

“WE WERE LEFTISTS ANYWAY”? :
LEFT-WING POLITIZATION OF ALEVIS IN THE 1960s AND 1970s
IN TURKEY

By

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Abstract

The primary aim of this thesis is to explore the strong left-wing tendency among Alevis during the left-right polarization in the 1960s and 1970s in Turkey. Additionally, this study examines how and why the Alevi youth devoted themselves to egalitarian revolutionary ideologies, took sides with the left, and became actively engaged in various leftist movements during this period. For this purpose, a qualitative study, through collecting memoirs and using semi structured in-depth interviews with eight Alevi people involved in the leftist movements during the 1960s and 1970s was conducted during my field research in Istanbul. Basically my interest during the interview was related to their socio-cultural background and how they encountered left propagandist materials, periodicals or literature with the intention of understanding how they were politicized within the left-wing. At the same time, Alevi religious poems and hymns, adapted to socialist class struggle, became common property of the left during these years. Re-interpretation of Alevi tradition and history was declared as the ideological source of the left. Therefore in this thesis, I seek not just to demonstrate this mutual relationship between the left and Alevis, but also to display how Alevism as a religious and traditional community politicized in the left by the 1960s and 70s and how this politicized community transformed into an Alevi movement in the 1990s being based on religious differences.

To my brother, *Lütfi Aksoy*

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Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iv
Introduction	1
CHAPTER I: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.....	7
1.1 The State and Religion	7
1.2 The Alevis in Scholarly Literature.....	9
CHAPTER II: The Alevis in Turkey: Historical Overview (16 th - 20 th century)	16
2.1 The Religious and Social Aspects of Kizilbash/Alevis.....	16
2.2 Kizilbash/Alevis: “Heretical Rebel of the Ottoman Empire”	18
2.3 Alevis during the Republican Era: A Holy Alliance of the Secular Turkey	22
2.4 The Alevi Migration and Urbanization from the 1950s onward	25
CHAPTER III: Analyzing In-Depth Interviews.....	28
3.1 Method and Researching Techniques	28
3.2 Questionnaire	29
3.3 Description of Interviewees.....	30
3.4 Analyzing the Interviews.....	35
CHAPTER IV: The Leftist Movement and Alevis in the 1960s and 1970s	40
4.1 The Leftist Movement in the 1960s and 1970s	41
4.2 The Alevi Youth of the 1960s and 1970s and the Left	45
4.3 The Revival of Alevism and the Reconstruction of Collective Identity	50
Conclusion.....	54
B I B L I O G R A P H Y.....	57

Introduction

Alevis, as a specific community, became a center of attention since they began manifesting themselves and demanding their religious and cultural rights in the 1990s both in Turkey and in Europe. Since the subjects of *nationalism*, *ethnicity* or *ethnic groups* have become an increasing trend in academic and political circles from the 1970s onward, the Alevi case cannot be separated from this trend. Parallel to this development, Alevis have appeared as a subject of academic and political interest. Alevis as a research subject touches several controversial issues of Turkish history such as nationalism, secularization politics, urbanization and migration. Since this thesis discusses the strong left-wing tendency among Alevis during the left-right wing polarization in the 1960s and 1970s, it also includes these several controversial topics within.

There are two main Muslim groups in Turkey: Sunnis and Alevis. According to unofficial estimates, Alevis comprise 15 to 30 percent of the total population of Turkey. Numbering about 15 million people, Alevis account themselves for some 25 percent of Turkey's population and, constituted the country's second largest religious community after the Sunnis¹. Although Alevis are predominantly Turkish speaking there are also a great number of followers among the Kurdish or Zaza-speaking population (some 20 percent of Alevis) of the country² and small numbers of Azerbaijani Turkish and Arabic speaking Alevis.

Therefore, the term "Alevi" does not refer to a homogeneous religious group. On the contrary, Alevi is used to cover a large number of different heterodox communities,

¹ Daivd Zeidan, *The Alevi of Anatolia*. in *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 3, No. 4 (December 1999) p. 74.

² Martin van Bruinessen, "Aslını inkar eden haramzadedir!" *The Debate on the Ethnic Identity of the Kurdish Alevis*. in Kelh-Bodrogi, Krisztina, Barbara Kellner-Heinkele and Anke Otter-Beaujean.(Eds) *Syncretistic Religious Communities in the Near East, Collected Papers of the International Symposium "Alevis in Turkey and Comparable Syncretistic Religious Communities in the Near East in the past and Present"*. Leiden: Brill, 1997, p.1.

including Bektashis, Tahtaci, Abdal, Cepni, Nusayris, Yörük. ‘Alevi’ is ‘a blanket term for a large number of different heterodox communities, whose actual beliefs and ritual practices differ much³. Alevi communities are scattered around Turkey. However, a significant number of Alevi inhabits Central and Eastern Turkey Anatolia. Some tribal settlement of Tahtaci and Cepni exist on the Mediterranean Coast. Moreover, in the eastern province of Kars there are communities speaking Azerbaijani Turkish, whose Alevism differs little from the ‘orthodox’ Twelver Shi’ism of modern Iran. The Arabic speaking Alevi community traditionally inhabits some provinces of Southern Anatolia especially Hatay and Adana. Since they are the extension of Syria’s Alawi community, they have no historical ties with Anatolian Alevi groups.

The religion of Alevis⁴, though to some extent islamicized, differs considerably from Sunni Islam⁵. Although Alevism receives some religious and cultural components from different religions and cultures, Shi’ism has an important impact on its basic cults, rituals and institutions. Alevis venerate Ali, the cousin of Prophet Mohammed and the fourth caliph, and the Twelver Imam. In addition to these, Alevis claim to possess the inner (*batini*) meaning of the Islamic revelation, they neglect the religious duties described by the *shari’a* – i.e. daily prayers, the fast in Ramadan, alms tax, and the pilgrimage to Mecca- which for them merely represent the external (*zahiri*) meaning of the faith⁶. Instead they have their own religious Cem ceremonies⁷, officiated by ‘holy men’ (*dede*) who belong to a holy lineage at which religious poems (*nefes*) in Turkish are sung and men and women carry out ritual dances (*semah*).

³ Martin van Bruinessen, *Kurds, Turks and the Alevi revival in Turkey*. in *Middle East Report*, July-September, p.1.

⁴ See Chapter I for the details.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Krisztina Kelh-Bodrogi, *Atatürk and the Alevis: A Holy Alliance?*. in Paul J. White and Joost Jongerden (Eds.) *Turkey’s Alevi Enigma, A Comprehensive Overview*. Leiden: Brill, 2003, p.1.

⁷ The ceremony of Cem or Ayin-i Cem is seen the basic ritual of the Alevi cosmology which is presided over by holy men with attending both men and women. It is part of the purpose of this ritual to pray to Ali, to recall the names of Hasan and Hüseyin and Twelver Imam.

Alevis first appeared in the 16th century under the name of *Kizilbash* (Redhead). They were seen not only as heretical by the Sunni Ottoman Empire, but also allies of the Safavids who were enemies of the Ottomans. During the war between the Ottoman and Saffavid, Kizilbash/Alevis took up the Safavids' side. After a series of battles the end result was an Ottoman victory, so Alevis were heavily subjected to repeated persecution. Due to these experiences, Alevis got marginalized territorially and socially and they survived – in the remote mountainous regions- as a rural community. In the following centuries the boundary between heterodoxy (Alevism) and orthodoxy (Sunni Islam) became increasingly solidified and Alevism gained more and more clear outlines as a distinct socio-religious entity⁸. *Taqiyya*, the concealment of one's own religious or social identity served to protect the group in a hostile environment.

The 20th century, with the collapse of the Sultanate and the creation of the secular Turkish State in 1923, brought a new chapter in Alevi history. On the one hand secularization equaled religious emancipation and initially they greeted Kemal Atatürk and his regime. Furthermore they came to be presented in nationalist Turkish historiography as the inheritors of the original Central Asian Turkish Shamanism. On the other hand, while traditional Sunni suspicions lived on, Alevis underwent a mass migration to urban centers. Their mass migration into the cities from the middle of the 1950s onward 'brought them into closer contact, and sometimes indirect competition, with strict Sunnis, from whom they remained socially separated for centuries'⁹.

Under the new conditions of urbanity and modernity the traditional socio-religious organization with its specific forms of religious life of Alevis gradually collapsed and Alevis became more secularized. Meanwhile, during the period of left-right polarization in the 1960s and 1970s the Alevi youth took sides with the left and became 'actively engaged

⁸ *Ibid.*, p.2.

⁹ Martin van Bruinessen, *Kurds, Turks and the Alevi revival in Turkey*, *Middle East Report*, July-September 1996, p. 8.

in various (Turkish Kurdish) leftist movements including some militant ones'¹⁰. The general tendency to leftism which had prevailed all over the world influenced the Alevis too.

Furthermore, the new 1961 Constitution, which came after the 1960 *coup d'état* and was the most liberal in the course of Turkey's history, had allowed new socialist formations. The Left became very influential for the first time in Turkey¹¹. The socialist and social democratic political parties and student clubs also made their appearance and began to flourish in this atmosphere. The 1960s and 1970s witnessed the encounter of the left-wing and Alevis. The left wing movements defined the Alevi rebellions of the past as proto-communist movements who considered the Alevis as their 'natural allies'¹². On the other hand, Alevis, who had been economically underdeveloped and marginalized, became sensitive to Marxist egalitarian discourse.

The main purpose of this research is to understand the strong left wing tendency among Alevis during the left-right wing polarization in the 1960s and 1970s in Turkey. From this point, I will address where this strong left wing tendency came from, more explicitly, whether this tendency came from religious or socio-economic dynamics of this community. To this end, this study aims to examine how and why the Alevi youth devoted themselves to egalitarian revolutionary ideologies, took sides with the left, and became actively engaged in various leftist movements during this period. For this purpose, a qualitative study, through collecting memoirs and using semi structured in-depth interviews with eight Alevi people involved in the leftist movements during the 1960s and 70s, was conducted during my field research in Istanbul. Basically my interest during the

¹⁰ Krisztina Kelh-Bodrogi., The Role of Kerbela in the (Re-) Construction of Alevism in Turkey. in Ildiko Beller-Hann (ed.) *The Past as Resource in the Turkic Speaking World*. Würzburg: Egon, 2008, p. 5.

¹¹ Murat Belge, *Türkiye'de Sosyalizm Tarihinin Ana Çizgileri*, (The Main Characteristics of the History of Socialism in Turkey) in *Modern Türkiye'de Siyasi Düşünce Cilt 8 Sol* (Political Thought in Modern Turkey Volume 8 Left). İstanbul: İletişim Press, 2007, p.34.

¹² Martin vanBruinessen, *Ibid.* p. 11.

interview was related to their socio-cultural background and how they encountered with left wing propagandist materials, periodicals or literature and to understand how they were politicized within the left wing. Moreover I also investigated their own political discourse both in the 1960s and 1970s in order to make a retrospective comparison.

Alevi religious poems and hymns, adapted to socialist class struggle, became common property of the left during these years. Re-interpretation of the Alevi tradition and history was declared as the ideological source of the left. Therefore in this thesis, I seek not just to demonstrate this mutual relationship between the left and Alevis but also to display how Alevism as a religious and traditional community was politicized in the left by the 1960s and 70s and how this politicized community transformed into an Alevi movement in the 1990s being based on religious differences.

Alevi studies have been increasing in the last two decades¹³. Considering the extreme increase in the amount of studies, blank spaces within these studies still remain. Since I have become interested in this subject, I decided to dedicate this research to finding out the reason(s) behind the relationship between Alevis and the left during the 1960s and 1970s in order to fill in one of these blank spaces within Alevi studies.

The other side of my personal concern goes back to one of my childhood memories. Once I remember my parents telling me that “We are Alevi but you should tell nobody either in school or in the street” I did not know anything about Alevism and the reason why I should keep it to myself. Then automatically I became interested in this hidden part of my identity. Nevertheless, seventeen years later, after writing a Master’s thesis on a related subject, my mind is even less clear than before. But something is different now. Although it took me a long time to realize the dynamics behind the urge to

¹³ See Chapter I for the details

stabilize and fix the meaning of Alevism and the Alevi identity. I can say that I am now able to critically analyze the identity and power relationships.

The structure of this study is as follows: Chapter One discusses some arguments about the state and religion and gives scholarly literature review on Alevi studies. Chapter Two has a closer look at the religion of Alevis and their history. Chapter Three analyzes the in-depth interviews that constitute the main source of the thesis and describe the interviewees and their framings. Chapter Four focuses on the encounter between the left and Alevis in the 1960s and 1970s and briefly analyzes the left and the Alevi youth who devoted themselves to the leftist movements. Moreover, this chapter provides briefly the process of Alevi revival.

CHAPTER I: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1.1 *The State and Religion*

Max Weber argues that intellectual demands for mundane religions are not convenient for the public. Additionally, he claims that what makes a religion mundane is its ability to generate different versions, which monitor rationalism or irrationalism of peasants or urban masses and different variations in statues. However, he states that today none of the mundane religions insist on their initial claims to reach masses:

...the notion of an impersonal and ethical cosmic order that transcends the deity and the ideal of an exemplary type of salvation are intellectualistic conceptions which are definitely alien to the masses and possible only for a laity that has been educated along rational and ethical lines. The same holds true for the development of a concept of an absolutely transcendent god. With the exception of Judaism and Protestantism, all religions and religious ethics have had to reintroduce cults of saints, heroes or functional gods in order to accommodate themselves to the needs of masses. ...Islam and Catholicism were compelled to accept local, functional, and occupational gods as saints, the veneration of which constituted the real religion of the masses in everyday life¹⁴

In the light of Weber's argument, one can argue that, within Ottoman society, there was not a conflict between heterodoxy, which is perceived as a religion of rural, and orthodoxy which represents the religion of urban. In contrast, the Ottoman Empire showed a realistic approach to govern the various religious segments with its diverse religious policy. What characterized rural, as opponent to central orthodoxy is not political authority and its anti-centralist stance but its ideology coherent to rural context. Moreover, 'political authority has contributed considerably to the emancipation of this ideology'¹⁵.

¹⁴ Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1992, pp. 103-104.

¹⁵ Yasin Akatay, . *Türk Dininin Sosyolojik İmkânı, İslam Protestanlığı ve Alevilik* (Sociological Possibility of the Turkish Religion, Protestantism of Islam and the Alevism) Istanbul: İletişim Press, 2006, p.60.

The relationship between the state and religion in Turkey has been a broadly discussed topic in academic circles¹⁶. The secularizing policies of the Turkish republic have been accompanied by keeping a latently official version of Islam promoted by the state itself. The establishment of the DRA (Directorate of Religious Affairs, *Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı*) in 1924 was not just to promote a rationalized version of Islam which was compatible with republican ideals, but also to build a modern nation-state and a homogeneous citizenry. The “secular” Kemalist regime has never given up on Islam completely, but kept it under state control with the DRA mechanism¹⁷. The result was the development of an official state Islam, which was based on the Sunni orthodox version, whose influence was envisioned to be determined by individual devotion and practice. However, Islam continued to provide the framework for large segments of society that were marginalized during the Kemalist modernization¹⁸. It also remained an important source of meaning and ethical guidance in the everyday lives of many citizens of the Republic¹⁹.

Moreover, from the nation-building perspective Alevis were seen as threats of the national unity. Therefore, the suppression of Alevi religion was to a great extent related to the Kemalist ideology of the nation as an ethnically and culturally homogenous unity. Krisztina Kelh-Bodrogi points out this approach saying that as a nation, Turkey was regarded as Turkish by ‘race’ and Sunni Islam by religion, although she considers the latter as contradictory to the idea of the official lack of a state religion in Turkey. Moreover, Kelh-Bodrogi states “expressions of deviating collective identities, may they be

¹⁶ See for instance:

David Shankland, *Islam and Society in Turkey*. Huntingdon, England: Eothen Press, 1999.

Şerif Mardin *Türkiye’de Din ve Siyaset* [Religion and Politics in Turkey] Istanbul: İletişim Press, 2006.

Richard Tapper, (Ed.) *Islam in Modern Turkey, Religion, Politics and Literature in a Secular State*. London: I.B. Tauris, 1994.

¹⁷ Yasin Aktay, *Türk Dininin Sosyolojik İmkânı, İslam Protestanlığı ve Alevilik* [Sociological Possibility of the Turkish Religion, Protestantism of Islam and the Alevism] Istanbul: İletişim Press, 2006.

¹⁸ M. Hakan Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.

¹⁹ Şerif Mardin *Türkiye’de Din ve Siyaset* [Religion and Politics in Turkey] Istanbul: İletişim Press, 2006.

ethnic or religious determined, were regarded as threats of the nation's unity and treated as separatism"²⁰.

The theory of modernization was used more dominantly like old versus new, religion versus secularism, tradition versus modernity in researches about Turkey. While some of the studies on Turkish policy and society disregarded the destruction of ethnic and religious plurality of Anatolia such as studies by Bernard Lewis and Niyazi Berkes, the new generation of scholars such as Şerif Mardin, Martin van Bruinessen, and David Shankland, has offered more nuanced studies of the state-society relations.

1.2 The Alevi in Scholarly Literature

Until recent times little was known about Alevi and their belief system. There are several reasons for this. One of the main reasons is that as Alevi were mostly rural, the lack of official recognition discouraged research in this field²¹. By the second half of the 1980s some taboos that restricted the discourse on ethnic and religious diversities, were surpassed and Alevism appeared on the public agenda. Alevi started to talk about their doctrine more openly and they began to exercise their rituals in more visible ways. Besides, the discussion on Alevism started to appear in numerous publications as a result of the realization that "Alevi reality" could no longer be avoided in Turkey's social and political life²². This awareness has been also reflected in many academic works published both in Turkey and Europe.

²⁰ Krisztina Kelh-Bodrogi, *Atatürk and the Alevi: A Holy Alliance?*. in Paul J. White and Joost Jongerden (Eds.) *Turkey's Alevi Enigma, A Comprehensive Overview*. Leiden: Brill, 2003, p.10.

²¹ David Shankland, *Islam and Society in Turkey*. England: Eothen Press, 1999, p.134.

²² Karin Vorhoff, *Academic and Journalistic Publications on the Alevi and Bektashi of Turkey* in *Alevi Identity* ed. by Tord Ollson, Elisabeth Özdalga and Catharina Raudvere, İstanbul: Sweedish Research Institute in İstanbul, 2003, p.23.

In addition, studies on Alevism was also triggered through the global focus on researches about ethnic and religious minorities, especially through a tendency that come about in tandem with an increase of NGOs activities. Alevi immigrants in Europe, mostly in Germany, where there is a flourishing Alevi community, and its center of thought in the large cities have had an immense influence on Alevi studies and helped internationalizing Alevi studies. At the same time, the important studies of Western researchers on the Alevis, such as those of Irene Melikoff and Martin van Bruinessen²³, were rapidly translated into Turkish. Irene Melikoff became one of the most highly-regarded names in the field of Alevi studies with her significant contributions on social and religious context of Alevism. Although most publications which appeared in the last twenty years must be qualified as more or less popular and journalistic works addressing a large reading public, I will review the result of some scientific studies which refer to social, religious, historical and politic components of the Alevi subject in this part of the thesis.

Alevi studies until recently were mostly in the area of Ottoman researchers and it was an esoteric branch of Turcology. The Ottoman scholars have focused on the history of the Bektashi order (*tarikât*) and *Babai* which goes back to the 13th century and the *Kizilbash* movement. In the 13th and 16th centuries tribal and rural groups of probably Turkish origin had first rebelled against the Seljuk authority under the spiritual guidance of the *Babai* –wandering dervishes and Sufi leaders- and later with the support of the Safavid, *şeyh* and *halifes*, who had their center in Ardabil in Northeastern Iran, rebelled

²³ See for instance,

Irene Melikoff, *Uyur Idik Uyardılar, Alevilik-Bektaşilik Araştırmaları*, [We were obedient they made us rebel, Researchs of Alevism-Bektashism], İstanbul: Demos Pres, 2006.

Irene Melikoff, *Bektashi/Kizilbas: Historical Bipartition and Its Consequences*. in *Alevi Identity* ed. by Tord Ollson, Elisabeth Özdalga, Catharina Rauvere, Sweedish Research Institute in İstanbul, 1998.

Irene Melikoff, *Hacı Bektaş Efsaneden Gerçeğe* [Hacı Bektaş From Legend to the Reality]. İstanbul: Cumhuriyet Kitapları, 2006.

Martin van Bruinessen, *Kürtlük, Türklük, Alevilik, Etnik ve Dinsel Kimlik Mücadeleleri* [Kurdishness, Turkishness and Alevisness, Ethnic and Religious Identity Struggles] İstanbul: İletisim Press, 2004.

against the Ottoman central authority²⁴. On this issue, Mehmet Fuat Köprülü and Halil Inalcık²⁵, Irene Melikoff and Ahmet Yasar Ocak, give us a reasonable understanding of the history of the Bektashi Order and *Kizilbash* movement that shook the Ottoman central authority from the late 15th century to the end of the 16th century. Melikoff and Ocak have done some pioneer work in this field. For instance, they studied in a comparative perspective the legends of Bektashi-Alevi, their patron saint; Hacı Bektaş Wali (13th century) who is the legendary founder of the Bektashi order²⁶. However, their approach is a bit problematic in terms of building a strong connection between the Alevism and pre-Islamic central Asian Turkish belief system. Especially in the early republican period and afterwards, political biased contribution has presented Alevism as a kind of pre-Islamic Turkish religion. Melikoff for instance, indicates a continuity from the idea of a *Gök Tanrı*, “a celestial god”, that is supposed to be a common religious representation among the central Asian Turkic groups in the pre-Islamic period, to the representation of Ali in Alevi cosmology²⁷. Moreover, there has also been a tendency to classify most elements in Alevi-Bektashi belief as the heritage of shamanism, a religious practice ascribed to the pre-Islamic Turks. There is no doubt that many Turkish elements in Alevism are decidedly prominent. However, the self-censorship of research and the influence exerted on it by non-scientific factors becomes clear when one considers our knowledge of Kurmanji or Zaza speaking (Kurdish) Alevi group.

²⁴ Karin Vorhoff, *Academic and Journalistic Publications on the Alevi and Bektashi of Turkey* in *Alevi Identity* ed. by Tord Ollson, Elisabeth Özdalga and Catharina Raudvere, İstanbul: Sweedish Research Institute in İstanbul, 2003, p.24

²⁵ See for instance,

Mehmet Fuat Köprülü, *The Sejuks of Anatolia: their history and culture according to local muslim sources*. The USA: University of Utah Press, 1992.

Halil Inalcık, *Popular Culture and Tarikats – Mystic Orders in The Otoman Empire, The Classical Age 1300-1600*. London: Phoenix, 1973, pp.186-202

²⁶ Ahmet Yasar Ocak, *Anadolu Heterodoks Türk Sufiliğinin Temel Taşı: Hacı Bektaş-ı Veli El-Horasani* [The cornerstone of the Anatolian Heterodox Turkish Sufism: Hacı Bektaş_ı Veli El-Horasani] in *Türk Sufiliğine Bakışlar* [Researches of Turkish Sufism] İstanbul: İletişim Pres, 2007, pp. 160-181.

Irene Melikoff, *Hacı Bektaş Efsanesinden Gerçeğe* [Hacı Bektaş From Legend to the Reality]. İstanbul: Cumhuriyet Kitapları, 2006.

²⁷ Irene Melikoff, *Uyur Idik Uyardılar, Alevilik-Bektaşilik Araştırmaları*, [We were obedient they made us rebel, Researchs of Alevism-Bektashism], İstanbul: Demos Pres, 2006.

As major landmarks in this field, one could mention Suraiya Faruqi's study of social and economic foundations of the Bektashi order in Ottoman Anatolia²⁸. Although John Kingsley's remarkable study²⁹ -*The Bektashi order of dervishes*- has been a key work of reference, it is dated and limited in geographical scope. Martin van Bruinessen has broad researches on Alevis as well as Bektashi and Sufi orders and sociological structures of Kurdish and Alevi communities which also make clear the differences between Kurdish and Turkish Alevis in his works³⁰. Nevertheless, 18th and 19th centuries have been blank spaces for Kizilbash/Alevi research; we are a little more fortunate with the information on the Bektashi order after its abolition in 1826³¹.

At the end of the 1980s one witnessed the Alevi belief system dissolving and Alevi identity appearing in the political sphere. Alevi publications have mushroomed as Alevi identity has gained a significant self-consciousness, with an avoidable tendency to claim recognition in the public sphere, drew attention from a variety of points of view in Turkey since that time. Some substantial work has been done in this field: Karin Vorhoff, who carried out research mainly on the Alevi revival and the relation *vis-à-vis* secular Turkey, wrote a critical article³² on this process of rediscovery, revitalization and redefinition of Alevism. Krisztina Kehl-Bodrogi's work, which focuses on central Anatolian and Western Alevi groups, has been a comprehensive work of reference on

²⁸ Suraiya Faruqi, *Der Bektaschi-Orden in Anatolien*. WZKMS 2, Wien, 1981.

²⁹ John Kingsley Birge, *The Bektashi order of dervishes*. London: Luzac, 1937.

³⁰ Martin van Bruinessen, *Kürtlük, Türklük, Alevilik, Etnik ve Dinsel Kimlik Mücadeleleri* [Kurdishness, Turkishness, Alevism, Ethnic and Religious Struggles]. Istanbul: İletişim Press, 2004.

Martin van Bruinessen, "Aslımı İnkar Eden Haramzadedir!" *The Debate on the Ethnic Identity of the Kurdish Alevis*. Berlin: Syncretistic Religious Communities in the Near East, Collected Papers of the International Symposium, 14-17 April 1995.

Martin van Bruinessen, *Agha, sheikh, and state: the social and political structures of Kurdistan*. London: Zed Books, 1992.

Martin van Bruinessen, *Kürtlük, Türklük, Alevilik, Etnik ve Dinsel Kimlik Mücadeleleri* [Kurdishness, Turkishness and Aleviness, Ethnic and Religious Identity Struggles] Istanbul: İletişim Press, 2004.

³¹ Melikoff has written some articles on this issue, for instance see:

Irene Melikoff, '1826'dan sonra Bektaşiler Tarikatı [Bektashi Order After the 1826] in *Uyur İdik Uyardılar, Alevilik-Bektaşilik Araştırmaları*, [We were obedient they made us rebel, Researchs of Alevism-Bektashism], İstanbul: Demos Pres, 2006, pp. 211-229.

³² Karin Vorhoff, "Let's Reclaim Our History and Culture!": Imagining Alevi Community in Contemporary Turkey" *Die Welt des Islams*, New Ser., Vol.38, Issue 2. (Jul., 1998), pp. 220-252.

Alevi/Kizilbash as an Anatolian esoteric community. Kehl-Bodrogi also devoted some articles to the recent developments in Alevism³³.

Research in Alevism on the process of urbanization has come with David Shankland's works. Shankland has carried out a comparative study on modernization and integration into the state structure of the Alevi and Sunni villages. He claims that because of lifestyle, the ethic and social order of Sunni villagers is compatible with the concept of the national, centralized administrative system, they are more successful than Alevis in terms of integrating and moving into the modern world³⁴.

On the other hand, the Alevis themselves have started writing on their own issues. Some Alevi publishing houses produced cheap editions of Alevi devotional books³⁵. When we come to the end of the eighties Alevi publications flourished. Alevis who due to secularization and modernization had given up much of their cultural differentiations, and who had done so for the sake of solidarity, encountered the challenge of political Islam. As a consequence, they did not have much choice left other than opposing the growing presence of Sunni lifestyle in public life and politics because they did not want to accept it as their own. Furthermore, the 1980s also witnessed, a group of new Alevi elite arise, which was recruited from the first generation of Alevi having some academic or higher education³⁶. However, with the 1980 military coup quite a few of them lost their positions and they had to resign from direct political activism and entered cultural politics.

As already emphasized, the aim of this thesis is to understand why and how Alevis politically took up a leftist position during the period of left-right polarization in the 1960s and 1970s. Although just a few direct works have been written on this subject, the other Alevi specialists indirectly referred to this topic. Emma Sinclair-Webb examines a violent

³³ Krisztina Kehl-Bodrogi (Ed.), *Syncretistic religious communities in the Near East*. Leiden: BRILL 1997.

³⁴ David Shankland, *The Alevis in Turkey, The emergence of a secular Islamic tradition*. Oxon: Routledge, 2003, p. 43.

³⁵ For instance; *Ayyıldız Yayınları* in Ankara.

³⁶ For instance: Cemal Sener, Reha Camuroglu etc.

and deeply traumatic incident concerning the Alevis, the Kahramanmaraş pogrom of 1978, in which Alevis were targeted by right-wing extremists not because of their religious affiliation but because of their perceived association with the left. She argues that although there is a strong connection between being an Alevi and being leftist, this association does not stem from the inherent nature and characteristics of Alevism, but from the dynamics of the process of nation-state building in Turkey³⁷. Murat Küçük argues that the coalition of Alevis and the left-wing ideology, which has been suppressed and prohibited since its appearance, should explain in the first place the necessity and indispensability of these two marginalized (one is modern the other is traditional) groups³⁸. While in the 1960s, the left was approaching Anatolia due to the societal progress led by social and economic transformation, this necessity and obligation made the left form an alliance with Alevis. The most important reason for Alevis who have been the historical rival of Sunni-Islam and who have been following the Turkish modernism from its beginnings was the egalitarian idea promised by modernism.

On the other hand, Martin van Bruinessen refers to Alevis as the “natural allies” of the radical left, which defines the Alevi rebellions of the past as pro-communist movements³⁹. The term “natural allies” is also used to refer to Alevis in Elise Massicard’s work⁴⁰. Massicard argues that with the double effects of being a marginalized community within society and being relatively economically underdeveloped, Alevis were more sensitive to the Marxist message like Kurds. The Alevi and Kurdish youth devoted

³⁷ Emma Sinclair-Webb, *Alevis and the Turkish Left in Turkey’s Alevi Enigma: A Comprehensive Overview* Eds. Paul J. White, and Joost Jongerden, Leiden: Brill, 2003.

³⁸ Murat Küçük, *Türkiye’de Sol Düşünce ve Aleviler*, [The Left Thought and Alevis] in *Modern Türkiye’de Siyasi Düşünce*, Cilt 8 Sol [Political Thought in Modern Turkey Vol:8 Left]. Istanbul: İletişim Press, 2007.

³⁹ Martin van Bruinessen, http://www.let.uu.nl/~martin.vanbruinessen/personal/publications/Alevi_revival.htm

⁴⁰ Elise Massicard, *Türkiye’den Avrupa’ya Alevi Hareketinin Siyasallaşması* [The Politicization of Alevi Movement From Turkey to Europe]. Istanbul: İletişim Press, 2007.

themselves to this egalitarian ideology and hoped that one day this discrimination would end.

I agree with Emma Sinclair-Webb's argument that the nation building process is fundamental to explain the alliance of Alevis and the left but also we should be concerned with the dynamics of Alevi belief and culture. However my contribution to this argument will be to demonstrate how Alevism as a religious and traditional community politicized in the 1960s and 70s and how this politization recently transformed into an Alevi movement based on religious differences.

CHAPTER II: The Alevi in Turkey: Historical Overview (16th - 20th century)

Having discussed the theoretical debates which concern the case of Alevi and given a scholarly literature review on the Alevi studies in the previous chapter, this chapter aims to introduce Alevi within their historical context. In order to fulfil this goal, I provide brief information on the religious aspects of Alevi before starting to give the historical background of Alevi. Therefore firstly, I examine the religious aspects of Alevi then demonstrate *Kizilbash/Alevi* in 16th century and Republican era and lastly their migration and urbanization from the 1950s onwards.

2.1 The Religious and Social Aspects of *Kizilbash/Alevi*

The term Alevism (*Alevilik*) designates a large socio-religious community, members of which are mainly of Turkish and Kurdish ethnic origin⁴¹. The religion of Alevi, though to some extent islamised, differs considerably from Sunni Islam⁴². Although Alevism receives some religious and cultural components from different religious and cultures, Shi'ism has an important impact on its basic cults, rituals and institutions. Alevi venerate Ali, the cousin of Prophet Mohammed and the fourth caliph, and the Twelver Imam. In addition to these, Alevi claim to possess the inner (*batini*) meaning of the Islamic revelation, they neglect the religious duties described by the *shari'a* – i.e. daily prayers, the fast in Ramadan, alms tax, and the pilgrimage to Mecca-

⁴¹ Besides Turkish and Kurdish Alevi there are a small number of Arabic speaking Alevi who inhabit Southern Anatolia such as Hatay, Tarsus and Adana.

⁴² Martin van Bruinessen, *Kurds, Turks and the Alevi revival in Turkey*.in *Middle East Report*, July-September, p.1.

which for them merely represent the external (*zahiri*) meaning of the faith⁴³. Instead they have their own religious Cem ceremonies, officiated by ‘holy men’ (*dede*) who belong to a holy lineage at which religious poems (*nefes*) in Turkish are sung and men and women carry out ritual dances (*semah*). As David Shankland sets out:

The Alevis, a heterodox Islamic group in modern Turkey, have no church, no established doctrine and no shared liturgy. Instead, their religion has developed in rural Anatolia through hereditary holy figures who transmitted esoteric religious thought through music, poetry and collective rituals⁴⁴.

The roots of this esoteric religion, as a syncretistic system of faith is based on a vast religious spectrum which ‘has been launched by the ancient belief system of Turks of Central Asia, turned to have a spiritual character with the effects of Shamanism and Buddhism, fed by Zoroastrism and Manheism, had the stigmata of Islam and Sufi version of Islam via the Yesevi cult, joined to Qalandarian attitude of Khorasan Malamatiyya, met and granted some Anatolian versions of Neo-Platonism and local cultural styles of Christianity, took some patterns of Iranian Hurifiyya in 15th century and motifs of Safavid Shi’ism in 16th century’⁴⁵. Furthermore, the thoughts of Hacı Bektash Wali (13th century), who was a mystic, philosopher, and humanist, who came from Khorasan lived in Anatolia approximately in the 1209-1271. He is the eponym of the Bektashi Sufi order and is considered as one of the principle teachers of Alevism, played a very important role in Alevi belief system. Alevis and Bektashis they both refer to Hacı Bektash.

The Bektashi Order became the *tarikāt* of Janissary corps who had a privileged position until the abolition of the Janissaries and the closure of *tekkes* in 1826 in the

⁴³ Krisztina Kelh-Bodrogi, *Atatürk and the Alevis: A Holy Alliance?*. in Paul J. White and Joost Jongerden (Eds.) *Turkey’s Alevi Enigma, A Comprehensive Overview*. Leiden: Brill, 2003, p.1.

⁴⁴ David Shankland, *The Alevis in Turkey, The emergence of a secular Islamic tradition*, UK: Routledge, 2003, p.1.

⁴⁵ Ahmet Yasar Ocak, *Babailer İsyanından Kızılbaşlığa: Anadolu’da İslam Heterodoksisinin Doğuş ve Gelişim Tarihine Kısa Bir Bakış*, [From the Revolt of the Babais to Kizilbashness: History of the Emergence and Progress of the Anatolian Heterodoxy in Anatolia] in *Türk Sufiliğine Bakışlar* [The Reserches of Turkish Sufism] Istanbul: İletisim Press, 2002, pp.222-223.

Ottoman Empire⁴⁶. Furthermore, because of the esoteric, eclectic nature and peculiar features of the Bektashi tradition, it made Islam easily acceptable to many native Christian Balkan provinces therefore, the Ottoman used Bektashi dervishes to spread Islam in the Balkan provinces. Though Bektashis and Alevis go back to the same origin, they have formed two distinct groups. While Bektashis experienced the gradual transition to a sedentary way of life and its adjustment to urban centers, Alevis remained in the Anatolian countryside, leading a nomadic or semi nomadic way of life and became exposed to periods of turbulence and trouble⁴⁷. These groups have been subjected to different ethnical influences: while the Bektashis were influenced by the Balkans, the Alevi by the people of eastern Anatolian, more clearly Iranian, Kurdish and others⁴⁸.

2.2 Kizilbash/Alevis: “Heretical Rebel of the Ottoman Empire”

For a long time Kizilbash had no definite name. In the Ottoman documents, they were called *rafizi*, schismatic, *zındık*, and heretic and also “shi’te”, *mülhid*, and atheist⁴⁹. Later on they will become known as Alevi. *Kizilbash* is their historical name and it refers to the village groups and tribes who followed the first Safavids⁵⁰. Kizilbash means “redhead”. Their name appeared in the time of Sheykh Haydar (1460-1488), the father of

⁴⁶ Halil İnalcık, *The Ottoman Empire, The Classical Age 1300-1600*. London: Phoenix, 1973, p.194.

⁴⁷ Irene Melikoff, *Bektashi/Kizilbas: Historical Bipartition and Its Consequences*. in *Alevi Identity* ed. by Tord Ollson, Elisabeth Özdalga, Catharina Rauvere, Sweedish Research Institute in İstanbul, 2003, p. 4.

⁴⁸ Irene Melikoff, *Uyur Idik Uyardılar, Alevilik-Bektaşilik Araştırmaları*, [We were obedient they had rebelled us, Researchs of Alevism-Bektashism], İstanbul: Demos Pres, 2006, p.33.

⁴⁹ Ahmet Yasar Ocak, *Türk Sufiliğine Bakışlar* [The Reserch on Turkish Sufism] İstanbul: İletisim Press, 2007, pp.281.

Irene Melikoff, *Uyur Idik Uyardılar, Alevilik-Bektaşilik Araştırmaları*, (We were sleeping they awoke us, Researchs of Alevism-Bektashism), İstanbul: Demos Pres, 2006, p.96.

⁵⁰ Irene Melikoff, *Bektashi/Kizilbas: Historical Bipartition and Its Consequences*. in *Alevi Identity* ed. by Tord Ollson, Elisabeth Özdalga, Catharina Rauvere, Sweedish Research Institute in İstanbul, 2003, p. 4. p. 5.

Shah Isma'il⁵¹. This name was given to them because of their headdress: a red bonnet with twelve facets, was so called Tac-i Haydari "the crown of Haydar". In Ottoman documents, *Kizilbash* has the pejorative meaning of "heretic" and "heretic rebel". The name of *Kizilbash* was supplanted by Alevi only after the end of the 19th century.

When the Alevis first appeared in the 16th century under the name of *Kizilbash* they were not seen only as heretical by the Ottoman Empire, but also allies of the Persian Safavids, enemies of the Ottomans and they were therefore subjected to repeated persecution. The *Kizilbash* movement was as much social and political as it was religious, and from the 15th century it became an expression of the strong peasant opposition to the Ottoman administration in Anatolia. These revolts were generally attributed to the *Kizilbash*, although we cannot exclude the moral participation of the Bektashis who may often have inspired action by means of their spiritual and intellectual influence⁵². In the 15th century when the Safavid dynasty replaced the Akkoyunlus in Iran, its founder, Shah Ismail intensified his propaganda in Anatolia so as to conquer the Ottoman Empire from within⁵³. The contact established between a variety of Anatolian dervishes and Safavid state brought about a modification in the religious mentality of dervishes⁵⁴. In 1511 the *Kizilbashis*, under the influence of Shah Ismail raised a rebellion in south-west Anatolia. The rebellion shook Ottoman rule to its foundations and it was put down with Selim I's merciless repression of the *Kizilbash* and the victory of the Ottoman over Shah Ismail in 1514. However this only temporarily halted the movement. The next rebellion came with a descendant of Haci Bektas called Kalender, who led the great peasant revolt in central Anatolia in 1527. Shah Ismail was seen as Mahdi by the *Kizilbahis* and the

⁵¹ *Ibid.* p.5.

⁵² *Ibid.* p.7.

⁵³ Ahmet Yasar Ocak, *Ibid.* p. 275.

⁵⁴ Pir Sultan Abdal was the most influential within these dervishes. His poems which include rebellion motifs were re-interpreted by the leftists during the 1960s and 1970s.

Kizilbash/Alevi poet, Pir Sultan Abdal represented him as a Mahdi during the Ottoman-Safavid wars of 1534-5. He expressed in verse his feelings:

My holy Mahdi must come,
He must set up his high council,
He must destroy the unjust,
And one day take revenge for me⁵⁵.

Furthermore, on the one hand, with the passage of the Caliphate in 1517 the Ottoman Empire became an empire with an “official religion” a form of worship and since the Safavid state was established in 1501 and Shi’ism of the Twelve Imams was declared to be the “official religion” of that state. Thus, the two rival states in the Islamic world rendered two main religious mentalities their “official religions” and hence, went up against one another to become the one and only political, military, cultural power of the Islamic world. The defeat of the Safavids in this competition brought about dreadful consequences for the Ottoman *Kizilbash* community: They were subjected to a heavy injustice, some of them were expelled, while some others escaped to reside in areas where the central authority could hardly reach⁵⁶. Due to these experiences, Alevis got marginalized territorially and socially and they survived –in the remote mountainous regions- as a rural community.

The establishment of a rigid socio-religious organization enabled them to survive in an environment which expelled them as heretic. The Alevis opposed this stigmatization in the outside world with the help of *taqiyya*, the concealment of one’s own religious and social identity⁵⁷. Although Ilber Ortaylı claims that in contrast to the non-Muslim minorities, whose statues was determined in the frame of the *millet system*, no legal

⁵⁵ Halil İnalcık, *The Otoman Empire, The Classical Age 1300-1600*. London: Phoenix, 1973, p.196.

⁵⁶ Cemal Sener, *Alevilerin Etnik Kimliği* (Ethnic Identity of the Alevis) Istanbul: Etik Press, 2002, p.95.

David Zeidan, *The Alevi of Anatolia*, *Middle East Review of International Affairs* Vol.3, No:4, 1999, p.75.

⁵⁷ Krisztina Kelh-Bodrogi, *Introduction* in Kelh-Bodrogi, Krisztina, Barbara Kellner-Heinkele and Anke Otter-Beaujean.(Eds) *Syncretistic Religious Communities in the Near East, Collected Papers of the International Symposium “Alevis in Turkey and Comparabile Syncretistic Religious Communities in the Near East in the past and Present”*. Leiden: Brill, 1997, p.12.

regulations existed within respect to the Alevis⁵⁸, during the reign of Abdülhamit II (1876-1909) Alevis were seen as heretical rural communities such as Yezidis and Nusayris. As a result many efforts of assimilation and conversion to Sunni Hanefi orthodoxy were seen under the systematic program of conversion in the 19th century⁵⁹. The counter measures taken by the Ottoman included the registration and observation of these ‘heretical sects’ and government financed construction of mosques in a number of villages. Sunni Hanefi imams were appointed to these mosques in order to teach the right (official) faith. As Deringil points out, the reason for these Sunnification politics was not just dealing with the missionary activities but also it was part of the nation building process⁶⁰. Furthermore, since Alevis were treated as Sunni Muslims and subordinated to the *shari’a* courts run by Hanefi law, the *Tanzimat* reforms during the 1839-1876 did not bring any new legal regulation.

The reign of the Young Turks (1908-1918), secular-oriented Turkish nationalists, led to considerably smoothed relations between Alevis and the state. Alevis became sympathizers of the Committee for Unity and Progress (CUP), the party of the Young Turks, since it accelerated the process of the secularization of the state, thus limiting the influence of the orthodox Islamic establishment⁶¹. The participation of a number of Bektashis⁶² in the government may also have caused the Alevis to feel closer to the political center than any time before. During World War I and the Independence War,

⁵⁸ İlber Ortaylı, *Alevilik, Nusayrilik ve Bab-ı Ali*, [Alevism, Nusayrism and Bab-I Ali] in *Aleviler, Bektaşiler, Nusayriler* [Alevis, Bektashis, Nusayris] Islam İlimleri Araştırma Vakfı (ed.) İstanbul: Ensar Press, 1999, pp. 35-36.

⁵⁹ Selim Deringil, *The Invention of tradition as Public Image in the Late Ottoman Empire, 1808 to 1908* in *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 35 (1993) 1, pp. 3-29.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ Krisztina Kelh-Bodrogi, *Atatürk and the Alevis: A Holy Alliance?*. in Paul J. White and Joost Jongerden (Eds.) *Turkey's Alevi Enigma, A Comprehensive Overview*. Leiden: Brill, 2003, p.4.

⁶² Irene Melikoff, *Bektashi/Kizilbas: Historical Bipartition and Its Consequences*. in *Alevi Identity* ed. by Tord Ollson, Elisabeth Özdalga, Catharina Rauvere, Sweedish Research Institute in İstanbul, 2003, p. 5.

Alevis were supporters of the CUP. This affinity deepened in the years of resistance and the proclamation of the Turkish Republic (1923).

2.3 Alevis during the Republican Era: A Holy Alliance of the Secular Turkey

Although during the Independence war Mustafa Kemal Atatürk stressed the Islamic character of the struggle, Alevis' veneration of Atatürk goes back to the beginning of the war. Mustafa Kemal, for the sake of taking the majorities' support repeatedly emphasized the fight for the salvation of the sultanate and '...took great care to get the public support ... of the orthodox Sunni religious dignitaries'⁶³. However, as I emphasized before, the contradiction between the announced aims of the war and the collective interest of the Alevis, may surprise as they became his active supporters. I think in this point Mustafa Kemal was aware of to need to win the Alevis support, but he had to use other arguments and methods than those meant for the public. In order to reach the Alevi masses, 'Mustafa Kemal and his men thus consciously made use of the primordial loyalties of the Alevis, who as a rule followed the decision of their (tribal and religious) chiefs'⁶⁴.

As a religious community, Alevis strictly obey the orders of their *dedes* (spiritual leader, holy men). Therefore Mustafa Kemal first tried to win the *dedes* support. Besides sending telegrams to win their confidence, Mustafa Kemal visited the main religious center (*tekke*) of the Hacı Bektash in order to consult them in person. While the majority of the *dedes*' responses were positive to support for the national war, some Kurdish Alevi tribes refused to co-operate. For instance, during the independence war, the *Koçgiri* (from

⁶³ Erik Jan Zürcher, *Turkey A Modern Turkey*. London, New York: I.B. Tauris, pp. 158-159.

⁶⁴ Krisztina Kelh-Bodrogi, *Atatürk and the Alevis: A Holy Alliance?*. in Paul J. White and Joost Jongerden (Eds.) *Turkey's Alevi Enigma, A Comprehensive Overview*. Leiden: Brill, 2003, p.6.

Dersim region) tribe even started an insurgency demanding autonomy from Ankara on the grounds of their Kurdishness⁶⁵. Yet, the Alevi villages of Sivas, Tokat, Amasya and Çorum (mostly central Anatolian region) declared their loyalty to Ankara and the majority of the Alevis as did also the great majority of the Sunni population who supported Turkish national liberation.

Moreover, one of the other reasons of the Alevis' reverence of Mustafa Kemal can be explained with the mythologizing of him in Alevi culture and religion. Among Alevis Mustafa Kemal is often compared and even identified with the central figures of Alevi religion. Irene Melikoff states that 'Alevi went even further and compared Atatürk to Hazret-i Ali'⁶⁶. As reported in the early years of the Independence war, the Alevis begun to regard Mustafa Kemal as being the *Mahdi* himself.⁶⁷ Such ideas were picked up and spread by the *aşıks* (minstrels)⁶⁸. For instance the publisher and writer Adil Ali Atalay (Vaktidolu) expressed his idea on Atatürk and identified him as equal to Hacı Bektash:

Believe that both of them who gave us inspiration
Are perfect and wise spiritual leaders.
The two who stay in my body, are one soul.
Hacı Bektash Veli [is] Kemal Atatürk !⁶⁹

After the foundation of the republic, Alevis chose to be silent in front of the decision of the abolition of traditional religious institutions for the sake of living in a secular state. Moreover, as Krisztina Kelh-Bodrogi claims, Alevis welcomed the Republic, because of that they considered the basic principles of laicism and nationalism as the best

⁶⁵ Martin van Bruinessen, "Aslını Inkar Eden Haramzadedir!" *The Debate on the Ethnic Identity of the Kurdish Alevis* in in Kelh-Bodrogi, Krisztina, Barbara Kellner-Heinkele and Anke Otter-Beaujean.(Eds) *Syncretistic Religious Communities in the Near East, Collected Papers of the International Symposium "Alevis in Turkey and Comparable Syncretistic Religious Communities in the Near East in the past and Present"*. Leiden: Brill, 1997, pp.12-13.

⁶⁶ Irene Melikoff, *Bektashi/Kizilbas: Historical Bipartition and Its Consequences*. in *Alevi Identity* ed. by Tord Ollson, Elisabeth Özdalga, Catharina Rauvere, Sweedish Research Institute in İstanbul, 2003, p. 4. p. 5.

⁶⁷ Krisztina Kelh-Bodrogi, *Ibid.* p.8.

⁶⁸ In an oral culture like Alevism has been very recently, the strolling *aşıks* played an important role as the transmitters of religious tradition. Even with their songs they often treat actual political themes.

⁶⁹ Adil Ali Atalay (Vaktidolu), *Gel Kendine Deli Gönül*. İstanbul: Can pres, 1988. p.177.

guarantors for putting an end to their religious discrimination, however they were still denied official recognition as a religious community⁷⁰. Alevis were given the opportunity to advance on the social, economic and political level on condition that they did not make a public issue of their religious and social identity.

Between 1924 and 1935 the secularization of the state, law and education was completed. Abolishment of Caliphate on 3 March 1924, followed the foundation of the Directorate of Religious Affairs (DRA) the same day. Therefore, secularism in Kemalist sense does not mean separation of state and religion but state hegemony over religion, the institutions of orthodox Islam were put under state control. Moreover, the foundation of the DRA brought about a legalization of Hanefi mentality and rituals in the public sphere by the hands of the state.

With the beginning of urbanization and migration, the social components of Kemalist policy of secularization started to have a noteworthy impact on the Alevi populace. The fact that the officially authorized religious adaptation was in favor of Sunni doctrine (in fact, in favor of a special version of Sunni namely Hanefi thought) legally limited the religious preference of the citizens in the public sphere. In this sense, what defined the nature and form of the connections of the religious groups to the state and governmental organs would turn to be the scope and limits of the official religion, which was reshaped by the state per se. Alevi belief was not considered to be in the span of the official religion. For that reason, Alevism could not be a reference point in the process of establishment of connection with the modern system.

⁷⁰ Krisztina Kelh-Bodrogi, *Introduction* in Kelh-Bodrogi, Krisztina, Barbara Kellner-Heinkele and Anke Otter-Beaujean.(Eds) *Syncretistic Religious Communities in the Near East, Collected Papers of the International Symposium "Alevis in Turkey and Comparable Syncretistic Religious Communities in the Near East in the past and Present"*. Leiden: Brill, 1997, p.14.

2.4 The Alevi Migration and Urbanization from the 1950s onward

Alevis started to migrate to urban areas parallel to the social and economic evolution of Turkey in the 1950s. As I mention in Chapter IV under the Democratic Party (1950-60) government, Turkey had rapidly changed. Over a million people left the land and by the end of the decade the major cities were growing by 10 per cent a year⁷¹. This rural exodus in the case of Alevis reached its peak during the 1970s for mostly economic reasons. Alevi people, who had been living in isolated social conditions since the 16th century, would gradually get in touch, so to speak, with the external world, because of a set of developments such as construction of roads and infrastructure, compulsory primary education, and the secular character of the new state. Thus, step by step the strict border lines and institutions of a closed community were radically overthrown in the new life conditions. Martin van Bruinessen state that this mass migration into the cities from the middle of the 1950s onward ‘brought them into closer contact, and sometimes in direct competition, with strict Sunnis, from whom they remained socially separated for centuries’⁷².

This rapidly urbanization and adaptation to urban life and modernity brought about dramatic changes for the community. As Alevism was a system of belief generally suited to rural life, in the new urban condition the traditional socio-religious institutions collapsed and the transmission of religious knowledge from one generation to the other was interrupted. The main impact for this interruption can be explained with the oral tradition of this syncretistic religious structure of Alevism. Under the new condition of

⁷¹ Erik Jan Zürcher, *Turkey A Modern Turkey*. London, New York: I.B. Tauris, p. 226.

⁷² Martin van Bruinessen, *Kurds, Turks and the Alevi Revival in Turkey* in *Middle East Report*, July-September , p.8.

urbanity, the oral tradition no longer played its former role in passing on religious traditions. The main institutions of Alevism: *cem* ceremonies, socio-religious role of *dede* and *musahip* (religious relative or brotherhood) lost its former significance. As a result of these developments, Alevism was secularized. The process of this secularization became especially accelerated in the 1970s when in the course of the political polarization of the country the Alevi youth became actively involved in the leftist movements.

The political attitudes of Alevis were related to the secular characters of the political party discourses. Alevis who had voted for Democratic Party (DP) in the beginning of the 1950 with the multiparty system, went away from DP due to the fact that the close relationship between this party and Sunni *tarikats* (communities). Although, Alevis turned back to the Republican People's Party (RPP) after the co-operation of DP's with the Sunni *tarikats*, during the 1960s they were attracted by the egalitarian leftist discourse of the WPT (Worker's Party of Turkey, *Türkiye İşçi Partisi*) which was founded in 1961. The period of the left-right polarization during the 1960s-70s led Alevis to take politically a leftist position.

Under the new political and urban condition Alevism became increasingly secular and left leaning. Since such terms as equality, freedom and secularism appeared as the outcomes of modernity, the process of urbanization played an important role in bringing the left and Alevi youth together. Alevi youth, which became extremely politicized and influenced by revolutionary thought in universities, high school and trade unions, reinterpreted their history as a class struggle. Furthermore, most of the Alevi youth turned against their own religious hierarchy, branding them feudal exploiters of the masses⁷³. Krisztina Kelh- Bodrogi states that, during this period "the nearly collective shift from the former religion-based identity to one defined in terms of a political ideology was

⁷³ David Zeidan, *The Alevi of Anatolia in Middle East Review of International Affairs MERIA*, Vol. 3, No.4 (December 1999) p. 77.

accompanied –and actually made possible- by the divestment of Alevism of its religious dimension...”⁷⁴. In other words, this led to changing the borderline that had distinguished the community from the outside world from a religious to an ideological level that referred to a historical transformation in the collective definition of identity.

Overall, the process of migration and urbanization brought dramatic changes for Alevis. On the one hand, the social and historical changes in the circumstances of the traditional way of Alevi life dramatically changed and it followed the collapse the traditional institutions of Alevism with their specific forms of religious life. On the other hand, cultural and political effects of modernity and urbanity gradually started to affect the community. Although first Alevism was threatened with losing its functions in the new urban life, by the end of the 1980s Alevism became a process of rediscovery⁷⁵. As a result many Alevis began to redefine themselves as “Alevi”.

⁷⁴ Krisztina Kelh-Bodrogi., *The Role of Kerbela in the (Re-) Construction of Alevism in Turkey*. in Ildiko Beller-Hann (ed.) *The Past as Resource in the Turkic Speaking World*. Würzburg: Egon, 2008, pp. 5-6.

⁷⁵ See Chapter IV for the details.

CHAPTER III: Analyzing In-Depth Interviews

The field research, as part of the main thesis, was based on semi-structured in-depth interviews which can be classified as qualitative methodology rather than quantitative. As I pointed out in the introduction, the main purpose of this thesis is to understand the left tendency among Alevis in particular in the 1960s and 1970s how and why Alevi youth became part of the leftist movement. In this context my aim in this chapter is to discuss certain questions with eight Alevi people who come from 1968 and 1978 generation and who actively participated in the left student movements at universities during the 1960s and 1970s.

3.1 Method and Researching Techniques

Methodologically I had difficulties in distancing myself as a researcher from my subject matter, since Alevi identity constitutes part of my identity as well. As often known, native researchers have difficulty with the binary of neutral researcher versus informants of the study at hand. Weston argues that this in-between position of native ethnographers makes them “hybrids” and “they become at once hyper-visible and invisible, painfully obtrusive and just as readily overlooked”⁷⁶. She goes on suggesting that the subject position the native ethnographer occupies is a “compound” one, whose hybridity “collapses subject/object distinctions” by not belonging to either of the categories but including elements from both⁷⁷.

During the research break I went to Istanbul for three weeks. My aim was to find people to interview who came from 68 and 78 left-wing generation but also who are

⁷⁶ Kath Weston, *Virtual Antropologist*. in *Antropological locations: boundaries and grounds of a field science*. Eds. by A.Gupta and J.Ferguson, Berkley: University of California Pres, 1997, p. 170.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.* p. 176.

Alevi. Doing research on Alevis has been a challenging task from the outset, due to the fact that I am of Alevi descent. Being a native researcher posed difficulties together with rendering certain parts of my research easier. Thus I used my own network in order to reach those people within the limited time. Overall my field research consisted of eight in-depth and semi structured interviews conducted with selected respondents from Alevi people who were involved in the leftist student movements. Basically my interest was related to their social background, educational life and how and when they encountered the left propagandist materials or literature etc. Furthermore, I thought it would also be interesting to know their own political discourse both in the 60s / 70s and currently, in order to make a retrospective comparison, I also added relevant questions.

3.2 Questionnaire

The questionnaire consisted of 7 basic questions and the process of applying the questionnaire was based on three main focuses. The first two questions were asked in order to find out their background. The next four questions were about their left-wing involvement and the last question was asked due to make a retrospective comparison between the political discourses during the 1960s and 70s and their current politics.

1. Could you describe what kind of family background you had in terms of socio-economic features when you were a child?
2. Could you describe your education life generally, how was it supported by yourself or by your parents?

3. How and when did you meet left-wing propagandist materials for the first time?
4. How you were influenced by the left and what was your basic reading selection in left-wing literature?
5. What was your (or your group's which you were involved in) slogans, what was your overall discourse in those years?
6. Why do you think Alevi youth found themselves in a leftist position during the radical political climate of the 60s and 70s based on your personal experiences?
7. What is your current political discourse and how was it changed so far?

3.3 Description of Interviewees

Having indicated the questionnaire in the previous section this part is devoted to a description of the interviewees. I do not claim to reach conclusions that concern Alevism in general or all Alevis in Turkey in this thesis. The scope of my research is limited to their political attitude in the 1960s and 1970s, more precisely to understand the reasons why and how they found themselves in a leftist position during the radical political climate of the 1960s and 70s. Therefore I decided to make my interviews mostly with the people who were young educated Alevi and involved in the leftist movements in order to receive critical responses.

Rıza Erdem (b.1953) was born in Sivas in eastern Turkey. He could not continue his education after elementary school for lack of finance. He went to Istanbul to work as an unqualified worker in construction in 1965. He was influenced by the radical left-wing university student discussion in coffee houses where he used to go during the 1969/70. He started to read left-wing literature, journals that he received from students. He became one of the members of the 'Turkish Workers and Peasants Liberation Army' which had a Maoist approach and which believe in the armed guerilla struggle could bring the revolution. Then he went back his hometown to organize mine workers and peasants which were close his village. He was arrested then sentenced to more than fifteen years in the aftermath of the 1980's coup. He read leftist literature, mostly Marxist and Maoist during his prison sentence.

He works as a night watchman for a private company and lives with his family in Istanbul.

Ibrahim Harman (b.1939) was born in Malatya in eastern Turkey. In comparison with his generation he was one in three people who could receive university education in his hometown. When he was in high school the 27 May 1960 coup took place. The new constitution was accepted in 1961. This new constitution was more liberal than the old one in the sense that it tolerated a wider spectrum of political activity than before. The Workers Party of Turkey was emerged and became attractive for him. He went to Istanbul to enter the Faculty of Law at Istanbul University. He became quite active during his education. Nowadays considering his old age, he is still working as an attorney.

Hüseyin Karabay (b.1947) was born in Malatya in eastern Turkey. After the graduation of state boarding high school in Sivas he entered the Medicine Faculty at Istanbul University in 1965. He worked for ‘Workers Party of Turkey’ and also became an active member of the ‘Federation of Debating Societies’ during his university education. With the March 12 1971 coup he came under arrest. Going to Germany for upper education after his graduation gave him an opportunity to compare between the left in Germany and Turkey. He is a surgeon working in a hospital in Istanbul.

Esat Korkmaz (b.1946) was born in Manisa in Aegean region. After completing high school education he was admitted to Istanbul University forestry faculty in 1965. He became a member of the steering committee of the Federation of Debating Societies and then ‘Revolutionary Youth’ known by its Turkish acronym as *Dev Genç*. During his active student life he also worked for a Revolutionary Trade Union in his hometown. He was on trial for ‘Revolutionary Youth’ and ‘Turkish People’s Liberation Party/Front’ *Türkiye Halk Kurtuluş Partisi/Cephesi*. He was released in the general political amnesty in 1974. Then he involved in politics for a while. He worked in a different position in the Ministry Forestry until 1980. He was not found eligible for working as a tenancy at the end of the security investigation when he turned back from the compulsory military service. His position was ended by Ministry decision. Since that time he has been working as a researcher-writer.

His diary was published under the name of Days of Resisting, diary of 68’ Underground (2002) and Days of Resisting, diary of 78’ aboveground/underground (2004). He has also written several books on Alevism, principles of Alevi belief and so on.

Sırrı Kulu (b.1959) was born in Malatya in a small village; called Kırbağlı. He could hardly supply his own education expense for the lack of family finance. He went to town for his high school education. During his high school he met with the left and its journals. He became involved in the Turkish People's Liberation Army during 1977-78. After the 1980's coup he went to Istanbul to work. He has been living and working in his own business in Istanbul since that time.

Hüseyin Özdemir (b.1943) was born in Malatya in a small Kurdish/Alevi village. He could only go to school when he was twelve for lack of possibilities. Moreover, elementary school was the first place to learn Turkish language for him. After completing high school he was admitted to the Faculty of Law at Istanbul University in 1967. He was very influenced by Deniz Gezmiş⁷⁸ and his 'Turkish People's Liberation Army' group's ideas. He became a member of the *Devrimci Hukukçular Örgütü* 'Revolutionary Jurists Organization' and then *Devrimci Öğrenci Birliği* 'Revolutionary Student Union', which were founded by Deniz Gezmiş and he was also involved in the most of the student protest and movements.

Currently he is working as a lawyer and is chairman of his village's association (*SEV-DER*) in Istanbul.

⁷⁸ Deniz Gezmiş (1947–1972) was a political activist, among the most high-profile revolutionaries active in the late 1960s. He was one of the Marxist-Leninist founders of the outlawed *Türkiye Halk Kurtuluş Ordusu* 'Turkish People's Liberation Army'. After becoming a member of the 'Workers Part of Turkey' he attended the Faculty of Law at Istanbul University in 1966. Becoming increasingly more politically active, he led the student organized occupation of Istanbul University in 1968 and he spearheaded protests against the arrival of the US 6th Fleet in Istanbul. Intensifying his involvement within the Worker's Party of Turkey, and advocating the National Democratic Revolution, his ideas circulated and inspired a growing revolutionary student base. In 1971 he took part in the robbery of a bank in Ankara. That year, he kidnapped four US privates in Ankara. After releasing the hostages, he was captured alive and arrested in Sivas with Yusuf Aslan following an armed stand-off with law enforcers. Their trial began in July 1971, and he was sentenced to death for violating Turkish Criminal Code's 146th article, "to attempt to overthrow the Constitutional order". The death sentence was carried out by hanging on May 6 1972, along with the death sentences of Hüseyin Inan and Yusuf Aslan, in the central prison in Ankara.

Ali Rüzgar (b.1946) was born in Kahramanmaraş and grew up in Hatay in southeastern Turkey. When he was in high school he got the reading habit under the influence of his literature teacher. He went to Istanbul and entered the Faculty of Architecture at Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University in 1969. During his university he mostly read basic literature of the left. He was a sympathizer of the ‘Workers Party of Turkey’ and involved in various student movements. In 1978 he became an active member of the WPT.

Currently he is working as an architect and also as the Secretary General of the Union of Chambers of Turkish Engineers and Architects.

Ali Taşar (b. 1947) was born in Hatay and after completing high school in Iskenderun went to Istanbul to continue his education in Private Architect-Engineering School (1968). He was admitted to the political science faculty of Ankara University, the most outstanding place for students of political science and the successor to the imperial *mülkiye* as the breeding-ground of Turkey’s civil servants. Moreover, this university was also very famous for its political debating societies (idea clubs) in 1969. Taşar’s tendency to Workers’ Party of Turkey (WPT), which had been already started at high school, moved him into those radical student circles. He became a director of the Revolutionary Culture Clubs of the East⁷⁹ in his own university in 1975. He was involved in radical left student movements during his university education.

Later on, he worked in the civil service but he was not promoted to a higher position as deserving of his educational quality due to his activity in student movements. He retired recently.

⁷⁹ In radical left circle some people began to demand that attention be paid to the plight of the Kurdish minority. When the majority felt that ethnic identities should be submerged in class solidarity like gender issue then Kurdish intellectuals founded the Doğu Devrimci Kültür Ocakları Revolutionary Culture Clubs of the East in 1969.

3.4 Analyzing the Interviews

Having introduced my interviewees in the previous section, now my intention is to analyze these interviews. My main focus will be on their socio-economic background and their left-wing experience. I will also make a retrospective comparison of their political discourses between the 1960s/70s and currently.

Considering the interviewers' background, they all came from rural provinces and they were the first modernized and urbanized Alevis. The result is overlapping with the process of mass migration from the countryside to the cities and of Alevi migration and urbanization, which started from the 1950s onward. Although some interviewees had really poor economic conditions as a family (Rıza Erdem, Sırrı Kullu), those who could take the chance to go to universities had reasonably wealthy family background, which could support the educational expense during the university period. Those who received university education became the first intellectuals among the Alevis.

They usually first became politicized during the high school. For instance, one of my interviewee, who is the oldest one; Ibrahim Harman tells (13/04/08) "the term socialism was forbidden when I was in high school and, I remember Nazım Hikmet' poems were blackened due to the fact they include communist elements. However after the 1960s military intervention, with the foundation of the Workers Party of Turkey (WPT), I became one of the sympathizers of it." Ali Taşar states (12/04/08) "When I was in high school the WPT and the first founders such as Mehmet Ali Aybar, Behice Boran, Yaşar Kemal, Çetin Altan were the most influential names in our left groups." Ali Rüzgar says "I first encountered the left populist discourse when I was in high school". Hüseyin Özdemir tells "I encountered the left through *Yön* (Direction) journal (edited by Doğan Avcıoğlu)

for the first time in high school”. Except Sırrı Kulu, whose leftist activity consists of his high school period, the others usually stayed as a passive supporter until entering universities.

University life not just brought them into an intellectual atmosphere but also into a modern, urban and more heterogeneous social structure. They were usually accommodated in the student dormitories where there were the headquarters of the revolutionary movements. They became politicized by reading Marxist journals, books and student discussion groups. The most common book for my interviewees was Georges Politzer’s *Elementary Principles of Philosophy* which is the most common book of other Turkish revolutionaries and which was the first work banished by the 1980 military coup. Besides Politzer’s *Elementary Principles of Philosophy*, Vladimir Lenin’s *The Revolutionary Proletariat and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination* and *The State and Revolution*, and Leo Huberman’s *Introduction to Socialism*.

From 1968 onwards, student movements became very influential all around the world. The student movements in Germany, the United States and especially in France, Germany, influenced the youth movements in Turkey. According to my interviews, they really believed that they had come close to launching a revolution in Turkey. For instance, one of my interviewees Rıza Erdem states (13/04/08) that “The revolution was definitely not a utopia for me in those years. I had believed that liberation of people will come very soon by revolution and that is why all my works focused on the revolution”. Hüseyin Karabay (25/04/08) tells “When I saw the 16-17 June 1970 workers movement, which was organized by the DISK (Turkish acronym for the Confederation of Revolutionary Workers’ Unions) and the other trade unions, in Istanbul I felt that revolution would come very soon.

My two interviewees (Rıza Erdem and Esat Korkmaz) became also active in armed guerilla struggles from 1970 onwards. Esat Korkmaz, who published his memoirs, explains his feelings very sincerely in his book: “Our theory of revolution was a kind of religion which was often contradictory with hindsight. Almost all of us believed that without armed struggle there could not be any changes. 68 was a utopia? Maybe yes: Creating utopia means to reach half of the way. Our utopia was a communist dream which consists of essences of pre-historic egalitarian society rather than socialism which comes after capitalism”⁸⁰. Although the general was tendency towards guerilla romanticism, particularly taking as a role model of the Cuban Revolution and the Palestinian guerrilla movement, in the world in the 1970s, the half-industrial social structure of Turkey also played a significant role in moving people to rural areas and politicizing peasants and bringing revolution with armed guerilla struggle with the cooperation of the peasants.

Hüseyin Özdemir and Hüseyin Karabay were mostly involved in student movements in Istanbul. They joined several protests such as; protests against the arrival of the US 6th Fleet (1968), and against the NATO. Hüseyin Özdemir tells (16/04/08) “I remember Deniz Gezmiş was leading the protest against the arrival of the US 6th Fleet, he was very tall and walking in front of the mass, people can see him even very behind. Our slogan was ‘damn American imperialism’ and ‘long live Turkey’s independence’”. Ali Rüzgar (24/04/08) also responded to this question in a similar way; “our slogan was “Entirely Independent Turkey and damn American imperialism”. From this point, I can simply argue that Kemalist discourses and the National Independence war (1919-1923) were very effective on leftist movements of the 1960s and 1970s.

⁸⁰ Esat Korkmaz, *Kafa Tutan Günler, yeraltı’68 güncesi* [Days of Resisting, diary of 68’ underground]. Istanbul. Anadolu Kültür Press, 2002, p.33.

The most significant part came with asking question 6 is “Why do you think Alevi youth found themselves in a leftist position during the radical political climate of the 1960s and 70s based on your personal experiences?” in these interviews. Apart from two (Rıza Erdem and Ali Rüzgar), mostly responded with long similar remarks, “I found Marxist discourse is overlapping with Alevi *dedes* discourses. We were listening to the same terms such as equality, brotherhood, communion in our villages from our *dedes* (holy leaders). Ibrahim Harman (16/04/08), “This is the destiny of Alevis. Alevis were leftists anyway, even I can claim that the first communist peasant movement was the Alevi (which is known as *babai* revolts which appeared in central Anatolia against the Seljuks) movement during the 13th century, three hundred years earlier than Thomas Müntzer’s German peasant movements. Moreover, during the 16th century Alevi revolts against suppression of the Ottoman Empire were also a class struggle against the ruling class. Overall, Alevism was a rebellion, a resistance flag of liberation raised against the ruling classes”. However, re-interpretation of Alevi history as a class struggle or as a source of (proto-) socialist ideology is an anachronistic and quite problematic approach. Although this approach started by the leftist intellectuals for the sake of reaching masses to produce historical materials during the 1960s, it seems to me that Alevis have significantly internalized it.

However, beside these approaches I received a very different response from Ali Rüzgar (24/04/08) According to him, the leftist movement was very powerful and effective during the 1960s and 70s and they came under the influence of populist leftist discourse. For him, it was not a conscious choice but more like a romantic approach. Although I partly agree with this argument, it is hard to explain the strong left-wing tendency among the Alevi youth simply with this approach.

Lastly, there is a point that relates to their current political attitudes, which needs to be explored in order to understand how their political stance in the 1960s and 70s has changed so far. The comparison between their political discourses during the 1960s/70s with the current one brought surprisingly various results. Apart from Rıza Erdem, all interviewees agree that their revolutionary aim during the 1960s and 70s was a utopia. Although Rıza Erdem is more critical now towards leftist approaches than he was before, he still keeps a revolutionary belief that one day when the conditions are ready communism will come. Obviously he is still opposed to legal parties and the European Union (EU). Ali Taşar, who was involved in the Kurdish leftist movement when he was at Ankara University (1969-75) which was DDKO (Revolutionary Culture Clubs of East, *Doğu Devrimci Kültür Ocakları*), supports pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP). He states that he does not believe in the dictatorship of the proletariat any more, rather he believes in democracy and liberal thought and maintains that regulations concerning human rights will solve Turkey's ethnic and religious minority problems. From this perspective, he says, he is certainly supporting Turkey joining the EU. Though Hüseyin Özdemir and İbrahim Harman are critical of the current nationalistic approach of the CHP (Republican People's Party, *Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*), supporting the CHP like most Alevis. They said "although we do not agree with the CHP's current policy there is no alternatives other than voting for it. However, unlike the CHP, they support the EU. The others (Hüseyin Karabay, Ali Rüzgar, Esat Korkmaz) voted for the individual social democrat candidates in the last general elections. Moreover, all my interviewees oppose the current party in government, AKP (Justice and Developments Party, *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*). They believe the AKP is not sincere in human rights and minority rights policy; in contrast they believe it has a hidden Islamist agenda.

CHAPTER IV: The Leftist Movement and Alevis in the 1960s and 1970s

After the analysis of the Alevis through interviews, in this chapter I will discuss main characteristics of the leftist movement in Turkey in the 1960s and 70s and left-wing politization among Alevis, finally I will analyze the recent revival of Alevi identity. The main source of my arguments in this chapter is based on textual analysis and my interviews.

The collapse of fascism and Nazism by the end of the Second World War strengthened the idea of democracy all over the world. In this atmosphere, the Republican People's Party (RPP) who led Turkey as a mono-party during 1925-45, initiated a multiparty system for the sake of finding a position for Turkey in this new democratic world⁸¹. By the elections of 14 May 1950 the Democratic Party (DP), which had campaigned with the slogan 'Enough! Now the people have their say' had won 53.4 per cent of the vote against the RPP's 39.8 per cent. The result was celebrated in an atmosphere of liberation all over the country. Under the new government of DP Turkey was rapidly changed not just socio-economically but also democratically. The tension between the armed forces and the DP became more heated for various reasons at the end of the 1950s⁸². The modern Turkey's first *coup d'état* had taken place on the 27 May 1960. The DP's government which came to power by election was overthrown by the military intervention. The army overthrew the Democratic Party and executed its leaders.

⁸¹ Murat Belge, *Türkiye'de Sosyalizm Tarihinin Ana Çizgileri*, [The Main Characteristics of the History of Socialism in Turkey] in *Modern Türkiye'de Siyasi Düşünce Cilt 8 Sol* (Political Thought in Modern Turkey Volume 8 Left). Istanbul: İletişim Press, 2007, p.24.

⁸² The rationale behind the 1960 *coup d'état* was to foster rights and freedoms which according to the military had been curtailed by the elected government which appealed to Islamic identity.

On the other hand, fundamental developments were seen during the DP government. Kemalist étatism was replaced by liberalism and this change also affected the economy⁸³. The strictly controlled and autarkist economy transformed into a liberal free-market economy with the extension of the Marshall Plan funds to Turkey. Although, the agricultural sector was the most profitable, some farmers were badly affected from this. As a result, the 1950s saw the emergence of mass migration from the countryside to the large cities. Besides these social and economic reforms and development, the hidden struggle about power between the army and DP led to the 1960 *coup d'état*. After this first *coup* the period of military *coups* came into being in Turkey. The commissions of professors⁸⁴ charged with drawing up a new constitution. The new constitution was accepted with the referendum on 9 July 1961 with 61.7 per cent of the votes which was the most liberal one in the course of Turkey's history and allowed to new socialist formations.

4.1 The Leftist Movement in the 1960s and 1970s

The 1960s were the years of rapid change for Turkey. The 1961 Constitution had allowed new 'ideological debates outside the Kemalist framework'⁸⁵. Moreover, it was designed to guarantee free speech and free association. As a result of these developments; the new actor of the 1960s left parties appeared. The Left became most influential for the first time in Turkey's history⁸⁶. The Socialist and social democratic political parties and student clubs also made their appearance and began to flourish in this atmosphere. The

⁸³ Erik Jan Zürcher, *Turkey A Modern History*. New York, London: I.B.Tauris, 2004, p.224.

⁸⁴ Professor Enver Ziya Karal and Professor Turhan Feyzioğlu did most of the work during the preparation of the new constitution.

⁸⁵ Feroz Ahmad, *Military Intervention and the Crisis in Turkey* in *MERIP Reports*, No 93, (Jan., 1981) Turkey: The Generals Take Over. p.13.

⁸⁶ Murat Belge, *Türkiye'de Sosyalizm Tarihinin Ana Çizgileri*, (The Main Characteristics of the History of Socialism in Turkey) in *Modern Türkiye'de Siyasal Düşünce Cilt 8 Sol* (Political Thought in Modern Turkey Volume 8 Left). Istanbul: İletişim Press, 2007, p.34.

Workers' Party of Turkey (WPT) was founded by a group of trade unionists and some socialist intellectuals in 1961. The WPT was the main legal party and aimed mainly at the proletariat (especially the trade unions) for support, but at the same time was very influential among intellectuals⁸⁷.

Besides these political developments, new periodicals were published which hosted lively intellectual debates on socio-political issues. The first was the journal *Yön* (Direction) which was not a narrow Marxist publication but a broad-based forum for all the other different and radical leftist ideas. However, the later publications such as *Devrim* (Revolution) or *Aydınlık* (Enlightenment) were inspired the specific brand of Marxism⁸⁸. The groups that formed around these publications often developed into factions and parties especially among the university students.

The universities played most important and influential part during the 1960s in Turkey. The most educated and intellectual side of Turkey saw themselves as the moving force of society⁸⁹. Political debating societies (*fikir kulüpleri*) sprang out at almost all major universities; such as Ankara University, Middle East Technical University in Ankara and Istanbul University. By the mid-1960s these political debating societies came together with other debating societies and founded a national network under the name of Federation of Debating Societies (*Fikir Kulüpleri Federasyonu*). The left rapidly developed in Turkey's unique dynamics during the 1960s and 70s. However the dilemma of third world countries' Marxism was also experienced in Turkey.

Basically problems were seen in three central aspects in the left circles and these problems led to new fractions in it. A major debate took place between Mihri Belli and

⁸⁷ Erik J. Zürcher, *Turkey, A Modern History*. New York: I.B. Tauris, 2001, p. 254.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ *Ibid.* p. 255.

Mehmet Ali Aybar's groups⁹⁰ within the Marxist circle. Mehmet Ali Aybar was claiming that Turkey ripened enough for a socialist revolution, expected success to come from a growing class-consciousness and political awareness among Turkey's workers, whom they tried, with considerable success, to organize in a new trade unions confederation led by WPT members⁹¹. Mihri Belli put more emphasis on the Asiatic and feudal characteristics of Turkey and suggested that revolutionary change could only be brought about by a coalition of officers and intellectuals. The second group was called National Democratic Revolution (*Milli Demokratik Devrim*) and took over the Federation of Debating Societies in 1968 and turned it into the organization Revolutionary Youth (*Devrimci Gençlik* or by its acronym *Dev Genç*). This debate steamed up with the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. Mehmet Ali Aybar's and his group's condemnation of the invasion was not supported by a number of other party leaders. One other cleavage was seen in the National Democratic Revolution group on a question of whether Turkey was a feudal society or rather one with the 'Asiatic mode of production'⁹². These debates continued on some other issues such as whether Turkey is an oppressive state or what the possible role of the army is in any revolution in Turkey's dynamics.

The third crucial cleavage appeared regarding the Kurdish issue. Notably, some Kurdish students and intellectuals began to demand attention to the problems of the Kurdish minority. However, the majority in the left thought that ethnic identities should be submerged in class solidarity like gender and religious minority issues⁹³. Thus, Revolutionary Culture Clubs of the East (*Doğu Devrimci Kültür Ocakları*) founded first at

⁹⁰ Mihri Belli and Mehmet Ali Aybar both were the party leaders of Worker's Party. Mehmet Ali Aybar became the leader of the WPT in 1962, Mihri Belli became the leader of the WPT in 1970.

⁹¹ Erik Jan Zürcher, *Ibid.* p. 255.

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ See for instance; Yaprak Zihnioğlu's article; *Türkiye'de Solun Feminizme Yaklaşımı* [The Approach of the Left in Turkey] in *Modern Türkiye'de Siyasi Düşünce Cilt 8 Sol* [Political Thought in Modern Turkey Volume 8 Left]. Istanbul: İletişim Press, 2007, pp. 1109-1144.

Istanbul University and Ankara University, began to spread out especially in Eastern and South-eastern provinces⁹⁴.

The military *coup* of 12 March 1971 did not exterminate the left, however it exacerbated the atmosphere in a polarized and radical way. The National Democratic Revolution circle decided that besides agitation there should also be armed propaganda and a guerilla struggle to bring about a revolution.

The radical left circles which were influenced by the model of Cuban Revolution and Palestinian guerilla movement, moved further to armed guerilla struggle. However, some groups believed that taking the Cuban revolution as a role model would be a kind of “little bourgeois” deviation, therefore they took the model of the Chinese Revolution⁹⁵. The Maoist splinter group TKP-ML (*Türkiye Komünist Partisi-Marksist/Leninist*) spawned the TIKKO (*Türkiye İşçi Köylü Kurtuluş Ordusu* – Turkish Workers and Peasants Liberation Army), while other groups were the THKO (*Türkiye Halk Kurtuluş Ordusu* – Turkish People’s Liberation Army) of Deniz Gezmiş⁹⁶ and the THKP/C (*Türkiye Halk Kurtuluş Partisi/Cephesi* – Turkish People’s Liberation Party/Front) of Mahir Çayan⁹⁷. These groups moved to rural areas become a guerilla movement or some of them continued in the cities as urban guerilla warfare.

⁹⁴ İsmail Beşikçi, *Hapisdeki Doğu Devrimci Kültür Ocakları* (Revolutionary Culture Clubs of the East whom are in Prison) in a PDF format in

<http://www.gelawej.org/indir/DDKO-Dosyasi/Ismail-Besikci.pdf>.

⁹⁵ Murat Belge, *Ibid.* p.39.

⁹⁶ Deniz Gezmiş (1947–1972) was a political activist, among the most high-profile revolutionaries active in the late 1960s. He was one of the Marxist-Leninist founders of the outlawed *Türkiye Halk Kurtuluş Ordusu* ‘Turkish People’s Liberation Army’. After becoming a member of the ‘Workers Part of Turkey’ he attended the Faculty of Law at Istanbul University in 1966. Becoming increasingly more politically active, he led the student organized occupation of Istanbul University in 1968 and he spearheaded protests against the arrival of the US 6th Fleet in Istanbul. Intensifying his involvement within the Worker’s Party of Turkey, and advocating the National Democratic Revolution, his ideas circulated and inspired a growing revolutionary student base. In 1971 he took part in the robbery of a bank in Ankara. That year, he kidnapped four US privates in Ankara. After releasing the hostages, he was captured alive and arrested in Sivas with Yusuf Aslan following an armed stand-off with law enforcers. Their trial began in July 1971, and he was sentenced to death for violating Turkish Criminal Code’s 146th article, “to attempt to overthrow the Constitutional order”. The death sentence was carried out by hanging on May 6 1972, along with the death sentences of Hüseyin İnönü and Yusuf Aslan, in the central prison in Ankara.

⁹⁷ Mahir Çayan (1945–1972) was the leader of the Turkish People’s Liberation Party/Front (*Türkiye Halk Kurtuluş Partisi/Cephesi*) who was killed with nine friends during the armed struggle with security forces in Kızıldere, in a village of Tokat where is in Central Anatolia.

4.2 The Alevi Youth of the 1960s and 1970s and the Left

Since the 1960s with the mass migration from rural area to urban settling, Alevis had become more visible, not just demographically but also economically in large cities. Martin van Bruinessen argues that Alevi mass migration into the cities since the 1960s onward ‘brought them into closer contact, and sometimes in direct competition, with strict Sunnis, from whom they remained socially separated for centuries’⁹⁸. The adaptation to new modern urban life and brought about dramatic changes for this traditional community. The religion and its traditional requirements and exercises which are the crucial part of the Alevi identity lost its former significance in this urban setting.

Political participation of a general higher class spread through lower segments which also positively affected Alevis and which led to the establishment of Alevi organizations. Despite the attempts of the Alevi to influence the politics with Hacı Bektaş Veli Associations which were founded in big cities and the Turkish Unity Party (*Türkiye Birlik Partisi*)⁹⁹, starting from the second half of the 1960s, the importance of Alevi demands in political participation decreased. The lion and twelve stars (symbolizing Ali and the Twelve Imams) were used as the party emblem by the Unity Party founded in 1966, however the party failed to attract the Alevi votes. During this period Alevis were increasingly attracted by the leftist egalitarian discourse. General tendency to leftism which had prevailed all over the world influenced Alevis too. As one of my interviewees Ibrahim Harman said that

⁹⁸ Martin van Bruinessen, *Kurds, Turks and Alevi Revival in Turkey*. in *Middle East Report*, July-September, p.8. Please see Chapter II for details on this separation.

⁹⁹ Turkish Unity Party (*Türkiye Birlik Partisi*) was established in 1966. This party is known as the first Alevi party in the Turkish history. However, they could not be sufficiently effective and declare Alevi demand directly. Although they succeeded to bring with eight MP to parliament in the 1969’s general election, with the new strategy of Ecevit’s defining the Republican People’s Party as “left of center”, was badly effected their rates and finally they abolished themselves in 1977.

(16/04/08) the order provided by the left was in fact what Alevis desired. He noted that even his illiterate was interested in socialism.

During this period the Alevi youth became an active participant of the student movements and they were highly influenced by the revolutionary ideas. Student clubs were formed by university students, who were children of bureaucrats or civil servant and who grew up in modern cities. In addition to these students, there were others, who caught the possibility of taking education at the same universities – who were not reactionary to irreligious ideas- and came from rural background. Alevis had been represented more compared to their population in these student movements¹⁰⁰. Especially after the Cuban Revolution guerrilla movement became internally widespread, this also affected the left-wing in Turkey. At this stage, those rural background youth's connection with their hometown became very significant.

The first revolutionary groups; such as THKO (1969), THKP-C (1970) and TKP/ML (1972) moved towards to rural areas to initiate the armed guerilla movement. Another reason to move to rural areas was the military coup of 1971 which made their life in urban areas unbearable. Therefore, according to them the most suitable place for them was the villages where Alevi population was intense. The first connection of THKO was established through Hüseyin Inan's¹⁰¹ family connection around Kahramanmaraş and Kayseri's Alevi settlements. Ibrahim Kaypakkaya; who was the founder of the TKP/ML decided to make Tunceli –the only province which has a majority of Alevi population- the center of its guerilla activity¹⁰². THKP-C took shelter in Kızıldere which is also an Alevi village.

¹⁰⁰ Murat Küçük, *Türkiye'de Sol Düşünce ve Aleviler*, [The Left Thought and Alevis] in *Modern Türkiye'de Siyasi Düşünce, Cilt 8 Sol* [Political Thought in Modern Turkey Vol:8 Left]. Istanbul: İletişim Press, 2007, p.909.

¹⁰¹ Hüseyin Inan was one of the leaders of THKO (Türkiye Halk Kurtuluş Ordusu- Turkish People's Liberation Army) who was sentenced to death for violating Turkish Criminal Code's 146th article, "to attempt to overthrow the Constitutional order" with Deniz Gezmiş and Yusuf Aslan on July 16, 1971. The death sentenced was carried out by hanging on May 6, 1972.

¹⁰² Murat Küçük, *Ibid.* p. 909.

However, the first attempt of creating a guerilla cadre of THKO, THKP-C and TKP/ML was bloodily suppressed by security forces.

Those were killed during the armed struggle were symbolized as Ali, or Hüseyin who is the martyr of Kerbela. For instance, the pictures of Deniz Gezmiş or Che Guavera can be seen next to the Ali and Twelve Imams pictures in some Alevi houses¹⁰³. The examples of Ali and Hüseyin resemble Jesus who is seen as the first communist since he pursued to protect the poor. As Bumke noted concerning the Alevi youth in especially Tunceli region; ‘...in their songs and discussions the martyrs of Kerbela are equated with the left-wing victims of the armed conflicts which took place in the cities, and with those persons, who had identified themselves as Marxist-Leninist guerrillas and who were hanged or shot dead after 1971’¹⁰⁴.

The Worker’s Party of Turkey (WPT) mobilized Alevis as provided to identify as opposing position again, which had been supporting Kemalism since the establishment of the Republic. During the transition of multiparty stage Alevi population supported the Democratic Party (DP). However, when the DP started alliance with Sunni *tarikat* leaders, Alevis turned back again to the Republican People’s Party (RRP). The WPT, which was established with the democratic expansions of new constitution of 1961, succeeded to gain Alevi support with promise of freedom and equality. In the 1965’s election WPT won three seats in parliament with open Alevi support, who used Alevis folk poems during its election propagandas. WPT seemed to win the considerable part of the Alevi constituents. Therefore, it was the first time for Alevis to encounter left-wing thought within the modern political discourse.

Alevi poems and hymns took an important part, not just in the discourse of the WPT which was used to reach the masses, but also in the discourse of the entire leftist movement.

¹⁰³ Murat Küçük, *Ibid.* p. 91.1

¹⁰⁴ Peter J. Bumke, *Dersimde Kızılbaş Kürtler* [Kizilbash Kurden in Dersim] in *Yabancı Araştırmacılar Gözüyle Alevilik* [Alevism in foreign researchers point of view] Istanbul: Ant Press, 1997, p. 54.

The songs of Ruhi Su, who is singing Alevi hymn and *semah*¹⁰⁵, became popular material of the WPT which applied during the party propaganda and organizations. However, neither in the 1965 election nor in the 1969 election, WPT leaders or MPs used a discourse indicating Alevi religious rights. Therefore, the reason for using Pir Sultan Abdal's poems during party meetings can only be explained as a pragmatic approach being based on folk literature which involves social problems derived from class struggle¹⁰⁶. Likewise Alevi songs and poems which were the product of the *Kizilbash*/Alevi struggle with Sunni poverty during the Ottoman Empire, suited perfectly to this concept the idea of fighting against discrimination and poverty. These poems provide enough material if they are revised from religious motives to socialist motives. As Kelh-Bodrogi argues:

For the new socialist –and actually the entire left- Alevism altogether appeared as a (proto-) socialist ideology and its central figures such as Ali, Hüseyin, the thirteenth century popular mystic Hacı Bektash and the 16th century poet and rebel Pir Sultan Abdal were re-interpreted as early socialists and revolutionaries who fought against the exploitation and suppression of their time¹⁰⁷.

As my interviewees Ali Taşar (12/05/08) and Hüseyin Özdemir (16/04/08) specified, they mostly used the Pir Sultan Abdal's poems in their slogans and anthem. Investing them with new meanings, young Alevis also appropriated the religious hymns of Alevism¹⁰⁸. Although the young revolutionary generation expressed its political actions in the symbolism of Kerbela, they were not interested in the religious dimension of the event, but the rebellious side. For instance, one of the Pir Sultan Abdal poems was re-written and became in this form the common anthem of the entire leftist movement:

Original version
Come oh souls let us reach unity
Let us strike a blow on the unbelievers

¹⁰⁵ Traditional songs; are played during the *ayin-i cem*, ceremonies.

¹⁰⁶ Faruk Bilici, *The Function of Alevi-Bektashi Theology in Modern Turkey*. in *Alevi Identity* (Eds.) Tord Olsson, Elizabeth Özdalga, Catharina Raudvere, Istanbul: Istanbul Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul, 2003, p.52.

¹⁰⁷ Krisztina Kelh-Bodrogi, *The Role of Kerbela in the (Re-) Construction of Alevism in Turkey*. in Ildiko Beller-Hann (ed.) *The Past as Resource in the Turkic Speaking World*. Würzburg: Egon, 2008, pp. 5-6.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.* p. 6.

And avenge the blood of our Hüseyin
I trust in God the Almighty¹⁰⁹

New version

Come oh souls let us reach unity
Let us strike blow on the suppressors
And avenge the blood of the poor
Come into being, long live socialism¹¹⁰

Furthermore, formerly a symbol of secrecy, the un-trimmed moustache of the Alevi became the distinctive feature of all Turkish revolutionaries¹¹¹.

Consequently, during the period of left-right polarization in the 1960s and 70s the Alevi youth took up the left position and devoted themselves to egalitarian revolutionary ideologies. This development was accompanied by a shift in the collective definition of identity from a religious to an ideological level. Alevi became synonymous with Communist¹¹². By a remarkable reinterpretation of history and tradition, Alevism became ideological sources of socialism. For example, in Engels' *The Peasant War in Germany* heterodox peasant rebellions in medieval were interpreted to Kizilbash/Alevi revolts during the 13th century and 16th centuries¹¹³. At the same time Alevis' 'unproportionally strong commitment in the left-wing movement led to a general infiltration of the left¹¹⁴. Alevi religious poems and hymns, adapted to socialist class struggle, became common property of the left.

¹⁰⁹ In the Turkish original: *Gelin canlar bir olalım / Münkire kılıç çalalım / Hüseyinimizin kanı alalım / Tevekkeltü taallallah.*

¹¹⁰ In the Turkish original: *Gelin canlar bir olalım / Zulüme kılıç açalım / Yoksulun kanı alalım / Yaşasın var ol sosyalizm.*

¹¹¹ Krisztina Kelh-Bodrogi, *Introduction* in Kelh-Bodrogi, Krisztina, Barbara Kellner-Heinkele and Anke Otter-Beaujean.(Eds) *Syncretistic Religious Communities in the Near East, Collected Papers of the International Symposium "Alevis in Turkey and Compaprabable Syncrestistic Religious Communities in the Near East in the past and Present"*. Leiden: Brill, 1997, p.13.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ See for instance: Faruk Bilici, *The Function of Alevi-Bektashi Theology in Modern Turkey*. in *Alevi İdentiy* (Eds.) Torld Olsson, Elizabeth Özdalga, Catharina Raudvere, Istabul: Istanbul Swedish Reserch Institute in Istanbul, 2003, pp. 51-62.

Murat Küçük, *Türkiye'de Sol Düşünce ve Aleviler*, [The Left Thought and Alevis] in *Modern Türkiye'de Siyasi Düşünce, Cilt 8 Sol* [Political Thought in Modern Turkey Vol:8 Left]. Istanbul: İletişim Press, 2007, pp. 896-934.

¹¹⁴ Kristina Kelh-Bodrogi, *Ibid.*

4.3 The Revival of Alevism and the Reconstruction of Collective Identity

Due to the fact that the majority of Alevis turned to socialism and Marxist discourse, their formerly religiously defined identity was abandoned and became more insignificant. At the beginning of the 1980s Alevism was nearly forgotten in the Turkey's public conscious. However, the late 1980s witnessed the growing activism of the Alevis. Renewed interest in the community has led to various efforts for the reconstruction and re-strengthening of Alevi collective identity. Alevism became one of the most discussed topics of Turkey's media.

The first visible signs of this process appeared with the Alevi periodicals, newspapers, books and articles by associations thought Turkey and especially in the European Alevi diaspora. The rediscovery of the Alevi community depends on various factors at various levels. Among them it can be roughly distinguished as sociological and political factors¹¹⁵. The first factor which is in the domain of sociology relates to process of migration and urbanization of Alevis. Migration to the large cities inevitably imposed new urban forms of expression on their identity, which maintained its existence in remote rural areas for centuries. Moreover in this new urbanized Alevi generation 'the great increase in the number of educated Alevis and emergence of an Alevi bourgeoisie resulted in new social stratification'¹¹⁶. Moreover, the nature of international conjuncture which was characterized by post-modern philosophy at the politics of identity influenced the emergence of ethnic and religious groups in the public sphere of Turkey. From this

¹¹⁵ Reha Çamuroğlu, *Some Notes on the Contemporary Process of Restructuring Alevilik in Turkey*, in Kelh-Bodrogi, Krisztina, Barbara Kellner-Heinkele and Anke Otter-Beaujean.(Eds) *Syncretistic Religious Communities in the Near East, Collected Papers of the International Symposium "Alevis in Turkey and Comparaple Syncrestistic Religious Communities in the Near East in the past and Present"*. Leiden: Brill, 1997, p. 25.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.* p.26.

perspective, the new Alevi movement appeared in these historical and social atmospheres of Turkey.

From the political point of view there are several factors which played important roles on the revival of Alevism. The first one was about the 1980 military coup which led to collapse of the alliance between Alevis and the political left, which had been set up in 1960s and strengthened in 1970s. This led Alevis to seek new approaches. The reason of this change was related to political and physical damage of the leftists due to military coup. Another important reason was the religious policy of the left. The left in Turkey kept away from ethnic, gender and religious matters and ignored all demands of the suppressed religious groups and saw them as an obstacle for the progression. After the military coup these suppressed groups which were ignored by the left during the 1960s and 70s started to appear in the public sphere by the late 1980s. In this respect, it can be say that Kurdish, Alevi, feminist movements took place as outcomes of these developments.

The second factor was the collapse of the Soviet block. As a result of this development, socialism, which in the previous two decades had an ‘indisputable authority as an ideological¹¹⁷ alternative for the young and middle generation of Alevis, lost its former importance’. As a result most of the Alevis began to seek other paths. In the late 1980s many Alevi intellectuals who were involved in the left-wing parties and groupings, started to redefine themselves as Alevi. In this respect, they started to reconstruct Alevism with modern terms and they ‘discovered Alevism as an ideology, which they now regarded as being even more just, egalitarian and libertarian than socialism’¹¹⁸.

The third important factor was the rise of political Islamic fundamentalism or political Islam in Turkey¹¹⁹. As Reha Çamuroğlu points out that, ‘because of their

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ See for instance:

considerable and extensive historical inheritance, the Alevi were put on alert by the Islamic Revolution of Iran’¹²⁰. Moreover the rise of fascist and Islamist movements in Turkey especially in the second half of the 1970s number of anti-Alevi pogroms produced by Sunni-fascist Islamists in the towns of Çorum, Malatya, Sivas, Kahramanmaraş and in July 1993 ‘the event of Sivas’¹²¹ accelerated the process of politicization of Alevi. As Krisztina Kelh-Bodrogi states ‘the massacre had a strong mobilizing effect on the Alevi, who increasingly felt the necessity of strengthening their community in order to be able to defend themselves against the growing influence of radical Islamism in view of the inability – if not unwillingness- of the state to protect its Alevi citizens.

The last factor that affected the new Alevi movement was Kurdish problem. Since an important part of Alevi are Kurds (according to the unofficial estimates between 10-20 percent of Alevi are Kurds) this Kurdish nationalist movement directly affected their community. They started to stress on their religious identity and unity. On the other hand, the rise of Kurdish nationalist movement seemed to encourage Alevi in their political activism.

As a result of these factors, Alevi have started to reconstruct and re-strengthen of Alevi collective identity since the end of 1980s. After centuries of invisibility Alevi have

¹¹⁹ Reha Çamuroğlu, *Some Notes on the Contemporary Process of Restructuring Alevilik in Turkey*.in Kelh-Bodrogi, Krisztina, Barbara Kellner-Heinkele and Anke Otter-Beaujean.(Eds) *Syncretistic Religious Communities in the Near East, Collected Papers of the International Symposium “Alevi in Turkey and Comparible Syncretistic Religious Communities in the Near East in the past and Present”*. Leiden: Brill, 1997, pp. 24-33.

Ahmet Yasar Ocak, *Çevreden Merkeze Yahut Gayri meşruluktan Meşruiyete: Cumhuriyet Döneminde Alevilik* [From the Periphery to Center or from illegality to legality: Alevism During the republican Era] in *Türk Sufiliğine Bakışlar* [Research to Turkish Sufism] Istanbul: İletişim Press, 2002, pp. 312-333.

David Zeidan, *The Alevi of Anatolia*. in *Middle East Review of International Affairs*. Vol.3, No.4 (December 1999) pp. 74-89.

¹²⁰ Reha Çamuroğlu, *Ibid*.

¹²¹ When the Pir Sultan Abdal association in July 1993 organized a cultural festival in Sivas numerous prominent authors and artists were invited, one of them was Aziz Nesin, who had recently provoked the anger of many Sunni Muslims by announcing his intention to publish a translation of Salman Rushdie’s Satanic Verses. On the second day of the festival, ten to fifteen thousand of surged onto the streets after the Friday prayer started to protest the festival. Then the mob stormed the hotel where Nesin and other guests of the festival were staying, showered it with rocks and finally set it on fire. Thirty-seven people in the hotel died in this fire.

become an indispensable element of Turkey's politics and society. By demanding their *de jure* recognition, Alevis have abandoned *taqqiye* once and for all and have come to the fore¹²². In this respect, the most common demand of Alevi movement which has not yet achieved its main goal was about the official recognition of the community and the legalization of its religious rituals and practices. Although the state policy is still unwilling to fully recognize the demands of the Alevis, it tolerates community-based organizations and their manifold cultures, which see Alevis as a counter-balance against Islamist tendencies.

¹²² Krisztina Kelh-Bodrogi,, *The Role of Kerbela in the (Re-) Construction of Alevism in Turkey*. in Ildiko Beller-Hann (ed.) *The Past as Resource in the Turkic Speaking World*. Wüzburg: Egon, 2008, p. 15.

Conclusion

From the middle of the 20th century onward, with the process of mass migration and urbanization, Alevis have undergone a radical transformation. The secularized Alevis lost their major characteristics as a distinct socio-religious community. However, from the late 1980s on, Alevis have started to reconstruct their collective identity based on religious and cultural differences in parallel to the period that began in the mid 1980s, and the Alevi revival was constituted by the form of politics that was based on certain identity politics. Although it seems that the Kurds have been chief actors of the politics of ethnic identity, the Alevi revival that constituted the Alevi identity with political terms took its place in the public sphere as one of the most important movements since the beginning of 1990s in Turkey.

As it was explained in the Chapter II, Alevi opposition to the Sunni Ottoman Empire in the 16th century resulted in spatial and social marginality. They retreated to isolated rural areas and turned inward, and developed their specific community structures and doctrines. Along with the proclamation of the Turkish Republic, the secularization of the state gradually destroyed the strict boundaries between Alevis and the outside world. Furthermore, with the process of migration and urbanization from the middle 1950s onward, the traditional institutions of Alevis were replaced by modern apparatus and ideologies of urban life.

During the political polarization of the country in the 1960s and 70s, the process of secularization accelerated and Alevis became more secularized than before. Thus, most young Alevis had completely rejected religion and re-interpreted Alevism as a way of life that intend to transform the existing system through revolutionary awareness. On the other

hand, the 1961 Constitution, which allowed new socialist formations, was the most liberal one in the course of Turkey's history. Therefore, the political left became that influential for the first time in the political arena of Turkey. The Workers' Party of Turkey (WPT) was founded in 1961, trade unions became very influential and university student movements flourished. The leftist groups found a measure of support all over the country among which most of the supporters were Alevis, who were defined as the Alevi revolts of the past proto-communist struggle, and considered the Alevis as its "natural allies".

The aim of this study was to explore the strong left-wing tendency among Alevis during the left-right polarization in the 1960s and 1970s in Turkey and the main research question was where this strong left wing tendency originated from, more precisely whether this tendency came from religious, historical or socio-economic dynamics of this community. Additionally, this study examined how and why the Alevi youth took sides with the left, and became actively engaged in various leftist movements. In order to do this; I conducted interviews with eight Alevis who were involved in these leftist movements in the 1960s and 1970s.

Although most of my interviewees drew a parallel between the basic leftist arguments and Alevi discourse of equality and freedom, and explained their active involvements in the left with this argument, this point of view is dubious. The notions of equality, freedom and secularism appeared as outcomes of modernity. The re-interpretation of Alevi rebellions in modern Marxist discourse as proto-communist class struggle was the strategy of the leftist intellectuals to reach out to the masses. Although, this point should not be ignored, it is hard to explain the strong left-wing tendency among the Alevis simply with this approach. The encounter of Alevis and the left should be sought in the nation-building process of Turkey. Despite the fact that Alevis were the most ardent supporters of Mustafa Kemal and his regime, later on while the state gradually characterized Sunni Islam, Alevis

became the “other”. These two marginalized groups who are Alevis and the political left met on the common grounds.

In conclusion, contrary to the tendency in the existing scholarship, my interviewees claimed that Alevi culture had already egalitarian and just underpinnings rather than it took these notions from the leftist movement. Therefore, Alevi culture was the basis for the Alevi youth which took part in the leftist movements as opposed to the general claim that they have internalized the notions of the left. They perceived the leftist movements as suitable structures for their ideological priorities and preferred to participate.

There are some deficiencies that need to be mentioned to consider to the aim and framework of this study. This study is relevant to the Alevi youth’s perception of left in the 1960s and 1970s. However, the perception of the non-Alevi urban youth towards Alevis coming from rural areas should also be taken into consideration. Moreover, the approach the left takes towards the pluralist perspectives of the 1960s and 70s is another interesting point to explore. I believe that these questions can be furthered in future researches.

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