

Euro-Alevi: From *Gastarbeiter* to Transnational Community

BESİM CAN ZİRH

Introduction: “Non-Sunni-Muslim-Minority” as a New Label for Alevi

After a long period of silence and invisibility, Alevi of Turkey have dramatically become one of the controversial issues of Turkish politics in the last two decades. This is the phenomenon known as *Alevilik Uyanışı* (the Alevi Revival) (Çamuroğlu 1998) and popularly named as *Alevilik Patlaması* (the Explosion of Alevism) (Vorhoff 2003: 91). These gripping concepts refer to a dramatic and almost unexpected increase in the socio-political visibility of Alevism. Hundreds of books published, dozens of Alevi associations and new radio stations established appeared as the indicator of this phenomenon. Although some researchers had forecasted the nearly inevitable disappearance of this particular culture in the beginning of the 1980s (Vorhoff 1998: 31), the silence was broken when an open letter, the Alevi Declaration, signed by numerous intellectuals was published in 1990. With this ‘coming out’, constitutional recognition of Alevi, as a particular but integral component of the nation, was explicitly demanded for the first time in Turkish history.

Nearly 15 years after the Alevi Declaration, another phase in this revival was reached when a second declaration was jointly issued by *Avrupa Alevi Birlikleri Konfederasyonu* (the Confederation of European Alevi Unions – the CEAU)¹ and *Alevi Bektaşî Federasyonu* (the Federation of Alevi Bektashi – the FAB)² on 7th of October 2004. This declaration was actually a response to the EU Regular Re-

1 The CEAU has been established in 2000 as an umbrella organisation so as to represent Alevi associations on European scale. Presently, hundreds of Alevi associations from 10 European countries such as France, the Netherlands, Austria, and Norway are represented under this organisation.

2 The FAB has been established in 2004 in cooperation with the CEAU so as to supply a similar umbrella function for Alevi associations in Turkey.

port 2004 on Turkey's progress³ which defined Alevi as a "Non-Sunni Muslim Minority" (Regular Report 2004: 44-45) instead of using the concept of "Non-Sunni Muslim Community" or "Alevi" employed before 2004. Having endorsed this new conceptualisation without reservation, this declaration indicated a dramatic shift in the discourse of the Alevi movement⁴ as the decade long agenda of Alevi movement shifted from the "right to be equal" as citizens to the "right to be different" as a minority group.⁵ Furthermore, the declaration also revealed a publicly unknown fact, namely that the concept was able to find a place in the report as a result of a five-year-long lobbying campaign by CEAU at the EU Parliament.

The concept of "minority" was removed from the Regular Report 2004 as a result of immediate reaction by Turkish state and replaced with that of "community" again in the subsequent years.⁶ Even in the absence of the concept, it would not be wrong to argue that the question of Alevism has begun to be appraised as another painful task in Turkey's yellow-brick road to Europe.⁷ Some red-blooded words from the declaration may well indicate this forthcoming 'political danger': "Although solving these problems through impositions by the Eu-

- 3 The EU Regular Reports on Progress are prepared by the European Commission for each candidate country during the process of accession. The first Regular Report on Turkey's progress was issued in 1998 followed by the reports prepared in 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006 and 2007. For more information, http://www.avrupa.info.tr/AB_ve_Turkiye/Muzakereler/Regular_Reports.html.
- 4 By the Alevi Movement, I refer to the socio-political awareness appeared at the end of 1980s firstly in Germany. In 1988, a small group of Alevi immigrants from different German cities gathered in Hamburg under the name of Alevi Kültür Grubu (the Alevi Culture Group). In addition to their associational title which overtly voices the name Alevi, the group differentiated itself from the previous Alevi associations by directly referring to the question of Alevism from a new approach.
- 5 It is impossible to discuss the Alevi movement as a monolith entity. Apart from the main stream divisions, there are also many localised forms of the movement in Turkey and Europe. To illustrate, in spite of its prominent position in the CEAU, the Berlin Anatolian Alevi Culture Centre (BAAC) responded to the definition of Alevi as a belief out of Islam very critically. When I was coincidentally in Berlin on the day the declaration was issued in 2004, the members of the BAAC were discussing about suspending their membership to the CEAU.
- 6 Alevi in the EU Progress Reports, 1998: Turkey's Alawi Muslims with non-Sunni background. 1999: the Alevi. 2000: the non-Sunni Muslim communities. 2001: the Alevi. 2002: the non-Sunni Moslem/religious communities and the Alevi. 2003: the non-Sunni Moslem communities and the Alevi. 2004: the non-Sunni Muslim minorities and the Alevi. 2005: the non-Sunni Moslem/religious communities and the Alevi. 2006: the Alevi community/the large Muslim Alevi community. 2007: the Alevi and the Followers of Alevism. Main concerns about Alevi in the Reports are mainly about legal and socio-political difficulties of expressing and practising their belief and identity.
- 7 German Green Party MP, Cem Özdemir stresses this vital importance of the question of Alevism in EU accession process by saying "Türkiye'nin AB'ye giden yolu cemevlerinden geçer" (The path of Turkey to EU passes through cemevis [Alevi religious centres]) (Alevilerin Sesi, July 2004: 83).

ropean Parliament annoys us, the assimilationist approach of the Turkish government in power leaves us with no alternative than EU" (CEAU – FAB, Manuscript – 2004). Additionally, the ensuing outcry from populist political groups blaming Alevis for "betraying" Turkey by cooperating with the EU indicates nothing but the ambiguous position of Alevism in Turkey. Needless to say, as we will see in the following section, such disagreements bear close resemblances to the political prejudices which stigmatised Alevis as an "inner-enemy" during the 1960s and 70s.

Considering the interaction and cooperation between the CEAU and the FAB, I prefer to approach this case as an appropriate example indicating the process of transnationalisation through migratory experiences in a historically specific context. In this sense, I claim that this is not a spontaneous 'revival/awakening' of what was going to sink into oblivion two decades ago. On the contrary, I suggest that 'Alevi Revival' should be understood as a 'reconstruction/recapture' on the basis of a new context that emerged as a result of migratory experiences. In other words, I basically claim that Alevism has become able to exceed the limitations of its historically rooted geographical, social, political, legal and economic marginality by establishing extensive social networks linking distant locales in the processes of internal and external migration. Alevi identity has been re-defined and restructured on the basis of various restraints and opportunities and as a result of diverse struggles and negotiations on local, national and transnational levels. In this article I attempt to analyse the transnationalisation of Alevis in the process of migration to Germany/Europe so as to understand the appearance of the concept of "Non-Sunni-Muslim Minority".

What is Alevism? A Perpetual Working Definition

Any attempt to define Alevism has to deal with two main difficulties. On the one hand, as Sökefeld mentions, "the answer is neither clear nor self-evident; the question is not a rhetorical one" (2004a: 1). On the other hand, the question of Alevism has always been wrapped in political concerns. Two separate sources of literature can be mentioned to exemplify this complexity.⁸

- 8 John Shindeldecker (2001) notes that he located all these following definitions about the question of what is Alevism during his research: (1) "An Alevi is any Muslim who loves the family of the Prophet Muhammad", (2) "An Alevi is simply any democratic, tolerant, human rights-promoting, modern-thinking person, whatever his religious background", (3) "An Alevi is a filthy, immoral person who is so far from religion that he must first become a Christian before he can become a Muslim", (4) "Alevism is the original, true essence of Islam", (5) "Alevism is a heterodox sect within Islam", (6) "Alevism is the most authentic expression of Turkish Anatolian Islam", (7) "Alevism is a philosophy, a 'way of life'", (8) "Alevism is pure Sufism", (9) "Alevism is pure Shiism", (10) "Alevism is simply Sunni Islam with an extra emphasis on Ali", (11) "Alevism is so syncretistic that it can't be counted as Islam at all", (12) "Alevism is an alternative to orthodox Islam", (13)

The literature on “the people of Asia Minor” from the late 19th century mainly focuses on the question of origin of certain communities such as *Tahtacı* and *Kızılbaş* which are identified as Alevi today.⁹ Although many European scholars have reached a consensus on the idea that such heretical communities represent the survival of pre-Islamic beliefs (Crowfoot 1900), the question is still loaded with “very considerable confusion” for Hasluck (1929: 311). De Planhol offers his “resignation” referring to “the complexity of the issue.” To conclude his literature review, Grønhaug cites De Planhol’s resignation and says “I feel no incentive to go further than that” (quoted in: Grønhaug 1974: 9, 189).

The question of what is Alevism has become very popular with the emergence of the ‘Revival’ at the end of 1980s and, since then, hundreds of books in Turkish have been published on the question which Alevis themselves are trying to answer (Vorhoff 1998: 31). However, this extensive literature blended with various political concerns does not supply more definite answers.¹⁰ I would mention only some of the main exemplars of such definitions and their relation to certain political agendas (Okan 1999; Göker 1999):¹¹

1. Having originated from Avesta and Zoroasterian, Alevism is an ethno-religion as a part of Kurdish Culture (Algül 1999).
2. Having originated from Middle Asian Turkic paganism, Alevism is an ethno-religion as a part of Turkish Culture (Türkdoğan 2004).
3. Alevism, as a syncretic belief, originated from Middle Asian Turkic paganism but also blended with many other different cultures during the process of Islamisation of the region (Ocak 1996).
4. Alevism is a branch of Islam specific to Anatolia (Sezgin 1998).
5. Alevism is a form of primitive communalism specific to Anatolia and the product of “class struggle” of early medieval period (Yürükoğlu 1990).

The first two definitions try to channel Alevism into Kurdish or Turkish national political movements. Various forms of the syncretism thesis, exemplified here in reference to Ocak (1996), are widely used by urbanised Alevis to celebrate Alevism as a secular culture rather than a belief system. The fourth thesis tries to loc-

“Alevism is an example of the classic Marxist struggle by an oppressed minority”, (14) “Alevism is a mixture of the best elements of Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Manichaeism, Zoroastrianism, Shamanism, and 20th century humanism”.

9 See also Footnote 15.

10 One of the prominent historians, Reha Çamuroğlu, who is Alevi himself and works on Alevism, concludes the discussion on the question of definition by referring to a Tao master who says: “Tao tanımlamaz, tanımlanırsa Tao olmaz” (Tao cannot be defined. If it is defined, it would not be Tao) (Çamuroğlu 2000: 10).

11 In his book titled as “What is Alevism?” in Turkish, Baki Öz, who is a retired high-school teacher and one of the “new Alevi intellectuals” himself, categorises such attempts to define Alevism under 32 different statements (Öz 1996).

ate Alevism in the circle of orthodox Islam, whereas the last praises as a proto-communist philosophy by indicating its non-conformism.¹² Massicard (2003: 3) employs the concept of “framing contest” to analyse this divergence in the definition of Alevism as a reflection of the political struggle between different parties over Alevism.

In light of these difficulties, my attempt to define Alevism should be understood as a working definition specific to this very moment of history. In other words, instead of trying to reach a static definition of Alevism, I focus on some essential symbols and institutions which are indispensable components of Alevism. Although their applications may differ in nuance for one or another reason, almost all Alevi communities share these institutions regardless of the question whether they are still in use or not.

To begin with, Alevi, as a contemporary concept, was popularised at the beginning of the 19th century, and refers to groups of people who have a particular belief system and set of practices which are different from that of Sunni Islam in Anatolia.¹³ The concept derives from Alawi, and etymologically means the follower of Ali, the son-in-law and cousin of the Prophet Mohammed. His assassination in 680 in Kufa resulted in the first and main division in Islam. This is specifically important for understanding Alevism since they comprehend their collective history of victimisation as a fate beginning with the murder of Ali. This event functions as a “chosen trauma” for Alevis by combining “their loss of col-

12 During the visit by German-Turkish Joint Seminar group to an Alevi organisation in Ankara in 2005, an “Alevi intellectual” translated the historical position of Alevism in Anatolia in reference to the German Peasant War in 1524/5. He also urged the audience not to consider Alevism in reference to Martin Luther what he has all done is “temporising such a great revolt by creating a new religion for bourgeoisie classes”: the Protestantism. Instead, he suggested another name, Thomas Munzer. Such a nuance could only be understood by those who already read *The Peasant War in Germany* by Friedrich Engels (Engels 2000).

13 The concept of ‘Alevi’ did not take place in the official documents of the Ottoman Empire until the 19th century (Ortaylı 1997: 120). These communities that we identify today with the name of Alevi, as the “umbrella term”, were known by their tribal names such as Tahtaci, Abdal, Cepni, and Zaza (Eickelman 1989); or by imposed pejorative labels such as Rafizi, Zındık and Mülhid which means unbeliever, infidel and non-Muslim (Melikoff 1998: 5); or by the name of Kızılbaş (red-heads) which referred to the insubordinate attitude of heretical communities especially in the eastern part of Anatolia (Birge 1965: 67). Much more importantly, many historical resources have been re-written following the popularity of this “new” concept. The memoirs of İbrahim Ethem Begh who was a governor in Gallipoli regions during the War of Independence (1919-1923) may be presented as a proper example of such re-writings. In its 1936 version, “A lady informed that an old kızılbaş Çetmi came and ask for irregulars” (Ethem 1936: 164) re-published as “there is Çetmi, namely, an Alevi in the village asking for irregulars” in its 1989 version (Ethem 1989: 289) (I should thank Mehmet Demiray for this last quotation about İbrahim Ethem Begh. He noticed this nuance in the period of literature review for our joint research on Alevism in 2002).

lective self-idealisation and the emotional burdens of historical grievances” and allows them to “act as ready victims of circumstances” (Volkan 1997: 48).¹⁴

Alevism may roughly be defined as a belief which has its own specific “secrecy of Gnostic forms and esoteric teaching” (Erdemir 2005: 938) and claims “to possess the inner/esoteric meaning of Islamic revelation” (Kehl-Bodrogi 2003: 53). According to Melikoff, the formation of Alevism is rooted in the 11 – 12th century following the Islamisation of Mesopotamia which caused the convergence of pre-Islamic beliefs with Islam (Melikoff 1998). Tord Olsson portrays the Ali-oriented belief communities in reference to (1) the priority of oral over written culture, (2) the principal of *takiye* (dissimulation)¹⁵ and (3) the insubordinate and non-conformist characteristic in opposition to any kind of political centrality and institutionalised orthodoxy (Olsson 1998).

Alevis, in their traditional settings, organise themselves in the form of endogamous and closed communal units. Membership can only be achieved through cognation but it is also needed to be upgraded with a special ceremony conducted by a *dede* (spiritual leader). Alevism may properly be defined by referring to what it is not, namely, its essential differences from orthodox-Islam. They do not observe any of the core rites of Islam such as practising *namaz* (Sunni prayer),¹⁶ or fasting during the Ramadan.¹⁷ *Saz* (Turkish lute) and *Semah* (ritual dance) occupy a central position in their rituals during which men and women gather under the same roof. In some communities, a symbolic amount of alcohol, *dem/dolu*, is consumed at the opening part of rituals. Lastly, Alevi women, mainly in the urb-

14 As Vorhoff writes, Alevis usually define their historical origin in a very pronounced dualism with Sunni-Islam by referring to Kerbela where Huseyin, son of Ali, and his followers were killed. The Alevis as “the people of Ali”, “the descendants of Kerbela”, “the adherents of the Ehlibley [the family of Mohammed]” oppose the Sunnis as “the people of Ebu Bekir, Ömer and Osman [first three caliphates]” or “the followers of Yezid [political rival of Ali during his caliphate]” (Vorhoff 2003: 103).

15 In Alevi tradition, the *takiye* principle refers that Alevis may dissimulate their belief and identity in the presence of non-Alevis so as to conceal the “secrecy” of the belief and to avoid possible discriminations by orthodox-Islam (Zeidan 1999: 2).

16 Unlike the followers of orthodox Islam, Alevis do not attend mosques, and consequently their settlements in rural Anatolia are known as *Camisiz Köyler* (the villages without mosques).

17 However, this non-practicing should not be considered as a denial of Islamic rites. The main structure of Alevi cosmology is described as a path though the four doors which are hierarchically ordered as *Şeriat* (the Sheri’a), *Tarikat* (Mysticism), *Marifet* (Ingenuity), and *Hakikat* (the Truth). Islamic rites are required by the first door. Since Alevis accept that their belief system has already passed through this very first door, they do not need to practice these core rites (Shankland 2003: 85).

an context, usually do not wear headscarves¹⁸ (Shankland 1993; Hasluck/Hasluck 1929: 153).

In modern Turkey Alevi constitute the second largest religious community. According to some estimates, the population of Alevi fluctuates between ten and twenty-five per cent of the total population of Turkey (70 million 2006 est.). Additionally, twenty per cent of the Alevi population is also Kurdish (Vorhoff 1998, Zeidan 1999). Regional, linguistic, ethnic, and ritual differences draw historical borders among Alevi communities (Aktaş 2000; Kehl-Bodrogi 1997). Nevertheless, these differences among the communities are not as vital as the difference between Alevism and Sunnism. As Geaves mentions, “otherness [in Alevism] is more a religious term rather than tribal” (2003: 61).¹⁹

Three social institutions, which have indispensable importance in the reproduction of Alevism, can further be focused to discuss Alevism. First of all, *dedelik* as a spiritual leadership has a unique role which cannot be compared with the role of imam in Sunni-Islam. Each Alevi community consists of *talips* (the followers) who are organised under the leadership of a *dede* who needs to be committed to specific spiritual centres, *ocaks* (heart) and is also supervised by a *pir* (grand-master) who resides in these centres (Shankland 2003). It is believed that each *dede* comes from the holy lineage of Ali which is the main sources of their spiritual charisma. *Dedes* also have absolute judicial roles.²⁰ In the special inter-

18 In Turkey, the difference between *Türban* and *Başörtüsü* is needed to be mentioned specifically. According to the republicans and secularist, although *Başörtüsü* as a rural and folkloric way of veiling does not have any political connotation; *Türban* is used by political Islam as a symbol of their movement. In light of some critiques to earlier versions of this paper where I used the concept of ‘headscarf,’ I prefer to use *Türban* to indicate the form of more urban and contemporary veiling – if it is not political – to stress the difference between Alevism and Sunnism. In this sense, my claim here does not apply to veiling in rural contexts where Alevi women may traditionally veil their heads.

19 The historical relation between Kurdish-ness as an ethnic identity and Alevi-ness as a spiritual/religious identity also highlights another difficulty about Alevism. On the basis of historical evidence, it would not be wrong to argue that Kurdish-Alevi and Turkish-Alevi can get together around the Alevi-ness much easier than Kurdish-Shafis and Kurdish-Alevi make a coalition on the basis of the Kurdish-ness. In this sense, Alevi and Kurdish organisations today constitute a strong neither/nor alternative to each other. A Kurdish-Alevi has to choose either an Alevi or a Kurdish organisation if he or she needs to participate in one. This choice also determines which part of his/her identity is going to be emphasised. During my pilot research, I came across many examples of this situation. Although they can use the Zaza/Kurdish language as the everyday language among family members, some people prefer to identify themselves only as ‘Alevi’.

20 According to many sources, Alevi especially in rural settings did not apply to the official judicial system. Any kind of intra-communal problems was preferred to be solved under the supervision of *dedes*. This principle has gradually dissolved since the 1950s when the internal migration began (Demir 1999: 24). On the other hand, it would not be wrong to argue that respected *dedes* have still some level of judicial authority to solve certain disputes in modern Alevi associations.

rogation ritual, *görgü cemi*, which is performed only once a year, the *dede* examines his *talips* as to whether or not they behaved in a morally up-right manner according to Alevi doctrine.²¹ In the case of being found guilty, a member can be required to compensate his/her fault in accordance to varying degrees of penalty. In much more extreme cases such as murder and adultery, the *dede* has the authority to label a guilty member as a *düşkün* (shunned) which implies a total excommunication from the community (Zeidan 1999; Geaves 2003: 63).

The main ritual in Alevism is *cem*, a nocturnal ritual constituting the main platform for Alevis to congregate under the supervision of a *dede*. Etymologically, *Ayin-i Cem* means gathering at the core of existence, namely, great integration (Bal 1997: 82). In Alevi cosmology, every human, *can* (life), is a form of energy which comes from and goes through the *hak* (God). In this sense, *cem* means glorification of the only sacred thing on this earth, namely, human beings (Shankland 1998: 20). *Musahiplik* is the third important social institution which is a prerequisite for entering into *görgü cemi* in some communities. *Musahiplik* is a kind of kinship relation which one can not be born into such as *kirvelik* (godparenthood of circumcision) (Kieser 2001: 5). The concept etymologically means the fraternity of path/world which refers to making two males socially responsible to each other about their way of life and commitment to the doctrine (Kaygusuz 1991: 11).

As a conclusion, these three institutions have critical importance for the reproduction and transmission of Alevism through generations. Some scholars stress this importance by claiming that Alevism cannot be imagined in the absence of these institutions (Yörükhan 1998: 35; Yaman 2000: 5). For anyone studying Alevism, especially in the urban and migration context, it is very difficult to locate ‘proper’ applications of these institutions.²² In this sense, first of all, I prefer to understand Alevism on the basis of these institutions. Secondly, I claim that focusing on the evolution of these institutions is important to understand the transformation of Alevism.

Historical Background: Alevis of Turkey: From “Non-Person” to “Inner-Enemy” – Leaving and Losing Home.

In the long history of the Ottoman Empire Alevi communities known by their tribal names and affiliations were treated differently in accordance with the politic-

21 These manners are understood in reference to the motto of “eline, beline, diline sahip olmak”. Be Master your hand, tongue, and loins; namely, do not take what is not yours, do not lie, and do not commit adultery (Tur 2002: 451).

22 Sökefeld, for instance, quotes on a *dede* living in Hamburg who says “Cem [which he is conducting in Hamburg] is a game, it is a drama because a deep, spiritual involvement of all the participants is missing” (2004b: 147).

al tensions of specific periods and regions. Their position in this long history has always been ambivalent. Although, they were often labelled as ‘non-believers’ or ‘out-of-Islam’, they were never recognised as “non-Muslim” within the Ottoman Millet system which entitled non-Muslim communities such as Jews and Christians to have particular rights and duties. In this sense, as Vergin argues, in addition to suffering from suppression and pressures over their belief and ways of life, Alevis, then and now, have a kind of “non-person” public persona which enhanced their public invisibility (2000: 76).

During the disintegration period of the Empire, especially at the very beginning of the 20th century, newly emerging nationalists approached Alevis from a different angle. This ‘disrespected’ and ‘ignored’ culture began to be esteemed in the search for an alliance during the War of Independence and then it was also socially mobilised in the frame of the new national identity (Küçük 2002: 165). During this period, certain literary components of Alevism such as folk lyrics and poets (Kehl-Bodrogi 2003: 57) were utilised as the culture of “true Turks” in order to purify the new official Turkish language in opposition to the Ottoman language (Karpas 1976: 120). With reference to this flirtation as opposed to their disadvantaged position during the Ottoman period, Alevis are usually presented as strong adherents of secular republicanism since the very beginning of the Republic. Alevis’ sympathy for the republic derives from both myth and reality which is a phenomenon that should also be contextualised to understand Alevism in Turkey (Öz 2000: 35, 45).

It would not be appropriate to understand this convergence as an attempt to open a new space for Alevis on the grounds that all these cultural elements were “neutralised” before being utilised for national identity building (Massicard 2003: 6). Once again, “the existence of Alevis in the state was covered in silence” (Sökefeld/Schwalgin 2000: 11). Since the Republic “did not discriminate [Alevis] in favour of Sunnis” (Ahmad 1994: 167), this new period has opened the door to social, economical and educational mobility for Alevis but only if they abandon their particularity (Alevi identity) to melt into the republican commonality (national identity). In this sense, I suggest that this “republican socialisation” has enabled Alevis to leave their geographically isolated locations and socially marginalised position.

In the 1940s, considerable inner-migration flows appeared in Turkey as a result of rapid industrialisation as well as modernisation. Considering their communal structure, Alevis were both the ‘victors’ and the ‘victims’ of this new period. They were victors because they were able to break free from violence and repression of the centuries under the Ottoman the Empire. They were victims because this liberation required them to keep a very low-profile in terms of displaying their identity in public life. They could be a part of newly emerging world by jumping on the bandwagon going to the cities, but their well-preserved communal structure also receded in their memories with every kilometer traveled.

In the same decade, the multi-party system was announced and the *Demokrat Parti* (the Democratic Party – DP) achieved a victory against the founding *Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi* (the Republican People Party – RPP) in 1950. In the political atmosphere of the period, Alevis were also among the supporters of ‘democracy’, however, they turned to the RPP as the DP’s discourse shifted from liberal-democratic to conservative-Islamist which reminded them of repressive days during the Ottoman Empire (Karpaz 2004: 91). With the military coup in 1960, Turkish socio-political life entered a new phase in which socio-political organisations mushroomed in accordance with the new constitution. This has brought the freedom of association. In this context, the first “Alevi Revival” came to fruition parallel with the urbanisation of Alevism which is the process increased their social and economic visibility especially in previously Sunni-dominated Anatolian city and town centres (Kaplan 2000: 246). The main motivation in this period derived from the necessity of responding to reactions by conservative-Islamists against the increasing visibility of Alevis. This process concluded with the establishment of *Türkiye Birlik Partisi* (the Turkish Union Party – TUP)²³ in 1966 (Şener/İlknur 1995: 77).

Although this first initiative managed to utter the name of Alevi publicly, Alevism remained invisible during the period between 1960s and 1980s. The reason of the invisibility in this period derived from another flirtation which was between Alevism and the leftist-secular politics. In the beginning of 1960s, quite a considerable number of Alevis had already been urbanised. As a result, in addition to legal and social difficulties, preserving and practising Alevism became nearly impossible as the organic relationships with three institutions mentioned above heavily dissolved.

In this sense, Alevism is now inadequate for helping Alevi youth to understand the new contradictions they have encountered in the highly-politicised urban context. In the wake of this ‘forgetting’, Alevi youth began taking part in the secular-leftist organisations against the raising rightist-Islamist hostility (Kehl-Bodrogi 1997: 11). In other words, as seen from this perspective it would be reasonable to argue that a historical enmity between Sunnism and Alevism emerged from the political polarisation of the period in the form of an antagonism between leftist and rightist groups (Neyzi 2003: 113). As one of initial outcomes of this process, Alevism was altered and transferred from the field of belief into that of politics as a “folk-socialism” (Koçan/Öncü 2004: 476).²⁴

This logical marriage of secular-leftist politics and Alevism also had some negative outcomes for the latter. First of all, this articulation reinforced the pro-

23 The TUP could never gain real political power. Especially after the national election in 1972, it turned into a more secular-leftist party by embracing a socialist agenda. It was abolished by the Military Coup in 1980.

24 For instance, a traditional motto of Alevi cosmology, “En’el Hak” (I am the God) was phonetically rewritten as a political slogan of “Emek-Hak” (labour-right) (Çoşkun 1995: 274) as “the untrimmed moustache of the Alevi becomes the distinctive features of all Turkish revolutionist” (Kehl-Bodrogi 1997: 11).

cess of forgetting by rendering Alevism as a local-symbolic component of a universal ideology inasmuch as Alevi youth in this period abandoned Alevism “in favour of the new secular ideologies” (Çamuroğlu 1998: 80). At the risk of oversimplification, it is possible to claim that sheltering in secular-leftist politics was the only way for Alevis to participate in the new social and political life of Turkey during this period. This sheltering may also be seen as a modernised version of the traditional dissimulation strategy by which Alevis were able to keep their identity invisible. Secondly, Alevism was identified with secular-leftist politics, and slightly with Kurdish separatism in the eyes of the rightist-Islamist groups which treated Alevism as an “internal enemy”.²⁵ This political polarisation culminated as a result of several armed attacks in a number of central and south-eastern Anatolian cities, such as Çorum, Sivas, Malatya, and Kahramanmaraş, between 1978 and 1980. Hundreds of people were killed in these attacks and most of them were Alevi (Sinclair-Webb 2003: 220-216). These events were very traumatic for Alevis who had become an integral part of social and economic life in these cities (Kaleli 2000: 102-103). Eventually, they started fleeing to Turkish and European metropolises and Alevis in Europe decided to stay instead of returning to insecure “home on fire”. In other words, “The homeland Turkey, which has become a land of repression and sorrow, has turned into a ‘lost homeland’” (Rigoni 2003: 164).

The military coup in 1980 constituted another turning point for Alevism. Initially, the tragic social extermination of secular-leftist politics in Turkey has left Alevis voiceless once again. With the emergence of “Turk-Islam synthesis” as a new *cementing ideology*, public life was radically reconsolidated on the basis of more nationalist (Turkish) and more religious (Sunni-Islam) ideology (Jongerden 2003: 71). This reconsolidation inevitably brought an end to *sui generis* neutrality of the Turkish state. Turkification and/or the Sunnification of the official persona of the state did not only ignore but also pushed sub-national identities into the category of “lesser Turks” (Kosnick 2004: 990).

Furthermore, the rise of the Kurdish armed struggle of the Kurdistan Worker’s Party (PKK) also heightened the situation of Alevis since they were caught in the crossfire between the Turkish state and the Kurdish separatism both of which attempt to redefine and mobilize Alevism for the sake of their own political agenda (Çamuroğlu 1998: 80; White 2003: 17). Another significant outcome of this period had to do with Alevis living in European countries. Before the military coup, they had already organised under highly home-land-oriented secular-leftist political organisations which were usually sister chapters of Turkey-based organisations. In this sense, the abolishment of all social and political organisations in the home-land drove them into a political vacuum which was hard to fill again.

25 During the period, 3K Doctrine appeared as an unofficial internal security doctrine, which indicates all “internal-enemies” of Turkish state: Kızılbaş-Kürt-Kommünist (Kizilbas-Kurd-Communist).

Alevis of Germany: From “Institutions of Alevis” to “Alevi Institutions” – *Desiring Home*

In the Turkish case, international migration basically refers to the process of labor migration from Turkey to Western Europe, especially to Germany, which began in 1961 in the frame of bilateral agreements. Secondly, although Turkish immigrants share certain social and cultural similarities, “it is impossible to talk about ‘the Turkish-German transmigrant’ as a homogeneous ideal type” (Jeffrey 2001: 107). In other words, Germany has a unique role in the story of Turkish immigration and the case of Alevism has its own particular chapter in this story. There are 2.5 million Turkish immigrants in Germany. Of those 600-700 thousands, about thirty per cent are Alevis (Rigoni 2003: 166). In Germany, Alevis have organised in the form of home-town and/or worker charity associations since the early days of immigration. In accordance with the changing political climate in both, the home- and host-land, previous “home-away-home” organisations have been gradually superseded by political and ideological ones. At the beginning of 1970s, secular-leftist organisations, which were usually official or unofficial sister chapters of home-land based legal or illegal political organisations, have appeared as the dominant form of organisation (Şahhüseyinoğlu 2001: 250). Despite a changing political climate, the political mobilisation of Turkish immigrants has remained as highly home-land-oriented. Consequently, it is not surprising that political organisations abroad inherited the home-made blindness to the question of Alevism. In this sense, as Sökefeld and Schwalgin claim, they were “institutions of Alevis” but the socio-political networks they established gave birth to “Alevi institutions” at the end of 1970s (Sökefeld/Schwalgin 2000: 12).

During this period, Alevis in Europe usually gathered at private meetings which were only open to acquaintances and compatriots who knew each other personally. These private meetings mainly resembled social chatting. Although the question of transmission of Alevism to next generations was a burning issue of these meetings, they were not able to perform even basic rituals due to difficulty of finding a learned *dede* in the context of migration. (Sökefeld/Schwalgin 2000: 12). On the other hand, a significant level of discrimination by Turkish Sunni immigrants constituted another difficulty for Alevis in expressing their identity during this period (Naess 1990: 188; Østergaard-Nielsen 2003: 28). Just as in Turkey, most of Alevis felt uncomfortable expressing Alevisness overtly.²⁶

Consequently, Alevis abroad had also remained “unorganised and invisible in secular-leftist organisations/associations” (Sökefeld/Schwalgin 2000: 12). In other words, the modernised dissimulation strategy has been imported to Europe

26 One of the most frequent examples of this dissimulation strategy appeared during the holy month of Ramadan. During this long period of silence, although they do not practice this core rite of Islam, Alevis in Europe pretend to be fasting to avoid humiliating discrimination by Sunni Turkish immigrants.

along with the arrival of the home-based antagonism and conflicts. Since they kept such a low profile, even in Germany, Alevis were almost invisible to academic research as well as to official reports until the end of 1980s (Thomä-Venske 1990: 83). The idea of discarding the cover of leftist-secular politics as a home-land custom appeared in the wake of the bloody attacks of the late 1970s. In this period, Mustafa Timisi, the leader of the TUP, visited Germany and toured several cities to seek for cooperation. As a result of his encouraging visit, a new association was established by Alevis who left secular-leftist political organisations to be part of this first independent initiative of their own. *Yurtseverler Birliği* (the Union of Patriots – UP) established as a sister chapter of the TUP to support the struggle for the rights of Alevis in the home-land. In a short period of time, the UP had organised in several German cities and they united under the roof of *Yurtseverler Birliği Federasyonu* (the Federation of Union of Patriots – FUP) with the participation of twenty-five local UPs. This first independent initiative also encountered depressing criticism from ex-comrades who accused Alevis of becoming “factionalist”, “religiously oriented” and “fickle”.²⁷

Even though they continued to use a social-democratic (right to be equal) instead of an ethno-religious (right to be different) discourse in the political context of the period, they were able to courageously reveal Alevisism by mobilising and liberating their cultural symbols. For instance, one of the first organisational activities was an amateur play, *Türkiye Gerçeğinde Kerbela* (*Kerbela* in the Reality of Turkey), which attempted to inform Turkish and German audiences about the bloody conflicts in Turkey (Şener/İlknur 1995: 116). In spite of its organisational power, members of the FUP were easily de-motivated after the military coup in 1980 due to the fear of being investigated in Turkey because of their political activities in Germany. As noted earlier, the military coup caused a political vacuum for Alevis at home and abroad. Under this circumstance, the FUP could survive only up to the mid-1980s by gradually losing its organisational influence. In my opinion, the period between 1980 and 1988 can be conceptualised as “reconsideration period” in which Alevi leaders and intellectuals considered former political strategies and searched for a new road map to overcome this political vacuum. As an outcome of this period, in the late 1980s some ex-leaders of the FUP and exiled leftist Alevi youth established a new social-democratic organisation which would be more concerned with problems of “being immigrant” in Germany rather than with the issues of their country of origin (Sökefeld/Schwalgin 2000: 13).

Towards the end of this period, in 1988, the most crucial point was reached when an independent small circle, *Alevi Kültür Grubu* (the Alevi Culture Group – ACG), gathered in Hamburg to discuss possible strategies to reveal *Alevi*

27 In the May Day demonstration in Germany in 1990, for example, a group of Alevis who want to participate in the demonstration with a placard which said “Freedom for Alevi Doctrine” was blocked by members of a Turkish leftist organisation (Tosun 2000: 113).

Gerçeği (the Alevi Reality) at home and abroad. Almost all the members were ex-members/leaders of the FUP. At the same time, some of them were also members of the Association of Turkish Social Democracy and volunteers for the *Deutsch-Ausländische Begegnungsstätten* (the German-Foreign Association of Cultural and Social Exchange – GFA) founded by the city council of Hamburg (Sökefeld/Schwalgin 2000: 15).

In the light of their experiences in the GFA, they noticed that the newly emerging multicultural context in European allows a particular identity to become a form of positive social capital.²⁸ With this inspiration, as a first step for revealing the question of Alevism in the home-land and Europe, they drew up a bi-lingual declaration which would clearly give voice to their demands on behalf of Alevism. This declaration was announced on the opening day of the first Alevi Culture Week organised by the ACG in December 1989. During this week, they also announced the establishment of the Hamburg Alevi Culture Center (HACC) as a new organisational model which focuses on the question of Alevism and migration. This was also the first association which used the name of “Alevi” as an organisational title in the history of Alevism. Some sentences from the declaration may be enlightening for understanding their initial motivation:

Alevism, nearly with 20 million participants, is a branch of living Islam in Turkey... Alevis disguise their identity because of anxieties about being excluded by Sunnis... Alevism is not a new trend; it is a cultural heritage hundreds of years old... A foreign worker is able to be a migrant worker in the case that both his/her society and German society accept the phenomenon of migration. This is the same for Alevis. It is necessary that he/she should accept him/her self as Alevi and the others should be acquainted with their Aleviness... We understand differences in society as dynamic of society... In the country that we are living in, fragments of Christianity, Catholicism and Protestantism, are living in harmony and even in solidarity. We believe that Alevis and Sunnis, one day, will reach this kind of tolerance (Manuscript²⁹ – 1989).

With these words, Alevis, as citizens of Turkey and as immigrants in Germany, proclaimed their problems in their home and host-land by directly referring to their particular identity which was invisible on these national spaces. Moreover, this declaration also points to their position of “double liminality” in the sense that they have certain difficulties because of their identity as Alevi in Turkey and as Alevi and immigrant in Germany (Mandel 1989). Another significance of this declaration is its transnational characteristic. After being announced in Germany,

28 For instance, the S.O.S Rassismus and the Beur is Beautiful movements of the 1970s are frequently mentioned by the current leaders of the Alevi Confederation to indicate their source of inspiration for a new strategy to reveal Alevi identity in Europe.

29 By ‘manuscript’, I refer to announcements and press releases issued by the organisations mentioned. To the best of my knowledge, the content of these documents were only partially and indirectly covered by the media, so I have quoted directly from the sources I have collected.

the declaration was ‘exported’ to Turkey through personal networks and published in *Cumhuriyet* newspaper with some retouches at the beginning of 1990. In this sense, although it is rarely known, the declaration written by ACG was the first version of the “Alevi Declaration” which is recognised as the milestone of the Alevi movement in Turkey (Kaleli 2000: 174).

This first phase of ‘revival’ ended with an unexpected incident. A mob, provoked by Islamist-fundamentalists, attacked the *Pir Sultan Abdal* commemoration festivals on the 2nd of July, 1993 in Sivas. In this incident, thirty-seven people died and of those thirty-three were Alevi. Alevis perceived this attack as another ‘massacre’ in reference to the bloody conflicts at the end of 1970s. The Sivas is a very critical turning point for the Alevi movement both in Turkey and abroad reinforcing the feeling that Turkey has become a “lost home-land” (Kaya 2000: 102). Under this extraordinary circumstance, Alevi Cultural Centres (ACC) could establish a complete hegemony over Alevism in opposition to some local and highly religiously-oriented Alevi initiatives.³⁰ On October 30th 1993, ACCs convened the 2nd General Assembly with the participation of 36 sister chapters from Germany and changed the name of FAC to *Avrupa Alevi Birlikleri Federasyonu* (the Federation of European Alevi Unions – the FEAU).³¹ After the Sivas, transnational cooperation between the European and Turkish Alevi movement has also become much more institutionalised.

Transnational Cooperation between Turkish and German Alevi Associations – *Transforming Home*

During the long decade of the Alevi movement in the 1990s, the newly emerging Alevi movement managed to generate a powerful discourse serving to uncover the question of Alevism both in Turkey and Europe. The main fields of associational activity in this period can be categorised under six interrelated topics:

- *Defining and Framing Identity*: As an initial outcome of the ‘forgetting’ in the 1960s, one of the most urgent tasks was to define Alevism in order to answer the question of “who are we?” In view of the complexity of the question, the Alevi movement inevitably drifted into a “framing

30 In contrast to new Alevi intellectuals of the period arguing “Alevis should turn their faces toward Europe” (Sökefeld 2004: 11), these local initiatives were in favour of keeping a low-profile to avoid the politicisation of Alevism.

31 The FEAU was established in Germany in 1994 with the participation of 140 Alevi associations represent 30,000 Alevis from all over Europe. Many of these associations were established just after Sivas. This is the process which is known as the ‘mushrooming period’. By this concept, I refer to a five-year-period between 1993 and 1998 in which a remarkable increase in the numbers of Alevi associations experienced. In this period, the number of Alevi associations in Germany increased from 20 to 140.

contest” (Massicard 2003: 3). In opposition to Turkish and Kurdish nationalists attempting to redefine Alevism ethnically, political Islamists tried to inject/eject Alevism into/from Islam, Kemalists desired to mobilize Alevism against a rising political Islam, leftists expected to take advantage of being linked to Alevism, and religiously-oriented *dedes* looked forward to restoring their status in the community.

- *Organising Panel Discussions*: In relation to “framing contest”, panel discussions on theological, historical, ethnic, and even political origins of Alevism were the most frequent and prestigious activity. Especially during the early period of the 1990s, a number of intellectuals were invited from Turkey on the basis of their expertise on Alevism.
- *Organising Cultural Courses*: Almost all associations tended to hold a variety of courses such as *saz* (musical instrument) and *semah* (ritual dance) to transfer the Alevi culture to new generations. Organising a course, however, has never been an easy task due to the lack of local expertise and of financial resources to invite professionals from Turkey.
- *Organising Religious Rituals*: Due to rising demands for religious services, almost all associations tend to organise *cem ayinis* and to employ a *dede*. At the beginning of 1990s, European associations invited *dedes* from Turkey through personal networks. However, as a result of disharmony between ‘Turkish’ *dedes* and ‘European’ audiences, associations have turned to European *dedes* who are much more familiar with the expectations of Alevis in Europe (Sökefeld 2002; Dumont 1997: 146).³² Due to the seriousness of the problem of defining and framing Alevi identity, employing a *dede*, who would be able to be flexible in adapting his view of Alevism in accordance with the association’s approach, became a very important asset for new Alevi leaders who need to gain a secular control over religious issues.
- *Organising Concerts*: Concerts are specifically useful for raising funds to buy a new building, to support sister associations in Turkey and to improve infrastructures and/or building *camevi* in home-villages in Turkey (Rittersberger-Tılıç 1998).
- *Issuing Reports*: Especially in the mid-1990s, some Alevi villages experienced brutal treatment by Turkish Special Forces operating against the Kurdish separatists in Sivas, Erzincan, Tokat and Ordu. The FEAU from Germany and *Pir Sultan Abdal Kültür Derneği* (Pir Sultan Abdal Cultural Association – the PSKAD) from Turkey issued several reports on these events in the framework of human right violations. The FEAU also con-

32 For instance, in a cem ritual that he participated in 1986 in Strasburg, Dumont witnessed that a dede needed to be prompted to complete the ceremony since it was one of the first rituals he was invited to supervise after many years (Dumont 1997: 144).

veyed these reports to the European Court of Human Rights (Şahhüseyinoğlu 2001: 385, 391).

- *Organising Burial and Funeral Services*: Funerals of Alevis were among the most traumatic experiences in Europe. Contrary to the situation in Turkey, where religious institutions were under the control of the state, in Europe, each Islamic community can establish a religious centre based on their particular understanding of Islam. Due to lack of their own centres, Alevis had to apply to Sunni-owned centres for having burial services. This situation renders them open to pejorative discriminations. One frequently hears sad stories of the rejection of an Alevi funeral by Sunni-owned centres on the grounds that Alevis do not attend mosques.³³ Consequently, establishing their own internment and funeral centres is always very important for Alevi associations in Europe (Gül 1999: 115).

These associational activities can be summarised as an attempt to redefine and re-frame Alevis as a particular identity based on the new context of immigration. In addition, European and Turkish Alevi associations also have been working to institutionalize transnational relations between the home and host-lands. *Alevi Bektaşî Temsilciler Meclisi* (the Council of Alevi-Bektashi Representatives – the CABR) was established in 1994 as an initial result of this search for transnational cooperation. In its statutes, the CABR was defined as the only organisation which is authorised to speak on behalf of Alevis both in Turkey and abroad (Şahhüseyinoğlu 2001: 294).

Another remarkable cooperation between European and Turkish Alevi associations was the establishment of *Barış Partisi* (Peace Party, PP) in the mid-1990s. This project was actually advocated by Germany-based Alevi federation so as to proclaim the demands of Alevis in Turkey.³⁴ In fact, they were aiming to apply a well-known political strategy which is commonly practiced in Europe. This political party would be established in order to withdraw just before the election, or members of this party would participate in the election as independent candidates. In both cases, their demands would be raised on the national level by taking advantages of the election period.³⁵

33 During my field research, I was told at many times that one of the most common expressions Alevis encounter is “diriymen gelmezsiniz anca ölünce gelirsiniz” (you don’t come [to mosque] when you are alive but only when you die).

34 For example, the chairman of the FEAU (then he was elected as a MP from the Republican Party in Turkey), Ali Rıza Gülçiçek, says “If we have had eighty MPs in the parliament [in Turkey], we could have expressed our demands by shouting [not by murmuring]” (Şahhüseyinoğlu 2001: 328).

35 This joint project concluded with a discouraging conflict between Turkish and European Alevi associations when the Turkish side of the project attempted to act independently. The Alevi Federation in Germany constituted an inspection committee to investigate this process.

The FEAU also attempted to establish cooperative relations among Alevi associations on the European level. They invited leading Alevi associations from all over Europe to the 7th General Assembly on November 28, 1998, in Cologne (Kaleli 2000: 76). With the participation of Alevi associations from Austria, France, Denmark, England, Switzerland, the Balkans and the Netherlands, they agreed on the establishment of a federation in each participant country which would also be organised under the European Alevi Confederation. This was done in order to coordinate the struggle to raise the issue of Alevism on the European level in 2000. Parallel to the establishment of the Confederation in Cologne, in 2002 the CARB was transformed into a new organisational body, the *Alevi-Bektaşî Federasyonu* (the Federation of Alevi-Bektashi – the FAB), with the participation of hundreds of local or national associations from all over Turkey. The most remarkable outcome of this process appeared as the first transnational and multi-lingual campaign, “Yes to a Democratic Turkey on the Way to the European Union”, organised to state the Alevi views on Turkey’s accession process to the EU. The campaign was started at the European Parliament in Brussels on May 5, 2004 by the CEAU and the FAB (Alevilerin Sesi, May 2004: 14-15). It was signed by ten member federations: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, England, France, Germany, Norway, Switzerland, Sweden and the Netherlands, and Turkey as a representative of the home-land. In the proclamation, they declare their support for the accession of Turkey to the EU with a ‘big but’ which demands official recognition of Alevis in Turkey as a particular identity (Manuscript – 2004).

In conclusion, the confederation can be considered as an example of “an affirmative ‘politics of recognition’, voicing demands in order to be recognised as a specific group and to obtain equal participation” (Massicard 2003: 91). It “serves as a bridgehead between political parties or movements in Turkey and organisations in other European Countries” (Østergaard-Nielsen 2003: 81). In this sense, the CEAU can be seen as a proper example of a transnational (immigrant) organisation. Østergaard-Nielsen states that “political institutions in the sending state” and “the receiving country’s particular political institutional context [...] has been heralded as central actors in shaping the field of transnational political practices” (2003: 20, 23). In this sense, to understand the transnationalisation of Alevi communities in the form of the CEAU, Turkey as a sending country, Germany as a receiving country, and Alevis as an immigrant group, all these should be considered as a single unit of analysis.

Fields of Transnational Alevi Community: Turkey and Germany

Living in Turkey has always held specific difficulties for Alevis in terms of expressing and practising their belief and identity. In accordance with the constitu-

tive principles of the Republic, Turkish socio-political life has been closed to any particular identity rather than “Turkish” since the very early days of Modern Turkey. As we have seen, Alevis could participate in Turkish public life by articulating their demands through secular-leftist politics during the period of silence until the late 1980s. These demands were basically to push for proper application of the secularism principle, to have the “right to be equal” before the constitution and to gain protection against rising nationalist-Islamist threats. Furthermore, a considerable rupture in the relationship with “authentic” Alevism and its social institutions has also left Alevi communities voiceless in answering the question of “who are we?” especially for the younger generations born in new urban contexts.

In contrast to Turkey, where the “non-person” status of Alevis was maintained, Germany has provided Alevis with significant opportunities for expressing and practising their belief and identity especially after the 1980s (Schiffauer 1995). In other words, “had there been less restriction on freedom of thought, expression, and organisation in Turkey, Turkish society might have looked politically more like its simulacra in Europe today” (Ercan-Argun 2003: 30). From a different and plainer angle, Europe means liberation of all kinds of “anthropological diversity” from any suppression and restriction of the home-land (Kastoryano 2000: 127). In this sense, the socio-political context of Germany plays a unique role in the formation of immigrant transnationalism, especially for those suppressed in Turkey.

To understand this role, certain particularities of the German context should be mentioned. First of all, based on the *ius sanguinis* principle, German citizenship is defined as an “ethno-cultural exclusionist” regime in which “foreign migrants find it difficult to obtain full citizenship rights and thereby join the national community” (Koopmans/Statham 1999: 661). In other words, since the concept of *gastarbeiter* (guest-worker) refers to a temporary stay (Kastoryano 2000: 27), German immigration policy indirectly causes institutional marginalisation for immigrants. They can be a part of the labor market but, at the same time, they are also excluded from the political and social spheres (Wilpert 1990: 90). As a result of this institutional marginalisation, immigrants “remain strongly tied to their homelands which might in turn strengthen the position of home-land based organisation” and “they organise and identify themselves on the basis of their national origin” and “the politics of homelands” (Koopmans/Statham 1999: 667, 691). At the same time, the “formalistic inclusion” system of Germany channels immigrant communities to restructure their organisational model and redefine the way of defining their identity so as to have access to certain legal rights and public resources to perform and practise their beliefs (Koopmans et al. 1992). For instance, the highest legal status for the religious communities, *Körperschaft des öffentlichen Rechts*, has remarkable importance as such, any community aims to benefit from certain rights and social funds has to be recognised with this status (Massicard 2003: 19).

During the 1980s, traditional “neutrality towards all different religions and denominations” overlapped with rising multiculturalism (Massicard 2003: 7-9) and opened a new space for immigrants in Germany. In contrast to the well-known motto of German immigration policy, *Deutschland ist kein Einwanderungsland* (Germany is not a country of immigration), Castles considers this articulation as the emergence of de facto multiculturalism on the basis of an ethnically defined national citizenship (*ethnos*) and a democratic state (*demos*) (2000: 136). In this context, the concept of *Gemeinde* (community) does not just refer to a kind of social network among immigrant communities but also to a kind of identification tool for carving out a niche for one’s group in host-societies. This means that the only condition for claims-making appears as to define their position as a minority community in Germany (Kastoryano 2000: 53; 96). The modification of the association constitution of Berlin Anatolian Alevi Culture Centre can be given as an example to illustrate how this challenging functions. When the directors of the association decided to apply for the right of denominational religious instruction at Berlin schools, the title of the association was needed to be changed from a secular one to *Glaubensgemeinschaft* (religious community) so as to be eligible to apply for this right (Sökefeld 2004a: 14-15).

In conclusion, institutional socio-political marginalisation in addition to German-type multiculturalism blended with a bi-denominationalist tradition “has resulted in policies that favoured and encouraged ethnic and religious differentiation among migrants” and “heterogenisation and deprivation of religion and ethnicity” among Turkish immigrants in Germany (Ercan-Argun 2003: 69). Thus, Alevism has been transformed “by Alevis themselves into a kind of denomination on the Christian model” by underlining the differences between Alevism and Sunni-Islam (Massicard 2003: 12). In other words, Alevism has gradually been repositioned by new Alevi intellectuals on the model of Protestant-Catholic dichotomy to emphasize their difference from Sunni-Islam during the ‘revival’ period in Germany.³⁶ For instance, Alevism has begun to be represented as a “humanitarian face of Islam” (Çakır 1998: 63), especially, with the rise of Islamophobia in Europe (Halliday 1999) which also overlapped with an increasing concern about the rise of political Islam in Turkey. Consequently, the Alevi movement in Germany is organisationally less divided and is discursively more inclined to define Alevism as a belief out of the circle of Islam (*İslam dışı*) than the Alevi movement in Turkey (Massicard 2003: 13) because this difference (or *dif-férence*) is the *raison d’être* of their legal existence in the German context.

36 Turgut Öker, the chairman of the confederation, states that “Alevism is a bridge for peace between Islam and Christianity” (Alevilerin Sesi, February 2004: 32). Actually, the identification of Alevism with Protestant Christianity is not new or rare. As Baykurt quotes, when an Alevi immigrant woman decided to get married with a Protestant Greek man, her family introduced their Protestant son-in-law to their relatives in the village in Turkey by saying “He is not a stranger, he is a Greek Alevi” (Baykurt 1998: 174).

The changing nature of global context has also played a certain role in the transnationalisation of Alevi communities. The appearance of new advancements in transportation and communication technologies has enabled more intensive and constant engagements among immigrant and non-immigrant communities which are scattered over distant locales (Portes et al. 1999; Foner 1997; Vertovec 2004: 220). In this shrinking world, the restructuration of the global economic system on the basis of neo-liberalism, de-industrialisation and the withdrawal of welfare state increased the vulnerability of immigrants. As a result, they became much more dependent on their social networks as an economic survival strategy (Basch/Glick Schiller/Szanton Blanc 1992; Faist 2000). The emergence and the empowerment of international and supra-national institutions, such as the UN and EU, enabled previously disadvantaged groups to proclaim their particularistic demands by by-passing national border and categories (Kriesberg 1997: 4). As a result of these transformations in the global context, as Nuhoğlu-Soysal indicates, immigrants can “make particularistic claim through universalistic discourse” and “mobilisation of claims takes place at different levels” such as local, national and transnational (Nuhoğlu-Soysal 2000: 7; Faist 2000: 240).

As a result of these transformations, the question of locality in the age of globalisation has become fragmented as “the circulation of interaction, goods, and populations” (Appadurai 2003: 338) gaining a transgressive momentum “through a static and unchanging notion of space” (Kaplan 1996: 146) and “in the midst of these displacements, new concerns over borders, boundaries, identities, and locations arise” (ibid. 101). The main outcome of this process appears as the locales “substantially divorced from their national context” resulting from new forms of practices and relations such as marriages and exchanges in the migratory context. These “divorced” single locales, however, fused into a new embeddedness what Appadurai calls “translocalities” (2003: 339). Ong conceptualises the condition of this emergence as “the processes of disembedding from a set of localised relations in the homeland nation and re-embedding in new overlapping networks that cut across borders” (ibid. 2003: 87).

Conclusion: From the Invisibility of Locales to the Visibility of the Transnational

The unexpected appearance of the concept of “Non-Sunni Muslim Minority” in the Regular Report 2004 is interwoven into the matrix of a multifaceted historical background in which Alevism has been redefined and restructured on the basis of certain restraints and opportunities in relation to various struggles and negotiations on local, national and transnational levels. This concept, however, refers to a striking increase in the (trans-)national visibility of Alevis in the last two decades which is usually understood as the “Alevi Revival”. Instead of backing this essentialist approach of ‘revival’, which tells a story about the spontaneous

return of what was forgotten, I propose to understand this phenomenon as a ‘re-capture’ of what has already been there. Speaking concretely, it is possible to assume that Alevism has been reconstructed as a new social identity during the long historical period which began in the 1950s. During this period, Alevi played the most important role by shuttling their life and culture, ideas and stories, identities and labels, fears and expectations, money and goods back and forth between Turkish and German contexts which are also subject to the spirit of our age – globalisation. Therefore, it seems quite reasonable to argue that the reconstruction of Alevism is inscribed in the transnationalisation of Alevi immigrant communities.

The appearance of the concept of “Non-Sunni Muslim Minority” is a direct outcome of this process.³⁷ In this sense, I also propose to understand the Germany-based Alevi movement as a transnational organisation of Euro-Alevi. From the same point of view which Europeanises Islam and Turks, Alevi can also be portrayed as a group of people who came from outside and stayed inside with their distinctive identity which has also been “culturally adjusted to the civic culture of modernity” (Tibi 2002: 37). Alevi organisations in Germany found a very fertile ground for gaining an important experience of the new global political climate in which immigrant communities have unexpectedly become an active actor in international as well as domestic politics (Shain 2005). As a result of their superiority arising from this spectacular experience and financial well-being, the Germany-based Alevi movement has also become the “agenda-setter” for Alevi associations in Turkey and Europe (Avcı 2005: 204).

In conclusion, it can be argued that Alevism has been transformed by Euro-Alevi from a locally invisible *Gemeinde* into a transnationally visible *Glaubensgemeinschaft* after several phases of their history. These phases are first, leaving home parallel to modernisation and industrialisation processes in which Alevi were subjected to inner or outer migration flows beginning in the 1950s, secondly, losing home in which Turkey as the home-land became ‘lost’ as a result of political polarisation and bloody conflicts which victimised Alevi at the end of the 1970s, thirdly, desiring home during the reconsideration period of the 1980s in which they searched for a new road map to uncover the question of Alevism in both Turkey and Europe, and fourthly, transforming home in which Alevi appear in the form of new social movements with wide transnational networks so as to struggle for the rights of Alevi in Turkey and to increase their visibility in Europe since the beginning of the 1990s.

37 It should also be mentioned that it is impossible to discuss the Alevi movement as a monolith and static entity. Apart from the main stream divisions, there are also many localised forms of the movement in Turkey and Europe. All these parties have very dynamic relationships with each other. Additionally, recent political developments in Turkey also make the emergence of a unified Alevi quite difficult. The “agenda-setter” characteristic of Germany-based Alevi movement is specifically focused in this paper to portray the historical background of the process. But, it is not easy to claim that this position would continue in the following years.

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Appendix

- CABR:** *the Council of Alevi-Bektashi Representatives (Alevi Bektaşî Temsilciler Meclisi).*
- CEAU:** *the Confederation of European Alevi Unions (Avrupa Alevi Birlikleri Konfederasyonu).*
- DPM:** *Democratic Peace Movement (Demokratik Barış Hareketi).*
- FAB:** *the Federation of Alevi-Bektashi (Alevi Bektaşî Federasyonu).*
- FEAU:** *the Federation of European Alevi Unions (Avrupa Alevi Birlikleri Federasyonu).*
- FGAU:** *the Federation of Germany Alevi Unions (Almanya Alevi Birlikleri Federasyonu).*
- FPR:** *the Federation of Populist Revolutionist (Halkçı Devrimçi Federasyonu).*
- FUP:** *the Federation of Union of Patriots (Yurtseverler Birliği Federasyonu).*
- HBVA:** *Hacı Bektaş Veli Associations (Hacı Bektaş Veli Dernekleri).*
- PKK:** *the Kurdistan Worker's Party (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan)*
- PP:** *Peace Party (Barış Partisi).*
- PSKAD:** *Pir Sultan Abdal Culture Association (Pir Sultan Abdal Kültür Dernekleri).*
- RPP:** *Republican People Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi)*
- TUP:** *Turkey Union Party (Türkiye Birlik Partisi).*
- UP:** *the Union of Patriots (Yurtseverler Birliği).*

