

Through Differences and Commonalities:

Women's Experiences of Being Alevi

Thesis submitted to the

Institute for Graduate Studies in the Social Sciences

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in

Sociology

by

Berna Ekal

Boğaziçi University

2006

## ABSTRACT

Through Differences and Commonalities: Women's Experiences of Being Alevi

Berna Ekal

This thesis is about women's experiences of being Alevi, with a focus on their everyday encounters with other Alevi and Sunni women. Based on a fieldwork in two different districts in Istanbul, with a specific focus on women's networks and visits (which also include places outside of these districts), this thesis, on the one hand, portrays how women experience the 'difference' between Alevis and Sunnis, and on the other hand, it looks at women's *ritualized* practices that are aimed at finding and emphasizing 'commonalities' among Alevis. In this way, it is argued that 'woman' as a symbol of group identity, which appears within the discourses of Alevilik as an identity movement since the late 1980s, falls short of accounting for women's experiences of being Alevi in their everyday encounters. But also it is argued that 'woman' as a symbol harkens to the accusations leveled at Alevis that take the form of gossip. Gossips about Alevis and the feeling of discontent that stems from them are seen as the shared experience of all Alevis and contribute to the imagination of a larger community of 'Alevis', an imagination that the identity movement also aims to establish. On the other hand, the gossips about Alevis gain a distinct meaning in the networks of women through the arguments over cleanliness and *namus*. The thesis concludes that 'finding and emphasizing commonalities' in practices among Alevis is a way of extending women's networks, which originally involve kin and 'villagers'; yet 'villager' is also a category that we should not take for granted.

Keywords: Alevilik, Gender, Experience, Identity, Migration

## ÖZET

### Farklılıklar ve Ortaklıklar: Kadınların Alevilik Deneyimleri

Berna Ekal

Bu tez kadınların Alevilik deneyimlerini, diğer Alevi ve Sünni kadınlarla olan ilişkilerine odaklanarak açıklıyor. Tezde, İstanbul'un iki farklı semtinde yürütülmüş olan etnografik çalışma ile, kadınların kurdukları ağlara ve ziyaretlerine odaklanılarak (ki bu ilişkiler bu iki semtin dışını da kapsıyor), bir yandan kadınların Alevi ve Sünni farklılığını nasıl deneyimlediklerine, diğer yandan da Aleviler arasında ortaklık kurmaya ve bu ortaklıkları vurgulamaya yönelik *ritüelleşmiş* pratiklerine bakılıyor. Buradan yola çıkılarak, 1980'lerin sonlarında bir kimlik politikası olarak gelişen Alevilik söyleminde bulunan ve grup kimliğini tanımlamakta kullanılan 'kadın' sembolünün, kadınların Alevilik deneyimlerini tam olarak kapsayamadığı ve bunun yanı sıra, 'kadın' sembolünün, Alevilere yöneltilmiş ithamlara ve dedikodulara dikkat çektiği öne sürülüyor. Aleviler tarafından tüm Alevilerin ortak deneyiminin bir parçası olarak algılanan bu dedikodulardan dolayı duyulan üzüntü, kimlik politikasının da yerleştirmek istediği geniş bir Alevi toplumu tahayyülüne katkıda bulunuyor. Öte yandan, kadınların ağları içinde, temizlik ve namus tartışmaları dolayısıyla bu dedikodular farklı bir anlam kazanıyor. Tez, sonuç olarak, kadınların Alevilerin pratiklerindeki ortaklıkları bularak ve vurgulayarak akraba ve köylüleri dışında ağlar kurduklarını ve hareket alanlarını genişlettiklerini, ancak köylülüğün de doğal bir kategori olmadığının altının çizilmesi gerektiğini söylüyor.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Alevilik, Toplumsal Cinsiyet, Deneyim, Kimlik, Göç

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish I were gifted enough to find the precise words to express my gratitude for people who encouraged and supported me during the time I worked for the thesis. I especially thank my thesis advisor N khet Sirman for generously sharing her thoughts and for her invaluable guidance and support. Without her wit and care, I could have never achieved writing this thesis.

I thank Biray K rl  for spending hours discussing this research since my undergraduate years. Without her encouragement, I would not have continued for MA in the first place. I thank Tahire Erman, who traveled all the way from Ankara to Istanbul to join the committee meeting, and kindly discussed her research on Alevilik with me.

Though I cannot mention their names here to protect their privacy, I thank all the women who contributed to this research by sharing some parts of their lives.

I thank my friends Murat and Feyza for reading, correcting and commenting on the thesis. I also thank Evren and Selin for their help in preparing the appendices.

I thank my mother and my father for their care, support, and for all the times they tried to keep quiet at home so that I can work more comfortably. I thank my brother for always being there every time I felt lost. I thank my grandmother, aunts, uncles and cousins for their encouragement. It was a real surprise to see that they were all relieved when they heard that I finally finished writing the thesis.

And I thank Kemal, for everything...

## CONTENTS

Preface .....	vii
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION .....	1
‘Who are Alevis?’ / ‘What is Alevilik?’ .....	1
Prejudices, a Discourse of Identity and Everyday Encounters .....	7
Method and the Scope of the Research .....	13
2. ‘WOMAN IN ALEVILIK’: A SYMBOL .....	21
Alevilik: Aleviness or Alevism? .....	24
Alevilik: Making an Object of Knowledge .....	26
A Symbol for Differentiation: ‘ <i>Woman in Alevilik</i> ’ .....	35
3. THE DIFFERENCE THAT DOES (NOT) MATTER .....	48
Resenting the Accusations: <i>Mum Söndü</i> and <i>Namus</i> .....	54
Confronting <i>Difference</i> : Cleanliness and Gossip .....	66
Living through <i>Difference</i> : ‘ <i>Mühim olan insanlık</i> ’ .....	73
4. THE COMMONALITIES THAT CAN (NOT) MATTER .....	82
‘Practices’ and ‘Alevis’ .....	84
Visiting among Women and ‘Commonalities’ .....	89
Visiting Holy Places and ‘Commonalities’ .....	102
5. WOMEN, ‘VILLAGE’, AND THE ‘VILLAGERS’ .....	113
<i>Cem</i> and the ‘Villagers’ .....	115
Women, ‘Villagers’, and the Village Association .....	120
Picnic in Hediye Village .....	127
6. CONCLUSION .....	134
REFERENCES .....	138
APPENDICES .....	145
A. <i>ALEVİLİK BİLDİRGESİ</i> .....	145
B. THE ARTICLE IN <i>TOPLUMSAL BARIŞ</i> .....	157
C. THE TICKET OF <i>BARIŞA SEMAH DÖNENLER</i> .....	161
D. THE INVITATION CARD OF <i>GELİN CANLAR CEM OLALIM</i> .....	162

## PREFACE

I started reading about Alevilik four years ago. My concern in Alevilik at the time was influenced by my work as part of a survey on women's literacy, where I traveled to different districts in Istanbul and visited women in their houses to fill in questionnaires. The women who opened their houses for this research, of course, wanted to know about me and also introduced themselves. The major topic of conversation, then, revolved around the question 'where are you from?' This question was a major way of people for getting to know each other in cities like Istanbul, which owed its sheer volume of population to the migration it received from all parts of Turkey. As an inhabitant of Istanbul, I was also familiar with the question, therefore I did not so much realize at the time that this question was sometimes used to interrogate whether I was Alevi or Sunni.

What I was not so familiar back then was the prevalence of items like pictures of Ali or calendars published by Alevist organizations that decorated the walls of the houses of Alevi women (which constituted about one fifth of the women whom I met for the questionnaires). Inspired by this symbolism, I wanted to know more about Alevilik, but soon I was overwhelmed by the number of different explanations that I came across. This multiplicity of explanations, as some other scholars like Massicard (2003b) argued, was the outcome and the defining characteristic of the Alevist identity movement since the late 1980s. Another defining characteristic I found out by reading on Alevilik was the use of 'woman' as a symbol which made me interested in Alevi women's lives: I wondered whether women used this symbol to make sense of their

everyday experiences as an Alevi. To carry out this research, I chose to visit women in their houses, a practice that I was used to, but this time with the help of an Alevi friend and his mother. Soon after I began visiting women, I saw that women's experiences of being Alevi had their own dynamics based on emphasizing (or sometimes undermining) differences and commonalities, which the symbol 'woman' was not linked with. This thesis is based on explicating these dynamics.

I chose not to look for an answer to the question of what Alevilik *is* and did not write an explanatory section on it, as this is a practice that I identify to be associated with the discourse of Alevilik as an identity politics since the late 1980s. I did not make a detailed section on the rise of the movement as well, as this was a widely discussed issue that nevertheless treated 'Alevis' as a homogeneous political entity, and explained the rise of the movement with the Alevis' dissociation from leftist politics after the 1980 coup in Turkey and their expression of their political demands through a discourse of identity. This thesis, then, should be read as an attempt to bring in a new perspective to these issues.

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

‘Who are Alevis?’ / ‘What is Alevilik?’

‘Who are Alevis?’ / ‘What is *Alevilik*<sup>1</sup>?’ - Simple though they seem, these are the questions at the heart of a multifaceted argument in Turkey today (and in those countries such as Germany where a considerable number of people who migrated from Turkey live) involving various actors such as ‘researchers’<sup>2</sup>, numerous associations and foundations that claim to act on behalf of ‘Alevis’, state institutions such as the Directorate of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı*)<sup>3</sup>, and the “elected and appointed agents of the state” (Erdemir, 2004, p. 5). The vitality of these discussions lie in the fact that the Alevilik definition of each ‘Alevist’<sup>4</sup> group is inherent to that group’s position vis-à-vis other groups of Alevists. Moreover, each definition is also central to the formulation of each group’s demands from the state over issues such as

---

<sup>1</sup> *Alevilik* can be translated as both ‘Alevism’ and ‘Alevisness’ and I prefer to use the Turkish term as it relates to both meanings. See Chapter 2 for a detailed discussion of the concept.

<sup>2</sup> ‘Researchers’ might be considered as the “newly emerged intellectual Alevi elite”, as Şahin puts it, “who took on the mission of defining distinctive characteristics of Alevi identity, to rewrite Alevi history, and to revive the Alevi tradition. The Alevi elite, who engage in the public discussion over the meaning of Alevism, have pursued competing agenda through a variety of channels” (Şahin, 2001, p. 3).

<sup>3</sup> See the third issue of *Kırkbudak* (2005) on the relations between the Directorate of Religious Affairs and Alevis for further detail.

<sup>4</sup> Massicard (2003a) uses the word ‘Alevist’ to refer to those activists engaged in the formation of *Alevilik* as a particularist movement.



the granting of the status of ‘the place of worship’ to *cemevis*<sup>5</sup>; the relation of Alevis to the Directorate of Religious Affairs which they see as an institution representing ‘Sunni Islam’<sup>6</sup> and question its presence in a ‘secular’ state; and the compulsory religion courses in schools which are mostly based on Sunni Islamic practice. However, ‘non-Alevi’ political actors also join these debates.

These positions are most apparent in the case of the status of *cemevis* in Turkey, which are not officially recognized as places of worship. As Murat Es (2006) demonstrates, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s remark that *cemevis* can be established as ‘culture’ houses and not as places of worship since Alevilik is not a separate religion (recognized by the Lausanne treaty) received different responses from different Alevist organizations: Whereas the Alevi Bektashi Unions Federation (ABF) and the European Alevi Bektashi Unions Confederation (EABC) started a signature campaign which defined Alevilik as a *specific faith* and argued that *cemevis* should have the same status as the centers of worship like other faiths (like mosques, churches, and synagogues) (Es, 2006, p. 3), “another group of Alevi intellectuals who were sympathetic to the notion of ‘Alevi Islam’ first attacked the text on the grounds that it invoked minority status for Alevis by putting the name ‘*cemevi*’ next to ‘church’ and ‘synagogue,’ places of worship for ‘minorities’, and then criticized the presentation of Alevism ‘outside [of] Islam’” (Es, 2006, p. 4). As can be seen in this

---

<sup>5</sup> *Cemevi* literally means ‘house of *cem*’. Even though the name indicates that these buildings are constructed for the purposes of holding *cem*, a ritual of ‘Alevis’ where a community gathers in the presence of a *dede* (literally ‘grandfather’, the religious leaders of ‘Alevis’ are called *dedes* whose lineage is believed to descend from the twelve *imams*, the blood descendants of the Prophet Mohammed), these places serve other functions such as funerals and serving meals for large groups of people. *Cemevis* as we see them today are largely an urban phenomenon. See Murat Es (2006) for a detailed discussion of the functions of, as well as the contested claims over, the construction of *cemevis* in the contemporary Turkey.

<sup>6</sup> An outright definition of the Directorate of Religious Affairs as a representative of ‘Sunni’ Islam, however, is criticized by İsmail Kara (2004), who argues that the Directorate is as much distant from smaller groups or *tarikats* of Sunni sects as it is from *Alevilik*, and should be thought more as an institution that serves the state to regulate popular forms of Islam.

debate, defining Alevilik today has its immediate concrete implications in legal and political terms, where an elected prime minister (known for his ‘Islamist’ background and his attempt to demolish a cemevi during his post as a major in Istanbul) does not recognize the difference of Alevi practices and invites Alevi to mosques, where the ABF and the EABC oppose this by saying that Alevilik is a distinct faith, and where other groups argue that Alevilik is an interpretation of Islam and *cemevis* should have the same status as mosques.

It is within such a context where Alevist groups voice demands in the name of ‘Alevi’ that the endeavors to explain Alevilik come up. Even though *Alevilik Bildirgesi*<sup>7</sup> (the Declaration of Alevilik), followed by the establishment of several organizations as well as the numerous publications on Alevilik, and coupled with the reactions of Alevi to the incidents in Sivas<sup>8</sup> (1993) and in Gazi district in Istanbul<sup>9</sup> (1995) are interpreted by many writers and scholars as the cornerstones in the formation of the Alevist movement (Şahin, 2001; van Bruinessen, 2002; Vorhoff, 2003; Massicard, 2002; Kehl-Bodrogi, 1997), one might argue that the defining characteristic of the movement today is the multiplicity of actors and the multiplicity

---

<sup>7</sup> Issued first in 1989 by *Hamburg Alevi Kültür Merkezi* (Hamburg Alevi Culture Center) “with support of a group of intellectuals and academics” (Şahin 2001, 2), it was later published in “*Cumhuriyet* (May 15<sup>th</sup>, 1990, p.15), a newspaper in the Kemalist tradition and in other liberal newspapers” (Vorhoff 2003, p. 31). See Appendix A for the original text and its translated version in English.

<sup>8</sup> “On the second of July, 1993, the Pir Sultan Abdal Association organized a cultural festival in Sivas ... a city predominantly inhabited by Turkish Sunni Muslims, while the surrounding villages in the province of Sivas are predominantly inhabited by Turkish and Kurdish Alevi. Among the numerous authors, singers and artists invited was the famous writer Aziz Nesin, not an Alevi himself, who had earlier that year announced his intention to translate Salman Rushdie’s *Satanic Verses* – an intention that raised fury in conservative Islamic circles. At the start of the festival a crowd of right-wing and Islamist demonstrators gathered in the center of Sivas near the Madımak Hotel, where the festival was organized. A statue of Pir Sultan Abdal, symbol of the leftist and rebellious tradition among the Alevi, erected by the organizers, was demolished by the demonstrators. The right wing and Islamist demonstrators besieged and set fire to the hotel, killing thirty-seven people.” (Jongerden, 2003, p. 85)

<sup>9</sup> “Gazi Osman Pasa is a poor new neighborhood which is dominated by Alevi inhabitants. On March 12 1995, unknown gunmen in a stolen taxi drove through this neighborhood and fired guns into five teahouses, killing one Alevi and wounding numerous people. The murders triggered bloody clashes between Alevi youth and the police that lasted three days.” (Dinçer, 2004, p. 119)

of the definitions of Alevilik (Massicard, 2002; 2003b).<sup>10</sup> Indeed, the arguments over the definition of Alevilik go hand in hand with scholarly works, such as the works of Irene Melikoff (1993; 1997; 2003) and Ahmet Yaşar Ocak (1997; 2003), who conceive of Alevilik as ‘heterodoxy’ and try to outline the ‘pre-Islamic roots’ of Alevilik.<sup>11</sup> The concern with ‘roots’, however, is characteristic of many of the contemporary identity movements.<sup>12</sup> But for Elise Massicard (2002), apart from the ‘classic’ traits that are characteristic of identity movements in general (such as the invention of tradition and reconstruction of history), the Alevist movement today has some unique characteristics, such as the multiple and simultaneous initiatives, a common cause, a certain closure, and non-hierarchical actors (i.e. associations) who

---

<sup>10</sup> The following statements, which represent some of the axes of discussion on the side of Alevist groups and intellectuals with regards to *Alevilik*, might give an idea of the diversity of and controversy on the meaning of *Alevilik*:

- “- ‘Alevism is the real essence of Islam’
- ‘Alevism is a Turkish Islam’
- ‘Alevism is outside of Islam’
- ‘Alevism is pure Turkish’
- ‘Alevism stemmed from Kurdish civilization’
- ‘Alevism is not a religion’
- ‘Alevism is a way of life’” (Şahin, 2001, p. 4)

<sup>11</sup> On the other hand, the concern with ‘roots’ of Alevilik, both in the discourse of Alevilik and in the works of scholars, is problematized by Ayfer Karakaya-Stump (2004). Examining the missionary reports from Anatolia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, she argues that the first depiction of *Kızılbaş* religion (Alevilik) as a syncretism and a concern with its ‘pre-Islamic roots’ (namely Christian) dates back to these works. According to Karakaya-Stump, the concern over roots was then taken up by Turkish intellectuals who argued for the pre-Islamic Turkish roots of Alevilik, whereas in the early 1990s Kurdish nationalist circles emphasized Kurdish/Iranian roots. Karakaya-Stump shows a really interesting parallelism between these works: “What is most interesting for the purposes of this study is that, despite their obviously contrasting conclusions, all these later approaches to Alevism held in common with the missionary writings, first the same preoccupation with the question of origins, secondly, the conceptualization of Alevism as a syncretism.” (Karakaya-Stump, 2004, p. 331)

<sup>12</sup> Here, I have in mind Stuart Hall’s argument with regard to the concern with roots in the contemporary identity movements: “Though they seem to invoke an origin in a historical past which they continue to correspond, actually identities are about questions of using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being: not ‘who we are’ or ‘where we came from’, so much as what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves. Identities are therefore constituted within, not outside representation. They relate to the invention of tradition as much as to tradition itself, which they oblige us to read not as an endless reiteration but as ‘the changing same’: not the so-called ‘return to roots’ but a coming-to-terms-with our ‘routes’”. (Hall, 1996, p. 4)

are positioned in relation to each other. As Tahire Erman and Emrah Göker also argue:

... actual Alevi politics manifests itself through a 'politics of recognition' where the demands of various groups are voiced in order to have equal participation in all spheres of life without facing discrimination, especially in their relations with Sunni population. In this 'politics of recognition', different Alevi groups have emerged with different claims on Alevilik. (Erman and Göker, 2000, p. 102)

It is within this multiplicity of explanations that 'woman' as 'a symbol of group identity' appears. Even though there are a number of different explanations for Alevilik, 'woman' as 'a symbol of group identity' is something that all the attempts of explanation share. This symbol is articulated as a point of differentiation of 'Alevis' from 'Sunnis', where Alevi women are depicted to be side by side with men and Sunni women as segregated from men, at times associating this difference with a dichotomy of 'enlightened (*aydın*) and forward-looking (*ilerici*)' versus 'backward-looking (*gerici*) and bigot (*yobaz*)'. In this dichotomy, to the extent that 'woman' becomes a symbol of backwardness and progressiveness we might compare this symbol ('woman in Alevilik') to the Republican approach to women as the signs of the modernity of the nation.<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> With reference to Nükhet Sirman (2004) the 'measurement of civilization/development' with regard to the position of women involved in this differentiation of 'Alevis' and 'Sunnis' can be thought as the effect of the era of colonization (even though Turkey did not go through an experience of formal colonization):

"In the temporality produced after the global experience of colonisation, which Hall calls the 'Euro-imperial adventure', all localities start to produce their own identity in relation to others and according to the measure of civilisation/development. The identity of both coloniser and colonised is thus constructed in a painful relation of identity/difference. Thus, in spite of the fact that Turkey has never been formally colonized, it can be argued that social practices, especially those related to the position of women in society, are assessed and rendered meaningful only in relation to those in the developed West. Nuclear families, women active in the public sphere and dressed in the European fashion therefore become signs of Turkey's modernity and the concept of honour becomes laden with fears of backwardness." (Sirman, 2004, p. 40)

The particularity of this symbol, on the other hand, comes from its use by Alevists in the post-1980 period: ‘The Turkish-Islamic synthesis’, which became a semi-official ideology with the 1980 coup and which was aimed at creating a unitary national identity which would put an end to the ‘separatist’ movements of the 1970s by incorporating Islam to nationalist the credo (Massicard, 2005), was taken by Alevists as an attempt that would at the same time efface Alevilik. Furthermore, if we consider that the Alevist movement gained ground in the 1990s, when “the conflict over secularism was probably one of the most central issues that shaped public life in Turkey” (Navaro-Yashin, 2002, p. 6), and the controversy over the headscarf was placed at the center of the debate between ‘Secularists’ and ‘Islamists’, we might go so far as to argue that the use of ‘woman in Alevilik’ as a symbol is aimed towards merging the ‘Alevi’ / ‘Sunni’ dichotomy with the ‘Secularist’ / ‘Islamist’ dichotomy, though both of the former categories cannot be equated with the latter ones.

I argue that ‘woman in Alevilik’ is a symbol, in the sense Talal Asad uses the term as “not an object or event that serves to carry a meaning but a set of relationships between objects or events uniquely brought together as complexes, or as concepts, having at once an intellectual, instrumental, and emotional significance” (Asad, 1993, p. 31). ‘Woman in Alevilik’, then, is a set of relationships between ‘Alevists’ and ‘Sunnis’, aimed at giving a new meaning to the ‘Alevi’ / ‘Sunni’ divide within the post-1980 context in the formulation of Alevilik as an identity movement, associating ‘Sunnis’ with ‘Islamists’ and being an objection to what is perceived as the ‘Sunnification’ of the state. Even though ‘woman’ as a symbol appears as a concept that unifies various definitions of Alevilik, the symbol is used at the same time to legitimize the different explanations of Alevilik, as I demonstrate in Chapter 2. ‘Woman’ as a symbol, then, plays a significant role in the constitution of Alevilik as a

discourse of identity today, as well as in the ‘imagination’<sup>14</sup> of ‘Alevis’ as a distinct community through this discourse. However, in these efforts to define Alevilik, women’s experience of ‘being Alevi’ is reduced to the symbol ‘woman’.<sup>15</sup> In this thesis, my intention is not to ‘find out’ the *true* explanation for Alevilik, but to look at the processes within which women feel, articulate, and practice ‘differences’ and ‘commonalities’, which are different from the formal accounts of Alevilik that reduce women’s experience of ‘being Alevi’ to ‘woman’ as a symbol. Here, I argue that ‘woman’ as it is used in the formulation of Alevilik as an identity movement today drives its power from its reference to the ‘prejudices against Alevis’ that Alevis experience in their everyday encounters with Sunnis. This thesis therefore is an attempt to look at the ways women counter these prejudices in the everyday.

### Prejudices, a Discourse of Identity and Everyday Encounters

The reification of Alevilik as a discourse of identity is a process that began in the late 1980s. The mobilization in the name of ‘Alevis’ has been distinguished not only for the unprecedented scale of associations, foundations, and *cemevis* established during this period, but also for the countless number of people who are willing to declare themselves to be ‘Alevi’. The *Alevilik Bildirgesi* (The Declaration of Alevilik), issued in 1989, was above all a manifestation of, and a call for, Alevis to

---

<sup>14</sup> “... the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion. ... In fact, all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined. Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined.” (Anderson, 1991, p. 6)

<sup>15</sup> Here, I refer to de Lauretis’ argument on Woman as representation and women as historical beings: “My own argument in *Alice Doesn’t* was to that effect: the discrepancy, the tension, and the constant slippage between Woman as representation, as the object and the very condition of representation, and, on the other hand, women as historical beings, subjects of ‘real relations’, are motivated and sustained by a logical contradiction in our culture and an irreconcilable one: women are both inside and outside gender, at once within and without representation.” (de Lauretis, 1987, p. 10)

openly declare their identity which they had avoided doing to protect themselves from ‘Sunni prejudices and accusations’ which represent Alevis as morally inferior to Sunnis, and which involve accusations that refer to Alevis as a sexually promiscuous community, above all targeting the *cem* as a place where incest occurs (*‘mum söndü yaparlar* – “they practice ‘candle went out’”).<sup>16</sup> The call for Alevis to declare their identity can be thought of as a process in which an Alevi subject is assumed, which we can discuss in relation to Stuart Hall’s conceptualization of ‘subject-position’ (which he discusses with regard to the work of Foucault), where every discourse opens up a place from which the discourse makes most sense:

Foucault’s ‘subject’ seems to be produced through discourse in two different ways. First, the discourse itself produces ‘subjects’ – figures who personify the particular forms of knowledge which the discourse produces. ... But the discourse also produces a place for the subject (i.e. the reader or the viewer, who is also ‘subjected to’ discourse) from which its particular knowledge and meaning most makes sense. It is not inevitable that all individuals in a particular period will become the subjects of a particular discourse in this sense, and thus the bearers of its power/knowledge. But for them – us – to do so, they – we – must locate themselves/ourselves in the *position* from which the discourse makes most sense, and thus become its ‘subjects’ by ‘subjecting’ ourselves to its meanings, power and regulation. All discourses, then, construct subject-positions, from which alone they make sense. (Hall, 1997, p. 56)

Regarding Alevilik as a discourse of identity, we might argue that the subject-position of being Alevi requires that the individual declares that he/she is Alevi, or at least it requires that the individual recognizes the ‘problems’ of Alevis (that the discourse of Alevilik make visible) as ‘his/her problems’. The basis for such a claim depends on the experience of injustice that stem from the everyday encounters between Alevis

---

<sup>16</sup> Another accusation is the claim that ‘Alevis’ do not perform ablution after sexual intercourse, which is called *gusül abdesti*.

and Sunnis. With the expression ‘feeling of injustice in everyday encounters’, I refer to the injustice that Alevis perceive in their everyday encounters with *some* Sunnis (those they find as *yobaz*, or bigot, as they clearly differentiate between *yobaz* and non-*yobaz* ‘Sunnis’) that stem from the ‘Sunni prejudices and accusations’ which are directed towards portraying Alevis as morally inferior by representing them as sexually promiscuous and dirty. It is through these encounters and sometimes confrontations that the perception of a community of Alevis also becomes possible, as they are seen as the *shared experience* of all Alevis. This shared experience finds its utmost expression, as stated by various publications on Alevilik, in the centuries-old oppression under Ottoman rule, the favoring of Sunni school of Islam in the *Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı* (the Directorate of Religious Affairs) in the Republican period, the religion courses in schools that only offer knowledge on Sunni ways of practice, the establishing of mosques in the Alevi villages since the 1980 coup, and the pogroms in Sivas and Gazi. Hence, the everyday encounters between Alevis and Sunnis require a study of their own, and through such a study we might see that the neat and strong boundaries drawn between Alevis and Sunnis in the discourses of Alevilik are appropriated by people in the cases of conflicts, but that they are not totally unbridgeable. We might indeed find other ways of feeling and being Alevi that do not necessarily correspond to the position of being Alevi that the discourse of Alevilik opens up.

These accusations, on the other hand, gain a distinct meaning in the world of women through the arguments over ‘cleanliness’ and *namus* (honor). Here, my argument is that women’s experiences of ‘being Alevi’ depend on their practices of underlining ‘differences’ and ‘commonalities’ in their everyday encounters. With ‘differences’, I particularly refer to a difference that Alevi women feel in their



relations with Sunnis. These ‘differences’ are mostly felt with regards to ‘practices’: there may be times when a Sunni woman asks an Alevi woman if the ‘gossip’ about Alevi is true, or there may be times when a Sunni woman might do something that reminds an Alevi woman of Sunni accusations against Alevi with regards to *cem* and ritual cleaning. However, ‘differences’ do not impede women from building friendship ties, and we can see a lot of Sunni and Alevi neighbors frequenting each other. Hence, ‘differences’ between Alevi and Sunni women are not unbridgeable. Tahire Erman (2005) also arrives at a similar conclusion in an article where she discusses the encounters between Alevi and Sunni women in a district in Ankara. Erman underlines the fact that the lines between Alevi and Sunnis in everyday life are not that unbridgeable, where both groups underline the values of ‘being human’ and ‘being Muslims’.

On the other hand, ‘commonalities’ among Alevi are not also ‘given’. As Alevi do not constitute a homogenous whole and come from different villages, towns, and regions, as well as from different class, ethnic and linguistic backgrounds, women look for ‘commonalities’ in ‘practices’ as a way of building and maintaining their networks among Alevi as well. Even with women who come from the same village, commonalities should also be worked on. For instance, with reference to his fieldwork, Benoit Fliche (2003) notes that for women of a village (of Alevi origin) who migrated to cities, their ties with women of their village lose their effect, while the primary sphere of sociability for women becomes their kin and neighbors, and women’s relations with their neighbors override religious cleavages.

Apart from Erman’s and Fliche’s accounts which look at women’s networks, it is difficult to find clues of women’s experiences of being Alevi even in the scholarly works on Alevilik that recognize the significance of gender relations in the discourse

of Alevilik since the late 1980s (Erdemir, 2004; Şahin, 2001; Vorhoff, 1997). In this thesis, then, I focus on women's networks and how through these networks women *experience* and *practice* 'being Alevi' through their everyday encounters with other women. I argue that the experience of women of being Alevi is through their practicing of the 'differences' between Alevis and Sunnis, and their practicing of the 'commonalities' among Alevis in their everyday encounters. I also argue that their experiences of 'being Alevi' depend on their perception of a larger community of 'Alevis', which the discourse of Alevilik calls them to. Yet, their attempts to find 'commonalities' among Alevi women of other villages and towns cannot solely be explained with regard to the call of the formal discourses of Alevilik, for their efforts are not solely motivated to find a community of 'Alevis', but finding 'commonalities' helps women to extend their networks in their immediate (urban) environment. In this sense, this research aims to contribute to the literature on Alevilik by demonstrating the subjective processes involved in the articulation of the identity and by demonstrating women's different ways of articulating identity from the more formal accounts within the discourse of Alevilik. I argue that women articulate and experience their identity through their own networks where they meticulously work on underlining or de-emphasizing 'differences' between Alevis and Sunnis, and 'commonalities' among Alevis.

Hence, in this study, I will not refer to a formal account that tells what Alevilik is or talk about its history, but throughout the thesis, the readers will find some pieces regarding how Alevi women introduced me (a woman they named as 'non-yobaz Sunni') to their beliefs and practices. In the thesis, I focus on certain 'rituals' (such as funerals, visiting holy places, cooking *aşure* and *lokma*) as well as women's ways of

visiting and meeting each other (including *güns*<sup>17</sup> and some meetings of them in the ‘village association’<sup>18</sup>). By doing this, I try to account for how these practices both become the symbols of ‘difference’ from Sunnis, as well as of the ‘commonalities’ among Alevis. I look at these accounts and practices, together with women’s ways of emphasizing ‘differences’ between Alevis and Sunnis and the ways of overcoming ‘differences’ (Chapter 3), and the ways of finding ‘commonalities’ among Alevis<sup>19</sup> (Chapter 4) in their everyday networks as indicative of a feeling of ‘being Alevi’ which cannot be comprehended by looking at the more formal discourses of Alevilik and definitions of *cem*. I construe the concept ‘everyday’ with reference to Dorothee Wierling:

The dimension of everyday life, I would argue, is not limited to specific domains. *Alltag* is not restricted to the so-called basic facts of human existence such as birth and death; it is more than the routine of daily labor; it is not just private or shaped by ‘small’ events. Everyday experiences cannot be limited thematically: the ‘high’ politics brought into the living room by the media, the fact that ‘simple, everyday’ people take part in public events, the possible breadth and diversity of experiences on the job, and the different historical conditions, for example, under which women give birth to children – all militate against any such thematic circumscription. (Wierling, 1989, pp. 150-151)

---

<sup>17</sup> *Gün* (day) is a kind of Rotating Savings and Credit Associations (ROSCA). See Chapter 4 for more detail.

<sup>18</sup> Village association is a formal organization that brings together the people whose place of origin is the same village, aimed towards bringing villagers together and maintaining the ties and solidarity among them. For a comparison with *hemşehri* associations see (Erder, 1999; Bayraktar; 2003).

<sup>19</sup> Apart from the fact that the word ‘Alevi’ replaced the more pejorative term ‘*Kızılbaş*’ (redhead) (Melikoff, 2003) and is used by most researchers and ‘Alevis’ alike as an umbrella term “to refer to various religious groups alternatively called *Kızılbaş*, *Ocakzade*, *Çelebi*, *Bektaşî*, *Nusayri*, *Tahtacı*, *Abdal*, *Bedreddini*, or *Çepni*, among others” (Erdemir, 2004, p. 40) and involve “Turkish, Kurmanji, Zaza, Arabic, and Albanian speakers” (Erdemir, 2004, p. 40), when I talk about the efforts to find ‘commonalities’ among ‘Alevis’, in addition to the differences cited by Erdemir, I refer to differences in practice among ‘Alevis’ from different towns and villages.

As it will become clearer throughout the thesis, emphasizing ‘commonalities’ among ‘Alevi’ is also a hard job, and even though the networks of women are extended through their relations with women coming from different villages and towns, there might at times be conflicts among women from different villages. On the other hand, coming from the same village does not ensure a ‘natural’ tie among ‘villagers’, and it also needs to be constantly worked on. The ‘village associations’ founded in big cities such as Istanbul work towards creating such a unity, where they employ some rituals of Alevilik (like *aşure* and *lokma*) while they sometimes omit *cem*. This also indicates a change in the community assumed for holding *cems* (Chapter 5).

### Method and the Scope of the Research

The ‘differences’ between Alevi and Sunni women, as well as the ‘commonalities’ among Alevi women are negotiated in the everyday encounters of women in their immediate neighborhood or within their larger networks, involving kin or villagers. Some practices which I prefer to call *ritualized* (Bell, 1992) (such as visiting each other, *güns*, cooking and distributing *aşure* that are to be found within the immediate network of women, as well as other practices which involve their larger networks, such as visiting the tombs of holy saints, and participating in funerals) are the places where ‘differences’ and ‘commonalities’ are negotiated and practiced. In this sense, *ritualized practices in everyday encounters* are neither *everyday* nor *ritual* in the strict senses of the terms. For women, visiting each other is clearly a way out of the daily/everyday routine, however the practices in these occasions need not correspond to *the* rituals that have clear-cut criteria of practice, such as *cems*. Therefore in this thesis, I focus on how women experience ‘being Alevi’ through these ritualized

practices with regard to women's practices in two districts in Istanbul<sup>20</sup> and some other practices of these women outside their immediate neighborhood that I also joined. I base my arguments on participant observation and in-depth interviews, which I started with the help of an Alevi friend whose family lives in a district in the Anatolian side of Istanbul.

My friend's mother, Zeynep hanım<sup>21</sup> helped me to make initial contacts in the district, whose networks included both kin, her 'villagers' (Zeynep hanım comes from a village in Sivas, which I call *Hediye*), some other villagers from Sivas whom she called *yakın köylü* (villagers who come from a nearby village to Hediye), some other Alevi women who comes from other towns, and some Sunni neighbors, who lived in the district in the Anatolian side and nearby districts. However, apart from the network of women in her immediate vicinity, she was attending to funerals, weddings, picnics, and other meetings of her villagers who were dispersed around Istanbul. The 'village association', located in a district in the European side of Istanbul, was playing a central role in providing a place for and organizing these occasions. Therefore, I extended my research to include the activities in this association organized for villagers and for women, and also interviewed some women working in the association and some women living in the district in the European side where a considerable number of Hediye villagers lives.

Between October 2004 and October 2005, I participated in women's meetings called *gün*, their other daily visits, women's activities in their homes (such as cooking *aşure*) or in the village association (such as women's day and mother's day meetings), funerals (in *cem* houses and in mosques), a visit to a sacred place in Antalya (the tomb

---

<sup>20</sup> I do not disclose the names of the districts for purposes of anonymity.

<sup>21</sup> A pseudonym I use for the purposes of protecting anonymity. In the thesis, all the mentioned names of women who contributed to this research are pseudonyms.

of Abdal Musa), and the ‘village picnic’ that took place in their village in Sivas in early July 2005. I also interviewed nine women from Zeynep hanım’s village (three of them live in the district in the Anatolian side, six of them in the district in the European side), and five women who are their Alevi neighbors and acquaintances (two from another village in Sivas, two from Tunceli and one from Malatya; four of them living in or near the district in the Anatolian side, and one of them living in the district in the European side). Also throughout the research, I got to know other women coming from different villages and regions, who were neighbors and friends of the women I visited in their houses.

### Joining Women’s Meetings

I decided to start the fieldwork by going to the houses of Alevi women and by joining women’s meetings. Zeynep hanım helped me to make contacts, to participate in meetings of two *gün* groups in the district in the Anatolian side and to conduct interviews in the area of this district, starting from November 2004. Filiz hanım and Nergis hanım, who are the paternal aunts of my friend, also sometimes helped me to make further contacts. For instance, they introduced me to Refika hanım (from Hediye village) who later invited me to a visit to Abdal Musa in Antalya. Hence, this study represents these women’s networks.

The women who contributed to this research mostly come from Zeynep hanım’s village in Sivas, they are between the ages forty and seventy, and a considerable number of them was not born in Istanbul but migrated to Istanbul in some period of their lives, mostly after marriage. They are first generation migrants, and they all had a period of difficulty in their lives until they and their husbands

achieved to have regular jobs, and sometimes established their own small businesses. Regardless of the districts they live in, then, they are middle-class women and their practices such as *gün* can also be read as places where they perform middle-class values.<sup>22</sup>

The study also includes the networks I mobilized through these existing ones. For instance, in January, 2005, Nergis hanım introduced me to some women (Zeliha hanım and Gonca hanım) working in the village association of Hediye in the area of of the district in European side. When they learned about my research interests, Zeliha hanım and Gonca hanım (a member of the board of the village association), and later Suna hanım, guided me in this district in the European side for visits and interviews. In this district, I could not find a *gün* meeting that I could join, but knowing that I wanted to meet and spend time with Alevi women and women of the village of Hediye, these women invited me to occasions like funerals, *aşure* days, women's day and mother's day meetings in the village association, as well as to the 'village picnic' in Sivas.

### Two Districts and Beyond

In the district in the Anatolian side, I basically participated in *gün* meetings that Zeynep hanım introduced me to, and then later interviewed seven women who joined these meetings (three women from Zeynep hanım's village, two women from another

---

<sup>22</sup> See Ekal (forthcoming) for the discussion of women and the performance of middle-class values. In this article the issue is discussed through the example of *güns*, where women's self-presentation proceeds through many resources, such that a woman might assert her care for the cleanliness of her house or her ability to cook, all of which might become a way of showing that she fulfills the requirements of 'modern' middle-class womanhood. The relations between mothers-in-law and brides also provide women (who are mothers-in-law or who have children who are expected to marry soon) with a topic of discussion that they can assert themselves as mothers-in-law who comply with 'modern' ways of behaving towards their brides. Here, by 'modern', women assert their respect for conjugal family who lives in a separate household as a unit whose privacy should be maintained.

village in Sivas, and two women from Tunceli). To carry out the interviews in this district, I visited the women in their houses, by asking them for appointments beforehand, usually in the *gün* meetings. Therefore, I was usually alone with the women during the interviews in the district in the European side, and after visiting them individually, we had more friendly relations. These women were all housewives, whereas their daughters usually worked and some of the women had to take care of their grandchildren. Their husbands were either employees in some companies, or had their own small and middle scale businesses.

Except one of these women who lived in a nearby district, the women from *gün* meetings were all living in the district in the Anatolian side, a neighborhood situated between the main highway E5 and Marmara Sea. Although the center of this district has a much longer history, the construction of the quarter that Zeynep hanım and her acquaintances live dates back to the middle of 1980s. The apartment buildings were constructed by contractors, and the quarter does not have a uniform style of buildings. Rather, there is a range of three- to six-storey buildings and each apartment-building is surrounded by a small garden. This is not a neighborhood that is densely populated by Alevis. But still, there is a network among some Alevis in the quarter, which manifests itself in the visiting practices and *gün* meetings of women. These women do not necessarily come from the same villages/cities in Anatolia, but they get to know each other in Istanbul.

In the neighborhood in the European side of Istanbul, I could not find a *gün* meeting that I could be a part of. But this district was a crucial part of the study, for there are lots of people from Zeynep hanım's village who live in this district, and the village association is also settled there. This is a more recently built neighborhood, received massive migration starting from 1950s, and has a background of *gecekondu*



(squatter) dwellings now turned into multi-storey apartment-buildings that are adjacent to each other, with little or no gardens at the back of each building.

Therefore, this district in the European side is a more densely populated area, yet again Alevis cannot be said to constitute a greater part of the population in the district.

The women I met in this district were usually housewives, but some of them were working: two of them had their own shops in the district and worked there with their husbands, while one of them was working in a nearby enterprise. While some of the husbands of the housewives also owned their small scale businesses in the district, some other were workers or employees.

The first time I went to the district in the European side was for a funeral in the association. In the funeral I met Zeliha hanım, who accepted to accompany me for interviews in this district. Each week we visited one woman – so that I made four interviews with women from Zeynep hanım’s village, and one with a neighbor from Malatya. As the entire interview situations were also accompanied by visits, they also provided insights into the ways of visiting as well. Indeed, without the acceptable form of visiting, making an interview would be impossible. Zeliha hanım was present during two interviews. During other interviews, she just sat for half an hour and then left. Later in October 2005, one of these women I interviewed, Suna hanım, also helped me to make visits in the district, so I had the chance to get acquainted with her village and neighbor ties and ways of visiting. Therefore, my fieldwork in the district in the European side consists of several different occasions: women’s activities in village association (*aşure* day, women’s day, and mother’s day), visits, and interviews.

Even though the core of the meetings, visits, and interviews in this study took place in two districts in Istanbul, as women’s networks are not confined to these

districts, the study involves visits to and occasions in other nearby districts to the district in the European side and the district in the Anatolian side, as well as the funerals that took place in several other districts in Istanbul. In addition, the visit to Abdal Musa's tomb in Antalya and the trip to Sivas for the village picnic show the mobility that women have within their networks. In this sense, this study is not confined to the two districts in Istanbul.

### My Position in Visits and Interviews

My participation in the meetings, visits, and interviews in A and B was facilitated by being a friend of Zeynep hanım's son. She introduced me as a friend of his son and as a graduate student interested in and writing a thesis on Alevi women's lives in the cities and in the villages.

Some women took this interest as a research of 'folklore', and began telling me about their practices in the village such as going to the fields and the difficulties of housework. On the other hand, some women had a more reserved attitude, as they took this interest as a 'political' one and did not want to get involved in 'those' issues. They simply chose not to talk much. While some women eagerly asserted that they had problems with their Sunni neighbors, some other women simply said that they never had a problem. Some other women, who were usually more active in the village association and had interest in Alevist politics, talked much more about 'politics' and connected their experiences to this wider framework.

During the interviews, I did not have structured questions, but I always started by asking women about their life in their villages and their migration to the city, as I knew that they all experienced rural to urban migration and this was a significant

event in their lives. As the conversations continued, I asked questions about their relations with their neighbors and other questions that were specific to their accounts; therefore each interview has its own unique pattern and was recorded with the consent of the interviewees. However, considering the reserved attitude of some of the participants, I never tape-recorded the meetings of *gün*, casual visits, women's meetings in the village association, their visits to Abdal Musa and the village-picnic. Therefore, for these meetings, my analysis is confined to my field notes about women's practices. I tried my best to protect the privacy of women by using pseudonyms and by totally disclosing the names of their villages.

## CHAPTER 2

### ‘WOMAN IN ALEVILIK’: A SYMBOL

*Erkek dişi sorulmaz muhabbetin dilinde  
Hakk’ın yarattığı her şey yerli yerinde  
Bizim nazarımızda kadın erkek farkı yok  
Noksanlık, eksiklik senin görüşlerinde  
Hacı Bektaş Veli*

...  
*Aleviler’i Sünniler’den ayıran en belirgin özellik, karşıt cins ilişkileridir. Aleviler’de kadın - erkek ilişkileri daha rahattır. Kadın - erkek arasında kaç - göç bulunmaz.*

...  
*Alevilik ve Bektaşilik’te kadın kelimenin tam anlamıyla ‘en yüce varlık’tır. Kadın evin her türlü sorumluluğunda tam söz sahibidir. Kadın bir mutfak eşyası veya baştan aşağı kara çarşaflara büründürülen bir canlı değildir.*

...  
*Şeriat düzeninde kadının hiçbir hakkı olmadığı gibi, kadın erkeğin iki dudağının arasından çıkacak ‘üçten dokuza kadar boşsun’ sözü ile bağımlı kılınmıştır. Şeriat düzeninde erkeğe böyle bir yetki verilmiştir. Tüm yetkiler yanlıdır. Dizginler erkeğin elinde olup kadın - erkek eşitliği yoktur.’<sup>23</sup>(Elçioğlu, 2004)*

---

<sup>23</sup> Subtitles of an article in *Tophumsal Barış*, November 2004 (p. 40-43) by İsmail Elçioğlu. See Appendix B for the whole article. The translation of the subtitles are as follows (unless otherwise indicated, the translations in the thesis belong to me):

‘In the language of affection, one does not ask male or female  
God’s every creation is perfect  
There is no male-female distinction in our perspective  
The defect and imperfection are in your vision’ (Translated by Erdemir, 2004, p. 101)

...  
‘The most discerning characteristic that differentiates Alevis from Sunnis is the relations between opposite sexes. In Alevis, the relations of man and woman are more relax. There is no hiding from each other.’

...  
In *Alevilik* and *Bektaşilik* woman is the noblest being in every sense of the word. In every household matter, woman has a say. Woman is not a commodity of a kitchen or a being covered with black cloth from head to toe.

...  
In the order of Sharia , woman has no rights, and she is dependent on the words that will flow out of a man’s mouth for a divorce. In Sharia, man has such an authority. Bias is inherent to every entitlement. Man is endowed with total authority and there is no equality between man and woman.’

The quotations above are the subtitles of an article called ‘Alevilik’te Kadın’ (‘Woman in Alevilik’), appeared in a monthly called *Toplumsal Barış* (literally, ‘Societal Peace’) which was published for a year starting from May 2004 and which is an example of the wave of publications on Alevilik.<sup>24</sup> The article compiles a set of understandings about ‘woman’ within Alevi thought and history, which are then compared to the order of the Shari’a as the basis of Sunni practice. The origins of the position of ‘woman’ are argued to be found in a series of Turkish epics before the conversion to Islam, in the thoughts of the saints who are the key figures for the Islamization of Anatolia, and in the practices of those who followed Ali in the history of Islam who are argued to have kept Muhammad’s treatment of women. In this respect, according to the article, unlike the Shari’a, in Alevilik a man is not allowed to divorce his wife, men are not allowed to marry more than one wife, the wife of a *dede* (who is called *ana*, or mother) receives as much respect as a *dede*, a woman can slaughter an animal, a woman have a say in every household matter, and is not forced to cover herself up in black. While the author of the article in *Toplumsal Barış* puts the practices in Alevilik in opposition to Arabic and Iranian traditions, where he finds the origins of ‘the position of woman’ (i.e. Turkish epics or the life of Muhammed) also reflects his understanding of the origins of Alevilik. On the other hand, ‘woman’ becomes a symbol through which Alevilik may be proved to be different (and more egalitarian) from *Sünnilik*.

As I argued in the introduction chapter, the meaning of Alevilik has been an increasingly contested terrain. I propose that in this process, ‘woman’ as a symbol

---

<sup>24</sup> See (Vorhoff, 2003) for a detailed discussion of these publications.

serves to portray Alevis as *çağdaş* (contemporary/modern) and *laik* (secular) vis-à-vis those Sunnis who ‘fail’ to live in line with Republican ideals. ‘Sunnis’, in this context, become a category used by Alevists to represent their opposition to Islamists and the Sunnification of the state. But this category of Sunnis (that is equated with ‘Islamists’) is usually embraced by individual Alevis as well, since it points to an ever-existing differentiation between Alevis and Sunnis that they find in the history of Ottoman State and in the history of Islam. In this context, ‘woman’ as a symbol harkens to ‘Sunni prejudices against Alevis’ and strengthens the idea of the difference between Alevis and Sunnis. The use of ‘woman’ as a symbol is usually related to a narrative that explains the ‘importance attributed to woman in Alevilik’ which is argued to manifest itself in the lack of strict sex segregation in *cems* and other contexts. This is an explanation to counter Sunni prejudices, as Sunnis are argued to be accusing Alevis of sexual promiscuity especially with reference to *cems*.

Hence ‘woman’ as a symbol contributes to an individual’s sense of a collectivity of ‘Alevis’ by implying that ‘all Alevis’ go through a process of dealing with ‘prejudices’. As Alf Lüdtke argues, “symbols link such ideas with individual feelings of liking and pleasure (or disgust). In so doing, they often make ‘powerful’ phenomena and ‘grand conceptions’ come alive” (Lüdtke, 1995, p. 208). Hence I find ‘woman’ as a unifying symbol for ‘Alevis’ vis-à-vis ‘Sunnis’, even though some Alevists may not agree on the origins of it, just as Massicard (2003b) argues for the case of Hacı Bektaş.<sup>25</sup> I argue that if there is one thing that the various attempts to

---

<sup>25</sup> “My hypothesis is that shared symbols cover the lack of consensus concerning the nature of Alevism, since the assertion of Alevism and one’s identification with it are more important, in this context, than the definition of its content.” (Massicard, 2003b, p. 130)

Massicard further argues that ‘Hacı Bektaş is a central figure of Alevism, since it is through him that Anatolian Alevism can be most clearly distinguished from Syrian Alawism or from the Twelver Shi’ism in Iran; he also permits the making of a direct link between Alevism and Bektashism, which are quite different sociological realities. Moreover, he is also respected by Sunnis, which is important in relation to the outside society. Like other figures, he may be considered as a ‘symbol’, one standing for

define Alevilik have in common, it is the way in which these accounts refer to ‘woman’, which becomes a symbol of the difference of Alevis from Sunnis. Hence, the approach in the article in *Toplumsal Barış* is nothing unique regarding the political stance of the group that published the monthly. I argue that both of the terms that appear in the title of this article (Alevilik and *kadın*) require careful scrutiny, as they help us to unravel the establishment of Alevilik as a discourse of identity since the late 1980s.

### Alevilik: Aleviness or Alevism?

The Turkish word for Alevilik is translated by Massicard in two ways, as ‘Aleviness’ and as ‘Alevism’:

The lack of consensus on the nature, scope and contents of *Aleviness*, and even the level on which such an identity should be defined (religious, social, political, or cultural?) is a striking feature of contemporary *Alevism*. The numerous debates, accusations and criticisms on this topic, which constitute the main activity of Alevists, show that there is a constant struggle over its meaning. (Massicard, 2003a, p.164; emphases added)

This translation, indeed, captures the double meaning in which the word Alevilik is used in Turkish today. Yet, the exact word for ‘Alevism’ and ‘Alevist’, as Massicard uses them, does not exist in Turkish usage. Here, as Massicard uses it, Alevism refers to the mobilization in the last twenty years with respect to an identity, while Alevist

---

many different things. But he is also a quite consensual figure among Alevis because most of the other figures in Alevism have a more precise significance: Pir Sultan Abdal is distinguished by a more marked left-wing connotation since the 1960s, sometimes reinterpreted as Kurdish; Atatürk a more state-centered one and Ali a more clearly religious one. But Hacı Bektaş is the figure who permits the widest range of interpretations and thus is most easily appropriated for a symbolic consensus among different constituencies.” (Massicard, 2003b, p. 132)

refers to those who are active in this movement. Therefore, in common usage and in the academic literature, there is a variety of expressions such as '*Politik Alevilik*' (Political Alevism) (Çakır, 2003), or '*Alevi Uyanışı*' (Alevi Revivalism) (Çamuroğlu, 2003) to refer to a movement based on Alevi identity. It is also common to refer to the people committed to this movement as '*Alevi Aydınlar*' (Alevi Intellectuals) or solely as '*Alevi*'.

The fact that Alevilik might refer to both 'Aleviness' and 'Alevism' in Turkish, however, does not necessarily mean that a dichotomy between 'religion' and 'politics' does not exist. Rather, I argue that what makes the discourse of Alevilik distinct since the late 1980s is this double meaning: the perception of Alevilik (as Aleviness) as a 'religious' (or 'cultural') essence which must be explained and understood 'correctly' so that a correct 'political' action can be taken (Alevism). It is within this dichotomy that the urge to explain and learn Alevilik appears, which can be understood as the basis for the production of knowledge on Alevilik. My argument might become clearer if we consider that what we have here is a 'discourse' in the sense Stuart Hall construes Foucault's use of the term:

By 'discourse', Foucault meant 'a group of statements which provide a language for talking about – a way of representing the knowledge about – a particular topic at a particular historical moment. ... Discourse is about the production of knowledge through language. But ... since all social practices entail meaning, and meanings shape and influence what we do – our conduct – all practices have a discursive aspect'. It is important to note that the concept of discourse in this usage is not a purely linguistic concept. It is about language and practice. It attempts to overcome the distinction between what one says (language) and what one does (practice). Discourse, Foucault argues, constructs the topic. It defines and produces the objects of our knowledge. It governs the way a topic can be meaningfully talked about. It also influences how ideas are put into practice and used to regulate the conduct of others. (Hall, 1997, p. 44)



The efforts to define Alevilik, that make Alevilik an object of knowledge, manifest themselves in the publications on Alevilik that have flourished since the late 1980s as various authors (Vorhoff, 2003; Shankland, 2003b; Şahin, 2001) suggest. I will also start with these publications, but will try to demonstrate their relation to the works that were published before that period. Considering the sheer number of works, however, I will have to limit my analysis with one or two examples of some of the different currents that explain Alevilik in my discussion in the next section, and then will move on to those that explain ‘the position of woman in Alevilik’ in the following section of this chapter. Here, I will focus on the making of Alevilik as an object of knowledge, a process which I find crucial to the formation of Alevilik as a distinct discourse of identity. Then, I will discuss the significance of ‘woman’ in the constitution of Alevilik.

### Alevilik: Making an Object of Knowledge

Demonstrated by the rise of the publications on Alevilik (Vorhoff, 2003), the post 1980 period may be argued to be a period of learning, and urging other Alevis to learn, about Alevilik, which consequently makes Alevilik an object of knowledge. For Vorhoff (2003)<sup>26</sup> and Şahin (2001)<sup>27</sup>, the Alevilik *Bildirgesi* (the Declaration of Alevilik) constitutes a milestone in the history of the Alevi movement, for the

---

<sup>26</sup> Vorhoff argues that “*Suddenly* Alevism appeared on the *public* agenda. Alevi and Bektashi started to reflect openly on the doctrines and ritual practices of their once esoteric religion – a transgression that would in former times have incurred the penalty of exclusion from the community. By way of contrast Alevism is nowadays no longer something mysterious, ‘Alevi reality’ can no longer be avoided in Turkey’s social and political life” (Vorhoff, 2003, p. 23). (Emphases added)

<sup>27</sup> “Since then, hundreds of books on Alevism have been published; Alevi periodicals, print houses and radio stations have emerged; newspaper series on Alevism have appeared in the major newspapers. Hundreds of Alevi associations have been established and a large number of *cemevis* have been constructed. Alevi cultural festivals have been organized while various programs discussing Alevism and describing Alevi rituals have been aired on national and commercial TV.” (Şahin, 2001, p. 2)

declaration marked the beginning of a new visibility of Alevilik in public. Vorhoff argues that with the publishing of this declaration, “for the first time in the history of Turkish Republic, the Alevi declared themselves openly not only as a political force but also as a religious community claiming the right of self-determination and official recognition” (2003, p. 31). But apart from increasing the visibility of Alevilik, the declaration was at the same time urging people to learn about Alevilik: urging Sunnis to ‘learn’ to abandon their prejudices, and urging Alevis to ‘learn’ in order not to let Alevilik be forgotten.<sup>28</sup>

As can be inferred from Şahin’s and Vorhoff’s accounts, when they refer to the ‘appearance’ of Alevilik in ‘public’, they primarily refer to the discussions of Alevilik in the media which can be seen in line with the call of the declaration to learn more about Alevilik. The visibility of Alevilik in the media since the late 1980s, as well as several books written on it, above all, urges us to consider the question of audience to outline the discourse that we are dealing with here: Who is assumed to be the audience of books and newspaper series on Alevilik? Secondly, and related to the first question, one can also inquire about the meaning of this appearance: Does it mean that Alevis were totally unknown to the public? Or is it that new forms of expression and new ways of recognition have become available? Thirdly, we should also consider the features of appearance involved in this new pattern: how are Alevis and Alevilik represented? What does reflecting openly on the doctrines and ritual practices mean? Is it simply a recording of the oral tradition? In the rest of this part of this chapter, I will try to elaborate on these questions to further clarify my argument on the production of Alevilik as a distinct object of knowledge.

---

<sup>28</sup> See Appendix A for the original text of the Declaration of *Alevilik*.

If we begin with Alevilik Bildirgesi that was issued in 1989, we can see that it is meant to *make known* that Alevis face some problems and formulate ‘the demands of Alevis’. While doing this, it also assumes and underlines two distinct audiences: while the declaration is primarily aimed towards informing a Sunni audience about the problems that Alevis face and demand that they change their disrespectful attitudes towards Alevis, at the same time it assumes an Alevi audience with a common set of characteristics and goals. In the text, the Sunnis are said to have insufficient *knowledge* about Alevilik which is argued to be a branch of Islam belief. According to the declaration, it is this lack of knowledge on the part of Sunnis that makes the prejudices against Alevis persist:

*Sunnis* who make up the majority of our country’s population almost know nothing about Alevilik. The ideas of this part of the population about Alevilik are formed by prejudices and slanders that originate from rumors. ... The 9th article of the Declaration of Human Rights and the 24th act of the Constitution of the Turkish Republic guarantees the freedom of ‘conscience, religious belief and opinion’ for all. In our country, although official state oppression on Alevis has ceased with the foundation of the Republic, social, psychological and political oppression, which has a long history, continues its presence. *Alevis* due to these oppressions are unable to exercise their rights of ‘conscience, religious belief and opinion’. *Alevis* still have to conceal their Alevilik (their being Alevi). (Alevilik Bildirgesi, 1990)

Here, we can see that the main concern is one of ‘existence’, an affirmation that comes with its relation to its ‘other’, ‘Sunni’. This affirmation comes as a response to what is perceived as a long existing prejudice, for Alevis were accused by Sunnis of incestuous activities during the *cem*. The affirmation, at the same time, formulates from ‘Alevi perspective’ the assumed difference between Alevis and Sunnis by creating an image of a Sunni who is a prejudiced, *dedikoducu* (gossiper), ‘Ottomanist’, or *gerici* (backward / reactionary) person. The perceptions of the both

sides of each other can be considered in the light of what Connolly argues: “built into the dynamic of identity is a polemical temptation to translate differences through which it is specified into moral failings or abnormalities” (2002, p. xiv). Hence, the ‘difference between Alevis and Sunnis’ is primarily a difference translated into the language of moral failings and abnormalities, usually affiliated with ‘improper’ habits of sexuality, which is a key to understand why ‘woman’ constitutes such a central place in the formation of ‘Alevi identity’.

A fear of assimilation also accompanies the urge for learning, as can be seen in Cemal Şener’s<sup>29</sup> book ‘*Alevilik Olayı: Toplumsal bir Başkaldırının Kısa Tarihçesi*’ (‘Alevilik Incident: A Short History of a Social Uprising’) that was the one of the first books that became popular during the period when the declaration was published. In the preface of the book, Şener points to the need of the Alevis themselves to *learn* about their own history. Şener underlines that his work is not a work of religious history, or folklore, nor fieldwork, but the history of a social opposition movement which is egalitarian, libertarian, democratic, and humanist (1989, p. 9). In this book, Şener outlines what he argues to be the historical background of Alevilik. At the end of the book, he asserts that Alevilik continues to be a concrete ‘political’ (and ‘cultural’) division despite the fact that the ‘religious’ side of Alevilik has weakened as a result of changing circumstances, such as the failure of illiterate *dedes* to provide sufficient *knowledge* to the educated youth.<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>29</sup> Cemal Şener is an author whom Şahin (2001, p. 271) notes to be affiliated with Şahkulu and Karacaahmet lodges.

<sup>30</sup> “The social and political change and development in the country effects the Alevi youth and society as well. Mostly, revolutionary and democratic strands of thought are accepted by Alevi masses and youth, due to the framework of their cultural texture. It is Alevi workers who make up the most of the union members, and Alevi youth plays an active role in the student events. The illiterate Alevi *dedes*, on the other hand, fall short of being the leaders of the awakened Alevi masses and the educated Alevi university youth. Democratic and materialist thoughts quickly spread among Alevis. When this situation is combined with the politics of the state that prohibits the Alevi religion, Alevi society gets

While for Şahin (2001) and Vorhoff (2003) these two examples, the accompanying rise in the publications on Alevilik and the expansion of associations signal the visibility and the expression of Alevilik as a form of identity, it should also be emphasized that this visibility is only a particular form of expression: in the post-1980 period, what we see is the translation of the difference between ‘sects’ (that was the prevailing way of expressing the Alevi/Sunni divide) into the difference of ‘identity’. Hence, if we are talking about the appearance of Alevilik on the ‘public’ agenda, 1989 is surely not the first time. However the post-1980 period, with its new forms of negotiation, brought a new understanding of difference that is no longer comprehensible solely in terms of ‘sect’.

Massicard (2002) argues that it was the state authorities who initiated the *Alevi question* to become public in the 1960s. She argues that it was with the declaration of some students against the decision of the existing government to form a *Mezhepler Dairesi* (the Directorate of Sects) in 1963 that the word Alevi was used for the first time in a public document (Massicard, 2002, pp.143-144). The 1960s have also witnessed the founding of the Unity Party (1966 *Birlik Partisi* – BP, renamed in 1969 as Turkey Unity Party / *Türkiye Birlik Partisi* - TBP), though its administrators rejected the label of Alevi. However, as Massicard (2002) explains, the debates did not reach a large audience of Alevis in the 1960s. In the 1970s, on the other hand, she argues that we see right/left polarization mostly articulated in terms of ‘communitarian cleavages’. While the symbols of Alevilik was embraced and reinterpreted by the left, the conflation of communism and Alevilik was “first used by

---

distanced from religion. Today, *Alevilik* is more of a political and cultural division, rather than a religious one. *Alevilik* was a religious matter in its moment of birth. But after the social phases that it went through it reached a different position. Today, *Alevilik* means a cultural identity. And this emphasizes a tolerant, humanist, democratic cultural structure.” (Şener, 1990, p. 167)

MHP to further its political goals” (Massicard 2002, 167). What is remarkable is that the terms of these debates in the 1960s and 1970s revolve around the concept of *mezhep* (sect), whereas from the 1980s onwards, *kimlik* (identity) comes to the fore.

This argument might become clearer if we take, for instance, a collection of essays that was first published in 1990 under the name ‘*Kimliğini Haykıran Alevilik*’ (Alevilik Screams its Identity), edited by Lütfi Kaleli.<sup>31</sup> The book compiles essays that were published in the late 60s, and many newspaper and magazine series that appeared in the year 1990. It must also be noted that it is not necessarily Alevists themselves that are at the forefront in these debates. The essays that were written in late 1960s first of all take a stand against the ‘perversity’ that is attributed to *cem* gatherings, and hence, to Alevi, though each writer does this in his own way. For instance Baltacıoğlu (1966; quoted in Kaleli 1990) emphasize the ‘Turkishness’ of Alevi and argues that the difference between Alevi Turks and Sunni Turks is only a difference of ‘*mezhep*’ (sect). He also adds that:

It is, at least a lack of knowledge of geography to think that thirty million Turkey Turks are solely composed of Sunnis. It is inappropriate for a citizen to think that honor, chastity, or virtue are only the property of a certain sect, and this kind of a thinking is against the truth as well. (Baltacıoğlu, 1997, p. 23)

Özek’s article is another example (1967; quoted in Kaleli, 1997). Özek contributes to these arguments by distinguishing between *tarikats*<sup>32</sup> and sects. For him, Alevilik is a sect and not a *tarikat* and hence it is not against the constitution and therefore should

---

<sup>31</sup> Lütfi Kaleli is an author and the association leader of ABEKV (Alevi Bektaşî Eğitim ve Kültür Vakfı) whom Şahin (2001, p. 271) notes to be also affiliated with Şahkulu and Karacaahmet lodges.

<sup>32</sup> We can translate *tarikat* as ‘religious order’. In this article written in 1967, Özek refers to Article 677 of the Turkish Penal Code which Özek interprets to forbid the activities of ‘religious orders’ and not ‘sects’.

be granted equal treatment (1997, p. 37). The proliferation of the debates on Alevilik in the media in the 1980s and especially in the 1990s was not the first time, then, that Alevis 'appeared in public' and it was not that 'sudden'. Rather, the visibility in this period is made possible by the articulation of Alevilik as a particular identity and the concomitant mobilization.<sup>33</sup> Apart from other little essays, the book '*Kimliğini Haykıran Alevilik*' refers to several newspaper series, contains one of them in great detail, and some other magazine articles that were published in the year 1990.<sup>34</sup> The series have similar characteristics to Cemal Şener's book and Alevilik *Bildirgesi* in terms of assuming both a Sunni and an Alevi audience.

On the other hand, in Şaylan's article in one of the series, we see a 'culture' / 'politics' dichotomy when he talks about the voting patterns of Alevis. Even if he is against such a notion as the 'Alevi vote', he nevertheless argues that 'Alevi culture' drives Alevis towards an interest in politics<sup>35</sup>. The culture / politics dichotomy is all the more apparent when Şaylan examines the Alevist movement in the post-1980 period. Şaylan uses 'identity' instead of 'sect' to refer to the movement which is a

---

<sup>33</sup> Şahin (2001) and Massicard (2002) analyze the formation of Alevi movements in the late 1980s and 1990s in detail. Among other things, both scholars recognize the emergence of 'identity as right' discourse as an available means to channel the discontent among Alevis after the setting of 'Turkish-Islamic synthesis' as the semi-official ideology of the state after the 1980 coup d'état.

<sup>34</sup> One of the series that Lütfi Kaleli includes in the book was prepared by Prof. Fuat Bozkurt and was published in *Sabah* between January, 22 and February, 9 1990. Lütfi Kaleli argues that this series played a pivotal role in the start of discussions in the press and for *Alevilik* to become the focus of public attention (Kaleli, 1997, p. 56). On the other hand, in the book Kaleli published an unabridged version of the series that was published in *Cumhuriyet*, between May, 6 and May, 21 1990, prepared by Gencay Şaylan, Şenay Kalkan and İlhan Selçuk. The series includes some other comments that were sent to the newspaper on these series as well.

<sup>35</sup> "Alevi citizens decide on voting for a party depending on the circumstances within which they are personally in, and there is no decision mechanism that binds all the Alevi collectivity. However, it seems that the feeling of being a minority that has lived under pressure lead to the politicization of Alevis in an intense way. The values and attitudes, which might be defined as 'Alevi culture,' seem to have affected which party that they would vote for. That is to say, each Alevi individual chooses among the political parties by considering their propaganda, approaching politics as a member of a social category such as being workers, villagers, or tradesmen, but at the same time keeping his/her Alevi identity. In this way, in the determination of the political choices of the Alevi collectivity, two different yet overlapping motives operate." (Şaylan in Kaleli, 1997, p. 96)

‘political’ entity: “We can see that in the period after 1980, the Alevi society in Turkey has moved into a more intense and organized politicization around Alevi identity” (Şaylan in Kaleli, 1997, p. 98). On the other hand, he still emphasizes that Alevilik is primarily a ‘sect’ of Islam which is peculiar to Anatolia, hence associating ‘religion’ with ‘culture’ as a separate sphere from ‘politics’.<sup>36</sup> The coexistence of the notions of ‘sect’ and ‘identity’ in one book (and even in one article) means that the post-1980 discourse on Alevilik does not exclude mezhep but makes it a part of the discussions within ‘identity’ politics so that ‘Alevilik’ is no longer defined solely as a mezhep.

Secondly, and related to this first point on the dynamics through which ‘knowing’ becomes something that the discourse of Alevilik urge people to do, the knowledge produced involves the formation of a new elite (*araştırmacı-yazar*, or researcher-writer, as Şahin 2001 also notes) that is different from the ‘traditional’ knowledge holders, namely *dedes*. I argue that the style of this new elite contributed to the reification of the differentiation between ‘culture’, ‘religion’ and ‘politics’, for in their discussions of what Alevilik is about, these writers work with the dualities of culture / religion, culture / politics, or religion / politics. Many authors conceptualize the knowledge produced by these elites as the result of ‘scripturalization’ (Vorhoff, 2003; Olsson, 2003) that also involves ‘desecretization’ (Şahin 2001) or the unraveling of the ‘secrecy’ of Alevilik. However, Olsson (2003) refines the use of the term ‘scripturalization’ by claiming that the scripturalization of the oral tradition of

---

<sup>36</sup> “We can say that *Alevilik* is essentially a sect of Islam that belongs to Anatolia.” (Şaylan in Kaleli, 1997, p. 102)



Alevis dates back to the sixteenth century, like the Turkish *Buyruk* catechisms that belong to that period.<sup>37</sup>

While Olsson differentiates between catechisms and recent publications, he nevertheless prefers to use the term scripturalization, as Vorhoff also does. Both authors recognize that by ‘scripturalization’ they do not refer to a simple process of writing down ‘the tradition’. For instance, Vorhoff contends that the recent publications on Alevilik, the examples of which I quote in this chapter, “affect the constitution and perception of social reality itself” (2003, p. 31), by which she refers to the fact that the popular writings, compared to the academic ones, are the outcomes of a political turn in the history of Alevis. Considering recent publications, Olsson makes a different point. He qualifies these writings as an example of “emic historiography of religion”.<sup>38</sup> Hence, Olsson treats these publications primarily as ‘religious’ productions that represent the popular understandings of Alevis and see these writings as an effort to keep up ‘Alevi identity’ (2003, p. 204).

While it is insightful to see these publications as ‘productions’ and not solely the key to understand ‘Alevi religion,’ with reference to Talal Asad’s (1993) argument in *Genealogies of Religion*, I suggest going one step further and propose to look at the power involved in naming of these writings as ‘religious’ in the first place. For Asad argues that:

---

<sup>37</sup> “On the whole, these early forms of scripturalization among the Turkish Alevi and the Syrian Nusairi did not essentially change the predominantly oral character of religious transmission, since the catechisms were still in the hands of the *dedes* and sheikhs and the manuscripts were used by them only in the situations of strictly personal instruction.” (Olsson, 2003, p. 201)

<sup>38</sup> “Typical of a description belonging to this genre is that it constitutes itself a part of the religion it claims to describe, and the content of the description is itself a part of the belief ... The main part of the Alevi scriptures on religion belongs to this genre of literature, and should be dealt with accordingly by historians and social scientists, that is, as written articulations of Alevi religion which make use of the formal features of scholarly genre and terminology. In spite of their at times scientific style, the Alevi writings of religion lack the empirically based and theoretically founded comparative dimension and are in this respect fundamentally different from academic works in comparative religion” (Olsson, 2003, p. 204).

The argument that a particular disposition is religious partly because it occupies a conceptual place within a cosmic framework appears plausible, but only because it presupposes a question that must be made explicit: how do authorizing processes represent practices, utterances, or dispositions so that they can be discursively related to general (cosmic) ideas of order? In short, the question pertains to the authorizing processes by which 'religion' is created. (Asad, 1993, p. 36)

Asad's argument above is based on his more comprehensive study of the construction of religion as an anthropological category. For Asad, the category of religion itself is "the historical product of discursive processes" (Asad, 1993, p. 29), or more specifically, he argues that the authorizing processes involved in this definition depend on a specifically modern Western notion of the separation of power from religion.<sup>39</sup> Having Asad's argument on the category of religion in mind, what I would like to argue here is that the discourses on Alevilik since the late 1980s, by defining Alevilik as a 'belief system' (or a 'religious system', and even refraining from calling it 'religious' by calling it as 'culture' or a 'political stance') are all directed towards separating what is 'religious' in Alevilik from what is 'political'.

#### A Symbol for Differentiation: *'Woman in Alevilik'*

In different definitions of Alevilik, which are aimed towards portraying the ('religious') essence of Alevilik, we can see a more or less similar depiction of

---

<sup>39</sup> The idea of Natural Religion which is said to exist in all societies, such as the belief in a supreme power, practices/worshipping, and ethics based on a belief in the afterlife, was in fact a specific response to the fragmentation of the Roman church and the wars of religion in the seventeenth century (Asad, 1993, p. 40). Through the idea of Natural Religion, or more concretely the idea that every society has some form of a 'religion', a category called 'religion' is constructed. In this way, Talal Asad shows that 'religion' is a taken-for-granted idea in anthropology, and is a 'modern' construction based on a differentiation between 'the sacred' and 'the profane' as distinct categories (Asad, 2003, p. 35).

‘woman’ although each is built on a different idea of what an ‘Alevi community’ looks like. As we saw in the beginning of the chapter, referring to ‘woman’, first of all, is a way of differentiating Alevis from Sunnis. In the debates on Alevilik, we see various discussions which usually use ‘woman in Alevilik’ as a heading, through which the talk about ‘woman’ becomes a strong and reliable resource against what is perceived to be the Sunni *şekilcilik* (formalism). We can observe this approach in the statements of several writers and Alevists. For instance, İsmet Zeki Eyüboğlu (1997) thinks that there is an unbridgeable gap between Alevis and ‘those who have an opposite point of view’ in terms of the way in which they live, for ‘Alevis’ value ‘human’ and ‘woman’ differently than others (Sunnis).<sup>40</sup> In a similar sense, in a book by Tanıttıran and İşeri (2006), we see some of the key figures of the movement such as Kazım Genç and Murtaza Demir from *Pir Sultan Abdal Kültür Derneği* (PSAKD)<sup>41</sup>, Atilla Erden and Selahattin Özel from Alevi Bektashi Unions Federation (ABF), and other authors like Cemal Şener and Erdoğan Aydın referring to the difference of Alevis from Sunnis on the basis of the ‘woman’s position’.

Before elaborating more on this point, I would like to focus on a second aspect of woman as a symbol. I argue that, in addition to maintaining a boundary between

---

<sup>40</sup> “We know that there is an unbridgeable gap between the way of life that Alevi citizens adopt and the ones that have the opposite belief. This gap is related to the way in which the human is valued. ... Woman has societal worth, she is active, she participates in social life together with man. ... But the Sunni perspective is not like that, it puts woman a few steps away from man.” (Eyüboğlu, 1997, pp. 35-36)

<sup>41</sup> As noted by Şehriban Şahin: “Until 1989, the PSAKD was the Banaz Village Association, which was founded in the mid-sixties. It was open only to the persons originally from this village. Banaz was the village of Pir Sultan Abdal, a 16th century Kızılbaş rebel and one of the seven great Alevi poets. In 1991, this village association changed to the PSAKD and opened itself to “democratic secular and modern” people, of course mainly Alevis. The PSAKD, whose headquarter is in Ankara, has 35 branches (the majority of them are located in İstanbul, Ankara, and İzmir) and approximately 70,000 registered members. The PSAKD has taken a central role in the Alevi movement since the 1993 Sivas incident. The hotel that was set on fire by the fundamentalists was hosting the guests of Pir Sultan Abdal Festival organized by the PSAKD, whose young members constituted the majority of victims died in the fire. After this incident its branches and members sharply increased.” (Şahin, 2001, p. 107)

Alevis and Sunnis, referring to ‘woman’ is a way of distinguishing each group’s claims to a homogeneous Alevilik from the other Alevist individuals or groups with different perceptions of Alevilik. When the wide range of books on Alevilik is considered, I decided to talk about some authors who represent some of the main perspectives on Alevilik, so the following should not be considered as an exhaustive analysis which covers all different perspectives on Alevilik and ‘woman’.

For İzzettin Doğan, the head and the founder of the Cem Foundation<sup>42</sup>, ‘woman’ is an *example*, the *example* of how Islam was interpreted and nourished by *Turks*.<sup>43</sup> Doğan articulates what he would like to demonstrate as the Turkish-Islamic roots of Alevilik by arguing that Turks had interpreted the sayings of Koran more correctly than the Arabs. The differentiation of Turkish and Arab traditions in terms of the position of women is associated with the idea that Alevilik preserved the ‘Turkish traditions’ whereas the ‘Arab traditions’ are associated with *Sünnilik* and hence, with backwardness. However, his stance should not be confused with those perspectives

---

<sup>42</sup> Cem is the abbreviation for *Cumhuriyetçi Eğitim ve Kültür Vakfı* (Republican Education and Culture Foundation). But it also reminds of the ritual of *cem*. The leader of foundation is İzzettin Doğan, who defines *Alevilik* as the essence of Islam, and prefers to use the term Alevi-Islam.

<sup>43</sup> “Especially after 100 years have passed from the coming of the Koran, the tribes in Transoxiana accepted it, accepted to be Islam, again with reference to what I argued before, understood and interpreted the message of God; I mean, it was inevitable that they perceived it within the boundaries of what constitutes their mental structure, within the framework of what constitutes the custom, tradition, and conventions, and that was what happened. ... Because, although Mohammed was the prophet, the chances was not high that the people of the Arabian peninsula would perceive it without delimiting themselves to their traditions and understand the messages of God as of expected them to do. ... We can give woman as an example. Islam would not have a chance to exist in a place where women were considered as nothing, not even a commodity, if it argued for monogamy or that women should be equally worthy as men. It could only have a chance of survival if it found an approach that the people could easily accept. And this is how it happened. It was a revolution in those days when Islam restricted the number of wives that a man could have to four in Arab tribes. ... It was a revolution, but is it the true message of the Koran with respect to women? Or do the people in Transoxiana, who are hundreds of kilometers away from the Arabian Peninsula perceive of this message more correctly? I think so; the message is understood more correctly. ... Because there, woman is a *hatun*. There exists a *hakan*, but *hatun* is also beside him. She is not like a useless piece of cloth. The sayings on woman in Kuran are interpreted there differently, different from its interpretation in the Arabian Peninsula. And this is where we see *Alevilik*.” (Doğan in Aydın, 2000, pp. 45-46)

who emphasize the Turkish roots of Alevilik by denying its relation to Islam. For Doğan, Alevilik is the Turkish (and true) interpretation of Islam.

Rıza Zelyut<sup>44</sup>, on the other hand, does not so much insist on the ‘Turkish’ roots. He discusses the Islamic roots of Alevilik in his book that was published in 1990. While doing this, he adopts a more embracing notion than Doğan, for he does not restrict Alevilik to an interpretation of Turks, but approaches it within the larger framework of Islamic history. For Zelyut, Alevilik is a ‘political’ choice of following Ali which was expressed in ‘religious’ terms. When Zelyut explains ‘woman’s place’ (1990: 59-62), we can see that his understanding of Alevilik is based on continuing the practices and life stories of the following figures of Islam: Muhammed, Ali, and İmam Cafer-i Sadık (one of the Twelve Imams); as well as to the key saints in accepted by ‘Alevi’ in Anatolia: Hacı Bektaş Veli and Pir Sultan Abdal.<sup>45</sup>

Nejat Birdoğan, on the other hand, defines Alevilik as a belief of its own, a genuine belief (independent belief), by which he argues that the history of Alevilik is older than the history of Islam. For Birdoğan, Alevilik is a specifically Anatolian belief, the product of the interaction between the beliefs of the Turk and Kurds who migrated there. In this sense, for Birdoğan, Alevilik cannot even be called ‘heterodoxy’, for heterodoxy is used to define a belief which deviates from an original form of religion, i.e. Islam (Birdoğan, 1995). He goes on to argue that Alevilik existed long before Islam, and has rituals that come from Shamanism and Zoroastrianism that Islam would never approve of. In relation to these points, Birdoğan argues that

---

<sup>44</sup> A writer who worked for the writing and publication of *Alevilik Bildirgesi* in 1989.

<sup>45</sup> “In Alevi thought, what is said about human is also valid for woman. Alevi woman, who works side by side with man, is beside man even in wartime. ... In the household, she might even have more saying than man ... If you abstract woman from *Alevilik*, you see that there is nothing left of religious-ritual, cultural and artistic aspects. If you take the element of woman out of the *Alevilik* philosophy and practice, you see that this system collapses. This situation clearly shows that woman constitutes the foundation of the phenomenon of *Alevilik*.” (Zelyut, 1990, pp. 59-60)

“woman’s participation in ‘social life’” is one of the points that contradict with Islam.<sup>46</sup> Hence, while the symbol of ‘woman’ for Doğan and Zelyut is the sign of Alevilik as an Islamic thought, for Birdoğan, ‘woman’ becomes the symbol of the ‘non-Islamic’ character of Alevilik. We can add these examples the article of Ali Haydar Cilasun, who sees the initial stages of Alevilik as a primitive communal society, and asserts that ‘Alevi Kurdish woman’ is a free and strong individual.<sup>47</sup>

As can be seen in the arguments mentioned above, ‘woman’ and ‘the position of woman’ first of all becomes a legitimizing tool for each author’s effort to define Alevilik, from which we can also understand the position of each activist’s stance pertaining to the identity assumed by the statist elites of the post-1980 period: a ‘Turkish’ and (Sunni) ‘Muslim’ citizen who would not be a threat to the integrity of the state, and who would not be a ‘separatist’. For instance, Doğan seems ready to embrace this identity by claiming that Alevilik is the real Turkish interpretation of Islam, while Birdoğan and Cilasun seems more critical of this discourse.

Secondly, ‘woman’ is a widely shared symbol which explains the practice of having both men and women in ritual contexts. The significance of the symbol ‘woman’ indeed lies in its embeddedness in Sunni accusations which primarily target

---

<sup>46</sup> “This situation did not change in the Turkish clans who accepted Islam. Women participated even in ceremonies and assemblies among the Mongols. In the times of Timor, they were present in states’ banquets where alcoholic beverages were served as well. These women held feasts for statesmen, where they drunk the wine served in gold and silver plates by holding the glasses with their silk handkerchiefs. As Islamic and foreign scholars mention them with great respect, they always protected their honor and pride. Their participation in social life, which is against Islamic belief, is praised by Iranian poets as well.” (Birdoğan, 2003, p. 395)

<sup>47</sup> “Women’s liberation is certainly the biggest problem of our era. Women’s exploitation goes on since the first time humans came across materials and production tools. ... In the passage from feudalism to bourgeoisie, woman is again looked down on. As I saw it when I was a child, and as my grandmother told me, Alevi Kurdish woman is not captivated with chains as such. If there is some, it is only a little proportion. My mother lived for one hundred forty two years, and I can say that she was one of the people who lived longest in the world. She used to take her husbands by wrestling with them; I say she ‘took’ them, as she had nine husbands. When one of them died, she wrestled with those men who wanted to marry him. And she married the one who could beat her.” (Cilasun, 1995, pp. 43-44)

the ritual of *cem*. Expressed with the words ‘*mum söndü yaparlar*’ (they practice candle went out’), these accusations refer to the three candles that are lit at the beginning of a *cem* ritual that represent God, Muhammed, and Ali, and which are then extinguished. With reference to the extinguishing of these candles and the presence of both men and women in the ritual, Sunnis accuse Alevis of having orgy during *cem* after the candles are extinguished, with a strong possibility of incest as it is argued that in the dark no one knows who is sleeping with whom. Therefore sometimes the expression ‘*ana bacı tanımazlar*’ (‘they do not recognize mother or sister’) is also used to target this ritual. As the people outside of the community are not let in, this conviction is all the more strengthened.

Here, we can see that the target of Sunni accusations is the presence of both men and women during a ritual, whereas in the mosques of Sunnis, women pray in a separate place. The explanations of Alevis for the presence of both men and women in ritual and other settings should be thought in the light of these accusations. To develop this idea further, I would like to refer to Lütü Kaleli’s article called ‘*Hülle, Mum Söndü ve Gerçekler*’ (Kaleli, 1997).

Kaleli (1997) interprets *hülle* as a practice which requires that if a man divorces his wife and then wants to remarry her, his wife should marry another man and then get divorced to remarry her first husband. This practice that Alevis associate with Sunnis is one of the ways of responding to Sunni accusations to Alevis. Kaleli starts the article by recounting two events concerning *hülle*. In both events that Kaleli talks about, men accidentally utter the words necessary for divorce, and want to remarry their wives. However, for this to happen, women should marry other men first, and then get divorced, to remarry their first husband. Kaleli argues that this practice is unacceptable: “A man who has *nefs* (essential value) can not let his ‘wife’,

‘his children’s mother’ sleep with another man” (1990, 14). By saying this, he implicitly refers to the difficulty of divorce in Alevilik. Hence, we can conclude from this account that what Kaleli wants to emphasize here is that Alevis – or actually Alevi men – are more careful about the issues with regards to sexuality and honor.

Then Kaleli moves on to the issue of ‘*mum söndü*’. Kaleli objects to *mum söndü* by arguing that secret gatherings like the *cem* dates back to the times of Muhammed, and he asserts that no Muslim can claim that Muhammed ever committed incest.<sup>48</sup> However, he feels sad that these kinds of accusations targeting Alevis continue even today, and refers to two news articles, one from the newspaper *Milliyet* and one from the newspaper *Hürriyet*. In the news, two teachers are reported to say insulting things about ‘Alevis’ in their classrooms.<sup>49</sup>

The mentioning of *hülle*, *mum söndü* and what some Sunni teachers are reported to say in newspapers are striking here in Kaleli’s article. In this article, we clearly see that the symbol ‘woman’ and associated arguments about ‘woman’s place is directly linked to the insult of ‘*mum söndü*’ and its way of defaming the presence of both men and women in worshipping. Here once again we can refer to Alf Lüdtke’s (1995) argument about the appealing of symbols to individual senses and linking these senses to powerful phenomena. I argue that the discussions over ‘woman’ and

---

<sup>48</sup> “The origins of this event date back to the secret worships that Muhammed and his followers practiced: In the initial years of Islam, it was not easy to find followers and have a bigger group. Men who were influential in the cities, like Ebu Cehil, Ebu Leheb and Ebu Süfyan were the primary enemies of Muhammed. ... Those who could not stand Muhammed and those idolaters who did not accept Islam would not let those who believed to live. ... In such a repressive environment, in the city and outside the city, especially in the mount of Hira, the meetings, that were held with the participation of women like Hatice and Fatima, was targeted by unbelievers. The worships that were held in secret by Muhammed and followers to be protected from the wrath of the unbelievers, like discussions, were accused by unbelievers with sayings like ‘ana-bacı tanımazlar’ (they do not recognize mother or sister.” (Kaleli, 1997, p. 14)

<sup>49</sup> - “It is adulterous for a man and a woman to shake hands. The girls in the West first sleep with their fathers, as in Kızılbas (Alevis).” (*Milliyet*, April, 24 1989, quoted in Kaleli, 1997)  
- “Half of the women in Istanbul are prostitutes. Seventy percent of Alevi girls are not virgins, for they [Alevis] do not have a family life.” (*Hürriyet*, September, 8 1989, quoted in Kaleli, 1997)



‘woman’s place in Alevilik is where the symbol ‘woman’ appeals to individual feelings, for this is where the discourse of Alevilik reminds individuals of their personal values, by implying that no man can accept that his wife has sexual intercourse with another man and by implying that the gossip against Alevis with regards to sexuality are the concern of all individual Alevis.

These authors’ use of ‘woman’ as a symbol can be considered in the light of what Anthias and Yuval-Davis’ (1993) argues to be the use of women as an ethnic resource in the marking of the boundaries of ethnic groups. For Anthias and Yuval-Davis:

The boundary of the ethnic group is often dependent on gender and there is a reliance on gender attributes for specifying ethnic identity; much of ethnic culture is organized around rules relating to sexuality, marriage and the family, and a true member will perform these roles properly. Communal boundaries often use differences in the way women are socially constructed as markers. Such markers (for example, expectations about honor, purity, the mothering of patriots, reproducers of the nation, and transmitters of ethnic culture) often symbolize the use of women as an ethnic resource. (Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1993, pp. 113-114)

Although helpful in terms of understanding the role of ‘woman’ as a symbol with its ‘function’ of maintaining boundaries, Anthias and Yuval-Davis’ approach does not offer us a way of understanding the peculiarity of how women experience the difference between the groups. By using the framework that Anthias and Yuval-Davis offer, we cannot answer the question whether women have their own ways of negotiating difference which may be other than those sanctioned by the discourse that works to underline the boundaries between the two groups. Indeed, as Nükhet Sirman (2002) argues, while this kind of approach demonstrates that nationalism as a discourse is based on gender relations, it remains short of accounting for its everyday

manifestations. Sirman (2002) argues that such an approach sees the identity constructed by the nationalist-modernist projects as a static entity, disregards the changes in the discursive realm as well as in the everyday, and does not look at how these identities constructed by the nationalisms are taken on by individuals.

In this sense, when we approach Alevilik as a discourse of identity, the main limitation of the works of those scholars who focus on Alevilik and women lies not in their disregard of the fact that ‘woman’ is a point of differentiation between Alevis and Sunnis, but in their inability to look at the subjective processes involved in women’s experiences of ‘being Alevi’, especially in everyday encounters. For instance, Erdemir’s study of Alevi cosmology incorporates the well-known resources of Alevilik and the accounts of the people in the Alevi movement, in shrine complexes, and in associations that helps him depict an extended picture of how certain statements as uttered by people are part of a common-sense that might contribute to the support that the Alevi movement has. On the other hand, Erdemir asserts that there is a contradiction between Alevi ideology and reality, and that men outnumber women in the Alevi movement. He also adds that although it is difficult to talk about ‘equality’, Alevi women are in a better position than their Sunni counterparts. His examples lead us to ask the following questions: Does the scarcity of women in the movement diminish the effectivity of the ‘equality of sexes’ discourse that already *works* to differentiate Alevis from Sunnis to contribute to a common feeling of identity? Or might it not be the very example of the effectivity of that common-sense that makes possible for those Alevi women that Erdemir interviewed to argue that they are in a ‘better’ position? The examples that Erdemir gives do not refute the effectivity of the discourse of Alevilik on gender, neither do they explain its power.

In a similar way, Şahin discusses the role of women in the Alevi movement as one of “existence in discourse versus absence in practice” (Şahin, 2001: 226). Karin Vorhoff (1997) also puts forward the role of ‘woman’ in the expression of the ‘Alevi identity’ vis-à-vis ‘Sunnis’ in Turkey. Indeed, she envisages that the way in which Alevi women are depicted in Alevi writers’ accounts corresponds to the ideals of Kemalist reforms and in this sense can be thought within the tension between secularists and Islamists. Vorhoff also argues that within the discourses that are produced and reproduced by Alevi intellectuals, Alevi women’s position in Alevi community is romanticized so as to depict Sunni women’s position as inferior. She goes on to claim that in ‘real life’, the supposed equality is not really established (Vorhoff, 1997).

The weak point of Vorhoff’s (1997) approach is the fact that she does not treat ‘woman’ as a symbol, but looks for a correspondence between ‘discourse’ and ‘practice’ when women are concerned. With ‘practice’, she refers to the current situation of women, and her use of the terms is not associated with Foucault’s (1991) conceptualization of practice that I explain below. Erdemir (2004) and Şahin<sup>50</sup> (2001), like Vorhoff, take what Alevists say with reference to the symbol of ‘woman’ (that in Alevilik men and women are ‘equal’) as something to be measured in ‘real life’ as well. This kind of approach, however, limits our understanding of the way in which ‘woman’ as a symbol works. For instance, whereas in more popular versions of the statement we usually see that it is articulated as *‘Alevilik’te kadın erkek bir aradadır* (in Alevilik men and women are together) and *‘Alevilik’te kadın erkek ayrımı yoktur* (In Alevilik there is no separation between men and women), when Erdemir (2004, p.

---

<sup>50</sup> “The actual role of women in Alevi movement contradicts the representation of women in the discourse of Alevism. ... Without exception, all Alevi writers and association leaders are men. Public Alevi figures appearing on media as spokesperson of Alevi are all men. The idealization of Alevi women as ‘free’ and ‘equal’ in discourse is not reflected in practice.” (Şahin, 2001, p. 227)

101) translates the Turkish word *ayrim* into English as ‘discrimination’, we might argue that he falls into the discourse of equality. However, *ayrim* has a second meaning that comes from *ayirmak*, to separate, which may alternatively be referring to the lack of strict sex-segregation. Indeed, we might argue that it is through this double meaning of the word *ayrim* that the equality of sexes argument can be based on the rituals like *cem* where men and women pray together. Hence, ‘woman in Alevilik’ as a symbol is meaningful mostly in the context of the relations *between* ‘Alevis’ and ‘Sunnis’ and it would be too much to expect that it should correspond to a ‘reality’ *among* ‘Alevis’.

David Shankland, on the other hand, does not look at the way in which the arguments over ‘woman’ within the identity politics of the post-1980 period.<sup>51</sup> However, he tries to come up with an explanation of the differences between Alevi and Sunni gender conceptions by basing his argument on a comparison between village and city settings, which almost only relies on a perception of ‘typical Alevi men and women’ that treats Alevis as if they constitute a homogeneous whole and that does not lend for differences in behavior among individuals. For Shankland:

First, Alevi men lack the codified, explicit discrimination against women build into Sunni Islam: they move into the city with a host of informal controls on women’s behavior but without such a codified conception of their superiority. Second, because Alevi men accept the principle of the Republican state, women are freer to exploit its laws and practical assertions of their equality such as access to higher education and independent careers than their Sunni counterparts. Thirdly: the religious edict that women should

---

<sup>51</sup> “Alevi religious ideology, distant from mainstream religion, is much less insistent on the subordinate place of women. Alevi men are aware of this, and even may declare that women in their society are better off in general, and not just from the point of view of religion, than their Sunni counterparts. The issue is particularly sensitive in Turkey today. Any discussion comparing the Alevi and Sunni can hardly take place without religious questions coming to the fore, and, as religion is raised, the place of women in their societies comes soon after. Indeed, one of the most frequent insults by Sunni who wish to offend Alevi is to mention the supposed immoral activities which take place in their societies.” (Shankland, 1996, p. 84)

share life with men, and be free to express themselves freely, because it is also embraced by Kemalism becomes consistent with the philosophy with which Alevi men would like to enter the modern world. That is, though they may feel internal conflicts and contradictions, men themselves accept as art of their own personalities the idea that women are equal to men because to do so also acquaints with their conception of themselves as citizens of the Republic: the positive affirmation of the living philosophy with which they identify themselves with the Republican ideas. It is in this way then that a religious edict, in its traditional setting no great help for women, becomes in its post-industrial setting a significant factor in their favor in their relationship between the sexes. Women still live in a world largely created by men, but it is one which permits them to be freer than their Sunni counterparts when taking their place within it. (Shankland, 1996, pp. 92-93)

As can be seen in this account, Shankland also does not open a space to account for women's experiences of 'being Alevi'. What I would like to draw attention to here is that the representation of gender goes on on several occasions, like in everyday settings, in discussions on Alevilik, in the media, and no less than these, in academic works as well. Teresa de Lauretis argues that:

The construction of gender is also effected by its deconstruction; that is to say, by any discourse, feminist or otherwise, that would discard it as ideological misrepresentation. For gender, like the real, is not only the effect of representation but also its excess, what remains outside discourse as a potential trauma which can rupture or destabilize, if not contained, any representation. (de Lauretis, 1987, p. 3)

In talking about 'Alevi men' and 'Alevi women,' academic works rely on some categorizations, and hence, they also contribute to the reification of gender perceptions by disregarding the formation of subjectivities and thinking with conceptualizations which are at the same time the building blocks of the discursive formation that constructs Alevilik as a particular identity.

What I will try to outline in the following chapters will be the constitution of an Alevi female subjectivity. The question is how women *experience* 'being Alevis', or rather, how their subjectivity is constructed through their citing and practicing of 'differences' between 'Alevis' and 'Sunnis', and 'commonalities' among 'Alevis'. In the focus on practices, I follow Michel Foucault's aim,

... of grasping the conditions which make [practices] acceptable at a given moment; the hypothesis being that these types of practice are not just governed by institutions, prescribed by ideologies, guided by pragmatic circumstances – whatever role these elements may actually play – but possess up to a point their own specific regularities, logic, strategy, self evidence and 'reason'. It is a question of analyzing a 'regime of practices' – practices being understood here as places where what is said and what is done, rules imposed and reasons given, the planned and the taken for granted meet and interconnect. (Foucault, 1991, p. 75)

## CHAPTER 3

### THE DIFFERENCE THAT DOES (NOT) MATTER

*At table, the women were talking about a TV series, called Seher Vakti. In the series, there were two families, one Alevi family and one Sunni family in Tarsus. The fathers in these families were in business together, yet they did not let their children marry each other. Consequently, the daughter of the Sunni man and the son of the Alevi man had to marry different persons, yet after twenty or twenty five years, their children fell in love as well. Besides the love story, there was also the story of an ancient mosaic panel that the two grandfathers smuggled, and which the Sunni grandfather kept in a secret place, only to be found later by his granddaughter. Before he died, the Alevi grandfather also asked his grandson to find the mosaic. The granddaughter of the Sunni man and the grandson of the Alevi man found themselves in a position where they had to find their way under the shadow of the heritage of their grandfathers and their parents' constant warnings about the 'cruelty of the place (Tarsus)' (read: the tragic outcomes of the Alevi/Sunni divide). In the series, the Alevi/Sunni divide was never uttered, but the symbols of the two sects were employed so that the spectator would definitely know that the enmity between the two families was based on this sectarian divide. The two young individuals found the enmity between the two families unreasonable, but we don't know exactly why they found it unreasonable. As spectators, we feel that the reason was that they found this enmity as something 'traditional'. Educated abroad in arts, they were much more interested in the artistic and historical value of the mosaic, while their grandfathers were mostly interested in the mosaic's exchange value.*

*More interesting are the comments that this series generated in our visit to Destan hanım's house. Destan hanım said: 'There is nothing like this anymore, who wouldn't let such a marriage (between Alevis and Sunnis) happen?' Her sister teased her: 'Because of you (the family), my husband had to come to our house three times to get your permission to marry me! And now you say these differences do not matter!' Apparently, her husband was a Sunni, and her family rejected the marriage at first. Nergis hanım*

*intervened: “Don’t talk about these things in front of Berna.” –  
And this is how they changed the subject...<sup>52</sup>*

The subject-position of being Alevi requires that the individual manifests that he/she is Alevi, or at least the individual recognizes the ‘problems’ of Alevis (that the discourse of Alevilik make visible) as ‘his/her problems’. The basis for such a claim depends on the experience of injustice that stem from the everyday encounters between Alevis and Sunnis, which gain a distinct meaning in the world of women through the arguments over ‘cleanliness’ and *namus* (honor) which is different from men’s experience of ‘being Alevi’ (vis-à-vis ‘Sunnis’) to a great extent. Men often resort to formal accounts of Alevilik when they encounter a *yabancı* (literally ‘foreigner’, *yabancı* is a word which is used by Alevis to refer to the non-Alevi). Therefore, in this chapter, I would like to elaborate on women’s experience of ‘being Alevi’ in their everyday encounters with Sunni women, and how they cite and practice difference between Alevis and Sunnis.

Difference, is argued by William E. Connolly, to be constitutive of every claim to identity:

An identity is established in relation to a series of differences that have become socially recognized. These differences are essential to its being. If they did not coexist as differences, it would not exist in its distinctness and solidity. ... Identity requires difference in order to be, and it converts difference into otherness in order to secure its own self-certainty. (Connolly, 2002, p. 64)<sup>53</sup>

---

<sup>52</sup> Excerpt from my field notes in a visit to Destan hanım’s house in a district near A, January 2005.

<sup>53</sup> The interesting point that Connolly makes is his conceptualization of Columbus’ ‘discovery,’ or ‘rediscovery’, as ‘the discovery of an enigma’. The enigma of ‘otherness’, or the formation of ‘otherness’ as something to be recognized yet something that resists explanation, constitutes for Connolly ‘a world-historical moment in the history of western intertextuality’ (2002: 38). By intertextuality, Connolly refers to an intertext between what is defined as ‘the old world’ and ‘the new’, and talks about the grasp of the new world as a strange text that can only be read with reference to earlier texts.



In the cases of Alevi and Sunni identities, we also see a mutual process of naming differences. ‘Sunni accusations’ leveled against Alevis constitute one side of this process, through which Sunnis associate Alevis with moral inferiority. The accusations targeting Alevis that are usually expressed using certain tropes, such as “*mum söndü yaparlar*” (they practice ‘the candle went out’) or “*ana bacı tanımazlar*” (they do not recognize mother or sister), serve to portray Alevis as sexually corrupt by accusing them of promiscuity and incest with reference to the ritual of *cem*, where men and women pray together (which is different from mosques where women pray in a separate place). “*Gusül abdesti almazlar*” (they do not perform the ritual ablution) is another way of portraying Alevis as impure, arguing that they are dirty for they do not perform bodily ablution following sexual intercourse.<sup>54</sup> Around these central accusations, other side arguments follow. For instance, it is recommended that the food that Alevis cook or the animals that Alevis slaughter should not be eaten (“*Aleviler’in kestiği yenmez*”), for they are perceived to be dirty. Erdemir (2004) sees these accusations as a Sunni concern with maintaining the boundaries of the Sunni orthodoxy, and in this sense is close to Connolly’s argument that difference is turned into otherness in order to secure an identity.<sup>55</sup> “to establish security of identity for any individual or group by defining the other that exposes sore spots in one’s identity as evil or irrational” (Connolly, 2002, p. 8).

---

<sup>54</sup> See Erdemir (2004) for a detailed survey of the portrayal of Alevis in Sunni cosmology.

<sup>55</sup> “The Sunni discourses about the Alevis were different ways of defining, legitimizing, and moralizing Sunni orthodoxy and orthopraxy. The paradox of reconciling a moral system based on strict gender segregation in a society where men and women have not been strictly segregated troubled many Sunnis. One of the ways of dealing with this problem was to constitute the Sunni community as virtuous and righteous by defining the Alevi other as sexually deviant. The omnipresent discourse about the alleged promiscuity of the Alevis as a way of constituting the Sunni community as the standard of modesty, honor, and purity.” (Erdemir, 2004, p. 98)

Alevis, on the other hand, identify ‘Sunnis’ as *yobaz* (bigot) or *cahil* (ignorant). However, we see that it is not a straightforward perception of Sunnis as *yobaz* (bigot) or *cahil* (ignorant) that constructs ‘Alevi identity’ as such. Rather, it is with reference to ‘accusations’ leveled at Alevis by Sunnis that a category of ‘Sunni’ as the other who is *yobaz* or *cahil* is constructed, where Alevis see themselves as the respondents and not the originators of prejudices. The significance of ‘woman’ as a symbol should also be considered of in this context, for the importance attributed to ‘woman’ is a way of legitimizing ‘togetherness of men and women’, which is the target of Sunni accusations.

It is by referring to the accusations and ‘woman’ as a symbol that a formal narrative appears which enables people to position themselves as ‘Alevis’ vis-à-vis ‘Sunnis’ in a clear, and sometimes, implicit way. This is a widely shared medium that both men and women use in their identifications as ‘Alevis’. For instance, when I went for an interview with Suna hanım in May, 2005 her husband was also in the house. When he learned that I was interested in Alevilik and ‘women’s lives’, he quickly told me the following:

[Alevis] have practiced the cultures they inherited from Shamanism and continue to practice them today. For instance, you do not step on the doorstep when it gets dark or you do not step on a broom. During visits, you tie clothes to the trees, you make wishes. Or you revere the rise of the sun in the mornings. These are Shaman culture. To play the javelin on horses in weddings, the equality of woman with man, her equality in terms of having a saying and having rights in assemblies. The value accorded to woman, this is also Shaman culture.<sup>56</sup>

---

<sup>56</sup> From an interview with Suna hanım’s husband, May 2005. “Şamanizm’den aldıkları kültürlerin çoğunu halen uygulamışlar, ve uygulamaya da bugün devam ediyorlar. İşte akşam karanlık bastıktan sonra eşige basılmaz, süpürgeye basılmaz. İşte ziyaretlerde ağaçlara çaput bağlanır. Dilek dilenir. Buna benzer daha, işte sabah güneş doğarken güneşe karşı saygı duruşunda bulunulur. Bunlar şaman kültürüdür. İşte atla cirit oynamak düğünlerde, işte kadının erkekle eşit oluşu, hak hukuk söz bakımından, meclislerde eşit oluşu. Kadına değer verilşi, bu da şaman kültürüdür.”

This kind of narrative that describes Alevilik is especially used when an ‘Alevi’ encounters a non-Alevi which s/he considers a non-*yobaz* ‘Sunni’. The fact that I was interested in Alevilik, had Alevi friends, and had friendly relations with women of the village put me in the category of non-*yobaz* Sunni as well. Not wearing a headscarf also contributed to this position, though sometimes men and women alike would check my position by asking me whether or not I was disturbed by what they said about Sunnis.

On the other hand, during the visits to women’s houses and interviews, what I figured out was that, in addition to the formal structure within which the men whom I talked to would formulate Alevilik by referring to ‘woman’, women would share with me some incidents in the course of which they had to ‘defend’ themselves as Alevis. This does not necessarily mean that men do not have such encounters where they have to defend ‘themselves’ and their *namus* (honor). But unlike men’s and women’s common ways for dealing with encounters and confrontations, in their encounters with Sunni women, Alevi women have the burden of proving that they are *clean* in terms of the food they cook, the cleanliness of their body (including the ways in which they wear clothes), and the cleanliness of their way of worshipping. Here, my argument is that women experience *difference* (of Alevilik from *Sünnilik*) through the constant questioning and negotiation of their morality and bodily practices, though they share some common references (symbols) with men and the discourse of Alevilik through which they make sense of their experience.

Furthermore, I argue that Lüdtké’s (1995) argument that symbols link individual ideas and feelings and that they make powerful phenomena come alive might be a useful way to think of ‘woman’ (in singular) and associated symbols that

make Alevilik (as it is formulated since late the 1980s) come alive as well. For Lüdtké, it is through these symbols that people ‘make sense’ of their experiences. If Lüdtké’s approach is a key to understand how experience is organized and how symbols connect the individual and the larger phenomena, Teresa de Lauretis’ formulation of ‘experience’ is useful to see how this connection is not a single instance but a process, and subject to change. As she explains:

I use [experience] ... in the general sense of a process by which, for all social beings, subjectivity is constructed. Through that process one places oneself or is placed in social reality, and so perceives and comprehends as subjective (referring to, even originating in, oneself) those relations – material, economic, and interpersonal – which are in fact social and, in a larger perspective, historical. The process is continuous, its achievement unending or daily renewed. For each person, therefore, subjectivity is an ongoing construction, not a fixed point of departure or arrival from which one then interacts with the world. On the contrary, it is the effect of that interaction – which I call experience; and thus it is produced not by external ideas, values, or material causes, but by one’s personal, subjective, engagement in the practices, discourses, and institutions that lend significance (value, meaning and affect) to the events of the world. (de Lauretis, 1984, p. 159)

Such an approach puts the emphasis on the ‘engagement’ of subjects in discourses and practices, which I find to be a crucial process for Alevilik as a discourse in the late 1980s to take root. Indeed, this is not a simple appropriation of institutional definitions of Alevilik (created by intellectuals mobilized in and around certain associations and foundations), but at the same time an individual engagement and self-perception around certain symbols and discourses that manifest themselves in the sense of a collectivity, or one might say, community. Even if an individual does not participate in *cems* in recently constructed *cemevis* and shrine complexes, even s/he is not and ‘active’ member of the associations and foundations, individuals develop a sense of

‘commonality’ in the late 1980s onwards as Alevis, that reach beyond and appropriates village-ties.

### Resenting the Accusations: *Mum Söndü* and *Namus*

Before Zeynep hanım, my friend’s mother, introduced me to the *güns* in the district in the Anatolian side of Istanbul and some women in the district in the European side, I was looking for a way to get acquainted with Alevi women living in the district in the Anatolian side. I thought that my friend’s brother’s wife, Yeliz hanım, could help me. Yeliz hanım accepted to help me by inviting some women to her house, as having two little children prevented her from visiting frequently other women in their houses. Hence, at the end of October 2004, she invited Yıldız hanım, who was reputed to be ‘knowledgeable’ (*bilgili*), Refika hanım, Zeliha hanım, Kader hanım and Nergis hanım to her house. As she told me later, she was careful to invite women whom she thought could ‘explain’ to me what Alevilik is about. Not so unexpectedly, when seen in retrospect, knowledge manifested itself in the ability to recount, as well as define, what Alevilik was about. Yıldız hanım, a woman in her late sixties, coming from a well known family, started to recount to me her understanding of Alevilik as soon as I introduced myself.

“Alevilik is a religious sect”, Yıldız hanım started, “but, in the times of Muhammed, there was nothing like a religious sect. Muhammed and Ali were cousins. These distinctions came out later.” She went on to talk about the fasting in the month of Muharrem, and how at the end of the month they cooked *aşure* as the remembrance

of the incident of *Kerbela*.<sup>57</sup> She also told me, and the others agreed, that they also fasted in Ramazan for three days, and that the Sunni version of fasting for thirty days was based on a misunderstanding: according to this narrative, Mohammed told his followers to fast three days in Ramazan, but Sunnis could not decide on which days to fast, so they started to fast the whole month. She added that Alevi did not go to the mosques, because after Ali died, his opponents did not let anyone enter the mosques unless they cursed Ali.

Yıldız hanım's explanation of Alevilik employed some of the most widely used distinctions in 'practice' to differentiate Alevilik from *Sünnilik*: fasting in the month of Muharrem and its difference from fasting in Ramazan, the differences in places of worship, and the significance attributed to *aşure* in Alevilik. Her account, on the other hand, exemplified how difference was negotiated in the everyday encounters: as I was categorized as a Sunni, she started by deemphasizing differences to bridge our positions by her initial assertion of the emergence of sects as an artificial divide. On the other hand, as I was taken as a 'non-yobaz Sunni', but still a 'Sunni', after Yıldız hanım explained in detail the main tenets of Alevilik, Zeliha hanım asked Yıldız hanım to explain to me *mum söndü*. Yıldız hanım paused for a moment, and then told me that in every religion candles are sacred. But Zeliha hanım insisted that *mum söndü* should be explained: "*İftira ediyorlar ya, o yüzden*" ("they slander us, that is why") she said. She was probably thinking that I was there to research whether this was true or not. Yıldız hanım started to recount a memory.

---

<sup>57</sup> "The historic battle between Hussain (the grandson of the prophet Muhammad) and his opponent Yazid in the month of Muharram in 680 C.E. in the desert of Karbala (Iraq)." (Afary, 2003, p. 7) Hüseyin, the son of Ali, is seen as the legitimate heir of the leadership of Muslims after the death of Muhammed in *Alevilik*, as well as in Shi'ism. The incident is taken as the origin of the difference of sects in Islam. See Korkmaz (2003, pp. 246-250) for further detail.

When she first migrated to Istanbul, she met a woman at the bus stop, and learned that she was from Kırşehir. When this woman learned that Yıldız hanım was from Erzincan, she commented: “There are many Alevi in Erzincan”. This was a way of inquiring whether Yıldız hanım was Alevi or not. Yıldız hanım responded that she was Alevi, and this woman told her: “*Siz ana bacı bilmezmişsiniz*” (“you do not recognize mother or sister”). This was one of those moments when a Sunni woman asks an Alevi woman if the ‘gossip’ about Alevi is true, which causes an Alevi woman feel offended. The protests pertaining to this gossip among women in the meeting showed that this feeling of offense was widely shared.

A few months later I visited Refika hanım, who was present in this meeting and who is also from Zeynep hanım’s village, for an interview in her own house. She raised this issue once more in the interview:

Three candles are lit [during our worship]. They [Sunnis who] allege that we extinguish the candles and then we [have sex with each other in the gathering]. They [who say this] do not have a place above [in the heavens]. Those candles are lit for the love of God, Mohammed and Ali. Look at that, they try to distort this. Those three candles are lit, saying God, Mohammed and Ali, the candles are lit with prayer and they are extinguished with prayers. ... Let me tell you something. In Hacı Bektaş, we held a *cem*. Our televisions do not shoot there, but there are lots of foreigners coming to shoot [the event]. Americans, English and Swiss people, TV channels from all the European countries came, as it was an international opening for the Hacı Bektaş festival. They came there, but since *cemevi* was not [big] enough [for such a gathering] we held the *cem* in a field. It was evening, the field was illuminated. It was full of people, men and women together, we held the *cem* together. The cameras shot us, line by line. After the *cem* was over, a man came, an American. There was also a woman. He asked the *dede* not to disperse the gathering. The *dede* told us not to disperse, so we didn’t. He said, with the help of a translator, there was a translator with him, of course. He said, Turkey should be proud of the fact that it has a people like this. Woman and man, how democratic they are, he said. For three hours, not a woman looked at a man, nor did a man look at a woman. We shot it all, we have the pictures of all this. Not in the whole world you can find

such a democratic and clean society like this, he said, not in the whole world. We traveled the whole world he said. ... We do not care about these [the accusations] anymore. But one gets sad when one hears these. *One lives for her namus (honor), I am not going to protect it for the sake of others. Namus is not exclusively their possession*<sup>58</sup>. How can you tell these [the accusations] to a person? How can they be told? God forbid. It is really sinful [to tell this].<sup>59</sup>

Refika hanım's account of the *cem* that took place in Hacı Bektaş festival is significant for showing us how a woman's self-perception as Alevi' is constructed through the discourse of the 'lack of strict sex-segregation' in *cem*. *Cem* is, indeed, one of those practices which attained a symbolic meaning with the reification of Alevilik as a discourse of identity politics. The construction of *cemevis* and *cem*'s performance in certain occasions, like the Hacı Bektaş festival, contributed to the consolidation of *cem* as a symbol. But above these, *cem* and the way it is presented to the 'outsiders'<sup>60</sup> become a 'proof' of the *namus* of Alevis, and as we see in Refika

---

<sup>58</sup> Emphasis added.

<sup>59</sup> From an interview with Refika hanım, March 2005. "Bizde üç tane mum yanar. Mum söndürürler, birbirlerine, diyorlar. Yukarıda onların yeri yoktur. O mum da bak Allah, Muhammed, Ali aşkına yaniyor. Bak bak. Onu saptırıyorlar. O üç mum yanar, Allah Muhammed Ali der, duasını eder, duası edilerek o mumlar yanar, duası edilerek o mumlar söner. ... Orada bak ben bir de sana şey anlatayım, Hacı Bektaş'ta cem yaptık. Amerikalılar, orayı bizimkiler çekmiyor ama, dışarıdan çok gelen oluyor. Amerikalılar geldi, ondan sonra İngilizler vardı, o İsviçreliler neyler, Avrupa ülkesinde ne kadar televizyoncu varsa, uluslararası açılış ya. Oraya geldiler, tabii cem evine sığmayınca, biz şeyde, tarlada cem yaptık. Tarlada ışıklar yandı böyle, gece. Tarlada. Tarla ağzına kadar dolu insan, ama erkek kadın beraber, cem yaptık. O insanlar bütün çektiler, yani bizi. Sıra sıra çektiler. Ondan sonra biz o cem bitti, 12 hizmet yerine geldi, bittikten sonra, adam geldi o şeyli olan, Amerikalı olan. Kadın idi biri. Dedi ki birşey konuşacağım, dağıtmayın dedi. Dedeye dedi, söyleyin dedi, bu halk dağılsın. Ondan sonra, halk dağılmadı tabii. Dede dedi ki, dağılmayın, Amerikalılar birşey söyleyecek dedi. Biz dağılmadık tabii. Dedi ki, tercüman aracılığıyla, tercüman da var tabii yanında. Türkiye dedi gurur duysun böyle bir halkı var, dedi. Kadın erkek ne kadar demokrat dedi. Tam dedi üç saattir dedi burada bir kadın bir erkeğe veyahut bir erkek bir kadına bakmamış dedi. Biz dedi aralarda dolaştık çektik, bunların hepsinin resimleri elimizde dedi. Bütün dünya dedi burada demokrat böyle dedi temiz bir toplum bulunamaz, dedi, bütün dünyada. Biz bütün dünyayı gezdik dedi. ... Boşverdik artık bunları. Ama insan üzüyor yani. İnsan namusu için yaşar yani ben namusumu herkes için koruyacak değilim ki. Namus onların tekelinde de değil. O ne demek yani? Sen karşıdaki insana, ben şimdi sana nasıl derim, denebilir mi? Allah göstermesin yani. Çok günah."

<sup>60</sup> "The cemevis have attained a significant role as schools where the proper representations of Alevism are to be produced and transmitted. Consequently, cem ceremonies have come to stand for performances where the "modern, humanist, peaceful" aspects of Aleviness are to be reiterated constantly in the presence of the "others," Sunnis (the significant others) and the Westerners (to demonstrate how modern



hanım's account. *Namus*, understood as the organizing moral principle of managing the relations between kin and everyday/local relations (Sirman, 2006; Tillion, 2006), and which would be the organizing principle of the usual way of behaving in a village setting or among kin, in this context enables the 'imagination' of a community of Alevis by creating this feeling of 'closeness' (like the closeness among kin), besides being a 'proof' of the *namus* of Alevis.

If we focus on Refika hanım's account we see that, *namus* is associated with both female and male chastity, and chastity is seen as abstaining from seeing each other as sexual beings in settings where both men and women are present (and outside marriage). It does, indeed, invoke a tripartite maxim that Erdemir (2004) notes to be perceived as the essence of Alevilik (*Aleviliğin özü*): "keep your hand, tongue, and loins under control!" (*Eline, diline, beline sahip ol!*). The 'togetherness' of men and women in *cem*, as we understand from this passage, does not violate the chastity of the participants for they are not present there as 'man' or 'woman' but as 'humans', not as gendered individuals, but they participate in the gathering through a denial of sexuality.

It is this kind of an expectation of chastity that leads Refika hanım to find the segregation of men and women (that she argues to prevail in her Sunni neighbors) and veiling redundant:

Those Sunni neighbors, most of them segregate men and women (*haremlik selamlık*). They (women) do not go anywhere. ... It is because Alevis are against these. How can somebody constrain me, even if he is my husband or whoever s/he is? Why would I hide from him? How ignorant (*cahil*) they are. Let me tell you something, though I cannot say it for all of them, maybe there

---

Alevis are and Sunnis not). Allowing "strangers" in cems is seen as an opportunity to prove that prejudices about Alevi rituals are wrong and that Alevis are as moral as everyone else." (Es, 2006, p. 65)

might be some who do so, let me tell you about my village and the surrounding villages, they do not like *açık saçık* ('too open' clothes) either. Is it clear? They do not like low-necked clothes or when arms or shoulders are bare. They do not want it, I mean, they do not like it. But they are against *kapalılık* ('too closed' clothes, including headscarf), against bigotry as well. You should dress in a normal fashion. ... We are against too much *açık saçık* and too much *kapalılık*. I have good intentions, but what if the man that you encounter has bad intentions, looks with an evil eye at you, why would I wear too open clothes. But I cannot cover my head and eyes thinking that he will look at me, he shouldn't do so. ... See, headscarf comes from Arabs, what has a Turk got to do with an Arab? We might have the same religion, they believe and we also believe. But our way of life is different. Woman in black chador: Does this suit a Turkish woman? They do not respect woman, they do not treat her as a human being. God created everyone the same; God didn't create women as inferiors and men as superiors. Woman is the same and man is the same.<sup>61</sup>

It is in this context, Refika hanım's depiction of the clothing that Alevis (at least those Alevis whom she knows personally) find appropriate for women also corresponds to the understanding of *namus* as chastity, and helps her to connect her everyday encounter with a Sunni neighbor with a larger framework in which Alevis are underlined to be the real Turkish people, whereas Sunnis are argued to be the adherents of the Arab tradition. A woman frequently visiting shrines such as Karacaahmet and Şahkulu, she was also interested in contemporary politics and was critical of the headscarf. For her the headscarf was a sign of extremism. In this sense,

---

<sup>61</sup> From an interview with Refika hanım, March 2005. "O Sünni komşularımın haremlik selamlık çoğu. Onlar yani bir yere gitmezler yani. ... Aleviler bunlara karşı çıktığı için. Olmaz yani böyle, beni nasıl kısıtlar, kocam olsun neyim olursa olsun. Niye ondan saklanayım. Ne kadar cahiller. Ben çok bak, Aleviler, yani herkese göre demiyorum, belki çok açılanlar da vardır da, bizim yani kendi köyümü, kendi çevre köylerimi söyleyeyim, o kadar açık saçığı da sevmezler. Anlatabildim mi yani. Öyle çok sevmiyorlar, göğüsleri buralara kadar açık, kolları omzu açık. İstemiyorlar yani sevmiyorlar. Ama o kapalılığa, bağnazlığa da karşılar. Normal şekilde giyin. ... Öyle çok fazla açığa saçığa da karşıyız, öyle bağnazlığa da karşıyız. Ben iyi niyetliyim ama karşıdaki adam kötü niyetli, sana kötü göz ile bakar, niye açılalım. Ama o bana bakacak diye kafamı gözümü de kapatmam yani, bakmasın. ... Bu başörtüsü hep Araplar'dan gelen birşey. Türk'ün Arap'la ne işi var? Tamam dinimiz bir olabilir, onlar da inanmış biz de inanmışız. O inanabiliriz, ama bizim yaşam tarzımız ayrı. Kadın, çarşafın içinde. Bu Türk kadınına hiç yakışır mı? Kadınları adam saymıyorlar, kadınları insan yerine koymuyorlar. Bu budur. Allah bir yaratmış, kadınlar aşağıdır, erkekler yüksektir diye yaratmamış. Kadın da aynıdır erkek de aynıdır."

the concern with clothing in her account is remarkable here, for we might argue that Refika hanım was taking on the position of being Alevi not only by imagining a community of Alevis by using the concept of *namus* among other things, but also by seeing ‘Islamist extremism’ / ‘Sunnis’ as a threat to ‘Alevis’.

On the other hand, to the extent that headscarf comes to be associated with Sunnis and the ways Alevi women wear headscarves also becomes problematic. A woman from a *gün* in A, Şükran hanım, for instance, positioned herself as follows in an interview:

I call Alevilik a [political] party order. I do not differentiate it in terms of belief. Because, what matters is to believe in God, belief has nothing to do with Alevilik or *Sünnilik*. Why? In the times of our prophet, there was nothing like Alevilik or *Sünnilik*, my dear. What happened next? Ali, Osman, and Ömer came out. What happened? Some followed Ali, some followed Osman, and some followed Ömer. Is there any fault in this? Now, if you vote for CHP or SHP or whatever, is this something sinful? Your vote is free. I voted for Ali. That’s it. I am purely Turkish and I see Alevilik as a belief. It is a party. I defend it as a party. For me, Alevilik is a party. What matters is to believe in God. But in terms of method, they go to the mosques and we go to the *cemevis*. A *cemevi* is a place of worship, and a mosque is a place of worship. If you go to a group like this, it is their belief as well. It is their belief. But when it comes to fanaticism, when you use the name of God for fanaticism... Look, they create a problem of headscarf, my dear sister. My mother also wears a headscarf. She would not take it off whatever you offered in exchange. Why am I not making my mother’s headscarf a flag? They turn the headscarf into a problem. We say that one should not wear a headscarf in public. We are not entering the mosque without a headscarf, are we? This is belief. This is how it should be. But to the *cemevis*, we can go either with or without headscarves. There is nothing wrong with this. This is hair, man’s is also hair and woman’s is also hair. We say that if a man is covering his wife, he should cover himself too. He has this hair too. God does not create anything bad. This is the philosophy of Alevi. God never creates something bad. Never creates something ugly. You cover something if it is ugly. I see the man, wearing jeans and sport shoes. And there’s a covered woman beside him, how do you explain it? I tell that woman to cover the man as well. But that man looks at somebody else’s wife. We [Alevis] do not have such a thing. We [men and women] are

together. Woman is exceptional in [Alevis]. Her word is respected. You might have seen it yourself; I do not have to explain it to you.<sup>62</sup>

In both Refika hanım's and Şükran hanım's accounts, we see a twofold process that the symbol 'woman' invokes: the respect accorded to 'woman' manifests itself in the 'togetherness of men and women' where both men and women have the right to be in a place through their status as human beings and where their right to be in a shared place is not restricted as a respect of their gender. But, the moment they gain respect as 'woman' by being in the same place with the same status as men is also the moment their gender is disregarded. It is through disregarding gender that men and women can occupy the same place without bringing dishonor on anyone present. And it is through this kind of an understanding that the perceived Sunni ways of segregating men and women, and veiling associated with this practice is seen as superfluous. From time to time, Alevi men or women feel offended by the practices that they think represent such superfluous understanding in everyday encounters,

---

<sup>62</sup> From an interview with Şükran hanım, April 2005. "Alevilik'e ben parti düzeninden başka birşey demiyorum. İnanç şeysiyle bakmıyorum. İnanç Allah'ta biter. Alevilik'te de bitmez, Sünnilik'te de bitmez. Niye? O peygamber efendimizin zamanında Alevilik Sünnilik yoktu güzelim. Ne oldu? Ali, Osman, Ömer çıktılar. Ne oldu? Birisi Alici, birisi Osmancı, birisi Ömerci oldu. Bunun ayıbı ne? Sen şimdi CHP'ye, SHP'ye, bilmem nereye oyunu veriyorsun, günah mı? Oy özgürdür. Ben Ali'ye verdim oyumu. Bu kadar. Ben öz be öz Türk, inanç gözüyle Alevilik'i görüyoruz. Yani o parti. Parti olarak savunuyorum ben. Alevilik benim gözümde partidir. Bu bir parti şeklidir, parti yönetimidir. İnanç Allah'ta biter. Ama şekil olarak onlar camiye toplanıyor, bunlar cemevine toplanıyor. Cemevi de bir ibadet yeridir, cami de bir ibadet yeridir. Öyle bir topluma girdiğin zaman, o da onun inancıdır. O da onun inancıdır. Ama fanatikliğe girdiği zaman, Allah'ın adını başka bir yerde kullanıp fanatikklik yaptığı zaman... Bak, bir başörtüsü sorunu çıkarıyorlar ablası. Benim annemin başı kapalı. Benim annemin başını kuzuyla, kurbanla, akçeyle desen benim annem kafasını açmaz. E benim annemin başörtüsünü neden ben bayrak bayrak açmıyorum? Onlar başörtüsünü sorun ediyor. Biz diyoruz ki kamusal alanlara başörtüsüyle girilmez. Biz başörtüsüz nasıl camiye gitmiyorsak, başörtüyü koyuyoruz camiye gidiyoruz değil mi? Bu inanç. Gerçi olması gereken de budur. Cemevine biz ister başörtülü gidiyoruz, ister başörtüsüz gidiyoruz bacım. Bunun ayıbı yok. Bu kıl, erkeğinki de kıl, kadınıninki de kıl. Biz diyoruz ki eğer ki bu kadını bohçalıyorsa bu adam kendini de bohçalasın. Bu saç onda da var. Allah hiçbirşeyi kötü yaratmaz. Biz Alevi'nin felsefesi. Asla kötü yaratmaz. Çirkin birşey yaratmaz. Çirkin birşey kapanır. Adama bakıyorum, blucin giymiş, kot giymiş, spor ayakkabıyı çekmiş. Yanında bohçalı bir kadın. çık işin içinden. E ben o kadına diyorum ki kızım sen de bunu sok cübbenin içine. Ama başkasının karısına bakıyor. Bizde bu yoktur. Bizde anca beraber kanca beraber. Kadın bizde tektir. Sözüne sohbetine riayet edilir. Görmüşündür, benim söylemeye anlatmaya gerek yoktur."

though they differentiate between those Sunnis who would ‘take these to the extremes’ and those who do not. Hale hanım, who was living in B and who was from the same village with Zeynep hanım, recounted to me the following event:

We had some Alevi friends, and they helped us find a house in the same place where they were living. But with fear, they had initially introduced themselves as Sunnis. So we had to do the same thing as well. I was very sad. I was thinking of telling the truth, but my friend would oppose it, saying that [the Sunni neighbors] would be hurt and would not talk to us anymore. One day, we visited our [Sunni] neighbor; it was the feast of Ramazan. I and my husband, we see that family as our sisters and brothers. I mean, I see the man of the house as my brother and my husband see the daughters of that house as his sisters. They say welcome, we shake hands. But [in the feast of Ramazan] another guest came. My husband was about to say welcome. But the girl [guest] did not shake his hand, so my husband was upset. The owner of the house was also very sorry. He said he was sorry in her name. He repeated it two or three times. He was sorry. It is really wrong [for the girl not to shake hands].<sup>63</sup>

In this case, Hale hanım’s husband feels offended by the refusal of the girl to shake hands with him, for this refusal puts him in an uncanny situation: in saluting the girl by shaking hands, he does not mean to approach her in an intimate way. But when the girl refuses to shake hands, he finds himself in that situation, though he does not mean to. For Hale hanım, this situation is explicable with reference to the interference of Sunni and Alevi understandings of sex-segregation. Unlike Refika hanım or Şükran hanım, however, Hale hanım recognizes that ‘the lack of strict sex-segregation’ does

---

<sup>63</sup> From an interview with Hale hanım, May 2005. “Ben eşimle, Alevi arkadaşlarımız oturuyordu, bize de ev tutmuşlardı. Kendilerini korkudan Sünni göstermişler. Biz de öyle göstermek zorunda kaldık. Üzülüyordum. Söyleyeyim diyordum, bizi böyle tanıslar. Yok diyordu, kırılırlar, yani konuşmazlar sizle. Hatta bir komşuya gittik bayramda, Ramazan bayramıydı, yani insan, bizim içimizde öyle kötülük yok. Onlarla tanıştığımız için de şöyle, hani komşusun. Eşimle o ailenin o annesi o da kardeşimiz diye gözlüyoruz. Yani o evin erkeğini ben kardeşim görüyorum, eşim o evin kızlarını kardeş görüyor. Hoşgeldin diyor, tokalaşıyor ama oraya bir misafir gelmişti. Eşim hoşgeldiniz diyordu tam. Kız elini çekince eşim bozuldu. Ev sahibi de çok üzüldü. Onun adına çok özür diledi. İki üç kez tekrarladı. Üzüldü. Yanlış.”

not necessarily correspond to the 'equality of sexes' for all Alevis in all periods. With regard to another question I asked about whether she knew anyone who married a Sunni, she told me the following:

*Hale:* As I say, we do not oppose such marriages, I mean; our stand point is like that. But there are lots of people who marry in that fashion [Alevis marrying Sunnis] and they are unhappy. Their opinions do not match. We do not raise our children like that, we do not tell them [not to marry Sunnis]. I guess when she marries she cannot continue as she is raised according to our order. Our daughters do not tell us, but...

*Berna:* What do you mean by 'our order', what is it like?

*Hale:* When I say order, I mean that there is no constraint. How we sat and ate today, it is always like this. Girls and boys sitting together... Now if a guest comes from our village... Zeliha can sit beside my husband, for instance, I can sit beside her, someone else can sit beside me. There is nothing like not sitting together, or if someone comes from outside he/she does not become *namahrem*<sup>64</sup>. There is nothing like this, neither in our thoughts nor in our hearts. They [Sunnis] want it to be like this, though only those who are *kapalı*, not every one of them. There may be segregation at the table, for instance. ... I am not talking in the name of every Alevi. Maybe some of us might be doing the same. For instance women might eat separately, or children might eat separately. In the old days, our mothers used to do that way, but it was because of respect, not a separation of men and women, it was because after men ate and were full women used to eat. The work conditions in the villages were really hard. They used to work in the fields, got wet. Men sat in front of the cookstone. No lamps, only kerosene lamp that is like the light of candles. They lived like that. It is the perception of men as well. Maybe they saw it like that, let me tell you my opinion. I see them to be equal. I see my husband and myself as the same. He is a human and I am a human. In every subject - be it clothes or food. He did not constrain me and I did not constraint him either. A woman can also constrain a man. She might ask you not to wear certain clothes, saying that she does not like it. It is about the harmony of ideas, I guess. In the old times, the men were ignorant. Maybe it was because of education... But it is not written on the books that woman is like this and man is like that. Maybe time changes us. The men do not tell the women to stay behind, but it is out of respect of the women for men that they let them eat first or get dried; it is out of respects perhaps.

---

<sup>64</sup> *Namahrem* is the opposite of the word *mahrem* (intimate), someone who should be stayed aloof.

Otherwise they [women] were not repressed at all... They were much more oppressed by their mother in-laws.<sup>65</sup>

As Hale hanım puts it, we understand that there is only a vague correspondence between the older generations' understanding of the gender roles and younger generations', reflected in the acceptable forms of socializing between men and women. In an interview, Gonca hanım, who works in the village association in B, also recognized a change of understanding between the younger and older generations:

That person who comes from the village, for her to take out her headscarf... For instance, my mother used to wear a headscarf. She sometimes took it off, and sometimes wore again, but it was a normal headscarf. She was wearing it when she came from the village. Never took it off. We didn't take out our headscarves when we were together with elders. But it was a normal headscarf, the front part of our hair could be seen. But I remember that my mother used to tell us to cover our hair when our grandfather came from the village. It was disgraceful not to cover your hair when together with men. Sometimes I think that there are some similarities with Sunnilik: they do not uncover their hair, we also do not uncover our hair but a little part of it can be seen, some things are related. When together with our grandfather my mother

<sup>65</sup> From an interview with Hale hanım, May 2005. "Hale: İşte diyorum ya biz karşı çıkmıyoruz yani görüşümüz öyle ama evlenip de mutsuz olan çok. Fikirleri uymuyor. Onları öyle yetiştirmiyoruz, yok ayrı evlilik, yok şöyle yok böyle diye. Gidince herhalde bizim düzenimiz gibi yetiştiği için sürdüremiyor. Yani söylemiyorlar kızlarımız ama..."

Berna: Yani sizin düzeniniz nasıl birşey?

Hale: Düzen derken yani hiçbir baskısı yok yani. Şimdi nasıl yedik içtik, hep öyle geçiyor. Kız erkek oturarak, şimdi misafirimiz gelse kendi köyümüzün insanı. Benim eşimin yanına Z oturabilir örneğin, ben onun yanına o onun yanına, yani öyle bir oturmamak, dışarıdan biri geldiği zaman namahrem oluyor falan, kesinlikle hiç öyle birşey ne aklımızda ne kalbimizde. Yani gelmez. Onlar belki kapalı öyle istiyor, hepsi değil yani, bazıları. Dediğim gibi yani öyle sofralarda falan ayrıcalık olabilir. ... Yani ben bütün Aleviler'in adına konuşmuyorum, belki bizim de vardır yani. Kadınlar ayrı yesin, çocuklar ayrı yesin. Bizim eskiden annelerimiz, saygıdan o da, illa bir kadın erkek ayrımı diye değil, erkekler yesin doysun da kadınlar daha sonra. Şimdi eskiden köy işleri daha ağırmış tabii, farklı. Tarlalarda çalışırlarmış, ıslanırlarmış. Erkekler önden ısıyor, ocağın önü açık. Onun önünde erkekler oturuyor. Lamba yok, gaz lambası küçük bir tane. O da mum ışığı gibi birşey. Onunla öyle geçirmişler. İşte şimdi erkeklerin de anlayışı. O zaman şimdi görmedikleri için mi yani kendi görüşümü söyleyeyim. Eşit gözlüyorum yani. Eşimi de beni de aynı diyorum yani. O da bir insan ben de bir insanım. Her konuda. Giyecek olsun, yiyecek olsun. Onun bana bir baskısı olmadı, benim de ona. Kadının da erkeğe olabilir. Belki ben bu kıyafetini istemiyorum giyme diyebilir. İşte fikir uyumu herhalde. Eskiden de öyle yani erkeklerin anlayışı, cahil yani. Belki okuyarak mı. Kitaplarda da öyle yazmıyor ki kadın öyledir, erkek öyledir diye. Zaman demek ki değiştiriyor insanı. Yani erkekler de siz geride durun diye değil de bu bir saygı. Kadın yani erkek yesin doysun da onun üstü kurusun da, saygı herhalde. Yoksa onlarda bir baskı... Onlarda daha çok kayınlı baskısı varmış."

used to warn us to cover our hair, but my hair could be seen from behind and the back, it was disgraceful only if all of your hair was uncovered. It was also disgraceful if you did not cover your hair when you were together with your mother-in-law and father-in-law. That kind of things... Things underwent a change after a period. There is change...<sup>66</sup>

Even though Hale hanım and Gonca hanım talk about a difference between the practices of younger and older generations, they nevertheless stick to the notion of *namus* that is formulated vis-à-vis “Sunnis’ accusations”. The notion of *namus* that derives its meaning from ‘Alevi thought’ legitimizes the co-presence of both men and women in *cem* and other settings. On the other hand, the symbol of ‘woman’ that this notion of *namus* generates, with regard to the lack of strict sex segregation and to veiling, invokes other identifications, such as *çağdaşlık* (being modern) or *laiklik* (secularism). This is indeed the kind of association between the practices of Alevis and secularism that is invoked through the discourse of Alevilik since the late 1980s. In this sense, the notion of *namus* in this context does not entirely correspond to Peristiany’s definition of honor and shame which he describes as “the constant preoccupation of individuals in small scale, exclusive societies where face to face personal, as opposed to anonymous, relations are of paramount importance” (Peristiany, 1966, p. 11). However, it appeals to the senses of individuals and creates a sense of face-to-face relations that a community imagination at national (and international) level strives for. In an article on the crimes of honor in Turkey, Nükhet

---

<sup>66</sup> From an interview with Gonca hanım, April 2005. “Yani o köyden gelen insan, saçını açması, mesela benim annemin başı da kapalıydı. Ne oldu işte, bazen açardı bazen kapardı ama öyle sıkımaş değil, normal bir başörtü bağlardı yani. Köyden geldiği zaman bağlıydı, mesela o hiç açılmadı. Şu vardı, büyüklerin yanında saç açılmazdı. Ama yani bizim normal başörtü bağlanırdı, şu ön falan görünürdü ama mesela ben hatırlıyorum, rahmetli dedem köyden geldiği zaman annem yani sırf başörtüsüz ayıptı erkeğin yanında şey yapması. Yani şöyle bazen düşünüyorum da bazıları, mesela Sünnilik’te baş saç açılmıyor, ama işte bizde baş açılmıyor ama tamamen çıkmıyor, yani bazı şeyler o kadar şey ki, yani birbiriyle bağlı şeyler, aynı şeyler. Mesela ayıp derler, annem aman dedenizin yanında başörtü derdi, ama benim saçım önden görünüyor, arkadan görünüyor, yani o tamamen çıkması ayıptı. Kaynananın kaynatanın yanında ayıptı mesela. O tip olaylar... Yani belli bir dönemden sonra farklılaşma oluyor. Farklılaşma var.”



Sirman argues that nationalisms reproduce the power relations of kin-based or house societies to create a national identity and adds that modernists “rather than striving to eradicate the notions of honor in the control of women’s bodies and actions ... have merely sought to devise new and more effective ways of sustaining it” (2004, p. 51). Here in the case of Alevis as well, the notion of *namus* is not an aspect of a *traditional* order but, together with ‘woman’ as a symbol, works to reify Alevilik as a form of identity which signals another form of power relations.

### Confronting *Difference*: Cleanliness and Gossip

The accusations ‘*mum söndü yaparlar*’ (they practice ‘candle went out’) or ‘*ana baci tanımazlar*’ (they do not recognize mother or sister) primarily target the co-presence of both men and women in settings like *cem*, and it is possible to find discussions with regards to these accusations in various contexts, such as the books on Alevilik or the explanations of Alevilik in everyday encounters, where the ‘togetherness’ of both men and women does not violate the *namus* of Alevis. In these contexts, the accusations that are related to *gusül abdesti* are rarely mentioned, and when they are mentioned in everyday encounters, they are usually discussed in same-gender environments, and especially among women with regard to being ‘clean’.

For instance, in the meeting in Yeliz hanım’s house in October, 2004, Yıldız hanım raised this issue after she told us about *mum söndü*. She continued with the same story where the Sunni woman asked her: “Do you take a bath after sleeping with your husband?” This sentence created a wave of excitement, resentment and amusement around the table; they all said that it was ridiculous to think that they didn’t take a bath. Reminding us about her hometown Sivas, Nergis hanım also

commented, “They [Sunnis] also go to the fields to collect the harvest and stay there for a month in tents. Can they take a bath there?” She was apparently exhausted by the remarks of ‘Sunnis’ and rather than trying to prove her cleanliness, chose to argue that ‘Sunnis’ did not also have a legitimate ground to accuse her of uncleanness.

In its most simple sense, apart from *namaz abdesti* which is a partial cleaning of the body before each prayer, *gusül abdesti* is a ritual ablution that involves the cleaning of the whole body, and in orthodox Islam, it is a requirement after sexual intercourse and the end of the menstrual period. Just like the difference in the Alevi way of worshipping in terms of the ‘togetherness’ of both men and women is seen by Sunnis as sexual deviance, Alevis’ different approach to ablution is also inconceivable within the ‘Sunni way’ of dealing with ‘dirt’. The formulation of ‘dirt’ in relation to sexuality and the allegation that Alevis do not properly perform ablution completes the picture where Alevis are depicted by Sunnis as ‘dirty’, and hence, morally inferior. The relation of dirt and morality can be thought with reference to Mary Douglas, who sees dirt avoidance as “a process of tidying up, ensuring that the order in external physical events conforms to the structure of ideas” (1975, p. 53). The relation between dirt avoidance and order in Douglas’ work is furthered by Kristeva, who argues that “filth is not a quality in itself, but it applies only to what relates to boundary and, more particularly, represents the object jettisoned out of that boundary, its other side, a margin. ... [And] the potency of pollution is therefore not an inherent one; it is proportional to the potency of the prohibition that founds it” (1997, p. 259). Hence, when ‘the accusations’ of Sunnis to Alevis are concerned, we are first of all dealing with an ‘order’ that perceives Alevis as ‘out of order’ and associates them with ‘dirt’.

Therefore, when the Sunni woman asks Yıldız hanım if she takes a bath after sexual intercourse, she refers to a ritual (and hence, moral) purity that Alevis are

argued to lack, and which is also deemed to be the reason why the food that Alevis cook is not eaten. In the relations of Alevi and Sunni women, the issue of cleanliness seems to be a pervasive one. In an interview in March, 2005, Canan hanım, who was from a *gün* group that I joined in the district in the Anatolian side, told me the following when we were talking about her relations with her neighbors:

Berna: Do you only see Alevi neighbors or do you also have Sunni ones?

Canan: Yes, we do. We do not discuss whether they are Alevi or Sunni, but the important thing is that they should be human (*insan olsun*) and have an enlightened point of view (*aydın görüşlü olsun*). There are some *yobaz* people. When we moved here, we used to distribute *aşure* to every neighbor, regardless of whether they were Sunnis or Alevis. This is how our custom is. Later we heard that, since we were Alevi, they were throwing away the *aşure* we gave them, saying that the food that Alevis cook should not be eaten. Really. People said so, so we decided not to distribute them *aşure*. We heard that they threw it away, why would we give them more? Their friends told us this, not Alevis, but their friends.<sup>67</sup>

As far as the Alevi – Sunni divide is concerned, gossip constitutes one of the primary mechanisms through which Alevi women learn the opinion of others about Alevis. In Canan hanım's account, there is no direct confrontation with Sunni women who are *yobaz*, but she hears from other Sunni women that some Sunni women threw away the food she cooked. In a similar fashion, she hears some other remarks about Alevis which makes her feel sad:

---

<sup>67</sup> From an interview with Canan hanım, March 2005. "Berna: Şey, peki görüştüklerinizin hepsi Alevi midir, yoksa Sünni komşu da var mı?

Canan: Var. İşte biz Alevi Sünni diye birşey tartışma yapmıyoruz da, önemli olan insan olsun, aydın görüşlü olsun. Bazı yobazlar var, biz ilk geldiğimizde, aşure pişiriyoruz. Herkesi yani Alevi Sünni diye ayırmadan herkese dağıtıyorduk. Bizim adetimizde öyle. Sonradan duyduk ki, biz Alevi'yiz, Alevilerin pişirdiği yenmez, yani hiçbirşey olmazmış. Bizim verdiğimiz aşureleri çöpe döküyorlarmış. Gerçekten yani. Öyle dediler, biz de ondan sonra daha vermemeye karar verdik. Duyduk daha bizim yazık günah değil mi verelim. Yemiyorlar çöpe döküyorlar dediler. Onu da diyen aynı kendilerinin şeyleri yani. Alevi değil de aynı kendilerinin arkadaşlarından."

Really, everyday we have a bath in the morning, we practice ablution (*boy abdesti* is another name for *gusül abdesti*). There might be some Alevis who are dirty, but I am telling this for myself and the people I know. If you change your clothes, if you have a bath... We are open minded. ... They do not tell us directly... They say Alevis do not wash themselves, or some other things. When you hear erroneous things like these, you get sad. How would they know if Alevis have a bath or not after they sleep with their spouse? This is nonsense. Not that they saw it or that somebody has done it.<sup>68</sup>

Just as Zeliha hanım asked Yıldız hanım to explain to me ‘*mum söndü*’, thinking that I was there to research whether this was true or not, Canan hanım was explaining to me her understanding of ‘cleanliness’, and her explanation marked me as a ‘close’ and a ‘distant’ person at the same time, that was a characteristic move of all the women I met during my research process. As she assumed I was a ‘Sunni’ who might think of her as a ‘dirty’ person, she distanced herself from me and she went through the details of her understanding of bodily cleanliness to dispel my doubts, in case I had any. On the other hand, she felt ‘close’ enough to about her feeling of sadness, as she thought I was not a *yobaz*. Indeed, the prevalence of such an attitude towards ‘non-*yobaz* Sunni women’, an attitude which is both distant and close, points to the presence of a space of negotiation and confrontation among women of different origin that manifests itself around the notions of cleanliness: While some Sunni neighbors might find her ‘unclean’, throw away the *aşure* she cooks, other Sunni neighbors (which might be named non-*yobaz* ‘Sunnis’) might bring the news to the Alevi woman that the other

---

<sup>68</sup> From an interview with Canan hanım, March 2005. “Gerçekten yani biz günlük, her gün sabah erkenden duşumuzu alırız, boy abdesti alırız. Yani diyebilirim ki Alevilerin kirlisi de var, biz kendilerimiz için söylüyoruz, temizi de var. Elbiseni değişirsen, banyonu yaparsan, yani. Fikrimiz açık. ... Yani yüzümüze söylemezlerse de. ... Yok Aleviler yıkanmıyormuş, yok öyleymiş yok böyleymiş. Bazı böyle yani yanlış şeyler duyulunca insan ister istemez şey yapıyor, yani üzülürsün yani neden sen nereden biliyorsun yani Aleviler eşiyile yattıktan sonra yıkanmıyormuş. Yani saçma sapan şeyler, eskiden gelen şeyler. Kulaktan dolma yani. Kimse birşey görüp de şey yaptıkları için değildir.”

Sunnis are throwing away the food she cooks, which we might take as a sign of closeness between the Alevi woman (Canan hanım) and the other non-yobaz Sunni woman.

Canan hanım's feeling of sadness, on the other hand, marks her self-perception as Alevi, or one might say, her identification as an Alevi is apparent in her feeling of sadness. As de Lauretis (1984) uses the term 'experience' as a process in which subjectivity is constructed, she *experiences* being Alevi as a constant process in which the food she cooks and her body is found unclean and in which she has to bear gossip; it is a process in which she *defends* Alevis and *defends* herself against 'Sunni accusations'. Apart from the discussions around the notions of cleanliness which are largely specific to the relations among women, *defense* is the most common way of experiencing 'being Alevi' (not so much specific to the space of women). In addition to the abovementioned accounts, we can also see it in the way in which Nihal hanım, who lives in the district in the European side and who is from Malatya, recounted a memory:

In some place, after somebody left the group, somebody said: 'Did you know that she is Alevi?' I said, 'I am also Alevi. Do you know that?' They told me not to get them wrong. I asked them if they had seen me doing something wrong. I said 'I see that you wear a headscarf, and even if you did not, I know that you are Sunni. I kiss all of you when I come here in the mornings. This is not to flatter you. I kiss all of you, embrace you, and salute you. I do these, knowing that you are Sunni. You embrace me without knowing it. But if you turn your back on me when you learn who I am, then I tell you to leave. I do not want you then. I know who you all are, I know that you are Sunni, and I love you all. You should also love me. Why do you turn your back to me when you learn that I am Alevi?'<sup>69</sup>

---

<sup>69</sup> From an interview with Nihal hanım, April 2005. "Mesela bir yerde şey oldu, birini göndermişler, arkasından şey diyorlar, biliyor musunuz o Alevi'ymiş. Tamam mı. Bana baksana sen dedim, ben de Alevi'yim, topluluk, birsürüyüz. Ben de Alevi'yim biliyor musun sen dedim. Sonra ay yanlış anlama. Bakın bende bir yanlış gördünüz mü şu ana kadar dedim. Sizin hepinize baktığım zaman türbanlısınız,

Here, we see the unequal relationship between Alevis and Sunnis: Due to the hegemonic character of *Sünnilik*, a Sunni never has to *disclose* her identity (as it is always there and visible) and is surprised to learn that somebody is Alevi. By contrast an Alevi knows that the people around her are all Sunnis and goes through a process of *disclosing* that she is Alevi. Indeed, women told me on several occasions that when they disclosed to the people who knew them for some time that they were Alevi, they were faced with a remark: “*Alevi olamazsın!*” (“You can’t be an Alevi!”). Filiz hanım, a woman from a *gün* group in the district in the Anatolian side, expressed her feeling when she encountered such remarks:

I fast in Ramazan, not the whole month but some days. They would not believe me. ‘You are such a [good] person, you cannot be an Alevi,’ they used to say. Nobody would believe this. I used to ask them if Alevis had a different aspect. Because I was not a person who did not pay back if I borrowed money, I stood by my word. They knew me, and they knew that I was a person that they could trust. We worked in the same place for several years.<sup>70</sup>

“You can’t be an Alevi!” is a remark through which their Sunni acquaintances distance these women they know from ‘Alevis’. This is different from gossip when the opinions about Alevis mark and impede their personal efforts to maintain good relationships with neighbors and friends, for this is an effort on the side of Sunnis to

---

ama türbanlı olmayanları da var, hepinizin Sünni olduğunu biliyorum. Ben hepinizi sabah geldiğim zaman öpüyorum. Yani bu size yalakalık olsun diye değil. Hepinizi öpüyorum, bağrıma basıyorum, selamlaşıyorum ben. Siz Sünni olduğunuzu bile bile. Siz beni bilmeden basıyorsunuz. Ama benim ne olduğumu bildiğiniz zaman sırtınızı dönüyorsanız gidin diyorum. İstemiyorum ben sizi. Sizin hepinizin ne olduğunu biliyorum ben, Sünni olduğunuzu biliyorum, sizin hepinizi seviyorum. Siz de beni sevin. Niye benim Alevi olduğumu anlayınca hepiniz dönüyorsunuz ki?”

<sup>70</sup> From an interview with Filiz hanım, March 2005. “Ramazan’da tutarım, ara ara bazı yerlerinde tutarım, hepsini tutmuyordum. Asla inanamazlardı. Sen böyle bir insansın, asla Alevi olamazsın derlerdi. Kimse inanmaz. Niye Alevi’nin farklı bir yönü mü var derdim. E çünkü ben öyle kimsenin borcunu alıp vermeyen bir insan değilim. Sözümün arkasındayım. Ben o güveni vermiştim yani, beni tanıyorlardı. Kaç sene aynı yerde çalıştığımız insanlar.”

bridge the gap between Sunnis and Alevis (though it is another way of looking down on Alevis). On both occasions, however, whether they are distanced from or named as Alevis, women feel the need to defend ‘themselves’, or defend Alevis. This is a moment in which they refer to existing ways of formulating Alevilik in terms of manifesting her identity, which I identify to be largely taking place within the discourse of Alevilik opened up since the late 1980s. In such a context that they talk about Alevilik as a system of thought that puts emphasis on ‘human’, on ‘looking forward’ and on not being ‘*şekilci*’ (‘*şekilci*’), which may indeed be a way of dealing with the position of being subjugated within a dominantly Sunni order:

A friend of mine had an Alevi girlfriend. He told me ‘Gonca, my family does not want me to marry her since she is Alevi’. When I told him ‘What would happen when you marry an Alevi? What is the difference?’ he told me about *mum söndü* and other kinds of things. I said ‘I am Alevi, why do you say so?’ He said ‘No you can’t be an Alevi!’ I said ‘Why? Why I can’t be an Alevi?’ When he said this to me, I wondered why he said so, so I decided to do some research, for as far as I knew, nothing like the things he said would happen in *our toplum*.<sup>71</sup> But corrupt people exist everywhere, and there may be some corrupt or wrong information among Alevis as well. But in Alevi culture, there is the notion of looking forward, not being formalist ... And I am really proud of being Alevi. Why? Everything is reasonable; there is no ‘formalism’. *İnsana insan gözüyle bakmak vardır* (You see everyone as human).’’<sup>72</sup>

---

<sup>71</sup> Literally means ‘our society’, and in this context it is used to refer to ‘Alevis’. But the same word may be used to refer to ‘villagers’ as well in another context.

<sup>72</sup> From an interview with Gonca hanım, April 2005. “Bir arkadaşım benim işte birisiyle konuşuyormuş falan, ya Gonca dedi bu Alevi dedi, işte fakat Alevi olduğu için ailem istemiyor falan dedi. Ne olacak yani ne fark var deyince, o yani mum yakma olayı var, bir sürü birşeyler söyledi. Ya dedim ben de Alevi’yim dedim, yani niye. Sen dedi Alevi olamazsın falan filan. Niye dedim Alevi olamam? Neden? Şimdi bu böyle deyince ben de dedim ki neymiş bu, bir şey yapayım bakayım, çünkü bizim toplumumuzda böyle birşey olmaz. Ondan sonra bu olayları araştırma gereği duydum. Ama tabii bu her yerde yozlaşmış insanların olduğu gibi Aleviler’in içinde de yozlaşmış, yanlış bilgiler mutlaka var. Ama Alevi kültüründe şu vardır, her zaman ileriye düşünen, şekilci olmayan ... Ve gerçekten de Alevi olduğum için gurur duyuyorum. Neden? Mantıklı oluyor herşey. Yani şekilcilik yoktur. Yani herşey, insana insan gözüyle bakmak şeyi vardır. Yani bunun oluşu.”

Although the terms of the debate between Gonca hanım and her friend seem to refer to ever existing accusations and responses, a point that Gonca hanım makes requires further attention: namely, her decision to ‘do some research’. Apart from the symbols and pieces of discourse that women share with men and institutions in general, what appears in the above mentioned accounts and Gonca hanım’s remark is a practice that they engage in and that the discourse of Alevilik since the late 1980s incites: to research, to explain, and to defend. Here, what we are talking about is a process of identification, which would be clearer if we refer to Stuart Hall’s (1996) argument of identification as a process of ‘suture’<sup>73</sup>, but also a process in which the position of being unequal to ‘Sunnis’ is embraced and made a significant component of one’s own identity.

### Living through *Difference*: ‘Mühim olan insanlık’

Alevi women differentiate between *yobaz* and non-*yobaz* Sunnis. The term ‘*yobaz*’ gains its significance from its connotations of ‘ignorance’, ‘backwardness’ and ‘intolerance’, which stand in opposition to Republican ideals of modernity. This term gained a significant meaning in the post-1980 period, and within the discourse of Alevilik as well, where *yobaz* is associated with ‘Islamist’. When women make general remarks about Sunnis, we can say that they refer to *yobaz Sunnis* in particular, and define them in certain ways. The most apparent quality attributed to Sunnis is

---

<sup>73</sup> “I use ‘identity’ to refer to the meeting point, the point of *suture*, between on the one hand the discourses and practices which attempt to ‘interpellate’, speak to us or hail us into place as the social subjects of particular discourses, and on the other hand, the processes which produce subjectivities, which construct us as subjects which can be ‘spoken’. Identities are thus points of temporary attachment to the subject positions which discursive practices construct for us. They are the result of a successful articulation or ‘chaining’ of the subject into the flow of the discourse ...” (Hall, 1996, pp. 5-6)



*ayrım yapmak*, which literally means ‘to separate’ or ‘to differentiate’ but in this context, it is an expression used to refer to ‘discrimination’, a notion that women portray as something that they did not come across until they migrated to the city:

I didn’t know that I was Alevi until I came to the city. When we were in the village, we were fasting for twelve days in the month of Muharrem. Sometimes we fasted on Thursdays as well. Elderly people also fast during Ramazan, but we do not fast for the whole month. They (Sunnis) do. I wish that God accept their service. I do not ask them why they fast for the whole month in Ramazan. ... Yes, we learned being Alevi or being Sunni here in the city. We didn’t know this in our villages. In the town near our village, of course there were some Sunnis, we used to shop there. But they used to appreciate Alevis.<sup>74</sup>

Nezihe hanım, who is a volunteer in the village association of Hediye, also says similar things:

We learned that we were Alevi when we came here. We really didn’t know it; we didn’t discuss anything like that among us. For instance, we had a Sunni primary school teacher, who stayed in our village with his grandmother. Sometimes he used to send me to his home [from school], to pick a book or something. There I used to see his grandmother performing *namaz*. We knew it. But we didn’t see him as a Sunni. We only knew that they worshipped like that.<sup>75</sup>

---

<sup>74</sup> From an interview with Filiz hanım, March 2005. “Biz orada Alevi olduğumuzu bilmiyorduk ki. Köyde yani. Çünkü biz de oruç tutuyorduk, 12 imamda geldiği zaman 12 gün oruç tutuyorduk, aralarda Perşembe’yi tutuyorduk, üç gün masumları, yaklaşık bir aya yakın oruç tutuyorduk. Ufak çocuktuk yani. Sonra buraya gelik, biz burada gördük yani öyle şeyi. Mesela bizim büyüklerimiz de tutarlar öyle şeyi, Ramazan’ı, ama bir ay onlar gibi tutmayız.”

<sup>75</sup> From an interview with Nezihe hanım, May, 2005. “Şöylesine bilmiyorduk, çevremizdekiler hep Alevi köyle ama aramızda hiç ya şu Sünni’ymiş, tabii ki dışarıdan çok insanlar gidip geliyordu, ama biz Sünni’ymiş diye duymazdık, bilmiyoruz. Büyüklerimiz öyle birşey öğretmedi, duymadık, ki biz gurbete geldik burada öğrendik. İşte geldiğim zaman ilk hemen şey yapıyorlar, sen Alevi misin Sünni misin diye bir yorum. Soran kim? Soran Sünni kesimler soruyor. Ama biz hiçbir zaman. Sadece sorma ne, ya memleket neresi? Bunu. Tabii ki herkes birbiriyle tanışmak amacıyla. Örneğin sen bana tanıştığın zaman soruyorsun, ya bir Sivaslı tanıdık vardı, veyahut şuradandı, gittim geldim tanıştım dersin. Bu şekilde tanıtılabilirsin. O amaçla sorardık biz.”

We can see here that the phrase ‘we didn’t know that we were Alevi’ does not point to a complete ignorance of a differentiation based on Alevi - Sunni divide. Rather it is obvious that being an Alevi *matters* with migration to the cities, which implies a process in which they always negotiate their difference and confront the questions regarding their practices. As Hale hanım puts it:

There in the village there is no differentiation. In the surrounding villages as well, there is no differentiation between Alevi and Sunni. Here, when Ramazan comes, when Alevi children do not fast, Sunni children act cruelly, asking why Alevi children do not fast. This is a real pressure. But we also have our fasting, if they research [they will see that], we have twelve days of fasting as well, not more. ... Fasting does not assure you to go to the heaven, nor does not fasting mean going to the hell. Only God knows where everybody will end up.<sup>76</sup>

Refika hanım portrays Alevi’s refraining from discrimination in her reluctance to teach her children what Alevilik and *Sünnilik* are:

We did not teach our children what Alevilik and *Sünnilik* are. My son was in the fifth grade and had a Sunni friend with whom he would play. While they were playing, they had a quarrel, probably because of a ball or something. That child called my son ‘*kızılbaş*’. Look how they [Sunnis] teach children. My son came home and said ‘Mother, Hayri’s son called me ‘*kızılbaş*’, is my head red?’ Why would I teach things like these to my son? I told him not to care about these things. Then I told the woman ‘you teach lots of things to your son, did you teach these things to him before he learned how to read and write?’ The woman said ‘no we did not teach him, he might have heard it in the streets’. I asked ‘do they educate children in the streets?’ I mean, we do not teach these things to children, not to make them see the others as enemies. If

---

<sup>76</sup> From an interview with Hale hanım, May, 2005. “Farkı şöyle, orada hiçbir ayrım yok. Çevre köylerinde de yani Sünni Alevi diye hiçbir ayrım yok. Burada şimdi Ramazan geldiği zaman Alevi çocuklar oruç tutmayınca, Sünni çocukları hırçınlaşıyor niye tutmuyorsun diye. Bu büyük bir baskı. E bizim de kendi orucumuz var yani. Araştırsınlar, 12 gün, bir fazla yok. ... Ben şimdi sen oruç tutuyorsun cennete gideceksin ben tutmuyorum cehenneme gideceğim, öyle birşey de yok. Herkesin nereye gideceğini Allah bilir.”

they do not teach their children as well, there will be no enmity among the children.<sup>77</sup>

Not teaching children what Alevilik and *Sünnilik* are may reach the point where a daughter might learn that she is Alevi at the age of twenty, though this may be an extreme case. During the interview with Fahriye hanım, who is from another village in Sivas and who is from a *gün* group in A, her daughter who came from work also joined us. At that moment, Fahriye hanım was telling me that they were not talking about ‘these issues’ in the older times when they migrated to the city:

We were not talking about Alevilik and *Sünnilik*, because there was not a majority in Alevilik. There was no one who would come forward. Never. If you said you were Alevi, you would come across unprecedented obstacles. Now, it is not like that. Now we have human rights, we have freedom; you can always defend your right. In the old times, it was not like that, you were not able to defend your right. Because you were not able to defend your right, you remained silent. We used to do it like that. We never defended.<sup>78</sup>

Her remark can be taken as the sign of the inequality she felt as an Alevi vis-à-vis Sunnis, an inequality that she feels that has found its expression in the unity among Alevis, or, we might argue, is facilitated by the Alevist movement’s call for disclosure

---

<sup>77</sup> From an interview with Refika hanım, March, 2005. “Bizim çocuklarımıza öğretmemişiz biz Alevilik Sünnilik. Benim oğlum 5’e mi gidiyordu, 4’e mi gidiyordu. Onun yaşıtı mı, ya ondan bir yaş küçük ya aynı devrede, bir çocuk, oynuyorlar devamlı. Sünni çocuğu. Oynamışlar, dövüşmüşler, çocuk değil mi, artık top yüzünden mi, dövüşmüşler. Çocuk oğluma demiş ki Kızılbaş. O, bak nasıl öğretmişler. Eve geldi, anne, e oğlum ne oldu, Hayri’nin oğlu bana kızılbaş dedi, bak bakalım benim başım kırmızı mı? Ben onları ne diye çocuğun kafasına sokayım yani. Oğlum dedim yok dedim onları boşver sen dedim. Kadına da dedim, oğluna çok şey öğretmişsin dedim, okumayı öğretmeden onları mı öğrettin dedim. Valla yukardan çağırdım o karyı. Kadın da dedi yok anam dedi biz öğretmedik, sokaklardan öğrenmiştir. Sokaklarda onlara eğitim mi veriyorlar dedim. Yani biz öğretmiyoruz yani, karşı tarafı düşman görmesin diye. Onlar da öğretmese aslında çocukların arasında hiçbir şey olmayacak.”

<sup>78</sup> From an interview with Fahriye hanım, March, 2005. “Böyle Alevilik Sünnilik konusu açmıyorduk. Çünkü sebebine gelince, Alevilik’te çoğunluk yoktu. Böyle öne çıkan yoktu. Hiçbir zaman. Her zaman için mesela ben Alevi’yim desen karşına olmaz şekilde engeller çıkıyordu. Şimdi öyle değil. Şimdi insan hakları var, hürlük var, her zaman hakkını savunabiliyorsun. Ama o zaman öyle değildi, hakkını savunamıyordun. Hakkını savunamadığın için de bilgin de kültürün de çok yeterli değilse, susuyordun. Biz yani öyle yapardık. Hiçbir zaman savunmamışızdır.”

of Alevi identity. When her daughter heard this comment, she added that she learned that she was Alevi at the age of twenty. Fahriye hanım explained this situation as follows:

Berna, we know lots of people, we do not want to differentiate between them. We see them as *human*, as Muslims. Other people discriminate against us, Alevis, but we do not discriminate against anyone. We say we also go to the army, we are the people of the same country, same land. We might also differentiate among people, [for instance] Alevi people gather in cemevis, their knowledge is also different. But if other people look down on you, since they [Sunnis] look down on them [Alevis], they also do so in return. For instance, here I cook *Hızır lokması*<sup>79</sup> and distribute it. If I do not have any Alevi neighbors, I do not tell them [Sunnis] that I am distributing them *Hızır Lokması*. Why? I should have the knowledge to tell them the meaning of it. The people you encounter ask more questions and it is never enough if you only say that you cooked *Hızır Lokması*. Since they ask more question, you do not tell them [that it is *Hızır Lokması*]. ... But when I moved to this building, I told those neighbors who asked where I was from that I was from Sivas. They asked whether I was Alevi. I said yes. We are Alevi, and this is how we look like. At first they were hesitant. I said live and see. But now, they really like us.”<sup>80</sup>

As we see in the above accounts, the tendency to conceal one’s identity is portrayed as a caution against the discriminatory approach of Sunnis. *Ayırım yapmamak* (not to differentiate), on the other hand, is a quality attributed to Alevis. This does not mean

---

<sup>79</sup> *Lokma* might be any kind of food, prepared for the purpose of special, usually religious, occasions and distributed to other people. See Chapter 4 for a discussion of *lokma*.

<sup>80</sup> From an interview with Fahriye hanım, March, 2005. “Şimdi Berna, o kadar geniş çevremiz var ki, biz orada kalkıp da insanlara ayırım yapmak istemiyoruz. Biz insan olarak görüyoruz, Müslüman olarak görüyoruz. Başkaları bizi Alevi kökenlilere ayırım yapıyorlar, yoksa bizde ayırım yok ki. Diyoruz ki, askerliğini yapıyorsun, aynı memleketin toprakların insanısın. Bizim çok ayırdığımızı, tamam, olabilir, nasıl olur, Alevi kesimi hepsi bir araya gelir, bir cemevinde toplanırlar, ederler, onların bilgileri daha değişiktir. Diğer taraftaki insanlar eğer bilmiyorsa, onları hor görüyorsa, o onu hor görürse o da onu aynı karşılıyor. Burada ben Hızır lokması yaptım dağıtacağım değil mi? Komşularımdan Alevi olan yoksa ben bunu Hızır’ın lokmasını yaptım da sana dağıtıyorum demiyorum. Niçin demiyorum? Benim ona anlatmam için kökenim kuvvetli olmalı. Sade ben Hızır’ın lokmasını yaptım da dağıtıyorum demeyle o karşıdaki insan yetinmiyor. Yetinmediği için de açmıyorsun. ... Ben şimdi bu binaya geldiğim günü komşular kim hangisi merhaba nerelisin nereden geldin dedikleri anda ben söyledim işte. Sivaslıyız. Alevi misiniz? Evet Alevi’yiz. Alevi’yiz, şeklimiz şemalimiz böyle. Önce biraz çekindi insanlar. Yaşayın görün dedim ben. Fakat şimdi bizden iyisi yok.”

that Alevis do not recognize a difference, but they argue that they do not discriminate against people on the basis of this difference. Indeed, treating difference as an unimportant thing is a positive quality attributed to Alevis. In Fahriye hanım's account, as well as in other accounts, we also see the recognition of the changing attitude of Alevis towards concealment as well: Alevilik is no longer something to be hidden, but with the space opened up by those who would speak for Alevilik, women also recognize a standpoint from which they can *defend themselves*.

Women contrast *ayrım yapmak* with Alevis' emphasis on *insan olmak* (to be human), which, they claim, does not lead to discrimination on the basis of identity, sect or gender. Indeed, in the meeting in Yeliz hanım's house, women agreed that the accusations were the result of ignorance ('*cahillik*') and Sunnis were not as tolerant ('*hoşgörülü*') as Alevis were. While talking about the negative attributes of Sunnis, however, women always 'admit' that there might be some Alevis who would behave like *yobaz* Sunnis. For instance, Nergis hanım and Yıldız hanım commented that there were ignorant persons among Alevis as well. Yıldız hanım gave another example where a friend of hers was responding to queries about her Sunni daughter-in-law by saying that her daughter-in-law was *yabancı*. Yıldız hanım was against this approach, "how can you call someone who has 'entered' your house a stranger?"<sup>81</sup>, she said (by which she refers to someone who became a member of the household through marriage). The ways of bridging the gap between Alevis and Sunnis could be seen in the mottos that they used and that I have become used to hearing in this kind of discussion: "*İyisi de var, kötüsü de*" ("You have good ones, as well as bad ones"), "*Alevi'nin de kötüsü var, Sünni'nin de*" ("There are some bad Alevis, and some bad

---

<sup>81</sup> "*Benim evime girmiş birine ben nasıl yabancı derim?*"

Sunnis as well”), or “*Mühim olan insanlık*” (“The important thing is to be human being”).

Emphasizing *insanlık* (humanity) is used by women to bridge the gap between Sunnis and Alevis in everyday encounters, which is meant to exclude those Sunnis and Alevis who resort to discrimination and unite those who on the basis of a shared ‘humanity’ do not discriminate. For instance, in a *gün* meeting that took place in Filiz hanım’s house, I sat beside Ayhan hanım, the *elti*<sup>82</sup> of a woman who is in the *gün* meeting and who is a Sunni. She learned that I was not Alevi by asking me where I was from (as she was not present in the first meeting). Comments flowed: “*Önemli olan Alevi olmak ya da Sünni olmak değil, önemli olan insan olmak.*” (“It does not matter whether you are Sunni or Alevi. What matters is *to be human*.”) In this moment, however, Hasibe hanım told the following incident to underline what they meant by *insan olmak* – this was an explanation that was directed to me, as I was ‘the new one’: “When we first came from village, we stayed in Ayhan’s house, we might even be dirty and snotty-nosed. But Ayhan would eat the food that our children would chew and throw away”<sup>83</sup> – which meant that Ayhan hanım never looked down on them, which was another attribute of *insan olmak*.

*İnsan olmak* is the phrase that can literally be translated as ‘to be human’, but in fact it is used to express that as a human one has to have some positive qualities (different from animals and plants, one woman said). This is a common sense phrase, used by almost everyone in Turkey, with connotations such as respect, dignity,

---

<sup>82</sup> *Elti* is the name given to a woman’s husband’s brother’s wife.

<sup>83</sup> From my fieldnotes: “*Köyden geldiğimizde ilk biz Ayhanlarda kaldık. Belki pistik, sümüklüydük. Ama bu Ayhan bizim çocukların ağızlarından çıkardıkları lokmayı kendi ağzına atardı.*”

tolerance, etc. However, in Alevi usage, it is argued to be the basis of the whole teaching. In fact, people find it hard to explain it, and they give some examples:

We value the human being. It is enough if somebody is human. No one else values the human being as we do. Alevis are the real Muslims, for they never look down on anyone. They do not differentiate between the poor and the rich. What we most value is manners and culture. This is really important to us. Always, we value human beings.<sup>84</sup>

Apart from the phrase *insan olmak* that is meant to define Alevis and to de-emphasize differences, women have other ways of marking and working with difference. In the everyday relations of Alevi women with some Sunni women, we see that conflicts become more intense once they are perceived to be the result of immutable differences that are attributed to ‘extremisms’, like the throwing away of the *aşure*, though this perception does not interfere with continuing good relations with other Sunni women and manifests itself in the visiting practices of women. For instance, when I went to a meeting of *apartman günü* (literally ‘building day’) in the house of an Alevi woman, which included women living in the same apartment building, where both Sunni and Alevi lived, my host agreed to hold a *mevlit* (a gathering in which people come together to recite a Turkish prayer that celebrates the birth of Muhammed, a common practice in Turkey, which is believed to be a good deed) together with Sunni women, which again was a way for the host to emphasize their good relations.

What can be inferred from the instances mentioned above is that the boundaries between Alevis and Sunnis do not go unnoticed by the actors; however,

---

<sup>84</sup> From an interview with Fahriye hanım, March, 2005. “Biz yani insana önem veriyoruz. İnsan olsun yeter ki. İnsana verdiğimiz önemi hiç başkaları vermiyor. Alevi kesimi gerçekten, gerçek Alevi, yani insan, esas Müslüman Alevi kesimi. Çünkü sebebine gelince, insanları hiçbir zaman hakir görmüyor. Bu zengin bu fakir demiyor. Yeter ki, bizim en öne koyduğumuz şey, görgü kültür. Bu bizim için çok önemli. Bu her zaman için, biz her zaman insanlara değer veren bir kişiyiz.”

these boundaries do not prevent these actors from forming friendship ties and alliances. The boundaries are not that neat as well, for unless an observer knows who is Sunni and who is Alevi and unless a 'religious' matter is mentioned, it is difficult to tell to which group a person belongs to. For the Alevi and the Sunni in an everyday setting, the boundaries are either underlined or treated as a non-existing entity, which again is a form of citing difference.



## CHAPTER 4

### THE COMMONALITIES THAT CAN (NOT) MATTER

In the discourse of Alevilik since the late 1980s, ‘practices’ play a significant role in the imagination of a community of Alevis. Emphasizing the ‘common’ aspects of practices enable people to imagine that they share a common *essence* with other Alevis, who come from different regions and from different linguistic and ethnic backgrounds. The differences in the practices, on the other hand, are treated as ‘varieties’, which again enrich the common heritage of Alevis. In this process, *cem* and *semah*<sup>85</sup>, which used to be carried out in places that were protected from the Sunni gaze and which were the target of the Sunni accusations leveled at Alevis, have become the most visible practices of Alevis through the construction of *cemevis* and, as Fahriye Dinçer (2004) demonstrates, through *semah* performances in *cems* and onstage. For instance, Dinçer argues that *semah* played a significant role in representing Alevilik, as well as in providing for ‘Alevis’ a practice through which they can claim their ‘identity’:

While becoming visible in the public sphere, the *semahs*, on the one hand, answered the question of ‘what Alevilik is’ for the non-Alevi; on the other hand, they served as a means for those Alevis who had not had a close – or any – relationship with the Alevi culture for a long period of time. In this respect, it is necessary to mention those Alevis who had been living in cities for a long time,

---

<sup>85</sup> *Semah* is a ritual dance, originally a part of *cem*. See Dinçer (2004) for a detailed study of how *semahs* played a crucial role in the formulation of Alevi identity.

and especially the young among them. By learning about *semahs* and by participating in the rehearsals, they became acquainted with Alevi culture, and by performing them publicly, they claimed their right to live with the Alevi identity. (Dinçer, 2004, p. 2)

The discourse of Alevilik since the late 1980s, then, is not only a call for Alevis to manifest their identity. It does, at the same time, propose a way in which the identity can be claimed: by citing ‘commonalities’ and ‘varieties’ *among* the practices of various peoples who are defined under the term ‘Alevis’. The sense of a large community of Alevis develops not only through the constant marking of ‘differences’ from Sunnis, but also through the marking of ‘commonalities’ among Alevis. Hence, if we are to look at the formation of a sense of being Alevi, practices comprise a necessary ground of inquiry, not only because some practices become the symbols of a given identity, but also because they are the moments where a sense of self develops through practices. As Anne-Marie Fortier argues, “practices of group identity are about manufacturing cultural and historical belongings which mark out terrains of commonality that delineate the politics and social dynamics of ‘fitting-in’” (Fortier, 1999, p. 42).

This chapter focuses on these ‘commonalities’. We should also consider, however, that within the networks among women, *cem* and *semah* are not necessarily among the practices cited as the commonalities. Rather, there are a number of other practices that are more abrupt and ‘everyday’ (or *ritualized*) in the sense that they appear within the context of other everyday practices, such as those practices that appear when women visit each other. Therefore, what we are dealing with here is not only *cem* and *semah* as particular practices constituting the basis for imagining an identity, but a particular way of talking about, practicing and imagining an identity, a discourse in the sense Hall (1997) uses it, based on ‘emphasizing commonalities’. As

we shall see in this chapter, women also emphasize and practice commonalities and varieties, but their emphasis works to enhance and expand the networks among women. Here I will first elaborate more on how a discourse of emphasizing commonalities appeared through *cem* and *semah*, and then move on to women's practices as they appear in their visits.<sup>86</sup>

### 'Practices' and 'Alevis'

Both *cem* and *semah* have become visible since the late 1980s with the rise of the Alevist movement as Dinçer (2004) and Es (2006) argue. Both practices gained this visibility through the construction of *cemevis*, while the formation of *semah* groups, as well as *cems* held in the *cemevis* and shrines have become the occasions for emphasizing commonalities among Alevis. For Dinçer (2004), for instance, *semah* plays a significant role in overcoming differences among those Alevis coming from diverse backgrounds:

... as put forward in the case of the *dedes*, the organized public rituals have become 'meetings of relative strangers'. Under these circumstances, *semah* dances and music emerge as the means by which a large number of different interpretations and explanations could be absorbed and a participatory space which can manage difference could be provided. (Dinçer, 2004, p. 334)

As Es (2006) notes, however, the practices in urban *cemevis* bring out the question of incongruity between the practices of Alevis from different locales as well.<sup>87</sup>

---

<sup>86</sup> Visiting is used both for the visits among women and for the visits to shrines. In both occasions, visiting someone means that you are showing respect to that person.

<sup>87</sup> This point might be clearer if we look at the following passage from Es' thesis: "People who have attended to *cem* ceremonies in their villages and are used to a certain form of *cem* liturgy are often disturbed and sometimes alienated from *cems* totally due to the incompatibility between different *cems*

Therefore, the tension in emphasizing commonalities is tried to be overcome by either treating differences in practices as varieties that enrich the common culture or by de-emphasizing the differences, which we can more clearly see on larger occasions organized by Alevist groups. Indeed, with reference to two organizations that I attended in 2004, we can also argue that the tension between emphasizing *semah* or *cem* becomes a point of friction for how Alevis will be represented today as well. These two organizations are *Barişa Semah Dönenler* (Turning Semah for Peace)<sup>88</sup> and *Gelin Canlar Cem Olalım* (Let us hold a *cem* together)<sup>89</sup>, both of which took place in a large sports hall in Istanbul.

Organized by *Radio Barış*<sup>90</sup>, *Barişa Semah Dönenler* hosted several different groups of *semah*, as well as several well-known singers who also sang some *deyiş* (songs and poems of Alevi literature) among other *türküs* (local songs) from different regions, and a considerable number of Alevis participated. The occasion was more like a festival, where people participated in singing *türküs* as well as watching different *semah* groups performing different kinds of *semahs* in their identical clothings. Their performances contributed to the ‘folkloric’ look of the event and showed the varieties of practices among Alevis. An alternative occasion, *Gelin Canlar Cem Olalım* was organized by the Cem Foundation, and was aimed towards re-

---

they attend in cemevis. In Alibeyköy, Hüseyin, a Turkish Alevi man from Tokat told me of his dislike of a Kurdish dede, ‘He was a Kurdish dede. The man talks, he says something, [but] you do not understand anything. A tall, dirty, thin man...he was from Erzurum.’ It was striking to see this man, who presented himself as a very devoted Alevi who attended cems regularly, and contributed money to cemevi constructions, make such harsh remarks about a dede, whom I expected him to revere. An old woman from Tokat, Fatma described, in a teasing manner, how strange she found the behavior of another Alevi woman during a cem they had attended together: ‘A woman from Erzurum beat me up. I was sitting [during the cem]. We do the *muhabbet* [cem] calmly. We don’t cry ‘Hü! Hü!’ We do the *muhabbet* from inside [silently]. The woman told me, ‘Why do not you say Hü? Say Hüseyin, why do not you cry?’ She hit my back, and it hurt very much.” (Es, 2006: 63-4)

<sup>88</sup> See Appendix C for the ticket of the occasion in 2004.

<sup>89</sup> See Appendix D for the invitation card of the occasion in 2004.

<sup>90</sup> *Radio Barış* (Radio Peace) is owned by the same company that published *Toplumsal Barış*.

situating *semahs* in *cems*. A large number of Alevis also participated in *Gelin Canlar Cem Olalım*, but the organizers' emphasis on its being a huge *cem*, directed by a *dede*, differentiated it from the former organization. The occasion's character as a form of worship was constantly reminded by the warnings that the participants should not clap their hands after *deyişs* and *semahs* as the occasion was one of a collective worship. Indeed, the occasion's 'religious' character was emphasized by the statement in the invitation card that the *cem* is the common practice of Alevis, Bektaşis, and Mevleviis. As a huge *cem*, the practice was more towards overcoming differences among 'Alevis' by de-emphasizing the varieties in holding *cems* that may appear due to regional differences. Both occasions, however, provided a space in which being 'Alevi' could be manifested by participating in large-scale public practices.

In the negotiations between state institutions and Alevist organizations as well, practices play a significant role. Although *cemevis* are occasionally referred as 'culture houses'<sup>91</sup>, to the extent that the word *cem* is the name given to the collective form of worship practiced by Alevis, these places are primarily represented as places of worship. One might argue the place of the *cem* as the focus of the negotiations with the state over the right to have buildings for worship and their comparison to mosques reduces the experiences of the difference between Alevis and Sunnis to a difference of practices, and hence to the difference between those people who go to mosques and those people who go to *cemevis*. Within this context, practices which are emphasized to belong to Alevis come to define the field of 'religion', and the 'political' field becomes a field of advocacy of the right to claim and learn these practices. In any case, the negotiations over the status of *cemevis* provide people with a discourse of

---

<sup>91</sup> The law does not permit these places to be named as *ibadethane*.

talking about practices when the differences between Alevis and Sunnis are concerned.

Within this context, given the diversity of the practices of *cem* (and *semah*, as Dinçer argues) among various regions, to defend the right to have *cemevis* and hence *cems* means that at least a minimum of commonality is tried to be achieved among those people participating, despite the recognition of diversities, so that a group called ‘Alevis’ can be maintained. Hence, in defending the right to have *cemevis* (and the right to have lessons on Alevilik in schools, to a certain extent), the activists contribute to (and in a sense construct) the internal unity, or homogeneity, assumed with the word ‘Alevis’. In addition, the emphasis on *cem* helps to maintain the ‘religion’ / ‘politics’ divide, manipulating this divide in an elaborate way so that the difference between Alevis and Sunnis might be reduced to a divide based on ‘religious practices’, hence suggesting an easy ‘political’ solution for dealing with this problem: that of mutual tolerance with regards to religious practices.

My argument will also focus on some practices, in terms of both performance of and conversations about these practices, which contribute to the imagination of a community of Alevis. However, I argue that focusing solely on the *cem* cannot account for the experiences of women of being Alevi. Therefore, even though I admit their central role in the constitution of the discourse of Alevilik as it is today, I will not treat the *cem* (and the *semah*) as *the* practice that might totally explain the sense of being Alevi for women who contributed to this research. Instead I will try to show that women’s sense of being Alevi and their perception of Alevis also depend on a number of practices that they perform within their immediate surrounding, especially within the context of their visiting practices and the networks among women, which appear to an outsider as ‘moments of commonality’. These moments do not require

specialized settings like *cemevis*, and are not necessarily verbal or ‘religious’ either. In this sense, I will not discard the instances which might be called the ‘religious practices’, but will include those instances where a specific ‘religious’ aspect is not necessarily present, such as serving *yöresel* (local) food.

In this chapter, then, my aim is to focus on those *ritualized* practices (or ‘ritualized moments’) in everyday encounters that mark ‘commonalities and varieties’ among Alevis within the networks of women who contributed to this research, in contexts such as *gün* groups, cooking and serving of foods and *aşure*, and visits to holy places. Here, the term that I have in mind is *ritualization*, used by Catherine Bell as follows:

Viewed as practice, ritualization involves the very drawing, in and through the activity itself, of a privileged distinction between ways of acting, specifically between those acts being performed and those being contrasted, mimed, or implicated somehow. That is, intrinsic to ritualization are strategies for differentiating itself – to various degrees and in various ways – from other ways of acting within any particular culture. At a basic level, ritualization is a way of acting that specifically establishes a privileged contrast, differentiating itself as more important and powerful. Such privileged distinctions may be drawn in a variety of culturally specific ways that render the ritualized acts dominant in status. (Bell, 1992, p. 90)

In addition to contributing to the notion of Alevis as a larger entity, finding commonalities and varieties in various occasions where women encounter other Alevi women from different regions is a major way of forming networks for women on the basis of being Alevi. Hence, we see that the will to discover commonalities and varieties is not restricted to ‘activists’ of Alevilik. As it will become clearer, being Alevi is not only about ‘rituals’ and ‘ritualized moments’, but also talking about them, which acknowledges the variety of practices yet emphasizes the commonalities so that

the sense of a larger community of Alevi can persist, through which women have a sense of self, as well as form networks on the basis of Alevi identity that they can count on to find support and intimacy. As it will become clearer throughout this chapter, within these networks of friendship, the difference of Alevi and Sunni does not go unrecognized, and therefore, difference is not out of sight in the formation of bonds based on commonalities among Alevi as well.

### Visiting among Women and ‘Commonalities’

The practice of visiting attracted the interest of scholars in various contexts as a significant component of forming networks. For instance, in an article on the visiting patterns in a Lebanese Druze village, Louise E. Sweet (1974) identifies daily and seasonal visits, as well as those organized around various calendars and life cycles.<sup>92</sup> Nadia Abu-Zahra, on the other hand, with reference to her fieldwork in the village of Sidi Amur in the Tunisian Sahel, argues that values of prestige are expressed with visiting patterns, and within this context, “it is a manifestation of prestige to be able to make few visits while receiving many of them” (Abu-Zahra, 1974, p. 121).

Like the patterns of visiting that can be seen in the larger community, women’s visiting also involves the forming of bonds and is aimed towards gaining prestige. Indeed, visiting provides a mechanism for women through which they build and enhance networks with other women. Soraya Altorki, in the case of a group of elite women in Saudi Arabia, argues that in a society where women’s mobility is

---

<sup>92</sup> For Sweet, the practices of social interaction in the village “was intricate, structured, participated in and observed by everyone; the flow was an on-going dynamic of forming and dissolving linkages and alliances within a bounded, ranked community of two functions, many patrilineal kin groups, and household units ... Everyone knew and interpreted the meaning or function of every social interaction undertaken by himself or those noted by other individuals – everyone was enmeshed in it” (Sweet, 1974, p. 112).



restricted to the private realm, “social visits are the only means by which they can develop and sustain relationships with friends and kinswomen who can be called upon in hours of need for help and cooperation. Such ties are more important for women since they offer a source of security needed because of their relatively precarious status in society” (Altorki, 1986, p. 100). With reference to her fieldwork in a village in Söke (Turkey), Nükhet Sirman argues that networks help women move independently from their husbands and female relatives: “A woman with access to other women not only functions as a proper woman, but she also has access to information other than that provided to her by her husband or female relatives. Through such contacts and the information exchanged, women are able to enlarge the sphere within which they can move” (Sirman, 1995, p. 211).

It is possible to look at the character of the networks of Alevi women from the village of Zeynep hanım whom I met in the two districts in Istanbul in the light of the authors’ arguments mentioned above. We might argue that Alevi women aspire to and perform the daily rituals of middle-class housewives in urban Turkey today, whose primary duties are providing for the children and maintaining the orderliness and cleanliness of the house. For those women working outside the house, these duties do not diminish as well. In this sense, visiting is a way of overcoming the isolation from other women that having a separate household and being a housewife brings for each woman. Hence, for all the women I met during the fieldwork, visiting another woman or accepting visits was an expected and important activity. Women’s relations to other women, including friends and kin, ranged from their immediate neighbors in the multi-storey buildings they lived in to those living in the same neighborhood and included both Alevis and Sunnis. Those women coming from the same village, living in the same or a different neighborhoods, and those Alevi women from different

villages and towns, with whom they had contacts were included in the circle of visiting as well.

### Casual Visits

Casual visits among women in the same neighborhood was a very frequent activity and I often encountered the neighbors of a woman when they dropped in to chat with my hosts, bringing their knitting-needles and relaxing themselves in the company of their friends after a morning of housework. In their relations with their neighbors, I observed that women usually had good relations with their neighbors and friends who are not of Alevi origin as well. This manifested itself in these casual visits where Sunni neighbors were as comfortable as Alevi neighbors in dropping by unannouncedly. As we saw in the previous chapter in Canan hanım's account, a case of accusation from a Sunni with regard to Alevis puts an end to these visits.

The good relations between Alevi and Sunni neighbors can continue even after one of them moves to another apartment, and they may still seek each other's company in times of hardship. The relation between Suna hanım in the district in the European side whom I met through Zeliha hanım and her Sunni neighbor is an example of the close relations between Alevi and Sunni women. The first time I saw her neighbor was when I went to interview Suna hanım. Her husband, who was more than happy to see a 'researcher student' at home, was talking to me about their village and how the 'traditional' practices were disappearing. A retired man in his sixties, Hasan bey was a reader of a wide range of books, including those on Alevilik and liked to talk about 'the folklore of Anatolia'. Indeed he was a little bit upset that I would interview his wife and not himself, though he convinced himself that his wife

could be a more ‘authentic’ resource than himself for a researcher who is interested in Alevi women’s lives.

Suna hanım’s neighbor, Halide hanım, dropped in when I was talking to Hasan bey. She was apparently upset, so Suna hanım asked her what happened and together they moved to the other room. After a while the neighbor left, relieved after talking to a friend. Suna hanım told me that the woman’s husband had lost his job, and she was now worried about their income. Suna hanım expressed the close relationship they built with Halide hanım over the years with the words: “*Bir evli gibiydik*” (“It was as if we were from the same household”). The degree of closeness between the two women made them seek each other in times of difficulty, which showed that the difference between Alevis and Sunnis did not impede women from being close.

### Visits with Prior Notice

Apart from these casual visits where women drop by, there are a number of other kinds of visits which take on a *ritualized* character, in which the guest informs the host beforehand. These visits involve more preparation on the side of the host, and women usually dress up for the occasion. For instance, if there will be another visitor (like me) whom the host does not know well, women usually inform the hosts beforehand. If there is some distance between the houses of the host and guest, such as when a woman visits another ‘villager’ woman living in another district, the guest notices the host to discard the chance of not finding the host at home.

These visits may work towards breaking the ice among two women as well. For instance, in the district in the Anatolian side, when I asked Zeynep hanım if she could take me to some of her neighbors’ houses, she took the opportunity for visiting

a woman who had stopped visiting Zeynep hanım. Zeynep hanım was wondering if she unintentionally did something that could hurt Deniz hanım. When we went there, Deniz hanım responded that her mother, who was in her village at the moment, was very ill. And she was often going to help her brother to take their mother to the hospital. Learning that there was nothing wrong with her relation with Deniz hanım, Zeynep hanım was relieved. Then they engaged in a long conversation about illnesses, doctors and hospitals.

In addition to these issues, in their common repertoire of conversation practices played a crucial role in emphasizing commonalities. Among other things, their trips to their villages and to one of the main holy places of visit (*ziyaret*) for Alevis constituted highly revered experiences that they shared with each other with great enthusiasm. Zeynep hanım had been to her village that summer, and grown some tomatoes and other vegetables. Deniz hanım recounted that she was also going to her village in Malatya every summer, helping with the harvest. Even though the experiences of these two women of their life in the summertime in the village differed from each other (Zeynep hanım perceived it more as a vacation where she grew food in small scale and more as a leisure activity, while Deniz hanım's labor in village was more towards contributing to the household economy of her larger family), for each woman their life in the village in the summers was a memorable event that they could share with other women.<sup>93</sup>

Zeynep hanım also talked about her visit to Hıdır Abdal (a *ziyaret*) while they were in the village. Deniz hanım added that they were also visiting Hıdır Abdal every summer, at the time of the festival. Hence they talked about the natural beauty of the place, as well as about the festival, which was an occasion to make a *ziyaret*, see other

---

<sup>93</sup> This point will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

Alevis from different regions, and listen to the famous Alevi *saz* players. The festival, like others of its kind<sup>94</sup>, was a place where women sensed the existence of a larger community of ‘Alevis’. Besides the fact that visiting a holy place might be a ‘religious’ practice for those who visit there, one might argue with reference to the conversation between Zeynep hanım and Deniz hanım that even talking about visiting the same place helps to create a ‘commonality’ of experience among those ‘Alevi’ women from different hometowns. This point might be clearer if we look at the *gün* (literally ‘day’, used to denote a specific form of visiting among women) for other similar instances of conversation and practice among women from different villages or towns where ‘commonality’ is felt through the emphasis on ‘practices’.

#### *Gün* as a Rotating Savings and Credit Association

*Gün* (day) is a specific form of visiting among women, whose most apparent characteristic is its semi-formal structure. Although other expressions like *altın günü* (gold day) or *paralı gün* (money day) are sometimes used to specify the medium of exchange in these meetings, I prefer to use the term *gün* to refer to this association as it came into being in the 1980s<sup>95</sup>, for it was a term more commonly used by women in

---

<sup>94</sup> See Massicard (2003b).

<sup>95</sup> “... at the end of the sixties or at the beginning of the seventies, the *gün* did not even exist in its present day form. At that time the *kabul günü* was an institution reserved for the urban elite. ... In contrast to the *kabul günü*, the *gün* of the middle-class women of eighties is a meeting of a steady group.” (Wolbert, 1996, p.188). In the *kabul günü* of the elite women of towns of the 1960s and 1970s, however, the host opens her house to twenty to eighty women in a particular day of each month. For Barbara Aswad, *kabul günü* is based on balanced reciprocity. Women, by choosing to pay a visit or not, underline the status of a host: If a woman is visited by a high number of women in a *kabul günü*, it means that she comes from a prestigious family or that she has paid visits to a necessary number of women before her *kabul günü*. Hence, the patterns of attending the *kabul günü* in the towns that Aswad (1974), Benedict (1974) and Lindisfarne (2002) refer to emphasize the already existing hierarchical bonds between the women in a certain area and remains a practice of elite women. In this regard, *kabul günü* in towns should be differentiated from *gün* associations in urban areas. *Gün* is practiced middle-class urban women with comparable statuses who set up groups, and the eligibility of each woman is

A, the middle class district in Istanbul. *Gün* is a common activity among women in urban areas and it is not something specific to Alevis. One of the main objectives of organizing a *gün* is to save money. When a certain number of women get together and start a *gün* (*gün yapmak*), they decide how much they will contribute (twenty Euros<sup>96</sup> for instance) each time they visit a house. They gather once in a month, for instance, in one of the women's houses, until each woman becomes a host for one time. And the guests give the specified amount of money to the host.

In *gün* association the equal contribution of money creates a sense of equality among the women in the meeting: In principle, as long as a woman can provide the specified amount of money, she can be a part of the *gün*. This aspect of *gün* makes it an example of Rotating Savings and Credit Associations (ROSCA), defined by Shirley Ardener as 'an association formed upon a core of participants who make regular contributions to a fund which is given in whole or in part to each contributor in turn' (Ardener, 1996, p. 1). In addition, the already regulated schedule of the meetings create a sense of equality as well. The *gün* is composed of a stable group of women (usually not more than fifteen women), and each woman is visited only once during the period in which the cycle is completed. Hence, the imbalance that might arise from the failure to reciprocate a visit is avoided.

---

negotiated before the meetings start. Usually, close neighbors or kin (who live nearby) form the initial group, while other women may join later if another member introduces them to the group. *Gün*, as it is practiced today in urban areas, looks more like the *kabul günü*s that Ferhunde Özbay (1999) recounts to have taken place in the urban middle-class houses of the first few decades of the Republican period. But still, the practice of collecting money differentiates *gün* from these *kabul günü*s in urban centers, for it offers a distinct way of regulating the visits.

<sup>96</sup> The use of foreign currency is a way of coping with inflation. See Khatib-Chahidi (1996) for a similar discussion about the use of foreign currency in the case of the ROSCAs among women in Cyprus.

### Gün and Women's Networks

In the district in the Anatolian side, I was introduced to two *gün* groups by Zeynep hanım in November, 2004. I attended some of their meetings and later conducted interviews with some of the participants. The first group of women had been organizing *gün* among themselves for fifteen years and was composed of ten women, aged forty five to sixty five. Seven of them had married children. Zeynep hanım called her other group of *gün* '*akraba günü*' ('kin day') as her husband's three sisters were part of that group. This was rather a small group, consisting of seven women, aged between forty and seventy, and five of them had married children. Except for one of the women in the first *gün* group, all of these women were Alevi, coming from nearby villages or towns. In addition, I learned that all of these women experienced rural - urban migration.

The initial formation of the group, expressed with the words "*zaten tanışıyorduk*" ("we already knew each other"), usually depends on the already constructed networks which are based on 'commonalities' as well. Living in the same building or the same neighborhood is the most basic commonality, while this commonality usually depends on, or is strengthened by, other commonalities such as coming from the same or nearby villages. Hence, the first group of *gün* was composed of Alevi women who came from nearby villages and towns, and who lived in the same neighborhood. By contrast, Zeynep hanım called the second group of *gün* as *akraba günü* (kin's day), although only three of the women in the meeting were her relatives and the rest of the women came from a nearby town. Zeynep hanım talked about a pattern when I asked her how she got to know these women. She told me: "You might meet new women when you visit a neighbor or when you go to a *gün*. For instance,

another woman might also come to visit the host, and you might get close with that woman if you like each other, *kaynaşırsan* (if you become close) you might invite her to your house as well”. I wondered with who she would like to get close to as well. She answered: “You like more to visit someone who is cultured and who has the manners. Some are more frivolous, you do not visit them much. You get closer with a person who knows what she is doing”.<sup>97</sup> The process through which women in the *gün* group felt themselves as equals, then, was not only based on equal contribution, but also in terms of a shared understanding of manners.

When guests come, they sit in *salon* (the larger front room of the apartments). Sometimes they bring their knitting, and while knitting, talk to each other. The host serves food to the guests, and her close friends or relatives help her with this work (both in the preparation and the serving of food). Actually, each woman, at least once, asks if she can help. This can be taken as a way of showing sincerity, based on *misafir sayılmamak* (a denial of host-guest relationship). The *gün* usually starts at lunch time and ends after tea time, but the food that is served is usually the kind that is supposed to accompany tea, like pastries. In such a context, we see that the kind of food served becomes one of the primary ways through which the host transmits a message about her ‘self’. As far as I could see, in addition to pastries, women may choose to serve ‘healthy food’ (like salads that does not contain much fat) to show her guests that she cares about her and their health, while conversations with regard to ‘origins’ may appear if she chooses to serve *yöresel* (local) food. Hence, the talk on ‘food’, as well as the cooking and the serving, becomes one of the ways through which women choose to underline their ‘being Alevi’ and to emphasize ‘commonalities’ within the

---

<sup>97</sup> From my fieldnotes of our conversation with Zeynep hanım: “Kültürlü, görgülü, kendini bilen insana daha çok gitmek istiyorsun. Bazıları daha haha-hihi, onlara pek gitmiyorsun. Kendini bilen insanla daha güzel kaynaşıyorsun.”



context of *güns*, which enhance the already built networks and may be argued to be the basis for the new ones. It might be argued that these practices might be argued to be *ritualized* in the sense that they are a step out of the usual pastries cooked for the *gün* meetings.

### Citing ‘Commonalities’

Filiz hanım had cooked *babiko* (a kind of pastry, served with yoghurt) on the first day of the *akraba günü*, saying “*yöremizden birşey olsun istedim*” (“I wanted to cook something characteristic of our hometown”). And they also talked for about half an hour about the butter produced in their villages, the best time to buy it, etc, for it was a necessary ingredient of *babiko* that gave it its unique taste. At that moment, Nalan hanım, a friend of Filiz hanım who was not actually in the *gün* group but who wanted to join the meeting as it was an enjoyable occasion, was talking about how delicious *their* food was in general and commenting ‘*We are Zaza<sup>98</sup> not Kurds.*’ Nur hanım, Safiye hanım, Sabahat hanım and Nalan hanım came from the same town, but Nalan hanım did not know them before, but she could underline a ‘commonality’ by referring to *their* common heritage of ‘food preparation’, their common practice not only as women but as women of similar backgrounds.

The cooking and serving of a *yöresel* (local) food, in this occasion, included the host’s motivation to impress her guests, but different from other kinds of

---

<sup>98</sup> “The Zaza-speaking Alevi of Dersim is distinct from that of other Alevi in Anatolia. ... Referred to and variously referring to themselves as ‘Kurdish’, the Zaza speaking Alevi of Tunceli differentiates themselves from the Alevi Kurds of Dersim (Kirdas), the Kurmanci-speaking Shafi’i, and the Zaza-speaking non-Alevi, preferring to underscore their Alevi identity, their region of origin, and their language as the basis of their cultural identity. Historically, the Zaza-speaking Alevi of Dersim referred to themselves as ‘Kirmanc’; ‘Dersimli’, meaning ‘from Dersim’, is increasingly used at present.” (Neyzi, 1999, p. 7)

‘delicious’ food that she could cook, *babiko* looked and tasted like a similar kind of food that was cooked in Nalan hanım’s town; so it appealed to their ‘commonalities’ of not only coming from close towns and villages, but also coming from a similar religious background, as the word *Zaza* implicated - which differentiates Alevis from Sunni Kurds. For Judith Goode, “Menu decisions for events in which the social context is larger than the family depend very much on who the social audience will be and what message is intended to be conveyed” (Goode, 1992, p. 242). Hence, this practice of serving a *yöresel* food appeared to me as a ‘moment of commonality’ among Alevi women, where the commonalities and varieties were expressed in terms of the food served, and solidarity among women was maintained on the basis of ‘being Alevi’.

The ‘commonality’ expressed through food *among* ‘Alevis’ (and sometimes vis-à-vis ‘Sunnis’) might be seen in the serving of *aşure* as well, as I witnessed in another meeting of the other *gün* group in Hasibe hanım’s house. Cooked after twelve days of fasting in the month of Muharrem in the memory of the martyrs of Kerbela, *aşure* is then served to guests, as well as distributed to the neighbors.<sup>99</sup> As it was the end of Muharrem fasting, Hasibe hanım (who came from a nearby village to that of Zeynep hanım) served *aşure*, which women basically called *çorba* (‘soup’) among them. When I was eating it, Nergis hanım (Filiz hanım’s sister) realized that I found it different from the kind of *aşure* that I was used to eating. She said: “*You* cook *aşure* differently. My daughter-in-law does not eat *ours*”. Her daughter-in-law was a Sunni, and the moment I found *aşure* different was also the moment where I was marked as a

---

<sup>99</sup> *Aşure* is cooked by several communities in Anatolia, including Armenians and Greeks, as well as the Sunni Muslims, though the way in which it is cooked and the timing differs. There are several explanations for the origins of this sweet food which is made up largely of cereals; the most common one is associated with Noah. See Korkmaz (2003, pp. 65-66) for further details on the cooking of *aşure* among Alevis and the related prayers.

‘Sunni’ as well. Goode’s argument again might help us to open up this point a little bit more. For Goode, “ethnicity is less often marked by particular items than by the complex rules for how to prepare the items and when to eat them” (Goode, 1992, p. 238). This statement is not necessarily specific to ‘ethnic’ groups, but may come to include those differentiations based on ‘religious practices’ as well. To the extent that it was cooked by Alevis and Sunnis in different ways, *aşure* was a marker of the boundaries between these two groups.

The serving of *aşure*, however, is not restricted to *gün* groups and there are other occasions especially organized for the serving of *aşure*. During my fieldwork, I encountered the cooking of *aşure* in several places: in Alevi associations like Karacaahmet, in village associations like Zeynep hanım’s village association, or in individual houses of women. In every instance, it became the sign of the ‘commonality’ of a certain group of people: in the case of Alevi associations, it becomes the sign of ‘Alevis’, no matter where they regionally come from; in village associations, it becomes the sign of the common ‘culture’ that ‘villagers’ own which is to a great extent based on ‘being Alevi’; and in women’s houses, *aşure* becomes a medium through which commonalities with Alevi neighbors, relatives and acquaintances can be emphasized. *Aşure* is also a matter between Alevi and Sunni neighbors as I underlined in the previous chapter: while inviting Sunni neighbors for *aşure* or distributing *aşure* to them might reflect the degree of sincerity among women, it might also become a site of tension as an Alevi woman told me that some Sunnis were not eating (and throwing away) the *aşure* that she cooked.

The connection between the serving of *aşure* in a *gün* meeting and the occasions organized for the serving of these foods should be considered as well. Like the serving of *aşure* in the *gün* meetings, inviting women to serve them *aşure* also

aims at underlining ‘commonalities’. The serving of food for sacred occasions is not restricted to the case of *aşure*; *lokma*<sup>100</sup> is highly valued as well. Whereas men usually choose to distribute *lokma* in village associations, shrines, or *cemevis* through the lambs that they sacrifice, in occasions like the Fast of *Hızır*<sup>101</sup> (which lasts for three days) and *aşure*, women, in addition to distributing *lokma* in these places, take the opportunity to cook the *lokma* they would like to distribute through which they both fulfill a respected practice, as well as enhance their networks built on the commonality of ‘being Alevi’.

Here I would like to draw attention to the fact that the boundaries between two forms of meetings (*güns*, and *aşure* - or *lokma* - meetings) are not that clear-cut. The meeting for the serving of *aşure* very much shares the characteristics of *gün* meetings and other visiting practices in terms of hosting women, while as I demonstrated above, the *gün* meeting see the serving of *aşure* as well. In this sense, even though she also makes a similar comparison, Nancy Lindisfarne’s (2002) arguments on *kabul günü* and *mevlit* meetings<sup>102</sup> do not let us see those *ritualized* moments within both kinds of meetings – *güns* and *aşure meetings*. In both occasions (*güns*, and *aşure* - or *lokma* - meetings), the cooking, serving, and eating of *aşure* marks this very act as the performance of shared values on the basis of ‘being Alevi’ as a separate practice from the more usual practices in the *gün* meetings and women’s other visiting practices,

---

<sup>100</sup> Women explained to me that *lokma* can be any kind of food that is distributed for the intention of sharing, like pastries or meat and rice. Specifically, it is a food cooked in lodges, and usually involves the meat of a sacrificed animal. See Korkmaz (2003, p. 270) for further details.

<sup>101</sup> A three day fast in the second week of February. See Korkmaz (2003, pp.198-200) for further details. According to the popular belief among Alevi women, if young girls fast for three days without drinking any water, at the end of the third day they would see their possible future husband in their dream.

<sup>102</sup> Lindisfarne (2002) sees *kabul günü* as a result of the ‘secular’ exclusion of women from men, whereas she sees *mevlit* as the result of a ‘religious’ exclusion, as women do not attend mosques in her place of fieldwork in Eğirdir.

and it is thus a *ritualized* practice in the sense Bell (1992) uses the term. The serving of *babiko*, is also a ritualized practice in the sense that it underlines the ‘commonalities’ among Alevis with no necessarily ‘religious’ connotation. Hence, it is not the characteristics of meetings as ‘secular’ or ‘religious’, but the *ritualized* practices within any meeting that creates a sense of ‘commonality’ among ‘Alevis’. However, it will become clearer in the next section that the building of ‘commonalities’ is not a straightforward process as it appears and has its difficulties as well.

### Visiting Holy Places and ‘Commonalities’

*Ziyaret* is the Turkish word for naming the practice of visiting holy places such as saint’s tombs<sup>103</sup> and shrines and natural marvels and was one of the primary practices that women mentioned in the interviews and in other occasions with regard to my questions about their religious practices. Inspired by the books I read on Alevilik, I was always asking whether they were participating in *cems*, back in their villages, as well as in the city. But for most of these women who left their villages when they were young, *cem* was not an occasion that they could regularly join, for as unmarried individuals they were not usually allowed in when they were in the village. Some of them were now participating in the *cems* that were held in *cemevis* (like Refika hanım, who is a regular follower of *cems* as well as *ziyarets*), but some of them did not find these *cems* genuine enough:

---

<sup>103</sup> For Lois Beck, “a saint is a venerated holy man or woman who becomes elevated upon death to the rank of saint; he or she is considered to have divine grace and the power to serve as an intermediary between Allah and living persons. This is regarded by some Muslims to be heretical in terms of the Prophetic tradition.” (Beck, 1980, p. 44)

I do not know much about *cem*. I was a child. But my parents would go. They do not take children with them. But my mother used to tell us. If someone does something wrong, they say that that person will be *seen*<sup>104</sup> in *cem*, which means that he gets punished or the people forgive him there. Or they expel him from the society. They used to tell it like this. I did not participate in many *cems* here. The old people say that they used to make beautiful *cems* and there used to be profound *dedes*. I believe that they are not like this anymore.<sup>105</sup>

In any case, for women, *ziyaret* constitutes as central a place as *cems* as a practice of Alevis:

Since we have Alevi origins, our worship takes place in *cemevis* and in *ziyarets*.<sup>106</sup> People with Alevi origins are drawn to the places where a holy man is buried. They visit, they make offerings. We used to have *ziyarets* back in village, we go to *ziyarets*.<sup>107</sup>

Scholars who work on women and Islam identify the visiting of tombs and shrines primarily as women's practices. Lois Beck argues that "since women are often encouraged not to attend the mosque, they find other places of sanctity and worship, such as tombs and shrines" (Beck, 1980, p. 50). For Emelie A. Olson as well, "shrine activities are perceived as being marginal to the larger society because they are largely

---

<sup>104</sup> Emphasis added.

<sup>105</sup> Interview with Şükran hanım, April 2005: "Ben cemi falan bilmiyorum. Ben çocuktum. Ama annemler giderlerdi. Gidiyorlardı. Çocukları götürmezler yani onlar. Ceme götürmezlerdi. Ama anlatırdı annem, derdi ki, yanlış yapana cemde o gün görgü var derler. Yani onu cezalandırırlar. Onu orada halk affedermiş. Toplumdan ihraç ederlermiş. Öyle derlerdi. Burada pek ceme gitmedim. Gitmeyi de isterim. Ama eskilerin anlattığına göre çok güzel cem yapılmış, çok derin dedeler varmış eskiden. Şimdi öyle olmadığından ben kendim eminim gibi geliyor."

<sup>106</sup> Ziyaret is used both as a verb and a noun. When it is used as a verb, it means 'to visit'. When it is used as a noun, it is used to denote the place visited.

<sup>107</sup> Interview with Fahriye hanım, March 2005: "Alevi kökenli olduğumuz için yani biz cem şeyine. Bizde ibadetlerimiz cem evlerinde geçer, ziyaretlerde geçer. Örneğin nerelerde hangi yerlerde yatırlar var oraları severler Alevi kökenliler. Ziyaret ederler, adakları vardır. Köylerimizde ziyaretler vardı, ziyaretlere gideriz."

women's activities" (Olson, 1991, p. 86). In these accounts, women's practices remain marginal to the practices sanctioned by Orthodox Islam and are explained as a response to women's exclusion from public life. In the case of Alevis however, *ziyaret* cannot solely be identified as a women's practice: though women outnumber the men in the case that I will recount below, it is possible to see equal numbers of men and women in *ziyarets*, like the one I encounter on the tenth day of Muharrem in the Karacaahmet shrine in Istanbul. This does not mean, however, that *ziyaret* does not create an opportunity for women to go beyond their daily routine, just like the non-Alevi women Lindisfarne (2002) talks about. The difference lies, however, in the fact that the centrality of *ziyaret* to Alevi practices does not turn women's visits to shrines into a marginal practice. Rather, for Alevi women, *ziyaret* is a legitimate ground of religious activity that they can carry out outside home.

The *ziyaret* that I joined in June 2005 organized by a woman<sup>108</sup> and included a visit to Abdal Musa's tomb in Antalya and to a nearby fountain in a mountain, named *Uçarsu*, believed to be a reflection of Abdal Musa's holiness. *Uçarsu*'s story, as was told to me by the women in the bus, was also significant in terms of the Alevi / Sunni divide. Abdal Musa, like Hacı Bektaş Veli, is a leading figure for Alevis in Anatolia. One day, Abdal Musa arrives to the villages on one side of the mountain and sees that they are very poor. He asks them why they don't farm the land, and the villagers tell him that there is no water in the area. So he creates *Uçarsu*. Next year, the villagers farm the land and become very prosperous. Abdal Musa goes to the village, and asks

---

<sup>108</sup> Refika hanım organized this trip. As she told me, she was formerly very interested in joining the 'tours' that the associations in Karacaahmet and Şahkulu shrines organized to various *ziyarets* in Turkey, such as the ones to Hacı Bektaş and Abdal Musa. In one of these tours, she met a driver who was coming from a nearby village to that of Refika hanım. Refika hanım thought that visiting these places with a group only composed of her acquaintances would be more comfortable, as they would be able to choose by themselves where they want to see and stay. Therefore she reached an agreement with the driver to organize a 'special' tour. The year before I joined the tour, they had visited Hacı Bektaş.

them to distribute some of the crop to those in need. The villagers refuse to do that: “We are the ones who worked for it, we won’t give it away,” they say. Abdal Musa gets angry: “*Kışın geçilmesin, yazın içilmesin!*” (“You won’t be able to pass through it in the winter, and you won’t be able to drink from it in the summer.” – Meaning: in the winter, there will be water floods and in the summer there will be drought.) The belief is that in the winter, it flows from the side where Sunni villages are settled, and in the summer, it flows from the side where Alevi villages are settled.

Unlike nearby *ziyarets* that women may visit, this *ziyaret* involves a fifteen hour bus trip from Istanbul to Antalya and requires the arrangement of a hotel and bus for the whole trip. Refika hanım, one of the women whom I had interviewed, invited me to this trip that she was organizing, telling me that this would be an opportunity to learn more about Alevilik. Refika hanım invited twenty three people in total: Refika hanım’s tenant’s relatives (twelve women from village F in Sivas, one of them being a Sunni bride), two women who comes from village G in Sivas and their Sunni neighbor, four women Zeynep hanım’s village (Hediye) and two husbands from that village, Nur hanım who comes from Tunceli, and myself.

The composition of the group reflected Refika hanım’s networks: Refika hanım’s tenant was an Alevi woman who comes from a village in Sivas. She was very sick, and could not join the trip, but her relatives came: her sisters, her sister’s daughters, and the granddaughters. One of the women was the tenant’s brother’s wife, a Sunni woman. The other three women from village G was also acquaintances of Refika hanım, and they also invited one of their Sunni neighbors with whom they were close. From Hediye, Refika hanım and Gonca hanım came, Filiz hanım and Nergis hanım came with their husbands, and also Filiz hanım’s friend Nur hanım, who is from Tunceli, joined the group. The diversity of the participants in this ‘visit’



enables us to see how commonalities based on being Alevi and on village-ties were at work, as well as the different ways in which Alevis and Sunnis related to each other.

When the day of departure approached, I called Refika hanım to learn where we would meet. She told me to be in front of Şahkulu shrine in Istanbul at 18:30 one Friday night. I arrived at 18:00 and started to wait in the garden. Refika hanım occupied herself with deciding who should sit with whom in the bus and trying to make everyone happy with this sitting arrangement. She was like a host in this place and she was trying to satisfy everyone, while she was trying to avoid any arguments that might stem from any dissatisfaction with the sitting arrangement. So she made me sit next to Filiz hanım on the right side of the bus, while the group from F village sat on the left side. At the back, the two women from G village and their Sunni neighbor sat. For the women who are from different villages, this was the first time they saw each other. Some of the women came late and the ones who came early were a little bit disturbed. But as we started our journey, we started listening to *türkü*s which all the women enjoyed and they started to sing together, which was one of those ‘moments of commonality’.

However, the ‘moments of commonality’ were not without end. Filiz hanım, who was talking to the women from the other village about the prices of houses and about their other vacations, asked one of the women whether she had been to *Meryem Ana* (the place which is believed to belong to the Virgin Mary near Izmir). The woman said she didn’t. Filiz hanım told her that she had been there, and made a wish which came true. Another woman listening to their conversation got angry: “Didn’t you read anything? Didn’t you ever hear it on TV? It is a sin; you are treating them as an equal to God.” Filiz hanım defended her position: “Don’t you ever ask for something from Ali or twelve *imams*?” “That’s different,” the other women replied, “I

believe in them, they are holy persons.” Filiz hanım asked “What is the difference between them and *Meryem Ana*? You wish from God via them.” The argument seemed to be resolved for the moment, but we can see here the tensions with regard to ‘religious practices’ among Alevis: Filiz hanım’s practice of ‘wishing’ from saints was found by the other women to be superstitious. According to this idea, when you visit the tomb of a holy saint, you should only pray for this holy person as an act of respect and not make wishes from him/her. It is possible to see notifications with regard to this issue in various tombs all over Istanbul as well, in addition to the broadcasting on TV channels.

*Türkü*s, which mark the ‘moments of commonality’ as a common repertoire for nearly all the women in the bus, also received their share of ‘being inappropriate in some occasions’ as well on the day we visited Abdal Musa’s tomb. This time, women were singing *türkü*s together when we arrived at Tekkeköy (the village where the tomb of Abdal Musa is), when an old woman of F village said “*Sanki kına gecesine gidiyorlar!*” (“It is as if they are going to a henna night!”). Another woman from F village also said, “*Huzuruna yaklaştık*” (“We are near to his presence”). The others objected, saying that they hadn’t arrived yet. The moments of commonality, then, was not without disturbances that pointed to the difficulty of forming bonds based on commonality. On the other hand, on both occasions where women warned each other about the appropriate way to behave (in the argument over making a wish and in the argument over singing *türkü*s near a holy tomb) women who claimed to be knowledgeable on the issue of ‘proper’ practice tried to assert their authority.

The disagreement among Alevis with regard to religious practices was not the only point of tension for the women who joined the trip. About 7 a.m. the first morning, we stopped by a restaurant where we ate the foods that the women brought

with them. One of the men arranged the waiters to serve tea. Meanwhile, women went to the restroom. When I entered, one woman from Hediye was angry: “Why don’t you throw the paper-towels in the waste bin?” Then Nur hanım and women from Hediye started to talk among themselves, and that’s how I learned the issue: According to the women from Hediye, women from F village threw the paper towels outside the bin and they didn’t flush water after they went to the toilet. Nur hanım said “They look *modern* but they are *dirty*.” This issue was brought about time and again by women from Hediye and Nur hanım. For instance, women from F found the picnic area that we went in the afternoon unclean. Nur Hanım, in a voice that all could hear, said:

“You should leave everywhere clean if you want to find the place clean.”

‘Cleanliness,’ then, was not just an issue between Alevi and Sunnis, but manifested itself among Alevi women from different villages and towns as well.

Apart from the issue of cleanliness that broke out among the women, the organization of the trip posed its problems that made it difficult to conceive of this group of women as a homogeneous one going to make a *ziyaret* and hence was ‘united’ around a goal. After breakfast in the first morning, we went to the Düden waterfall, and then to another waterfall. In both waterfalls, women walked around and took photos. Even though she was the organizer, Refika hanım was not insisting on which places that the group would visit in Antalya before going to the tomb of Abdal Musa the next day. Filiz hanım’s and Nergis hanım’s husbands were disturbed a little, because the drivers had to sleep and we needed a place to stay for a couple of hours, but the group couldn’t decide where to go. Husbands told Refika hanım to be a decision-maker, but she rejected “*Ben ziyarete gelmişim, kimsenin kalbini kıramam*” (“I came to *ziyaret*, I cannot break anyone’s heart”).

After we went to the second waterfall, the tension intensified. Some women thought that we could stay there more, while other women wanted to go to the city center. As most women wanted to go to the city, we did so. In the meantime, one woman from G told us that there were some relatives of hers in the city, and she wanted to see them as well. So we had to tell them exactly where we wanted to go. But the problem was that they couldn't make a decision. So the woman got angry because her relatives couldn't find her. Other women from F were also angry with this woman: "I also have friends in Antalya, but I don't see them because I don't want to disturb the group," one of them said. The drivers were exhausted, so we stopped in a picnic area on the road to have a rest.

Even though there were some tensions among the group in terms of the organization of the trip, this did not mean that the activity of 'finding commonalities' came to a halt. After breakfast on the second morning, we were on our way to Uçarsu when Filiz hanım brought the issue of sacrificing a lamb when they arrived at the tomb of Abdal Musa in the afternoon. She first talked to Nur hanım and her villagers. After all of them backed up the idea, she told the women from other villages. She was saying that to join the fund to buy the lamb was not compulsory: "*Istemeyen katılmaz*" ("Those who do not want to participate does not have to participate"). Filiz hanım proposed that everyone contribute as much money as she wants. This was not accepted: "*Hak geçmesin*," they said. So, the cost of the lamb was equally shared, and the sacrificing of the lamb in the *cemevi* near the tomb of Abdal Musa became a performance of 'common' practices for all the women who joined the trip. The meat was eaten at dinner when the whole group sat together at the tables in the garden of the cultural center. They told the attendants in the center to call the people living in the village; they wanted to distribute the meat (*lokma*) to the villagers. Some villagers

came to take *lokma*. The attendants in the center told them that no one who visits the tomb distributes *lokma* anymore, but eat by themselves. This issue was talked about again and again: “*Kendin yedikten sonra ne anlamı var*” (“Does it mean anything if you eat the *lokma* you cook yourself”) they said.

Finding commonalities is a practice that goes on at several levels and it especially becomes a way of getting to know each other when women from different regions meet for the first time. For instance, I was walking up the mountain to *Uçarsu* with Gonca hanım. On the road, we ran into two Alevi women from a nearby village. They were walking to *Yeşil Göl*, a lake near *Uçarsu*. They told us that the son of a villager had come back safely from military service, so his father was making a sacrifice there (sacrificing a lamb). The villagers were invited. Gonca hanım started to talk to them, told them that we were going to *Uçarsu* and that she was from Sivas. This was enough for the other women to understand that Gonca hanım was Alevi. “You should have come at the time of the festival,” one woman said. And this was the cue for Gonca hanım. So she asked them where their ancestors came from to Antalya. The women said that their ancestors came from Iran. Gonca hanım was curious: “Are you different from us? When do you fast?” she asked. Learning that they also fasted in Muharrem, she commented “Then, we are no different,” and asked what other rituals that they were doing. The women replied that they were making *cem*, fasting and sacrificing lambs. Gonca hanım continued: “Is there migration from the village?” They said that there weren’t many people migrating, mostly young people were going to the cities to continue their studies. They were proud: there were fifteen doctors who came from this village. These women were farmers, and they said that they were using the method of artificial insemination in their farms. Their products were exported to European countries.

Then we arrived to Uçarsu. We sat on the stones near the source. Everyone filled their bottles with this water, to take to Istanbul. Gonca hanım was taking the bottles to some of her relatives in Istanbul, for instance. The water of this source is thought to be sacred and healthy. Refika hanım said that she washed her granddaughter with the water she took from this source, and her granddaughter turned out to be very clever. From a steep footpath, we climbed back to the other side of the hill to *Yeşil Göl* where the villagers of the women we saw on the road were cooking the lamb they had sacrificed. We couldn't stay there long, because the group had decided in the morning that they also would sacrifice a lamb in the tomb of Abdal Musa.

When we arrived at the tomb, they washed their hands and feet. Then we entered the building where Abdal Musa's tomb is. There, women kissed the head part of the tomb, and they prayed. There were some women who left some *yemenis* (headscarves) there; their acquaintances or relatives who couldn't come to visit sent their *yemenis*. After that, we went to the tomb of another holy man near Abdal Musa's tomb. It was a smaller place and some women sat around the tomb. The Sunni bride started to read prayers from a book, in Arabic. One of the younger women from F (Ayşen hanım) seemed furious, and she left the place, and I went after her. She was telling her cousin: "They read in Arabic!" She saw me smiling, and turned to me "I heard that you were writing a thesis," she said. We talked with Ayşen for a long while. She said "*Bence bu devirde artık Alevi-Sünni ayrımı yok, laik-antilaik ayrımı var*" ("I think Alevi/Sunni difference does not matter in this age anymore, what matters is being *laik* or anti-*laik*"). According to Ayşen hanım, the division between Alevis and Sunnis was a phenomenon of the past, and if this division was continuing that was because of ignorance, stemming from an inability to analyze today's conditions.

Ayşen hanım thought that the most dangerous group in the country today was the *yobaz* people. She said that if one day she had a lot of money, she would educate *yobaz* children and would make them *laik*.

Hence, the *ziyaret* that Refika hanım organized, with its undisputable religious concerns, was at the same time an occasion where the commonalities and differences among Alevis become apparent. While finding commonalities was a way of creating bonds with women they got to know recently, tensions also arose with regards to the ways in which certain practices should be carried out, as well as to the cleanliness of women from different regions. It was interesting to see that the issues of practices and cleanliness were concomitantly the points of tension between Alevis and Sunnis on different occasions.

Here, it might be argued that practices and cleanliness are the primary ways of differentiation that is used by Alevis and Sunnis alike on different occasions to articulate differences – although this could be the difference between Alevis and Sunnis, as well as the difference between different villagers who can otherwise get together under the notion of being Alevi. ‘Coming from a village’ or their identity as ‘villagers’ that they express with expressions like “*Aynı köylüyüz*” (“We come from the same village”) is a point that I discuss in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 5

### WOMEN, 'VILLAGE', AND THE 'VILLAGERS'

*Alevism is a system of belief generally suited to rural life. It lays down principles for the organization of daily life in an isolated location. Strict control forms the essence of this belief, which aims at keeping the community going without appealing to the state security forces and without state support. All their ceremonies and sanctions are aimed at achieving this end. (Bozkurt, 2003: 85)*

For the Alevist movement since the late 1980s, as well as for scholars, the distinctive characteristic of Alevilik today is its alteration from a structure based on rural life to a structure based on urban life<sup>109</sup>, which is argued to manifest itself most clearly in the

---

<sup>109</sup> For instance, in a book where he gives an account of Alevi organizations, Nedim Şahhüseyinoğlu explains the recent identity movement as the outcome of migration and urbanization of 'Alevi': "The migration of Alevi society should be considered as the result of a general tendency of rural - urban migration [in Turkey]. The problems and class-based stakes are common. But Alevi workers had other specific problems that differentiated them from other workers. These problems actually stemmed from their culture and beliefs. Alevi society had gone through a process of oppression, prohibition, and massacres during Ottoman rule. Under the influence of this fear, they were disguising their identity. If it was known that they were Alevi, they would not find jobs or houses to rent. Such that Alevi were even disguising their identity from each other and were not even telling it to their own children. But the Alevi migration had increased so much that in the big cities that Alevi neighborhoods began to appear. While some of the Alevi who migrated to the cities strengthened their places in commerce, industry, and politics, some Alevi had become workers or had small-scale businesses. As the literacy rate increased, the number of doctors, engineers, lawyers or accountants were increasing among Alevi as well. But these positive developments were going hand in hand with the erosion of Alevi identity and culture. In the villages, *dedes* or *pirs* would visit the village once or twice in a year for *görgü cemi*, where they would judge the guilty, make peace among those who had problems with each other, and decide on the issues of debt. *Dedes* and *pirs* were trying to teach Alevi culture and tradition as well. In the villages, it was relatively less difficult for Alevi to live in line with their beliefs and institutions. Since there was generally no other belief groups in the villages, they could live according to the rules of Alevilik without fear. But with the migration to the cities, this process was interrupted, and for many years Alevi had to disguise their identity, and could not transfer their belief and culture to younger generations. Alevi, who were living in different neighborhoods in the city, did not have any chance of getting to know and monitor each other. In the cities, Alevi were following *dedes* from different *ocaks*, and the rule of not changing the *ocak* lost its strength. There was no chance of holding *görgü cemi* in secrecy in the cities either. In short, the rules of village Alevilik have lost their validity, and a new form of Alevilik which is based on urban conditions has started to appear." (Şahhüseyinoğlu, 2001, pp. 58-60)



change in the practice of *cems*. With *cems* held in *cemevis* in urban centers, one of the most challenging issues becomes the boundaries of the group that is supposed to participate in *cems*. Even though for many Alevis, the ‘village’ (before migration to urban centers) continue to represent a genuine way of practicing Alevilik with a more or less closed community to exert social control over individuals (the necessary basis for holding *görgü cemîs* where *cem* functions as a court), the participants of *cems* in urban *cemevis* come from diverse backgrounds. In this sense, in urban *cems*, the group is composed of Alevis, and not villagers, and within the discourse of Alevilik since the late 1980s, we see Alevis as the assumed performers of these practices. On the other hand, the longing for the genuine village practices that is characteristic of this discourse is shared by women as well, and villagers continue to be a significant part of women’s networks. In addition, the village association plays a significant role in organizing occasions for villagers and for ‘village women’. Within this context, the experience of ‘being Alevi’ takes on a different character: practices that signify the ‘commonalities based on being Alevi’ are no longer emphasized to build networks with other Alevis, but practices that are perceived as the ‘culture’ of the villagers gain significance in building networks among the villagers.

With rural - urban migration, villagers are no longer within women’s immediate reach as families who come from the same village settle in different neighborhoods. Even though the district in the European side seems to be an exception in the sense that about forty families from the village of Zeynep hanım live in this neighborhood, they are still much dispersed around the neighborhood so that women necessarily have relations with women other than their kin or villagers, just like other women from Zeynep hanım’s village (Hediye) do in other neighborhoods.

Consequently, the relationships based on coming from the same village often take on a more *ritualized* character, in the sense that coming from the same village also becomes something to be underlined through the meetings that the village association organizes. This chapter focuses on these meetings organized by the Hediye village association in the district in the European side, in terms of women's participation, as well as on women's notions of 'village' and 'villagers'.

### *Cem and the 'Villagers'*

Expressed with the words *köylümüz*, or *bizim köylü*, 'villager' refers to someone who comes from the same village, a word which above all implies a familiarity with the person involved.<sup>110</sup> The character (or the 'ideal', as Fliche puts it<sup>111</sup>) of the relationship built and maintained between villagers manifests itself in the meetings that 'village associations'<sup>112</sup> undertake. These meetings may be based on 'religious' occasions, such as feasts, or they may be based on other activities such as picnic or a

---

<sup>110</sup> I will stick to the use of the word 'villager' as the women who contributed to this research used this word. Though Benoit Fliche finds the term *hemşehri*, instead of villager, as more illustrative of the character of relations based on looking for equality among the participants of a village association: 'As much as it pre-supposes a common geographical belonging, *şehir* – the city; the emphasis has to be put on the prefix *hem* – meaning similarity, 'the same'. *Hemşehri* is more than just a geographical link, it denotes a relationship of equality, and is therefore not intrinsically linked to the feeling of a common geographical belonging. In fact, my sources do not use this term to refer to the village community; they prefer the term '*millet*' – ('the people') or more simply '*köy*' – the village. The difference between a group of *hemşehri* and the 'village' would ultimately be that with 'village', we are in a social space differentiated by relationships characterized by unequal relationships, whereas a group of *hemşehri* is characterized by a group of equals.' (Fliche, 2005: 22) Also see Bayraktar (2003), Erder (1999) and Schüler (2002) on the relations of *hemşehrilik* (localism).

<sup>111</sup> Fliche describes the notion of 'ideal' as "an ensemble of values to which a group tries to conform" (Fliche, 2005, p. 1).

<sup>112</sup> Village association is a formal organization that brings together the people whose place of origin is the same village, aimed towards bringing villagers together and maintaining the ties and solidarity among them. Compare with *hemşehri* associations (Erder, 1999; Bayraktar, 2003).

wedding. In the case of a village association in Ankara that Fliche (2005) analyzes<sup>113</sup>, the efforts of the people willing to work in the association to bring together the villagers through the organizations of picnic, *cem*, *semah* and *aşure* encounter different reactions from the members. Fliche (2005) argues that the meetings are successful in bringing together as many people as possible to the extent that they do not refer to the competitions between different families within the village, as well as to the extent that they disregard ‘personal’ gain. In this sense, he shows the competitive character of the relations between the villagers and that the ties between the villagers are not ‘natural’ or ‘given’ and needs to be constantly worked on. In addition, in Fliche’s account, we see that villagers from Kayalar think that the *cem*, as it is organized by the village association, cannot fulfill the precondition of *rızalık almak* (maintaining peace among all the participants). Fliche adds that:

After 1975, no *cem* was held: urbanization, rural to urban migration, the breakdown of the *dedelik* system and left-wing politicization had deprived this religious ceremony of all meaning. Perceived as useless, even as archaic and restrictive, it was forgotten. Twenty years later it has made a comeback, but now exists in an oxymoronic manner. In its new form, the people’s court no longer exists, which might lead us to believe that the *cem* has lost its religiosity and that when it is organized, it is on more commemorative – even folkloric lines. However, according to the organizers, this is not the case and the *cem* still lives on as a prayer even if the people’s court is missing. ‘In 1997, we organised a real *cem*. It was not a show. It was a real *cem*, but without *semah*. Back then we had no dancers. But it was a real *ibadet* (cult). We had invited some *dede* for it.’ (Fliche, 2005, p. 35)

The relation between the *cem* and the village is not only the concern of the organizers in the village association that Fliche talks about, but it is also the concern of many

---

<sup>113</sup> Founded by the migrants from Kayalar village in Yozgat, a village composed of Alevis, whose population migrated to Ankara, and to other different places.

researchers and scholars who would like to account for the ‘change’ in Alevilik. In most research, we see that ‘urbanization’ as a result of migration from villages to cities is portrayed as a source of ‘discontinuity’ for religious practices, where the village provides Alevilik with its unique form of organization. For Reha Çamuroğlu:

...the rural exodus, which in the case of Alevi reached its peak during the 1970s for economic and political reasons, is surely the most decisive factor. Migration to the cities inevitably posed new, urban forms of expressions on Alevilik which, in the foregoing centuries had maintained its existence in remote rural areas of the country. Rapid urbanization led not least to fundamental changes in the social structure of the community. (Çamuroğlu, 2003, p. 79)

The most apparent example of this discontinuity becomes the claim that Alevis no longer hold the *cem* among them when they migrate to the cities. Nail Yılmaz argues that:

Due to urbanization, we see that Alevis abandon the *cem*, one of their most important rituals. In rural areas *cem* rituals continue to a certain extent despite the fact that they have lost much of their strength. But those people who left rural areas for urban centers like İstanbul, Ankara, and İzmir abandoned *cems*, twelve services and other rules of conduct. (Yılmaz, 2005, p. 144)

Indeed, the issue of migration and Alevis has attracted the interest of various scholars. Under this category, we might cite works on the changes in villages (see Shankland, 1996; 2003a), the networks and encounters in the urban context (see Erder, 2002; Erman, 2005; Schüller, 2002), as well as the perceptions of the ‘village’ after migration and how this perception plays a role in the building of networks in the urban context (though sometimes with different meanings than expected), which in turn changes the appropriation of the village as well (see Fliche, 2003). The concern with the migration of Alevis is due to the prevailingly rural character of many of the

Alevi settlements<sup>114</sup> before the accelerating pace of rural - urban migration beginning from the 1950s.<sup>115</sup> Some scholars focus on this process as an explanation for the change in ‘traditional’ aspects of Alevilik to understand the formation of Alevilik as a movement of identity (see Ellington, 2004; Yılmaz, 2005). However, we should also consider that migration and urbanization are a significant experience for some generations of Alevis, and their places of origin (as well as ‘being Alevi’) continue to be the key dimensions through which we can understand the networks of Alevis in the cities. For instance, Sema Erder (2002) looks at the functions of *hemşehri*<sup>116</sup> (localism) and villager networks, and the networks among ‘Alevis’, in relation to local and supra-local governmental agencies within some neighborhoods in Istanbul. In her study in Pendik (a neighborhood in Istanbul), Erder (2002) notes that different *hemşehri* associations collaborate on issues pertaining to common (usually

---

<sup>114</sup> There is not exact statistical data on the size of Alevi population as well as the numbers of their settlements, since in Turkey, censuses do not include questions that differentiate between Alevis and Sunnis (see Schüller, 2002, pp. 171-174). However, Melikoff (2003) identifies Alevi communities as rural in character whereas for her Bektāşis constitute the urban form of these two paths which follow the saint Hacı Bektaş Veli (See Massicard, 2003b for more information on Hacı Bektaş Veli as a symbol).

<sup>115</sup> “Explosive urban growth is a recent experience for Turkey. Atatürk’s republic was forged in a largely rural society. During the 1920s less than one-sixth of the population lived in cities and towns with more than 10,000 inhabitants. Aside from Istanbul with its 700,000 residents, only Izmir contained more than 100,000 people. ... After 1950, urban growth accelerated sharply. Over 3.3 million people were added to the urban population during the 1950s, more than twice as many as in the previous quarter century. Turkey became one of the most rapidly urbanizing countries in the world – between 1950 and 1980 the average annual increase of urban population was 5.7 percent. Large cities grew even faster, with cities over 100,000 experiencing yearly increases of 7 percent over the same period. Rapid urbanization also multiplied the number of major urban centers. Only five cities had more than 100,000 inhabitants in 1950; by 1980 there were twenty-nine.” (Danielson and Keleş, 1985, p. 27)

<sup>116</sup> “Relying on a loyalty and solidarity allegedly reflecting a shared sense of provincial origin, these new organizations became the building blocks of neighborhood clubs, professional associations, and even the political parties. An immediate consequence was the changing nature of rivalry, conflict, political competition and alliance in the city. ... In the recent period, however, the nature of such movements has changed somewhat. While the departure of the non-Muslim population has signaled a degree of homogenization and the official discourse began to talk about a Turkish and Islamic city, the recent urban social movements (since the 1980s) seem to be organized along the lines of new ethnic and confessional solidarities, such as Laz, Kurdish, and Alevi. Some of these movements are directly concerned with identity politics – demands for cultural recognition and group identity, although ethnicity is usually instrumental in the sense that it serves the immediate organizational needs of the movements. Most however, have been concerned with problems of public space.” (Erder, 1999, pp. 162-163)

infrastructural) problems of the neighborhood, whereas on issues that concern ‘communities’, such as the construction of mosques and *cemevis*, ‘Alevi’ groups face more political and administrative problems.

Here, in the current situation where *cemevis* have flourished in the cities, it is no longer possible to argue that the *cem* is abandoned. Though we might talk about a discontinuity in *cems* before the flourishing of *cemevis* after the late 1980s, for the current situation we can only argue for a change in the composition of the group of participants: whereas in the former, the group is supposed to be composed of ‘villagers’, in the latter, the participants are ‘Alevis’. More and more ‘Alevis’ as a larger community (larger than ‘villagers’) takes its place as the *usual* community of holding the *cem*. Hence, we cannot say that this process of migration to the cities leads to a process in which the *cem* loses *all* the meaning.

For Hediye villagers in Istanbul, we might rather say that even though there were some similar concerns for some women (like Şükran hanım whom I talked about in the third chapter), for the women of Hediye village that I knew, it was difficult to say that the *cem* was a meaningless activity. It is true that like the association of Kayalar, the village association of Hediye does not organize *cems* for the villagers, and it is true that there had been a period when women did not attend any *cems*. However, women join *cems* in *cemevis* in recent years with varying regularity: while Refika hanım (whom I talked about in the second chapter) joins *cems* regularly, there are other women who join them less regularly, for instance on occasions like feasts. With these examples at hand, we cannot say that the *cem*’s meaning has been lost. Rather, we might talk about a change in the ‘community’ assumed for holding a *cem*: the *cem*’s meaning for the ‘village’ might have lost its strength, but the *cem* has become representative practice of Alevis as a community and, with this change in

structure, it is still found to be a valid practice to attend. Indeed, it is also possible to argue that with its ‘legal function’ lost, the *cem* all the more conforms to the separation of ‘religion’ from ‘power’ that is characteristic of the modern forms of power, and in this sense becomes all the more ‘religious’, a category that Asad urges us to see as the “product of historically distinctive disciplines and forces” (Asad, 1993, p. 54).

What we can arrive at from Fliche’s (2005) account, then, is not that the *cem* loses its religious character, but that villagers and *dedes* cease to be a form of power over the individuals through *cems* (which they had a chance to exert through the meetings of *cem* which had a legal function). As the *cem* becomes *religious*, in the sense Asad (1993) uses the term, villagers cease to be the necessary group holding the *cem*. Hence, what we have is a different notion of ‘villagers’ which is emphasized by activities other than the *cem* - which might be both religious and not necessarily religious. However, for the case of Hediye villagers, we might say that to the extent that villagers as a community of *cem* loses its grip, there appears other practices (which may be called religious or non-religious in character) that emphasize the identity of villagers.

### Women, ‘Villagers’, and the Village Association

The meetings of the village association of Hediye play a role in the maintenance of a villager identity through organizations that bring the villagers together, like feast-days, *aşure*, picnic or funerals. Whereas these practices involve the participation of men and women alike, there are other occasions, like the celebration of women’s day and mother’s day, which involve only women’s participation. On the other hand, the

village association's role should not be overstated in the sense of providing villagers with a place which all villagers regularly attend, because people won't go there unless there is an important meeting and sometimes I heard women who regularly attend these meetings complaining about the *duyarsızlık* (insensitivity) of their current villagers, in the sense that the failure to attend the meetings was sometimes interpreted as a reluctance to continue the relations with the villagers. Therefore, through the meetings in the association, Hediye villagers would articulate and emphasize their identity on a cyclical basis, meeting from time to time to show their solidarity.

Sensitivity is a criterion for assessing the respect that people pay to 'village ties'. This point might be clearer if I give an example from the interviews. For instance, when I asked Nezihe hanım about the economic conditions of the villagers, she told me that there were some families from the village with large businesses who would employ those in need from the village. She told me that this was due to a sensitivity for helping each other. When I asked about how this sensitivity became possible, she explained to me that this, above all, was possible by being members of a 'common culture' and a 'common society' (words which are used interchangeably to refer both to Alevi identity and villager identity):

Because they are the people of the same culture, same society, everyone learns something from each other. I say, if someone has bad thoughts or is insensitive, she sees that she can go nowhere. Either she is left alone in that society, or she tries to be [good, helpful] like the other persons. If you approach something sensitively, it is easier. Most of our society is like that, they are sensitive. In our weddings, you see that lots of people come.<sup>117</sup>

---

<sup>117</sup> Interview with Nezihe hanım, May 2005. "Çünkü aynı kültürün insanı, aynı toplumun insanı, ne oluyor, herkes birbirinden birşey kapıyor. Şöyle diyeyim, bazı insanda bir art niyet bir katılık varsa, bakıyor bir yere varamıyor. Ya o toplumda tek kalır. Yahutta ne yapar, ya bu insanlar şöyle, ben de öyle olayım, herkes yani... Herşeye yani duygusal yaklaşıldı mı daha kolay oluyor. Toplumumuzun çoğu da böyle duygusaldır. Düğünlerimiz mesela bizim şey olduğu zaman, köylülerimiz, bir bakarsın ki salonlar dolmuş tıklım tıklım."



The occasions organized by the association as well as by other villagers, then, are instances where this common culture is emphasized. Participation in those meetings itself is an admired practice, expressed with the words '*topluma girmek*' ('participating in society'), and people usually go there to be seen by the other members of the village as a person who pays attention to the villager ties. Besides those meetings like weddings, funerals, *lokma* distribution or picnics that take place in a variety of places, the place where the association is settled is also used for the meetings organized by the association.

The first time I went to the association of Hediye village was for a funeral at the end of December, 2004. Nergis hanım, whom I was supposed to visit that day, had to cancel our appointment but asked me whether I would like to go with them to the funeral. The funeral which took place in the village association was actually an occasion where villagers gathered to communicate their wishes to the family of the deceased. When we arrived, the close relatives of the deceased were sitting in a circle around the coffin in the large area. When people came, they first spoke to the relatives who were sitting in the circle, and then moved outside the circle to speak to other people. The coffin, then, was put on a bus which took it to Hediye village's cemetery in Sivas where it was supposed to be buried after a religious service. However, when they put the coffin on the bus one man still asked: "*Hakkınızı helal ediyor musunuz?*"<sup>118</sup> And the crowd answered that they did.

Depending on the choice of the family, however, the deceased may be taken either to *cemevis* or mosques, where in each case a *hoca* leads the *cenaze namazı* (funeral prayer). For instance, another funeral for a relative of Zeynep hanım took

---

<sup>118</sup> "Do you renounce your rights?" A question asked in every Muslim funeral.

place in a *cemevi*. It was a cold February day, and women were sitting in the largest room of the building, around the stove. In the *cemevi*, there was a room where they washed the deceased. Then came a *hoca*, and we went outside the building. The building was still under construction, so the *hoca* and the men started to pray in an area surrounded by other buildings, while women waited at a little far from them. At this time as well, a bus came to pick up the coffin, to take the deceased to Hediye. In May, there was another funeral, this time in a mosque. The deceased woman (from Hediye) had cancer, and she died six months after learning that she had the disease. When I arrived, the call for prayer was about to begin. Some of the villagers were standing in the courtyard of the mosque, while Zeliha hanım was sitting in a bench, talking to another woman. Together with Zeliha hanım, I went to the courtyard. Then the *hoca* came out, and they prayed for the funeral. The deceased was taken to a cemetery in Istanbul. On both occasions, ‘villagers’ constituted the largest group of acquaintances that came to extend their condolences. The association plays a significant role in this: The village association of Hediye undertakes an active role in the organizations of funerals, as well as participating in other occasions. The association has a news system: when there is an important occasion, an SMS is sent to the cell phones of every member of the association, regarding the time and place of a funeral, a wedding, or an occasion that a member of the village would give *lokma* in a *cemevi* after a funeral, etc.

The association’s building is used for some meetings of villagers as well. Located in a narrow street in the district in the European side, the building has a large area where there are tables and chairs, and where about two hundred people can sit. On more crowded occasions, some of the ‘villagers’ may stand among the tables or in front of the association. On one side of the area, there is a stage and a microphone,

while one of the corners is preserved for tea-service. On the second floor, which is very small, there is only a kitchen and a restroom. The kitchen, though not a big space, contains big cauldrons that women use to collectively cook the food distributed in the meetings in the association, especially in the first day of *Kurban Bayramı* (Feast of Sacrifice) to cook the sacrificed lambs with *bulgur* (a rice-like food made up of cracked wheat) and later for the *aşure*.

On Women's Day (March 8) and on Mother's Day, we see that the women on the board of the association prepare meetings in the association to bring the women of the 'village' together. However, about forty women participated in the first meeting, whereas in the latter, only fifteen women came, which made the women, as well as Gonca hanım and Nezihe hanım, a little upset since they had worked hard to prepare the organization. The aim of 'bringing together' the women was based on a perception that 'villagers' lost the bonds with each other that they should otherwise have. However, what women expected from 'village women' to do as a group was not that clear. For instance, on Women's Day, Gonca hanım's speech with regard to women's rights was followed by the comments of the women in the gathering. A woman complained that the women of the village did not support each other when one of them had a problem, and some of the women were gossiping. Gonca hanım also suggested that the women of the village might come together from time to time, and a 'women's branch' might be founded in the association.

A younger woman also added that their mothers were oppressed when they were in their villages, but her own generation was oppressed as well. She said: "we did housework before coming to this meeting, but we will also continue doing it after the meeting". She was challenging the view that the 'village' was a place of hardship whereas in the 'city' women were more comfortable, as their workload, it is argued,

diminished. Even though her view was met with applaud, there was not a final word after these comments and the meeting continued with a young woman playing *saz* and singing *türkü*s. There was also *halay* (a kind of group dance where people hold each others' hands and make the same steps, a very common dance throughout Turkey). As the *türkü*s were followed by *deyiş* (verses uttered in *cem*), they started *semah* as well. These performances were a way of underlining the 'commonalities' among women on the basis of coming from the 'same village'. By participating in the meetings and by performing *halays* and *semahs*, women were showing their respect for village ties and enhancing their networks. As Nezihe hanım once told me in an interview, networks provide women (as well as men) with a support mechanism:

We always host lots of guests. May God not withhold it from us. I even invite [someone] even if I only prepare tea, otherwise I do not feel comfortable, really. Why? The more people you know, the more you have friendships, the more you get closer to people ... Let's say my husband is working in a phone company now. And you have a problem with your phone but you cannot solve it. Or some of our villagers, let's say they pay the necessary fee, but their phone does not work, even though they draw up a petition, their phone does not start to work, they call my husband. My husband calls his friend, and that phone starts to work, you know the saying '*mahkemede dayın olsun*' (all you need is to have good connections), just like that. Today, you and me, we got to know each other. If you have some problem and call my husband, he immediately resolves it. Just like that. Or if somebody works somewhere else [he or she can do the same thing for you]. The more you have connections, the more you are helpful for each other. Everything becomes different.<sup>119</sup>

---

<sup>119</sup> Interview with Nezihe hanım, May, 2005: "Misafirimiz eksik olmaz. Allah eksikliğini de göstermesin. Hiçbir zaman rahat edemem yani. Gerçekten. Bir çay yapsam çağırıyorum. Neden? İnsan ne kadar çok çevren olursa, o kadar dostluklar, daha da kaynaşırsın. Şöyle bir durum. Diyelim bugün benim eşim telefon şirketinde çalışıyor. Senin telefonunla ilgili herhangi bir sorunun var ama çözemiyorsun. Veya bazı köylülerimiz mesela, ya işte gittim parasını yatırdım hala açılmadı veyahut şu sorunu var falan şey yapar işte dilekçemi yazdım, başvuruda bulundum daha bağlanmadı. Eşime telefon açarlar. Eşim hemen arkadaşını arar, oradan o telefon hallolur, hani mahkemede dayın olsun derler ya, onun gibi. Bugün ne oldu, birbirimizi tanıdık. Senin bir işin düştü, hemen bildirsen mesela eşime benim bir sorunun var. O onu hemen çözer orada. Bunun gibi. Veya bir başkası, başka bir şeyde çalışıyor. Çevren ne kadar geniş olursa birbirini o kadar faydalı olursun. Herşey daha bir farklı olur."

Commonalities based on coming from the same village, then, provide women (and men) with a support mechanism that they can count on in the times of hardship. Women's relationships to their village can be analyzed in this regard as well. The notions of the 'village' and 'village culture' may be used in different ways to contribute to the commonalities among villagers, even though the one to use this notion is not necessarily someone who lived in the village for a long period of time. For instance Gonca hanım, who works on the board of the village association of Hediye and who used to go to the village only in the summer, emphasizes that her family has a 'village culture', and she respects it even if she did not live there:

For instance my friends from work would say, when there was a wedding or a feast - my mother was ill, so that I would participate - my friends would ask me if he or she was my peer? Or when there was an ill person. They would tell me that if my mother was not going then I need not go as well. But that was wrong for me. Due to our traditions, we should go there. What else can I give as an example? My friends used to criticize me, well not exactly criticize, but they used to ask me why I would cancel our appointment with them and go visit an ill person. They would ask me why that would interest me. But that is important for me, I feel like I should go there. That is a tradition. Some of my friends do not value this. I mean, it is the way your family lives. Of course each family has love and respect for each other but we have a village culture. I am not able to give you a clear example at the moment but, if there is a meeting in the village, and if I have another appointment with my friends, I do not prefer to go with them but I prefer to go with my villagers, I mean.<sup>120</sup>

---

<sup>120</sup> Interview with Gonca hanım, April 2005. "Mesela benim çalıştığım arkadaşlar mesela derlerdi ki işte bir düğün bayram olduğu zaman, annem hastaydı katılamazdı, ben mutlaka bir gidip gelirdim. Arkadaşlarım derlerdi o senin yaşıtın mı? Veya bir hasta olduğu zaman. Yani ne işin var, ne gidiyorsun, annen de rahatsız, o gitmiyorsa sen de gitme derlerdi. O bana ters gelirdi. Bizim gelenek ve göreneklerimize göre oraya gidilmesi gerekir. Başka nasıl örnek verebilirim? Arkadaşlarımla beni en çok eleştirdiği, eleştirdiği değil de bana şey yaparlardı, ya sen niye, mesela arkadaşlarla bir gezi programı olmuştur, sonra bir hastalık olduğu zaman ben mutlaka giderim. Sonra derler ya bu seni neden ilgilendiriyor? Yani benim için o çok önemlidir, ben gitmem gerekir diye düşünürüm. Mesela bir gelenek gibi düşünürüm. Mesela bazı arkadaşlarım ona pek değer vermezler. Yani ailenin yaşam tarzı. Yani muhtemelen her ailenin kendine saygısı sevgisi vardır da yani bizde bir köy kültürü vardır yani. Yani bariz bir örnek veremiyorum ama, köyde olan bir toplantı olur, mesela benim arkadaşlarımla bir

When seen in this light, on the occasions where all the villagers are invited, the association's building might get really crowded. For instance, at the day of *aşure* there was a lively and crowded meeting where the man working in the association (*çaycı*) was distributing the *aşure* cooked by women who came to the association early in the morning, and where Nezihe hanım's husband was announcing that those who would like to participate to the expenses of the *aşure* were welcome, and that members were expected to pay their subscription fees. In funerals, as well as in the cooking of *aşure*, villagers constitute the group within which activities with 'religious' aspects are carried out, and large numbers of people attend the meetings that concern them as villagers (like funerals, *aşure*, as well as the sacrifices and the distribution of *lokma*). Compared in terms of crowdedness, one might push the argument so far as to argue that it is because of the indefinite goals of women's meetings in the village association that the attendance to these meetings are low, whereas the meetings to which all villagers are invited offer a predictable agenda for strengthening the 'village-ties'.

### Picnic in Hediye Village

Besides the other meetings which involve the underlining of the common culture of the village, the picnic of Hediye village plays a significant role in bringing together the villagers on an annual basis. The picnic, with its connotation of 'escaping from the city to nature' becomes a *ritualized* practice for the villagers where they, in a sense, escape from the city, and where nature is often associated with their life back in their

---

gezmem vardır, ben arkadaşlarımla gitmeyi tercih etmem, kendi köylümle olan şeye gitmeyi tercih ederim. Yani.”

villages. Hence, the picnic may be read as the annual ritual of escape from the city and a return to the village, and in this sense a marker of villager identity. The picnic is an occasion for Hediye villagers in Istanbul to gather every year in the forests near Istanbul. Although closer kin or neighbors who come from the same village see each other regularly, this is the time when the whole village gets together. The picnic involves the sacrificing of lambs and distribution of *lokma*, playing *saz*, and singing *türkü*s as well, and it is an activity that includes both men and women.

In the case of the picnic organized by the village association of Hediye in 2005, however, villagers actually ‘returned’ to the village (though for only holding the picnic). The idea of holding the picnic in Sivas came out in 2004 for the fortieth anniversary of the association. In 2005 as well, the association hired buses for those villagers who didn’t have their own cars. I joined them in the bus. In the bus, no one was talking at first. The head of the village association was talking to everyone, asking if they were comfortable. I was sitting with a young girl (Sibel), who was to sing *türkü*s at the picnic. Although she didn’t want to sing in the bus, the others insisted that she should do so. Sibel was working in a *türkü bar* in Istanbul. She told me that she quit her previous job because the owner of the bar didn’t want her to sing *tevhid* (a poem sang to music, which is a part of the *cem*): “*Ben niye kendimi saklayayım ki, söylerim*” (“Why would I hide myself, I sing it”) she said. Her account showed the role of music for the expression of ‘Alevi identity’.<sup>121</sup>

When we arrived at the village in the morning after a bus ride of sixteen hours, the villagers were waiting for the bus in the entrance of the village with drums and clarions. The people got out of the bus, and they started to dance with the villagers

---

<sup>121</sup> Ayhan Erol (2002) perceives of ‘Alevi music’ as an element that communicates the main tenets of Alevi thought (such as the emphasis on human) through some symbols in lyrics that unites ‘Alevi’s’. On the other hand, he sees the varieties in tunes as a point of differentiation for smaller communities.

there (*halay*). Then everyone went to their houses to rest. Some had their own newly-built houses, while others stayed with kin. Some of the older houses were also used. I stayed with Zeynep hanım in the house of one of her relatives (Nihan hanım). After a few hours of sleep, Nihan hanım took me to her garden where she planted vegetables. She was very happy that she could once again grow her own vegetables, and she busied herself in the summers with planting her garden. Then her neighbors, who lived two houses away and who also came for the ‘village picnic’, came to welcome me and Nihan hanım’s daughter who came with her husband and children on the same day as me.

This was a short visit, where women talked about the village in general, such as how some things changed, how beautiful the weather was, what they would cook for the picnic, or who built a new house, whether X’s daughter or son also came for the picnic. At about 18:00, Nihan hanım and her daughter prepared the table for dinner. Some other visitors came, and Nihan hanım’s son-in-law started playing *saz*. For a couple of hours, visitors came and went, they drank tea and talked, and altogether *türkü*s (which also included *deyiş*s) were sung.

Their talk about the village was very much in line with what women told me in the interviews. The ‘village’, in women’s usage, appears both as a place of hardship (as we see in the contribution of the younger women in the women’s day about ‘mother’s work in the villages’, and the relations between mother-in-laws and father-in-laws) as well as a beautiful place. However, it should also be considered that their perception of the ‘village’ also usually corresponds to a thing of the ‘past’, and is a subject of nostalgia:

The village was beautiful. The school atmosphere, the village life... You are free there as well, but you cannot find everything



you want, it is not like when you go to school in a city. We saw every aspect of the village when we were children, the housework, the village work... Now our school [in the village] is closed due to the fact that there are no children to go there, but there were no constraints. Families really wanted their children to go to the school, for them to achieve something. ... We now have different facilities. In my mother's times, there was no electricity in our homeland. No flowing water inside the houses. No machines. Now you have dishwashers in villages. They lived through hard conditions in those times. Now you have machines for everything. People are a little bit more comfortable, but they lost their health.<sup>122</sup>

A similar kind of nostalgia can be seen in the interviews of older women, who shared the same house with their mother-in-laws and only had a separate house when they migrated to the cities. The practice of *dil saklama* (tongue hiding), or *gelinlik etme* (being a bride) is seen as the most remarkable aspect of the relation between the brides and mother-in-laws, where brides do not talk to the parents of her husband out of respect (do not open their mouths, and hence do not show their tongues):

In the village, you stay in the plateaus, we have barns and plateaus. You stay in the plateau. That is how our life has passed. I mean, you do not have a married life. You do not live separately, no chance. You cannot talk to your husband when your mother-in-law and father-in-law are present. You cannot talk to them either, you hide your tongue, you do the bride.<sup>123</sup>

---

<sup>122</sup> Interview with Hale hanım, May 2005. "Köy, güzeldi. Okul ortamı, köy hayatı... Orada da yani özgür ama istediğini bulamıyorsun yani, şehir okuması gibi. Arkadaşlık güzeldi. Köyün herşeyini yaşadık çocuklukta. Ev işlerini, köy işlerini... Şu anda okulumuz kapalı öğrenci olmadığından dolayı ama hiç kısıtlama yoktu. Daha çok istiyorlardı okutsunlar aileler çocuklarını. Bir yerlere ulaşınlar diye. ... Bizim daha farklı olanaklarımız var tabii. Annemlerin zamanında elektrik yoktu memlekette. Evlerde su yoktu. E makina olanağı hiç yoktu. Şu anda bulaşık makinası falan köylerde var hepsi. O zaman bayağı zor şartlarda tabii ki yaşadılar. Şimdi herşey makinalaştı. İnsanlar biraz daha rahata kavuştu ama sağlıkları bozuldu."

<sup>123</sup> Interview with Suna hanım, May 2005. "Köyde yaylada durursun. Ağılımız, yaylalarımız var. Yaylada duruyorsun. Hayat böyle geçti. Yani bir evlilik bir hayatımız yok. Öyle bir gidesin de kendi başına bir hayat yok öyle. İmkânı mı var. Beyinle konuşamazsın. Kaynanan kaynatana orada olacak, sen beyinle konuşacaksın... Onlara da konuşmazsın, dil saklarsın, gelinlik edersin."

In addition to the view that the ‘village’ was a place of hardship for women in the past, we see that the ‘village’ now appears as a place to spend summers, even though for those villagers whose close kin continue to live in the village this time might be spent in helping relatives in the fields and in raising the herd. In the Mother’s Day meeting as well, women were talking about their summer houses, whether it was reasonable to build a house in the village, etc. Whereas women like Suna hanım preferred that a new house be built as she spent the whole summer in the village, Gonca hanım’s sister said that she wouldn’t prefer to build a new house in the village because she already had a summer house and she could always find a place to stay when she went to the village, as lots of her relatives had houses in the village.<sup>124</sup>

The issue of building houses in the village, however, is a point of tension among ‘villagers’. For instance, Nihan hanım was living in a newly built house and was not talking to her neighbor who lived next door. She was complaining about the smoke that came out of her neighbor’s stove in the garden. When I asked whether they talked to their neighbor to turn the chimney of the stove in the opposite direction, Nihan hanım’s daughter told me that the neighbors were doing it on purpose. As I was wondering why, Zeynep hanım explained to me that Nihan hanım’s husband first wanted to build the house up on the hill, but the neighbors complained to the land registry, saying that they were building a house on the common land of the village.

---

<sup>124</sup> Women’s perceptions of the village now as a place where to spend summers correspond, in some ways, to what Benoit Fliche (2003) argues for the village of Kayalar. The villagers of Kayalar, who leave their villages for Ankara and France for economic reasons return to their village some time later, but only to reconstruct this space as a place of vacation and build their summer houses there. A similar perception applies to the women from H village as well, and the decision of the village association to hold the annual picnic in H can be said to be an indication of such a perception. However, for Fliche, the return of the people from Kayalar does not enhance the workings of the village association in Ankara and working with an identity of ‘villager’ becomes hard, as the stakes in the village prevents people from working in the association without being doubted that they work for personal gains. Even though I do not have extensive information about the workings of the village association of Hediye, as far as I have seen in a meeting of the association for the elections of the new board, tension might arise in this association as well, for instance, due to the effective use of the budget.

Therefore, Nihan hanım's husband had to build the house next to this neighbor's house, but this time they started to complain about the borders of the garden. Nihan hanım's husband told me that the neighbors, who were staying in the village all the time (who did not migrate to the city), were actually disturbed by the people who came to the village in the summers, which interrupts the way they were accustomed to live in the village.

Nihan hanım and her daughter spent the rest of the night preparing food for the picnic and taking care of the children. In the morning, we went to the field where the picnic was to take place. People brought their tables with them. There was also a little stage in one corner of the field. People were visiting each other's tables and talking to each other. It was almost impossible to go from one place to another without stopping every now and then, talking to people you hadn't greeted. Gonca hanım, who was responsible for the preparation of the stage in the picnic area was in a rush, trying to get everything settled.

When the stage was ready, Sibel started to sing *türkü*s. Lambs were sacrificed, and lamb and *bulgur* were cooked in cauldrons. When the *lokma* was ready, people queued to get their share. I learned from a relative of Nihan hanım that the villagers who wanted to give *lokma* contributed to the cooking of this meal, so that their *lokma* could better fulfill its purpose of distribution. The picnic was, first of all, an occasion 'for families': Women spent hours before the picnic day to prepare food, thinking about what to bring to the field (like chairs, tables, and table-cloths), and in the picnic area, they usually spent time with their families, occasionally joining *halay* and talking to the people whom they could not visit in their houses. The singing of *türkü*s, as well as the distribution of *lokma*, enhanced the feeling of 'common culture' of villagers.

In the afternoon, however, when people were dancing and singing, a man started to shout: “You can’t continue having fun!” As I learned, one of his relatives had died in Istanbul. Everyone already knew it and his close kin told them not to stop the picnic: “*Toplumu dağıtmayın*” (“Do not disassemble the society”) they said. What this man did was disapproved by some, who told me “*İçmiş, dağıtmış*” (“He is drunk, he does not know what he is doing”). One of the women I knew from the district in the European side told me that if the funeral had been in the village, of course they wouldn’t play *türkü*s. After this incident, the *halay* continued for a while, though everyone seemed upset. Then everybody went back to their homes.

Hence, *toplum* (literally ‘society’, in this case ‘villagers’), once gathered in a *ritualized* way, symbolizes for the ‘villagers’ how their relations with each other should be: together, in peace with, and helping each other. In the village, the commonality that is tried to be built on ‘coming from the same village’ re-defines the conflicts and cleavages among the villagers as things to be undermined for the sake of maintaining the solidarity of the *toplum* (in this new context defined by the settlement in the city). The solidarity which is tried to be established by the efforts to find commonalities on the basis of village ties, on the other hand, are aimed at continuing the relations in the city that enhance the networks of ‘villagers’.

We might argue that the commonalities based on village ties have a different character than those efforts to find commonalities on the basis of being Alevi: the commonalities based on being Alevi are relations built in the city anew, for instance when the persons unknown to each other feel close when they learn that they are both Alevis. Alevilik, hence, provides people with a network very much like village-ties, yet a larger one, both of which are based on ‘commonalities’ that need to be worked on, as I tried to demonstrate in this chapter and in the previous chapter.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

Since the introduction of Alevilik as an identity movement in the late 1980s, the most intriguing topics for Alevists, various other political actors, and scholars alike have been those associated with the rise of the Alevist movement and those associated with explaining what Alevilik is. The scholarly discussions of these topics, however, often disregard the subjective processes involved in the formulation of Alevilik as a discourse of identity in this period, as well as its formulation as a gendered discourse. Even if some scholars like Erdemir (2004), Shankland (1996), Şahin (2001), and Vorhoff (1997) refer to women in their writings, they do not see that ‘woman in Alevilik’ is a symbol, that it is mostly meaningful in the context of the relations *between* ‘Alevis’ and ‘Sunnis’, and that it would be too much to expect that this symbol should correspond to a ‘reality’ *among* ‘Alevis’.

This thesis, then, starts with identifying that ‘woman’, as it is used in the singular in the discourse of *Alevilik* since the late 1980s, is a ‘symbol’. Identifying ‘woman’ in the singular as a ‘symbol’ is crucial in two ways. First, we see that the narrative associated with this symbol does not encapsulate the experiences of women of ‘being Alevi’. Secondly, in the formulation of ‘Alevi identity’ in this period, ‘woman’ becomes a means through which the ‘Alevi’ / ‘Sunni’ divide can be combined with an ‘Islamist’ / ‘Secular’ dichotomy. Analysis of the written materials of the period show that the reification of *Alevilik* as a discourse of identity is a process

that began in the late 1980s, the discerning characteristic of which is the call for ‘Alevi’ to make their identity manifest – a process in which an ‘Alevi’ subject is assumed. Regarding *Alevilik* as a discourse of identity, then, we might argue that the subject-position (Hall, 1997) of being ‘Alevi’ requires that the individual manifests that he/she is ‘Alevi’, or at least it requires that the individual recognizes the ‘problems’ of ‘Alevi’ (that the discourse of *Alevilik* makes visible) as ‘his/her problems’. It is this process that constructs the subjectivity of Alevi with reference to the discourses that produce categories such as ‘woman’ as the symbol of Alevi identity.

The designation of ‘woman’ as a critical symbol of Alevi identity means that women are especially called upon by the discourse to perform *Alevilik*. Women refer to this discursive position in their everyday encounters with Alevi and non-Alevi. This thesis is an attempt to show how this subjectivity is constructed by women in the realm of the everyday. This is why I have focused in this thesis on how women perform *Alevilik*. In women’s accounts, we see that their assertion of themselves as Alevi mostly occur when they tell about their feeling of injustice that stem from the everyday encounters between ‘Alevi’ and ‘Sunnis’. With the expression ‘feeling of injustice in everyday encounters’, I refer to the injustice that ‘Alevi’ perceive in their everyday encounters with *some* ‘Sunnis’ (those they find as *yobaz*, or bigot, as they clearly differentiate between *yobaz* and non-*yobaz* ‘Sunnis’) that stem from the ‘Sunni prejudices and accusations’ which are directed towards portraying ‘Alevi’ as morally inferior (Connolly, 2002) by representing them as sexually promiscuous and dirty. It is through their association with care and cleanliness that women are called upon to display the meaning of *Alevilik*. Women are doubly interpellated by the Alevi identity discourse.

One of the main conclusions that can be derived from this thesis, then, is that rather than the political declarations and grand *cem* or *semah* organizations, it is mainly through these everyday encounters and sometimes confrontations that the perception of a community of ‘Alevis’ also becomes possible, as they are seen as the *shared experience* of all ‘Alevis’. These accusations, on the other hand, gain a distinct meaning in the networks of women through the arguments over ‘cleanliness’ and *namus* (honor). Focusing on these arguments demonstrates from women’s point of view what Alevilik means, not what it *is*, and how Alevilik works in everyday encounters. This indicates the need to understand Alevilik as an ongoing performative process, rather than a pre-given identity. My argument is that through ‘differences’ and ‘commonalities’ on the basis of being Alevi, women extend or move within their networks. Indeed, I argue that Alevilik as a discourse of identity depends on how being Alevi works on the everyday basis, for the symbols employed by the discourse cannot gain hold without referring to such an experience.

In this thesis, I therefore focus on women’s networks and how through these networks women *experience* and *practice* ‘being Alevi’ in their everyday encounters with other women. Indeed women’s experiences of ‘being Alevi’ depend on their practices of underlining ‘differences’ and ‘commonalities’ in their everyday encounters, which do not fully correspond to the ways in which ‘Alevis’ are differentiated from ‘Sunnis’ and to the ways in which commonalities among ‘Alevis’ are underlined in the discourse of *Alevilik*. Their experiences of ‘being Alevi’ through their ‘difference’ from Sunnis depend on their perception of a larger community of ‘Alevis’, which the discourse of *Alevilik* calls them to. Yet, their attempts to find ‘commonalities’ among Alevi women of other villages and towns cannot solely be explained with regard to the call of the formal discourses of *Alevilik*, for their efforts

are not solely motivated for finding a community of ‘Alevis’, but finding ‘commonalities’ helps women to extend their networks in their immediate (urban) environment.

The *ritualized* (Bell, 1992) practices in these encounters, such as visiting each other or cooking *aşure*, which are neither strictly everyday nor strictly ritual, are indeed where we can observe most clearly how commonalities are produced. Unlike the rituals like *cem* which take a formalized form in the urban context (Es, 2006), these ritualized practices open a space for women in everyday encounters to emphasize commonalities and become a way through which they can maintain their networks.

In this sense, this research demonstrates the subjective processes involved in the articulation of the Alevi identity, by demonstrating women’s different ways of articulating identity from the more formal accounts within the discourse of *Alevilik* - through their own networks and through *ritualized* practices where they meticulously work on underlining or de-emphasizing ‘differences’ between ‘Alevis’ and ‘Sunnis’, and ‘commonalities’ among ‘Alevis’. Finding commonalities may not solely be explained, yet is informed, by the encouragement of the discourse of *Alevilik* since the late 1980s to find commonalities among Alevis. In this sense, we might argue that the question we are concerned with here is not so much what *Alevilik* *is*, but rather how *Alevilik* *works* in everyday encounters. This thesis contributes to this concern by taking the issue of ‘woman as a symbol’ seriously and by looking at what this means for women and for the Alevi community they are part of. In this sense, this thesis should be taken as a preliminary attempt to account for the subjective processes involved in the discourse of *Alevilik* as an identity movement since the late 1980s.



## REFERENCES

- Abu-Zahra, N. (1974). Material Power, Honor, Friendship, and the Etiquette of Visiting. *Anthropological Quarterly*, 47:1.
- Afary, J. (2003). Shi'i Narratives of Karbala and Christian Rites of Penance: Michel Foucault and the Culture of the Iranian Revolution, 1978-1979. *Radical History Review*, Issue 86.
- Altorki, S. (1986). The Social World of Women: Kinship and Friendsip. In Altorki, S., *Women in Saudi Arabia: Ideology and Behavior among the Elite*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Anderson, B. (1991). *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London; New York: Verso.
- Anthias, F. and Yuval-Davis, N. (1993). *Racialized Boundaries : Race, Nation, Gender, Colour and Class and the Anti-racist Struggle*. London : Routledge.
- Ardener, Shirley. (1996). Women Making Money Go Round: ROSCAs Revisited. In Shirley Ardener and Sandra Burman (eds.) *Money-Go-Rounds: The Importance of Rotating Savings and Credit Institutions*. Oxford; Washington D.C.: Berg
- Asad, T. (1993). *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam*. Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Aswad, Barbara C. (1974). Visiting Patterns among Women of the Elite in a Small Turkish City. *Anthropological Quarterly*, 47:1.
- Aydın, A. (2000). *İzzettin Doğan'ın Alevi İslam İnancı, Kültürü ile İlgili Görüş ve Düşünceleri*. İstanbul : CEM Vakfı.
- Bayraktar, U. (2003). Formelleşen hemşehri dayanışma ağları: İstanbul'daki hemşehri dernekleri. *Toplumbilim*, 17.
- Beck, L. (1980). The Religious Lives of Muslim Women. In Smith, J. I. (Ed.) *Women in Contemporary Muslim Societies*. London: Associated University Press.
- Bell, C. (1992). *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*. New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Beller-Hann, I. (1996). Informal Associations among Women in North-East Turkey. In Gabriele Rasuly-Paleczek (Ed.), *Turkish Families in Transition*, Frankfurt am Main; Berlin; Bern; New York; Paris; Wien: Peter Lang.

- Benedict, Peter. (1974). The Kabul Günü: Structured Visiting in an Anatolian Provincial Town. *Anthropological Quarterly*, 47:1.
- Birdoğan, N. (2003). *Anadolu'nun gizli kültürü Alevilik*. İstanbul: Kaynak Yayınları.
- Bozkurt, F. (1993). *Aleviliğin toplumsal boyutları*. Ankara: Tekin Yayınevi.
- Bozkurt, F. (2003). State-Community Relations in Restructuring Alevism. In Olsson T., Özdalga E., Raudvere C. (Eds.), *Alevi identity: cultural, religious and social perspectives*. İstanbul: Swedish Research Institute in İstanbul.
- Cilasun, A. H. (1995). *Alevilik Bir Sır Değildir*. İstanbul.
- Connolly, W. E. (2002). *Identity\Difference: Democratic Negotiations of Political Paradox*. Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press.
- Çakır, R. (2003). Political Alevism versus Political Sunnism. In Olsson T., Özdalga E., Raudvere C. (Eds.), *Alevi identity: cultural, religious and social perspectives*. İstanbul: Swedish Research Institute in İstanbul.
- Çamuroğlu, R. (2003). Alevi revivalism in Turkey. In Olsson T., Özdalga E., Raudvere C. (Eds.), *Alevi identity: cultural, religious and social perspectives*. İstanbul: Swedish Research Institute in İstanbul.
- Danielson, M. and Keleş, R. (1985). *The Politics of Rapid Urbanization : Government and Growth in Modern Turkey*. New York : Holmes & Meier.
- de Lauretis, T. (1984). *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- de Lauretis, T. (1987). *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction*. Bloomington : Indiana University Press.
- Dinçer, F. (2004). *Formulation of semahs in relation to the question of Alevi identity in Turkey* (Doctoral dissertation, Boğaziçi University).
- Douglas, M. (1975). *Implicit Meanings : Essays in Anthropology*. London ; Boston : Routledge & Paul.
- Ekal, B. (forthcoming). 'How a Kaynana Should behave?': Discussions on the Role of Mothers-in-law in Two Gün Groups. *European Journal of Turkish Studies*, Thematic Issue N°4, The Social Practices of Kinship: A Comparative Study from Iran to Balkans.
- Elçiöğlu, İ. (2004). Alevilikte Kadın. In *Toplumsal Barış*, Sayı: 7.
- Ellington, G. (2004). The Alevi Revival. In Shankland, D. (Ed.), *Archeology, anthropology and heritage in the Balkans and Anatolia: the life and times of F. W. Hasluck, 1878-1920*. İstanbul: the Isis Press.

- Erdemir, A. (2004). *Incorporating Alevi: the transformation of governance and faith-based collective action in Turkey* (Doctoral dissertation, Harvard University).
- Erder, S. (1999). Where do you hail from: localism and networks in Istanbul. In Keyder, Ç. (Ed.), *Istanbul: between the local and the global*. Lanham; Boulder; New York; Oxford: Rowman Littlefield Publishers.
- Erder, S. (2002). *Kentsel Gerilim: Enformel İlişki Ağları Alan Araştırması*. Ankara: Uğur Mumcu Araştırmacı Gazetecilik Vakfı.
- Erman, T. (2005). Mahalledeki Öteki: Gecekondu Ortamında Alevi-Sünni İlişkileri. In Pultar, G. and Erman, T. (Eds.), *Türk(iye) Kültürleri*. Ankara: Tetragon.
- Erman, T. and Göker, E. (2000). Alevi Politics in Contemporary Turkey. *Middle Eastern Studies*, 36/4.
- Erol, A. (2002). Birlik ve Farklılık Ekseninde Alevilik ve Alevilik Müziği. In *Folklor / Edebiyat*, 30.
- Es, M. (2006). *Alevist Politics of Place and the Construction of Cemevis in Turkey* (MA Thesis, Boğaziçi University).
- Eyüboğlu, İ. Z. (1997). *Günümüzde Alevilik: Sorunları, İlkeleri, Gelişimi*. İstanbul: Pencere Yayınları.
- Fliche, B. (2003). *Les Vacances de Kayalar: Histoire Migratoire, Usages et Representations d'un Village Anatolien en Milieux Urbaines (Turquie, France)* (Doctoral Dissertation, Universite d'Aix-Marseille I – Universite de Provence).
- Fliche, B. (2005). The *hemşehrilik* and the village: the stakes of an association of former villagers in Ankara. *European Journal of Turkish Studies*, Thematic Issue N°2, Hometown Organisations in Turkey, URL : <http://www.ejts.org/document385.html>.
- Fortier, A. M. (1999). Re-Membering Places and the Performance of Belonging(s). In Bell, V. (Ed.), *Performativity and Belonging*. London; Thousand Oaks; New Delhi: Sage Publications.
- Foucault, M. (1991). Questions of method. In Burchell, G., Gordon, C., Miller, P. (Eds.), *The Foucault effect: studies in governmentality*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Goode, J. (1992). Food. In Bauman, R. (Ed.), *Folklore, Cultural Performances, and Popular Entertainments*. New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hall, S. (1996). Who Needs 'Identity'? In Hall, S. and du Gay, P. (Eds.), *Questions of Cultural Identity*. London ; Thousand Oaks, Calif. : Sage.
- Hall, S. (1997). The Work of Representation. In Hall, S. (Ed.), *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. London: Sage.

Jongerden, J. (2003). Violation of Human Rights and Alevis in Turkey. In White P.J. and Jongerden J. (Eds.), *Turkey's Alevi enigma: a comprehensive overview*. Leiden; Boston: Brill.

Kaleli, L. (1997). Hülle, Mum Söndü ve Gerçekler. In Kaleli, L. (Ed.), *Kimliğini Haykıran Alevilik*. İstanbul: Can Yayınları.

Kaleli, L. (1997). *Kimliğini Haykıran Alevilik*. İstanbul: Can Yayınları.

Kara, İ. (2004). Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı: devletle Müslümanlar arasında bir kurum. In Aktay Y. (Ed.), *Modern Türkiye'de siyasi düşünce 6: İslamcılık*. İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları.

Karakaya-Stump, A. (2004). The emergence of the Kızılbaş in western thought: missionary accounts and their aftermath. In Shankland, D. (Ed.), *Archeology, anthropology and heritage in the Balkans and Anatolia: the life and times of F. W. Hasluck, 1878-1920*. İstanbul: the Isis Press.

Kehl-Bodrogi, K. (1997). Introduction. In Kehl-Bodrogi, K., Kellner-Heinkele, B., Otter-Beaujean, A. (Eds.) *Syncretistic Religious Communities in the Near East* (pp. XI-XVII). Leiden; New York; Köln: Brill.

*Kırkbudak*. (2005). Sayı 3.

Korkmaz, E. (2003). *Alevilik-Bektaşilik terimleri sözlüğü*. İstanbul: Kaynak Yayınları.

Kristeva, J. (1997). Powers of Horror. In Oliver, K. (Ed.), *The Portable Kristeva*. New York : Columbia University Press.

Küçük, M. (2002). Mezhepten millete: Aleviler ve Türk milliyetçiliği. In Bora, T. and Gültekinil, M. (Eds.), *Modern Türkiye'de siyasi düşünce: milliyetçilik*. İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları.

Khatip-Chahidi, J. (1996). Gold Coins and Coffee ROSCAs: Coping With Inflation the Turkish Way in Northern Cyprus. In Ardener, S. and Burman, S. (Eds.) *Money-Go-Rounds: The Importance of Rotating Savings and Credit Institutions*. Oxford; Washington D.C.: Berg.

Lindisfarne, N. (2002). Kabul Günleri ve Mevlit: İki Formel Kadın Toplantısı. In *Elhamdülillah Laikiz: Cinsiyet, İslam ve Türk Milliyetçiliği*. İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları.

Lüdtke, A. (1989). What Happened to the 'Fiery Red Glow'? Workers' Experiences and German Fascism. In Lüdtke, A. (Ed.), *The History of Everyday Life: Reconstructing Historical Experiences and Ways of Life*. Princeton; New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

- Massicard, E. (2002). *Construction identitaire, mobilisation et territorialité politique. Le mouvement aléviste en Turquie et en Allemagne depuis la fin des années 1980* (Doctoral Dissertation, Institut d'Etudes Politiques de Paris).
- Massicard, E. (2003a). Alevist Movements at Home and Abroad: Mobilization Spaces and Disjunction. In *New Perspectives on Turkey*, 28-29.
- Massicard, E. (2003b). Alevism as a Productive Misunderstanding: the Hacıbektaş Festival. In White P.J. and Jongerden J. (Eds.), *Turkey's Alevi enigma: a comprehensive overview*. Leiden; Boston: Brill.
- Massicard, E. (2005). Les Mobilisations 'Identitaires' en Turquie apres 1980: une Liberalisation Ambigue. In Dorronsoro, Gilles (Ed.), *La Turquie conteste. Mobilisations sociales et régime sécuritaire*. Paris: Editions du CNRS.
- Melikoff, I. (1993). *Uyur İdik Uyardılar: Alevilik-Bektaşılık Araştırmaları*. İstanbul: Cem Yayınevi.
- Melikoff, I. (1997). Anadolu İslam Gizemciliğinin Orta Asya Kökenleri. In Erseven, İ. C. (Ed.) *Tuttum Aynayı Yüzüme Ali Göründü Gözüme: Yabancı Araştırmacılar Gözüyle Alevilik*. İstanbul: Ant Yayınları.
- Melikoff, I. (2003). Bektashi/Kızılbaş: Historical Bipartition and Its Consequences. In Olsson T., Özdalga E., Raudvere C. (Eds.), *Alevi identity: cultural, religious and social perspectives*. İstanbul: Swedish Research Institute in İstanbul.
- Navaro-Yashin, Y. (2002). *Faces of the state: secularism and public life in Turkey*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton UP.
- Neyzi, L. (1999). Gülümser's Story: Narratives, Memory, and Belonging in Turkey. In *New Perspectives on Turkey*, 20.
- Ocak, A. Y. (1997). Un Aperçu General sur l'Heterodoxie Musulmane en Turquie: Reflexions sur les Origines et les Caracteristiques du Kızılbaşisme (Alevisme) dans la Perspective de l'Histoire. In Kehl-Bodrogi, K., Kellner-Heinkele, B., Otter-Beaujean, A. (Eds.) *Syncretistic Religious Communities in the Near East*. Leiden; New York; Köln: Brill.
- Ocak, A. Y. (2003). *Alevi ve Bektaşî İnançlarının İslam Öncesi Temelleri: Bektaşî Menakıbnamelerinde İslam Öncesi İnanç Motifleri*. İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları.
- Olson, E. A. (1991). Of Türbe and Evliya: Saints' Shrines as Environments that Facilitate Communication and Innovation. In Kıray, M. (Ed.), *Structural Change in Turkish Society*. Bloomington, Ind. : Indiana University.
- Olsson, T. (2003). Epilogue: The Scripturalization of Ali-oriented Religions. In Olsson T., Özdalga E., Raudvere C. (Eds.), *Alevi identity: cultural, religious and social perspectives*. İstanbul: Swedish Research Institute in İstanbul.

Özbay, Ferhunde. (1999). Gendered Space: A New Look at Turkish Modernization, in *Gender & History*, Vol.11, No:3.

Peristiany, J. G. (1966). *Honour and shame : the values of Mediterranean society*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Schüler, H. (2002). *Türkiye’de Sosyal Demokrasi: Particilik, Hemşehrilik, Alevilik*. İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları.

Shankland, D. (1996). Changing Gender Relations among Alevi and Sunni in Turkey. In Rasuly-Paleczek, G. (Ed.) *Turkish Families in Transition*. Frankfurt Am Main; Berlin; Bern; New Yowk; Paris; Wien: Peter Lang.

Shankland, D. (2003a). *The Alevis in Turkey: The Emergence of a Secular Islamic Tradition*. London; New York: Routledge.

Shankland, D. (2003b). Anthropology and Ethnicity: The Place of Ethnography in the New Alevi Movement. In Olsson T., Özdalga E., Raudvere C. (Eds.), *Alevi identity: cultural, religious and social perspectives*. İstanbul: Swedish Research Institute in İstanbul.

Sirman, N. (1995). Friend of Foe? Forging Alliances with Other Women in a Village of Western Turkey. In Şirin Tekeli (ed.) *Women in Modern Turkish Society: A Reader*. London; Atlantic Heights, N.J.: Zed Books.

Sirman, N. (2002). Kadınların Milliyeti. In Tanıl Bora (ed.) *Modern Türkiye’de Siyasi Düşünce Cilt 4: Milliyetçilik*. İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları.

Sirman, N. (2004). Kinship, Politics, and Love: Honour in Post-Colonial Contexts – The Case of Turkey. In Shahrzad Mojab and Nahla Abdo (eds.) *Violence in the Name of Honour: Theoretical and Political Challenges*. İstanbul: Bilgi University Press.

Sirman, N. (2006). Önsöz: Namusun Arka Planı. In Tillion, G., *Harem ve Kuzenler*. İstanbul: Metis Yayınları.

Sweet, L. E. (1974). Visiting Patterns and Social Dynamics in a Lebanese Druze Village. *Anthropological Quarterly*, 47:1.

Şahhüseyinoğlu, H. N. (2001). *Alevi örgütlerinin tarihsel süreci*. Ankara: Ayyıldız Yayınları İtalik Kitapları.

Şahin, Ş. (2001). *The Alevi Movement: Transformation from Secret Oral to Public Written Culture in National and Transnational Social Spaces* (Doctoral Dissertation, New School for Social Research).

Şener, C. (1989). *Alevilik Olayı: Toplumsal Bir Başkaldırının Kısa Tarihçesi*. İstanbul: Yön Yayıncılık.

Tillion, G. (2006). *Harem ve Kuzenler*. İstanbul: Metis Yayınları.

Tanıttıran, H. and İşeri, G. (2006). *Aleviler Aleviliği Tartışıyor*. İstanbul: Kalkedon.

Van Bruinessen, M. (2002). *Kürtlük, Türklük, Alevilik, etnik ve dinsel kimlik mücadeleleri*. İstanbul: İletişim Yayıncılık A.Ş.

Vorhoff, K. (1997). Söylemde ve Hayatta Alevi Kadınına Kısa Bir Bakış. In Melikoff, I. et. al. (Eds.) *Tarihi ve Kültürel Boyutlarıyla Türkiye’de Aleviler, Bektaşiler, Nusayriler*. İstanbul: Ensar Neşriyat.

Vorhoff, K. (2003). Academic and journalistic publications on the Alevi and Bektashi of Turkey. In Olsson T., Özdalga E., Raudvere C. (Eds.), *Alevi identity: cultural, religious and social perspectives*. İstanbul: Swedish Research Institute in İstanbul.

Wierling, D. (1989). The History of Everyday Life and Gender Relations: On Historical and Historiographical Relationships. In Lüdtke, A. (Ed.), *The History of Everyday Life: Reconstructing Historical Experiences and Ways of Life*. Princeton; New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Wolbert, Barbara. (1996). The Reception Day: A Key to Migrant’s Reintegration. In Gabriele Rasuly-Paleczek (ed.) *Turkish Families in Transition*. Frankfurt am Main; Berlin; Bern; New York; Paris; Wien: Peter Lang.

Yılmaz, N. (2005). *Kentin Alevileri*. Kitabevi: İstanbul.

Zelyut, R. (1990). *Öz kaynaklarına göre Alevilik*. İstanbul: Anadolu Kültürü Yayınları.

Zelyut, R. (1993). *Aleviler ne yapmalı: şehirlerdeki Alevilerin sorunları-çözümleri*. İstanbul: Yön Yayıncılık.

## APPENDIX A

### ALEVİLİK BİLDİRGESİ<sup>125</sup>

Bu bildirge, Müslümanlığın Türkiye’de yaşayan bir kolu olan Aleviliğin, sorunlarını duyurmayı ve Alevilerin bazı isteklerini kamu-oyuna duyurmayı amaçlıyor.

Aleviler başka inançlara, “doğru, güzel, kutsal” gözüyle bakarlar. Ama kendi inanç ve kültürleri için de aynı olumlu duygu ve yaklaşımı beklerler... Alevi öğretisinin tanınması, Türkiye için barış ve zenginlik kaynağı olacaktır...

#### GERÇEKLER

Türkiye’de 20 milyon Alevi yaşıyor.

60 milyona yaklaşan Türkiye nüfusunun yaklaşık 20 milyonunu Alevi yoluna mensup Müslümanlar oluşturuyor.

Alevilik de Sünnilik gibi islam inancının bir koludur. Sünnilik kadar eskidir. Türkiye’de dinsel, siyasal, kültürel, sosyal yönleriyle Alevilik, halkın bir bölümünün yaşama biçimidir. Kültür ve inanç olarak halen varlığını sürdürmektedir.

Ama kaynak İslamiyet olmakla beraber, Sünni islam ve Alevi islam arasında hem öğretilerde hem de pratik yaşamda belirli farklar vardır.

Sünni halkımız Alevilik hakkında hiçbir şey bilmiyor.

Ülkemizdeki çoğunluğu oluşturan Sünni müslümanlar, Alevilik hakkında hemen hemen hiçbir şey bilmiyor. Bu kesimin, Alevilik hakkındaki görüşleri, tamamen olumsuz önyargılardan, söylentilerden doğan yakıştırmalardan oluşuyor.

Geçmişte şeriatçı Osmanlı devleti zamanında Alevilere karşı yaratılan iftiralar, bugün de bazı insanlar tarafından gerçek gibi kabul ediliyor. Osmanlı zihniyetini bu çağda yaşatmaya kimsenin hakkı yoktur.

Diyanet İşleri, İslam’ın sadece Sünni kolunu temsil ediyor.

Türkiye’de çoğunluğu oluşturan Sünni İslam, Türkiye Cumhuriyeti’nde Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı aracılığıyla resmen temsil ediliyor. Devlet okullarında din ve ahlak eğitimi ile camilerde imamlar vasıtasıyla Sünni İslam yaşıyor ve yaşatılıyor.

Alevi varlığı yok sayılıyor

---

<sup>125</sup> *Alevilik Bildirgesi* was originally published in *Cumhuriyet* in May, 15 1990, and quoted by Massicard (2002, pp. 712-717).



Buna karşın, 20 milyonluk Alevi kitlesi resmen yok sayılıyor, görmezlikten geliniyor. Bunun en canlı kanıtı, devlet yetkililerinin yaptıkları açıklamalarda, Türkiye'nin tümünü "Sünni" göstermeye çalışmaları, "Biz Sünniyiz" demeleridir. Halbuki Türkiye nüfusunu 3'te 1'i Alevidir...

Alevilere karşı olanlarla birtakım yarı aydınlar da, "Alevilik öldü!" diyerek Osmanlıcı tavırdan yana çıkıyor. Alevi geçinen bazı okumuşlar da kraldan fazla kralcı kesilerek bu görüşlere destek veriyor.

Kimileri de Alevi kültürünün canlandırılmasını "gericilik" olarak görüyor. Bunlar, Aleviliği yok sayma tavırlarıdır. Unutulmamalı ki, Alevilik yok olursa, meydan Osmanlı kafalıları kalacaktır...

Türkiye'de Hristiyanların, Yahudilerin, Süryanilerin bile kendilerine ait ibadethaneleri olduğu halde Aleviler bundan yoksun bırakılmıştır. Bugün Alevi kültürünü yaşatacak hiçbir kurum bulunmamaktadır.

İnanç ve anlatım özgürlüğü bir insanlık hakkıdır.

İnsan Hakları Bildirgesi'nin 9. maddesi ve Türkiye Cumhuriyeti 1982 Anayasası'nın 24. maddesi, herkese "Vicdan, dini inanç ve kanaat özgürlüğü" garantisi veriyor. Ülkemizde, cumhuriyetin kurulması ile birlikte Alevilere yönelik resmi devlet baskısı sona ermişse de eskiden gelen sosyal, psikolojik ve siyasal baskı varlığını sürdürmektedir. Aleviler, bu baskılar yüzünden "vicdan, dini inanç ve kanaat" özgürlüğünü kullanamıyorlar. Aleviler, halen Aleviliklerini gizlemek zorunda kalıyorlar.

Aleviler, Atatürk devrimlerini hep desteklediler.

Cumhuriyeti yaratan temel güçlerden birisi de Alevi kitlelerdir. Aleviler, her zaman Atatürk'ün ve onun devrimlerinin yanında olmuşlardır. Fakat sıkıntıları cumhuriyet döneminde de bitmemiştir. Alevi kitle Türkiye'nin modern, demokratik, özgürlükleri tam bir ülke olmasını temel hedef alır. Türkiye'ye gerçek anlamda sahip çıkar.

## İSTEKLER

Aleviler üzerinde baskı olduğu kabul edilmelidir.

Bugün Türkiye'deki 20 milyonluk Alevi kitle üzerinde Osmanlı'dan gelen ve halen sosyal, kültürel ve psikolojik ağırlıklı olarak süren ağır bir baskı vardır. Bu baskının adını, açık yüreklilikle koymanın zamanı gelmiştir.

Aleviler çekinmeden "Ben Aleviyim" diyebilmelidir.

Alevi kitle bugün bile Alevi olmaktan korku duymaktadır. Buna gerek yoktur. Bu kesimden insanlar, gerektiğinde, açıkça "Aleviyim" diyebilmelidirler. Bu, onların doğal insanlık haklarından birisidir.

Sünni aileler, Alevilik hakkındaki düşüncelerini değiştirmelidir.

Türkiye'nin gerçek bir huzur toplumu olabilmesi için Sünni ve Alevi kitlenin, birbirleri hakkında iyi düşünceler beslemesi gerekir.

Aleviler hakkında görmediği şeyleri söyleyerek iftira etme olayına, Sünni aileler izin vermemelidir. Kafalara yerleşmiş olan olumsuz düşünceler atılmalıdır. Her inanç, her kültür diğerlerine saygı duyarak yaşamalı, yaşatılmalıdır. Avrupa'daki Protestan ve Katolik mezhebinden aileler, bugün yan yana, dostça, gül gibi yaşayıp gidiyorlar. Türkiye için de aynı samimi bütünlük mümkündür.

Aydınlar, Alevi varlığını, insan hakları bağlamında savunmalıdırlar.

Her ülkede olduğu gibi ülkemizde de insan haklarını savunmak ve korumak, devletten önce aydınlara düşmektedir. Aydınlar, kendi sorunlarının dışındaki toplumsal sorunlarla ilgilenen toplumun seçkin elemanlarıdır. Bu nedenle, onlar Alevi varlığına dikkati çekmek ve Alevilere karşı yapılan baskılara karşı tavır almak zorundadırlar. Bugün ülkemizde önemli insan hakları ve demokratik sorunlar bulunduğu gerçektir. Bunların ve önemlilerinden birisi de Alevilerin durumudur.

Alevilerin sorunlarını duyurmada önderlik aydınlara, demokrasiyi isteyen politikacılara, iş adamlarına ve serbest meslek sahiplerine düşmektedir.

Politik veya maddi çıkar yüzünden Aleviliğini gizleyenlerin de, bu tavırlarını bırakmaları gerekir. Aydınların yanı sıra, belli bir konuma gelmiş Alevilerin bu konuda tavır alması zorunludur. Bu sorumluluğu başkalarına yıkmaya kalkışmak yanlıştır.

Her insanın kendi kimliğini açıkça söyleyebilmesi, insanlık hakkıdır. Bu kimliğin "mezhepçilik" veya "şovenistlik" ile damgalanması, temel insanlık hakkına saygı duymamaktır.

Türk basını, yayınlarında Alevi kültürüne yer vermelidir.

Bugün, Türk toplumunun en seçkin, en demokratik, en laik kafalı insanları, emekçisinden patronuna, basın sektöründe yoğunlaşmıştır.

Buna karşın basınımızda, 20 milyonluk Alevi kitleyle ilgili bilgiye veya habere az rastlanır. Alevi kültürünün tanıtılmasına basınımız daha geniş olanaklar sağlamalıdır. İnaniyoruz ki Aleviler üzerindeki baskının kalkması, Türkiye'yi daha demokratik bir yapıya kavuşturacaktır. Bugün basınımızın sorunları ile Alevilerin sorunları birbirinden çok yakındır...

TRT, Alevi varlığını da dikkate almalıdır.

Türkiye radyo ve televizyon istasyonları Alevi kitlenin varlığından habersiz görünüyorlar. Radyo ve televizyonda Alevi kültürü de yer almalıdır. Alevi büyükleri, alevilerin kutsal günleri, şiiri, müziği, folkloru tanıtılmalıdır.

Diyanet İşleri'nde Aleviler de temsil edilmelidir.

Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı (devlet), 20 milyonluk Alevi kitlesini görmezden geliyor.

Diyanet, Alevi öğretisini, resmen tanımalı ve bu öğretinin temsilcilerine kendi bünyesinde görevler vermelidir.

Bu ülkede, 20 milyonluk Alevi kitle de devlete vergi veriyor. Tahminen üçte biri Alevilerden alınan devlet bütçesinden Diyanet işlerine, her yıl yüzlerce milyar lira para aktarılıyor. Laik bir ülkede Diyanet işlerine para verilmesi yanlıştır. Eğer devlet, Diyanet'e para veriyorsa, Alevi kesime de nüfusu oranında para aktarmalıdır. Bu para da Alevi kültürünün yaşatılması ve canlandırılması için harcanmalıdır.

#### Alevi köylerine cami yapmaktan vazgeçilmelidir.

Diyanet İşleri, son yıllarda, Alevi köylerine cami yapmak, imam göndermek gibi etkisiz bir baskı yöntemi daha geliştirdi. Kendi varlığından başkasına tahammül edemeyen zihniyetin bu uygulamasına, devletin alet edilmemesini bekliyoruz. Bu uygulamalar derhal durdurulmalıdır. Aleviler, köylerine cami değil okul ve cem evi (kültür evi) istiyorlar...

#### Din ve ahlak derslerinde Alevi öğretisi yer almalıdır.

Okullarda, din ve ahlak eğitiminin zorunlu hale getirilmesi sonucu, Alevi kökenli öğrenciler, kendi öğretilerini değil, Sünni öğretiyi öğrenmektedirler. Bu yetmiyormuş gibi okullarda Alevilik her fırsatta kötülenerek genç yürekler yaralanmakta, beyinlere düşmanlık tohumları ekilmektedir. Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı'nın buna mutlaka engel olmasını bekliyoruz.

Bu durum, din ve vicdan hürriyeti ilkelerine uymadığı gibi toplumsal barışı da zedelemektedir. Bunu engellemek için okullarda, isteyen Alevi öğrenciye, Aleviliği öğrenme olanakları yaratılmalıdır. Bunun için din ve ahlak derslerine Aleviliği tanıtıcı bilgiler eklenmelidir...

#### Hükümetlerin, Alevilere bakış açısı değişmelidir.

Alevilere yönelik olumsuz şartlanmalar, iş başına gelen hükümet üyelerini de etkilemektedir. Bunlar, Aleviliği görmezden geliyor, yok sayıyorlar. Bakanlar ve milletvekilleri "Alevi" sözünü ağızlarına almaya korkuyorlar.

Bizim gibi çok kültürlü toplumlarda; hükümetler, bütün inançlara saygı duyacak bir politika izlemek zorundadırlar. Diyanet İşleri'nin; Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı'nın bu açıdan yeni baştan düzenlenmesi, hükümetlerin önünde çok önemli bir görev olarak durmaktadır.

#### Aleviler, laik devletin güvencesidirler.

Alevilik bütün Ortaçağların sevgi ve sohbete dayalı tek canlı kültürü olarak bugüne dek geldi.

Aleviler kültürleri gereği, hoşgörülü, bilime saygılı, ilerlemeye açık bir toplumdur. Bağnaz düşünceye karşıdırlar. Laik devletin, şeriat devleti kurma çabalarına karşı korunması için bugün Alevi varlığı bir güvencedir. Devlet, bu güvenceyi eritmeyi

değil, kuvvetlendirmeyi düşünmelidir. Demokratik, laik çoğulcu güçler, Alevi varlığının netleşmesi için çaba göstermelidir.

#### Dedelik kurumu, çağdaş anlamda yeniden yapılandırılmalıdır.

Dedeler yüzyıllarca Alevi kesiminin hem öğretmenleri, hem din görevlileri hem yargıçları olarak çalıştılar. Bu insanlar; Alevi kültürünü kuşaktan kuşağa aktardılar.

Zamanımızda, camilerden ve okullardan yetişen yüz binlerce imam, ülkenin her tarafında maaşlı olarak çalıştırılırken dedelik, Aleviliğin baskı altında tutulması sonucu, sıkıntı içindedir. Dedelere kendilerini geliştirme ve yetiştirme olanakları sağlanmalıdır. Alevi kültürünün yaşatılmasında kendisini yenilemiş, çağdaş kafalı aydın dedelerden yararlanılabilir...

#### Yurtdışındaki Aleviler için acil programlar şarttır.

Bugün yalnızca Federal Almanya’da 350 bin’le – 400 bin arasında Alevi işçimizin bulunduğu sanılıyor. Yurtdışındaki Alevi işçiler, çocuklarına kendi kültürlerini vermek için yoğun istek duyuyorlar. Fakat onlara Sünni programlardan başka seçenek verilmiyor. Bu da kabul görmüyor. Böylece yeni yetişen gençler, kültürel boşluğa itiliyor. Yurtdışındaki Aleviler için Alevi kültürünü tanıtıcı programlar, Alevi çocukları için de bu konuda dersler şarttır. Devlet, bu işçiler için, din adamı yollarken Alevilik gerçeğini göz önünde tutmalıdır. Türkiye’de olduğu gibi yurtdışındaki Alevilere de, imamlar aracılığıyla din hizmeti sunmak mümkün değildir. Bu gerçek, artık kabul edilmeli ve aydın Alevi dedelerden yararlanılmalıdır.

#### Alevilik ile bugünkü İran Şiiliği’nin ilgisi yoktur.

Alevilere karşı tavır içinde olanlar, geleneksel iftiralarını sürdürerek, Türkiye Aleviliği ile İran’daki molla düşüncesini aynı paralelde göstermeye çalışıyorlar. Bu yanlıştır. Gerek felsefede, gerek uygulamada Anadolu Aleviliği ile bugünkü İran Şiiliğinin bir benzerliği yoktur. Aleviliğin temeli; hoşgörü, insan sevgisi, canlıya saygı, zorbalığa karşı olmaktır. Aleviler, bağınaz güçlerin değil, demokratik kitlelerin yanındadırlar. Bu geçmişte de, günümüzde de böyle olmuştur...

#### **SONUÇ**

Türkiye, tek değil, birçok kültürün bulunduğu bir toplumdur. Bu durum da ülkemiz için zenginliktir. Değişik kültürlerin kendilerini açık açık ortaya koyması, insanları bireysel planda demokratik, hoşgörülü, insancıl bir kimliğe sokar. Bu da tüm insanlığın arzuladığı bir hedeftir.

Temeli insan sevgisi ve barış olan Alevi kültürü, bugün hiç desteklenmiyor. Hükümetlerin, bu insan kültürünü koruması; yaşatması için aydınlarla işbirliğine girmesi şarttır. Siyasetçiler tarafından dile getirilen, “inançlar ve fikirler üzerindeki baskıların kaldırılması gerektiği” yolundaki açıklamaların sözde kalmamasını diliyoruz. Bu konuda demokrat aydınlar olarak, tüm Türk halkından destek bekliyoruz...

Yazar Yaşar Kemal, Gazeteci yazar İlhan Selçuk, Prof. Dr. Berker Yaman, Prof. Dr. Kıvanç Ertop, Gazeteci – Yazar Rıza Zelyut, Araştırmacı Atilla Özkırımlı, Gazeteci – Yazar İlhami Soysal, İnsan Hakları Derneği İstanbul Şubesi Başkanı Emil Galip Sandalcı, Yazar Aziz Nesin, Sanatçı Zülfü Livaneli, Sanatçı Tarık Akan, Doç. Dr. Çetin Yetkin, Yazar Atıol Behramoğlu, Gazeteci – Yazar Seyfettin Turan, Gazeteci Musa Ağacık, Gazeteci – Yazar Süleyman Yağız, Avukat Muharrem Naci Orhan, Yazar Nejat Birdoğan, Avukat Cemal Özbey.

## THE DECLARATION OF ALEVILIK<sup>126</sup>

This declaration aims to voice the problems of Alevilik which is a branch of Islam that is practiced in Turkey and to reflect certain demands of Alevis to the public.

Alevis regard other beliefs as “true, good and sacred”. However, they also expect the same positive feelings and approach for their beliefs and culture... The recognition of the Alevi doctrine will be a source of peace and enrichment for Turkey...

### REALITIES

There are 20 million Alevis living in Turkey.

Muslims who belong to the path of Alevilik comprise 20 million of the almost 60 million Turkish population.

Alevilik, just like Sünnilik, is a branch of Islam. It is as old as Sünnilik. Alevilik including its religious, political, cultural and social aspects is the way of life of some of the people of Turkey. As a culture and belief system, it continues its existence.

Although the main source of Alevilik is also Islam, there are certain differences between Sunni Islam and Alevi Islam considering both the doctrine and the practice.

Sunni people do not know anything about Alevilik.

Sunnis who make up the majority of our country’s population almost know nothing about Alevilik. The ideas of this part of the population about Alevilik are formed by prejudices and slanders that originate from rumors.

Some people still hold on to the slanders that were produced in the past, at the time of the Ottoman State which was ruled by the sharia. No one has the right to revive the Ottoman mentality at this age...

The Directorate of Religious Affairs represents solely the Sunni Branch of Islam.

Sunni Islam which is observed by the majority is represented officially by the Directorate of Religious Affairs. Sunni Islam is lived and observed in public schools through religion and morality lessons and in mosques through imams.

The existence of Alevis is ignored.

In contrast, the existence of 20 million Alevis is officially denied, ignored.

---

<sup>126</sup> This is the translation of *Alevilik Bildirgesi*, which was originally published in *Cumhuriyet* in May, 15 1990, and quoted by Massicard (2002, pp. 712-717).

The most obvious proof of this fact is the declarations of the state officials saying “We are Sunnis” in an attempt to present the whole of Turkey as Sunni. However, one third of the population of Turkey is Alevi...

Some people who are opposed to the Alevis and some semi-enlightened intellectuals support this Ottoman attitude by claiming that “Alevilik has died out!” Some educated people who pass for Alevis also support this view.

Some people regard the revival of the Alevi culture as a move “backward”. These are the kinds of attitudes aimed to ignore the presence of Alevilik. It should not be forgotten that if Alevilik disappears, people with Ottomanist minds would have attained power...

Although even Christians, Jews and Assyrians have their own places of worship in Turkey, Alevis are deprived of this. There is no institution today to continue the Alevi culture.

#### Freedom of speech and belief is a human right.

The 9th article of the Declaration of Human Rights and the 24th act of the Constitution of the Turkish Republic guarantees the freedom of “conscience, religious belief and opinion” for all. In our country, although official state oppression on Alevis has ceased with the foundation of the Republic, social, psychological and political oppression, which has a long history, continues its presence. Alevis due to these oppressions are unable to exercise their rights of “conscience, religious belief and opinion”. Alevis still have to conceal their Alevilik (their being Alevi).

#### Alevis have been a persistent supporter of Atatürk’s Revolutions.

Alevi mass is one of the major powers that have created the Republic. Alevis have always been on the side of the Atatürk and his revolutions. However, their troubles haven’t come to an end in the Republican period. Alevi mass aims to make Turkey a modern, democratic country where freedom is exercised fully. It truly watches over the country.

#### DEMANDS

##### It should be acknowledged that Alevis are under oppression.

Today, in Turkey, oppression against the Alevi mass goes on especially in its social, cultural and psychological forms which is taken over from the Ottoman times. It is time to name this oppression daringly.

##### Alevis should be able to say “I am an Alevi” without worries.

Today even the Alevi mass is afraid of being Alevi. This is useless.

This part of the public should be able say “I am an Alevi” openly when needed. This is one of their most natural human rights.

Sunni families should change their ideas about Alevilik.

For Turkey to be a really peaceful society, the Alevi and Sunni societies should maintain good thoughts for each other.

Sunni families shouldn't let others slander Alevis for things they haven't themselves witnessed. Long-established negative ideas should be discarded. Each faith, each culture should be lived and preserved with mutual respect. Today, in Europe families from Catholic and Protestant confessions live together in harmony. It is also possible for Turkey to attain this sincere togetherness.

Intellectuals should defend Alevi existence in the context of human rights.

As it is true for every other country, defending and securing human rights is more an obligation for the intellectuals than for the state. Intellectuals are an elite section of society that concerns themselves with issues that are not related with only themselves but also with the public in general. For this reason, they should point to the presence of Alevis and stand against the oppressions that Alevis are faced with. It is a fact that today in our country there are serious problems considering human rights and democracy. One of the most serious among them is the condition of Alevis.

It is a duty for intellectuals, politicians demanding democracy, business owners and businessmen to be leaders in the articulation of the problems of Alevis.

People who disguise their Alevi identities for their own political and material interests should quit this attitude. Beside the intellectuals, prominent Alevis should also react against this. It is wrong, to try to make solely others responsible for this.

It is a human right, to be able to declare one's identity freely. To defame this identity as "factionism" or "chauvinism" is to disrespect the basic human rights.

Turkish press should include Alevi culture in its publications.

Today, the most prominent, democratic and secular people of Turkish society from business owners to workers are gathered in the publication sector.

In contrast to this, one hardly comes across any news about the 20 million mass of Alevis. The press should open more space to make Alevi culture known. We believe that with unburdening the Alevis of oppression Turkey could have a more democratic structure. Today, in this respect, the problems of the press and the problems of Alevis are very similar...

TRT should also take into consideration the presence of Alevis.

Turkish radio and television stations seem unaware of the presence of the Alevi mass. Alevi culture should also take place on radio and television. Holy days, venerable personalities, poems, music and folklore of Alevis should be introduced.

The Directorate of Religious Affairs should also represent the Alevis.



The Directorate of Religious Affairs (the state), disregards the 20 million Alevi mass.

Directorate of Religious Affairs should acknowledge the Alevi doctrine officially and should assign positions for the representatives of this doctrine.

In this country, the 20 million Alevi mass also pays its taxes to the state. From the taxes, about one third of which is provided by the Alevis, hundreds of billions of liras are allotted to the Directorate of Religious Affairs. It is wrong to allot money to the Directorate of Religious Affairs in a secular country. If the state will do this then it should also spare some for the Alevis in proportion to their population. Then this money should be invested for the revival and continuation of the Alevi culture.

The construction of mosques in Alevi villages should be stopped.

Directorate of Religious Affairs has recently formulated a new and futile method of oppression through the construction of mosques and the appointment of imams to Alevi villages. We expect that the state won't be a part of this mentality that has no tolerance for anything but itself. These orders should be immediately withheld. Alevis want schools and cemevi (culture houses) in their villages and not mosques.

Alevi doctrine should take its place in religion and morality lessons.

As religion and morality lessons have become obligatory in schools, students of Alevi origin learn the Sunni teaching and not their own. As if this was not enough, Alevi doctrine is being degraded every time possible, as a result of which young hearts are injured and brains are filled with enmity. We demand that the Directorate of Education definitely takes measures against this.

This fact not only contradicts with the freedom of religion and conscience but also damages the societal peace. In order to prevent this, Alevi students who make a request to learn about Alevilik should be provided with this opportunity. With this aim, information introducing Alevilik should be included in the religion and conscience lessons...

Governments' view of Alevis should change.

Negative conditioning against the Alevis also affects the governments in charge. They disregard, ignore Alevilik. They are afraid to utter the word "Alevi".

In multicultural societies like ours, governments should have policies that are respectful for all confessions. The revision of the Directorate of Religious Affairs and the Directorate of Education, remains as a crucial task to be accomplished for governments.

Alevis are the guarantee for a secular state.

From the Middle Ages only Alevilik has come to the present as a culture that is still alive and that is based on love and oral communication.

Alevis are tolerant, respectful to sciences and open to development as requires their culture. They are against religious conservatism. Alevi existence is an insurance for the secular state against the attempts to found a state of sharia. The state should endeavor to strengthen this insurance and not to erode it. Democratic, secular and pluralist forces should try to make the Alevi existence clearer.

The institution of Dedelik should be restructured.

Dedes have served as educators, religious guides and judges to the Alevis for centuries. These people have transmitted Alevi culture to subsequent generations.

Nowadays when many imams, raised in schools and mosques are employed all over the country, dedelik suffers due to the oppression against Alevilik. Dedes should be provided with the opportunity to cultivate themselves. To continue the presence of Alevi culture, we can benefit from modern and open-minded dedes who have improved themselves...

Urgent programs for the expatriate Alevis are essential.

Today, 350- 400 thousand Alevis are estimated to live in Federal Germany alone. Expatriate Alevis feel a great desire to instruct their children their own culture. This is also not acknowledged. That is why, the new generation is pushed towards a cultural void. For the expatriate Alevis, programs that introduce Alevi culture and for their children, lessons on the same topic are essential. When the state sends religious officers to these countries, it should also take the fact of Alevilik into consideration. It is not possible neither in Turkey or abroad to provide religious service to the Alevis through imams. This reality should finally be accepted and open-minded and intellectual dedes should be put into service.

Alevilik has nothing to do with the Iranian Shia branch of Islam.

The ones against Alevis continue their long-established slanders and try to represent Turkish Alevilik in parallel to the Iranian molla doctrine. This is wrong. There is no resemblance between the Anatolian Alevilik and today's Iranian Shiite branch. The basis of Alevilik is tolerance, human love, respect to living creatures and standing against despotism. Alevis are not on the side of the religious conservatives, but on the side of the democratic masses. This has always been so in the past and at present...

CONCLUSION

There is not only one culture in Turkey but many. This is a source of richness for our country. The uninhibited expression of different cultures makes people democratic, tolerant and humanitarian individually. This is an aim that the whole of humanity aspires to achieve.

Today Alevi culture whose basis is human love and peace is not the least supported. Governments must cooperate with intellectuals to preserve this human culture. We wish that statements like "the suppression of beliefs and opinions should come to an end" which are uttered by politicians would be more than mere words. As democratic intellectuals, we expect from the whole of Turkish society their support...

Writer Yaşar Kemal, Journalist-Writer İlhan Selçuk, Prof. Dr. İlhan Yaman, Prof. Dr. Kıvanç Ertop, Journalist-Writer Rıza Zelyut, Researcher Atilla Özkırımlı, Journalist-Writer İlhami Soysal, Head of the Human Rights Association İstanbul Branch Emil Galip Sandalcı, Writer Aziz Nesin, Artist Zülfü Livaneli, Artist Tarık Akan, Doç. Dr. Çetin Yetkin, Writer Ataol Behramoğlu, Journalist-Writer Seyfettin Turan, Journalist Musa Ağacık, Journalist-Writer Süleyman Yağız, Lawyer Muharrem Naci Orhan, Writer Nejat Birdoğan, Lawyer Cemal Özbey

## APPENDIX B

THE ARTICLE IN TOPLUMSAL BARIŞ (No:7 - November, 2004)

Araştırma / İsmail Elçioğlu

# Alevilikte kadın

Erkek dişi sorulmaz, Muhabbetin dilinde  
Hakk'ın yarattığı her şey yerli yerinde  
Bizim nazarımızda kadın, erkek farkı yok  
Noksanlık, eksiklik senin görüşlerinde.

*Hacı Bektaş Veli*

**A**nadolu Aleviliğinde kadının özel bir konumu vardır. Alevilikte kadın; peçe altına giren, eksik etek veya "saçı uzun aklı kısa" değildir. Bu düşüncenin Alevilikte yeri yoktur.

Alevileri Sünnilerden ayıran en belirgin özellik, karşıt cins ilişkileridir. Alevilerde kadın-erkek ilişkileri daha rahattır. Kadın-erkek arasında kaç-göç bulunmaz. Kadın peçe altına girmez. Medrese Sünniliği'nin Aleviliğe tüm olumsuz etkilerine karşın, Alevilikte kadın hakları daha çoktur. Kadın daha özgürdür. Kadın yetkileri elinden alınmış bir varlık değildir. Erkeğin taşıdığı yetkileri o da taşır. (Prof. Fuat Bozkurt, Aleviliğin Toplumsal Boyutları, s.108)

Alevilikte kadının bu konumu, eski Türk töreleriyle karşılaştırıldığında, kadın, kutsal bir varlık, dişi bir tanrı gibi düşünülür. Yaratılış Destanı'nda, Tanrı'ya insanları ve yeryüzünü yaratma düşüncesinin verildiği; Oğuzlarda ise, kadına yeryüzünün ışıklarının çoğalmasının verildiği söylenmektedir. (Nihat Sabri Banarlı)

Kırgızlarda ise kadın, evinin ve namusunun koruyucusu olarak betimlenir.

Kazak Destanı'nda kadın bir tanrıça, bir koruyucudur. Atına seslenirken kadın için, "Senin sevgili anan,

bizim sevgili anamız" der. Bu nedenle Roblandı tüm utku ve yenilgilerini kadına ve onun beslediği atına borçludur.

Altay Destanı'nda kadının konumu

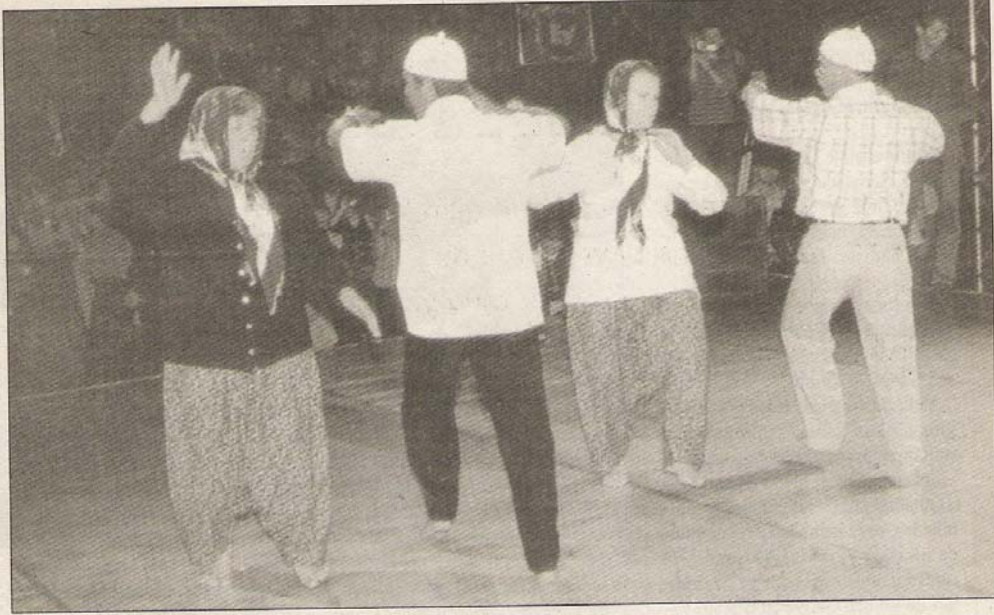
yüksektir. Kahramanlar karısının ya da kız kardeşinin bağlılık ve dayanışmasıyla ölümden ve kötü durumdan kurtulur. İlk yol gösterenleri ana ya da ablalar olur. (Abdülkadir İnan, Makaleler ve İncelemeler, s.275,276)

Oğuz boylarında genç kızlar değerli el işleri ve becerileriyle değil, at binip kılıç kuşanmalarıyla anlatılır. Kadının giyiminde kapalı değildir. Kocasıyla birlikte savaşlarda çarpışır. (Özgül Erten, Yüzyılımızda Kadımlarımız ve Kadımlarımız s.63)

1241 yılında büyük düzen kavgasını başlatan Şeyh Baba İlyas, şeriatın kadını her türlü horlamasına bakmaksızın dinsel törenlere kadını da ka-







tar. Toplantılarda er-bacı hep bir arada Alevi cemlerinde olduğu gibi daire biçiminde otururlar. Yaş ve konumlarına göre yerlerini alırlar. Şeyh Baba İlyas kadın erkek ayrımı gözetmeksizin herkese eşit lokmalar sunar.

İmam Cafer-i Sadık buyruğu da buna benzer bir söylenceyi anlatır. Dede olarak Hz. Ali posta oturmuştur. Kırk kişi topluca Cem yaparlar. Kırk kişiden kimin er kimin bacı olduğu bilinmez. Kırkı bir üzüm tanesi paylaşılır ve hep birlikte Kırklar Semahı'na girerler. (Buyruk İst.1982 s.7-11)

Oysa şeriatla kadın anlayışı daha katıdır. Dört duvar ve peçe altına kadını tutsak etmiştir şeriat. Şeriat kadını erkeğin tarlası olarak görür. "Karılarınız sizin tarlanızdır. O halde tarlanıza nasıl dilerseñiz öyle varın" (Bakara suresi 223)

İmam-ı Gazali'de kadınlar üzerine verilen yargılar çok daha ağırdır.

"Akıl sahipleri içerisinde aklın ve dinin (siz kadınlardan) daha noksanını görmedim, erkekler kadın üzerinde hakimdirler. O sebeptendir ki (Al-

**Alevileri Sünnilerden ayıran en belirgin özellik, karşıt cins ilişkileridir.**

**Alevilerde kadın-erkek ilişkileri daha rahattır. Kadın-erkek arasında kaç-göç bulunmaz.**

lah) erkekleri kadınlara üstün kılmıştır. (Kadınlar) erkeklerin eline hürriyetini terk etmişlerdir. Nikah kadınlar için bir tür köleliktir. Tanrı erkeği üstün yarattı, kadını da erkeğin emrine verdi. (Allah) "erkekler kadınlar üzerinde hakimdirler" diye buyurmuş ve erkeğe "Seyyid" (efendi) adını vermiştir." (İmam Gazali, İhtiyacı Ülümid-din, İstanbul 1975 Cilt 2.S.50-156)

"gerektiğinde onu dövün" diye erkeğe öğüt verir. Sözelimi şeriatın kadınlar için kimi uygulamaları şöyledir.

1. Mirasta kadın, erkekle eşit değildir. Erkeğe kadının iki katı mal kalır. Bu konudaki Kur'an ayeti şöyledir:

2. Kadın, İmam yada halife olamaz. Onunla yan yana danışıklı olarak göreve katılamaz.

3. Kadın tek başına tanık olamaz. İki tanık kadın bir erkek tanık yerine geçer.

Erkeklerinizden iki kişiyi şahit tutun. Eğer iki erkek yoksa razı olduğunuz şahitlerden bir erkek, iki kadın (şahitlik etsin). Ta ki kadınlardan biri unuttuğunda diğeri ona hatırlatsın. (Bakara suresi ayet 282)

4. Kadın toplum yönetimine katılamaz. Erkeklerin bulunduğu bir topluluk içine giremez, konuşamaz, bir düşünce ileri süremez. Bu konularda ünlü hadisçilerin aktardıkları hadisler çok katıdır. Sözelimi:

"Kadınlar aklın ve vicdanın dün (eksik) yaratıklarıdır" Ebu Said-i Hudri bu hadisi aktarır. (Sahib-i Bahari Tercümesi) Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı



## Araştırma

ğı'nın yayınladığı 12 ciltlik yapıtın 223 sayfasında yer alır.

5. Kadın, Cuma ve bayram namazları kılamaz. Kadın peçe arkasına itilmiştir, göstermesinler.”(Nur Suresi ayet 31)

Kadın seçime katılamaz. Oy kullanamaz. Şeriat kadının uğursuz bir yaratık olduğu görüşündedir. Güvenilir hadis kaynakları bu savı doğrulayan hadisler bildirirler. Sözelimi:

“Kadınlar insanın karşısına şeytan gibi çıkarlar.” (Cabirin bildirdiğine, Zeyd'in söylediğine göre), (İlhan Arsel, Şeriat ve Kadın).

Yukarıdaki örneklerden görüldüğü gibi şeriatın kadına tanıdığı ikinci sınıf insanlık anlayışı ile Anadolu Aleviliği'nin anlayışı hiçbir zaman bağdaşmamaktadır. Peygamber'in ölümünden sonra kadın hakları konusunda ilk çıkış yine Hz. Ali yandaşlarından gelmiştir. Hz. Ali'ye bağlılıkları ile bilinen Galiye taraftarları kadınla erkeği eşit saymışlar. Bu doğrultudaki isteklerini şöyle gündeme getirmişlerdir.

Kadın eşini seçmekte özgür olmalıdır. Erkeğin yaptığı işi yapabilmelidir. Toplum düzeninde erkeğe verilen yetkiler kadına da verilmelidir. Galiye kadına verilen yetkileri bir toplum gereği olarak görür. İsmet Zeki Eyüpoğlu şöyle diyor:

“Günümüz Alevi toplumunda kadının yetkileri elinde alınmış bir varlık değildir. Kimi durumlarda kadının saygınlığı daha çoktur.” (Alevilik Sünnilik, İstanbul 1985)

Anadolu kültürünün büyük ürünü Dede Korkut ise Alevilik'te kadına büyük değer verildiğini şu mısralar-



la açıklamaktadır.

*Beri gelsene, başımın tahtı evimin tahtı*

*Evden çıkıp yürüyende selvi boy-lum*

*Kurulu yaya benzer çatma kaşım  
İkiz badem sığmayan dar ağızlım  
Güz elmasına benzer al yanaklım  
Kadınım, dirliğim, dölüğüm.*

(Orhan Saik Gökay, Dede Korkut hikayeleri İstanbul 1985 sayfa 52)

Şeriatın tüm olumsuz etkilerine karşı Anadolu Alevi yaşamında kadının somut durumu şöyledir.

Alevilik'te erkeğin eşini boşaması kesinlikle yasaktır. Eşini bırakan erkek düşkündür. Toplum dışı tutulur. (Kadın yüz kızartıcı hallerde bulunursa o zaman boşanma gündeme gelir.)

Oysa şeriat düzeninde kadının hiçbir hakkı olmadığı gibi, kadın erkeğin iki dudağı arasından çıkacak “üçten dokuza kadar boşsun” sözü ile bağımlı kılınmıştır. Şeriat düzeninde erkeğe böyle bir yetki verilmiştir. Tüm yetkiler yanlıdır. Dizginler erkeğin elinde olup kadın-erkek eşitliği yoktur. Ayrıca medeni olmayan bu kurallara aleviler alay ederek bakarlardı. Alevilik'te kadının toplumda önemli bir yeri vardır. Din adamı durumundaki Dede'nin eşi “Ana”dır. Ana da Dede ölçüsünde saygındır. Oysa şeriat düzeninde kadının din adamlığı söz konusu değildir. Alevilik'te kadının hayvan kesmesi doğaldır. Şeriat için geçerli olan “kadının kestigi yenmez”.

Kadınlar da erkeklerle birlikte savaşa katılırlar. Alevi tarihinde Çaldıran Savaşı bunun açık örneğidir. Ayrıca Kurtuluş Savaşı da bunun örnekleri arasındadır. Çaldıran'da savaş yenilgiyle bitince ölümler arasında kocalarıyla birlikte omuz omuza savaşmış birçok savaşçı kadının cesediyle karşılaşılır. Yine savaşta kocalarını yalnız bırakmamış çok sayıda kadın bulunur. (Osmanlı İmparatorluğu Tarihi, Şiar Yalçın Havas Yayınları, İstanbul 1975 s.323)

Alevilik ve Bektasılık'te kadın kelimenin tam anlamıyla “en yüce varlıktır”. Kadın evin her türlü sorumluluğunda tam söz sahibidir. Kadın bir mutfak eşyası veya baştan aşağı kara çarşafı büründürülen bir canlı değildir.



Diğer tarafta Alevilik çok evliliğe karşıdır. Başta Hacı Bektaş Veli olmak üzere Anadolu Alevi ulularından hiçbirinin çok kadınlı evliliği bilinmez. ( İ. Z. Eyüpoğlu, Bektaşilik, Şiilik, İstanbul 1980, s.405-406 )

Alevilik ve Bektaşilik'te kadın kelimenin tam anlamıyla, "en yüce varlıktır". Kadın evin her türlü sorumluluğunda tam söz sahibidir. Kadın bir mutfak eşyası veya baştan aşağı kara çarşafı büründürülen bir canlı değildir.

Alevilik'te kadının bu özgürlüğünün tarihi ise çok eskilere dayanır. İslamiyet'ten önce İran'da ve Araplar'daki kadınların yaşamına birkaç kelimeyle değindikten sonra, Hz. Hüseyin'in kızı Süheyni ile konumuza devam edeceğiz.

İslamiyet'ten önce Arabistan'da ve Arabistan'ı çevreleyen ülkelerde kadının durumu korkunçtu. Örneğin İran'da kadın tam anlamıyla köle idi. Kapalı bir yaşayış sürüyor, dünyadan habersiz bulunuyordu. Yasalar kadın alım-satımına izin veriyordu. Dinsel yasalar erkeğin annesi, kız kardeşi, hala ve teyzesi kardeş çocuklarıyla evlenmesine izin veriyordu. İranlı kadınlar bazı zamanlarda evlerinden uzaklaşmak ve dehme denilen mezarlara girmek zorundaydılar. (Firdösi, Şahname, Zend Avesta, Jules Scholke)

Hız Muhammed bu tür olumsuzluklar karşısında bir hadisinde "Allah cenneti annelerin ayakları altına serdi" demiştir.

Hız Peygamberin döneminin faziletli kadınlardan bir tanesi kız Hız Fatma'dır. Uysallığı, yumuşak başlılığı, fazileti, çevresi üzerindeki sosyal etkisi onu her dönemde bütün dünyanın ideal kadını haline getirmektedir. Hintli yazar Mir Ali, Hız Fatma için şöyle diyor: "Hız Muhammed'in erkek çocuklarının ölmesi, peygamberin bütün sevgisini kız Fatma'ya vermesine sebep olmuştur. Erkeklerden farksızdı; ciddiliği ve tevazuu her gün biraz daha artıyordu.

Hız Fatma 16 yaşında Hız Ali ile evlendi. Bunların arasındaki bağlılık,

karşılıklı sevgi, çocuklarına olan düşkünlük zamanımıza kadar İslami aile hayatı için bir örnek oluşturmaktadır. Hız Fatma bir peygamber kızı olmasına rağmen evinin işini kendisi yapar, her türlü sosyal konuda Hız Ali'ye yardımcı olurdu."

Hız Hüseyin'in kızı Süheyni ise daha çok özellikler ve güzellikler taşımaktadır. O dönemde kadınların bilim ve edebiyatla ilgilenmesi, alışıldığı üzere, yalnız yüksek tabakayla sınırlı değildir. Tanınmış Arap yazar Hallikon, Hız Süheyni için şöyle diyor: "O dönemin tanınmış kadınları arasında peygamberin kızı Fatma'nın torunlarından İmam Hüseyin'in kızı Süheyni başta gelmekteydi. Güzelliği, zekâsı ve faziletiyle o dönemin kadınları arasında birinci gelmektedir."

"Halifeler Devrinde Kültür" adlı eserin yazarı De Slan, Süheyni hakkında şunları yazmaktadır:

"O dönemin en parlak kadınıydı. Bilgisi, zekâsı, zerafet ve inceliği çevresinde genel bir saygı uyandırmıştı. Çağdaş olan en iyi şairler, öğüt almak için ona başvururlardı."

Fransız şarkiyetçi Peron, Süheyni hakkında şöyle demektedir;

Zamanın modasını yaratan, ona yön veren o idi. Zamanın kadınları ona benzemeye çalışır, üslubunu taklit ederlerdi. Ama Süheyni'nin önemi, icat ettiği modalarla değil, fikri ve manevi etkisinde idi. Onun evi zamanın meşhur şairlerinin, hukukçularının ve bilginlerinin bir toplantı yeri haline gelmişti."

Hiç şüphesiz ki, Hız Süheyni için söylenecek ve yazılacak çok şey vardır. Konumuz "Alevilik'te kadın" olduğu için bu konuyu kısa kesiyoruz.

Alevilikte kadının bir diğer özelliği de hayatın her alanında erkekler kadar sorumlu ve eşit yükümlülükler taşımasıdır.

Alevi cemlerinde bunun açık bir örneğini görmek her zaman mümkündür. Alevilik'te kadın evinin anası, eşiğinin bekçisi, çocuklarının hocası, mutfağının eşit bir biçimde lokma vericisidir. Ona saygı duymamak, onun

Şeriat düzeninde kadının hiçbir hakkı olmadığı gibi, kadın erkeğin iki dudağı arasından çıkacak "üçten dokuza kadar boşsun" sözü ile bağımlı kılınmıştır. Şeriat düzeninde erkeğe böyle bir yetki verilmiştir. Tüm yetkiler yanlıdır. Dizginler erkeğin elinde olup kadın-erkek eşitliği yoktur.

en yüce varlık olduğunu kabullenmek ne demokrasiye ne de insan onuruna yakışmaz.

Yazımızı Naciye Ana-Bacı'nın bir şiiriyle bitiriyoruz:

*Ey erenler, erenler nasıl erensiniz?*

*Söyleyin sizinle davamız vardır. Bacılara niçin (Nakıs) dersiniz?*

*Bizim de Hazreti Hava'mız vardır.*

*Bizi de halk eden Sübhan değil mi? Arslanın dişisi Arslan değil mi?*

*Söyleyin, Makbul-Rahman değil mi?*

*Ümmü Gülsüm, Zeynep, Leyla'mız vardır.*

*Naciye fakire, kemter bacıdır. Muhammed Ali'ye kuldur, Naci'dir.*

*Cümle erenlerin başı tacıdır. İşte Fatma tû Zehra'mız vardır. ■*



## APPENDIX C

### THE TICKET OF BARIŞA SEMAH DÖNENLER (2004)

**3. Geleneksel**  
**BARIŞA SEMAH DÖNENLER**  
**3 Ekim 2004 Pazar / Saat: 13:00 - 20:00**  
**Abdi İpekçi Spor Salonu - Zeytinburnu / İstanbul**  
Sunan: Mesut Mertcan Anlatan: Cemile Kutgün Yönetmen: Ali Taygun

**BİLET ve VCD BİR ARADA**

**RADYO BARIS** 1070

Radyo Barış'ın Bir Kültür Hizmetidir.

**Baris**

**HALKIN YÜKSELEN SESİ**  
**TOPLUMSAL**  
**Barış**  
AYLIK SİYASİ FİKİR DERGİSİ

**Tüm abonelere  
CD-VCD-KITAP  
hediye**

Radyo Barış Tel:(0212) 660 72 03-04 - İstek Tel:(0212) 583 00 73  
www.radyobaris.com.tr e-Mail: info@radyobaris.com.tr

Karacaahmet Sultan Derneği Semah Ekibi - Garip Dede Türbesi Derneği Semah Ekibi  
Şahkulu Sultan Vakfı Semah Ekibi - Tokat Hubyar Semah Ekibi  
Arguvan Vakfı Semah Ekibi - Dersim Semah Ekibi

CAVİD MURTEZAOĞLU - EMRE SALTİK - FERHAT TUNÇ  
GÜLER DUMAN - GÜLCİHAN KOÇ - KIVIRCIK ALİ - METİN KARATAŞ  
MUSA EROĞLU - MUSTAFA ÖZARSLAN - ÖZLEM ÖZDİL  
SABAHAT AKKIRAZ - YUSUF HAYALOĞLU



## APPENDIX D

### THE INVITATION CARD OF GELİN CANLAR CEM OLALIM (2004)



#### PROGRAM

15.00	Açılış
15.05	Saygı Duruşu ve İstiklal Marşı
15.10	Alevi İslam Din Hizmetleri Başkanı Sayın Ali Rıza UĞURLU'nun Açılış Konuşması
15.20	Cem Vakfı Genel Başkanı Sayın Prof. Dr. İzzettin DOĞAN'ın Konuşması
15.35	Barkovizyon Gösterisi
15.50	Türk Halk Müziği Sanatçılarının Seslendireceği Deyişler
16.15	Cem
17.45	Galata Mevlevihanesi Semazenleriyle Birlikte "Birlik Semahı"
18.15	Semah Duası ve Kapanış

Tarih : 25 Eylül 2004 Cumartesi  
Saat : 15.00  
Yer : Abdi İpekçi Spor Salonu  
Onuncu Yıl Caddesi Zeytinburnu / İstanbul  
Oturma Planı : D2

#### CEM'E DAVET

Alevi İslam anlayışının,  
Alevi - Bektaşî - Mevlevî  
uygulaması olan "Cem"i  
izlemek üzere teşriflerinizi  
bekler, saygılarımızı sunarız.

CEM VAKFI

Alevi İslam Din Hizmetleri Başkanlığı