Central European University
Nationalism Studies Program

The Making and Unmaking of Ethnic Boundaries: the Alevis in Germany

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In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

Budapest, Hungary
2011

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Introduction

The initial spark which would become this thesis was a comment made by my tandem partner, Erdal Atila, in Germany last year. Erdal, a Kurd born in Southeastern Turkey, was helping me improve my Turkish while I assisted him with his English. One day I suggested that we meet at a small Turkish restaurant, Istanbul Cafe, and his response was something along the lines of, "No, they are too religious." His response perplexed me as my mind started reeling, searching for the reason for this answer. Had Erdal had a bad experience with the employees there? Had Erdal converted from Islam to Christianity?

When I finally asked him what he meant by that, I was enlightened by his answer. All of a sudden, I felt like I had been admitted membership into an exclusive club, a secret world inhabited by those individuals in Germany who had personal experience with migration from Turkey. From the viewpoint of most members of the dominant society, the "Turks" in Germany form a homogenous group of Muslims, with poor German language skills and a refusal to "integrate" into society which goes hand in hand with their strict adhesion to Islam. Indeed, the only division which most "Germans" are aware of within the Turkish community is the ethnic one related to the Kurdish conflict. Erdal proceeded to inform me of the crimes committed against non-Sunnis by the Turkish government. This is the first time that I recognized the deep religious division which runs through Turkey, brewing beneath the surface, threatening instability.

Then I began to connect the dots. I began to understand why so many women in Turkey do not wear a headscarf. I remembered the "liberal" family I lived with in Ankara, I thought about how my host mother had desperately tried to explain things about Humanism to me despite the significant language barrier. I thought about the owner of the internet cafe down the street who had invited me to a "cem" event. Finally, and most importantly I thought of my beloved baglama, the musical instrument which produced hauntingly beautiful music. I had, in fact, been surrounded by Alevis during my

experiences in Germany and Turkey, yet I had never realized it.

I began to interrogate Erdal about his past, his identity as a Kurd, as a "Turk" in Germany. I asked him how her came to Germany, and why he left his home. The responses I got from him reflected a sense of contempt for the Turkish state. Not only had Erdal been treated unfairly because of his Kurdish ethnicity, he had also been threatened because of his religious inclination towards Alevism. I wondered what Alevism was. How was it connected to the Kurdish conflict? Where did it come from, and why was it such an important contention that people had to leave their home because of it? My conversation with Erdal ended with a suggestion from him that I give up on learning Turkish, the language of the oppressors.

However, this conversation was also the beginning of an academic journey. Since then, I have delved deeply into the German Alevi movement, driven by this question: Why do the Alevis continue to distinguish themselves from the Sunni within the Turkish Diaspora in Germany? Considering the hardships that all individuals of Turkish descent face in Germany due to racism and anti-foreigner sentiments, one would expect the Turkish identity to be salient, yet it seems that the religious/cultural division between Alevis and Sunnis remains crucial to the self-identification among members of the Turkish diaspora in Germany.

Ethnicity as a Collective Identity

Combining work from disciplinary fields including anthropology, sociology, political science and social psychology, I will outline an interdisciplinary perspective on ethnicity as a category of collective identification and mobilization. This discussion will begin by outlining social identity theory, and then, focusing on ethnicity, patterns of assimilation, ethnic retention and ethnic reorganization will be examined.

The social identity theory of "Intergroup Behavior" set forth by Turner and Tajfel, builds upon the concepts of social categorization and social identity in order to help evaluate an individual's behavior toward ingroup and outgroup members.[1] Social identity can be understood as the cognitive, evaluative and emotional aspects associated with membership in a group, while social categorization is a "system of orientation" that helps one identify his/her role in society.[2] "Social identity provides a link between the psychology of the individual-the representation of self and the structure and process of social groups within which the self is embedded."[3]However, not all group memberships are similarly salient for the individual, and the perception of group membership is not fixed. The cognitive, emotional and evaluative components associated with membership fluctuate, thereby necessitating a continuum to evaluate an individual's social behavior from purely interpersonal to purely intergroup.[4]

If group membership ceases to contribute positively to an individual's social identity, he/she will attempt to leave . If this is impossible, an individual will alter his/her perception of the group or engage

1 The definition of ingroup and outgroup members is based on a subjective evaluation made by an individual or enforcers of a group's boundaries regarding who belongs to the group and who does not.

2 Henri Tajfel,, " Social Categorization, Social Identity and Social Comparison," in *Human Groups and Social Categories*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 254-255.

3 Marilynn Brewer, "The Many Faces of Social Identity: Implications for Political Psychology," *Political Psychology* 22(2001): 115.

4 Henri Tajfel, "The attributes of intergroup behavior," in *Human Groups and Social Categories*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 229-239.

in social action in order to objectively improve the situation.[5] In the case of membership in a minority group, an individual may choose either to accept or reject the image of group membership imposed by the majority population depending on the perceived legitimacy and stability of the status quo associated with intergroup relations.[6] Indeed as Yinger points out, prejudice against a group in an inferior position "demoralizes the members, heightens intragroup conflict, accentuates the tendencies towards self-hatred and programs of escape…"[7] The degree to which individuals belonging to a minority identify themselves as members of this collective identity will have a significant impact on the integration process.

Ethnicity as a collective identity has been a popular topic for scholars: the literature regarding ethnicity is vast and a precise definition of "ethnicity" is still debated by scholars today. Instead of attempting to establish a final definition on ethnicity, it is more important to reconsider the way that ethnicity is used as a concept. As Brubaker points out: "Ethnicity,race, and nation should be conceptualized not as substances or things or entities or organisms or collective individuals...but rather in relational processual, dynamic, eventful, and disaggregated terms."[8]

The Primordialist-Circumstantialist Divide

With this suggestion, the two schools which represent crucial academic disagreement regarding ethnicity, the circumstancialists and the primordialists, have been introduced.[9] Following Herder's

5 Tajfel, " Social Categorization, Social Identity and Social Comparison," in *Human Groups and Social Categories* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981):256.
6 Henri Tajfel, "The Social Psychology of Minorities," in *Human Groups and Social Categories* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 309-343.
7 Yinger, Milton J., "Social Forces Involved in Group Identification or Withdrawal." *Daedalus* 90(1941):254.
8 Rogers Brubaker, "Ethnicity without groups," in *Ethnicity without Groups,* ed. Rogers Brubaker (Cambridge:Harvard University Press, 2004):11.
9 The primordialists have alternatively been labeled essentialists, and the circumstantialists, instrumentalists.

philosophy, the primordialists believe in the invariable, acsriptive qualities of culture and race.[10] According to primordialists, the justification for ethnic group identification are blood and kin ties. An individual is born as a member of an ethnic group whose existence is permanently rooted in history, unaffected by novel circumstances.[11] This logic suggests that ethnicities are naturally found in nature and their character does not change; their boundaries persist over time, allowing for the survival of distinct ethnic groups. Primordialists, however cannot account for the variation of salience regarding ethnicity as an identity.

Drawing on Weber's logic, circumstancialists assert that ethnicity as a category is neither stable nor inherited by birth. They understand identification with an ethnic group as motivated by utility or by structural systems which encourage socialization into a certain ethnicity or increased intragroup interaction, resulting in an increased level of solidarity. Ethnicity is perceived as an instrumental identification which depends on circumstance and choice. Ethnic groups are understood to be shaped by historical circumstances, and individuals have the choice whether or not to identify with an ethnic group.[12] Circumstancialists have been criticized for overlooking the powerful, enduring power which ethnicity seems to have. If ethnicity is simply a product of circumstances, how can we explain its salience?

The constructivist framework has merged aspects of both camps in order to develop a theoretical perspective which addresses the shortcomings of the primordialists and circumstantialists. While constructivists recognize increased importance of ethnicity as an identification because of real or perceived blood ties and common origins, they maintain that social actors are responsible for attaching this significance. Constructivists also agree that identities are contingent on circumstances,

10 Wimmer, "The Making and Unmaking of Ethnic Boundaries," 971.
11 Stephen Cornell and Douglas Hartmann. *Ethnicity and Race: Making Identities in a. Changing World*, (London: Sage Publications, 1997):68.
12 Ibid.

but they attribute an active role to social engineers in shaping identities. Ethnic categories are not simply imposed on individuals by history, it is rather a dialectical process in which these categories and the ascribed attributes which accompany them are actively specified, resisted or adapted.[13]

Ethnicity as a Category of Identification

Which features characterize ethnicity as a category of identification? Central to the understanding of ethnic group identification is the boundary concept which assists in determining which characteristics ingroup members share, and how these characteristics distinguish them from members of outgroups. In order to explain how distinct ethnicities survive despite interaction with other ethnicities, Barth determined that a boundary is drawn which "...constructs an assumption of shared homogeneity within the group and cultural difference between groups."[14] This strategy of reifying groups leads to the assumption of internal commonality and solidarity while simultaneously asserting a limitation on shared values and interests with members outside of the boundaries.[15]

The second characteristic of ethnicity as a category of identification is the "perceived position" of the group. According to Cornell and Hartmann, the location of the ethnic group within the hierarchy of social relations is crucial to the self-understanding of the ethnic members. Whether the ethnic group is perceived to constitute part of the dominant society or occupy a minority position will have consequences for behavioral patterns. The third crucial aspect of ethnicity as an identity put forth by Cornell and Hartmann is "meaning". Meaning does not necessarily imply a normative evaluation of ingroup and outgroup members. It is rather the significance attached to ethnicity as an identity: how is membership to a specific ethnic group pertinent for self-understanding and everyday experience?[16] For

13 Cornell and Hartmann. *Ethnicity and Race:*73-77, 89.
14 Fredrik Barth, "Boundaries and Connections," in *Signifying Identities:: Anthropological Perspectives on Boundaries and Contested Identities* ed. Anthony Cohen (London: Routledge, 2000): 30.
15 Fredrik Barth, "Introduction," in *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries. The Social Organization of Cultural Difference* ed. Fredrik Barth (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1969):15.
16 Cornell and Hartmann. *Ethnicity and Race:*81.

example, the meaning attached to Jewish ethnicity could be something along the lines of: "we are a people who have been oppressed throughout history, but managed to persevere and become powerful actors in the modern world."

There are a number of bonds which members of an ethnic group are assumed to share. The first bond is a common historical consciousness because of kinship ties and shared past experiences. Shared interests, whether they be political, economic or related to status are also perceived to be unanimously held by those within the boundary. Shared institutions can be understood as social organizations which are populated by members of the ethnie, they lead to increased interaction, and a possible feeling of solidarity. Finally, there is the assumption that ethnic group members share a specific culture; this can range from religious practices to a common language.[17]

The Salience of Ethnicity

Within the context of a globalizing world in which the trans-state movement of individuals and populations has been increased exponentially, many scholars have predicted a decline in the identification of people with their ethnicity. However, it seems that those loyalties run deep and persevere despite the increased migration and instability of modern times. Indeed, we continue to experience ethnically-framed conflict in all corners of the world despite the diffusion of power from the state to local and supranational institutions. How can this irrational bond to an individual's ethnic group be explained? Why are people willing to sacrifice themselves and their family for perceived ties to extended kin?

According to Cornell and Hartmann, there are three reasons why it is logical to construct groups along ethnic lines. Primarily, social actors are motivated by their interests; ethnic construction can help secure favorable patterns of social allocation by ensuring solidarity. Utility is the second benefit; by establishing this solidarity based on ethnicity, a group has a better chance of competing with

17 Ibid., 86.

other groups over scarce resources such as power, jobs or prestige. Neither of these explanations, however, clarify why ethnicity is chosen as an identification out of the multiple identities which human beings may possess. The third explanation offered does not involve material resources. Membership in an ethnic group can offer an individual defense against spiritual insecurity including a continuous history and meaningful intragroup ties based on kinship.[18]

Yet, ethnic identities are not salient in every context, and the efforts of ethnic elites to mobilize individuals on the basis of this identification are not always successful. Cornell and Hartmann propose a model to predict whether ethnic identity will be salient within a given society. Contextual factors which are likely to increase the importance of ethnicity as a collective identity include: government policies which treat ethnicities differently, differential access to social institutions , the use of ethnicity as a category of ascription and a situation in which ethnic identity plays a dominant role in an individual's daily experience. Group factors which lead to an increased salience of ethnicity as a category of ascription include: a preexisting ethnic identity embedded in social relations, a large population, a high proportion of first generation migrants, a large "social repertoire"which includes myths and symbols, and a situation in which the cultural practices of the dominant society vary greatly from those of the sub-group.[19]

Ethnic Stigmatization

Ethnic stigma, which has been defined by Wells as "...the negative assessment of an ethnic identity by the dominant society...", has implications which effect the ethnic group's ability to participate in society and influence the behavior of members of the stigmatized group.[20] Stigmatization effects an individual's ability to integrate economically, socially and politically, and is often associated

18 Cornell and Hartmann. *Ethnicity and Race:*96-98.
19 Ibid., 190.
20 Miriam Wells, "Ethnicity, Social Stigma, and Resource Mobilization in Rural America: Reexamination of a Midwestern Experience," *Ethnohistory* 22(1975):320.

with psychological well-being. While it is true that groups sometimes internalize the label imposed on them by the dominant society, it is also possible for a group to resist this categorization because they do not want to be stereotyped or because the ascribed role leads to economic, social or political disadvantages.[21]

One strategy employed by ethnic elites in order to improve the status of their ethnic group is that of transformation. The concept of "racial reassignment" mentioned by Cornell and Hartmann offers insight with regard to the Alevis efforts to emphasize cultural commonality with German society while simultaneously underscoring their distinctiveness from Sunni Turks. Though this concept uses race as the category of ascription, the goal is the same: to escape stigmatization by differentiating oneself from a group which is perceived negatively by the dominant society. "Racial reassignment" was achieved by Asian immigrants in the United States by conforming to white behaviors and relationships as well as setting up parallel institutions within their own communities which were similar to those among white communities. The benefit of creating their own institutions was increased intragroup interaction; the increased contact promoted solidarity and reinforced the dissemination of the new strategy to members of the group. In order to emphasize their racial distinctiveness from African Americans, the Asian immigrants also avoided relationships with them. Though this form of acculturation focused on the adoption of white norms and practices in order to distance themselves from the stigmatization associated with the black race, the Asian immigrants did not seek to threaten the dominant position of the whites.[22]

Drawing on Nagel and Snipp, Cornell and Hartmann also apply the concept of "ethnic reorganization" in which Chinese immigrants in the United States resisted the identity which the whites had assigned to them by attempting to resist the meanings the dominant society had attached to Chinese

21 Cornell and Hartmann, *Ethnicity and Race* 198.
22 Ibid., 117-119.

identity. These efforts resulted in the introduction of a new racial category; instead of the white-black dichotomy, Asian became a third legitimate racial identification. This is certainly a common trend among migrant groups who fall into a competition with other subordinate social entities in order to secure the resources which attracted them to the new country in the first place.[23]

The Ethnic Transformation of the Alevis in Germany

The aim of this thesis is to examine the ethnic identification of a religious minority within a diaspora. To borrow the term from Mandel's anthropological study on individuals of Turkish origin in Germany, the Alevis occupy a "doubly liminal" position. Though Mandel's study was published in 1989 at the very incipient stages of the German Alevi movement, she was already able assert that "...their relative position vis-à-vis Sunnis has undergone a transposition."[24]

Drawing on Brubaker's criticism of the tendency towards "groupism", it must be emphasized that the Alevis, regardless of their location, do not constitute an internally homogeneous, externally bounded community.[25] On the contrary, the "Alevis" exhibit great internal heterogeneity marked by language, ethnicity, religiosity, political affiliation, etc. Individuals who identify themselves as "Alevi" do not even agree on a basic definition of what it means to be an Alevi. It is precisely because of this fact that academics have struggled to define Alevism; the heated discussion of whether Alevism is a culture or a religion, for example, is still unresolved. This case study will focus on the efforts of the most prominent Alevi organization in Germany, the Alevitische Gemeinde Desutchland (AABF), to construct a codified collective identity and mobilize individuals who identify themselves as Alevis.[26]

23 Ibid., 121, 213.

24 Ruth Mandel, "Turkish Headscarves and the 'Foreigner Problem'.Constructing Difference Through Emblems of Identity," *New German Critique* 46(1989): 44.

25 See Rogers Brubaker's chapter "Ethnicity without groups," in *Ethnicity without Groups,* ed. Rogers Brubaker (Cambridge:Harvard University Press, 2004):7-27.

26 A recent study claims that 29% of Alevis in Germany who are aware of the AABF feel that they are totally represented by the AABF, while 42% feel they are partially represented. Though this does not imply that the AABF can legitimately speak for all Alevis, they are the most active organization.

Therefore, when I refer to the "Alevis" in Germany, I am referring to those individuals who support the efforts of the AABF and who have conformed to the definition of Alevism set forth by the association.

I will not attempt to extensively address the salience of the Alevi identity and its behavioral consequences among individuals, as I lack the evidence to make well-founded claims. First, I will provide a short biography of the Alevis including a section on their history, as well as an overview of the characteristics which define the group as a collective identity. From there, I will examine the Alevi movement in Germany led by the AABF.

This analysis will focus on three main questions:

1. Why has a mobilization, centered on Alevi identity, taken place within the diaspora context? Which conditions during the late 1980s-early 1990s allowed for it's incipient stages?
2. Which strategies have been utilized by the AABF in order to ensure the success of the Alevi movement?
3. Has the Alevi movement been successful? What have been the material and non-material consequences of this mobilization for the Alevi identity?

In order to answer these questions, I will use a model proposed by Andreas Wimmer regarding the transformation of ethnic groups. Combining on work done by Cornell and Hartmann as well as scholars from the constructivist school of thought, Wimmer has proposed a model which seeks to explain how macro level variables such as the societal distribution of power affect the behavior of those involved in ethnic boundary reconstruction. His theory utilizes the historical character of an ethnicity, namely the political salience, cultural significance, social closure and stability, as the starting point for an analysis of ethnic transformation. Moving to an analysis of this transformation as a result of a dialectical process of negotiation between social actors, he predicts that the outcome of this process will result in a consensus among actors regarding the new ethnic boundaries. Finally, the theory suggests that the extent of this consensus among actors and the power inequality reflected by it will

affect the political salience, cultural significance, social closure and stability of the new boundary.[27]

The decision to employ Wimmer's model was based on his basic premise: ethnic boundaries are understood as an "outcome to be explained".[28] Though constructivists do recognize the dialectical nature of ethnic construction and transformation, there has been no model which systematically identifies macro level phenomena and predict how they will affect the consensus which is reached by social actors regarding the new ethnic boundary. While Wimmer does briefly address what he refers to as "dynamics of change", his theory cannot fully accommodate the unique conditions which surround the transformation of Alevi identity, including migration, the prominence of integration policy in contemporary German politics, and the influence of supranational and transnational actors. Thus, I will not attempt to utilize his theory in the positive sense, by identifying a specific causal relationship. Instead, I will employ Wimmer's theory as a framework which offers an explanation for transformation patterns observed and an organizational structure for the analysis of the Alevi movement in Germany.

27 Andreas Wimmer, "The Making and Unmaking of Ethnic Boundaries: A Multilevel Process Theory," *American Journal of Sociology* 113(2008):970-1022.
28 Wimmer, "The Making and Unmaking," 1003.

Historical Overview of the "Alevis"

An objective history of Alevism is difficult to arrive at because of the complicated nature of historical events which transformed the Ottoman empire into a modern republic. Conflicting narratives reported by the various parties reflect differing agendas. The "renaissance" of Alevism which started in Germany and spread to Turkey adds to the complexity of this task. Instead, of trying to develop my own interpretation of Alevi history, I understand my task as the highlighting those significant historical events related to Alevism which historians, as well as Alevi elites and organizations claim to have significantly contributed to the evolution of contemporary Alevi thought and politics. Moreover, it is important to point out that "Alevi" as a collective identity first came into existence in the 1980s. This section will attempt to piece together a history based on the peoples assumed to be the forerunners of the Alevi people, or, as Dressler labeled them, the "proto-Alevis".[29]

Both followers of Alevism and Shia Islam believe that Ali, Mohammed's cousin and son-in-law, should have been the prophet's successor. Instead of the three caliphs who took power after Mohammed's death, Shias and Alevis remained loyal to Ali and the eleven imams who succeeded him. The first significant historical event for the Alevis, an event which is also commemorated by followers of Shia Islam, was the death of Imam Hüseyin in 680 during the massacre at Kerbala.[30] According to the opponents of the caliphate, Hüseyin and his followers were unjustly slaughtered by caliph Yezid.[31]

29 Markus Dressler, " Religio-Secular Metamorphoses: The Re-Making of Turkish Alevism," *Joumal of the American Academy of Religion* 76(2008): 284.

30 This event is also known as the battle of Kerbala, depending on the point of view from which the story is told.

31 Martin Sökefeld, "Einleitung: Aleviten in Deustschland: Von Takiye zur alevitischen Bewegnung," in *Aleviten in Deutschland*, ed. Martin Sökefeld. (Bielefeld:transcript Verlag, 2008), 10.

Most scholars, however, trace the history of today's Alevis back to two distinct entities from the Ottoman empire: the Kızılbaş and the Bektaşis. The Kızılbaş were a tribe of turcomen who became Safavid collaborators within the context of social and political inequality experienced under the Ottoman Empire; they were also motivated partly by an inclination towards the Safavid's religious tradition: Shia Islam. However, Ottoman political rhetoric has largely ignored the material causes of Kızılbaş upheavals, preferring instead to label them as dirty, immoral heretics who embraced sexual debauchery, especially incest. The Ottomans issued an official order to persecute the Kızılbaş, which resulted in such violent oppression that those who remained within the empire resolved to disperse and "go into hiding".[32]

Those among the followers of the Bektaşi order, on the other hand, were the most loyal supporters of the Ottomans. The Bektaşi order was developed by Haci Bektas Veli, a mystic from Eastern Anatolia who promoted gender equality and the priority of reason over dogma. The order was institutionalized by an Ottoman Sultan during the 16th century as a way to control heterodox religions within the empire, and it became the religion of the sultans' most trusted soldiers, the janissaries. However, when the janissaries were disbanded in 1826, the Bektaşi order was also officially disbanded. Still, the Bektaşis continued to play a central role in politics by supporting the Young Turks during the establishment of the Turkish republic. This alliance, and Atatürk's promises of secularization gave the Alevis hope that the new republic would grant them freedom of religion, and put an end to the persecution and discrimination experienced under the Ottoman Empire.[33]

However, the Alevis were soon disappointed; the state developed an even more intimate relationship with religion, and diversity was oppressed in favor of stability in the young nation. And though Atatürk is heralded for the secularization of Turkey, "Turkish secularism meant neither the

32 Janina Karolewski, "What is Heterodox About Alevism? The Development of Anti-Alevi Discrimination and Resentment," *Die Welt des Islams* 48(2008):434-456.

33 Sökefeld, "Einleitung," 11-13.

separation of religion and the state, nor the abolition of Islamic control over public and private realms, but rather the establishment of state control over religion, and hence a bureaucratization of "Turkish" Islam from above."[34] Furthermore, as part of what Anderson might refer to as "imagining the community", a rhetoric was proliferated which aimed at creating the illusion of homogeneity among those inhabiting Anatolia. A policy of repressing difference among the population was pursued, which one again left the Alevis unprotected.[35]

The birth of the Turkish nation also subjected Alevism to the forces of modernization which created a new type of awareness regarding Alevi collective identity and transformed the social structure of the religion. During the 1940s, Turkey experienced massive urban migration, and a significant number of Alevis moved from the secluded villages to cities. Primarily, this put Alevis into contact with "the other", the Sunni Muslims. On the one hand, the contact with "the other" made the Alevi identity more salient than it had been; for many individuals this was the first time that they became aware of their identity as an Alevi. On the other hand, the history of persecution by the state and Sunni Muslims was still fresh in their minds. In the urban centers, Alevis lacked the face-to face relations with other ingroup members which had reinforced their customs. Furthermore, institutions which would have been helpful in maintaining the Alevi religious practices in the urban context had not yet been developed. Lacking support for their collective identity, Alevi people responded by adopting the strategy of *takiye*, or dissimulation.[36] By hiding their identity, or "passing" within mainstream society, Alevi individuals were able to avoid persecution.[37] This shift was also characterized by a

34 Gürcan Koçan and Ahmet Öncü, "Citizen Alevi in Turkey: Beyond Confirmation and Denial," *Journal of Historical Sociology* 17(2004): 466.

35 Özlem Göner, "The Transformation of the Alevi Collective Identity," *Cultural Dynamics 17(*2005):118.

36 Sökefeld, "Einleitung," 14.

37 Passing is understood as an illegitimate form of assimilation in which an individual simply hides his/her identity in order to blend into mainstream society.

waning of importance with regard to the spiritual leaders, the *dedelik*.[38]

In 1945, the single party system ended and gave way to a multiparty democracy which was characterized during the 1960s and 1970s by a right-left polarization.[39]Facing a lack of support for maintaining religious traditions, and an increased emphasis on political affiliation in Turkey, many young Alevis who had not experienced the traditional lifestyle and emphasis on religion in the villages embraced political identities. "...Alevis overwhelmingly tended to the left, for the most part identifying with the universalistic worldviews offered by socialism and Marxism. If they did use Alevism as a point of reference, then they did so by reinterpreting Alevi symbols in line with their politics...."[40] Along with a leftist inclination, some Alevi people, a significant number of whom are Kurds, became affiliated with the Kurdish separatist movement.[41] These events resulted in what Sökefeld refers to as "cultural amnesia"; the failure to maintain knowledge about the history and traditions of the Alevi prior to the shift to a leftist political ideology is still evident in the lack of knowledge about Alevism today.[42]

Within the context of this political polarization, a row of violent attacks were committed in Çorum, Malatya, Sivas and Kahramaraş between 1978 and 1980, leaving a large number of Alevis dead. In 1980, a military coup was staged which succeeded in crushing the opposition from the left in favor of a neoliberal order. A "Kemalist prescription" was applied which included a revamped 'Turkish-Islamic Synthesis', aimed at eliminating separatist threats in the country.[43] This synthesis focused on neutralizing a separatist threat, and included more aggressive policies to assimilate Alevis into the Sunni Muslim mainstream. This time, however, instead of retreating into seclusion or practicing dissimulation, there was a tendency among the Alevi people to mobilize around the rhetoric of religion.

38 Dressler, " Religio-Secular Metamorphoses," 285.
39 Ibid.
40 Ibid.
41 Karolewski, "What is Heterodox," 450.
42 Sökefeld, "Einleitung," 14.
43 Göner, "The Transformation," 116.

Indeed, the future success of the Alevi movement was based on a "defensive instinct of the Alevis against the rise of Islamism" and changing social and political conditions which made the campaign possible.[44]

Boundary Features of the Historical Alevi

The history of the "Alevi people" points to great variations with regard to what Wimmer calls "boundary features" of an ethnicity: political salience, cultural significance, social closure and historical stability.[45] Political salience can be understood as the extent to which mobilization is determined by ethnic identity. The political salience of what would become an ethnic Alevi identity does not seem to be pervasive throughout this chronology; mobilization seems rather to have been limited to membership in the Kızılbaş or Bektaşi communities during the Ottoman empire and a leftist political affiliation during the 1970s and 1980s. Curiously, however, between these two periods, it is evident that a social stigmatization of the Alevis was present in society. The accusations of members of the majority population, which labeled Alevis as "Kızılbaş-Kürt-Kommünis" (Kızılbaş, Kurd, Communist) during the era of political polarization and instability, suggests that the Alevi identity was defined, at least by outgroup members, by a counter-hegemonic tendency.[46] However, the implications of this categorization for the self-understanding of the Alevi people are unclear, and therefore cannot be considered as a credible identification upon which the political salience of Alevi identity can be considered.

According to Wimmer, social closure refers to the degree to which a boundary cannot be

44 Bedriye Poyraz, "The Turkish State and Alevis: Changing Parameters of an Uneasy Relationship," *Middle Eastern Studies* 41(2005): 506.

45 Wimmer, "The Making and Remaking," 976-985.

46 The fact that both members of Kurdish and Turkish ethnic groups, as well as the idea that Alevis descended from both Kızılbaş and Bektaşis prove this label to be false. However, it points to a trend which Alevi elites themselves have identified: a tendency to struggle against the hegemonic order with the aim of advancing moral causes such as social equality. The validity of this claim is also questionable, but it does indicate a degree of consensus between in-group and out-group members.

crossed, as well as the consequences that membership implies. This dimension is also problematic because of the historical conditions which left the question, "Who are the Alevis?", unanswered. From the point of view of various state officials, the boundary could certainly be crossed if Alevis assimilate by practicing Islam in the proper way.[47] Among other things, this implies that if Alevis pray in mosques and follow the five pillars of Islam, they can be accepted as members of the majority. However, the perceived permeability of the ethnic boundary from the point of the Alevis cannot be determined from this research. The boundary for those individuals who identify themselves as Alevis is consequential; their marginalized position in society implies a range of disadvantages, from discrimination in the job market to the possibility of becoming a victim of ethnically-framed violence.

Cultural differentiation implies internal homogeneity and an external boundedness which serves to separate "groups" from one another. As can be expected by the diverse peoples who are understood as members of the Alevi ethnoreligious group, there is great internal heterogeneity. Linguistic and ethnic heterogeneity, as well as varying interpretations of the Alevi religion and diverse positions regarding the Turkish republic are characteristic of the "Alevi people". In fact, many scholars have concluded that the only commonality held unanimously among the Alevi people is a reverence for Ali, Mohammed's son-in-law. The external boundedness has already been hinted at, and is perhaps the most consequential variable with regard to Alevi identity until the Alevi movement in Germany developed. Members of the majority population have tended to categorize Alevis as internal enemies and individuals who maintain a perverse interpretation of Islam.[48]

Attempting to assess the historical stability of the Alevi ethnic group is also problematic because of its ambiguous history and contemporary heterogeneity. Wimmer claims that ethnies whose

47 Göner, "The Transformation," 114.

48 In his discussion on ethnicity, Wimmer claims that "...ethnicity can be both a category—imposed by outsiders—and a group—embraced by its members..." (980). It is important to keep this distinction in mind when considering collective identities.

transmission is based on genealogy are on the stable side of the continuum while ethnies that are based on behavior of members are generally unstable.[49] Scholars have pointed to the endogenous nature of the "proto-Alevis" while they were living in secluded rural communities, and the position of spiritual leader, or *dede*, was ascribed by birth. However, I lack enough evidence to make claims regarding the effect of urban migration on this endogenous tendency. Because the contemporary Alevi ethnicity is composed of multiple historic entities, such as the Kızılbaş and the Bektaşis, a strict adherence to genealogical transmission of membership in the religious community seems unlikely.

Alevi Migration to Germany

The Alevis had migrated to Germany for three main reasons: to take up employment in as guestworkers, to seek asylum as refugees during the increased instability and violence of the 1970s and 80s, and to reunite with family members. Because "Alevi" was not recognized as category at this time, there are no official statistics about their migration. Initially, many individuals who identified themselves as Alevis became affiliated with German and/or Turkish social democratic parties. However, the shift of emphasis within leftist politics from class struggles to identity recognition during the late 1980s made the conditions favorable for the first organization, which focused on cultural and religious aspects of Alevism, to be formed in Hamburg in 1988.[50]

The Alevi movement, however, was galvanized after an act of violence in the Turkish city of Sivas in 1993. During a cultural event organized to commemorate 16th century Alevi poet, Pir Sultan Abdal, religious fundamentalists set fire to the Madimak hotel in protest of the presence of Aziz Nesrin, an author who had translated Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses*. During this incident, 33 Alevis perished in the fire.[51] This event became a "productive crisis" as it was utilized to rally Alevis all over Germany

49 Wimmer, "The Making and Unmaking," 984.
50 Sökefeld, "Einleitung," 22.
51 Martin Sökefeld and Susanne Schwalgin, "Institutions and their Agents in Diaspora: A Comparison of Armenians in Athens and Alevis in Germany," Working Paper, Institute of Social and Cultural

to get involved with the cause.[52] After this event and the subsequent mobilization, Alevi organizations sprang up all over Germany, and a few associations were founded in other European countries.[53]

The Alevi are mainly located near Stuttgart, in the Rhein-Ruhr area, in Berlin, in Hamburg or in other small cities in West Germany.[54] It is estimated that between 480,000 and 552,000 Alevis live in Germany. According to a recent study done by the German interior ministry, approximately 75% of Alevis living in Germany were not born in there. However, the community does display a high rate of naturalization; an estimated 67.9% are German citizens. [55]

Religious Beliefs and Philosophy

As previously mentioned, Alevism exhibits internal heterogeneity due to the development of the religion in dispersed, secluded societies which lacked an overarching spiritual leader. The Alevis do not have a holy scripture as the religion was mainly passed down orally, leaving room for diversification across space and time. In addition to these characteristics, and perhaps due to the fear of discrimination, Alevism was traditionally characterized by its esoteric nature; far from a public religion, the beliefs and practices were largely kept secret from outsiders.

The veneration of Ali is at the center of Alevism. Followers of Shia Islam also venerate Ali and the eleven imams who seceded him, and, therefore, reject Abu Bakr and the following three caliphs. However, differences between Alevism and Shia Islam "formed through [Alevism's] syncretistic integration of Central Asian Turkish shamanistic beliefs, mystical Islam, and local religions in Anatolia, including Christianity."[56] This amalgamation resulted in a religion which rejected all forms of

Anthropology, University of Hamburg, 2000: 17.

52 Beatrice Hendrich, " Alevitische Geschichte errinern-- in Deutschland," in *Aleviten in Deutschland*, ed. Martin Sökefeld. (Bielefeld:transcript Verlag, 2008), 60.

53 Sökefeld and Schwalgin, "Institutions and their Agents," 17.

54 Sökefeld, "Einleitung," 20.

55 Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge, "Muslimisches Leben in Deutschland," (Nürnberg: Bundesministerium des Innern, 2009).

56 Esra Özyürek, "The Light of the Alevi Fire Was Lit in Germany and then Spread to Turkey: A

dogmatism in favor of reason.[57] Alevis are not required to adhere to the five pillars of Islam because they believe that they have already passed through the first door on the path to God, sheriat or sharia.[58]

Alevism has been influenced greatly by the principles of Humanism as proliferated by Haci Bektas Veli and Mevlana Celaleddin Rumi in Anatolia. Instead of a holy scripture, the Alevis put the human being at the center of their religion and philosophy. It is believed that every person is on the path to God, though at different stages; the ultimate goal in Alevism is unity with God. As preached by Haci Bektas Veli, equality for all people regardless of their gender, ethnicity, religion, etc. is a central tenant. Therefore, Alevis are forbidden from causing harm to other people.

Instead of praying in a mosque, Alevis generally gather in a *cemevi*, or simply at someone's home. They do not pray five times per day, and it is normal to visit a *cemevi* only a few times per year. During worship, men and women form a circle on the floor, facing each other, so as to emphasis the centrality of the human being. The service is led by a spiritual leader, the *dede.* However, before the ceremony can begin, all conflicts amongst members must be resolved with his assistance and, because of the importance of equality,all those present must agree that they are ready to begin the ceremony. During the ceremony, the *saz*, an Anatolian lute, is played and members of both genders perform the *semah* dance together.[59]

The Alevis celebrate their own holidays as well. If Alevis fast at all, they fast during the month of Muharrem to commemorate the events which took place at Kerbala, especially the suffering of Imam Hüseyin's followers and his death. Alevis do not fast during the month of Ramadan.[60] More recently, it has become a custom to annually commemorate the victims who perished at Sivas.

Transnational Debate on the Boundaries of Islam," *Turkish Studies*, 10(2009), 236.

57 Sökefeld, "Einleitung," 17-18.

58 The second door is *tarikat*, spiritual brotherhood, the third door is *marifat*, spiritual knowledge, and the fourth door is *hakitat*, truth or unity with God.

59 Ibid., 18-19.

60 Ibid.

The Birth of the Alevi Movement in Germany

Within the context of the Turkish diaspora in Germany, the Alevis possess multiple identities with which they define themselves. An Alevi individual could identify as an immigrant or foreigner, making reference to their Turkish nationality. An Alevi could give precedence to a political orientation, or his/her gender. Another option which had been employed in the past was to identify oneself as either Turkish or Kurdish. The task of this section is to determine why an ethnoreligious identity became salient enough for elites so that the Alevi movement was set into motion in Germany.

According to Wimmer's theory regarding construction and transformation of ethnic boundaries, three macro phenomena must be examined in order help understand which strategies of ethnic identification are chosen by social actors: institutions, power and networks. The term "institution" refers to the way ethnic boundaries are drawn by the dominant society; possibilities include drawing boundaries along racial, religious or linguistic lines. The distribution of power influences a more differentiated identification within an ethnic category, encouraging actors to choose the identification which is most likely to generate benefits. Finally, "network" can be understood as the extent to which political alliances transcend ethnic boundaries exist in a given society.[61] For example, Wimmer cites the Swiss political landscape as one which is not divided by ethnolinguistic lines, and therefore exhibits a high capacity for transcending these boundaries.[62]

Turkish Migration to Germany

A short discussion of the immigration of Turkish nationals to Germany is necessary in order to identify Wimmer's macro phenomena in the German context. The first Turks arrived in Germany after a bilateral "guestworker" agreement was signed between the two nations. According to the plan, the

61 Wimmer's "networks" are necessarily influenced by both institutions and patterns of power inequality. They are, in a way, the contemporary echo of institutions which were created during the nation-building process.

62 Wimmer, "The making and unmaking," 990-997.

Turkish labor migrants were only to reside in Germany temporarily which resulted in a policy which prepared workers and their families to return to their country of origin instead of a policy of integration. Migrants' children were educated in their mother tongue, housing segregation along national lines was the norm, and naturalization was not an option.The “guestworker” program was put to an end in 1974 after an economic crisis made the labor migrants more of a burden than an asset. However, by this time, it became evident that the “guests” did not plan to leave Germany, and xenophobic tensions were already identifiable within the society.[63]

These tensions were further exacerbated by the immigration of asylum seekers and refugees during the 1980s; by this time, there was a population of 1.5 million individuals of Turkish nationality living in West Germany.[64] Public discourse surrounding immigration ranged from xenophobic attacks on migrants and an insistence that they return home, to demands set forth by the Green party for multicultural policies. Politicians were baffled, and the inability to understand the complexities of the situation led to a policy regarding non-natives characterized by its “...lack of consistency and foresight, wavering between impotent attempts to send guest workers home with a check and opposite attempts to "integrate" the second generation through half-hearted education and employment offers.”[65] Until recently, migrants in Germany tended to be largely excluded from the politics and mainstream society; they were categorized as “foreigners” because of an exclusive understanding of German national belonging based on descent.[66] A serious commitment to integration policies was only made approximately ten years ago, parallel to citizenship reforms which made naturalization for migrants

63 Matthias Bartsch, Andrea Brandt and Daniel Steinvorth, “Turkish Immigration to Germany: A Sorry History of Self-Deception and Wasted Opportunities,” *Spiegel Online*, July 9, 2010, 1-2.

64 “Türkische Staatsbürger in Deutschland, Gesamtzahl seit 1967,” Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen. http://multimedia.zdf.de/2010/sport/infografik/tuerkei/tuerken.swf

65 Christian Joppke, “Multiculturalism and Immigration: A Comparison of the United States, Germany, and Great Britain,” *Theory and Society* 25(1996):469.

66 Ruud Koopmans and Paul Statham, “How national citizenship changes transnationalism. A comparative analysis of migrant claims-making in Germany, Great Britain and the Netherlands,” *Revue Eurohernne des Migrations Internationales* 17(2001): 67.

possible.

Specifically, migrants of Turkish descent have been targeted as "problem foreigners". The sheer size of the population alone made this group visible in society, and their physical attributes which largely distinguished them from "Germans" reinforced their visibility. Their religious inclination towards Islam has contributed to the perception of the dominant society that Turks are unable and unwilling to integrate because their values are not compatible with European values including gender equality and secularism. [67]

During the periods of heightened immigration and the subsequent debates surrounding migrants,however, no distinction was made between Sunni Turks and non-Sunni Turks, indeed it was largely accepted that all Turks were Sunni Muslims. Thus, Alevis were allocated to the "Turk" ethnic category, and the implications presented Alevis with major disadvantages originating from both the dominant society and pressures within the minority position. Primarily, the Alevis were forced into a marginalized position because of their perceived sameness with the "problem foreigners". However, the source of discrimination was not limited to the majority population, the Alevis still had to contend with negative stereotypes imposed on them within the Turkish community. In order to avoid being singled out by the Turkish Sunnis, the Alevis continued to practice *takiye*, or dissimulation, upon arrival in Germany.[68] So, although the Alevis suffered by passing as "Turks", the possible consequences of asserting their Alevi identity within the Turkish diaspora combined with the lack of experience in mobilizing around their religious identity, resulted in a delay for the Alevi movement.

The Forces Behind the Alevi Movement

A number of conditions began to change, however, in the late 1980s which made the Alevi movement possible. In the first place, the military coup in Turkey was followed by directed at the

67 Philip Martin, "Germany: Managing Migration in the Twenty-First Century," in *Controlling Immigration,* ed. Wayne Cornelius et al. (Stanford, Stanford University Press:2004): 231.
68 Sökefeld, "Einleitung," 20.

assimilation of Alevis, and mandatory religious instruction in public school was introduced with the aim of proliferating Sunni Islam as the legitimate Turkish religion.[69] Sensing that what was left of their religious identity after the era of mobilization along the lines of left-leaning politics was being threatened, the salience of the religious identification increased. During the late 1980s, the Kurdish conflict in Southeastern Turkey reached a climax of violence, and many of those Kurds who became refugees were also Alevis. Thus, a significant amount of the refugees from Turkey who joined the the Turkish guestworkers in Germany were Alevis whose religious identity had become more salient because of the Turkish state's assimilation efforts. As emphasized by Koopmans and Statham, "...migrant communities from countries with a high level of internal political strife or -oppression often harbour a disproportionate number of ideologically, ethnically or religiously "conscious" members, who hold a diasporic identity and wish to remain
involved in the homeland "struggle"..."[70]

While the increased awareness and importance of the Alevi identity were necessary for the Alevi movement to take place, they were not sufficient. It was crucial that the conditions within Germany were favorable for the assertion of a "new" identity, and an emphasis on the politics of recognition was ushered in by the postmodern era. "As a reaction to an increasing incidence of racism and violence against immigrants, multiculturalist discourse framed migrants' cultures and identities as an "enrichment" for German society that deserved protection and that need to resist assimilation."[71] Leftist politics, especially, shifted its focus from a concentration on class to a concentration on identity. This trend reflected the diffusion of multicultural policies and identity politics at the supranational level; indeed, the European Parliament began offering subsidies to immigrant cultural associations in

69 Poyraz, "The Turkish State and Alevis," 506.
70 Koopmans and Statham, "How national citizenship changes transnationalism," 73.
71 Martin Sökefeld, "Difficult identifications: The Debate on Alevism and Islam in Germany," In *Islam and Muslims in Germany,* ed. Jörn Thielmann and Ala Al-Harmaneh (Leiden: Brill, 2008): 272.

1986.[72] Therefore, the traditional distribution of power in Germany regarding which entities were eligible for political rights and social acceptance, began to be challenged. Moreover. the political alliances between the Green party and migrants reflected a capacity to transcend ethnic boundaries, further challenging the historic understandings of who belongs to the German nation.

While this offered an advantage to the Alevis, the Sunni Turks also stood to benefit from the multiculturalist discourse and policies, therefore, competition within the Turkish diaspora played a significant role. For example, Islamic religious instruction was already available in selected Bavarian public schools during the 1980s.[73] Because the language of instruction was Turkish, this service was attractive to a number of Alevi families who wanted their children to master the language of their ancestors. However, because the instruction was focused solely on Sunni Islam, it seemed to proliferate this interpretation as legitimate, and reflected the same problems which were presented by the mandatory religious instruction in Turkey. Therefore, Alevi elites realized the necessity for their own religious instruction so that the newer generations would have the opportunity to learn about Alevism and preserve the tradition.[74]

Furthermore, Sunni leaders within the Muslim community had already mobilized in order to gain official recognition of Islam as a religion in the 1980s. "Gaining this right is important because according to Article 140 of the German Constitution, recognition as a public religion ensures legal autonomy and allows the government to collect taxes from the members of the religious group to be handed to the religious officials."[75] Taking after their Sunni counterparts, Alevi leaders recognized the advantages of achieving official recognition for Alevism.

However, the motivation did not stem entirely from conditions in Germany. The prospective of

72 Sehriban Şahin, " The Rise of Alevism as a Public Religion," *Current Sociology* 53(2005): 477.
73 "Germany: International Religious Freedom Report," United States Government: Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2006/71382.htm
74 Krizstina Kehl-Bodrogi, "Von der Kultur zur Religion: Alevitische Identitaetspolitik in Deutschland." Working paper, Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, 2006: 13.
75 Özyürek,"The Light of the Alevi Fire,"241.

returning to Turkey, along with familial ties to the homeland and sense of loyalty to the Alevis suffering from oppression at the hands of the Turkish government made the protection of the Alevi identity in Turkey another major motivation. Ögelman's term, "transnational political opportunity structure" refers to a situation which "...links a home country where there is little room to debate ethnic, religious, class, and other societal issues with a host country that grants immigrants considerable associational freedoms but fails to absorb foreigners rapidly into society."[76] Since Germany did not absorb the Turkish migrant population, associations organized by Turkish leaders offered individuals within the diaspora a chance to fulfill psychological and ethnocultural needs.[77] According to this model, if the immigrants are not fragmented ideologically, they will generally unite to make claims with regard to the host society. However, political/ideological factions are likely to persist despite migration.

It was within this context that the first Alevi association was established in Hamburg in 1988, the *Alevi Kültür Grubu.* In 1989, they had organized an Alevi cultural week which brought Alevism to the public for the first time in Germany. During the nascent stages of the Alevi organization, Alevi intellectuals gathered to compose the "Alevi Declaration". "The document defined Alevism as a branch of Islam and aimed to make the demands of Alevis publicly known. It asked for recognition of Alevism as a different faith and culture, asked for equal representation and opportunity in education and in the media, and for proportional assistance in religious services."[78] Still, the extent to which the Alevi movement spread, as well as its' rapid nature has been attributed largely to the unfortunate event which took place in Sivas in 1993. In order to protest against what was perceived as state-enabled violence against the Alevis in Turkey, a demonstration was organized in Cologne. Over 60,000 Alevis from Germany and other European countries attended, and this event called so much attention to the Alevi

76 Nedim Ögelman, "Documenting and Explaining the Persistence of Homeland Politics among Germany's Turks," *International Migration Review* 37(2003): 164.
77 Ibid., 172.
78 Özyürek,"The Light of the Alevi Fire*,"* 239-240.

cause that a new, European Alevi organization was formed, the *Avrupa Aleviler Birlikleri Federasyonu*.[79]

Domestically in Germany, the conditions were ripe for the Alevi movement. Not only did the new emphasis on multicultural politics provide the movement with a platform on which to stand, the motivation to rally around the Alevi identity was increased by the influx of migrants who possessed a heightened awareness this identification. Although the traditional institutions which emphasized membership to the German nation on the basis of genealogy persisted during this time, the emphasis on politics of recognition altered the distribution of power, offering Alevi elites the opportunity to capitalize on the Alevi identity. As predicted by Wimmer, the distribution of power is expected to effect the specific "level of ethnic differentiation" elites will identify with; this topic will be examined in the next section which discusses the strategies of ethnic transformation.

79 Sökefeld and Schwalgin. "Institutions and their Agents in Diaspora," 18.

The AABF and Alevi Ethnic Transformation

The purpose of this section is to determine which strategies the AABF utilized during their campaign for recognition. Two distinct, yet necessarily interdependent, goals can be identified as crucial for the success of the movement. Initially, the movement had to create an awareness of the Alevi people as distinct from the Sunni Turks which would make recognition based on a separate identity viable. The second task was to prove the authenticity of the religion in order to secure a legal status and the benefits which come with it. This section will be separated into two discussions examining these strategies separately. The first section will focus on the rhetoric employed by the AABF in redrawing the ethnic boundaries within the Turkish diaspora. The second section will focus on the codification of Alevism as an official religion, and the reification of the transformed identity of Alevis as an ethnoreligious group.

Ethnic Boundary Restructuring

The scholarly debate surrounding minority status has attempted to define and explain patterns of assimilation and ethnic retention. Drawing on Gordon's model of the seven types of assimilation as set forth in his book, *Assimilation in American Life*, Yinger asserts distinctions which are useful in understanding these processes. He maintains that "...the absence of prejudice, the absence of discrimination, and absence of value and power conflict...can be better seen as the causes and then as consequences of the extent of assimilation", while "...separate but interdependent subprocesses of which assimilation is constituted...are:integration, acculturation, identification, and amalgamation..."[80]

Based on Yinger's logic, integration of individuals constituting a minority group occurs when members are distributed among social and economic sectors of society instead of relying solely on

80 Milton Yinger, "Ethnicity," *Annual Review of Sociology* 11(1985): 154.

ethnic organizations for social interaction, economic opportunity, educational institutions, etc.[81] Acculturation is the adoption of the dominant society's cultural norms and values; though, Yinger points out that it is often a dialectical transformation of culture instead of a simple one-way process in which minorities shed their culture for that of the dominant society. Identification is the psychological aspect of assimilation in which members of the minority group begin to identify themselves with members of the majority population. Finally, amalgamation suggests a biological connotation and refers to the extent of genetic (dis)similarity of the minority and majority population.[82]

However, in the event that prejudice, discrimination and value and/or power conflicts exist, the process of assimilation is hindered. In these cases, a pattern of ethnic retention is likely to occur because the ethnic boundary is not permeable; the ethnic group must find a way to maintain a positive self-image for group members, or at least escape social stigmatization. Wimmer suggests a model of ethnic boundary re-drawing which seeks to explain the strategies utilized by ethnic groups who occupy a minority status in society; these strategies include: ethnic boundary contraction, normative inversion, repositioning and boundary blurring

Ethnic boundary contraction is a strategy used to reduce the number of ingroup members by specifying additional criteria for ethnic group membership. Normative inversion seeks to change the position of the group within the social hierarchy by actively rejecting the negative value attached to group membership; the hierarchy is not accepted as legitimate, so members are able to maintain a positive self-image by rejecting the structures imposed by the dominant society. Ethnic groups engaging in repositioning, however, accept the social hierarchy as legitimate. Therefore, members seek to change their position within the hierarchy either as an individual, or collectively. Repositioning can include assimilation or acculturation despite a pervasive blocking by the dominant society. Those

81 While Yinger's discussion concentrates on assimilation with regard to minority groups, I have applied his work to a specific kind of minority group, namely, an ethnic minority.
82 Yinger, “Ethnicity,” 154-156.

engaged in the final strategy, boundary blurring, attempt to "...overcome ethnicity as a principle of categorization and social organization altogether. Other, nonethnic principles are promoted in order to undermine the legitimacy of ethnic, national, or racial boundaries."[83] One way to do this is to emphasize universal qualities of mankind and membership of the human race.

Still, ethnic elites are not free to choose any strategy, the choice of strategy is constrained by the limitations set forth in the previous section: institutions, power and networks. Furthermore, the transformation of an ethnic boundary is not a one-way process. In the first place, it is generally impossible that an internal unanimity exists with regard to the cultural significance and social closure related to an ethnic boundary. Secondly, as recognized by scholars drawing from the Gramscian idea of hegemony, an ethnic group must submit, at least partially, to the cultural models developed by elites from the dominant society.[84] As Wimmer asserts,"If they want their preferred ethnic classification to be accepted by others and the associated boundaries of inclusion and exclusion generally enforced and socially respected, they have to convince others of their view of society. They thus have to enter a negotiation process with other actors that may prefer other types of boundaries."[85] He proposes that this process will result in a cultural consensus which must be met on the basis of actors' overlapping interests.

With this model in mind, I will proceed to examine the rhetoric used in AABF publications in order to shed light on the transformation strategies,as well as the negotiation process. I have gathered documents posted on the AABF websites, as well as articles published in their monthly magazine, *Alevilerin Sesi*.[86] I have also included articles published from a book published by the Evangelical

83 Wimmer, "The Making and Unmaking," 989.

84 This concept is further discussed in Charles Taylor's "The Politics of Recognition*."* in *Multiculturalism and "The Politics of Recognition",* ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994):25-73.

85 Wimmer, "The Making and Unmaking," 997.

86 The collection of texts include those from local branches of the AABF who receive funding from the umbrella organization, as well as texts from the website of the AABF's youth organization, the *Bund der Alevitischen Jugendlichen in Deutschland e.V.* All of the publications were collected between

Center for World View Questions (*Evangelische Zentralstelle für Weltanschauungsfragen*), which was sent to me by the AABF center in Cologne. Although my inability to read Turkish greatly limited the number of texts I could utilize, I do not perceive this necessarily as a drawback. The use of the German language makes the information published in the texts accesible to, perhaps in some cases tailored for, the larger German society. Therefore, the German texts play a crucial role in the negotiation process between the Alevi elites and the majority population.

Alevi Transformation Strategies

To begin examining the mechanisms used by the AABF in their pursuit of recognition for the Alevi identity, ethnic boundary (re)drawing must be considered. Without threatening the hegemonic order in the German context, the Alevi elites sought to escape the stigma associated with Turkish descent. Three of Wimmer's suggested strategies are evident: ethnic boundary contraction, repositioning and boundary blurring. Because some of the same themes and actors are utilized in multiple transformation strategies, it is impossible to discuss the strategies as completely separate from one another.

The first step to improving the reputation of the Alevis was ethnic contraction; instead of continuing to blend in to the German Turkish category, leaders sought to distinguish Alevis from other Turks. As Dressler proclaims: " In their competition with Sunni Muslims for political resources, they use anti-Muslim stereotypes in order to emphasize their own compatibility with "modern" values and ways of life."[87] Ethnic lines were redrawn so as to indicate a more precise identity, one which was compatible with the beliefs and behaviors of the dominant society. In order to do this, the Alevi elites had to exclude individuals whose perceived values were not in line with principles set forth in the German Basic Law. The AABF simultaneously emphasized common values held with the dominant German society in order to secure a higher position within the hierarchy of social actors through

2010 and 2011 and reflect publish dates ranging from 2006 until 2011.

87 Dressler, "" Religio-Secular Metamorphoses,"299.

repositioning. Instead of threatening the hegemonic order, and thereby risking the possibility of alienating the majority population, the Alevis worked within the existing social hierarchy , exhibiting what Wimmer calls, an "informed, partial, and strategic nature of consent".[88]

The AABF has focused largely on defining the Alevi identity by emphasizing what they are not, namely, Sunni Turks. In an article entitled, "Alevis and their Integration in Germany", the vice president of the AABF, Ali Erin Toprak, emphasizes that Alevis reject the major aspects of contemporary Islam, especially, the five pillars, sharia law and jihad. In this same article, he asserts that Muslims living in Germany give precedence to sharia law over German law. Contrary to the "dogmatic" Muslims, the Alevis recognize German rule of law as the only higher power than the individual. Furthermore, Alevism is portrayed as a private religion, thereby emphasizing a commitment to principles of secularism which are valued in German society, but assumed to be rejected by other Muslims.

The religious tendencies of the Alevis go hand in hand with their philosophy, emphasized by the texts as a philosophy based on the principles of the enlightenment and humanism. Respect for all humans is represented as a central tenant, implying a liberal world view and a tolerance for diversity On the other hand, Sunni Turks are illustrated as intolerant of non-Muslims. According to various publications, the Sunnis' adherence to sharia law necessarily indicates a rejection of secularism and religious diversity; instead, Sunnis are characterized by their dogmatic tendencies. One article asserts that the logic of Sunnism is an "either or" logic which makes followers unable to understand or support diversity.[89] The assertion that Alevis in Turkey have been oppressed by the Sunni majority, and are victims of targeted assimilation is pervasive throughout the organization's rhetoric. These allegations seem to prove that the Sunni Turks are oppressive and intolerant, and makes the distinction between the

88 Wimmer, "The Making and Unmaking,": 999.

89 See "Das alevitische Manifest" by Levent Mete. Available at http://www.aagb.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=128:das-alevitische-manifest&catid=66:das-alevitentum&Itemid=227

two religious groups irrefutable.

The logic of Alevism, however, is characterized by a capacity for a nuanced view of the world so that Alevis are able to accommodate for the complexities of diverse beliefs instead of rigidly rejecting new ideas. The logical implication is that Alevis are able and willing to coexist peacefully within the boundaries of a liberal democracy, while the Sunnis neither possess the ability nor the will to do so. Indeed, it is explicitly stated in a number of texts that the AABF supports inter-religious dialogue and peaceful coexistence of all religious groups in Germany; any type of discrimination, racism, extremism or violence are rejected by the AABF and its followers. The Sunni Turks, on the other hand, are accused of rejecting liberal democratic principles because of their allegiance to the inflexible rules of sharia law.

The AABF has also capitalized on the public's distrust for Islam by employing topics which have been major concerns in Germany: gender equality, headscarves and mosques. The widely-held belief that Islamic culture encourages the dominance of men over women, while not explicitly stated, is implicitly supported by AABF rhetoric. In distinguishing the Alevis from the Sunnis, the texts often mention a commitment to gender equality. For example, the AABF reports that women are encouraged to take executive roles within the organization. During the *cem* ceremony, men and women worship side-by-side, unlike in the Sunni tradition which requires a separation of the sexes. Furthermore, the publications underline the fact that Alevis do not wear head scarves. Because the headscarf is a symbol of Islam's "oppressive nature", as well as a "hindrance" to integration, this distinction is crucial for the ethnic contraction and repositioning strategies.

Another symbolic source of anxiety and conflict within the public discussion surrounding Muslims in Germany is the mosque. The AABF exploits suspicions associated with the mosque debate by constantly referring to the construction of mosques by the Turkish state in villages inhabited solely by Alevis. This practice is labeled as a strategy of assimilation which is carried out against the will of

the villages' populations. These allegations are useful because they emphasize, in the first place, that Alevis do not pray in mosques. However, perhaps more importantly, they underline a common fear shared by the Alevis and the dominant society.

A further commonality which is instrumental in the AABF's rhetoric is a shared understanding and support for integration of minority cultures into German society. The organization insists that Alevis have made extensive efforts to properly integrate as desired by the German government. The official policy regarding integration in Germany requires that migrants master the German language and make a commitment to the principles set forth in the constitution. As previously mentioned, the organization labors the point that Alevis respect and uphold the laws and ideals outlined in the German Basic Law. According to the AABF, 70% of all Alevis in Germany have naturalized which indicates loyalty to the German government.

Moreover, the Alevis are politically and socially engaged in the mainstream society. One article asserts that 80% of German politicians of Turkish descent are Alevis. Great efforts have been made to publicize the activities of the Alevi youth organization, the *Bund der alevitischen Jugendlichen in Deutschland*. They are characterized by the publications as the strongest and most active migrant youth group, and their close cooperation with the Evangelical youth group points to their tolerance and endorsement of religious diversity. This cooperation is not limited to the youth organization, it extends to the AABF's collaboration with German civil society institutions, churches and politicians.[90]

Simultaneously, the AABF is highly critical of the Sunni Turks' efforts to integrate into German mainstream society. Their "dogmatic" nature not only prevents them from committing to the German Basic Law, it also leads to their aggressive claims-making which does not comply with the "rules of the game" as set forth by the German government. According to the AABF, Muslim interest groups are only able to legitimize their claims by intimidating German politicians. The AABF has also claimed

90 Ali Ertan Toprak, "Aleviten und ihre Integration in Deutschland," In *Aleviten in Deutschland,* ed. Friedmann Eissler, *Evangelische Zentralstelle für Weltanschauungsfragen* 211(2010):13-14.

that anyone who calls assimilation a crime is an enemy of freedom and the freedom of self-identification; this statement uses the allegations set forth by Muslim interest groups to show solidarity with the German government and labels the Muslim interest groups as "enemies". In contrast, the AABF's efforts appear to exhibit a strict adherence to the rules set out by the German government. Furthermore, the AABF asserts that its aims are directed to benefit the whole society, whereas the Muslim interest groups are accused of mobilizing solely for their own benefit.[91] Once again, the AABF emphasizes that they share the same interests as the majority population, while Sunnis only work towards their own, questionable ends.

A final theme which has been utilized by the AABF to distinguish the Alevis from the Sunnis is loyalty to the German state over the Turkish state. The AABF has identified one of the major Muslim organizations in Germany, the *Türkisch-Islamische Union der Anstalt für Religion e.V.,* as the extension of the highly oppressive Turkish Presidency of Religious Affairs in Germany. The AABF seeks to portray the claims set forth by this institution as illegitimate in two ways. Primarily, extensive references are made to the human rights violations which have been committed by the Turkish Presidency of Religious Affairs, especially the assimilatory practices targeted at the Alevi minority, such as mandatory religious instruction based on the Sunni interpretation. By mentioning that the European Court of Human Rights has condemned the Presidency of Religious Affairs, the *Türkisch-Islamische Union der Anstalt für Religion* is further disenfranchised.

Moreover, the *Türkisch-Islamische Union der Anstalt für Religion* is illustrated as an instrument of the Turkish state used to maintain control over those who emigrated from the country, and, therefore, influence German domestic politics. This strategy serves to exacerbate the real or perceived fear held by German society that individuals of Turkish descent are only loyal to the Turkish

91 AABF. "Integrationspolitische Forderungen der Alevitischen Gemeinde Deutschland e.V.." Last modified December 9, 2010. http://www.alevi.com/de/content/integrationspolitische-forderungen-der-alevitischen-gemeinde-deutschland-ev.

nation, and, therefore, present a potential threat to domestic security. At the same time, the AABF refers to Germany as their "home" and stresses a preoccupation with the Alevis' future in Germany. By emphasizing that this threat is only presented by those individuals who follow the Sunni faith, while asserting Alevi allegiance to the German state, the AABF is able to distinguish Alevis from Sunnis and gain a normative advantage.

Though I will not extensively address this issue, it is interesting that the "boundary blurring" strategy is also present within the AABF's rhetoric. An emphasis on universal human rights, humanism and respect for diversity implies an effort "...to overcome ethnicity as a principle of categorization and social organization altogether."[92] Though the strategies of ethnic transformation set forth by Wimmer are not mutually exclusive, it seems counterproductive to combine a strategy which embraces ethnicity as a legitimate category of organization with one that seeks to question its legitimacy. This contradiction can be explained as a result of the AABF's frustration because recognition of the Alevis has not spread throughout the German population and their disappointment because German politicians allegedly give priority to Muslim interest groups who behave aggressively.

Negotiation and Cultural Consensus

These frustrations and disappointments point to the contested nature of ethnic transformation which can stem from the what Wimmer calls "negotiation of the identity" and the "cultural consensus" reached between social actors. The success of strategies of ethnic transformation depends on multiple variables such as the cohesiveness of group members, as well as the majority population's willingness to accept a change in the social hierarchy. Several social actors, including individuals who identify themselves as Alevi and those who identify themselves as Sunni, stand to be effected by the AABF's efforts to redraw ethnic boundaries. However, in line with the previous section, this discussion will focus on the negotiation of ethnic boundaries between the AABF and the German government.

92 Andreas Wimmer, "The Making and Unmaking," 999.

Wimmer asserts that this cultural consensus can only occur when actors' "...interests at least partially overlap and strategies of classification can therefore concur on a shared view."[93] At the same time, however, the strategies of classification which are agreed upon reflect the power inequality which exists with regard to the social actors at stake. Generally, this will reflect the limitations set on subordinates by the hegemonic order, as suggested by scholars drawing on Gramsci.

The initial goal of the Alevi movement was the "recognition and protection of Alevi identity".[94] As a young organization, the AABF focused mainly on transnational kin-state politics, utilizing the space for open public dialogue to express its concerns regarding the unfair treatment of the Alevis in Turkey. However, recent publications have indicated a shift of focus from homeland politics to domestic integration and minority politics.[95] Today, the interests of the Alevi elite include securing multicultural protections and rights for Alevis as a religious minority, and combating discrimination in the public and private sectors. Currently the AABF is mobilizing to further develop the Alevi religious instruction initiative which has begun in several of the German states. Though they have already become legally recognized as a religious community, *Religionsgemeinschaft*, Alevi elites are determined to achieve the status of *Körperschaft des öffentlichen Rechts*, which would expand the rights and resources available to the Alevi community. The logic behind these ambitions is that the Alevi religious community should be entitled to the same benefits which the churches and Jewish institutions receive if Germany truly supports equality and the protection of human rights. In a way, the AABF is asking Germany to put their money where their mouth is.

The interests of the German government with regard to the Alevi minority are a little less transparent; however, scholars studying the Alevi movement in Germany concur that the German government is happy to support the Alevi community as a modern, secular counterbalance to the

93 Wimmer, "The Making and Unmaking," 998.
94 Sökefeld, "Difficult identifications," 272-273.
95 Ibid.

potentially-threatening, Turkish Sunnis.[96] Indeed, the Alevis have been portrayed in the German media as an integration success story.[97] The Alevis provide a good role model for other minority groups.

Therefore, it seems that the cultural consensus has been settled at the category of "well-integrated minority". Though their identity has been recognized by the German government as distinct from the other "Turks", and their integration efforts and adherence to liberal democratic values have been applauded, they are still not considered a full member of society. Their identity in the public sphere is still confined to that of *Ausländer*, or foreigner. This can be attributed to the institutional understanding of the nation in Germany, which was traditionally based on descent. Though migrants now have the opportunity to naturalize, and state policies officially tolerate diversity, the government's rhetoric does not translate directly into the everyday experience of individuals who can be identified as "non-native."

The power inequality is reflected in the accusations put forth against the German government by AABF leaders in several recent publications. In one article, the AABF asserts that Alevis no longer want to be treated like second class citizens.[98] This article implies that the Alevis have done everything in their power to integrate into society, but they are still hindered by forces stemming from the majority population. One article asserts that, according to Germany's commitment to equality, the state has a responsibility to put an end to discrimination politically; this includes combating elements of structural and institutional disadvantages for minorities.[99] These comments underline the contested nature of the cultural consensus; from the AABF's point of view, the Alevi commuity should be accepted as full members of German society, not simply as a "well-integrated minority".

96 See Özyürek 2009, Mandel 1989, Kehl-Bodrogi 2006.
97 See, for example, "Aleviten-- die anderen Türken in Deutschland" *Welt Online*, March 4, 2011.
98 AABF. "Integrationspolitische Forderungen."
99 Banu Bambal, "Wie viel Gleichberechtigung verträgt das Land?" *Die Stimme der Aleviten*, October 2010.

Standardizing Alevism and "Imagining" the Alevi Community

The second section will focus on the codification of Alevism as an official religion, and the reification of the transformed identity of Alevis as an ethnoreligious group. Whereas individuals who can be identified as Alevis lived in small, secluded villages in the past, the forces of modernization have increasingly led to migration into more industrialized locations. This trend has been emphasized by Göner and Vorhoff in their applications of the Weberian concepts of *Gesellschaft* and *Gemeinschaft* to the Alevi collective identity. *Gemeinschaft* can be understood as a small community in which behavior is determined by habit,[100] therefore there is no need to "invent" tradition. Tradition, in this sense , can be understood as what Hobsbawm refers to as "convention or routine"; conventions are developed which help increase the efficiency of daily practices, yet these habits lack symbolic significance.[101]

However, the migration to urban centers, and an industrially advanced country,Germany, necessitated the restructuring of social relations compatible with life in a *Gesellschaft*, which is characterized by institutions and organizations. Since identity is no longer reinforced through face-to-face relations in the *Gesellschaft,* individuals must search for a way to fill the vacuum: "...the rise of Alevism and the growth of associations, religious foundations, and cultural centers in the Alevi community can be viewed as attempts to reform the *Gemeinschaft* community in the new setting."[102]

However, it is important to be aware of the danger of essentializing "community", and, as asserted by Anderson, any "community" which is not based on face-to-face relations must be imagined.[103] Still, in order to be regarded as a legitimate identity group in need of institutional

100 Vorhoff, "'Let's Reclaim our History'," 251.
101 Eric Hobsbawm, "Introduction: Inventing Traditions," in *The Invention of Traditions* ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambrige:Cambridge University Press, 1992): 3.
102 Göner, " The Transformation," 121.
103 Benedict Anderson, "Introduction," in *Imagined Communities:Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso Books, 1991): 6.

protection and eligible for group rights, it was necessary to present the image of an authentic, unified people. Unsatisfied with the implications of being merely an organization, the AABF's activities reflect a desire to create the image of a unified Alevi community.

Central to this enterprise has been the codification of Alevism, yet these efforts have resulted in modifications which greatly alter previous understandings of the religion. Whereas Alevi religious practices were characterized by their esoteric nature and exhibited variations among regions, Alevi elites have attempted to make the religion public and homogenize beliefs and rituals in order to meet the standards of what a legitimate religion should be in Germany. As Şahin points out, scriptualization aims at "fixing" a tradition so that it becomes irrefutable: "Belief fixation involves the process of standardization by reducing the differences that emerge out of the transmission interpretation of orally inherited transcripts."[104] This does, however, require that the variety of local interpretations, which has been a defining characteristic of Alevism in the past, must be eliminated, a problematic task which has led to deep rifts among Alevis. Furthermore, the traditional role of the *dede* as a spiritual leader has been threatened severely as they have lost their authority among numerous Alevi groups because of a bureaucratization of the religion.

The public character of the religion has also been made apparent through an increasing engagement with Alevi cultural festivals. These festivals are generally organized to celebrate holy days, and often include a performance of the *cem* ceremony, a religious ritual exclusive to the Alevi religion in which music and dance are performed. The festivals not only serve to disseminate information about Alevism to the public, they also play a crucial role in "imagining" the Alevi community. Sökefeld specifically names the *Bin Yılın Türküsü* festival which took place in Cologne in 2000 where young Alevis met to play the "traditional" Alevi instrument, the *saz*, and perform the "traditional" Alevi dance-ritual, the *semah:* "To come together in a single place with so many others and to perform for a

104 Şahin," The Rise of Alevism as a Public Religion," 479.

large audience was a very strong experience and it made them 'really' feel part of the (transnational) Alevi community."[105]

Another theme which is pervasive at Alevi cultural festivals is closely related to Volkan's concept of "chosen trauma". According to Volkan, a crucial component of a large group identity is the "...transgenerational transmission of a mental representation of a traumatic historical event" which links members of the ingroup together and becomes "...an inseparable part of the group's identity".[106] Indeed, the victim discourse has played a dominant role in the "imagining" of the Alevi community.[107] In fact, it became a common practice to trace the historical continuity of the Alevis from the event labeled at the "Massacre of Kerbala" in 680, to the attacks in Çorum, Malatya, Sivas and Kahramaraş between 1978 and 1980, the incident in Sivas 1993, and most recently to a violent event in Gazi in 1995. Beginning with the demonstration in Cologne in 1993, Sivas has been commemorated publicly each year: "Sivas is represented in these ceremonies not as a local event that happened at a distant place but as an incident of violence that targeted the whole community and therefore concerns every Alevi. Thus, the commemoration of violence suffered by some Alevis helps to imagine the Alevi community as a whole."[108]

These efforts directed at proving the authenticity of the Alevis as a *Religiongemeinschaft*, religious community, have helped achieve the right and resources to implement Alevi religious instruction in Germany public schools: "This requires first of all a certain coherence of religious dogma and the existence of an institutional body which could authoritatively define the teachings of the community, supervise the development of curricula, and represent the community vis-à-vis the state."[109]

105 Martin Sökefeld, "Mobilizing in transnational space: a social movement approach to the formation of disapora," *Global Networks* 6(2006): 277.
106 Vamık Volkan, "Transgenerational Transmissions and "Chosen Trauma": an Element of Large-Group Identity," (paper presented at the XIII International Congress International Association of Group Psychotherapy, London, August 2008).
107 Hendrich, "Alevitische Geschichte errinern," 57-58.
108 Sökefeld, "Mobilizing in transnational space," 277.
109 Dressler, " Religio-Secular Metamorphoses," 300.

A review of German media and AABF publications indicate that it has been the AABF who has filled this institutional role of authority. Although the AABF does not represent the interests of all German Alevis, they have taken over the responsibility of developing the curricula. Today, Alevi religious instruction is available in Hesse, Baden-Württemberg, North Rhine- Westfalia, Berlin and Bavaria. However, the AABF is demanding that Alevi religious instruction becomes further institutionalized through the development of university programs of study, especially teacher-training programs.

Religious instruction in the public schools will further standardize the religion, transforming the traditionally syncretic character of Alevism, and requiring the elimination of various interpretations in order to provide a coherent outline of the religion. This process, which has already started, has resulted in internal conflict, and a struggle over the authority to define the religion. A key aspect of this struggle has been the discussion of Alevism's relationship to Islam. While Alevis in Turkey almost unanimously identified themselves as Muslims, the conditions in Germany offer new incentives to distinguish the Alevism from Islam. In the first place, especially after 9/11, Islam has come to be perceived widely as threatening and extremely problematic with regard to the integration of Muslims. Secondly, by defining Alevism as a religion separate from Islam, the Alevi elites were better able to secure resources for the Alevi movement. Their desire to disseminate this position is evident in AABF publications which insist that Alevis are not to be labeled as "liberal Muslims".[110]

However, many individuals identifying themselves as Alevis are reluctant to go along with this rhetoric, insisting that Alevism is a part of Islam, or even that Alevism is the truest form of Islam.[111] These disagreements have led to a factionalization within the "Alevi community", and the AABF explains the tendency of some Alevis to define themselves as Muslims, by asserting that these Alevis

110Toprak, "Aleviten und ihre Integration in Deutschland."

111Martin Sökefeld, "Sind Aleviten Muslime? Die alevitische Debatte über das Verhältnis von Alevitentum und Islam in Deutschland," in *Aleviten in Deutschland: Identitätsprozesse einer Religionsgemeinschaft in der Diaspora* ed. Martin Sökefeld (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2008): 195-218.

have been the victims of sunnification in Turkey.[112] However adamant the AABF is about Alevism's distinctiveness, its relationship to Islam is still left ambiguous; Alevism is to be defined as a separate religion which has "Islamic roots". This tactic is important for two reasons: this definition does not fully exclude those individuals who understand Alevism in relation to the Islamic faith, and it allows for the AABF to continue being involved in the public debate on Islam in Germany. The AABF refuses to allow Muslim interests groups become the only authority on Islam in Germany.[113]

112 BDAJ. "Die Aleviten – eine Erfolgsgeschichte." Taken from *Welt Online,* July 29, 2007. http://www.welt.de/nrw/article1062084/Die_Aleviten_eine_Erfolgsgeschichte.html.

113 "Die Positionen der AABF zur Deutschen Islam Konferenz." *Die Stimme der Aleviten*, October 2006.

Conclusion

The history of the "Alevis" reveals that identification with Alevism as a religion was not constant among individuals who would come to compose the Alevi ethnoreligious group. While the group known as the Kızılbaş did hold religious beliefs which were not compatible with the Ottoman rulers, their identity was also characterized by an opposition to the state because of social and political inequality. The Bektaşis, on the other hand, were supporters of the Ottoman regime, and were permitted to practice their interpretation of Islam. Alevi religious practices were upheld in small, isolated communities by descendants of these groups. However, subsequent to large-scale urban migration the traditional structure of the religion transformed, and a strong commitment to the religion was difficult to maintain. In the 1960s and 70s many individuals neglected the religious aspect of Alevism and began to interpret it as a philosophy which demanded equality; individuals became aligned with leftist politics. In the 1980s there was a return to the interpretation of Alevism in religious terms as a response to the Turkish state's (re)emphasis on religion and efforts to "sunnify" Alevis. This period marked the beginning of efforts to interpret "Alevi" as an ethnic group distinguished by their religious beliefs and practices.

The migration of Alevis to Germany presented favorable conditions for this interpretation of Alevism to develop. In the first place, Alevis faced discrimination in German society because they were lumped together with the other individuals of Turkish descent who were perceived to threaten the values and stability of the German social, economic and political order. The 1980s witnessed the rise of politics of identity, and support for multicultural policies in the Western world which challenged the distribution of power in Germany. The Alevi elites were among those ethnic leaders who saw this opportunity as a chance to achieve formal recognition of their respective identities. The pressure still exerted by the Sunni majority within the Turkish diaspora, as well as the desire to improve conditions for Alevis in the homeland, added to the impetus of this goal.

In order to achieve recognition and improve Alevis' status in German society, the most prominent Alevi organization, the *Alevitische Gemeinde Deutschland* (AABF), engaged in a process of ethnic boundary (re)drawing. "Ethnic boundary contraction" served to distinguish the Alevis from their Sunni counterparts within the Turkish diaspora. The "repositioning" strategy was utilized in order to secure a position higher in the social hierarchy than that of the Sunni Turks. Finally, elements of "boundary blurring" are also apparent in the AABF rhetoric. Aside from ethnic transformation, Alevi elites have also made efforts to standardize and publicize the religion, as well as reify the Alevi ethnic group by "imagining" the community. These efforts have, however, proved to be problematic in that they cannot accommodate all of the diverse interpretations related to Alevism; disagreements and a struggle over the authority to speak for the Alevis are prevalent.

There is an ongoing debate between the traditionalist and the reformists. The traditionalists are worried that the nature of Alevism is being altered to the extent that the true essence of the religion is threatened. An example of this is the modified position of the *dedes*. As mentioned in Göner's account, courses are now offered which train individuals to become spiritual leaders.[114] This role, however, was always passed down by descent, and dedes were believed to be the protectors of the religious teachings. Now, it seems that organizations led by ethnic elites monopolize this authority. Reformists insist that Alevism must adopt to the modern world, or face the possibility that the religion will be lost. The preservation of religious traditions is central to the argument for religious instruction in German public schools.

Though the Alevi movement in Germany has been successful in some respects such as recognition in public discourse and special minority protections including religious instruction in public schools, it is questionable whether the AABF's efforts have been able to strengthen the salience of Alevi identification among individuals. A study conducted by Burak Gümüş in Berlin indicates that a

114Göner, " The Transformation," 122.

significant number of Alevis in Germany do not identify with Alevis at all; they identify themselves as German, do not maintain relationships with other Alevis outside of their families, and prefer to distance themselves from the cultural and political aspects of Alevism.[115] Another study by Halil Can suggests that some Alevi individuals merely identify with Alevism along the lines of what Herbert Gans has defined as symbolic ethnicity. This type of identification is characterized as a "nostalgic allegiance to the culture of the immigrant generation" which manifests itself in the form of transformation of cultural patterns into symbols such as ethnic foods or holidays rather than a re-adoption of the "old ways".[116]

Moreover, the cultural consensus arrived at by Alevi elites and the German government reflects a power inequality which the AABF is not ready to accept. Because members of the German nation were historically defined by descent from the "German *Volk*", it seems that the highest status available to the Alevis is a "well-integrated minority". AABF publications, however, reflect the organization's dissatisfaction with this compromise. Though the German government has recognized Alevis as distinct from Sunni Turks and publicly commended them for their liberal views and integration efforts, Alevi leaders want to transcend the minority/migrant category and be accepted as full members of society. However, the extent to which minority groups, including the Alevis, will be able to transform traditional German understandings of belonging to the nation cannot yet be determined; it would be interesting to follow these developments in the future.

115 Burak Gümüş, *Aleviten in Deutschland erzählen: Ethnologische Randnotizen und Einblicke in die Alltagssituation von türkisch-alevitischen Migranten* (Darmstadt: Manzara Verlag, 2007), 141-144.

116 Herbert Gans, " Symbolic ethnicity:the future of ethnic groups and cultures in America," in *Nationalism: critical concepts in political science*, ed. John Hutchinson and Anthony Smith (London:Routledge, 2000): 1226-1227.

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