Alevi immigrants on the one hand appreciate a liberal environment in which they can freely

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[48]   Cihangir is a neighborhood in Istanbul, known for the bohemian lifestyle and the many artists living there. Lately property prices went up in the neighborhood due to the high demand from intellectuals and artists.

manifest their identities and are eligible for social benefits, but on the other they complain about the lack of integration opportunities. For instance, the former chairman, İsrafil Erbil argues:

> … As to our demands from England, the immigrants here are deluded by some social rights, these might seem as very positive opportunities compared to our country [Turkey] but the reality is not this. The reality is that here we have problems stemming from being immigrants; this country is never interested in these problems. This country…
>
> A: Integration problems?
>
> I: There are integration problems. There are obstacles in front of integration, and it is the state's responsibility to remove those obstacles. People's own efforts to remove those obstacles cannot be denied... (Interview 3, London).

Those immigrants who do not speak English tend to socialize only with coethnics. Although Alevi people emphasise being open minded as a central characteristic of their culture, many Alevi migrants find it difficult to socialise outside their own group and the better integrated community members address this as a problem. For instance, Feride argues that the members of the Alevi community in London socialise only among themselves and do not open up to the society they now live in:

> What I want is to change the women; we must find something to get women out of their homes, because women are really imprisoned at home. Their whole world is cleaning, taking care of children, surviving and getting old. But this is not life, I think that there are more things that women can do but getting women out of their homes is the first problem. The second problem is that they should adapt to this country. I mean they should learn the language now. Or for instance, the city centre is not a different country, when there is a demonstration in the centre; say in Trafalgar, they consider it as going abroad. They have such a mentality, but it's not that far. Well, a museum here, the British Museum is not far away. None of them, they've been living here and there are people who haven't been to any of those… Enfield, Dalston, Harringay, a community, we are here, there are no people from us there. So they don't go to those places (Interview 10, London).

This makes the elderly immigrants especially vulnerable since they rely on relatives and community centres to socialize and fulfill their needs[49]. It is important not to assume a marginal position for the research participants and stereotype them as 'mere recipients of aid' (Binder and Tošić 2005, 610); integration measures must be situated in the cultural and subjective context of refugees (or migrants in general) and take into account the conditions in the receiving country. By contextualising the receiving state as well as the immigrants' needs, more effective policies can be developed to deal with immigrants' needs.

4.7. Influences of the private sphere on the public sphere

The private aspects of identity relate to personal identification with Alevism and its manifestations in personal spaces such as home and family. Traditionally, these are transmitted orally from one generation to the next; but nowadays Alevi organisations play an active role in teaching Alevism to the youth. On the personal level, this includes traditions, oral culture, memories of individuals and their personal opinions and experiences of Alevism. Private identity is the prerequisite of a collective identity that can be manifested in public spaces. Common culture and Alevism's boundaries from other identities are necessary to transform it and gain visibility in the public sphere.

As previously mentioned, these two spheres interact on many occasions. Weintraub argues that 'the discourses of public and private cover a variety of subjects that are analytically distinct and, at the same time, subtly – and often confusingly – overlapping and intertwined' (1997, 3). For instance, Alevis in Britain have memories of victimhood or discrimination back in Turkey although the level of discrimination and negative treatment

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[49] One such example is an anecdote about the large scale protest organized by EACC on 16 February.2012. EACC volunteers went to various Alevi people's shops and coffee houses in North London in order to invite them to the demo and one old man said he has never been to Trafalgar Square in London and asked if he requires a visa to go there. In addition there were people in the crowd who had been living in London for some time but have never been there or go to central London rarely.

varies for different individuals and regions. These experiences constitute an element of identity that they have in common which brings people together in solidarity, such as the commemoration ceremonies. They may or may not have been affected by massacres and discrimination personally, yet feelings of solidarity encourage their participation in public events. Similar to the second wave feminists' understanding of the situation, the solution to individual or personal problems should be collective (Hanisch 1969).

Personal experiences of discrimination as well as the need for practicing rituals bring people together and foster activities in the public sphere. In addition to the collective memory of discrimination in the home country, Alevis also share traditions such as memories of *cem* ceremonies in villages, cooking *aşure* and sharing it with neighbours, and poems and folk songs. These elements of culture are not confined merely to personal spaces; through special occasions in the London *cemevi*, cultural activities, *cem* ceremonies and concerts Alevi individuals feel that they share the same social space with other Alevis regardless of physical place. These rituals provide them with a space for both personal and collective manifestations of Alevi identity.

Furthermore, personal attachments influence the level of participation in public events. For example, people who have strong feelings about being Alevi mainly participate more in the activities that promote Alevis' rights such as petition campaigns, donations and rallies. Strong feelings for the homeland motivate activism on a transnational level. Because of the salience of Kurdishness among the Alevi-Kurdish community, some Kurdish Alevis embrace Kurdish identity over Alevi: for these people it is important to participate in the Kurdish community centres or HTAs. For instance, the story about the football games between people from Sivas and Pazarcık reveals that regional identities also overlap with ethnic and religious identities.

4.8. Conclusion

This chapter explored Alevi identity building and its manifestation in the transnational context. By using data mainly relating to ordinary Alevi individuals, who are either affiliated or non-affiliated with community centres, I aimed to give voice to the less heard members of Alevi community. My findings provide insight to ordinary Alevi migrants' experiences and views and contribute to the literature on modern Alevism which is dominated by research on Alevi organisations and their leaders.

A close examination of Alevis in Britain shows that they carried with them the elements of their belief and culture, which are rooted in Anatolia. In the migration context, their identity is influenced by these past experiences in Turkey, continuing relations with Turkey such as symbolic ties and other transnational activities, and new experiences in Britain. While Turkey remains the main source of identity, Britain is regarded as a source of civic political rights and its liberal environment helps Alevis to reflect on past experiences of discrimination and to mobilise for recognition. They did not 'find out' that they are Alevi once they had arrived in Britain, but, as a consequence of international migration, they had the opportunity to identify with Alevism more openly once they gained the political and economic capital from establishing their community centres and institutional links.

Similar to Alevi communities in Turkey, Alevis in Britain construct their identity by drawing boundaries with other social groups; the boundary with Sunni Muslims appears as the most important since this is the largest social group they encounter. They articulate these differences through characteristics such as the priority of moral values over observing religious practices, liberal gender attitudes and compatibility with the West.

What is more peculiar to migrant Alevis in Britain is that they manifest Alevi identity in a liberal environment and do not have to hide being Alevi. If they experience discrimination they are more assertive when defending themselves. Since they outnumber

Sunni migrants from Turkey, they are not constrained by the pressure in Turkey that prevents Alevis' activities. Moreover, the ethnic aspect of their identity, i.e. Kurdishness for the majority of British Alevis, is very salient. Past incidents of discrimination based on both identities and the refugee experience make the expression of identities more political. In some cases being Alevi and at the same time being Kurdish are intricate; as they experienced discrimination based on both of these identities, the boundary between the two blurs. In the urban middle class social context, Alevism appears as a less conflictual and more compatible identity, while being Kurdish carries stigma. Their prior political involvements affect even the personal level of identification with Alevism; the political and cultural elements of Alevism emerge as the defining characteristics of their identity rather than religious elements.

Personal affiliation with Alevism prompts ties with Alevi communities in Turkey through institutional or personal links or simply through being interested in recent developments in Turkey regarding Alevis. Even when individuals lack the means to travel or be actively involved in these matters, many retain symbolical ties, visit the community centres and at least become members and pay membership fees as a means of economic contribution.

5. Alevi identity in the public sphere

In this chapter I address the remaining research questions and explore how Alevi identity is constructed and manifested in the public sphere within the transnational context of Britain. I do so by examining mainly the interviews with organisations' leaders and attendees alongside audio and hard copy documents of community events. I first describe the institutional dimensions, the ceremonial aspects of identity building and then explain the influences of public identity building in the private sphere. I argue that the boundary that constitutes Alevi identity, between 'us' and 'them' is also constructed yet not permanently as it is flexible and inclusive particularly as a political identity. However, maintaining a boundary with Sunni Islam and emphasising Alevism's unique qualities and distinct rituals are crucial in order to resist assimilation. The strong focus on human rights and solidarity with oppressed communities are promoted in public identity building, not only as an instrument to gain recognition but also presented as a coherent part of Alevi identity.

The links with Turkey influence Alevis' public manifestations of their identity. As Lamont and Molnar (2002) have argued, the social boundaries are carried to the migration context and these links need to be analysed further. My analysis revealed that the Alevi-Sunni boundary and the progressive-traditional[50] boundary are carried into a transnational context and are constantly negotiated, are reproduced in the collective actions of individuals and organisations, and are influenced by interactions with the host society. They manifest a flexible and inclusive Alevi identity that cooperates with the persecuted communities beyond their own group.

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[50]   The progressive camp does not preclude traditions; the division is about the way traditions are evaluated from a modern perspective.

Alevis are highly aware that their identity was stigmatised and labelled in terms of 'difference' from the unmarked Sunni population when they were in Turkey. Even when it is not relevant to disclose their identity or when they do not have a strong identification, they may be reminded of this 'difference'[51] which exposes them to discrimination in the public sphere. Identities can be imposed from outside, which increases the salience of social borders. For instance, Jewish communities in twentieth century Europe, even without strong identification with being Jewish, were labelled as such due to their urban lifestyle and anti-nationalist and socialist political affiliations (Goldstein 1997). Similarly, Alevis' secular and left-wing political orientation mark them as different and make them suspicious in the eyes of the state elites (van Bruinessen 1996) even when they do not strongly identify with Alevi belief. As Tajfel (1992) argues, the minority group identity develops at times as a wish to preserve differences and sometimes as a common identity thrust upon people even in the lack of strong identification.

On the public level, Alevis actively struggle for their demands from the state, which are manifested with the motto '*eşit vatandaşlık*' (equal citizenship). This demand is twofold: on the one hand, they wish to be recognised and enjoy the freedom to express their religion and culture. On the other, they demand the secularisation of Turkey and equal treatment to all people regardless of their ethnic and religious background. The current JDP government's Alevi opening increased Alevis' visibility, yet it created new lines of social conflict while making them hyper-visible. Therefore, increasing public visibility without addressing the problems of discrimination is not an adequate response for Alevis.

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[51] These differences are usually invisible but some indicators such as hometown, political orientation, certain first names or elderly women's dress code (lack or style of wearing headscarf) might reveal their Alevi origin.

Taylor's (1997) conceptualisation of difference politics helps us understand the dilemma between the wish to be recognised and being equal regardless of differences. First of all he argues that recognition of identity is linked with human dignity , so the acceptance of differences is important. However, he also suggests that there is difference between a politics of universalism (which is difference blind) and a politics of difference (which strives to assert distinctness). The Turkish state elite had a difference-blind approach on the surface; however, the non-recognition of Alevis was not only due to a difference-blind discourse but also to the conscious repression of Alevis' differences as Sunni Islam was the de-facto religion of the state. Therefore, most Alevi organisations demands are not for additional rights but rather the implementation of secularism and universal rights (Göner 2005).

While Alevis' distinctness or difference is made more visible with the JDP's 'Alevi opening', their universal claim to be accepted as equals is not met. The problem with ID cards, discussed in chapter three, is an example of this dilemma. Having to disclose one's religion or lack thereof might cause discrimination in public, especially in a society with low levels of tolerance for difference (Toprak et al. 2009). Consequently, a difference-blind universalism in terms of treating all citizens equally should balance the recognition of differences.

Symbolic ties with Alevi culture were maintained with the help of travelling *dedes*, community centres' cultural activities and also political involvement such as press/public releases, and through panels and rallies in the struggle for recognition in Europe. In Britain, the influence of Alevis' collective action has been a very important catalyser from the beginning of this activism, such as the 1993 Sivas hotel fire and the subsequent protest rally. They combine what they brought from Turkey (cultural capital and the know-how of political activism) with the knowledge they gained after immigration. To borrow Levitt's

(1998) terminology, these 'social remittances' have been crucial assets for Alevis' activism in Britain. Among the community centres in London, first and foremost, the EACC is the social space for the public manifestation of Alevi identity. The other political associations and HTAs are either rivals in recruiting and mobilising people or support some of the London *Cemevi*'s activities and promote Alevis' emancipation as long as their political views are compatible with each other.

I observed that although the collective activism and participation of many people developed Alevi activism from a modest community centre into a federation across Britain, these individuals have a different impact in constructing Alevi identity. This impact depends on their cultural capital which is characterised by their formal and informal educational level (especially the mastery of English as well as Turkish languages), social networks with British institutions and also with the Alevi organisations in Turkey and elsewhere.

Identity construction on the public level is a dynamic process and it is shaped constantly in interaction with Turkey. Alevis in Britain follow the media and are aware of developments in Turkey especially those regarding Alevis' situation. Turkey is still a strong reference point for migrant Alevis; the JDP government's Alevi opening and the sectarian aspect of the Syrian conflict were crucial factors in attracting the community centres' attention and mobilising people, although any reflection of this in the Turkish media and government were limited. The attacks against Alevi people in recent years, politicians' statements that targeted Alevis or government proposals that interest Alevis are problems not only for Alevis in Turkey but also of Euro-Alevis. In addition to the social media and the non-mainstream (left-wing oriented) media channels, Alevi media (most important of all, YOL TV) circulates news regarding Alevis to various European countries including Britain. Subsequently, the Alevi organisation in London reacts to Turkey's domestic and foreign policies that involve Alevis.

The idealised Alevi movement, described and formed by the community centres, intellectuals and the more educated and politicized section of the Alevi public, is not only about gaining a set of rights but is a matter of transformative politics and finding their own voice. The public discourse on Alevism can be explained as a framing contest, as Massicard (2003) puts it, since different social actors frame Alevism according to their own political agenda(Massicard 2003). Being able to tell their own history and construct their own identity is the main concern for Alevis. Being a majority in the British context helps them organise rapidly and act freely without the pressures that existed in Turkey, so they can frame how they see Alevism, which principles they would like to underline, and how to act accordingly in the public sphere.

A significant motivation for Alevis' activism is to be able to speak for themselves and establish an active position in studying and promoting their culture. A research participant, Samim, explains this with a personal example. He is a well-educated and politically active person in his fifties and I developed a friendship with him and his family during my fieldwork. He tries to connect researchers who are studying Alevism from different viewpoints and has arranged a number of meetings in the *cemevi*. On different occasions Samim told us, as young researchers on Alevism, how his views changed on the necessity of studying Alevism. He told us that when he was younger he evaluated the Alevi question from a socialist point of view: when socialists take power, they will give rights to all oppressed groups and there is no need to separately deal with identity politics. He states that as he grew older and witnessed Alevi people's problems, he realised the need to study Alevism scientifically. He said his friends thought that he contradicts himself as a socialist, because in their view Alevism is a religion and all religions are oppressive.

Eventually, his wife also began to think differently about Alevism and she recognised the need to research it. He told the following anecdote a few times: his wife

prepares coursework at a London university for her degree and she is given an essay question: 'is it possible to have law without a state?' Samim tells her that Alevis have been doing mediation led by their *dede* for centuries and solving their conflicts internally. After contemplating the essay question for a while and doing some library research, she realises that there is academic material on even the smallest tribes of Africa and their legal systems, yet there is no academic source on Alevis' traditional mediation. Eventually they cannot find sufficient academic material to write an essay on Alevis' mediation practice. As she realises the lack of documents and academic works on the topic, she understands the necessity of giving Alevis more visibility in academia. Samim argues that when there is a gap, it is filled by others. In this case since Alevis have left academic knowledge production unattended, others (for example Islamists and Western researchers) write about Alevism and their work may be politically motivated or not be able to grasp the Alevi point of view. As he often says, 'up until now the history of the lions is written by the hunters'.

The political climate of different time periods influenced how Alevism is framed. The 1960s and 1970s was a time in which class politics defined the right-left axis, rather than identities. However, after the military coup in 1980, the political atmosphere began to change, identity gained importance and Alevi people who were previously involved in socialist groups now began to reconsider Alevism as a public identity. Some adopted a new perspective that recognised the importance of ethnic and religious identities. For instance Can explained how his mind was changed:

> There are very serious studies about Alevism. They are conducted in Turkey. I had had a barrier like this: it is a religion; religion is backward so I don't need to bother with this activity specifically. Once I read the Quran or Bible, whatever, I read some of it and stopped reading. I read a couple of books on Alevism, finally Esat Hoca, Esat Korkmaz, came here a few years ago. I went to his panel, then he gave some lectures on Alevism, I attended those. I could relate to his philosophy. I saw his philosophy was very scientific, he explained its links with Alevism. I noticed this; we put some barriers in front of us, like this is religion, that is religion and we don't research. We made a mistake. On the contrary, people who are interested in

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politics should study this phenomenon of religion that affects millions of people in order to change the world. The more you understand religion, the better you can enter people's lives (Interview 20, London).

In public Alevi identity formation, various actors have different motivations in their public involvement; however, these motivations sometimes overlap. For most people merely asserting identity and being able to state 'I am Alevi' is a big achievement. In addition to this, the organisational leaders have a goal of making Alevism recognised in Turkey and in Britain and improve the civic political rights of Alevis in both countries. The intellectuals on the other hand would like to understand what Alevism is and oppose the assimilation and destruction of its heterodox and humanist essence. They aim to resist assimilation in academia and in everyday representations of Alevism. The organisations' current chairman has been successful in recruiting many people to the centre by gaining their consent. By enabling a social space to fulfil all these aims, they can mobilise many Alevi individuals in London who have different ideas about Alevism and different motivations for involving themselves in Alevi identity politics.

5.1. Alevi identity building on the organisational level:

5.1.1. A space for socialising:

Alevi organisations in Britain mainly serve as community centres and struggle for the recognition of Alevis in Turkey and Britain. These spaces serve as 'potential springboards for civic engagements' (Levitt 2003, 876) and teach immigrants knowledge of the host society. The EACC's aim in Alevi identity formation and activism are twofold. On the one hand, it is instrumental; gaining rights and recognition in Turkey and creating solidarity in Britain for practical purposes such as solving the problems of youth's gang involvement, drug abuse and suicide, which I will elaborate on in this chapter. On the other

hand, it aims to strengthen the solidarity among the community members and help to create a sense of community (Langer 2009).

Being together with the members of one's own group motivates people to socialise in the same spaces and residential concentration in certain London neighbourhoods, such as Hackney, Wood Green and Enfield, facilitates participation in local and transnational events. For instance, when the EACC organises events such as a large scale rally, in addition to informing the members through the text messaging system, they also send volunteers to the coffee shops and other businesses run by Alevis to announce their events.

Community centres (*dernekler*) are crucial spaces for socialising from the first years of migration onwards. Especially because they are mainly political migrants, they needed support from more experienced people who had migrated before about practical matters on asylum and living in Britain. Mehmet's case, presented in Chapter 2, illustrates some of the difficulties facing migrants from Turkey. At that time struggling for Alevis' rights was not a priority since the new migrants had more immediate problems to deal with such as obtaining refugee status, housing and finding jobs. The community centres were important places to receive help to deal with those problems and form the early social links. The bonds and social networks that were developed in those years remain until today. These social bonds emerged as a response to needs such as accommodation and learning the basic know-how to survive in a foreign country. They continue to be important and are places for socialising and imitating home in a foreign environment. Kaya (2010, 178) argues that the need for celebrating homeland-based ethnic and religious identities stems from feelings of insecurity and ambiguity in the host country. Accordingly, the community centres are safe havens for migrants.

The original Alevi way of life is exemplified in rural areas through immediate contact to community members[52]. Creating the same lifestyle in a highly individualistic urban environment such as Istanbul or London, however, is challenging. The Alevi culture centres aim to create familiar social spaces. The *cemevi* and other community centres contain traditional elements from decoration such as posters and pictures to the food they serve.

Figure 13-14. EACC, London

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[52]   For instance, Erman (1996) researched rural to urban migration in Turkey and found that most of her research participants maintain strong identities relating to their rural background (*köylülük*) and this is even stronger for Alevis.

The *cemevi* offers various classes for children, youth and adults (such as Alevism, English, Turkish, various school subjects, *semah* and music), and works to fulfil immigrants' practical needs such as helping with filling out forms, translating official documents and providing a space for socialising. The elderly and parents who take their children to the classes spend time there watching TV and drinking tea in the large hall, where there is also a cafeteria. Although Alevi men and women can pray, socialise and work side by side, in the community centre men and women generally tend to sit on separate sides of the large hall. Men usually sit on the side where the TV set is located and women sit on the other side of the room. It is normal and acceptable, though, for a man to sit on the other side with women or women to watch TV and converse with men. There is a cafeteria/open kitchen where the meals are cooked and sold (a homemade hot meal with salad and rice cost £ 1 in 2012-2013 – the time of my fieldwork). At funerals the meal costs are undertaken by the family of the deceased and the food is distributed to the attendees for free to please the soul of the dead person. A friendly atmosphere is created in the *cemevi* and people address each other by first names, for the older people followed by *abla* (sister), *teyze* (aunt), *ağabey* (brother) or *dayı* (uncle).

Moreover, in these places the new generation learns about Alevism through panels and seminars. Most of my informants complain about their lack of knowledge on Alevism because they either grew up in big cities in Turkey or migrated to Britain at an early age and did not experience Alevi traditions the way their parents had. Ersanilli and Koopman's (2010) cross-cultural quantitative research on Turkish migrants' religiosity that compares various continental European countries also points to the differences between Alevis and Sunnis, and shows that Alevi migrants are less religious than Sunni migrants from Turkey. Sökefeld argues that 'for many of those who publicly profess to be Alevi this is more an expression of symbolic identification than of actual belief. Only a small minority of Alevis participate regularly in the ritual *cem* which is nevertheless regarded as the spiritual centre of Alevism' (2002b, 183). The London *cemevi* mainly provides educational and political activities rather than religious courses, so there are limited opportunities to receive an education on Alevism in London. Despite the oppression against Alevis in Turkey, the older generation had opportunities to practice Alevism secretly in small villages or towns, especially if they were the majority in their region (such as Dersim or some districts of Sivas and Maraş). However, migration changed this pattern and this 'lost generation' which is now middle aged attempt to compensate for the lack of spiritual identity by learning about Alevism, reading popular and academic works and through personal communication with *dedes*. Although people were highly aware of being Alevi, particularly as a politically stigmatised identity, they expressed their lack of knowledge about its history and traditions. Alevi culture centres thus function to increase people's knowledge about Alevism for those who identify with the religious aspect of Alevi culture. Those, who only identify with Alevism as a political identity, also visit the *cemevi* to attend funerals or panels and participate in political campaigns.

Dede Mehmet Turan is a key figure for conducting religious ceremonies. This middle aged *dede* from southwest Turkey visits Britain several times a year and conducts

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cem ceremonies in London and other cities of Britain. He also participates in the EACC's

other activities such as commemorations. He is concerned about the erosion and

assimilation of Alevi practices and aims to compensate for this situation by conducting the

rituals and teaching people the pillars of this faith through conversations (*muhabbet*),

panels and *cem* ceremonies. He argues that there has been a lack of rituals over the last

years and that European Alevis are beginning to practice their rituals again. He says:

> Today in many places our people could not tell their children that they are Alevi, so many children grew up not knowing they are Alevi. This is one of the biggest pains. [...] But in the escape process to Europe, at that troublesome time when they came here for their bread, since there is more liberty here and the organisations have financial means to carry out activities, our souls[53] here are luckier. At least they learned that they are Alevi, their only lack is in the rituals and the philosophical teaching. Therefore Europe [he means Euro-Alevis] is really lucky. As I said the compensation for it, these kinds of activities [he refers to the previous night's *cem* ceremony] should be more often and the participation needs to be encouraged (Interview 22, London).

5.1.2. Political activism and transnational connections with Turkey:

The activities in the *cemevi* focus on education and the struggle for Alevis' rights

rather than religious services. For example, in many *cemevi* in Turkey, *cem* ceremonies are

conducted on a regular weekly basis, while this is less frequent in Britain (a few times a

year). The public level Alevi identity building in Britain, which is pioneered by EACC, is

largely influenced by the political context in Turkey. The JDP's Alevi opening and the

increase in the discussions about Alevism in Turkish public is reflected in Britain's Alevis and

has prompted discussions and protests against the government's actions. From the first

Alevi declaration in 1989 until the present, Alevis' core demands were the recognition of

cemevi as a place of worship, the abolition of the DRA, stopping the mandatory

construction of mosques in Alevi villages and the abolition of mandatory religious education

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[53] *Can* (which is a Turkish word that means soul or life) is used by Alevis when referring to human beings regardless of their gender.

classes at schools. The government's Alevi opening did not fulfil these demands and created a definition problem of Alevism *vis-à-vis* Islam. Dressler argues: ' to the extent that Turkish laicism espouses a notion of legitimate religion strongly influenced by Sunni Islam, Alevis are compelled to articulate their difference within the parameters of an explicitly laicist, and implicitly Islamic, framework if they want to advance their cause' (2010, 123). The Alevi actors who remain outside of this framework are regarded as radical or marginal, while those within the framework are approached by state officials for negotiation. Also, involvement in political and social matters is an issue: should Alevis focus solely on the recognition of their belief or should they also maintain an anti-hegemonic position and be involved in political matters? This dilemma creates divisions within the community such as right and left-wing Alevi organisations respectively.

In Britain, the EACC wants to revive a 'resistance culture', which they believe is already inherent in their belief system. They regard the current government's actions in Turkey as the threat of the assimilation of their belief into mainstream Sunni-Turkish culture. Although they are not directly affected by these policies, a collective Alevi identity connects them in a transnational social space. State and politicians' discourse on Alevism either emphasises the lack of a uniform definition of Alevi belief or they try to define Alevism in certain ways that match with their political agenda (as Turkish Islam, pure Islam, a tolerant interpretation of Islam or a separate religion). My participants suggest that they feel they are denied the right of self-definition or the right not to define their belief in a uniform way. Consequently, the opening did not fulfill Alevis' demands on the basis of secular democratic rights.

For example, the inclusion of Alevism in the religious education class textbooks in Turkey demonstrates how public discussions and experts' opinions were disregarded in creating policies. The participants of the workshops often expressed that they were invited

to the workshops and shared their opinions based on their expertise; however, their thoughts were not considered in later stages. Dr. Ali Yaman, who is an Alevi *dede* and a university professor, explains this:

> The state and the people who rule, not only this government but also the previous ones, wish that the Sunni status quo continues. It's like, 'where did the Alevis come from?' etc. Eventually we see that the opening did not reach anywhere. There have been small changes, they did a few things in the text books, there were discussions about *cemevi* but they were not legalised, you know. Therefore, nothing came out of the opening (Interview 3, Nevşehir).

Not only Alevi actors' but also governments' choices to discuss Alevism are very selective. Sökefeld argues that 'structures, relations, contexts, and agents of recognition (or nonrecognition and misrecognition) play an important role in constituting what is recognised (or not recognised) and in shaping the claim for recognition' (2008, 33). While the Alevi organisations' leaders in Britain focus on the inherent socialism, culture of sharing and humanism in Alevi culture, Sunni state elites refer to Alevism's non-political elements and the symbols Alevis share with Islam such as Hz Ali and Turkish Sufis Yunus Emre and Hacı Bektaş Veli. Alevi culture is rich in symbols and these are meaningful for people as long as they can relate these symbols to their worldviews. One of my interviewees, Mustafa, a former teacher who runs a bookshop in North London, says that Alevism corresponds with his political views and offers a worldview that is compatible with his socialist outlook. When describing Alevism and why it appeals to him today, he explains a utopia:

> All people are brothers and unite under a white flag, everybody participating in production and everybody benefiting from consumption, I mean something like a Town of Consent (*Rıza şehri*), I have such a utopia (Interview 26, London).

He then tells me about a waiter in his bookshop, which he runs also as a coffee house, this waiter's membership of a utopian group and the similarities of this with Alevism:

There was a waiter here, a guy from Trabzon. His fiancé is Alevi, he himself is Sunni, but he is a democrat kid. While we were having conversations here, it caught his attention; I asked him 'what do you think?' Ibrahim said 'Brother, I don't know any religion or anything, my family is Sunni but I am atheist'. I asked him [...] how should the future of mankind be in your opinion? He said 'there is a group in Germany, I became a member. They bought an island in New Zealand, they model a new social life. There is no money, everybody produces and everybody consumes, there is no private property.' He told me about this lifestyle and I said that Alevis have been saying this for centuries. He didn't believe this, then I said 'there is something called *rıza şehri*, read it on the internet' he did and he said it is exactly the same. So when someone knows about *rıza şehri* utopia and gets to know about Alevism a bit... I feel lucky because my family is Alevi. I don't mean it as being religious (Interview 26, London).

Rıza şehri is a utopia and a worldview with political implications; it regulates people's relations with one another in society. It models an alternative society to the political economic structure that we live in today. It is also the reason why Alevis argue that Alevism is inherently socialist. Generally, Western societies think of spirituality and materiality as dichotomous terms (McGuire 2008, 97); however, this view in Alevism integrates the two realms.

While this political orientation is prevalent among the left-wing Alevis in Turkey and also among the majority of my research participants in London, traditional wing Alevism maintains a distance from political militants. For example, Doğan Bermek, one of the founders of the CEM Foundation in Turkey, argued that involvement in socialist politics has had very negative consequences for Alevis so far and eventually destroyed their community's intellectual capital. When the military coups in 1970 and 1980 imprisoned (mainly leftist) militants, Alevis whose university educated population was smaller in ratio to their overall population, were worse affected. Therefore, he thinks, it is best for them to stay away from politics and strive for expanding their rights (Interview 5, Istanbul). Government projects on Alevis are therefore supported by this second group and the government treats them as legitimate actors who represent Alevism while it uses a harsher tone against left-wing Alevi associations. This intensifies the boundary between

progressive/leftist versus moderate/traditional Alevi organisations both in Turkey and among Euro-Alevis.

For instance, the former Prime Minister Erdoğan underlined this difference when he was protested against by Alevis in Germany during his visit to Cologne in May 2014. He called his opponents '*Alisiz Aleviler*' (literally Alevis without Ali) by referring to a book on the extra-Islamic roots of Alevism. He said: 'Now they are scratching the Alevi issue. They make the Alevis without Ali protest against us' (*Erdoğan Kendisini Protesto Edenlere "Alisiz Aleviler" Dedi* 2014). Since the government is aware of the transnational opposition which comes mainly from Alevis, it aims to keep their protests under control by instrumentalising their internal differences.

A recent example of conflict between Alevis and the JDP government was the project of a joint *cemevi*-mosque building which was proposed by Fetullah Gülen, who is the leader of a powerful Islamic brotherhood and resides in the USA, yet has influence in the public sector and domestic politics in Turkey. Gülen proposed the idea of building a *cemevi* and mosque side by side. This project did not find popular support among the Alevi organisations except for the CEM Foundation and its leader, İzzettin Doğan. The building was completed in September 2013. Various Alevi associations and intellectuals expressed discontent and that they were against it. Because certain elements of Alevi rituals such as the lack of gender segregation and music and dance in rituals are not tolerated in mainstream Islam, it would be difficult to perform these in a joint *cemevi*-mosque building. Those who oppose the project argue that gradually these elements would be erased from Alevism and they would eventually be assimilated into Sunni Islam. Various Alevi organisations protested against the project[54] and published a public release. The document

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[54]   http://www.sendika.org/2013/09/alevi-orgutlerinden-cami-cemevi-projesine-karsi-eylem-takvimi/

was distributed in the London *cemevi* as well and signed by the European Alevi Confederation (which is formed of twelve federations in Europe), nine different Alevi federations and associations in Turkey, and also by the EACC representing Britain's Alevis. The public release reads:

> [...] This is an assimilation project, it aims to melt Alevism within 'moderate political Islam'. Both of the *hodjas*[55] 'glorious aim' is moving Alevis away from their democratic rights demands, ripping them off from social opposition in the struggle for rights and liberties and making them 'docile'. The current mentality uses the phrase 'making peace between Alevis and Sunnis' on purpose. We, Alevis, do not have any problems with Sunnis that cannot be solved or any problems that require fighting. Alevis demand rights not from Sunnis, but from the state (11.09.2013).

Although this particular project only attracts interest in the Turkish context, Alevis worldwide reacted against it because they perceive the project as assimilation directed to Alevi belief and rituals. Such forms of protest bring Alevi organisations from different countries together, usually under the roof of the European Confederation and can be seen as an example of transnational activism. The protest shows how the above mentioned Alevi organisations perceive such government proposals; they are against them as they argue that through such policies the state's aim is to decouple Alevis from political struggle for rights and to make them 'docile'. Such protests and cooperation among various Alevi institutions is the public manifestation of how Alevi identity should be in their perspective; a culture that incorporates struggle for rights and a focus on democracy and liberty.

There are other government proposals that Alevis regard as a threat of assimilation that expand the borders of Turkey. Turkey wishes to keep its émigré population under control and as many countries of emigration do, it seeks their loyalty to the homeland. Not only economic remittances but also political bonds are important and these are encouraged

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[55] *Hodja* literally means Muslim school teacher, in this context it is used ironically, while referring to Gülen as well as Cem Foundation's leader İzzettin Doğan, who is a law professor at an elite university in Istanbul.

with policies such as double citizenship and the right to vote. Also, due to the Kurdish issue and minority issues that are handled on a transnational level of human rights, the Turkish state has been cautious and willing to control their activities abroad.

One of the projects of the DRA is to send *dedes* from Turkey to European countries that have a high Alevi population. Alevis have an internal hierarchy of *ocak* (literally hearth, meaning holy lineage) from where the *dedes* descend (Okan 2004, 81) and generally they claim to be *seyid*, descendants of Ali (Sökefeld 2002b, 165). Most of the *dedes* I met argued that the *dedes'* lineage descends from Imam Ali and his sons, while a few said that this is a myth. *Dedes* have their own internal hierarchy and a loosely centralised mechanism. The DRA interferes with the internal working of Alevi communities and by appointing *dedes* to European countries on a transnational scale.

The Turkish state's long-distance control mechanism was felt by the founders of the *cemevi* in London. Mustafa, who was one of the founders of the London *cemevi*, said when they first established it in 1993, the Turkish embassy asked for their member list. Some older members were ready to submit the list to the embassy but Mustafa argued this was not only wrong but also a crime to share people's personal information with third parties:

> Most of these people don't know; they have not even been administrators in a village council before, they administer the association here, yet they have no experience. I said 'friends, we are abroad, we are a foundation which is connected to the English laws and their relevant organizations. I mean we are connected to the charity company and their organizations, we are liable to them. … We have got no connection with any organization in Turkey, we have got no responsibility because Alevism is not legal, it is banned'. […] Also when abroad even if they are your own association's members, it is a crime to give somebody else's information to others (Interview 26, London).

This intervention shows the Turkish state's desire to keep its emigrant population under control. Although some of the people in the above example were ready to share the information back then, EACC administers now interpret transnational interventions as

attempts of assimilation or state control. They express that if the state influence on the Alevi organisations increases and the aspect of democratic struggle is toned down, they lose the essence of Alevism. Samim expresses a concern that is shared by many community members: he says that every social and political actor in Turkey has an Alevi agenda and talks on behalf of Alevis. He says they (the state elite) realized that they cannot annihilate Alevis by killing, now they try the strategy of assimilating Alevis from within.

The effects of transnational activism on gaining rights in Turkey and changing Turkish society are challenging. The contribution of UK Alevis' transnational activities is limited and the extent of these contributions is hard to measure. İsrafil Erbil hopes that their rights in Britain will be an example to Turkey:

> Well, in Turkey these are very important models for the Alevi organisations. At least it makes their demands more realistic, it embodies their demands from the government and it suggests that on the path to the European Union, that you want to become part of, these [rights] are already granted and there is no problem so naturally you should give these [rights] in our own land. But since everything operates differently in Turkey... for example Alevism education in Turkey, they said we teach it but we teach what we understand from Alevism (Interview 3, London).

Despite the limited influence of British Alevis' activism on Turkey, the symbolic ties with the homeland encourage many migrant Alevis to take part in collective activities. The media is particularly crucial for informing the younger generations and strengthening the symbolic ties. For example Esra, a woman in her twenties who came to London two years ago, says that she became interested in her Alevi identity and searched for information on Alevi massacres in recent history, such as Sivas. She is originally from Maraş and spent most of her life in Turkey but was not involved with the *cemevi* or Alevi teaching. She says she found information about the Sivas massacre in particular, presumably because it occurred more recently. The televised images of the hotel fire especially became a powerful symbol of the attacks against Alevis. Esra was born before the Maraş massacre but since she comes

from Maraş, I asked her if she knew anything about others' experiences of the massacre. She answered:

> E: At that time many people were killed, it was not spoken much but things we hear from the internet...
>
> A: So it wasn't spoken at home?
>
> E: Well. There was no such talking. […] Now whomever you ask who is around my age, well I don't know much about this. […] I learned a bit from family and my social circle. (Interview 36, London)

She went on to tell me that she researched online, particularly about the Sivas massacre. Another research participant who is in her late thirties was also unable to remember the Maraş massacre on a personal level but had memories of the people who were affected by it. In a group conversation with her husband and their friend, I asked how they acquired their knowledge about Alevism, she expressed her lack of knowledge about Alevism as a belief but she knew about the political aspect and the massacres in recent history. It struck me that the community members' narratives of Alevism always contained victimhood; political awareness and cultural belonging were inseparable.

> Ceylan: We, I didn't hear *cem* or anything but my family experienced the Maraş incidents. It was in that neighbourhood; before the incident spread to our neighbourhood the soldiers arrived. My family directly lived that but I was a little baby. After that I never, I mean I learned the Alevi-Sunni thing here in this country. There, they were not saying.
>
> A: At what age did you come here?
>
> C: Fifteen. We didn't stay there for long, we went to Mersin. We had stayed in the same neighbourhood but they used to do, like... In the Maraş incidents some people were injured, some of the people's noses were cut, I used to ask with curiosity, I was a kid. That happened during those incidents, we found out later. The guy had an ear missing for example they called him 'earless', these all happened in those incidents. I found out later. (Interview 27, London)

The victimised identity is either experienced directly or mediated through media channels or memories of family members and acquaintances that had experienced the atrocities. The sense of victimhood due to the massacres consolidates Alevi identity;

although some of these people do not identify with Alevi teaching and religious aspects, they realise either through direct or mediated experience that the victimhood and the traumas of the past situate them on one side and the perpetrators on the other. The victimhood intensifies the boundary with the perpetrators and continues it through generations. Alevis perceive the Turkish state's policies as threats that affect not only themselves but also secular Muslims, non-Muslims and atheists in Turkey and, to a more limited extent, Euro-Alevis. Therefore, a shared sense of victimhood makes the oppressed communities closer to Alevis and encourages a more inclusive political activism.

Alevis' organisations in Britain value solidarity with other oppressed groups, mainly Kurdish people from Turkey, and they engage in local and transnational activities that are not directly related to the Alevi identity movement. Involvement in these activities is a consequence of the Alevism ideal which is supported by the institutions and majority of people who are influential in the community centres in London. Although the lack of language proficiency limits the activities of ordinary people outside their own group, the organisational elite and the core attendees of the community centres exhibit solidarity with other oppressed peoples and encourage the Alevi community to develop awareness beyond their own group's problems. For instance, on May Day 2013 some members of the EACC and various other community centres' founded by Turkish/Kurdish immigrants marched from Marx's library to Trafalgar Square and they outnumbered the British people in the crowd[56]. Participation in global events helps Alevis construct Alevism as a public identity that is humanist and supportive of the democratic rights of other groups. In addition, it helps them construct a transnational identity (Bradatan, Popan, and Melton 2010) beyond the physical spaces and beyond a single nation state.

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[56]   Not all of the Kurdish-Alevi population marched under the same flag though. Some belonged to socialist organisations, some belonged to Kurdish political organisations and some to the EACC.

The strong emphasis on humanism and equality makes it necessary for Alevis to develop solidarity with the oppressed and marginalised people in order to apply Alevi morality to daily life. For example, the *DayMer* community centre's youth is aiming to expand solidarity from their own community (Kurdish and Turkish working class) to other political activities in London. Ceren, a young volunteer, explains:

> Well, we live here. Practically you live here and you need to know the rules here, the conditions of life, and the things you will be living in. All right, some things are going on in Turkey and definitely these should be supported; those things might happen here as well someday. But eventually we live here. Two years ago they increased the tuition fees, all the youth rioted because it will affect them. We really need to raise the awareness of the Turkish and Kurdish youth here. Many young people would not learn about these if we didn't organise all these practical meetings, activities, trips and protests (Interview 25, London).

When I asked if they are mainly concerned about Britain, she answered positively:

> It is mainly here but also Turkey and the entire world. For example, if there is a support march for the events in Brazil, we would go to that. Or Greece, there's a lot going on there as well, Greeks, for example people went to the BBC and did a press release. The national TV channel of Greece will be shut and there was a protest against that and we went there to support them. They support us about the Taksim resistance. Here we have got international solidarity (Interview 25, London).

Although her ideal is promoted by Alevi intellectuals and organisational elites, global solidarity is limited to those who can communicate in different languages and have a cosmopolitan view. The majority of the population, although they would not object to global solidarity in principle, have neither the knowledge on such matters nor the means to act upon them.

Among the wider social issues that do not concern Alevis, the discrimination against Kurds attracts the attention of the British Alevi community. The Kurdish-Alevis show their interest in these issues depending on the different level of attachment to their two identities. The EACC prioritises the Alevi identity movement and tries to maintain a distance from the Kurdish armed struggle against the Turkish state. Yet most of the administrators

and attendees of the community centres are ethnic Kurds and they sympathise with the democratic struggle of Kurdish people. In addition, politically active and socialist Turkish Alevis in the community also support nonviolent Kurdish activism. Consequently, human rights violations such as attacks against civilians are protested against by Britain's Alevis regardless of the victims' religion; whether they are Alevi or Sunni Kurds does not matter.

For instance, the attack in Uludere (which is a district in Şırnak, a province in Eastern Turkey populated mainly by Kurdish people) was condemned by the community members. On 28 December 2011, the Turkish military forces bombed civilians in Uludere who were smuggling on the Turkish-Iraqi border. As a result of this bombing thirty-five people died but the media did not cover the events for the first forty-eight hours. The mainstream and right-wing media emphasised the fact that the victims were smugglers and that the bombings were a consequence of some false information about the PKK (Demir 2013). Two weeks later, Alevi associations' representatives (such as Alevi Bektaşi Federation, European Alevi Associations Confederation and several local Alevi organisations based in Turkey) paid a visit to the families of the deceased. The EACC prepared a report on Uludere and quoted the AABK Director Turgut Öker: 'As Alevis, we are a society that knows bombings and mass killings. We recognise these from the Dersim, Maraş, Çorum, Sivas massacres.'

The victimised identity is the potential bridge between other oppressed groups and Alevis. Zırh (2014) shows that the narratives of victimhood in Alevi history are connected to one another. The organised and political identity of Alevis manifests a flexible identity that allows them to connect their past suffering with non-Alevis' misfortunes in the present. These instances of cooperation and solidarity are also welcomed by the ordinary community members, as was the case with the Maraş commemorations in the London

cemevi and *Dede* Mehmet Turan's words that opposed Uludere, as discussed in chapter three.

The language employed by the EACC demonstrates their commitment to egalitarian principles and justice regardless of the victims' ethnic and religious affiliations. They maintain this position also in protesting against the attacks on Alevi people. For example, in November 2012 an Alevi fast-breaking tent was attacked in Erzincan, in the east of Turkey, during the fasting and mourning month of Muharrem. The EACC condemned this attack in a public release declaring it: 'a direct product of the discriminative and hatred motivated approach taken by the government in power against other religions and cultures'. In the same document they also addressed the Turkish parliament and argued that labelling people 'such as non-Muslim, atheist, Sunni or Alevi' is wrong. The attack was not only condemned but also categorised as a hate crime which is the evidence of their embracing a universal human rights discourse. In another public release concerning constitutional change in Turkey and the necessity of legal amendments to make Alevis equal with Sunni citizens, the control of Alevi places of worship by the state is criticized. For instance, in order to visit the Lodge of Hacıbektaş, a very important sacred place for Alevis in Central Anatolia, one has to buy a ticket. In the press release they also criticized this situation and emphasised the equality principle for all belief communities: 'If believers had to enter mosques, churches, synagogues by paying and buying tickets, we, as Alevis, would defend their rights as well'.

The interest in global social issues beyond Alevis' problems is limited. As Guarnizo et al (2003) argue, the transnational practices are usually conducted by a small group within the immigrant population. The number of people who take part in a more global set of transnational practices is even smaller. The community centres represent these kinds of activities, which are mainly conducted by well-educated men who have wide social

networks. Women are not entirely excluded from these public events: on the contrary well-educated women do participate, yet the traditional gender norms in Turkey and lack of education for many rural women is a limitation.

In addition to defending other ethnic minorities' and belief communities' rights, the EACC's political concerns expand to environmental issues and the protection of nature. Although, the topic is not directly linked with Alevi faith and culture, it is considered important by the community centre leaders that they organise events which aim to raise awareness of the public about global questions. Informal links and networks have a significant role in the organisation of such events. Since the community centres do not have large budgets to invite speakers, they rely on informal networks. In spring 2013, while two academics from Turkey were staying in London for research, they were introduced to the EACC through their friend, Samim, who is a member of the EACC and actively participates in the Alevi research group and educational activities. He introduced the couple[57] to the EACC and other community centres in London in order to find interview partners for their academic research on immigrant women. One of their research interests was environmental exploitation under capitalism and they were invited by Samim to give a talk in the *cemevi* in June 2013.

A few days before the panel the administrators and Samim discussed how to frame the talk so that it would make sense to the public and be connected to Alevism. One of the speakers (the woman) said that there is a massive exploitation of nature in the Dersim region, where the state builds dams beyond the river's capacity and is leaving the region without water. Dersim is important for Alevis for two reason; firstly it is populated mainly

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[57]   The couple came from prestigious universities in Istanbul Turkey, and stayed for a few months in London. During their stay they kept in touch with the community centres and gave talks in *DayMer* about Marxist theory. The fact that they are not Alevi was not a problem for the people in the centres.

by Alevis (and it is the hometown of many Alevi people in Britain) and secondly the region has some places that are holy to Alevism. These are called *ziyaret* (lit. visit) where Alevis visit and make wishes. With the building of dams the *ziyaret* places will be destroyed. This aspect was of course a significant point to attract Alevis' attention to the talk. But Samim and other *cemevi* volunteers argued that the exploitation of nature and social inequality would get Alevis' attention anyway, even when it does not concern them directly.

At the end of this discussion they decided that activities in the community centre do not always have to be directly linked with Alevism. Eventually the talk was organised successfully; there were over fifty people who came to listen, afterwards the attendees posed many questions to the speakers and were thankful to them for sharing their knowledge and visiting the *cemevi*. This activity is interesting and indicative of the public Alevi identity that the *cemevi* wants to promote. It matches with the 'progressive', inclusive expression of Alevism and a means to open up to the world. It is negotiated with the public and not only motivated by the community leaders but also easily accepted by the base.

5.1.3. Creating unity and consensus

The EACC aims to create unity through its discourse and activities that will allow more people to identify with Alevism and support their cause. Britain's Alevis are united around the *cemevi* and the visiting *dede*'s charismatic leadership. This unity is crucial due to Alevis' internal differences. These differences can be ethnicity, regional differences in the rituals and modern conflicts arising from different interpretations of Alevi belief. The EACC administers are aware of the potential divisions among the community and use an inclusive discourse to enable collective action.

Since the chairman and administrators of the *cemevi* changed in 2008, membership requirements to the EACC were eased; they now welcome people from different opinions

and ethnic backgrounds. I heard from many respondents in the *cemevi* that previously the place was controlled by a group of people mainly from Sivas. One needed witnesses in order to become a member. Also members of other associations were not eligible for *cemevi* membership. This was intended to prevent the membership of people who were affiliated with Kurdish or communist organisations. Nowadays, the *cemevi* appeals to a wider population and membership to other organisations does not prevent EACC membership. The majority of Alevis in Britain is Kurdish and supports the legal democratic struggle for the Kurdish identity on a personal level. Currently the EACC has softer boundaries with the nonviolent, democratic struggle of Kurds, while it still maintains distance from illegal and militant groups.

Two common problems that concern the community have added to the unification around the *cemevi*: the violation of Alevis' rights in Turkey and the rising suicide rate among Kurdish/Alevi youth. The first problem is addressed through a set of transnational activities that involve Turkey, Britain and supranational organisations that defend Alevis' rights. To solve the second problem, the community centres founded by immigrants from Turkey united under the leadership of the EACC and created a platform in order to address the youth's problems. There have been forty eight reported suicide cases in the community since 2003 (Cetin 2014) and Çetin's ethnographic data reveals that those who committed suicide had 'low educational attainment and problematic relationships with their schools, families, peer groups and in their intimate relationships' **(2015, 14). T**he community members frequently express their concern about this issue.

There is a widely held belief that the adolescent children of immigrants have problems of identity and commit crime due to their lack of belonging (King et al. 2008, 18). Therefore, the platform members treat 'identity' as a saviour for the youth and the EACC in particular believe that if the youth is given education on Alevism as well as political

consciousness, their sense of belonging to a community will develop and they will no longer need to fill this identity gap with drug abuse, gang involvement or by committing suicide. Although the belief or rituals of Alevism are not enforced on children or youth, they believe that identification with Alevism will strengthen young people's confidence and solve their problems. For instance, Yusuf Çiçek, from Enfield Labour Party town council, says:

> I believe that, a young person who knows 10 per cent of Alevism, let alone 100 per cent, wouldn't do anything wrong. Sometimes I see a wrong opinion like this: the majority of the young people who committed suicide are Alevi or Kurdish. They may have come from Alevi families, true, because the number of Alevis here is very high. […] We only see the suicide in our own group however in the district where I work; there are suicide incidents among the Asian or European groups (Interview 14, London).

He makes the point that it is wrong to label one immigrant group as potentially prone to suicide. He argues that generally the second generation immigrants have problems with belonging to society (both to their parents' culture and to Britain) and need to learn about their roots to develop a strong sense of belonging. Community activities such as informing children and teenagers about Alevism and encouraging political awareness and a platform to be interested in extracurricular activities, aim to strengthen their collective identity and to keep them safe from gangs and illegal activities.

5.1.4. From victimhood to pride:

Since the late 1980s, Alevi organisations have expanded in Europe in a liberal context where they can manifest Alevi culture in private and public spheres with great facility. This brought confidence to their identity manifestation. Tilley (2006) argues that although identities are constructed, they are meaningful to their bearers and can be empowering. In the migration context, a vibrant Alevi identity and its public manifestations empower the community. The community centres and their activities are perceived as an indicator of the Alevi community's strength.

Using Alevism's once stigmatised symbols in a new context is an example of this changing attitude. For instance, the EACC uses the word *Kızılbaş* (see chapter four) in the documents (press releases, and speeches etc). The term literally means redhead and denotes a branch of modern day Alevis' ancestors from the sixteenth century; it has gradually acquired a pejorative meaning in the Sunni majority's usage (Melikoff 2005, 7). Even in the New Turkish-English Redhouse Dictionary, the word *Kızılbaş* was defined as someone with loose morals (Sökefeld 2008, 43) and in the Turkish Language Association's Dictionary the word incest was defined as *Kızılbaş*, which was later changed due to Alevi organisations' protests (Taraf 2012). Many Alevi people in the community centres and elsewhere use the word on purpose now to deconstruct and cleanse it from its pejorative association.

Alevis' increasing social networks in Britain contribute further to this growing confidence. As discussed in the previous chapter, Alevis in Britain relate to British culture mainly through civic-political rights and these are important since they facilitate Alevis' collective identity building. As Kastoryani argues 'the country of origin becomes a source of identity and the country of residence a source of rights' (2002, 160). The peaceful cooperation with British institutions is a positive asset for Alevis and as Faist (2000b) argues, the availability of multicultural rights in the receiving state encourages transnational activities and border crossing collective consciousness. For instance, Yusuf Çiçek, the local Enfield politician mentioned above, explained the recognition of Alevi cultural values during the town council's annual opening. As part of the opening ceremony, prayers from different religious groups are said and in 2012 they included *gülbank* (Alevi prayers) in. Çiçek says:

> We opened the official town council on 29 February 2012 with *gülbank*, with EACC and their *dede*. It was very nice. As opposed to the power that rejects and ignores us in the country we were born, the state here gave us such a chance. And it was

very good. All media was there, English media. There were many people from different cultures, from different ethnicities (Interview 14, London).

The political activities and identity building are aimed at being inclusive in a multicultural environment such as London. Gaining public visibility is crucial on the local level as Alevis in Britain are not dispersed across the whole country and mainly reside in certain neighbourhoods of London. They develop these relations by inviting local politicians to their activities and trying to engage the local non-Alevi population. For example, the EACC's annual summer festival is such an opportunity for celebrating Alevi culture, strengthening transnational ties and gaining visibility in public spaces. Since 2011, the festival has been organised every June and continues for a week. Its opening ceremony is conducted in Westminster with the hosting of local MPs and the participation of *cemevi* leaders. Alevi culture is presented to the British public and Alevi community's demands for recognition and equal citizenship in Turkey are also expressed in these meetings. The final day of the festival is celebrated in Hackney Downs Park, London. It is financed by the EACC, advertisements from businesses owned by Alevis, as well as volunteers who donate money or food to be sold in the stalls, so it is also an occasion to celebrate the community's economic success. Folk musicians and Alevi intellectuals are invited from Turkey and such activities attract many people, including those who are loosely affiliated with Alevi organisations and the festival provides them with the chance to participate in the cultural transnational social space.

Moreover, representatives of various faith groups are invited by the *cemevi*. For instance, in 2013 they had sent invitations to several religious groups; however, only a Christian church replied and sent a priest to participate in the festival on 23 June 2013. These invitations are emphasised in order to ensure positive and inclusive identity building for the Alevi community. Although an imam was also invited as a representative of the Sunni community, he did not attend the festival. Later in a private conversation, Dede

Mehmet Turan stated that they try to interact with the other belief communities and invited members of various local belief communities in order to build intercultural dialogue and that the Sunni community did not respond. This also helps to maintain the Alevi Sunni boundary; rendering Alevis as inviting and open-minded and Sunnis as a closed community. During the festival, after the *dede* gave his blessings and read a *gülbank*, the Christian priest thanked the community for the invitation and gave messages of peace and religious tolerance. Such actions are received positively by the audience as well and aim to build positive relations with British society and its values. They link local engagements with a transnational collective identity. Through improving communication with the host society's institutions, the transnational involvements encourage integration to Britain.

The pride aspect is also visible in a public release from the EACC Youth Branch about the summer festival: 'There are no more those Alevis who get together only to commemorate Dersim, Maraş, Sivas or similar massacres. It is betrayal to forget the massacres but Alevis have now become a society that gathers to celebrate their success'. This is a break from the Alevi institutions' conventional attitude which is defensive. It is a proactive approach that enables Alevis to celebrate their culture.

5.2. Alevi identity building on the ceremonial level

5.2.1. Manifesting identity through symbols

Alevi identity is manifested through certain symbolic figures who both unify the community and at times create conflict: for example twelve imams, other religious or secular symbols such as Kemal Atatürk (which connotes a moderate Kemalist view) and

Seyit Rıza.[58] All are all important and signify different aspects of Alevism: Islamic roots, a secular/progressive ideal and a resistance culture respectively. Local symbols of Maraş include Mahsuni Şerif, a musician who is said to have come from a Sunni family and later converted to Alevism and Elif Ana, the local saint of Maraş, who is a highly respected woman and whose pictures decorate many places in London including the *Cemevi*.

These symbols are interpreted differently by community members and create various reactions. One of the most contested of these is the picture of Kemal Atatürk. While the elderly in the *cemevi* usually respect Atatürk for bringing secularism to Turkey, middle aged and younger generations criticize the fact that he banned Alevi *dedes'* titles and their places of worship and denied Kurds independence, although he had made a strategic alliance with Kurds and Alevis before commencing the war of independence in 1919. Moreover, the Dersim massacre in 1937 took place when Atatürk was still alive, so the Kurdish Alevi community has complicated opinions about the Republic's founder. On the one hand, they appreciate the modernizing project and secularism (at least the restrictions on the role of Islam in public), whilst on the other they are critical of the massacres and the monolithic nationalist identity which is promoted by that regime.

For example, a young research participant, Ceren, gave an account of her changing opinion on Atatürk which is shared by many other community members. She migrated to Britain with her family at the age of fourteen from Mersin. She told me that her teacher in Turkey showed the class a documentary video about Atatürk. She was impressed by his life and his modernizing project at first, but as her knowledge of the recent history of Turkey increased her opinions altered from adoration to being critical. She said:

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[58]   Seyit Rıza is the leader of the Dersim rebellion of 1937, and an Alevi *dede* and charismatic leader in the region. He was eventually hanged after the rebellion was heavily suppressed by the Turkish army. Such symbols are used more widely in Britain than in Turkey.

I wanted to take it home and watch it over and over again, I used to cry but later I found out that in 1938 all Alevis were massacred and Atatürk was involved in this. When I found this out, it shocked me. But well, ok, one must evaluate him justly; he has done many great things, he moved it away from Arab culture and built a new secular country, the alphabet we use now, well, it's all very good but some of the things he did… (Interview 25, London).

Younger generations particularly are more critical of the early Republican era and its policies since they have wider access to alternative sources of information. Generally, the Republic's modernizing project is evaluated positively while the massacres and oppression against Alevi and Kurdish groups are criticized.

In addition to Atatürk pictures, another contested area is the pictures of twelve imams. These Shia symbols are quite mainstream and now fully incorporated into Alevism; however, some suggest that these penetrated into Alevism only after the sixteenth century during the times of Shah Hatayi (Okan 2004). Mustafa Bey argues that the Islamic symbols entered Alevi belief much later as a defense mechanism in order to protect against persecution. He comments negatively on the abundance of the religious and political figures in the *Cemevi*:

When you go there, you see that our friends are confused. Have a look at the main room, Mustafa Kemal's picture, pictures of twelve imams, like the Arab football team, pictures of Hacı Bektaş, Pir Sultan, Che Guevara, I mean when you look, you see they are confused. When observers and people from different belief visit there, they say 'so this is Alevism' (Interview 26, London).

The role of Islam in the Alevi faith is long debated both in the community and in the domestic politics of Turkey; as explained above, Alevis' right claims are made dependent on how they position themselves in relation to Islam and their rights are denied on the basis of internal differences. The majority of my research participants in London, more so than in Turkey, argue that Alevi belief is either entirely or partially separate from Islam. Those who argue that Alevism is distinct from Islam feel uncomfortable being categorised under it, since they interpret this as assimilation and the denial of the unique qualities of their belief.

5.2.2. The threat of assimilation – what is true Alevism?

On a public-ceremonial level, one of the biggest shortcomings is ordinary people's lack of information on Alevi theology, its rituals and roots. As Sökefeld (2002a, 114) argues, Alevism is presented through the elements of non-practice such as not fasting during Ramadan, not going to *haj*, not wearing a headscarf, rather than a set of practices that they follow. The identity is revived selectively and although many actors are involved in this, not everyone has equal influence. The discussions on the true origins and core belief system of Alevism are influenced by the discussants' political attitudes and so any information on Alevism that is presented as factual might be highly opinionated. Mysticism in the Alevi faith, the fact that they had to hide their identity from public for many centuries, and the scarcity of available written documents are factors that complicate the situation.

In addition, the modern identities that people have encountered following urbanization and international migration have influenced perspectives aimed at understanding Alevism. The conflict between the so-called 'traditional' and 'progressive' groups within Alevism is visible in their relationships with current ideologies. Ali Yaman, as a social scientist who studies Alevism and as someone who comes from a *dede* family, argues that people enforce their modern identities on Alevism:

> In order to understand, there are old people in rural areas today who lived Alevism traditionally. If we look at them we can see Alevism. I mean today's environment that we live in is different, we can't force our own dress on Alevism. Consequently, Alevism is not hidden, it is open anyway, there is a traditional structure in the rural areas, we know what they pray and talk. If we look at this, we can understand. Right-wing, left-wing, nationalist, communist, the fact that we try to explain Alevism with our modern world's identities does not seem right to me (Interview 3, Hacıbektaş).

Assimilation into Sunni traditions is seen as a threat because Alevis believe that this will annihilate their belief system and culture. As Özdalga argues 'in whatever form this threat presents itself, the concern for losing one's cultural and religious uniqueness runs

deep and is a recurring theme, when the situation of the Alevis is being discussed' (2008, 192). Funeral ceremonies are important occasions to conduct Alevi rituals. The debates over the 'correct' way to conduct these ceremonies reveal the community's concerns about assimilation.

Initially the nonexistence of properly conducted funerals was one of the reasons that motivated Alevis in Britain to establish a *cemevi* and community centre. İsrafil Erbil expressed the difficulties they had experienced previously (Interview 3, London): in the first years of migration Alevi people took their funerals to the Turkish mosques nearby, but they received negative reactions from the imams, implying that Alevis never visit mosques but they show up only when they have a funeral. They found a temporary solution in using other Muslim communities' mosques, such as Pakistani; however, the people who brought the funeral to the mosque would refuse to enter the mosque and pray *salat*[59] but rather waited outside. Eventually, after the foundation of the first *cemevi* in London, they no longer had to conduct their funeral ceremonies in the mosques. This has been important for discovering and implementing their 'own' ways of performing rituals, although there is no consensus over what the 'original' way of conducting these actually is. Eventually this practical need has contributed to the transformation of the Alevi community from a locally invisible to a transnationally visible belief community (Zirh 2012).

The ritual transformation is not free from conflict and affects the Alevi communities both in Turkey and in diaspora. The attempt to discover the 'authentic' Alevi rituals is also a way of drawing boundaries with the Sunni majority. Dertli Divani, a contemporary Alevi poet I met in Istanbul, argues that Alevism suffered from cultural erosion and the community needs to recover from it:

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[59]   Funeral *salat* (salat-al-Janazah) is the Islamic funeral ceremony conducted by men only.

The path has come from those days to today, there is a tradition that has been going on but because of the pressure gradually we looked like others. Especially in the cities, people needed *hodjas* because they don't know anything about their own teaching and they didn't want others to say 'they didn't even pray *Fatiha* and buried their dead like an animal corpse'. And as time goes by they thought this is how it is supposed to be. Our funeral rituals are unique to us (Interview 9, Istanbul).

Boundary drawing practices can also be seen in official forms. For instance local politician and former *cemevi* chairman Yusuf Çiçek argues that Alevis need to define and present themselves correctly in order to be recognised:

We are Alevi, Alevism is a very different thing… Within Alevism of course there are many values that belong to Islam, to Christianity or Judaism. It took all the beauty in the four books, it is a peculiar belief therefore when I was *cemevi*'s chairman, we were telling all our people, when you fill in forms to register your children to school. Under the equal opportunity thing, which ethnicity are you, African, white etc. It also asks your religion. Definitely do not tick Muslim, write Alevi under 'other'. If we express ourselves correctly, other people recognise us correctly. But if we don't, they recognise us wrongly (Interview 14, London).

Now the Alevi community in Britain has its own places throughout Britain and funerals can be conducted according to Alevi tradition; however, the funeral issue still invites conflicts since the ceremonies are not standardised. In addition there is controversy surrounding the use of Islamic references: while citing from the Quran is a widespread practice in many *cem* houses in Turkey, both in *cem* ceremonies and in funerals, the same practice is more limited in Britain. Therefore, whether or not the Quran should be read at funerals becomes a problem in the community. My fieldnotes from a funeral meal I attended reveal the diversity of opinions on this matter. In the funeral meal in the *cemevi*, there were nearly 100-150 people in the large room at the back; the *dede* addressed the people in a tone of anger:

… there was a disagreement about the funeral ceremony. The relatives of the deceased asked the *dede* to read the Quran but he refused this and wanted to

conduct it according to Alevi rules[60] (*Alevice*). He said 'we had to assimilate, hide our path, forget our customs but now we have a chance to go back to our roots and do our prayers in the proper way. We show respect to everyone, Sunni Muslims, Jews and Christians who do their ritual in their own way. But we have to stick to our own rituals and not be assimilated'. Most people clapped after his speech but I am not sure if they agree completely (Fieldnotes, 26.01.2013).

The ritual affirmation of identity is necessary for both internal consumption and for marking differences from outside (Jenkins 2014, 146) taking the form of a set of practices that help to affirm belonging to the group and define a group boundary from the outside. The c*em* ceremony carries this function for Alevis and has a structure composed of twelve services. Nevertheless, the question 'how it should be conducted?' has different answers for different people. These can be discussed more easily in Britain rather than Turkey because of the liberal climate and the absence of restraints.

The differences between the two *cem* ceremonies that I observed reveal the traditional and progressive approaches to Alevism. For instance Kartal *Cemevi*, Istanbul, has a more traditional approach to *cem*; the first thing that I noticed when I entered the room where the *cem* was to be conducted was the sitting arrangement. Men and women were in the same room yet sat on separate sides. Also the female *cem* participants were required to cover their hair, although this was optional in other *cemevi* that I visited in Istanbul. In addition to the formal differences, the content of the *cem* was mainly composed of reading a Turkish translation of the Quran, a short *muhabbet* (the part of *cem* where the *dede* discusses a topic of importance) and *semah* (Fieldnotes, 09.09.2012, Istanbul).

The *cem* ceremonies I observed in London were different both in form and content. First of all there was no strict sitting arrangement or dress code; men and women were

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[60]   By this he means reading *gülbank*, Alevi prayers in Turkish language, and citing the names of twelve imams instead of reading parts from the Quran.

sitting next to one another and the headscarf was optional. Although this seems to be more 'modern', they claim that this is closer to the original village *cem* (*köy cemi*), where there is no gender segregation and participants wear their everyday clothes. Also the content of the *muhabbet* was very different; as explained previously, the victimhood at different points in Alevi history is told in a continuum and the current situation of Alevi community as well as other forms of social injustice is incorporated in the commemorations of past victims. Towards the end of the *cem* ceremony the suffering of Kerbela is remembered and a small amount of water is distributed in the memory of Kerbela martyrs who suffered from thirst in the desert. In the London *cemevi*, during this part of the ceremony the current problems of Alevis as well as other oppressed groups are mentioned. The incorporation of worldly matters to *cem* is perceived positively by most community members, because they claim that awareness of social justice and human centred views are inherent to Alevism.

Ideas of justice and equality are embraced by most Alevis, and these are not peculiar to British Alevis. All my research participants in Turkey, without exception, argued that Alevism is humanist and egalitarian; however, they do not necessarily link these with their rituals, while British Alevis make a conscious effort to integrate these principles to all their activities. This approach of integrating worldly matters to *cem* ceremonies is perceived positively by most of the participants I talked to. It appeals to them by connecting the central ritual of their belief with their personal experiences of victimhood, not only because of the distant past (such as Kerbela) but also due to addressing more recent or current incidents of discrimination.

The boundary with Sunni Islam is still important for the majority and helps them define their identity through opposition/difference from it. However, since they are free from the pressures they encountered in Turkey, this reference point is not the only one. Therefore, Britain's Alevis have less pressure if they wish to implement their own ways of

prayers and funeral ceremonies. Dressler argues that in Germany, Sunni Islam is not in a privileged position and 'is not necessarily the standard against which Alevism is measured' so Alevis in Germany can go beyond the boundaries of Islamic discourse in their self-representation (2011, 201). Likewise in Britain, EACC leaders manifest Alevi identity not only in relation to Sunni Islam but also through its distinct principles and rituals.

Although the majority of people in the *cemevi* seem to have developed positive relations with the *dede* and respect his authority, there are instances where his authority is challenged indirectly. I had a conversation with a woman I met in the *cemevi* towards the end of my fieldwork. She was in her late fifties, came from Adiyaman, a southeastern town in Turkey, and had been living in London for a long time. She was illiterate yet told me that she was familiar with the traditional understanding of Alevism as experienced in rural areas because her father was a *dede*. She was not pleased with the way the new generation practices Alevism and referred to Mehmet Turan, who visits the London *cemevi* a few times a year to conduct *cem* ceremonies, as a 'leftist *dede*' (*solcu dede*) in a pejorative way because she thought that he was too heavily involved in politics. She did not approve of the removal of Atatürk's picture in the centre (which I noticed only after she told me), yet she said she visited the *cemevi* nevertheless in order to chant God's name. She was not entirely satisfied with the way Alevi rituals are conducted in the modern *cemevi* in London and thought that it was necessary to conduct these as close as possible to the original. A major difference was that in the traditional village *cem* ceremonies they used to sit on the floor (she says: '*sitting on our knees*'), but now some people find it uncomfortable and chairs are provided for the people who cannot sit on the floor[61]. She thought this was spoiling the naturalness of the faith. She found it important to follow traditions, but the circumstances did not allow imitating the rural *cem* ceremonies. On the other hand, the *dede* states that

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[61]   Chairs are provided in many *cemevi* in Istanbul as well.

formalism is unnecessary and the good will and moral qualities in the *cem* are more important.

5.2.3. Religious transnationalism and finding own voice –mediation in London

In exploring Alevis' transnational activism and networks in Britain, one of the examples I elaborate is the application of traditional mediation in a modern context. It is a practice that links Alevi traditions and the legal apparatus of the host country. It also sheds light on the rediscovery of Alevism in a liberal environment; through the transnational activities of a community centre, the community members adopt an old tradition and integrate it into an entirely new social context.

Conflict resolution via spiritual leaders is an Alevi practice which is nowadays seldom conducted[62]. I asked Mehmet *Dede* about mediation in Alevi belief and to what extent it is still practiced. He first explained the concept to me: this is an old tradition that goes back to the historical documents called *erkanname*, which organize Alevi rituals and proper conduct. Individuals swear an oath (*ikrar*) to follow certain moral principles, which organize the daily life and ethical codes necessary for living together. He said:

> If somebody gives this promise, then the person accepts the consequences as well… if you behave contrary to your '*ikrar*', do you allow this court to judge you, are you content with that? People accepted this in advance…" (Interview 22, London).

People ask their *dede* to help solve their problems instead of through litigation so that they do not have to deal with the state institutions. Historically this strategy of

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[62] I observed this only once in Istanbul when the *dede* asked this question and one person said she had a problem with another woman. It was about the sitting arrangement before the cem ceremony started, so it was not a serious problem and the dede was upset that they were occupied with this kind of problems.

remaining out of state officials' sight gradually helped Alevis develop a peaceful conflict resolution method which resembles modern day mediation.

Traditional mediation has been practiced lately (or was at least attempted) among the Alevi community in England, when the EACC's previous and current chairmanship had problems over property which was allegedly embezzled by the previous chairmanship. The charity committee, to which the community centre is affiliated, and the court decided that the conflicting parties should first try to solve their problem on their own by using their traditional mediation method. I was surprised that British authorities knew about Alevi traditions, Mehmet *Dede* said they knew from the information they had previously provided to the court and also the court researched into Alevism:

> Based on this knowledge, the judge says 'you were not supposed to be filing lawsuits', the judge of an English court. 'It is recorded in your history that you solve your conflicts among yourselves'. He says, 'not only what we had been told but also our own research shows this', can you imagine? (Interview 22, London).

Paradoxically in the migration context, which eroded some traditions, Alevis are not only allowed to exercise their rituals but are also encouraged to integrate these into a modern legal practice.

Although the attempt to solve their problems 'in an Alevi way' (*Alevice)* eventually failed and a lawsuit had to take place between the previous and the new chairs of the EACC, this attempt demonstrates the transnational efforts of travelling *dedes* (one from Turkey representing the new chairman and the other from Germany representing the old chairman) and the linking of Alevi tradition to modern identity building in the conditions they now live under. This is an opportunity to demonstrate the compatibility of the Alevi tradition with modern legal practices and norms of the host country and underline the importance of non-violent solutions to problems. Conflict resolution through the guidance of a *dede* means that they can perform rituals in their own way (*Alevice*), which is extremely

important for the identity building of a community that was persecuted as 'Other' in the home country. Alevis in Britain can implement their own values and rituals as long as these are compatible with the host country's liberal and secular principles. The mediation example shows both the extent of multiculturalism in Britain and Alevi traditions' compatibility with the host country.

5.2.4. *Cemevi* – a room of Alevis' own and its discontents

As a place of worship, the *cemevi* is another area of controversy. The different attitudes towards the *cemevi* do not overlap with ethnic or hometown identities but they are based rather on individual opinions and convenience. Many respondents argue that it is a necessary place for Alevis to conduct their religious ceremonies and to organize politically. The respondents who support the counterview argue that the more the modern institutions represent Alevi faith, the more standardised it becomes. Especially those who emphasise and celebrate the spontaneous and dynamic quality of Alevism are concerned that their faith will become confined to the four walls of institutions and freeze or gradually assimilate into Sunni Islam. Some older research participants even call the *cemevi* a mosque without a minaret (*minaresiz cami*) and say that they do not need a specific place to experience spirituality.

The *cemevi* is not an entirely new concept but the modern *cemevi* have more versatile functions such as providing help and advice to migrants and offering educational services. Previously in communal village life, Alevis conducted their *cem* ceremony in a large living room and called that place *cemevi* (gathering house). After migration to cities or European countries they needed formal places to gather in the anonymous context of cities and the modern *cemevi* gained public visibility in urban spaces in the 1990s. For some community members, the increasing numbers of *cemevi* mean more visibility and it is a powerful way of saying 'we exist'. For example, the EACC is very proud of the new *cemevi*

they are constructing in Wood Green, London, which will have more capacity for *cem* ceremonies, classes, panels and conferences and also a separate area for funerals.

Cemevi construction in Turkey is particularly significant as a political statement and for the empowerment of Alevi people. Also, Salman Akdeniz, chairman of the local branch of PSAKD that cooperated with the EACC in the Maraş massacre commemorations, emphasized the importance of *cemevi* as a social space for Alevis. He participated in EACC's summer festival in 2013 and raised money in order to build a *cemevi* in Maraş. Transnational help for *cemevi* construction is seen as crucial because they think the physical places will contribute to Alevis' solidarity, and allow them to practice their religion and organise cultural and political events. Akdeniz argues that there is no place where Alevis can express themselves in Maraş town centre except for a small association. He stresses the importance of the *cemevi* as a physical space that will help not only Alevis but also all democratic people to have an opportunity to organise and carry out cultural and political activities:

> There is no house that we can do the *cem*. *Cem*, house. I mean we don't have our house where we can conduct our *cem*. […] in many provinces, [there are *cemevi*] Alevis try to do because of their needs, in the districts and villages, but Maraş is both a need and a must. It is a need as a centre of belief. It is a must, in order to protect the souls we have lost in the massacres in history. It is a must, still today, there are no conference halls where democrat, enlightened, revolutionary, secular, left, where these people can express themselves. The Sunni citizen in the neighbourhood will also have a chance to express himself there (Interview 23, London).

As opposed to this positive view of building *cemevi*, there are some counter positions usually voiced by non-affiliated people or those who identify less with the religious aspects of Alevism. For instance, Can, who is a member of the EACC theatre group said he has never been to a *cem* ceremony, and he was not interested in it. However, he said he assumed that the ceremony would be conducted 'differently' and not be 'backward'

(*gerici*) in London[63] (Interview 20, London). A few of the non-affiliated people among my research participants said they wanted to go to the EACC or to the other associations but they could not due to lack of time or inconvenient location. The remainder said that they deliberately did not go to the *cemevi* although they may go there on rare occasions such as a family member's funeral or an interesting panel. At other times they expressed the view that the kind of Alevism which is propagated in *cemevi* does not fulfill them spiritually or intellectually. They also think that traditional gender roles are being reinforced in these places; for example the fact that men and women are sitting on separate sides of the room was criticised by such non-affiliated people.

Selma, a middle aged female university graduate I met in London tells me that her understanding of Alevism that was shaped back in Turkey is different from what she sees now in the community centres and *cemevi*. She says her father was a *dede* but after migrating from Sivas to Istanbul, it was no longer possible to conduct *cem* ceremonies. Instead, her father embraced Alevism as a humanist way of life, promoting education, sharing and equality and passed these values on to his children. Selma feels that the spiritual aspect of Alevism should remain a personal issue. In her opinion, if religions are institutionalised they become backward. I heard similar opinions from many non-practicing Alevis, who regard Alevism as a way of life to become a good human being, rather than conducting a set of practices. She said:

> S: For me it is a very special space, not something that can be told … I don't talk very much about this, I don't give my opinion.
>
> A: Is it more like something about the private sphere?

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[63]   Again the word *gerici* (backward) is used in direct opposition to *ilerici* (progressive). The progressive wing argues that Alevi teaching is inherently interested in this world so it should incorporate a humanist and social justice aspect to all its practices.

S: Yes, yes. […] It is something I don't like. Sadly it turned into a folkloric thing. When you look at the structuring of the *cem* houses, I mean that can be a need but it changed the essence of it […] We would not have been involved in those things, even if we stayed in Turkey, because it is a kind of Alevism that transformed into something different for us. We regard the Alevi organisations, not that I am against *cemevis* but we regard them as more backward and bigoted as opposed to the kind of Alevism that we lived in. In my family, we would have some distance from them. Among the Alevis we were different anyway. And I'm not a person who lives Alevism like that. My difference is I am not that traditional. For example as a child I used to question Alevism, for instance when I was at high school, my father, he was respected by everyone, all people were respectful to him… I told my father one day 'you are not really that… I mean you defend gender equality but it doesn't happen in practice'. I was someone who questions it, and he said 'you are right, we don't practice many things that we defend'. In that sense although I was a *dede*'s daughter, I think also because of my father's personality, he was very open minded, he lived it very differently and deeply. Alevism is not just superficially… but in the real sense, it is in all religions; if you embrace the essence of a religion, the form is not important. That was more dominant in our family. They claimed that they are '*hakikatçi*'; you know there are four levels in Alevism. They claimed to be *hakikatçi* so its rules are different; it is more about the inner self. My mother used to fast but my father didn't. We weren't taught that we should fast. So the dimension where people live Alevism as a religion… That didn't exist in our understanding. It was more spiritual, more Sufi-like.

For example the humanists here, we are like the equivalent of them. What the humanists do as people, it is also our people's… In that sense it is embedded as values, as the way you are brought up. This doesn't necessarily have a name, all religions are about being a human or not breaking other people's hearts, respecting them, developing your spiritual side, it is such a point. (Interview 37, London).

Similarly an elderly research participant, Haydar, who comes from an Alevi village and is familiar with *hakikatçi* explains his concerns when I ask him if he practices Alevi rituals:

A: There are particular rituals and practices in Alevism. Do you conduct any of those? Such as participating in *cem* ceremony…

H: Well, I don't like them very much [talking at the same time]

A: or *Muharrem* fast.

H: *Muharrem*, I don't know, I'm not involved in those businesses but others can if they want to. For me such fake things don't mean much anyway. The main thing is the essence of a person, the essence must be honest. A human being has a brain, the brain thinks. Thinking leads to working, working leads to knowledge, knowledge

leads to affection, affection leads to love, love leads to God. If you have these, it's all fine. If not, the rest is just a formality.

A: Have you ever participated in a *cem* ceremony? Either in your youth or now in here?

H: I did one time.

A: What was your impression?

H: Impression… not that I despise them but [a long pause] well I said it, it is fulfilling a formality (Interview 12, London).

As Alevis become more visible in public, their culture is increasingly folklorised. For the general public it is a source of pride that their religion and the symbols are presented to a wider audience and gain recognition. Alevi music, poetry and dance are presented both in Britain and in Turkey, but they are taken out of their spontaneous context. For example, *semah* is the holy spiritual dance which is performed at the climax of the music in the *cem* ceremony. People join the dance in a circle: men and women dance together in the same place and as they turn in circles they do not turn their backs to the *dede*. Because of their respect they perform a formation turning to face the *dede* when they are passing in front of him. Originally *semah* is a spontaneous but essential component of *cem*. Nowadays in the *cem* houses, there are *semah t*eams that prepare for the weekly ceremonies and perform this almost professionally with a set choreography in matching costumes.

During the *cem* ceremony when *semah* begins, the *dede* says 'let it be for God, not for entertainment' meaning that it is not intended as a show to please the audience but rather as a manifestation of inner spirituality and a feeling of oneness with the universe. Therefore, some participants criticize when it is performed at every public event. Dr Ali Yaman is one of those who think that *semah* loses its meaning when its performers dress uniformly and perform it as a folkloric dance.

It is widely accepted that Alevis need to organize for their political cause and solidarity and that there is a need for the community centres. However the institutions

promote different aspects of 'the Alevi identity' and create different camps ranging from moderate/ state-friendly to leftist/oppositional (Okan 2004; Soner and Toktaş 2011). Those in attendance regularly fulfill their social, spiritual or intellectual needs (or a combination of them) whereas those who criticize the modern *cemevi* believe that these institutions and their leaders fall short of representing the spontaneous, dynamic essence of Alevi belief.

Particularly those research participants who argue that they had experienced Alevism as a way of life in their hometowns before they migrated are not satisfied with the Alevi community centres. For instance Metin, a Kurdish Alevi in his forties who grew up in Dersim, says that he did not develop a consciousness of Aleviness until he went away to another town to study, because in Dersim the vast majority was Alevi. The people did not need to express being Alevi explicitly there but rather experienced Alevism as a natural part of life. Metin said he learned about Alevism after he moved to another town, encountered Sunni people and began to observe differences in terms of religiosity and lifestyle. Through this comparison and difference with Sunnis as well as what he learned from the people in the Kurdish movement that he was involved in, he learnt what Alevi means. He was very critical of the modern *cemevi*:

> … because I believe that Alevism is misled through the *cemevi*. I believe it is pushed towards fanaticism politically or ideologically. *Cemevi* emerged with the support of a section of the state anyway. For example, in the construction of *cemevi* in Europe, as we found out later, there were rumours that these were developed with a decision of the National Security Council[64]. In the same way, in Turkey, they did it in order to make Kemalist ideology dominant. Since it gradually became more like Sunni Islam, I was never interested in it (Interview 24, London).

Then he said that he embraces Alevism not as a religion, but rather as a philosophy that blesses the human and regards everyone as equal.

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[64] National Security Council is the junta that was established after the military coup in 1980.

Similar concerns are shared by the people who do not go to *cemevi* at all or who go only occasionally. For instance Akın, whom I met in Kırkısrak Culture Centre, was very critical about the modern cemevi:

I have a criticism against *cemevis*. You know *cemevi* is a recent thing in the history of Alevism. It has a history of 10-15 years. Nothing before that. And in this process *cemevis* turned into assimilation centres rather than a place where Alevis conduct their belief and practices. I mean those symbols, what they do there… They turned *cemevis* into mosques without minarets. I think what the *cemevi* (in London) should do are these [things]: first they should distance away from the Turkish-Islamic synthesis. They should get rid of the symbols of Turkish-Islamic synthesis. Today in any mosque do you see the photograph of Mustafa Kemal? For instance in a church can there be the photograph of a state's leader? Or a state's flag? All places of worship have rules, regulations. They should pay attention to that. Today's *cemevis* do not practice Alevism. 12 September's Turkish-Islamic synthesis has found itself a base in these places. Instead of finding solutions to Alevis' problems, they do discussions over those symbols (Interview 13, London).

Another concern is about blending the belief and practices with contemporary issues. Feride says:

I don't relate to it much; Hasan died like this, Hüseyin died like that. All right I respect but you can't attract people there with that kind of talk. I don't want to listen to that… Find me something about now, tell me something that is about this moment (Interview 10, London).

Many Alevis also emphasise that they are able to develop egalitarian relationships with their clergy. Modern Alevis not only respect but also question their *dedes* and take pride on not following them blindly. On the one hand, practices such as *niyaz* (kissing the hand of the *dede* to show respect to the holy lineage of twelve imams that the *dede* represents) still continue in the older generation and I have seen older men kissing the *dede's* hand. On the other hand, they are able to ask questions to *dede*, which shows that he is not an absolute authority figure.

For example Özge, a young woman in her early thirties who witnessed the opening of the first *cem* houses in Istanbul, told me that she was able to stand up against the *dede*

when she was criticized by him for no reason. When she was in Istanbul, she had volunteered to conduct one of the twelve duties in the *cem* ceremony, *süpürgeci* (sweeper) which symbolizes the cleanliness of the place of worship. The *dede* criticized her but did not explain what she did wrong; then she stood up with her feet crossed (right toe on top of left toe[65]) and asked the *dede* what she did wrong so that she can correct her mistake. The *dede* refused to answer and ignored her. Later at the end of the ceremony the participants of the *cem* told her she was right and the *dede* was wrong for criticizing her (Interview 17, London). Similarly, many others in the community take pride in being able to speak their minds or ask questions to the *dede* confidently and they think this is a major difference from other religions, especially from mainstream Islam, where they believe it is more difficult to challenge an imam.

5.3. Effects of public level identity on the private sphere

The manifestation of Alevism in the public sphere also affects the way individuals identify with Alevism on a personal level since 'individual and collective identities coincide in complex ways' (Jenkins 2014, 127). Public and private spheres interact; the existence of Alevi identity in the public facilitates the identification with Alevism and its transmission to the next generations. Institutions and sustained activities create the necessary social space for this. The main activities of the EACC, and also of the other HTAs and political organisations that cooperate with the EACC from time to time, not only provide a space for religious rituals and social solidarity but also raise awareness of political issues and strive for Alevis' recognition on a transnational scale. Two activities are mainly important for the

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[65] This is the appropriate standing position when addressing a *dede* during the *cem*. According to the legend, Muhammed asks for water and his daughter Fatma runs to fetch it. On the way she hurts her foot and her left toe bleeds. She covers her left toe with her right foot when giving the water to Muhammed, so that she will not upset him with the bleeding foot (Sökefeld 2008).

community and these started in the public and then affected the private sphere: education on Alevism and political activism.

Religion and ethics education in Turkey have been a problem for Alevis because it was mandatory and the curriculum excluded Alevi belief. Now in Britain, Alevism has been included in religious education classes in a few London schools under the initiative of the EACC. The former chairman, İsrafil Erbil, assesses the project very positively. He argues that previously primary school children from Alevi families were not able to identify themselves as Alevis, although the other children of the same age group knew to which religion or sect they belonged. After Alevism courses began in the schools, Erbil reported, the children from Alevi families could identify themselves as Alevi and learned about their rituals and belief system (UK Interview 3). In addition, other parents I spoke with in Nurhak Culture House in Enfield stated that their children began to ask questions to their parents about their Alevi heritage after they had Alevism classes at their local school. This demonstrates how the collective actions in the public sphere influence the private sphere and facilitate the transmission of identity to immigrants' children.

Another influence of the public sphere on the private is the political activism for Alevi identity. Alevi migrants have strong symbolic ties to Turkey and are affected by the developments and events there. Significant events such as an earthquake or accident in Turkey or political developments such as the peace talks between the government and the Kurdish politicians or the recent Alevi opening also affect social mobilisation. The symbolic and real attachments connect Alevis living in different places. As the events concerning Alevis intensify, more activities are organised by the EACC in order to protest/support them and Alevis participate in them individually or as affiliated with these organisations. In addition, people take part in political activism with their families, including their children, in order to raise their awareness of Alevi identity and to encourage their solidarity with other

community members. The example elaborated on in the previous chapter concerning those parents who take their children to the protests shows that political awareness is also transmitted through these collective actions. The public aspects focus on the political and educational activities and this reflects on Alevis' private lives.

5.4. Conclusion:

Alevi identity on the public level is also constructed in a wider transnational social space that includes Alevi communities and institutions in Britain and Turkey. The boundary regarding Alevi identity is drawn in this context and influenced by both developments in Turkey and Alevi immigrants' experiences in Britain. In addition to the Alevi-Sunni boundary, which is crucial in understanding contemporary Alevis, there is also a concern about reviving Alevism properly and thus an internal boundary that separates the two camps of Alevism: progressive versus traditional. Behind this division there is a strong concern about assimilation and the cultural erosion of Alevism and ideas about what constitutes the true essence of the Alevi path. It reflects on the ceremonial aspects of identity building as a need to rediscover Alevis' own voice through distinct practices and cultural elements as opposed to melting into the majority religion in Turkey. The concern continues even after migration due to strong symbolic attachments with the Alevi communities back in Turkey.

A universal human rights discourse as a principle also dominates Alevis' activities in the public sphere; solidarity with other oppressed groups and claiming rights beyond one's immediate community proves this. Alevis usually justify the need for intercultural solidarity with the principles of their belief system and argue that it is compatible with universal ideas such as humanism and egalitarianism. In addition, the ethnic aspect of many Alevis in Britain, Kurdishness, motivates a broader solidarity with the Kurdish cause. With the help of

multicultural rights and a liberal social environment in Britain that allows the expression of cultural differences, Alevis find the public space in order to express their identity and struggle for their rights. While belief and spiritual aspects of Alevism are pushed into private sphere, cultural and political identification with Alevism has a wider appeal in the community and is more visible in public.

6. Conclusion

This research is an ethnographic exploration of the Alevi community in Britain. The main points of focus are Alevis' identity building and the supranational and transnational links. It answers the following questions: in which context did Alevis' cross-border practices develop; what kind of cross-border activities do Alevis in Britain practice and how do various Alevi actors manifest their identity in the private and public spheres in the migration context. In this final chapter I summarise my main findings and contributions to the literature and discuss the gaps in the research literature regarding Alevi identity and transnationalism.

My findings demonstrate that transnationalism is a very suitable theoretical lens that can be used to understand contemporary migrant experience and that migrants' cross-border relations are normalised both by migrants and nation states. Yet this phenomenon does not apply to all migrants' experience. First of all, not all migrants have the resources and/or motivation to engage in transnational activities. A strong sense of identity, economic safety and social networks encourage transnational activity. Second, although transnational activism (especially for political causes) is important in changing policies, laws and cultures, the nation state remains an important frame of reference for identities, claims and the organisations of migrants and ethnic minority groups (Koopmans and Statham 1999).

Alevis' transnational struggle has contributed to gaining certain rights and recognition in the host countries and contributed to the public visibility of the Alevi movement in Turkey. As a consequence of a vibrant Alevi movement, it has become easier to identify as an Alevi in public than was the case thirty years ago. Furthermore, the JDP government's proposal of an 'Alevi opening', in addition to several other ethnic and belief communities, can be understood as a result of the persistent organised effort of these communities for their rights. Transnational struggle for rights is a dynamic process yet it is the nation states that have the power to grant or refute recognition of these communities.

Several factors constitute the context in which British Alevis' transnational practices developed. As Özkul (2014) argues, Alevis' demands were shaped in a transnational social space in a dual process between their country of residence and Turkey. Their past experiences of discrimination in Turkey, new social conditions in the host country, current developments regarding Alevis and the supranational structures as a framework have influenced Alevis' transnational practices and identity building in Britain. First of all, discrimination in Turkey had a strong effect on the identification with Alevism and taking part in Alevi community organisations. Being mainly Kurdish and being political immigrants in Britain has created a strong sense of discriminated identity, sometimes articulated as being entwined with Kurdishness. This identity is at the centre of Alevis' local and transnational activism in Britain.

Second, experiences in the host society are crucial for this community's sense of identity. The social context in Western European countries in the late 1980s and early 1990s provided the conditions for identity politics to flourish. Multiculturalism and tolerance for immigrant and minority cultures created such an environment. My findings confirm Faist's (2000b) proposition that a host society's multicultural and liberal environment encourages immigrants' transnational engagements. Alevis in Britain strengthened their socio-economic status through entrepreneurial activities, established businesses and took employment in public and private sectors. This social and economic capital facilitated their organised activities in Britain.

Third, current developments in Turkey and the Middle East have intensified Alevi activism. The JDP's conservative tendencies which increased after its second term of government created a growing anti-JDP sentiment among the Alevi community and secular groups. The Gezi Park Protests, which mobilized and united many people with anti-government sentiments, the armed conflicts in the Middle East, sectarian cleavages in the

region and JDP's pro-Sunni reactions all strengthened Alevis' sense of being part of a discriminated community, even long after their migration to Britain.

Finally, Turkey's long-sought after aim of becoming an EU member state and the EU's criteria regarding the recognition of ethnic and religious minorities as a prerequisite of EU integration are very important leverages for minorities that live in and outside of Turkey. All these factors have influenced Alevis' struggle and demands to have their rights recognized by the Turkish state.

Members of the Alevi community in Britain participate in various cross-border relations and activities on the basis of many factors. Being Alevi is only one aspect among their multiple identities. For instance, my research participants can be categorised not only as Alevi but also as Kurdish or Turkish, migrants from Turkey, socialists or Kemalists. My research specifically focused on those transnational links and practices that aimed at Alevis' recognition and cultural rights. I examined these in two categories: supranational and transnational. Supranational links are the activities that go beyond the nation state such as universal human rights and links with supranational institutions such as lobbying for Alevis' rights in UN and the EU. Transnationalism includes activities on the levels of nation state and below such as petition campaigns, protests on a local scale and commemorations of violent attacks that occurred in the past.

London *cemevi* and now the BAF (Britain Alevi Federation) are the most active agents of these relations. Their links with supranational institutions influence transnational activities and how Alevi identity is manifested. Alevis describe their belief system not only as a set of cultural practices and rituals but also as a cosmopolitan identity. They emphasise that it is inherently compatible with more encompassing identities and human rights. Consequently, the human rights discourse and the links with supranational institutions reflect on their transnational activities to enhance the rights of Alevi communities in Turkey.

A strong sense of Alevi identity and ties with Turkey motivate Britain's Alevis to strive for rights on the supranational level. In addition the perspective that was acquired from the supranational level infiltrates to ordinary members of Alevi community; they demand the recognition of religious and ethnic diversity which poses a challenge to the monolithic state in Turkey. In addition, the more educated members of Alevi community are able to construct their demands in a comprehensive way to include all oppressed people.

A social constructionist approach to identities guided my research in order to capture the dynamic process of identity. As many have argued, identities are plural, constantly evolving and not fixed (Eriksen 2010; Hall 1996; Tilley 2006) and are shaped via social interactions and encounters with other identities (Barth 1998; Deschamps 2010; Lamont and Molnár 2002; Tajfel 2010). Furthermore, the boundaries that migrants draw with other communities reach beyond a single nation state's physical space. This perspective has helped me grasp Alevi identity as a dynamic process in relation to other identities.

Identity is at the core of Alevi mobilisation because in Turkey Alevis are struggling in order to be able to freely express their identity while having equal rights and not being discriminated against. There is a two-way relationship between identity and transnationalism for this community. On the one hand, a strong sense of victimhood and an urge to protect their identity motivates transnational activities. On the other, the way transnational activism is conducted by the London *cemevi* and BAF (by emphasising human rights and in solidarity with other oppressed groups) frames the Alevi identity and strengthens the public identification with it.

Alevis in Britain are mainly of Kurdish ethnic origin. They have experienced persecution and discrimination on the basis of both religious and ethnic identities in the homeland and have arrived in Britain mainly as political migrants. Due to these factors I had

expected them to be active in defending their rights on both a supranational and transnational level and to be involved in activities that aim to transform the home country as well as expand their rights in the host country. Having two salient persecuted identities, Britain's Alevi community uses the liberal and multicultural rights that they have gained as a result of migration. The recognition of Alevis is attained with relative ease in Britain; multicultural policies and respect for ethnic and religious diversity facilitate their accommodation into the host society. For instance, they can establish community centres, gain acceptance as a belief community and even recognition in religious education classes in some East London schools. Moreover, through their links with the local and national British institutions Alevis can demonstrate that their demands are compatible with British values. Gaining recognition for Alevis in Turkey is more challenging; Alevis in Britain strive for improving Alevis' rights back in the home country by using human rights discourse and supranational institutions as support for their claims making. The discourse of human rights blends into their transnational activities as well and it has become a large part of their identity manifestation. They construct their identity as one that defends rights and justice for all, extending to non-Alevi groups such as Kurds.

This encompassing identity is manifested both in personal opinions on Alevism and in public discourse as one that is progressive, egalitarian, non-discriminatory and one that embraces women's rights. Since Alevis in Britain had experienced discrimination in the home country before their migration, I had expected that most community members would identify with Alevism regardless of their religious and spiritual attachment to it. Indeed, most of my research participants had a strong sense of being Alevi even if they did not consider themselves to be religious. Especially after migration they had a chance to express being Alevi more openly which offered them a positive identity that is compatible with the host society. As Smith and Guarnizo argue, identity is important for migrants and provides

them a place in the world; 'Identity is contextual but not radically discontinuous. People seek to be situated, to have a stable mooring, an anchor amidst the tempest' (1998, 21).

In-group and out-group differences and social boundary concepts have guided this research in order to explain Alevi identity. For instance, the largest out-group, Sunni Muslims, is the social group which stands as a reference against which Alevis frequently describe themselves. The boundary making and maintenance is based on either real or mediated experiences of discrimination. Consequently, the Sunni majority in Turkey and Sunni Turkish immigrants in Britain emerge as the most significant out-group in Alevis' identity making. This boundary is not straightforward because Alevism is not experienced purely as a primordial identity; the meaning of true Alevism is contested and for many community members it means much more than being born from Alevi parents. Alevism as an identity and cultural concept is constantly being restructured and there are rival interpretations of it. At times, both Alevi and non-Alevi actors (including the Turkish state) are involved in these public debates.

The Alevi community in Britain embraces a broad definition of Alevism that includes both theological and political aspects. They emphasise the need for political involvement and solidarity with other oppressed groups. Being Alevi is seen as being progressive and peaceful in social interactions with others, and this sentiment is shared by both religious and non-religious Alevis. Therefore, similar worldviews bring them closer to secular and democratic Sunnis, while right-wing and conservative Alevis are regarded as assimilated. The Alevi-Sunni boundary, despite its great importance, is not a solid division that limits the interaction between the two communities. The boundary is actively constructed through principles that are attributed to Alevis such as egalitarianism, respect for women and gender equality, democracy and solidarity with the oppressed groups. Practicing and identifying with Alevism without these qualities is regarded as spoiling the

nature of Alevi culture and as assimilation into Turkish-Islamic synthesis. Therefore, there is a concern for becoming assimilated and losing the egalitarian and progressive 'essence' in Alevism. The Alevi-Sunni identity boundary has a more facilitating role in defining the meaning of contemporary Alevi identity rather than defining a sharp divide between Alevi and non-Alevi people.

Alevis mobilised for their identity in a transnational social space and Alevi individuals and federations communicate through personal links or media. Consequently, there are similarities in the way Alevis in different countries manifest their culture and their political demands. Alevi communities elsewhere also describe Alevism in similar terms; as progressive, egalitarian and compatible with human rights. So what is specific to Britain is the ethnic composition of the Alevi community (being mainly Kurdish) and the host society's tolerance for diversity. Being in the intersection of two discriminated identities make them aware of the need for solidarity with other groups, also the past experiences of political mobilisation for the Kurdish cause and socialism help the community leaders in their activism for Alevis' recognition. The multicultural environment and the accommodation of ethnic and religious differences in social life make Western Europe a hospitable environment for Alevis' identity manifestations.

Alevism is expressed as egalitarian and progressive in Turkey as well but in European countries there are more opportunities to actually incorporate egalitarian principles to their activities for improving Alevi community's rights and global social issues. Examples of solidarity with the working class and with other oppressed minorities and sensitivity to ecological issues suggest that this influence is reflected on actions with relative ease. The administrators' attempts to be involved in activism for global issues are received positively by most community members.

International migration experience is a key factor in Alevis' identity building. The lack of oppression and tolerance for diversity are the factors that ease Alevis' activities in Western Europe. In Turkey, Alevi people continue to mobilise for their rights despite the monolithic state but the advantage of struggling for Alevism abroad is the possibility to think and act outside the available political categories in Turkey (unitary state, nationalism and state controlled secularism). Alevis in Britain compare and incorporate the host society's political culture in their demands to Turkey and experience less intervention in shaping their demands.

My research contributes to the literature on several points. First of all it provides empirical knowledge of the Alevi community in Britain, which has not been studied as extensively as Alevi communities in Turkey or Germany. Their demographic characteristics make them an interesting case because the majority of Alevis in Britain are Kurdish and come from the Central and Eastern parts of Turkey. Kurdishness, as another salient identity is a factor that has caused discrimination and persecution in the past and this has also been the official reason for seeking asylum. Turkish Alevis who come from Central Anatolia are a smaller group within the immigrants from Turkey. Alevis in Britain are mainly asylum seekers affiliated with the Kurdish and/or socialist movements. As I had expected, these past experiences motivate the community members to take action for their rights now in a liberal environment and construct their Alevi identity in solidarity with other oppressed groups.

Although the British case has peculiar aspects, such as being mainly composed of Kurdish and political migrants as well as Alevis being the majority within the migrants from Turkey, British Alevis do not differ dramatically from the Alevi communities elsewhere. They also engage in activities to further their recognition and construct their identity positively in relation to Sunni people in and from Turkey. They express this identity as humanist,

egalitarian and compatible with the host society's norms and culture. These similarities of

Alevis in Britain result from the fact that Alevi migration to Britain is relatively recent; in the

30 years since they arrived, Alevi identity has not evolved in an entirely different direction.

Furthermore, communication between the Alevi communities in Turkey and Europe enables

cooperation among them. The Alevi movements in different countries may develop

different strategies within the legal and political structure of the receiving country, but

Alevis' demands for recognition are formulated similarly.

On the other hand, what is striking about the case of Alevis in Britain is their

unification on the organisational level. Their small number and residential concentration

eased such organisation. Jongorden's (2003, 81) observation on Alevism evolving into three

strands (Kemalist, socialist and Kurdish nationalist) can also be observed in Britain; there

have been serious conflicts in the past that even continued to some extent during my

fieldwork, such as the court case between the old and new management. In addition the

community members' attitudes towards the EACC differ as explained in Chapter five.

However these differences did not evolve into different Alevi organisations. On the

contrary, EACC management uses a unifying language and refrains from enforcing the

existing frictions among the community. This helped to consolidate the EACC as a legitimate

actor that represents the Alevi community in Britain.

Current literature on Alevi communities mainly focuses on Alevi identity on the

organisational level. My study provides empirical evidence of ordinary Alevi people's

experiences as well as dealing with the public manifestations of identity through community

centres. Since one of my aims was to give voice to Alevi people in Britain, a qualitative

research was used in order to enable my research participants to articulate their views and

experiences in their own words. This also helped me demonstrate the interaction between

organisations' leaders and community members. My participants' experiences show that

when the community centres' public identity complies with the people they represent, they gain more support and a stronger base. Alevi individuals in Britain support Alevi organisations more as these organisations embrace more encompassing identities and a 'progressive' approach to Alevism.

My study of Britain's Alevi community provides a better understanding of the immigration pathways of people leaving Turkey and choosing to establish themselves in Britain. Alevis strive to attain their goals through non-violent means and have no overt conflicts with British values; moreover, migrant Alevis regard Britain as a source of social and cultural rights and as a place where they can express their identity without any fear of persecution or discrimination. The debates that dominate the European public about immigrant integration, especially from dominantly Muslim societies, assume the existence of fundamental cultural conflicts between immigrants and Western values. At this point Alevis' peaceful teaching that is in harmony with secular and democratic norms presents a positive example. It also demonstrates the diversity within faith groups against the flattening and simplification of complex identities (Shankland 2010) and helps to capture the phenomenon of superdiversity (Vertovec 2007).

Western media and public tend to homogenise Islam and Muslim communities, not paying sufficient attention to their inner diversity. Although there is no consensus on Alevism's relation *vis-á-vis* Islam and the organisations' leaders in Britain refrain from an Islamic framing of Alevi belief, Alevis are frequently understood in the West as moderate and progressive Muslims. From that perspective Alevis constitute a counter example to the stereotype of Islam that is in conflict with European values. Demonstrating the interaction between Alevis' particular culture and universal human rights is a valuable contribution that illuminates the diversity of migration experience in Britain.

This study also highlights emigration from Turkey. While most of the migration from Turkey has been in the form of labour migration and from various regions of Turkey, migration to Britain has been politically motivated and mainly from Kurdish-Alevi regions. This is a different migration path compared to other migration patterns from Turkey to continental Europe. The fact that a particular ethnic and belief community migrated more than others (and disproportionately to their population in the home country) show the impact of certain push factors such as discrimination, regional distribution of social inequalities, limited investments and job opportunities in Eastern rural regions of Turkey, and the interplay of economic and political reasons that motivated Alevis (and Kurds) to migrate.

My findings shed light on the immigration experience by examining migrants' cross-border links on different levels and identifying the relationship between these. In the Alevi case, the supranational and transnational levels interact as the universal human rights discourse permeates Alevis' transnational activism, their demands from the Turkish state and public manifestations of Alevi identity. For example, most of my informants stated that human rights need to be improved in Turkey and described their belief system and culture through respect for human rights and moral values such as egalitarianism and non-discrimination. A strong sense of identity and compatibility of values contribute to the interaction between the different areas of cross-border attachments. Although a small community, Alevis in Britain are active in linking with the supranational organisations and strive for the rights of Alevis in Turkey and Europe. They have learnt both from past experiences such as the commemoration of massacres and standardisation of protest events and also created unique ways of protesting such as petition campaign housed in a tent.

Finally, the in- and out-group concepts are enhanced by the empirical data I present. My findings show the importance of a constructivist perspective to grasp the emergence of social groups and their boundaries as the in- and out-groups are not based solely on primordial identities and are not fixed: they develop in a complex transnational social space that influences how identities are manifested. Discrimination in homeland, migration experience and continuing relations with the homeland create a context in which identities are constructed.

Still, many aspects of the Alevi community in Britain need additional analytical and empirical inquiry. First of all my focus was on the British context and more specifically based in London; its strength was its in-depth focus on a single case. However large-scale comparative research projects that study Alevi communities in various locations would help to assess the role of host country policies and migration motives (economic or political migration) on the way Alevi identity is shaped in those countries.

Moreover, the role of Alevism in integration begs further analysis. The assumption that Alevi belief is inherently in harmony with Western culture and that they easily adapt to their host countries may hide the problems of subgroups such as women, elderly and economically marginalised people. The positive in-group presentation conceals the difficulties that individuals experience. It should be noted that such problems can be experienced by other immigrants as well and they stem from structural factors such as economic marginalisation and difficulties with integration. In order to conclude whether Alevis integrate better or not, a systematic comparison with other immigrant groups who have similar demographic characteristics would be needed. For instance, comparative studies of Alevi and Sunni immigrants from Turkey can help assess the influence of being Alevi on integration and explain if Alevis are indeed more inclined to integration due to their liberal views. A more systematic and quantitative analysis of the assimilation and

integration trajectory of Alevis would help to assess their transnational involvement. My analysis shows that transnationalism and integration coexist and that Alevis' transnational struggle and activism for the recognition of their belief enhance their involvement in the host country's political institutions; so transnational activities foster integration. Quantitative data would provide more tangible results on the relationship between these two phenomena.

Finally, second generation Alevi migrants deserve more scholarly attention. It would be interesting to see how they relate to Alevi belief, how much they participate in the Alevi movement and how their gradual assimilation into British society influences their identities. Alevis' migration from Turkey to Britain is relatively new so research on this group is limited. Further research on this population would not only illuminate themes of migration in Britain (such as assimilation and diaspora concepts) but also the future of the Alevi movement. Since the second generation learned about Alevism in a liberal environment, it would be interesting to see how this shaped their perception of being Alevi and of the Alevi movement. Identity is processual and dynamic, and this is particularly evident in the formation of immigrants' identities as these are greatly influenced by transnational links. Only time will show how the Alevi community in Britain will negotiate homeland identities and British culture.

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8. Appendix

1. Provisional general map showing the distribution of the Alevis in Turkey (Shankland 2010)
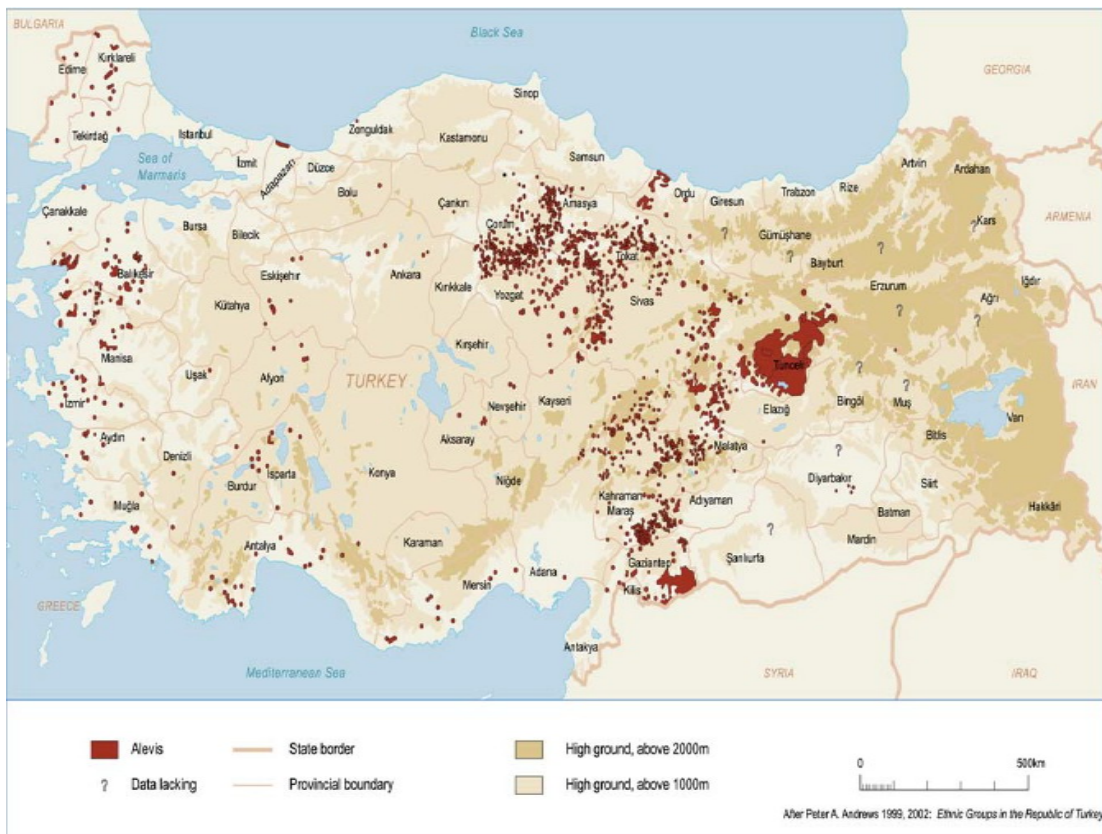
2. Table of Informants, Turkey

Participant	Background	Age	Gender	Ethnicity
Hüseyin Taştekin (Interview 1)	He comes from Tunceli, moved to Istanbul at the age of 16. He runs his own business and is the general secretary of Şahkulu Sultan Derneği in his spare time.	L50s	Male	Kurdish
Mehmet Tural (Interview 2)	He is from Muş. He is a lawyer and chairman of Şahkulu Sultan Derneği.	70	Male	Kurdish
Dr. Ali Yaman (Interview3)	He is from Erzincan. He is a university lecturer. He comes from a dede family.	E40s	Male	Not specified
Celal Çelik (Interview 4)	He comes from Sivas. He is a dede and does weekly cem ceremonies in Karacaahmet Sultan Derneği.	50	Male	Not specified
Doğan Bermek (Interview 5)	He is from Ankara. He is architect, has worked at universities and in private sector. He works in the CEM Foundation.	L50s	Male	Turkish
Hüsniye Takmaz (Interview 6)	She comes from Erzincan. She volunteers in Şahkulu Sultan Derneği and is also the chairwoman of Alevi Associations Federation.	53	Female	Turkish
İsmail Saçlı (Interview 7)	He is from Sivas. He is the chairman of Kartal Cemevi.	L40s	Male	Turkish
Mustafa Düzgün (Interview 8)	He is from Tunceli. He worked as a civil servant. He is the dede of Kartal Cemevi.	L60s	Male	Not specified
Dertli Divani (Interview 9)	He comes from Urfa. He is a dede and a well-known *ozan* (poet).	50	Male	Not specified
Atilla Taş (Interview 10)	He comes from Sivas. He studied anthropology, works in a florist. He volunteers in Şahkulu Sultan Derneği.	E30s	Male	Not specified
Fethi Bölükgiray (Interview 11)	He comes from Tunceli, grew up in Elazig. He is the chairman of Pir Sultan Abdal Kültür Derneği, Kadıköy Branch.	M50s	Male	Kurdish
Rıza Eroğlu (Interview 12)	He is from Erzincan, comes from a dede family. He is the chairman of Erikli Baba Derneği.	M50s	Male	Turkish
Kıymet Elmas (Interview 13)	She comes from Sivas. She volunteers in Yalincak Sultan Derneği.	L40s	Female	Turkish
Hüseyin Elmas (Interview 13)	He comes from Sivas and Tunceli. He is the chairman of Yalıncak Sultan Derneği and is also affiliated with PSAKD.	E50s	Male	Turkish
Servet Demir	He has been living in France since	M60s	Male	Not

(Interview 14)	1976. He worked for 8 years as chairman of France Alevi Federation and general secretary of AABF.			specified

3. Table of Informants, Britain

Name/Pseudonym	Background	Age	Gender	Ethnicity
Murat (Interview 1)	He was born in Adana, grew up in Istanbul, and arrived London at the age of 10. He is affiliated with EACC.	36	Male	Kurdish
Şirin (Interview 2)	She is from Sivas, lived in Istanbul, migrated after marriage. EACC.	42	Female	Kurdish
İsrafil Erbil (Interview 3, 31 and 41)	He is from Maraş, arrived in Britain at the age of 13. Chairman of EACC at the time of first interview, currently head of BAF.	44	Male	Kurdish
Ahmet Kömürcü (Interview 4)	He is a dede who lives in Germany. He was visiting the cemevi at the time of interview.	E60s	Male	Turkish
Mehmet Turan (Interview 5 and 22)	He is a dede from Isparta, lives in Turkey and visits EACC frequently and conducts cem ceremonies.	L50s	Male	Turkish
Cemil (Interview 6)	He comes from Malatya. He retired from public service and migrated to Britain. EACC.	L60s	Male	Not specified
Ali (Interview 6)	He is from Maraş, migrated after Maraş massacre. EACC.	M60s	Male	Kurdish
Haydar (Interview 6)	He is from Malatya, arrived in Britain 24 years ago. EACC.	M60s	Male	Kurdish
Serkan (Interview 7)	He is from Maraş, migrated with his family as a child. He is affiliated with GikDer.	M20s	Male	Kurdish
Fatma (Interview 8)	She is from Sivas and lived in Istanbul and migrated to London with her husband in mid 1990s. EACC.	35	Female	Not specified
Halil (Interview 9)	He is from Maraş, loosely affiliated with EACC.	37	Male	Kurdish
Feride (Interview 10)	She is from Maraş, lived in Ankara, then migrated after her family to London. She works as a nurse. DayMer and EACC.	E40s	Female	Kurdish
İsmail (Interview 11)	He comes from Maraş, was highly involved in Kurdish politics, then	49	Male	Kurdish

	migrated to London. He works as a taxi driver. Affiliated with DayMer.			
Meryem (Interview 11)	She is from Kırkısrak, Kayseri. She migrated in her 20s to London. Affiliated with DayMer and Kırkısrak Community Centre.	47	Female	Kurdish
Haydar (Interview 12)	He is from Kayseri, has been in London for 23 years. He worked as a tailor. Kırkısrak Community Centre.	75	Male	Kurdish
Akın (Interview 13)	He is from Maraş, arrived in London 17 years ago, studied sociology. He is the chairman of Kırkısrak Community Centre.	44	Male	Kurdish
Yusuf Çiçek (Interview 14)	He is from Maraş, lived in Trabzon, Istanbul and now lives in London for 24 years. He is a lawyer and local politician.	48	Male	Kurdish
İbrahim (Interview 15)	He comes from Kayseri, has been highly involved in left politics in Turkey. He migrated to Britain 2007. DayMer.	64	Male	Kurdish
Hatice (Interview 16)	She is from Maraş, lived in Mersin then migrated to Britain in 1998. DayMer.	M40s	Female	Turkish
Özge (Interview 17)	She is originally from Sivas, lived in Istanbul. She arrived in Britain in 2010 with Ankara Agreement. EACC.	35	Female	Turkish
Saniye (Interview 18)	She is from Sivas, lived in Istanbul arrived in London in 1989. Kırkısraklilar Community Centre.	48	Female	Kurdish
Kamile (Interview 18)	She is from Kayseri, arrived in London in 1990. Kırkısraklilar Community Centre.	51	Female	Kurdish
Gaye (Interview 18)	She is from Kayseri. She arrived in London in 1996. Kırkısraklilar Community Centre.	E40s	Female	Kurdish
Lale (Interview 19)	She is from Kayseri, has been in London since 1989. She is working part time in Kırkısraklilar Derneği.	51	Female	Kurdish
Can (Interview 20)	He is from Kayseri, migrated to London in early 2000s. He was a journalist in Turkey, now works as an electrician. EACC, DayMer and YCA.	42	Male	Kurdish
Mahmut (Interview 21)	He is a semah teacher from Turkey, he visited the Alevi festival in London.	63	Male	Not specified
Salman Akdeniz (Interview 23)	He is head of PSAKD, Maraş Branch. He was visiting the Alevi festival in London.	L40s	Male	Not specified
Metin (Interview 24)	He is from Tunceli, has been involved in Kurdish movement back in Turkey. He arrived in London in 2000 and is	40	Male	Kurdish

	now affiliated with Komkar.			
Ceren (Interview 25)	She is originally from Malatya, lived in Mersin, arrived in London with her parents at the age of 12. She is a university student. DayMer.	26	Female	Kurdish
Mustafa (Interview 26)	He is from Sivas, lived in Istanbul, arrived in Britain in 1995. He is one of the founders of London cemevi but not affiliated any more.	55	Male	Kurdish
Cem (Interview 27)	He is from Nurhak, Maraş. He first tried to seek asylum in France in 1987, then came to Britain. He is chairman of Nurhak Cultural Centre.	42	Male	Turkish
Ceylan (Interview 27)	She is from Nurhak, lived in Mersin and arrived in London at the age of 15.	L30s	Female	Turkish
Hasan (Interview 27)	He is from Nurhak, arrived in London in 2000. Nurhak Cultural Centre.	E40s	Male	Turkish
Aynur (Interview 28)	She is from Tunceli, arrived in London in 2010, works in a shop. No affiliation.	35	Female	Kurdish
Yusuf (Interview 29)	He is from Maraş, arrived in London in mid1980s. He works as an accountant. EACC.	34	Male	Kurdish
Filiz (Interview 30)	She is from Maraş, lived in Hatay, arrived in London in 2002. Not affiliated.	32	Female	Kurdish
Nazan (Interview 32)	She is from Mersin, migrated to study and work in her early 20s. She works as an accountant. Not affiliated with any organisation.	41	Female	Turkish
Mehmet (Interview 33)	He is from Maraş, migrated in 1999. He works in construction sector. Nurhak Kültür Evi and EACC.	43	Male	Turkish
Sibel (Interview 34)	She is from Maraş, migrated in 1999, worked as a hairdresser in Turkey. Currently she is a housewife. Nurhak Cultural Centre and EACC.	38	Female	Turkish
Meral (Interview 35)	She is from Kayseri, migrated to London in 1991. DayMer and EACC.	41	Female	Kurdish
Sevim (Interview 35)	She is from Kayseri, arrived in London in 1993. Rarely goes to EACC and DayMer.	44	Female	Kurdish
Esra (Interview 36)	She is from Maraş, migrated 2 years ago. Not affiliated with any organisation.	23	Female	Kurdish
Selma (Interview 37)	She is originally from Sivas but grew up in Istanbul. She migrated to London at the age of 24. She works as a therapist. Not affiliated with organisations.	49	Female	Kurdish
Zeynep (Interview 38)	She is from Erzincan, lived in Adana and Kayseri. She has been in London	40	Female	Kurdish

	since 1995. Loosely affiliated with cemevi.			
Aykan (Interview 39)	He is originally from Kars, lived in Istanbul. He migrated to London so study and work. He works as a psychotherapist. Not affiliated with organisations.	47	Male	Turkish/ Kurdish
Sakine (Interview 40)	She is from Maraş, has been living in London since 1998. EACC.	54	Female	Kurdish
Ezgi (Interview 40)	She is from Maraş, grew up in Mersin. She lives in London since 1998. She works as a paralegal. EACC.	33	Female	Kurdish
Yaşar Demiralay (Interview 42)	He is from Maraş, arrived in London in 1989. He runs his own business. He is the current chairman of EACC.	E60s	Male	Not specified

4. Interview Guide

1. Personal Identity
   a. What is your age?
   b. Level of education
   c. Have you attended any education or training program in Britain?
   d. Where did you grow up? What was it like to be an Alevi in this town/village etc?

2. Migration
   a. When did you arrive in England and from which country/town?
   b. What was your reason? Family, Ankara agreement, political or religious reasons?
   c. Did you experience any discrimination or harassment because of your religious belief?
   d. If your family is in Turkey, do they ever call you and ask if you follow Alevi rituals such as going to cem or cooking aşure during Muharrem etc?
   e. Do you spend your earning for yourself and your immediate family in here or do you help your relatives in Turkey financially? Do you have a business that you established in Turkey?
   f. Do you consider moving back to Turkey? If you do, what are the conditions for this?
   g. Do you ever talk with your non-Alevi friends about the Alevi teaching? Or do they ever ask you any questions about Alevism?
   h. Where do you feel you belong the most? London, Turkey, particular city, town or village?

3. Cultural and Religious Identity
   a. How would you describe yourself in terms of religion? Which option applies to you the most: very religious, moderately or a little religious or not religious at all?
   b. How did you learn about Alevism; in your family, by going to cemevi meetings or by reading published research on this topic?

    c. How did you contact London *cemevi* for the first time? Do you go there regularly? How often?

    d. Do you think that attending the events in *cemevi* is beneficial for you? If yes, in what ways? What kind of other activities would you like them to organise?

    e. How are you notified about the events in *cemevi*?

    f. Did you used to visit *cemevi* in Turkey as well? What are the differences and similarities in the activities of cemevi in Turkey and in Britain in your view?

    g. In your opinion what are the demands of Alevis in Europe and in Britain? Are these demands different from those in Turkey?

    h. If I say Maraş or Sivas, what comes to your mind first?

4. **Social Environment and Alevi Culture**

    a. Do you have friends who are not Alevi (Sunnis, Christians, Jews, and Buddhists etc.)?

    b. Do you see any differences when you compare Alevism with other religions?

    c. What do you spend the largest amount of your earnings on: accommodation, transportation, food, children's education etc.?

    d. If you experience financial difficulties do you use any social support networks through Alevis and *cemevi*?

    e. Which media channels do you follow the most?

    f. Do you follow the political developments in Turkey; in particular the recent peace process and constitution preparation process? Are these important for you? Why (not)?

    g. How did you spend your free time in Turkey? How do you spend it here?

Mülakat Soruları

1. **Kişisel Sorular**

    a. Yaşınız

    b. Eğitim durumunuz

    c. Britanya'da herhangi bir eğitim veya meslek edinme programına devam ettiniz mi?

    d. Nerede büyüdünüz? Burada Alevi olmak nasıl bir deneyimdi?

2. **Göç Üzerine Sorular**

    a. Ingiltere'ye hangi yılda ve hangi ülke/şehirden geldiniz?

    b. Geliş nedeniniz? Aile, Ankara anlaşması, siyasi iltica, dini nedenler?

    c. Burada hiç inancınız yüzünden aşağılandığınız, hor görüldüğünüz ya da ayrımcılığa uğradığınız durumlar oldu mu?

    d. Aileniz Türkiye'de ise, zaman zaman size arayıp cemlere gidip gitmediğinizi, ya da muharrem ayında aşure yapıp yapmadığınızı vb. dini ritüellere ne derece uyduğunuzu soruyorlar mı?

    e. Buradaki kazancınız sadece size ve ailenize mi ait, yoksa Türkiye'deki yakınlarınıza da para yardımı yapıyormusunuz? Ya da Türkiye'de kurduğunuz, hala devam eden ticari bir işiniz var mı?

f. Kesin dönüş yapmayı düşünüyormusunuz? Bunun için hangi koşulların gerçekleşmesini bekliyorsunuz?

g. Alevi inancının temel öğretilerini Alevi olmayan arkadaşlarınızla da paylaşıyormusunuz? Ya da bu arkadaşlarınız size Alevi inancıyla ilgili soru soruyor mu?

h. Kendinizi en fazla nereye ait hissediyorsunuz? Londra, Türkiye/İl, kasaba, mahalle, köy?

3. Kültürel ve Dini Kimlik

a. Din açısından kendinizi nasıl tanımlardınız? Çok dindar, orta, çok az dindar ya da dindar degil seçeneklerinden size en fazla uyanı hangisi?

b. Alevilik inancını aile içinde görerek ve duyarak mı, yoksa cem evi toplantılarına katılarak mı ya da bu konuda yayınlanmış çalışmalardan okuyarak mı öğrendiniz?

c. Londra Cem Evi ile ilk kez ne zaman ve nasıl tanıştınız? Düzenli olarak gidiyor musunuz? Hangi sıklıkta?

d. Cem Evinin etkinliklerini takip etmenin sizin için yararlı olduğunu düşünüyor musunuz? Hangi açılardan? Ve başka hangi tür etkinliklerin de yapılmasını istersiniz?

e. Cem evinde düzenlenen etkinliklerin haberi size nasıl ulaşıyor?

f. Türkiye'deyken de cem evlerine gidiyor muydunuz? Türkiye ve Londra'daki cem evlerinin çalışmalarındaki farklılıklar ve benzerlikler sizce nedir?

g. Sizce Avrupa'daki ve Britanya'daki Alevilerin talepleri neler? Bu talepler Türkiye'deki Alevilerin taleplerinden farklı mı?

h. Size Maraş ve Sivas desem ilk olarak neyi hatırlarsınız?

4. Sosyal Çevre ve Alevi Kültürü

a. Alevi olmayan çevreden de arkadaşlarınız var mı? (Sünniler, Hristiyanlar, Yahudiler, Budizme inananlar, vs.)

b. Alevilik ile diğer dinleri karşılaştırdığınızda fark görüyor musunuz?

c. Londra'daki yaşamanızda aylık bütçenizin en büyük harcamasını hangi ihtiyaç oluşturuyor: barınma, kent içi ulaşım, mutfak, çocukların eğitimi vs?

d. Maddi sıkıntı içinde olduğunuzda Aleviler ve cemevi üzerinden oluşturulmuş sosyal yardımlaşma ağlarından yararlanıyor musunuz?

e. En çok takip ettiğiniz medya kanalları neler?

f. Türkiye'deki politik gelişmeleri, özellikle yakın zamandaki barış sürecini ve anayasa oluşturma hazırlıklarını takip edebiliyor musunuz? Bunlar sizin için önemli mi? Neden?

g. Türkiye'de boş vakitlerinizi nasıl değerlendirirdiniz? Burada neler yapıyorsunuz?