Teaching History, Learning Piety

an Alevi Foundation in Contemporary Turkey

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Introduction

At The First World Congress for Middle Eastern Studies (WOCMES) in Mainz 2002, I chaired a full-day session on "Alevism".[1] It was a long day filled with presentations and discussions mostly centred on social, cultural and religious changes experienced by Alevi communities. Towards the end of the day, a woman in the last row raised her hand and expressed her satisfaction with the papers and discussions she had listened to throughout the day. She had only one question left in her mind and that was "Who are these Alevis?"

As I was a novice in the field of Alevi studies and had just started the doctoral project that has now resulted in this thesis, I looked around for some volunteers to give the woman an answer. A moment of silence occurred as most of the researchers on the panel probably wondered what to include in a short introduction to such a complex issue, but suddenly another woman from the audience stood up and offered her help. She started off with the formula "The Alevis are a heterodox minority in Turkey" and from there she systematically spoke about various aspects of "Alevism" – as was the term chosen for the conference to represent social, religious, cultural and historiographical aspects of the lives and identities of Alevis. As a religious system, she defined Alevism as syncretistic in its fusion of Shia Islamic reverence for Ali ibn Abi Talib and the Twelve Imams, its Sufi mysticism and its old shamanistic rituals. Culturally, she located the Alevis in the heart of authentic Turkish rural heritage. Historiographically, she told a narrative of a persecuted people living in remote mountainous areas, developing their own socio-religious structures in order to remain clear of the centralized power of the Ottoman Empire. She further explained that the prospect of religious freedom after the

1 See www.wocmes.de. It resulted in a publication intended as a session proceedings volume (Markussen 2010a [2005]). Only some of the articles, however, were based on presentations from the conference – other contributors joined in at a later stage.

establishment of the Turkish Republic was profoundly believed in, but never completely fulfilled, and that the Sunnification of Turkish politics since the 1980s were the main reasons for the many Alevi associations and publications which have mushroomed among urban Alevi migrants since the 1990s.

After her speech, she sat down and the woman who had asked the question thanked her for an enlightening summary and, as no one else raised their voice, there was no further dialogue on the matter. Those of us on the panel picked up the thread from our earlier discussions, presented our conclusions and ended a successful day of knowledge exchange. Since then, I have heard such standardized presentations of *Alevilik* a multitude of times.[2] Looking back, that short answer to a very basic question was, for me, the first seed of a growing attentiveness towards the importance of the telling of narratives in contemporary Alevi settings.[3]

What this thesis is about

This thesis is a study of ways in which Alevilik is taught and learned in an Alevi foundation in Istanbul. Through religious and cultural activities such as weekly ritual gatherings, seminars and courses the foundation provided Alevi visitors with knowledge and experience of their religious and cultural heritage. By studying the weekly ritual gathering, *cem*, and an *Alevilik course*, which was designed to teach Alevi religion within the framework of lectures and seminars, as arenas for transmission of Alevilik, I present ways in which narratives on Alevi history formed the basis of teaching and learning Alevilik in this foundation. Examples of how this teaching was internalized as personal piety among Alevis interested in learning about their specific religion and culture is highlighted in the last chapter of the thesis.

I argue that there are certain historiographical themes through which the beliefs and practices of Alevis have come to be defined. Some of these themes are contextual in their nature, such as stories of changes in central Alevi institutions related to migration. Others are relational and centred on Alevi-Sunni polemics. What they have in common is that they rely on a silent consensus of the rural past as authentic and the urban present as incomplete models of this rural past. In the foundation, these histo-

2 The Turkish term Alevilik can be translated both as Alevism and Aleviness. Unless I specifically refer to a sense of being Alevi (Aleviness) or Alevilik as an ideology (Alevism), I use the term Alevilik throughout the thesis.

3 Narratives may be defined as "constellations of relationships (connected parts) embedded in time and place" (Somers 1992:601).

riographical themes surfaced in discourses of criticism of contemporary practices and the present situation in general.

Another argument I put forward in this thesis is that although the Alevi historiography taught and learned in the foundation is part and parcel of a religious discourse, it still relies on research of both a scholarly and non-scholarly character. Therefore, I also look into scholarly contributions on which the ongoing processes of Alevi identity formation have been nurtured. The religious discourse presented in the foundation is, however, clearly different from most of the academic research on Alevilik, as it is religious by its claims to divine authority and absolute truth. What often happened in the foundation was that scholarly research on various aspects of Alevi history became invested with absolute truth and divine authority and, as such, it became a part of the religious discourse. I therefore give attention to such close relationships between religious teaching and scholarly research.

Methodologies

After the conference in Mainz, I started long-term ethnographical fieldwork at an Alevi foundation in Istanbul called Şahkulu Sultan Dergâhı / Mehmet Ali Hilmi Dedebaba Eğitim ve Kültür Vakfı, "The Şahkulu Sultan Dervish Lodge / The Mehmet Ali Hilmi Dedebaba Education and Culture Foundation", commonly known as *Şahkulu*. It is located in the Anatolian part of Istanbul and the majority of regular visitors are Kurdish migrants (or children of migrants) from the Eastern and Central Anatolia. Various aspects of the foundation such as its historical significance, its role in the local, national and transnational Alevi environment, as well as the range of activities it offers will be described in detail in Chapter One. Here, methodological aspects of my presence in the foundation, which lasted – on and off – from October 2002 to June 2004 will be discussed.

The fieldwork in retrospect

A researcher present at the foundation is a part of the associational life in Şahkulu.[4] According to Şehriban Şahin, it is also a major centre for those who want to record cem ceremonies for print or visual media.[5] Entering

4 Among people who have conducted research in Şahkulu are Şehriban Şahin and Aykan Erdemir.

5 Şahin 2001:204. Searching for *Alevi cem* or *Alevi semah* on www.youtube.com reveals the majority of relevant hits are recordings from Şahkulu or from dancers affiliated with Şahkulu.

the field was, therefore, not a big deal. I basically showed up and informed the representatives of the board of Şahkulu that I wanted to do research in the foundation for my doctoral dissertation. Without asking me for further details, I was welcomed, given a tour of the compound and assigned a couple of people to assist me during my visits.[6] In a professional manner, I was informed that the *dede*, the religious leader, was available for interviews, that I could observe and document the cem rituals and that I could of course take part in any of the activities offered. Every week after the cem, there would be distribution of *lokma*, the sacrificial meat, and in order to avoid the lines of people waiting for food I was told to take the back door directly into the lunchroom of the people working there. However, getting to know the visitors who were coming and going required more commitment and patience than the initial meeting with the board.

In the first eight months after my initial visit to the foundation in October 2002, I spent almost every weekend at the compound, participating and observing the organized activities and trying to lend a hand wherever I could be of any help. The activities, which came to be my main sites of observation during this period, were the cem ritual and an introductory course to *semah*, the religious dance. On Sundays, I was practically dashing from one activity to the other, starting the morning by watching the experienced semah dancers practising right before the beginners' lecture. After the lecture, it was time for the weekly cem ritual followed by the distribution of the sacrificed meat in the dining hall where I chose to help my fellow semah course students with the distribution before we collectively entered the back door into the lunchroom. Afterwards in the evening, we took turns helping out in the bookshop where books on Alevilik, cassettes and CDs released by Alevi poets and singers, and posters with the portraits of Atatürk, Ali, and the twelve imams were available. On Saturdays – and in between our lectures and duties on Sundays – I socialized with the group of young semah course participants, gossiping, singing and practising semah.

During these first eight months, I was a beginner student in the Turkish language and I did not have any other languages in common with the people I spent most of my time with. It is safe to say that until my level of Turkish became sufficient our will to communicate was much stronger than our skills. It was also this initial language barrier that made the semah

6 I did not consider this particularly problematic. The boys were young, uninterested in my project and they only assisted me a couple of times before I started participating in the various courses and activities in the foundation.

course a fruitful way to begin my studies. Every weekend I mimicked the movements of the semah dancers, became familiar with the sound of the music and the rhythm of the poetry and common prayers, and basically breathed the atmosphere of an Alevi community. During the breaks we helped each other practise the choreographies and sometimes after the lessons we went to the nearby patisserie and communicated with body language and laughter over a glass of tea.

This first period of my fieldwork was, in many respects, invaluable. I participated in the semah courses and the cem rituals without really being able to grasp much of the information presented verbally. Naturally, I came to focus on familiarizing myself with the movements and rhythm of the semah, and to perform the various ritual acts of the cem ritual in the right manner and at the right time. Still, I observed more than I participated. While doing my best to follow the dance steps and blend in during the cem ritual, I observed the way my fellow students and participants perfected movements and cultivated emotions. While socializing, combining my poor Turkish with body language, I became familiar with the way they related to authorities and behaved among themselves. Just by my mere presence, I established acquaintances and temporary friendships.

After the initial eight months, I moved to Ankara, intensified my Turkish studies and established contact with other Alevi researchers at various universities in the city. I soon became part of valuable informal research networks and through personal connections I became acquainted with Alevis living in Ankara. I kept in contact with the people I had come to know in Istanbul by calling them regularly and visiting when I was in the city on various occasions. During the next year, I spent seven weekends and approximately double the amount of weekdays at the foundation, catching up with the people I already knew and getting to know a few others. During these visits, my Turkish was sufficient enough to conduct interviews with both students and various authorities, talking at length about all conceivable aspects of the Alevi traditions, religion and history. In this period I also started to participate together with my friends from the semah course in lectures on Alevilik provided by the foundation during the weekends. It was a great help in narrowing the scope of my research from the unlimited task of understanding the religion and culture of these Alevi students to the more limited focus on the way Alevilik was taught and learned within the context of religious, cultural, social and educational activities in the community.

After almost a year of coming and going, I paid longer visits to the

foundation during the spring semester of 2004. I would stay for two or three weeks and spend every day from morning to evening either in the compound or together with the semah and Alevilik course students. By this time I had become fluent in Turkish and had come to know some of my informants quite well. It was during these visits that some of the most comprehensive interviews were conducted. In addition, some of the lectures from the Alevilik course were tape-recorded during these visits. These recordings have become essential material for the argumentation of this thesis. The importance of these last months of my fieldwork, ending in June 2004, is reflected in the fact that the majority of references to the Alevilik lectures and various interviews and conversations throughout this thesis are dated from this period.

Main characteristics of the fieldwork

Methodologically speaking, the fieldwork may be characterized through several constituting aspects. One of these was the practice of going back and forth between Istanbul and Ankara and repeatedly entering and leaving the foundation. The choice of doing so in this way was strategic and based on similar experiences (albeit on a smaller scale) during fieldwork in Ankara for my MA thesis in 1999. At that time, my fieldwork sites were Ankara and the town of Hacıbektaş in Central Anatolia, but I also had an intermediate stay at the Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul. When writing my MA thesis, I characterized this as a good strategy for maintaining the position of being in charge of my own investigation and for the possibilities of analysing material, and then returning to the field to learn more.[7] I still think this holds true, also for another important reason. The activities I did when I was not at the foundation made me gain understanding of various local and national contexts of which Şahkulu was an integral part. By visiting other Alevi foundations in Istanbul and Ankara and familiarizing myself with other, non-Alevi NGOs as well, I could see opposition and conflicts, differences and similarities, which enabled me to approach Şahkulu as an integral part of Istanbul's flourishing civil society. The research networks I became a part of were also valuable in the sense that they provided me with common categorizations and descriptions of the foundation – stereotypical as well as empirically founded. In my opinion, this thesis is as much a result of the time I spent outside Şahkulu, as the time I spent within it.

Another aspect was the decision to not use translators during the ini-

7 Markussen 2000.

tial phases of my fieldwork. There were several reasons for that. One was the fear of becoming complacent with my lack of knowledge skills in our social interaction and, as such, become totally dependent on a translator. Receiving information through a third person has obvious hermeneutical implications for the interpretation process, as well as the practical implication of limiting the spontaneity in the flow of information, as all conversation has to be scheduled. A further reason for avoiding the aid of translators was due to a couple of misunderstandings leading to one of the informants becoming upset during an initial interview where I used an interpreter. Without being a complete part of the conversation, I experienced how hard it was to register hints in the voice, body language and the choice of terms that could have prevented me from crossing an invisible line during that interview.

Studying people without a common language is clearly highly problematic. It was, however, an initial obstacle that I managed to overcome with hard work, patience and time. In retrospect, this choice also generated other kinds of information seeking strategies such as focusing on observing relational social behaviour. To study how the students related to various kinds of authorities, the dedes, the teachers, the representatives of the board and the like, became one of the ways on which I focused my determination to analyse and understand during this initial period. My interest in the existence of various kinds of co-existing authorities in the foundation, which will be analysed in Chapter Four, can be seen as an outcome of this focus.

A third aspect constituting my fieldwork was the choice to not conduct systematic research in the private spheres of the people I studied. Only on a couple of occasions was I invited by informants to their homes to meet with their families, and although it helped me gain understanding of their lives and family situations, I did not attempt to systematically collect relevant material. This choice was a natural outcome of the focal point of my project. Studying how Alevilik was taught and learned in the foundation did not require systematic analysis of the parts of the informants' private lives accessible through their homes and their families.[8]

The last aspect constituting the fieldwork was the nature of the systematic gathering of information, and can best be characterized as a mixture of participation, observation, conversation and interviews. My fieldwork notes and my recorded interviews bear witness of my interest in the nar-

8 When studying organized activities in semi-public arenas like the foundation it is quite common to limit the research field to certain parts of the informants' social life, see Raudvere 2002.

ratives told in various settings. Conversations and interviews were often planned, but seldom particularly structured. I often let the informants tell their stories and present their perspectives without interruption before I went on asking questions contextualizing, tracing and even contesting their stories and worldviews. As I became increasingly interested in how the narratives presented in teaching were understood by the students, an important structuring element in the interviews and conversations was discussions of the weekly topics in the Alevilik course. I often took notes and formulated entry questions during the lectures. In the breaks or at the end of the day, I sat down with one particular informant, or we gathered a group from the course and discussed the topic of the day. Sometimes these conversations and discussions were recorded, other times they were transformed into field notes.

In practice, all conversations and discussions ended up as interviews, since I seldom had a conversation about Alevi beliefs and practices without redefining it within a framework of systematic collection of material. The informants also joined into this redefinition, because they expected my interest to be completely scientific. They never considered me as a potential convert or anything comparable, so even though I was always in the process of adapting to a variety of circumstances, and although I sometimes adjusted quite well, I was always present on my own conditions, created and recreated by myself and our interaction to fit as neatly as possible into the situation. By this I mean that successful adaptation does not necessarily mean participation on equal terms, which in my case was neither practically possible since I was always requesting my fellow participants to articulate their actions and thoughts. Nor was it desirable, since I felt accepted without trying to become like them and I believed that I could reach an understanding of their religiosity without sharing their experiences.

Ethnography and Narratives

My interest in narratives deserves some closer methodological attention. Epistemologically speaking, the ways in which I chose to gather information might be defined within a Grounded Theory approach. Derived from the typical Chicago School ethnology, the basic characteristic of Grounded Theory methodology is the reciprocal relationship between data collection, analysis and theory where the researcher relies on analytical induction in order to extract patterns, themes and categories of

analysis out of empirical data.[9] As with most theories and methodological perspectives, Grounded Theory has evolved and changed with time. The classical Grounded Theory objectivist methodology trusting the empirical world to inhabit an objective reality, which would reveal itself and its structures to the researcher, has successively been replaced by ideas of the social world as inherently situational and narrative-bound.[10] The people and institutions the researcher meets in the field provide narratives of lived experiences most helpful in delineating social life as a meaningful entity.[11] From this perspective, theoretical narratives developed in the research process are elicited from the narratives of actors in the field.

The Grounded Theory approach to the social world has offered me valuable insights into ways in which people organize their understanding of the world in narratives. My attentiveness towards the telling of narratives in Alevi settings has been guided by at least three basic and interrelated assumptions on the nature of narratives. The first assumption lies in the heart of a Grounded Theory approach to the ethnographical enterprise – the insight that ethnographies generate narratives. The second assumption is that whether normative or scientific, theoretical or empirical, narratives are filled with intentions and hence work for certain aims. The third assumption points to an important aspect of mobility; narratives are shared and, therefore, they travel. Consequently, my analysis on processes of identity formation has been focused on teaching *and* learning, that is, both communication *and* reception of Alevilik in the foundation. Many methodological and practical choices made during my fieldwork have been guided by this emphasis on the intentions and mobility of Alevi narratives. Furthermore, attention given to ways in which normative, theological reasoning and scholarly research influence each other in the processes of defining and revitalizing Alevi identity is another outcome of the emphasis given to narratives throughout this project.

The use of material: Anecdotes and people

The length and character of the fieldwork resulted in a quite extensive bulk of material documented in recordings and in fieldwork notes. I have carefully and selectively chosen particular people, happenings and events

9 For an introduction to basic concepts and approaches within Grounded Theory, see Glaser 1992, 1998; Bowen 2006; Corbin 2008.

10 For situational analysis within Grounded Theory, see Clarke 2005. For a description of Grounded Theory as a research approach rather than a strict methodology, see Seaman 2008.

11 Tavory and Timmermans 2009:257.

from the material in order to analyse and visualize certain issues. In doing so, I have followed a number of standard conventions in the ethnographic genre which all aim at giving the reader a sense of closeness to the research milieu and subjects.[12] The issues that arose through particular "diagnostic events" and individual voices are wider and more far-reaching than the individual accounts.[13] I have also made use of what is within ethnography generally called composite descriptions combining elements from different parts of the material in order to condense my analysis and reach more general conclusions.[14] Some of the more general tendencies I claim to have noticed are also presented as background material.

Throughout the thesis I have focused on a limited number of key individuals whose voices have come to represent more general tendencies in the community. Some of these individuals were public figures sharing information in public settings such as open lectures, rituals and written publications. They have been presented by their real names. Others were ordinary people sharing their private reflections and they have been kept anonymous. In the following, I offer background descriptions of these key individuals. Throughout this thesis, the author has, unless indicated otherwise, translated all citations from interviews and conversations in Turkish, as well as from published and unpublished material.

Esat Hoca (Esat Korkmaz) was the teacher in charge of the Alevilik course with lectures on Saturdays and Sundays during spring 2004. He had prepared much of the material for the Alevilik course and was given an office on the compound. For the time of my fieldwork, he was considered by many to be a Şahkulu-affiliated researcher. Esat Korkmaz has published an extensive amount of books on a variety of aspects of Alevilik and he was also a popular lecturer outside of the foundation. He was a regular speaker at the annual Hacı Bektaş Veli Anma Törenleri ve Kültür Sanat Etkinlikleri, "Hacı Bektaş Veli Commemoration Ceremonies and Cultural Art Activities",[15] and he had featured as an expert on shamanism on national television. The commonly told story about Esat Hoca's life and career was that of a politically active leftist from the 1968 generation

12 Murchison 2010:196–197.

13 Moore 1987.

14 For composite descriptions as one of the many conventions in the ethnographic genre, see Murchison 2010:201.

15 This festival takes place every year from 16 – 18 August in Hacıbektaş, a small-sized town in Central Anatolia close to Nevşehir. The main historical Bektaşi convent is situated in Hacıbektaş, now renovated as a museum. For more information on the festival and the various activities carried out there during these three days in August, see Markussen 2000 and Soileau 2010[2005].

who, after serving time in prison for political activism, received a degree in engineering in 1976, but changed his career after the 1980 coup d'état and started publishing on Alevi history, religion and culture.[16]

Another teacher on the Alevilik course whose voice is transcribed in this thesis was Şakir Baba (Şakir Keçeli). He was a Bektaşi Baba who interestingly enough was also one of my informants for my MA thesis based on interviews with Bektaşis in Ankara and Hacıbektaş in 1999.[17] At that time, he was a dervish in the Bektaşi order, but when we met again in Şahkulu, he had advanced to Baba within the order. Şakir Baba was invited to teach Islamic mysticism, *tasavvuf*, in the Alevilik course and some of the course material was prepared by him. He was a member of the board of Şahkulu, as well as a number of other Alevi organizations. He has published books on Ottoman history and various aspects of Alevi and Bektaşi culture and religion.[18]

Since 1996, Veli Akkol Dede has been the officially employed dede in Şahkulu. He was also a member of the board. According to his personal website, he has occasionally appeared in public in radio and television broadcasts as well as an invited speaker in Alevi organizations in Germany, France and the Netherlands.[19] In the foundation, his primary contact with the visitors was through leading the cem ritual, blessing the sacrificial meat and being available in his office for blessing, consultation and personal advice.

Dertli Divani was a dede and devoted poet and singer, *ozan*.[20] He was highly respected in the community for several reasons. His poems had been published in newspapers and magazines, his albums were widely distributed and his musical performances attracted a lot of people. He was invited to conduct a cem ritual as a kind of voluntary examination and celebration upon the completion of the Alevilik course.[21]

16 This picture is confirmed on the back cover of some of his publications, one of them being a two-volume work on the leftist movement in Turkey from the revolution in Cuba 1953–1959 through the 1960 coup d´ètat up until the actions of Türkiye Halk Kurtuluş Partisi-Cephesi (THKP-C), "Turkey's People's Liberation Army-Front" which put him in prison between 1971 and 1974 (Korkmaz 2001[1992], 2001).

17 Markussen 2000.

18 See for example Keçeli 1995, Keceli and Yalcin 1996.

19 www.veliakkol.com.

20 Literally poet, bard, wandering minstrel. In the Alevi context it is used synonymously with *aşık*. *Aşık* poetry has a mystical dimension which distinguishes the *aşık* from an ordinary poet, *şair* (Köprülü 1962:37). See Chapter Five for more information about the importance of the *aşık* institution for Alevi religion and culture.

21 For more information about Dertli Divani, see his website www.DertliDivani.com.

In the thesis, the private reflections of three individuals are presented with pseudonyms: Evrim, Nur and Burak. Evrim and Nur were regular visitors to the foundation and participants in the cem ritual, as well as devoted semah dancers. Evrim, who was in her early twenties and born and raised in Istanbul, lived with her family. She had completed high school but was unemployed and spent her time helping her parents who were doorkeepers of a large apartment building in a middle-class area not far from the foundation. She was a very committed student on the Alevilik course. Nur was in her late twenties and a mother of two children. She had not had the opportunity to continue education after secondary school, when she moved from Sivas to Istanbul and got married. Her husband was supporting the family through temporary work in construction and business. She was a housewife and often spent her days at the foundation when her children were at school.

Burak was an unemployed man in his early thirties who used to help out at the foundation. He had migrated from Erzincan to Istanbul with his parents at primary school age and had continued his education until he dropped out of high school and started working as a driver for a medium-sized company. A couple of years before I started my fieldwork, the company he worked for went bankrupt and he lost his job. Doing odd jobs for the foundation was a way for him to help support his family while searching for a steady job.

Alevi research history: Three decades of continuities and change

Organizing the panel at The First World Congress for Middle Eastern Studies (WOCMES) in Mainz was a way to start my doctoral project by gathering experts on the topic and learn from what they had to say. Among the participants there were researchers with and without an Alevi background and their presentations were based on both historical and ethnographical research projects. For me, the panel enabled access into a rather undeveloped area of research battling with lack of historical documentation and research objects experiencing rapid changes under contemporary conditions.

It was after massive waves of migration from rural to urban areas in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s that scholarly communities first noticed the existence of Alevis in Turkey. Therefore, it is not particularly surprising that the whole research history on Alevis for the past three decades has been evolving around changes and continuities. Ongoing processes of

redefinition and revitalization of Alevi identities are vital parts of Alevi communities today. Interest in documenting the rural past and describing contemporary communities is shared among Alevis and non-Alevis, resulting in both normative and scientific literature.[22] In the following, I do as other researchers have done before me: I distinguish between the in-house Turkish "Alevi literature" and "Literature on Alevis" produced mostly by non-Alevi scholars.[23] The following outline is also limited to publications relevant to the understanding of contemporary Alevi communities.[24] One closely related field of research that I, therefore, will not include is the historical and contemporary studies of the Bektaşi order.[25]

The first comprehensive studies of Alevis and Alevilik were published in French and German by Altan Gökalp (1980) and Krisztina Kehl-Bodrogi (1988).[26] Published as monographs with chapters thematically organized according to topics like Alevi history, social organization and religion, these studies were structured to introduce a new topic into social, political and cultural studies.

In 1993, David Shankland entered the research scene with his doctoral

22 Interaction and co-operation between scholars and activists is quite common within Alevi research. I have attended several conferences and seminars where the invited scholars are well-planned mixtures of people active in such processes and those who are not. Such conferences often end with discussions on how Alevi research should proceed in order to be of benefit for Alevi identity formation processes.

23 See Sökefeld 2008:10.

24 This overview will, however, not provide a complete picture of everything that has been published on the topic. For surveys with slightly different structuring categories, see Erdemir 2002 and Sökefeld 2008.

25 The classical studies of the Bektaşi Order is *The Bektaşi Order of Dervishes* by John Kingsley Birge (1937) and the anthology *Bektachiyya: Études surl'ordre mystique des Bektachis et les groupes relevant de Hadji Bektach* edited by A. Popovic and G. Veinstein (1995). Irène Mélikoff and Suraiya Faroqhi have both published a substantial amount of historical research on the Bektaşi order. Mélikoff's research has mostly been centred on rural life and wandering dervishes. Her articles from the 1950s to 1994 are collected in two volumes published by The Isis Press (Mélikoff 1992, 1995). Variations on the same topics can also be found in Mélikoff 1998a, 1998b and 2004. Faroqhi's speciality is Ottoman studies and she has focused a part of her production on the Bektaşi order in the Ottoman Empire (1976a, 1976b, 1976c, 1981, 1995, and 2003). Hülya Küçük has published on Bektaşis in Turkey up to 1925 and the abolition of Sufi orders in 1925 (2002). Ahmet Yaşar Ocak has produced text-based historical research on the Bektaşis (1983), and Frederick DeJong has studied the pictorial art of the order (1992). Terry Dennis Smith has translated the hagiography of the patron saint Hacı Bektaş Veli into English (1971). For studies of contemporary Bektaşis, see Ataseven 1997; Markussen 2000; and Soileau 2001, 2005.

26 Gökalp 1980 and Kehl-Bodrogi 1988.

dissertation that, for several reasons, is in a category of its own.[27] It was a comprehensive empirical study of Alevi villages, which has become a milestone in Alevi research and a much-cited source for various analyses of Alevi village life.[28] Relying on Paul Stirling's village studies[29] and Ernest Gellner's theories of the "Islamic world",[30] it was also a comparative study dealing with Alevi and Sunni village responses to processes of modernization – an approach which had never been presented before and which has become Shankland's scholarly trademark. Shankland's scholarship on the Alevi topic is extensive, with two monographs and a list of articles and edited anthologies, all further developing the results and argumentation of his dissertation.[31]

In the second half of the 1990s, a number of monographs and anthologies were published. Karin Vorhoff's *Zwischen Glaube, nation und neuer Gemeinschaft: Alevitische Identität in der Türkei der Gegenwart* (1995) and Gloria Clarke's *The World of the Alevis: Issues of Culture and Identity* (1999) both provide structured overviews of various aspects of Alevi identities.[32] In 1999 and 2002, two publications by Markus Dressler focusing on Alevism as Civil Religion and on the charisma of Alevi leaders respectively, also joined the list of comprehensive work on Alevism.[33] The anthologies *Syncretistic Religious Communities in the Near East* (1997) and *Alevi Identity: Cultural, Religious and Social Perspectives* (1998) were outcomes of international symposiums and have become influential sources within Alevi studies.[34]

In the 2000s, the anthologies *Turkey's Alevi Enigma: A Comprehensive Overview* (2003) and *Alevis and Alevism: Transformed Identities* (2005) were published.[35] Although both publications were collections of articles on a wide range of topics related to Alevis, the former had a certain focus on Kurdish Alevis, which I find most welcome since this topic has been

27 Shankland 1993.
28 Hüseyin Bal has also published (in Turkish) a comparative study of a village with a mixed Alevi and Sunni population (Bal 1997).
29 Stirling 1965.
30 Gellner 1993 [1981].
31 Shankland 1999, 2003, 2004a, 2004b, 2006 (a collection of articles published between 1994 and 2005).
32 Vorhoff 1995 and Clarke 1999.
33 Dressler 1999, 2002.
34 Kehl-Bodrogi, Kellner-Heinkele and Otter-Beaujean 1997 and Olsson, Özdalga and Raudvere 1998.
35 White and Jongerden 2003 and Markussen 2010a [2005].

underrepresented in the study of Alevis in general.[36]

In 2001, Ali Yaman received his doctoral degree from Istanbul University with a thesis exploring Alevi religious leadership, which was published in 2004. His work has become an important source for knowledge about various aspects of the concept of religious authority within Alevilik.[37] In 2005, another publication based on a doctoral dissertation was published by Élise Massicard. Her *L'autre Turquie: Le movement aléviste et ses territoires* gives comprehensive insights into the contemporary Alevi movement.[38] In 2008, Martin Sökefeld published an ethnography of the Alevi movement in Germany focusing on Alevi politics of recognition.[39]

Since the 1980s, a considerable amount of articles has also been published. Among the total of publications – including monographs and articles in both anthologies and various scientific journals – it is safe to claim that the overwhelming majority focus on either the Alevi mobilization in general with urban communities in Turkey as the centre of attention, or on Alevi diaspora groups and the transnational aspect of the Alevi mobilization.[40] Furthermore, apart from a couple of studies on Alevi communities in Norway[41] and Britain,[42] most of the research on Alevi diaspora groups has been centred on Alevi mobilization processes in Germany.[43]

Although a rather recent field of research, studies of various aspects of Alevi culture and organization have contributed to analytical and theoretical development within certain disciplines and sub-disciplines. The place of Alevi mobilization and networking in studies of transnationalism, for example, is well established through the range of publications mentioned above. Ritual Studies is another example of disciplines that have benefited from the field of Alevi studies.[44]

36 van Bruinessen (1989, 1992, 1994, 1997) and Kieser (1993, 1994, 2003) represent the most comprehensive scholarship on Kurdish Alevis. See also Bumke 1979; Fırat 1997; Seufert 1997; Kehl 1999.

37 Yaman 2004.

38 Massicard 2005.

39 Sökefeld 2008.

40 Seufert 1997; Dressler 1999, Vorhoff 1999, 1998a; Schüler 2000; Yavuz 2003 [1999]; Erdemir 2002, 2005; Massicard 2001, 2003; Göner 2005; Langer, Motika and Ursinus 2005; Sökefeld 2002a; 2002b.

41 Naess 1988.

42 Geaves 2003.

43 Wilpert 1988; Şahin 2001, 2005; Sökefeld 2002a, 2002b, 2006; Kosnick 2004; Mandel 2008; Zirh 2008; and Özyürek 2006.

44 Among others Stokes 1996; Langer et al 2006; Yaman 2010; and Markussen 2011.

A theoretical framework: Memory cultures

In search of a theoretical framework that would allow for the complexity of the empirical processes of teaching and learning within the community, I have settled for the idea that what I witnessed at the foundation in Istanbul was the contours of a *memory culture*. Inspired by a study by Sune Haugbolle of sectarian memory cultures in the aftermath of the civil war in Lebanon, I approach the concept of memory culture as *a collection of cultural productions (belonging to a certain group or constellation of people) both producing and expressing historical memory.* In his analysis of conflicting representations of the traumatic civil war in Lebanon (including collective amnesia), Haugbolle is mostly interested in

> the process of representation through which cultural productions expressing memory – memory cultures – are formed; how the life stories of ordinary people are consumed publicly and in the process shaped and altered by sensitivities and collective notions particular to the national imaginary; and how these notions themselves give shape to history as it unfolds.[45]

My interest lies in the attention given to limits and agency that the idea of memory cultures offers the understanding of the processes of collective remembering in the study of teaching and learning among the Alevis in Şahkulu. First of all, talking about Alevi memory cultures situates Alevi identity making within certain boundaries of cultural productions relating to each other. By approaching the various activities at the foundation and, additionally, even literary and visual productions, as well as the national and transnational identity-political work carried out by Şahkulu as cultural productions expressing memory, an inter-dialogue creating a relatively coherent field of knowledge is visible. Furthermore, memory cultures denote a plurality that, according to Haugbolle, is a good way to describe the variety of overlapping agendas, issues and interpretations that "fits the Lebanese context better than, for example, the more commonly used, and more monolithic-sounding 'collective memory'".[46] Memory cultures exist side by side and carve their space in society in dialogue and opposition with other similar and conflicting representations. Commonly, in the modern Turkish public sphere,

45 Haugbolle 2007:7. Other authors have also used the term "memory cultures". (Carrier 2005; Radstone 2005). Another term introduced to analyse the discursive production of memory is "memory regimes" (Radstone and Hodgkin 2003).

46 Haugbolle 2007:8.

memory cultures also respond to the grand narratives of state-centred nationalist historiography.

Secondly, memory cultures are far from static entities. Rather, the production of collective memory is about "producing new perspectives on the past and new modes of engaging in the past".[47] As a set of practices of remembering the past in light of present conditions and future aspirations, collective remembering is about agency and conscious choices of representations. In Haugbolle's terminology, the production of historical memory expressed by memory cultures is facilitated by "memory-makers", and often there is a certain disjunction between the cultural elite engaging in this production and the people they want to represent.[48] Within this theoretical framework, analysis of teaching and learning in the foundation offer interesting examples of knowledge transmission between such memory-makers and their audiences.

This meta-theoretical approach corresponds well to my analytical approach to narratives and hence is also in alignment with methodological choices I have made throughout the project. Suggesting that the activities at the foundation described in this thesis are parts of a memory culture is, however, a meta-picture that does not necessarily explore and explain all processes of identity making among Alevis in Turkey today. The thesis and its various chapters have also benefited from other theoretical perspectives without challenging the idea that Alevilik taught and learned is Alevilik culturally remembered. In the following, I present an outline of the chapters in the thesis commenting on its relevance for this meta-theoretical framework.

The thesis chapter by chapter

Şahkulu is a local centre for Alevi migrants in Istanbul as well as a part of transnational Alevi associational networks. It is also a part of the national socio-political climate in Turkey. The formal teaching of Alevilik at the foundation and the informal knowledge transmission between the people frequenting the place bears witness to the transnational character of Alevi mobilization, as well as the specific Turkish national socio-political context in which it operates. Chapter One, *The Foundation and its Contexts*, offers a transnational and national background relevant for the understanding of the local expressions of Alevilik in Şahkulu. Central Alevi institutions like the cem, the major collective ritual, have experienced

47 Rigney 2011.
48 Haugbolle 2007:9

profound changes due to rural-urban and international migration, as well as modernization and globalization processes. Naturally, changes in the cem have become historiographical topics of such importance in the teaching of Alevilik that the ritual itself may be approached as a central site of memory (lieu de mémoire)[49] within the collective processes of remembering among Alevis. Chapters two and three both deal with the ways these changes were remembered and discussed in the foundation where differences between rural, urban and ideal cem performances were the centre of attention. Chapter Two, *The Cem Ritual: An Account of a Performance*, gives an account of a specific ritual performance, its symbolic references and its continuities as well as divergences from ideal cem performances. As such, it lays the groundwork for a theoretical discussion of the transmission of ritual knowledge in Chapter Three, *Transmission of Ritual Knowledge. A Theoretical Approach*, where I suggest that critique of the way current cem rituals are conducted and narratives of how they have changed, were integral parts of the ritual itself.

The theoretical approach presented in Chapter Three is not limited to past and present performances of the cem ritual, but also offers insight into the question of genuine religious authority. In Şahkulu, Alevilik was often described as being in between (the ideal) past and present (not satisfying) conditions and the co-existence of old and new religious authorities inspired definitions of contemporary Alevilik. Chapter Four, *Alevi Authorities: Between Rural Practices and Urban Realities*, analyses the authority of the customary religious leaders in relation to more recent religious authorities like teachers and intellectuals.

In Şahkulu, the Alevilik course offered knowledge of past and present Alevi beliefs and practices. The specific form of the Alevilik lectures was yet another outcome of the transition of Alevi communities from rural societies to modern urban associations. In Chapter Five, *Mediating Alevilik: Intellectual Readings of Poetry in the Alevilik Lectures*, the teaching presented in the Alevilik course is analysed as a medium for systematization and transmission of Alevi religion and culture. Teaching Alevilik through lectures and seminars was a new initiative revealing the trend of intellectualization of Alevi knowledge. In this chapter, the use of poetry as a medium of knowledge transmission in the lectures is one example of how the teachers of the course were teaching piety with new means. Other examples could have been intellectual analyses of the ritual dance, semah, or systematization of dispersed performances of the cem ritual.

49 Nora 1984.

With this example, I pose the question of what this intellectual mediation of Alevi traditions adds to the Alevi memory.

In the Alevilik lectures, the various topics often amounted to a question of historiography. In Chapter Six, *Alevi Historiography. "Sufism of the Anatolian People"*, the overall perspective on historiographical narratives in the thesis changes from a focus on the near past of Alevi village life to the narratives of the distant pasts of religious and cultural influences on Alevilik. Şahkulu is one of several foundations in Turkey and abroad which has reached a consensus over defining Alevilik as the authentic teaching of Anatolia.[50] The teachings of Anatolia, however, comprised a number of cultural and religious influences, which in the lectures of the Alevilik course were glued together within the framework of religious, cultural and historical syncretism.

There was not only teaching in the foundation – there was learning too. Chapter Seven, *The Quest for Piety. Two Cases of Individual Appropriation of Alevi Teachings,* is devoted to the ways in which two individual students approached the processes of learning Alevilik. With sometimes quite differing strategies of appropriating Alevilik, they both internalized the teaching in the foundation as a way to facilitate realization of Alevi piety. This last chapter offers insight into an empirical example of individual reception of the cultural memory constructed and presented at the foundation.

50 Şahin 2001:192.

CHAPTER ONE

The foundation and its contexts

Şahkulu is an old Sufi lodge, *dergâh*,[51] located in the Anatolian part of Istanbul that has been associated with the Bektaşi order since the late fifteenth or early sixteenth century.[52] Until the state-ordered abolition of the order in 1826,[53] it was the main Bektaşi lodge of Istanbul and an important destination for pilgrims visiting the tombs of the saints buried there. As a result of the abolition, the property was given to the Nakşibendi order, to be restored and returned to the Bektaşis in the 1860s. After the establishment of the Turkish Republic, the *tekke* was again closed in 1925 as part of the secular reformation of the state. From then on it was not in use until a group of Alevis founded an association under the name Merdivenköy Şahkulu Sultan Külliyesi'ni Koruma, Onarma ve Yaşatma Derneği, "The Association for Protection, Restoration and Maintenance of Merdivenköy Şahkulu Sultan Building Complex" in 1985, and started an extensive restoration project. In 1994, it was turned into Şahkulu Sultan Dergâhı / Mehmet Ali Hilmi Dedebaba Eğitim ve Kültür Vakfı,[54] "The Şahkulu Sultan Dervish Lodge / The Mehmet Ali Hilmi Dedebaba Education and Culture Foundation" in order to legally organize and conduct religious, cultural and educational activities within the compound.

51 Sufi lodges are referred to by a variety of names, the most common being the Turkish word *tekke* and the Persian derived term *dergâh*. Among the visitors of this particular foundation, *dergâh* was also used in colloquial language to designate the community of people frequenting the place. For more information about various terms for Sufi lodges, see Lifchez 1992:76.

52 Kocadağ 1998:16.

53 The Bektaşi order was closed down because of close connections with the Janissaries, which were abolished by Sultan Mahmud II in 1826. For further information, see Goodwin 1994.

54 Mehmet Ali Hilmi Dedebaba was the first head, *postnişin*, of the *tekke* after it was given back to the Bektaşis from the Nakşibendis in the 1860s. Together with the very first Bektaşi head of the *tekke*, Şahkulu Sultan, Mehmet Ali Hilmi Dedebaba is honoured as a patron saint of this particular *tekke*.

Locally, the foundation offered a range of activities all aimed at teaching various aspects of Alevilik to the participants and visitors. Activities like the weekly cem ritual and distribution of *lokma,* semah and *saz* courses, theatre groups for children and the Alevilik course were on the schedule every weekend during most of the year. In the compound there was also a bookshop selling Alevi literature, music, posters and accessories. During the weekends, when the weather was nice, the beautiful garden of the compound was a meeting place for Alevis from near and far. Tea was served from a small teahouse and people would sit for hours chatting and sipping tea. The foundation was, for a handful of people, also an important resource for social welfare. A free dental service was available and scholarships for education were distributed according to capacity.

Locally organized activities, as well as informal conversations and discussions among the visitors, testify to the contemporary national and transnational socio-political contexts which Şahkulu and other Alevi foundations and associations in Turkey are operating within. The transnational dimension of urban Alevi communities is a result of extensive processes of urbanization and international migration. Mobilization efforts by Alevis living in Germany and other European countries are decisive for the development of Alevilik in Turkey. Further, the discourses prevalent in the foundation also bear witness to two important aspects of Alevi identity among the visitors, namely their Kurdish origin and the ways in which they identify themselves in opposition to the Sunni majority of the country. Hence, transnational mobilization of Alevi identities and the national socio-political development are central reference points in local expressions of Alevilik. This chapter outlines these transnational and national backgrounds relevant for the understanding of the activities in Şahkulu.

Şahkulu as a centre for migrants: Transnational, local and national aspects

For Alevis, who were markedly rural before the 1960s, migration resulting in urban Turkish and European diaspora[55] communities has been the most profound effect of the Kemalist modernization reforms with centralizing state policies in areas of industry development, education and

55 I use the term "diaspora" in the following meaning: "a socio-political formation, created as a result of either voluntary or forced migration, whose members regard themselves as of the same ethno-national origin and who permanently reside as minorities in one or several host countries. Members of such entities maintain regular or occasional contacts with what they regard as their homelands" (Sheffer 2003:9).

infrastructure.[56] During the 1960s, the Turkish state policies promoted urbanization as a vehicle of economic and social development and exercised a permissive public policy towards migrants.[57] The result was massive migration from rural areas in Central and Eastern Anatolia to the major cities in the western part of Turkey. In accordance with the general migration patterns of this decade, Alevi migration was characterized by chain migration typically starting with one type of movement and continuing in other forms. The settlement of rural Turkish workers in urban centres of Turkey created informal networks that soon developed into infrastructure for further migration in the following decades.[58] The work migration of the 1960s during which time the migrants had optimistic opportunities of finding employment in the larger cities was followed by increasing unemployment rates and political unrest in the 1970s, which forced many migrants to flee the country. After the escalation of the conflict between the Turkish armed forces and Kurdish nationalists in the eastern provinces in the mid-1980s, immigration to Istanbul has acquired a new dimension which Çağlar Keyder called the "ethnic dimension of new immigration" in his study of globalization and social exclusion in Istanbul:

> The migrants of the last decade, who arrived in a city with diminished opportunities, are different from the previous waves: Kurds from eastern and south-western provinces predominate in the 1990's migration [and] compared to the previous flows of migration, push factors have become more important than pull factors.[59]

This change from work migration to the movement of refugees is also apparent in the migration waves from Turkey to Germany and other Western European countries. In 1961 and 1964, Turkey signed bilateral

56 Despite a lack of official statistics on Alevis, there are indications that Alevis have a high propensity to migrate, and that they have engaged in international migration in larger numbers than Sunnis (Ayata 1997).

57 In the Second Five Year Development Plan 1968–1972 the state policy stated that "urbanization as an institution of settlement, structure and social order of the industrial society emerges as a goal to be attained. Urbanization is not only a goal but at the same time it is a vehicle of economic and social development" (Şahin 2001:90).

58 Existence of prior links between sending and receiving countries as an important factor facilitating chain migration is an explanatory model which has partly replaced theories of push and pull factors within migration studies in the social sciences (Castles and Miller 2009[1993]). In the study of the migration patterns in and from Turkey, both push and pull factors as well as the importance of prior links can easily be discerned. For an informed survey of the research history of migration studies within various disciplines, such as anthropology, demography, economics, history, law, political science and sociology, see Brettel and Hollifield 2000.

59 Keyder 2005:131.

recruitment agreements with Germany, which during the coming decade established the most comprehensive guest worker system in Europe. In Turkey, migration abroad was encouraged to reduce the increasing unemployment rate in the major urban centres,[60] and Germany welcomed masses of Turkish workers on specially-designed guest worker permits. During the first decades the guest workers' remittances were sent home to families and villages and the money soon became the major source of Turkey's foreign currency.[61] During the time of the oil crisis in 1973, German labour recruitment stopped. The majority of the Turkish guest workers who had stayed without their families acquired permanent settlement and brought their families to Germany via family reunion throughout the 1980s and 1990s. In Turkey, political unrest in the 1970s leading up to the 1980 coup generated waves of asylum seekers, and the mid-1980s also experienced an upsurge in refugee and asylum-seekers from Turkey.[62] The last decades have witnessed an increase in the number of highly qualified professionals and university graduates moving to Europe.[63]

Şahkulu and transnational Alevi mobilization

The existence of Alevi foundations in Turkey is in many ways a natural outcome of the social infrastructure created by international migration. Sehriban Şahin maintains in her doctoral thesis that "the transnational dimension of the Alevi movement is crucial, because associational activities started earlier in the European Alevi diaspora than in Turkey".[64] When emigrants facilitate migration for family members or co-villagers, retain and develop ties with their country of origin, and when their agendas and activities cross territorial borders, transnational communities and identities emerge. In migration research, such dense and continuous transborder ties between migrants, groups, communities and non-state organizations have been called transnational social formations, transnational social fields and transnational social spaces.[65] The economic, social

60 The First Five-Year Development Plan 1962–1967 indicated that "the export of excessive manpower" to Western Europe was one of the possibilities for coping with unemployment. The flows of savings and remittances were among "good" aspects of exporting workers abroad (Şahin 2002:93).

61 Şahin 2001:49.

62 Castles and Miller 2009[1993]:208–209.

63 http://www.migrationinformation.org/Profiles/display.cfm?ID=176.

64 Şahin 2001:7.

65 Faist and Özveren 2004:1. In Alevi research, the term 'transnational social spaces' coined by Pries (2001) is the most widely used. See Şahin 2001; Sökefeld 2006, 2008 and Faist 2000a.

and political conditions of Turkish migrants in Germany have triggered the formation of Alevi mobilization through associational networks. After the labour recruitment stopped in 1973, the Turkish migrants lost much of their appeal as a flexible labour force with few demands. The migrants' families came to Germany through family reunion and suddenly a mass of workers with families were in need of housing, schools and social amenities. Residential segregation both isolated the immigrants from the majority population as well as facilitated opportunities for community formation and the development of ethnic infrastructure and institutions. The workers' position transformed from temporary guest workers to a segment of German society where they were in an inferior economic position and with "secondary political rights".[66] On the basis of the German definition of national belonging in terms of ethnicity (common descent, language and culture) and cultural homogeneity, the Turkish immigrants were excluded from the practical possibilities of achieving German citizenship.

The Turkish immigrants had access to the welfare system and other social entitlements, but they had no political rights. Therefore, social and political participation was necessarily channelled through secondary or intermediary structures created by organizations and associations. The naturalization process was initially set to ten years, but has gradually been reduced. On 1 January 2000, a significant reform of the nationality law came into force, making it easier for long-term resident foreigners in Germany, and especially for their German-born children, to acquire German citizenship.[67] In 2010, 1.6 million people living in Germany held Turkish citizenship.[68] According to recent estimates from the German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, the total number of Muslims in Germany is approximately 3.3 to 3.8 million. Among these, between 2.5 and 2.7 million have Turkish roots and 13 per cent – between 480 and 550 thousand people – are Alevi.[69]

According to Şahin and a number of other authors, the starting point for the process of visibility of Alevis in Europe and Turkey was the declaration of an Alevi manifesto stating that, "there is no freedom of religion in Turkey". It was issued by Hamburg Alevi Kültür Merkezi, "Hamburg

66 Schmitter 1980:186.

67 The Turkish presence in Germany is a recurrent theme in German public and political debate. A random search on the Internet version of *Deutche-Welle* gave a number of articles and readers' responses on the impact of the Turkish guest workers on German society. See for example Prevesanos 2012, Danusman 2012 and Shahrigian 2012.

68 Statistisches Bundesamt. http://www.destatis.de/jetspeed/portal/cms/.

69 Haug, Müssig and Stichs 2009.

Alevi Culture Centre" in July 1989 and published in the Turkish newspaper Cumhuriyet one year later in May 1990.[70] In the same year, the Alevi intellectual Cemal Şener published a book titled *Alevilik Olayı. Toplumsal Bir Başkaldırının Kısa Tarihçesi*, "The Alevism Incident: A Short History of a Social Uprising",[71] which later became a symbol of the start of a surge of publications on Alevi history, beliefs and practices. Since then, hundreds of Alevi associations and foundations have been established in Turkey, Germany and other Western European countries, held together by webs of umbrella associations throughout Europe and Turkey.[72] What makes these networks transnational is the widespread contact and consultation between the various associations crossing the borders between the European Union (EU) countries and the border between the EU and Turkey.[73] As the first associations were established in Germany, it was also the first country transferring organizational Alevi know-how and manpower to other European countries and to Turkey. In this respect, the organizational infrastructure of Alevi associational activities has mainly been drawn from the associations in Germany.[74]

In his ethnography of the Alevi movement in Germany, Sökefeld explains that the regular members of the Alevi organizations in Germany rarely travel between the organizations or between events and rituals organized around Europe or Turkey. Therefore, he concludes, "diasporic Alevis could be regarded more as 'consumers' of the cultural phenomena that evolves in transnational space than as their 'producers'".[75] This fact also holds true for regular members of Alevi organizations in Turkey, as it is mainly the products of communication between transnational actors such as musicians, authors, functionaries and (to a lesser degree) dedes, that constitute the transnational character of the communities.

The dynamics of these networks and their influence are also deter-

70 See Şahin 2001:2; Schüler 2000:206. However, this was not the first Alevi mobilization in Turkey. For an interesting article on Alevi public activism in the 1960s, see Massicard 2010[2005].

71 Şener 1989. This book has been published in 40 editions.

72 For detailed lists and descriptions of various kinds of Alevi associations and their transnational character as well as the widespread contact and consultation between them, see Şahin 2001.

73 Vertovec 1999 and Vertovec and Cohen 1999, both published in the series *International Library of Studies on Migration* are two valuable reads on the topics of migration and social cohesion, diaspora and transnationalism. See also Sackman, Peters and Faist 2003, and Faist 2000b for informed analyses of migration and transnationalism in general.

74 Şahin 2001:116.

75 Sökefeld 2008:227.

mined by the political and legal conditions in Turkey and Europe. The liberal climate in Europe has offered opportunities for organizing and freely expressing identities to a greater degree than in Turkey.[76] For Alevis in the German diaspora, the question of recognizing Alevism in Turkey is the most pressing transnational concern and, as Sökefeld has noticed, critical approaches to lack of religious freedom for Alevis in Turkey are sometimes not shared with Alevis living in Turkey.[77] Discourses on recognition, minority protection and international human rights are, however, prominent in discourses in Alevi organizations in Turkey, resulting from both transnational and national efforts. The EU is one agent that has been active in helping Alevi and Sunni groups in and from Turkey to frame and claim their rights within prevailing international human rights discourse.[78] This has been increasingly clear throughout the last decade with the AK-party in government. Through these efforts, Alevis as a non-recognized and neglected minority has been exported into the international discourses of "identity and culture as right".[79]

Şahkulu as a local centre for migrants in Istanbul

Most of the frequent visitors in Şahkulu came from families that had migrated from the eastern part of Turkey. Some had experienced the migration themselves, coming to Istanbul either with their families or alone. Others were born in the city, their parents or grandparents having migrated in search of economic opportunities or a safer place to live. Many had planned their migration in contact with family members or co-villagers already living in Istanbul. Upon arrival in the city, they had been dependent on assistance from these family members and co-villagers, and had thus automatically become a part of already existing networks of people from the same area of origin. Those who had experienced forced migration, however, did not have initial support of people from the same village area and many of them told stories about how they had barely survived through low-paid odd jobs and begging around the city until they managed to become a part of one of the networks connected to the foundation.

A significant number of them had experienced double migration, moving first to provincial centres, then to Istanbul. In fact, expansion of the rural in the form of towns has been quite typical for the process of

76 Şahin 2002:8 and Yavuz 2006:247.
77 Sökefeld 2008:229–233.
78 Yavuz 2006:247.
79 Soysal 1997.

urbanization in Turkey. According to Altan Gökalp, movement of people from rural settlements to already existing cities is only a part of the urbanization processes in Turkey because much of the urban context has been created through the expansion of the rural and existing settlements have been upgraded from villages to towns and provincial centres.[80]

Needless to say, Alevi communities have been experiencing rapid changes in most areas of life with resulting alterations on structural as well as ideological levels. The urban experience has for the migrant communities in Istanbul mostly been centred on integration into the city through permanent housing, education and employment, as well as redefinition of social, religious and cultural identities. For many newcomers, the process of advancing from informal housing constructions in the *gecekondu*[81] areas to permanent flats in low-rise buildings seems to have been of major importance for both economic security and urban integration.[82] For the majority of people included in this study, the acquisition of permanent housing meant the definition of residence and locality, as well as self-respect, security, and for the young men it also meant the ticket to marriage proposals. For some, a certain degree of independence from social networks that had been initially essential for survival in the city was a considerable outcome of the housing process. Partially replacing the importance of the extended family, neighbours from the villages or other supportive networks, new loyalties had arisen through the integration into a certain neighbourhood, workplace or place of education. In several respects, Şahkulu also had such a position in the lives of many of the visitors. Some found occasional work there, others found friends and yet others engaged in organizing committees and voluntary work. By locally organizing religious, cultural and educational activities, and translocally engaging in matters of identity-politics and public space, the foundation responded to a variety of needs among the Alevi migrant population in the area.

In her study of migrant networks in Istanbul, Sema Erder asserts that the very nature of the migration patterns in Turkey usually constitutes "an environment where localism becomes an accessible and useful relation".[83]

80 Gökalp 1986. Also discussed in Shankland 2006:62–63.

81 Literally "placed overnight". The Redhouse Turkish-English Dictionary defines *gecekondu* as a "house put up quickly without proper permission" and a "squatter's house". For a study of social and political organization among Alevis in the *gecekondu*, see Karpat 1976. For a study of the development of a specific Alevi area in Istanbul, see Erder 2006[1996].

82 This is also noted by Keyder 2005.

83 Erder 1999:166.

Chain migration has led to clusters of migrants in the cities sharing local affiliation and place of origin, and this has increased the level of interdependence and interaction between the cities and the rural areas.[84] Erder further states that the social differentiation in Istanbul has changed from an urban-peasant divide in which the latter were clearly subordinate, to the establishment of associational ties based on localism, and to further changes along the lines of new ethnic and confessional solidarities.[85] Şahkulu was, like most other Alevi associations in Turkey and elsewhere, publicly based on Alevi solidarity and whether it and the Alevi mobilization of which it is a part should be called ethnic or confessional, or both, is an ongoing debate in Turkey.

Kurdish migrants in Şahkulu

The majority of the frequent visitors to the foundation were Kurds and most of the informants in this study came from villages around Sivas and the Dersim area.[86] A shared place of origin was indeed an important point of reference among them and localism served in many ways as a common ground for a Kurdish Alevi identity. While some kept close contact with the place of origin, many were left with only a vague remembrance of visiting their village during childhood summers. Their degree of contact with the villages varied according to the opportunities to travel, the continued presence of relatives in the village and the safety of the journey. Nevertheless, their village of origin and the Eastern Anatolian area were integral to their understanding of themselves as belonging to the same community.

Although it seemed like they had more characteristics in common than not – all of them being Kurdish, Alevis and migrants, they constantly engaged in friendly polemics grounded in discussions about their places of origin. Sometimes jokes and a sort of respectful mockery occurred between those hailing from Kurmanci-speaking and Zaza-speaking groups in Eastern Anatolia – although most of the younger people had Turkish as their primary language because of their lack of practice and knowledge of their mother tongues. This distinction between Kurmanci- and Zaza-speaking groups corresponds with an internal perception of cultural differences between the tribes of Eastern Dersim (Zaza speakers)

84 For a historical discussion on the importance of Aleviness, Kurdish-ness and common places of origin among Alevi Kurdish migrants in Istanbul, see Çelik 2003.

85 Erder 1999:162.

86 The Dersim area consists of the province of Tunceli with the adjacent districts of Kemah and Tercan in Erzincan and Kığı in Bingöl (van Bruinessen 1997:2).

and Western Dersim (both Zaza and Kurmanci).[87] Other times, places of origin were the topic for debates among people from Dersim and those coming from villages around Sivas. Some claimed that Sivas was the symbol and heart of Alevi traditions while Dersim could only flaunt with PKK[88] and Kurdish nationalism. This was not at all meant as a compliment, as most of the people from Dersim blamed both PKK and the Turkish Army for the fact that their home of origin had been turned into a war zone after the 1980s.[89] They also tended to associate Kurdish nationalism with Sunni Kurds.[90] Consequently, when insinuations of PKK affiliation were presented they were immediately countered with portraits of Alevis from the Sivas area such as Central Anatolian, an attribute with general associations of Turkish Alevis but also more specifically associated with another of the Alevi foundations in the city, the Cem Vakfı. This was no compliment either. The picture they had in mind of the political and medial efforts of Cem Vakfı and its founder Izzettin Doğan, as well as the character of the people they believed frequented Cem Vakfi's cultural centre in Yenibosna, was as close as it can get to "an Alevi other". On the associational level, there was mistrust mostly because Cem Vakfı had on

87 van Bruinessen 1997:2. The ethnic identities of Kurdish Alevis is a debated issue among both scholars and Turkish and Kurdish nationalists who have tried repeatedly to define an 'organic relationship' between Aleviness and Turkishness or Kurdishness (White 2003:17). Scholarly concerns have evolved around the linguistic heritage of Zaza and Kurmanci, the syncretistic character of historical religious expressions in the Dersim area, the relationship and conflicts between the Turkish state and the Kurdish Alevis of the Dersim area – as well as their contacts with Kurdish nationalism, and their historical role in the number of rebellions against the establishment of the Turkish Republic and the development of the Turkish nation-state (van Bruinessen 1989, 1992, 1994, 1997; Kieser 1993, 1994, 2003; Seufert 1997; Kehl 1999; White 2003; Leezenberg 2003).

88 Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan, (Kurdistan Workers Party).

89 These discussions mostly dealt with the armed struggle between the Turkish armed forces and the PKK in the 1980s of which the Alevis from Dersim clearly identified themselves and their families as innocent victims in the midst of a power struggle they did not have any interest in. Earlier rebellions and clashes with the Turkish authorities, like the Koçkiri revolt in 1920–1921, and the Ethnocide in Dersim in 1937–1938, were clearly understood as a part of the heritage of Kurdish Alevis (field notes January and February 2003, April and May 2004). For literature on these incidents, see among others Kieser 2003 and van Bruinessen 1994.

90 Despite efforts to integrate Kurdish Alevis in the nationalist struggle by shifting emphasis, in its mass media, from Kurdistan to a common Mesopotamian heritage and by publishing the magazine *Zülfikar*, in mid-1990s, aimed at Kurdish Alevis, the general ideology of PKK is acknowledged to have had a Sunni revival since the 1980s (van Bruinessen 1994; Leezenberg 2003).

several occasions claimed that they represented all Alevis in matters where they were not in agreement.[91] On the interpersonal level, the stereotype of a Cem Vakfı visitor was that of rude, ignorant and money-loving Central Anatolian peasant.[92] On these occasions, the "Central Anatolian" label triggered support from friends hailing from areas around cities west of Sivas such as Amasya and Yozgat, as their places of origin were even closer, in their minds, to the Central Anatolian area. In mentioning this kind of friendly teasing based on origin, it is important to note that it was indeed friendly and did not, to my knowledge, rest on any wider or historical antagonism between Sivas- and Dersim-based Kurdish Alevi tribes. On the contrary, historically there seems to have been quite close relations between the tribes in these areas.[93]

Alevi-Sunni antagonism in Alevi mobilization

When listening to speeches of Alevi dedes and intellectuals, and when reading the vast amount of Alevi publications available since the end of the 1980s, one gets the impression that the history of Alevi-Sunni antagonism, discrimination and even violence has no beginning and no end. There are, however, certain landmarks in the history of the Turkish Republic that these anti-Sunni sentiments evolve around. In the following, I will in brief point out these factors which have fuelled processes of identification of Alevis in opposition to a vague category of Sunni Muslims, sometimes understood as Islamists or advocators of political Islam, other times as merely non-Alevi Muslims in Turkey or in the Turkish diaspora.

The history of Alevi mobilization in Turkey seems to have started as early as the 1960s. After a decade of rising economic difficulties and increasing withdrawal from the secularist reforms instigated before the multi-party period, the military intervened in 1961 and sentenced the prime minister Adnan Menderes to death together with a couple of his cabinet members. After the coup, a coalition between Atatürk's old party, Cumhurriyet Halk Partisi (CHP), "Republican People's Party", and Adalet Partisi (AP), "Justice Party" was formed. During this period reform packages were discussed in the Parliament in 1963, suggesting the

91 On the political level, Şahkulu is not joining Cem Vakfı in their struggle for integrating Alevi representatives into the state-controlled Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı (DIB), "Directorate of Religious Affairs". On the contrary, they want to see the whole *Diyanet* abolished together with all mandatory religious courses in schools.

92 Field notes November and December 2002, April and May 2004.

93 See for example van Bruinessen 1997 and Seufert 1997 for accounts of historical ties between the Koçgiri tribe from the Sivas area and various Dersim tribes.

foundation of a Mezhepler Dairesi, "Office for Denominations" in the state-controlled Diyanet under the pretext of securing equal treatment of all Muslim communities. The proposition brought a huge tide of reaction from right-wing media, accusing the project of "bringing *mum söndü* ceremonies into the mosques".[94] *Mum söndü* literally means, "the candle went out" and indicates a common prejudice towards the ritual life of Alevis. It denotes stories about how Alevis engage in incestuous and adulterous orgies after having turned off the lights during nocturnal cem rituals. In response, a group of Alevi university students in Ankara got together and published a declaration defending themselves as loyal to Atatürk and the Kemalist principles and calling for unity of the Turkish population.[95] Although, in the end, it was signed by only four Turkish Alevi students[96], this declaration was widely broadcasted in the news and has become a symbol of the first public reaction to the name of Alevilik. It was also followed by another declaration signed by Alevi students from Istanbul as well as a seminar on "Secularism and Its Application in Turkey" organized in 1963 in Ankara.[97] A series on Alevis in the newspaper *Cumhuriyet* was also started the same year but was interrupted by the military administration in Istanbul.[98]

The Alevi mobilization in the 1960s had both cultural dimensions in the forms of cultural events and, to a certain extent, visibility in the press, as well as political dimensions manifested through the establishment of the short-lived Alevi party, Birlik Partisi (BP), "Unity Party" in 1966.[99] This decade also witnessed the establishment of the first few Alevi associations and publications of various Alevi journals and magazines. Growing Islamic conservatism was one among several factors triggering the Alevi mobilization in the 1960s. The era was also that of a growing, organized working-class movement,[100] and as migrants in the larger cities, Alevis were attentive to leftist political discourse. After a new military intervention in 1971, a period of further polarization between the political right and left followed. It has been characterized as a period where

94 Massicard 2010[2005]:119.
95 Quoted in Massicard 2010[2005]:119.
96 A group of Kurdish Alevis are reported to have left the meeting because they could not agree with the Turkish students on the formulation of the greeting "to the Great Turkish nation" and "to all the peoples of Turkey". Şahin 2001:40 and Massicard 2010[2005]:119.
97 Şahin 2001:50–51 and Massicard 2010[2005]:120.
98 Şahin 2001:53.
99 The name of the party was later changed to Türkiye Birlik Partisi (TBP).
100 Türkiye İşçi Partisi (TİB), "Turkey Workers' Party" was established in 1961.

"Alevis moved to the left and the left increasingly became identified with them".[101] In the political turmoil of the late 1970s, Alevi-Sunni and Kurd-Turk antagonisms were increasingly identified with left–right clashes and turned into violent conflicts such as a series of bloody Alevi–Sunni clashes in cities with mixed populations as such as Maraş, Çorum and Sivas.[102]

The growing chaos ended abruptly on 12 November 1980 with the most severe military coup in the history of the Turkish republic.[103] All political activities were suspended until the elections in 1983 where the centre–right Anavatan Partisi (ANAP), "Motherland Party" rose to power. Under the head of Turgut Özal and with the aid of the generals restricting the candidates to only three parties, ANAP won 45.14 per cent of the votes. Under this leadership, the 1980s became a decade of economic and social liberalization, which facilitated the development of civil society and a relative acceptance of diversity in cultural and political expressions. The acceptance was, however, only relative as the 1980s was also a decade of restrictions on the right of expression for groups like political leftists and Kurdish nationalists. Furthermore, as a mouthpiece for Islamic interests, ANAP facilitated first and foremost the development of Islamic NGOs. Under the concept of the Türk İslam Sentezi, "Turkish-Islamic Synthesis", the 1980s became a period of consolidation of a Turkish state version of Islam as a synthesis between pre-Islamic culture and Islam. Increase in compulsory religious lessons in public schools and of the number of courses related to the Independence War and principles of Kemalism were among the central amendments in the 1982 Constitution. Although Alevis look back at ANAP rule in the 1980s as a period of Sunnification of the Turkish society, it was also this period of liberalization that allowed for the beginning of a flourishing civil society that the Alevis have benefited from since the 1990s.

During the 1990s, popular support for publicly pronounced Islamic political parties increased steadily until Refah Partisi (RP), the "Welfare Party", gained 19 per cent of the votes in the 1994 municipality elections and attained control over Istanbul and Ankara as well as other provincial centres. In the general elections the following year, RP won 21.4 per cent of the votes and 158 parliamentary seats. With such changes in the political

101 Van Bruinessen 1996. See also Çamuroğlu 1997, 1998; Çakir 1998 and Şahin 2001.

102 For a study of Alevism in Swedish, partly based on the memories of experiences of these clashes, see Hamrin-Dahl 2006.

103 Most publications dealing with Turkish politics or modern history include chapters or paragraphs on the 1980 coup. For studies of the coup in particular and of the following transition period, see Birand 1987; Schick and Tonak 1987; and Heper 1998.

climate, the 1990s became a period where Islam, as an aspect of political life, was a central part of the public debate. Discussions were often fierce and polarized between supporters of RP and the idea that religious parties have a rightful place in Turkish politics, and advocators of secularism. The secularist press reported on the Islamization of public space in Istanbul and other cities where RP was in power, and the government tightened its ties with other Muslim countries such as Iran, Iraq and Libya.

In 1993 and 1995, the Alevis were victims of two serious incidents of violence that increased the visibility of the Alevis in public debates.[104] On 2 July 1993, at Dördüncü Pir Sultan Abdal Şenliği, "The 4th Pir Sultan Abdal Festival" in Sivas, a mob which has later been described as consisting of militants with ties to RP, set fire to the hotel where the festival participants were staying.[105] After raiding the building where the festival was held, the mob damaged and removed statues of Pir Sultan Abdal and Atatürk and brought one statue to the hotel where the participants were residing. There, they burned the statues and shouted Islamic slogans, calling for the secular writer Aziz Nesin who was also attending the festival.[106] The mob then surrounded the hotel and set fire to it and the hotel burned for seven hours before the fire brigade arrived. Thirty-seven people were killed and 60 injured. In the aftermath, the state and politicians were blamed for the absence of the fire brigade and stories about directives from the president to not interfere, together with badly formulated speeches from other politicians, drove thousands of Alevis to the streets to demonstrate.

Two years later on 12 March 1995, in the Gazi neighbourhood of Istanbul, heavily populated by Alevis, three gunmen in a taxi randomly shot at coffee houses and patisseries. One person died as well as the taxi driver who had brought the gunmen to the neighbourhood. The Alevis immediately gathered in a demonstration in front of the police station in the area. The police responded by shooting into the crowd and fights between Alevis and the police erupted in the streets resulting in injuries

104 For an analysis of these incidents as "suddenly imposed grievances" functioning as opportunity structures for Alevi mobilization, see Şahin 2001:160–185.

105 For more detailed descriptions of the incident and its immediate aftermath, see Şahin 2001:160–165; Olsson, Özdalga and Raudvere 1998; Şahhüseyinoğlu 2005 [1997]; or any Turkish newspaper in the period between 3–7 July 1993. Film clips from news coverage of the incident are available at www.youtube.com.

106 Aziz Nesin was at that time working on a Turkish translation of Salman Rushdie's book *The Satanic Verses*.

on both sides. The Alevis gathered in the local *cem evi*[107] and the police barricaded the areas around the building. In the night, while community leaders were on the phone to government officials calling for intervention, the police fired shots into the cem evi and killed two people. The next morning, there were still no signs of assistance.[108] In the following week, demonstrations were held in various Alevi neighbourhoods in Istanbul, and the police injured and killed protestors to maintain order. In total, about 30 people were killed. In the U.S. State Department's *Human Rights Report* 1995 the incident was defined as

> […] religiously motivated rioting […] in two heavily Alawi neighbourhoods in Istanbul. […] Although the rioting appeared to be sectarian, it was not aimed at Sunni institutions. Rather, it appeared to reflect Alawis' desire for the State to do more to defend secularism in Turkey and counter the threat they perceive from resurgent Sunni extremism.[109]

Similar presentations of the incident as riots in Alevi neighbourhoods, completely omitting the initial shootings by the gunmen and the police, are, according to several of my informants, common outside of Alevi circles.[110]

After these two incidents in the mid-1990s, the number of Alevi associations increased. In Europe before 1993, the first generation of immigrants constituted the majority of members of Alevi associations, but after the incidents the younger Alevis from second and third generations rushed to become members. This was also the case for associations in Turkey.[111]

Throughout the 1990s, the military remained in the background, sending more or less subtle warnings to the RP leader Necmettin Erbakan and other leading figures of political Islam from behind the scenes.[112] In 1997, the frequency and severity of the warnings increased until the military rolled their tanks through the streets of Ankara, demanding Erbakan

107 Literally "house of gathering", the cem evi is the place where Alevis perform their collective rituals. In urban areas in Turkey and Europe, buildings functioning as cultural centres that include a room for the performance of the cem ritual are also called cem evi.

108 For a more detailed description, see Marcus 1996.

109 *Human Rights Report* 1995. www.hri.org.

110 Interviews and conversations February 2003, April 2003 and May 2004.

111 Şahin 2001:163.

112 Tayyip Erdoğan, at that time the mayor of Istanbul, was imprisoned for ten months on subversion charges "for provoking religious hatred" by reciting an Islamic poem in public (Kinzer 1998).

to step down from office. General Keniz Deniz announced the military action programme to reduce Islamic influence on Turkish politics with the words "The first priority of the military is the domestic threat of separatism and fundamentalism. Destroying fundamentalism is of life and death importance".[113] Erbakan stepped down and his party, RP, was banned the following year.[114]

Islamic political parties in Turkey have been closed down one after the other since the 1970s. A new party had been founded before RP was banned in 1998. It was called Fazilet Partisi (FP), "Virtue Party" and won 15.41 per cent of the votes and 111 parliament seats in the 1999 elections. The winning parties were Bülent Ecevit's Demokratik Sol Partisi, (DSP) "Democratic Left Party" with 22.19 per cent of the votes and 136 seats in the parliament, and the ultra-nationalist Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi (MHP) "National Action Party" with 17.98 per cent of the votes and 129 seats. Together with ANAP, which won 13.22 per cent of the votes and 86 seats in the parliament, DSP and MHP formed a coalition government based upon a strong nationalist common ground. The Islamic FP was banned in 2001 and was split into two parties, Saadet Partisi (SP) "Felicity Party" led by Erbakan and Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (AKP) "Justice and Development Party" which proved to be the great winner of the next general election in Turkey in 2002. [115]

During the election campaigns leading up to the November elections of 2002, the opinion polls showed that Atatürk's old party consisting of the old secular elite in Turkey, Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi (CHP) "Republican People's Party", and the Islamic AKP would become the major winners of the votes. Although AKP did not use any religious argumentation during their election campaign, speculations and discussions in the press were mostly centred on the Islamic character of the party.[116] The secularist press portrayed scenarios of a Turkish Islamic theocracy and CHP and its leader Deniz Baykal did his best to fuel such speculations. Alevis have often been considered firm supporters of CHP and many of them openly express that

113 Savvides 1999:21.

114 For an analysis of the intervention's impact on a local Islamic NGO in Istanbul, see Raudvere 2002.

115 For studies of Islamic parties in pre-AKP Turkish politics, see Özbudun 2000, Rubin and Heper 2002 and Sayarı and Esmer 2002. After the 2002 election, the literature on political Islam in Turkey has boomed. See for example Markussen 2002; Yavuz 2003, 2006; Arat 2005; Cizre 2008; Rabasa and Larrabee 2008; Eligür 2010; and Watts 2010.

116 Markussen 2004.

they adhere to Atatürk's Kemalist principles.[117] As many of them looked upon AKP as nothing more than a continuation of RP which ruled at the times of the Sivas fire and the Gazi shootings, anti-Sunni sentiments flourished and AKP was given the symbolic function of representing militant and fanatic religious rebels. In the election held on 3 November 2002, AKP won a majority in the parliament with 363 seats and 34.2 per cent of the votes, and CHP became the sole opposition party with 178 seats and 19.3 per cent of the votes. Many of my informants considered this a catastrophe for themselves as well as for the country in general.

Throughout Turkey's multi-party history, Kurdish parties have been organized to make claims on the behalf of the Kurdish population through legitimate political channels. Although the Islamic parties have been facing cycles of closure and subsequent re-establishment under new names, there has always been a pro-Kurdish party or pro-Kurdish independent candidate to vote for in the elections. In the 2002 election, Kurdish parties were, for my informants, completely overshadowed by the AKP–CHP power struggle, and many of them openly proclaimed that they would have to support CHP if they had to choose between fighting for their rights as Alevis or as Kurds.[118]

Since then, AKP has won their second and third political victory in the 2007 and 2011 elections and has stayed in power for a decade. They have re-initiated the process of becoming a member of the European Union, with the start of official membership negotiations in October 2005. AKP has chosen to present itself as liberal and tolerant towards the Alevis, but nevertheless refrains from recognizing them as a distinct minority.[119] Still, voices have been raised that a number of minorities, including Alevis, have aligned with AKP in their quest for democratic reforms and membership to the European Union. Yavuz, for example, claims that "The bulk of the excluded Turkish society, whether Anatolian Muslims, Kurds, Alevis, or leftist, now see the EU as an opportunity to overcome state authoritarianism and facilitate democratization".[120] More truthfully, Alevis remain indecisive towards democratization reforms

117 For discussions on electoral behaviour among Alevis, see Schüler 2000; Güneş-Ayata and Ayata 2002; and Markussen 2004.

118 Interviews September and October 2002.

119 Interestingly, between 2004 and 2006, the identification of Alevis in EU's Progress Reports changed from "Non-Muslim Alevi minority" to "large Muslim Alevi community" and hence, "The EU's identification and reference to Alevis have come closer to the official definition used by the Turkish state" (Çarkoğlu and Bilgili 2011:352).

120 Yavuz 2006:238.

for EU membership,[121] hoping to gain from the reforms and fearing the Sunni-Islamization of politics and society.

Summary

The following chapters of this study of local expressions of Alevilik in Şahkulu will reveal ways in which teachers and leaders navigated between a number of aspects of the national and transnational socio-political contexts of which the foundation – and Alevi mobilization in general – is an integral part. In their quest to define and transmit the content of Alevilik, they exercised politics of recognition, much in the same way as Sökefeld has demonstrated in his study of Alevis in Germany.[122] There is, however, a further dimension of the identitypolitical endeavours of Alevi organizations, not directed towards the state, politicians or international organs. This dimension is about filling Alevilik with a content that most interested Alevis can accept and integrate as their own identity. This requires balancing notions and ideas of an Alevi past with present conditions and opportunities available for Alevis (and Alevi Kurds) to express, maintain and celebrate their identities in the contemporary socio-political reality they live in.

121 Çarkoğlu and Bilgili 2011.
122 Sökefeld 2008.

CHAPTER TWO

The cem ritual. An account of a performance

Towards the end of the spring term 2004, a special event was organized for the students of the Alevilik course. Dertli Divani, a highly respected dede and *aşık*, was invited to conduct a cem ritual as a voluntary examination of the students and to celebrate the completion of the course. The students were thrilled about the opportunity to meet the famous singer and come together in worship with this pious and knowledgeable man. Furthermore, they portrayed him as a "contemporary dede", something like a mix between a dede and an urban Alevi intellectual. He is practising *dedelik*[123] in accordance with what is considered traditional Alevilik and he carefully carries on what are believed to be traditional practices. The students of the Alevilik course also characterize him by his ability to teach Alevilik in a language comprehensible to the younger generation. The manner in which the dedes were able to pass on their knowledge seemed to be very important to the young people, who often complained about other dedes' extensive monologues and endless digressions.

The day started with the last lecture of the term and all the teachers and dedes gathered for a communal conversation on various aspects of Alevilik. The presence of Dertli Divani triggered a discussion on the authority of the dede, which in an ideal world is based upon a presumed genealogical connection to Muhammed. The genealogical lineages are organized into patrilineal clans called *ocak*,[124] and the descendants, *ocakzade*,[125] are all called dedes although "only a small number of them actually perform the function of a dede".[126] For those who do, ideally, the eligibility for the position is inherited, along with the knowledge

123 *Dedelik* is the practice of being a dede, often referred to as one of the main institutions in Alevilik.

124 *Ocak* literally has many meanings ranging from stove and fireplace to meeting place, heart and family household. It is also the term for the holy lineages among the Alevis.

125 *Zade* is derived from Persian meaning here "the son of".

126 Sökefeld 2002a:166.

required to practise, from fathers to sons. Due to a long-term decrease in the number of dedes, however, they also take the responsibility of instructing dedes from other families or even other *ocaks*.[127] For the same reason, people outside of the holy lineages can currently on rare occasions receive the authority to function as dedes. Dertli Divani is an example of such a non-*ocakzade* dede who has been authorized by the *Çelebi Ocağı*.[128]

Dertli Divani was formally invited to the foundation by the association. This is a common practice both in Turkey and Europe – a practice that differs from ideal arrangements where the dede travelled between villages visiting his followers, *talips*. The term *talip* was used to imply all Alevis who were not of holy lineage and each *talip* was bound hereditarily to a dede.[129] As the dedes' travels between villages to see their *talips* have decreased considerably, visits to local associations have become the most common way of keeping in touch. Consequently, the term *talip* is no longer applied to non-*ocakzade* Alevis in general. It has been given a more specific definition, meaning the inner circle of followers of a dede. Some associations in Turkey employ dedes on a regular basis as well.[130] They have their own offices where anyone can knock on the door, ask questions about Alevilik, ask for advice on personal matters, or receive a blessing for the sugar or sweets they have brought to the foundation as *lokma*. They take care of the ritual life, conducting the weekly cem and blessing the sacrificial meat.

After the lecture, we were instructed to go directly to the cem evi to prepare for the evening cem. As the ritual duties were limited in number, people had to be selected and my Alevilik course classmates did their best to convince the teacher that they were the right ones to perform the various tasks. A couple of them were replaced by older and more

127 There are many reasons for this decrease, but the fact that young *ocakzade* Alevis generally choose not to practise *dedelik* has had a profound impact. Yaman has shown for example, that 80 per cent of the practising dedes are in the age group of 51 and older, while only 6.4 per cent are younger than forty years old (Yaman 2004:197).

128 According to Dressler, "the *çelebiyan* branch of the Bektashi order [*Çelebi Ocağı*] claims superior authority over other Alevi lineages based on its alleged direct descent from Hacı Bektaş Veli, the patron saint of the Bektashi order. A considerable part of Alevi *ocak*s recognizes the *çelebiyan* as their main authority; their dedes in exchange receive formal authorization by the *çelebiyan*" (Dressler 2006:280).

129 Yaman 2004:140 and Sökefeld 2002a:182.

130 According to Sökefeld (2002a), who has studied the practices of *dedelik* in the German diaspora, this pattern of employing dedes is not common among the Alevi associations there. They prefer instead to invite travelling dedes to conduct the cem rituals.

experienced cem participants when they could not perform the prayers correctly during the rehearsal but, all in all, it went smoothly and after a couple of hours everything was set for the evening.

This chapter is basically an account of the cem conducted that evening.[131] It has, however, aspirations beyond a mere case study. Cem rituals are not identical and although most cems consist of more or less the same elements, there is no common liturgy for the choice of prayers and hymns, or for the order in which the various elements are to be performed. Consequently, the weekly cems in the foundation differ in details from the weekly cems conducted in other Alevi associations, and none of these are identical with the ideal cem upon which they are all modelled. As the cem conducted by Dertli Divani was performed in the spirit of teaching and examination of the students, it also differed from the cem rituals the congregation usually attended. Although Dertli Divani made an effort to follow the local sequential order of the various performances, his choices of prayers and hymns and his mere presence made a considerable impact on the ritual. Throughout the cem he explained the ritual actions and their symbolic meanings – and he frequently referred to differences and similarities with an ideally conducted cem. This fact made his cem performance an ideal source of illustrations of the cem ritual and the various way of performing (in) it. One aim of this chapter is thus to let such differences and similarities present themselves through the voice and acts of Dertli Divani.

Further, it is my intention that this chapter will provide a background for some of the descriptions and theoretical arguments that will be presented in the following chapters. The account of this ritual event is therefore not completely chronological or detailed in depth. Manuals exist for those who are interested in step-by-step descriptions and reiteration of prayers and hymns, written by Alevis themselves and mostly available in Turkish.[132] I have chosen to elaborate on certain elements of the ritual in order to prepare for later discussions.

131 This cem ritual was taped and documented in field notes.

132 See for example Yaman 2003 and Cem Vakfı & Alevi Islam Din Hizmetleri Başkanlığı 2007. According to Dressler, Dedeler Kurulu, "the Dede Council", of Almanya Alevi Birlikleri Konfederasyonu, "The Confederation of the Alevi Communities in Germany", the biggest European Alevi umbrella organization, has formulated a sequence of the cem, trying to provide dedes with a blueprint for how to conduct a cem ritual (Dressler 2006:287).

The cem evi and it's symbolism

The seemingly circular cem evi is actually a twelve-sided room with a vault supported at its centre by a massive column expanding into twelve equal parts at its central point, not unlike the tufted Bektaşi headgear.[133] According to Raymond Lifchez, the column and the vault are of particular architectural and ornamental interest, as they also resemble a candle with its upper shaft "branching into twelve ribs like the radiating light, *çırağ* or light of Muhammad and the Twelve Imams, which illuminates the path toward God".[134] The concept of this illuminating light carried through the holy lineages from Muhammad to the various Alevi dedes is a symbol of the enlightenment of the soul and is represented by a candlestick in the cem ritual. The twelve sides of the room give the impression of being extensions of the aesthetically impressive vault, as if the radiating light reaches all the way down to the floor, illuminating the people gathered in worship. Each of the sides is decorated with the names of the twelve imams.

I was sitting in one of two niches in the wall together with one of the students of the Alevilik course who was filming the event. These niches are said to have been the traditional altars of the ceremonial room,[135] but now they are furnished with pillows and mostly used as seats by the participants in the rituals or spectators of the semah course. The cem evi was more crowded than it used to be during the weekly cems, but the spatial organization of the people in the circular room was the same. While the rest of the participants were sitting on the floor, Dertli Divani and some other dedes, Esat Hoca and a representative of the board of the association were seated on the permanent elevations along the wall. On their right hand the *zakir*[136] was seated next to the loudspeakers, as he was in charge of a number of extension cords for the microphones and the electric long-necked lutes, *sazes*. During rituals, these benches are reserved for authorities and distinguished guests such as dedes, intellectuals and official representatives. Only rarely are visiting scholars invited to sit there and then merely as a token of respect and appreciation, and photographs

133 Lifchez 1992:122. The Bektaşi headgear is referred to as both *taçı şerif* and *elifi taç*. *Şerif* is a title given to the descendants of Muhammed. The name *elifi taç* has been given because the shape of the headgear resembles the Arabic letter *elif*.

134 Lifchez 1992:122.

135 Lifchez 1992:122.

136 The dervish who leads other dervishes in their contemplation during a contemplative, repetitive prayer, *zikir*. In the cem ritual, the *zakir* is the one playing the *saz* and singing the hymns as well.

of visiting scholars following the cem rituals from these spots are proudly referred to in various contexts.[137] The open space in front of the most important persons, the *meydan*, is the focal point of the ritual. As will be described, Muhammed, the twelve imams and the patron saint Hacı Bektaş Veli are all summoned while the colourful prayer rug is ritually placed on the space where the various rites are to be carried out successively, culminating in the performance of the semah and shedding of tears in remembrance of Kerbela.

As always, the people in charge of the various ritual duties were seated on the floor closest to the *meydan* with their faces towards the dedes. Even participants who are not conducting any of the ritual duties may sit close to the *meydan*, but it implies a certain familiarity with the codes and modes of behaviour in the ritual. After I had learnt when to join in the hymns and when to listen, when to hug and grasp the hands of the people beside me, and when to become emotional, I sat in the second row close to the *meydan* only a few times. Generally, I would prefer to position myself among the rest of the participants seated in rows of half circles around the *meydan* that extend up to the walls at the back. This part of the congregation is always separated by gender – men to the left and women to the right of the dedes. As a rule, the involvement of the various participants seems to gradually decline the further away from the centre of the activities they are seated. In other words, those sitting closest to the *meydan* not only follow the ritual behavioural patterns, but also listen more closely to the speeches of the dede, join in the hymns and display stronger emotions during the course of the ritual, than those seated further away. People at the back are often relatively detached from the ritual itself. They are merely spectators who may focus their attention on other things like nursing children, communicating by whispering or signs, or filming or taking pictures during parts of the ritual without disturbing the course of the ritual performances. It is obvious that there are various ways of participating in a cem ritual and that the involvement of each person present may range from deep immersion to detached spectatorship.[138]

The doorkeeper was responsible for locking the main entrance of the cem evi when Dertli Divani started the ritual. In this particular cem, correct performance of these ritual duties was greatly emphasized, not only

137 Such a photo from a visit by Irène Mélikoff is printed both in and on the back cover of Mehmet Yaman's *Alevilikte Cem* (2003).

138 The importance of personal involvement and attachment in the ritual context has been noted and developed into a theory of ritualization by Humphrey and Laidlaw (1994).

because of Dertli Divani's presence, but also because the cem was initiated both as a cessation of the Alevilik course and as a kind of examination of the students. Thus, the entrance was closed and, as modelled on the idea of the ideal village cems, no latecomers or anyone else were let in after the ritual had started. This rather small change in practice altered the atmosphere in the room considerably. Being used to the more relaxed weekly cems in the foundation where people kept coming and going, several of my fellow students stated after the ritual that they had felt removed from the rest of the world in a way they had not experienced before. They described their experiences of the room as being sealed and as if relations with the rest of the people present in the foundation outside of the cem evi were temporarily cut off. This atmosphere was portrayed as a fusion of mystique and divine inspiration, and some of them claimed that it was just as it used to be in the old days. It is very common among dedes, intellectuals and the rest of the community to portray the cem rituals in the villages with such a nostalgic and romantic aura of mysticism and secrecy. Thus, the doorkeeper's role is not only to guard the entrance against unwanted visitors or other intruders, but has an important symbolic function as well. In the villages, guarding the entrance is also believed to have meant defining the boundaries of the cem ritual and symbolically protecting the esoteric knowledge communicated during these secret happenings, but also defending the sacredness of the entrance itself. As Esat Hoca has defined it in one of his publications:

> The entrance to the meydan is understood as the *kıble* of the heart. In Alevilik-Bektaşilik the door is sacred. From the saying 'Science is the gateway to knowledge'[139] it is a symbol of Hazret[140] Ali; that is why we should never turn our backs to the door, nor step on its threshold. The two sides of the door case represent Hazret Hasan and Hazret Hüseyin, and the upper part Hazret Muhammed.[141]

139 Esat Hoca's interpretation of Alevilik is heavily influenced by the natural sciences. "Science is the gateway to knowledge" is a direct reference to the well-known and contested hadith where Muhammed is reported to have said that "I am the city of knowledge and Ali is its gateway", often referred to by the Alevis. (For a couple of different positions vis-à-vis the hadith, see http://www.al-islam.org/tahrif/cityofknowledge/index.htm and http://www.schiiten.com/backup/AhlelBayt.com/www.ahlelbayt.com/articles/hadith/city-of-knowledge.html.) In general, Ali is understood as the gateway to mystical knowledge. For Esat Hoca, this mystical knowledge is equal to an understanding of the laws in the natural sciences. For further details, see Chapter Four.

140 *Hazret* is used as an honorary title for prophets and imams.

141 Korkmaz 2003 [1993]:241.

In the urban context, the degree of attentiveness to the entrance changes according to the activities to be carried out in the cem evi. When entering the room for the ritual, the students generally kiss the door case and make sure they do not step on the threshold, but when they are running back and forth on other occasions, like during the semah course or only to socialize with each other, the door symbolism seems to be temporarily set aside.

Alevi-Bektaşi mysticism and the *tarikat*

When the doorkeeper had done his duty and the door was locked, and we were all ready to start the cem, Esat Hoca, the teacher of the Alevilik course, seized the opportunity to say some well-chosen words establishing the performance of that particular cem as both the continuation and conclusion of the Alevilik course. He emphasized the importance of transmitting Alevi knowledge and continuing the performance of the Alevi rituals. Such speeches by intellectuals and other authorities, like presidents of various associations, for example, are rather common contributions in the weekly cems in the foundation. In the village cems, however, it is commonly said that speeches were given by only the dedes. The microphone was then passed over to Dertli Divani who started off the event with the mandatory educational and enlightening speech, also called 'friendly conversation', *muhabbet*:

> Praise be to God, our Lord. In fact, I have nothing to add to Esat Hoca's words. As we all know, as the closure of the Alevilik course that has been going on for a couple of months, we are here today to conduct a cem together with the participants, classmates and close friends. With whatever intentions we crossed the threshold, let Him accept it. What we do once, let Him do a thousand times.[142]

The congregation responded in a united "Allah! Allah!" and Dertli Divani continued:

> I only touch upon the basic lines very shortly and in brief because the people coming and going here are not ignorant people. You know quite a bit, and when people like Esat Hoca are here I don't think that it is necessary to say that much. If you have any questions or any topics you would like to discuss, these wonderful people are always here for you. Whatever question you may ask, they will answer to the best of their ability. And if you have any questions

142 Cem ritual May 2004.

> right now, you may save them for later, then, if we are able, we will provide you answers, if not, we will ask someone who knows. In that way we will all learn something new together. Pir Sultan once said: "No matter how much you know, consult the ones who know".[143] None of us is perfect. Without passing the first door, I mean, without finishing primary education, how can a student go to high school? Without passing the first door, we have no chance, of course, to assume that we can pass the second door.[144]

Dertli Divani's apparent appreciation of Esat Hoca is more than a strategy of goodwill and comradeship. By locating the teacher, himself, the students and the saint, Pir Sultan Abdal, within the common realm of continuous appropriation of religious knowledge, he harmonizes the different layers of authority within the community. The dedes, the intellectuals, the students and the saints are all in a position of learning; they are all, in other words, striving to pass through yet another door. The prevalent concept of knowledge which Dertli Divani's words display is that of the *tarikat*. As a basic concept in Islamic mysticism in general, tarikat is a path to enlightenment consisting of various levels of understanding and spiritual conduct. Following the path thus means to traverse various spiritual stages that are successively revealing portions of divine knowledge. Within this mystical approach to knowledge acquisition, the capacity of the human being is not limited to operations of intellect or faith, but has the ability to cross the boundaries and "remove the dividing line which appears to separate him from God and, as it were, to relegate him wholly to nature and the realm of becoming".[145]

In Alevi terminology, this path is referred to as "Four doors, Forty posts", *Dört Kapı, Kırk Makam*, where each main level, the doors, consists of ten minor posts or necessities as a means of advancing on the path. The four doors are named in accordance with the gradual advancement towards enlightenment, thus, the first level, *şeriat*, is associated with the traditions and customs based on necessities like belief, education, worship, disassociation from forbidden actions and promotion of goodness.

143 Pir Sultan Abdal was a sixteenth-century wandering mystic, poet and minstrel who rebelled against the Ottoman authorities and was ultimately executed. Due to a lack of written resources, information about his life and death remains obscure. He has become a national symbol of Anatolian culture as well as one of the most important saints of the Alevis. There exists a number of books in Turkish about his life and poetry, among them Gölpınarlı and Boratav 1943; Avcı 2006 (this book has its own account on Facebook) and Özdemir 2008. Esat Hoca has also published a book on Pir Sultan Abdal (Korkmaz 1994).

144 Cem ritual May 2004.

145 Meier 1999:24.

Among the Alevis, there is, however, an eagerness to point out that *şeriat* does not imply obedience to any divine law manifested in the sharia. Religious practices are rather understood as human products based on people's perceptions of the reflection of their own divine roots. In the interpretations of the Koran as the source of divine law presented in the Alevilik course, for example, neither Esa Hoca nor the other main teacher, Şakir Baba, literally accepted the angel Cebrail as God's messenger. Esat Hoca portrayed him as a symbol of Muhammad's holy self and his "instinctual intelligence and intuitive wisdom"[146] – his alter ego so to speak, and in Şakir Baba's approach Muhammed had reached the state of "the Perfect Man", *insan-i kamil*, and found therefore the verses of the Koran in himself.[147]

The Alevi understanding of the divine roots of the human being owes much to the concept of "unity of being", *vahdet-i vücud*, as it has been ascribed to the mystical philosopher Ibn Arabi (1165–1240).[148] In Lapidus' terms, the divine reality of Ibn Arabi is

> […] utterly transcendent, yet everything that exists is a manifestation of that reality and is embraced by and encompassed within the divine. Everything that exists is God; and yet everything that exists is a veil between the seeker and God.[149]

In Alevi terms, the divine reality is Hak-Muhammed-Ali. Approaching the unity of being is thus to gradually realize the true nature of the relationship between God, the prophet Muhammed and the imam Ali. Understanding this relationship means recognizing that the world consists of an invisible, esoteric part, *batin*, and the exoteric arena of its reflection, *zahir*. Such a division of the world is common among the Sufis, a basic teaching among the Nusairis and has also been practised by Ismai'ili groups, which

146 Alevilik course May 2004. A similar interpretation is presented in Korkmaz 1998 [1995]:33–34.

147 Alevilik course May 2004.

148 I claim this although the teachers of Alevilik in the foundation never once mentioned Ibn Arabi in connection with the concept of *vahdet-i vücud*, which they used quite frequently. They chose instead to refer to Greek philosophers like Socrates, Plato, Plotinus, etc. I will elaborate on this interesting point in Chapter Six in an analysis of Esat Hoca's idea of Alevilik as syncretistic. The historical circumstances of the influence of Ibn Arabi on Alevi and Bektaşi thinking are uncertain although he did reside in Anatolia for the last part of his life, which coincides with the period of Islamization of Anatolia through wandering mystics (see Chapter Six). His thoughts have, however, not only influenced Alevis and Bektaşis but also great parts of what has sometimes been labelled as "Gnostic Sufism" in general (see for example Lapidus 1992). For more information about Ibn Arabi, see Chittick 1989.

149 Lapidus 1992:21.

were given the name Batiniyya because of their consistent focus on the hidden meaning behind everything literal or external.[150] It is, however, also assumed to be a common denominator among other Shia-oriented Muslims as a foundation of the status of the various genealogical lines of authority resting on the idea that the Koran was revealed together with its exegesis to Muhammad, and that he, in turn, transmitted the revelation but preserved the exegesis for the imams. Alevis generally hold that Ali is the master of inner science and the genealogical mystical heritage has been passed on from him to the dedes and founders of the various *ocaks*.

Şeriat as the start of the journey towards the esoteric understanding of reality is thus associated with Muhammed and his prophecy, while the following stages – the tarikat, *marifet* and *hakikat* – are attributed to Ali.[151] While *şeriat* and tarikat represent, in a narrow sense, the name of the first two levels on the path to enlightenment, these terms are also used as synonyms of *zahir* and *batin* reflecting the passing from the exoteric teachings of Muhammed to the inner sciences represented by Ali. The symbol of this division is the threshold. In its widest sense, however, the term tarikat refers to the means of gradual advancement towards complete comprehension of the divine reality, and it often encapsulates the doors of *marifet* and *hakikat* as well. As levels of gradual acquisition of knowledge with understanding, moral behaviour and divine inspiration as intertwined factors; these signifiers are basically the means to identify various levels of enlightenment and authority in order to relate the disciples to their master, and the masters to their initiators and the saints.

So far, the mysticism portrayed is a common heritage of both Alevis and Bektaşis. The term *Alevi-Bektaşi* is commonly used when referring to Alevi religious ideas. In the urban context of Alevi associations and foundations, Bektaşi leaders, *baba*s, are often invited as teachers of Alevi mysticism. Şakir Baba was one such Bektaşi leader teaching mysticism on the Alevilik course in the foundation. Some of his teachings will be presented in Chapter Four.

The term tarikat is also the generic term for a Sufi order, and Alevis and Bektaşis differ in terms of affiliation to the tarikat. Bektaşis are associated as disciples under total obedience to a master. In contemporary Turkey, the relationship between the Bektaşi masters, the *babas* and their followers is based on vertical ties of loyalty. Although the *babas*

150 Momen 1985:55.

151 *Şeriat* is the Turkish form of *sharia*, tarikat the Turkish form of *tariqa*, *marifet* (from Arabic *marifa*) may be translated as special skill or unique feature, and *hakikat* (from Arabic *haqiqa*) as reality.

are hierarchically structured with a committee of seven elected *babas*, the *halifebabas*, with one grand master at the top, the *dedebaba*, each *baba* defines the means by which the followers will walk the path of the tarikat. After the initiation confirmed by a secret ritual, the followers go through a process of adaptation to the Bektaşi principles and philosophy by internalizing the behaviour and set of ideas of their role model, or their "generalized other" – their master.[152] Their meetings are often held as ceremonial meals in the private home of the *baba*, whose teaching is passed on by means of tales and cryptic sayings.[153]

Alevi affiliation to the tarikat is, on the other hand, based on Alevi households collectively associated with a specific dede. According to Alevi historiography, in the rural past two families would come together and become spiritual relatives, *musahip*, and submit themselves to the doctrines and rules of the tarikat, but even more importantly, they would promise to support and take care of each other. In contemporary Turkey, however, the practice of *musahiplik* is no longer prevalent as it is considered practically impossible for individuals to become "spiritual relatives" who share all aspects of life, or even to completely submit oneself to the path of the tarikat in the urban environment. *Musahiplik* is, therefore, remembered as a practical arrangement that brought families together in the villages, authorized by a cem ritual, *musahiplik cemi*, in which the spiritual brothers should bow in front of the dede and promise to follow the path of the tarikat. Now that it is fading away as a practical arrangement in the urban environment, *musahiplik* is revered instead as a symbol of Alevi commitment to God and humanistic values.

If we go back to Dertli Divani's attempt to harmonize the different layers of authority within the community, we can now understand the rationale behind his choice of quoting the words of Pir Sultan Abdal. "No matter how much you know, consult the ones who know" is a maxim not only reflecting the continuous acquisition of knowledge but also a confirmation of the chains of authority. Within the context of the tarikat it reflects an endless vertical chain of authority because "the ones who know" are defined in relation to each other and the positions they possess. The reason for this is that the path of the tarikat is "[…] not only an internal perception of the hidden meaning of the Law, [but] it also purports to be a total discipline aimed towards the progressive purification of the

152 For an analysis of identity construction within the Bektaşi order in contemporary Turkey, see Markussen 2000.

153 For more information on the importance of the ceremonial meals among the Bektaşis, see Soileau 2001, 2005 and Algar 1992.

soul".[154] However, when I claim that Dertli Divani is harmonizing the various layers of authority, it is primarily the way he integrates the Alevilik teacher, Esat Hoca, within the hierarchical organization of authority. By virtue of his knowledge about Alevi and Bektaşi mysticism, Esat Hoca teaches the students about Alevilik and Bektaşilik without himself being a part of the gradual advancement towards divine knowledge. Dertli Divani's public appreciation of the teachers and intellectuals in general, and Esat Hoca in particular, is thus twofold: that of the mystical concept of learning within the tarikat, and the kind of knowledge acquisition that the intellectuals, research publications, lectures and conferences represent. The simultaneous existence of these two concepts of knowledge can be recognized within the Alevi community, and this will be further elaborated in Chapter Four.

Establishing consent in the ritual community

Dertli Divani plugged in his electric *saz*, adjusted the microphone and announced that he would like to perform one of his own songs if the congregation would allow it. Usually, the first poem, *nefes*, *deyiş*,[155] of the ritual is sung by the *zakir*, but judging from the anticipation in the air, many of the participants had been hoping for such a mini-concert within the fixed boundaries of the ritual.[156] After a moving performance invoking humming, tears and praises to Allah, he continued his speech focusing on the social aspect of the cem ritual:

> In our belief, there is no meaning in gathering in worship without uniting our hearts and establishing peace in the community. First of all, the people gathering for the cem must trust each other, that is, they have to be at ease and in agreement with each other. That is, by our hand, belly and tongue. We can receive conciliation (*rızalık*) only after securing consent and contentment between us and, then, we may start the cem. Everyone should embrace the persons on their right and left sides. This is the peace symbol of our community and it is our duty to make sure that this unity consists.[157]

154 Geoffroy 1998:244.

155 *Nefes*, literally 'breath', denotes poems sung by dervishes, and *deyiş* is a more common term for Alevi *aşik* poetry. The terms were used interchangeably at the foundation, which can be seen as a typical strategy of blending Alevi heritage of Sufi mysticism and Anatolian culture.

156 For literature on the role of *ozan*s, the *saz* and music in Alevi religion and culture see Reinhard and Oliveira Pinto 1989 and Markoff 1986.

157 Cem ritual May 2004.

As we all embraced the people within our reach, we enacted the vows of agreement and confirmed our state of harmonic co-existence. *Rıza* is a central term within Alevilik. Literally defined as "consent, assent, approval" and "the fact of being pleased or contented", it also connotes the acceptance of the will of God and the reciprocal contentment of the human soul and God.[158] In Alevi terminology, this reciprocity is expressed in addition to the constructed term *rızalık*, which means the state of consent and contentment and is something the believer may receive after earning God's approval and consent by unconditionally accepting the divine will. The tarikat is also called the door of consent, *rıza kapısı*, as the "Four Doors and Forty Posts" is "not a path taking you to the level of God, but on the contrary, […] is a belief with the aim of transforming the understanding of the existence into social obligations".[159] Hence, the terms have a further meaning closely connected to Alevi practices such as personal and communal peacemaking. As a heart-searching act, the person comes to terms with himself in the context of the cem ritual. However, self-examination is not only related to personal dedication to God, but has an important social aspect as well. As an Alevi, one should uphold certain moral standards of conduct, encapsulated in the much cherished creed "Be master of your hand, belly and tongue!", *Eline, beline, diline sahip ol!*. With the hands, the Alevi should avoid actions like stealing and physically hurting others, but should also promote peace and the creation of beauty. The belly symbolizes the importance of integrity and virtue and the significance of production within the boundaries of the family, and the tongue is a reminder to always tell the truth as well as an obligation to teach religious knowledge.

If a person fails to behave in a proper way, and if they have fallen into conflict with anyone in the community, they have to approach the dede and ask for his help to solve the conflict and re-establish agreement and consent. The place to do this is in the cem ritual called *Görgü Cemi*,[160] where the dede has the authority to perform as both the mediator and the judge in all kinds of disputes between members of the community. Before the performance of the various duties within the ritual, the dede will ask the congregation if there are any disagreements or conflicts between the

158 Bearman et al. 1994.

159 Korkmaz 1998 [1995]:24.

160 *Görgü* literally means good manners, experiencing or witnessing, and Shankland translates it alternatively as "to be seen" or "appear" (Shankland 2004a:41). In the context of the Alevi cem, it denotes the ritual questioning of participants in conflict in order to achieve consent and harmony in the community.

participants and he will urge them to come forward and explain their problems in front of the congregation in order to solve the problems and receive *rızalık*. In the role of a peace-making mediator, the dede should ideally consult the most authoritative written source of Alevilik, the decree of the sixth Imam Cafer-i Sadık, *Imam Cafer Buyruğu*, but if there is no solution or explicit guidance to be found on the topic, he can, in consultation with his congregation, make decisions that might set an example for additional practices.[161]

To further explain the importance of admitting and solving both existing and potential conflicts with fellow worshippers, Dertli Divani referred to the idea of internal ritual ablution, *iç abdesti*, and reminded the congregation that being morally clean is as important as the physical ablution they had performed by the fountain before entering the cem evi:

> In order to conduct this cem, there should be no disagreements of conflicts between the participants. I therefore ask you, if there is anyone here that is angry with, offended by, or in conflict with someone, you should step forward and let us know so that we can solve the problems together. I tell you that if you don't come forward[162] with your heart, the dirt will remain inside of you. You may fill the bottle with the dirt inside, cork it and throw it away. You may leave it in the Marmara Sea for seven years, and you may take it out and clean it with forty cauldrons of soap. It will still not be clean.[163]

Unexpectedly, a middle-aged man caught the dede's attention and declared: "Without knowing it, I think I have broken the heart of my friend Ibrahim". The sudden confession aroused confusion among the participants; some were looking at each other with anxiety, others started whispering between themselves. The dede called both parties to the centre of the ritual space and they both bowed in front of him. As the confessant tried to explain the situation and ask for forgiveness, the man called Ibrahim got angry and raised his voice causing the whole situation to become rather unclear. Soon, both men were speaking at the same time, interrupting the words of both Dertli Divani and Esat Hoca, who also joined in the debate. The congregation became extremely surprised and the whispering among them increased. The confessant was asking for

161 In Şahkulu at the time of my fieldwork, the version of *buyruk* referred to was a version published in 2001 by the foundation. Esat Hoca had also published an interpretation of the *buyruk* in 2002, which he occasionally referred to during his lectures (Korkmaz 2002b). For further information on *buyruk* texts, see Dressler 2012.

162 *Meydana koymak* means to step forward to the spot in front of the dede and confess conflicts with fellow participants.

163 Cem ritual May 2004.

forgiveness, but Ibrahim could not see the point of discussing it in front of the whole congregation and expressed that he felt he was regarded with disdain. He minimized the conflict and pointed to the fact that they had both been regularly participating in the cem ritual for the twenty years that the conflict had lasted. The two men went on talking at cross-purposes until Dertli Divani raised his voice and demanded the men solve their dispute. The confessant threw a 20 million bill[164] in front of the dede as a token of his quest for forgiveness and *rızalık*, and Ibrahim forgave him verbally but refused to come up with any money. Nevertheless, this was enough for Dertli Divani to reconcile the two men and he concluded the peacemaking with a short prayer calling upon Muhammed, Ali, Hacı Bektaş Veli and Pir Sultan Abdal. Again, everyone was ordered to embrace those sitting close by, while the dede made some reflections on the peacemaking event:

> Everyone, look how wonderful! Two of our older uncles came forward and shared their sentiments with us. First, they opened up their inner feelings and then they made peace. That's the beauty of our path. If we follow this road there will soon be no more problems to solve. No more problems to solve. Well, in reality, mistakes are made in the performance of the cem rituals, but you should all forgive! I ask all of you for forgiveness! The quality of these cem rituals only counts for self-education and they don't offer anything beyond that. This is of course not real *görgü cems*; if it were, people would interrogate each other. You would know each other's good and bad qualities, people would talk and it would become a subject of gossip. In such a community everyone would control each other. Our people come to the cem in the same way as others go to their places of worship, and that's the only place where you see your fellow participants. I mean, they listen to the *saz* and the chanted hymns, and they listen to the prayers and the speeches of the dedes. And then they just leave.[165]

Having participated in close to fifty cem rituals, I thought that the words of Dertli Divani were absolutely true. The dede would always mention the importance of *rızalık* in his speeches, but I had never before experienced an actual peacemaking event, and judging from the reaction of the rest of the participants it was not a scene they were accustomed to either.[166] Compared to the image of the annual *görgü cems*, the ritual has

164 At that time, approximately ten euros.

165 Cem ritual May 2004.

166 Some months later, in a cem ritual in Ankara, the same confusion arouse among the participants when a girl called her parents to come forward to the dede and solve their marital problems.

lost its significance as an annual ritual of social renewal with moral and spiritual accounting of the villagers' actions, peacemaking between people in conflict and vows for the year to come. In the foundation, the cem is performed on a weekly basis for approximately one or two hours. It has its regular prayers, hymns and rites, and the only segment that is open to adjustment is the speech of the dede. Elements that might produce unplanned events, such as peacemaking or *zikir*, are generally left out. Indeed, the weekly cem has in many respects adopted a symbolic character and as Dertli Divani further elaborated – both the annual accounting of the year and the peacemaking events are today revered as special authentic traits of Anatolian Alevilik:

> Look what an exemplary cem this has become! You got up and came forward with your problems and as you all witnessed, peace was achieved. In the old days, in the remote corners of Anatolia, when the dede went to a village, whatever disputes about land, fields or material possessions had been aroused in the course of that year, would be brought to the *görgü cem* and with the help of the dede, it would all be solved there and then. After that, the dede would perform the ritual duties and leave for the next village. The dede would travel between the village and stay for three days, five days, a week and maybe as long as ten days. Unfortunately, if I say that there are no more gifted people left in our villages, I would be right because a lot of people have migrated and consequently, the *dedelik* institution has degenerated. In the past, it was always knowledgeable people performing these duties, then, after most people got caught in the struggle to earn a living, the dedes could not educate themselves and they ended up not sufficiently qualified. Now, we have entered an era where we can pull ourselves together and if our hopes are solidly based and complete, we can come to the point where we are able to once again conduct such *görgü cems*. We hope that with God's permission we will get back to where we were.[167]

With these words, the initial preparations were successfully fulfilled and Dertli Divani could move on to the performance of the ritual services.

Ritual performances in the Alevi cem

Dertli Divani initiated the ritual performances by reading al-Fâtiha and sura 112.[168] He then welcomed Muhammed and his family, *ehl-i beyt*, and the rest of the twelve imams one by one and addressed the congregation with a question about what to do next:

167 Cem ritual May 2004.
168 Sura 112 is a regular element in Muslim prayer, *salat*.

> Yes, friends, let's start our duties. In fact, we don't want to interfere with the way cem ceremonies are conducted here because there are frequent participants of the cem here. We will do in accordance with how you generally perform the cem. In every region – and between the various tarikats – the way the duties are performed may differ. But between the basics there are no differences. So, without getting lost in digressions, let's start our thing, let's start our duties. Do you first spread out the skin?[169]

A customary voice from the male part of the room confirmed his question and the participants chosen for "the twelve services", *oniki hizmet*,[170] came to the *meydan* for their duties to be blessed by a standard prayer of the dede. Three of them went on to ritually spread a colourful prayer rug "for the unity of the cem, for the mystic conversation, for the kindness of the saints and for luck" on the spot in front of the dede. The cem was now ritually opened and before he continued, Dertli Divani summed up the meaning of the ritual actions of opening the cem:

> Now, I will explain as well as I can what we have done until now. The duties we have done so far; the part we have completed is called the opening of the *meydan* in the Alevi-Bektaşi belief. The *meydan* is opening. The dervishes came to the centre with their arms crossed and their feet sealed[171] and bowed to the dede (*dara çikmek*) receiving permission, and spread out the skin using only the Turkish language. It is a duty to spread the skin of the Sultan of Kerbela. This is the skin of Hak-Muhammed-Ali, Hacı Bektaş Veli and the Twelve Imams. Actually, what has happened is that Hak-Muhammed-Ali, Hacı Bektaş Veli and the Twelve Imams are all here and ready. We spread out their skin and they are watching us from the other world (*mana âleminden*) and right now they are inside of us, they are present. Believing in this we spread them out as we placed the skin. They are here now.[172]

169 Cem ritual May 2004. *Postu serilmek* means the spreading out of the skin and denotes the ritual placing of the prayer rug that ideally should be a sheep's pelt. *Post* is also the term for the position of the sheikh in dervish orders.

170 According to Esat Hoca, the twelve services (*oniki hizmet*) vary geographically. A common list of services is: 1) To conduct the cem (dede), 2) To assist the participants, 3) To keep order and silence during the cem, 4) To light the candle, 5) To perform the hymns and play the *saz* (*zakir*), 6) To sweep the *meydan,* 7) To sprinkle water in remembrance of Kerbela, 8) To be in charge of the sacrifice and the cooking, 9) To perform the semah, 10) To inform the congregation, 11) To clean the cem evi, and 12) To protect the cem participants (Korkmaz 2003 [1993]:335). It is important to note that these services are not the same as the sequence of the various ritual performances.

171 *Ayak mühürlenmiş* (sealed feet). To place the right big toe on top of the left one is a sign of respect when bowing in front of the dede or other authorities. It is also the position to adopt in front of a sheikh in the Sufi orders.

172 Cem ritual May 2004.

From there, he directed the rest of the cem as an orchestra, conducting both the performers and spectators through one rite at a time, explaining the symbolic meaning and reminding those who forgot their prayers in moments of excitement. The floor was ritually swept with a broom by three of the performers, symbolizing ablution of the hearts of everyone present; and as a symbol of the light of Muhammed illuminating the path to God, candles were lit to the sound of Dertli Divani reading the light verse (35–36) of sura 24.[173] Some ritual services, such as bringing a sheep to the *meydan* for blessing and then taking it outside to be offered, cooked and shared among the participants and poor people in the neighbourhood, were not performed since the institutionalization of the offering has resulted in a separate activity carried out at weekends in the foundation. The many prayers said by Dertli Divani and the performers did not differ very much from each other. They followed the pattern described by Tanman in his analysis of veneration practices of saints in Sufi orders in Ottoman Turkey:

> […] during the most common forms of incantation […] almost all the orders include recollection, through prayers, hymns and supplicatory *gülbangs*[174], of the names of the Prophet Muhammed, his companions, the pirs of the order and other saints. On mentioning them, each dervish places his right hand over his heart, bows his head in homage and repeats the word "Hu".[175]

The numerous poems chanted by Dertli Divani were, to the appreciation of the congregation, a mixture of his own songs and the common ones that everyone could join in with, singing, clapping their hands on their legs and even following a certain movement pattern. One such poem was a twenty-one-verses-long narrative about Muhammed's ascension, *mirac*, sung in accompaniment with the *saz*.[176] In this version of *mirac*, Muhammed encountered an assembly of forty men and women including Cebrail, Selman-i Farisi[177] and Ali. After having drunk the juice of a single

173 The ritual sweeping is called the sweeping service, *süpürge hizmeti*, and the lighting of the candles is referred to as "light", *çırağ*. In Esat Hoca's terms, *çırağ* is a symbol of the human brain – as he calls it "the *kıble* of reason" (Korkmaz 2003 [1998]:104). Note also his use of *kıble* in an earlier quotation where he claims that, "the entrance to the meydan is understood as the *kıble* of the heart".

174 *Gülbang* is a hymn or prayer chanted in unison.

175 Tanman 1992:132.

176 This part is called *miraclama* (the activity of performing *mirac*). For information on this widely held belief in Muhammad's nightly ascension, generally based on sura 17:1 in the Koran, see Schrieke et al. 2003.

177 *Selman-i Farisi* or *Selman Pak* is a semi-legendary figure of early Islam, believed to be a companion of Muhammed. See Levi Della Vida 2012.

grape and become ecstatic, Muhammed is said to have tied a rope around Ali's waist as a symbol of the practice of spiritual brotherhood, which has continued symbolically among the Alevis under the name *musahiplik*. The congregation knew every word of the poem and the right moments to rise to their feet, grab each other's hands and mimic the way Muhammed tied the rope around Ali's waist. Then, Dertli Divani confirmed the significance of the cem by establishing the ritual as a continuation of the "assembly of the Forty":

> After entering through this door, all is one, from seven to seventy. The one on the threshold is one; the one sitting in the corner is also one. The seven year olds and the seventy year olds, they are all the same. We are all one person. One of us is forty and the forty of us are one. So, the continuation of the Forty, anyhow, this [the cem] is that continuation.[178]

Under the leadership of Ali, the assembly is revered as a manifestation of God. The cem ritual does not only continue this meeting but also allows for the congregation to become one with each other, with existence and with God himself. The meeting is thus called *Kırklar Cemi,* "the Cem of the Forty", .

The story about Muhammed's ascension culminated in a performance of *Kırklar Semahı*, "the Semah of the Forty", which is believed to be a continuation of the ecstatic dance of Muhammed and the rest of the assembly. This is the only mandatory semah in the ritual, but the dede may allow for several more semahs to be performed. It is often said among the students that the number of semah in the villages in the past was unlimited, and that it could continue as a *zikir* the whole night. To the disappointment of my fellow semah course classmates, Dertli Divani had decided not to allow for any additional semah and due to the small size of the *meydan*, only two women and two men had been picked out for the sole performance of "the semah of the Forty". The female dancers were dressed up in colourful Anatolian garments and matching headscarves decorated with lacework and together with their male partners they performed with accuracy, immersed in the task, and made their semah teacher very proud.

The performance of the semah created just the right atmosphere for the subsequent ritual service: that of sprinkling water in remembrance of the battle at Kerbela.[179] Dertli Divani performed another long poem

178 Cem ritual May 2004.

179 For information on the battle at Kerbala and the legend of Imam Hüseyin, see Veccia Vaglieri 2012 and Hylén 2007.

telling the story of the death of Hüseyin while the congregation was singing and stroking and clapping their hands on their thighs, receiving drops of water in their hands and touching their faces so that the water blended with their tears. The poem was immediately followed by another elegy with the refrain based on the first part of the profession of faith, *la ilaha illa'llah*. This formula is considered especially suitable for *zikir* exercises "not only because it [is] the first part of the profession of faith but also because it expresse[s] both the negative and the positive operation which the mystic ha[s] to accomplish in himself during concentration".[180] During the cem with Dertli Divani, this poem was the closest the congregation came to a *zikir*-like exercise. They joined in with loud voices, some emotional, others using techniques of breathing out rather heavily on the endings a's of the words in the formula while they all continued clapping and stroking their thighs.

After prostrating in respect of God and all the legendary figures which had been praised during the course of the ritual, the *meydan* was ritually closed by blowing out the candles, sweeping the spot with the broom and wrapping up the prayer rug, accompanied by prayers and exclamations of "Allah! Allah!" and "Ya Muhammed! Ya Ali! Ya Hüseyin!". Dertli Divani made a short summary of what the congregation had accomplished together that evening, said a prayer and ended it all by declaring: "OK, that was all, we are done, it is over and you may leave".

Summary

On one hand, this specific performance of the cem ritual was in several ways an aberration. Dertli Divani's presence created the atmosphere of a concert performance and he met the expectations of the congregation by performing his own poems during the ritual. The ritual also became something between a guided tour through the various ritual performances and an examination of the students of the Alevilik course. On the other hand, Dertli Divani's way of conducting the ritual was to a high degree in line with the weekly cems at the foundation. Not only did he follow the local sequences of the ritual performances, but his verbal focus on the divergence between contemporary and ideal ritual practices was also an element familiar to the congregation.

The weekly cem ritual in Şahkulu was an important arena for production of collective Alevi memories. It was the arena where the distant

180 Meier 1999:25.

past was enacted through rites and, more importantly, for the purpose of the next chapter it was the arena where contemporary Alevi practices were evaluated and criticized. This criticism laid the groundwork for a consensus in the community on the recent rural past as authentic and desirable, though nevertheless close to impossible to restore. In the following chapter, I present a theoretical approach to this specific kind of criticism.[181]

181 An earlier version of the following chapter has been published in the conference proceedings from the international conference *Ritual Dynamics and the Science of Ritual* at Heidelberg University 2008. See Markussen 2011.

CHAPTER THREE

Transmission of ritual knowledge. A theoretical approach

In his speeches in the cem ritual, Dertli Divani addressed the differences in cem practices between regions and communities. He minimized the importance of the absence of a jointly accepted cem liturgy with the assurance that the basics of the ritual were the same. He did, however, express his concerns about the contemporary cem performances, which he characterized as filled with mistakes and with the sole purpose of self-education.

While we were in the cem evi listening to Dertli Divani's complaints, some of our friends were dozing in the garden. One of them was Burak, an unemployed man in his thirties who used to help out at the foundation. Although he had only once in his childhood experienced parts of a village cem, and had never participated in any of the weekly cems in the foundation, he had strong opinions on what he called the degeneration of the cem ritual. During my visits, he shared his thoughts and feelings on this topic through hours of interviews and conversations. It became a standing joke between us as I would ask him every Sunday to join the cem with me, and he would raise his eyebrows and reply with a smile: "You know me… I never have and I never will". During our conversations, Burak often used the current ways of teaching and performing semah both in and outside of the ritual context as an example of a changed attitude towards Alevi ritual practices in general. He claimed that his fellow community members were participating in the cem rituals without being aware of the authentic, religious depth of their actions – and that they were learning semah without realizing that it was originally a form of *zikir*. He therefore characterized the weekly cem at the foundation, as well as the various semah- and *saz*-courses, as nothing more than a celebration of Alevi culture. He claimed that the village cems had once been genuine

because the rituals had been intense, emotional experiences for the participants. He had a double reason for not joining the cem rituals; first of all, he did not want to contribute to a process of further degeneration of Alevi worship, and secondly he did not consider himself religious enough to be worthy of participation in an authentically performed cem ritual.

Burak often compared village cems with contemporary urban performances of the cem ritual. His descriptions of the village cems always rested on the assumption that they had a level of authenticity that the contemporary urban cems could never do anything else but emulate. For him, the authentic cem rituals were places for both individual and collective religious experiences and the semah performed in the ritual context was a means to lose oneself in the worship of God. Technically, he considered only the semah as proper *zikir*, but he also emphasized that the cem ritual as a whole was a *zikir*-like activity because it created emotions filled with intensity.[182] Dertli Divani shared the same focus on the concepts of village-city performances of the cem, but his notion of authenticity was based on the responsibility of the dedes to achieve consent, *rızalık*, and harmony, *huzur*, within the Alevi community. He blamed the lack of educated dedes for the degeneration of this social aspect of Alevi worship.

Burak and Dertli Divani shared their perceptions of village cems with the rest of the community. The prevalent understanding of rural and urban cems was that of village cems as synonymous with the way cems were conducted in the villages in the past. More specifically, "the past" was mostly an unspecified reference to the time before migration and could therefore vary according to each person's migration history. Rural authenticity and urban reality was thus divided along the lines of past and present before and after migration. As such, current cem performances were looked upon as contemporary copies of village cems and explained and legitimatized by changes related to migration and experienced as inevitable. Ritual life in the rural areas of Turkey today or among Alevis in urban areas before the massive migration waves were not integrated topics in the critical discussions of ritual change.[183]

182 Interviews and field notes October, November and December 2002, January 2003, May and April 2004.

183 There seems to be a silent agreement that there were no Alevis in the larger cities before the waves of migration in the 1960s. The urban history and character of the Bektasi order, however, is commonly referred to.

A theoretical approach to the cem ritual

In this chapter, I will explore ways in which the Alevi cem ritual was conceptualized and define the contours of a theoretical approach to the transmission of ritual knowledge within the community. As I am engaging in transmission of ritual knowledge, not to be confused with ritual transmission of knowledge, it is worth mentioning what this chapter is not about. First of all, it is not an attempt to define the nature of rituals per se, as has been the focus of a great part of the literature on rituals, which may be grouped under the heading of ritual studies.[184] Secondly, this chapter does not offer analyses of how Alevilik is ritually presented or embodied through performance in the cem ritual either, even though I do think it would be an interesting and fruitful way of studying Alevi traditions (and an approach which to my knowledge has never been presented so far).[185] The ideas presented here rather represent a specific approach to the various ways in which ritual knowledge was transmitted and communicated between the members of the community – and to interested people outside of the community as well.

Ritual knowledge, including knowledge about the cem as well as knowledge of how to conduct the ritual and how to perform in it, was taught and learned both in and outside of the ritual context itself. I will limit myself to a very specific way of expressing knowledge of, and involvement in, the cem ritual; that is, the evaluation of the performances of the ritual. This evaluation, which took the form of criticism within the community, was not limited to knowledge exchange between the participants in the ritual, but was a common topic of reference in formal and informal transmission of knowledge in Şahkulu. Thus, the criticism presented by Dertli Divani in the ritual context was only one part of the intrinsic web of formal and informal communication in which knowledge of Alevilik was taught and learned.

It is of crucial importance that, for the purpose of this chapter, the cem ritual must be understood as a concept transgressing the boundaries of the ritual context. Consequently, I understand Dertli Divani and the other dedes conducting the cem rituals, and Burak and his friends dozing in the garden as sharing common ritual knowledge. In Chapter One, I mentioned that changed attitudes towards the entrance of the cem evi

184 See for example Bell 1992, 1997; Grimes 1980; Humphrey & Laidlaw 1994; Rappaport 1999 and the *Journal of Ritual Studies*.

185 A performance study of the cem ritual, perspectives on variations of performances according to ideal types of ritual and actual performances presented, among others, by Humphrey and Laidlaw (1994) and Brown (2003) would be of special importance.

also reflected a changed approach to ritual secrecy. These changes were of course not limited to communication of ritual knowledge, but were also characteristic for the teaching of Alevi knowledge in general. As anyone who wished to could join the weekly cem – and the fact that the teaching of Alevilik in public courses and seminars also included knowledge of the cem – transmission of ritual knowledge was not limited to one arena or to selected students. Focusing on the cem ritual as a concept transcending the ritual context is therefore not only a choice of perspective. Extending the boundaries of the ritual scene to its immediate physical and social environment is also a necessity in order to understand the different ways in which knowledge about the ritual was communicated ritually and non-ritually, formally and informally.

Ritual criticism as communication of ritual knowledge

My approach to the cem ritual is to a large extent in line with the understanding of "ritual" put forward by Ronald Grimes in his book *Ritual Criticism* (1980). For him, a ritual is more than a collection or sequence of ritual building blocks called rites, because it refers to "the general idea of which a rite is a specific instance. As such, ritual does not 'exist', even though it is what we must try to define; ritual is an idea scholars formulate".[186] I propose that the existence of the cem as a ritual performed every week in Şahkulu does not undermine the construction of a "cem ritual" as a general idea of which the actual performance is only a part. The cem is, however, not constructed and formulated by only scholars. The ideas of how the cem should be conducted, how it was conducted in the villages in the past, and how it is conducted in the contemporary urban areas were all presented as criticism of the current cem performances by community members themselves. As a specific way of communicating ritual knowledge, such criticism may be passably understood within Grimes' concept of ritual criticism. In his words, "ritual criticism is the interpretation of a rite or ritual system with a view to implicating its practice".[187] Below, I quote his further elaboration on crucial aspects of this particular kind of criticism:

> […] Part of the work of ritual criticism is reflecting on the ways participants and observers decide that one way of doing a rite is more effective or appropriate than some other way. Ritual criticism may include evaluative judgments, but

186 Grimes 1980:9.
187 Grimes 1980:16.

> only insofar as it takes into account the circumstances and contexts which ritual knowledge […] is produced.[188]

One important characteristic of ritual criticism is thus that it implies reflection on *how* people decide about a particular ritual model, and not just evaluation of the ritual itself. In my opinion, the speculations of Dertli Divani and Burak on the reasons for what they consider the degeneration of the cem ritual were both excellent examples of such reflection. For Dertli Divani, the ritual specialist, the dedes were the ones to decide how the cem ritual was to be performed and, due to ignorance and lack of education, they chose to become ritual specialists without sufficient knowledge and competence to lead communities or to guide their followers in moral and social matters. Burak, a non-participant, on the other hand, blamed the people attending the cem of participating without immersion and thus ending up joining a common celebration of Alevi culture instead of engaging in serious Alevi worship.

The other aspect highlighted by Grimes is the importance of the context of production of ritual knowledge that has to be taken into account in evaluative judgments of a ritual. Although Dertli Divani and Burak presented different reasons for the deterioration of the cem ritual, they both contextualized the authentic performances of the cem and the attempts to model this ideal within the dual concepts of rural-urban and past-present.

Commemoration of rural authenticity

Ritual criticism is a shared practice between ritual participants and others not directly involved in the ritual. The criticism presented by the dedes during the cem, however, had a special role in the community as it functioned as an integral part of the cem ritual. It was very common for the dedes to address the degeneration of the cem in their speeches, not only during the *muhabbet* before they began the various ritual services, but also here and there during the whole ritual. The ritual criticism they presented was, therefore, not to be understood as a rite in a sequence of ritual building blocks, but rather a collection of judgments that could be assorted under the heading "the dede's comments". Whether the incorporation of ritual criticism as a part of the cem ritual itself was an innovation or whether there has always been room for such criticism is hard to tell. We might think that it is unique for the urban context since the migration from the villages to the cities seems to mark the distinction between the

188 Grimes 1980:16–17.

village cems and contemporary cems, at least in the Alevi historiography. On the other hand, there might always have been room for evaluation and improvement of ritual practices in accordance with an idea of how the ideal cem should look.[189]

As a ritual action, ritual criticism was not only a part, but also a constituent element of the cem ritual. It was also the crucial link between the teachings within the ritual context and the transmission of ritual knowledge in the physical and social environment of which the ritual was a part. Hence, ritual criticism defined the relationship between the critical teaching of ritual knowledge within and outside of the ritual context. The reason why ritual criticism linked critique presented as a part of the cem ritual, such as Dertli Divani's criticism, and the critical thoughts of Burak and other non-participants, lies in the commemorative character of ritual criticism. This does not necessarily mean that the cem ritual as a whole is a commemorative ceremony, but rather that one of the constituent elements of the cem is based on commemoration. The foundation of such constituent commemoration is the transmission of social or collective memory where images and recollected knowledge of the past legitimate both present practices as well as the critique of the very same practices. In Paul Connerton's words, this is how "practices […] are transmitted, in and as tradition".[190] The criticism presented in the cem ritual was an act which explicitly claimed continuity with the near past and, although indirectly and imperfectly, re-enacted the prototypical cem. Ritual criticism was thus a commemorative practice because it was repetitive "acts of transfer that [made] remembrance in common possible".[191] As commemoration transmits social memory, criticism of current cem performances became the main means through which the collective memory of the village cems was sustained and communicated. In the end, this was not only commemoration of rural ritual practices, but of rural authenticity as such. Alevi village life and the nature of Alevi

189 There is a serious lack of research on ritual plurality in Alevi villages, both past and present. Sources are mostly oral and have been documented within ethnographical projects often not focusing exclusively on ritual practices. References to a variety of Alevi ritual practices and to changes in cem performances in the rural areas can be found here and there in a limited number of research publications (see for example Shankland 1993, 1999, 2003, 2004a, 2006; Metin 1994[1992] and Bal 1997). In this respect, ritual criticism had a further function in Alevi communities. Constant evaluation of current performances gave the illusion that the scarce collection of sources available was vast and substantial.

190 Connerton 1989:4. My italics.

191 Connerton 1989:39.

villagers were also subjected to ideals of authenticity in comparison to Alevis living in urban areas.[192]

Ritual criticism and scholarly research

Connerton stresses the habitual nature of collective memory when he explains that "there can be a habit of remembering a unique event; when we have once described the event, the words we have used to do so can easily become habitual".[193] I will suggest here that the collective remembrance of the village cems rests not only in normative judgments and explicit critique of current performances, but also in descriptions of how the migration of Alevis from villages to cities has resulted in changes in the ritual. Such descriptions can also be categorized as ritual criticism. In his elaboration on various forms of ritual criticism Grimes explains that:

> The rhetoric of criticism need not be restricted to that of the moral imperative: this ought to be changed, that is bad, stop doing things that way. Often critique is embedded in the telling description that calls attention to vested interests, political implications, inherent contradictions, unconscious motives, or dissonant values.[194]

Thus, the rhetoric of ritual criticism does not always have to be moral imperatives like Dertli Divani's and Burak's ways of expressing their concerns. Ritual criticism may also include descriptions of a particular performance, or various performances, of the ritual. This means that, within the semantic context of the ritual differences between the "village cem" and contemporary performances of it, it is not only moral judgments of how it was better "in the old days" that count as ritual criticism, but also descriptions of changes related to migration, to the extent that, I will add, they are *based on the notion of the "village cem" in the past as the authentic model for cem performances in general*.

The ritual criticism of the Alevi cem ritual is thus defining and commemorating the prototypical cem by the means of habitual narratives. Consequently, ritual criticism may not only legitimate but also trigger ritual change. According to Grimes, ritual criticism has the power to re-contextualize rites:

192 In an earlier publication I have pointed out that contemporary understandings of central Alevi institutions such as *musahiplik*, cem and *dedelik* rest on symbolic representations of Alevi villagers as pure, authentic and with a high level of morality (Markussen 2010b[2005]:73–75).

193 Connerton 1989:23.

194 Grimes 1980:17.

> Criticism re–contextualizes. One can re–contextualize rites in any number of ways. Bringing moral or aesthetic standards to bear on them are only two such ways. Another is to wrap a rite in a theory that smothers or extols it.[195]

The most obvious way of re–contextualizing a ritual is thus to define the prototypical cem as the moral standard for all other performances of the cem. This is what both Dertli Divani and Burak were doing, and the most direct appeal for ritual change was presented by Dertli Divani when he called for the communities to pull themselves together in order to "with God's permission get back to where we were", during the cem ritual described in Chapter Two.

Using Grimes' terminology, Dertli Divani and Burak exercised "intra–cultural" or "intra–religious" ritual criticism in their judgments of contemporary cem performances.[196] Not all kinds of ritual criticism need, however, to be of such an "in–house variety".[197] As it is a practice of reflection on the contexts in which people decide on a particular performance of the ritual, as well as an exercise in simultaneous involvement and distancing, Grimes argues that the practice of ritual criticism is not at all an activity foreign to ethnographic inquiry.[198] In the context of the Alevi cem ritual, intra–religious ritual criticism finds its base of support in historical and ethnographic research on changes in Alevi institutions due to urbanization and international migration. This same intra–religious ritual criticism establishes research results as general truths and gives the impression that single examples of changes and continuities are in fact manifold. In this dialectic relationship, normative intra–religious ritual criticism and descriptive scientific research both have their specific roles in Alevi commemoration of authenticity and production of collective memory.

In the following, I will relate two studies of ritual change in Alevi communities to the theoretical framework of ritual criticism: one solely focusing on the contextual aspects of changes related to migration, and the other approaching changes in context and the content of the cem ritual comparatively. First, I will present a theory of "transfer of ritual" partly developed in relation to the cem ritual, presented by a research group in Heidelberg, and then I will analyse how David Shankland relates migration and ritual change in Alevi villages to their ultimate other – Sunni villagers.

195 Grimes 1980:17.
196 Grimes 1980:20.
197 Grimes 1980:20.
198 Grimes 1980:20.

Ritual criticism and the "Transfer of Ritual"

Within the research programme *Ritual Dynamics*, Langer and his colleagues at Heidelberg University have developed a productive structure for the study of ritual change with the concept of "transfer of ritual". As an aspect of the inherent dynamics of rituals as such, "transfer of ritual" refers to a specific kind of ritual change brought about by a transformative "transfer of a ritual from one context into another or – more generally – a change of the context surrounding the ritual".[199] Contextual aspects are defined rather broadly, and the list of the various aspects includes media, geography, space, ecology, culture, religion, politics, economy, society, gender, the group carrying on the tradition and the historical connection between these aspects.[200]

Contextual chances triggering ritual change

For Langer and his colleagues, the complex processes of rural–urban and international migration are the main explanations for changes in cem performances. Theoretically, they elaborate on different kinds of ritual transfer and describe how various forms may take place as consequences of a range of contextual changes related to migration. If a part of a group changes its geographical location so that the ritual is practised simultaneously by two groups, the transfer has been synchronic. Diachronic transfer takes place if there is a continuity of location but changes in the historical context, but also with re–invention or re–adoption of a ritual after a break in the performance, or with "other reception processes of (elements of) (real or assumed) 'historical' rituals".[201] According to Langer and his colleagues, the changes in the Alevi cem ritual are examples of recursive transfer since double migration – from the villages to the cities and then from there to Europe – has caused reciprocal transfer processes where dedes living in Europe transfer practices developed in the diaspora back to Turkey when they conduct cem rituals there. As an example of the reciprocal transfer processes of the cem, the use of chairs in some cem rituals both in Germany and Turkey is emphasized and characterized as a form of European culture influencing the performances of the cem. Accordingly, the use of chairs began when cem rituals were performed in university lecture rooms and churches due to a lack of proper cem evis where the congregation generally sits on the floor. Later, it was transferred

199 Langer et al. 2006:1.
200 Langer et al. 2006:2.
201 Langer et al. 2006:4.

back to Turkey by the dedes travelling to conduct cem rituals in their home country. Other changes in the ritual performances of the Alevi cem portrayed by Langer and his colleagues are based on the idea of the annual *görgü cemi* as the prototypical cem. Changes in frequency from once a year in the villages to performances on a weekly basis in the urban Alevi organizations, also resulting in a shortened form of the night–long village cems to a couple of hours in the cities, are emphasized. The lack of questioning of participants in conflict, *görgu*, and adjustments from performances in secrecy to more or less "representational" rituals are mentioned as further indications of ritual change resulting from a transfer of the cem ritual from rural villages to associational environments in the big cities.[202]

The concept of recursive transfer successfully highlights the transnational aspect of Alevi communities and their mobilization today.[203] The focus is on changes in the cem as a result of conscious mobilization of Alevi identity and puts the role of travel and other means of transnational communication at the centre of attention. Langer and his colleagues argue that the fluidity and complexity of Alevi networks today have resulted from a shift in the "internal dimensions of functionality […] from confirmation of group cohesion to a means of identity politics (against the Sunni Turks) and representation of the modern 'Aleviness' (alevilik)".[204] Such changed conditions for the cem performances are to be found in Europe and the urban centres of Turkey, where Alevi migrants from a range of different geographical places and Alevi traditions co-operate in creating Alevi communities and claiming their space in society. A certain degree of formalization of beliefs and practices is a common outcome of such joint efforts. The concept of the ideal cem located in the villages functions as a template for common ritual practices among people from different geographical and traditional backgrounds, and the ritual criticism becomes a local as well as a translocal means to strive for the unity of each specific community.

International migration and transnational Alevi networks have indeed a constitutive role in changing Alevi ritual life as well as in the conceptualization of the ideal cem. To exemplify the theory of "transfer of ritual", Langer and his colleagues have thus chosen to highlight the recursive changes of the cem ritual by focusing on the role of the dedes

202 Langer et al. 2006:4–5.
203 Langer, Motika and Ursinus 2005.
204 Langer et al. 2006:5.

in Germany who also conduct cems in Turkey.[205] The complexity of the migration patterns of Alevi communities also affords understanding changes in the cem ritual as synchronic and diachronic. Doing so allows for a reconsideration of the comparison between urban complexity and villages as ontological *gemeinschafts*.[206] Some villages might rightfully (still) be characterized by simplicity and isolation, but a great part of the rural areas in Turkey has experienced long-term transformation processes resulting in a high degree of interaction with the rest of the world. Television came early to rural Turkey[207] and Alevi organizations have local branches in villages and towns all over the country. For villagers who stayed behind when segments of their communities chose to migrate, the resulting changes in the cem may be characterized as diachronic transfer, as there is a continuity of location but changes in the historical context. This point is especially interesting in the case of Alevi migration, since it has often been forgotten that rural-urban migration does not necessarily result in deserted villages, but rather complex processes of transformation of the village communities.

Cases where only parts of the rural community have migrated may be called synchronic as they have changed their geographical location and the cem ritual as a result is practised simultaneously in the cities and the villages as related practices within the same Alevi tradition. Since villages and rural towns in general are not isolated from national nor transnational information flows between Alevi communities, there is a great chance that Alevi cem performances in a village in Anatolia have a similar outlook as a weekly performance in a cem evi in Germany where locals from the same rural area gather in worship – sometimes also under the leadership of the same dede travelling back and forth between Turkey and Germany.

In other cases, breaks in the cem performances in both the villages and the cities due to lack of qualified dedes or a sufficient number of participants may have triggered diachronic transfer. Re-invention or re-

205 Langer et al. 2006: 5.

206 Tönnies 1887. Tönnies' *gemeinschaft* (or community as it is sometimes translated as) is a social grouping based on feelings of togetherness and mutual bonds in which membership is self-fulfilling. Its opposite, *gesellschaft*, (sometimes translated as society), on the other hand, is a social grouping instrumental to individual member's aims, needs and aspirations. For a village to be categorized as *gemeinschaft*, it must be characterized by a certain degree of isolation from the rest of society and by well-defined social ties. Rural life in Anatolia in the past is portrayed in Alevi historiography with such isolation and simplicity.

207 Stirling 1965.

adoption of the ritual performances after such breaks in ritual practices certainly includes the revival of elements remembered or prescribed, but may also include (and for my line of argumentation more importantly) other important reception processes of ritual practices. The latter processes may redefine, relocate and re-contextualize the ritual as both a concept and a lived practice. Ritual criticism could be one such reception process.

Internal dynamics triggering ritual change

The theory of transfer of ritual assumes that it is first and foremost changes in contextual aspects that create changes in one or more of the internal dimensions of the ritual. However, the changes of these internal dimensions, such as script, performance, performativity, aesthetics, structure, transmission of ritual contents, intentionality, self-reflection, interaction, communication, psycho-social functionality, mediality, symbolism and ascribed meanings may be caused by internal dynamics.[208] It is not clear where the limits for what they consider as a ritual's internal dynamics extend, but it seems like a logical outcome of their arguments that it could also include the dynamics between the various internal dimensions of a ritual. If this is the case, ritual criticism presented by the dedes and within the community at large could be an important aspect of the internal dynamics of the Alevi cem ritual.

Here, I identify ritual criticism both as a reception process of contemporary practices of the cem ritual, as well as a part of the internal dynamics of the ritual. I do this to demonstrate how well the idea of ritual criticism as a constituent ritual element based on commemoration fits the theory of "transfer of ritual" as a structure for the study of ritual change. Approaching the cem ritual conceptually, I have argued that narratives based on an ideal cem performance are commemorative acts integral to all cem performances. The crucial link between the narratives (or the reception process considered as a contextual aspect by Langer and his colleagues) and the ritual act itself (as a part of the internal dynamics of the ritual) must be the people creating and telling the cem narratives and acting out the commemoration of village authenticity. Langer and his colleagues also recognize the importance of such people when they state that participants constitute the link between contextual aspects and the internal dimensions of the ritual according to their various roles as ritual actors:

> […] at one extreme there are the main actors, playing an almost independent role in the enactment of the ritual; in the middle, there is the 'chorus', acting as

208 Langer et al. 2006:2.

> a group […] while at the other end of the scale there may be passively onlooking spectators. Such spectators may not only be a part of the community, but sometimes can even include outsiders, scholars among them. Also that part of the community, which is not present but still has influence on the ritual and its arrangement, has to be taken into consideration.[209]

Langer and his colleagues include all categories of people who might influence the cem ritual in their definition of "ritual actors". This means that dedes, participants, non-participants and scholars alike may constitute the link between changes in contextual aspects of the cem ritual and changes of its internal dimensions. The theory of "transfer of ritual" can thus be understood as an analysis of collective memory sustained through commemoration of contexts.

In the following, I will present a somewhat different approach to these processes of commemoration; that of analysing Alevi processes of change in comparison with changes in Sunni practices. By linking an Alevi-Sunni dichotomy to migration-related changes in the cem ritual, David Shankland has presented a relational approach to changes in the cem ritual.

Ritual criticism and the Alevi-Sunni dichotomy

David Shankland's ethnographic research in contemporary Anatolia is unique in its consistent focus on the rural population. Since the end of the 1980s, he has been studying changes in both Alevi and Sunni village communities where migration has been a major reason for various forms of structural changes and has, accordingly, had a significant impact on village life. His understanding of the migration processes and their impact on social life is refreshing because it establishes migration as an integral part of the challenges facing the villagers in their efforts to adapt to modernization. As he considers migration as a part of more comprehensive changes in the rural areas, he creates a dynamic picture of the complexity of rural-urban migration.

Out of his initial studies conducted in the Anatolian countryside, Shankland drew interesting conclusions about the ways in which Sunni and Alevi villagers have adapted to modernization processes in rural Anatolia.[210] In sum, he argued that the differences in social and religious organization of Sunni and Alevi rural communities influenced their abilities to integrate into the modernized Turkish nation state. For the Alevis to successfully become an integral part of this nation state, their cosmology

209 Langer et al. 2006:3.
210 Shankland 1993.

and mechanisms of social control had to change more radically than those of the Sunnis. Consequently, while the Sunnis could integrate almost without changes in their religious beliefs and practices, the Alevis, he claimed, became less religious as they accepted the secular tenets of the Turkish Republic. The reason, as understood by Shankland, was partly that the social order of the Sunni villages was compatible with the process of gradual absorption into a centralized administrative system, while the Alevi villages under the social control of the dedes were not.

Since he first presented his results in his doctoral dissertation in 1993, Shankland has further developed his ideas in several monographs and a considerable number of articles.[211] Although with a main focus on the Alevi rural population, his research has continued to be comparative in nature.[212] As he has analysed Alevi rural social organization in comparison to that of Sunni villages, his approach to changes in central Alevi institutions such as the cem ritual has been persistently relational. His analytical framework has to a high degree been that of Ernest Gellner's approach to the nature of Muslim societies and, in fact, he has explicitly devoted much of his writings to revitalize Gellner's distinction between two versions of faith within "the Islamic World".[213] As this distinction is based on diffe-

211 See for example Shankland 1999, 2003 and 2006.

212 In many ways, this comparative approach is both the weakness and strength of Shankland's scholarship. As an analytical framework for his ethnographic research, it is clear that it facilitates a broad picture of the impacts of modernization and migration in rural Anatolia. What seems to be the strength in the study of rural Anatolia in general, however, is sometimes perceived as a weakness when Shankland relies on these categories to describe changes in Alevi and Sunni religiosity. In my opinion, there can be several reasons for this. One possible reason might be that since his primary subject of study is Alevis, he does not seem equally distant and close to the Sunni and Alevi categories he seeks to describe. He is, therefore, not distant enough from the typically Alevi world views and not close enough to see the complex varieties within the Sunni population in Turkey. Another explanation lies not in Shankland's research specifically, but rather in implications of the enterprise of comparative studies of religion itself. One important aspect is that comparison should be recognized as a threefold relation between the two phenomena that are to be compared and the interests of the researcher, be it theories, models or analytical perspectives (Smith 1990). In Shankland's comparative studies of Alevi and Sunni faith, ritual and social organization, the third part is clearly the model of "the Islamic World" presented by Ernst Gellner (1993[1981]). Implications of this model will be elaborated in the footnote below.

213 Gellner 1993[1981]. Gellner's perception of "the Islamic world" is an approach widely criticized for its essentialist underpinnings. Among the well-formulated critiques we find that of Talal Asad (1986) and Sami Zubaida (1995). Asad presents a discursive approach to the idea of "an Islamic world": "It is too often forgotten that 'the

rences in social structures, it seems to fit well with Shankland's parameters of the degrees of compatibility between the structures of Alevi and Sunni villages and the centralized Turkish nation-state:

> […] Gellner assumes that within the Islamic world, there is often conflict between two different versions of the faith. The first of these is centred upon face-to-face collective ritual led by hereditary or at least sacred leaders, where the community may be largely or entirely illiterate. Worship tends to be expressive and irregular, based more on the ecological rhythm of the pastoral or semipastoral community than any more abstract time-reckoning. Both in life and death, such "saintly" leaders and their tombs may be focal points of religion within the community, which is often closed to outsiders, whether by default or design. Participation, in effect, is only through initiation, birth, or both. Though nominally, or even avowedly, Islamic doctrine content is often minimal, and the actual practice of religion varies tremendously, not just over a small area, but also over time. Often rural, these societies are prepared rigorously to defend their independence in the face of central rule, though at the same time are profoundly prone to fission and internal opposition.
>
> The second version of faith is much more universalistic, proselytizing and capable of uniting very large groups. Worship is based on a carefully established doctrine, one devoted to removing intermediaries between a worshipper and God, eliminating variation and asserting the truth of a single text. While devotion takes place frequently throughout the day and adheres to an annual cycle, it

world of Islam' is a concept for organizing historical narratives, not the name of a self-contained collective agent. This is not to say that historical narratives have no social effect – on the contrary. But the integrity of the world of Islam is essentially ideological, a discursive representation" (Asad 1986:11).

This critique is not very far from Zubaida's claim that Gellner acquired his idea of Muslim orthodoxy from the modern reformist Muslims and then applied it firstly to the history of the rise and fall of Muslim dynasties and secondly, to the nature of political dynamics among Muslims in history (Zubaida 1995:172).

There is another interesting aspect of Zubaida's critical analysis of Gellner's "Muslim Society" which is of importance specifically for the way in which Shankland has revived Gellner's model in the context of rural Anatolia. Basing his understanding of "two versions of Islamic faith" on the Khaldunian dialectic between tribe and city, Gellner acknowledged the history of the Ottoman Empire as a major exception, and even as an alternative model of the political dynamics of Islamic history (Gellner 1993[1981]:77). Shankland is of course aware of this and expresses the awkwardness of his own use of Gellner's model to explain modernization processes in Anatolia in this way: "Gellner himself was profoundly unsure of the extent to which the model applied to the Turkish case [note to Gellner 1981:73]. This puts me in the slightly awkward position on disagreeing with Gellner on the grounds that he is, at least in great part, correct" (Shankland 2003:174–175).

> is deliberately staggered in such a way that makes it clear that neither the sun nor the seasons are being worshipped. Highly literate and based upon teaching that is thought-out and argued through in minute detail by a scholarly group of specialists, it is at the same time open to all. Not in itself terribly interesting or exciting (though its adherents may be highly skilled in disputation), it nevertheless is capable of spreading quickly and convincing many populations of the truth of its message. Astonishingly stable, it varies greatly only within very large regions, and is capable of crossing the rural/urban divide with ease, so that village worship may often come to resemble that of the larger cities. Far from requiring a separate political organization, it is inclined toward using state power to its own ends, and often merges with it.[214]

In the article "Modes of Religiosity and the Legacy of Ernest Gellner", from which this excerpt is taken, Shankland also parallels Sunni and Alevi belief systems with Harvey Whitehouse's ideas of two qualitatively different cognitive "modes of religiosity".[215] He demonstrates a correspondence between Whitehouse's theories and Gellner's idea of two versions of "the Islamic faith" based on social structure and thus enables the differences in social organization between Sunni and Alevi villages to become incorporated into a joint Whitehouse-Gellner-Shankland kind of concept of Sunni-Alevi. As a result, the Sunni villagers' religiosity is characterized as having a universalistic and text-based "doctrinal mode" fitting neatly into a social order that is predominantly urban in its characteristics. The mode of Alevi religiosity, on the other hand, is portrayed as "imagistic" as it is "predominantly collective, intermittently celebrated, hierarchical, non-doctrinal and inspirational", and it is based on a rural social order under the control of dedes in hereditary positions.[216] Here, he invests the Alevi past with authenticity related to a Sufi heritage and strongly linked to a specific Alevi understanding of Anatolian culture, which will be explored in Chapter Six. In this specific mix of Gellner's and Whitehouse's theories, it also becomes apparent that Shankland uses ritual practices as parameters to measure changes in religiosity and social organization brought about by modernization and rural-urban migration.

One central aspect of Whitehouse's "modes of religiosity" is an assumption that through the monotonous character of its repeated rituals, a doctrinal mode of religiosity may move towards becoming imagistic. Shankland accepts Whitehouse's claims regarding "the tedium to which

214 Shankland 2004a:32–33.
215 Whitehouse 2000 and 2004.
216 Shankland 2004a:35.

repeated rituals doubtless give rise",[217] but he states that the move from "doctrinal" to "imagistic" religiosity which Whitehouse envisions has not happened among the Sunni orthodox population in Turkey. Instead, those seeking "boredom relief" turn to secular forms of entertainment like alcohol, women or consumerism:

> When men[218] are bored (and they have often complained to me that the mosque ceremony is not of great interest) they appear to turn to that lively, sensuous secular celebration of life that may be found in drink, wine, women, or, alternatively, (or as well), in that wholehearted embrace of consumerism for which Turkey is famous.[219]

According to Shankland, this is a modern phenomenon because for the Sunnis there once used to be an "imagistic escape" in Sufi mysticism and brotherhoods – an option which, according to him, is not available any more, because

> […] the brotherhoods are now emptied of almost all imagistic focus that they may once have possessed. Thus, for much of the history of the Turkish Republic, boredom relief has been at least largely sought outside the accepted canons of religion. In contrast, the previous vehicles for "imagistic" thinking have become doctrinal.[220]

Hence, on the basis of the assumption that Sunni ritual practices in Turkey are doctrinal and boring, Shankland creates a picture of the pre-republican Sunni population as being able to escape into a more collective, non-doctrinal and inspirational ritual life through Sufi mysticism. He further depicts a lack of religious imagistic possibilities for escape among the contemporary Sunnis, and presents the consequences as one of two options: either they become more doctrinal or they turn to the kinds of secular forms of entertainment described above.

When it comes to changes in Alevi religiosity, on the other hand, Shankland does not accept psychological factors inherent within the ritual practice as sufficient explanations. Instead, he turns to the Gellnerian

217 Shankland 2004a:34.

218 Unfortunately, he does not mention how women in Turkey seek "boredom relief". Studies of women's consumer culture in Turkey also focus on the Sunni population but do not portray women's consumption as particularly secular. On the contrary, analyses of changes in veiling practices and studies highlighting veiling as fashion among the Sunni upper middle class in Turkey are quite common. See for example Özdalga 1998; Kiliçbay and Binark 2002; Navaro-Yashin 2002; White 2002 and Çınar 2005.

219 Shankland 2004a:34.

220 Shankland 2004a:35.

assertion that there exists a demonstrable link between social control and religion, and demonstrates how changes in Alevi religiosity are direct results of the transformation of the social order in the villages. In polemics with Whitehouse's assumption that ritual practice dissolves along with the death of faith, Shankland sets out to illustrate how religious faith comes and goes. He traces changes in faith in Alevi villages through three phases: conversion to Sunnism, the decline and even disappearance of faith as villagers turn to secular forms of entertainment and the revitalization of religiosity in the urban centres. Regarding the turn to secular forms of entertainment, he states:

> Albeit simplifying a far more complex ethnographic reality, it appears that those who proclaimed this countermovement [leaning towards political leftism] gave up belief in the religious efficacy of the village's ceremonies. They also often stopped attending them, or did so only under pressure. Nevertheless, they continued to celebrate very significant parts of that same ritual in secular settings, even to express great pleasure in doing so. During drinking ceremonies, festivals and marriages, even the most sceptical Alevis would call for the sema ritual dance, play minstrel music extolling Ali continuously, and maintain little touches of ritual, clearly drawn from their religious myths such as touching glasses finger to finger, or passing a little piece of liver to a friend when they had finished taking a sip of strong drink (known as rakı). This, they called not religion but their "culture", using the word in direct translation, kültür. Thus, for this group at least, belief or literal faith dissipated but their ritual in many respects continued in a new guise and with new justification.[221]

It is interesting that Shankland highlights the context in which the music is listened to and the semah performed as parameter for religious and cultural practices. These are two elements of the cem ritual that seem to have never been confined only to the ritual context of *zikir*. According to Fritz Meier, who studied various forms of Sufi practices:

> The technical designation of these communal occasions for inducing ecstasy [listening to music and dancing] came to be sama' 'listening'. This designation corresponds to the designation of a profane social gathering, an evening of musical entertainment, and the Sufi sama' was nothing other than an appropriation of this profane activity. […] The performed musical pieces were mostly love songs that were intended in a purely earthly sense by the poet. It was the task of the Sufi to reinterpret them.[222]

221 Shankland 2004a:38.
222 Meier 1999:35–36.

In Şahkulu, reading poetry, singing along with hymns praising Ali and other religious authorities and dancing the semah were communal activities frequently performed outside of the ritual context – sometimes for educational purposes and sometimes for relaxation and for fun. Through conversations with elders in the community, I got the impression that this was not a change of practice related to modernization or migration. They all spoke of music and semah at various kinds of gatherings in the villages, towns and cities to which they eventually migrated. Some of them explained that this was the reason why they knew the lyrics of the hymns chanted in the cem ritual and also how to perform the "semah of the Forty" without being a frequent cem participant.[223]

Regardless of these modifying comments, Shankland's portrait of changes in the cem ritual complements the ideas presented by Langer and his colleagues in Heidelberg. As they point out, migration processes generating changes in the contexts of which the cem rituals were performed are without doubt the main triggers of ritual changes in Alevi communities. By adding Shankland's focus on rural-urban migration as linked to other changes related to modernization processes in rural Anatolia, however, the picture of the republican history of Alevi ritual practices broadens significantly. In the villages, Shankland reports on loss of Alevi faith either through conversion to Sunni Islam or through a reorientation to secular forms of entertainment. From his perspective, decline of religious dimensions of Alevi ritual practices is somehow related to changes in the social organization of the Anatolian Alevi villages as much as it is a result of migration processes. As a consequence of this approach, revival of Alevi religiosity is treated as an urban phenomenon.

Summary

In this chapter, the words of the visiting dede and poet Dertli Divani and that of Burak, who had only experienced parts of a cem ritual in his early childhood, have come to represent the kinds of ritual criticism presented in Şahkulu. It has been argued that when Burak, Dertli Divani or others within the community spoke about village cems, they were not talking about the village practices today, nor were they referring specifically to historical facts. The logic behind their reasoning was embedded in the notion of rural authenticity connected to "the past", specifically referring to the time before migration from the villages to the urban centres. The "village cem", as they described it, was thus conceptualized as referring

223 Field notes November 2002, February 2003 and May 2004.

both to the villages in the past and to an ideal cem serving as a standard by which the current practices could be evaluated and judged. The common appreciation of the village cem as genuine and "real" rested on this kind of double legitimization of authenticity.

Furthermore, I have presented ritual criticism as covering both normative judgments in the Alevi community, as well as descriptions of changes in performances of the cem ritual resting on the notion of "the village cem" as the authentic model for cem performances in general. I have presented two scholarly contributions to the discussions on how and why cem rituals have changed. In the theory of "transfer of ritual", Langer and his colleagues call attention to the contextual aspects of the migration processes of which the majority of Alevis living in the urban areas have experienced since the 1960s. Through his studies of the Anatolian countryside, Shankland has treated rural-urban migration and consequent changes in the cem ritual as parts of more comprehensive processes of modernization and integration into the Turkish nation state.

Borrowing the concept of *ritual criticism* from Grimes and reinterpreting it in the context of the cem ritual has been the major tool with which I have presented a theoretical foundation for understanding processes of transmission of ritual knowledge in Şahkulu. This is a theoretical assessment that can also be applied to transmission of Alevi knowledge in general. Importance given to the rural past is inherent in several other aspects of Alevi community life as well. Embedded in the concept of the rural past lies not only the authentic cem ritual, but also the genuine religious authority as was ascribed by Dertli Divani to the dedes in the villages in the past. The authority of the dede was remembered as total control encompassing the villagers' spiritual as well as earthly matters, and this control was executed and reinforced in the annual *görgü cemi*. The dedes in the rural past were revered as knowledgeable leaders with God-given powers and a high sense of morality. Contemporary dedes were described as lacking knowledge and without authority to guide Alevi communities on the path of the tarikat, as Dertli Divani criticized during the cem ritual. The next chapter describes the role of the dedes in the urban context of the foundation and explores changes in the *dedelik* institution and Alevi religious authority.

CHAPTER FOUR

Alevi authorities
Between rural practices and urban realities

In the midst of a volleyball match between students of the Alevilik course, two of the boys regularly visiting the foundation received everyone's attention when they declared that they had decided to become spiritual brothers, *musahip*. The first reaction from the students was a disparaging "Why?" as if it would be a completely meaningless act. The boys, who were both approaching their twenties, then started a speech filled with emotions about how much they loved and cared for each other and how much they wanted to stay close for the rest of their lives, but were interrupted by one of the students asking them if they really knew what it meant to become *musahip*. Their answer was focused on sharing everything from feelings to money throughout their lives, and one of them also talked with enthusiasm about the duty to take care of his friend's future wife if his friend should pass away. This generated a flow of questions to which the boys were not able to provide answers, and when a question about whether or not they were ready and willing to commit to the tarikat and submit to the will of the dede was posed, they both looked uncertain. They were sent off to the dede's office to ask for the possibilities of becoming *musahip*, and while waiting for their return, the students exchanged knowledge on various aspects of spiritual brotherhood and related issues. Not surprisingly, we had to wait for more than an hour before the boys came back and told us that the dede had decided they were too young to give such vows. Nevertheless, after one hour of listening to the dede's monologue about *musahiplik*, they had decided that it was nothing for them – and that they could probably show their affection for each other in better and less constraining ways.

It was clear that the boys, although they did not have much knowledge of the *musahiplik* institution, approached it as something good, honourable and authentic. They expressed a willingness to sacrifice individuality for each other in their quest for mutual ties and affection. Such self-

sacrifice was in the foundation commonly related to people of high moral standards, such as the villagers in the past, the dedes and the saints. This was partly the reason why the students of the Alevilik course viewed it as an impossibility. Urban conditions did not, in their view, allow neither for the sharing of all aspects of life, nor for the complete submission to the path of the tarikat and the will of the dede. Furthermore, among contemporary Alevis living in these urban conditions, only a few could, in their opinion, have the ability to develop into people of such high moral standards required for the practice of *musahiplik*. Therefore, they agreed that such practices were best confined to the rural past. Both the boys and the students agreed that the question of whether they could become *musahip* or not was to be decided by the dede. Since the *musahiplik* institution is still under the jurisdiction of the dedes, the practical way for the boys to fulfil their wishes would be to contact another dede. They would, however, never do that since the authority of the dede stretched further than the practical decision-making. They accepted that the knowledge he possessed included knowing what was best for them, which is a type of authority still widely associated with the dedes.

The boys and the students were all practising Alevilik under urban conditions with reference to the rural past. Consequently, they were in the midst of processes of re-negotiating power structures and hierarchies of authority. These were processes common to other urban Alevi communities and changes in this particular community were consistent with integral parts of changes on a wider national and transnational scale.

In Şahkulu, as in other urban Alevi foundations, authority took many forms and was not confined to only the *dedelik* institution. Alongside the authority of the dedes, functionaries of the foundation as well as intellectuals publishing books and giving lectures on Alevilik represented other forms of religious authority in the community. In this chapter, I look at the changing role of the dedes in relation to these other authorities. I have chosen to approach the various authorities from the perspectives of different agents in the community; that is, the older and the younger generations of visitors, the permanent dede in the foundation, Veli Akkol Dede, and the main teacher of the Alevilik course, Esat Hoca, who could be characterized as a typical Alevi intellectual. In order to grasp important aspects of the authority of the dedes, I also look at the *dedelik* institution in relation to the prevalent concept of sainthood in the foundation.

Saints and dedes

Most visitors came to Şahkulu to participate in or observe the various activities organized by the foundation, but some of them also visited the tombs to pay their respects. The tombs on the compound, more than fifty in total, were placed side by side with narrow spaces between them and the devotional practices were, as a rule, limited to prayers and lighting of candles. Most of the tombs belonged to Bektaşi leaders of various ranks and heads of this particular *tekke*. Some tombs were adorned with calligraphic inscriptions and pictographs showing the Bektaşi headgear, but the decoration on most of them consisted of inscriptions of the name of the deceased in Ottoman Turkish – a script very few of the visitors knew how to read. Apart from by the tomb of Şahkulu Sultan, the first head of the *tekke* in the fifteenth century, most of the visitors paid their respects to the saints as a collective without knowledge of the identities of the people buried there. The awareness of the existence of these tombs, however, was one of the features creating the distinct atmosphere of this particular foundation.

At times, the days on the compound could feel like an endless stream of new faces and polite handshakes. On days like that I would bring some tea to a secluded corner of the compound in order to doze in the sun and chat freely without the constraints of courtesy. One such day I was sitting by the tombs with a regular visitor, chatting, sipping tea and watching visitors pay their respects to the saints. An old woman approaching the iron cage surrounding the tomb of Şahkulu Sultan caught our attention when she tied a small piece of cloth to the ironwork, kissed it and uttered a prayer. Close on her heels was a representative of the management, speaking with a resigned voice as he untied the cloth:

> Auntie, I have told you many times that you may not tie pieces of cloth on the tombs here in the foundation. We try to keep it neat and clean here. You may light a candle and say your prayers, but you have to tie your cloth elsewhere.[224]

The old woman shook her head, mumbled to herself and continued to the next tomb where she tried to fit small stones into cracks in the wall. We all knew that she would continue these practices of wish fulfilment as an important part of her devotion to the saints.

224 Fieldwork notes May 2003.

The ritual acts of wish fulfilment taking place by the tombs were considered popular practices connected to a God-given power of working miracles, *keramet,* believed to be manifested by the saints. Although in the example above, the old woman has come to represent such practices, they were not understood as specifically female. Women and men alike approached the tombs for vows of wish fulfilment. Instead, the ways in which these men and women conceptualized their practices revealed distinctions more along the lines of generation and age than of gender.

The younger generation made a clear distinction between veneration of the saints within Alevilik and such "popular practices". This did not, however, mean that such acts of wish fulfilment were not practised, only that it was important to know what kind of activities one was engaged in. As one of the students of the Alevilik course explained to me on a trip to Hacıbektaş after we had tied cloths to the branches of a dried out bush already covered in garishly-coloured cloths, wishing for the health of her family and for her future success in the labour market:

> It is superstition, you know! It has nothing to do with Alevilik; it's only a part of the Turkish folklore. Showing your respect to the saints by lighting a candle and wishing well for them in your prayers, that is Alevi devotion, but to do these small tasks in order to receive something from the saints, or from God with the help of the saints, in the future… That is superstition, and actually, it is not that good. But it is a part of us, so we do it![225]

For this student, and for many of the other younger visitors in Şahkulu, the division between superstition (*boş inan*) and devotion (*ibadet*) was an important one. In particular, the students of the Alevilik course commonly approached popular practices according to how well they fit with "proper Alevilik". One might claim that these students had compartmentalized Alevilik as a limited religious system from other aspects of being an Alevi in contemporary Turkey. In comparison with the ways in which the older generation conceptualized Alevilik and their wish fulfilment practices, this claim seems justified. The older generation of men and women seldom referred to their practices as superstition and approached their vows to the saints as mere necessities in life. For them, Alevilik was equal to their identity as Alevis, encompassing most aspects of their lives. The two English translations of the term Alevilik might sum up the generation gap between the students and the elders: Alevilik as Alevism and Alevilik as Aleviness.

225 Interview May 2004.

When I asked Veli Akkol Dede about his reflections on wish fulfilment practices and whether they should be characterized as superstition or not, he answered that

> It is true that these practices are not really part of Alevilik, but they are part of the Alevi culture. And it is mostly the old illiterate ones who engage in these practices. I mean, they are uneducated; they have been deprived of proper religious guidance. We should bear with them; they mean no harm. They are good people, their hearts are clean and they are bearers of our culture.[226]

The older generation of migrants as bearers of the Alevi cultural heritage was an idea widely spread in the community. Students of the Alevilik course repeatedly expressed their high opinions of the human qualities of the elders in the community. It seemed to me that in this admiration of the elders, rural authenticity and high morals came together and constituted the survival of Alevilik despite their perceived lack of religious education. Although the younger generation made an effort to learn their religion through courses and seminars, they were considered to be mostly guided and influenced by contemporary urban conditions and therefore more willing to accept contemporary urban solutions to many of the challenges facing Alevi communities. In other words, although the activities aimed at teaching the younger generation Alevilik with modern means were also considered crucial in the transmission and survival of Alevi religion and culture, there seemed to be certain inconsistencies with the reverence for rural authenticity.

Esat Hoca did his best during the Alevilik lectures to bridge these inconsistencies by approaching God-given powers of working miracles, *keramet*, as at the heart of what Alevi mystical devotion was all about. In one of his lectures, he read aloud from his own published text:

> In the orthodox[227] approach to the concept of *keramet*, we find ourselves face to face with the acceptance of miracles in social life or in the natural [objective] environment. In this way, from a fact outside reason we move beyond rational understanding. In Anatolian Alevilik, on the other hand, the approach to *keramet* is quite the opposite: There exist no miracles in real life, nor in the natural development; that is, *keramet* is not to be found in this life. The place of *keramet* in Alevilik is on the level of speech. More correctly, within an esoteric (*batin*) understanding, *keramet* is an expression of how desires and wishes are

226 Conversation May 2004.

227 In this kind of Alevi discourse, orthodox generally refers to Sunni Islam but here it seems to denote "general" or "common".

> sent through the mediation of the people that have been given a mission [saints] and natural objects, by moving beyond the path of reasoning and to a context where the obstacles of reason and logic are not to be found.[228]

For Esat Hoca, practices of wish fulfillment by the tombs of the saints and in other revered places like the town of Hacıbektaş, were natural parts of Alevi mysticism. This was an ideological position that was hard to grasp for the students in the lecture. It generated a flow of questions and ended with the following conversation between Esat Hoca and the student with whom I tied cloth to a tree in Hacıbektaş:

Student:	You say that miracles do not exist. Do you really mean that wishing for miracles is a part of Alevi devotion?
Esat Hoca:	Yes, but in order to grasp this you have to understand the meaning of the esoteric part of reality.
Student:	Which means that…?
Esat Hoca:	…that when you make a wish to a saint you manifest the relationship between humans and God, and you actualize the esoteric world, the world beyond the desires of your wish.
Student:	But what about the old people who actually believe that they will get help from the saints – in this world?
Esat Hoca:	Unfortunately they are uneducated, because they can not understand the mystic dimension of Alevilik, they take it at face value.[229]

The student was not completely satisfied with the answers given by Esat Hoca. During a short conversation between her and me after the lecture, however, she settled with this explanation when she managed to fit it with her original point of view on practices of wish fulfilment. Her conclusion was that Esat Hoca was talking about these practices along the lines of other devotional practices towards the saints, such as lighting candles and wishing them well in prayers. For her, there was still a difference between the *keramet* within Alevilik and the belief in wish fulfilment found in the rural Alevi culture.

228 Alevilik course May 2004. Also to be found in Korkmaz 2003 [1993]:245.
229 Alevilik course May 2004.

Relating to the dedes: Subtle abilities and God-given authority

In the context of Sufi tarikats, the prerequisite for production of miraculous deeds is often referred to as *baraka* and translated as divine grace. Continuity of religious power and social status from saints to living religious leaders is often secured through the hereditary nature of *baraka*.[230] In the foundation, the power of performing miracles was solely attributed to the saints and most commonly communicated by and through their tombs. *Keramet* was not associated with the living Alevi dedes; their authority was instead based on their position as guides to religious knowledge and role models for right conduct. Ideally, they were responsible for taking care of their communities, both socially and spiritually. They were, in other words, like governors in all their connotations: caretakers, supervisors, teachers, tutors and friends. The reputation of a dede mostly depended on stories of intrinsic knowledge, moral standards and the ability to conduct the cem rituals correctly. The manner in which the dedes taught Alevilik was also a significant reason for their popularity, especially among the young people. As was the case with Dertli Divani, the criteria of holy descent seemed to be left in the background. According to Dressler, the Alevi journalist and author Rıza Zeylut has presented arguments that "instead of descent, […] virtues and merit of a person should decide on whether he could become a dede".[231] Riza Zeylut was one of the invited lecturers on the Alevilik course, and his fame was recognized by many of the students.[232] Dressler argues, however, that this is "the most radical approach to the reformulation of the dedelik question" and as such a marginal position in the general Alevi discourse.[233]

Despite all of this, the dedes possessed some kind of extraordinary quality that differed from the knowledge enjoyed by, for example, the intellectuals. Like Sufi leaders in other parts in the world, the dedes manifested the existence of a subtle ability inherited through the holy descent, giving them the authority to perform both ritual and spontaneous blessing. Pnina Werbner, who has written extensively on sainthood among Muslims in South Asia,[234] has given a valuable comment on these various ritual acts of wish fulfilment and blessing:

230 See for example Paulo Pinto's analyses of sainthood and Sufism in Syria (Pinto 2004; 2007).

231 Dressler 2006:290.

232 Ilhan Ataseven has interviewed Riza Zelyut for his doctoral dissertation project. The interview is quoted in Part Three of his dissertation (Ataseven 1997).

233 Dressler 2006:290.

234 Werbner 2003; Werbner and Basu 1998.

> In different ways all these ritual acts are ways of reaching out materially to the saint's grace. I use the word grace here deliberately because too much weight has, in my view, been put by scholars on Sufism, including anthropologists, on barkat or baraka, as though this one term could sum up the complex ideas about charisma and blessing held by Sufi followers. In reality, I found, there is a whole lexicon of terms referring to subtle differences in modes of saintly blessing. These terms together form a symbolic complex of blessing. The subtle variations between the terms are important, because they provide insight into the way Sufi cosmology is embodied and embedded in more usual ways of Islamic ritual blessing.[235]

Werbner's comment on the overemphasis on *baraka* is valuable in order to understand the position of the dedes in the community, especially because *baraka* was not a term commonly used. In daily conversation, this subtle ability that the dedes possessed was not articulated as one specific quality. It was instead inherited spiritual and moral qualities exercised in blessing and guidance. Yet these inherited qualities were, in the Alevilik lectures, defined and imparted in the concept of *akıl*, reason. In Esat Hoca's terms, *akıl* had three distinct but interrelated meanings:[236]

> 1) The human mental ability that makes it possible to recognize things in nature; to know what to say and how to behave. 2) The intuitive comprehension in heart and mind – which can be recognized as inspiration – makes it possible to understand the things on the other side of the visible world. 3) The basic tendency of nature appearing in the form of law, instinct and the like; the reason of nature (*doğanın aklı*).[237]

The two first definitions depict *akıl* as the human ability to recognize both the laws of the natural world and the secrets of the hidden part of existence. As I mentioned in Chapter One, the nature of the divine reality was defined in terms of Hak-Muhammed-Ali, and realizing this also meant recognizing that existence is divided into two parts, an invisible esoteric, *batin*, and its reflection, *zahir*. The ability to recognize this was thus one aspect of *akıl* based on development and purification, *tasfiye*, of human wisdom in the context of the tarikat.[238] This ability was a part

235 Werbner 2003:250.

236 The third aspect of this definition defines *akıl* as equal to the divine reality itself. Esat Hoca's metaphysical speculations on the nature of the divine reality are analysed in Chapter Four. I have therefore chosen to not comment here on this third aspect of the definition.

237 Korkmaz 2003[1993]:27.

238 Korkmaz 2003 [1993]:28.

of human nature, but the inclination, *eğilim*, towards the realization of this capacity was hereditary through the holy lineages and as such the dedes were what Esat Hoca preferred to call *yarı kutsal*, "half holy".[239] In the third aspect, Esat Hoca made an associational leap from *akıl* to natural laws and defined it as divine reality itself.[240] Therefore, in order to acquire a genuine understanding of the divine reality – and this was a point repeatedly emphasized by Esat Hoca during his lectures – the acquisition of knowledge, *bilgi*, had to be an integral and fundamental part of the tarikat path towards enlightenment. As he stated in a lecture: "Without knowledge about Alevilik, how can you believe in the Alevi path to God?" He further illustrated this relationship between reason and faith with a short but clarifying statement: "Faith is the sheep; reason is the shepherd; Satan is the wolf. If the shepherd leaves, what will the wolf do to the sheep?"[241]

In the lecture, this division of the first two aspects of *akıl* created a flow of questions from the students. One interesting line of argument came from a group of students interested to know whether dedes had to be of holy descent (*seyyid, ocakzade*). They deduced an answer to this through a series of questions starting with the two aspects of *akıl*:

> – Is it so that the dedes have inherited both the ability to recognize the esoteric reality as well as the inclination towards the ability to recognize the esoteric reality?
> – Or is it so that all humans have the ability but only the dedes have the inclination towards the ability?
> – If so, then it makes it easier for the dedes, but not impossible for others to recognize the esoteric reality?
> – Does that mean that it is possible to understand without being *seyyid*?[242]

Esat Hoca commented on only the first two questions from the students, and he used the Bektaşi order as an example of an approach where human beings all have the ability to start the journey towards realization of the

239 Alevilik course March 2004.

240 This leap was made philosophically possible through the association of a dialectic *Hak-Nature-Human*, parallel to that of *Hak-Muhammed-Ali* and the identification between universal reason, *akl-ı kül*, and universal essence, *nefs-i küll*. The result was that natural laws were as such constituent parts of the divine reality and that they were manifestations of the universal soul, reason and capacity of nature simultaneously.

241 Alevilik course March 2004.

242 Alevilik course March 2004.

divine reality, although they will not all reach the end and some will never get further than the first step.[243] When confronted with these questions on another occasion, Veli Akkol Dede also chose to focus on the concept of the Sufi path. According to him, nothing on the path was reserved for the dedes. Holy descent and commitment to the tarikat, however, were necessary ingredients to reach the final stages, *marifet* and *hakikat*. On the question of whether dedes should be of holy descent, his answer was "Yes, that is preferable".[244]

The dedes and the foundations

Veli Akkol Dede was officially employed by the foundation and presented with an office at the compound. His primary contact with the visitors was through leading the cem ritual, blessing sacrificial meat and being available in his office for blessing, consultation and personal advice. Spending time in his office, sipping tea and observing people consulting him for a variety of reasons was time well spent in terms of reaching some kind of understanding of his role in the community.

Towards the end of my fieldwork in 2004, a man approached the dede in his office with the request of enrolling his son for a *dedelik* course. He had heard rumours that a training programme for dedes was about to commence and saw this as a short-term educational opportunity for his son, who had not been able to enter university studies. Some months earlier, the president of the association had publicly announced that they would soon start up a dede training programme.[245] This was a result of a long-term concern about the overall low educational level of contemporary dedes; a concern that had been publicly expressed as early as in 1998 with the wish to educate dedes in philosophy, social sciences and literature at university level.[246] The man had obviously misunderstood the purpose of such a training programme and approached it as a way for his son to gain training for an occupation. The dede patiently explained the nature of the *dedelik* institution and listed several criteria for embarking on the path towards becoming a practising dede and the man decided rather quickly that it would not be a suitable career choice for his son.

243 These are the steps of the gradual advancement within the tarikat. See Chapter Two under "Alevi-Bektaşi mysticism and the tarikat".

244 Field notes from a session of questions and answers between students of the Alevilik course and Veli Akkol Dede in May 2004.

245 Odabaşı 2004 referred to by Dressler 2006:282.

246 Dressler 2006:282.

Although it might seem like an odd request and a complete misunderstanding, this request is a part of the conditions in which *dedelik* is practised in contemporary Alevi communities. In the following, I look into these changed conditions for *dedelik* as well as changed approaches to the nature of dedes within the organizational structure of foundations.

Past and present conditions for dedelik

Veli Akkol Dede was not a particularly public figure, and only a few of the students had frequent contact with him. He was a good example of how the visibility of the dede authority was framed within the formal activities of the urban Alevi associational life. Many contemporary dedes have made similar choices regarding their practices of *dedelik*. Others have chosen to travel around, visiting villages, associations and other communities to conduct cem rituals. Some of them have followed the trend of publishing literature and giving lectures and seminars, adjusting their language and means of presentations to the younger generation with demands on contemporary relevance. As I mentioned in Chapter Two, Dertli Divani was celebrated as such a contemporary dede by the students of the Alevilik course.

Changes in the *dedelik* institution related to migration from village communities to urban foundations have been noticed by a range of researchers, and studied specifically by Dressler and Sökefeld during the last decade.[247] Dressler has characterized this situation as the secularization of the dedelik institution because "the role of the dede is constrained to ritual contexts increasingly defined as religious in opposition to non-religious functions such as representation of the community".[248] The dedes have, until now, been irreplaceable in a number of ritual functions such as leading the cem, blessing sacrificial food and accepting (or – in the case of the two boys – refusing) *musahip* candidates to become spiritual brothers. It is mainly in these religious ritual functions that the monopoly of the dede authority is still intact in urban contemporary communities like Şahkulu. However, some dedes have also found ways of integrating their restricted religious authority into a new system of social organization and knowledge transmission, which has, in various ways, enabled them to influence non-religious representations of Alevi communities. The public profile and the ideological framework in which the dedes and the teachers are working is, to a large extent, defined by the urban associational community in general and by the representatives of the various foundations in

247 Dressler 2006 and Sökefeld 2002a.
248 Dressler 2006:270.

particular. The regular organs of directors and committee members of the foundations engage, both on a national and international level, in what has been labelled "identity-politics". They negotiate the public image of Alevilik and have the responsibility of scheduling local ritual performances and other religious, cultural and educational activities. Through their publishing houses, they also have a say in matters concerning the publication of Alevi literature. Each association has its own public profile and attracts visitors from different geographical places, social strata and ethnic communities, and with specific understandings of Alevilik, and they often employ and invite dedes and teachers with a matching public image.[249] The dedes practise their *dedelik* within (or rather in between for those dedes without permanent affiliation) these ideological and political frames, in accordance with the wishes of the communities. Through their affiliation and through their duties as employees of various foundations, they represent the specific ideological outlooks of different Alevi associational communities.

Yet, this does not necessarily mean that contemporary dedes are without influence on the public images of these communities. Some dedes hold such representational positions themselves;[250] others influence the communities by touring from one association to another, communicating their own understanding of Alevilik in their speeches during the cem rituals they conduct.[251]

Differences between past rural and present urban conditions in which the dedes exercise their authority were often discussed in the community. Two concerns were most frequently brought up: One particularly engrossed the students of the Alevilik course and the other was, above all, the main concern of Veli Akkol Dede. Among the students, a balance

249 Sökefeld 2002a:182.

250 Veli Akkol Dede was engaged in representational positions in Şahkulu during the first years of his affiliation with the foundation. The director of Cem Vakfı, Izzettin Doğan, is, however, the typical example of a dede of holy descent who has chosen to combine his role as a religious leader with that of a variety of representational positions in both Alevi and university circles. He is also the Alevi leader who features most in the media as a representative for Alevis towards politicians and the Turkish state. For more information on Doğan and his Alevi outlook, see Cem Vakfı's website: www.cemvakfi.org.

251 Travelling between associations seems to be a more common practice among dedes in Germany than in Turkey, as most associations in Germany do not have frequent, regularly scheduled cem rituals. As the tomb of Şahkulu Sultan has made the foundation an important pilgrimage site, the number of visitors is high enough to conduct weekly cem rituals and as a consequence it is one of the places that has a regularly employed dede.

between contemporary urban conditions and past rural authenticity was of utmost importance. It was often argued that the dedes had to adapt to urban conditions out of necessity and teach Alevilik in accordance with contemporary needs, although they should also protect and pass on rural traditions and the genuine Alevi essence of the past. For the students, Dertli Divani served as an example of such a contemporary dede devoted to the protection of rural traditions. His language was contemporary and his teachings and music was distributed by modern technological means.

Veli Akkol Dede's main concern was the lack of young men of holy descent willing to embark on the journey of becoming a practising dede. His favourite allegory for the present and future situation for the succession of dedes was that of contaminated water. "We are like still water in a bowl now, which will soon become contaminated if we do not have any new fresh water added".[252] On one of the many occasions when he made use of this allegory, I was able to ask him whether the water could not be cleaner by adding knowledge to the already practising dedes. His answer was practical: "Well, yes, but what do we do when these educated dedes die? Throw the water out of the bowl?" Veli Akkol Dede was not opposed to the idea of educating practising dedes in philosophy, social sciences and literature at university level; on the contrary, education could never be wrong as long as it was not at the expense of the important practice of passing on the esoteric knowledge of Alevilik.[253] On this matter of the education of practising dedes, the students of the Alevilik course were synchronized with the dede's opinions. This was exactly what they were talking about when they time and again emphasized the importance of balancing present urban conditions and past traditions.

Past and present dedes

The co-existence of Alevi foundations and the *dedelik* institution has not always been unproblematic. Tensions between individual dedes and various foundations is one aspect of such difficulties, and the establishment of the Dedes' Council within the largest European Alevi umbrella organization, the Confederation of the Alevi Communities in Germany has proven to be another.[254] Sökefeld argues that the reason for these tensions is that:

252 Speeches in March 2003 and conversations in April and May 2004.

253 Conversation in April 2004.

254 The establishment of the Dedes' Council aimed at integrating dedes into the work of the federation. According to Sökefeld, co-operation has, however, been difficult and characterized by discontent among a number of dedes who have felt that the dedes' opinions have not been taken seriously (Sökefeld 2002a: 174).

> […] there is a basic contradiction in the sources of authority between dedes and the Alevi associations that can hardly be solved. Alevi organizations pride themselves on having democratic constitutions. Democracy is counted among the basic values of Alevism and it is seen as distinguishing Alevis clearly from their principal others […]. The religious institution and authority of the dede has, however, no democratic foundation. […] This contradiction between sources of authority contributes to many difficulties in the relations between dedes and Alevi associations.[255]

Among the students of the Alevilik course in Şahkulu, the contradiction between hereditary, personal authority and democratically founded power was, at an ideological level, solved through an emphasis on democracy as a personal quality. This was pointed out to me in a number of interviews and conversations.[256] One specific conversation illustrated this point very well.[257] Whilst having tea in the garden after a cem ritual, I asked a group of five semah dancers "What is it with this claim that Alevis are more democratic than others?" The immediate reaction was that this was not a claim, but a truth. Furthermore, they explained to me that democracy was not only a matter of elections or other aspects of a political system, but also a quality possessed by certain people. Alevis were inclined to be more democratic than others for several reasons: they had always been victims of oppression and stigmatization,[258] Alevilik was a religious and cultural system which in its nature was democratic, so people accepting this system gradually absorbed democracy as a personal quality, and since Alevis were secular and humanistic by nature, they were also by definition democratic.[259] Sökefeld also points out this aspect

255 Sökefeld 2002a:173.

256 Interviews January 2003, April 2003, May 2003 and conversations November 2002, March 2003 and May 2004.

257 Group conversation May 2003.

258 See Chapter Six for this part of Alevi historiography.

259 These are three attributes frequently mentioned together, which have also been pointed out and criticized by other researchers on Alevilik, such as, for example, Ocak, who writes that "[the theories which suggest] that Alevilik and Bektaşilik are secular, national and democratic belief systems, cannot be said to reflect either a historical or a scientific reality because none of them are results of a scientific approach, but rather theories with biased and ideological aims. […] because to be secular is not a description belonging to religion, but to the state's attitude towards religion in democratic systems" (Ocak 1991:52). Although I agree with these words, I also see this critique as an example of how normative Alevi literature is sometimes approached as scientific research literature. Here, it seems to be forgotten that Alevi literature does not follow scientific principles, but rather the logic of theological exegesis and the common sense of philosophical reasoning. See Markussen 2010b [2005]:86.

of self-definition among Alevis – that democratic values are what distinguish Alevis from their principal others.[260] According to the students in Şahkulu, any good leader could possess democratic values, even those functioning within non-democratic systems. Naturally, their legitimate examples of such leaders were the dedes. As the conversation progressed, I realized that "being democratic" was another way of expressing the sum of other qualities attributed to the dedes – those of education and enlightenment, high morals and rural authenticity. Unfortunately, I did not obtain Veli Akkol Dede's comment on such democratic nature and authority of the dedes, but I did get his approach to these other aspects: enlightenment, education, morals and the rural past. For him, religious enlightenment was closely related to holy descent, religious education was a practical question related to succession and, as such, lack of proper religious education for young men of holy descent was the reason the water was about to become contaminated. Finally, as I have mentioned earlier in this chapter, Veli Akkol Dede associated morals with the rural past and the purity of the villagers.

Dedes and the intellectuals

Esat Hoca, with his publishing and teaching activities, was an excellent example of what is generally called an *araştırmacı-yazar*, "researcher-writer", in Turkey. In this thesis, I have chosen to call Esat Hoca and other "researcher-writers" like him Alevi intellectuals. There are reasons for this. Alevi intellectual is a term frequently used in English texts on Alevis, although in Turkish texts, *araştırmacı-yazar* is generally preferred instead of the Turkish equivalent to intellectual, *aydın*. The term *aydın* has mostly been related to Sunni counterparts of people like Esat Hoca. Muslim intellectuals, *müslüman aydın*, or Islamist intellectuals, *islamcı aydın*, which they are also called, display similar characteristics as the Alevi intellectuals.[261] They all publish religious literature in new forms and through new means as an integral part of a new kind of public culture. They engage believers through television, quasi-scientific publications and the Internet, and they have all challenged the monopoly of religious authority of customary leaders. In many ways, these intellectuals have become spokespersons for their respective religious identities in public fora and in the mass media. Despite obvious differences in their religious orientation, Sunni and Alevi intellectuals are both products of the adapta-

260 Sökefeld 2002a:173.

261 For information about Sunni intellectuals in Turkey, see Meeker 1991 and 1994.

tion of local and oral Islam to urban life, as well as to modernity and the opportunities for mass transmission provided by new technology.

Hakan Yavuz has pointed out that mass media like television, radio, periodicals and newspapers have provided "a habitat for the evolution of native intellectuals".[262] Esat Hoca and other intellectuals connected to Şahkulu were mainly engaged in publishing literature and giving lectures, hence it is in these arenas that they have challenged the authority of the dedes. When it comes to the Internet, at the time of my fieldwork Şahkulu had (and still has) its own website (on www.sahkulu.com) but none of the regular students, or any of the other visitors I was in contact with, had regular access to the Internet. Therefore, the following reflections are not directly relevant to these students, although the Internet is of utmost importance with regards to the national and transnational context of which the foundation is a part.

On the websites of the various Alevi foundations and associations, authority may be related to the reputation and public identity of the foundation if the reader is well enough acquainted with the foundations and their websites.[263] Otherwise, the reader must find other criteria for judging the content of the homepages. This is also true for websites with even higher degrees of anonymity, such as various Alevi discussion fora. In a study of one such forum, Johannes Zimmerman found that in the interaction between people posting questions and answers and contributions to discussions and debates, the form in which knowledge was presented was important for how much response it generated.[264] Having followed the Aleviforum.net quite sporadically during the first six months of 2008, my own impression was that Zimmermann has pointed to something crucial in the way authority is distributed in these Internet fora where anonymity prevails. The forms that seemed most often to be taken at face value and, as such, gain most authority were lengthy, formalistic elaborations with frequent references to historiographical matters, lives and sayings of legendary figures and other saints, as well as frequent quotations of poetry. Although it is hard to draw any conclusions from a general impression of such a non-systematic, sporadic study, it seems to me that the form of the dedes' rather formalistic monologues and their love for Alevi poetry are often reproduced in Internet fora with

262 Yavuz 2003 [1999]:181.

263 These websites do not always explicitly announce the foundation or association they represent. For an example of a rather tangled web of Alevi websites, see Sökefeld 2002b.

264 Zimmermann 2007.

the aim of gaining authority. If this is the case, it could be an indication of continuity of dede authority in the global and transnational context of new media. In his project, Zimmermann also interviewed one of the discussants frequently publishing bits and pieces of knowledge about Alevilik in the forum he studied. The person was a twenty-five-year-old Alevi who obviously considered himself as fulfilling a function of teaching other discussants about Alevilik. He explicitly recognized the authority of the dedes (albeit with minor modifications) when he, although born outside of the hereditary holy lineages, characterized his own role in the forum as that of an "Internet Dede".[265]

Knowledge of and knowledge about Alevilik

The intellectuals were first and foremost challenging the monopoly of the dedes as teachers of Alevilik. However, in Şahkulu, it was not only a question of who was to formally teach Alevilik in courses, seminars and in ritual contexts, but also to whom the visitors chose to turn for guidance in various matters. The students of the Alevilik course sent the boys who wanted to become spiritual brothers, *musahip*, (mentioned in the anecdote introducing this chapter) to the dede for instruction. These students attended lectures in order to become familiar with their own culture and religion, but decided that the boys should consult the dede on the question of spiritual brotherhood, *musahiplik*. Whether this was because *musahiplik* was associated with the dede or whether it was because it involved making decisions on behalf of the boys is hard to tell, and both aspects were probably at play. A couple of weeks later, I asked one of the students who had been present when the boys announced their plans to become spiritual brothers, why they were sent off to the dede and not to Esat Hoca, and his reply was:

> The dede is part of a long tradition; you know he is of holy descent (*seyyid*). Most people trust that he is capable of making good decisions based on his knowledge and, you know, he is a dede! Esat Hoca is not a dede, but of course, he is very knowledgeable when it comes to Alevilik. But, he is not like the dedes, I don't know what to say, what are they? Mature (*olgun*)?[266]

Although the student had difficulties in articulating his point of view, it is, in my opinion, obvious that he was battling with two different concepts of knowledge. He tried to point to what was special about the knowledge

265 Zimmermann 2007. See also Kaya 2001 for examples of Turkish hip-hop youth in Berlin characterizing musicians as contemporary minstrels.

266 Interview May 2004.

of the dedes and therefore associated them with maturity. The knowledge of the dedes was hereditary, mystical and gradually revealed within the tarikat. Esat Hoca, on the other hand, represented intellectual knowledge taught by the means of courses, seminars and research publications. In the foundation, the prevalent idea of the knowledge possessed by the dedes was that it was manifested in them as personal wisdom and morality, and as an inherent part of their very existence. Such an approach to knowledge relied on the notion that someone can possess the totality of knowledge and fuse with it to such an extent that "the drop cannot be separated from the ocean".[267] In contrast, the knowledge represented by the intellectuals was understood as a substance in its own right that might be transmitted and transferred instrumentally by the teachers. One might say that ideally, the dedes know Alevilik, while the intellectuals know about it. These different kinds of knowledge require different teaching strategies and, accordingly, different ways of learning, which might be summed up in the distinction between knowledge as an acquirement; that is, a personal skill or knowledge which has been gained, and knowledge as an acquisition, a material possession. For Alevilik to become a personal skill or, furthermore, a personal quality, it had to be taught as a gradual advancement within the tarikat. On the other hand, the courses and seminars offered first and foremost knowledge about Alevilik.[268]

Esat Hoca, however, did not reduce knowledge about Alevilik to something outside of the tarikat. In his definition of *akıl* – that special quality of the dedes, he claimed that what was hereditary was the inclination towards recognizing the nature of the divine reality and the true character of existence. With right knowledge and right training within the tarikat, it was also possible to realize this without possessing hereditary qualities. Knowledge about Alevilik was, from his perspective, crucial in

267 Conversation with Veli Akkol Dede in May 2003. This allegory is taken from the poetry of Jelaluddin Rumi of which the mystical poetry and worldview of Alevis and Bektaşis are heavily influenced. For an English translation of the poem "A garden beyond paradise", which features the metaphors of the drop and the ocean, see Star and Shiva 1992:148–149. This allegory was also presented to me when I interviewed Bektaşi *Babas* in Ankara and Hacıbektaş for my Masters thesis in 1999 (Markussen 2000:69).

268 These two concepts of knowledge were presented, in an email correspondence with a Bektaşi member in Ankara in 2000, as the difference between knowledge and wisdom: "[…] knowledge is extremely significant to utilize the tools around and in yourself in order to unite them. However, to put the pieces in the right places, you have to improve your wisdom. And, through personal mystical experience, which is actually a 'gift', you begin knowing yourself". See Markussen 2000:71.

personal development and purification, *tasfiye*, and, therefore, knowledge *about* Alevilik was necessary in order to acquire knowledge *of* Alevilik. In Esat Hoca's teachings, knowledge about Alevilik could become a skill or even a personal quality. His strong emphasis on reason and intellect should also be understood as a strategy to balance his own authority to teach Alevilik with the inherited position of the dedes. Some of his students also strategically chose the same position in their endeavour to learn Alevilik and in their quests for piety. One of them was Evrim, who was determined to become a dede. Her perspectives will be presented in Chapter Six.

Summary

In an earlier publication, I have stated that dedes have been losing ground to a group of newly emerging authorities of intellectuals. As a result of this, dedes have either embraced new kinds of authority and means of passing on Alevi religion and culture, or ended up as ritual specialists.[269] In this chapter, I have added some complexity to this picture by looking at ways in which the dede's authority was defined and upheld in relation to other authorities within the organizational framework of the foundation.

The dedes had something the intellectuals and the representatives of the foundation did not have: they had an inherited subtle ability which in Esat Hoca's teachings was defined within the concept of *akıl*. They were, however, not living saints like we might expect in such a Sufi-oriented context. Besides this, the dedes were also special in another sense – they were symbols of the rural past as opposed to the present urban conditions represented by the intellectuals. Further, I will maintain that they manifested the importance of the past in urban, present-day Istanbul. Hence, in my opinion, this was why the criticism of the practices of contemporary dedes, presented and analysed in chapters two and three, was so central in the religious discourse in the foundation.

Authority is never a constant personal quality. It is always attributed, taken or mainly an outcome of a specific situation or relation. Various authorities naturally have different perspectives on the nature of each other's authorities – sometimes they match and sometimes they do not. In Şahkulu, Esat Hoca and Veli Akkol Dede had different concerns about the nature (and the future) of the *dedelik* institution, but they were both attributing authority to each other and to the positions and roles they had in the community. The visitors' approaches to the authority of Veli

269 Markussen 2010b [2005].

Akkol Dede and Esat Hoca respectively were not only dependent on their personalities and titles. The situations in which the students, for example, found themselves when learning from Esat Hoca and Veli Akkol Dede were also decisive in the ways they were approached. Learning from Veli Akkol Dede meant, most of the time, either to participate in the cem ritual or to engage in sessions of questions and answers in his office. None of these situations had scope for critical discussions or articulation of differences of opinions in the ways common in the Alevilik course. In fact, the Alevilik lectures provided the only formal arena in Şahkulu where students of all ages, antecedents and origins could critically discuss and let their voices be heard in the continuous process of systematization of Alevi beliefs and practices. In the next chapter, I take a closer look at the Alevilik lectures, the processes of systematization and the content of the particular form of Alevilik taught in the classroom.

CHAPTER FIVE

Mediating Alevilik

Intellectual readings of poetry in the Alevilik lectures

Sundays were busy days in Şahkulu. Most of the devotional and educational activities were scheduled for that day, so the garden was crowded with students from the various courses mingling with other visitors, sipping tea, waiting for the cem ritual and the subsequent distribution of the sacrificial meat. Occasionally, brides and grooms visited for blessings and young boys in prince-like dresses proudly strolled around the compound with their families as a part of their circumcision celebrations. Every now and then, the foundation organized seminars or public speeches on a chosen topic held either outdoors or in the conference room, and sometimes representatives of the foundation showed interested journalists, researchers and other foreigners around and willingly elaborated on the range of activities and services they offered to the community.

The lectures of the Alevilik course were held on both Saturdays and Sundays. Regular students participated on both days, but it was mostly on Sundays that the classroom was packed with additional people and that the discussions were most lively. The regular students were familiar with the teachers; in particular, they were well acquainted with Esat Hoca and Şakir Baba's lines of argumentation and ideological outlooks. They also seemed to have a common approach to the lectures as arenas for teaching and learning as well as to the ways in which knowledge should be presented in this forum. This was not always the case with a number of other participants coming to the lectures every now and then, and this sometimes led to lively discussions and even awkward situations. It was in such an awkward situation in one of the lectures that I first came to ponder on the effects that intellectual mediation of Alevi beliefs and practices have on the common understanding of Alevilik. In this specific lecture, whenever Şakir Baba referred to any of the poets celebrated within the community, an older man present at the lecture interrupted

him by reciting a poem by the poet in question. The man knew quite a lot of poems by heart and he recited one after the other with a powerful, sonorous voice. It seemed like the first poem was a welcomed illustration of the intellectual and theological inquiry of Şakir Baba, but after a couple of poems the students started giggling amongst themselves as Şakir Baba kindly tried to conclude the man's recital. Unexpected as these interruptions were, it was reasonable that Şakir Baba had other plans for the lecture, and although it is important to note that the old man was not an agitator in any way, the students obviously considered it an act of disrespect. During the tea break after the lesson, it also became clear that the students considered the recitation of even well-chosen, thematically relevant poems as disturbing elements in the lectures. The lectures were understood as a context of formal transmission of Alevilik where devotion and affective modes of mediation had given way to intellectual inquiry.

It was the performance of poetry within the formal setting of the lectures that created ambiguities, not its mere presence. Poems were used in the lectures as illustrations and starting points for discussions on various aspects of Alevilik and poetry was often utilized as evidence for claims of historiographical and theological character. This chapter focuses on the presence of poetry in the Alevilik lectures and describes ways in which certain poems were read and used in the transmission of Alevi knowledge. Readings of poetry in the intellectual atmosphere of the lectures was one example of how the teachers balanced old and new traditions in their modern and urban endeavours of systematizing Alevilik. Ultimately, this chapter is about contemporary mediation of Alevilik, and I pose the question of how this specific mediation influences the definition and content of contemporary, urban Alevilik in Şahkulu.

The use of poetry in Alevi religion and culture

In Alevi culture, orally transmitted tales, songs and poems have been the means by which traditions have been remembered, interpreted and constantly redefined.[270] The main institution for the maintenance, transmission and reinterpretation of Alevi tradition has been the *aşık* institution. Travelling around the countryside, performing and interpreting self-composed poems as well as poems of other past and contemporary bards, the *aşık* has passed on epic traditions and mystical knowledge to the rural population. Through creation of new poems, the *aşik* has also

270 Dressler 2003:115.

had the power to reinterpret traditions.[271] The typical *aşık* repertoire has comprised epic tales, songs of love and devotion, religious hymns as well as social and political commentaries. Although the *aşık* tradition has never been particular to Alevi culture – but rather a wider phenomenon of rural Eastern Anatolia, the majority of *aşıks* have an Alevi background.[272] The most typical themes in the *aşık* poetry have been iteration of religious aspects of the Alevi worldview like the adoration of Ali and the rest of the twelve imams and the rules of the spiritual path, as well as commentaries on historical Alevi uprisings and the historiography of continuous injustice.

Migration, urbanization and modernity have, like with other central Alevi institutions like *dedelik*, *musahiplik* and the cem ritual, influenced and transformed the Alevi *aşık* institution. In contemporary Turkey, the most famous *aşıks* are musicians performing in concerts and on radio and television. Outside of the entertainment business, *aşıks* perform mostly in cem evis and in cultural and religious events like festivals and other gatherings of a considerable size and significance. The poetry created by both past and present *aşıks* is, however, still widely used in a variety of formal and informal settings. Further, the poetry of mediaeval mystics and other deceased saints is widely distributed and appreciated throughout the country. Some of these, like Rumi, Yunus Emre and Hacı Bektaş Veli have been appropriated as symbols of modern ideology and are promoted as cultural heritage by the Turkish state.[273]

In Şahkulu at the time of my fieldwork, knowledge transmission was profoundly oral in both formal and informal contexts. Monologues of religious and worldly authorities and the rather formalized performances of the cem ritual constituted the main formal occasions for transmission of Alevilik. Both in and outside of the cem ritual recitation and singing of poetry, as well as the storytelling about the lives of the poets and saints, were constitutive parts of the speeches of the dedes. Informally, songs and poems were performed in every kind of social gathering, be it a full-day picnic in the countryside or a random gathering at the foundation where like-minded visitors shared experiences, thoughts and gossip.

Although the literacy rate among the younger generation was high and most of them had completed secondary school (some had even continued

271 Moyle characterizes the work of the *aşik* as recomposing and conserving tradition (Moyle 1990:144). Hande Birkalan-Gedik has presented interesting research results on female *aşıks* in the Alevi culture (Birkalan-Gedik 2007).

272 Clarke 1999:145.

273 Soileau 2006.

through high school and got accepted into university), they were not in the habit of reading books. More easily digestible texts such as periodicals or information on the Internet was generally not consulted either.[274] One reason for this was lack of access to the Internet and information about how to orient oneself in the jungle of published literature, another was that reading was not considered to be the most reliable and efficient way of learning. Still, the written word was highly valued, especially in the form of published texts. The reflections of Tord Olsson on this point fit well with the general impression I got from Şahkulu:

> The buying and keeping of books also seem to be an epigraphic and even "talismanic" phenomenon with formulaic and iconic ingredients. The book and its title, in the bookstore and on the bookshelf at home, or an issue of an Alevi magazine that has been left on the table demonstrate and define the presence of an identity.[275]

Describing the presence of books and periodicals as tokens of identity, Olsson rightfully understands written texts as part of a material culture. From this perspective, the publications are tools in the process of creating social, cultural and religious space in Turkish society, but we may also discern the contours of another debate – that of the relationship between the written and the oral. Olsson claims that what we are dealing with in contemporary Alevi communities is the scripturalization of an entire religion and "not specifically […] the more limited processes by which individual oral traditions, oral texts, or pieces of orature are committed to writing".[276] One vital aspect of the scripturalization process Olsson talks about is a specific way of relating to ideas of intellectuality and science as integral parts of being modern in the Turkish context. I chose to call this an intellectuality trend in the transmission of Alevi knowledge. The appreciation of the written word and the intellectual systematization of Alevi knowledge create new ways of relating to oral texts and traditions

274 With reference to the extensive amount of research published on the use of various media among Muslims around the world, this point may seem unexpected. The multitude of Alevi websites, chat forums and printed periodicals are indications that this might not represent the Alevi youth in general. For more information about Alevi activity on the Internet, see Sökefeld 2002b; 2008.

275 Olsson 1998b:206. Vorhoff came to the same conclusion in her article about Alevi literature in Turkey, when she stated: "[…] Alevi society is for the most part not a reading public. However, actual reading seems to be not so important. Even if the books only decorate the showcases of the bookshops and the bookshelves in private houses, they may still function as signals and symbols" (Vorhoff 1998b:35).

276 Olsson 1998b:204.

such as poems and songs. Like, for example, in informal settings where poetry was shared and appreciated, written copies of the poetry were not of importance. When a group of friends gathered on the compound to play the *saz* and sing together, the fact that the various poems and hymns were to be found in published volumes in the bookshop nearby was not at all an issue. Even when there was a disagreement about the passages in the lyrics or the melody, consulting the books did not seem to be an option. As with the recitation of poems in Şakir Baba's lecture, the border between spheres of formal, intellectual teaching and oral transmission sometimes seemed rather clear-cut.

The Alevilik course, however, displayed multiple examples of balancing and synthesizing oral traditions with what was understood as contemporary, modern knowledge. It was in these lectures that the intellectuality trend was most visible as a specific Alevi experience of Turkish modernity.

Approaches to intellectuality in the Alevilik lectures

The Alevilik lectures were modelled after academic studies in ways that resembled scholarly lectures and presentation of research reports. In fact, the lectures often followed the topics of the written material prepared for the course. This material was mostly photocopied published texts, either in their original published form or in stapled compendia. As most of the written material had been prepared by Esat Hoca and Şakir Baba, their lectures were characterized by them reading aloud and quoting from their own published texts. In general, the students did not read much of this material; they only used to glance at it right before and during the lectures.

This focus on scholarly activity was, however, not guided by scientific principles, but instead followed logics of normative reasoning. The presentations during the lectures, for example, did not refer to empirical studies for legitimacy for their claims, but to other writers honoured for their religious ranks or university degrees. Both in the lectures and publications, it was common to use the marker Prof. Dr or Doç Dr in references in order to legitimate various assertions. Interestingly, in the case of the writer and Bektaşi *halifebaba* Bedri Noyan,[277] the references Doç Dr.

277 Bedri Noyan was the *dedebaba* of the Bektaşi Order in Turkey from 1960–1997. He spent much of his life preparing an encyclopaedic work with the title *Bütün yönleriyle Bektaşilik ve Alevilik*, "Bektaşilik and Alevilik in all aspects". The first volume was published posthumously in 1998, one year after he passed away, and six more volumes have been published successively up until 2006. The seven first volumes comprise about 3,700 pages and six more volumes are expected to be published. It is an ambitious pro-

Halifebaba carried both academic and religious authority. Furthermore, when it came to valuation of sources, the logic of Alevi exegesis was quite the opposite of the general understanding of research as an accumulative process; old publications were considered more valuable than newer ones. In a conversation about sources of knowledge about Shamanism, Esat Hoca made this clear, referring to older publications: "We have valuable Turkish sources on Shamanism, like for example Abdulkadir Inan's book from 1954, and now we have newly acquired access to interesting research on Shamanism from Russia, published in the 1920s and 1930s".[278] These books were, in his view, closer to the original knowledge of Shamanism as well as religion in general and were therefore more authentic sources for people seeking the origin of religion.[279]

The Alevilik course was a part of the new urban orientation of Alevi communities, teaching piety with new means. The teachers of the course basically adapted to the demands of the contemporary climate of the community, but they were also heedful of the importance of the authenticity of traditions. This balancing sometimes created awkward situations, such as the old man reciting poems in the middle of Şakir Baba's lecture, but more often it resulted in a synthesis of new and old, which heightened the sincerity and increased the legitimacy of the knowledge they were communicating. The combination of the experienced knowledge of Alevilik, symbolized in the poetry of holy figures, with the knowledge about Alevi beliefs and practices, represented by contemporary intellectuals, successfully established authoritative interpretations of the truth of Alevilik: its content, form and history. One might claim that the truth about Alevilik created in the lectures was a dialogical truth established through interaction and mutual influence.[280] Further, I will claim, this intellectuality trend in the transmission of Alevi knowledge served a double purpose increasing the status of both oral and written traditions. The truth of the knowledge conveyed in poems was established through modern means of knowledge transmission and references to science – and the value of the intellectual inquiries was established through poetic examples.[281]

ject aiming at giving a comprehensive overview of all aspects of Alevilik and Bektaşilik, and it has become a standard work among both Alevis and Bektaşis.

278 Conversation May 2004.

279 The works *La Religion Des Turcs et des Mongols* (1984) and *L'Asie Centrale. Histoire et Civilizations* (1997) of the French Turkologue Jean-Paul Roux have been translated into Turkish (2001, 1999) and were also among the works Esat Hoca mentioned as authoritative sources of Central Asian and Turkish history.

280 The term "dialogical truth" is borrowed from Phelps 2004:62.

281 Emphasis on science as a true guide to life is a particularity specific to the history of

Readings of poetry in the alevilik lectures

In an interesting article on Alevi poetry, Markus Dressler illustrates ways in which political themes are embedded in religious contexts in Alevi poetry.[282] He points to an aspect of poetry as a medium for knowledge transmission and reinterpretation of tradition crucial for the understanding of the role of poetry in Alevi oral culture when he states that, "The medium of the poem offers a distinct voice that – through the use of stylistic devices of metaphors and analogies – allows the formulation of positions not necessarily expressible in prose".[283] He further demonstrates how to disentangle the web of religious and political themes in Alevi poetry and reflects on the inherent double-layered esoteric nature of Alevi knowledge. In the following, I turn to demonstrations of esoteric reading of poetry in the Alevilik lectures and show ways in which the teachers utilized inner and outer complimentary dimensions of Alevi poetry for purposes of theological and historiographical character.

Reading of the poem Kara Toprak by Aşik Veysel

It was not uncommon that the lectures were spent analysing poetry in order to establish the Bektaşi identity of the poets. Thus, poems were read with the aim of finding more or less typical Bektaşi mystical references. In one such lecture, Şakir Baba presented a poem called Kara Toprak, "Dark Soil", by the famous Alevi poet and *ozan* Aşık Veysel Şatıroğlu.[284] He claimed that the last of the forty *makam*, the one you arrive at when you reach the state of *insan-i kamil*, was called "the post of being soil". Then he further explained that the gradual purification of people advancing on the path of the tarikat was advancement towards becoming "like the soil", that is, to become a person who will always serve other people no matter how badly he or she is treated. According to Şakir Baba, no one has expressed this better than Âşık Veysel:

Turkish modernity. According to Ibrahim Kaya, radicalization of dualities between modernist intellectuals and the ulema is an integral part of the Kemalist project (Kaya 2004:147–148).

282 Dressler 2003:110.

283 Dressler 2003:109–110.

284 Aşık Veysel (1894–1973) was one of the most popular *aşık*s of the twentieth century. His poetry has been characterized as a complete subscription to the Kemalist nation-state project and therefore been defined as a national treasure of the Turkish state and criticized by traditionally oriented Alevis (Zelyut 1989:41).

Koyun verdi, kuzu verdi, süt verdi;	It[285] gave sheep, it gave lamb, it gave milk;
Yemek verdi, ekmek verdi, et verdi.	It gave food, it gave bread, it gave meat.
Kazma ile döğmeyince kıt verdi	When I didn't hit the mattock it gave scarcity
Benim sâdık yârım kara topraktır.	My faithful beloved dark soil.
Karnın yardım kazmayınan belinen;	I split your womb with my mattock, with my spade;
Yüzün yırttım tırnağınan, elinen	I scratched your face with my nails, with my fingers
Yine beni karşıladı gülünen	Still you approached me smiling
Benim sâdık yârım kara topraktır.	My faithful beloved dark soil.[286]

Using these two selected verses of the poem as illustrations, Şakir Baba stated that

> Everyone who wants to perceive the inner knowledge and live accordingly has to risk becoming soil. If we do not accept the risk or cannot run the chance of becoming soil, then we should give up this path. […] The people of the *tasavvuf* [the mystics] have to decide to become like the soil. No matter how badly you treat the soil of Veysel, it will still give. When you scratch its face it approaches you with roses. If you have made the decision to become like this, you should commit to the path.[287]

Then he referred to the text he had given the students and quoted an elaboration on the term *toprak*: "*Turâb* is Ali's most beloved name. The word means *toprak* [soil]. In the nefes called Kara Toprak [Dark Soil] the famous thinker Âşık Veysel explained the morality of Ali".[288]

The interpretation of this poem was an excellent example of how Şakir Baba illustrated the art of esoteric reading of poetry during the lectures. It was apparent that this particular lecture was aiming at teaching the students how a poem may carry several layers of meaning. By presenting the hidden meaning of the term *toprak* he openly revealed the esoteric understanding of a poem that was not only read within Alevi-Bektaşi circles. With such a mystical analysis, the poet, who is also celebrated as

285 The soil may be translated with it or he/she, as it is not differentiated in the Turkish language. A translation with "he" would be closer to the esoteric understanding of the soil as a metaphor for Ali.

286 The poem can be found in its entirety on http://siir.gen.tr/siir/a/asik_veysel/kara_toprak.htm.

287 Alevilik course May 2004.

288 Keçeli 2004:20.

an important part of Turkey's cultural heritage, was located among the many Alevi-Bektaşi mystics through history.

A similar strategy was used in another lecture by a dede who was giving only a couple of lectures in the course, Dursun Gümüşoğlu. In his lecture, poems of Yunus Emre were analysed in order to establish that he was not only a mystic, but also an initiated Bektaşi dervish. The poems were read with the aim of more or less finding evident references to the "Four doors and Forty posts" (*dört kapı, kırk makam*). Since it was believed that Hacı Bektaş Veli taught the forty posts, references to these would distinguish Bektaşis from other mystics and consequently establish the Bektaşi identity of Yunus Emre.[289]

Both these readings, in addition to demonstrating the art of esoteric reading, aimed at establishing national icons within Alevi history. Therefore, these lectures were integral parts of a more general creation of an Alevi historiography that will be analysed in Chapter Six. These poems served as examples investing the teaching of Alevi history with authority and legitimacy.

Readings of deification of Ali in Alevi poetry

In other lectures, esoteric readings of poetry were used to communicate with assumptions of the nature of Alevilik present among researchers and other non-Alevis. An example of this was the reading of a poem well known among both Alevis and researchers on Alevilik. It was created by the last *postnişin* of the *tekke*, Mehmed Ali Hilmi Dedebaba, and as there exists several versions of this poem, I quote at length the one used in the lecture:

Ayine tuttum yüzüme,	I held the mirror to my face,
Ali göründü gözüme.	Ali appeared to my eye.
Nazar eyledim özüme,	I caught a sight of my heart
Ali göründü gözüme.	Ali appeared to my eye.
Âdem Baba Havva ile,	With our father Adam, and Eve,
Hem allemel'esma ile,	With the knowledge of the name of all things[290]
Çark-ı felek sema ile,	With this turning world and the visible sky,
Ali göründü gözüme.	Ali appeared to my eye.

289 Gümüşoğlu 2000.

290 With reference to the sura 2:31 in the Koran: "And He taught Adam the nature/Of all things; then he placed them/Before the Angels, and said: Tell Me/The nature of these if ye are right" (Ali 1938 [1934]).

Hazret-ı Nuh neciyyullah,	God's confidant (hazret) Noa
Hem İbrahim Halilullah,	God's beloved Abraham
Sîna'daki Kelîmullah,	Moses who heard the words of God at Sinai
Ali göründü gözüme.	Ali appeared to my eye.
İsa'yı Ruhullah oldur	He is Jesus Christ
İki âlemde Şah oldur,	He is the Shah of the two worlds
Müminlere penah oldur,	He is the protector of the believers,
Ali göründü gözüme.	Ali appeared to my eye.
Ali evvel, Ali âhır,	Ali is the first, Ali is the last,
Ali bâtın, Ali zâhir,	Ali is the hidden, Ali is the manifest
Ali tayyib, Ali tahir,	Ali is good, Ali is pure
Ali göründü gözüme.	Ali appeared to my eye.
Ali candır, Ali canan,	Ali is [the] life, Ali is [the] beloved
Ali dindir, Ali iman.	Ali is [the] religion, Ali is [the] faith
Ali rahîm, Ali rahman,	Ali is [the] Merciful, Ali is [the] Compassionate
Ali göründü gözüme.	Ali appeared to my eye.
Hilmi gedayi bir kemter,	Hilmi is an unesteemed
Görür gözüm, dilim söyler.	My eye sees, my tongue speaks.
Her nereye kılsam nazar,	Wherever I look,
Ali göründü gözüme.	Ali appeared to my eye.[291]

Tord Olsson is one, among others, who has argued for an apparent identification of Ali with God in Alevi poetry.[292] With parts of the poem cited above as illustrations, he has stated that the poem is:

> […] elaborated on a much-liked motif in Alevi literature: A person who looks in a mirror does not see himself, but Ali, and indirectly God. […] The Turkish Alevi and Bektaşi literature is rich with examples illustrating the identification of Ali with the divine reality, by attributing to him some of the "beautiful names" otherwise given to God.[293]

The most clear-cut example from the poem is obviously the line referring to Ali as the Merciful and the Compassionate – adjectives that are used in definite form solely about God in the Koran. In Esat Hoca's lectures, this phenomenon was referred to as the deification of Ali, *Aliallahilik*, and it was argued that the emotional character of poetry as opposed to

291 To be found in *Mehmet Ali Hilmi Dedebaba Divani*, see Noyan 2006.
292 See also Olsson 1988 for an analysis of the divine epiphany in Nusairi scriptures.
293 Olsson 1998b:172–173.

other forms of communication makes it a preferred means of expressing overwhelming emotions and piercing thoughts. This was explained as the main reason why we may detect elements of *Aliallahilik* in Alevi poetry. Thus, it was not an illustration of how Alevis identify Ali as God, only a burst of emotions. [294]

Şakir Baba, on the other hand, offered another interpretation of the poem and ultimately gave another explanation for the supposed *Aliallahilik* within Alevilik by focusing on the qualities of *insan-ı kamil* and the idea of correspondence between the macrocosmos of the universe and the microcosmos within each human being. By illustrating the relationship between God and the human being with the sun and its sunlight, Şakir Baba argued that even if it is right to say that humans are not God, they are not apart from God either.[295] Within his perspective, the message of the poem was not so much to identify Ali with God, as to express that every human being is a part of the divine reality. Ali is God and God is Ali – but everyone is a part of God, as the whole universe is reflected in the creation of the human being. Holy people like prophets and saints have a special position since they have obtained the ultimate understanding of the divine reality and therefore reached the state of the perfect being, *insan-ı kamil*. Muhammad was understood as the ultimate example of *insan-ı kamil*, and his revelations were perceived as expressions of his feelings. The angel Gabriel was thus understood as a symbol of his wisdom, and angels in general were nothing but various characteristics of the human being. If we re-read the poem from the perspective of Şakir Baba, Mehmed Ali Hilmi Dedebaba does not only see Ali when he looks in the mirror because Ali is God, he catches a sight of his own heart as well because God, Ali and human beings are to be identified with each other. In one of the following stanzas, Ali is recognized as God's confidant Noa, as God's beloved Abraham and as Moses who heard the words of God at Sinai – an expression of identification between Ali and the line of prophets in the Koran. It is worth mentioning here, however, that the stanzas elaborating on Ali's qualities as the first and the last, the hidden and the manifest, as religion and as faith, and ultimately as the Merciful and the Compassionate were also understood by Şakir Baba as records of

294 The apotheosis of Ali is considered the cornerstone of the religious systems of the *ghulat* sects. The question of whether *aliallahilik* is an integral part of Alevilik is therefore particularly relevant to categorizations of Alevis and Bektaşis together with other so-called extremist Shiites. In this respect, Moosa argues that although some of these sects deny it, "there is ample evidence in their prayers and rituals to demonstrate this deification of Ali" (Moosa 1988[1987]: 50).

295 Keçeli 2004:30.

Ali's divine attributes. He was clear, however, in his interpretation of the poem as an expression of the foundation of Bektaşi mysticism, which he claimed to be the identification of the human being with God and not excessive veneration of Ali.

Teaching the art of esoteric reading was not only a path to the inner Alevi beliefs and identities, but also a question of worldly, social and historical positioning. Through their interpretations of poems, the teachers of the Alevilik course commented on ongoing discussions among fellow Alevis in Turkish society and among researchers interested in the nature and history of Alevilik. The comments on excessive veneration of Ali, for example, positioned Alevis away from other Ali-oriented esoteric minority groups in the Middle East and steered the attention towards more mainstream Turkish Sufism. Attempts to define national icons historically within the Bektaşi tradition carved space for Alevis and assigned them a formative role in the historical as well as contemporary Turkish society.

Teaching Alevilik intellectually: What does mediation add to the Alevi memory?

The intellectual mediation of Alevi beliefs and practices was centred on texts in various forms. Whether poetry, legends or historical and theological expositions, "texts by themselves are silent; they become socially relevant through their enunciation, through citation, through acts of reading, reference and interpretation".[296] The knowledge abstracted from the texts is made socially relevant through the forms in which it is taught as well as through the web of social relations in which the knowledge passes.

Alevi institutions like *dedelik*, *musahiplik*, the cem ritual and the *aşık* institution all exist(ed) in order to secure the passing on of Alevi traditions and knowledge. These institutions have come into being, developed and adjusted in accordance with the needs and possibilities of Alevi communities. Under contemporary conditions, intellectual mediation of Alevi knowledge has become one of the forms through which Alevi communities learn about their religion and culture. As with all forms of mediation, the intellectual emphasis has influenced both the form and the content of Alevi knowledge. Published literature, stapled compendia, photocopied poetry and lecture notes are all part of the processes of scripturalization which produces libraries of available and non-changing information on past and present Alevi beliefs and practices. For the purpose of understanding the specificity of intellectual mediation of Alevi knowledge,

296 Lambek 1993:136.

I turn to Jan Assmann and his reflections on different forms of social memory. Communicative memory, he states, is oral and transmitted from generation to generation, while cultural memory also includes stored memory verbalized in writings.[297] Knowledge of the near past of Alevi village life, remembered through individual experiences, collective story-telling and criticism of contemporary conditions, and narratives of the distant pasts of religious and cultural influences on Alevilik are today verbalized and scripturalized in a number of written genres. Borrowing Assmann's terminology, the changes brought by the intellectual mediation of Alevi knowledge establishes the collective remembrance of Alevilik as a cultural memory. With this distinction, it follows that "With cultural memory, depths of time open up".[298] Cultural memory goes far beyond the time span of other forms of communicative memory that rely on actual experiences and direct communications of others. With the written word available – although seldom read or consulted by anyone other than leaders, intellectuals and researchers – the acts and processes of teaching Alevilik benefit from the inevitable effects of narrativity and historicity. The essence of these processes is what Ann Rigney formulates as "the significance of one moment […] deferred to another point in time"[299] and the result is a story where the experience of time becomes meaningful and where patterns in history are established.[300] In other words, knowledge of a multitude of Alevi beliefs and practices from dispersed geographical areas and from various historical epochs become systematized into a meaningful and more or less coherent Alevilik.

Summary

In this chapter, the ways in which poetry was used for the purposes of education and identity building have served as examples of the intellectual transmission of knowledge in the Alevilik course. Rising out of the teachings presented in the classroom was a system of beliefs and practices called Alevilik, with built-in ambiguities and tensions between intellectual inquiry and devotional practices, between reverence for the rural past and necessities for new urban orientations, and between inner sciences and public positioning. As a form of mediation, the intellectual emphasis added a considerable amount of truth to the knowledge taught

297 Assmann 2006.
298 Assmann 2006:24.
299 Rigney 2010:101.
300 Rigney 1991:594–595.

in the lectures, and the use of poetry as a medium complemented this truth with authority and legitimacy. The intellectual form of knowledge transmission in the Alevilik lectures was, however, not only a matter of form and authority. It was also an important force in the development of a definition of Alevis as modern and science-bound. The content of the Alevilik lectures also revealed the importance of intellectuality as a part of the inherent Alevi nature. Explanations for this were found in the rather specific Alevi historiography presented in the Alevilik lectures. This historiography is the topic of the following chapter.

CHAPTER SIX

Alevi historiography
"Sufism of the Anatolian people"

In one of the lectures of the Alevilik course, when Esat Hoca was in the midst of a lengthy elaboration on "the humanistic dimension of Anatolian Alevilik", one of the students raised her hand and asked: "Why are we heterodox?" In his reply, Esat Hoca referred to the collection of photocopies from one of his publications given to the students as course material, and by quoting and expounding selected passages he elegantly integrated concepts of heterodoxy, orthodoxy and syncretism with ideas of the moral superiority of Alevis. "Utterly", he quoted from the course material,

> Anatolian Alevilik is the philosophy of the traditional thoughts of the Anatolian people. This means that the sources of enlightenment are many and in this context, that it is the wisdom or the teachings of dervishes; it is the Sufism of the people (*halk sufiliği*).[301]

As "Sufism of the Anatolian people", he depicted Alevilik as a creation of values derived from three major sources: Central Asia, ancient Anatolia and monotheistic, especially Islamic, mysticism. According to his line of argumentation, Alevilik developed through eras of foreign influence and had therefore acquired the qualities of religious and cultural syncretism, *birleştirme*. The multitude of influences was, however, often reduced to a background for a demonstration of how Alevilik supposedly had persisted through the co-existence and symbiosis of the good days, as well as the deterioration and suffering of the dark ages.[302] The history of Anatolian Alevis had made them naturally disposed to collective life and

301 All the quotations from the Alevilik course in this chapter are taken from lectures in May 2004. When the teacher was quoting from the course material, references are given both to the photocopied material, which is unpublished, and to where it can be found in his published writings as follows: "Korkmaz 2004: 47. Also to be found in Korkmaz 2000a:117".

302 Markussen 2010[2005]b.

resistance against official authorities. These were the reasons why Alevis were humanistic in nature and naturally democratic beings – in direct opposition to elitist and intolerant Sunni Muslims in Turkey; a label that is used interchangeably with orthodoxy in the historical development of Alevilik as a syncretism, and for Esat Hoca this was "not a claim of belief, but an assertion based on knowledge".[303]

In Chapter Five, the use of poetry in the Alevilik course was described in order to demonstrate the importance of intellectuality in the lectures as specific forms of knowledge transmission and collective remembering in the foundation. In this chapter, the teachings of Esat Hoca and Şakir Baba will serve a related purpose, namely that of illustrating the importance of historical, cultural and religious syncretism in the collective remembrance of the Alevi past and celebration of a specific Alevi nature. The idea of Alevilik as "Sufism of the Anatolian people" encompassed the teachings of both lecturers; the specific form of Turkish Sufism taught by Şakir Baba, as well as Esat Hoca's detailed descriptions of similarities between Alevi traditions and aspects of selected cultures and religions in Anatolian history. Syncretism is a trait that has been ascribed to Alevi religion and culture from a range of different historical and contemporary actors interested in the definition of Alevilik, and the Alevi syncretism taught by Esat Hoca and Şakir Baba revealed both a leftist and a nationalist ideological heritage.

Esat Hoca's analyses of Alevilik as syncretistic

Esat Hoca often started his lectures by stating that: "the 'Asian values', which have created the Anatolian Alevilik we see today, have been filtered through various channels".[304] He then combined highly stereotyped features of Shamanism, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism/Mazdaism and Manichaeism with selected ideas about the nature of Alevilik. His descriptions were rhetorically presented in various ways. Similarities were sometimes understood as continuities, like ideas that the drum of the shamans at a certain time in history had been replaced by the *saz*, or that the moral Alevi creed *Eline, diline, beline sahip ol!* "Be Master of your hands, your tongue and your loins!" is a continuation of the Manichaean trinity of mouth, hand and heart.[305] The nationalist historian and turcologist Irène Mélikoff has also highlighted this last correlation.[306]

303 Korkmaz 2004:87–88. Also to be found in Korkmaz 2000a:185.
304 Korkmaz 2004:55. Also to be found in Korkmaz 2000a:129–130.
305 Korkmaz 2004:54. Also to be found in Korkmaz 2000a:128.
306 Mélikoff 2004:302. See also Ocak 1997:200.

Sometimes, chosen stereotypes were presented so as to legitimate each other. A typical example of this was done when Esat Hoca traced the idea that Alevis are liberal in their treatment of women to a conception of Central Asian shamanistic societies as defined by inherent matriarchy based on female totem animals and presence of both male and female shamans – although, as he explained it, it had to be a man who "behaved like a woman".[307] In another lecture, Mazdaism was chosen to represent this kind of Alevi socio-moral superiority. In that lecture, an underlying socialist notion of material possessions as common goods in Mazdaism paved the way for a kind of equality among Alevis, erasing social categories such as gender and class.[308]

At other times, key concepts of Alevilik and Central Asian heritage were rhetorically established as a centre of a matrix of wider religious constellations. The Buddhist idea of the soul purified from suffering and reaching a state of completeness in nirvana was mentioned as an important historical source of influence on Alevi mysticism, mostly because Buddhism was considered to be the source of all kinds of mysticism.[309] However, in the context of Shamanism, the Islamic mystic concepts of *batin* and *zahir* were argued to be reformulations of the responsibility of the shamans to create and maintain contact between heaven, earth and the underworld.

In the same way as Buddhism and Shamanism were given the prominence of being modifiers of Islamic concepts in the example above, myths and legends from Central Asia were sometimes given the same status. The Alevi understanding of the Shia teaching of the twelfth imam Mehdi in occultation, for example, was persistently explained as influenced by the cosmology in Zoroaster's teachings where the world is the arena for a battle between God, *Ahura Mazda* and the spirit of evil, *Ehrimen*, – a battle in which *Ahura Mazda* will finally prevail and become fully omnipotent.

Although most of the historiographical combinations were focused on the distant past in the lands of Anatolia, Esat Hoca also related his ideas to sociological research on changes in Alevi communities in the contemporary, urban contexts. He spoke, for example, about the new kind of transmission of knowledge in the contexts of the Alevi associations,

307 Korkmaz 2004: 49. Also to be found in Korkmaz 2000a:122.

308 Korkmaz 2004:54. Also to be found in Korkmaz 2000a:129. Esat Hoca defined both Mazdaism and Manichaeism as Zoroastrian faiths and ascribed the Manichaean form of equating evil with matter and good with spirit to Mazdaism and the more general Zoroastrian dualism. For studies on Zoroastrianism see Stausberg 2008, 2004.

309 Korkmaz 2004:51. Also to be found in Korkmaz 2000a:125.

and found the roots of the newly established courses and seminars in the conception of the shaman, who, even though he or she may receive supernatural skills by lineage or by being chosen by the spirits, still has to go through training and examination in order to be accepted by the community. He also cited the well-known poem by the sixteenth-century poet Pir Sultan Abdal, *Uyur idik uyardılar*, "We were asleep, we have been awakened", in a lengthy description of the importance of the Alevi associations in the revival of Alevilik. He further traced the sources of Pir Sultan Abdal's inspiration in the Manichaean creation myth. His reasoning was identical with that of Mélikoff, found in one of her works that is translated into Turkish.[310]

Evolution as the foundation of Esat Hoca's syncretistic Alevilik

As a systematization of historical influences on Alevi beliefs and practices, Esat Hoca's reasoning was not particularly consistent and often required a certain degree of holistic thinking – and imagination as well. My aim is not, however, to point out inconsistencies in the teachings presented in the Alevilik lectures. In fact, systematization does not necessarily produce systems, but may also create "unified repertoires", as Michael Lambek prefers to call it in his study of local cultural and religious discourses in Mayotte.[311] In his work, he points to the inherent inconsistent character of such repertoires:

> In any cultural or personal repertoire there will be concepts or paradigms that cannot be related logically to one another, hence organic and mechanical metaphors – knowledge as a fully integrated body or system – are inappropriate. This is not to say that knowledge need contain outright contradiction, only that the components do not always precisely match up. Relationships of parts of the repertoire to one another can better be understood hermeneutically, set in conversation or argument.[312]

Esat Hoca's teachings of Alevilik as syncretistic were important, *set in conversation or argument* with the identities of his audience, with Turkish nationalist historiography and with his own socialist political ideology. One way in which he managed to glue all the pieces of the repertoire together was by developing an evolutionary foundation of the syncretistic nature of Alevilik. In his teachings, contemporary Alevilik was the result of an evolutionary maturation throughout history. This evolution was

310 See for example Mélikoff 1998b; 1999[1998].
311 Lambek 1993:54.
312 Lambek 1993:9.

presented in the lectures with explicit reference to Western philosophy and socialist ideology.

In the lectures, Esat Hoca first and foremost presented a timeline of the development of Alevilik by tracing key philosophical and mystical concepts back to Plato and later neo-platonic Greek philosophy. In Chapter Two, I mentioned that the Alevi understanding of the divine roots of the human being owes much to the concept of "unity of being", *vahdet-i vücud*.[313] For Esat Hoca, *vahdet-i vücud* constituted a fundamental element of Alevilik but had no significant meaning without its counterpart, *vahdet-i mevcut*, which in this context is best translated as unity of material existence.[314] In Esat Hoca's lectures, these concepts were neither explicitly associated with Islamic mysticism in general nor with Ibn Arabi or any other Muslim philosophers in particular. Rather, they were traced directly back to Greek philosophy and the ideas of Plato (428/427–348/347 BC), Aristotle (384–322 BC) and Plotinus (205–270 BC). In Esat Hoca's terms, Plato's division between the real existence of things – the ideals – and their copies, and Aristotle's distinction between their matter and form – potentiality and actuality – correspond to the concepts of *vahdet-i vücud* and *vahdet-i mevcut* respectively. Moreover, Plotinus' ideas of how the souls of human beings and other material things are constantly longing to return to their non-material origin, characterize the relationship between the "unity of being" and the "unity of material existence". Esat Hoca also claimed that this distinction goes back further to Parmenides from Elea's (540–480 BC) ideas of the world as it is perceived by our senses as utterly mistaken and not identical with the true reality existing independently of our perception, and to Empedocles' (490–434 BC) theory of the world consisting of the four elements earth, air, fire and water, and Democritos' (455–370 BC) atomic theory. As a result, he sketched a timeline of the development of Alevilik, understanding the division of the visible and spiritual world in terms of what he called idealist and materialist unity and depicted Alevilik as a combination of idealism and materialism.[315] For him, this timeline was not a tool to trace influences on Alevilik, but rather the history of Alevilik and its maturation.

Various ways of defining a distinction between the visible world and the spiritual world, and the longing of the human soul bound to the

313 In Dressler's terms, this concept is "at the philosophical edge of the spectrum" of the mixture of religious ideas concerning the Alevi conception of God (Dressler 2003:113).

314 Alevilik course April 2004. Also in Korkmaz 2003 [1993]:445.

315 Alevilik course April 2004.

material world to be reunited with the divine reality are, of course, not confined to Alevilik or Bektaşilik. These religious philosophies were transformed into practical religious systems in the Hellenistic era, resulting in a profound influence on Islamic mysticism in general.[316] Alevilik and Bektaşilik are thus parts of a larger constellation of religious systems defining God as immanent to the material world. In basic theoretical Islamic discussions of how to understand the oneness of God, *tevhid*, as expressed in the first part of the profession of faith, this focus on divine presence in the material world opposes the idea that God is transcendent.

Esat Hoca was also aware that Alevilik was not the only religious system focusing on God's immanence. He did hold, however, that what distinguished Alevilik from other, similar, religious philosophies was its focus on intellectual knowledge.[317] In this claim, the second aspect of evolution appeared. In Esat Hoca's teachings, the concept of *akıl* (discussed in Chapter Four) was subjected to an evolutionary theory following the gradual levels of the tarikat path. The most important aspect of the gradual transition towards *hakikat* was for a person to use their intellect in the search for knowledge and understanding. This was also the place in Esat Hoca's theory where the double meaning of *akıl* became most evident; a person on the path developed by using their intellect and by being an intelligent person, but in addition to that it was also the intellect itself as a part of divinity which matured and became refined through an evolutionary process towards the last stage. When reaching unity with God, *hakikat*, the processes of personal development and the maturation of *akıl* were to be united because the difference between taught and learned knowledge would disperse and, as such, the distinction between the ones who learn and the knowledge itself.

Esat Hoca and Alevilik as socialism

In much of his teachings, Esat Hoca's underlying agenda was to demonstrate a natural Alevi inclination for humanism and socialism, and his argumentation was always anti-Sunni polemics. In a general sense, the evolutionary development of Alevilik that he advocated placed the ability to mature through knowledge and reason at the core of Alevi humanism.

316 Cornell 1998:54–57; Nagel 2006[1994]:171–206.

317 In his analysis of Alevi poetry, Dressler also points to the fact that these mystical and philosophical concepts are not exclusively Alevi. He, claims, however, that the characteristically Alevi feature concerning their understanding of the concept of *vahdet-i vücud*, for example, is the way it is embedded in Alevi mythology (Dressler 2003:113). Unfortunately, he does not give any further explanations on this matter.

Furthermore, quite clearly, "Sufism of the Anatolian people" covered class-related concepts of the Anatolian people where the people were the rural masses; the villagers who had come to represent a host of concepts ranging from victims of oppression to political socialism and moral superiority. In particular, his socialist reading of Mazdaism as the ancestor of material possessions as common goods, for example, was undoubtedly guided by an understanding of Anatolian Alevilik as socialist reformist. It was in this part of his teachings that it was most obvious that his concern about the nature of Alevilik was also a personal project. His socialist underpinnings were always present, but he rarely articulated his political ideology explicitly in the lectures.

In his publications, however, his political ideology was clearly outspoken. In his two-volume work *Kafa Tutan Günler*, "Days of Opposition", about the Turkish leftist movement in the 1960s, where he described the significant happenings and development of the movement through the decade, he started the first volume with the following words: "The '68 generation is attached to yesterday's suffering and usually fails to look at the future. A decisive, rational reminder keeps holding one's attention, so that people always carry with them yesterday and the past".[318] Although not autobiographical, the book described the successes and failures of the 1960s leftism movement in Turkey in detail and with the chronological closeness of an insider.[319] Understanding his teachings in light of this book, it becomes evident that Esat Hoca has never abandoned his political mission, even after he began to publish on Alevilik in the 1980s. However, none of the students from the Alevilik course whom I interviewed had read this book and some of them did not know of its existence.

In other publications, Esat Hoca reformed central Islamic concepts in the socialist spirit. The path of the tarikat became the common path towards liberation of the Anatolian people bound together with common values of freedom and communal life,[320] and the theological concept of

318 Korkmaz 2001[1992]:8.

319 Turkish socialism as a mass movement was short lived, starting in the 1960s and ending abruptly with the 1980 coup d'état. The Turkish political left, both in the forms of social-democracy and communism, was, through the close identification with the institutions and ideology of Kemalism, an offshoot of Turkish nationalism. Kemalism was honoured for being a progressive ideology of anti-imperialist nationalism by the 1960's Marxist socialists. After the 1960s, it was the new social-democracy movement of the People's Republican Party (CHP), the continuation of Bülent Ecevit's "left of centre" political campaign in the 1960s, which established political leftism as part of mainstream politics in Turkey (Belge 2009).

320 Korkmaz 2003[1993]:424–430.

the perfect being, *insan-i kamil*, was turned into "the perfect society", *kamil toplum*, which he defined as follows:

> The representations of Anatolian Alevis with their philosophies, teachings and lifestyles mature enough to carry the society to liberation; the evident absence of state, class, private ownership and money; everyone assists in producing according to their abilities; a perfect society where everyone gets their share of the common production according to their needs; the Alevi utopia.[321]

In the Alevilik lectures, Esat Hoca's political ideology served mostly as a background for the characterization of Anatolian Alevis as humanistic in nature. This nature was described as fundamentally different from the nature of the Sunni Muslims of Turkey because it had evolved through oppression, stigmatization and exposure to religious and cultural influences in the history of Anatolia. Much of the content of the notion of Alevilik as the Sufism of the Anatolian people was stored in this specific approach to the nature of the Anatolian people. The Sufism of this people was explored mainly in the lectures of Şakir Baba where he described the development of Turkish Sufism and analysed the syncretistic aspects of Alevi mysticism.

Şakir Baba's analyses of Alevilik as syncretistic

Şakir Baba's lectures made use of the syncretistic aspect of Alevilik to distinguish between Arabic and Turkish mysticism. In one lecture, Greek philosophy was used alongside the Koran as sources legitimizing each other on topics concerning evolution and cosmology. Well within an evolutionary framework, Şakir Baba further applied historiographical means to mark the difference between Alevilik-Bektaşilik and other forms of Islamic mysticism.

This specific lecture started with the Big Bang theory and Şakir Baba claimed that it was indeed similar to the approach to creation evident in the Koran.[322] He explained that the supernova explosion could be compared to the ability of God to create by the decree "Be!", *Ol! Kün!*, mentioned in several places in the Koran.[323] He further stated that Bektaşis were in complete agreement with scientific research claiming that an explosion actually took place. He claimed that everyone knew that the

321 Korkmaz 2003[1993]:241.

322 Reference to the Koran as encompassing scientific knowledge is a common way of illustrating the superiority of Islamic knowledge. See for example Stenberg 1996:196ff.

323 See for example sura 3:59 about the creation of Adam, and 3:47, 6:73,16:40, 40:68 for general emphasis on God's ability to create by the word.

world was first a cloud of gas, which solidified and transformed into soil and minerals. Then at the end of creation water was born and from there all living beings rose. Water was thus the origin of all living beings – an idea he claimed came from the Greek philosopher Thales' (624–546BC) cosmological doctrine of the world originating from water, and from the Koran of which he quoted verse 30 of sura 21:

> Do not the Unbelievers see
> That the heavens and the earth
> Were joined together (as one
> Unit of Creation), before
> We clove them asunder?
> We made from water
> Every living thing. Will they
> Not then believe?[324]

Alevis, he claimed, understood and appreciated this, as they symbolically re-enact the creation by the sprinkling of water in remembrance of Kerbela during the cem ritual.[325]

Further, God's decree "Be!" was portrayed in this lecture with a significant difference between Turkish and Arabic mystical interpretation:

> The Arabic mystics compared God's decree "Be!" with the strict command of an officer, while the Turkish mystics compared it with the soft sound of the strings of the lute in God's hand.[326]

The importance given to such perceived differences between Arabic and Turkish mysticism was also expressed in terms of Sunni and Alevi Islam. Among the students, this antagonism was one of the elements of the theological exegesis that gave legitimacy to the evolutionary framework and the intellectual explanations in the lectures. Although the students primarily identified themselves as Muslims, the values they cherished as the essence of Alevilik – equality between men and women, humanism, liberalism, democracy and so on – were understood as characteristics of societies pre-dating the presence of Islam in Anatolia. Consequently, they experienced certain ambiguities regarding the position of Islam within

324 Ali 1938 [1934] sura 21:30. The Turkish translation used by Şakir Baba (of which he did not refer to the source) was like this: Görmüyorlar mı kâfir olanlar göklerle yer/Kapalı iken açtik onları birer birer/Diri olan her şeye hayat bulurduk sudan/Etmeyecekler midir yine de buna iman/.

325 Alevilik course May 2004. Also in Keçeli 2004:1.

326 Alevilik course May 2004. Also in Keçeli 2004:1.

the development of Alevilik, as Islam was thus considered as both an interruption of, and the end of, the evolutionary development.[327] As a result of the apparent need to depict a coherent, unified Alevi religious system, the solution to this potential paradox was found in the concept of good and bad representing Turkish and Arabic Islam respectively. In a historiographical explanation, Şakir Baba referred to this passage written by another Alevi intellectual:

> […] The Islam that formed in the homeland [Anatolia] created a new formation by accepting along with its own values the values in Islam that were in accordance with it. Maybe this difference is the basis of the Alevi-Sunni separation in Anatolia today. In other words, most probably, the distinction between Alevi and Sunni is ultimately the clash between Turkish and Arabic culture. It is the resistance of Turkish culture against a culture alien to it – Arab culture.[328]

The author's basic point here was that the Islamization of Anatolia following the battle of Manzikert in 1071 gave rise to the distinction between Alevi and Sunni, not because the Anatolian population resisted Islamization but because they protected their own Islamic faith by opposing Sunnification.[329] Hence, the students learned that while the introduction of Sunni Islam in Anatolia was an interruption of the evolutionary development of Alevilik, another form of Islam was accepted conditionally by the Alevis through the teachings of the wandering dervishes in the area. This was a Turkish form of Islam that was only accepted because it resembled the Islamic faith already present among the Anatolian villagers. This perception of Islam as already present in Anatolia was a cornerstone in the evolutionary framework firmly rooted in the antagonistic dualism between good and bad. Islam was thus considered as an interruption and as the ultimate aim of the evolutionary development of Alevilik. Şakir Baba further elaborated on this point:

> Some of the writers doing research on Alevilik (most of them being socialists), set forth the idea that Alevilik is not related to Islam, and that the religions before Islam live on within Alevilik with an Islamic guise […] Even in the Koran, which we believe came from God, expressions which resemble words from religions before Islam, even ancient Greek ideas are to be found. With

327 See also Markussen 2010b [2005].

328 Şener 2003:90–91.

329 The significance of the Battle of Manzikert for the Turkification of Anatolia is one of the foundational myths in Turkey. The defeat of the Byzantine Empire by the Seljuk army destroyed the hold of Christian Byzantium on Eastern Turkey and opened up the whole country to the spread of Islam. See Hillenbrand 2007.

> these similarities, can we say that the Islamic religion is not an original religion, and that it has been copying from other religions? […] The Koran is in itself the essence and the summary of earlier religions.[330]

Remnants from religions and cultures present before the introduction of Islam in Anatolia – religions and cultures believed to cherish qualities like equality between men and women as well as rebellion against the oppression of ruling powers – were claimed to be a part of the ahistorical essence of Alevilik. Thus, syncretistic features of Alevilik were explained as the visible and apparent proof of its superiority and, accordingly, by highlighting these syncretistic aspects, Şakir Baba was preaching true Islam and genuine Islamic mysticism.

Crucial for the notion of Alevilik as the Sufism of the Anatolian people was the historical connection to the wandering dervishes of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Described as resisting any kind of Sunnification, these mystics became symbols of a genuine Turkish Islam. In the Alevilik course, the rural masses of Anatolia were directly connected with the wandering Sufis of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries and they were all portrayed as allies against urban elitist Sunni Muslims. Consequently, the spread of Sufism in Anatolia was described in line with "the great and little traditions" of the urban Sufi elites with poets and intellectuals like Jalal al-Din Rumi and Ibn 'Arabi mastering Persian and Arabic languages and the rise of a new category of rural, holy men called Babas, preaching in Turkish and depicted as "Islamized versions of the ancestral shamans of the non-Muslim Turkish nomadic tribes".[331] Thus, Islamization of Anatolia has in Alevi historiography become a matter of urban-rural antagonism. In his distinctions between Arabic and Turkish mysticism, Şakir Baba painted a picture of a dualistic world divided into good and bad – Turkish and Arabic Islam, Alevi and Sunni, rural and urban, Anatolian and Ottoman. Based on one of his publications, *Osmanlı kim, Şeriat ne?*, "Who are the Ottomans, what is Sharia?", he further equated Anatolian Alevis and the Sunni Islamic Ottoman Empire with laicism and sharia respectively, and stated that these two positions were of such opposing natures that they could never be reconciled.[332]

In the Alevilik course, the emphasis on syncretism served several purposes. Tracing selected aspects of a number of religious and cultural traditions as influences constituting the nature of Alevilik allowed for

330 Alevilik course May 2004. Also in Keçeli 2004:6.

331 Karamustafa 1993:176.

332 Alevilik lecture May 2004. Also to be found in Keçeli 1995:17–19.

unlimited variations in the characteristics of Anatolian Alevis. The teachers traced remnants from religions and cultures in Central Asia such as Shamanism and Zoroastrianism, which allowed the students to feel at home with both their Turkish and Kurdish identities. Furthermore, linking these influences to Western philosophy also enabled the teachers to portray the contours of the evolution of the Alevi nature through time, resulting in a mature and heterodox nature of "the people". In line with his personal cause, Esat Hoca's Alevilik was socialist, while Şakir Baba's concerns were directed in opposition to Sunni-Islam. Syncretism was the concept that allowed Şakir Baba to define Alevilik as the true Islam and the genuine Islamic mysticism while resenting the value of the Islamization of Anatolia and opposing the Islamic-ness of the Ottoman Empire and the Sunni majority in contemporary Turkey.

A historical background of the notion of Alevilik as syncretistic

The idea of Alevilik as syncretistic was, however, not created by Esat Hoca and Şakir Baba. With their teachings, they had established themselves well within Turkish nationalist historiography, which itself rose out of a conglomerate of Ottoman, Turkish and foreign interests. In the words of historian Ayfer Karakaya-Stump,

> We cannot assume […] this conceptualization as simply 'natural', but have to evaluate its initial appearance, as well as its mostly unreflective adoption by different groups, with an eye on the politics surrounding the issue of […] Alevism.[333]

With this in mind, I now turn to a historical background of the notion of Alevilik as syncretistic.[334]

333 Karakaya-Stump 2004:331–332.

334 In an interesting article with the main heading "What is Heterodox About Alevism?" (2008), Janina Karolewski rightfully establishes the initial point of the denomination of Alevi tradition as "heterodox Islam" – closely related to the claim of Alevi syncretism – to the socio-political power struggle between the Ottoman Empire and the Safavids. She further presents Dressler's argument that the declaration of Safavid and Kızılbaş heterodoxy was integral to the invention of Sunni orthodoxy (Dressler 2005). I have chosen to start this historical background with sources of speculations on the syncretistic nature of Alevi religion from the second half of the nineteenth century onwards.

From American Protestant missionaries to the Young Turk movement

The oldest written sources mentioning Alevi communities as syncretistic are letters and reports from American Protestant missionaries working in Eastern Anatolia from the mid-1850s to 1920.[335] According to Karakaya-Stump, these missionary accounts, published in *Missionary Herald* between 1855 and 1892, consisted of the first formulations of theories about a pre-Islamic origin of the religion of the *Kızılbaş* as well as depictions of its syncretistic traits.[336] She further elaborates on the depictions of syncretism in these accounts:

> […] their overall conclusion about the pre-Islamic roots of the Kızılbaş religion [and] the conceptualization of Kızılbaş-ism as a 'mixture' of disparate elements which allowed the juxtapositioning of these different constructs, a conceptualization which likewise helped relegate the Islamic elements in it to a status of one among many. The depiction of Kızılbaş-ism as a 'mixture' ironically also served to push it out of the league of religions that had 'substance and body', in which category the Protestant missionaries implicitly included orthodox Islam.[337]

Naturally, the characterization of "Kızılbaş-ism" in the missionary reports should be read with reference to the missionaries' understanding of the Ottoman Sunni Islam and their relationship with the Ottoman authorities. Like Christianity, Sunni Islam – albeit misguided and corrupted – was obviously understood as a religion with "substance and body".[338] For this and several other reasons, like fear of sanctions from the Ottoman authorities (despite expansion of religious freedom through the imperial edict of reform, *Islahat Fermanı*, in 1856) and low expectations of success among the ordinary Sunni Muslims, the American Protestant missionaries limited their proselytizing activities to Christian minority groups like Armenians and Assyrians and to the Alevis, who, in the reports, were used as examples of people easy to convert because they were already practically half-Christian. The pre-Islamic heritage of the religion of the *Kızılbaş* the

335 These missionaries were sent by *The American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions*, ABCFM. For the history of the ABCFM, see Maxfield 2001.

336 Karakaya-Stump 2004:331. *Kızılbaş* literally means "red-head" and originates from a red headscarf used by these people. This term was in use until it was gradually replaced by "Alevi" during the second half of the twentieth century. Today the term is perceived as stigmatizing.

337 Karakaya-Stump 2004:335–336.

338 The formulation "substance and body" is borrowed from an account of the missionary Herrick in 1866, quoted in Karakaya-Stump 2004:335.

missionaries discovered was thus defined as originally an ancient form of Christianity in an unfortunate mix with heretic practices.

The stories about the pre-Islamic, syncretistic nature of *Kızılbaş* religion were circulating not only among missionaries, but in wider circles including Western travellers, official representatives and among Turkish nationalist intellectuals in the Young Turk movement of the post-Tanzimat era of the Ottoman period as well. In the following, I illustrate a small part of the complex web of acquaintances, friendships and influences in the scholarly and political world of this period of transition from a dissolving empire to a Turkish nation.

In the reign of Abdulhamid II (1876–1909), the Eastern Anatolian areas were inhabited by communities of various ethnic and religious backgrounds, proselytized by missionaries, excavated by Western archaeologists, visited by diplomats as well as the Sultan's forces who were sent to convert rural communities to the officially recognized Sunni Islam. The Ottoman administration closely monitored the missionary activities under the pretext that their work was "subversive and seditious", as the Yıldız Palace documents from 1890 onwards frequently stated.[339] It is also known that Ottoman officials in the United States were keeping track of the *Missionary Herald* where most of the missionary reports were published, and translations from this journal often appeared in Ottoman records of various kinds.[340] This mutual distrust between the Protestant missionaries and Ottoman authorities probably resulted in some of the measures taken by the latter to convert or reinforce the local population, which this period is widely known for.[341] The Scottish archaeologist William Ramsay (1851–1939) who travelled with his wife in Western Anatolia from 1880–1884, visiting villages in search of archaeological remains, also reported on the deep distrust of the Muslim villagers towards the government in this area, and further depicted the situation in the Ottoman Empire as follows:

> In 1882 a change was very marked, and has been so ever since. There began a distinct revival of Mohammedan feeling. The prophecies current were no longer about the term of Turkish power; they were that the year 1300 (beginning 31st Oct., 1882) was an epoch of Mohammedan power, bringing either new life and strength or utter and complete ruin. The change of adjective, no longer Turkish but Mohammeadan, was significant of much that was to follow.[342]

339 Kieser 2001:98.
340 Deringil 1998:125.
341 Deringil 1998:112.
342 Ramsay 1897:136.

In Ramsay's opinion, Abdulhamid's conversion policies were basically an attempt to prevent Anatolia passing under British influence:

> He [Abdulhamid] gauged the situation from the first; he saw that the party of Reform in Turkey was hastening on the dissolution of Ottoman rule, for a reformed Turkey was a contradiction in terms. He saw that Reform was inconsistent with a Sultan of the Ottoman type; that Sultan and Khalif were united in one person, and that, when there ceased to be a Khalif in Constantinople, then Mohammedanism in Europe and in Asia Minor was doomed. He saw too that English policy was always and necessarily directed to secure Reform; that the dream of English statesmen and their watchwords were always "a reformed and strong Turkey", that the young Turkish party of Reform was the Anglophile party […].[343]

It is clear from Ramsay's accounts that there was a close relationship between the British travellers, scientists and diplomats in Anatolia, and very often one person acted in the office of all these positions.[344] Young consuls were sent on language and cultural training before beginning their official work[345] and the work of archaeologists like Ramsay meant years on the road between towns and villages in Anatolia – and the ideological and political tone of their stories and narratives bear witness to their close contact with the British diplomats and the British government that sent them there in the first place. Through their travels, the British also came in contact with the rural population of Turks, Kurds, Armenians, Greeks and Turkmen and also, unsurprisingly, the American Protestant missionaries. About the nature of the relations between the British and

343 Ramsay 1897:140.

344 Ramsay himself, for example, accompanied Charles Wilson (1836–1905), who travelled extensively around the empire when he was in the office of Consul-General in Anatolia from 1879–1882, as a trainee (www.pef.org.uk/Pages/Wilson.htm). He later brought along young aspiring archaeologists "as beginners in Turkish travel" (Ramsay 1897:viii). Among them was David George Hoghart (1862–1927) who became a renowned archaeologist excavating in, among other places, Ephesus, and who also became an authority on research on the Hittites, and was to later publish *Wandering Scholar in the Levant* (1925). In his work, Ramsay also repeatedly referred to the works of Austin Henry Layard (1817–1894), the British archaeologist famous for his excavations of Nineveh (2001[1850]) (see also Ramsay 1897:108), and Felix von Luschan (1854–1924), who was an Austrian archaeological expert on the Hittites, the inventor of "Von Luschan's chromatic scale" for classifying skin colour (1897, 1927), and, according to Karakaya-Stump, also the first to conflate the question of the religious origin of the *Kızılbaş*, the *Tahtacı* and the *Yezidi* with that of racial origin (Karakaya-Stump 2004:331).

345 Ramsay 1897:144.

the Americans, Ramsay noted that they "formed a partnership"[346] and explained it as an inevitable and natural fact:

> There is no getting over the fact that Americans and British, when they meet in a land like Turkey, feel the tie of manner and blood and religion; and try as their best to be neutral and non-political […]. The people of the country can rarely distinguish between the two peoples, and are hardly ever quite clear whether Amellika is a part of Londra or Londra a town of Amellika.[347]

With the Young Turk revolution in 1908, the American missionaries gained prestige as "pioneers of progress" and were invited as speakers at the Young Turkish club meetings.[348] The years between the 1908 revolution and the Balkan War in 1913 are depicted as a short period of sympathy between the *Kızılbaş* communities, the Protestant missionaries and the authorities. Further, the British travellers constituted an additional, but not separate, channel of influence on the Turkish nationalist movement. The Young Turks' ideologues and scholars like Ziya Gökalp[349] and Mehmet Fuad Köprülü put effort into creating new pride in the Turkish past and an awareness of historical ties with the Turks of Central Asia and other pre-Islamic features. They introduced the idea of the Turkish nation in terms of social evolution and the Alevis received the identity of bearers of authentic Anatolian Turkish culture and traditions. These scholars continued their historiographical studies after the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923, and their ideas formed the basis of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk's ideological foundation for the creation of a Turkish nation.[350]

346 Ramsay 1897:147.

347 Ramsay 1897:223–224.

348 Kieser 2001:99.

349 *Türk Medenyeti Tarihi* (1925) "The History of the Turkish Civilization". Articles in the newspaper *Yeni Mecmua,* (1917–1918) and his own periodical *Küçük Mecmua* that he published towards the end of his life, were essential to the development of Turkish Nationalism. All the issues of the periodical have been translated into modern Turkish and collected in a two-volume publication by the Kemalist Press *Anadolu ve Rumeli Müdafaa-i Hukuk Yayınları,* which also publishes a monthly political Kemalist magazine of the same name (Gökalp 2009).

350 A considerable amount of these and other ideological entrepreneurs' nationalist historical research was published in the periodical *Türk Yurdu* established by the leading political thinker of the period, Yusuf Akçura, functioning mainly as the mouthpiece of the nationalist association *Türk Ocağı.* The first numbers were published in 1911 and 1912, simultaneously with a similar journal *Türk Derneği*, but it was only *Türk Yurdu* which continued after 1913 – and only with small intervals in times of war – that has been published relatively regularly until today. Before and right after the establishment of the Turkish Republic, *Türk Yurdu* and other publications

One example of the direct influence of the Turkish nationalist historiography of that time on the teachings presented in the Alevilik course is the Alevi understanding of the development of rural Anatolian Sufism. According to Ahmet T. Karamustafa, this understanding can be clearly traced back to the nationalist writing of Köprülü:

> The Sufi-colouring of the latter [rural Sufism] is […] explained as the legacy of a crucial early encounter between the Turkish tribal mind and mainstream Sufism, namely the disciple-master relationship between Ahmed Yesevi (d. 1166) and Yusuf Hamadani (1049–1140). In this view, the master architect of which was the Turkish historian M. F. Köprülü, the origins of the little tradition in early Anatolian Sufism are to be traced back to a Khurasanian milieu, where, it is postulated, the nascent Yesevi movement was the point of contact with Sufism for the majority of Turkish-speaking Muslim people. The Babas of Asia Minor are thus rendered direct spiritual descendants of the great Turkish Sufi master Ahmed Yesevi.[351]

This model of distinct developments of urban and rural Sufis, Karamustafa continues, does not apply to the Anatolian case. On the basis of biographies, he illustrates close ties between well-known mystics like Baba Ilyas, Baba Ishak, Geyikli Baba, Abdal Musa, Kaygusuz Abdal, Hacı Bektaş, Sarı Saltuk and Barak Baba, and concludes that emphasis should be placed not on the continuation of pre-Islamic Turkish beliefs and prac-

> by members of the *Türk Ocağı* were important forces in developing the beginnings of Turkish nationalism into a major movement. Scanning through the *Türk Yurdu* volumes published up to 1930 actually gives an idea of the early Turkish nationalists' preoccupation with the works of other foreign researchers as well. In 1927, for example, Köprülü published an article about the Danish linguist Wilhelm Thomsen (1842–1927), who became famous for deciphering the Orhon inscriptions published by his colleague and rival Friedrich Wilhelm Radloff (1837–1918). The Orhon scripts were the alphabet used by the Gökturks from the eighth century to record the old Turkish language. This interest in linguistic research was a part of the nationalist historical endeavour, as is also evident from the journal *Türk Derneği* where a couple of articles about Radloff and a series of articles called "Our language" were published in 1911 and 1912 (Türk Derneği No: 1, 2 and 3, 1911). The Ottoman script, in which the seven volumes published between 1911 and 1912 were written, were translated into the Latin alphabet and published as an anthology in 2006 (Okay 2006). In 1930, upon the death of the German archaeologist Albert von Le Coq, *Turk Yurdu* also published a long article about the importance of his excavations of Buddhist and Manichean cave temples with a bibliography of his publications and a contribution on his life and writings by Köprülü (Köprülüzade 1930:4–7) and Zübeir (Zübeir 1930:11–20).

351 Karamustafa 1993: 177–179.

tices but on the emergence of a new Turkish voice within mainstream Sufism:

> The mere existence of such a well-established network of relationships among prominent Turkish Sufis indicates that these latter functioned well within the matrix of mainstream Sufism where the concept of the spiritual lineage of initiation (*silsila*) reigned supreme. The Turkish Babas in question were not tribal religious figures but full-fledged Sufis who functioned beyond narrow ethnic/tribal identities. For this reason alone, it would not be proper to consider them shamans in Islamic disguise. For these Turkish holy men at least, the process of conversion had long been completed.[352]

Köprülü's use of the Yesevi movement as the link between Central Asia and Anatolian Sufism seems to be of utmost importance in the construction of a Central Asian heritage of Alevilik. In the foreword of the English translation of Köprülü's *Türk Edebiyatinda Ilk Mutasavvuflar*, "Early Mystics in Turkish Literature", Devin DeWeese also explicitly states this major implication of his work, and calls it "the Anatolian Turkish prism" through which Köprülü described Central Asia, as his lack of knowledge of the religious history of the area left it essentially as a blank screen upon which he "felt free to project religious, cultural and literary developments known to him from Anatolia".[353] DeWeese further states that Köprülü ascribed the "synthesis of Turkic and Islamic traditions" to the Yesevi tradition with a most unfortunate result, namely

> […] the notion that the Yasawi tradition, like the Bektashiyya that supposedly sprang from it, was from its inception a "heterodox" movement shaped more by antinomian disregards for juridical norms, and by an eager receptivity to non-Islamic "influences", than by "normative" Islam.[354]

This approach of the Yesevi tradition as inherently receptive to non-Islamic influences made Köprülü reach conclusions regarding the sources of Ahmad Yesevi and his legacy:

> […] he concluded that Anatolian works of Bektashi, Haidari and Baba'i provenance were more reliable sources of Ahmad Yasawi and his legacy than were other works he implicitly dismissed as dominated by Naqshbandi influence. This view […] continues to shape the predominant understanding of the Yasawi tradition in Turkish scholarship, and in much European and American scholarship as

352 Karamustafa 1993:196–197.
353 DeWeese 2006:xvi.
354 DeWeese 2006:xvi.

well (it is perhaps best represented today in the works of Ahmet Yaşar Ocak and Irène Mélikoff) […][355]

According to Esat Hoca's description, *Yesevilik* (Yasawiyya) is today a Sunni tarikat established by Ahmet Yesevi, which displays non-Sunni mystic and esoteric elements and is therefore a source for both Sunni and Shia tarikats to claim their descent.[356] The predominant understanding of the Yesevi tradition as heterodox and receptive to non-Islamic influences was, for him, covered in the mystic and esoteric elements of past and contemporary Alevilik. As the Sufism of the Anatolian people, Alevilik covered a large span of esoteric elements, both in its theology (as Şakir Baba demonstrated in his lectures) and by the religious traditions of the Anatolian people. One such tradition was the belief in *keramet* and practices of visiting holy tombs, which was explained by Esat Hoca as a natural part of Alevi mysticism.[357] These practices have also been objects of discussions on the historical heritage of Anatolian religion and culture and are yet another example of the development of discourses on the syncretistic nature of Alevilik.

Syncretism as survival, transference or nature

Sir William Ramsay and a contemporary English archaeologist, Frederick William Hasluck (1878–1920), were among the foreign travellers in the Ottoman Empire who explicitly debated over the nature of cultural and religious continuities in traditions and practices they encountered in their travels in Anatolia. Ramsay, who in 1897 stated that he had not "realized how much ancient history still remain[ed] in Turkey, clothed in Mohammedan forms, and called by Turkish or Arabic names",[358] seemed to have uncovered the pre-Islamic heritage of the Turks when he in 1928 – towards the end of his life and career – was interviewed for the journal *Türk Yurdu*:

355 DeWeese 2006:xix. He does not refer specifically to any of the writings of Ocak or Mélikoff, but I agree with his claims as a general impression of their scholarships. For a list of their publications, see the references. As an example, Ocak states with reference to Köprülü, that "Pendant une période allant du XIe jusqu'à la fin du XIIe siècles, Ahmed-i Yesevî et plusieurs autres, ont fondé un islam mystique largement adapté à la structure socioculturelle des Turcs nomads et semi-nomades" (Ocak 1997:200).

356 Korkmaz 2003[1993]:453.

357 As analysed in Chapter Four.

358 Ramsay 1897:33–34.

> The truth, which has slightly appeared to me from time to time, is that your Turkish-speaking ancient forefathers existed in Anatolia before the Romans, before the Greek-Ionians, which existed before the Romans, and the Hittites before them again – and even before the Hittites. Like in the vast region of the Anatolian Taurus Mountains, some significant areas could not be reached by the Hittites. Traces of the ancient Turks can be found in these areas.[359]

Hasluck, on the other hand, explicitly denied the survivalism inherent in Ramsay's continuation thesis.[360] His interest in the cultural interaction between Christianity and Islam in Anatolia and the Balkans led him into discussions about continuity of cultural and religious practices between eras of different religious orientations. Like Ramsay, he encountered on his journeys practices of attributing "Religious awe with certain places", as Ramsay chose to call visits to holy tombs among the Turkish population.[361] In a two-volume ode to Hasluck's life and work, the editor, Shankland, explains that Hasluck chose not to see these practices as survivals of earlier religions, but rather as "transference" of sanctity, as he engaged in an explicit polemical battle with Ramsay over the nature of the continuity of such practices.[362] With the term "transference", Hasluck wanted to direct the attention to the fact that the past is interpreted by the present, and continuity can thus only happen under favourable social conditions – in opposition to Ramsay's survivalism which, according to Hasluck, implied the idea that certain places or natural phenomena represented the infinite regress of older traditions and thus worked as entry points facilitating travel through different times.[363] This, he thought, was utterly wrong, because "In all survivals the first man ignores the chronological gap in his theory and the public doesn't know there is one".[364] With these words, Hasluck may be remembered as an early thinker reflecting on the social dimension of remembering and the collective processes at work when engaging with the past.

Hasluck's studies were primarily on Bektaşis, not Alevis. According to Mélikoff, the name Alevi only occurs three times in his comprehensive work Christianity and Islam under the Sultans.[365] She approaches Hasluck's work as a description of the syncretistic nature of Bektaşilik and

359 Subhi 1928:163.
360 Shankland 2004:18–19.
361 Ramsay 1897:265.
362 Shankland 2004:18–21.
363 In Shankland's interpretation (2004:20–21).
364 Hasluck 1929:13, 54, quoted in Shankland 2004:18.
365 Hasluck 1929. Mélikoff 2004:301.

claims that his work has revealed this nature to be a mutual religious assimilation between Christianity and Islam with the addition of surviving elements of Central Asian Shamanism.[366] Within a framework of Turkish nationalist historiography, she fuses Eastern and Western Anatolian traditions by allowing historical studies of the Bektaşi order to represent the contemporary nature of Alevilik. Following Köprülü's ideas in an explanation of the relative absence of the term Alevi in Hasluck's writings, she claims that

> […] whilst Hasluck was aware of the connection between Bektashis and Kizilbash, he did not see until right towards the end of his career how close they were to one another sociologically. He did not see that the Bektashis and those who are nowadays called Alevis, were of the same origin, indeed Fuat Köprülü used to call the Alevis 'country Bektashis'.[367]

The historical legacy of the Eastern Anatolian Kurdish Alevis is a topic that has been explored only marginally in research on Alevism.[368] It was not something that was explicitly taught in the Alevilik lectures either.[369] In fact, my impression was that separating Alevis from Bektaşis or Kurdish from Turkish Alevis was not particularly welcomed in the setting where Kurdish Alevis were taught to be the proud bearers of a genuine, authentic Turkish-Anatolian culture. In one lecture, I asked Şakir Baba why he insisted that Alevilik and Bektaşilik were the same as he consistently said "we" when referring to Bektaşis and "you" when talking about Alevis. His answer was short and left me with a feeling of being politically incorrect: "That is to construct the Great Wall of China. Every Bektaşi is at the same time Alevi and *Kızılbaş*".

366 Mélikoff 2004:302.

367 Mélikoff 2004:301.

368 See the introduction chapter for references on research literature on Kurdish Alevis.

369 Kieser illustrates another aspect of the relationship between the Eastern Anatolian Kurdish Alevis and the Bektaşis in the beginning of the last century – in a story about a certain Hüseyin Karaca: "[…] Cemaleddin Çelebi Efendi, then the Bektashi head responsible for rural Alevis but unpopular in the eastern provinces for his close collaboration with the Young Turks' dictatorial regime, had in 1909 obtained from Sultan Reshad a declaration that he was descended from Hacı Bektaş (Küçük 2002:130). It is interesting to note too that Bektashism was an attractive 'label' for the young man Hüseyin Karaca to oppose himself to the dedes. To call himself a member of the Bektashi Tarikat […] was a way to distinguish himself from the traditional dedes: it was for him a sign of being 'progressive', not traditional, superstitious, or conniving with exploitation" (Kieser 2004:362).

Syncretism and nationalism

The teachings of Esat Hoca and Şakir Baba can be approached both as discourses on syncretism as well as processes of religious synthesis. They taught history in their lectures; they pointed the students' attention to cultural and religious expressions in what they considered relevant times and places for the understanding of Alevi history. They drew the map of Anatolia and filled it with knowledge acquired from historical research. As such, their teachings were examples of nationalist discourses on syncretism based on the prevailing historical research in the beginning of the Turkish Republic passed on and reinterpreted by contemporary nationalist historians. As an example of a nationalist discourse, the Alevi historiography presented in the lectures did what nationalism always does: searched back in time to demonstrate a linear time between past and future with the undisputed presence of cultural expressions relevant for present conditions.[370] Alevi historiography has found its place well within the framework of The Turkish History Thesis developed in the times of transformation from a crumbling Ottoman Empire to a Republican nation-state.[371] The idea of Anatolia as the homeland of the Turkish forefathers of all great civilizations was a pertinent background for tracing Alevi religion and culture to Central Asian shamanism and genuine Islamic mysticism simultaneously, and consequently for analyses of Alevis as bearers of an authentic Turkish culture.[372]

In their lectures, Esat Hoca and Şakir Baba were not only teaching history as they had learnt it from nationalist outsiders; they were also creating religious synthesis. They displayed power and agency in their endeavours, and they should be approached as conscious, active memory-makers rather than passive receptors of others' labelling. According to Haugbolle, memory-makers construct memory as nostalgia,[373] and Esat Hoca and Şakir Baba certainly did. They rebuilt and patched up gaps in the historical outline of Alevilik and offered the students of the Ale-

370 For an introduction to the nature of nationalism, see Özkırımlı 2005. One of the most basic, but nonetheless important points he makes is that of nationalism being a normative principle (Özkırımlı 2005:63).

371 The literature on this period of transformation is quantitatively overwhelming. For some qualitatively good introductions, see Copeaux 1997; Zürcher 2003; Hanıoğlu 2001; 2006 and Göçek 2002.

372 Ancient survivals in both Greek and Turkish early modern nationalist discourse have also had the purpose of linking the ancient civilizations with the dominant European culture of the twentieth century (Özkırımlı and Sofos 2008:77).

373 Haugbolle 2010:74.

vilik course a platform of knowledge, which in turn created a space for the students to mourn the loss of golden times as well as to celebrate the essence that supposedly had survived. The memory created by their teachings was, using Svetlana Boym's terms, nostalgic in both a restorative and reflective way.[374] The Alevi past, all the way back to ancient times (and even beyond that – to the beginning of times) represented a range of qualities in Alevi nature, such as inherent humanism, morality as well as a natural inclination to collective life and an understanding of the hidden reality, which culminated in the near past of Anatolian rural village life. The nostalgia surrounding the rural past was clearly restorative in the sense that it represented the absolute correct way of living and practising Alevilik, of which the community should strive to model in their contemporary, urban devotion. This nostalgia, however, was also reflective as it represented the loss of a better time and the awareness that it was not fully reversible. Esra Özyürek has come to a similar conclusion of restorative and reflective nostalgia for the Republican "Golden Era", the 1930s, among Kemalists in contemporary Turkey.[375] Her approach to nostalgia is similar to that of Boym, stating that nostalgia is an integral part of modernity,[376] and she illustrates how modernity itself is an ongoing invention and an object of nostalgia in the neo-liberal economic and political climate in contemporary Turkey. In this context, she states, nostalgia becomes a political battleground for people with conflicting interests because:

> […] a shared understanding of the past as an unspoiled time, what Michael Herzfeld (1997) calls "structural nostalgia", can serve as a resource for the marginalized. By creating alternative representations of an already glorified past, they can make a claim for themselves in the present.[377]

The Alevilik course and Alevi historiography in general, has created and continues to develop an alternative representation of the syncretistic nature of Alevilik well located in the realm of the Turkish nationalist historical master narrative. As this chapter has shown, others have engaged in defining the nature of Alevilik and creating memories of the Anatolian past

374 Boym 2001.

375 Özyürek 2006:178–179. Due to this fact, Özyurek expresses uneasiness with the distinction between restorative and reflective nostalgia in its clear-cut form. I definitely agree with her concerns and suggest that the distinction may be approached more as analytical tools for recognizing qualities of narratives and blueprints for action.

376 Boym 2001:19–32.

377 Özyürek 2006:154. For the reference in the quotation, see Herzfeld 1997.

before, all of them concerned with consolidating a non- or pre-Islamic heritage in Alevi cultural expressions. Another, more recent historical approach to the Alevi past grew out of an international symposium called *Alevism in Turkey and Comparable Syncretistic Religious Communities in the Near East in the Past and Present* held in Berlin in 1995. In the conference proceedings, Alevi and Bektaşi communities in Turkey were defined in relation to groups like Ahl-i Haqq in Iran, Nusairi (Alawi) in Syria and the southeast of Turkey, Shabak and Kakai in Iraq, Yezidi in Iraq, Syria and Turkey, as well as Druze communities in Lebanon and Israel. According to the introductory comments of the volume, these communities display parallels in religious traditions and historical situations to such an extent that it should be assumed "that most of them have a common religious origin".[378] Historically, they have all been minority groups both within and outside of the Ottoman Empire – mountain dwellers practising dissimulation, esoterism and endogamy – now experiencing "transition processes in the modern age".[379] As related religious systems, they were characterized as Gnostic, Shi'i inclined, syncretistic and heterodox.

Both in the nationalist version, as well as in this last mentioned academic "discovery" of Alevi cultural and religious expressions in the 1990s, syncretism has been an efficient tool for essentialization. Within the agenda of the nationalists, Alevi syncretism has been appropriated as Turkish cultural heritage. In the categorization as one of several minority religious systems in the area of the former Ottoman Empire, the use of syncretism as a classificatory label has established the Alevis as "others" who are historically, geographically and theologically distant, newly discovered, not necessarily readily accessible and all the more interesting.

In contemporary Turkey, Alevi communities have taken charge of the processes of defining and delineating the content of Alevilik. In Şahkulu, Esat Hoca and Şakir Baba made use of already existing discourses on Alevi syncretism in their efforts to produce religious synthesis and present an essentialized holistic picture of Alevilik that the students could relate to and feel proud of. In Charles Steward and Rosalind Shaw's terms, they were exercising the politics of religious synthesis.[380] Interestingly, they equated the syncretistic nature of Alevilik with notions of authenticity and purity – which their nationalist and academic predecessors had reserved for the Sunni-Islam of the majority population. Esat Hoca's and Şakir Baba's teachings are, therefore, also a good example of minority strategies of re-

378 Kehl-Bodrogi 1997:XV.
379 Kehl-Bodrogi 1997:XI.
380 Stewart and Shaw 1994.

defining the content of stigmatizing labels such as heterodoxy. In certain ways, this chapter could be a possible answer to the student who, in the classroom, raised her hand and asked "Why are we heterodox?"

Summary

Virtually all forms of identity-politics in Turkey dwell in the garden of Turkish nationalism.[381] The revitalization of Alevi identities in Turkey today is no exception; rather, it is a perfect example of the possibilities available for groups to claim their identities and demand visibility and participation in the Turkish public sphere.[382] Nationalism in Turkey is not limited to a certain part of the political sphere; the ideological content of the transmission period from the late 1880s to the 1940s still exerts its influence in contemporary politics as well as in civil society. Politically, left and right wing parties have developed the national ideological heritage in different directions, but lurking in the shadows are the same considerations for all of them: how to negotiate Ottoman and Anatolian heritage, and how to relate to prevailing definitions of Turkish Islam.

In general domestic discourses and in national as well as international research, prevailing definitions of Turkish Islam are linked with a Sunni Islam propagated by the *Diyanet*, Directorate of Religious Affairs (DRA), Laicism and Turkish Sufism – all of these being state-sponsored, albeit in different contexts.[383] As one of several Alevi foundations in Turkey and abroad that has reached a consensus over defining Alevilik as the authentic teaching of Anatolia, Şahkulu represents a part of Turkish Islam celebrated as folklore and culture of the Turkish state and politicians. This fact is reflected in the teachings presented in the Alevilik course.

The teachings of Esat Hoca and Şakir Baba – as well as the other educational activities in Şahkulu – still offered room for personal contemplation on Alevi knowledge and memory. The next chapter presents the individual practices of two women frequently visiting the foundation and the various activities carried out there. The voices of Evrim and Nur and their particular ways of appropriating Alevi knowledge serve as examples of individual reception of the cultural memory produced in the community.

381 This also holds true for Kurdish nationalism, see Hirschler 2010.

382 The edited volume *Turkey beyond Nationalism: Towards Post-Nationalist Identities* (Kieser 2006) reflects this fact. See also Massicard's contribution in this volume for such an approach to the Alevi mobilization.

383 For publications characterizing the essentials of Turkish Islam, see Yavuz 2004; 2003, and Yavuz and Esposito 2003. For *Diyanet* perspective on the qualities of Turkish Islam, see Bardakoğlu 2004.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The quest for piety

Two cases of individual appropriation of Alevi teachings

Nur rarely attended the Alevilik course. She said it was mostly a waste of time because Alevilik could not be taught intellectually. The day that Dertli Divani visited the foundation, however, she slipped into the back row just as Esat Hoca was about to start the lecture. She was not there to listen or to discuss; she stopped by because she was a big fan of Dertli Divani and the way he combines his musical expressions with the teaching of Alevilik. In her words, his poetry was divine. She claimed that she could learn everything about Alevilik only by contemplating on his voice.

The topic of the lecture was centred on the concept of holy descent, and Evrim threw herself into the debate and asked both the teachers and the several dedes present for the occasion whether they thought it was appropriate for her to become a dede. As she had a lack of holy decent in common with Dertli Divani, she probably seized the opportunity to get his opinion on this matter. Her questions accelerated the discussions and soon several other students had joined in the debate. Nur, however, spent the whole lecture listening patiently from the back row, nodding in agreement with everything Dertli Divani said.

Among the students of the Alevilik course, the expectations for Dertli Divani's visit were multifaceted. Evrim was obviously on a mission to realize her dream of becoming a dede. Furthermore, Dertli Divani's contemporary style and intermediary position between the authority of the dedes and the intellectuals gave him an aura of credibility in her eyes. Nur, on the other hand, was expecting Dertli Divani to provide experiences of spiritual character during his visit to the foundation, so she listened carefully to his words, contemplating without interrupting.

Later that evening, both Evrim and Nur were chosen to perform semah in the cem ritual with Dertli Divani. During the poetic narrative

about Muhammed's ascension, they sat in the front row, singing and swaying their bodies to the rhythm. Their appearance, however, bore witness to their anticipation of the upcoming semah performance and the moment the music changed into the "Semah of the Forty" they were on their feet in lightening speed and stepped into the ritual space. Together with their male partners, they made their semah teacher proud and led the rest of the congregation into the right mood for emotional reception of the following elegies.

As informants, Evrim and Nur were among the people I spent most time with in interviews and conversations during my visits in the community. I started to pursue an idea of writing about different ways of learning Alevilik early in my fieldwork and I deliberately spent a lot of time with Evrim and Nur because it seemed to me that they often approached their own learning processes in different – and sometimes opposite – ways. As a result, many of the conversations we had were focused on their personal strategies of learning and living with Alevilik. Methodologically speaking, there are obvious implications in steering the direction of the information flow at such an early stage of the research process and, above all, there are the risks of obtaining only favourable answers and of unintentionally keeping other topics and areas of research in the shadows. Evrim and Nur were, however, strong-minded women who had already pondered and contemplated over most of the issues raised during our conversations. In addition, I frequently discussed the topics of the Alevilik lectures with them – a strategy which gave me insights into their own personal interpretation of Esat Hoca and Şakir Baba's points of view. With Evrim, this was a practice that very soon became a habit because she was a frequent participant of the course and a very committed partaker in discussions. For Nur, who only occasionally came to the Alevilik lectures, these conversations often functioned as an opportunity to express her dissatisfaction with the whole concept of teaching Alevilik in courses and seminars, and she often contrasted her own ideas to what she imagined Evrim must have expressed on the subject. These conversations proved to be exceptionally valuable since they – in addition to her own favourite subjects – also revealed ideas about the intellectuality trend in the teaching of Alevilik.

This chapter is devoted to the ways in which Evrim and Nur approached the processes of learning Alevilik. In some respects, their understanding of Alevi beliefs and practices differed, but they had in common a conscious effort in urging themselves and their fellow Alevis to learn and live a pious life in order to secure the survival of Alevilik. Furthermore, their differing

approaches to the appropriation of Alevilik notwithstanding, Evrim and Nur's preferences clearly merged in their identity as semah dancers.

Appropriating Alevilik: Evrim and Nur

When my ideas began to develop about the different ways in which Evrim and Nur approached the teaching of Alevilik available at the foundation, I asked them both what they thought about their own methods of learning and ways of appropriating Alevilik. Evrim immediately responded that the only way of pursuing her goal of becoming a dede was to participate in courses about Alevilik. She strongly emphasized the importance of intellectual knowledge and quoted Esat Hoca's words about how no one can appropriate Alevilik without learning *about* it. She perceived her participation in the Alevilik course as climbing the tarikat path with the ultimate goal of becoming a dede, and she considered an increase in moral standards and closeness to God more as a means to advance towards the dede position as well as a positive side effect of following the various courses and participating in the cem ritual. In fact, during the spring term of 2004, Evrim started referring to the Alevilik course as "the Dedelik Course". When I corrected her, saying that the courses available in the foundation at that point were Alevilik courses aimed at a general public, she referred to the announcement made by the president of the association in March the same year that a dede training programme would soon commence. She claimed that the Alevilik course offered that spring was a broad basic education necessary in order to enter various specialized courses that would be offered the following term – one of them was to be "the Dedelik Course". I do not know for sure where she got this idea from because the dede training programme in Şahkulu was only discussed as a series of lectures aimed at educating practising dedes in philosophy, science, literature and contemporary issues in order to equip them with the knowledge and the abilities to reach out to the contemporary Alevis. I do know, however, that Evrim had failed the university entrance exam twice and, in my opinion, her approach to learning and appropriating Alevilik was obviously coloured by her ideas of what university studies entailed.

Evrim's consistent focus of becoming a dede made me ask her why it was so important to her. Her answer revealed another of her concerns – a concern less self-absorbed and careerist. Becoming a dede was, for her, a question of passing on knowledge to future generations in order to combat the processes of Sunnification of which Alevi communities had

experienced since the 1980s. For her, learning about Alevilik and being a part of a community where people were constantly urging each other to learn and practise Alevilik, was only the first step towards teaching Alevilik to the next generations. One day, she came to me after reflecting on one of our interviews and said:

> I have heard that the only weapons the Palestinians have are their suicide bombers. The only weapon we have in order to combat Sunnification is knowledge about our religion and traditions. You have to understand that. And the readers of your book have to understand that as well. So, you have to write these words.[384]

I immediately copied the words as they made me realize that Evrim's endeavour was more than a substitute for university education – it was at the heart of her understanding of what it meant to be a pious Alevi and a good Muslim.

As an answer to my question of her methods of learning and appropriating Alevilik, Nur, on the other hand, expressed that the intellectual way of teaching Alevilik was a complete misunderstanding – and that it was also an easy way out. Still, she appreciated the other activities at the foundation such as providing space for alternative ways of being Alevi. For her, the only important aspects of appropriating Alevilik were sealed in the experiences of *huzur* (harmony, peace of mind and presence), *heyecan* (excitement, thrill) and *manevilik* (spirituality). These are all terms with multiple meanings, which Nur had internalized and arranged into chains of causalities from practices to experiences to states of mind. Her favourite activities were dancing semah, listening to music and poetry, and singing. These more or less ritualized practices all produced emotions of presence, peace, tranquility and comfort. For her, these emotions were the experience of *huzur* and, by making the dance and music an integral part of her life, she nurtured the emotions into a state of mind characterized by harmony. Experiences of *heyecan,* on the other hand, were mostly generated by her rather excessive fasting in Muharram. Feelings of excitement and enthusiasm, as well as trembling and exhilaration, were important ingredients in her yearly attempts to continuously abstain from food and water for the first ten days of Muharram. She had been hospitalized several times and obviously never succeeded in her attempts, but approaching the line between life and death seemed to be crucial in her experiences of *heyecan*. As I will elaborate further later in this chapter, Nur was emotionally attached to the imams and saints, and through her fasting exercises she was re-living the experiences of Hüseyin and his fol-

384 Field notes May 2004.

lowers in the battle at Kerbela as a way of purifying her own soul. For her, the emotions of excitement and ecstasy were a first step towards cultivating love in the meaning of both passion and affection.

Nur was also a consumer of music tapes and commodities like posters and accessories with portraits of Ali and the succeeding twelve imams. Surrounding herself with visual and audio expressions, she created an aura of spirituality that was important for her appropriation of Alevilik. She used the term *manevilik* to concretize this sensation of spirituality – a well-chosen term because it also implied a psychological state of mind as well as some level of morality. The music and poetry, as well as the portraits, enabled her to exist in a parallel sphere with the poets, saints and the imams where it was easier to cultivate herself in order to reach the level of consciousness and moral integrity of these holy figures. She did not consider herself on any advanced spiritual level, but she hoped that her continuous efforts could be an example for others. She admitted that it might not be a very efficient way of urging fellow Alevis to follow the right conduct, but at least it could create long-lasting impressions. She approved of Evrim's strategy of securing the future existence of Alevilik through learning and teaching, but illustrated the difference between their efforts by slightly changing a famous proverb into "one pious [one who shows affection and respect] Alevi in the house is worth a thousand of ignorant Alevis far away".[385] She would rather urge one Alevi to become pious than teach Alevilik to people only interested in knowledge. For her, that was a matter of focusing on quality versus quantity.

The fact that Evrim and Nur were both frequent participants in the semah course and the cem ritual did not mean that they agreed on the nature of these practices. Evrim viewed participation in the semah courses and the cem rituals as activities alongside other religious, cultural and educational events. Attending a lecture in the Alevilik course, distributing sacrificial meat to the needy, or participating in a cem ritual were, for her, activities of equal worth in her quest for piety. She approached the semah lessons as opportunities to refine her movements in accordance with the various choreographies so that she could perform in the cem ritual without mistakes. Her participation in the cem was often focused around the question of whether she was chosen for the semah performance or not, and sometimes she used the terms semah and cem interchangeably.

Nur approached the semah as a *zikir* performance – *zikir* as con-

385 Evdeki sevgi ve saygı gösteren bir Alevi uzakta cahil bir çok Alevi'den iyidir (Interview May 2004). The original version of this proverb is "Eldeki bir kuş daldaki bin kuştan iyidir" and in English it is "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush".

templation upon the presence of God, and the suffering surrounding the deaths of various imams, saints and poets; and performance as a way of sharing her experiences of harmony with the spectators through absorption in correctly performed semah movements. The ideal cem ritual for Nur was the same thing, but on a larger scale and with additional strength created by the common experiences of the congregation. The actual cem performances in the foundation were, in her experience, a hollow celebration of Alevi culture, so she chose to focus on the performance of "the Semah of the Forty", but she was never absent from the ritual. With these different approaches, understandings and agendas, Evrim and Nur sat side by side in the cem rituals and they both performed the semah every week with accuracy and immersion.

Realization of piety: Evrim and Nur's approaches to listening

Evrim and Nur's strategies of appropriating Alevilik were also their quests for piety. This became perfectly clear during one of the few lectures of the Alevilik course that Nur also attended. In this specific lecture, which is also described in Chapter Five, Şakir Baba depicted God's decree of creation "Be!" with a significant difference between Turkish and Arab mystical interpretations. He claimed that, in Arabic mysticism, the decree was compared with the strict command of an officer, while for the Turkish mystics, the sound of "Be!" was that of the soft sound of the strings of a lute in God's hand.[386] In his polemics against the Sunnis, the sound of the decree was presented in this lecture as the decisive point around which different approaches to the act of listening circled. Sunni Muslims were portrayed as passive listeners, who, without independent contemplation or individual search for knowledge, internalize the speeches of the imams and the Nakşibendi shaykhs. As such, they were described as easy victims of manipulating powers. Alevis, on the other hand, were described as active listeners focusing on rational thought and with an individual drive to seek knowledge and engage in independent reasoning.

Şakir Baba's anti-Sunni polemics really hit the mark for Evrim. Her ideas of the importance of intellectual knowledge and rational reasoning in order to appropriate Alevilik and become a pious Alevi linked well with the distinction between passive and active listeners. During a discussion after the lecture, however, it became clear that the most important aspect of listening was, for her, the ability to present the words in such a way that

386 Keçeli 2004:1.

it facilitated active listening. She compared the sound of the lute in God's hand with what she called "the art of speaking convincingly", which in my opinion is best understood as rhetoric. She was especially fond of Esat Hoca's rhetorical teachings on Alevi syncretism, which she considered the best example of how intellectual knowledge could create a heartfelt will to perform good deeds.

Nur, on the other hand, was more sceptical of Şakir Baba's reasoning. Although she agreed with the definition of Alevis as active listeners as opposed to Sunni Muslims, she did not think that Sakir Baba, teaching Alevilik intellectually, could pride himself with being a representative of any kind of listening that would have the potential to generate experiences or changes in a person's heart. In her opinion, that kind of listening bypasses rational faculties and penetrates the heart directly. Intellectual knowledge could never do that – only music and poetry.

Evrim and Nur's approaches to the act of listening are worth closer consideration because, as illustrations, they serve more than as an example of how they could nurture their own understanding through listening to the same words at the same time at the same place. Their approaches also show how they both were able to create space for their own personal understanding within the context of the activities in the foundation.

Both Evrim and Nur referred to the theological concept that opening the heart accompanies closeness to God, *gönül açılması*, in their evaluations of the pious character of the Alevilik lectures. Evrim praised Esat Hoca's rhetoric for its ability to create the will to follow moral conduct in her heart, and Nur claimed that only music and poetry had the potential to create changes in a person's heart. Similar perspectives on practices of pious audition have been analysed by Charles Hirschkind as a concept of ethical listening in his study of the use of cassette sermons in Egypt.[387] Cassette-sermon listening was a popular practice of pious relaxation in contemporary Egypt and an integral part of the wider Islamic revival in the country. Listening to the sermons in the car on the way home from work or at gatherings with neighbours and friends, Hirschkind's informants reported feelings of tranquility and relaxation, defining their own listening as a practice, which "attune[s] the heart to God's word and incline[s] the body toward moral conduct".[388] The ethical functions of these auditory experiences were described by Hirschkind's informants in much the same manner as Nur defined the effects of listening to music and poetry as feelings of *huzur*.

387 Hirschkind 2004; 2006.
388 Hirschkind 2004:132.

Borrowing a conceptual distinction between affect and emotion from Brian Massumi, Hirschkind offers a theoretical tool for understanding the quality of these reported feelings of tranquility and relaxation. For Massumi, affect is emotional responses in the body that are not culturally or personally integrated in a person's character. Emotion, on the other hand, is affect "owned and recognized" as subject content.[389] Hirschkind identifies the feelings created by listening to the cassette sermons as intervening at Massumi's affective level because "the relaxed attentiveness of this auditory practice invests the body with affective intensities, [that is] latent tendencies of ethical response sedimented within the mnemonic regions of the flesh".[390] Although recognizing that emotional responses to the sermons (Massumi's affect) may initiate pious action, some of Hirschkind's informants characterized the benefits as insubstantial and short-lived. Such a distinction between immediate experiences and long-lived emotions was also expressed by both Evrim and Nur and for both of them the processes of the cultivation of feelings into personal traits were crucial to their strategies of appropriating Alevilik. In Nur's case, Massumi's distinction between affect and emotion is concurrent with the experiences of *huzur* and a state of mind typified by harmony. In the process of listening to music and poetry as a strategy for appropriating Alevilik-generating experiences of *huzur*, which then can be cultivated into a harmonic state of mind, the most important condition for Nur was the ability to listen and contemplate with good intentions. Hirschkind reports of the similar attitudes among his informants:

> The listeners […] must have cultivated the capacity for humility and regret. […] If these conditions are not met, then the listener will not be able to adopt the attitudes, the dispositions of the heart, upon which successful and beneficial acts of audition evolve. One's listening, in short, will be impaired.[391]

In order to facilitate the opening of the heart through ethical listening, the listener must have cultivated and nurtured specific capacities, which for the Egyptian sermon-listeners were humility and regret, and for Nur was the ability to listen with good intentions. For Evrim, on the other hand, the opening of the heart was a short-lived experience generated by the kind of convincing rhetoric demonstrated by Esat Hoca in the Alevilik lectures. This experience was, however, necessary in order to cultivate the kind of pious person she wanted to be: a hard-working, determined person devoting her life to the learning and teaching of Alevilik.

389 Massumi 2002:28.
390 Hirschkind 2006:82–83.
391 Hirschkind 2006:85–86.

Bodily practices and cultivation of piety: The performance of semah

Both Evrim and Nur were among the experienced semah dancers in Şahkulu. They did, however, always attend the semah courses aimed at beginners and less experienced dancers as well. Sometimes they helped the teacher to illustrate correct movements to less skillful dancers like myself, but most of the time they listened and followed the teacher like everyone else. They both used the lectures as opportunities to refine their movements and to stay in touch with what they described as "the semah attitude". This attitude was related to the feelings generated by their practices of ethical listening. Such feelings seemed to be quite common among other semah dancers as well, often illustrated with stories of the overwhelming sensations of *huzur*[392] and drunkenness they had felt while observing a semah performance for the first time. Stories of such first experiences with semah was a common ingredient in the personal narratives of religious awakening among the participants in the semah courses and many of the stories were recounted in a similar manner as the one below:

> I went [to the foundation] with a friend from work. He is also an Alevi and he wanted me to watch him perform semah. I thought, why not? I can have a look. And the moment I saw the dancers performing – whirling – I got this overwhelming feeling inside. Like, Yes! This is it! I joined the course the week after. I was thrilled. While performing semah I felt like [I was] going back to the real and pure times. Then I slowly began to understand what it means to be an Alevi.[393]

Evrim, however, added a further aspect of self-transformation to her religious awakening story about her first encounter with semah:

> Even though I had witnessed semah in the cem rituals before, I was completely awestricken when I first watched the semah dancers from the course performing. Their movements were so tender and were completely in line with the choreography. That does not mean that they did not perform with intensity – no, it was like their perfect movements were their means to immersion! Now I know that the experience I had watching those dancers was genuine and now I am also doing like them: You cannot just dance semah and feel a lot of things, you have to be able to dance semah properly in order to feel the right sensation. But,

392 Among my informants, *huzur* was generally used to mean harmony. Nur was the only one of the people I talked with who distinguished between *huzur* as a short-lived sensation and harmony as a state of mind.

393 Interview May 2004.

> it is also important to understand that when your heart is not open, (*gönlün açılmadan*), perfect movements are not sufficient. I think that is the reason why you have problems with following the rhythm when you dance, Hege. It is not only a dance; it is something more than that![394]

Broaching the matter of my poor sense of rhythm, Evrim referred to a couple of weeks earlier when she took pity on me after one of the semah lectures, where I had struggled more than usual to follow the others in the three-stepped rhythm of the semah. She tried to help me both by practising with me and by making me understand what semah was really about. Her explanation of the interdependence of perfection of bodily movements and the feelings created by a readiness for reception draws the attention to what I think of as the core of her and Nur's strategies of cultivating pious selves. It does, however, also point to the ways in which semah performances were approached in the foundation. During the lectures and the cem rituals, no one appears to have been encouraged to reach any particular state of mind. The dancers were expected to execute performances without error, and with respect and seriousness. The focus was mainly on performing the dance in the right manner at the right time and, thus, there was absolutely no scope for the kind of "losing oneself" in the worship of God as might have been expected from such a *zikir*-like activity. At the same time, the teachers were known to make frequent reference to the fact that, although semah was performed as a folkloric dance, the performance was, in the end, a form of worship. Thus, during the courses the dancers experienced a sense of ambivalence, respecting the necessity for precise execution on the one hand and the holiness of worship on the other. For Evrim and Nur, this ambivalence was translated into a matter of co-ordinating inner status and outer practices in their endeavours to cultivate ethical listening into performance of semah. The precondition for a virtuous semah performance was, according to Nur, acts of listening to music and poetry with good intentions and, for Evrim, opening of the heart through listening to someone who knows "the art of speaking convincingly". That does not mean that semah performances were for them only expressions of their pious characters, but more importantly, dancing semah was itself a process of defining and creating their identities as pious Alevis.

Evrim and Nur approached the practice of semah performance in much the same manner as Saba Mahmood describes a perspective on bodily (ritualized) practices she found among the members of an Egyptian

394 Interview December 2002.

women's mosque movement in Cairo. For these women, "[…] bodily behaviour does not simply stand in relationship of meaning to self and society, but it also endows the self with certain kinds of capacities that provide the substance from which the world is acted upon".[395] Mahmood presents a different approach to the cultivation of ritual performance than the one represented by Bourdieu where bodily practices are understood as embodying and symbolizing social structures and cultural logics (the doxa and ethics of a group).[396] Instead, she suggests that the "importance of these practices does not reside in the meanings they signify to their practitioners, but in the work they do in constituting the individual".[397] Further, Mahmood also distances herself from the paradigm of cultural construction of personhood as represented by Marcel Mauss, Margret Mead, Erving Goffman and Marilyn Strathern:

> I do not begin my inquiry from the vantage point of an individuated consciousness that uses various corporal techniques to acquire a cultural specificity. Rather, my investigation treats the empirical character of bodily practices as the terrain upon which the topography of a subject comes to be mapped.[398]

In other words, her perspective on bodily practices is that they are neither symbols *of* cultures, social structure or the like, nor symbols *for* specific cultural or social identities. Instead, she interprets the way the women of the mosque movement in Cairo construct their pious selves through bodily practices from the point of view that these practices are in themselves part and parcel of the individual selves – and that repeated performances of these acts leave permanent marks on a person's personality.

With open hearts and good intentions, the bodily practice of performing semah was, for Evrim and Nur, an integral part of the processes of cultivating emotions and knowledge into personal pious Alevi identities. With closed hearts or the absence of good intentions, however, the acts themselves would not enhance the processes of constructing pious selves. As merely acts, semah performances were nothing more than a celebration of culture or plain entertainment. When discussing their personal projects of appropriating Alevilik, both Evrim and Nur were critical to processes of folklorization of Alevi worship and identities. They blamed the politicians for embracing Alevilik as folklore but not accepting them as a religious group, as well as Alevis who were eager to express their

395 Mahmood 2005:27.
396 Mahmood 2005:26.
397 Mahmood 2005:29.
398 Mahmood 2005:121.

Alevi identity by displaying Alevi worship as entertainment.[399] If this development should continue, Alevi worship would end up as the same kind of hollow shells that – and here they both quoted Şakir Baba from his lectures – "Sunni Islam has become after having been reduced to ceremonies".[400]

This critique of Alevi worship being subject to folklorization was quite widespread in the community. It does, however, not mean that it was uncommon for semah dancers and cem participants to both practise and consume these activities as entertainment as well. Many of the dancers, including Evrim and Nur, occasionally performed semah together as a group of dancers carrying out assignments outside of the ritual community. Similarly, semah, hymns and religious poetry were essential parts of a successful picnic in the countryside or an evening among friends in the garden of the foundation. For Evrim and Nur, pious intentions and readiness versus closed hearts and emptiness were crucial in the distinction between semah as worship and semah as entertainment.[401] Once, I asked Nur whether it was not hard to keep the preferable state of mind when performing semah for an audience appreciating semah as entertainment and as a folkloric show. Her answer was a plain "Yes". I then asked her why she engaged in such performances if she thought it was detrimental to her own development as a pious Alevi and for Alevilik in general. She explained that semah was an integral part of her life that she could not, and would not, confine to one part of her existence.[402] Performing semah was one of the means to training and realization of piety in the entirety of her life and, for her, Alevilik was not only a religion or a culture, but also "a way of life".[403]

Appearance is one of the aspects of the work bodily practices do to constitute the individual. In the processes of cultivating pious selves, both Evrim and Nur nurtured their specific appearance in the cem ritual and semah courses in their everyday lives. As semah dancers rather than Alevis or cem participants who happened to know how to perform semah, they

399 Fieldwork notes February 2003.

400 Fieldwork notes May 2004 and Alevilik course May 2004.

401 *Boşluk* was regularly used by both Evrim and Nur in their descriptions of emptiness. In addition, meaninglessness, *anlamsızlık,* was central to Nur's interpretation, and ignorance, *bilgisizlik*, was at the core of Evrim's understanding.

402 Interview April 2004.

403 This is a highly standardized way of presenting Alevilik and both the Turkish and the English terms seem to be well integrated in the standard repertoire you will hear if you ask an Alevi to define Alevilik. Few will, however, present Alevilik as "a way of life" in such a spiritualized and developed manner.

had adopted a particular style in their semah movements. Anyone who has witnessed both semah performed by elders or others who have not learnt and practised the bodily movements through courses, as well as the performances of those who have, cannot fail to notice the very obvious differences in style between them. While the elders also carry out the same movements at the same time during the performance, they are far from as synchronized as the semah course dancers. The latter also dance with a high degree of grace and calmness, as if they are floating around the floor, performing with accuracy and perfect timing and without – it seems – any particular exertion. It basically looks as if the movements and the choreography are parts of their personal bodily appearance despite the fact that they are all almost completely synchronized. Cultivating this graceful appearance in their daily lives was important for both Evrim and Nur because it was crucial in the processes of forming themselves as pious Alevis, but also because internalizing the semah movements into personal appearance helped them become better semah dancers.

Subordination and the authority in the quest for piety

Mahmood argues that the task of realizing piety is related to structures of authority. Basing her reasoning on Foucault's analysis of ethical formation, she maintains that

> Foucault's work encourages us to think of agency: (a) in terms of the capacities and skills required to undertake particular kinds of moral actions; and (b) as ineluctably bound up with historically and culturally specific disciplines through which a subject is formed.[404]

In other words, possibilities for moral agency rest on processes of acquiring necessary competence for the cultivation of piety. Such processes may be realized through lectures and informal meetings on moral codes derived from the Koran and the exegetical literature, as was the case with the women of the mosque movement in Cairo. For Evrim and Nur, the necessary competence was acquired through participation in the various activities organized both formally and informally at the foundation. Also, although possessing a strong individualizing impetus, the kinds of pious beings Evrim, Nur, and the women in Cairo were seeking to become were nurtured within historically specific authoritative role models. In Cairo, these role models were based on Islamic orthodoxy, liberal discourse,

404 Mahmood 2005:29.

authority of parents and male kin and state institutions. In Şahkulu, Evrim and Nur oriented themselves and their endeavours towards different individual authorities, but nevertheless towards the same structures of authority based on selected passages from the Alevi historiography.

The relationship between pious action and subordination can best be understood as a mutual relationship where "the capacity for action is enabled and created by specific relations of subordination".[405] Such an approach, Mahmood argues, "[…] draws our attention to the kind of authority through which a subject comes to recognize the truth about herself, and the relationship she establishes between herself and those who are deemed to hold the truth".[406] Agency in this context, therefore, is based on abilities taught by authorities – be it female preachers and interpreters of the Koran and hadiths in the mosque movement in Cairo or Alevi dedes, intellectuals and teachers in Şahkulu. According to Mahmood, this condition has classically been referred to as docility in the meaning of "the quality of teachableness, readiness and willingness to receive instruction", and not as abandonment of agency.[407] In sum, practices of subordination seem to be necessary parts of the pious agency of the women in Cairo as well as for Evrim and Nur.

In the following, I describe how Evrim and Nur disciplined themselves in reference to selected authorities, and demonstrate how their approaches to the nature of their quests for piety ultimately guided their preferences regarding authorities and forms of subordination. In the theoretical context of Mahmood's reading of Foucault quoted above, this is an attempt to show how Evrim and Nur acquired the capacities and skills that enabled their pious agency.

Nur: A history of suffering

After attending a lecture from the Alevilik course, where Esat Hoca had portrayed Alevilik as nothing but remnants from a Shamanistic heritage to such an extent that I doubted anyone in the classroom was able to recognize themselves in this ideological historiography, I decided to discuss the matter intimately with both Evrim and Nur. As usual, Nur had not been present at the lecture, so I approached her in the garden. Our conversation started as it usually did when I wanted to discuss the topics of the Alevilik lectures with her:

405 Mahmood 2005:29.
406 Mahmood 2005:30.
407 Mahmood 2005:29.

– Today we talked about the shamanistic roots of Alevilik in the course. What do you think about that?

– To talk about that is not worth the time spent. It is more important to consider the historical suffering of the imams and the saints.

– OK, let us talk about this history, then? And why do you think it is more important than the shamanistic heritage?

– Because the history of Alevilik is a history of suffering. The only authentic thing in the history of Alevilik is suffering.[408]

In understanding the history of Alevilik as a history of suffering, Nur only attributed importance to particular incidents in Alevi historiography. She did not care too much for living authorities; her exemplary role models were all deceased. Ali and the subsequent twelve imams, as well as selected poets and saints such as Pir Sultan Abdal and Yunus Emre were historical and legendary figures whom she did not only try to emulate, but also to relive their experiences of suffering. The fact that her role models were all deceased was at the heart of her approach to piety. She once summed up her respect for the saints with these words:

> They are dead, so they are pure [*masum*]. They are not entangled in earthly desires for power and benefits. And they were not when they were alive either, because they suffered and died because of their suffering and pureness [*namuzluk*]. There are no such people in the world today.[409]

When I asked whether this meant that present-day people were of lesser quality than before, and if there were no possibilities for a person of our time to become a saint, she laughed and said that she was trying the best she could, although it was difficult because of earthly desires – but that she at least had overcome her fear of death.

Nur ascribed extra importance to Hüseyin and Pir Sultan Abdal. The narratives of suffering connected to their lives were for her the essence of what piety was all about. The stories of the massacre at Kerbela and the injustice experienced by Pir Sultan Abdal facing the Ottoman authorities who eventually put him to death, were narratives guiding her life and her interpretation of her own life story. She had herself, "suffered as only an innocent and pure person can suffer", as she chose to sum up her worldly experiences.[410] For Nur, suffering and the condition of being deceased were both important parts of the holiness of the imams and the saints.

408 Interview May 2004.
409 Interview April 2003.
410 Interview May 2004.

The correspondence between her and their suffering and her forcing herself to the edge between life and death during Muharram, were common references enabling her close relationship with these holy figures. She also claimed that her close relationship with the imams and the saints was a result of the pious person she was about to cultivate, because she nurtured and further developed her piety as opposed to some people who had to create it within themselves. This was the reason she was among the few people who could feel the "blessed presence" of the saints even though she was far away from their tombs.[411]

Nur understood Alevi history as a continuation of suppression and attacks from Kerbela in Muharram 680 to the night when a group of Sunni extremists set fire to a hotel filled with participants at a Pir Sultan Abdal festival in Sivas on 2 July 1993.[412] Therefore, she did not consider it worthwhile to dwell on the origins of Alevilik and dismissed the whole discussion about the supposed Central Asian heritage of Alevilik with a reference to suffering as the only historical authenticity. Within this idea of an inevitable chain of recurrent suffering, the battle at Kerbela and the fire in Sivas were the most important ones for Nur. It is her interpretation of these incidents that will be analysed in the following.

Nur's interpretation of the battle at Kerbela

Nur read books and magazines selectively – she was mostly interested in stories about the lives of the prophet's family and descriptions of the battle at Kerbela.[413] The critical manner in which she approached all kinds of intellectual transmission of Alevilik, both through normative and historiographical accounts, was not the case with the legendary literature. She referred to publications for legitimacy, but also had her own version of what happened at Kerbela during the first ten days of Muharram 680:

> Hz. Hüseyin was on his way to the Kufas [*Kufa'lar*] but was stopped by the army of Yazid. The Kufas denied their affiliation with Hz. Hüseyin although

411 *Huzur* is generally understood as a blessed presence when it refers to the atmosphere at the tombs or mausoleums of saints and other holy figures (Tanman 1992:133). Nur also used *huzur* in this meaning here although she claimed that she could sense it everywhere independent of the tombs. For clarification, this is another understanding of the term *huzur* than the ones I have presented earlier in this chapter.

412 See Saktanber 2002:93–94 for an understanding of the Sivas fire as one among many assassinations of public figures in the beginning of the 1990s.

413 Among the books she referred to as decisive for her personal approach to *ehl-i beyt* and the battle at Kerbela were Abdülbaki Gölpınarlı's *Yeni Gülzâr-ı Haseneyn Kerbelâ Vak'ası* (2005[1955]) and Ali Sefa's *Hz. Ehlibeyt Divanı ve Alevilik* (2003).

> they had prayed together with him earlier that same day. Still, Hz. Hüseyin gave both Yazid and the Kufas water. Yazid then cut him off from the river and they stayed there without water for ten days – it was on the tenth day Yazid attacked and slaughtered them because it was easy for him, they were not strong anymore since they had been without water for ten days.[414]

It is apparent that the story of the battle at Kerbala was, for Nur, centred on Hüseyin and his followers' suffering as a result of lack of water. As I mentioned earlier, every year during the first ten days of Muharram, she abstained from food and water until her family sent her to the hospital for rehydration treatment. The last two years, however, she had been drinking just enough water to avoid dehydration, because her children had grown to the age at which they could understand what was going on and, thus, her family had begged her not to scare them. She wanted to start again as soon as the children had grown up, but as they were in primary school she knew that she would have to wait for some time.

I asked her once if she really believed that it was possible for human beings to survive without water for ten days. Her response what that of "No, believe me, I have tried! But Hz. Hüseyin and his family were not ordinary people. They were blessed".[415] Her yearly re-enactment of those ten days was also a way for her to purify her own soul and nurture her personal piety. In particular, it was a way to create the sensations of excitement and exhilaration, which could be cultivated into love in the meaning of both passion and affection.

When I also asked her whether she was practising a different kind of flagellation, she stated that it was rather the people who flagellate themselves who practise a different kind of fast. Although they were trying to re-enact Hüseyin's suffering, these people had missed the central point of martyrdom, in her opinion. For her, martyrdom was not the act of dying for God, but to endure recurrent suffering and still approach the world with love and affection. This kind of suffering was not related to external conditions, but to an internal state of mind. Reliving it could therefore only be realized through inner suffering of which fasting and dehydration was a part, but not wounds inflicted in the flesh. From her point of view, flagellation defeats its own ends because the physical wounds minimize the real and important suffering. As a result, people who flagellate themselves mislead their spectators into believing that wounds, bruises and blood are synonymous with suffering. Nur assumed that these people had

414 Interview May 2004.
415 Interview May 2004.

forgotten their positions as role models and their responsibility of acting collectively. She portrayed this as a major mistake, since cultivating piety was, for her, equal to accepting the responsibility of being other peoples' exemplary role models.

Pir Sultan Abdal and the Sivas fire

Nur also placed great importance on poetry in her quest for piety. Poetry, like semah performances, created feelings of presence, tranquility, peace and comfort. Particular to Nur was also the fact that she often internalized parts of the poems to such an extent that she could present the experiences she believed formed the basis of the poetic expression as her own experiences. This was especially the case when we talked about suffering – as a large part of the poems she was most fond of dealt with just that topic. One standardized phrase that she used repeatedly was "What shall I do? Suffering found me in the places I went". The last part of this sentence was taken from a poem attributed to Pir Sultan Abdal called Alçakta Yüksekte Yatan, "Lying low and high" .[416] In the same poem, one of the verses started like this:

Oturup benimle ibadet kıldı	They sat down and prayed with me
Yalan söyledi de yüzüme güldü	They smiled lying to my face
Yalin kılıç olup üstüme geldi	They drew the naked sword and came over me

After quoting this passage for me with passion, Nur continued:

> Can you see? Pir Sultan Abdal also talked about the Kufas! I mean, he explained how they betrayed Hz. Hüseyin. But actually, he experienced this himself as well. He was also a martyr, you know! These saints, these martyrs, there is a connection between them. And you know, you have heard about Sivas – the hotel that was attacked by the Islamists during the commemoration of Pir Sultan Abdal. The young semah dancers and all the poets who died that day – in Sivas, the home of Alevi poetry. It was an attack on all Alevis and I am from Sivas and I am a semah dancer. It was an attack on me in the same way as it was an attack on Hz. Hüseyin and Pir Sultan Abdal.[417]

Although Nur was not one of the semah dancers caught up in the flames in the hotel in Sivas, this incident – or massacre as she preferred to call it – was still traumatic for her. She identified strongly with several aspects

416 The whole poem is to be found in Turkish at www.turkuler.com/ozan/pirsultan.asp.
417 Interview May 2004.

of the incident. Apart from the fact that she saw herself as a part of a chain of historical suffering, she also considered herself as one of the bearers of a poetic tradition from Sivas. She often referred to Sivas as the heart of poetic art in friendly polemics with friends hailing from other places in Eastern Anatolia. Pir Sultan Abdal was her symbol of the importance of Sivas in Alevi poetic tradition, and the fire seemed to be one of the crucial links between her concept of suffering, her interest in poetry and the geographical location of her place of origin. In addition, she strongly identified with the young semah dancers who died in the fire, as she herself had been performing semah at festivals and commemoration ceremonies.

One of the books she was in possession of was very valuable to her. This was a collection of poems composed by Metin Şimşek titled Yangınlarda Semah Döndük,[418] "We Danced the Semah in the Fire". Most of the poems were composed as a reaction to the Sivas incident. Nur's absolute favourite poem in the book was one called Unutmayız,[419] "We Will not Forget", composed about four months after the fire:

Halk uğruna ölenleri	The ones who died for the people
Unutmayız unutmayız	We will not forget, we will not forget
Ademi Hak bilenleri	The ones who know
Unutmayız unutmayız	We will not forget, we will not forget
Akarsu destan dillerde	Akarsu epic is an epic on [our] tongues
Hasret yatar gönüllerde	Hazret lies in our hearts
Nesimi sazdır ellerde[420]	Nesimi is the saz in our hands
Unutmayız unutmayız	We will not forget, we will not forget
Susturulamaz ozanları	The *ozan*s will not be silenced
Hiç ölür mü Pirsultan'lar	As if Pirsultans will ever die!
Unutulacak sananlar	The ones who think it will be forgotten
Unutmayız unutmayız	We will not forget, we will not forget
Elleri kanlı yobazlar	The religious fanatics with bloody hands
Bizleri korkutamazlar	They cannot frighten us
Şehit düşenler ölmezler	The fallen martyrs do not die
Unutmayız unutmayız	We will not forget, we will not forget
Otuz yedi can bir candır	Thirty-seven souls are one
Sevdai Metin kurbandır	Sevdai Metin is a victim
En kutsal varlık insandır	The holiest being is the human being
Unutmayız unutmayız	We will not forget, we will not forget

418 Şimşek 2002.

419 Şimşek 2002:29.

420 Akarsu, Hasret, Nesimi and Sevdai Metin refer to some of the poets who lost their lives in the fire. See for example www.tr.wikipedia.org *Sivas katliamı* for a list of the victims.

As an elegy to the people who lost their lives in the fire, and to some of the poets and artists in particular, Nur approached this poem as an ode to the Alevi poetic tradition. She explained that the means through which the Sivas fire would not be forgotten was the poetic tradition and, as it was also a tradition of suffering, the martyrs of the fire would not die; they would be in their hearts, become epics on their tongues, and be the *sazes* in their hands.[421]

Evrim: Shamanizing Alevilik

Evrim often initiated discussions both within and outside of the classroom. She made her voice heard independent of whom she was conversing with and she appeared quite unafraid of any kinds of authorities. She seemed comfortable in such settings, much more than in customary dialogues – or monologues as she criticized them of being – with dedes. Although she did not read the books of the various Alevi intellectuals, the fact that they had been published made a great impression on her. She told me that she preferred to receive her knowledge directly from them by listening to their lectures and speeches, because she then had the opportunity to challenge them through comments and discussions. She did so constantly with Esat Hoca and Şakir Baba although she seldom rejected their points of view.

For Evrim, the dedes and the intellectuals were the main references of authority. Even though she disliked the tendency of many dedes to speak in monologues, she never questioned the dede's position as such. After all, one of the goals of her efforts was to become one of them. In some cases, like with Dertli Divani, the characteristics of the teachings of the intellectuals and the qualities of the dedes were combined. Hence, Dertli Divani was the ultimate role model for the kind of pious Alevi and practising dede Evrim sought to become.

Unlike Nur, Evrim was all ears whenever the Central Asian heritage of Alevilik was discussed. The historiographical sketches presented by Esat Hoca and Şakir Baba during the Alevilik lectures provided her with the references she needed to pursue her dream of becoming a female dede. She was especially attentive to the picture of Shamanism portrayed by Esat Hoca. His attempts of shamanizing Alevilik rested on the will to genderize Shamanism, which suited Evrim perfectly. She found particular interest in his descriptions of female shamans and male shamans with female traits functioning within societies marked by their matriarchy. This was more than the empowerment of women for Evrim; it was first and

421 Interview April 2004.

foremost recognition of femininity. For her, the most significant female attribute was that of patience and endurance, *sabır*, and she believed these traits were the core competences of the shamans. Locating these female traits within the core of Alevi identity also meant that she understood them within the context of anti-Sunni polemics. In her mind, she had the pictures of a shaman and a veiled woman as the absolute opposites on a continuum of recognition of femininity. Becoming a female dede was thus not only a personal career, but also a way of combating Sunnification by preserving the authentic essence of Alevilik. For Evrim, the golden period of Alevilik was "in the old days, when shamans practised shamanism in shamanistic societies".[422]

The characteristics of female nature that Evrim saw in the shaman were very much the opposite of how she expressed her personality. Patience and endurance were not the first impressions that came to my mind when Evrim threw herself into critical discussions and filled the room with her presence. She came across as a strong-minded and free-willed woman with her own agency, and when she talked about the importance for women to endure and accept sitting in the second row, I have to admit that I never really completely grasped her personal logic. In fact, in a similar manner, Nur considered the ability to endure suffering as a female attribute, but turned only to male figures for exemplary role models of suffering. Every time I brought these logical mismatches up for discussion, they both immediately countered it with their ideas of veiled women as the ultimate victims of patriarchal structures.

Indeed, much of the Islamic virtues of female modesty and endurance find their expressions through the veil. Or at least, the veil has been highlighted both in media and in research as a sign of female attributes both as expressions of agency as well as suppression. In the Turkish context, the veil has additional politicized connotations, and for Evrim and Nur, questions concerning the role, responsibility or nature of women ultimately triggered their anti-Sunni, anti-veil registry. When talking about their efforts to cultivate themselves into good and pious Alevis, they were both eager to define feminine attributes as constitutive in their endeavours. Discussions on female nature outside of the reference of Alevilik, on the other hand, never gave anything else but ideologically driven descriptions of suppressed veiled Sunni women and non-veiled Alevi women with the opportunity for education.[423] It did not seem, though, that neither Evrim nor Nur were living any kind of contradictions or incompatibilities in

422 Interview May 2004.

423 Interview April 2004, May 2004. Fieldwork notes October 2003, November 2003.

their approaches to femininity. One might suspect that their words and actions belonged to different "normative registers". A normative register is, according to Samuli Schielke, who has studied ambivalences of morality, religiosity and aspirations among young Egyptians, "a way of speaking about a specific range of topics with specific styles of argumentation and acting in specific ways".[424] He argues that the concept of normative registers might explain "why people can argue for very coherent and clear moral claims without systematically subscribing to or living according to a coherent system of values and claims".[425]

For Evrim, the focus on the pre-Islamic shamanistic heritage of Alevilik was, however, not only a question of gender. She also became attached to the descriptions offered by Esat Hoca of the training and examination of the shaman in pre-Islamic societies. She imagined that the contemporary urban associational environment and the processes of cultivation of pious selves were all parts of a common quest to pass on one of the oldest institutions in Alevi history – that of the shaman. She sometimes labelled this as *şamanlık* instead of *şamanizm* to "further integrate it into Alevilik", as she once explained.[426]

Summary

This chapter has been devoted to the ways in which Evrim and Nur reflected upon their Alevi identities during the time of my fieldwork. I have analysed their specific understandings and ways of practising Alevi culture and religion as appropriation of the Alevi teachings available to them. As they were both semah dancers, this particular form of religious and cultural expression was at the heart of their understanding of what it means to be an Alevi. The choice of analysing the reflections of these particular people with theoretical tools from the works of Mahmood and Hirschkind in particular, has been made in order to contextualize this empirical example of reception of Alevi cultural memory-production within contemporary Islamic piety. Given Evrim and Nur's initial responses of associating the concept of piety with Sunni religiosity, this is not an apparent, self-given choice.

The terms *dindarlık* or *takva* (as piety is generally translated as) were not used at all among any of my informants, and when I mentioned these terms to Evrim and Nur, they immediately associated *takva* with

424 Schielke 2009:167.
425 Schielke 2009:166.
426 Interview April 2004.

the Sunni fear of God and countered it with love. Evrim in particular associated *dindarlik* with *dinci* as a term for Sunni fundamentalists and supporters of an Islamic theocracy in Turkey. The term *dinsel* (religious) was, for them, a neutral term for everyone who was not *dinsiz* (without religion) and, as such, a term without particular significance for them in this context.

In their quests for piety, Evrim and Nur sought to establish their own truths about the nature of Alevilik and their own ways of practising their religion. Although their endeavours were individual, they were only private within certain limits and their own conclusions about how to practise Alevilik and become pious Alevis were established well within certain historically authoritative frameworks. They relied on the historical and theological information available in their search for the correct understanding and practise of Alevilik and found nuances of truth in the teachings in Şahkulu. Their efforts of seeking knowledge and understanding may be characterized as pious acts in their own right – like Lara Deeb has done in her study of pious communities in Beirut.[427] She calls the processes of "establishing the true or correct meaning, understanding or method of various religious and social practices and beliefs" among her informants "authenticated Islam" in order to highlight the very modern character of these efforts – a synthesis between past ideals and modern lifestyles.[428]

Another modern aspect of Evrim and Nur's quests for piety was that they could be appreciated as driving forces in some kind of Alevi piety movement. In my opinion, the ways in which they evaluated their own (and others') pious agencies seemed to be related to an understanding of themselves as a part of something contemporary and historically wider than their individual efforts. Furthermore, their endeavours also implied a certain level of responsibility in influencing others than themselves through their pious agency.

That the Alevi revival resembles a religious or cultural or even social movement is hardly a surprise. The activities in Şahkulu are all part of a collective struggle for recognition and cultural rights in the Republic of Turkey. As a part of this, there is an ongoing debate among Alevis over the nature of Alevilik. The voices heard mostly blend historiographical matters with views on correct procedures for practising Alevilik. In fact, this is quite symptomatic for the Alevi revival in general: teaching history while communicating correct ways of being an Alevi – this seems to be the core of Alevi piety.

427 Deeb 2006.
428 Deeb 2006:20,27.

Concluding remarks

I started this project with the aim of understanding the role and importance of narratives in contemporary processes of Alevi identity formation. Through participant observation in the cultural and religious educational activities in Şahkulu, and through interviews and conversations with leaders and visitors, I gained an understanding of the importance and nature of these narratives. In the cem ritual and in the teachings presented in the Alevilik course, as well as in formal and informal conversations on the nature of Alevilik, the discussions repeatedly concluded with descriptions and analyses of Alevi history. Whether it was the recent past of Alevi village life or the distant past of cultural and religious influences in Anatolia, certain predominant narratives of the Alevi past were taught, learned and utilized in the endeavour of collective identity formation and memory construction. Stories of changes in basic Alevi institutions due to migration and urbanization were presented with reverence for an authentic rural past, and teachings on the syncretistic nature of Alevilik established moral superiority and a genealogy of collective experience throughout the history of Anatolia. In this thesis, I have demonstrated that, in Şahkulu, to understand, live and convey Alevilik meant looking back in time for models and a common heritage forming the base of collective and individual agency. By studying the content of the teachings presented in the cem ritual and in the Alevilik course, I have identified ways in which ideas of the Alevi past were inherently contextual, relational and bound to the teachers and their audience. Specifically, I will argue, this thesis shows the dialectic and eclectic processes of how the teachers arrived at their formulations of Alevi knowledge in dialogue with their audience as well as with other narratives relevant to the understanding of Alevis in contemporary Turkey. Further, this thesis offers insight into how "ordinary" Alevis aided by their teachers developed their religious knowledge and cultivated their Alevi piety.[429]

429 Such dialectic processes have been investigated in literature on knowledge acquisition among Muslims in Europe and "the West", see for example van Bruinessen and Allievi 2011.

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In most of the literature published on contemporary Alevi communities, the ways in which Alevilik is revived, re-invented or re-constructed in Turkey and Europe today have been discussed within the framework of continuity and change in the conditions of these communities. This is an aspect of contemporary Alevi realities that cannot be overlooked, and much can still be said about the forms in which Alevi knowledge is produced and disseminated. In this thesis, I have given prominence to the transmission of Alevi beliefs and practices, the systematization of Alevilik as a belief system with a relatively coherent set of traditions, as well as the construction of a memory culture celebrating a (seemingly) common historical heritage. In the midst of these processes, I have highlighted some fundamental mechanisms that bring together Alevis from heterogeneous contexts and backgrounds in a common understanding of the history and nature of Alevilik.

One such mechanism – the critique of contemporary Alevi practices against the model of village traditions – united people from various geographical locations and, hence, from a variety of historical backgrounds. In Chapter Two and Three, the critique presented in the weekly cem ritual in Şahkulu has been analysed as a ritual element crucial for the constitution of religious knowledge beyond the borders of the ritual itself. As such, these chapters draw attention to narratives presented in the ritual context as decisive for identity-making and collective remembrance in the community at large. In its focus on the narrative functions of the cem ritual, this thesis adds a new perspective in the study of the nature and functions of rituals.

The other mechanism crucial for the definition of an Alevi nature discussed in this thesis is that of intellectuality. In Şahkulu, intellectual forms of knowledge transmission contrasted with what was understood as traditional ways of teaching, learning and living Alevilik intrinsically and, as such, were a force in the development of a definition of Alevis as modern citizens with an understanding of the world bound by science and reason. In Chapter Five, the use of poetry in Şahkulu has exemplified what I have labelled an "intellectuality trend" in the urban, contemporary forms of transmission of Alevi knowledge. Esat Hoca's approach to wish fulfillment practices presented in Chapter Four and the evolutionary teachings of Esat Hoca and Şakir Baba analysed in Chapter Six deepen the understanding of the importance of intellectuality, not only for the forms of teaching but also for the subject matter taught.

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This thesis adds empirical knowledge and theoretical understanding of how processes of identity formation and collective remembering may take place in contemporary Turkey. By analysing identity-making processes in Şahkulu as the constitution of a memory culture, it illuminates the importance of present conditions and future aspirations in the practices of collectively remembering the past. Furthermore, it illustrates how ways in which we engage with the past may become decisive for the content of that particular history. In his work "On History", Eric Hobsbawm highlights the peculiar relationships between memory, the past and history in a characterization of the memory of a German Second World War massacre in a village in northern Italy: "[…] the village narrative had to be tested against the sources, and by these standards it was not history, although the formation of this village memory, its institutionalization and its changes over the past fifty years were part of history".[430] The same words could easily describe the collective remembering in Şahkulu. The narratives of Alevi village life and of cultural and religious predecessors in the lands of Anatolia are themselves integral parts of Alevi history; parts which teach us about institutionalization, continuities and changes in modern Alevi worldviews. The work carried out by teachers like Esat Hoca and Şakir Baba in establishing and delimiting an Alevi nature is one example that is relevant for the understanding of Şahkulu as an arena for modern, contemporary religious and cultural transformation. The way they used available research and modern methods of knowledge transmission to foster religious and cultural consolidation and change displayed the agency of memory-makers and religious entrepreneurs. Opportunities for teachers, intellectuals and functionaries to define and influence the content and forms of Alevi beliefs and practices have increased due to changes in authority in Alevi communities. This thesis, and especially Chapter Four, indicates that these new figures are not merely replacing the authority of the dedes, but co-exist and co-operate with them; sometimes challenging the dedes' authority, but more often finding new areas of religious and cultural influence.

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This thesis offers an empirical example of individual reception and utilization of the teachings derived from both old and new authorities, valuable for studies of collective memory and religious and cultural traditions in wider (and even comparative) contexts. In Chapter Seven, the ways Evrim and Nur understood and appropriated the Alevi teachings in Şahkulu have

430 Hobsbawm 1997:269.

been examined within the theoretical framework of Mahmood's study of Islamic piety in Egypt. This perspective has illuminated their individual agency and the importance of historical authoritative frameworks for the legitimization and expression of their quests. By taking a closer look at their reflections on the teachings in the foundation, and their choices of strategies for applying Alevi knowledge to their lives, this chapter offers a rare insight into individual and personal Aleviness. Through this chapter, the thesis marginally uncovers gender roles and narratives of the nature of Alevi and Sunni women that are vital for an Alevi self-image. One can sense that, for Evrim and Nur, Alevilik was a truly liberating worldview in regards to the freedom and rights of women, and polemics against traditionalist and social conservative Sunni Muslims seem to be an important ingredient in the self-assertion of thoroughly modern Alevi women emancipated by education and non-veiling. An interesting continuation of this part of the thesis would be to investigate narratives on the role of and conditions for Alevi women in Turkey and the European diasporas and the narratives surrounding the image of the modern, secularist, educated and non-veiled Alevi woman. This research would further develop the field of Alevi studies and also add complexity to the current understanding of female religious agency in contemporary Turkey.

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Processes of construction, dissemination and consumption of religious and cultural knowledge in the contemporary, modern world have been characterized by a number of features. Notwithstanding technological achievements in information and communication technology and their impact on society, migration seems to be a key force of change in the modern context of Alevi communities.[431] Although not subjected to explicit analysis, the forms and content of Alevi knowledge presented in this study all show signs of modernity in a variety of aspects. Quite obvious are signs of individualization such as the decline in the influence of classical institutions, fragmentation of authority structures and a certain level of democratization of the religious sphere. Such processes have been analysed as aspects of modernity foremost in studies on Islamic movements and the presence of Muslims in Europe.[432] The Alevi revival as such, is, however, an excellent example of modern efforts, and the ongoing identity-formation processes in the Alevi foundations and associations in

431 Mandaville is one author who has accentuated the effects of migration as the principal force of change in religious knowledge among Muslims in the modern global world (Mandaville 2003, 2007).

432 See Peter 2006 for an overview of this literature.

Turkey and Europe are suitable arenas for the study of religion and culture in the age of modernity.

Related to these processes of individualization are trends of historicity and authenticity. On a global scale, Peter Mandaville explains these trends by highlighting the discontent with increased pluralism in the European diasporas and the considerable generational gap between young Muslims in Europe today and their parents and grandparents.[433] In other words, it is the needs and aspirations of younger generations of Muslims experiencing a multitude of choices in religious authorities, beliefs and practices that are the driving forces of the re-articulation of religious knowledge in the world today. The realization among these younger generations that the worldview of their parents and grandparents does not always match the realities they live in also equips them to pick and choose among the alternatives available both with regard to authorities and to the subject matter they teach. This thesis has demonstrated the dynamic processes of such re-articulation where the teachers and the audience to a certain degree adapt to each other. Further, this thesis has shown the importance of historicity and authenticity in these processes. The dedes and the teachers of the Alevilik course in Şahkulu taught historical authenticity and established a sense of continuity of Alevi traditions. They also recognized the importance of plausible authenticity among their students – where historical evidence was not the only and far from the most relevant parameter, but where the feeling of continuity of experiences and the survival of a core Alevi nature created the historical and emotional depth needed for personal engagement. According to Charles Taylor, such feelings of authenticity have become a significant characteristic of modernity.[434]

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Several authors have indicated the specificity of the Turkish experience of modernity as decisive for the formation of identities in the modern history of the country.[435] Relevant for the Alevi experience of modernity is Kemalism as an ideology with a dual nature of being both a disciplining project of nation building and a liberating movement in its understanding of modernity.[436] The closeness between the Kemalist ideology and the Alevi worldview dominating the definitions of Alevilik in Şahkulu has been demonstrated primarily in Chapter Six where constructions of an Alevi nature have been related to the master narratives of Turkish

433 Mandaville 2003:130, 2001:121.
434 Taylor 1992.
435 Kieser 2006; Özyürek 2006; Kaya 2004; Bozdoğan and Kasaba 1997.
436 Kaya 2004.

nationalism. In this respect, the term "nostalgic modernity", borrowed from Esra Özyürek (and described in Chapter Six), is highly relevant both as a political ideology as well as a discursive and sentimental condition.[437]

The effects of Kemalist domination is obvious in the Alevi revival in Turkey and Europe today; through identity-political struggles of recognition and cultural rights Alevis are constantly opposing and challenging the limits of Kemalist tolerance. Alevis, however, also recognize Kemalism as liberating with regard to individual development and autonomy based on science and reason as well as in the field of women's rights. In an interesting article on Alevi understandings of the concepts of modernity and tradition, Aykan Erdemir identifies different approaches to the Alevi revival among contemporary authors on Alevilik. Some of these are concerned with the question of whether or not the Alevi revival is a result of state domination. Erdemir refers to opposing views expressing Alevi identity-political struggles as a consequence of the Turkish state's inability to dominate social dynamics and as evidence that the Turkish state is actually controlling and domesticating Alevis by turning them into Kemalists.[438] Both these perspectives could be meaningful when applied to the processes at work in Şahkulu. As a part of the Alevi movement that challenges secularist limits of the Kemalist ideology by claiming their rights to free expression and state support of their religious traditions, Şahkulu (and other Alevi foundations and associations) are clearly not only in the hands of the state. In Şahkulu, the state-sponsored definition of Alevilik as authentic Turkish Anatolian culture, however, is upheld and further developed.

Other authors understand the replacement of class politics with identity politics in contemporary Turkey as an indicator of post-modernity.[439] In Şahkulu, the life and teachings of Esat Hoca could be an example of this. The predominant approach to the Alevi revival in Şahkulu (where Erdemir has also conducted research) is, however, that of a return to tradition.[440] The understanding of modernity and tradition in Şahkulu is not antagonistic. Possessing, articulating and living traditions are rather signs of being modern. In other words, modernity is, in Şahkulu, a moral framework for defining and delimitating what Kieser has chosen to call "post nationalist identities".[441] This is a Kemalist heritage that is widespread throughout the civil society in urban Turkey.

437 Özyürek 2006: 18–20.
438 Erdemir 2005b: 940.
439 Erdemir 2005b: 941.
440 Erdemir 2005b: 940–942.
441 Kieser 2006.

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