

Remaking Alevism in diaspora:
The socio-spatial dynamics of migrant
Alevism in the UK

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Abstract

This research explores how a religion 'on the move' responds to the challenges of diasporic conditions and the tensions between continuity and change. It provides an understanding of how migrant religions articulate and orient their ritual universe and social and organisational structures within the new spatial settings of diaspora.

Alevism, forming the second-largest religious movement in Turkey, has recently adopted a transnational scope as a consequence of international migration. Migration has transformed the oppressed Alevis into a migrant faith community with the freedom to practise their collective rituals openly and, to some extent, have become 'recognised' in the host society, while the Alevi claim for recognition is still an ongoing struggle in Turkey. During three decades of diasporic journey, Alevis have had significant community developments, intensifying their activism in the national and transnational spheres. Political and economic developments in the UK have also shaped their homeland engagements. Besides newly built migrant houses, *cemevis* (Alevi community centres) began to spread into rural areas, funded by diaspora remittances. Such diasporic spatial markers have multiple effects on the homeland's changing rural landscape.

A multi-sited ethnography, including interviews and observations in London and villages of British Alevis in Turkey, is used to gain insights into the remaking of religion and rebuilding of identity and community in the diaspora. It examines the diasporic experience of the Alevi community in the UK through territorialisation, the rebuilding of community and identity and reproduction of culture, and their impact on the changing rural homeland landscape.

Intergenerational transmission and the Alevi claim for visibility and recognition are the central motivations shaping the diasporic rebuilding process, in particular placemaking performances. As a result, diasporic Alevism has become more institutionalised, organised and spatialised. Such diasporic developments have also involved ritual transformation. The religious structures established through historical processes have encountered many challenges and have been updated and re-oriented in the diaspora setting. This thesis demonstrates that the diasporic experience has profoundly transformed ritualised Alevi culture.

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Glossary

Aşure/Germe: (Aşure in Turkish and Germe in Zazaki) A special dessert made of cereals, fruits and nuts and shared after the Muharrem fast.

Bağlama/Saz: (Turkish) An Alevi musical instrument of religious and cultural significance. As a part of religious ceremonies, it is perceived as a holy musical instrument.

Can: (Turkish) Literally 'soul'; an Alevi individual.

Cem: (Turkish) Literally 'gathering'; it is the fundamental ritual of Alevism.

Cemevi: (Turkish) Means cem house, a gathering place for cem rituals.

Cenaze erkani: (Turkish) Funeral customs.

Dede/Pir: Dede, literally 'grandfather' in Turkish and Pir in Kurdish and Zazaki; clergy belonging to an ocak and believed to be descended from a sacred lineage. Every Alevi is the follower (talip) of a particular dede/pir.

Dergah: (Turkish) A place for religious gathering, mystical teaching and spiritual practice.

Deyiş/Nefes: (Turkish) Mystical songs and hymns.

Dört kapı kırk makam: (Turkish) Literally 'four doors, forty levels'; a core teaching of Alevism, expressing a religious and moral path to approach wisdom gradually. Doors and levels illustrate the steps of inner knowledge.

Ehl-i Beyt: (Turkish and Arabic) Household of Muhammad

Halay: (Turkish) A traditional folk dance, performers form chains by holding each other's hands or arms and make the same rhythmical movements.

Hoca/Xoce: (Turkish/Zazaki) Hoca literally 'teacher' in Ottoman Turkish and is used for a Muslim schoolmaster.

İkrar/ İqrar: (Turkish/Zazaki) Oath.

Kırk (yemeği): (Turkish) The meal of forty; the ritual of the fortieth day after a death ending the mourning period for the family. The family of the deceased prepare a meal to share with the community.

Kirve/kewra: (Turkish/Zazaki) Kirve in Turkish and kewra in Kurdish. It is a form of ritual kinship, a kind of godfather, beginning with the circumcision of a boy.

Lokma/Loqme: (Turkish/Zazaki) Food offered during the ritual provided by the followers. It has a symbolic meaning of sharing.

Miyaz: (Zazaki) A kind of traditional pastry for sharing during religious rituals.

Muhabbet: (Zazaki) Literally 'conversation'. It is also a type of cem gathering with the purpose of conversation among the attendees and dede rather than a ritualistic ceremony.

Muhtar: (Turkish) A chief official in a village in Turkey.

Musahip/Mısayb: (Turkish/Zazaki) Spiritual brotherhood. It refers to a spiritual tie between two married men and their households.

Ocak/Ucağ: (Turkish/Zazaki) Literally 'hearth'; an extended family claiming to be descended from a holy lineage. Ocaks are Alevi institutions of leadership where religious knowledge is passed down orally through the families responsible for the community's religious and social leadership.

Semah/Sama: A spiritual and sacred dance that is traditionally performed as a part of cem gatherings. It is a principal form of Alevi worship and a figurative representation of the relationship between humans and the universe.

Seyid: (Arabic/Kurdish/Zazaki) The term is used for people who are descendants of the prophet Muhammad, mostly identified with those who have blood ties with Hussein, the son of the Caliph Ali and Prophet Muhammad's grandson.

Talip/Talıb: (Turkish/Zazaki) Follower of an ocak. Every Alevi individual is the talip of a particular ocak.

Turna: (Turkish) Crane bird, a prominent figure in Alevi poetry and ritual.

Ulu ozanlar: (Turkish) The Great Poets are seven poets who lived between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries and deeply affected the beliefs and structures of Anatolian Alevism and Bektashism; they transmitted Alevi beliefs and teachings through songs and poems of mystical meanings.

Xızır: (Zazaki and Kurdish) One of the main cults of Kizilbash Alevism symbolising the sacred power of nature. As the 'God of hard times', it is believed that he is omnipresent and helps everyone in hardship.

Yol/Rae: (Turkish/Zazaki) Spiritual path. It is how Alevis describe their faith.

Zakir: (Turkish) The musical conductor at the Alevi cem gathering.

Ziyaret/Jare: (Turkish/Zazaki) Sacred places of pilgrimage.

Zülfikar: (Turkish) The name of Caliph Ali's sword.

Notes on the use of terminology

Diaspora is a complex phenomenon, requiring conceptual debates linked to transnationalism, globalisation, diversity and hybridity. The complexity involves multiple and continuous interactions of actors and agents over time and space. When speaking about the diasporic transition, using binary terms (often with hyphens and the prefix 're') becomes necessary to mean process rather than singular actions (such as territorialisation and re-territorialisation, grounding and re-grounding, making and remaking or planting and replanting). I use these dual terms in the thesis, which may be tiring for the reader, as a way to keep their meanings dynamic and continuous and sensitised for diasporic transition.

Though this research does not deal with religious texts or scripts, translating religious terms still has some challenges. Religious terminology must be respected and the meanings should be preserved. When translating them into another language, we must be very careful in our choice of terms to avoid a false translation (Agliz, 2015). Whenever necessary, I use Alevi terms in their original language (Kurdish, Zazaki, Turkish or Arabic) together with my interpretation to reduce the risk of mistranslation.

I use the term 'traditional' not in the sense of fixed or unchangeable structures; instead, I use this term to refer to Alevism or rituals as practised in rural settings until migration.

I use Turkishness as an ethnic background rather than a reference to Turkish nationality that covers all ethnic minorities in Turkey, including Turks and Kurds.

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Introduction

The second half of the twentieth century saw the advent of an 'age of migration' (Miller and Castles, 2009) linked to the collapse of imperial-colonial systems, war, genocide, political conflicts and crises that created social, political and economic insecurities that displaced millions from their origin countries. The start of the twenty-first century saw boats full of migrants that became a topical issue, especially after an image of the three-year-old Alan Kurdi, a Syrian Kurdish boy, drowned while attempting to reach a Greek island on 2 September 2015¹. The tragedy of the refugees on the shores of Europe and the severe risk they took to cross borders and seas, with the deaths of many, stimulated global debates on migration, particularly in relation to international law on refugees and human rights. According to the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN-DESA), 232 million migrants live outside their country of origin worldwide, compared with 175 million in 2000 and 154 million in 1990², suggesting the extent to which migration is one of the most crucial and persistent issues of our time. The high and growing number of migrants reflects global-wide social and economic inequalities and insecurities, making people cross borders, often desperately, for better opportunities and to start a new life in a new country. Migration is a process that continues to affect people and has long term consequences for migrants, the environment and socio-spatial context of departure and arrival. The period of post-migration has many facets and challenges shaping the migrants' life in global cities.

Under globalisation, the interaction of people and ideas has moved into a new phase, and migrants often experience transnational lives, maintaining or reactivating economic, political and social ties across national borders. This has raised a series of new questions about the study of migrants and diaspora communities whose existence can be located both 'here' and 'there' through networks and institutions that make complex their modes of belonging and identities in a transnational-global context.

¹ Shocking images of drowned Syrian boy show tragic plight of refugees. *Guardian*. 2 September 2015 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/sep/02/shocking-image-of-drowned-syrian-boy-shows-tragic-plight-of-refugees>

² Number of international migrants rises above 232 million, *The UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN-DESA)*, September 2013, <https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/news/population/number-of-international-migrants-rises.html>

This dimension is also relevant when it comes to religious lives, structures and cultures, as suggested by the growing literature on the topic (see the pioneering works of Johnson, 2007:42; Levitt, 2001b; Tweed, 2006). The diasporic rebuilding of migrant religions within global-transnational interactions often means a tension between change and continuity. This research on the Alevi community in the UK provides an understanding of how migrant religions articulate and orient their ritual universe and social and organisational structures within the constraint of the new spatial settings of diaspora. It exemplifies how a religion 'on the move' responds to the challenges of diasporic conditions.

Alevism, a once-localised minority religion in Turkey, has recently taken on a transnational scope as a consequence of international migration. Migration transformed the oppressed Alevis into a migrant faith community free to openly practise their collective rituals and, to some extent, become recognised in the diaspora. Alevis, forming the second-largest religious group in Turkey, suffered discrimination and exclusion there and struggled for survival. The Alevi collective memory, consisting of social rejection and physical violence that culminated in quasi-genocidal massacres, is crucial in understanding their social formation in Turkey and the diaspora. This aspect of Alevi collective history, dominated by violent repression, has formed the diasporic Alevi communities into what sociologist Robin Cohen (2008) calls a 'victim diaspora'.

As an Alevi myself, my interest has always been to question the role of this collective history of victimhood and its influence on members of the community. I am also fascinated by the spectacular spread of *cemevis* (Alevi community centres) in rural Turkey, funded by diaspora remittances, suggesting the important role played by members of the diaspora in the 'development' — at least ritually and culturally — of the homeland. These two features of diasporic Alevism are the motivation for this study, particularly as the influence of diaspora on the socio-spatial change in the rural homeland has been largely under-researched. Before embarking on the focus and scope of this thesis, it is necessary for those readers who may not have heard of Alevis to provide some information about them.

Who are the Alevis? A brief introduction

Alevis are a minority faith group in Turkey. There are also groups in Syria and a small minority in Lebanon known as Alawites. This research focuses on Alevis from Turkey since they constitute the largest segment of the Alevi population globally and in the UK. Though they are the second-largest

religious group in Turkey, because of their oppression and marginalisation forcing them to hide their identity, there is no reliable data on the exact number of Alevi. However, many estimates suggest they constitute between twenty to twenty-five percent of Turkey's population, putting the number at around eighty million (Massicard, 2012; Vorhoff, 2003).

Alevi include different ethnic and linguistic communities that traditionally inhabited rural areas of central and eastern Anatolia (and Mesopotamia). They are ethnically and culturally pluralised with a wide range of practices and rituals, which makes generalisations difficult. Bruinessen's (1996) division of Alevi into four ethnolinguistic groups may help for an understanding of the diversity. The smallest group is Azerbaijani Turkish speaking Alevi in northeast Turkey; the second smallest group are Arabic speaking Alevi³ living in southern Turkey, especially Hatay and Adana provinces; the third and fourth are Turkish and Kurdish speaking Alevi forming the largest populations in central and eastern Anatolia. Alevi Turks constitute the majority of the Alevi population in Turkey (Andrews and Benninghaus, 1989).

The constant persecution of Alevi and threat of violence stopped them from expressing their identity openly, and Alevism was practised in secret and mostly transmitted orally. The history of Alevism in its homeland constitutes reorientations, re-formations and reproductions, in which two periods mark a cornerstone that stimulated a qualitative transformation. The first rupture was the growth of Islam in Anatolia and Mesopotamia and its influence on the core beliefs and teachings of Alevism, something which I describe elsewhere as 'evolution' to highlight its significant impact on Alevi theology and ritual practices (see Hanoglu, 2016). As a result of this historical process, Alevism's conventional form, characterised as *Batınniyya*⁴ communities and later symbolised as Kizilbashism, which I consider as ancestral Alevism, underwent structural alterations. Alevi communities were historically known as Kizilbash (or Qizilbash) in the Ottoman era. This period is well-remembered among Alevi because of the fatwas labelling Kizilbash as heretics and infidels and declaring that killing them was not only allowed by law but also viewed as praiseworthy (Baltacioglu-Brammer, 2014). This has echoed down through history as a religious heritage of public discrimination and prejudice towards Alevi. Indeed, the

³ Their beliefs and practices show significant differences from Alevi Turk and Kurds.

⁴ *Batınniyya* is used for esoteric/mystical faith groups in Anatolia and Mesopotamia.

humiliation and negative labelling of Alevis in the Ottoman era is a plausible argument as to why the term 'Kizilbash' was more recently dropped in favour of 'Alevi'.

The second qualitative transformation started towards the end of the Ottoman Empire with the policy of Turkish-Islamic synthesis, which left a strong mark on the social and political formation of Alevis. The Turkish-Islamic synthesis was introduced by the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) (*Ittihat ve Terakki Komitesi*)⁵ as part of the nation-building process to replace the *umma*⁶ of the Ottomans. The CUP aimed to homogenise the cultural diversity of Anatolia and Mesopotamia under Islamic Turkishness and initiated the cultural (and physical) destruction of diverse communities, including the Alevis, who were subject to particular assimilationist strategies. During the change from the Ottoman Empire to the Turkish Republic, although the official policy on religion was revised, Islam-centred discourses and policies continued. The CUP's conceptual Turkish-Islamic framework later became the official policy of the Turkish Republic founded in 1923 following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire (Dressler, 2013). The Republic, despite its rhetoric of Turkish nationalism, was widely accepted as more progressive by minorities, including the Alevis, because of its secular values that offered the hope of escaping Islamist religious persecution and explains Alevi support for the Republic (Akdemir, 2016). However, in reality, 'de facto discrimination and suspicion of Alevis as potentially subversive continued for most of the Republican period' (Bruinessen, 2018:12).

There is a long history of violence towards Alevis under the Republic, sometimes perpetrated by military forces (Koçgiri, 1921 and Dersim, 1938) but often by radical (or nationalist) Islamists groups (Elbistan, 1967; Maraş, and Malatya, 1978; Çorum, 1980; and Sivas 1993). Common to all these Alevi massacres is that the perpetrators were not punished and commemorations were not allowed in Turkey until recently. The history of the struggle for survival against discrimination and the threat of extermination is crucial in understanding the formation of the Alevi population. This context of social, political and economic insecurity was the principal reason that 'pushed' Alevis to move abroad. Here, I shall consider

⁵ The CUP was founded in 1889 and gained power after the rebellion of nationalist Young Turks (against Sultan Abdulhamid II) in 1908 which gave the party an essential role towards the end of the Ottoman Empire.

⁶ *Umma* refers to the world-wide community of Muslims which at this time had the Ottoman Empire at its centre.

migration as the third cornerstone in the historical trajectory of Alevism due to its significant impact on the social, religious and organisational structures and ritual practices of Alevi communities. Such structural changes that significantly affected social and religious institutions and practices, though provoked by rural-urban migration, shifted and ripened in the diaspora. Consequently, Alevism adopted a transnational scope that influenced its social, political and religious settings worldwide, the changes that this thesis will explore in detail, taking the British Alevi community as a case study.

Focus and scope

This thesis examines diasporic formations through the nexus of continuity and change in terms of religion, identity and community, 'grounded' in particular socio-spatial contexts. International migration has transformed Alevi communities from an oppressed faith minority into a diasporic group able to engage in freedom of religion and collective action. The thesis deals with the Alevi community in the UK and examines the transformation in terms of ritual practices, organisational and institutional structures and spatial developments. Focusing on the intersecting processes of territorialisation (and re-territorialisation), rebuilding of community, and identity and reproduction of culture, the thesis provides insights into the remaking of religion in a diasporic situation while taking into consideration the impact of this diasporisation on the homeland. The influence of the diasporic transition on the homeland's social, religious and political sphere is complex. While we can speak of a widespread change that parallels diasporic developments, its impact on rural and urban spaces has been different.

As a multi-sited ethnography, this research considers a range of socio-spatial dynamics in both urban diaspora and rural homeland. Focusing on the transmigrant Alevi community, the study draws upon data collected in multiple ethnographic settings in the UK and Turkey between September 2017 and January 2020. The fieldwork focused on the British Alevi community in London and the villages of British Alevis located in the Afşin-Elbistan region of eastern Turkey. These sites were chosen to explore the transformation of religion, identity and community within their socio-spatial contexts. The research involved several qualitative data collection methods, including direct observation, interviews, focus groups and an online survey.

Relevance of the research

The study provides an understanding of contemporary Alevism that has been reproduced in the secular Western context. Migrant groups like Alevis, who have faced discrimination and exclusion because of their religion, enjoy democratic rights, including the freedom of religion, in the diaspora that they never had in their homeland. Alevis have various organisations and networks flowing across borders that make them visible and encourage institutionalisation to secure their continuity. However, to ensure continuity in the Western-global context, Alevis have needed to re-articulate their social structures and ritualised religious culture within new socio-spatial settings. This is the primary concern of this thesis which explores how modes and structures of religion change within the social, political and spatial shifts in the diaspora where modern, secular and global discourses dominate everyday life. As an ethnographic case of a migrant faith community in the UK, where religious pluralism is part and parcel of the management of multiculturalism, the thesis also contributes to wider debates about the implications of the Western secular context of religious pluralism for migrant religions.

A collective history is a leading dynamic shaping the present experiences of groups, especially when marked by victimhood. By causing disruption, conflict and insecurity in society and individuals (Cubitt, 2007), collective traumatic events play a founding role in diasporic identification (Bhabha, 1994; R. Cohen, 2008; Gilroy, 1999; Hall, 1990; Safran, 1991). This research offers insights into the effect of collective traumatic history on the configuration of Alevi diasporic identity politics.

Collective memory and homeland are fundamentals of diasporic identity; however, diasporas also involve the creation of transnational spaces channelling cultural exchange and the circulation of ideas and money. In this new global era, as a result of the rapid increase in cross-border activities and interactions that have introduced the interplay of migration, globalism and transnationalism, the meaning of diaspora has broadened in its complexity, as I discuss in detail in Chapter 1. In the light of global developments, particularly the rapid development of transportation and computer-mediated communications, cross-border social, economic and political interactions and movements are boosted. Thus, as far as the contemporary formation of diaspora is concerned, it is necessary to give more attention to changing global conditions and transnational linkages.

Community associations, by creating and reinforcing migrant networks, encourage transnational social spaces that not only shape diasporic practices but also influence homeland life (Levitt and Glick Schiller, 2004; Levitt, 2001b; Vásquez, 2008). The claim for space and rights in European countries, while Alevi transmigrants have also retained their homeland social, political and economic ties as well as citizenship, has encouraged transnational activism involving homeland politics. This can be seen in the electoral participation of expatriate Alevis and Kurds who mainly support Turkey's opposition parties. For example, in the 2015 Turkish general election, their expatriate votes in Europe guaranteed two MPs from the pro-Kurdish leftist People's Democratic Party (HDP) in the Grand National Assembly of Turkey (TBMM) to become the third biggest party of Turkey.

Migrant Alevism has increasingly adopted a transnational scope as a result of the growth of Alevi associations and their networks unifying the community around the politics of Alevi identity and recognition. Transnational linkages have allowed Alevis to constantly communicate and exchange information on demands, rights and actions across borders. As a result, Alevi claims for identity, visibility, and recognition are constantly produced and reproduced within transnational social fields, but also within a diasporic temporality with some events particularly significant, such as the Sivas Massacre that stimulated the resurgence of Alevi identity, widely called the 'Alevi Revival' (Bruinessen, 1996; Sökefeld, 2008).

Alevism in the diaspora is increasingly practised in *cemevis* which have become vital in the modern social organisation of diasporic Alevis. For the Alevi community, the significance of *cemevis* is not linked merely to religious practice but also to social and political activities as they are community spaces where *cem* gatherings (the Alevi communal service of worship) only occasionally take place. *Cemevis* are vectors of identity and visibility in the diaspora which underline the relationship between place, religion and collective identity that encapsulate placemaking experiences in a diaspora context. This point leads us to explore the important issue of Alevi spatial politics that marks the interplay of religion, identity and politics in producing and performing space in diaspora.

Religious placemaking is of increasing interest to scholars (Eade and Garbin, 2006; Garbin, 2014; Kong, 2012; Kong and Woods, 2016; Mazumdar and Mazumdar, 2009; Vásquez and Knott, 2014). The spatial performances of migrant groups, bound up with the politics of identity, visibility and recognition, shape the territorialisation process and discourses in which religion plays a vital role within the social, political and spatial settings of settlement countries (Garbin, 2013; 2014; Vásquez and Knott, 2014). Knott (2016:74) suggests that religious practices are linked with 'identity, identification and the politics of recognition' and are 'enacted strategically or tactically to assert, challenge, discipline, subvert or make space for change'. Since religious placemaking plays an important role in the reconstruction of identity and community in diaspora (Garbin, 2014; Tweed, 1997; Vásquez and Knott, 2014), it is essential to gain an in-depth understanding of the multiple dynamics involved in these processes. This thesis examines how space is produced and practised in the diaspora by looking at the role placemaking plays in the diasporic rebuilding process.

In recent years, the diasporic transition has shifted into a new phase with rising transnational activities. Politically and economically becoming more active, diasporic Alevism influences the rural homeland landscape in many ways. Recently, *cemevis* have begun to be built in rural areas with remittances that diasporic Alevi send to their villages. The spread of these *cemevis* is a remarkable change in the rural homeland landscape that provides clues as to the wider implications of transnational engagement. As a very new phenomenon, these homeland developments have been under-researched and this research is the first to investigate the socio-spatial implications of migration in high-emigration Alevi villages.

The studies on the impact of migration in the homeland have primarily focused on migrant remittances and their socio-economic implications. However, the socio-spatial implications of remittances are also a salient dimension of migration (Boccagni and Bivand Erdal, 2020; Fletcher, 1999; Gardner, 2008; Lopez, 2010; 2015) and studies on the influence of the built environment shaped by migrants and in particular, in a rural context, are still limited. Through a focus on the socio-spatial practices of migrants in their homeland, this thesis shows how the spatial practices of migrants affect a range of social and cultural dynamics in the homeland. Moreover, while remittances have an essential place in studies on the relationship between migration and development in the homeland context, the link between migration, remittances and religious change has received limited scholarly attention. Another key ambition of this thesis, by focusing on the funding of rural *cemevis*, is to make an original contribution to the study of religious remittances.

Several studies look at the social and political mobilisation of Alevis, especially after the Sivas Massacre, framed around theories of social movement and identity (Sökefeld, 2008; Yaman and Dönmez, 2016; Yildiz and Verkuyten, 2011), studies that have paved the way for later works on diasporic Alevi communities. Since the last decade, there has been, indeed, a growing interest in studying diasporic Alevi communities, especially around issues of transnationalism and identity building (such as Erol, 2012; Hopkins, 2011; Issa, 2016; Issa and Atbaş, 2016; Massicard, 2012; Özyürek, 2009; Sözer, 2014; Zirh, 2012). British Alevis are also increasingly attracting the attention of various scholars and some ethnographic studies have provided helpful insights into Alevi identity formation in the UK (Akdemir, 2016a; Bilecen, 2016; K. B. E. Cetin, 2020; U. Cetin, 2014; Geaves, 2003; Keles, 2016b; I. Şahin, 2012; Salman, 2020). However, despite this growing literature on Alevism and Alevi diasporas, there is, in my opinion, still much more to be explored. Despite limited attention (Sökefeld, 2002; Yaman, 2012), the changing nature of Alevism, broadly in terms of ritual practices and religious structures, has not been studied yet. Moreover, ethnographic studies on diasporic Alevis, though often focusing on *cemevis* as research sites, have not prioritised a socio-spatial perspective. Except for the valuable research focusing on funeral practices in a transterritorial context (Zirh, 2012), the influence of religious placemaking on the socio-cultural formation of Alevi communities in a broader manner, especially from a transterritorial perspective, has also remained largely unexplored. My research is, therefore, the first to focus on both the social, spatial and ritual formation of the Alevi community in the UK and the diasporic influence on the rural homeland landscape.

Finally, migration is one of the most central and persistent issues of our time. This thesis will, I hope, make a timely contribution to an understanding of migration as a continuous process and the intersecting fields of migration, integration, development and policy. As linkages between policymakers, researchers and civil society develop, it is important to keep migrants at the centre of migration debates and my thesis, by focusing on a migrant faith community, contributes to the wider debates within migration studies and, in particular, to the integration challenges migrant groups face.

Research questions

This study, using data from ethnographic fieldwork and a consideration of the extant literature, explores how migrant Alevism has been transformed in diaspora through its socio-spatial settings and how, and to what extent, transnational diasporic attachments have influenced the rural landscape of the

homeland. The main aim is to understand the interaction of religion, space and diaspora that characterises the territorialisation process and shapes placemaking practices in the diaspora and the homeland.

The first objective is to examine how a once marginalised migrant faith is transformed in diaspora settings to understand the organisational, institutional, and spatial implications of diasporic transition encapsulating the dynamics of change and continuity in the diaspora. The second is to explore how space is produced and practised in the diaspora to understand how diasporic structures transform the spatial practices of Alevi society and the socio-spatial dynamics leading to identity and community building processes and religious transformation. The third is to conduct an ethnographic study of spaces created by migrant Alevi in their hometowns, to understand how and to what extent diasporic dynamics affect the rural homeland's socio-cultural landscape. To accomplish these aims, a number of questions, with a number of sub-questions, are addressed.

1. How has Alevism, as a marginal minority faith in Turkey, been transformed in diasporic settings?
 - 1.1 How is Alevism lived, ritualised and practised in diaspora space?
 - 1.2 What are the challenges migrant Alevi faith has faced in the Western context?
2. How is 'Alevi space' produced and practised in the diaspora landscape?
 - 2.1 What are the dynamics of Alevi place-making in the diaspora?
 - 2.2 What role do *cemevis* play in the reconstruction of identity and community in the diaspora?
3. How and to what extent do diasporic dynamics shape the cultural and religious landscape of the homeland, in particular in the rural context?
 - 3.1 What are the implications of the built environment on the rural homeland landscape?
 - 3.2 What are the dynamics and implications of the spread of *cemevis* with diaspora remittances?

Structure of the thesis

This thesis is divided into an introduction, eight chapters and a conclusion, exploring the 'diasporic transition' through its ritual, organisational and spatial implications. Chapter One and Two present the research context and set the theoretical, analytical and methodological framework for the ethnographic

study of diasporic Alevi in the UK. Chapter One explores, through a discussion of the literature, the core features of diaspora and transnationalism, the question of religious (re)territorialisation and finally, Alevi transnational spaces. Chapter Two discusses the research framework and methodology, including some reflections on my personal experience of conducting ethnography among the British Alevi community.

Chapter Three focuses on the migration story of Alevi from Turkey to the UK as an initial phase in the diasporisation process. Chapter Four explores how diaspora experience has affected the ritual world and religious structures of 'traditional' Alevism. It examines how Alevism is lived, ritualised and practised in diaspora settings in order to understand the formation of diasporic religion.

Chapter Five, Six and Seven focus on Alevi spatiality, respectively, through public performances in diaspora space, religious placemaking in diaspora, and the diasporic spatial engagements in the rural homeland landscape. Chapter Five discusses the institutional and spatial dynamics as well as political discourses shaping Alevi public performances in the public diaspora space, looking into the interplay of religion, space and politics. Alevi spatial politics cannot be fully comprehended without taking into consideration the strategies of permanent placemaking addressed in Chapters Six and Seven. Focusing on the new London Cemevi as a case study of Alevi placemaking, Chapter Six explores the role religious placemaking plays in the reconstruction of identity and community in the diaspora. Following two chapters that discuss the spatial practices of Alevi in the UK, Chapter Seven explores the spatial performances of diasporic Alevi in the homeland and their influence on its changing rural landscape.

Finally, Chapter Eight explores the contextual and spatial dimensions of Alevi identity formation to provide insights into the diasporic transition discussed throughout the thesis. It discusses the leading dynamics, discourses, and contexts involved in constructing Alevi identity from a generational perspective. The chapter pays particular attention to the repercussions of the diasporic community and identity building process on younger generations, which offers insights into the future of diasporic religions. Finally, in conclusion, I give a summary of my main findings underlining key points within my research and then go on to identify some issues that were not developed in this thesis but are productive areas for future research.

CHAPTER 1: Concepts, themes and perspectives

Introduction

What is real is the continual change of form: form is only a snapshot view of a transition.

Henri Bergson (Creative Evolution, 1911)

There is a method in filming called greenbox in which a green background is created to allow the filmmaker in postproduction to use any backdrop they choose behind the actors. In this way, a green screen allows the filmmaker to construct and fashion the story we see in the movie. Though the context cannot be sensed in the use of the solid colour itself, the greenbox, as a method, nevertheless facilitates the creation of the context in which the subject is placed. The interplay of diaspora, religion and space (and place) set the research context and themes of this thesis and can be defined as the greenbox against which the diasporic transition of Alevism is to be understood.

Alevism has journeyed from an oppressed and excluded local faith to one that is now thriving as an officially recognised religion in diasporas, even though the Alevi claim for recognition is still an ongoing struggle in Turkey where Alevis have never seen freedom of religion and still face oppression. Given their pre-migration story, their political actions in Western countries have focused on their claim for visibility and recognition of Alevism in Turkey and in their settlement countries.

This thesis is about this diasporic transformation and seeks to understand the dynamics of change and continuity in terms of religion, identity and community. It explores the social, ritual and spatial formation of the diasporic Alevi community in the UK and its influence on their rural homeland landscape. This chapter outlines the theoretical framework of the thesis through a discussion of the core features of diaspora, transnationalism and religious (re)territorialisation and offers insights into the transnational spaces linking Alevis with their homeland and worldwide.

Theoretical perspectives on diaspora, religion and space

Diaspora

The starting point for theories on diaspora has entailed a discussion of the form and reasons for dispersion, the homeland left behind and the assimilation processes in settlement countries. However, in this new global era, as a result of the rapid increase in cross-border activities and interactions that have introduced the interplay of migration, globalism and transnationalism, the literature on diaspora studies is booming. Historically the term 'diaspora' was used to describe the dispersion of Jews; however, in the last decades, with the explosion of interest in diaspora studies across the social sciences, the meaning of the term has broadened in its complexity. While the term 'diaspora' is now a commonly used notion in sociology, social anthropology, cultural studies and geography, there is a degree of uncertainty around its definition and conceptualisation and little consensus about its constitutive elements. As a starting point, it is useful to look at the most widely accepted key features of the concept as specified in the pioneering works of Robin Cohen (2008), William Safran (1991), and Khachig Tölölyan (2007). These are summarised by Rogers Brubaker (2005) as 'dispersion', 'homeland orientation' and 'boundary-maintenance'.

According to Safran (1991), in his exploration of the case of the Jewish diaspora, dispersion from the homeland to foreign countries as an aftermath of a traumatic experience is one of the main criteria in defining diaspora. However, Cohen (2008) criticises and expands Safran's view of dispersion by considering both non-voluntary and voluntary motivations. He argues that whilst dispersion can occur as a result of traumatic events, voluntary factors embodying political and economic reasons also need to be taken into account. Hence, he suggests a broader understanding of diaspora as an umbrella term and discusses the changes and expansion of its meaning.

Cohen adds different categories of diasporic experience to broaden the concept. However, he singles out dispersion following a traumatic event as a 'qualitatively different phenomena' from other motivations to migrate since traumatic experiences affect groups collectively. He identifies migrant groups who have a history of victimhood in their homeland as 'victim diaspora' (2008:2). In his seminal book, *Global Diasporas*, Cohen defines Jewish, African, Armenian, Irish and Palestinian diasporas as

prototypical cases of victim diasporas because of their extreme traumatic experiences. He considers 'victim-origin' as a predominant character that forms collective memory, arguing that:

In both established and embryonic victim diasporas the wrench from home must survive so powerfully in the folk memories of these groups that restoring the homeland or even returning there becomes an important focus for social mobilisation and the mould in which their popular cultures and political attitudes are formed (p.4).

In this way and to some extent, the UK Alevi diaspora has the characteristics of a victim diaspora since the majority of its population come from the Maraş province of Turkey where the local Alevi community had experienced a massacre. This aspect of the UK Alevi diaspora is discussed later.

Cohen (2008:7) suggests the addition of other features to his concept of diaspora. These include: 'labour diaspora' to entail 'trading and commercial networks'; 'trade diaspora' to include 'those seeking work abroad'; and 'imperial diaspora' for 'imperial or colonial settlers'. He also identifies a 'deterritorialised diaspora' to underline cyberspace and cover groups that 'can, to some degree, be cemented or recreated through the mind, through artefacts and popular culture, and through a shared imagination' (p.8)

Floya Anthias, however, criticises Cohen's typology, finding it problematic 'in allocating a group to one of the types, there is a reliance, essentially and foremost, on the origin or intentionality of dispersal' (1998:4). She argues that migration motivations do not offer sufficient insights to classify groups and analyse their structures and identity forms. Anthias refuses to consider diasporas in unitary categories and thus argues that Cohen's concept has failed 'to investigate inter-ethnic processes and a lack of concern with the intersectionalities of class and gender' (p.4).

A traumatic past in the homeland has been a central point in traditional diaspora theory; however, there are contested issues and debates on this phenomenon. For example, Faist (2000a) contrasts with Cohen and supports Safran's definition of diaspora based on the Jewish case and argues that the term diaspora is not appropriate for settlers and labour migrants since they are neither victims of traumatic experiences nor wish to return to their countries of origin. Conversely, Sheffer (2003) argues that the term diaspora embodies labour migrant populations because of their social and emotional connection with the homeland and involvement in homeland politics. Indeed, large immigrant populations or their

associations often create pressure on the politics of their homeland, as can be seen in the case of the Turkish labour diaspora in Germany. The Turkish diaspora, which was formed from the massive labour migration to Germany in the 1960s, has had a significant impact on Turkish politics, particularly through their votes in general elections and referendums in Turkey as a result of their dual citizenship.

In relation to homeland-related criteria in diaspora theory, Safran and Cohen identify collective memory, idealisation of an ancestral home, and an intention to return as common features. Safran puts ancestral homeland at the centre of diaspora formation as migrants' 'true, ideal home and as the place to which they or their descendants would (or should) eventually return' (1991:83). Through this relationship, a collective consciousness and solidarity are maintained. Similarly, Cohen (2008) highlights the salience of homeland in forming the collective memory of victim diasporas that bind the group together. However, Cohen considers homeland as a metaphor in the creation of diaspora, one that is an 'imagined homeland that only resembles the original history and geography of the diaspora's natality in the remotest way' (2008:4).

Some authors attribute less importance to the effects of the homeland connection than that of new engagements formed in the diaspora which de-emphasise homeland orientation (Anthias, 1998; Clifford, 1994; Gilroy, 1999). Both Clifford (1994) and Gilroy (1999) place new activities and the changing conditions within host countries at the centre of the diaspora concept, considering diaspora as a process rather than a fixed entity. Clifford (1994) strongly criticises homeland-centred models of diaspora and points to the new global conditions that encourage 'multi-locale attachments':

the transnational connections linking diasporas need not be articulated primarily through a real or symbolic homeland – at least not to the degree that Safran implies. Decentered, lateral connections may be as important as those formed around theology of origin/return (1994:306).

The third common point of classical diaspora theories is 'boundary maintenance' that is widely seen as an essential condition of the diaspora (see R. Cohen, 2008; Safran, 1991; Tölölyan, 1996). Safran, Cohen and Tölölyan agree that group consciousness produces a sense of a distinctive collectivity, shared historical experiences and solidarity that bind members of a community across different countries. However, drawing on an extensive range of sources, some scholars set out the different ways of

questioning boundary maintenance, which Brubaker defines as 'a strong counter-current' that 'emphasises hybridity, fluidity, creolisation and syncretism' (2005:6).

Some influential authors challenge the importance of boundary maintenance as an essential quality of diaspora and speak of the configuration of diasporic identity in terms of hybridity and transnationalism (Bhabha, 1994; Clifford, 1994; Gilroy, 1997; Hall, 1990). The postmodern approach to diaspora, according to Anthias, addresses 'a condition rather than being descriptive of a group' (1998:5). Critical scholars of diaspora underline difference, diversity, and the changing structures of communities within rising transnational and global interactions. As a result of 'travelling and hybridising in new global conditions' (Clifford, 1994:306), contemporary diasporas entail transnational movements, engagements and solidarities (Appadurai, 1990; Clifford, 1994; Robertson, 1992) which shift the concept into a new phase. The sociologist Stuart Hall (1990), one of the most influential postcolonial theorists, highlights the importance of heterogeneity and diversity rather than purity. He defines the diaspora experience:

not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of identity which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by hybridity.

Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew through transformation and difference (1990:235).

The idea of hybridity emphasises a cultural combination and the transformation of cultural elements and practices in interacting with other diasporic cultures. Diasporic identities cannot be understood without hybridity, a process that continuously involves mixing, exchanging, producing and reproducing. Thus, the hybridity or cultural mixing that migrants experience in the diaspora has been widely defined as a key element of diasporic identity by postmodernist diaspora theorists (Bhabha, 1994; Clifford, 1994; Gilroy, 1997; Hall, 1990). Although some scholars find it insufficient for understanding and addressing issues related to the concept of identity (Anthias, 2001; Brubaker and Cooper, 2000), cultural hybridity is a contributory concept, especially in understanding diasporic identification among young generations, as we shall see in Chapter 8 in the context of young British Alevi.

Safran (1991) and Clifford (1994) speak of a collective awareness that they define as 'diaspora consciousness' that has developed in contemporary transnational communities. Clifford (1994:322) states that 'the empowering paradox of diaspora is that dwelling here assumes solidarity and connection

there'. Diaspora consciousness is said to be established by the 'experience of discrimination and exclusion' and an 'identification with a historical heritage' or 'contemporary world cultural or political forces' (Vertovec, 1997:8) that 'bind many people into the social forms or networks' (Vertovec, 1999:450). It is 'diaspora consciousness' (Clifford, 1994) or 'double consciousness' (Gilroy, 1999) that encourages an individual's 'awareness of multi-locality' and which 'stimulates the need to conceptually connect oneself with others, both "here" and "there", who share the same "routes" and "roots"' (Vertovec, 1997:8).

In his analysis of diaspora theories, Brubaker (2005) highlights a tension between theories of diaspora and those of transnationalism and between theories of 'boundary-maintenance' and those of 'boundary-erosion'. This ambivalence is primarily due to the effect of time since boundary maintenance is a process which must proceed in terms of both change and continuity over an extended period of time. However, boundary erosion resulting from a continuous inter-generational process of assimilation also progresses over a long time. Brubaker asks a crucial question echoing this dilemma: 'to what extent and in what forms are boundaries maintained by second, third and subsequent generations?' (2005:7).

Answering this question is not possible with a concept of diaspora that remains incapable of recognising the effects of the global dynamics influencing social, economic, political and cultural structures. Diaspora is a useful concept that captures many things; however, essentialising diaspora within the context of homeland connections is not sufficient to understand these contemporary structures. As far as the contemporary formation of diaspora is concerned, it is necessary to give more attention to changing global conditions. In the light of global developments, particularly the rapid development of transportation and computer-mediated communications, cross-border social, economic and political interactions and movements are exposed. This reality of contemporary diaspora deserves a better explanation and here it is useful to quote Vertovec (1997) who defines diaspora as:

any population which is considered 'deterritorialised' or 'transnational' – that is, which originated in a land other than which it currently resides, and whose social, economic and political networks cross the borders of nation-states or, indeed, span the globe (1997:1).

In this regard, diaspora as 'a social form', 'a type of consciousness' and 'a mode of cultural reproduction' (Vertovec, 1997) is characterised by a mixture of global and transnational engagements that emphasise

a triadic relationship (Safran, 1991; Sheffer, 1986) rather than a basic understanding of a relationship between homeland and hostland. Thus, for a clear vision of contemporary settings, the following section discusses, by reference to the literature, the theoretical perspectives on transnationalism.

Transnationalism

As mentioned above, classical diaspora theories fail to offer an adequate explanation that recognises the newly developed conditions linking diaspora and transnationalism. Faist (2010:9) explains this link metaphorically as 'two awkward dance partners, which talk about similar categories of persons involving forms of forced and voluntary migrations'. Transnationalism has been defined as the linkages of individuals, networks and organisations across borders (Faist, 2000a). Pasura (2014:15-16) points out the lack of conceptual clarity in the literature about the definition and the use of transnationalism, echoing the similar problems with diaspora, and indicates the 'regularity and intensity' of cross-border activities as the most critical aspect of transnationalism. Vertovec (2009:4) identifies six themes to clarify the concept of transnationalism that remains ambivalent among its many different descriptions. He explains transnationalism 'as a social morphology, a type of consciousness, a mode of cultural reproduction, an avenue of capital, a site of political engagement, and a reconstruction of "place" or locality'.

As the key themes of transnationalism parallel those of diaspora too, some studies reveal a correlation and a differentiation between diaspora and transnationalism. Vasquez and Garbin (2016:693) argue that both diaspora and transnationalism speak to 'the immigrant experience of "bifocality" or "multifocality" that question the traditional theories about migrant's life which addresses assimilation into the country of settlement and forgetting the senses of the homeland'. However, both concepts entail 'different dynamics of mobility': transnationalism confronts a 'simultaneity across present-day localities' that emphasises interaction between the migrant community and home society while diaspora engages with 'multiple spaces through a work of imagination and memory that link past, present, and future' (Vásquez and Garbin, 2016:693).

Since transnationalism refers to the attachment to more than one country, diasporas without significant social and symbolic ties to the receiving country and homeland cannot be considered as transnational communities (Faist, 2000a). Moreover, occasional or annual contact with the homeland cannot be

simply a condition of transnationalism as it requires regularity in cross-border activities (Basch, Blanc, and Glick Schiller, 2005; Faist, 2000a; Pasura, 2014). This is very clear in the explanation given by Glick Schiller, Basch, and Blanc (1995:48) of the transmigrants who 'live dual lives':⁷

Transmigrants are immigrants whose daily lives depend on multiple and constant interconnections across international borders and whose public identities are configured in relationship to more than one nation-state.

Indeed, in this global era, migrants are increasingly involved in their homeland's political and economic life while also integrating into their settlement countries. Levitt (2001b:3) defines this 'simultaneous engagement' as 'keeping their feet in both worlds'. Similarly, Basch et al. (2005:315) consider transnationalism as 'an ongoing process of linkage' that creates 'transnational social field/spaces'. Thomas Faist (2000b:199), who is one of the most important scholars of transnational relations and migration, considers transnational social spaces as dynamic processes and, as such, are 'combinations of sustained social and symbolic ties, their contents, positions in networks and organisations, and networks of organisations that can be found in multiple states'. Scholars also highlight the importance of social networks and organisations in exposing transnational practices (Faist and Özveren, 2004; Levitt, 2001b; 2002; Vásquez, 2008; Vertovec, 2009). According to Levitt (2001b:8), transnational social fields, although often borne out of economic ties between migrants and non-migrants in their country of origin, also entail social, political and religious linkages. These cross-border networks and organisations enable migrants 'to remain active in both worlds'.

Sheffer (1986) points out transnational political practices of migrants and highlights the influence of new nongovernmental trans-state political organisations in the international political arena. Diasporic Alevi organisations are a good example of this. More than two hundred and fifty Alevi cultural centres in Europe, organised under national federations in the UK, Germany, France, the Netherlands, Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland, are linked under an umbrella organisation, the Europe Confederation of Alevi Unions (AABK). While these national federations represent the Alevi population in the domestic politics of their settlement countries, the Europe Alevi Confederation lobbies

⁷ Portes, Guarnizo and Landolt, cited in (Sökefeld, 2008:212)

about the politics of Turkey in the international arena (particularly in the European Union and Parliament). Moreover, all these diaspora organisations travel to Turkey frequently, run collaborative projects with Alevi associations in Turkey and support them socially and economically, maintaining transnational solidarity. The organisational character of transnational Alevi associations also exemplifies what scholars call a 'triadic relationship' between homeland, settlement countries and other places in the diaspora (Safran, 1991; Sheffer, 1986; Vertovec, 1997).

In her pioneering study on Miraflorenos in the US, Peggy Levitt (2001) focuses on the transnational linkages of migrant and non-migrant Miraflorenos and examines the effects of cross-border engagements in the contexts of the Dominican Republic and the US. She speaks of the multiple attachments of migrants in the host country and indicates that 'they belong to and are making a future in two places' (2001b:203). However, what forms these attachments is the transnational character of political, religious and social organisations. As she explains: 'how individuals distribute their loyalty and energy between sending — and receiving — countries depends upon how political, religious, and social life is organised across space' (2001b:203). While mobilising migrants through issues related to the homeland, these transnational organisations and institutional networks also encourage the integration of migrants into the host society by offering basic protection and representation. Levitt also highlights institutionalised forms of transnationalism and argues that organised and institutionalised cross-border activities transform the way they think of themselves as a group. Acknowledgement of belonging to a transnational community strengthens solidarity and encourages members to establish hometown organisations. These organisations and networks, as she argues, 'stimulate and are stimulated by the institutionalisation of transnational practices' (2001b:11).

Levitt points out the effects of the rising multiple memberships that enhance the migrants' attachments to both countries of origin and settlement. From dual citizenship to memberships of political institutions and unions, as well as religious and civic organisations, these multiple memberships offer various spaces in which migrants can actively live their dual lives. The interaction of religious and political memberships is an important point here since religious institutions encourage civic engagement and mobilisation. By representing the members and helping them access resources, transnational religious institutions contribute to integrating migrants into the host society while engaging them in social and political networks that encourage political activism in the homeland.

Levitt (1998a) rearticulates the concept of 'social remittances' which she considers a 'migration-driven form of cultural diffusion' and explains them as 'the ideas, behaviours, identities, and social capital that flow from receiving- to sending-country communities' (1998a:926). She highlights the importance of social remittances in transforming the structures of the home community and argues that home community members, to some extent, live on social remittances. Social remittances are 'the tools with which ordinary individuals create global cultures at the local level [... by] encouraging them to try on new gender roles, experiment with new ideas about politics, and adopt new organising strategies' (2001b:11).

Levitt's study can be considered a pioneering work on the consequences of transnational engagements for migrants' and non-migrants' lives. In particular, its contribution regarding the circuit of social remittances offers helpful insights into the influence of migration in changing structures of homeland life. However, the research data was collected almost three decades ago (1992-1994) and with the speedy development of computer-mediated communication and global media, the capability of these interactions has widened. Thus, the impact of transnational attachments on the social and religious landscape of the rural homeland deserves to be explored through more community cases and the use of a fresh perspective with new empirical data, as this research does.

Having discussed theories of diaspora and the importance of transnational networks and spaces, I need to make one point clear: diaspora is not a single entity although this is how it is often portrayed in classical diaspora theories. Although diasporic groups have a sense of collectivity originating from a shared historical experience and carry the idea of a real or imagined homeland, as well as a solidarity binding the members together, the diaspora as a unitary form is far from its reality. To avoid such a homogenistic approach it is important that the heterogeneous and fragmented character of the diaspora is now considered.

Heterogeneity and fragmentation

As mentioned above, unlike classical diaspora theories, postmodern theorists emphasise hybridity, fluidity, creolisation and syncretism (Anthias, 1998; Clifford, 1994; Hall, 1999) when considering identity configuration within the new forms of belonging and contested identities that occur across national borders. Pasura (2014) also criticises the concept of diaspora (as described by classical diaspora theorists

like Cohen and Safran) for its emphasis on homogeneity with its 'static and singular conception of group identity' (p. 67) and instead highlights the notion of fragmented identities. Drawing on his study of the UK Zimbabwean diaspora, he points out 'plural and shifting identities' and underlines a fragmentation that is multiplied through migration to different countries and with different diaspora experiences: 'The scattering of the population saw a multiplicity of routes taken, various destination countries reached and variation in terms of degrees of political belonging, and the different ethnicities and genders involved' (2014:143). He has coined the term 'fractured diaspora' to highlight the 'plural meanings of crystallised and shifting notion of identities' (2014:148).

The Alevi population is characteristically fragmented, varied by means of regional, ethnic and cultural differences in Turkey that has been multiplied in the diaspora. As all Alevi diasporas are unique and different, the UK Alevi diaspora is also not a single united community. There are different, contested identities linked to a varied sense of belonging, be it ethnic, political, or cultural. The most salient reference for the fragmentation of the UK Alevi diaspora appears to be that of political motivation. As Bilecen (2016) has observed, membership of associations in the UK is characterised by their political tendencies. There are four types of Turkey-related associations and groups: a) NGOs that were founded as extensions of particular leftist⁸ movements in Turkey; b) kinship organisations that (mostly) belong to almost all districts of the province of Maraş in south-eastern Anatolia; c) Kurdish associations that lobby around Kurdish issue in Turkey; and finally, d) religious organisations such as *cemevis* and cultural centres. Since the UK Alevi diaspora is also largely a Kurdish diaspora with a small pocket of Alevi Turks and the two biggest associations are the England Alevi Cultural Centre and Cemevi (the London Cemevi) and the Kurdish Community Centre, alongside the existence of many left-wing organisations, it will come as no surprise to observe contestations around ethnic identity as well as tensions between religious and socialist-atheist discourses.

Brubaker (2005) speaks of the problem of 'groupism' that conceives of diasporas as 'tangible, quantifiable and bounded entities' (2005:11-12). He refuses to treat diaspora 'in substantialist terms as a bounded entity'; rather, he defines it as 'an idiom, a stance, a claim' (p. 12). Diasporas should be seen

⁸ I use leftist as the person or organisation supporting or belonging to the political left and supporting its principles.

as a category of practice that 'is used to make claims, to articulate projects, to formulate expectations, to mobilise energies, to appeal to loyalties'. He considers diaspora as 'a way of formulating the identities and loyalties of a population' that emphasises political, social and cultural struggles without presupposing 'groupness' (p. 12). Brubaker's words make this conceptualisation clearer and make sense of the unusual title of his article 'The "diaspora" diaspora':

rather than speak of 'a diaspora' or 'the diaspora' as an entity, a bounded group, an ethnodemographic or ethnocultural fact, it may be more fruitful, and certainly more precise, to speak of diasporic stances, projects, claims, idioms, practices, and so on (Brubaker, 2005:13).

A similar approach can be found in Werbner's work. Werbner (2002a) speaks of the complexity of diasporas that are 'characterised by multiple discourses, internal dissent, and competition for members between numerous sectarian, gendered or political groups, all identifying themselves with the same diaspora' (2002a:123). She highlights the co-responsibility embodied in the material performance that emphasises solidarity and loyalty within heterogeneity. Werbner suggests the term 'chaordic diasporas' to underline a 'complex combination of shared rules' and argues that 'organisationally, diasporas are characterised by a chaordic structure, and a shared sense of moral co-responsibility embodied in material gestures and extended through and across space' (2002a:119). She writes:

New diasporic communities form through usual patterns of growth and expansion and recreate ties to a place of origin and a shared history, and hence also to a sense of common destiny, without homogenising themselves globally. [...] [E]ach diasporic 'community' is unique, historically contingent and different. Nevertheless, they all share certain common parameters [...]: above all, in the case of the most powerful diasporas, a sense of co-responsibility extending across and beyond national boundaries (2002a:131).

As mentioned earlier, the concept of diaspora in the contemporary context entails transnational movements and engagements that refer to globalisation and the rise of transnational solidarities (Appadurai, 1990; Robertson, 1992). The influence of various global processes, actors and agents embedded in the making and practising of transnational spaces needs to be recognised more. With this in mind, the following section discusses the globalisation of religion in the diaspora context.

The globalisation of religion

Scholars increasingly pay attention to the rise of transnational religious spaces and the globalisation of religion. It has been said that religious globalisation increases cross-border engagements and develops transnational institutional relationships and practices that globalise local level religious life (Levitt, 1998b). Since transnationalism has been seen as a fundamental aspect of globalisation (Vertovec, 2009), contemporary religious formations in the context of diaspora and transnationalism cannot be understood without considering the changing conditions and global structures of the world.

To better understand the ways that the local and the global influence each other, anthropologist Arjun Appadurai's conceptual framework of 'global cultural flows' is helpful. Appadurai (1990) explains these dynamic processes as the 'building blocks' of what he calls 'imagined worlds' that are:

inflected by the historical, linguistic and political situatedness of different sorts of actors: nation-states, multinationals, diasporic communities, as well as sub-national groupings and movements (whether religious, political or economic), and even intimate face-to-face groups, such as villages, neighbourhoods and families (1990:7).

Global cultural flows, Appadurai explains, are: 'ethnoscapes' that address transnational engagements of migrants and non-migrants; 'financescapes' that refer to the circulation of money; and 'technoscapes' that refer to the rapid development of information, communication and transportation technologies. Moreover, he extends these flows to 'mediascapes' and 'ideoscapes' that are 'closely related landscapes of images' that are created by media and ideologies of states (1990:9).

Appadurai's conceptual framework offers a broad explanation of the interaction between global processes and actors; however, scholars underline the importance of religion(s), which need to be distinguished from other cultural forms. McAlister (2005) coins the term 'religioscape' that she explains as 'the subjective religious maps (and attendant theologies) of diasporic communities who are also in global flow and flux' (2005:251). Similarly, Tweed (2006), considering religions as 'confluences of organic-cultural flows that intensify joy and confront suffering by drawing on human and suprahuman forces to make homes and cross boundaries' (p. 54), suggests the term 'sacrosapes' for religious flows that 'change over time and move across space' (p. 64).

One of the meanings of diaspora outlined by Vertovec (1997) is cultural production (or reproduction), linked to the global circulation of cultural objects, images and meanings. Diaspora involves 'the production and reproduction of transnational social and cultural phenomena' (Vertovec, 1997:19). Glick Schiller et al. (1992) discuss the cross-border flow of goods and activities and assert that:

these social relations take on meaning within the flow and fabric of daily life, as linkages between different societies are maintained, renewed, and reconstituted in the context of families, of institutions, of economic investments, business and finance, and of political organizations and structures including nation-states (1992:11).

Global media and communications strongly influence cultural reproduction and the transformation of diasporic identity (Appadurai and Breckenridge, 1989; Spivak, 1989; Vertovec, 1997; 2009). Appadurai and Breckenridge (1989:3) argue that

complex transnational flows of media images and messages perhaps create the greatest disjunctures for diasporic populations, since in the electronic media, in particular, the politics of desire and imagination are always in contest with the politics of heritage and nostalgia.

Indeed, the dramatic rise of computer-mediated communication (CMCs), notably the internet and social media, has intensified the interplay of globalisation, migration and religion (Vásquez and Garbin, 2016) and has had a strong impact on transnational religious organisations and activities (Castells, 2009; Eickelman and Anderson, 2003). Vasquez and Garbin (2016) argue that the capacity of CMCs to produce a 'hyper-real' virtual world 'has enormous consequences for religion. For one thing, it means that authentic and authoritative religious experience is no longer the monopoly of elites dwelling in a particular place, which is claimed to be a sacred centre (e.g. Rome)' (2016:695). Moreover, the 'distribution of the electronic capabilities to produce and disseminate information', as argued by Appadurai (1990:9), encourages the de-territorialisation and re-territorialisation of culture.

There is a lack of research on the role of the internet in the Alevi diaspora. In this field, we can mention here only the work of Janroj Yilmaz Keles. Keles (2015; 2016a) examines internet use by the Kurdish Alevi diaspora in the UK and highlights its contribution towards rebuilding and empowering the community at the local and transnational levels. Keles asserts that the internet, particularly social media,

contributes to social networks, social capital and political and cultural participation in the Kurdish Alevi diaspora.

The relationship between religion and globalisation emphasises the interplay of the local and the global, and the research presented here considers space (and place) as an important dynamic in this interrelation. The role of religion in increasing the movement and engagement of people 'through space', its role in technological change (particularly information and communication) 'across space' and in transnationalism 'between places', has widely attracted scholars of contemporary religions (Mcalister, 2005:250). The following section discusses the key features of the reciprocal relationship between diaspora, religion and space (and place), which establishes the framework of this thesis.

Space, place and religion

The interplay of religion and space in diasporas has increasingly gained the attention of scholars. Along with this growing interest, there has been a considerable number of inspired works that have paved the way for more exploration, particularly by Tweed (1997; 2006), Vasquez (2014; 2003), Knott (2010; 2008a; 2008b; 2009; 2013), Garbin (2012b; 2013; 2014; 2017) and Kong (2001; 2016). Before explaining these theories of religion and space, it is necessary to mention the inter-disciplinary studies that have been published on 'space'.

It has been suggested by Knott (2010) that studies of space advanced by postmodern geographers draw upon spatial theories of the earlier French theorists, Lefebvre, Foucault and de Certeau. These studies focus on social and physical space and stress the importance of knowledge and power in producing and practising space. For example, the philosopher Henri Lefebvre's theory of space has inspired many scholars from different fields. In his pioneering book, *The production of space*, Lefebvre (1991) offers a conceptual triad of 'spatial practice, representations of space, and spaces of representation'. Lefebvre conceptualises space as a unity of physical, mental and social space that emphasises space as 'perceived, conceived and lived' realms (1991:38-9). Similarly, Massey(2013:264) considers space as an outcome of the 'simultaneous coexistence of social interrelations and interactions [...] from the most local to the most global'.

Studies of religion and space from various fields, including religious studies, sociology, geography and anthropology, have grown in the last two decades. The work of scholars in these areas have contributed

to a shift from 'relating theories of religion and space' to 'theorising religion and space together' (Mcalister, 2005). Notably, the work of geographer Lily Kong (1990; 2001) has led to a renewed interest in the field. Kong focuses on cultural and social plurality and conflicts of religious and secular agents that form urban space. Moreover, she found studies on religion and space 'incoherent' and suggests a new dichotomy: 'the politics and poetics of religious place, identity and community'. She highlights the importance of analysing religion in urban space where various sacred and secular places exist together and 'overlap, complement and conflict' (2001:212).

In a similar sense, Kim Knott (2013), by developing a spatial analysis of religion, examines the location of religion in the secular context of Western modernity and states that theories of space encourage debates on globalisation, urbanisation, diaspora and identity which are timely and necessary to understand contemporary religion. She argues that understanding religion at the global level creates a necessity to consider it locally and vice versa. In her study, *The Location of Religion*, she develops a spatial methodology of religion based on Lefebvre's spatial theory and highlights the importance of localities and places in the study of religion. Her suggestion of religious space as 'a medium, a methodology, and an outcome' gives an instrumental perspective for new explorations. Knott considers space as 'a medium in which religion is situated'; 'a spatial strategy for examining the relationship between religion and its apparently secular context'; and an 'outcome produced by religions, religious groups, and individuals in contemporary Western societies' (2013:3).

Recent developments in the study of religion and place in urban space have encouraged increasing attention to the role of religion in forming the politics of space (Garbin, 2014; Garbin and Strhan, 2017). Religious communities and their struggle for visibility in multicultural urban space have also attracted the interest of scholars (Engelke, 2015; Garbin, 2012b; 2013; 2017; Tweed, 1997; Vertovec, 1995). However, there is also an increasing focus on secularism and the relationship between religion and state and its spatial strategies (Kong, 1992; B. S. Turner, 2011; Vásquez and Knott, 2014). As Kong (2010) argues, the increasing number of ethnographic studies of religious life and secularity in urban space that emphasise the micropolitics of religious spatial practices shed light on larger socio-political issues that the global era faces, including national and transnational conflicts and religious changes.

In his pioneering work on religion and diaspora, Thomas Tweed (1997) focuses on the interplay between religion, identity and place. Drawing on an ethnographic study on the religious practices of Cuban exiles

in Miami, Tweed highlights the importance of locality for identity and religion. For him, the diasporic religion of the displaced community is 'translocative', referring to the symbolic movement of migrants between two lands. He argues 'the religion of the displaced draws on transtemporal and translocative symbols that transport followers to another time and bridge the homeland and new land' (1997:12). In other words, religious performances cut across time and space and thus are translocal in that they 'move participants spatially' and are transtemporal in moving them 'back and forth in time' (1997:131-2). According to Tweed, these translocative and transtemporal impulses are religiously manifested in different practices such as narratives, rituals and artefacts.

In another seminal book, *Crossing and Dwelling*, Tweed (2006) builds a critical theory of religion that gives relevant insights into the interaction of religion and space. In 'mapping, building, and inhabiting', migrant groups 'plant' and 'replant' their existence into territories of 'dwelling' symbolically and materially (Tweed, 2006:82). Tweed (2011:119) analyses religions as spatial practices that are 'about dwelling and crossing, about finding a place and moving across space'. He considers religious spaces as processes that change over time and argues that 'political processes, social relations, and economic forces mark religious spaces, and, therefore, they are sites where power is negotiated as meaning is made' (2011:121). As he points out:

Religions involve homemaking. They construct home – and a homeland. They delineate domestic and public space and construct collective identity. Religions distinguish them and us - and prescribe where and how both should live (2006:75).

Scholars also take an interest in the role of religious place-making in forming collective identity through spatial politics. Vasquez and Knott (2014), in a comparative study of religious place-making in three global cities (Kuala Lumpur, Johannesburg and London), focus on three dimensions of religious place-making, namely 'embodied performance, the spatial management of difference and belonging, and multiple embedding across networked spaces' (2014:326). The study highlights the key roles that religion plays in the 'dynamics of place-making' in the diaspora and in the spatial strategies of the state 'to manage the migrant's presence, visibility, invisibility' (p. 326). They speak of the 'spatial politics of recognition' that religion involves through the building of religious places 'that render migrants and long-standing settlers visible to each other' as well as through public performances (Vásquez and Knott, 2014:338).

Similarly, David Garbin (2014), in his study of Congolese migrants in London and Atlanta, focuses on the re-territorialisation of transnational religions in the secular context of urban space and highlights the interaction of politics, religious identity and place. According to Garbin, religious place-making practices not only contribute to visibility in the city space but also address the struggle for 'both a physical and a symbolic centrality' (2014:379). He goes on to explain that '[t]hrough spatial production and performance, religious diasporic presence gives rise to alternative ways of claiming space and asserting territorial existence, of making and remaking a world of multiple centralities' (p. 379). In his works on Afro-Christian churches, Garbin underlines the performative dimension of diasporic religion and considers visibility as a strategy for representing religious identity to the public (2012b; 2013; 2014). In a similar sense, political mobilisation is said to be seen as a way of creating 'a legitimate place' in the public space among members of South Asian religions (Vertovec, 1995; Vertovec and Peach, 1997).

Kong and Woods argue (2016:117) that spaces in heterogenic territories '— whether religious or secular — would have an element of the "quasi" to them'. They consider quasi-secular spaces as a 'new form of competition' that reduces the differentiation between the religious and the secular so that 'they are replete with politics and conflated ambition'(2016:117). Quasi-secular spaces are strategic tools that 'religious groups use to establish a spatial presence, to compete and grow. They are also materially and symbolically ambiguous and are often associated with assertion or defence of religious identity' (Kong and Woods, 2016:117).

In his inspiring study of the Garifuna, Paul Johnson (2007) offers important insights into the diasporic conversion of religion and its connection with 'the past': 'Diasporas make religions in the sense that they generate a spatial trail, an itinerary of sites which, by signifying golden ages of organic autonomy, present multiple horizons of memory for adherents' (p. 44). Orienting their ritual world into new settings, migrant faith groups implant their culture, identity and existence into their new land where they 'spatially and ideologically replant rituals' (Johnson, 2007:45). His definition of diasporic religion as

the collected practices of dislocated social groups whose affiliation is not primarily or essentially based on religion but whose acts, locutions, and sentiments toward the distant homeland are mediated by and articulated through, a religious culture (p. 258)

is a very useful working definition that will be used to understand the transformation of the ritualised Alevi culture in this study.

This section has provided a summary of the literature relating to the interplay of religion and space in the context of diaspora. To conclude this section, I underline three relevant approaches that are utilised in this research. Tweed's theory of translocative dynamics (1997) and the spatial metaphors of dwelling and crossing (2006) provide essential insights into understanding the dynamics of religious placemaking and its transterritorial character. The spatial politics of visibility and recognition emphasised by Vásquez and Knott (2014) and Garbin (2013; 2014) offer a significant perspective into the spatial performances of the migrant Alevi community and their link to the politics of identity and visibility. Johnson's (2007) characterisation of 'diasporic religion' that has been transformed within the diasporic experience, and especially his emphasis on spatial shift that links religious transformation with spatial change, provides an essential perspective for this research into an examination of the diasporic transition of migrant Alevism. These three approaches give valuable perspectives on the multiple dimensions of religious place-making and its role in the construction of collective Alevi identity and ritualised religious culture in the diaspora. I now move on to discuss the key features of Alevi diasporas.

Transnational Alevism

The transnational Alevi journey has been marked by many historical events; however, it is the Sivas Massacre that has profoundly affected Alevis worldwide and mobilised them for collective action.

The Sivas Massacre and the Alevi Revival

A traumatic history or victim-origin is a predominant character that has a transformative power on later experiences and discourses and plays a founding role in diasporic identity (Bhabha, 1994; R. Cohen, 2008; Gilroy, 1999; Hall, 1990; Safran, 1991). The collective memory of Alevis that consists of a struggle for survival and the suffering of exclusion and discrimination is a crucial feature in understanding the social formation of the Alevi population around the world. Throughout history, Alevis have been marginalised, oppressed and have faced mass killings. How the collective memory of victimhood has influenced the diaspora experience of British Alevis will be detailed in Chapter 8. In this section, I discuss the Sivas Massacre, the last brutal event that marked the Alevis' history of victimhood. Its importance

lies not only in the event itself but also in the profound impact that it has had on Alevis worldwide, particularly in stimulating the mobilisation of collective action and in expanding their transnational activism.

On 2 July 1993, in the Sivas city centre, thousands of radical fundamentalist Islamists gathered after Friday prayer and marched to the Madımak Hotel where Alevi intellectuals and artists were staying for a cultural festival celebrating the sixteenth-century Alevi poet Pir Sultan Abdal. After surrounding it, the mob set fire to the hotel, killing thirty-five people. The globally circulated video footage, which showed the perpetrators gathering and surrounding the hotel, setting it on fire and then watching it burn while shouting 'Allahu Akbar' and 'burn in hell!', all in front of the media and the police-military forces⁹ and lasting for eight hours, generated intense anger amongst all Alevi communities. As a result of the brutal violence and the burning of community members by radical Sunni Islamists, a clear line was drawn between Alevis and Sunnis, as victims and perpetrators, and came to be seen as a marker of the 'Alevi-Sunni master difference' (that is the major marker of the difference between Alevis and Sunni Muslims) (Sökefeld, 2008). Indeed, Alevis widely use the provocative phrase '*yakanlar*' (those who burn) and '*yananlar*' (those who burned) to divide people into two sides.

The effect of the Sivas Massacre on the whole Alevi population was far-reaching and pushed them into becoming more organised in associations and encouraged their involvement in collective activities, all of which strengthened Alevi mobilisation both in Turkey and in the diaspora in preparation for any further potential attacks (Sökefeld, 2008). This was the case with British Alevis who established in 1993 the first Alevi association in the UK, the English Alevi Cultural Centre and Cemevi (the EACC London Cemevi), just after the Sivas Massacre as a gesture of unity with Alevis in Turkey and to offer support against potential future attacks¹⁰. By politicising and mobilising Alevis in Turkey and the diaspora, the Sivas massacre was the most important recent event in the history of Alevis because it forced and provoked a resurgence of Alevi identity all over the world and helped to structure 'Alevi revivalism' (Bruinessen, 1996; Sökefeld,

⁹ Turkish state found responsible for 1993 Sivas massacre, 15 July 2014, *Hurriyet Daily News*, <https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkish-state-found-responsible-for-1993-sivas-massacre-69177>

¹⁰ Informal discussion with Israfil Erbil, the chairman of British Alevi Federation, 5 August 2017, Dalston

2008). It made a strong mark on the social formation of Alevis globally and is, therefore, widely regarded as a catalyst for the emergence of Alevi identity politics and institutionalisation (Bruinessen, 1996; Köse, 2012; Sökefeld, 2008; Yildiz and Verkuyten, 2011).

Yildiz and Verkuyten (2011), using a social identity perspective, focus on the effects of the Sivas Massacre and explore how this collective trauma developed 'a coherent and unifying Alevi identity and a sense of shared victimhood' (p. 243). The article considers how narratives of the massacre were used as political capital in drawing group boundaries, highlighting the efforts of the Europe Alevi Confederation to establish a common Alevi identity by addressing the oppression and discrimination of the Alevis in Turkey. Sökefeld (2008) also considers the Sivas Massacre as the most important factor in the Alevi mobilisation in Germany. The resurgence of Alevi identity and institutionalisation in the 1990s was a consequence of the efforts of migrant Alevis in Germany, the country to which the largest population of Alevis had migrated. This is discussed further in the next section.

The politics of identity and recognition: the Alevi movement in Germany

Migration transformed Alevis from being an oppressed minority in Turkey into a diasporic group that was able to experience the freedom of religion and to engage in collective action that they never had in Turkey. As a result, Alevis became visible through their increasing political action (Cesari, 2013; Sökefeld, 2008). Indeed, especially in the last two decades, new Alevi organisations and associations have been built worldwide to deal with the political issues of the Alevi communities and to preserve the continuation of Alevis. These Alevi organisations and networks play a significant role in the social configuration of the Alevi communities by accumulating knowledge and coordinating collective action.

Keles (2014) explores the role of transnational organisations and networks among migrant Kurdish Alevis who have faced genocidal massacres, discrimination and exclusion because of their religious and ethnic affiliations. He argues that in our global age, with the development of communication and transport technologies, diaspora communities who have been previously subjected to ethnic or religious discrimination meet with new opportunities to create a new conceptualisation of their world. He states that 'diaspora communities can play a central role in breaking the silence of their community's subordination, marginalisation and discrimination both in their settlement country and country of origin'

(2014:173). Indeed, Alevi in Europe have broken their long-lasting silence and have gathered to pursue common claims, mainly centring around recognition not only in Turkey but also globally.

Transnational migration of Alevi from Turkey began with the labour migration to Germany in the 1960s and continued with the political migration to different European countries after the military coup in 1980. Alevi, as a distinct community, were not recognised in the diaspora initially, as the studies on labour migration considered these new immigrants to be part of the Turkish Muslim community (Keles, 2014; Sökefeld, 2008). More recently, with the diasporic developments, they have gained recognition as a migrant faith group which has increasingly distinguished them from Muslim communities. Cesari's Interact Research report (2013), which concentrated on religious communities in emigration countries, identifies Alevi as a unique category of a 'minority within the migrant minority'. Cesari points out the cultural characteristics of the Alevi community as 'compatible with multiculturalism' and stresses their differences from Sunni Muslims. Sökefeld (2008) and Özyürek (2009) explain that both the policy of the German government to recognise religious minorities as independent units and the legal and political conditions of the European Parliament encouraged Alevi to describe their belief as distinct from Sunni Islam and to claim recognition of this difference. This aspect of the Alevi boundary-making process in the diaspora is discussed in detail in Chapter 8.

The resurgence of Alevi identity and institutionalisation in the 1990s was a consequence of the efforts of diaspora Alevi, particularly in Germany to where the largest population of Alevi migrated (Köse, 2012; Massicard, 2012; Özyürek, 2009; S. Şahin, 2005; Sökefeld, 2006; 2008). This period was crucial in the historical trajectory of Alevism because the public identification of Alevi was a recent development encouraged by Alevi organisations. Şahin (2005) concentrates on the rise of Alevism as an identity movement and examines how Alevism was transformed from a closed minority into a 'reinvented public cultural community'. She considers Alevi migrants in Western countries as 'the central actors in making Alevism public' (2005:482). Moreover, she indicates that European Alevi transferred 'identity discourse and an identity-based association model' to Turkey through transnational networks.

A seminal study in this area is the work of the German scholar Martin Sökefeld who has made a valuable contribution to studies of the Alevi diasporas. Sökefeld (2008) frames the Alevi mobilisation as a social movement and explores the question of Alevi identity and the politics of recognition. According to him, Alevi identity is 'in the first place produced by the Alevi-Sunni master difference, but it is also shot

through with other intersecting identities/differences like regional and national belonging, ethnic identity, political orientation, gender, identification as foreigner or Turk, etc.’ (2008:253). Sökefeld highlights the ununified character of the organisational structure and diverse conceptualisation of Alevi identity in the Alevi population and argues that the struggle for recognition needed a unified identity which has led Alevis to represent themselves as a collective subject, namely a religious community that differs fundamentally from Muslims.

Sökefeld defines the politics of identity and recognition as the central issues for Alevi society and the essential conditions for the Alevi movement because ‘the very terms and claims of the movement could not have been conceived and articulated without this discourse’ (2008:254). As social movement theory stresses the importance of mobilisation by the actors involved, he considers Alevi networks and associations as agents of Alevi politics and recognition which have led to the establishment of the Alevi movement. Alevi networks and associations developed various practices to mobilise Alevis around identity and recognition issues and, therefore, the consciousness of Alevi identity was a result of that mobilisation process. Sökefeld goes further and argues that the Alevi movement created the Alevi community through mobilisation. He writes that ‘to speak of a social movement that creates the Alevi community underlines the significance of mobilisation’ (2008:255).

Sökefeld considers the commemoration of the Sivas Massacre as the most important element of the Alevi mobilisation. Commemorative events remembering the massacre and its victims are conceptualised as the most important duty of all Alevis. According to Sökefeld, the Sivas massacre created the necessity of being organised into associations and establishing the Alevi movement as a bulwark against potential attacks from radical Muslims. Thus, commemorative events encouraged Alevis to become members of associations and to participate in activities that strengthened the Alevi movement. As he explains further:

We have seen that the movement with its commemorative practices turns individual memory into communal memory, which creates the specific significance of the event. Discourses and ritualised practices of commemoration firmly inscribe the victims of Sivas into the texture of the discursive construction of community. They identify the victims with the community and conversely enable the identification of every individual Alevi with the victims. [...] Memory creates community (2008:256).

Another significance of the commemorative events is their contribution to the process of recognition for Alevi in Germany. The representation of the massacre, according to Sökefeld, furthered claims for recognition by presenting the 'Alevi-Sunni master difference' to the German public. More openly, commemorations showed how Alevi, as victims of a massacre by radical Sunni Muslims, were religiously different from Muslims, in fact as much as Germans were. Unlike cultural differences, religion is seen as a legal category of recognition in Germany; thus, their claims for recognition needed to be represented as religious, despite the debates around whether Alevism means a 'culture' or a 'religion' for Alevi in the diaspora as addressed elsewhere by Sökefeld (2004).

Focusing on the Alevi politics of recognition, Sökefeld (2008) conceptualises the Alevi experience as a social movement. He applies social movement theory to the concept of diaspora to identify mobilisation as an essential process for the development of a collective consciousness. According to him, the Alevi movement has shaped the diasporic Alevi community as an imagined community across borders and has subsequently configured the transnational cultural space of Alevism. As Alevi institutions play a crucial role in constructing a diasporic consciousness, Sökefeld points out the deficiency of diaspora theory in acknowledging the role of associations:

A diasporic consciousness, that is, the construction of a community that transcends boundaries of states and imagines people who have migrated together with people who have stayed as parts of one community, is not a natural consequence of migration. There have to be efforts to create such an imagination, often in response to particular events, and to disseminate it among the members of the presumed community. These efforts are undertaken by particular organisations that become the agents of this imagination (2008:261).

He indicates that the concepts of social movement theory can be used in the study of diaspora communities and accordingly proposes that the formation of diaspora communities should be analysed through the mobilisation process (Sökefeld, 2006; 2008). Sökefeld's work offers a clear understanding of the emergence and institutionalisation of the Alevi movement in Germany and the transition of Alevism from a private issue to a public affair and the role of institutions in this development. The period that Sökefeld observed in Germany was a crucial phase for developing an Alevi consciousness. The public activities of Alevi were a recent development in that period led by the leftist leaders of Alevi associations who were previously activists in class-based socialist organisations. They transferred their

knowledge of political activism to build and lead the mobilisation. Thus, studying the Alevi diaspora in Germany by employing social movement theory was innovative and timely, offering relevant insights into diasporic rebuilding through the politics of recognition in the early stages of the post-migration period. However, there is a need for new studies offering a fresh and wider perspective into the changing structures of Alevi communities within transnational and global interactions occurring in the later period of diasporisation, to which my research makes a contribution.

The UK Alevi diaspora

The UK Alevi diaspora differs in many ways from the Alevi diaspora in Germany. Mainly the UK has received more Alevi asylum seekers than other European countries. Politically motivated migration to the UK resulted from the Maraş Massacre in 1978, the military coup in 1980 and the armed conflict between the Kurdish Workers Party (PKK) and the Turkish State in the 1990s (Bilecen, 2016; Geaves, 2003; Issa and Atbaş, 2016; Keles, 2014). There are no existing statistics with regard to the size of the Alevi population in the UK, and estimates vary. A tentative evaluation indicated in research is that nearly 300,000 Alevi immigrants live in the UK (Issa and Atbaş, 2016), though some studies estimate much fewer (Sirkeci et al., 2016).

The majority of Alevis in the UK are Kurdish, mainly from Maraş in south-eastern Turkey (officially known as Kahramanmaraş), with smaller numbers from the provinces of Kayseri, Sivas, Malatya and Tunceli (known as Dersim) in eastern Turkey. The UK Alevi community includes many individuals who have either lost relatives, friends and neighbours in the massacre or are connected to those who have. Thus, although the massacre does not seem to be the primary motive for moving abroad, as a 'living' event in the collective memory of UK Alevis, it forms a push factor. Moreover, having the same region of origin has established strong social relationships among the community members. There are many kinship associations founded by people from the same neighbourhood, village or district of Maraş.

The most remarkable peculiarity of the UK Alevi diaspora is the salience of religious affiliation. The catastrophic experience of the massacre that targeted them because of their religious affiliation appears as a dominant factor strengthening their commitment to Alevi identity. Thus, religious belonging seems a primary feature of the UK Alevi diaspora. However, it does not mean that political participation is limited, as the Alevi immigrants in the UK are mostly political refugees and asylum seekers. As Levitt

(2001b) suggests, religious associations play a major role in the participation of the diasporic groups in the domestic politics of the settlement country. The UK Alevi associations, organised under the umbrella of the British Alevi Federation (BAF), have a significant role in creating religiopolitical awareness and recognition in the UK. The BAF and London Cemevi organise various activities about issues affecting Alevis in Turkey and community developments in the UK. Thanks to these efforts and lobbying activities, Alevism has gradually become recognised as a religion in recent years. Recent research has revealed that as a consequence of the efforts of BAF and London Cemevi, the interest and participation of Alevi (and Kurdish) migrants in British politics is higher than their Turkish and Sunni counterparts (Bilecen, 2016). Indeed, the 2018 local council election results appear as a justification of this statement. The UK Alevi community gained more than 20 council members in the London boroughs of Enfield, Hackney, Islington and Haringey, where the largest Alevi population live.

As mentioned before, the majority of Alevis in the UK are Kurds and, therefore, the interplay of religious and ethnic identity cannot be ignored when discussing the UK Alevi diaspora. Research on Alevi Kurds, in general, suggest that their Alevi identity is dominant over their Kurdishness. Bruinessen (1996) stated that ‘many if not most of the Kurdish Alevis define themselves as Alevis first and only in the second place, or not at all, as Kurds’ (1996:10). Drawing on fieldwork in London among Alevi Kurds, Demir also suggests that the Alevi identity is stronger than their Kurdish identity and Alevi Kurds culturally and politically stay closer to Alevi Turks than Sunni Kurds (Demir, 2012). The study points out the intensity of the Kurdish question in the 1990s that linked Kurds from all religious backgrounds globally, while Alevi identity remained the main association between Alevi Kurds and Turks.

The interaction between Kurdish and Alevi identity in the UK has attracted attention from scholars. Bilecen’s research on political participation in the UK offers a detailed look at Alevi Kurds. Bilecen (2016) argues that the fluidity between ethnicity and religion affects political and economic participation and identifies an ‘ethnic economy’ as a significant factor in the unity of the Alevi community. Drawing on fieldwork among Alevi Kurds in London, Bilecen describes the ethnic economy as ‘the hidden force behind both diasporic identity and politicisation’ in the UK (Bilecen, 2016:373). Keles (2014; 2016b) also examines the socioeconomic practices of the UK Kurdish Alevi community through the interaction of ethnic and religious identity and identifies Kurdish Alevi networks as resources of ‘material and non-material’ support for community members. The creation of these social networks is based on ethnic and religious belongings to accumulate their social capital, mobilising economic and social sources. Keles

also points out the vital role of social networks in the political participation of Alevi in the UK and political and financial support to Alevi organisations in Turkey. Both studies give crucial insights into the Kurdish Alevi networks and their functions in the community. However, a wider understanding of the fluidity between Kurdish and Alevi identity is still lacking as their approaches stand within the boundaries of the ethnic economy and social capital.

Drawing on fieldwork among the first generation of Alevi immigrants in the UK, Akdemir (2016b) explores the boundaries of Alevi identity and the salience of the interactions with other identities. The research offers valuable empirical insights into the formation of Alevi identity in the UK. By focusing on three boundaries, Sunni Muslims, Kurdish and British identities, Akdemir (2016b) explores how transnational social space has been influenced by interactions, identities, and boundaries established in the homeland and formed within new experiences in the UK. The data gathered in this study underlines the boundary between the first-generation immigrant Alevi and Britishness and emphasises the lack of integration. However, it seems to have changed by the next generation, as the study by Issa and Atbas (2016) shows how different age groups see themselves and how their expectations and outlook for the future differ between generations. Notably, the research suggests that younger Alevi adopt Alevism as a positive contribution to their life in the UK and most importantly, the participants seem happy about living in the UK primarily because of the freedom of religious practice and equality (Issa and Atbaş, 2016).

The homeland practices of British Alevi have not been studied yet, except for the ethnographic study of Zirh (2012) who focuses on the funeral rituals of Alevi immigrant communities in Europe (included the UK). He explores the transnational scope of funeral rituals and considers the transporting of deceased community members back to their home village as a ritualised and spatial practice of the transnational Alevi community. The study gives us valuable insight into the emergence of institutional and familial transnational networks and is the first attempt to embody migrants' placemaking practices in the rural homeland. However, as it is limited to migrants' funeral practices, a wider perspective into this phenomenon is still lacking, especially the implications of the spread of *cemevis* with diaspora remittances and the wider effects of migrant engagements in high-emigration Alevi villages is under-researched.

Finally, although religious affiliation seems more salient in the UK Alevi diaspora, researchers have neither addressed the transformation of ritualised Alevi culture and religious structures nor the changing socio-spatial context. This research addresses these issues. The next chapter sets the analytical and methodological framework for this ethnographic study of diasporic Alevis in the UK.

CHAPTER 2: Methodology

This thesis can be seen as a case study of the ways migrant faith communities respond to the challenges of the 'diaspora condition' (Brah 1996). It is an ethnographic study of the Alevi community in the UK and focuses on the socio-spatial dynamics of diasporic transition through a transterritorial perspective, encapsulating the interplay between diaspora, religion and space that shape placemaking practices in the diaspora and the homeland. The research aims to address the following questions to explore the diaspora experience of the migrant Alevi community:

How has Alevism, as a marginal minority faith in Turkey, been transformed in diasporic settings?

How is 'Alevi space' produced and practised in the diaspora landscape?

How and to what extent do diasporic dynamics shape the cultural and religious landscape of the homeland, in particular in the rural context?

A discussion of the methodology includes details of the data collection process, the methods used and their connection with the questions. In a final section, I reflect on my personal experiences when conducting the ethnographic fieldwork, in particular, my status as both an insider and outsider.

Multi-sited data collection

When studying the transformation of diasporic religion that involve many agents, interactions and practices, an ethnographic approach has been chosen as the best method of data collection as it offers a 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973) of social phenomena that 'enrich our ways of understanding the world' (Scheper-Hughes, 2000). It is a way to approach 'the subjective meanings' of human experience through a set of methods involved in contact with agents, or as Gille (cited in Pasura, 2014:49) puts it: 'doing ethnography is a commitment to study an issue at hand by understanding it from the perspective(s) of people whose lives are tied up with or affected by it'. Understanding an issue both empirically and theoretically within its 'symbolic forms, patterns, discourses, and practices' is central to ethnography (Willis and Trondman, 2000:6).

In the contemporary era dominated by global and transnational flows, understanding the relations between the local, the transnational, and the global is not possible with the 'narrow boundaries of the traditional ethnographic "site"' (Gowan and Riain, 2000 cited in Pasura, 2011:49). Thus, 'doing ethnography of transnational migrants' requires a multilocal focus that avoids misrepresentation by only 'starting and ending in one locality' (Fitzgerald cited in Pasura, 2014:49). Multi-sited ethnography introduced by Marcus (1995) addresses these challenges. As a methodological practice, it moves 'from its conventional single-site location' 'to multiple sites of observation and participation' linking 'the "local" and the "global," the "lifeworld" and the "system"' (1995:95). Discussing the inspirations for the emergence of multi-sited research, Marcus highlights the contribution made by interdisciplinary cultural studies, particularly the works of Appadurai that has 'provided a complex multi-sited vision for research in this transnational domain that defies older practices of "locating" culture(s) in place(s)' (1995:104). He states that 'theoretically rethinking concepts of space and place in ethnographic research' endorsed by the studies of cultural geographers and sociologists has pushed 'the opening of established genres of anthropological research to multi-sited constructions of ethnographic research designs' (p. 104). Among those works, Marcus praises migration studies that have 'become part of a much richer body of work on mobile and contingently settled populations, across borders, in exile, and diasporas' (1995:104-5).

This study explores the diasporic transformation of the Alevi community in the UK and its influence on the rural homeland landscape. Focusing on the transmigrant Alevi community from a transterritorial perspective, the study utilises data collected in various ethnographic sites in the UK and Turkey between September 2017 and January 2020. The sites were chosen to explore the transformation of identities, community, tradition and discourses within their socio-spatial contexts.

The fieldwork in the UK concentrated on the British Alevi community in London. Since London hosts the vast majority of the Alevi population (as much as 80%)¹¹ and Alevi activities are concentrated in London, the observations and data collection in London are likely to represent the wider Alevi population in the UK. The British Alevi community is predominantly Kurdish, with a small minority of Turkish ethnic

¹¹ Stated by Israfil Erbil, the chairman of BAF

background. However, to capture the whole panorama of the community, I ensured that Alevi Turks were also interviewed and included in observations and informal conversations.

In London, I collected extensive data through interviews and participant observation in community spaces. Although the fieldwork concentrated on the London Cemevi in Wood Green, the British Alevi Federations headquarter opened during this time and fieldwork was also conducted there so as to encompass a wide picture of the Alevi community. The new facility of the London Cemevi that also opened during the fieldwork had particular importance for the thesis as it is employed as the case study of placemaking.

Ethnography, being an effective method to understand the interaction between people and space, and among people through space, I chose the case study method to carry out a detailed examination of producing and practising place. For the case study, I conducted eighteen months of ethnographic research at the new London Cemevi that began from the last phase of construction and continued after its opening. During this time, multiple ethnographic techniques, including observations, visual documentation and interviews, were used. Observations focused on physical settings, people, and interactions. I made many visits to the construction site, more or less on a regular basis, ensuring visits when something of particular interest occurred, such as organisational meetings or public events. Besides a cluster of questions about engagements with the new *cemevi* asked of all the participant groups living in London, I interviewed organisational elites who had responsibility for the construction in order to collect detailed data about the organisational, financial, social and political dimensions of the new *cemevi*. At every visit to the site, I took photographs to record images showing the construction process and the environment over time.

I also conducted fieldwork in nine villages and a major town in Maraş and surrounding areas in Turkey. Two factors determined the choice of sites: the first was their large emigrant population living in London and the second was the existence of *cemevis* built with the remittances of diasporic Alevis. Conducting fieldwork in these sites, I sought to discover the diasporic influence on the rural context of the homeland. I conducted many formal and informal interviews and one-to-one and group discussions in the villages. Although the fieldwork in Turkey concentrated on the villages of British Alevis, I also visited some other villages that had a large amount of emigration to various other European countries in order to catch a sense of similarities and differences. I also made a visit to Mersin, the leading internal

destination of migration from Maraş, to interview Hasan Kilavuz, a *dede* and the chairman of the Mersin *cemevi*, the biggest in Turkey. He was chosen because of his religious position and experience in Alevi organisations in Europe and Turkey. In my fieldwork, from London to Maraş to Mersin, I followed the migration paths of British Alevis.

The London Cemevi and the BAF, providing access to participants, networks and activities, offered significant logistical help in the fieldwork in both London and Turkey that significantly facilitated data collection. The London Cemevi's texting system for its members, announcing all events in the *cemevi* in advance, was an excellent example of this. Having my mobile number on that list provided me with regular information about various opportunities to conduct observations. Regular communication with board members of the London Cemevi and the BAF allowed me to be kept informed about special occasions and their comments on community matters. The networks of the Alevi associations in London provided significant logistical help in Turkey, including access to participants, accommodation and travel between villages, which can be the most challenging aspect of fieldwork in less developed rural areas.

My communication with the board members was also an opportunity to build trust in the community. Although I was an insider as an Alevi researcher, I was also an outsider because I had not been an active participant in the community and my face was not familiar to community members, particularly at the beginning of the fieldwork. To conduct participatory observation at events, I often arrived early to introduce myself to people, tell them about my research and have short chats to make my face familiar, as well as building a rapport, as I was going to watch and take pictures of them during the event. However, over the months and years, I became more welcome and trusted as they got to know me and many knew that I was an Alevi researcher which opened the way to access information, ask endless questions, participate in public and even smaller meetings of members, and to take pictures.

Participation observation concentrated on physical settings, people and interactions in spaces where communal activities occurred. In London, observation at daily *cemevi* services included various regular and irregular events such as *cem* gatherings, *lokma* days and *aşure* days, including funerals and *kirk* meals where Alevi identity was explicitly enacted. Special occasions such as cultural festivals, protest marches and public events offered room to explore the internal and external dynamics of the community. The opening ceremonies of the BAF headquarters and the new London Cemevi were events caught during the fieldwork. Moreover, as I got to know the two board chairs and witnessed three board

elections at the London Cemevi, the observations on election days gave essential insights into the internal conflict and contestations among community members. During my visits to the *cemevi* and the BAF headquarter, having spontaneous discussions with the community members, *dedes*, and the board members provided highly useful information. Thus, informal discussions were also an essential source of data besides interviews and observations.

All interviews and focus groups were tape-recorded and informal discussions recorded as field notes, often immediately after the discussion. The information gained from observations were recorded by photographs and fieldnotes. I first took short notes as a kind of log or jottings about what happened, what I saw and my reflections during the day, then after the event I poured over my notes and recorded the events of the day which I then typed into the computer as a more detailed account. I also took pictures of people and spaces as I had the opportunity to observe their daily lives in public and private spaces. All photographed events and sites offered a visual reminder about the events I had witnessed. Visual data produced in fieldwork allow researchers to extend their research to incorporate the knowledge that is not accessible verbally and to present their work to others (Banks, 2008; Harper, 1998; MacDougall, 1997; Pink and Seale, 2004). Unless indicated, all the photographs are taken by myself.

I also collected published materials such as leaflets for events, festivals and campaigns, books for children learning Alevism and I tracked online activities of British Alevis through their websites and social media networks. Social media offer an opportunity to observe the networks and activities of the group studied. I subscribed to many online networks and followed the discussions and advertisements of events and campaigns.

Four main participant groups were targeted for interview. The first group consisted of lay members of the community engaging with the *cemevi* and BAF to various degrees, such as volunteers, activists, chair members, employees, trainees and attendees at the religious services and other events. However, as the UK Alevi diaspora is a fractured society and there are various political and regional associations and networks, a few observations and interviews occurred with people linked to other associations to provide a wider perspective on the UK Alevi diaspora and its factions. The second group were the organisational elites who had responsibility for the construction project, something specific to the case study. The third participant group were young people involved in the *cemevi* in different ways who took

part in face-to-face interviews and an online survey. Finally, the fourth participant group were those in the villages in Turkey consisting of non-migrants and emigrants who were there for the summer holidays.

The participants interviewed were adults aged between 18 and 84 and men and women from different educational and occupational backgrounds. Semi-structured, in-depth, face-to-face interviews were conducted with 31 participants and three focus groups with 16 participants, in addition to 15 participants who took part in an online survey. A total of 63 participants (35 in the UK and 27 in Turkey) were chosen from various backgrounds and regions. Three focus groups conducted in Turkey were with the young volunteers of the Elbistan *cemevi*, a team of board members from the Demircilik village *cemevi*, and a group of the emigrant *ocakzades*, descendants of the Sinemilli *Ocak*, the only religious lineage located in the area. As geographical conditions often limit places to conduct research in rural areas of Turkey, focus groups were important platforms providing space to concentrate on research matters.

The participants, excluding organisational elites, were randomly selected among community members through association networks and snowball sampling. Six organisational elites were chosen because of their positions of responsibility in the construction of the London Cemevi: the architect, the construction manager, the director of construction, the interior designer, the main sponsor and the Chairman. Questions were concentrated on the construction process, its financial and organisational aspects, and the meanings they invest in the new London Cemevi.

The qualitative interviews mainly consisted of open-ended and follow-up questions. During the interviews, I felt free to follow the answers and to ask related questions when I found any interesting or thought-provoking statements without sticking to a set order of questions. However, it does not mean that the interviews did not follow a guide. Every target group had a specific interview guide planned according to their characteristics associated with the research themes. The interview guides were divided into sections to help organise the flow of the discussion and ensure that key themes were covered. Besides specific questions on the main topics, all guides had sections aimed to collect other essential information from all participants, such as demographic data and their migration story, along with a section on 'identity and belonging'. How participants practised their Alevism was also a common theme in all interview types, and there were essential questions on this topic, their perceptions of

religiosity and their approach to traditional institutions and practices. Other question groups covered gender issues, memory and victimhood, homeland and domestic politics, and social media usage and attachments of Alevis with various spheres. Some sections were aimed at providing detailed data for specific topics (later to become chapters), such as the migration questions that provided data for Chapter Three and the practising Alevism section for Chapter Four. A considerable portion of the interview guide also informed the online survey administered to young Alevis, using a mixture of multiple-choice and closed and open questions.

The language in which the interviews were conducted and the online survey were left to the participants. The majority of the interviews were conducted in Turkish and a smaller number in English, especially with young Alevis who are more comfortable using English than Turkish. All the quotes in Turkish have been translated by myself. The audio-recorded interviews lasted between 45 and 90 mins and were transcribed and anonymised using NVivo. All participants were informed regarding the aims and methods of research and how the data collected would be used, especially the procedures concerning confidentiality and data anonymisation. The storage of my data is password protected.

Since ethnographic work is conducted in natural settings, control of the ethnographer over the fieldwork process is limited (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). The sites and events observed were public spaces, so it was not possible to inform every individual about my research to secure their consent. However, I gained the consent of the administrative boards of the associations before the events and introduced myself to every individual I communicated with and informed them about my research. Regarding confidentiality and anonymity, I have not used real names or any other identifying details of participants with whom I had a formal or informal conversation. An exception applies to public figures. The institutional leaders preferred to use their real names, so I used the names of those public figures by their own wishes and explicit consent.

In-between 'sides': Doing ethnography of British Alevis

So far it is my eyes, judgment, and searching that speaks these words to you

Herodotus

Being a researcher born into an Alevi family in Turkey gave me a particular kind of knowledge of what Alevism as a cultural phenomenon is, which can be as much a hindrance as a help in ethnographic research on the Alevi community. On the plus side, 'knowing' its mysticism, ritual and form helped me understand the 'change' in lived practices. Besides, living in London also made me conversant with the contexts, issues and structures of the community. The substantial knowledge of Alevism as a cultural phenomenon and as a collective memory that was 'naturally' gained from my insider status may be something that other ethnographers would have to acquire with more effort. Similarly, some opportunities, such as having my number in the *cemevi* SMS system informing me of all activities in advance was a great bonus for an Alevi researcher, which may not have been possible for an outsider, as it was an internal announcement system only for community members, even though I was not a member.

This is not a battle between the 'insider' and the 'outsider' as to who is best placed to study Alevis. I am aware that the doctrine of the 'insider is best' leads to the false belief that only Alevi ethnographers can understand Alevi culture. The pioneering works of Irene Melikoff and Krisztina Kehl-Bodrogi in the 1980s, and later Elise Massicard, Marcus Dressler and Martin Sökefeld, who have all made essential contributions to the literature on Alevism, prove this false. They reveal the value of research and original contribution to knowledge that can be undertaken by 'outsiders'. I am, however, merely stressing that the insider has advantages that can be used to facilitate research.

On the minus side, some may think that my insider status has potential disadvantages that can reduce my objectivity and the lack of a critical approach to the subject studied. But this is to see insider and outsider as binary opposites with fixed or settled positions confined to an 'affiliation with a single collectivity or occupancy of a single status' (Merton, 1972). In contrast, these positions are the outcomes of various social processes and contexts that can be fluid and interchangeable so that one's status cannot be taken for granted. As Merton suggests, 'in structural terms, we are all, of course, both insiders and outsiders' (1972:22) when considering the various ways we belong in terms of identities,

age, gender, class, ethnic background, education, and political allegiances (the list could go on). Therefore, insider and outsider have 'distinctive interactive roles' that 'involve interchange, trade-offs, and syntheses in the formation of social knowledge' (1972:36).

Marking a clear line between subjective and objective interpretations is still a challenge, however. I have tried to refrain from personal bias as much as possible with help from my theoretical and methodological perspectives and research supervision. Thus, I consider my research experience as a collaboration between my insider status that offers a relatively deep knowledge of the culture I am studying and my outsider status as an academic that provides a more distanced analytical approach. Put simply, the ethnographic data was collected 'inside' but critically evaluated and analysed 'outside'. This point is well expressed by Cetin (2016b:268) when saying 'the ongoing interaction between my more "outsider" theoretical position and the more "insider" ethnographic fieldwork created a positive dynamic between the two'.

Most of the participants asked about my hometown, which reveals their intention to identify or position me within their own circle. My hometown, Dersim, certainly helped my relationship with the community. Their positive impression toward Dersim¹² often warmed the atmosphere as many interviews and discussions began with commonly known stories and jokes about Dersim. These chats built trust with the participants and off-set the difference in the balance the power between us, which is essential to building rapport. Free engagements with community members and religious and secular leaders in the various sites offered a deeper understanding of the issues and organisation of the community which Hunter (1993:152) defines as a 'thick description of local knowledge'.

Moreover, most of the participants I communicated with were very keen to answer my questions. When attending events, taking pictures, chatting with people or asking questions, my position as an 'Alevi' who was 'researching Alevis' seemed to have contributed to this ease and I was even praised for undertaking this research, as it was seen as a 'contribution to Alevism'. Also, acknowledging that this research would

¹² Dersim has a central position in Alevi tradition and history. It is the only area in Turkey where Alevis are the majority and is a central province for Alevi Kurds due to its cultural geography where the traditional religious institutions (*ocaks*) are predominantly situated. Many of the first-generation Alevis see Dersim as their left-behind hometown that their ancestors emigrated from during the Ottoman era.

be written as a PhD thesis and most likely published, they volunteered to tell their history and opinions so they could be recorded and made known.

However, these positive impressions and acceptance were not free of challenges. For example, besides the efforts to involve me in some developmental/organisational workshops that needed the contribution of, in their words, 'educated minds', I was often asked about my findings on the situation of Alevis or about current issues. It put me in an awkward situation, as at this stage I needed to avoid giving details of my research findings. I was also invited to contribute to radio and TV broadcasts to introduce my research and findings. However, I did not find it appropriate to participate as I would, most likely, be asked about my opinions on recent political issues which may have upset some research participants and created a 'distance' in my relationship with them.

Despite sharing an ethnic and religious family background with them, doing a PhD manifested a level of education and skills gained from outside the community. Moreover, there were other factors that positioned me as 'outside' their circle: having an urban background, while the vast majority of the community members have a rural one; the difference in my motivation and conditions of migration to London; and not being a regular participant in the community life. For example, I was once told that because of my urban background, as one who grew up in Istanbul, I could not understand their life experiences in Maraş. Another time, I was told that not being an asylum seeker when I migrated meant I could not understand their migration experience and being a refugee. My professional background was also another factor. For some community members, and especially for some administrative members, I was known as a former radio presenter that they had listened to on the radio or had met when I was hosting them for a radio programme; this positioned me outside of their circle.

My insider and outsider positions sometimes clashed. I was often given extensive details of the conflicts and arguments between the community members and leaders with the intention to get me to take sides, an aspect of my insider position. But sometimes, some rare attitudes reminded me implicitly that I was an outsider, especially by those who positioned me outside their circle. Very rarely, I witnessed some board member trying to hide the details of an internal dispute from me, asking me not to write about it, and another asked why I was there at the beginning of a meeting where tensions were likely, illustrating an ambiguous status of both insider and outsider.

Negotiation of these statuses appeared in other forms too. There was some point where, as an ethnographer, my autobiography engaged with the ethnography I was doing and this somehow put me into an ambiguous position. It happened at the beginning of the fieldwork when participating in a *cem* in the former building of the London Cemevi in Dalston. As a researcher, it was my first bit of fieldwork and as someone brought up in an Alevi family it was my very first *cem*. My curiosity was heightened as both a first-timer at a *cem* and a researcher doing my first piece of fieldwork. I could not identify exactly what was causing the most excitement, something which placed me somewhere in between an insider and an outsider.

At this first event of my fieldwork, I also noted the impact of my presence as an observer on the observed. As a new face, taking pictures and jotting down what I saw, my presence was easily noticed by the attendees and the *dede* leading the gathering. As my visibility grew as an observer, it influenced the observed in a way that I could not easily put into words. For example, at some point, I found that the way the *dede* was explaining something might have been influenced by my presence. Somehow, I thought he might be adding extra information for my benefit as a researcher or someone documenting the event. Being observed and recorded, which may suggest that what is being observed is for broader distribution, may motivate those being observed to pay more attention to how they are 'doing things' which shifts the focus of activity from the activity itself to its presentation to outsiders. This issue was more acute in the old building of the *cemevi* in Dalston where there were relatively small numbers attending. By the time the *cemevi* had moved to its larger premises in Wood Green and *cem* gatherings began to host far more people, many taking pictures and streaming videos, I became far less visible. I had already tried to reduce my visibility by the way I held my camera and notebook.

The account of the ethnographer is central in ethnography: 'enabling' and 'sensitising' themselves, the ethnographer makes 'a unique sense of embodied existence and consciousness' (Willis and Trondman, 2000:6). Observing the British Alevi community in their community and public spaces, I was curious about their presence in other spaces and how it might give more insights into their daily lives. Although it was not formally for research purposes, I began freelance interpreting which allowed me to observe the Alevi community in their engagements with local and public services, such as local authorities, the NHS and refugee support organisations. Although I cannot use any data for reasons of confidentiality, this experience made me familiar with the psychosocial horizon of the migrant Alevi community.

Particularly the psychotherapy sessions I interpreted for asylum seekers and refugees gave me significant insights into the aftermath of their traumatic past as well as into domestic and gender issues.

Again, not for research purposes in a formal sense, at the end of my fieldwork in the south-eastern part of Turkey, I made a visit to my hometown of Dersim in eastern Turkey to conduct an embodied observation of the cultural context. It was a useful trip as an 'Alevi' from Dersim, 'enabling' and 'sensitising' myself to discover what may appear as familiar and strange in the sites. Making sense of the rural composition and lived culture in both localities (Maraş and Dersim), the trip offered useful tips for understanding the cultural nature of Alevism involving ethnic, linguistic, regional and ritual differences and analysing the context and settings observed in the villages of British Alevis.

CHAPTER 3: Migration and settlement

If all men are sedentary (or migratory) 'by nature', why do some migrate and some not?

William Peterson

Introduction

I describe Alevism in diaspora as a 'migrant faith' because of the profound way that migration has affected the destiny of Alevism and the Alevi community. Originally, Alevi migration occurred within Turkey, the politically and economically disadvantaged situation of Alevis forcing them to move from rural areas to the large cities of Turkey. This rural-urban migration profoundly affected the social organisation of Alevi communities and their ritual practices. Alevi migration to Europe began in the second half of the twentieth century, dominated first by labour migration to Germany in the 1960s, then later politically driven migration triggered by the oppressive policies of the Turkish state after the military coup in 1980 and the war between the Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK) and the state.

This chapter focuses on the migration story of Alevis from Turkey to the UK as an initial phase in the diasporisation process. It covers the contexts and dynamics driving migration and settlement and the subsequent re-creation of community. The first section explores the rural-urban migration within Turkey with a brief mention of the Maraş Massacre because of its effect on how Alevis oriented themselves in their new urban setting (see Chapter 8 for more discussion on its significance for UK Alevis). The second section focuses on international migration which was first to Germany and then to other Western European countries, including the UK.

The third section deals in more detail with Alevi migration to the UK using fieldwork data contextualised within theoretical approaches to migration. The section covers the migration story of British Alevis through the context, causal factors, and the role kinship networks played in the migration process. In the fourth section, I provide a demographic picture of Alevi immigrants through their residential clustering and economic activities, to be followed by an account of community building and the dynamic

role Alevi associations played in this process. Lastly, the section explores the idea of 'return' among British Alevi and highlights the changing nature of the diasporic community.

Homeland context: Rural to urban migration

Unlike Sunni settlements, often concentrated in low-lying regions, towns and cities, Alevi settlements in Turkey are to be found in the more remote and mountainous areas. This social and geographical isolation was a result of centuries-old oppression that had marginalised their faith. Their geographical isolation compounded their economic and social disadvantage providing an incentive to move to urban spaces. Alevi gradually migrated from their villages to western Turkish cities mainly for economic reasons and to escape ethnic and religious discrimination and the armed conflict between the Turkish state and the PKK.¹³

As a result of massive rural-urban migration in the late 1950s and early 1960s, Alevi built shantytowns on the outskirts of cities, mainly Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir. Their make-shift shanty dwellings in the suburbs, *gecekondus* (literally 'built overnight'), can be seen as the spatial manifestation of migration (S. Şahin, 2005:470) and the first phase in the urbanisation and modernisation of rural migrant Alevi (Karpas, 1976). An interesting point made by Karpas is that Alevi lived in peace with their Sunni shantytown neighbours under a commonly shared status of *gecekondus* in contrast to inner-city dwellers. The religious difference would appear to have been less visible than socio-economic ones in this new urban space. Although Alevi had a sense of their own identity in this early period of urbanisation, they did not claim recognition as a separate religious community (Karpas, 2004) compared to later periods of urbanisation and diasporisation. It affirms the role migration (or diaspora) has played in constructing a collective Alevi identity that claims recognition, as is discussed throughout the following chapters.

Alevism was never practised openly for centuries, but the tradition somehow lived on in rural areas. Religious practice was kept hidden in their villages where often the whole population was Alevi, although surrounded by Sunni villages. However, this changed when they moved from their villages to

¹³ Alevi are a multi-ethnic/multilingual population, however, a large number of the Alevi population are Kurds. Thus, Alevi Kurds are strongly affected by the war between the Turkish state and the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK).

city or town centres and mixed with the Sunni population. They not only had to hide their identity but often also had to act as though they were Sunni. For example, during Ramadan, the Muslim month of fasting, drummers wake up people for *sahur* (the pre-dawn meal) until people turn their lights on to show they are awake. Alevi living in the cities, though they do not keep Ramadan, would do the same in order not to give away their Alevi identity. Drumming was also intentionally done in Alevi neighbourhoods as a form of psychological oppression. The difficulty in performing acts of collective worship weakened observance of the faith. The following participant (47, female), whose family moved to the city of Kayseri from Sivas before she was born, explains how she 'learned Alevism' in the UK:

In Turkey, we, as Alevi, always had an identity problem. We could never live our identity in Kayseri. We were even trying to fit into a culture that does not belong to us, to hide our identity. Although we did not fast in Ramadan, we were trying to turn our lamps/lights on at *sahur*, not to show our identity. Even most of our neighbours did not know we were Alevi. We were really scared. When I came to England, I wondered about *cemevis* and came. [...] I began living my faith here. I learned Alevism here. I wish I would be able to do it where I was born. It is very painful that people cannot live their identity where they were born.¹⁴

The fear mentioned by this participant was common to Alevi, who have been the victim of mass violence. As mentioned before, most British Alevi came predominantly from the Maraş province in southern Turkey, where the local community living in the city suffered a brutal massacre starting on 19 December and ending on 26 December 1978. The massacre was planned in advance as the doors of Alevi houses were marked with red crosses weeks before the attack. In the event, 101 people were killed, 176 were injured, and 552 houses and 289 workplaces were destroyed (Jongerden, 2003:84; Sinclair-Webb, 2003). The traumatic effects of the massacre are vividly engraved on the collective memory of British Alevi, as discussed in Chapter 8. The massacre made the region economically and politically insecure for Alevi in Maraş and stimulated the migration, first to neighbouring cities such as Mersin or Adana, then later beyond Turkey.

¹⁴ Interview 2, 11 oct 2017, Wood Green

International Migration

The collective memory of Alevis, according to Mutluer (2016:145), reflects the consequence of what she calls 'three acts of violence': the massacres of the 1970s, the 1980 coup and the rapid urbanisation of the 1960s. These account for the feelings of a loss of social and economic security and loss of political trust in the Turkish state that led Alevis to emigrate abroad. There are no accurate statistics about the Alevi population in Europe but a tentative estimate, according to research, is that over 1 million (Keles, 2014) and as many as 1.5 million (Europe Alevi Confederation) are living in Europe.

In the 1960s, an agreement between Turkey and Western European countries meant that more than three million Turkish citizens migrated to Western Europe, of which two-thirds went to Germany (De Tapia, 1995, cited in Bruneau, 2010) as the first agreement was signed with the West German government in 1961 (Dedeoğlu and Genç, 2017). Bruneau highlights the complex nature of migration from Turkey to Europe due to the ethnocultural, religious and ideological diversity of the migrants and the different causal factors driving it. The mix of migratory labour, the following migration of family members to join them and the subsequent second- and third-generation marriages, and then the political migration of Kurds, Armenians, Alevis and members of leftist organisations led to a 'great diversity' of migrants in terms of reasons as well as the results of the migration (Bruneau, 2010:42).

The first migrant Alevis were 'guest-workers' (*Gastarbeiter*), who moved to Germany, with subsequent waves of migration to Europe occurring after the Maraş massacre in 1978, the military coup in 1980, and the armed conflict between the state and the PKK which peaked in the 1990s. Family reunion was another factor in the transnational migration of Alevis in these periods. A survey among the members of Alevi associations in Hamburg verifies this pattern. It suggests three peak periods of migration: the first is the labour migration in the late 1960s, the second is political asylum seekers in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and the third consists of those seeking political asylum in the mid-1990s (Sökefeld, 2008). This resembles the more general pattern of migration from Turkey. The majority of migrant Alevis in Europe, including the UK, are Kurdish, a result of the double discrimination (ethnic and religious) of Alevi Kurds in Turkey.

International migration has transformed oppressed Alevis into an officially recognised migrant faith community in the countries of settlement, where they have gained social, economic and political

influence. The Europe Alevi Confederation represents more than two hundred and fifty Alevi Cultural Centres organised under national federations in Germany, France, the Netherlands, Austria, Belgium, Switzerland and Sweden. It is the organisational and financial power of these Alevi associations in providing space for so many community activities and services, along with the Alevi media, that have developed and maintained social and political cohesion in and between Alevi communities and pushed for the political mobilisation around an Alevi collective identity (Coşan-Eke, 2016; Koşulu, 2013; Sökefeld, 2004; Yaman and Dönmez, 2016; Yildiz and Verkuyten, 2011). Hence, European Alevi associations play a crucial role in the transformation and transmission of Alevi identity and tradition.

Having outlined the pattern of Alevi emigration to Europe in general, we now explore the migration story of British Alevis in greater detail.

Migration to the UK

The migration story

Migration from Turkey to the UK involved a different pattern than Germany. In the 1980s, the UK received more asylum seekers than other European countries. Although there were many reasons for migration, the main one was political and the majority of British Alevis were asylum seekers. Alevis seeking asylum cited human rights abuses against Kurds and Alevis in Turkey to justify their claim, although ethnic discrimination against Kurds was seen as a more valid reason than religious discrimination because of the intensity of the armed conflict at this time. In addition, the threat of arrest for links to illegal leftist organisations was another reason supporting the claim for asylum.¹⁵

Up until 1989, a visa was not required for Turkish citizens to enter the UK but with the increase in application for asylum new visa regulations came into force (R. Cohen, 1994). When the UK government gave three months' notice of these new visa regulations, the UK faced a huge influx of people coming from Turkey. Many first-generation Alevis I interviewed reported that they came to the UK in small groups of people from the same village. The news spread quickly in Alevi villages, and consequently, in

¹⁵ In the end, Turkey has had an infamous record with the highest number of appeals to the European Court of Human Rights from 1959 to 2017 (Parrilli, 2018).

those three months, many tried to bring their family and relatives before the start of the visa restriction. I was told that when Turkish Airlines flights became fully booked because of the excessive demand for seats, other airlines such as Azerbaijan Airlines and Philippine Airlines organised special flights between Istanbul and London. One participant, whose father moved to the UK one month before the restrictions, not only described the spread of this news and how easy it was to enter the UK, but also how it was fuelled by the suspicion that the Turkish state was conspiring to get rid of Alevi Kurds. At this time, the conflict between the PKK and the state was at its peak and had begun to spread into the Alevi areas. The participant believed it was actually a plan by the Turkish state to prevent Alevis from engaging in the conflict. This was not the only time I encountered this belief when talking to Alevis about migration. Many accuse the Turkish state of deliberately 'opening doors to outside' and easing the process of migration to get rid of Alevis and Kurds and so 'killing two birds with one stone'.¹⁶

The change in visa regulations had a significant effect on migration pathways. In the following period, the UK faced a dramatic increase in the irregular immigration of Turkish citizens. After the restriction, smuggling gained an important role and approximately one hundred thousand people were smuggled from Turkey to the UK (Bennetto, 2005 cited in Akdemir, 2016a). An overwhelming majority of Alevi immigrants came to the UK illegally through the *şebeke* (network) that organised documents and entry into the UK. Many participants who travelled illegally through the *şebeke* said that they travelled in difficult conditions, often in lorries delivering products to European countries or directly to the UK. The following participant (45, male) who migrated to the UK in 1995, and was wanted by the Turkish police after the Gazi demonstrations,¹⁷ was one of those who travelled illegally:

¹⁶ Interview 17, 25 May 2019, Tottenham

¹⁷ The Gazi demonstrations (*Gazi Mahallesi olayları*) were events that occurred in the Gazi neighbourhood in Istanbul, where mostly Alevis live. The protests began after drive-by shootings on a coffeehouse on 12 March 1995 and spread throughout the city and lasted four days. As a result, 23 people were killed and hundreds were injured and arrested.

It was a nine-day journey at the back of a lorry. The truck was delivering tractor factory engines sent here from Turkey, plastic-coated used engines in pitch black sludgy oil. The nights were frosty, and the daytimes were warmer than outside. It was such a journey lasting nine days.¹⁸

The Ankara Agreement carved out another path that immigrants could follow. It was signed between Turkey and the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1963, to which the UK became a party when it joined the EEC in 1973. Under this agreement, Turkish citizens gained the right to apply to live and work in the UK if they had the necessary skills and qualifications. However, initially, the agreement was not known widely and until the 2000s only a limited number of people took advantage of it (Sirkeci et al., 2016). Turkish citizens began to use the agreement's advantages when asylum procedures became increasingly difficult. Although the Ankara Agreement was aimed at those with higher education and professional skills, the immigrants who entered under this arrangement did not differ from those who claimed asylum because their migration was also 'a response to various conflicts and perception of human insecurity in Turkey as well as not differing in terms of facing various difficulties and tensions in the UK' (Sirkeci et al., 2016:63).

Studying in the UK is also a path to migration, yet in relatively small numbers. I encountered only a few participants who came to the UK to learn English with the intention to stay permanently, using a student visa (Tier4) as means of entry. Some participants who came to study English assumed that they would return within months but remained for reasons such as getting married, seeking further education or job opportunities. What distinguishes them from others is their level of education and integration into British society, yet their migration was also motivated by their social and economic insecurity in Turkey.¹⁹

Interviews and observations confirmed that many British Alevis have multiple migration stops, internal and external, before their final destination. The table below charts the journeys of participants living in London. As indicated in the table: for six London is the first destination, for nine the second, and for

¹⁸ Interview 7, 16 Jan 2018, London Cemevi, Dalston

¹⁹ This is an impression, as it was rarely given as a reason, otherwise there are no comprehensive data

three the third, and for one it is the fourth and for another the fifth and final stop in their migration journey. Although it is limitedly indicated in my interviewee profiles, following the Maraş and Elbistan massacres, many families moved to neighbouring cities or towns (such as Mersin and Adana that still had a significant Alevi population) making them their first or second step on the journey. For some of the earlier migrants, the UK was their second international stop as their first destination was Germany. When Germany stopped accepting 'guest workers' and tightened the regulations, they began to search for alternative destinations. Some of the participants or their fathers first migrated to Germany and later came to the UK when conditions worsened in Germany. Some of them returned to Turkey, then later moved to the UK. All are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Migration journeys of participant families in the UK

ID	D.O.M*	SP**	Destinations				
			1	2	3	4	5
1	1994	Muş	Ankara	London			
2	1996	Maraş	Adana	London			
3	1989	Maraş	London				
4	1998	Maraş (Göksun)	Maraş (Afşin)	Mersin	Saudi Arabia	Return to Turkey	London
5	1989	Maraş	London				
6	1990	Kars	Ankara	London			
7	1995	Dersim	Adana	Maraş	Germany	London	
8	2000	Dersim	Germany	Return to Turkey	London		
9	1991	Sivas	Kayseri	London			
10	1995	Maraş	Germany	London			
11	2014	Malatya	Istanbul	London			
12	1988	Maraş (village)	Maras (town)	Mersin	London		
13	1989	Maraş	London				
14	1995	Erzincan	London				
15	1997	Maraş	London				
16	1987	Maraş	Germany	London			
17	1992	Maraş	London				
18	2000	Malatya	Istanbul	Germany	London		
19	2003	Kayseri (village)	Kayseri (town)	London			
20	2006	Erzincan	Istanbul	London			

* Date of migration

** Starting point

Reasons for migration

Many theories try to explain the causes of migration; mostly concern labour migration to developed countries. One of the most widely known is the push-pull model that focuses on negative and positive factors leading to migration where the negative conditions in the sending country are 'push' factors and the advantages in the receiving country are 'pull' factors. The theory correlates the size and destination of migration flows with the conditions in both the sending and receiving countries (Portes and Böröcz, 1989). However, the push-pull theory cannot explain the complexity of international migration. Whilst acknowledging that the origins of massive migration flows are often located in the countries suffering socioeconomic hardship, it does not answer the question, as in the case of Alevis, of 'why do some migrate and some not?' (Petersen, 1958:258). The Alevi population of Turkey has a much higher rate of transnational migration than their Sunni counterparts (Faist, 2000b) and the answer would seem to lie in their disadvantaged position arising from their religious and ethnic identity which is not the case necessarily with other migrant groups.

The political and economic insecurity of Kurdish Alevis because of their ethnoreligious identity appears as the principal reason for British Alevis to emigrate from Turkey. Politically motivated migration to the UK was triggered by three significant events: the Maraş Massacre in 1978; the military coup in 1980 and the armed conflict between the PKK and the Turkish State peaking in the mid-1990s including the forced displacement of the rural Kurdish population in south-eastern Turkey (Bilecen, 2016; Geaves, 2003; Issa and Atbaş, 2016; Keles, 2014; Sirkeci et al., 2016). As reported by many participants, the Maraş Massacre and the military coup put severe pressure on Alevis who had little opportunity to establish a business or to trade in town or city centres. International migration was a response to this. Alevi Kurds were subjected to double discrimination as both Alevis and Kurds, as explained by the following participant (47, male) who immigrated to London in 1996:

Our villages are in remote areas. There was no guarantee for us from the state. We are Kurds, and our ethnic identity was a problem for them. Alevism was a hidden belief at that time. [...] Also, due to the fight between the state and PKK, there was no place to refuge. Our village was in the forest. Livestock animal farming stopped because we could not use the forest. Cultivation stopped because we could not plant the fields. For the state, Kurds are terrorists. The military

commander of Göksun said to me that ‘for me, you and those in the mountains [militants] are the same’.²⁰

The testimony of another participant (43, female), who immigrated to the UK with a family reunion visa when her father was granted refugee status, underlines the same feeling of insecurity Alevi Kurds experienced:

Alevi Kurds in Elbistan and generally in Turkey would never feel safe. There was always restlessness because they did not think they would be protected by the state. In fact, migration was something they always dreamed of. [...] The pressures of the years made Alevi Kurds think in that way. Especially my dad, he never thought to migrate to another part of Turkey. He wanted to go to Europe to escape from Turkey.²¹

In giving these reasons for migrating abroad, the testimonies of the participants stressed their intention to raise their children in a socially and economically safe environment. Their motivation to secure their children’s future is underlined by the ‘pull’ effect of a promise of educational and economic opportunities in the UK. A participant (58, male) who immigrated to London in 1998 gives his reasons:

Economic [...] when you have children, it makes you restless if they are needy or have a lack of something, you need to do something for them. However, I had not had opportunities as I was not educated and nothing was inherited from my father. [...] I could not manage to build a life with the opportunities I had. At that time, people were coming here rapidly. I decided to try it. I came and found opportunities, then brought my children 3 to 4 months later.²²

²⁰ Interview 2, 11 Oct 2017, Wood Green

²¹ Interview 17, 24 May 2019, Tottenham

²² Interview 4, 19 Oct 2017, Haringey

As well as a better future for their children, democracy and freedom of religion protected by the state are other pull factors in migration. The expression of the following participant (56, male), who emigrated London in 2000, confirms this:

Like all Alevis here, being Alevi and being left-oriented made our life difficult. For the future and my children, I felt compelled to migrate. I have two daughters; especially I did not want my girls to grow up in such a country. That is the reason.²³

Asylum procedures and the social benefits system in the UK had a pull effect on migration. Some of my participants reported that although Germany was another possible destination, they decided to come to the UK because of the better economic and social conditions and asylum procedures. However, the lack of visa requirements until 1989 was the major factor in choosing the UK as a destination. The following participant (56, female) immigrated to London in 1989, just two months before the visa regulation changed. For many, like this woman, though the reason to migrate was economic, the basis of the entry was to seek political asylum. I interviewed her in her village of Ağcaşar in eastern Turkey, while she was on summer vacation there, and asked her the reason for emigrating:

It was for our livelihood. There was a chance to live there [in the UK],²⁴ more job opportunities. That is why we went [to the UK]. There was no job here [in Turkey]. My husband worked in the *termik*²⁵ but was dismissed. When the job was over, our livelihood was left in ruin. At the same time, a door opened to us and we followed. We applied for asylum. Since then we have been there [in the UK].²⁶

²³ Interview 8, 16 Jan 2018, London Cemevi, Dalston

²⁴ I interviewed her in Turkey, so that the meanings of 'here' and 'there' were reversed.

²⁵ The Afşin Elbistan (A) Thermal Power Plant called *termik* (thermic) by local folk. The majority of people in the surrounding areas worked in the power plant.

²⁶ Interview 13, 8 Aug 2018, Ağcaşar village, eastern Turkey

In the above testimony, the 'opened door' was the help of a relative who was one of the pioneer migrants who paved the way to the UK for their extended family, relatives and fellow villagers. The following section looks at the crucial role of kinship networks in the migration process.

Networks and locality

My data indicates that emigration from the Maraş province was connected to the commercial relations between Alevi living in the Mediterranean cities (mainly Adana and Mersin) and Turkish Cypriots living in Cyprus.²⁷ The migration of Turkish Cypriots to the UK dates back to colonial times when Cyprus was a Crown Colony under British jurisdiction. The UK became an alternative destination for Alevi through their relatives living in Mersin or Adana who had commercial relations with Cyprus and very often travelled to Cyprus where they met with British tourists or emigrant Cypriots and were told about the UK. Hence they became aware of the UK and the choice of the destination came about because of kinship networks.

Almost all the very early Alevi immigrants had work experience in textile factories. When the number of migrants coming to London rapidly increased in the late 1980s and early 1990s, they were recruited to work in the textile factories which were owned by pioneer migrants from Turkey and Cyprus, later these included Alevi. One of these factories was owned by three Alevi who were the first Alevi immigrants to arrive in London in the 1970s, one of whom came from Dersim and the other two from Maraş. They worked in a textile factory for years and later had accumulated enough wealth to establish their own factory where all newly arrived migrants worked. They helped members of their extended families, as well as villagers and friends, to move to the UK. As individual actors, the function of these pioneers in facilitating migration and settlement by giving job opportunities was a significant contribution to the migration process.

Like everyone else, the following participant (56, female) has siblings, cousins and many other relatives from her expanded family living in London. Her statement confirms the importance of these pioneers

²⁷ Having stated the Cyprus connection as an important factor in migration does not mean that there is not a unique story behind choosing to migrate to the UK.

and local networks in migration flows, especially from particular villages. She mentions one of the factory owners was originally from Ağcaşar, a village that sent a large number of immigrants to the UK thanks to his efforts:

There was my aunt's son. He went there [the UK] to work in the 69-70s. We all went [to the UK] with his help. All the people of this village gave thanks to my cousin.²⁸

This character of Alevi migration reflects the significant role that locality and kinship networks play in the process of migration. Immigration of Alevis to the UK shows the characteristic of chain migration since the vast majority of Alevis come from the same areas and villages and every participant has kin who either came before or after. Chain migration refers to the 'movement in which prospective migrants learn of opportunities, are provided with transportation and have initial accommodation and employment arranged by means of primary social relationships with previous migrants' (MacDonald and MacDonald, 1964:82). As Peterson (1958:263) says: 'So long as there are people to emigrate, the principal cause of emigration is prior emigration'.

By providing the help and encouragement of earlier immigrants to new arrivals, chain migration underscores a living connection between settled immigrants and members of their community of origin (Böcker, 1994). The immigrants' continued connection with their homeland community allows for an exchange of information. Hence, early immigrants were joined by their relatives, some of whom came because they had been told about living conditions in the UK. This function of kinship networks, what Tilly and Brown (1967:142) call the 'auspices of migration', emphasises 'the structures which establish relationships between the migrant and the receiving community before he moves'. It is the 'feedback effect', as it is called in network theory, 'to explain why even more migration occurs once it has taken off' (Faist, 2000b:14).

In this manner, chain migration explains why the UK received a large number of Alevi immigrants from particular villages such as Kötüre, Tavla, Tilkiler, Demircilik, Kırkısrak, Ağcaşar and Bozhöyük. This is affirmed by the existence of more than ten associations related to particular villages and five town

²⁸ Interview 13, 8 Aug 2018, Ağcaşar village, Maraş

associations in London. Importantly, most of these associations are socially and economically very active, have their own buildings, and organise many activities with large numbers involved. Although there is no statistical data regarding the exact populations of these villages in the UK, given the membership of the village associations, it is likely to be high. For example, the Bozhöyük village association has 1,200 members, while the membership of the Kırkısrak association is between 1,000 and 1,500. Given that only one member of the family may register, the number may be in the several thousands. Similarly, the population from Tilkiler, another village with a large representation, is estimated at around 5,000. The effects of high emigration on such villages are discussed in Chapter 7.

Every village has one or more pioneers that pave the way for others. As Choldin (1973:6) puts it, ‘one moves and others follow’. For example, the first migrant from Kötüre to the UK was in 1984, inspired by his brother-in-law’s business connections in Cyprus that made the UK a favoured destination. People from Kötüre are now one of the largest Alevi village groups living in London. Nearly a thousand people from this village have the surname ‘Erbil’, according to the Chairman of BAF who also shares this surname, a name which can be seen on supermarkets, jewellery shops and wholesale companies, itself an indicator of the number of people who originate from this village now living in London. The following participant (84, male) who immigrated to London in 1989 tells of emigration from Kötüre:

Our village is very big, named Kötüre. People thought Kötüre was a city. When I arrived at the airport, they lined us up to take our statements. The interpreter asked me, ‘are you from Kötüre too?’. When I said yes, he asked me if Kötüre is a city as every newcomer says Kötüre. [...] Because we came one after the other.²⁹

Alevi kinship networks help new immigrants before, during and after migration, from travel to settlement and orientation, including asylum procedures and finding accommodation and work. The following participant, like many others, reported that they received material help and assistance from their relatives — from the decision to migrate and in the settlement process. The participant, who

²⁹ Interview 3, 6 Oct 2017, London Cemevi, Dalston

claimed asylum on arrival, reports how he was received by his kin at the airport, indicating their functional role in the whole process of migration:

We called our kin; they came to pick us up from the airport. Due to his surname that was the same as mine, verifying our kinship tie, they [officers in the airport] allowed us to go with them. Otherwise, they would not let us go. The officers asked if my kin had enough space to host and take care of us. Then they took me to their house, and I stayed there for around one week until the council gave us a house.³⁰

As this illustrates, migrant networks 'make migration extremely attractive' by lowering the 'costs and risk of movement' (D. S. Massey et al., 1993:448-9). Such networks decrease the potential costs of migration by providing accommodation, jobs and assistance in the country of arrival. The progressive reduction of both migratory costs and risks explains why later immigrants did not experience the same difficulties as the earlier immigrants and why their lives were easier. Moreover, amongst the difficulties encountered by earlier migrants was getting asylum. One fact, I was told, was that the lack of interpreting services for Kurds and Alevis³¹ meant that their asylum statements were poorly translated and, as a consequence, their applications were initially refused by the Home Office and only accepted after a lengthy appeal taking several years, triggering in one case a hunger strike.

The early newcomers were closely linked through ties of kinship, neighbourliness, and friendship; however, their low presence in London at that time was a more critical factor generating the closeness of their links. The newly-arrived men were given free accommodation by their relatives, friends and fellow villagers or by voluntary organisations until a job or better accommodation was found for them. If, however, a whole family arrived together, the immigration officer found them free accommodation as their relatives had little space since they often shared houses with four or five living in one room. For these early migrants, the memories of this period were not only about poor and overcrowded living conditions but also, more positively, a culture of help, sharing and living together arising from a moral

³⁰ Interview 3, 6 Oct 2017, London Cemevi, Dalston

³¹ It is said that at that time interpreters were Turkish or Turkish-Cypriots who did not understand their accent and way of explaining things.

obligation of mutual help and support. The difficulties of this very first period for Alevis in London can be seen as what Werbner (1980) defines in his study of Pakistani immigrants as a 'community of suffering'. This early 'trial period' occurred amongst many different immigrant communities, including Alevis, where this experience of hardship became transformed into a culture based on a 'myth of endurance and sharing, a trial period successfully overcome' (Werbner, 2015:22).

The organisations established by earlier and now knowledgeable immigrants were important facilitators in settlement of newcomers by offering help for social, economic and legal issues. The *İşçi Birliği* (Labour Union) and *Halkevi* (People's House) were the voluntary organisations for immigrants coming from Turkey. Run by Turkish and Kurdish volunteers from its large premises in Dalston, the *Halkevi* helped newcomers by providing shelter and social and legal advice about their asylum applications, benefits and housing. It played an important role in the orientation of new immigrants, providing not only material help but also in offering space to engage and socialise with other community members. The following statement by a participant (65, female), who emigrated to London in 1988, explains her feelings about the *Halkevi* in that period. I interviewed her in Kötüre where she was visiting her sister during the summer vacation. It highlights both the nostalgia felt at being away from home and the positive benefit of community engagement:

When we went to the *Halkevi*, it was like going home. [...] I constantly asked my husband to take us to the *Halkevi*. When we went to the *Halkevi*, it was as if we went to our family. Turks were all there.³²

The kinds of network connections detailed above compose multiple forms of social capital from which people can gain material and non-material benefits. The concept of social capital emphasises resources available to individuals and groups through social networks that can be transformed into human and economic capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 1993). It signifies interaction and exchange 'between individuals and groups that facilitate social action and the benefits derived from these mechanisms' (Faist, 2000b:15). Kurdish Alevi networks play a significant role in building and accumulating social capital as they provide a range of opportunities for developing ties between

³² Interview 12, 5 Aug 2018, Kötüre, eastern Turkey

community members for the purpose of collective action. As such, they are sources of social outcomes for common benefit (Keles, 2016b). For example, the social gatherings organised by these networks help Alevis collect information and exchange business ideas, co-operation, and provide access to the community's job opportunities. Thus, it is not surprising that the notice board in the London Cemevi (pictured below) is full of announcements, requests and advertisements for jobs, rooms and houses pinned up by the community members.

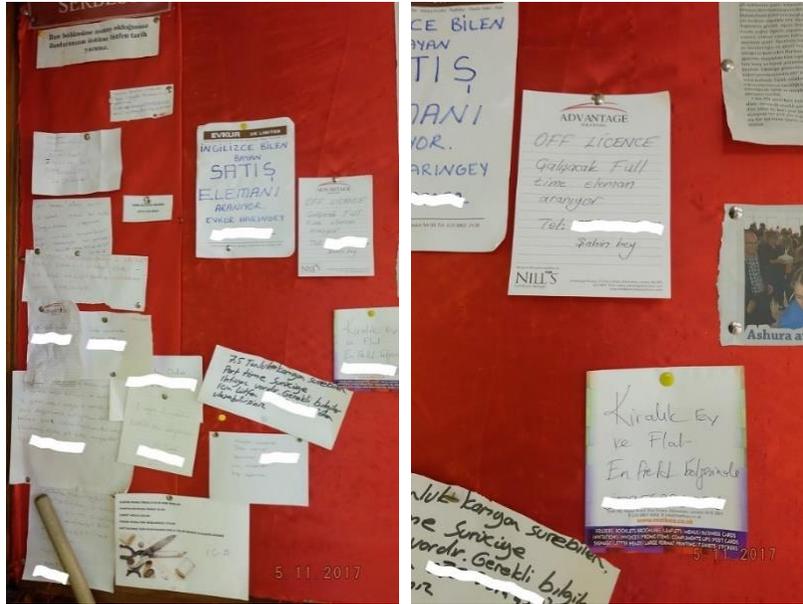


Figure 1 (a-b). Notice board for community members in London Cemevi, Dalston (the old building, 05 May 2017)

As a last note on migrant networks and locality, it must be emphasised that they have importance not just for the early migrants but for ‘the continuation of migration long after the original impetus for migration has ended’ (Boyd, 1989:661). Indeed, Alevi migration, especially from the particular areas already noted, is still continuing.

The Alevi community in London

Residential clustering

The Alevis living in the UK are geographically concentrated in mainly the Enfield, Haringey, Islington and Hackney boroughs of north and east London. The immigration service, accommodating new asylum

seekers in particular areas, influenced this geographical concentration in the earlier migration period. The majority of the earlier asylum seekers were temporarily housed mainly in north and east London in such areas as Manor House, Wood Green, Enfield, Islington and Hackney. These later formed the core of settlements as later newcomers applied for council housing in these same boroughs where their extended family and relatives lived. However, in the last two decades, the shortage and cost of housing in these areas has led some to move to other areas. Consequently, apart from north and east London, a considerable number of Alevis live in south London and Croydon, and further afield in places like Doncaster, Sheffield, Birmingham, Manchester, Edinburgh and Glasgow, where Alevis have been establishing *cemevis* since 2009.

Alevi settlement in the UK shows residential clustering, a function of kinship networks and the desire to live close to kin and fellow migrants. Migrants with the same (or similar) origins often tend to live near each other because clustering 'enhances interaction and helps to ease culture shock', especially in the very first period of settlement (Anwar, 1979:11). However, although eighty per cent of UK Alevis live in various north London boroughs,³³ such propinquity does not mean segregation or isolation as many live within a much wider community of people from Turkey and Northern Cyprus (along with British and other ethnic groups) which characterises areas of north London and attracts the description of 'Little Turkey' (Enneli, Modood, and Bradley, 2005; Sirkeci et al., 2016).

In these areas, everything available from Turkey can be found and community members provide various goods and services for the community, ranging from real estate, mortgages, travel, solicitors, Turkish gold jewellery, furniture, and barbers, as well as a large number of restaurants, kebab shops, off-licences and supermarkets. Research identifies the Turkish-speaking community³⁴ as 'one of the most self-sufficient communities in London' with several community-based newspapers and countless digital radio channels in addition to Turkish TV (Enneli et al., 2005:2). Hence the soubriquet, 'Little Turkey'. These

³³ Indicated by Israfil Erbil the chairman of the BAF

³⁴ The term 'Turkish-speaking community' covers a range of ethnic and religious differences and identities and is used for Turkish, Kurdish and Turkish Cypriot immigrants. However, this term is disputed by the Kurdish diasporas, including Kurdish Alevis in Europe and is seen as a deliberate attempt to subsume Kurdish language and culture into the broader Turkish identity.

neighbourhoods are socially and economically vibrant areas. The community institutions are also placed near these geographical clusters around Dalston, Wood Green, Tottenham, Haringey and Enfield. Lastly, a considerable number of Alevis now own their houses mostly bought from the local authority under the policy of 'right to buy' where long-term standing tenants have benefitted from favourable discounts and payment options.

Economic activities

All the early immigrants (men and women) I spoke to, who started to come to London in the late 1980s and early 1990s, had worked in textile factories which then were concentrated in areas in the east and north of London such as Shoreditch, Hackney, Newington Green, Stoke Newington and Haringey. This was a common pattern with Alevi migrants at this time. However, in the mid-1990s, these textile factories began to close as production moved to Eastern Europe where labour was cheaper. Moreover, a large number of these migrants did not have work permits and so were working illegally. The textile factories were suddenly faced with raids by immigration officers searching for illegal workers. All these factors forced immigrants to search for alternative work opportunities.

The majority of the first-generation Alevi immigrants were poorly educated with no professional and poor language skills. After the decline of the textile industry in London, many Alevis looked to self-employment by opening up small-scale businesses such as off-licences, shops, restaurants and kebab and coffee shops. In fact, many Alevis claim that this enterprising spirit is what has helped the revival of certain previously run-down areas of London, such as Dalston, Haringey and Enfield, as explained by the chairman of the BAF (46, male) who moved to London in 1987 and is now a prosperous businessman:

Half of the shops in Dalston were closed. The streets were not crowded. But it's changed dramatically. Almost no building has remained untouched since then. There was a serious revolution in these areas, especially in the areas our people live in. For example, neglected workplaces became terrifically clean after our people from Turkey — Kurds, Turks, Alevis — owned them. They cleaned up and modernised such places. Whether they were restaurants or markets, they had a profound change. The shops that used to be owned mostly by those from India, Far East, or Central Asia were almost gleaming when they came into the hands of our people. Our people also gained an explicit appreciation in this regard. Local authorities also

encouraged us. There were more incentives at that time. Even the landlords were coming to us and saying that 'my shop is also empty, take and own this too'.³⁵

The majority of Alevis work in the food and drinks sector, mainly owning businesses such as off-licences, small supermarkets, kebab and coffee shops, restaurants and wholesale importers of Turkish produce. There is also an increase in the numbers of barbers, solicitors, and estate and travel agents. This rise in business activity and networks allowed the circulation of social and material capital within the community and stimulated an 'ethnic economy'. According to Bilecen (2016), the ethnic economy solidifies the Alevi community by strengthening inter-group relations and encouraging the social and political participation of Alevis in the public life of the UK.

British Alevis have economically become the most successful of the Alevi diasporas, which is evidenced not only by the growth of business activities but also by the building of the London Cemevi in Wood Green, costing 1.5 million pounds (discussed in Chapter 6), and the opening of the BAF headquarters in Enfield set in large grounds. This statement by the late chairman of the London Cemevi, Tugay Hurman, illustrates the increasing economic and political power of Alevis:

In Haringey, I assert that every shop you see belong to us. Every shop in the neighbourhood belongs to an Alevi. There is no society owning properties as much as Alevis. So, we have so much power. We have 10 to 20 per cent of the economic power of Haringey. Nobody is seen from this perspective, but it is a wonderful thing. Look at it: Alevis have begun to exist in England.³⁶

Alevi associations and re-creation of the community

When Alevi migration started to the UK, there was no Alevi association as such, only some community organisations to assist newcomers. However, later, the economic advancement and social and political mobilisation of British Alevis led to the establishment of Alevi associations across the UK. The

³⁵ Interview 16, 16 Feb 2019, Enfield, BAF Headquarters

³⁶ 1 Dec 2017, Wood Green

establishment of the England Alevi Cultural Centre and London Cemevi (EACC) nursed the re-creation of the UK Alevi community by mobilising Alevis towards gaining recognition both in the UK and beyond and to maintain solidarity with Alevis in Turkey. The key events in the history of the Alevi community in the UK are listed below, followed by an explanation of their importance in the history of British Alevis and how they helped create both a national and transnational Alevi community.

Table 2. History of mobility

Events	Date
The founding of England Alevi Cultural Centre and London Cemevi (EACC)	1993
Purchase of the first building in Dalston	1998
Purchase of the new building in Wood Green	2005
Establishment of the second <i>cemevi</i> in Glasgow	2009
First Alevi Festival on Hackney Downs	2010
Beginning of Alevi lessons in the Prince of Wales Primary School in Enfield	2012
The founding of the Britain Alevi Federation (BAF)	2013
Alevis are an officially recognised religion by the Charity Commission	2015
The founding of the All-Parliamentary Group for Alevis	2015
First Alevi mayor in the country elected in Haringey	2016
Opening of BAF Headquarters	2017
Opening of the new (EACC) London Cemevi in Wood Green	2018
The first commemoration of the Maraş Massacre in Parliament	2018
Second Alevi Mayor in the country elected in Enfield	2018
Seventeen Alevi council members elected in Enfield and Haringey	2018
The first Alevi MP (Labour Party) elected in Enfield North	2019

The England Alevi Cultural Centre (EACC), known as the London Cemevi, was founded in 1993 to meet the needs of the London Alevi population. By 1998 there was a sufficient social need and economic resources to buy their own place in Dalston, one floor of a large building, to provide for various social,

cultural and religious gatherings. This made a significant contribution to the development of the British Alevi community.



Figure 2. Cem gathering, London Cemevi, Dalston, 15 June 2017

With the economic and organisational growth of the community, the existing building had outgrown its usefulness and the EACC bought an old warehouse and the surrounding land in order to build a much larger, purpose-built centre in 2005. The project was enthusiastically supported by the community as it marked a new Alevi space built to their own wishes and needs. The subsequent conflict and divisions within the community that delayed its completion until 2018, along with its importance for Alevi placemaking, is discussed in Chapter 6.

EACC was the only Alevi association until 2009 when a second *cemevi* opened in Glasgow to be followed by others around the UK. Since then, *cemevis* have been established in eighteen regions such as Leicester, Northamptonshire, York, Liverpool, Bournemouth, Nottingham, Sheffield, Edinburgh, Manchester and Newport. However, EACC stands as the first and most active association with the largest number of members and it has kept its central and powerful place among the UK Alevi associations.

Another important community development was the organisation of the summer Alevi Festival in 2010 which has continued ever since. It is the most important annual event and brings thousands of Alevis together. The first festival was held solely in one location but now consists of many events held over a one-week period in London (in two venues) and other regions in the UK. As explored in Chapter 5, the festival is important in providing and creating a sense of unity for the community. The increasing public visibility of Alevism, furthered through the work of its associations, is also evidenced in the inclusion of Alevism into the Religious Education curriculum of some primary and secondary schools in London (discussed further in Chapter 5). The first Alevism classes began in Prince of Wales Primary School in Enfield in 2012, followed by a rapid increase in the number of schools and currently is included in more than twenty schools in England.

Following the increase in the number of *cemevis* around the UK, the BAF was established in 2013 as an umbrella organisation and has had a considerable impact on the organisational formation and mobilisation of the UK Alevi diaspora. Moreover, the activities of the BAF and its main member, the London Cemevi, increased the engagement with the UK public domain and its lobbying activities. As a consequence, Alevism has been an officially recognised religion in the UK since 2015 when the Charity Commission for England and Wales granted the BAF charitable status. Following this, came the establishment of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Alevis launched in December 2015. Its aim, as explained in the official webpage, is 'to ensure that British Alevis are represented in Parliament by giving them a platform to express their legitimate socio-political aspirations, ensuring that they achieve recognition for their rights and religion in Britain and overseas' (House of Commons, 2017).

The London Cemevi finally completed its huge centre in Wood Green, a result of the dedicated and concerted efforts of the community, something of material and symbolic significance. The opening ceremony of the centre in January 2018 was a big transnational event with an international presence that signified a new phase in the history of the Alevi community in the UK. The attendance by politicians at the local and national levels, representatives of Alevi associations from Europe and Turkey, as well as MPs from Turkey, besides a large crowd of Alevis, was a clear indication of the rise in the organisational and institutional importance of Alevis in the public and transnational sphere (see Chapter 6).

The increasing parliamentary engagement of Alevis is further evidenced by the annual commemoration of the Maraş Massacre in Parliament since 2018 hosted by MPs of both the Labour and Conservative

Parties. The effective lobbying of Parliament about Alevi issue has led to an official letter being sent from the British Parliament to Turkey expressing their concerns about the religious freedom of Alevis there. All these developments have a strong symbolic meaning for Alevis in the UK that strengthens their collective confidence, as underlined in the following comment by Tugay Hurman, the late chairman of the London Cemevi:

Alevis were not so strong in any period of history. We no longer live in a single geography. In addition to Turkey, eight hundred thousand Alevi live in Germany and three hundred thousand in Britain. We have great economic power. We are informing Parliament regarding the problems of Alevis in Turkey, even sending a letter through Parliament. We do not have our tanks and cannons as we do not need them at all, but we have the power to influence the social and economic structures of the countries we live in. We use their opportunities to send a declaration to the Turkish Government who despise Alevis. This never happened before because Alevis were living a nomadic life in mountainous areas and small towns. For the past twenty-five years, we have achieved great power with the migration of Alevis to Europe.³⁷

The British Alevi associations play a major role in the participation of diasporic Alevis in the domestic politics of the UK. As a consequence, the interest and participation of Alevi migrants in British politics is higher than that of their Turkish and Sunni counterparts (Bilecen, 2016), as is also witnessed in their increasing involvement in local politics. There is a growing number of Alevis elected to the local councils in Enfield, Hackney and Haringey where there are significant Alevi populations. Haringey Council elected its first Alevi mayor in 2016; Enfield had its first Alevi mayor in 2018; and at the local elections the same year more than twenty Alevi council members were elected in Enfield, Haringey and Hackney. This involvement is not limited to local politics and the first Alevi MP, Feryal Clark, was elected for the Labour Party in Enfield North in the 2019 General Election.

Because of the growing visible presence and voting power of Alevis in particular areas, it is not surprising that the Labour and the Conservative Parties have begun to engage more with Alevi associations and to vie for the Alevi vote. Local election results suggest that British Alevis are more likely to vote for the

³⁷ Tugay Hurman, 1 Dec 2017, Wood Green

Labour Party but this has not deterred the Conservative Party from thinking that they might capture some of that vote. For example, the Chair of the London Cemevi proudly told a meeting how the Conservative Party had sent out an invitation for Alevi businessmen to a meeting at the Treasury.³⁸

British Alevis' growing engagement in the socio-economic and political life of the UK has also increased the scope and regularity of their transnational activities. The BAF and London Cemevi organise various activities to do with social and political issues affecting Alevis in Turkey. British Alevi associations run collaborative projects with Alevi associations in Turkey to support them socially and economically through fund raising in the UK. One such example is the construction of the Maraş Erenler *cemevi* in Yörükselim, a neighbourhood of Maraş and the centre of the massacre. It was a collaborative effort between British, German and Turkish Alevi associations, but started by those in the UK. In addition, its successful attempt to commemorate the massacre in Yörükselim, which had previously been banned, attracted attention from Europe and Turkey as well as initiating commemorations elsewhere. Another example was the successful campaign run for the BAF calling for donors to give blood for a stem cell database to help a young child in Turkey undergoing chemotherapy for leukaemia. Five hundred volunteered and the campaign was taken up by other Turkish associations. These collective actions both provide help for the homeland communities and galvanise Alevi collective identity by reinforcing ties and a sense of belonging to them. Thus, Alevi associations and networks, keeping migrants engaged with their homeland communities, strengthen social bonds across borders and a sense of transnational solidarity.

³⁸ EACC members meeting minutes, 5 Nov 2017, London Cemevi, Wood Green



Figure 3 (a-b). The BAF poster asking British Alevis to become stem cell donors for the child and British Alevis giving blood samples for stem cell donation in the BAF headquarters

The affiliation of Alevi political activists with the political parties in Turkey should also be noted here as another component of transnational activities. During general elections in Turkey, political activity rises dramatically. Alevi associations campaign for the opposition in Turkey among British Alevis. Alevi Kurds who form the vast majority of immigrants from Turkey vote mainly for the opposition parties, the CHP and HDP, while the ruling pro-Islamic party, the AKP, gains very few votes from Turkish citizens in the UK.

The Britain Alevi Federation, the umbrella organisation for UK *cemevis*, is a member of the Europe Alevi Confederation that has a link to more than two hundred and fifty Alevi associations in Europe. The chairs of the Alevi institutions in Turkey and Europe, including the UK, gather for regular meetings to discuss political developments concerning the situation of Alevis in Turkey and lobbying activities in Europe. Collaboratively organised religious events are another type of transnational activism. For example, the EACC and BAF have organised *cem* gatherings in Rotterdam, Paris and Cologne to bring Alevis of different countries together and around two hundred and fifty Alevis from the UK travel on chartered buses to attend them. The acknowledgement of belonging to a transnational community strengthens solidarity and empowers networks and organisations. These organisations and networks 'stimulate and are stimulated by the institutionalisation of transnational practices' and shape the way people 'think of themselves as a group' (Levitt, 2001b:10-1) while strengthening their collective identity. From dual citizenship to membership in institutions and organisations, these multiple attachments provide various transnational spaces in which migrant Alevis actively live their multifocal lives.

As a last note, it is obvious that Alevi migration to the UK (probably to Europe too) is a continuing process that seems to be related to recent political developments in Turkey and the accompanying increase in persecution of government opponents. The rising electoral success of the Islamic ruling party, AKP, and the failed military coup in 2016 have exacerbated a political polarisation that also sustains emigration. This creates a fear of more migration from Turkey to European countries, which is a factor in the difficulties of the negotiations concerning the accession of Turkey to the EU.

Is return relevant?

Classical diaspora theories see the desire to return to the homeland as a defining characteristic of diaspora communities in which an idealisation of the homeland where migrants 'and their descendants would eventually return one day' (Safran, 1991:83) lies at its heart. However, with the changing nature of diaspora communities with their various transnational and global interactions, the homeland keeps its salience through a continuous connection with, rather than the dream of a return to, it.

Homeland connection manifests a continuity carried through social, political, economic and sentimental ties. Many first-generation participants feel a strong attachment to their village. When asked where they feel at home, many reported that they feel this only in their village. The following statement of a participant (58, male) from Maraş who spends the summer months in Mersin, a neighbouring city where he bought a house, illustrates this clearly:

When I go to Turkey, even though I travelled around for months, I do not feel that I am in Turkey if I do not go to my village. I feel that only when I go to my village. I was born there, my childhood and twenty years of my life passed there, my family is there, my parents' graves are there. So, I mean, we have a history there. This is what takes us there. That is what makes me happy together with melancholy in there.³⁹

However, although it still keeps its important place in diasporic minds, the homeland does not appear as a place of return anymore. Four critical factors seem to work against the idea of return. The first

³⁹ Interview 4, 19 Oct 2017, Haringey

concerns the children of immigrants born or who grew up in the UK. According to almost all the parents, the UK is the country where their children were born or grew up and built a life. The parents are aware that their children do not intend to leave the UK; consequently, the idea of return has lost its urgency. Indeed, my observations and interviews with youth revealed that young Alevi do not consider living in Turkey permanently. They certainly feel they belong in the UK and define themselves as British in addition to their Alevi (and Kurdish) identity. Almost all young Alevi define themselves as British Alevi and show a 'hybrid' perspective in terms of identity, homeland and where they belong, making no sense of the idea of return (see Chapter 8).

The second is that today, by virtue of regular communication and travel opportunities, migrants never completely leave their country of origin, both literally and metaphorically. Consequently, the idea of return has lost much of its meaning. The new formation of transnational diasporas in a global setting emphasises the regular communication of migrants with their families, kin and communities of origin. A desire to return weakens because 'transmigrants never actually leave their place of origin' as they retain their ties with the homeland by virtue of ever-growing ease of regular communications (Bruneau, 2010:44). Travel opportunities are another crucial factor as they can visit Turkey whenever they want. Most of the participants have a house in their village, town or city where they spend their long summer holidays (for a detailed account of the migrant engagements with their homeland, see Chapter 7).

The third is the re-creation of the community in the diaspora that decreases the significance of return. Alevi in the UK have their own community life consisting of friends, relatives and fellow villagers. They have associations offering space for various gatherings, social and religious activities, socialising with their fellow Alevi and being involved in the collective. They have their own businesses established by community members where they can speak their own language.

As repeatedly indicated by the participants, the fourth factor is the political developments in Turkey that makes Turkey an unwelcoming environment for Alevi. Some wish to go back, but social, political and economic circumstances prevent them from returning. Stating their concerns about the political situation in Turkey, many reported that it is not possible to live permanently in Turkey under Erdoğan's rule. They see the rising Islamic developments in Turkey as a threat to Alevi. Moreover, many stated that they would not have the rights and freedoms they have in the UK. Many elderly participants highlighted the importance of the provision of care for the elderly in the UK, something they would not

find to the same degree in Turkey. Overall, despite the emotional connection and feeling of belonging to Turkey as a homeland, it seems in current conditions that Turkey is not a country that they have a desire to return to.

Their political opposition that coexists with an emotional tie to Turkey describes what Demir (2012), in relation to UK Kurds, calls 'battling with *memleket* [homeland]'. This equally applies to Alevi since the vast majority in the UK are Kurds. She uses the term 'dual-home construction' to describe the two distinct attachments of diasporic Kurds to Turkey that is 'felt as one'. 'Battling with *memleket*' represents 'the political struggles and disputes of Kurds with Turkey' together with 'the close and intimate ties, Kurds continue to maintain with Turkey' (Demir, 2012:825). This is expressed by a participant (43, female), who migrated to the UK when she was 15 (and who expresses herself better in English):

I have mixed feelings every time I go to Turkey. But when I come back, I feel something in the depths of my heart. A powerful feeling; it is like that country will never be mine. But even though I am more comfortable and I have much better opportunities in this country, it feels like something that I could never gain, never take back. But we are still full of hope, maybe in future it will be a different story because it is a beautiful country.⁴⁰

In this respect, the case of the British Alevi diaspora, while manifesting how diasporisation involves the continuity of homeland ties, also demonstrates how the idea of return no longer has such a strong hold in contemporary diasporas.

Concluding discussion

This chapter has explored Alevi migration to the UK through the factors driving migration and its consequences. As a complex process structured by various intersecting factors, international migration influences, and is influenced by, the social and cultural settings of both the sending and receiving countries. It is evident that international migration and its consequences cannot be understood without

⁴⁰ Interview 17, 24 May 2019, Tottenham

acknowledging the socio-economic, political and historical contexts in which it takes place. Classically, identifying 'push' and 'pull' factors has been a basic way of explaining international migration. However, Alevi migration, like all other international migrations, is more complex and needs to be understood within its economic, political and historical contexts. This study confirms the social, political and economic insecurity in Turkey as the principal condition that has encouraged Alevi transnational migration. Widespread poverty in the rural Alevi regions of Turkey has been a major cause of migration across borders and marks most of the narrative stories. However, poverty in itself is not the only factor as it must be understood within the political context that has led to the marginalisation and social and geographical isolation of Alevis which in turn has determined their economically disadvantaged position in Turkey.

Better opportunities in the UK in terms of work, social benefits and asylum procedures have influenced the migration of Alevis. However, the most compelling pulling factor is the network of kinship as well as the lack of visa regulation that facilitated migration until 1989. Concurring with other research on British Alevis (U. Cetin, 2014), my findings confirm that Alevi migration to the UK has had the characteristics of chain migration and the significant role that kinship networks play in it. As many migration theories highlight, the continuation of migration once it has started, as in the case of Alevi migration, continues because of kinship networks that decrease the costs and risks of migration (as underlined by the theory of migrant networks). However, the recent developments and ongoing adverse political and economic situation in Turkey maintain its continuing importance.

My findings clearly show that the idea of return has lost its relevance among British Alevis. Thus, this case exemplifies the fact that return to the homeland does have much importance in contemporary diasporas structured within transnational and global interactions. However, on the other hand, it does not mean that the homeland has lost its central importance since migrants sustain strong social, economic and emotional ties with it through visits and other regular engagements with their homeland. Migration has transformed Alevis into a diasporic group able to access the rights and freedoms available in a liberal democracy. British Alevis, as the economically most powerful of the Alevi diasporas, is increasingly engaged in British politics and parliamentary activities which have also made them a significant player in lobbying activities about Turkish politics. My findings also show the leading role diasporic organisations play in forming transnational social and political spaces that keep migrants

actively linked with their communities of origin while helping them to integrate into British society and politics.

CHAPTER 4: Ritual in diaspora: The diasporic transformation of Alevism

Introduction

*Faith is similar to a hearth; the closer you sit, the warmer you feel. Our belief is exactly the same. When Alevis migrated from here and went to Europe, wherever they went, some values they took together remained fresh in the first generation. But after that, by the time generations changed, those values became diluted.*⁴¹

Opening this chapter is an extract from an interview with Hasan Kılavuz (73), a returnee *dede*, chairman of the Mersin *cemevi*, who lived in Germany for nearly forty years before retiring to Turkey in 2009. His observation aptly summarises the link between migration and religion and offers valuable insights into the changing ritual world of Alevism after Alevis moved away from the foundational centre of their faith, a process that is the main focus of this chapter. More specifically, I want to explore how migration and settlement affected the practices of Alevism, the changes it underwent, and the various causes of these transformations. This chapter explores how Alevism is lived, ritualised and practised in migration settings to examine the formation and experience of diasporic religion.

The first section provides a brief look at the scholarly accounts of the diasporic transformation of religion to understand the Alevi experience. The second section deals with the fundamental transitions and discontinuities shaping the religious and organisational structures of community life. The transition from religious to modern secular institutions following the breakdown of spiritual connexions, the changing position of religious leaders (*dedes*), and finally the diminishing importance of the internal justice mechanisms that were maintained within the *cem* are key components of the structural changes identified in this section. The third section explores the ritual changes within the diaspora that have developed multiple distinctive characteristics. With the structural and ritualistic changes that Alevism underwent in the post-migration period, the chapter aims to understand how a religion 'on the move' oriented its ritualised culture within the diaspora settings.

⁴¹ Hasan Kılavuz, 11th August 2018, Mersin Cemevi

From 'yol' to diasporic Alevism

The interplay between diaspora and religion is complex. Moving to a new place modifies the viewpoint of migrants, especially for those whose movement was caused by the social and political insecurity in their homeland. For migrants, there is often a longing for some sort of stability that requires 'the reproduction of familiar norms, structures, discourses and practices (Knott, 2016:71) which are 'maintained through the work of memory, transit, communication, consumption, political contest and, not least, of ritual' (Johnson, 2007: 44). Diaspora stimulates a new consciousness that 'involves the transformation of identity, community and ritual practices' (Levitt, 2001a:6). It is a revision in religious subjectivity that encourages self-questioning and a shift 'from 'what shall I believe?' to 'how shall I believe it?' (Geertz, 1971, cited in Vertovec, 1997:10).

The understanding of religion in the host society affects the diaspora's interpretation of faith both directly and indirectly. On encountering other cultures or new conditions, the migrants' previous understanding of religion may be subject to change and they may 'adopt new approaches that might be commensurate with a new context in their host country' (Hosseini, 2015:12). The religious practices of migrants, as Knott (2016:86) suggests, cross social, political and ethnic boundaries 'in order to move beyond established social divisions and limitations of conventional cultural categories: they perform cosmopolitanism'. These diasporic practices are shaped by their 'readiness to negotiate with outsiders and cope with the limitations of their context' as well as 'their ability to develop effective tactics for addressing challenges of migration and the requirement to integrate' (Knott, 2016:86).

Migrant faith groups, like Alevis, seek a new conceptualisation of beliefs and practices to be applied in diaspora settings. Claiming recognition by the host society to secure their existence, religious groups have to articulate their rituals for a 'persuasive presentation' that requires the production of 'legible and relevant' cultural products (Johnson, 2007: 44). Johnson explains this further:

When indigenous religions become diasporic, they must become at least modestly more cosmopolitan in their appeal — available and recognisable to audiences that did not produce them and which may be distant in time and space from the site of their origins (2007: 44).

Here, the question is what kind of transformation do religions undergo under diaspora conditions. Using the example of the diasporic Garifuna religion, Johnson suggests that 'the diaspora version of "tradition"

takes on increasingly doctrinal form' that address standardisation of meanings, ritual performances and customs (p.241). Johnson speaks of this progression of religion through the two modes of religiosity as delineated by Whitehouse (2004), 'imagistic' and 'doctrinal'. While the imagistic mode refers to infrequent but highly emotional rituals that echoes what Durkheim (1995 [1912]) defines as the state of 'effervescence', doctrinal religions like Islam and Christianity, which carry out standardised and frequently performed rituals ruled by sacred scripts, emphasise low arousal with well-established ritual meanings and expression. Due to institutional regulations and the everyday repetition of standardised rituals, the transmission of doctrinal religions is much easier than imagistic ones. Whitehouse (2004) explains a progression between these modes. It begins as the imagistic mode of religiosity then turns into a doctrinal mode through a 'long-term reproduction' (2004:75). However, focusing more on spatiality, Johnson (2007) defines this progress through a spatial shift rather than a historical process and says 'the shift in space has initiated a shift in religious mode' (2007:240). His emphasis on the phenomena by linking the transformation of the religious mode with spatial change facilitates an understanding of the diasporic transformation of Alevism.

Alevism originally is an 'imagistic' path grounded in a spiritual affiliation based on faith, religious institutions and their followers. Traditionally, Alevi spirituality has focused on morality and inner meaning (*batın*) rather than the shape or formalities of worship practices (*zahir*). Alevi morality is centred on love, peace, respect and control of oneself, encapsulated in the fundamental principle of '*Eline, diline, beline sahip çık*', which can be translated as 'be in control of your hand, tongue and body'.⁴² This code of ethics is meant to prevent hands from thieving and fighting, the tongue from lying and insulting others, and imposes a duty to avoid immoral behaviour involving the body. The main focus of Alevi mysticism has been on the quality and wisdom of humankind rather than formalist worship, as is frequently stressed in religious poetry. For example:

⁴² This ethical principle needs a short explanatory note. Though the Turkish word '*bel*' literally means the middle back of body, to my knowledge of Alevi philosophy, it actually refers to the body as a whole and covers all immoral bodily behaviours.

The heat is in the fire, not in the iron; the miracle is in the head, not in the crown;
Whatever you are searching for, search within yourself, not in Jerusalem, in Mecca, nor in Hajj.

Due to the mystic nature of Alevism that claims to be built on the wisdom of humankind and the universe,⁴³ it is 'naturally' against the need for a formal description of worship and Alevis have preferred to call their belief *yo/* (the spiritual path). However, this imagistic character of Alevism has been subject to change in the diaspora. The rest of this chapter explores how the journey of Alevism, which began as *yo/* in its homeland, is now transforming itself into a new form of Alevism in the diaspora.

As with other migrant faith groups, the dynamics transforming Alevism in the diaspora are various. The diaspora conditions have provided a challenge to Alevism as it adjusts to new social, spatial and institutional settings that require re-production, re-articulation and re-formation of the religious culture. The organisational structure of religious institutions and their socio-spatial context is the key factor that has led to structural alterations in the diaspora. The rigidity of the *ocaks*, the religious institutions that had been established in tribal settings, could not be transferred unchanged after migration, resulting in organisational and operational challenges leading to change, as detailed in the following section. The nature of Alevism that praised diversity in religious practices is another key factor that was subjected to change leading to the modification of rituals and the invention of new traditions for collectivisation in the community and how Alevism was presented to outsiders. In sum, the living practices of British Alevis that addressed a new mode of Alevism came, to some extent, to distinguish itself from its old traditional⁴⁴ religious composition and inner motivations. The following quote from the late chairman of London Cemevi, Tugay Hurman (43), in which he challenges this diasporic version of Alevism, gives voice to a nostalgic sense of loss:

⁴³ This is symbolised in the *semah* which includes bodily movements that represent the universe.

⁴⁴ I use the term 'traditional' not in the sense of fixed or unchangeable structures, instead I refer its form as practised in rural settings until migration.

In Turkey, we were poor, but our faith was rich. Now, we, as Alevi in Europe, have money and power, but our faith has been emptied.⁴⁵

The alterations in religious tradition through time and space offer a vision of how to understand the way in which the transformation proceeds in a 'moving' religion. The following section discusses the structural changes that have occurred in the vital characteristics of Alevism in the diaspora.

Structural changes

The discontinuity in spiritual connexions: Institutional and spatial shift

Alevism in eastern Anatolia traditionally operated on the basis of a chain of spiritual ties between followers and the religious institutions, called *ocaks*.⁴⁶ *Ocak* literally means 'the hearth' and refers to an extended family descended from a sacred lineage. Religious knowledge was passed down through these families who were responsible for the spiritual leadership of the community. The members of these sacred lineages/families (called *ocakzade*) and their followers (called *talip*), the latter giving allegiance to these sacred lineages, were two hereditary positions that determined the socio-religious structure of rural Alevi communities (Gültekin, 2019). A *talip* is the follower of an *ocak*, and every Alevi is the *talip* of a particular *ocak*. Rural Alevi lived in tribal settings and every tribe was associated with a particular *ocak*; therefore, the sacred ties between the *ocak* and *talip* were established at birth. The connection between *ocak* and *talip* was sustained by a *dede* who was a member of these *ocak* families and carried out religious duties as their representative, as will be explored in the next section.

By maintaining religious loyalty and subordination, the connection between *ocak-dede-talip* was the primary means of practising Alevism. However, when Alevi scattered to urban areas in Turkey and then more globally, the *ocak*-centred religious organisation faced a rupture as followers lost connection with their *ocaks* and *dedes*. Consequently, the socio-religious and organisational function of the *ocaks* that

⁴⁵ Fieldwork notes, 10 August 2017, London Cemevi, Dalston

⁴⁶ In her study drawing upon newly available historical documents and manuscripts, Karakaya-Stump (2020) argues that the socio-religious organisation of Alevi built on *ocaks*, can be traced back to the Sufi milieu of the late mediaeval period.

structured the ritual world and society vanished. Since it was the village communities that maintained the framework of worshipping, when they dispersed due to migration, it collapsed too (Massicard, 2007). As a result of the decline in the influence of the *ocaks*, it followed that the representatives of these institutions, the *dedes*, lost their vital role in the socio-religious order and hierarchy.

This is reflected in the fieldwork data which reveals an increased lack of knowledge about the *ocaks* amongst diasporic Alevis. To understand the relevance of religious loyalty and subordination in contemporary settings, I asked all participants which *ocak* their family was associated with and if they knew or had met their *ocak*-related *dede*. Apart from a very few, mostly older, participants, informants neither knew which *ocak* their family was associated with nor had they met the *dede* from their *ocak*; this is in contrast to their fellow villagers living in Turkey. The fieldwork findings suggest a break in the *ocak-dede-talip* chain in the collective knowledge of the diaspora.

In parallel to the fracturing of this spiritual chain over time, *musahip/mısaybine* (spiritual brotherhood), another essential component of Alevi spirituality, was severely affected and lost its relevance. *Musahip* was a precondition of being an Alevi, seen as the first step in starting on the religious and moral path to gradually reach inner knowledge.⁴⁷ One could not be Alevi without having a *musahip*. Representing an essential spiritual connexion between the followers and *yol*, it was the most important and prestigious social institution in traditional Alevism.

Musahip also formed a social contract between followers, as it referred to a spiritual brotherhood between two married men and their households. The ritual kinship began with a particular type of *cem* ritual (*görgü cemi*) in which an *ikrar* (oath) was taken by two men in front of the *dede* and the community to be brothers and to care for each other and their households until death. This kinship was seen as more significant than blood ties and *musahips* became siblings along with their wives and children. For this reason, marriage between seven generations of the two families was prohibited and was considered to be incest (Melikoff, 1998). It characterised the most robust sense of solidarity among

⁴⁷ The moral path to gradually reach inner knowledge refers to the core teaching of Alevism called 'Four gates and forty levels' (*Dört kapı kırk makam*). According to this, to approach spiritual wisdom of the 'perfect human being' (*İnsan-ı Kamil*), four gates and forty levels must be passed. The gates and levels illustrate certain steps towards inner knowledge that begins with the ceremony of being *musahip* by taking an oath (*ikrar*) (Korkmaz, 2005).

the community members through obligations structuring socio-cultural and religious life. *Musahip*, forming both a spiritual connexion between Alevis and their faith and a social contract among the community members, had an essential place in the socio-religious organisation of Alevi communities. The following participant (84, male), an elder who is the one of very few who has a *musahip*, describes its place in Alevism:

In our childhood, in the village, we started to join *cems* when 10 to 12-years-old. Then when we got a little older, we had a *musahip*. *Musahip* is a heavy term. There is no betrayal of the *musahip* and his honour; his family is always considered as brothers and sisters. That is the way of Alevism to us.⁴⁸

I asked all the participants if they had a *musahip* to judge whether it carried any weight in the community. Apart from a very few of the eldest respondents, no one had a *musahip*. This is linked to the break over time in the spiritual chain of *ocak-dede-talip*. The following comment of a *dede* (56, male), who explains how migration (in his words) ‘destroyed their *yol*’, laments the loss of these spiritual ties:

with migration, the society lost each other, *musahips* and *kirves*⁴⁹ lost each other so that the chain of *ikrar* (religious loyalty) which kept us together was broken. And with this, our *yol* began to break.⁵⁰

Musahip was the precondition to be an Alevi, but now it no longer exists in diaspora life. However, despite this, diasporic Alevis have a strong sense of belonging when it comes to Alevi identity. A young

⁴⁸ Interview 3, 6 October 2017, London Cemevi, Dalston

⁴⁹ *Kirve* is also a form of spiritual companionship and solidarity that constitutes an internal social welfare system together with *musahip*. A *kirve* is a kind of godfather who is part of a ritual kinship and, like *musahip*, is considered more important than being a blood relative. As with *musahip* families, their children are considered to be siblings and thus marriage between them is also not allowed. A *kirve* used to be considered as the spiritual guide and sponsor of the child; therefore, the ritual kinship functioned as a component of the social well-being of children.

⁵⁰ Interview 9, 16 Jan 2018, London Cemevi, Dalston

participant (23, male), who defines himself as religious but who does not have a *musahip*, describes his perception of a new 'social contract' replacing old spiritual forms:

In the past, one had to have a *musahip* to be Alevi. Then technically, no one is Alevi anymore. Of course, we cannot say that. That was thirty years ago. But people still believe in this philosophy and try to practise and adopt it. Then how do you define Alevism? I mean, how do you define entering into *yol*? [...] The most significant change I have seen is that there were *musahip* and *kirve* as a social contract, but now the social contract is being a member of the association. There is a link between the association and the person.⁵¹

Indeed, though it used to be defined through affiliation with an *ocak*, and having a *dede* and a *musahip*, being Alevi is now very often linked to belonging to a *cemevi*. Replacing spiritual connexions with a commitment or membership of a *cemevi* is a practical innovation linked to diasporic dynamics and provides a key to belonging. Not surprisingly, engagement with the *cemevi* (and BAF) is very often cited in participants' responses when asked how they practise Alevism.

As the *ocaks* could not find a place in urban/diasporic Alevism, *cemevis* came to play a key role. This migration-driven development emphasises that a spatial shift had taken place since Alevism in the diaspora is now centred on *cemevis*, a characteristic that substantially distinguishes post-migration Alevism from its old, pre-migration form. The existence of special buildings as places of worship (such as a Christian church or a Muslim Mosque) did not characterise Alevism until migration, *ocaks* were spiritual institutions and were not located in particular public buildings. There were no specific places reserved to conduct the *cem* and Alevis used to gather in the largest village house or the house of the *ocak* family, or sometimes in an open area that had sacred significance. The only sacred spaces were things like a fountain, a mountain or an unusual geological feature, a tomb or a grave. A widely known Alevi aphorism, '*dört can bir cem her yerde olabilir*' (with four followers, a *cem* can be everywhere), expresses this well. In one of the *cem* gatherings I attended in the building of the London Cemevi,

⁵¹ Interview 14, 21 Nov 2018, Dalston

Dalston, a *dede* told a story to the attendees to explain why 'Alevism is a "na-mekan" [non-place] faith'. He clearly expresses the Alevi approach to the spatiality of worship:

The Christian clergyman asks a *dede*, 'We have churches, Muslims have mosques, what do you (Alevi) have?' *Dede* responds: 'apart from your churches and mosques, everywhere between earth and sky is our place to worship'.⁵²

However, with the development of Alevism in the urban context, what Alevi needed most was a community space in which to gather together and practise their faith. *Cemevis* were the first public places of Alevism established as a necessity of urban life and, consequently, this new urban tradition determined the new socially constructed form of Alevism. As a socio-spatial manifestation of urban Alevism (Sen and Soner, 2016), *cemevis* provided a new way for Alevi to claim their collective identity (Özyürek, 2009). Even though *cemevis* did not have a place in traditional Alevism, they have played a leading role in reformulating Alevi identity, discourses and practices in the diaspora.

The centrality of *cemevis* marks the social and religious configuration of Alevi communities in the post-migration period. The power that *ocaks* had in the past was transferred to *cemevis* in the diaspora. As *ocaks* and their spiritual networks regulating communal life lost their relevance and faded away in the diaspora, *cemevis* played a key role in strengthening social cohesion and maintaining social regulation. It is what makes this new form a *cemevi*-centred Alevism. This institutional transition suggests a fundamental structural alteration, a shift from *ocak*-centred Alevism to *cemevi*-centred Alevism, one that has changed the spirit of Alevism as is now detailed.

The implications of this institutional and spatial transformation are manifold in terms of the religious, socio-political and organisational life of Alevi communities. The question to be asked is what religious significance has been invested in this new modern institution that emerged with migration and has played such a central role in Alevi society; and from a religious point of view, what is its place in the Alevi faith, since the *cemevi* is not just a community centre. A prominent *dede*, Hasan Kılavuz, addressed

⁵² Fieldwork notes, participant observation, *cem* gathering in London Cemevi, Dalston, 15 June 2017. The *dede* who delivered this speech was conducting a *cem* as a visiting *dede* from Turkey.

this question and explained the religious significance of the *cemevi* in modern/urban Alevism and the place of the *dede* in them:

Since ancient times it is said that wherever an Alevi *pir*⁵³ [*dede*] sits, it is a *cemevi*. If he comes to your house, your house is a *cemevi*. If he sits in the field, the field is a *cemevi*. Today, our *pirs*, *seyits* are in *cemevis*, so the *cemevi* is our place of worship. *Cemevi* has now become a must because we no longer fit in houses. We made such a place because a large space is needed. We see our *seyits*, *dedes*, our religious leaders in *cemevis* where they serve. That is why we call it a *cemevi*, just as the house of any *talip* where our *pir* sits is blessed as a *cemevi*, today because our *pir* comes here, we blessed it as a *cemevi*. Wherever our *pirs*, *seyits* sit, it is a sacred place for us.⁵⁴



Figure 4. Dede leading a *cem* in the London *Cemevi*, Wood Green

Here, the account of the Hasan Kılavuz *dede* refers to a kind of sacralisation due to the presence of a *dede* in a *cemevi*. As *cemevi* means a *cem* house where people for the *cem* have gathered, and as the

⁵³ *Pir*, *dede* and *seyit* are synonyms used for Alevi clerics

⁵⁴ Interview 30, 11 August 2018, Mersin, Turkey

cem cannot be performed without a *dede*, technically *dedes* are indispensable actors in the *cemevi*. Thus, one might think that the religious charisma of the *dede* is transferred into the *cemevi*. The reality is slightly different, however. The transition from *ocak*-centred Alevism to *cemevi*-centred Alevism is crucially connected to the changing role and decline in the charismatic influence of the *dede*, as we shall see now.

The changing role of the *dede*

As we saw in the previous section, Alevism in eastern Anatolia conventionally relied on *ocak*-centred spiritual networks regulating community life. Among the members of sacred *ocak* lineages (called *ocakzade*), some undertake religious duties and provide services such as visiting the villages of their *talips* (followers) and conducting *cems*. These *ocakzade* clerics are called ‘*pir*’, ‘*seyit*’ or ‘*dede*’⁵⁵. These are synonymous words used in different linguistic settings. Apart from *dede*, a Turkish word (literally meaning grandfather), *pir* and *seyit* are used in Zazaki, Kurdish and Arabic. However, in the post-migration period, *dede* has become the term widely used to define these clerics. As Gezik (2020) points out, the widespread adoption of the Turkish word *dede* (rather than *pir* or *seyit*) among the ethnically and linguistically pluralised Alevi population suggests a change in social structure experienced in the last half-century and has sociological and ideological implications. Those who read the origins of Alevis from a Turkish perspective tend toward using the word *dede* because of its ethnic (Turkish) origins while the terms *pir* and *seyit* tend to be neglected because of their Kurdish and Arabic associations. Along with the Turkish assimilationist policies forced on Alevis throughout history, the desire for terminological standardisation amongst Alevis in the post-migration period has also favoured the term *dede*. With this in mind, in this thesis I shall use the term *dede* to indicate Alevi clerics who belong to an *ocak* family and undertake religious duties as it is the most widely accepted.

When Alevi communities were dispersed by migration, *dedes* could no longer undertake their particular religious duties for the followers of their *ocaks* and lost their vital position in the communal hierarchy.

⁵⁵ There are also female *ocakzades*, called ‘*Ana*’ in Turkish or ‘*pire*’ in Kurdish. However, although her position has a religious significance due to their sacred lineage, she is not visible as much as *dede*. Even though *Ana* appears more in diasporic *cem* gatherings, traditionally, apart from some unique cases (such as *Anşa Bacılar*), female religious leaders are not very common in religious practice and authority.

Sökefeld explains this through the inflexibility of the *dede* institution and the fact that ‘dedes could not be transferred from one congregation to another like a Christian priest or a Sunni hoca as they occupied specific positions within particular and fixed networks of *talips*’(2002: 170).

The rise of left-wing politics in the 1970s also contributed to the weakening of the charismatic influence of religious leadership. Alevi experienced, as Sökefeld (2002:165) suggests, ‘a collective amnesia’ in the period between 1950 and 1990. As a result of this ‘ideological re-orientation’ which simultaneously occurred with urban migration, religious institutions and practices had a ‘very limited and reduced scope’ (Sökefeld, 2002:165). This period was important in the history of Turkish politics as the leftist political movement gained momentum and tensions increased between far-right and leftist groups which led to the 1980 military coup⁵⁶ that has left a significant mark on social and political life until the present day. Alevi were widely involved in Turkish left-wing politics as members or leaders of socialist organisations that aimed to establish a socialist revolution in Turkey. In the first decades after the coup, these former socialist activists turned to their communities and contributed towards the politicisation of Alevi and the secularisation of its religious leadership. This process was later advanced through a boom in publications in the early 1990s by and about Alevi led by Alevi intellectuals who were non-academic Alevi researchers. The increase in written accounts discussing Alevi origins, practices and beliefs, challenged the primacy of the *dedes*’ wisdom and knowledge.

Sökefeld (2002) explains this challenge to *dedes*, the ‘religious specialists of Alevism’, as an outcome of the new Alevi politics of identity in Turkey and Germany. This period was marked by the establishment of Alevi associations worldwide which were set up, as mentioned before, against the backdrop of the Sivas Massacre in 1993. In Germany, these pioneering associations were founded as Alevi cultural centres and led by leftist Alevi who adopted Alevism as a cultural rather than a religious heritage (Sökefeld, 2002). These new leaders of the Alevi community explicitly promoted secularism and criticised the *dedes* whom they claimed did not have the education and knowledge to lead society, thus left *dedes* outside of associational leadership. Thus, the *dedes* did not play any significant part in the

⁵⁶ The military coup was the third and bloodiest one in Turkey’s history and had the most brutal and traumatic consequences with fifty people executed, five hundred thousand arrested, and hundreds dying in prison due to brutal treatment and widespread torture. Thirty thousand went abroad as political refugees (Massicard, 2007; Zürcher, 2004).

formation and rise of Alevi associations in that period. There were also a very limited number of *dedes* in the diaspora at that time.

In the earlier periods of diasporisation in Germany, the Alevi cultural centres conducted *cems* using a few independent *dedes* who travelled all over Germany (Sökefeld, 2002). However, the recent periods of diasporisation have seen further developments. With the spread of *cemevis*, Western European countries have started to host more *dedes*, newly migrated from Turkey, so that they have a greater presence in community life. Subsequently, *dedes* have regained some of their functions, albeit in a different context where religious duties in the *cemevi* are conducted by *dedes* who work for a salary or on a voluntary basis. As a result, a *dede* becomes known more by their association with a *cemevi* than the *ocak* to which they belong. Thus, the main characteristic of the urbanised *dede* is what Yaman (2012) calls a transition from an '*ocak dedesi*' (*ocak dede*) to a '*cemevi dedesi*' (*cemevi dede*). Similarly, Gezik (2020) suggests that while *cemevis* are the spatial and symbolic manifestation of the urban Alevi transformation, the term '*cemevi dede*' has come to the fore as its representative.

The fieldwork data support this argument. As mentioned before, most Alevis do not know who their *ocak*-related *dede* is; instead, they know the *dedes* from their *cemevi*. Meeting with *dedes* randomly assigned or hosted by a *cemevi*, while allowing for the continued recognition of their role in maintaining ritual practices, has weakened the religious submission to them and accordingly their charismatic influence. The statement of the following elderly participant (84, male) strikingly expresses this:

Before, when we saw a *dede* at the door, we used to stand up and greet him with great respect and kiss his hand and feet. But now we are sitting here, *dede* comes and say hello [...] Times have changed, *dedes* become *kul* [servant] to us as they come and greet us.⁵⁷

Dedes used to have ultimate power in the community when it came to decision making, not only concerning religious matters but also the social and organisational structures of the close-knit Alevi communities. For example, in the village setting, from land disputes to domestic problems, all community or family issues went to *dedes* for resolution. However, the migration-driven institutional

⁵⁷ Interview 3, 6 October 2017, London Cemevi, Dalston

transition from *ocak* to *cemevi* lessened their prestige compared to the bureaucratic authority of *cemevis* (or Alevi associations) along with the socialist and secular movements which had noticeably become woven into Alevi society. As a result of this decline, the institution of the *dede* became secularised (Dressler, 2006), as their remit is decided by the secular leaders and their role confined to ritual contexts and removed from the social and organisational spheres of Alevi society.

Research suggests that immigrant religious institutions in the US are often established by ordinary community members and carried on a membership system built on lay participation in decision-making and lay-centred leadership (Yang and Ebaugh, 2001). Similarly, diasporic Alevis, including British Alevis, exemplify the concept of the lay-centred religious community since *dedes* do not have a visible role in the decision-making mechanism. Kehl-Bodrogi (2000) indicates that the integration of Alevism into modern urban conditions occurred through both the change in the transmission of the tradition from the oral to the written (and from secret/hidden to public) and to the transition of authority from *dedes* to the laity, something which Sökefeld (2002:165) initially sees as 'a transition from dede-centred Alevism to an association-centred Alevism'. However, the term 'dede-centred Alevism' as a description of what was traditional Alevism is debated, as the central institution of Alevism was not the *dede* itself but the *ocak*, the importance and influence of the *dedes* being due to belonging to an *ocak* family. My point here is that the loss of the *dedes'* authority is linked to the loss of the relevance of the *ocak* in urbanised Alevism. In other words, what they lost was their influence because of the decline in recognition of *ocak* lineage as a mark of charisma. Accordingly, this structural change is an institutional transition from an *ocak*-centred Alevism into *cemevi*-centred Alevism which has caused a shift in power from the *dedes* to the lay-leaders of *cemevis*.

A Weberian reading of *cemevi*-centred diasporic Alevism emphasises the replacement of the spiritual/religious charismatic influence emanating from the *dede* himself (a charisma bestowed traditionally through their *ocak* lineage) with the bureaucratic authority held by the laity through their organisations. The old type of *ocak*-based charismatic authority and the affective type of social action associated with it has been replaced with the bureaucratic power of the *cemevis* mobilising collectively around a more rational type of social action. While the old type of authority was based on religious-charismatic grounds, the new modern rational leaders had non-religious qualifications, privileges and training and were bound by bureaucratic rules. It is closely connected to a process that Weber (1978) defines as the routinisation of charisma.

Although there are substantial differences between the historical trajectories of Alevism and doctrinal religions, nevertheless the notion of transformation and routinisation apply well in explaining the changes that have been outlined so far. As in the studies of Christian Pentecostalism by Poloma (1989) and Protestant congregations by Moberg (1962), their Weberian approach to the transformation of religious organisations is applicable to the migration-driven Alevi experience. For example, Moberg suggests that after the passing of the original charismatic figure and the question of what will follow, the charismatic period comes to an end and another major period in which religion is institutionalised, bureaucratised and the charisma routinised begins. In the Alevi case, after migration, a new period began with the decline in the importance of the *ocaks* and hence the charismatic influence and authority of the *dedes* that flowed from it. The need for a system that could perform the functions previously performed by the *ocaks*, led *cemevis* to broaden their functions and to become influential in Alevi society. Consequently, the charismatic period of Alevism ended in the diaspora and a new institutionalised and bureaucratised period began.

It is in this context that the charismatic spiritual leader who used to visit their followers annually on special occasions turned into an everyday cleric who is employed by a *cemevi* and subjected to the management of its chair and board. Consequently, the charisma of the *dede* was swapped for the bureaucratic power of the *cemevi* leaders authorised by its members through elections. Today, the way the religious functions of the *dede* are carried out depends on the decision of the *cemevi* administration. A *dede* (56, male) in London critically describes working with the *cemevi* leaders:

We provide our services under challenging conditions. That is part of modern Alevism. The person who comes out of the ballot box thinks he is the king [...] With the ballot box, he has even the power of putting the *dede* in front of the door. He has all the resources. You, as a *dede*, even cannot gather a *cem* if he does not offer financial opportunities. You are not able to bring the community together. The secretary is at his command; if I tell the secretary that I will gather a *cem* and request an announcement, she asks him and ignores me if he did not order her to do so.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ Interview 8, 16 Jan 2018, London Cemevi, Dalston

Eliminating the influence of *dedes* from all non-religious spheres not surprisingly has made their function more symbolic, formal and limited. The rituals requiring *dedes* are mostly religiously symbolic events decided by the organisational leaders. Besides *cem* gatherings, the British Alevi associations frequently need a *dede* for ceremonial rituals at public events. A *dede* often opens events by lighting candles (a ritual to start events) and saying prayers, sometimes giving a short speech, and then finishes with prayers at the end of the event.

Some *dedes* I met during fieldwork in Turkey and the UK told me *they* should manage *cemevis* rather than the laity. Although the participation of *dedes* in the leadership race to run Alevi institutions has not been seen yet in the UK, it does occasionally happen in Turkey. The following participant is one of those *dedes* who, since 2013, chairs one of the biggest *cemevis* in Turkey. He is a returnee who lived in the diaspora for decades and who was among the pioneers in establishing the first Alevi association as well as representing Alevis in interfaith dialogue projects, which he later continued to do in Turkey. The fact that he was diasporic may explain the reasons for his decision to run for *cemevi* leadership. He defends the presence of *dedes* in the administration of *cemevis*:

Most of our institutions have problems with the *dede* and *seyit*. Why? First, the reorganising of Alevis disfavoured their *seyits* and *dedes*. Second, the children of *seyits* and *dedes* did not educate themselves to serve better their *talips*, to guide or lead *cemevis*. Or among them, those who had a profession did not come to the *cemevi*, did not undertake these services. As it happened, a space remained for ordinary *talips*. Anyone with the opportunities, time and connections can be chairman. But as a chairman, if there is a *seyit* and *dede* there — even if he is deficient — you must respect him, listen to him or encourage him to undertake this service instead of ignoring him. While some *dedes* do not want to conduct services, some chairmen do not wish to have *dedes* as the head of the institution. [...] But there should be a religious person in this office. People come here [to the *cemevi*] because this is a faith centre, so the leader must be capable of informing them about our belief. [...] The children of *seyits* and *dedes*, who have studied, have made an academic career, have increased their knowledge, or would increase it, should they be put into service in *cemevis*. It is undeniably necessary not to give our beliefs into

the hands of ignorant people. It would ruin our faith. The spirit of our ancestors will not rest in peace.⁵⁹

However, the balance of power between the bureaucratic authority of associations (and *cemevi* leaders) and *dedes* is likely to shift. Some *dedes* have begun to develop their organisational and intellectual skills and have put forward various ideas about community and identity issues. Though still limited in number, there is a new form of self-educated *dede* who writes books, engages in public discussions on Alevi identity and tradition, and gives advice to associations on educational matters. Moreover, in recent years, Alevi federations have begun to establish faith boards (*inanç kurulu*) made up of *dedes*, making them more actively engaged in regulating ritual customs. The newly established Britain Faith Board (*Britanya Inanç Kurulu*), which is directly connected to the faith board organised under the auspices of the Europe Alevi Confederation, works independently of the *cemevi* administrative board. These board practices have the potential to both recover to some extent the charismatic influence of *dedes* and to reduce the conflict between *dedes* and the chairs of *cemevis*. Yet even so, these faith boards have reduced the function of *dedes* to a ritualistic one, a phenomenon bound up with the institutionalisation and the bureaucratisation of Alevism in the diaspora.

Although Alevi associations have overshadowed *dedes*, they are still the clerics of Alevism. Since a *cem* cannot be conducted without the presence of a *dede*, regardless of their position in the organisational structure of Alevi communities, they are essential for conducting religious services. Thus, Alevism cannot be Alevism without *dedes* and, further, keeping the community together around a collective religious identity is impossible without these clerics. Thus, under their own rules, bureaucratic leaders require the presence of the *dede* (a position now based less on an *ocak*-derived charisma and more on having the necessary skills and knowledge to carry out the function of the *dede*) to maintain their power and purpose.

Overall, the recent diasporic developments have improved, and are improving, the *dedes'* position and influence within Alevism although a different basis from before. They are now chosen because of their skills and knowledge that will make them a competent *dede*, which is very much a bureaucratic process.

⁵⁹ Interview 30, 11 August 2018, Turkey

They are increasingly becoming part of the bureaucracy and it is their advancement in the bureaucracy (rather than their *ocak* charisma) which is now giving them power and influence. In this way, the institution of the *dede* is itself becoming rationalised in that the modern *dede* exercises influence only through their bureaucratic place in the *cemevi*. In other words, the 'modern' *dede* exercises power through their employment by a *cemevi* (just as does the chair and board) although their job remit limits them to religious matters. It parallels the change of authority from charismatic to rational, the institution of *dede* too becoming rationalised.

Another significant change and break with the past in diasporic Alevism, which is closely linked to the changing position of the *dede* and the decline in his charismatic influence, is the weakening of the traditional internal justice mechanism that upheld and regulated the social and moral principles of Alevi communities. It is to this that we now turn.

A change in the vital function of the *cem*: The internal justice mechanism

The *cem*, which literally means gathering, is the fundamental communal practice of worship of Alevi which takes place under the direction of a *dede* who conducts a set of rituals. The ritual begins with the lighting of candles and continues with prayers and various ritual duties accompanied by music and the *semah*. At the end of the ritual, *lokma* (food) provided by the attendees is shared.

Traditionally, the *cem* was not merely a form of worship but also provided a platform to resolve disputes and perceived injustices among community members. It was a kind of community court that operated at the beginning of the gathering when the *dede* would ask those present if they had any disputes to settle. There were even some *cem*s organised purely to settle disputes. At these proceedings the community would collectively judge whether a person had broken any moral principles and the *dede* would sanction anyone who had by assigning them particular tasks such as working on volunteer projects for the community. A serious violation of the rules and codes, such as theft or sexual abuse, might result in the exclusion from the community and the person declared '*düşkün*' (fallen). Acceptance of such decisions made by the *dede* was obligatory.

Thus, *cem* gatherings functioned as an internal court of justice policing the adherence to the moral principles of Alevi communal life. This worked well because Alevi were close-knit communities and the participants in the *cem* were small in number, consisting of the members of the village community who

knew each other and accepted the authority of the *dede*. When migration dispersed these local communities, Alevi were separated from each other and their tribal *ocak dedes*, and the community structures were not transplanted to the diaspora. The internal justice mechanism, which was one of the vital functions of the *cem*, became difficult to maintain in a *cem* with large and mixed Alevi groups. Eventually, the Alevi tradition of solving problems internally disappeared under diaspora conditions.

However, the breakdown of the internal justice system that was one of the most functional characteristics of Alevism not only resulted from the diversity of the people meeting in the *cem* but also from the complexity of relationships between community members shaped by the altered social, economic and political expectations in the diaspora. It only remained in theory and did not, for instance, prevent Alevi from taking legal action against each other. For example, it was not used to resolve the internal conflict over the leadership of the London Cemevi though the conflict was among a group of people who had known each other and had worked together for years in the *cemevi*. The conflict peaked with the purchase of the new London Cemevi (see Chapter 6) which resulted in a court case. I discussed this with some of those who had been at the court hearing and heard how they felt when the high court judge, after researching Alevism on the internet, asked them why they had not used their internal justice system under their *dedes* instead of resorting to court action. Both participants (58, male and 47, female) stressed how they felt 'shame' when the judge reminded them of their practice of solving problems internally. One of them said:

I cannot explain how much shame I felt when the judge said that. We were claiming that we are Alevi, including me, but in those three months, the judge had become a better Alevi than us".⁶⁰

Business partnerships among community members that sometimes result in financial disputes also could not benefit from this mechanism. In an informal discussion, when I asked a *dede* about such disputes between community members, his comment exposed the challenges of running such community courts under diaspora conditions:

⁶⁰ Interview 4, 19 October 2017, Haringey and Interview 19, 21 February 2020, Wood Green

We ask people in *cem* if they have any complaints about each other. They say ‘no’. But I know many of them had business partnerships and had problems with money and some have unpaid debts to another, even some went to court for economic disagreements. Many have not been kind to each other. So, then technically, many of them are ‘*düşkün*’ [fallen]. If we ask more, they will get angry with us. So we cannot use this function of *cem* anymore.⁶¹

His comment reveals the link between the waning functionality of the internal justice mechanism and the decrease in the power of *dedes*. Whereas obedience to the decision of a *dede* was once obligatory and thus secured conformity to the regulations, now *dedes* are aware of the potential reaction from community members against the *dede*’s decision. Overall, the whole section has reviewed the structural changes that have occurred in the diasporic transformation and the changing authority of the institution of the *dede*. I now move on to looking at the implications of this transformation for the ritual practices of diasporic Alevis.

The shifting mode of believing and ritual

Diasporic transformation of religious communities raises the question of whether the secular and pluralistic character of diasporas weaken religion (Kiong and Kong, 2000; Yang and Ebaugh, 2001). Using the example of migrant religious communities in the US, Yang and Ebaugh suggest that the process of modernity, secularisation and globalisation does not involve a decline of religion; instead, it ‘promotes institutional and theological transformation that energise and revitalise religions’ (2001:270). Thus, it can be said that ‘neither the function of religion nor the significance of religion is declining among immigrants’ (p. 270). This claim frequently applies to diasporic religious communities around the world, including Alevis, and its implications are twofold. On the one hand, as this section will show, the British Alevi community have experienced an increase in religious practice but, on the other, this increase may not indicate a corresponding increase in piety and devotion. This dilemma necessitates a rethinking of the distance and link between ‘belonging’ and ‘believing’ when referring to a diasporic religion.

⁶¹ Informal discussion, 16 Jan 2018, Dalston

In her study of belief and social identity, Day (2011) tries to find out 'what people really believe in' and argues that 'many people "believe in belonging", sometimes accepting religious identifications to complement other social and emotional experiences of "belongings"' (p. 191). She has coined the concept of 'performative belief' to emphasise how belief is reproduced through social action, stating that 'belief is not pre-formed, but a lived, embodied performance, brought into being through action and where the object of worship is not an entity such as a god or "society", but the experience of belonging' (2011:194). Thus, 'believing in belonging' refers to the performative function of belief 'through social actions of both belonging and excluding' which 'reinforce their sense of collective belonging' (2011:194).

My fieldwork findings suggest many reasons to argue that diasporic transformation has caused a shift in believing that signifies a performative belief in Alevi identity rather than in Alevi theology. First, though only a small number of participants explained their connection with Alevism through 'believing', all research participants, including those who described themselves as 'not religious', prioritised Alevi identity as a master identity, even compared to their ethnic or political affiliations. So, diasporisation has revitalised Alevi identity and practices but not religiosity and piety.

Second, the fieldwork data pointed to a changing view of what it is to practise Alevism, or what 'being Alevi' means, which demonstrates this performative mode of believing. Many Alevis, including some of my participants, consider themselves 'culturally Alevi', suggesting the centrality of a philosophical conception of Alevism (an attitude towards life) rather than a more theological orientation. Alevi teachings which reject formal rules of worship and instead focus on inner meanings, moral values, and ethical conduct may have helped such interpretations of Alevism to move beyond being seen simply as a faith. Many research participants from different generations avoided seeing Alevism as a religion, and even some stated that Alevism was not a religion at all, instead described it as a 'way of life' or 'a materialist philosophy' as stated by this young participant (male, 23):

I think Alevism is the philosophy and rituals that enable people to live in the most harmonious way with nature in the Anatolia landscape. I think this is the principle of Alevism. In my view, the trouble with defining Alevism as religion is that religions are philosophically idealistic. There are concepts that we create in our brains, we cannot prove these concepts, but we have to believe they exist. However, there are no such things in Alevism. I think Alevism is a very materialist

philosophy; rituals come from what is available and real. It is a philosophy and teaching built on the '*somut*' [meaning concrete or tangible].⁶²

If the age of the participants is taken into account, then the responses of the young and old to the question of how they practise their faith show some differences. While the older participants indicated conventional worshipping practices, most of the young participants were more inclined to perceive practising Alevism as something beyond worship, as they named various socio-cultural activities. Apart from some of the essential worship practices (such as *cem* and the rituals in the period of the Twelve Imams) which were common to all age groups, the young participants repeatedly indicated that they follow philosophical principles in their practice of Alevism. The following seven answers cited in the online survey to the open-ended question 'how do you practise Alevism?' demonstrates this:

following the Alevi philosophy of humanism

ritual does not exist same as [sic] Muslim context, it exists as a principle, such as 'have your hand-tongue-waist' or respecting the *ziyarets*⁶³

by perceiving belief and philosophy as a guide in my life

being kind to others and treating everybody the same respect [sic]

having *muhabbet* (which is the best form of practising my faith, i.e., sharing experiences)

I practise to rid of [sic] bad habits and feelings, I practice to kill all bad sins

focus my energy around love and respect, not to judge, not to discriminate, look at people with [sic] the same eye level, etc.

⁶² Interview 14, 21 Nov 2018, Dalston

⁶³ Sacred places of pilgrimage

Besides such philosophical principles, most young participants named various socio-cultural activities in the *cemevi*, most often ‘volunteering at *cemevi*’ (or at the BAF), as practising Alevism. While for some attendance at classes that taught Alevism and playing the *bağlama* (a musical instrument that accompanies most of the Alevi rituals and social activities) took their place in the list of Alevi practices. Such a broad list of activities indicating ways of practising Alevism or ‘being Alevi’ that are not merely religious but also social signifies the claim that for many, Alevi identity is a cultural identity.

Third, the considerable decline in fasting despite a noticeable attendance at collective fasting rituals also denotes this changing context of believing. The fast of the Twelve Imams, also known as the Muharram Fast,⁶⁴ is the most important and longest fast held by Alevis in the first month of the Islamic calendar called Muharram, a mourning period of twelve days honoured by fasting one day for each of the saints. Despite its fundamental place in the Alevi ritual world, only very few research participants reported fasting, an indication of a lack of inner religious motivation. On the other hand, the large attendance every day during this particular period to share *lokma* (food) reveals the importance of its symbolic meaning of a collective religious identity.

Fourth, the decrease in individually performed rituals that also demonstrates the lack of inner religious motivation has accompanied the increasing collectivisation of rituals. The changing form of everyday worship, such as the sharing of *lokma*⁶⁵ and lighting the *çerağ (çıla)*⁶⁶ that used to be more often performed individually rather than collectively, exemplify this. Both practices used to be the most common individual rituals, often performed weekly, fortnightly, or more irregularly (often on Thursdays), and for many reasons such as to mark special religious days or for the peaceful repose of

⁶⁴ Muharrem Fast represents mourning for the death of Hussein (the grandson of Muhammad and son of Caliph Ali) and his supporters during the Battle of Kerbela in 680 AD. Although it is the only common practice with Shias, the form of fasting rituals is different from those practised by Shias. Following Twelve Saints as well as Caliph Ali are only two common symbols between Alevism and Shia, there is no further similarity.

⁶⁵ *Lokma* (literally bite in Turkish, Kurdish and Arabic) refers to the food baked by the followers and sacralised as *lokma* which represent the symbolic meaning of ‘sharing’ amongst the community. At the individual level, often conducted by Alevi women in their homes, the *lokma* sharing ritual contains the preparation of food and its distribution each time to a different family among the neighbours often chosen from those in financial need.

⁶⁶ Lighting candles (*çerağ/çıla*) symbolises a blessing with the divine light. Traditionally, it was performed with handmade candles, made with a piece of white cloth, waxed and twisted.

members of the family who had died. Both were also performed during visits to sacred places and annual *cem* gatherings, but such collective practices were not frequent. However, in the diaspora, this was reversed. At the individual level, both rituals were observed extremely rarely, indicating their break with the past when they were very much rituals performed by the individual. However, they have become much more frequently performed as collective practices in the diaspora. *Lokma* sharing is performed during the Twelve Imam (Muharrem) fasting days and at *cem* gatherings that are conducted at least once a month. Lighting candles is accompanied by prayers said by a *dede* at the beginning of many events (religious and even social) and the candles are blown out at the end. Lighting candles is also one of the rituals that have been transferred into a non-ritual context as it increasingly occurs at social events too. This is the same for the *semah*, as will be discussed later.

As far as I have observed, the only widely continuing individual practice is the preparation of *aşure* at the end of the Twelve Imams fasting period, which seems to be related to its distinctively symbolic manifestation of Alevi identity. Following the twelve days of fast, a special dessert called *aşure*, made from twelve different grains, nuts and fruits, is cooked and shared with people. Preparing *aşure* and sharing with neighbours is a deeply symbolic custom which all Alevis continue to practice, including those in the diaspora. However, it is also a collective event. Besides making and sharing *aşure* at home, Alevis also gather for *aşure* at the *cemevi*, something I shall come to later.

Fifth, the lack of inner motivation in *cem* gatherings is another point that suggests a change to a more performative mode of believing. In traditional *cem* gatherings, the spiritual flow of the ritual accompanied by music often enabled the followers to enter into an ecstatic trance. However, in the *cem* gatherings I observed at the London Cemevi, only a few participants, mostly the elderly, seemed to go into an ecstatic trance while the others showed different types of engagement. During the gathering, a considerable number of attendees were taking pictures, recording videos or streaming online on Facebook, Instagram and YouTube. Some were trying to capture and stream videos online while reading the real-time comments made by those watching during this central ritual where they are expected to give 'faithful' attention. Thus, it would seem that what attracts the attention of participants is the ability to share this collective performance showing their Alevi identity.



Figure 5 (a-b). An attendee streaming an online video and attendees at a cem recording and streaming videos and taking photos

Overall, all the examples of worship observed during the fieldwork highlight participation as a performance of religious identity and belonging rather than religious worship *per se*. Thus, believing in Alevism has turned into believing in belonging to Alevism, something which strengthens the collective senses of Alevi identity. Ritual has become a social action of identification that encompasses a sense of collective identity and, therefore, constitutes a performance of belonging rather than an expression of a belief in Alevi theology.

The frequency of collective practice and its routinisation

The decrease in individually performed rituals has accompanied an increase in the frequency of collectively performed practices as exemplified currently in the *cem*. In traditional rural settings, *dedes* used to visit their *talips* (followers) in their village once a year and conduct a *cem*. However, in the diaspora this annual sacred ritual turned into a routine one conducted at least once a month. This is specific to the diaspora. In Turkey, with some exceptions, whether in the city or rural spaces, the *cem* takes place much less frequently than in the diaspora. The significant increase in the frequency of *cems* in the diaspora is one of the most significant alterations to worship and can be seen as denoting its routinisation and also its standardisation, a matter that will be addressed later.

Another case that exemplifies this change is the Twelve Imams fasting ritual. In recent years, during the Muharram fasting period, nearly every day, one hometown association organises an event at the

London Cemevi called 'Lokma Sharing Day'. These *lokma* sharing events that mark the collective ending of daily fasting represent a new diasporic form of ritual. Although Muharram fasting is a fundamental ritual of Alevism, there was no equivalent tradition in Alevism to the rituals associated with the Muslim period of Ramadan. The collective ending of fasting is a new tradition in Alevi society and one that seems to have arisen out of the diasporic conditions, similar to the many other practices that have become collective rather than individual events.

British Alevis also come together annually to share *aşure* in the *cemevi* at the end of the fasting period. Every such event has extensive participation from the community. The volunteers at the *cemevi*, predominantly women for whom it is a two-day effort, begin work the day before preparing large quantities of *aşure* in large pots and the next day distribute it to the community.



Figure 6 (a-b). Cauldrons with *aşure* ready to be shared; and volunteers serving *aşure* at the London Cemevi

Discontinuity of old religious festivals

Comparing the answers from young and older participants about the ways of practising Alevism helps to track the transmission of what is seen as 'tradition' to the new generation. For example, the *cem* and Muharram rituals are mentioned most by young participants, verifying the fact of their transmission to the new generation. However, the calendrical religious festivals celebrated annually in rural areas such as *Xızır*, *Gağan* and *Howtêmal*, which are linked to seasonal periods (similar to religious festivals such as Easter or Christmas), are not. These are religious festivals celebrated by Alevi Kurds with a set of rituals performed individually and collectively. The cult of *Xızır* is one of the main ones of Kizilbash Alevism and

symbolises the sacred power of nature. In *Xızır* month, fasting for three days and conducting a set of rituals were essential aspects of Alevi worship. However, these traditional festive rituals have faded away with the urbanisation of Alevism and were wiped out in the diaspora. In the UK, only a very limited range of *Xızır* rituals are performed by some older participants and there is no other indication that these rituals are observed, another break with the past. *Xızır* seems to be recalled only with a *cem* during its period. However, in some rural areas of Turkey, such as Dersim, these religious festivals are still celebrated, albeit to a reduced extent.

More written materials appear

Like many other religious immigrant communities, Alevis have experienced difficulty in the transmission of their religious traditions to the younger generation due to problems of linguistic understanding as well as those arising from intergenerational tensions. Fieldwork findings suggest that the second and third generations that consist of UK-born or UK-raised young Alevis have English as their first language which they use very comfortably, as most of the young participants reported and preferred to be interviewed in English. Thus, the difficulty in understanding Alevi terminology used to describe Alevi concepts and teachings, not surprisingly, is one of the primary challenges in passing on the tradition to young Alevis as their parents would wish. This difficulty was initially made worse by the lack of *dedes* who could conduct religious services in English. This may also explain why young Alevis are more likely to be engaged in social activities such as courses or social meetings that are run by English speakers.

With the intention of teaching Alevism to the younger generation, Qızılbaş Publishing, established in recent years by the BAF, began to publish bilingual (Turkish and English) educational books. For instance, some books and brochures specifically aimed at children and young people describe core Alevi rituals and their meanings. A mother (47) describes the function of these books:

When my son was a kid, the first question he asked me was why I was lighting candles like Christians? When I told him that Thursdays are very important for Alevis, I light up *çerağ* [the ritual name for lighting candles], he could not understand. But I brought an English leaflet from

the *cemevi*, then he understood better when he reads them and, now, he joins me when I light the candles.⁶⁷

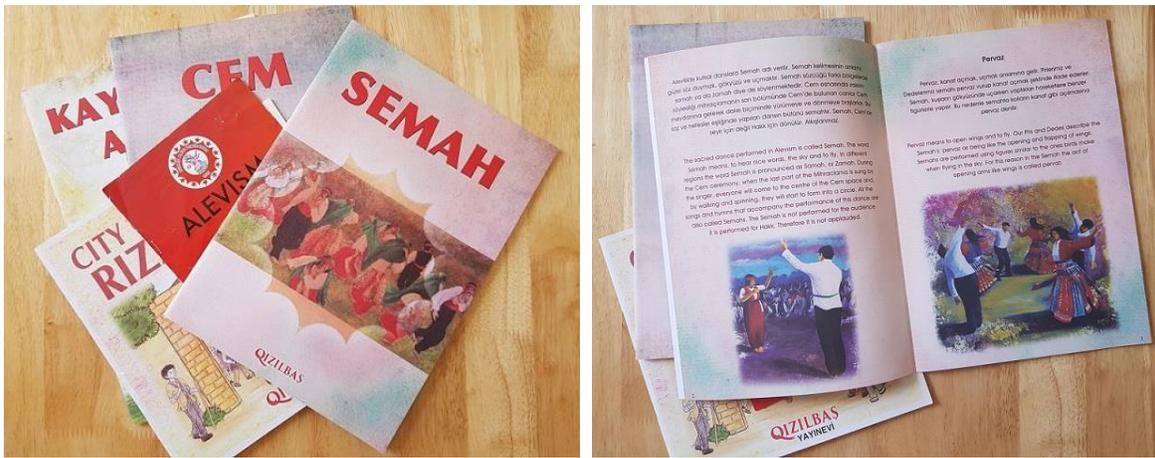


Figure 7 (a-b). Some of the books published for children and young people

The increase in institutionally published books and content prepared for the schools (as Alevi philosophy and ritual practices are now taught in more than twenty schools in England) signify a structural shift from an oral to a written transmission. Besides the plan to distribute content via a mobile app for wider use by young people, the BAF is now preparing an Alevi curriculum that will be published as a textbook with the intention to distribute it to all other English-speaking countries, such as New Zealand, Australia, and the US, for its use in education.

This shift from oral to written also promotes standardisation. The production of a written description and explanation of Alevi rituals contributes towards the standardisation of ritual practices and the language used to describe them. The difference between younger and older participants in how they referred to the *cem* exemplifies this. When discussing *cem* rituals, young Alevis preferred to describe it as the '*cem* ceremony', while the older participants avoided the term 'ceremony' and instead preferred to use only the word '*cem*'. In fact, some of the elderly reacted against the use of the word 'ceremony' when they heard it. The use of the term 'ceremony' by young Alevis seems to be a new habit adopted

⁶⁷ Interview 19, 21 February 2019, London Cemevi, Wood Green

from written source materials that define the ritual gathering as the '*cem* ceremony'. The production of new written materials will no doubt further create standardisation of language describing Alevi rituals.

Folklorisation and standardisation

The spiritual character of Alevism puts a greater focus on inner meaning than the actual form of its rituals. That Alevism covers a diversity of interpretations and different ritual practices is highlighted in the saying: *Yol birdir sürek binbir* (The path is one; practices are a thousand and one). However, this essential characteristic of Alevism that praises diversity has been subject to modification as a result of migration. While diversity could be spatially accommodated in rural Alevism, in the diaspora Alevism needed to pay more attention to collectivisation in the pursuit of unity among community members and its expression and presentation in the quest for visibility and recognition. Community space provided by *cemevis* played an instrumental role in this re-orientation and modification process. Thus, the characteristics of ritualistic change that are explored in the rest of this chapter will be seen to play a crucial role in the remaking of Alevism in the diaspora space, a part in which *cemevis* have played a significant role.

The *cem* rituals I observed in the London Cemevi contain a set of repeated almost folkloric acts, the Twelve Services, that create a kind of stage performance. Although the Twelve Services are a set of rituals performed only in some *cems*, however in London all *cems* contain the Twelve Services, and even some of these rituals are redundantly repeated three times. The constant repetition of these rituals during the *cem* turns it into a kind of theatrical performance, as critically observed in the following statement by a *dede*:

Two or three things make the *cem* cold. Twelve Services do not need to be implemented in every *cem*. For example, three times symbolic sweeping of the square or three times prostrating (*secdeye varılması*) [...] these can only be done once. Above all, *muhabbet cemi* [a *cem* for conversation] has disappeared. *Cems* began to turn into rituals from a template.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ Interview 8, 16 Jan 2018, Dalston

Describing the form of *cem* as a 'ritual from a template' emphasises the repetition of one standard form although there are a variety of forms that a *cem* can take depending on its particular purpose. Most importantly, the Twelve Services are not included in every type of *cem*. However, as far as I have observed, and as confirmed by this *dede*, a particular kind of *cem* that includes the Twelve Services is the one predominantly conducted in the UK. In addition, as mentioned in the *dede's* testimony, the disappearance of the *muhabbet cemi* (a conversational *cem*) supports this argument. This type of *cem* is conducted with the purpose of allowing communication between the *dede* and community members where the Twelve Services and other such rituals are not necessary. However, this type of *cem* is held very rarely in the London Cemevi and, no doubt, in other Alevi diasporas. In sum, the fieldwork data support the argument that the *cem*, the central practice of Alevism, is increasingly taking on a standardised form that has prioritised a type of folkloric visual representation.

In addition, the common practice of participants digitally recording the rituals of the *cem* may also shape, and are shaped, by the prioritisation of its folkloric visual content. On the one hand, visually appealing folkloric performances are likely to attract extensive attention and a desire to digitally record and share the rituals. On the other, the very fact of being observed and recorded by those attending, and therefore its broader distribution on social media, means that the performers may well pay more attention to their way of 'doing', enacting the ritual rather than what it symbolises, which shifts the focus of the ritual activity away from its spiritual meaning to an emphasis on how its folkloric performance is presented to others.



Figure 8 (a-b-c-d). a) Çerağcı (the candle lighter) lighting candles, one of the Twelve Services — b) An attendee taking a picture of the İbrıkçı (Jug servers) washing each other's hand for symbolic purification, one of the Twelve Services— c) Attendees recording a video of one of the Twelve Services — d) The postçu (Fleece keeper), one of the Twelve Services

The contextual change in the *semah*, which is an essential part of the *cem*, also emphasises this pattern of folklorisation and standardisation. The *semah* is a sacred dance with a set of mystical body movements forming a figurative representation of the relationship between humans and the universe. Traditionally, the bodily movements are supposed to emerge spontaneously through the ecstatic trance-

like state of the performers, although there were different regional forms and outlines for the *semah* accompanied by religious songs or hymns. No particular form of dress was required and any devotee could join in the *semah*.



Figure 9. Devotees performing *semah* during a *cem* at the London Cemevi, Wood Green

However, in urban *cem* rituals, as in the UK, though anyone can start the *semah* at the beginning, it is predominantly performed by trained groups employing a choreography that embodies a standard set of aesthetic bodily movements and specific costumes. Now, every Alevi association has its own *semah* group, organised and taught through courses that promote a standard form of these mystical movements which makes them easier to teach. In this way, these courses encourage the standardisation of ritual gestures and the *semah*'s whole visual appearance. Observers, too, follow this pre-designed framework; therefore, even ordinary community members perform the *semah* by using a very similar set of bodily movements. In the following comment, a *dede* nostalgically criticises these *semah* courses:

Semah courses are provided everywhere. It makes me uncomfortable to turn the *semah* into a class. What is *semah*? It is the moment when the person meets God during the *cem*. At that moment, some turn *pervaz* [opening their arms like wings], some cry, some dive into a dream,

some walk on the fire [...] *Cems* in our village used to be like this. It is wrong to force it into shape.⁶⁹

As exemplified in the Twelve Services and *semah* rituals, diasporic Alevi have increasingly focused on the aesthetic visibility of these rituals. Increasing the folkloric content and its visual prioritisation in the ritualistic parts of the *cem*, especially with the *semah* performed by trained groups with a set choreography and costumes that are like uniforms, emphasise the reification of the ritual.

This reification of ritual and its change from an expression of spirituality to a folkloric performance can be seen as another response to the diasporic conditions and environment of migrant Alevi. Johnson (2007), in his study of the Garifuna, speaks of ritual authenticity and explains how it is transformed under diasporic conditions, explaining that ‘the shift from rituals of ancestral territory itself to rituals of territorial representation allows the critical re-examination of “tradition” in view of present needs, social formations, sources of information, spaces, and material contexts’ (2007:233). As Woodhead (2013 cited in Knott, 2016:74) also notes, in contemporary forms of practising religion ‘rituals, beliefs and symbols are cut loose from their old containers and become free-floating as never before’. This is very much the case with Alevi rituals.

The standardised forms that the *semah* now take can be linked to the changing spatial context in which *semah* is performed, which itself is also linked to the diasporic process of modification. Whereas the *semah* was traditionally performed only in *cem* gatherings, now it is also performed in non-ritual contexts with costumes and a set choreography as a part of a public event. Even though performing the *semah* is not allowed in entertainment venues, it is performed at various Alevi events that are not only religious but also social. Moving the *semah* from its sacred ritual context to a non-ritual one signifies the priority given to public visibility. The scholars who have studied contemporary Alevism link this transformation to the Alevi revival. According to Sökefeld (2004:10), the Alevi revival entailed a substantial change in rituals ‘that can be glossed over as folklorisation’ and defines current Alevism as a ‘secular culture’. Similarly, Erol (2010) considers the significant contextual change in the ritual as a change to a cultural representation from a religious one and, by linking it with the Alevi revival, explains

⁶⁹ Interview 8, 16 Jan 2018, Dalston

the transformation 'from ritual/religious practices to practices as an expression of political identity for urban Alevis' (2010:382). Indeed, the moving of the *semah* into a non-ritual context has helped to portray an aesthetic Alevism in public spaces. Thus, the folklorisation and standardisation of such spiritual practices mark the conversion of ritual into a public assertion of religious identity.



Figure 10. A semah performance at Oxford University at the opening ceremony of the Fifth Britain Alevi Festival, 26 May 2015

Conclusion

The chapter has explored how the ritualised Alevi culture has been profoundly transformed by the challenges created by the diasporic experience. Studies on the transformation of migrant religions show that the traditional religious institutions (such as churches, synagogues, mosques and temples) and the affiliations to these institutions have often undergone significant alterations in order to address their place within the diasporic environment (Garbin, 2013; 2014; Johnson, 2007:42; Tweed, 1997; Vásquez and Knott, 2014). The diasporic journey of Alevism shows a profound change in its rituals and their meanings as its traditional institutions, the *ocaks* and their charismatic influence on the rural community no longer had relevance in the diaspora.

By fulfilling the social functions that the *ocaks* held in the past, the laity-managed modern institutions, *cemevis*, came to play a more significant role and became vital for Alevi society. This institutional

transition manifested itself in a shift from *ocak*-centred Alevism to *cemevi*-centred Alevism which replaced spiritual charisma with bureaucratic power. Accordingly, this affected the influence and position of the *dedes*, the Alevi clerics, who were now challenged and, to some extent, brought under the control of the association leaders holding bureaucratic authority legitimised through elections. In sum, the diasporisation of Alevism ended the charismatic influence of the *ocak* and *dede* and initiated a new period centred on the bureaucratic power of *cemevis* and the federations representing Alevi.

This migration-driven transformation denotes a spatial shift. Alevism in the diaspora was now centred on the community space that the *cemevis* provided. This substantially differentiated post-migration Alevism from its old pre-migration form that had not been characterised by specifically designated Alevi buildings or communal spaces. At the same time, the spiritual characteristics of Alevism that valued the diversity of interpretations and practices confronted the necessity to present a more unified face in the diaspora. *Cemevis*, in their provision of a community space, became instrumental in this process of change, allowing more attention to be given to how Alevism should be expressed and presented in the quest for greater visibility and recognition. Thus, the characteristics that distinguished the ritualistic changes that this chapter has reviewed signify a space-related modification, promoted by *cemevis*, of the ritual world of Alevism. In other words, the changes toward more standardised forms are a direct and indirect outcome of the spatial centrality of *cemevis*.

The diasporic modification of rituals through a process of routinisation, folklorisation and standardisation swamped those characteristics of Alevism that had emphasised inner meaning rather than outward performance and which had allowed for diversity. The unmistakable signs of reification with a more symbolic and increasingly standardised (*cismani*) interpretation of Alevism changed its essence. I would agree here with Johnson (2007:42) who argues that 'diasporas do not merely express or carry religions: in a certain sense, they make them'. The diasporic transformation of Alevism emphasises a shift from a spiritual path (*yol*) towards an increasingly standardised diasporic religion.

Finally, the change from a charismatic power bestowed on *dedes* through their *ocak* lineage to a bureaucratic power legitimised through the leadership of associations and *cemevis* has meant that Alevi communities now engage in rational action that best ensures their collective well-being and recognition. This may explain why diasporic Alevism has increasingly come to resemble an 'organised religion'

(Brubaker, 2013) and one that puts its focus on the politics of identity, visibility and recognition. This is explored in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 5: Diasporic Alevism in public space

Introduction

As I write these lines, the Coronavirus pandemic is affecting millions of people globally. I open this chapter with some insights into how the Alevi community responded to this crisis during the first UK lockdown which began on 16 March 2020. The BAF started a campaign in London to provide food for those in self-isolation or with financial needs which involved a considerable collective effort on the part of the community. A food bank was set up with donations from Alevi wholesalers and retailers in the UK and many community members volunteered to distribute food using their cars, vans and bikes. The campaign targeted Alevis and the wider community and, in addition to vulnerable individuals and families, some food was distributed to orphanages and hospitals in London. The EACC London Cemevi joined the campaign by supplying dinner packs consisting of a full traditional homeland meal to NHS workers (not only Alevis) at the nearby North Middlesex University Hospital. Though the food banks were mainly concentrated near the BAF base in north London, the food distribution spread over an extensive area, including Greater London and the other UK regions such as Scotland and Wales, with the help from Alevi associations in those areas.

This campaign illustrates how migrant networks can contribute to addressing a public crisis. In such a national and global emergency, the efforts of community groups can fill the gaps in essential public services caused by the Coronavirus crisis. This scenario also demonstrates the twofold capacity of associations. The first in channelling solidarity and mobilising the Alevi community for a philanthropic purpose; the second in partnering with outside organisations, something that requires collaboration with public service institutions, local authorities and organisations.

As argued in the previous chapter, the transition from religious charisma to bureaucratic power inaugurated a new era of Alevism in the diaspora. Such community work illustrates the institutional and spatial repercussions of this diasporic transition, which is this chapter's focus. Focusing on the interplay between religion, space and politics in the public diaspora sphere, this chapter explores the institutional, spatial, and political dynamics and discourses shaping public performances of British Alevis. The first section explores the engagements of Alevis with UK public institutions and asks how and to what extent Alevism has become institutionalised and what role the politics of identity, visibility and recognition

have played in this institutional journey. The chapter then moves its focus to Alevi spatial politics and explores the theoretical perspectives on placemaking practices with a brief look into the activities surrounding the Memorial to the Sivas Martyrs in London in the second section. Drawing upon a discussion of the first Alevi rally in Trafalgar Square, London's most central and iconic public place, the third section explores Alevi spatial politics in public city space involving homeland politics. Finally, the last section focuses on the annual Britain Alevi Festival, a diasporic 'tradition' celebrating Alevi existence in the UK which links to wider diasporic discourses of space, religion and identity.

Alevi Institutionalisation and recognition in the UK and beyond

Throughout history, Alevis have been in religious and political conflict with the state authorities governing their homeland. From the Ottomans to modern Turkey, Alevis have never been officially recognised and their public existence has been barely visible. Despite the long struggle for recognition that has mobilised Alevis in Turkey and worldwide, *cemevis* are still not officially recognised in Turkey. The Turkish government continues to reject the Alevi claim for the official recognition of *cemevis*, although in recent years there have been a few efforts by local councils held by the opposition parties of the CHP (The Republican People's Party) and HDP (Peoples' Democratic Party) to do so. Given the centuries-long experience of invisibility and marginalisation, recognition may symbolise a collective wound that has never healed. It is certainly a prominent matter in the identity politics that forms Alevis' present-day collective practices in the diaspora.

Popular acceptance of religious presence, as Oosterbaan (2014:598) suggests, 'is often based on the public life of religious traditions that are considered part of the nation'. In Western settings, religious identity becomes more visible through a material presence that allows for their acceptance. Places of worship identify religious groups uniquely: Muslims are typically associated with mosques, Christians with churches and Jews with synagogues, for instance. Spatial and institutional visibility often dominates the discourses of migrants claiming legitimacy and recognition. However, it may be more challenging for smaller, non-Abrahamic migrant faith groups, like Alevis. Despite the opportunities Western societies offer, the regulations enforce these religious groups to orient their faith within a 'template' that is dominated by a Western — and specifically Christian — understanding of religion. This understanding suggests systematically arranged beliefs and rituals (defined through sacred scriptures of rules and

practices) and a bureaucratically organised religion with a hierarchical leadership structure. Such a reading of religion has organisational and institutional implications.

Western regulations of religious pluralism, while guaranteeing religious freedom and the setting up of community spaces for meeting and worship, also create the conditions which allow for, and even encourage, the transformation of the organisational structures of faith (and ritual). Using the example of migrant religions in the US, Yang and Ebaugh (2001) suggest that in contrast to religious institutions in their homelands, migrant religious groups in the US establish places of worship and structure that echo the model of American Protestant congregations. According to them, the congregational form that new immigrant religions adopt in their organisational structures represents the American context of religion, thus denoting an 'organisational assimilation' or 'Americanisation' (2001:273). Likewise, Warner (1998) sees the similar congregational forms that religious groups have adopted as 'de facto congregationalism' and suggests that 'the congregational mentality has great practical force as an official norm in American religious life' (Warner, 1994 cited in Yang and Ebaugh, 2001:273). In this context, institutional regulations impose a similitude in the organisational structures of migrants. The institutional journey of Alevism, while increasing its recognition, has also experienced organisational assimilation in European countries.

Western governmental legal frameworks that protect freedom of religion and religious pluralism, however encourage migrant faith groups to be more what Brubaker (2013:2) calls 'organised religion' that is expected to have an 'organisational dimension and a structure of authority'. Comparing religious and linguistic pluralism in Western liberal societies, Brubaker states that in contrast to linguistic pluralism, 'enduring religious pluralism is not simply normatively accepted in liberal states, but institutionally supported' (2013:10). Western states promoting religious pluralism, in this manner, encourage the institutionalisation of migrant religions. Brubaker explains it further:

Many of the rights and recognition enjoyed by long-established religions have been extended to immigrant religions. Liberal states have differing historically conditioned modes of accommodating religious pluralism. But whatever their established mode of accommodation, they face nontrivial pressures to accommodate immigrant religions on similar terms (2013:11).

Giving the example of Islamic education in public schools, Brubaker points to the accommodation of religion in the educational sphere as an explicit form of institutional support for religious pluralism. Indeed, governmental regulations and opportunities offered to religious groups, including providing religious education in public schools along with other charitable rights, are what encourage migrant religions to become more institutionalised, as in the Alevi case.

British Alevis have experienced significant institutional developments after Alevism began to be taught in local authority schools in 2012 as part of the National Religious Education (RE) Curriculum. The curriculum content was agreed at the local level in a collaborative project between the EACC London Cemevi, Westminster University and some local state schools.⁷⁰ Alevism became part of the RE curriculum in schools mainly in North London and in some parts of East London where Alevis are residentially concentrated. The core Alevi beliefs, teachings and practices are now integrated into the RE curriculum at Key Stages 1 and 2, and soon to be Key Stage 3, in more than twenty local authority schools in London. The introduction of Alevism lessons in these schools has increased the legitimacy of Alevism as a religion and has paved the way for an institutional shift.

Subsequently, Alevism has gained official recognition as a religion following the decision by the Charity Commission for England and Wales to grant the British Alevi Foundation the status of a religious trust in 2015 as an umbrella body for twelve Alevi centres in Britain.⁷¹ With this institutional designation, the Charity Commission officially recognised Alevism as a religion that offered it more opportunities in the public sphere. This significantly increased their legitimacy and recognition and was later followed by the founding of the UK All-Parliamentary Secretary Group for Alevis. Functioning as a bridge between the British Parliament and Alevis, this All-Party group made Alevis a visible group known to the government and parliamentary parties, such as the Labour Party for which it became the main channel for Alevi involvement in domestic politics. These developments boosted Alevi engagement with local and

⁷⁰ The project called 'The Alevi Religion and Identity Project', aimed to help tackle the negative identity of Alevi youth and to integrate Alevism into the RE curriculum to give Alevi pupils a positive sense of identity and a feeling of belonging in the school (see Jenkins and Cetin, 2017)

⁷¹ 'England accepts Alevi Federation as charity to promote religious aims', *Hurriyet Daily New*, 6 October 2015, <https://www.hurriyetaidailynews.com/england-accepts-alevi-federation-as-charity-to-promote-religious-aims--89484>

national authorities and increased their commitment to engage in domestic politics. The election of more than twenty Alevi councillors in the London boroughs of Enfield, Hackney and Haringey in 2018 and the first Alevi MP Feryal Clark from the Labour Party in Enfield North in the 2019 general election are some of the outcomes of the British Alevis' increasing involvement with the public domain.

Such national developments have, in several ways, amplified their transnational attachments. As financially and politically powerful within the global Alevi diasporic sphere, British Alevis increasingly take a significant part in campaigns and lobbying activities in Europe together with other European Alevi associations. More than two hundred and fifty Alevi associations in European countries, including the UK, are connected through national federations under the umbrella of the Europe Alevi Confederation and have made Europe an organisational centre for worldwide Alevis. The national federations, representing Alevi populations in their respective countries of settlement, campaign for recognition in the international arena, particularly in the European Union (EU) and its Parliament. The Alevi Friendship Group of the European Parliament, established in 2018 by the Socialist and Democrat MEPs, reflects such efforts. Launching the group with a parliamentary meeting with Alevi representatives, the MEPs declared their friendship in a statement that claimed that '1.5 million Alevi all over Europe come together as a vital part of our society [...] we are celebrating their deep belief in European core values by founding this group'.⁷² As a result of such lobbying activities, Alevis have increasingly become one of the key players in talks about the accession of Turkey to the EU. Alevi claims for recognition and their disadvantaged situation in Turkey became a noticeable element in the negotiations between Turkey and the EU concerning Turkey's progress on accession to the EU. Official recognition of *cemevis* as places of worship and the compulsory Islamic religious education of Alevi children were the primary issues that most frequently occurred in the European Commission's progress reports.⁷³

⁷² SandD members launch the Alevi Friendship Group of the European Parliament, 1/06/2020, <https://www.socialistsanddemocrats.eu/newsroom/sd-members-launch-alevi-friendship-group-european-parliament>

⁷³ See European Commission Turkey progress reports, https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/countries/detailed-country-information/turkey_en and European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) - Country monitoring in Turkey, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/european-commission-against-racism-and-intolerance/turkey>

The transnational cooperation between European Alevi associations links together worldwide Alevi communities through various significant events, meetings and forums that discuss Alevism and exchange ideas about the communities' development. One of these large-scale events took place on 8 and 9 February 2020 in Vienna. Named the 1st Europe Alevi Congress (*1inci Avrupa Alevi Kurultayı*), the event hosted many Alevi representatives, authors, academicians and *dedes* from Turkey and Europe, including the UK. It began with a statement reminding the delegates of the existence of Alevis in sixteen countries across Europe and that official recognition had been gained in six of them. The event included various workshops and panels that addressed the religious, academic and institutional dimensions of Alevism and ended with a public declaration highlighting their struggle for recognition as a unique faith'.⁷⁴

The Alevi claim to be a 'unique faith' signifies its distance from Islam, which has increasingly become a central element in the Alevi politics of recognition. This echoes the claim of Yang and Ebaugh (2001:278) that institutional developments necessitate a 'theological justification' to maintain their distinct religion. The religious tradition reconstructed in the diaspora often comprises a return to its 'roots', as in the case of Alevism. For example, the changing funeral customs and religious symbolism that has materialised in the new London Cemevi puts forward a new theological vision that recalls its non-Islamic roots (see next chapter). Being free from certain religious restrictions that are found in Islam, such as gender segregation in its social and religious practices and the prohibition of alcohol, and the rejection of a particular dress code (such as women wearing the hijab), has made it easier for Alevis to distinguish themselves from Muslims and to depict Alevism as more secular and in keeping with European secular values. In addition, events in Turkey, such as the electoral success of the Sunni-Islamist AKP (Justice and Development Party) government of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and the rise of radical Islamism in the Middle East, has also encouraged Alevis to express a secular identity that remains entirely separate from Islam. The following participant (37, male), the education secretary of the BAF, illustrates a diasporic vision highlighting this 'independence' from Islam:

⁷⁴ See the congress conclusion declaration here, <https://aleviten.com/2020/02/14/kurultay-sonuc-bildirgesi/>

Alevism is Alevism. Debates about whether it is in or outside Islam or is faith or religion do not matter anymore. The most important thing is defining Alevism independent of Islam; it is what secures continuity.⁷⁵

This diasporic vision of Alevism that is seeking recognition as a unique faith is also reflected in the BAF's efforts to have Alevism recognised in UK prisons. The negotiations between the BAF and the Justice Ministry to conduct religious services for Alevi prisoners in the UK had begun at HM Pentonville Prison during the fieldwork. The BAF had encountered difficulty in identifying Alevi prisoners when Ministry officials told them that no prisoners had registered themselves as Alevi and it turned out that the Alevi prisoners had been registered as Muslims. Due to the absence of Alevism on the list of recognised religions, because national data surveys only listed the major religions, Islam had become an option for Alevi prisoners as it allowed them to catch a few hours break — as socialising time — that Her Majesty's Prisons (HMP) allows weekly for worship. After asking for information from community members whose relatives were in prison, the BAF eventually sorted out this misidentification by putting in a request for the prison to ask certain prisoners if they were Alevi.⁷⁶ As a result of these efforts, Alevism became recognised as a religion by HMP Pentonville which secured the prisoners' right to worship separately from Muslims. Given that the need for Alevi worship in prisons does not seem to be a particular issue for British Alevi, since, as far as I have ascertained there is only a small number of Alevi prisoners (there is no statistical data, however), the BAF's insistence seems to be an effort to expand recognition of Alevism within another state institution.

The BAF also started a campaign for Alevism to be recognised as a religion in the UK 2021 census. The campaign included an online parliamentary petition to strengthen their demand to be included among the listed religions (which were Christianity, Islam, Sikhism, Hinduism, Buddhism and Judaism) on the census survey form with a box that could be ticked. Arguing that the census data influence government policy ranging from the media to religious services and from council services to political representation, the BAF wanted to make Alevi's existence visible in the national statistics in order to access more public

⁷⁵ Interview 11, 10 May 2018, Islington

⁷⁶ Israfil Erbil, 05 August 2017, Dalston

resources and opportunities. This is explained by İsrail Erbil, the BAF Chairman, when publicising their campaign in an interview (in Turkish) on a global Alevi TV channel:

There are nearly half-million Alevis living in the UK and we are visible in many public sectors and politics. But there is no statistical data about us. As we are not visible in statistics, we cannot gain our social and religious rights. That is why the visibility of our existence in a statistical manner becomes a must. To be more visible in the UK, we have to be placed in the census conducted every ten years.⁷⁷

Indeed, I could not find any statistical data from Hackney and Haringey Councils on Alevis. Since Alevis were officially invisible to their local councils, it seems, as with many other governmental authorities, that they also use national survey forms to identify the existence and size of different communities in their boroughs. It is likely that they also established their policies towards their local communities based partly on the demographical data of the Census, which also supports the Alevi claim to be made visible in it.

When the BAF first contacted the Office for National Statistics (ONS), their request was declined with a response that cited the UK's religious diversity and the difficulty in accommodating such diversity in the survey. However, the argument of the BAF to be placed on the census form was based on the size of the Alevi population in the UK that, in their view, is larger than some of the listed religions such as Judaism and Buddhism.⁷⁸ Following these discussions, the ONS came up with a partial solution on the online survey which allowed Alevis to identify themselves using the 'Other' section. If 'Other' under Religion is chosen when the letters 'ALE' are typed in, the box fills in 'Alevism' automatically. Whilst this shows some progress towards recognition, nevertheless, the fact that it is only available on the online census form (as well as being in the 'Other' section) indicates only a partial recognition.

⁷⁷ Yol TV Programlar, 11 August 2020. *Britanya'da Alevilerden nüfus sayımı kampanyası | Britanya ABF Başkanı İsrail Erbil anlattı (Census campaign of Alevis in Britain | British ABF President İsrail Erbil explains)* [Video]. Youtube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Ohn5VdwEdM>

⁷⁸ If the Alevi population is considered to be nearly half-a-million in the UK, the BAF Chairman claims that Alevis number more than Jews (around 300,000) and Buddhists (around 280,000).

The BAF chairman sees their efforts to widen recognition in the UK as a ‘resistance’ against Turkey’s ignorance and their assimilationist policies. In his view, making Alevi identity known to the public is crucial, not only for British Alevis but also other Alevis, since, if achieved, it would likely be an exemplary case for all countries in which Alevis live:

Unlike Muslims, Christians or Buddhists expressing themselves with one word due to being ‘known’ by the public, Alevis need to express themselves with a paragraph explaining who they are. Thus, being visible in census data will help Alevis to express themselves easily with one word too. We want to make ourselves visible and known. It is as simple as that. It will realise our saying that ‘Alevis exist and Alevism is a right’ (*Aleviler vardır ve Alevilik haktır*). That will also be a message to the Turkish government. In a Western country like the UK, official statistics indicating the number of Alevi population among its citizens will be a further step in official recognition first for British Alevis then for all Alevis around the world.⁷⁹



Figure 11. Census campaign banners outside the BAF in Enfield

⁷⁹ Yol TV (11 August 2020). *Britanya’da Alevilerden nüfus sayımı kampanyası | Britanya ABF Başkanı İsrail Erbil anlattı* (Census campaign of Alevis in Britain | The BAF President İsrail Erbil explains) [Video]. Youtube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Ohn5VdwEdM>

The institutional and organisational developments and campaigns exemplified in this section show that Alevis have achieved a considerable part of their claim for recognition in the UK. The recent period emphasises a period of advance for Alevis. While widening Alevi claim for recognition in order to access more public resources, it has also allowed Alevis to expand their spatial performances into the public space, as we shall see in the rest of this chapter.

Alevi spatial politics

In their theoretical work on the dialectic of diasporic politics, Drzewiecka and Halualani (2002:340) state that ‘the dynamic relationship between the structural forces (for example, nation-state powers, governmental forces, global economic structures) and situated cultural practices, is key in understanding the complex articulations of diasporic identity, agency, and discourses’. This structural and cultural dialectic of diasporic politics also has a spatial dimension and its complexity increases in the context of religious groups like Alevis. Spatial practices of religious groups in the diaspora shape the territorialisation process and discourses of religion that play a vital role within the social, political and spatial configurations of settlement countries (Garbin, 2013; 2014; Vásquez and Knott, 2014).

By carving out spaces both ‘physically and spiritually’, immigrants maintain ‘a visible and aural presence to claim their particular “right” to the city’ (Lefebvre, 1968 cited in Garbin, 2014:364). Orsi defines ‘urban religion’ as a ‘site of converging and conflicting visions and voices, practices and orientations which arise out of the complex desires, needs and fears of many different people’ (Orsi, 1995 cited in Garbin, 2012a:402). ‘Intersecting with unexpected others (and with unexpected experiences of their own subjectivities)’, migrant groups in urban spaces experience differentiation within ‘boundaries between insiders and outsiders, public and private and sacred and profane’ which ‘may play a crucial role in the politics of belongings and identities’ (Orsi, 1995 cited in Garbin, 2012a:402). Garbin speaks of a spiritual and emotional ‘investment’ in the city when religion is materially (spatially) emplaced:

The urban materiality of spatialised religion is not only bound up with a collective or individualised act of ‘believing’ within the differentiated and differentiating social setting constituted by the city, but it also conjures a notion of physical, emotional and spiritual engagement. [...] Perhaps more importantly, one is ‘believing in the city’ when placing faith in

the possibility of sustaining, projecting or even reinventing a sense of self through urban religious place-making and home-making (2012a:402).

In multicultural cities where various identities and cultures co-exist, performative diasporic religions often utilise space as a strategy to assert their religious identity to the public in a quest for visibility and recognition (Garbin, 2013; 2014; Vásquez and Knott, 2014). Such spatial performances are also 'bridging and linking' practices allowing them to engage with neighbours, negotiate with secular agencies and communicate with other religious groups (Knott, 2016:81; Kong, 2005). These communicative and performative actions of religious groups that claim their space and rights in the settlement country make them a part of society, thus contributing to the larger integration process.

Religion involves the spatial politics of recognition through 'materialising practices such as building churches, mosques or temples that render migrants and long-standing settlers visible to each other' (Vásquez and Knott, 2014:338). The centrality of *cemevis* in the diaspora (and the spread of remittance *cemevis* in the homeland, see Chapter 7) encapsulates such permanent placemaking experiences that shape Alevi spatial politics. Whether permanently or temporarily, occupying urban spaces for the public presentation of culture and identity, the spatial performances of religious migrant communities convey 'politico-religious' senses operating through 'connections with other meaningful spheres across time and space' (Garbin, 2014:364). This sense of performing space echoes what Foucault (1984) calls 'heterotopias', juxtaposing other places of significance and multiple meanings across time and space which allows for the consolidation of the collectivity. The Alevi Festival discussed in detail later exemplifies a heterotopic space embodying homeland, memory and politico-religious senses that empower the community in the diaspora space.

The general nature of Alevi public performances is one that is bound up with the politics of identity, visibility and recognition, affirming a sense of belonging and forming a more spatialised Alevism. The Sivas Martyrs Memorial in London dedicated to the victims of the Sivas Massacre, and the remembrance activity associated with it, exemplifies such spatial performances in the localised diaspora space in which Alevi have secured a territorial presence. The memorial built on Stoke Newington Common in 1997 has been host to an annual commemoration event since 2011 (Çaylı, 2014).



Figure 12. The Sivas Martyrs memorial

Annually, on the day of the massacre, 2 July, British Alevis march from Dalston to the memorial. The parade with pictures of victims and slogans remembering the massacre and protesting against Turkish policies towards Alevis is accompanied by Alevi songs played through a huge speaker on a vehicle along Stoke Newington High Street. Following the march, people gather at the memorial and commemorate the massacre victims with speeches and Alevi music accompanied by a *semah*. Like all Alevi events, music is an integral part of the street parade and the ceremony at the memorial as it creates an aural space appropriating the atmosphere.



Figure 13. Sivas march on Stoke Newington High Street

Stoke Newington, where the monument is placed, is a central location in the London Borough of Hackney where a significant Alevi population lives and works. Besides the London Cemevi established in 1993, many of the earliest hometown organisations (HTOs), which were the first community spaces, were created in this area. Although the commemoration does not have a massive attendance, typically around two hundred people, the annual march to the memorial spreads its message to other community members who may be working or are present nearby, as well as to the onlookers.⁸⁰

The memorial is a symbolic and material marker that ‘engraves’ Alevi existence onto the diaspora landscape. The speech by the BAF chairman Israfil Erbil at the last commemoration, defining it as ‘the

⁸⁰ The collaborative protests performed together with other HTOs against Turkey’s policies towards Alevis and Kurds are other examples of such practice. During my fieldwork, many protests took place in Turnpike Lane Park, Wood Green, which is another central location in which Alevis have secured a territorial presence.

face of their struggle opened to the world',⁸¹ reflects this. It has a symbolic significance of materially being in a public space, marking the Alevis' existence in their own socio-spatial zone. The march and commemoration address their history of victimhood and the situation of Alevis in Turkey, something which equally applies to other collective performances, including those taking place in public city spaces. While performing their identity and rights in the UK, such practices in public city space are deeply attached to homeland politics, as we shall now see.

Homeland politics in British public space

Turkey's political context significantly influences Alevi diasporic politics and shapes their claims. The political activism and lobbying strategies of British Alevis, as with all other Alevi diasporas, are concentrated on protesting Turkey's discriminatory policies toward Alevis and demanding recognition of *cemevis* as places of worship. Almost all the British Alevis who participated in my research follow political developments in Turkey and express their concern about the security of Alevis there. According to most participants, Alevis are in danger from new massacres. What has led them to a fear of mass violence again, something which is not unusual in their history, is linked with a belief in an alleged cooperation between Erdoğan and ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) as the rise of radical Islamist groups, especially ISIS, has boosted the conflict in the Middle East and played a significant role in the Syrian civil war.

The Syrian war brought new territorial challenges for Alevis. While Turkey's aggressive approach towards Syrian Kurds had an ethnic dimension,⁸² Turkey's open support for Syrian opposition forces, including jihadist groups,⁸³ indicated a more religiously sectarian dimension to the conflict exemplified by the accompanying sectarian discourses (Can, 2017; Phillips, 2012). This tension arose out of the

⁸¹ 'Madımak "can"larına Londra'da anma töreni (Commemoration ceremony for Madımak "cans" in London)', *Hurriyet Newspaper*, Europe, 3 July 2020, <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/avrupa/madimak-canlarina-londrada-anma-toreni-41556225>

⁸² *Syria war: Turkish-led forces oust Kurdish fighters from heart of Afrin*, BBC, 18 May 2018, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-43447624>

⁸³ The opposition forces later formed as Syrian National Army, also described as the 'Turkish-backed Free Syrian Army' that majority consists of Sunni-Islamist groups.

religious characteristics of the conflicting parties. While the Syrian president Assad was a Syrian Alawite (the regional name for Syrian Alevis),⁸⁴ amongst the opposition fighting the Assad regime were a large number of radical Sunni Islamists. Alawites living in Syria and at Turkey's Syrian border were threatened by the rise of the radical Islamist groups in the Middle East, which was also seen as a threat to all Alevis in Turkey because of the danger of inspiring Sunni Islamist oppression against them. Though most of Turkey's Alevis did not support Assad's regime, their public activism against the war coupled with Erdoğan's aggressive policies towards the Kurds appeared to raise the threat against Alevis in Turkey (Akdemir, 2016a). They were labelled as 'internal enemies' by Erdoğan's government, and subsequently, markings started to appear on Alevi houses and workplaces, which reminded Alevis of the days before the Maraş Massacre,⁸⁵ and violent attacks on Alevis began to take place (Zirh, 2013).

Homeland politics convey a sense of 'co-responsibility' among the Alevi diasporas, which echoes what Werbner (2002a) calls a 'chaordic transnationalism'. The conflict in Turkey and Syria attracted considerable attention from the Alevi diasporas and large protests against the war took place in various cities in Europe, such as Cologne, Strasbourg, Berlin and London. The rally in London, which took place on 16 February 2013 in Trafalgar Square, one of the city's most famous landmarks, was organised by the London Cemevi. Supported by the Europe Alevi Confederation, the rally hosted many representatives of Alevi institutions from Turkey and Europe and the hometown associations in the UK, including the Kurdish Community Centre. The focus of the rally, with the slogan 'No to Assimilation, Discrimination and War', was to protest against the Turkish government's support for jihadist groups in the Syrian war and the public discrimination and assimilationist policies of the Turkish government towards Alevis. Alongside anti-war claims, the speeches concentrated on the recognition of *cemevis*, equal citizenship, and a democratic and peaceful solution to the Kurdish question.

⁸⁴ There are some debates about the relationship of Alevis and Alewites. However, despite differences, what is clear here is Alevis widely think that Alewites are Syrian Alevis.

⁸⁵ As mentioned in Chapter 3, the Maras Massacre started with attacks on Alevi houses and workplaces which had been marked with a cross a few days in advance. Thus, marking houses recalls the fear of massacres in Alevi collective memory.

Following the speeches, a trained troupe with special 'traditional' costumes performed a *semah* in the square, after which they released peace doves against a banner saying 'semah for peace' in English and Turkish. At the end of the meeting, the square hosted a *halay* (traditional folk dance) accompanied by a *davul*, a traditional Anatolian drum. The event was attended by approximately one to two thousand people and attracted considerable attention in the global Alevi media as well as local Turkish newspapers in London (Akdemir, 2016a). One of Turkey's prominent national newspapers, *Milliyet*, a centre-right publication, covered the protest with a short report noting the Alevi claim for equal citizenship but with no mention of the war.⁸⁶ However, despite this relatively small coverage, it was still a sign of some visibility in the Turkish media.

The rally at Trafalgar Square was the very first event for Alevis in the heart of London. Given that Alevi activities are often limited to north London, where they are residentially concentrated, a collective performance in the city centre that moved Alevis out of their usual neighbourhood contributed to their integration into the city (Akdemir, 2016a). Travelling outside of their 'comfort zone', such public performances in the city centre enable Alevis to engage more with the British landscape and society and move them beyond their established socio-spatial boundaries.

The meaning of such performances, Garbin (2013:691) suggests, 'is multivocal and also contingent, bound up with particular context of actions, interactions and collective presentation of self'. The choice of where this rally took place reflects the Alevis' claim for public visibility since any such event in Trafalgar Square would entail presenting their religious identity to the public, something which characterises the performative dimension of diasporic religion. By performing the *semah* and playing religious hymns, such religious activity, as Garbin (2013:690-91) suggests in his discussion of public parades by Kimbanguists in London, 'temporarily territorialises the sacred' and involves the 'appropriation of space in the cityscape'. It 'reflects a growing confidence in asserting a legitimate presence in the countries of settlement and claiming a space and a place within European societies' (p. 691).

⁸⁶ 'Londra'da cemevi eylemi' (Cemevi protest in London), *Milliyet*, 17 February 2013,

Such practices also demonstrate the strong connection between politics and religion, which is deeply rooted in Alevi activism. Alevi activities always have a political dimension due to the historical context of oppression and marginalisation that has encouraged and informed their left-wing alignment and struggle for recognition. The *semah* performance in the diasporic public space captures the mixture of religion and politics well. The *semah*, which is an essential Alevi ritual, has been moved into a non-ritual context in order to further the public assertion of religious identity through aesthetic visibility (see Chapter 4). Besides creating visibility to outsiders and onlookers, such activities and ceremonial performances are also 'designed to affirm a sense of belonging and identity through expressions of solidarity and group cohesion for insiders' (David, 2012:454). The public space they perform turns into a 'particular space, a landscape that could be exploited effectively through the collective performance of particular rituals to communicate, legitimate, and politicise values' (Goheen, 1993 cited in Kong, 2005:230). The *semah* performance, an identifying ritual, serves as a marker focusing the individual's attention on their collective values and identity. That scene of *semah* in the heart of London carried strong symbolic meanings that stimulated collective feelings and reinforced cohesion. An image of a *semah* group (below) freeing peace doves was circulated widely throughout the Alevi global mediascape dressing the covers of magazines and books to become an indicator of 'taking' diasporic public spaces and claiming Alevi identity, not only in the UK but simultaneously in Turkey and Europe. Such performances concerning homeland politics in a 'triadic' diaspora space (Vertovec, 1997) link the experiences of Alevis across borders.



Figure 14. A semah in Trafalgar Square, 16 February 2013 (copyright: BAF website, www.Alevinet.org)

This first Trafalgar Square performance was a step towards expanding the community beyond their usual socio-spatial boundaries. However, it did not remain the only event spreading Alevi interests in Turkish politics within the British public space. There were many marches to Trafalgar Square and events in the British Parliament also followed. For example, the BAF's event campaigning for a 'No' vote in the Turkish constitutional referendum for a new presidency system held in April 2017 was also a notable rally. The event was attended by thousands in Trafalgar Square, including the Labour MP David Lammy who gave a speech at the rally. He later publicised his participation by tweeting Alevi slogans and conveyed the political messages of British Alevis about Turkey when he took part in a parliamentary debate. Moreover, in recent years, the commemorations of the Maraş massacre have moved from localised diaspora spaces to the British Parliament, which seems to be a consequence of this socio-spatial expansion together with an increasing number of engagements with Parliament. The commemorations often host MPs from Turkey's opposition parties and always include political discussions about the situation in Turkey. The yearly May Day marches in the centre of London that celebrate International Workers Day, and are always attended by Alevis who carry banners and shout slogans protesting against Turkey, should also be noted here. Overall, whether organised for religious,

commemorative or political reasons, Alevi public practices carry the purpose of claiming their place in homeland politics.

While being involved in homeland politics, British Alevis simultaneously perform their identity, religion and rights in the UK. As Drzewiecka and Halualani (2002:344) suggest, ‘diasporas strategically construct their identities and positionalities in such a way as to gain political clout and an ability to influence politics in both “homes”’. The rest of this chapter explores the Britain Alevi Festival, a diaspora-born ‘tradition’ reflecting these diasporic discourses of belonging, identity and politics.

A diasporic ‘tradition’: The Britain Alevi festival

Festival culture is not common among Alevis. Instead, a culture of commemoration became deeply rooted due to the centuries-long sufferings that marked their history. For this reason, large-scale public activities celebrating Alevism are often described as ‘commemoration ceremonies’ (Salman, 2020; Soileau, 2005). There are, traditionally, some calendrical religious celebrations such as *Gağan*, *Xızır*, and *Howtêmal* linked to the seasons but their religious and regional characteristics, embodying a set of rituals performed as worship limited to some eastern Anatolian provinces, distinguish them from a ‘festival culture’ celebrated by the whole Alevi population. As mentioned before, these religious traditions practised in rural contexts have declined as a result of rural-urban migration. Although it would seem that these traditional events have made a recent comeback in the diaspora, such diasporic activities are no more than symbolic representations that supposedly recollect these old traditions.

There are two annual public activities that started after the period of urban migration and resemble a festival, although they are designated as commemoration ceremonies. The oldest one is the *Hacı Bektaş Veli Anma Şenlikleri* (The Memorial Ceremonies to Hacı Bektaş Veli⁸⁷) in central Anatolia which began in the 1960s and is still going. Such continuity without any interruption is linked to its ethno-political context and the Turkmen background of Hacı Bektaş Veli that fits better into the state’s Turkish-Islamic assimilationist discourses around Alevism and thus securing its official support. However, the second

⁸⁷ Hacı Bektaş Veli, who lived in the thirteenth century, is recognised as an *ulu* (great) leader of the spiritual path among Alevis and is the main icon for many Anatolian Alevis.

festival, *Pir Sultan Abdal Şenlikleri* (The celebrations of Pir Sultan Abdal⁸⁸), which began in 1976 in Sivas, has not received the same support. It was first suspended by the Turkish government and later, after resuming again, people attending the festival in 1993 were attacked by a group of radical Islamists that resulted in the death of thirty-five of them. This became known as the Sivas Massacre. The annual celebration was then turned into a commemoration of the massacre victims which later became a prominent element in Alevi mobilisation (see Chapter 1).

In the diaspora, particularly in Germany, Alevis have organised a few large-scale public events, the first of which was the Alevi Cultural Week in Hamburg in 1989. The weeklong event with concerts, discussions, panels and *cem* played a crucial role in mobilising Alevis and stimulating networks and associations as it was the first public manifestation of Alevi identity through a declaration called *Alevi Bildirgesi* (Alevi Manifesto). Defined as the ‘starting point of the Alevi movement’ by Sökefeld (2008:61), it is seen as a critical event that generated ‘new modes of action’ and the redefinition of ‘traditional categories’. Later, in the last two decades, Alevis have organised many large-scale public events that have enhanced their visibility in Germany; yet none of them has turned into annual events.

Although such activities were instrumental in creating new models of action, the Britain Alevi Festival embodies further characteristics in terms of its conception and form. As a London-born ‘tradition’, the Britain Alevi Festival seems to be inspired by London’s multicultural environment that embodies the various religious and cultural activities of migrants. Festive events are common activities among migrant groups. Africans, Asians, and Latin Americans organise large-scale events marking London’s great diversity and around one hundred carnivals, festivals, and religious celebrations take place each year and attract large audiences (Sepulveda, Syrett, and Lyon, 2011). As Werbner (2012:228) suggests, ‘much immigrant culture is celebrated outside the home, often deliberately, as migrants take over the streets and parks of their adopted cities and inscribe them with their presence’. Thus, it may also exemplify a ‘spatial mimetic’ that Vasquez and Knott (2014:339) define ‘as a strategy for recognition, which migrant

⁸⁸ Pir Sultan Abdal, who lived in the sixteenth century, is a poet and one of the most prominent figures of Alevism who was known for his rebellion against the Ottomans and who was eventually hanged by them.

groups engrave their legitimate presence on the new landscape by creatively adapting the spatial practices [of others]’.

There are two festivals celebrated annually by migrant groups from Turkey that might also have inspired the Britain Alevi Festival. One is the *Newroz* celebration, a traditional Kurdish festival organised by the Kurdish Community Centre, and the other is the Day-Mer Culture and Art Festival organised by Day-Mer, the Kurdish and Turkish Community Centre. Dominated by these associations’ political characteristics, both these festivals have been organised as one-day festivals in a park in London for more than two decades and attract a large number of Turkish and Kurdish migrants. However, the Britain Alevi Festival began years later in 2010 and is now the largest in size and duration. Hosting more than twenty thousand people every year, it is also the biggest Alevi festival in Europe.

The Britain Alevi Festival

This annual festival is the most important event for British Alevis and is endorsed by the London Cemevi and the BAF. It used to be organised by the London Cemevi as a one-day park event held on Hackney Downs. The annual gathering ran from noon till evening and was filled with speeches and concerts ending with a performance by famous musicians from Turkey. It also had some stalls selling food. In recent years, with the opening of the BAF’s Enfield premises that includes a five-thousand square metre green space, the festival has broadened in size and form. It has become a week-long event starting with a reception at the London Cemevi in Wood Green, continuing with various events at the BAF premises in Enfield, and ending with a large concert on Hackney Downs. The festival now involves a host of activities which are mainly held in London but have recently spread to other parts of the UK, such as Glasgow, Edinburgh, Sheffield, and Doncaster.

The weeklong activities, including live music, speeches from guest speakers, traditional folk dances and *semahs*, also include the presence of countless stalls selling food from the homeland, books and handicrafts, all happening in the large grounds in Enfield. Since the opening of the BAF premises in the Churchfield Recreation Ground in Enfield, the festival has been opened up to accommodate hometown associations (HTOs) representing various regional areas and political groups. Along with a lesser number of political associations and business companies, the occupants of the stalls and tents in the festival area are mostly regional/village associations renting tents to mainly sell food.

The Alevi Festival is very much a commercial event, with attendees spending money on food and various products. There are also sponsors and suppliers as well as musicians who have to be paid. The tens of thousands of visitors every year provide not only an opportunity for products and services to be marketed but also for the circulation of social as well as material capital within the community, stimulating an 'ethnic economy'. It also serves as a fundraising space for smaller groups within the community. HTOs representing predominantly regional associations rent most of the tents and stalls in order to sell food and drink (water, tea, coffee) to raise income for their particular cause. Homeland food is a vital enterprise generating a considerable amount of money that circulates through the festival area. The HTOs' contribution to the festival is not only financial; they also participate in the festival programming, organise mini-concerts and invite their members along. Such activities make the festival a gathering place for local clusters, which increases its attraction and energy.

The ninth festival, which ran from 24 May to 2nd June 2019, hosted a large number of people during the daytime. It began with a reception at the London Cemevi and continued with various events, including panels, seminars and stage performances, mainly held at the BAF premises in Enfield. The festival ground hosted numerous artists, Alevi representatives, civil society organisations, authors and political figures from the UK, Europe and Turkey. On the sixth day of the festival, a *muhabbet cemî*⁸⁹ (*cem* for conversation) was held with the *dedes*. On the last day, Sunday 2 June, a large concert took place as usual on Hackney Downs with thousands of people attending. The event started at noon and continued to the evening. Taking part were various musicians, performers accompanied by music who danced the *halay* (an Anatolian folk dance), and there was a *semah* performed by a trained group. All this was widely reported on social media and in the Turkish newspapers published in London.

⁸⁹ *Muhabbet* means conversation, a symbolic type of *cem* gathering with the purpose of conversation among the attendees and the *dede* accompanied by music and *semah* rather than a ceremonial ritual.



Figure 15. On the last day concert of the 9th Alevi Festival, 4 June 2019, Londra Gazete (Newspaper)

The festival brought together more than twenty thousand Alevis, young and old, together with people living in areas with a high concentration of Alevis who regularly engage with the associations along with those who live more remotely and are neither regularly in contact with daily community life nor linked to associations. The festival enables a remarkable number of Alevis from various parts of the community, with different ethnic, regional, and political affiliations, and with different class and educational backgrounds to come together. Accommodating such diversity within a unified presence under the umbrella of Alevi identity makes it a significant event carrying a profound sense of the collective.

The festival area is a heterotopic space, bringing multiple spaces, times and meanings together. Salman (2020:117) suggests that ‘modern’ Alevi festivals, ‘especially in the diaspora, can be considered as heterotopias that juxtapose the projection of homeland and the new home of community on to the festival ground during the transitory time of the festival days’. The festival area was scattered with religious figures and symbols, banners about Turkish politics, and goods and books brought from Turkey. Tents and stalls sold mainly traditional homeland food that had been cooked there. As a result, the festival area was turned into a homeland food festival where one could find all the traditional

specialities normally missing, such as freshly baked *sac ekmeği* [flatbread], *gözleme*,⁹⁰ various kinds of kebabs and favourite sweets.



Figure 16 (a-b). Women baking and selling fresh gözleme in the tents

There were always queues in front of the tents to buy food and crowds of people sitting at the tables eating and chatting. Some people's attention was fixed on the stage, listening to music, and others danced the *halay* or performed a *semah* with Alevi *deyiş* (hymns) which aurally took over the space. Some people walked around chatting with their fellow community members, usually about political developments in Turkey, while those who sold Turkish political magazines added to the political atmosphere.

With all these complementary elements, the festival area portrayed a diasporic imagination of the homeland that turned it into a 'little Turkey' in the UK. Through the festival, Alevis 'import and inscribe' (Werbner, 2012:228) a left-behind homeland into their country of settlement maintaining a connection that provided comfort for their diaspora experience. These transnational practices are the migrants' 'ways of being and belonging' (Levitt and Glick Schiller, 2004:32) and stimulate a sense of the collective in diaspora space. The festival scene depicts their simultaneous attachments to 'multiple spaces through a work of imagination and memory that link past, present, and future' (Vásquez and Garbin, 2016:693). The Alevi festival thus functions as a heterotopia (Foucault, 1984) that embodies the spatial and

⁹⁰ A traditional pastry made of thin layers of dough that are filled with toppings and baked

temporal horizons (Johnson, 2007:42) of diasporic Alevism and the nexus of the poetic and politic (Kong, 2001).

While contributing to a consciousness of 'self' and 'other', such public performances reinforce social relations among community members (Kong, 2005) and develop a feeling of belonging 'within an imagined, collective sense of "we", of being part of the community' (Duffy and Waitt, 2011:55). By intensifying the interaction between community members, the week-long event increases cohesion and empowers the community. The following testimony of an attendee (male in late 40s) illustrates this:

The festival is very important due to gathering us together. We see each other and our community and enjoy time together. Even the food is tastier here.⁹¹

Another attendee (female in 40s) stressed its contribution to the transmission of Alevi identity to the younger generation:

We came here as a family, bring our children. It attracts their interest, as there are music and activities they can enjoy. Plus, we are in an Alevi environment, so here they learn who we are.⁹²

The festival functions as a platform encouraging the adoption by the younger generation of an Alevi identity and, in this way, is instrumental in enabling the process of intergenerational transmission. Its various events and activities attract young Alevis encouraging them to join in as a volunteer helper or simply as an attendee. Since the festival requires many volunteers to run the event, volunteering plays a crucial role. Most volunteers are young Alevis and so the festival week is a hive of activity for Alevi youth. For the youngsters I talked to, volunteering is a meaningful experience, making them feel involved and connected to their community. The festival forms a space for young people to meet with the community they feel they belong to and to share a collective sense of being part of that community. Concerts that have featured famous musicians from Turkey, including in recent years well-known Turkish rock groups, have been very important in attracting young participants. They enjoy being

⁹¹ Informal discussion, 28 May 2019, Enfield

⁹² Informal discussion, 28 May 2019, Enfield

together to perform the *halay*, a traditional and lively folk dance in which dancers form a chain by holding each other's hands or arms while making the same bodily rhythmical movements. The *halay*, as a bodily performance by a large group of people connected to each other, seems to reinforce the atmosphere of collectivity, which echoes what Warner (1997) calls the contribution of bodily rituals to the production of solidarity.



Figure 17 (a-b). Young attendees and volunteers are enjoying the halay

Encompassing a transnational space hosting various representatives, musicians and politicians from Turkey, Europe and the UK, the festival increases multifocal visibility. Given the attendance of Alevi representatives from Europe and Turkey and Turkish MPs from the largest opposition parties in Turkey (the CHP and HDP), the festival increases the visibility of British Alevi among the Alevi diasporas and in Turkey. It equally applies to increasing Alevi visibility in the UK. The festival receptions, hosting from year to year an increasing number of MPs, mayors, and councillors, are a mark of the relative visibility of Alevi in the UK public domain. Its annual organisation requiring various collaborations and engagements with local authorities, meetings with public service institutions and communications with other communities also increase this visibility and it is this linking and bridging (Knott, 2016) that expands external, as well as internal, social relations. The development of immigrant festivals, therefore, indicates a broader process of integration (Nurse, 1999). As a site for the public presentation of culture and identity, the festival also expresses a 'rootedness' in their new land and affirms the diasporic identity. The regular annual recurrence of the festival, alongside its ever-expanding scope and

attendance of people and institutions from the UK public domain, indicates its growing institutionalisation and legitimacy as a cultural performance in multicultural London.

However, festivals carry multiple meanings and encompass many functions that often embody inconsistent or opposing concepts (A. Cohen, 1993; Duffy and Waitt, 2011; Frost, 2016; Werbner, 2012). For example, besides the religious ambience created by figures and symbols to be found in the festival grounds and the Alevi *deyiş* (hymns) accompanied by *semah* performances, the festival also has a secular narrative. The boundaries between the religious and the secular (and political) and between public and private also blur as they intersect and become mixed together in the festival context. In her study of the ecology of festivals, written from an anthropological perspective, Frost (2016) points out the complex character of festivals and suggests that festivals and carnivals 'are inevitably subjective, embodied, and lived, which of course means that their myriad elements are complexly interconnected and inter-dependent' (2016:570). Witty and Duffy (2011:55) define such complexity as a 'paradoxical nature' that 'creates the festival's socio-spatial and political significance for notions of community and belonging'. As Frost (2016:571) suggests, 'there is no necessary contradiction within festivals between, for example, culture and commerce, politics and entertainment, or tradition and regeneration'. The Britain Alevi Festival is no exception. As well as circulating social and material capital within the community, it is a cultural practice combining the old with the new, the past with the present, the religious with the secular, and is also a political platform embodying protest, subversion, competition and contestation, as we shall now see.

Festival politics

Political events and discourses in the global arena and in the homeland influence the political, social and cultural developments of diasporas (Eade and Garbin, 2006). For diasporic groups, especially 'victim diasporas' (R. Cohen, 2008), the homeland is a salient locus channelling their active involvement in politics. Diasporic actors closely follow political developments in the homeland and their collective activities often convey political messages about it. Alevis characteristically align with left-wing politics and their activities always involve some kind of political platform. The political campaigns organised by the main opposition parties, the HDP and CHP, in Turkey against Erdoğan's presidency find extensive support among all Alevi diasporas, including British Alevis. The atmosphere and themes of the festival are often dominated by the same political discourses of opposition that are found in Turkey. In the

period when the Ninth Britain Alevi Festival was held, Turkey's central political focus was on the election campaign of the incumbent CHP mayor of the Istanbul municipality, Ekrem Imamoglu, who had widespread left-wing support. As he had won the initial election in March 2019, the nullification of that election by Erdoğan's government made him even more popular and widened his support base for the second election that was to take place on 23 June 2019. Famous for its hashtag slogan *#herseycokguzelolacak* (#everything will be fine), the campaign, though it was about a municipal rather than a national election, attracted enormous interest among worldwide opposition groups with its symbolic meaning of 'taking Istanbul from Erdoğan'. The festival area was festooned with campaign banners and posters carrying this hashtag slogan. From the stage to the stalls, there were campaign messages everywhere and almost all conversations in queues and at meetings were dominated by talk of the election.



Figure 18 (a-b-c). The campaign banners on stalls and the stage

The left-wing alignment of the British Alevi diaspora applies to domestic politics too. The Labour Party represents the main channel of Alevi involvement in UK politics. The Party's visible participation in Alevi activities confirmed by the election of Labour Alevi councillors and the first Alevi MP who was the Labour Party candidate. This attachment to the Labour Party is very noticeable at the festival, although to a lesser extent, other party representatives, including from the Conservative Party, can also be seen.

Although typically supporting left-wing politics, British Alevis form a fragmented, politically diverse diaspora. This is also reflected in the festival. Besides the large tents representing the social-democratic CHP and pro-Kurdish HDP (represented by the Kurdish Community Centre), many different political groups from Turkey are represented in the festival with stalls or members selling political magazines and

handing out leaflets about their cause. The rivalry between the CHP and HDP, the largest opposition parties in Turkey and the most voted for by expatriate Alevis, seeking to enlarge their support could also be felt at the festival. Their sizeable tents placed at opposite sides of the festival grounds were probably the most visited. Keeping the competition between them in mind, Alevi associations often maintain an equal relationship with both. The hosting of political figures, often MPs, from both parties at every festival reflects this desire.

Such large-scale public events are also an arena for power negotiations and contestations within the community. As Garbin (2012b:429) suggests, public practices of migrant groups often contain a 'problematic' side as they can 'crystallise tensions within the group'. In their study of Bangladeshi Muslims in London, Eade and Garbin (2006) note the internal negotiations that occur between secular and religious leaders of the community and highlight their divergent approaches on the way to reach a common position on how they represent their community in the public sphere. In the Alevi case, these types of debates occur between the secular leaders of the leading associations (the BAF and London Cemevi) in discussing the organisation of the festival. The religious leaders do not play any crucial role in the organisation of events like the festival. For reasons explained in the previous chapter, their role is largely limited to the festival's ritual content.

The collaboration between the BAF and the London Cemevi in the organisation of the festival is accompanied by a spatial competition signifying a conflict over the management of community spaces. Since the opening of the BAF's Enfield premises, the festival has been the subject of disputes between the two associations about where festival events should be held, particularly with regard to the concert on the final day. The BAF wants the festival, including the final day concert, to take place at its Enfield site. However, the London Cemevi rejects this because of their concern that should this concert, which is the biggest event in the festival week, be held at BAF's Enfield site, then the administration of the festival would fall entirely under the control of the BAF since the majority of events in the week-long festival are also held there. The London Cemevi has won this battle so far and the final concert has been held every year on Hackney Downs. However, what will happen in the future is uncertain.

Such spatial competition in the festival is linked to power negotiations between the two leading associations. The BAF, as a national federation, forms an umbrella organisation of *cemevis* in the UK, including the London Cemevi. However, the London Cemevi, as the first Alevi association and the largest

in terms of membership, is the primary source of the organisational body in the UK. The negotiations on the management of community spaces began when the BAF opened its Enfield premises just before the London Cemevi opened its new premises in Wood Green. Since then, there have been many disputes, particularly about where essential religious services should take place because the BAF also started to organise funeral and *cem* gatherings despite the better facilities at the London Cemevi. Notwithstanding the sizeable Alevi population residing in Enfield and its geographical distance from Wood Green, such attempts by the BAF are perceived as an effort to undermine the pre-eminent position of the London Cemevi. The conflict between these leading associations about the leadership and representation of the community has become a running issue in the internal politics of British Alevis and manifests itself in many other community spaces. For example, at the general assembly meetings I observed there were usually tensions between their leaders and their supporters.

The internal conflict reflected in the festival is not limited to the power struggle between the two major organisations. A conversation I had with an Alevi Turk couple at the festival illustrates the contestation that exists over ethnic identities. The couple in their 50s told me how they felt discriminated against in the BAF due to their ethnic Turkish identity.⁹³ The husband explained his experience of exclusion when he attempted to stand at an election for the administration board of the BAF and stated that he felt ‘there is no place for Alevi Turks in the British Alevi associations’.⁹⁴ That he defined his experience as ‘discrimination’ because of his ethnic affiliation indicates that he felt he had an inferior status as an Alevi Turk in the British Alevi community where the vast majority are Alevi Kurds.

Alevi Turks differ substantially from Alevi Kurds in terms of worship practices and political positioning. The couple was from a province in central Anatolia where Alevi Turks make up a significant part of the population while, as mentioned before, most British Alevis come from southern and eastern Anatolia

⁹³ A note for readers not familiar with the ethnic diversity of Alevis in Turkey: Alevis under Turkish national/citizenship identity consist of Turks and Kurds with a smaller number of Arabs. The majority of the Alevis in the UK are Kurds, alongside a smaller number of Turks.

⁹⁴ Informal discussion, 28 May 2019, Enfield

where Alevi Kurds are concentrated.⁹⁵ These two groups have had different historical experiences due to their ethnic affiliation (and geographical separation) which has resulted in political differences provoked by the state's Turkish-Islamic assimilationist policies (Hanoglu, 2016). The experience and emotion mentioned by the participants signify an ethno-political cleavage within the community. This aspect of the British Alevi community typifies what Pasura (2014) calls a 'fractured diaspora', highlighting the diversity of ethnic, political and regional identities and feelings of belonging that can be found within the community.

However, the participant who complained about the institutions involved in the organisation of the festival also stated with the same clarity that his reasons for coming to the festival were his Alevi identity, showing how the collective sense of Alevi identity engendered by the festival can undermine such divisions:

We come here because we are Alevi and this is the Alevi festival. This is our festival.⁹⁶

Despite such ethnic and political contestations, the festival has a unifying attractiveness captured under the umbrella of Alevi identity. What unites people is the sense of a common cause indicated by the socio-spatial and political significance of the festival for the community. Such collective performances as manifestations of religious affiliation and identity temporarily suspend internal divisions and differences and unite the fractured community. Thus, the festival functions as a source of cohesion, prioritising a shared sense of identity and belonging, despite the differences, which exemplifies the 'chaordic' (Werbner, 2002a) structure of the community. This aspect of the British Alevi community embodying a sense of moral co-responsibility for a common cause is noticeable in many other community actions, such as the collective efforts in the construction of the new London Cemevi, detailed in the next chapter.

⁹⁵ A smaller number of Alevi Turks also live in Eastern Anatolia and perhaps because of regional affinity share noticeable similarities with Alevi Kurds in terms of culture, religion, and politics.

⁹⁶ Informal discussion, 28 May 2019, Enfield

Conclusion

Following the previous chapter that explored how the transition from religious charisma to bureaucratic power inaugurated a new era of Alevism in the diaspora, this chapter has focused on the repercussions of the institutional and spatial journey of diasporic Alevism. I have explored diasporic Alevism in the public sphere through the intersecting themes of Alevi institutionalisation and recognition, and spatial politics and homeland politics, all of which shape the public performances of British Alevis. This chapter identifies the Britain Alevi Festival as a unique example of a spatial performance that involves all of these diasporic themes and discourses.

Diasporic Alevis have undergone considerable institutional and spatial developments that have shifted their local, national and transnational engagements since their arrival. This more institutionalised and spatialised Alevism has allowed them to become more visible in the public space and achieve a considerable part of their claim for recognition in the UK. However, their journey of recognition continues to progress, as manifested in the increasing amount of official claims they are making and the increasing number of public performances.

Alevi public practices are multivocal and embody many intersecting social, institutional and political dynamics across the local, national and transnational spheres. The common nature of Alevi public performances is that they are bound up with the politics of identity, visibility and recognition. While affirming a sense of belonging and identity and contributing to the consolidation of the community, such performances increase their engagement with the UK public domain and expand them beyond their socio-spatial boundaries.

The institutional developments and increasing participation in domestic politics also expand the community's transnational political activism. Their intention to address and put pressure on Turkey's policies towards Alevis connects worldwide Alevis across transnational social spaces. Homeland politics conveys a sense of 'co-responsibility' among Alevi diasporas and produces, despite the differences within and between the different diasporas, a cross-border solidarity that is characterised by a 'chaordic' transnationalism (Werbner, 2002a). The Alevi claim for identity, visibility and recognition serves a collective triadic purpose, asserting their territorial rights simultaneously in their homeland and the

countries of Alevi settlement, and thus encourage a spatially emplaced Alevism in the territories of Europe.

The model of the Britain Alevi Festival is a perfect example in which to observe the interplay of religion, space and politics in the public sphere of the diaspora. It is an outcome of a process of diasporisation that has emerged to then turn into a 'tradition'. The festival creates a heterotopic space through a London-born cultural practice by carrying a diasporic imagination of the homeland and religion, the key elements that reproduce the diasporic Alevi identity. Manifesting religious affiliation and identity, it is a bonding experience that stimulates a collective sense of 'us' and consolidates the community and becomes instrumental in facilitating intergenerational transmission. The festival prioritises a shared sense of identity and belonging that has a unifying attractiveness under the umbrella of Alevi identity. Temporarily suspending internal divisions and differences, it unites the fractured community in a common cause indicating its socio-spatial and political significance for the community.

The festival reinforces not only internal but also external social relations. It is a linking and bridging practice connecting Alevis with other communities, organisations, and local and national authorities. The development of the Alevi festival signifies being part of the wider society and a claim for a space in UK public and political life. It is an outcome of an increasing engagement with the public domain and an increase in political participation that has advanced in the last decade. The festival is shaping and is shaped by this broader process of integration. Its annual regularity, alongside its expanding remit and attendee profile from UK public life, indicates its growing institutionalisation and legitimacy as a cultural performance in multicultural London. Besides elevating visibility, legitimacy and recognition in the UK, it also increases the presence of British Alevis in Turkey and among the Alevi diasporas in Europe.

Lastly, the Alevi festival is a multifunctional platform that embodies inconsistent and intersecting features. Besides circulating social and material capital within the community, stimulating an 'ethnic economy' and forming a fundraising space for HTOs, the festival is a cultural practice that combines the old and new, the past and present (and future), the religious and secular, with diasporic identity. It is also a political platform embodying protest, subversion and contestation and stimulating the discussion of identity and politics. Though most Alevi public rituals have a political dimension, the yearly festival particularly reflects the results of their participation in politics, not only at the local level but also at the national and transnational.

This chapter has concentrated on the temporary spatial performances of British Alevis in the public space. However, Alevi spatial politics cannot be fully comprehended without understanding the role of more permanent placemaking performances that are addressed in the following two chapters. Chapter 6 explores Alevi spatiality through a case study of religious placemaking in the diaspora, focusing on the new London Cemevi. Chapter 7 explores the spatial performances of diasporic Alevis in their birthplace and their influence on the changing rural landscape of the homeland.

CHAPTER 6: A case study of Alevi placemaking in the diaspora

‘This is not just a building; it is our future.’⁹⁷

Introduction

This chapter explores the interaction of space and identity with religion through Alevi placemaking in the diaspora. Religious placemaking is a complex process involving many intersecting dynamics. The chapter uncovers the dynamics of the placemaking process by examining how space (and place) are produced and practised and the role that religious placemaking plays in the reconstruction of identity and community. Using the new building of the EACC London Cemevi, completed and opened in January 2018, as a case study, it offers theoretical and ethnographic insights into the placemaking practices of the migrant Alevi community.

A long construction process finally came to an end through the collective efforts and outstanding cooperation of the community. The centre is an outcome of diasporic Alevis in the UK, the economically most powerful of the Alevi diasporas. The construction of the centre is important for a number of significant reasons. For organisational leaders and many community members it is seen as a *dergah*,⁹⁸ described as the most beautiful *cemevi* in Europe or perhaps in the world. For some, it is a place that unites the community and shows the power of British Alevis. The organisational leaders view it as the institutional achievement of Alevis and marks the acceptance of their religious identity and an opportunity to become a power in society.

The centre is a quasi-religious space combining multiple meanings and religious and secular practices. Quasi-religious spaces, Kong and Woods (2016:119) argue, ‘are implicitly more accessible than religious spaces, and more meaning-laden than secular spaces’. What makes the new centre a quasi-religious (at

⁹⁷ Interview 2, 11 Oct 2017, Wood Green

⁹⁸ *Dergah*, means dervish lodge, traditionally a building designed specifically for gatherings of a religious sect and a place for mystical teaching and spiritual practice.

the same time a quasi-secular) space is its religious and non-religious functions. The building named *İngiltere Alevi Kültür Merkezi ve Cemevi* (England Alevi Cultural Centre and Cemevi) combines religious and secular practices in one place. Besides a *cem* house for religious practice, it is a cultural centre offering various opportunities for socialising and education for community members.

The pre-migration period of Alevi spatiality when Alevism was a marginalised minority faith in Turkey and its subsequent journey towards visibility can help us understand the Alevi diasporic experience. The first section begins with a discussion on Alevi spatiality and visibility in Turkey in order to make sense of how and why the *cemevi* is so important for Alevis in the diaspora. This leads to an introduction to the new London Cemevi. The second section explores the cooperation and conflict among the community members that crystallised around and during the construction project, emphasising the interaction of religion, place and politics that Kong defines as the 'poetic and politics' of place (Kong, 2001). The first part of this section discusses the conflicts and competitions that began with the purchase of the building, while the second part focuses on the involvement of British Alevis in placemaking and explains why material existence was of such importance to the Alevi community as the most visible mark of *birlik* (unity) and co-operation in the community. The third section focuses on the only sacred space in the centre, the *cem* hall, to explore the ways in which diasporic transformation proceeds through new religious spaces and is reflected in religious materiality. The fourth section explores the nature of the transterritorial horizons of the new London Cemevi through material transportations, activities hosting people from Turkey and Europe and, finally, through mortuary practices that link the UK and Turkey.

Alevi spatiality, invisibility and visibility

The historical background and political context of Alevism shed light on Alevi spatiality and its journey towards visibility. Alevi spatiality in the Turkish context is twofold. On the one hand, the theological and philosophical context of Alevism that focused on inner meanings rather than the form of worship allowed Alevism to orient itself into the natural landscape and produced ritualised community spaces (rather than built places). Communal life was well served through *cem* gatherings held in the biggest village houses and the collective rituals at *ziyarets*, the sacred places of Alevis found within the natural

landscape, such as mountains, fountains, and rivers.⁹⁹ On the other hand, if there were any desire for Alevi to build special places of worship, this was not allowed under Turkey's socio-political regime that forced Alevi to have an invisible and non-material existence. Anyone travelling between the eastern and central parts of Anatolia would find a striking view of the territorial presence of Alevi. In fact, rather the opposite, as they would be struck by their territorial absence with the only sign that these villages skirting the mountains were Alevi being the absence of a mosque.

Alevi were subjected to official discrimination and oppression and, therefore, Alevism lived secretly in communities, with beliefs and teachings only transmitted through an oral culture. Visibility meant discrimination and exclusion, as well as the danger of violent attacks against individuals or the community at large, thus it was a matter of security for Alevi. Throughout their history, Alevi became visible only in the light of violent events, especially massacres. Such a history of mass violence has accompanied official discrimination and attitudes that aim to exclude Alevi from social, economic and political life. Alevi historian Karakaya-Stump (Karakaya-Stump, 2013) defines an Alevi-phobic heritage that was transferred from the Ottoman Empire to the Republic. Such a historical phobia nourished by the maintenance of a Sunni-Turk official identity represented a widespread 'hate speech' and prejudice against Alevi in society, which labelled them as 'enemies of the state and religion' and was accompanied by other kinds of insulting accusations. One particular derogatory phrase, '*mum söndü*' (blowing out the candles), is a striking example of this. Alevi, when outsiders came, had to switch off the light (which at that time meant blowing out the candles) to hide their *cem* rituals. This notorious insult also accuses Alevi of sexual impropriety in *cem* gatherings that are not open to outsiders as Alevi men and women worship together in contrast to the Sunni tradition (Tas, 2016). Due to worshipping secretly, Alevi were labelled as 'impure', so visibility meant severe consequences for Alevi. It is not surprising, therefore, that even in the urban context they made great efforts to maintain their invisibility when mixing with the Sunni population. For many who lived their childhood in cities or towns in Turkey, their parents avoided teaching Alevism to them to prevent them from possible discrimination and

⁹⁹ For a detailed account of *ziyaret* rituals still intensively practised in Dersim, see (Gültekin, 2004).

exclusion. This socio-political context in Turkey prevented Alevism from becoming materialised and spatialised.

However, migration changed the destiny of invisibility for Alevism. Against the backdrop of the global rise in identity politics, the urbanisation of Alevis caused a shift towards a publicly expressed identity and claims for recognition in Turkey and beyond. That period marked a cornerstone in the historical trajectory of Alevism. It emphasised a shift in Alevi identity 'from repression to expression' (Göner, 2005:107) which encouraged Alevis to create their own places, *cemevis*, as a 'spatial and symbolic indication of Alevi presence' (Olsson, Ozdalga, and Raudvere, 2005:237). These first public Alevi places marked the beginning of the continuous transformation of Alevism into an open community (Kehl-Bodrogi, 2000). *Cemevis* are now vital to the social organisation of Alevis not only for religious reasons but also social and political. Although they are community spaces specially designed for *cem* gatherings and funerals, they are, in addition, a focus of various social activities and educational services for Alevis. The last two decades have seen a spread of *cemevis* worldwide, providing visibility and recognition in the countries in which Alevis have settled.

The mystic essence of Alevism emphasising symbolic inner meanings has shifted toward a more outwardly spatialised and materialised expression through the *cemevis*. To illustrate this, let us look at what has happened to *ziyarets*, the sacred natural places left behind after migration. I have asked all my participants about their last visit and experience of these sacred places in Turkey in order to understand if they, and their sacredness, still hold any significance in their lives after migration, and more specifically if they still visit them when on vacation in their homeland. Though there is a difference between migrant generations, the participants' responses signal a decline in the importance that *ziyarets* and their sacredness holds. While the older participants still visit sacred spaces, but to a lesser extent, the idea of a sacred natural place does not hold any meaning for the younger participants who somehow ended up with an answer linked to *cemevi* (as detailed in Chapter 8). The poetic and politics of *cemevis* give some sense of what Alevis exchanged when they left their sacred places behind. However, while the aspects of ritual worship, primarily in *cem* gatherings, invest *cemevis* with a poetic quality and a religious significance, they are not sacred places. *Cemevis* fit more the description of quasi-religious places that confuse the difference between the religious (or sacred) and the secular and are 'replete with politics and conflated ambition' (Kong and Woods, 2016:117).

Cemevis play a significant role in consolidating a collective Alevi identity and sense of belonging in the diaspora and in increasing visibility. Formal and informal discussions with the organisational leaders of the new London Cemevi suggest its symbolic and physical space and visibility were a powerful motivation for building it; indeed, visibility is precisely a strategy for the public expression of identity (Garbin, 2014) and ‘a matter of legitimacy’ (Vásquez and Knott, 2014:338). The spatial politics of recognition emphasises the role religious placemaking plays in advancing visibility and collective identity in the urban landscape (Garbin, 2014; Vásquez and Knott, 2014). It is the spatial politics of recognition that diasporic Alevism is engaging in through the building of *cemevis* that proclaim Alevism as a legitimate religion in the settlement country. In addition, its spatialisation, in hand with its institutionalisation, is also what secures Alevism’s continuity in the diaspora.

The new London Cemevi is a sign of Alevi territorial presence. It is in the borough of Haringey where the largest Alevi population live and work and where there are a large number of shops and businesses that belong to Alevis. Haringey Council has its first Alevi mayor, and three Alevi councillors were elected in 2016. The attendance of the local Labour and Conservative MPs and the new Mayor of Haringey Council at the opening ceremony acknowledged its territorial presence as well as marking its connections to local politics and its attachment to ‘powerful others’. According to Eade (2016:1), places ‘claiming to represent a specific religious “community” engage with powerful others, such as politicians, planning officers, protest groups and the media, and have learned how to “play the game” by building alliances with secular leaders’. Indeed, the facilities offered by the complex of the new London Cemevi in Wood Green increased such relationships, especially with local authorities and organisations. For example, the regional Labour Party London Conference was held at the newly built *cemevi*, a signal of the growing alliances. A respondent, who is a Haringey councillor and a Kurdish Alevi woman, explains the significance of the London Cemevi as a built space for the visibility of the Alevis and their relationship with the local community:

Cemevi has a good reputation in the Haringey area. The new *cemevi* played a major role in the acceptance of Alevism as a faith. Because when you go there, it is a place of belief in terms of its aesthetics. Having such a place actually creates something nice. It is a really beautiful and big place. People also know that all Alevis do their funeral and forty meals there. In other words, the authorities have accepted that it is an important asset for the community. Also, they have had very positive relationships until now. It is a big place having rooms made to book for some

events when needed. For example, the regional Labour Party London Conference was at Cemevi, in the newly built community house. With such things, it became known more. And when you look at the people who come there, you know, they were saying we are Alevi and going somewhere, where there is a teahouse, a small kitchen and ordinary tables, people sitting. But this place literally represents a faith community visually.¹⁰⁰

The participant's expression offers insights into what changed after the new London Cemevi was built in Wood Green when previously the *cemevi* had been located on a single floor in a building in Dalston. But it is more than a matter of size. Besides the large space it occupies, the specifically designed religious materialisation have contributed toward its increased visibility and legitimacy.

The new London Cemevi

The first and central Alevi place in the UK is the EACC London Cemevi, established in 1993 in Dalston, a vibrant area of east London. However, with the economic and organisational growth of the community, the existing building had become inadequate for the collective needs of the Alevi community. As a result, the EACC bought an old warehouse with a large open space in Wood Green (see figure 19) to convert into a large Alevi centre in 2005.



Figure 19: The old warehouse before the construction, 2008 (London Cemevi archive)

¹⁰⁰ Interview 17, 24 May 2019, Tottenham

The construction began in 2007 but ceased in 2009 due to disputes among community members over the administration of the *cemevi* (discussed in the following section). It recommenced at the beginning of 2014 but was halted again because of financial problems. Eventually, work started again and the project was completed in its eleventh year in 2018 (during the period of my fieldwork).



Figure 20 (a-b). The Centre from the beginning and end of Clarendon Road

It is a three-floor building facing Clarendon Road; however, beyond the gates there are two more buildings and a large open area. The number of facilities is surprisingly large: a *cem* hall (the *cemevi* proper) and a large multi-functional hall (each has a 650-person capacity), a morgue, eight classrooms, a library, a cafeteria, a youth centre, a conference room, three administrative offices, an emergency room, two changing rooms, an industrial kitchen, two reception areas, a car park, and a one-bed flat as a guest house for visiting *dedes* from abroad. Among these extensive facilities, three are specifically designated for essential activities for Alevis. First is the morgue and the main hall that make it particularly suited for customary funerals and *kırk*¹⁰¹ meals, the second is the large hall (*cemevi*) for *cem* gatherings and finally, the classrooms that support a wide range of educational activities (such as GCSE classes) and other types of Alevi-related training (such as *bağlama*, *semah* and Alevism classes). The quality of the facilities and fittings are way beyond what was provided in the previous premises in Dalston.

¹⁰¹ Literally forty; the ritual of the fortieth day after a death ending the mourning period for the family.



Figure 21 (a-b). Internal area



Figure 22 (a-b). The entrance from inside and from the road

The building is surrounded by a mixture of industrial units, cultural centres and residential housing. Backing onto a railway line and facing the West Indian Cultural Centre, on the right-hand side, there is an industrial unit producing fashion items and, on the left-hand side, there is a ten-floor residential building with a large number of apartments. It is located in a multicultural and multilingual area

between Wood Green and Hornsey and is several minutes walk from Turnpike Lane Underground Station and Hornsey Railway Station. A short walk in the surrounding area offers, like in many parts of London, an encounter with an ethnically and religiously diverse population, deservedly characterised as a 'city of migrants'. One will encounter different languages, particularly Turkish, in the walk from Turnpike Lane and a variety of east European languages en route from Hornsey Railway Station, passing Polish shops amongst others and the Islamic Cultural Centre and Mosque.

The following section focuses on the conflict and cohesion that crystallised the construction project, which throws light on the multiple dynamics and discourses involved in Alevi placemaking.

Internal politics of religious place: Conflict and cohesion

Conflicts and competition

Power coexists with conflict. The management of religious places often creates internal conflicts over power and resources, something that Kong (2001) describes as the politics of community in spatial dynamics. The London Cemevi, a registered charity with more than four thousand members,¹⁰² often has internal conflicts and disputes over its administration. However, the conflict that began with the purchase of the new building lasted for years and significantly delayed its completion.

The debates between the members of the two rival factions concerned political differences over the boundaries between Alevism and Islam and the issue of Kurdishness. Both called into question the other's position about Islam and the Kurdish movement and identity. These issues are long-standing ones that reflect political-ideological divisions within Alevi communities worldwide, and the British Alevi diaspora is no different. The former board of the *cemevi* was accused of being under the influence of the Turkish government and favouring their interpretation of a Turkish Islamic Alevism, emphasising the Turkishness of Alevis and denying their Kurdish background even though most British Alevis are Kurd. In contrast, the new board claimed to be the legitimate representation of Alevism and was, in turn,

¹⁰² The number of members reported by the London Cemevi.

accused of pushing Alevism beyond its traditional framework and aligning itself too closely with the Kurdish movement.

The two factions had not only become engaged in a political battle over the 'correct' interpretation of Alevism but also a legal one over the administrative control of the London Cemevi. This conflict reached its peak in 2010 with a number of court cases. One of the three cases concerned the freehold of the new building complex that had been registered under the names of the board members rather than the charity.¹⁰³ Legal action between the two opposing boards, both claiming to be legitimate, lasted three years and ended with a decision to elect a new board under the supervision of the Charity Commission.

This period of conflict between the two administrative boards resulted in a delay in construction for several years. Construction had to wait for the outcome of the fight, both personal and legal, between the two factions to be resolved for it to commence again. Also, as I was told, a large amount of money collected from the community had been spent on these legal proceedings. Consequently, the long delay in construction, which took eleven years to be completed, marked a period of disharmony and distrust within the community. It divided the community and created a rift between the supporters of the two factions. During this period, there was even a march in Dalston protesting against the former board members in front of their shops and restaurants (as typically the administrative board members were businessmen). More significantly, many community members who had supported the old board left the *cemevi*, one of whom explained this disconnection as 'a pause in practising their faith'.¹⁰⁴

This period of controversy also marked the founding of regional associations, with the first village association being established by those who had lost the fight over the administration of the *cemevi*. Subsequently, many village associations were established and currently there are around seventeen village and town associations, all linked to Maraş and the surrounding areas from where the vast majority of British Alevis have their roots. The setting up of kinship/regional associations reflects only

¹⁰³ However, interestingly, eight years on, the centre is still registered as a private property, but this time the owners of the freehold are those who initially questioned the old board's ownership. At a members' meeting when this issue was raised by a member, the freeholders explained their ownership of the freehold as a necessary procedural requirement. (Fieldwork notes, members meeting in London Cemevi, Wood Green, 05 November 2017)

¹⁰⁴ Interview 9, 10 Feb 2018, London Cemevi, Wood Green

one facet of the fractured character of the community. It was expected that the coming into existence of the new *cemevi* as a central religious place would entail fresh new competition over its administration. During my fieldwork, two board elections took place and I observed tough competition in both. Many candidates were nominated for posts and lobbying activities began well in advance of the elections. The palpable tension during the elections was a telling sign of the likelihood of contestations in the future. At the members meetings I attended at the London Cemevi, all of the speeches ended with a request for constructive questions and comments rather than ‘destructive criticism’, indicating that such comments and the presence of what the board saw as ‘destructive critics’ were a common occurrence. The late chairman’s request at one of these meetings during the last months of the construction clearly illustrates this when he asks: ‘please ask *rahmani* (virtuous) questions not ‘*seytani* (devilish) ones’.¹⁰⁵

When the *dede* made speeches, he also usually diplomatically conveyed a message of *birlik* (unity) as he never named or shamed people involved in disputes. At the end of every speech, he prayed for *birlik* and the need for cohesion among Alevis. At one of these gatherings I attended, the *dede* was reluctant to say a prayer (*gülbang*) at the end of the meeting because of the tense atmosphere of dispute. He clearly disapproved of this and explained how he felt before finally saying the prayer:

I say may our *birlik* (unity) and *beraberlik* (togetherness) be forever, but it does not happen.

Gülbeng is based on the unity of the hearts. But I'm upset; hearts do not become united.¹⁰⁶

The heterogeneous and complex makeup of the British Alevi community echoes what Pasura (2014) calls a ‘fractured diaspora’, emphasising the variety of identities and belongings related to political, ethnic and regional affiliations that exist within the community. The existence of such internal fragments and clusters that characterise contemporary diasporas as heterogeneous contrasts with classical diaspora theories that consider a diaspora ‘as an entity, a bounded group, an ethnodemographic or ethnocultural fact’ (Brubaker, 2005). The heterogeneous and fractured nature of the British Alevi diaspora is what feeds the conflict and competition among its members.

¹⁰⁵ Fieldwork notes, EACC London Cemevi members meeting, 5 November 2017, Wood Green

¹⁰⁶ Fieldwork notes, EACC London Cemevi members meeting, 8 April 2018, Wood Green

However, as we shall now see, even though the community went through such an intense period of internal conflict, it was also capable of demonstrating a remarkable unity and cohesiveness involved in religious placemaking. Such involvement of the heterogeneous British Alevi community in religious placemaking confirms its 'chaordic' (Werbner, 2002a) character, which helps to explain how conflict and unity can exist simultaneously. The internal diversity of diaspora communities, Werbner (2002b:119) suggests, address 'multiple discourses, internal dissent, and competition for members between numerous sectarian, gendered or political groups, all identifying themselves with the same diaspora'. The members of these fractured diasporas often unite for a common cause that creates a sense of 'moral co-responsibility'. As Werbner (2002a:121) suggests, diasporas are 'de-territorialised imagined communities [...] sharing a collective past and common destiny' and enforcing a sense of 'co-responsibility'. This can be seen in the collective efforts utilised for Alevi placemaking.

Cohesion in action: Involvement of the community

A continuous flow of Alevis pour from their cars and walk towards a construction site in an area situated between Wood Green and Hornsey. There is no space to walk along Clarendon Road, everywhere is crammed with people and cars and neighbouring car parks are full. This is 2017 and thousands of Alevis are attending the *aşure* sharing event at the site of the soon to be completed London Cemevi. The *aşure* sharing day is an annual event that takes place in *cemevis* at the end of the Muharram fast. However, this year it has been organised at the construction site when there were still a few more months to go before the *cemevi's* completion. By organising such an event, the EACC had intended to show people that the construction was gradually coming to an end and to inform them about what had been done and what still needed to be done, and more importantly, how much money was still needed. The size of the crowd at this event clearly demonstrated how important this new centre would become for diasporic Alevis.

Indeed, the near completion of such a large facility created new hope and synergy that gathered people together raising their collective expectations. The event created a spectacular image that motivated community members to donate money to complete the building. As the construction progressed, people who had lost their faith in it ever being completed, or had stayed away because of the tensions between the rival factions, began to return and contribute to the construction. This change in attitude is described by the construction manager (47, male) as the construction moved toward completion:

When we started the construction again, in the first years people's enthusiasm was broken; they thought that this construction would not end. They had lost their hope because they had just got out of an atmosphere of conflict. Later, when they saw that the construction was progressing and getting closer to the end, the donations increased, people started to adopt their faith much more.¹⁰⁷

Eventually, the EACC that had had the responsibility for the planning and construction of the site managed to raise more than £1.5 million, this large complex having been built through sponsorship, donations and the voluntary efforts of community members.

The involvement by the community in the creation of a religious place is a salient dynamic in reinforcing the sense of collectivity both literally and symbolically. Mazumdar and Mazumdar (2009:318) highlight the connection between religious place-making and community formation and indicate that religious place-making 'help[s] to build, foster, and solidify a community'. Indeed, the social contact and interaction between people contributing towards the building of the centre, and the centre itself, created a tangible synergy amongst individuals and groups within the community. Thus, the construction of the centre played an important role in building and fostering a sense of community and the late chairman's words made during the construction that 'this faith will be revived with this building'¹⁰⁸ have been vindicated.

The collective effort cannot be discussed without highlighting the importance of individual actors who played a crucial role in the construction process. For example, the architect for the project who, as its principal designer, was responsible for all the legal and functional matters with regard to the building regulations, surprisingly worked for the construction project as a full-time volunteer. His knowledge of building regulations and his collaboration with the local authorities was a significant bonus. The construction had run into some planning issues when it was re-started the third time, but thanks to the architect's knowledge and collaborative skills in dealing with the council authorities, and his effort in

¹⁰⁷ Interview 2, 11 Oct 2017, Wood Green

¹⁰⁸ Informal discussion, 17 November 2017, London Cemevi, Dalston

assiduously following the necessary procedures stated by the organisational leaders, all the problems were solved. Under his guidance, the centre met all the planning and building regulations and health and safety standards. This man, whom I met on the construction site, was a professional, forty-one years of age, an Alevi born in Elbistan, a town in the Maraş province, and had lived in the UK since he attended secondary school here. He expresses himself more comfortably in English than Turkish and has a good educational background. When the *cemevi* board asked him to work for them, he prepared a quotation for his services, providing a figure of between £60,000 to £70,000 for a year's work, although he did not charge anything and preferred to work on a voluntary basis in the end. I asked what were his motivations for undertaking such a huge project as a full-time volunteer:

I see myself as an Alevi [...] I donated that money as a volunteer help for myself and my family. [...] I am a volunteer and did not get a coin until today. Even on the contrary, I spent money from my pocket. [...] I have three kids. The oldest is twelve, and the youngest is five-years-old. Because they were born here, they do not know what Alevism is and Kurdishness. I was thinking of what would happen to our children in the future, and when this request came to me, I said yes, I would like to do it [...] I want our children to come here, get a good education and learn about their background and culture. And when the construction is over, my children will come here to study. For this, I wanted to do it as a volunteer.¹⁰⁹

The architect's testimony clearly emphasises how, for him, passing on an Alevi identity to the new generation is the most important value of the new *cemevi*. His concerns about his children's future in terms of their identity signals the critical role that the centre plays in transmitting Alevi identity between generations. The same concerns appeared repeatedly in nearly all the participants' testimonies, including the construction manager who worked partly as a volunteer, as did many other builders. The construction manager was a forty-seven-year-old Alevi born in Goksun, a town in the Maraş province, who had migrated to the UK in 1996. He had been working in construction since the third re-start in 2014 and was responsible for all the processes involved from buying materials to managing the daily work, including opening and closing the site. For the last three years, he had spent all of his time on the

¹⁰⁹ Interview 5, 22 Nov 2017, London Cemevi, Wood Green

construction site, almost adopting the site as a second home. I asked what the building meant for him. His response signals a vision of the future to be achieved through the building:

Such buildings make up our future. It is not just a building; it is our future. I would not have stayed here with this salary for three years. But it is, believing that makes me work. It is our future here in these buildings.¹¹⁰

The same participant, in explaining why 'it is not just a building', emphasises the importance of the material existence of the building for the inter-generational transmission of Alevism as parents want to bring their children to the *cemevi* to show them what Alevism is and how it is practised:

There are no places where our people can take their children. Fifty or sixty per cent, maybe more, of the children born here are asking that: 'what are we' or 'who are we'. Some say I am Christian; some say I am Muslim, but what do we say? The kids cannot express themselves. Such places will be very beneficial to them. Plus, Alevism is not something that comes with a written history, but a lifestyle that comes with a tradition. If these places do not exist, who will tell our children about this after years?¹¹¹

Like other immigrant communities, Alevi families are usually concerned about the transmission of identity and tradition to the new generations born and raised in the diaspora. How Alevism can be taught to the new generation is the central question among parents because maintaining continuity in the diaspora is possible only if their children continue to adopt an Alevi identity and keep its traditions. Indeed, the young generations grow up in entirely different conditions from the homeland. In the diaspora, where religion is expressed explicitly within spatial and institutional markers, the *cemevi* helps the younger generation answer the question of who they are and where they belong. It is a spatial indicator of Alevi identity and a medium for identifying themselves and expressing that identity to others. The involvement of British Alevis in the materialisation of their community signals a strong

¹¹⁰ Interview 2, 11 Oct 2017, Wood Green

¹¹¹ Interview 2, 11 Oct 2017, Wood Green

commitment to the transmission of Alevi identity. These participants' expressions reveal that the construction of the new *cemevi* symbolises the construction of a collective future, securing continuity.

During my visits to the construction site, I observed a noticeable amount of volunteer work; thus, there are many more volunteers whose stories could be told. To give a few examples: an electrician who fixed lights for five days, an electrical engineer who installed electricity distribution boards, a man who recycled the bricks from the old building that had existed on the site by cleaning them for nine days, or the women volunteers who cleaned the whole centre before and after the opening ceremony, all deserve to be noted here.

Apart from volunteering, there is also something that has to be said about giving donations. Nearly every individual I interviewed or had informal chats with donated money to the construction. During the construction period, one board member reported that he had been collecting an estimated £500 to £750 from his daily visits to community members. Each individual he had visited had made donations of between £50 to £200, whatever they could afford. Some donations were considerably larger. For example, when I was interviewing an elderly Alevi, a man sitting next to us in his middle 80s proudly interrupted our conversation to tell me that he had donated £1,000 towards the building.

Moreover, the EACC organised many fundraising events at the construction site. Beginning with the *aşure* day, every event was aimed at collecting donations for the building's completion. In these events, it was continuously announced that people should not forget to donate before leaving. There was a donation box at the door so that people had to pass it when leaving the building. My observations during those events revealed that most of the people leaving were making donations of between £10 and £50. The donation box was covered in a slogan announcing that 'with our donations, we will build our *cemevi* and our future'. This point reminds me of what Johnson (2007:37) calls 'institutional infrastructures' providing and maintaining 'diasporic sentiments' that offer 'solidarity, purpose, identity and futurity' and transform subjectivities. Such collective efforts by the community prove the power of institutions to create diasporic sentiments, which in this case encouraged Alevis to fundraise and campaign for something that would help them meet their collective expectations.



Figure 23: People making donations and receiving a receipt before leaving

Besides money, other types of donations should also be noted here. Community members donated furnishings and tools. In a brief talk, the Chair of EACC explained how the offices had been got ready when they had moved to the new *cemevi*:

I called my friends, who are businessmen and gave everyone a different responsibility. One bought the chairs and seats, another desk and another TV. All offices became ready with the material donations shortly.¹¹²

Donations and volunteer work made a significant contribution to the construction project; however, the primary financial source came from sponsorship. Sponsors undertook to fund different aspects of the building works covering the entire material and labour costs for different parts of the building, such as the *cem* hall, main hall, toilets, library, industrial kitchen and car park. The main sponsors undertook to cover the entire costs, from design to materials and labour, of the *cem* hall, main hall and all the toilets (there are fifteen public toilets) which are the most important public spaces in the whole centre. Some sponsors made a significant contribution to material and labour in decorating the library, providing the

¹¹² Informal discussion, 09 February 2018, London Cemevi, Dalston

kitchenware materials and air filtration system, paying for the large marble on the ground floor, and undertaking the entire construction of the car park. Other sponsors funded or supplied essential materials needed to complete the project, such as parquets, flooring and tiles, doors, and skirting boards and floorboards. One sponsor sent his builders to work on the construction site for five days paying their wages.

All those who gave sponsorship or made large donations were Alevi businessmen who were settled in London. The construction of such a large facility that cost nearly one and a half million pounds needed financial backing and would not have been completed without their efforts. Their involvement was not limited just to funding more than half of this amount, but they also supervised the design of the central public areas, such as the *cem* hall and the main hall, which are so important in providing the overall impression of the building and contributing to its prestige. Moreover, the enthusiasm of some of the main sponsors and their efficient involvement in the construction work encouraged other Alevi business people to contribute. It would not be wrong to say that their contribution was the motor that drove the construction forward.

The role that sponsors, especially the main sponsors, played in the construction exemplifies how personal agency plays a part in religious placemaking that shapes the experiences of diasporic communities. Tweed (2006) speaks of the contribution of individual agents and states that they can have 'as much influence as those biological, political, economic, and religious flows' (2006:174) and reaffirms the role of personal agency in 'the kinetics of religious dwelling and crossing' (2006:176). Tweed is referring here to an individual who, in his role as a clergyman, founded and directed a shrine for thirty years; but those who fund religious buildings in the diaspora can be seen to play a similar role.

Whether with sponsorship, donation or volunteering, the involvement of community members plays an essential part in placemaking, not only because of its practical contribution to the production of place but also by fostering bonds between people and place that shape their later practices. Thus, placemaking is a continual process; it is not only about producing but also practising place. The places they created in their new land make sense of what Tweed (2006:83) calls 'dwelling' and 'homemaking' that 'allow devotees to inhabit the worlds' they have constructed. Such places are spaces of belonging that convey their collective past, feelings, and traditions, thus forming a medium for rebuilding a collective culture and, accordingly, community.

My fieldwork continued for some time after the *cemevi* opened to the public and thus I had a chance to observe how the *cemevi*, although very new, was increasingly attracting attendance by the community. Every event that I observed at the site attracted many more participants than the previous *cemevi* and even *cem* gatherings saw a higher participation of Alevis than previously which was not simply a result of its greater capacity. The following statement of a participant (37, female), who was very proud of the new *cemevi*, expresses a feeling and sense of collectivity (she is also one of the many who donated towards the construction). Her answer to the question of where she feels she belongs to most shows her emotional connection to the *cemevi*:

When I come to *cemevi*, I feel very peaceful. When I see my people, the people of my own culture, I join them immediately [...] I belong here. This [*cemevi*] belongs to our belief, our society. As people say, time is the time of unity here.¹¹³

The collective expectations of the future that they invest in the new *cemevi* denotes the significance of temporality in placemaking. A strong sentiment bridging the past with the future appeared in all the testimonials. The intergenerational transmission of Alevi identity and the continuity of culture and tradition come forward as a dominant motivation mobilising the community to make their own place. It echoes a collectively imagined future that, as Mische (2009:695) suggests, builds a 'link between cognition and action'. She highlights future projectivity as a dynamic force that leads to action as expectations of the future often determine people's cognitive behaviour, the way they think, feel and act. The collective projections of the future that 'shape and are shaped by social processes' are embedded in social change (Mische, 2009:702). It is the sociology of the future, Mische points out, that helps us to understand the broader effects of temporal dynamics on social settings.

The transmission of identity and culture is the main challenge for diasporas, especially those whose members have been oppressed, marginalised, forced to hide their identity, and have had to secretly live their traditions in the homeland. Fieldwork data suggests that what Alevis feel most at risk of is maintaining continuity in the diaspora, which is, of course, possible only if their children continue to practise their Alevi identity and tradition. Thus, for the continuity that requires transmission, Alevis unite

¹¹³ Interview 9, 10 Feb 2018, London Cemevi, Wood Green

in making their own places and building a spatial and institutionalised existence. Thus, the case of Alevi placemaking suggests that the collective future expectations unifying and mobilising heterogeneous communities are essentially the characteristics of the contemporary diasporas.

So far, we have discussed the collective efforts in placemaking and its implications. The next section focuses on the interior of the *cem* hall (that is the *cemevi* proper), which is the only sacralised space in the centre in order to explore religious materialisations and the spiritual investments visualised in placemaking.

Religious materialisation: An imagined *cemevi*

As mentioned above, the London Cemevi complex encompasses predominantly non-religious facilities, such as the big hall, conference room, classrooms, morgue, offices and library. Thus, even though the term *cemevi* refers literally to a *cem* house, practically London Cemevi refers to more than simply a place where a *cem* gathering is held. In this section, I shall refer to the ‘*cem* hall’ to mean the ritual space in the complex. This distinction is marked by the fact that the *cem* hall is the only sacralised space where people have to take off their shoes to enter inside.

The *cem* hall was created and designed through a team effort that included the sponsor, architect, interior designer, and Chairman. The main sponsor financed and supervised the creation of the *cem* hall including the design, the materials and the building labourers who worked solely on the *cem* hall which was like a semi-autonomous area in the construction site. However, all final decisions about the design were made with the administrative board’s approval. During one of my visits (23 Nov 2017), the interior designer was working with two craftsmen who were specialists in their particular areas. All were employed by the sponsor and assigned to work only in the *cem* hall.

The high-level quality of the design is apparent in the hall where technology serves theological needs through a thematic design. An enormous air conditioning system circulates air through hidden air channels behind the ceiling formed of twelve large sections, these being the essential part of the thematic concept behind the design (see Figure 24). The triple-glazed windows that provide soundproofing to reduce noise transfer also carry through the thematical concept with the use of coloured stained glass. All the carpets and cushions which have traditional Anatolian patterns are hand-made using natural dyes extracted from plants and trees and were made specially for the *cemevi*.

The conceptual design of the interior is unique and modern. The composition of the roof and the marble platform is the primary visual focus of the interior design and was the most architecturally challenging part to design and build. It is an imposing sculptural form that emphasises a meeting of symbolic representation with modern technology. The centre of the roof is a dodecagon (twelve-sided figure) surrounded by twelve large sections emanating outwards from the centre and symbolising the Twelve Imams, a core symbolism of Alevism. The design of the roof is mirrored in the twelve-sided marble platform that stands on the floor and is used for *semah* performances. The platform consists of massive pieces of marble transported from Turkey that each weigh around 200kg to 500kg. The design of the marble platform was inspired by the *teslim taşı* (stone of devotion), a twelve-cornered stone symbolising devotion to Alevism. Next to the marble polygon, there is a wooden platform where the *dedes* sit to supervise the *cem* gatherings. Both platforms together compose a section labelled the '*sahne*' (stage) by the interior designer and, indeed, it looks like a stage (see Figure 24). Designing a *semah* platform as a stage shows how diasporic re-articulations are reflected in material practices linked to the contextual changes in ritual that take on elements of theatrical performance and folklorisation, as explored in Chapter 4. The shifting of the *semah* into non-ritual contexts as a 'public performance' lies behind the priority given to the aesthetic visibility of the *semah* space in the interior design. Indeed, the attachment to new sites requires religious materiality and practices to be visualised and presented in new ways paralleling changes in the ritualised Alevi culture.



Figure 24. The composition of the 'stage' during a ritual cem gathering

The *cem* hall differs remarkably from other *cemevis*. The iconography, the visual images and symbols, has been specially selected and uniquely designed to provide an entirely new representation that cannot be found in any other *cemevi*. For example, the stylistic painting of Ali, who is the most important holy figure in Alevism, illustrates a very new representation. The disc of light surrounding Ali's face, placed on a blue background centred on a wrought-iron panel, is very different from traditional depictions (see figure 24). The traditional pictorial representation of Ali has three common forms: a half or full-body image of Ali sitting and holding his sword or Ali sitting in the middle of the Twelve Imams who all wear a green headcover. These traditional depictions refer to pious representations in Alevism suggesting a link

between Alevism and Islam as Ali and the Twelve Imams are two symbols shared by Alevism and Shia Islam; although there is no further similarity.¹¹⁴



Figure 25. The painting of Ali behind the stage and Haji Bektash Veli on the left

The subdued representation of Ali and the absence of the Twelve Imams is a clear statement that defines Alevism as something distinct from Islam. This clear separation from Islam is reinforced by the prominence given to the large painting of Haji Bektash Veli, whose teachings have deeply influenced Alevism, in which he is surrounded by *turnas* (cranes) which is a symbol synonymous with Alevism. The crane has a deep spiritual meaning in Alevism as is represented in the *semah* where the participants'

¹¹⁴ The link between Alevism and Islam is a matter of controversy amongst scholars and amongst Alevis themselves. However, many suggest that both symbols have become located at the centre of Alevi teaching during the assimilationist policies under the Seljuk Empire, although they have become more oriented towards the spiritual world of Alevism as an essential focus of the belief (Bayrak, 2004; Korkmaz, 2009).

bodily movements represent the crane in flight and walking. This presence of Haji Bektash Veli is accompanied by other Alevi dervishes who are known as the *ulu ozanlar* (the great poets),¹¹⁵ who have had a strong influence on the belief and structures of Anatolian Alevism. A deep reverence for Haji Bektash Veli and the other great poets brings Kizilbash¹¹⁶ and Bektashis¹¹⁷ together under the umbrella of Alevism and represents a more inclusive vision of Alevism.



Figure 26. Haji Bektash Veli and turnas

¹¹⁵ *Ulu ozanlar*, the Great Poets are seven poets who lived between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries and have profoundly influenced the belief and structures of Anatolian Alevism by transmitting the beliefs and teachings through poetry and songs of mystical meaning.

¹¹⁶ Kizilbash is the former name given to Alevis that include different tribal and linguistic communities which traditionally inhabited the rural areas of central and eastern Anatolia.

¹¹⁷ Bektashis are a dervish order (*tariqa*) founded in the fifteenth century throughout Anatolia and the Balkans, named after the thirteenth century Alevi saint Haji Bektash Veli.

Such symbolisation in religious materiality, highlighting a common origin and common reverence for historical figures shared by different Alevi groups, proclaims a return to Alevism's ancestral roots (though much of those roots are a social construction viewed through the lens of current diasporic realities and demands). A newly restructured religious tradition is the result of a profound change in the religion and, as Yang and Ebaugh (2001) suggest, it often entails a claim to a return to theological foundations in order to maintain itself as a distinct religion. The coming together of diverse ethnic and regional groups within the community inspires religious associations to articulate the commonalities in their beliefs and practices in order to cement a collective sense and to create solidarity. No doubt, a theological return to claimed origins helps to create unity amongst Alevi diversity. These kinds of developments often carried through initiatives by the community leaders create an 'effective change by building on traditional rationales, structures and practices' (Rudolph and Rudolph 1967, cited in Yang and Ebaugh, 2001:278). This process of a search for commonalities compels them to 'identify the essentials in their religion' that determines 'what they must keep and what may be given up' (Yang and Ebaugh, 2001:279-280). The late Chairman of the EACC, in explaining their deliberate choice of paintings, affirms this:

Cemevi is designed according to an inclusive perspective about our belief. Instead of the religious motifs evoking the Shiites, figures like '*ulu ozanlar*' [the great poets] representing Anatolian Alevism, Kizilbashism and Bektashism were selected. Most of the *cemevis* have *Ehli-i Beyt*¹¹⁸ or Shia themes. But we represent the Anatolian Alevism that embraces a wider Alevism.¹¹⁹

The religious transformation emphasises the multiple horizons of the diasporisation process. Diasporas, as Johnson (2007:228) says, 'adjust and transform religion' that represent left-behind territory 'in new social contexts and places with different resources' and 'construct religion as a discrete entity by problematising its boundaries and priorities; they shift them from implicit practice to overt debate, and from hegemony to ideological contest'. The religious figures used in the *cemevi* give emphasis to what

¹¹⁸ *Ehli-Beyt* is the name for the Household of Muhammad

¹¹⁹ Tugay Hurman, 17 November 2017, London Cemevi, Dalston

has been identified as the core teachings of an ancestral Alevism, more in touch with its emphasis on the philosophical cosmos rather than pious symbolism that originated under Islamic influences. It depicts a new vision and interpretation of religious symbols that claim to return to the very old, non-Islamic roots and represents a material manifestation of a new positionality about Islam formed in the diaspora. By replanting rituals 'spatially and ideologically in new sites' (Johnson, 2007:44), diasporic religions are involved in both the transmission and reproduction of identity and memory. Diasporic religions are 'memory performances' that mark a continuity and connection to their origins through a 'conscious recollection' that reconfigures the past in the present by creating a 'retroactive force' to the legacies of the attachments to the centuries and territories (Johnson, 2007:11). Indeed, the past is a social construction viewed through the lens of current diasporic realities and demands, and surely the diasporic associations are constructing a particular view of Alevism and its roots retrospectively.

Religious places contain material forms of collective symbolisation in order to preserve a memory and loyalty to origin, history and territory. Such places, Bruneau (2010:38) says, are 'places of memory' that contain 'iconography' to bond people and transmit identity to the next generations. Combining the group's ethos (Geertz, 1973), religious materiality makes building their own space, a place to which they belong. The *cemevi* is the place of memory for Alevis. Its iconography and symbolism represent the senses, meanings, and history of an 'Alevi collectivity'. The imaginative design of the *cemevi* recall their common past and values and binds them in the present, and configures a collective identity and a shared future.

Overall, the religious materiality of the new London Cemevi suggests that Alevi placemaking in the UK is a process of re-materialisation and re-memorialisation of Alevism beyond its usual frame. Through a new 'way of seeing' (Johnson, 2007:42) constructed in the diaspora, migrant Alevism has oriented itself towards new conditions by replanting its existence materially, visually and symbolically. It is a material manifestation of a re-imagined Alevism that has been formed in the diaspora. The whole composition of religious materiality visualising Alevism illustrates how diasporic re-articulations are reflected in material practices.

The next section explores the transterritorial horizons that the new London Cemevi involves through material importations, activities hosting people from Turkey and Europe, and mortuary practices moving the deceased from the UK to Turkey.

Placemaking in transterritorial horizons

On my visit on 22 November 2017 to the London Cemevi, the newly arrived religious materials from Turkey, such as figures, pictures, poems and quotes, were all around the halls. The scene in the halls illustrated a transnational collaboration. The unique thematic materials had been designed by the interior designer in the UK and the drawings and instructions were sent to Turkey where the goods were produced. This also applied to everything else from carpets to the marble for the décor, almost everything of which had been transported from Turkey. The importation of all the decorative and thematic materials from Turkey indicates an overlap between religious and commercial links with the homeland. It echoes what Johnson (2007:45) defines as the 'commerce of memory-making' that underscores homeland attachments through an economic collaboration 'brokered by merchants of material goods who sell the "authentic" to diaspora'.

There are other dimensions of this 'commercial' connection with the homeland. The homeland remains grounded within diasporic identities and continuously reflects various ties and solidarity (R. Cohen, 2008; Safran, 1991). The production of UK-designed thematic materials in Turkey is linked to the main sponsors' intention to support their homeland financially. The businessmen's connection with Turkey affirms a transnational solidarity sustained through financial ties. One of the sponsors' attachments with the homeland goes beyond simply buying goods from Turkey. He also makes other financial contributions, such as building a school in his village and giving bursaries to students all over Turkey. Such attachments also exemplify how diaspora remittances are involved in the development of the homeland.

The transnational linkages of the new London Cemevi are not limited to the material goods that are transported from Turkey. The opening ceremony on 7 January 2018 was a remarkable event in its demonstration of these transnational networks. It hosted many representatives and politicians from Turkey and Europe, besides a large number of attendees from the UK. The presence of representatives and *dedes* from the Alevi federations of Germany, Belgium, Austria and Turkey and MPs from the two main Turkish opposition parties (HDP and CHP) also demonstrated these wider transnational linkages across different borders and formed a triadic diaspora space.

The opening ceremony began in the big hall with an opening speech by a *dede* following the lighting of ritual candles. It continued with a performance of Alevi music and a *semah*, followed by a number of speeches by politicians and representatives from Turkey, Europe and the UK. The speeches were full of political messages about the situation of Alevis in Turkey and the conditions of Alevis around the world. The gathering ended with a *cem* led by four *dedes* from the Alevi federations of Germany, Belgium, Austria and Britain. Because of its purely physical and symbolic presence, the new London Cemevi is the most famous material example of Alevism in the Alevi diasporas whose opening had attracted the attention of Alevis not just in the UK but also from Turkey and Europe. The event was also a marker of the role that the new London Cemevi played in gaining recognition for the Alevi community in the UK. Representatives from all Turkey-related associations, including all the kinship associations, MPs, and Labour and Conservative councillors, including the Mayor of Haringey, were part of the large attendance indicating recognition at both the institutional and individual level in the UK.

The *cemevi* also provides a bridge between Alevis and the homeland as is particularly the case with funerals as the London Cemevi organises the transportation of deceased community members to be buried in their birthplace, a subject to which we now turn.

Funeral customs and new conceptualisations

Funeral arrangements constitute an important transnational practice in the Alevi community that sustains continuous ties with the homeland. The new *cemevi* is a key centre for funerals and for the arrangement to transport deceased community members to be buried in their birthplace; thus, it is the final destination in the UK before starting the deceased's last journey of repatriation that ends in the village cemetery. Zirh (2012:1758) considers the transportation of deceased community members back to their village as 'a ritualised and spatial practice of (transnational) community-making beyond national categories and cartographies'.

Cemevis provide Alevis with the opportunity to conduct funerals according to their religious customs and is a further representation of their collective identity. Death rituals, as Hertz (2013:28) suggests, are a matter of social consciousness and 'the object of a collective representation'. The mortuary is one of the primary reasons for Alevis to invest in a new *cemevi* as it includes the essential facilities for funerals, such as a morgue with a washing room and a large hall to host funeral gatherings. These facilities make

the *cemevi* a principal place for customary funerals and *kirk* meals. *Kirk* (literally forty) refers to the ritual that commemorates the fortieth day after death and marks the end of the family's period of mourning. The family of the deceased supply a meal to share with the community which used to be provided in the home but is now organised in the *cemevi* with much higher attendance. The funerals and *kirk* meals are announced to the community through the *cemevi* SMS system in advance. *Kirk* meals are the most frequent large events to take place in the *cemevi* with one or two such events taking place nearly every weekend.

Like many other practices, the funeral (and *kirk*) rituals have also been reconceptualised to meet the ways that identity is negotiated in the diaspora, and the *cemevi* plays a significant part in this. The critical question of positionality in relation to Islam marks the modification of the *cenaze erkani* (funeral customs) that intensified with the building of the new London Cemevi. The London Cemevi, since it moved premises, has applied new regulations to redesign funeral customs towards a more non-Islamic form. Funeral practices are the subject of common debate in almost all Alevi communities worldwide. In recent years, stimulated by diaspora, Alevi have increasingly begun to cease reciting Arabic prayers from the *Quran* which is seen as an outcome of the assimilation of Alevism into Sunni Islam. In the London Cemevi, the presence of a *dede* is now compulsory at funerals to ensure that the ceremony is conducted according to this modified Alevi rite, in particular the removal of Quranic prayers. However, such a reconceptualisation of funeral customs, especially excluding Quranic prayers, has been subject to disagreement between community members and the *cemevi* because for some the recitations of prayers from the *Quran* is also seen as a tradition that Alevi have performed for a long time.

The use of Quranic prayers in Alevism may seem puzzling here. Reciting Arabic prayers from the *Quran* in funerals is seen by many Alevi as an outcome of the long history of assimilationist policies towards Alevism in Turkey.¹²⁰ Similarly, Dertli Divani, an Alevi poet and a *dede* interviewed by Akdemir, also reflects on this and claims that 'Alevism suffered from cultural erosion, and the community needs to

¹²⁰ I should note here that this argument applies to Alevi Kurd and Turks, not Alevi Arabs, as Arabic is their language and also their customs show significant differences.

recover from it' (cited in Akdemir, 2016a:246). He explains how such customs became infused into Alevi culture:

The path has come from those days to today, there is a tradition that has been going on, but because of the pressure gradually, we looked like others. Especially in the cities, people needed hocas because they don't know anything about their own teaching, and they didn't want others to say, 'They didn't even pray *Fatiha* [an essential ritual prayer of Muslims] and buried their dead like an animal corpse'. And as time goes by, they thought this is how it is supposed to be. Our funeral rituals are unique to us.¹²¹

As has been argued previously, although restructured religious tradition contains profound changes, diasporic Alevism comprises a theological return to its pre-Islamic roots and a new positionality about Islam. It is closely linked to the Alevi associations striving for recognition. As addressed in the previous chapters, with the diasporic developments, Alevi associations sought public recognition of Alevism as a faith with clearly articulated boundaries as a religion in its own right. The modifications to funeral rites serve as an initial element in boundary-making with Islam. Their desire to articulate a distance from Islam has led to the removal of Islamic elements, most explicitly Arabic prayers, from Alevi ritual customs. However, as an alternative to Arabic prayers, prayers in Turkish have taken their place even for Alevi Kurds. This is a consequence of the long-term ethnic and linguistic assimilationist policies of the Turkish state towards Kurds and there are a very limited number of *dedes* who can say Alevi prayers in Kurdish or Zazaki (Kirmancki). During the fieldwork, I came across only one *dede* in the London Cemevi who says prayers in Zazaki, though not as much as Turkish.

Formal and informal discussions with board members of the London Cemevi reveal that removing Arabic (Quranic) prayers from funeral practices is, in their view, a way of distinguishing Alevism from Islam. The administrative board stresses the significance of modifying funeral customs to remove Islamic traditions. Moreover, such diasporic modifications now travel back to the homeland via transnational networks, and *cemevis* play an important part in this transmission. For instance, two chairpersons of the London Cemevi proudly told me how they interfered in the funeral rituals in their village. As in London, both

¹²¹ Quotation from Dertli Divani, from fieldwork conducted by Aysegul Akdemir (as cited in Akdemir, 2016a:247)

brought a *dede* to conduct the ceremony and to recite Turkish prayers despite some villagers' objections who requested Quranic prayers as was the custom. One of them was the Chairman of the London Cemevi at that period and his words reveal this perception of diasporic Alevism as separate from Islam:

*A hoca usually leads our funerals in the villages. Hocas are Alevi but not dede; they know Arabic, read the Quran. But this is an assimilation of the state. Of course, Alevism is influenced by Islam, but we have our own belief system. Why do we read prayers in Arabic or from the Quran that we do not understand? It is not our custom, implemented by the state. We cannot let hocas pray in Arabic at our funerals; we have our dedes to pray. We have our own prayers, Alevi prayers. We are Alevi. Can we be the same with those beheading innocent people?*¹²²

Overall, not praying in Arabic marks a rupture with Islam which has increasingly become central to the negotiation of Alevi identity and boundary-making process in the diaspora. This transition led by diasporic Alevi is a recent development and is not yet settled with the ongoing debates about funeral practices. The exchange of information among Alevi associations has spread such modifications worldwide. It also denotes the role that religious associations and transnational linkages play in reconstructing ritualised religious culture in countries of settlement and in the homeland.

Conclusion

Studying religious placemaking in secular settings requires an understanding of the various overlapping, conflicting and intersecting dynamics involved in its poetic and politics (Kong, 2001). As we saw in this case study, material (and spatial) practices of Alevi disclose many diasporic dualities, dilemmas and positionalities that make placemaking a complex process with diverse actors and agencies involved. This case study demonstrates how placemaking practices shape religious practices and discourses and how diasporic re-articulations are reflected in religious materiality.

This material existence is a matter of visibility and legitimacy, forcing religious traditions and identities to orient themselves within new settings. Such a large *cemevi* signifies the social, political and economic

¹²² Informal discussion with the Chairman and a board member, 9 February 2018, London Cemevi, Dalston

growth of the Alevi presence which, as a result, expands the engagement of the Alevi community with the public sphere of the UK. By integrating religious and secular practices, the centre restructures and empowers the community and imposes a modern-secular Alevi identity on the UK-born generation and others.

The collective involvement in making a *cemevi* that emphasises co-responsibility and solidarity in material performance confirms the 'chaordic' structure of the community, mobilising it for collective action. The story of the building lends weight to the argument that space literally matters for the construction of identity and community. Ethnographic evidence unavoidably addresses the fact that the motivation for the involvement of the community in making a *cemevi* is closely linked to their intention to secure the transmission of Alevi identity to the younger generations. It manifests a desire for continuity that mobilises British Alevis towards a common future and makes them the agents of placemaking and institutionalisation. Thus, this case study signifies the importance of place in shaping the future of the community through the transmission of values, beliefs and religious identity. The strong commitment to the inter-generational transmission of religious identity and the collective imagination of a secure future, that is continuity, are the temporal dynamics that direct collective action for the materialisation of the community.

The whole composition of religious materiality in the London Cemevi illustrates how diasporic conversion proceeds through new religious spaces. Migrant Alevism is orienting itself to meet new conditions by replanting its existence materially and symbolically through the construction of a new 'way of seeing' (Johnson, 2007:42) in the diaspora. Alevi placemaking in the UK is a process of re-materialisation and re-memorialisation of Alevism beyond its usual frame. It is a material manifestation of an imagined Alevism formed in the diaspora. Moreover, the figures, texts and paintings represent the philosophical cosmos of ancestral Alevism rather than a pious symbolism formed under Islamic influences. Besides the religious materiality used in the *cemevi*, the changing funeral customs also suggest that the positionality in relation to Islam has increasingly become the primary issue dominating identity negotiations and boundary making in the diaspora.

This case study makes an original contribution to the understanding of the symbolic and material building of a migrant faith community that is crystallised in religious placemaking.

CHAPTER 7: Diaspora in the village: The socio-spatial impact of migration on the rural homeland context

Introduction

*You are travelling in gurbet
don't know the language
missing dad and mum
drowning in thoughts*

*England or London
where did you stay, where did you sleep?
suffered lots of trouble
drowning in thoughts*

*England became homeland to you
filled with all nations
life became difficult
drowning in thoughts¹²³*

Opening this chapter is part of a long poem written by an elderly villager (82, male), the father of two migrant children who are living in London. It was written for his son who claimed asylum in the UK and could not return for years while waiting to claim his refugee status. This poem aptly summarises what migration means for the non-migrant parents left behind, longing for their children who went to *gurbet*.¹²⁴ Alevi immigrants in the UK were predominantly asylum seekers and found themselves in this situation. The first period of their settlement meant suffering for both sides; they missed each other and longed for the day when they could be together again. Later, when they gained refugee status, their first

¹²³ Interview 29, 8 August 2018, Örenli, Afşin

¹²⁴ *Gurbet* means faraway lands

priority was to visit their hometown and fulfil the dream of return. This heralded a new period of continuous and regular engagements with their hometowns, the main focus of this chapter.

I shall explore the relationships diasporic Alevi have with their villages and how these engagements shape the spatial, social, religious and cultural landscape of the rural homeland. In other words, the chapter aims to understand the homeland experiences of a migrant faith community and their impact on the homeland. Drawing upon a multi-sited ethnography in Alevi villages around the towns of Afşin and Elbistan in Maraş, in addition to villages near the cities of Sivas and Kayseri, in Turkey, this chapter examines how and to what extent transnational engagements influence the remaking of the rural homeland landscape, a key component in my study of the interaction of diaspora, religion and space.

This chapter is about the influence of migration, in particular the migrants' engagement with their villages. The principal findings of the fieldwork are presented by examining three types of relationships between diasporic Alevi and their villages. The first is the construction of new houses which significantly change the homeland's physical landscape. The second is the sending of collective remittances to build *cemevis* in villages, a process that affects not only the religious but also the social and political landscape. The third is holiday practices as British Alevi make regular visits to their villages, spending anything from two weeks to five months, which has a considerable impact on the rural homeland's social and cultural landscape. I have organised the following sections in line with this three-fold classification of practices that delineate the primary engagements of diasporic Alevi with their hometowns. As these spatial performances also have implications for young non-migrant Alevi, in the last section, I explore how, and to what extent, such engagements influence non-migrant youth, their experiences, expectations and future plans.

Migration, remittances and the rural homeland landscape

In 2014, the developing countries received more than four hundred billion dollars from migrants settled in other countries (World Bank Group, 2016). The World Bank report counts only officially recorded remittances and, together with those that are unrecorded, the actual size of remittances is much larger. Given their volume, remittances have become a dynamic element noted in debates about migration, development and transnationalism (Bakewell, 2008; De Haas, 2005; Kapur, 2005; Kelegama, 2011; Schiller and Faist, 2010). Remittances as 'the most tangible evidence and measuring stick for the ties

connecting migrants with their societies of origin' have 'transforming effects' on the socio-economic settings of the homeland as well as 'on global macroeconomic processes, including international financial arrangements, international trade, and the production and consumption of culture' (Guarnizo, 2003:666-7).

Migrant remittances, as markers of the relationship between migration and development, also play a dynamic role in the transnationalisation of hometown communities (Gardner, 1995; Lacroix, 2015; Levitt, 2001b; Lopez, 2015). In her study exploring the cross-border attachments of Miraflorenos from the Dominican Republic, Levitt (2001b:11) indicates that the regular engagement of migrants with their homeland changes the context of the home community and notes how 'nonmigrants also adapt many of the values and practices of their migrant counterpart' and 'engage in social relationships that span two settings'. Such engagements create what Levitt calls 'transnational villagers', signifying cross-border connections of migrants with their non-migrant kins which proceed through transnational social, or religious, spaces and circulation of social and economic remittances. She highlights the importance of social remittances in transforming the home community structures and argues that social remittances are 'tools with which ordinary individuals create global cultures at the local level' (p.11). Transnational villages 'create and are created by organisations [... that] act across borders' and maintain a 'transnational belonging [... that] allow migrants to express and act upon dual allegiances' (2001b:11-2). The reference here is to hometown organisations (HTOs). Encouraging them to participate in both settings, HTOs bond migrants to their community of origin and strengthen collective village identity (Lacroix, 2015). Lacroix points to the role HTOs play in maintaining a collective village identity that forms a transterritorial and transtemporal continuity of 'villageness' which emphasises a 'sense of identification that they produce as a historically embedded construction' (2015:63).

This is especially the case for the British Alevi village associations which sustain multiple attachments. First, they link migrants with their village and sustain regular communication with its community. Second, they bond together with their fellow villagers in the UK and worldwide and are involved in the stimulation and transmission of collective memory. Third, they are involved in the development of their villages. These HTOs contribute to the circulation of collective remittances for use in such projects as constructing *cemevis* or infrastructural developments, as well as individual investments in Alevi villages (detailed later). Overall, such social networks involving communities without a territorial base provide a bridge between London and the village.

The spatial implications of remittances are another salient dimension of migration. The built environment, particularly migrant houses, has become increasingly important in the debates about the consequences of international migration in the shifting rural context of the homeland (Boccagni and Bivand Erdal, 2020; Fletcher, 1999; Gardner, 2008; Lopez, 2010; 2015). In her work on remittance houses in rural Mexico, Lopez (2015) highlights the importance of space, place and the material world due to the buildings produced by migration and which encourage more migration. She explores how migrant money has altered the built environment and suggests that 'remittances are financial transactions with spatial implications' that 'affect daily life for migrants and nonmigrants alike' (2015:8). The built environment redesigned by the remittances 'shapes the social spaces of migration' that 'structure human movement and are powerful evidence of the aims, desires, and fears that drive social change' (2015:8). Similarly, in her ethnographic study of Napizaro in central Mexico, Fletcher (1999) explores the efforts of migrant villagers to build their dream houses in their hometowns, stressing the role new houses play in the recreation of the social space in the shifting economic and moral landscape. They are 'both the locus of growing consumerism and a site for heavily charged and contested ideas about family and community' (1999:23).

Migrants, as with Alevi, stimulate a physical transformation of the rural homeland landscape with money earned in the diaspora. In emigrant Alevi villages, the diaspora finances the construction of new houses and *cemevis*. These new spaces, which sustain diaspora engagements, can be seen as 'remittance spaces [that] span international boundaries' (Lopez, (2015:1). Such spaces indicating the effects of remittances on the homeland landscape also demonstrate the 'economic wealth and symbolic success' gained in the diaspora. It emphasises what Eade and Garbin (Eade and Garbin, 2006:183) describe as 'the visibility of the "migration miracle"' with 'in particular, the improvement of collective facilities including mosques, schools, madrassahs [by migrants]'. The migration 'miracle', in this manner, signifies the consequences of international migration and emphasises its dramatic influence on the social, religious and economic landscape of the homeland.

I now examine these processes ethnographically in the context of Alevi villages, focusing on what I call 'diasporic spatial markers' in the rural landscape of the homeland.

Diasporic spatial markers: Emigrant houses

Alevi villages are mostly located in mountainous regions in Maraş and nearby areas. They do not usually receive public infrastructure investment from the state. Almost no Alevi village has either an asphalt road or a state-built infrastructure, including a sewerage system. The Maraş and district municipalities, which are always elected from right-wing nationalist or Islamist parties, usually neglect Alevi villages.¹²⁵ As I observed in the fieldwork region, while Sunni villages are connected by asphalt roads, roads to Alevi villages, in contrast, remain unpaved.

However, arriving at a remote Alevi village, the visitor may be surprised by the visible presence and often ostentatiousness of migrant houses suggesting a wealthy presence. Every village with a high level of emigration has had most of its houses rebuilt by migrants. As stated in interviews, when Alevi migrants were first reunited with their villages, refugee status now allowing them to travel to Turkey, the first thing they did was to construct new houses. During my fieldwork, besides the already existing newly built houses, I saw much ongoing construction. Similar to many other emigrant places, for example, Mirpur in Pakistan (Ballard, 2003) or Sylhet in Bangladesh (Gardner, 1992), the vast majority of remittance inflow seems to have been invested in the construction, maintenance and improvement of houses. The construction boom generated by these buildings also creates a significant employment in the region which has provided plentiful work opportunities for skilled and unskilled workers in the construction sector. In addition to new houses, the maintenance of old houses also continues to support the construction sector, local suppliers, and local craft trades. Thus, from suppliers to labour, the investment of Alevi migrants in housing has made a significant contribution to the local economy, a pattern found in many other cases (see Ballard, 2003; Gardner, 2008; Lopez, 2010).

This construction boom has also had some, but not great, effect on land prices since the majority of emigrants build houses on family-owned land, often where their old house stood. Those who do not have adequate land for their house, I was informed, first try to buy state-owned village land (*hazine*

¹²⁵ The city council has always been elected from far-right party, the MHP (Nationalist Movement Party), from which some of the perpetrators of the Maraş massacre were later elected as MPs.

arazisi),¹²⁶ but if that opportunity does not exist, then the purchase of private land becomes an option. This need to build houses has, in very few cases, led to an increase in land prices. For example, in Kantarma, the price of a piece of land doubled when a migrant from another village bid at a public sale of state-owned land and offered a higher price. The participant who told me this condemned the sale of public village land without the villagers' consent. He explained with nostalgia that 'in the past, such things were not possible, people have changed'.¹²⁷ These words indicate that the things that have changed after migration are not only material but also social, cultural and even moral, because for him it broke the rules of courtesy that used to exist between the village communities in the past.

Many studies show that migrants often invest in their hometowns through development projects in cooperation with government authorities (Lopez, 2015). However, this is not the experience of Alevis, particularly Alevi Kurds. The conflictual relationship between Alevi Kurds and the Turkish state often prohibits such collaboration. It may be related to the lack of trust in government institutions that De Haas (2005:1275) says can play 'a constraining role in remittance transfers and may prevent migrant households from taking the risk of investing socially, politically and financially in their countries of origin and lower their incentive to return and circulate'. Indeed, as far as I observed, the investment of Alevi Kurds in their villages generally produce limited outcomes confined to such things as building houses, renewing the ancestral graves, and contributing to the construction of a *cemevi*, beyond which their collective projects rarely reach.

There are some exceptions to this. In Kötüre, a village near the town of Afşin in Maraş, emigrant villagers have funded many infrastructural projects. Kötüre is one of the pioneering villages that led the wave of migration from the region to the UK. Migration from Kötüre to the UK began in 1984 and has continued through chain migration until the present. Currently, more than two thousand migrants from this area live in London and many of them are wealthy, running large businesses, mainly jewellery shops, wholesale food companies and supermarkets. Their collective diaspora remittances have financed

¹²⁶ State-owned land (or treasury land) are areas within the village territory that are owned by the state. Such land can be bought at public sales.

¹²⁷ Informal discussion, 13 August 2018, Kantarma

infrastructural projects in the village, including the sewerage system, bridges and an asphalt road, all without any local municipal support. All works have been done through an association, *Kötüre Köyü Güzelleştirme ve Yardımlaşma Vakfı* (Beautification and Solidarity Foundation of Kötüre Village) which was established by villagers settled in the UK to run these projects.

The villagers from Kötüre now living in London dominate the business activities and Alevi associations in London and many of them are attached to the BAF and London Cemevi. One is the chairman of the BAF, who plays an active role in mobilising his fellow compatriots in London to fundraise for his home village. In an interview published by an online news agency, he explained that building infrastructure and new houses in the homeland were 'aimed at bringing the young generation living abroad to the village, where they can stay comfortably in the summer [...] so it is like a summer village'.¹²⁸ This re-building of a village as a place to spend summer holidays denotes the re-territorialisation of migrants in their homeland with a transnational consciousness. Migrants redesign their village according to the 'comfort' and 'better life' that they experience in the diaspora. Studying remittance spaces of migration in rural Mexico funded by those who migrated to the USA, Lopez (2015:19) similarly suggests that by building places and bringing objects back to Mexico, emigrants imitate their 'new lifestyles acquired through transnational migration'.

The extent and quality of the building in emigrant Alevi villages depend on the money available to spend, indicating their financial status in the diaspora. Migrants who have reached a relatively high level of wealth knock down their old village house and build an entirely new and more substantial one, although some prefer to keep their old house, which remains unoccupied, and build a new one next door. Whether this is the need for extra storage, or for use as a workplace,¹²⁹ or out of respect or nostalgia for family history¹³⁰ (as will be mentioned later), these old houses remain under the shadow of their new sizeable and ostentatious remittance-funded neighbour. These new houses substitute the

¹²⁸ 'Alevi Köyü Kötüre'nin Alt Yapısını Köylüler Kendi İmkanlarıyla Yaptı' (Villagers built the infrastructure of the Alevi village Kötüre with their own resources) VİDEO, Pir Haber Ajansı (Pirha.Net), 2 January 2018

¹²⁹ Interview 24, 4 August 2018, Kötüre

¹³⁰ Informal discussion, 2 August 2018, Kantarma

principal materials of vernacular architecture, adobe and stone, with brick, steel, cement and glass. Though they show some architectural similarities, every remittance house is unique and displays a different style that seems to depend on the circumstances and visions of the owner and builders.



Figure 27. Emigrant houses in Kötüre

These new houses do not exhibit any characteristics of vernacular architecture, nor do they utilise any traditional elements or patterns. The interior design and the amenities speak utterly of a modern house. Modern fitted kitchens and bathrooms, the latest technological household appliances, stylish furniture and glass balconies all signify a considerable investment in village life whilst also being culturally distant from it.



Figure 28. Living room in a remittance house in Kötüre



Figure 29. A corridor opening to three private rooms and a large glass terrace on the second floor. The house is a newly built three-floor building decorated with all-white furniture. Kötüre

However, those with less money to spend may undertake smaller-scale refurbishments to their existing village house, such as replacing windows, doors or adding new rooms. Though they have been extended

with improved amenities, these houses retain the characteristics of the vernacular and the interiors continue to include traditional elements and patterns.



Figure 30. Interior of an extended village house. Some of the family members are living in London. Köseyahya



Figure 31. Interior of an old village house. The house was extended with a new room by the migrant family members. Örenli

The typical old house with a large unfenced yard, usually with limited private space and one or two communal rooms, is in contrast to the large mansions with many private rooms on two or three floors within a fenced compound. But many of these houses remain empty most of the year, used only for summer breaks. Though villages were full of summer visitors during my fieldwork, many houses remained empty. These empty buildings, representing the success of the migrants' journey, are also a reminder of their existence (Ballard, 2003), acting as a 'proxy presence' of migrants (Garbin, 2019:6) and marking a negotiation between their 'absence' and 'presence'. While in Kötüre, where the majority of houses are impressively large and ostentatious, I asked an owner (47, male), living in London for 30 years, why he had built such a large house with ten rooms, four kitchens and five toilets. He explains his reason:

Yes, there are big houses, even with swimming pools. [...] It was a desire to return to the village with a gift when people reached a level of economic welfare. So, they felt like it was a debt of loyalty to here. They returned here, like reuniting or fulfilling a longing. When first time they came here for their summer vacation, their first job was to pull down the old house and build a new one. There was a serious construction sector at that period. All the local businessmen of Afşin were only working for Kötüre. Then they started to work in the surrounding villages.¹³¹

Building such luxurious houses for those who could afford it is seen as a 'debt of loyalty', a gift to the village they have returned to after many years. The sizeable and good-looking houses symbolising their financial achievement in the diaspora also emphasise its transmission into an investment in their village they left decades ago. This makes sense of why the participant describes it as the 'return to the village with a gift'. The ostentatiousness of remittance houses conveying images of success (see also Gardner, 1995; Lopez, 2015; Riccio, 2005) also suggest the idea of rupture with the past. In such villages marked by past economic hardship that drove migration, such houses may also monumentalise their 'revenge' on the past or their desire to forget history. As Lopez (2015:26) explains with reference to Mexican migrants:

¹³¹ Interview 16, 16 February 2019, Enfield

Their ambitions to improve the *pueblo* can be restated as an effort to erase the crumbling adobe and brick one-story facades, dirt and stone streets, and other built-environment features that attest to a history of poverty and neglect.



Figure 32. (a-b) A remittance mansion with a swimming pool. The mansion is used only for a short period during the summer and remains empty most of the year. (The second photo was borrowed from the village Facebook group page)

Emigrants from Kötüre not only pioneered migration and later the building of luxury houses but also the first *cemevi* in the region; as such, it was a precursor to the spread of *cemevis* to other villages,¹³² which is detailed in the following section.

Remittance *cemevi*: Diasporic Alevism in the rural homeland

While remittances hold an essential place in studies on the relationship between migration and development in the homeland context, the link between migration, remittances and religious change has received limited scholarly attention. Focusing on the flow of religious capital from the diaspora to the homeland, Garbin (2019:2) highlights the complexity of this link and addresses the conversion of religious donations ‘into “sacred remittances” producing a moral economy of transnational religious life, shaped by a diasporic politics of belongings on both local and global scales’.

In the Alevi case, the diaspora donations to construct *cemevis* in their villages mark this link between migration, religion and remittances. In my fieldwork region, almost every Alevi village had a *cemevi*, built and maintained by collective remittances. The construction of *cemevis* reflects not the only conversion of diaspora resources into a physical communal space but also ‘represents the crucial vector through which sacred remittances acquire and realise their values’ (Garbin, 2019:4). For British Alevis, collecting money and building a *cemevi* in the village is increasingly important: most of my research participants proudly reported their financial contribution toward their construction. It is seen as an investment in their faith, as explained by the late chairman of the London Cemevi:

Alevis gained economic power and confidence after migrating to Europe. This self-confidence led them to invest in faith, and they started to build *cemevis* in their villages.¹³³

Even low-income Alevi migrants often donate a considerable part of their salary to construct a *cemevi* in their village. During fieldwork in London, I came across an Alevi man in his 50s, earning the minimum wage, requesting an advance of £500 from his employer to send for the construction of his village

¹³² Israfil Erbil, 16 February 2019, Enfield

¹³³ Interview 10, 10 August 2017, London Cemevi, Dalston

cemevi. On asking why he sent such a relatively large amount, he replied: 'it is our duty'¹³⁴. Two years later, when interviewed, he admitted that he had not yet visited the *cemevi*. The motivation for donating was not about him using its services but about creating and maintaining a spiritual connection that strengthens the sense of belonging to his faith and village.

Seeing their donation as a 'duty' emphasises the connection to collective identity. The primary motivation of diasporic Alevis to fundraise for a *cemevi* is to have a place to conduct funerals as it allows Alevis to conduct them according to their religious rites, another manifestation of collective identity. The funeral rituals are one of the main transnational engagements as discussed in the previous chapter. Kong (2012:416) defines the symbolic and religious significance of burial in the birthplace 'as focal points of identity and as expressions of relationships with the land, and as central to the practice of religious beliefs and rituals'. The village *cemevi* is the pivotal point for the funeral ceremonies and preparation for burial in the village cemetery.

The collective effort to build *cemevis* embodies a 'spirit of solidarity' (Garbin, 2019:3) that can be traced back to the pre-migration period when Alevis had to practise their rituals in secret. As mentioned in the previous chapters, Alevis could not have public buildings for worship and Alevi identity and tradition had to be invisible. Migration changed this invisible destiny as they founded *cemevis* in urban spaces which became symbols of urban Alevism. However, *cemevis* were confined to the urban context until transmigrant Alevis started to fund the building of *cemevis* in their villages. Thus, these spatial symbols of urbanised Alevism spread into the rural homeland. Moreover, as detailed in Chapter 5, diasporisation allowed Alevis to become more organised and advance a spatial politics of identity and visibility which became transmitted to the homeland. The spread of rural homeland *cemevis* paid through collective remittances characterises a diasporic spatial performance that explicitly manifests its religious belongings. Diaspora made Alevi identity spatially visible through the presence of *cemevis* in the rural homeland and, in a way similar to building ostentatious houses as 'revenge' for the history of hardship, building *cemevis* served as 'revenge' for Alevis' invisible history.

¹³⁴ Fieldwork notes, 28 May 2018, Woodford, London

Moreover, as argued in Chapter 4, diasporic Alevism illustrates a migration-driven transformation from *ocak*-centred Alevism to *cemevi*-centred Alevism. It distinguishes post-migration Alevism substantially from its old, pre-migration form that was not characterised by built communal spaces. By planting *cemevis* in their birthplace, migrant Alevi symbolically transfer diasporic Alevism into the 'natural habitat' of Alevism, materially and spatially. Remittance *cemevis*, in this manner, serve as a 'proxy presence' of diasporic Alevism in the rural homeland landscape.

Remittance *cemevis*, accordingly, have many more social and religious implications for the rural homeland. The sacred remittances, converted into what Garbin (2019:13-4) calls 'developmental materiality', influence 'local everyday lifeworlds' as it 'locally "uploads" new practices and values'. *Cemevis* sustain the link between the diaspora and the hometowns and allow diasporic Alevi to expand their role in the village community and influence social and ritual life. The funeral engagements between the 'sending' diaspora *cemevi* and 'receiving' village *cemevi*, which characterise an ongoing transnational connection, channel diaspora changes in ritual customs. For example, the removal of Quranic prayers (detailed in Chapter 6) at funerals in the London *Cemevi*, where the deceased start their journey to the village *cemevi*, has an influence on the burial process in the latter.

Remittance *cemevis* become particularly busy in the summer when migrants visit their hometowns. *Cem* gatherings take place only during the summer as there are not enough people at other times of the year. Thus, with some exceptions, *cemevis* are primarily used by migrants. However, despite this, remittance *cemevis* exhibit different characteristics from those in diaspora. For example, in diaspora *cemevis*, although some non-religious meetings and events are hosted, weddings are not. When the London *Cemevi* moved to its new place, it was proposed to use the big hall for weddings to provide an income but, probably because of potential objections from the community, it was scrapped. Some I spoke to opposed such activities in the *cemevi*. However, it is different in remittance *cemevis* which are multifunctional places; besides *cem* gatherings, funeral and *kirk* meals, weddings are also allowed to take place. They also provide other non-religious services, such as catering for social activities, as in the case of the Elbistan *cemevi*. Perhaps in spending only a limited time in their villages, diasporic Alevi wish to incorporate the features of many different communal spaces they have in the diaspora (both in and outside the *cemevi*) into their village *cemevis*.



Figure 33. (a-b) A wedding I came across in Kötüre Cemevi, 4 August 2018

This does not necessarily meet with the approval of non-migrant villagers. Some, like this participant (66, male), had an objection to these non-religious services:

Cemevis grow like mushrooms. We have a *cemevi* in almost every village, but it is an establishment that cannot fulfil its duty. What is happening is just a place where funerals are conducted, funeral meals are given, and weddings, circumcisions, and wedding dinners are hosted. I certainly did not see anything about worshipping. Our best *cemevi* here is Elbistan

cemevi, but it is almost the same. Circumcisions, weddings, funeral meals, wedding meals all are held there. But there is no such thing in Alevism.¹³⁵

While some other villagers thought that the spread of *cemevis* was making a positive contribution to Alevism, their usage for non-religious purposes appeared to be the subject of debate between emigrants and non-migrants.

Diasporic Alevi in the village: Transnational summer villages

The high emigrant Alevi villages in the region of my fieldwork are mostly empty during the winter apart from a few, mostly older, residents. A resident of Kötüre (56, female) told me how, one winter, when a team of workmen, having restored the electricity to the village after a blackout, came knocking on the doors to make sure power was fully restored, had found no-one present until they finally arrived at her house. They were so surprised to find someone at home that one of the electricians said: 'We have given up hope of finding someone in this village, where are these people? This is a ghost village'.¹³⁶ Indeed, in the winter many such places are 'ghost villages'.

However, in the summer, these villages become alive again with migrants returning to spend their holidays. A scene I witnessed in Köseyahya illustrates this summer version of Alevi villages. A large group of people were sitting at long tables in the large garden of an emigrant house. The tables were full of food and drink, including whisky, beer and *rakı*, the traditional Turkish spirit. Those at this social gathering were mostly from London, with a handful from Edinburgh and Izmir (a western city in Turkey to where villagers who did not go abroad had migrated). Among them were members and chairpersons of Alevi associations in the UK, including the Edinburgh *cemevi* and the BAF in London. Many of the people of Köseyahya live in the UK with more than two hundred families living in London and twenty in Scotland, and less in Switzerland, Belgium and France. It is similar to the 'Londoni' village Gardner (1992) describes in her ethnography of migrant villages in Bangladesh. During the summertime, one can hear English spoken in the streets by emigrant children and young people and I was told that almost every

¹³⁵ Interview 24, 4 August 2018, Kötüre village

¹³⁶ Informal discussion, 9 August 2018, Kötüre

house has at least one member living in the UK and that the village is highly dependent on the inflow of remittances from the UK.

The informal gathering was a prelude to the annual summer festival to be held the following day. The festival organised by emigrants to celebrate their summer holiday has become a yearly tradition in the village square. In 2018 it hosted hundreds of emigrants and the parking area was full of European registered cars. A communal space next to the square called a *köy odası* (village room), built by an emigrant, was used as a kitchen for the festival catering. The diasporic festival was professionally organised, from the stage to the sound system and musicians, to the food with *mezes* and alcohol, all delivered by local providers from Elbistan. One of the event's main objectives, I was told, was to allow young people who were born or grew up abroad to get to know each other (with an eye to marriage). This reinforces the idea of the close-knit community, one in which marriage within the community is preferred.¹³⁷ Such marriages are not arranged, for although families and relatives may recommend a partner, the decision is left to the young people. This echo of marriage practices suggests a modification and modernisation of 'traditional' settings following the diasporic experience. Moreover, such spaces that contribute to keeping marriage within the community also sustain the continuity of migration. Migration to the UK began with men, with their wives and family following later, and then by new marriages within the diaspora community or between women from the homeland with men who had already migrated (although in the diaspora, marriages outside the community also occur).

¹³⁷ Similar socialising spaces exist in diaspora. For example, a youth game I saw at a wedding also served to introduce young women and men to each other. It is called *testi oyunu* (jug game) played with a traditional Anatolian jug that the young people hold and dance to show themselves to the singles circled around.



Figure 34. The village festival. Waiters (with yellow T-shirts) were from the Elbistan cemevi serving food during the festival, 4 August 2018, Köseyahya



Figure 35. The village festival, 4 August 2018, Köseyahya

The length of the migrants' summer stay differs, particularly between the older and younger generations, and can last anything from two weeks to five months. Younger migrants usually accompany their parents and stay for a shorter period. As reported in interviews, they often go first to the seaside in southern Turkey for a holiday then come to their village usually for a week to visit their parents or grandparents who are permanent or summer residents of the village. The regular summer residents who typically spend all their summer vacation in the village are mostly first-generation emigrants. The length

of stay depends on their work situation with working parents staying between twenty days and a month while those retired, or do not have a job, stay longer, sometimes as much as four to five months. These regular and often long holidays allow people to live a life that is shared between London and the village.

Ayse (56)¹³⁸, who has been settled in London since 1989, is one of these regular summer residents. Like many other earlier Alevi migrant women, she worked in textile factories for years and when those factories closed, she became a housewife. I interviewed her in her village, Ağcaşar, where she spends three to five months every year. She arrives in spring or the very beginning of the summer and returns to London around September. Her husband joins her for one month as he has a job in London. She spends a large part of her time gardening, growing vegetables and fruit, and preparing food for the winter in London. When I visited her house, fruit and vegetables lay on trays in her garden drying under the sun. Her son, who also lives in London, was there for ten days, visiting his parents with his Danish wife and their child.



Figure 36. Winter preparations in her garden, 08 August 2018, Ağcaşar

¹³⁸ Interview 13, 08 August 2018, Ağcaşar

Ayse's relationship with her village is typical of the migrants' engagement, as I met many like her. Building new houses, re-building a new 'village life' emphasise re-territorialisation in their homeland while sustaining a transterritorial life. They are involved in two settings (village and London) and sustain a 'transnational belonging' (Levitt, 2001b) to both territories in which their existence is spatially emplaced. It also reflects an intention to 'transcend space and time': by building both simultaneously 'here and there', 'they psychologically dwell in both places at once' (Lopez, 2015:20). This is encapsulated by a participant who says:

We are Londoners in the village and villagers in London.¹³⁹

As the main income of Alevi villages depends on migrants' money, there is little agricultural activity, if at all, as in the village of Köseyahya where no more than four to five families (that is, the permanent residents) engage in animal husbandry or agriculture. Ethnographic studies show similar patterns in other migrant territories, such as in Sylhet (Gardner, 2008) and Mirpur (Ballard, 2003). Whether this is due to the male gender-related nature of such work (Gardner and Osella, 2003) or other reasons, working on the land, traditionally a distinctive feature of rural life, becomes devalued by migration. There are few or no such activities in Alevi villages that have experienced an intensive emigration¹⁴⁰ compared to Sunni villages from which emigration is far less.

High emigration Alevi villages exemplify how the migrants' regular participation transforms the social and cultural context of hometowns. It emphasises the 'transformative potential' of remittances embodying money, ideas and behaviours transferred from another context (Levitt, 2001b:11). These diasporic markers were ubiquitous during my house visits. From personal care products to household tools, from clothing to electronic devices, I saw a wide range of products brought from the UK.

¹³⁹ Informal discussion, 16 August 2018, Afşin

¹⁴⁰ There was one exception among Alevi villages in the fieldwork region. Demircilik although it had emigration as did other Alevi villages, however, unlike them, there is still a significant involvement in agriculture and animal husbandry. It retains though a high number of non-migrants with the emigrants providing a significant remittance inflow. However, as a Turkmen Alevi village, its ethnic and geographical peculiarities that determine such social and economic settings distinguish it from the vast majority of Alevi villages that are Kurds. It is beyond my scope, however, to look at how ethnopolitics is involved in the link between remittances and development.

Behavioural traces of diaspora were also noticeable. For example, instant coffee is served more than traditional Turkish tea in the villages. Tea is still a primary and common component of Turkish culture and hospitality, even in urban spaces, and its replacement with instant coffee, not even with traditional Turkish coffee, demonstrates how diaspora culture invades village settings signifying the transfer of behaviours. It was not only emigrants but non-migrants too who showed similar habits, an indication of how diaspora affects the culture of the hometown community and its transnationalisation.

Moreover, though they are limited in number, it is worth noting returnees (and retirees) since their return also contribute to this transnationalisation by the importation of diaspora culture and their ongoing ties with the countries they had migrated to maintained by linkages to family and friends still living abroad. Thus, in contrast to classical theories that consider migration as a movement from one point to another and back again as the end of that mobility, this ongoing association retains the connection between the two points, making return and transnationality closely linked (Anghel, Fauser, and Boccagni, 2019:7).

Transnationalisation is a complex process sustained through multiple channels and is the principal impact that migrants have on their hometowns. The extent to which migrants transform the social and cultural nature of villages is explored in a case, the Kantarma village, to examine its transformation in the post-migration period.

Kantarma: An *ocak* village in the post-migration era

The village of Kantarma is a useful case study because, as an *ocak* village, it had a central role in religious life in the pre-migration period. It illustrates how and to what extent migration and the diaspora can influence local settings since the vast majority of villagers emigrated abroad, later to become summer residents.

The cultural geography of Kantarma, where the Sinemilli *ocak*, a Kurdish Alevi sacred lineage, is located, characterised its pre-migration context. The Sinemilli *ocak* was one of the central religious authorities for Alevi Kurds and a source of religious leadership and knowledge in Maraş and the surrounding areas. The Kantarma *dedes*, widely known as Sinemilli *dedes*, played an essential role in transmitting religious knowledge and was a central source of a largely Kurdish Alevi musical tradition. In the past, even people of neighbouring Sunni villages showed great love and respect for the *dedes* of Kantarma, visiting them

and bringing animals to sacrifice.¹⁴¹ A large section of the village population consisted of *ocakzades*, descendants of a sacred lineage, who fell into two categories: those who undertook religious duties and served as *dedes*; and those who became involved in left-wing politics and took a secular approach to Alevism. The former became further divided in the post-migration period into those who refused to associate themselves with *cemevis* and those who did engage with them and were often involved in faith boards (*inanç kurulu*) in Turkey and the diaspora. One of those Kantarma *dedes* now undertakes religious duty in a UK *cemevi*.

The centrality of the Kantarma *ocakzades*, both religiously and politically, allowed them to play an active role in debates about Alevi politics and theology, and ritual practices worldwide. Given that migration is the mutual experience of these diverse *ocakzades* since all of them emigrated, Kantarma provides useful insights into how migration affected a central lineage of religious significance and the changing role of the *dede* (as discussed in Chapter 4). The appearance of a new type of self-educated *dede* who writes books, engages in public discussion on Alevi identity and tradition, and is involved in the regulation of ritual customs through the faith boards of *cemevis* are all features of the ‘modernised’ form of the *dede* institution in the post-migration period and can be observed in Kantarma. During a mini walk in the village, I heard many conversations on the future of Alevism, Alevi associations, and Kurdish politics being held in gardens while Alevi music was played on the *bağlama*. Of the *dedes* or *ocakzades* I talked to in Kantarma who did collaborate with *cemevis*, like many other *dedes*, they were critical of Alevi associations and their negative influence on ritual, bemoaning the fact that contemporary Alevism is detached from its essence.¹⁴² This advances the claim made in Chapter 4 that migration has produced a shift from charismatic to bureaucratised Alevism.

The majority of villagers had emigrated abroad, mainly to Sweden and Belgium, with smaller numbers to France, Germany and the UK. I was told that there are only four houses occupied in the wintertime so that the village, like other Alevi villages, only becomes ‘lively’ in the summer when it hosts a considerable number of emigrants from various cities in Europe and Turkey spending their holiday

¹⁴¹ Interview 21, 1 August 2018, Kantarma

¹⁴² Focus group 1 — 4 August 2018; Informal discussion — 2 August 2018, Kantarma

there. The village *cemevi* was built and is now maintained by their collective remittances. Like Kötüre, they are the earliest migrants who have made a good living abroad. Thus, apart from building a *cemevi*, they also have paid for much work in the village. Kantarma, like other villages, also underwent a spatial transformation as emigrant villagers rebuilt almost all the houses. Some retained their old houses (although unoccupied) and built new ones next to them. One was a migrant *dede* who preferred not to pull down the old house as it was an *ocak* house where his ancestors, the *ocak* family, had lived. However, despite its historical importance, the old house now stood in the shadow of the new grand four-floor remittance house (see figure 37). These two buildings within a fenced yard signify many dualities in this space: the old and new, the past and present, the religious and modern, and diaspora and homeland. Here the remittance house represents the diaspora experience while the old house represents loyalty to their religious heritage. Moreover, both buildings characterise the two sides of this migrant's status: the old ancestral house is a past reminder of an *ocakzade* identity and place in the religious hierarchy, while the modern building is a manifestation of the 'successful' outcome of their diasporic journey.



Figure 37. The remittance house and at the back, their old pre-migration house where the *ocak* family lived, Kantarma

Kantarma was noted for the watermill that had served surrounding villages until about 1988 when the large wave of migration to Europe, along with the owner of the mill, emptied the region's villages. It remained neglected for years. However, in 2010, when the remittance *cemevi* was built and villagers

returned for vacations, the mill attracted attention. Eventually, a local businessman from a neighbouring village, who had relatives in Kantarma, rented it and refurbished it as a restaurant named the *Kantarma Değirmen* (Kantarma Mill) Restaurant. He preserved the mill and its equipment and collected various traditional hand tools used by the villagers, such as old copper pots and pans and some other tools used in cultivation, as well as pictures depicting the history of the village, to create a mini-museum inside the riverside restaurant. This preservation, collection and exhibiting of a village's cultural heritage suggest a very modern idea of culture (as nostalgia and heritage) formed after migration. The customers I spoke to said how happy they were to visit the mill, now a restaurant, where they used to come as children. Spending time surrounded by nature, eating and drinking while remembering their childhood meant much to them. One of the customers (female in middle 40s), who settled in Belgium, told me how she feels about seeing the tools her ancestors used and old pictures of villagers:

It is very nice to see them. It reminds me of the past, our history.¹⁴³

Another customer (56, male) from a neighbouring village, who migrated to the UK, expressed similar feelings:

When we were kids, we couldn't wait to come here. Sometimes we had to wait in a queue for a week for the mill. While our parents used the mill to make flour, we were hanging around. Kantarma and this place were very popular in the region. Now it is very nice to come here again, sit and enjoy it in a restaurant environment.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴³ Informal discussion, 3 August 2018, Kantarma

¹⁴⁴ Informal discussion, 2 August 2018, Kantarma



Figure 38. The exhibition in the restaurant

The old building was enlarged to contain a new kitchen and there is a large outdoor area for seating by (and in) the river where food, mainly fish and alcoholic drinks are served. The seating areas have many advertisements seemingly targeted at migrant consumers. Advertising by travel agencies, furniture stores, hairdressers, dry-cleaning shops and food retailers provide a considerable income to the restaurant, according to the owner.





Figure 39. (a-b) The outdoor area of the riverside restaurant (the second photo was borrowed from the restaurant Facebook page)

The owner had been a farmer, who then migrated to the town centre, opened a shop and had become a local businessman. As it is not usual to see a restaurant in a village, I asked him his reasons for opening it. His vision of converting an old mile that had closed when the local people migrated into a restaurant for the same people when they regularly returned on holiday is an excellent example of the effect of migration on the local setting. Migration had provided the opportunity for a farmer, who had first become a shopkeeper in his local town, to become a restaurant owner who would create space and services for migrant consumers returning home. It illustrates how migrants are involved in the transnationalisation of the non-migrant community socially and economically as they play a major role in maintaining the local economy.

During my two visits to the restaurant, the car park was full of European registered cars, including the UK, as the restaurant customers are, in the owner's words, 'Avrupacilar' (meaning emigrant vacationists from Europe). The owner proudly told me how popular the restaurant is among transmigrants from surrounding villages and cities:

Our restaurant has now become a brand in Europe. All of them [emigrants] know it. When they come for their summer vacation, they definitely visit us. Some of those who heard our name even come out of curiosity. It also attracts the attention of young people. There are even those

who come here on their annual leave because this place exists. The young people who think they will normally get bored in the village decide to come because they can hang out here.¹⁴⁵

Indeed, the restaurant has influenced the nature of Kantarma significantly, as it portrays the village as a modernised environment that influences the younger generation's view of the village. Besides the younger generation, it also influences other migrants to come more often or stay longer. When I interviewed Ahmet (55),¹⁴⁶ a migrant settled in Sweden since 1987 who was telling me that he stays more than two months in the village every summer, his wife intervened in our conversation and said that she could not stay as long as him, only two weeks, but added: 'I like the village, but more than two weeks bore me. I even stay that long because of the restaurant'. Thanks to the restaurant, Kantarma, is now, and again, one of the most socially active villages in the region where migrants come with their families and friends to enjoy the riverside food and drinks. Along with the built environment, the effect of migration and emigrant return on the level of transformation is obvious. It is now a transnational village rebuilt with migrant remittances from all over the world. Pre-migration Kantarma, where the surrounding villages used to benefit from its religious services as well as the mill, has been replaced with a new migration-made one. The village of religious significance is now a redesigned village that has undergone a significant spatial and cultural transformation due to migration and transnationalisation.

So far, we have discussed the principal types of relationships that exist between migrants and their villages (building houses, sending collective remittances to construct a *cemevi* and regular holiday visits) and the consequences of these spatial practices. Such spatial performances are re-territorialisation practices embodying re-mapping, re-building and re-inhabiting their hometowns that they left decades ago. In addition to these primary engagements, there are other kinds of engagements; for example, sending remittances to the families which sustain their economic stability. However, this cannot be considered a principal characteristic of British Alevis. Their emigration was one of chain migration that included the later arrival of extended families and kin networks so that for many Alevis there is no one left in the village to send remittances to. This differentiates Alevis from cases cited in other

¹⁴⁵ Informal discussion, 3 November 2018

¹⁴⁶ Interview 21, 1 August 2018, Kantarma

ethnographies of emigrant regions (such as Gardner, 1992; Levitt, 2001b; Lopez, 2015). But what of those who have not migrated? For example, what is the influence of the migrants' spatial performances on non-migrant Alevi youth in rural Turkey? The following section is based on formal and informal discussions with young Alevis who predominantly live in the town centre (with some exceptions such as those who live in the village of Demircilik included in this discussion) because the villages are mostly empty and are home only to the elderly.

Non-migrant Alevi youth and the appeal of the West

In countries of emigration, images of the West and opportunities that migration offers often play a significant role in the social and cultural change shaping local contexts (Gardner, 1995; Lopez, 2015; Riccio, 2005). In her ethnography of the 'Londoni' village of Sylhet, Gardner (1992) speaks of the ideological dimension of migration and argues that 'widespread out-migration has had not only economic consequences on the region, but has also generated a whole ideology of migration in which the notion of 'bidesh' (foreign countries) is glorified to the detriment of investments in the 'desh' (home)' (p. 580). Lopez (2015:24) similarly suggests that in the Mexican context, the non-migrants who grew up in remittance spaces have been 'influenced by popular culture and migration'.

The material culture of transnational migration, especially 'remittance houses', crystallises locals' desires and creates 'new aspirations and perceived needs in youth' (Lopez, 2015:24) which encourage migration. Thus, remittances also mean an investment in the reproduction of migration (Gardner, 2008). This is the case for Alevi youth living in the fieldwork region. For example, in the village of Demircilik, the majority of the young population, which is already small, plan to migrate to the UK. I was told that almost every young boy waits for the day they will leave.¹⁴⁷ They even chose not to get married due to the costs and problems of migration. The following participant (male, 54) explains how marriage makes migration difficult from the viewpoint of youngsters:

Everyone is waiting for the day they will go to England one day. They do not get married to make their migration and settlement process more painless. As they go with a *şebeke* [network],

¹⁴⁷ Focus group 2, 3 August 2018, Demircilik *cemevi*

they [youngsters] think if they get married and have children, it will be an obstacle to their migration.¹⁴⁸

I spoke with the young people about migration in Demircilik and saw that having family members or relatives already in London inspires and assures their plans or belief that one day they will begin a new life in London. Given that almost every family has a member in the UK and most youth plan to move to the UK with help from relatives, the existence of kin relations both eases and increases migration significantly. Lowering the costs and risks of migration, such ties and networks 'make migration extremely attractive' (D. S. Massey et al., 1993:448), a characteristic of chain migration. Many young people in the town centre have a plan or at least the intention to move abroad one day. When I asked their reasons, they repeatedly stressed the better economic and educational opportunities in addition to their desire for freedom and to escape discrimination. As explained in Chapter 3, besides the economic opportunities, for oppressed and marginalised minority groups like Alevis, religious and political freedom is one of the dominant push factors shaping migration. For young people, living in rural Turkey is difficult because of the ongoing double oppression of being Alevi and Kurd.

During the focus group with young volunteers at the Elbistan *cemevi*¹⁴⁹, many reported they had experienced discrimination, especially in school and public places. For example, one of the participants (19, male) stated how he had been violently attacked because he wore a Zulfikar necklace that was accidentally seen by others (such necklaces worn by Alevis tend to be kept hidden because of likely reprisals). The following participant (18, male), who volunteered for the *cemevi* during his summer vacation, also explained his experience of discrimination and his claim for a life without political, economic and religious worries, and interestingly chose an entirely different destination compared to his fellow participants in uniquely wanting to move to Cuba:

We are living in difficult conditions. Three years ago, I was living in Elbistan. I am now in Aydin. When I started school, people asked who I was. Some said, 'you look like a Kurd'. I said I am

¹⁴⁸ Focus group 2, 3 August 2018, Demircilik *cemevi*

¹⁴⁹ Focus group 3, 4 August 2018

Alevi. Then they excluded me and eventually excluded me from school. I went to another school. [...] You cannot live in such a place like Turkey. When I get a bit older, I want to go to Cuba. Because money has no value and people are smiling there. There is no gap between salaries, and most importantly, religion and politics are not important.

Among the youngsters I formally or informally contacted, European countries to where relatives and fellow villagers had migrated were the proposed destinations, with the UK as the most popular since the UK already has taken a large number, if not the largest number, of people from the region. Many think that the UK will provide better opportunities for them, as stated by the following participant (18, male), who is planning to move to the UK with help from his relatives:

My age is 18, and I work 16-17 hours a day. But a man from England earns much better. When he brings the money he made there, it is six times the value of our money. It offends me. Because our fathers and grandfathers, despite their significant efforts for years, are not set up in life yet. There is a man in power for 20-25 years who is trying to rule everything¹⁵⁰. There are many prohibitions and we are going through many difficult things. Most of our parents go to Russia or Azerbaijan to work in the construction sector. Our money is not valuable. Humanity is not valuable too. That's why it would be nice to go there [the UK]. We can make some savings there and come here for a holiday. Every year, those who moved there come and have a fantastic holiday here, making plans, buying summer houses. But what can be achieved here might be maximum buying a house and a car and making a child's wedding. There is no more future here.

His testimony well exemplifies the consequences of living in remittance spaces and how non-migrants feel envious. Similarly, the following participant (19, male) also stressed the better living conditions in the UK, an impression he has gathered from his migrant kin, echoing what Faist (2000b) calls the 'feedback effect' allowing them to dream of a better life:

¹⁵⁰ Refers to Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the President of the Turkish Republic

England is better in human terms. For example, after you finish university, they [in the UK] give you a job. But here, people are not given much value. Even if you work with great effort, you cannot get anywhere.

The following participant (18, male) highlighted the political freedoms in the UK compared to Turkey:

You cannot do politics in Turkey on the streets. In England, you can criticise England, but in Turkey you cannot.

Overall, almost all participants compare Turkey unfavourably to the UK and highlight the better opportunities there. The focus group and informal discussions revealed that young Alevis see no future in Turkey due to their Alevi identity that creates an economically and politically disadvantaged position. They repeatedly mentioned the discrimination experienced in every walk of life, from education to job opportunities which make many feel that they have no choice other than to go abroad.

These young non-migrants, who grew up in remittance spaces, are influenced by a 'culture of migration'. The economic distance between migrants and non-migrants that manifests itself in remittance houses and a different lifestyle is what makes the West so appealing. The large, luxurious migrant houses that have redesigned the region create what can be called 'spatial feedback', signifying the positive outcomes of international migration. The spatial transformation of villages, in this manner, is a key element in the fascination that the West holds and explains the motivation to move there; thus, maintaining continuous migration.

Conclusion

This chapter has looked at markers of diaspora and explored the physical and socio-cultural transformation of emigrant villages. It has focused on the spatial practices of migrants that shape places and social and religious spaces. I have sought to explain how migration transforms the religious, material and cultural landscape in the homeland, a major theme of this thesis.

As examined in this chapter, the influence of transnational engagements and remittances on the rural landscape has multiple facets. Transnationalisation is the principal impact that migrants have on their hometowns. Emigrant houses and *cemevis* that characterise what I call 'diasporic spatial markers' signify

the physical transformation of the rural landscape. This spatial transformation in emigrant hometowns has many implications, as the built environment reshaped by migrant remittances initiates social change. The long-term social and religious repercussions have an overwhelming impact on the 'traditional' setting. As the villages financially depend on remittances and much of it used to build houses, there has been almost no investment in agricultural activity; if anything, these remittances have devalued it. On the other hand, remittance houses showcase the economic distance between migrant and non-migrant villagers in terms of the financial (and social) rewards in the diaspora and form what I call a 'spatial feedback' that demonstrates the positive outcomes of migration. Thus, the spatial transformation of the villages is a crucial element contributing to the appeal of the West and fascination with life in Western countries, especially among the young non-migrant generation that helps to sustain a continuous migration.

With limited exceptions, the Alevi migrants' collective remittances do not extend beyond building a *cemevi* in the village. However, these collective remittances have a religious significance as they see it as an investment in their faith. They create and maintain a spiritual connection while strengthening the sense of belonging to their faith as well as their birthplace. Thus, in producing a moral economy of transterritorial religious life (Garbin, 2019), collective remittances used for the construction of *cemevis* are closely linked to the diasporic politics of belonging. The growth in *cemevis* built with diaspora remittances can be summarised as follows. Firstly, building village *cemevis* emphasises a spatial performance, openly manifesting religious belonging as they are the spatial indicator of Alevi identity. In this way, migrant Alevis make Alevi identity spatially visible in contrast to a history marked by invisibility. Thus, the spread of village *cemevis* is a reflection of the diasporic politics of identity and visibility. Secondly, *cemevis* became the spatial indicator of Alevi identity as a result of migration from rural to urban areas and their establishment in urban spaces. They were not found elsewhere. That changed when diasporic Alevis began to send collective remittances to build them in their villages and in this way, diasporic Alevis implanted an urban-born 'tradition' into the rural Alevi landscape. Thirdly, with the establishment of remittance *cemevis*, diasporic Alevism, characterised by a '*cemevi*-centred' Alevism, was transferred into the 'natural' rural habitat of Alevism where Alevism is not centred on a particular building or buildings. Thus, remittance *cemevis* are the spatial and material indicators of an Alevism 'remade' in the diaspora, a 'proxy presence' of diasporic Alevism in the rural homeland. Further, as exemplified in funeral rituals, diasporic Alevis attempt to impose ritual modifications that have been

restructured in the diaspora on the rural homeland. In sum, migrants who have 'remade' Alevism in the diaspora are now importing this restructured religion back to its old habitat where Alevism originated.

Given the story of Alevism that has been the subject of this thesis, this chapter completes the 'spatial circle' of Alevism as shaped within the migration experience. What I mean by the spatial circle is the circular journey of Alevism from its origins in its homeland, its migration to the diaspora where it became a migrant faith, its restructuring and re-orientation under diaspora conditions to become a diasporic religion, and finally its journey back to the homeland through transnational networks, through all of which *cemevis* have played an important part.

How diasporic Alevis practise village life is another crucial focus of this chapter. By rebuilding the environment and settling back into village life through seasonal visits, diasporic Alevis become village dwellers again. They live in between the diaspora and the homeland living in both territories and involved in both settings. In this way they are 'keeping their feet in both worlds' (Levitt, 2001b:3), not only symbolically but literally too and maintain a transterritorial life. Their homeland practices emphasise the re-territorialisation process that embodies re-mapping, re-building and re-inhabiting their birthplaces. This point also explains why they do not consider the need to 'return' (see Chapter 3) because they have a transnational sense of belonging to the territories in which their lives are spatially placed. Their transterritorial life encompasses the UK and Turkey together and simultaneously which makes 'return' lose its relevance. Overall, the long-term consequences of migrants' homeland engagements will stretch far beyond what we can see and predict in the present. What is clear for now is that diaspora involves the rebuilding of identity and community in countries of settlement and transfers that diasporic 'culture' to the rural homeland where it fundamentally redesigns its spatial, social, cultural and religious character.

CHAPTER 8: Diasporic identity dynamics: Contexts and generations

Introduction

This final chapter explores the contextual and spatial dimensions of Alevi identity formation and the concomitant diasporic transition that has been discussed throughout the thesis. The chapter explores the leading dynamics, discourses and contexts involved in the construction of Alevi identity. I pay particular attention to the effects of the community and identity building process on the second-generation Alevis who, unlike their parents who were the seeds of the diasporic community, grew up within it and had no other experience apart from it. This chapter examines how diasporic transition influenced their social and identity formation. It has two parts: a discussion of the dynamics of identity formation and an examination of the contexts in which this happens with particular reference to the younger generation.

Alevi identity is a socially and politically constructed identity formed within a historical context and through the social processes and political positionalities that are produced and reproduced through collective actions and discourses. It has a contingent and contested texture sustained and reproduced within the migration and diaspora experience. There is no fixed mode of identification, but there are actors and dynamics in identity formation, mobilising fixed (permanent) notions of identity, such as memory and victimhood. The first part explores Alevi identity formation through its link with memory and victimhood and its boundaries with Islam, factors that profoundly shape its construction and performances. It then discusses the fluidity of Alevi identity in relation to Kurdish (and Turkish) ethnic identities.

The second part locates Alevi identity in a socio-spatial context, especially in relation to spaces of belonging, to understand how young Alevis construct and perform their identity. Though the chapter focuses on young Alevis, representing the second generation, it will first discuss the experiences of

earlier Alevi youth, consisting of the so-called 1.5 generation¹⁵¹ and the early members of the second generation, to underline how the socio-developmental context changed over time. Following a consideration of the locational, hybrid and hyphenated ways of Alevi identification placed in the second section, the final section develops my argument on the role that 'place' plays in the social and identity formation of young Alevis.

Diasporic identity: Dynamics, discourses and positionalities

Identity matters, as it defines and 'performs' who we are. It is an essential element of selfhood and of connectedness. It relates to the way individuals position themselves socially and allows them to link with, and become part of, a collectivity. However, identity is complex and conceptually challenging. Stuart Hall (1996:16) speaks of a set of problems against which identity (or identification) emerges and stresses 'its centrality to the question of agency and politics'. The question of identity occurs in the 're-articulation of the relationship between subject and discursive practices [or the process of subjectification through discursive practices and the politics of exclusion]' (p. 16). Alongside its links with a common origin or shared characteristics, 'the discursive approach sees identification as a construction, a process never completed, always in process' (p. 16). Identity is conditional, contingent, strategic and positional. Hall suggests that as identities are 'constructed within, not outside discourse', we need to consider them 'as produced in specific historical and institutional sites within specific discursive formations and practices, by specific enunciative strategies' (p. 17).

Alevi identity has its own internal complexity and embodies many discourses and interpretations. Concurring with my fieldwork findings, research on the British Alevi community (Akdemir, 2016a; U. Cetin, 2020) suggest that Alevi identity is 'ambivalent' within the community, understood and practised differently by different individuals and groups. As Akdemir (2016a:218) suggests, Alevis 'have different ideas about Alevism and different motivations for involving themselves in Alevi identity politics'. However, a shared history and boundaries with other groups give some essential insights into the

¹⁵¹ The concept of the 1.5 generation, coined by Rumbaut (1976), has been used to describe Asian Americans who migrated to the US as children or adolescents (Kim, Brenner, Liang, and Asay, 2003) as opposed to second-generation migrants who were born in, or migrated to the US, at a very young age.

construction and reconstruction of collective identity. Any attempt to understand diasporic Alevi identity cannot be done without appreciating their memory of victimhood and boundaries with Islam. These can be seen as fixed (not in the sense of unchanging but as permanent) aspects of Alevi identity transported from Turkey to the diaspora context. Though understood and adopted differently by different groups of Alevis, these two elements are continuously produced and reproduced in the diaspora for the construction and recognition of Alevi identity. The following sections deal with the question of what role they play in forming Alevi identity. I first begin with the important theme of victimhood since the strong commitment to Alevi identity that was repeatedly observed across all generations in my interviews is closely linked to the collective history and memory that marks victimhood as a prominent aspect of Alevi identity.

Memory, victimhood and Alevi identity

Individuals and groups have a collective memory of historical events whether they occurred in their lifetime or long before they were born. Collective memory, encapsulating a shared history produced and reproduced through time, is a key element in maintaining a collectivity (Bergson, 1911; Halbwachs, 1992). It is a 'black box' of shared experiences, forming what Berger and Luckmann (1966) call 'a common stock of knowledge' (cited in Soileau, 2005:104), comprising a communal history and feelings shaping identity dynamics. In other words, it involves the construction and preservation of collective identity (Tajfel, Turner, Austin, and Worchel, 1979). Passing between generations collective traumas involve 'intergenerational haunting' that signifies a cultural inheritance of a violent past which has widespread effects on the psychology of groups and their identity formation over time and space (Frosh, 2018). It is this process, transforming collective trauma into a collective memory, that 'culminates in a system of meaning that allows groups to redefine who they are and where they are going' (Hirschberger, 2018) and continues to shape the present and future of societies. Collective traumatic experiences play a founding role in diasporic identity (Bhabha, 1994; R. Cohen, 2008; Gilroy, 1999; Hall, 1990; Safran, 1991). This is the case for Alevis who have suffered exclusion and discrimination throughout history and even occasionally mass violence and massacre.

Such past events do not remain in the past: they shape societies into post-massacre societies in which the trauma of these atrocities is still very much present (Fournet, 2016). The Alevi collective memory of a struggle for survival is extremely significant in understanding the social formation of Alevis. Since the

founding of the Turkish Republic there has been a long history of massacres of Alevi, sometimes perpetrated by the military, such as Koçgiri (1921) and Dersim (1938), but often by radical or nationalist Islamist groups, as in Elbistan (1967), Maraş (1978), Malatya (1978), Çorum (1980) and Sivas (1993). As already discussed in Chapter 3, it is the Maraş massacre that is foremost in the memory of British Alevi. A vast majority of the participants I interviewed had either lost relatives, friends and neighbours, or knew those who had. The following (55, male) expresses how these traumatic events remain in their minds:

We had great fears. Many of our relatives lived there and were involved. Their factories were among the first to be destroyed and burned. Nobody had the chance to get there and help. We lived in fear as a child due to such brutality. The fathers of the fellows we played together with chopped our fathers with cleavers and axes. The man we called 'uncle' burned our houses. Maraş is such an event.¹⁵²

Such traumatic experiences are settled in their collective memory. Almost all participants from the Maraş district avoid saying 'Maraş' when naming where they come from, preferring instead to use other town names. The following responses indicate that it had become taboo, a source of traumatic memory:

I do not want to say Maraş; that word grows in my mouth (Female, 40s).¹⁵³

Maraş is a *yobaz*¹⁵⁴ city; we do not use this name as our city after the massacre. We do not even use the city centre for anything other than legal proceedings. (Male, 47)¹⁵⁵

In the Elbistan region, Alevi Kurds do not like or accept Maraş because they are very anxious about the massacre. [...] I was two when the massacre happened. But our subconscious is kind

¹⁵² Interview 21, August 2018, Kantarma

¹⁵³ Informal discussion, 13 June 2018, Dalston

¹⁵⁴ *Yobaz* refers to fanatic or radical Islamic fundamentalists.

¹⁵⁵ Interview 2, 11 Oct 2017, Wood Green

of stuck in it. That is why Maraş does not fit comfortably with us. Of course, Elbistan is officially linked to the Maraş, but in a personal sense, if there is a choice, we see Elbistan as a hometown. (Female, 42).¹⁵⁶

The collective Alevi past marked by massacres is crystallised into victimhood within a ‘duty’ to remember, strengthening their commitment to Alevi identity. Ricoeur (1999) considers remembering as a ‘duty of memory’ that not only brings concerns of the past to the fore but allows for the meanings and sentiments associated with past traumatic events to be passed down to subsequent generations. The following young participant (23, male) talks about victimhood as a vital aspect of shared identity:

The fact that our society has gone through all of these [massacres] gives you a burden; you feel psychologically so. It may create a bit of victim psychology. As if something that came with Alevi identity. So, if you adopt this identity, there is also victimhood. We are victims and oppressed and adopt this identity.¹⁵⁷

Victimhood, indeed, is a central element of Alevi identity and performance and is reproduced within a memorial culture. Alevism, to some extent, has been transformed into an identity-centred culture built on collective victimhood, especially after the Sivas Massacre that mobilised Alevis and, indeed, provoked the resurgence of Alevi identity. Not all Alevis, of course, directly experienced the massacres, ‘but they share an indirect, communal experience of these events when the events are commemorated in their presence’ (Soileau, 2005:104). This echoes what Delbo calls an ‘external memory’ that is socially constructed (cited in Wise, 2004:33). Sökefeld (2008:256) also underlines this function of commemoration when speaking of the profound effects of the Sivas Massacre on the Alevi community in Germany. He states that ‘commemorative practices turn individual memory into communal memory. [...] They identify the victims with the community and conversely enable the identification of every individual Alevi with the victims. [...] Memory creates community’. The commemorations that are

¹⁵⁶ Interview 17, 24 May 2019, Tottenham

¹⁵⁷ Interview 14, 21 Nov 2018, Dalston

ubiquitous performances in Alevi communities do not merely commemorate massacres but also reproduce a diasporic victim culture, emphasising the continuity of a 'community of suffering'.

British Alevis regularly commemorate the Sivas Massacre, as with all Alevi communities worldwide, and has built the Sivas Martyrs Memorial in London that annually hosts a remembrance activity (see Chapter 5). Besides the Dersim Massacre, British Alevis also regularly commemorate the Maraş Massacre, the commemoration of which transferred from localised diaspora spaces to the British Parliament in recent years. These commemorations that often host MPs from Turkey's opposition parties always include political discussions about the situation in Turkey. However, remembering massacres is not limited to commemorations; almost all public Alevi performances address their history of massacres and the oppression Alevis face in Turkey.

Such performances strengthen the shared sense of victimhood and serve to consolidate the collective identity and sense of community. In addition, as Kleinman et al. (1997) argue: 'cultural representations of suffering — images, prototypical tales, metaphors, models — can be (and frequently are) appropriated in the popular culture or by particular social institutions for political and moral uses' (cited in Jeffery and Canda, 2006:288). It is how victimhood intersects with politics (Jeffery and Canda, 2006) and channels them 'into a political community of suffering' (Wise, 2004). Indeed, collective trauma is used by Alevi associations to create a coherent and unifying Alevi identity and sense of shared victimhood in order to address the oppression and discrimination of Alevis in Turkey (Yildiz and Verkuyten, 2011). So, the reproduction of a victim culture is closely linked to the associations' politicisation of Alevi identity to mobilise the community in the diaspora and towards fellow Alevis in Turkey.

This collective memory also plays a part in the boundary-making process, which applies to all Alevi communities. Sökefeld (2008) suggests that the Sivas Massacre formed a clear boundary between Alevis and Sunnis as 'victims' and 'perpetrators', which he defines as the 'master Alevi-Sunni difference'. Additionally, due to the terrible experience of the Maraş Massacre, the tension with Sunnis remained as a primary aspect of identity, especially for the first-generation British Alevis who have actual and often vivid memories of it. An 84-year-old male participant who questioned my origins to make sure 'I was not a Sunni' before agreeing to be interviewed, is one of them:

If you were Sunni, I would not answer your questions. We do not give our secrets to Sunnis.¹⁵⁸

Not surprisingly, the British Alevi community engages little with their Sunni counterparts from Turkey either socially or economically. In general, the Alevi history of collective victimhood seems to shape their positionality in respect to Sunnis (or Muslims in general) and raises the question of the role that Islam plays in the articulation of Alevi identity, as we shall see now.

Boundary-making and the question of Islam

Social psychologists Tajfel (2010) and Turner (2010) argue that social identities are closely linked to intergroup relations which affect how members identify and develop shared self-definitions. People construct their identities in relation to the boundaries they perceive they have with others (Barth, 1998; Brubaker, 2010; Eriksen, 2010). Thus, identity needs an 'other'. As Edgell et al. (2006) state, 'the work on symbolic boundaries and moral order suggest, however, that the creation of the other is always necessary for the creation of identity and solidarity' (cited in Akdemir, 2016a:42). Similarly, Hall (1996) speaks of the logic of 'more-than-one' in the process of identification and states that 'it operates across difference, it entails discursive work, the binding and marking of symbolic boundaries' which then 'requires what is left outside its constitutive outside, to consolidate the process' (1996:17). According to Hall, identities

emerge within the play of specific modalities of power and thus are more the product of the marking of difference and exclusion than they are the sign of identical, naturally-constituted unity — and 'identity' in its traditional meaning (that is, an all-inclusive sameness, seamless, without internal differentiation) (p. 17).

Speaking of the symbolic construction of community, Cohen (2013:12) considers boundaries as marking 'the beginning and end of a community' and stresses how groups symbolise and utilise boundaries for their values and identities. Boundaries encapsulate the identity of community or collectivity, and as with individual identity, social interaction with others is required for them to be distinguished. Boundaries

¹⁵⁸ Interview 3, 16 October 2017, London Cemevi, Dalston

are symbolic and have different meanings for different people which are less clear to outsiders. However, their meanings have importance to members of the collectivity as 'they relate to increasingly intimate areas of their lives or refer to more substantial areas of their identities' (2013:13). Alevi identity is deeply bound up with differences that continuously construct and reconstruct boundaries. Scholars note how the differences to Sunni Islam are seen as a 'benchmark' for Alevis in explaining and legitimising their sense of identity (Cesari, 2013; Dressler, 2015; Sökefeld, 2008). As Akdemir (2016a:156) suggests, 'Alevis construct their religious identity in opposition to, or as different from, Sunni Islam'. Indeed, Alevis often respond to the question of what Alevism is with what it is not. That Alevis do not practise the five pillars of Islam marks a precise, clear-cut distinction between Alevism and Islam.

As frequently noted elsewhere in this thesis, for centuries Alevis have lived and been persecuted as a minority under a Muslim majority forcing them to keep the practice of their faith hidden from outsiders. With emigration from Turkey to the secular environment of the UK, both Sunnis and Alevis became a minority sharing equal status, seen by the UK authorities simply as Turkish (and Muslim) whose religious differences went largely unrecognised. However, the increasing institutional and spatial developments of the Alevi community and growing involvement in the UK public domain both encouraged and provided a means to advance their claim for recognition in the diaspora. In this process, the boundaries between Alevism and Islam became a key element both defining diasporic Alevi identity and in Alevis being identified as a faith group in its own right. It also reinforces the shared sense of community.

Positionality in relation to Islam shapes many facets of Alevi identity politics. It is 'produced and reproduced through actions and discourse' (Akdemir, 2016a:150) and becomes an ideological issue of Alevi identity. It becomes unambiguous among young Alevis. Given that Alevis interpret Alevism in different ways, and some Alevis in Turkey see it as a form of Islam, I wondered if young Alevis would also see a link with Islam. I included 'being Muslim' among the options to be rated in order of importance for their self-identification in the online survey. By far the most indicated that it was not important at all, and in answer to another question asking whether they define themselves as Muslim, apart from one, all answered in the negative. One participant even criticised the online survey for having 'being Muslim' as an option:

Alevism is an independent belief system. It goes back almost 6,000 years. Alevism is not a sect or denomination of Islam. Please rectify your study to reflect this matter.

Later, in a phone discussion with the same participant, when I explained these questions were necessary in order to understand how they saw the boundaries of Alevi identity with Islam, he expressed his disapproval of people, in his words, 'labelling Alevis as Muslims'. This radical rejection expresses a wider distance from Islam, which in the diaspora is highly politicised. The participant was an Alevi youth leader actively involved in the management of the Britain Alevi Youth Federation. Such clear-cut positionality or boundary-making in relation to Islam is linked to the Alevi associations striving to make Alevism recognised as a unique faith, distinct from Islam. It is an example of the influence of Alevi associations and their leaders on young people's social, cultural, and political formations that will be detailed in the last section.

Differentiating Alevism from Islam as a crucial matter of comparison also serves to establish a positive self-representation. In the view of Alevi informants, the lack of certain religious restrictions, such as gender segregation, the prohibition of alcoholic drinks, and dress codes, such as women wearing the hijab, make them more 'modern' and 'secular' and reflect more 'European values'. Gender mixity in worship is also a key marker of differences with Islam. Alevis often talk about how women's position in Alevism 'is better than in Islam' and stress the lack of gender segregation in Alevi worship compared to Islam. The testimony of a female participant (37), who was 'proud' of her son's positive comparison of Alevism with Islam with regard to women, echoes this:

My son has Somalian friends. He goes to their house. One day they told my son that 'you are not Muslim, your mother does not cover her head, you do not come to the mosque'. They asked him why he did not go and pray in the mosque. After that, we started to show something. We all have faith, there is God, but each of us worships in different ways. That is your faith, but this is my faith. Our worship does not include prayer or reading the *Quran*. As my son says, we are a more democratic modern society. He says, 'We care about women much more, there is no discrimination. My friend's mother covers her head when she sees me. Look, how old am I, but

she is still embarrassed by me'. Look at the child's thoughts. In fact, it is very good for him to see at this age that we are very democratic people.¹⁵⁹

Gender discourses play an integral part in the boundary-making process, especially for asserting a positive comparison with Islam. However, they have other implications for Alevi women's gender identity and practices, an examination of which is, unfortunately, beyond the scope of this thesis but are certainly worthy of future attention.¹⁶⁰

Overall, like the shared history of victimhood, boundary-making is a crucial element of Alevi self-identification that is continuously reproduced and stimulated in the diaspora to consolidate identity and community. However, when we speak of diasporic Alevi identity in the UK context, the dynamics of ethnic identity cannot be ignored since the British Alevi community is predominantly Kurdish but with a small minority who are ethnically Turkish.¹⁶¹ The following section explores the interaction and fluidity between religious and ethnic identities and their effect upon the community.

Ethnic versus religious identity

Ethnic boundary making has its own complexity, involving many actors, power relations and political debates. Wimmer (2013) offers a comparative approach to ethnic boundary-making and stresses how and why ethnicity matters for some but not for others. He points out its close links with political debates, inequality and exclusion and argues that institutional structures, the distribution of power,

¹⁵⁹ Interview 9, 10 February 2018, London Cemevi, Wood Green

¹⁶⁰ Gender integration, which is always represented as a marker of difference with Islam, has implications for Alevi women. On the one hand, it serves as a building block in constructing Alevi women's gender identity and, to some extent, empowerment. However, on the other, such representation of gender 'equality' may conceal the areas of gender imbalance in Alevi communities. For example, Alevi women seem to play a relatively passive role in the associational world in the diaspora. Although *cemevis* often function thanks to the work of women volunteer, as they carry out some of the most important tasks necessary to run *cemevis*, very few women play a visible role in decision making. To my knowledge, only men occupy the position of president or leader of *cemevis* and federations in Turkey and Europe. In the UK, although the London Cemevi and BAF boards always have female members, there has been no female president since the establishment of the London Cemevi in 1993.

¹⁶¹ This is opposite to the situation in Turkey where its population is predominantly Turkish with non-Turkish ethnic minorities, including Kurds.

networks of alliances, together with the dynamics of representational politics draw ethnic boundaries and shape boundary-making strategies. Kurdish Alevi identity, as Gültekin (2019:5) suggests, involves 'intersected cultural boundaries between Alevism and Kurdishness'; both identities together embody 'new socio-political and ethno-religious aspects' and form a 'unique cultural identity'. Amongst many other similarities, Alevi Kurds' socio-religious organisations, worshipping practices, myths and beliefs show substantial differences from Alevi Turks. Likewise, they show significant cultural and religious differences from other Kurdish communities who are Muslim. This 'twice minority' position also produces an ideological tension over secularism with Islamist Kurds and nationalism with Alevi Turks (Köse, 2013).

Confirming other studies on the interplay of Alevi and Kurdish identity (Bruinessen, 1996; Demir, 2012), my findings suggest that, for Kurdish Alevis, Alevi identity is more central and stronger than their Kurdish identity or their sense of Kurdishness. When asked which identity is felt more strongly, 'being Alevi, Kurd or both', almost all participants prioritised their Alevi identity over Kurdishness. The prioritisation of Alevi identity and how it undermines ethnic affiliation has been observed in other research on Alevi Kurds in the UK (Demir, 2012). Many participants, especially the first generation, also identified their ethnic origin as Turkish, no doubt reflecting the long-term Turkish-Islamic assimilationist policies in Turkey that marginalised Kurdish identity and pushed it towards Turkishness. However, Kurdish identity appears to be more important among young rather than older Alevis in the diaspora. Unlike the first-generation participants, most young Alevis, when asked about their ethnic origin, stated Kurdishness. The importance of being Kurdish in their self-identification ranked significantly on the online survey. When asked how they define themselves in terms of identity, many hyphenated their Alevi identity with Kurdishness and Britishness, and some defined themselves as 'British Kurdish Alevi'. Such hyphenated definitions combining multiple identities or investing them with multiple meanings are closely linked to the multicultural diaspora environment creating new ways of self-identification that I shall discuss later.

A vast majority of the 1.5 generation and almost all the second-generation participants cannot speak Kurdish, indicating the lack of inter-generational language transmission and an outcome of the assimilation and oppression Kurds have faced in Turkey. After the military coup of 1980, the Kurdish language was officially banned in public and private life in Kurdish regions under martial law. Besides in schools and official documents, the use of Kurdish was not allowed in the streets, in student accommodations and prisons (when speaking with families), and listening to Kurdish music was banned.

With these restrictions, Kurdish was suppressed to become a language of ‘unknown sounds’¹⁶² and people avoided speaking or teaching Kurdish to their children.

The fluidity between Alevi and Kurdish identity has different social, economic and political consequences in Turkey compared to the UK. In Turkey, the multi-ethnic Alevi population has lain outside the ‘ideal’ model of the citizen defined within the Turkish-Islam synthesis and thus has faced harsh discrimination. However, Alevi Turks, compared to Alevi Kurds, have not experienced the same level of discrimination. Alevi Turks, to some extent, affiliated themselves with the Turkish majority and did not experience discrimination to the same degree as Alevi Kurds, and Alevi Kurds have experienced double discrimination as Kurds and Alevis. However, in the UK, Kurdish Alevi identity became a resource mobilised to gain refugee status. Also, the overlapping of Kurdish and Alevi identities encourages their political and economic participation and the creation of an ‘ethnic economy’ (Bilecen, 2016). As Keles (2016b) suggests, Kurdish Alevi networks are resources of ‘material and non-material’ support for community members. These social networks are created based on ethnic and religious belongings to accumulate social capital, mobilising economic and social sources.

As mentioned earlier, many Alevi Kurds already define themselves as Turkish, thus blurring the line between Kurdish and Turkish Alevi identity. The relatively advantaged position of Alevi Turks in Turkey (because of their ethnicity) does not apply in the same way in the diaspora as they now form a minority within the UK Alevi community. But despite some ethnopolitical cleavages between Turkish and Kurdish Alevis in the UK (as mentioned in chapter 5), Turkish Alevis are not disadvantaged; instead, they come under the unifying umbrella of Alevi identity. Although ethnic differences sometimes become visible, often around political positionalities, for Alevi Turks, as with Alevi Kurds, religious identity is explicitly prioritised over ethnic identity. The discussion with an Alevi couple at the Alevi Festival quoted in Chapter 5 exemplifies this. While their complaints about a sense of, in their words, exclusion from the BAF suggests some ethnopolitical cleavage within the community, adopting the festival as ‘ours’ shows the strong commitment to Alevi identity and its prioritisation. So, we cannot speak of Alevi Turks as a

¹⁶² In recent decade it was recorded as an ‘unknown language’. For more details on this ‘progress’ of the Kurdish language under the policies of the AKP in Turkey, see (Derince, 2013)

separate group with their own structures. Community spaces, particularly *cemevis* bringing different ethnic or political belongings under religious identity, prevent such separations.

As Phinney and Ong (2007) suggest, ethnic identity is developed through a multidimensional and dynamic process and is strongly influenced by contexts. The contextual texture of Turkish and Kurdish identities and their fluidity with Alevi identity makes it challenging to frame conceptually. However, although the way ethnic and religious identity interact differs in the context of Turkishness and Kurdishness, Alevi identity remains central. When asked how they define themselves in terms of identity, almost all participants from different generations clearly stated that they are 'Alevi'. The repetition of 'I am Alevi' —not 'I feel' or 'I belong', but 'I am'— is a very powerful and clear individual way of expressing a collective identity. It is a master identity that overshadows other modes of belonging. This applies to the second-generation participants too. The statement of this young participant (female, 25) who holds Turkish and British citizenship shows how, despite being attached to both Turkey and the UK, Alevi identity is prioritised, this time over national identities:

Turkishness and Britishness are the same for me. [...] I mean, both describe me equally. But Alevi identity is the identity that I fully adopt.¹⁶³

Alevi identity, though sustains its priority, coexists with other types of identity among the younger generation, those born and bred in the diaspora.

Space, place and belonging

Identity is a complicated concept with various actors, processes and discourses involved, together with internal group dynamics. It is difficult to pin down exactly what it is, as it is used in an overly broad sense. Such proliferation of meaning, as Brubaker and Cooper (2000:1) argue, may make the notion of identity lose 'its analytical purchase':

If identity is everywhere, it is nowhere. If it is fluid, how can we understand the ways in which self-understandings may harden, congeal, and crystallize? If it is constructed, how can we

¹⁶³ Interview 18, 21 December, 2019, Wood Green

understand the sometimes coercive force of external identifications? If it is multiple, how do we understand the terrible singularity that is often striven for — and sometimes realized — by politicians seeking to transform mere categories into unitary and exclusive groups? How can we understand the power and pathos of identity politics?

Similarly, Anthias (2002:494) speaks of the problematic 'texture' of the notion of identity and states that 'to ask a question about identity asks both too much and too little'. She argues that the ways participants 'narrated their sense of belonging and not belonging could not be captured by the notion of identity' (2002:492). In her study of young Greek Cypriots, Anthias suggests that 'identity has a tendency to function as a disabling concept' limiting the understanding of 'context, meaning and practice' (p.493). To escape such limitations, she deploys 'the notion of narratives of location and positionality for addressing the range of issues thought to be about collective identity' (2002:493).

Location and positionality (and translocational positionality) are more useful concepts for investigating processes and outcomes of collective identification — that is, the claims and attributions that individuals make about their position in the social order of things, their views of where and to what they belong (and to what they do not belong) as well as an understanding of the broader social relations that constitute and are constituted in this process. (p. 493)

Accordingly, focusing on location and positionality allows us to 'pay attention to spatial and contextual dimensions, treating the issues involved in terms of processes rather than possessive properties of individuals' while dealing with identity 'as a socially meaningful concept'(2002:494). She speaks of the narrative of location, which is 'an account that tells a story about how we place ourselves in terms of social categories such as gender, ethnicity and class at a specific point in time and space' (2002:498). Such an account embodying location (in a broader sense), according to Anthias, 'will also be articulated in terms of notions of identity-making claims to "who I am", which groupings "I identify with", and which groups "I participate within"'(2002:499).

While younger generations grow up within multicultural environments, many different factors and contexts influence their social and identity formation and the ways they self-identify. Thus, discussing the identity of the young generation becomes more complex in a context involving more hybrid, fluid, intersecting and contextual identities. Here, following Anthias's suggestion, I pay attention to how they

locate themselves in terms of social categories, discourses and spaces of belonging and how identity and belonging are articulated and narrated in relation to space (and place). More specifically, I explore the contextual and spatial dimensions of their self-identification.

But first, let us visit the experiences of the earlier youth — representing a mixture of the so-called ‘1.5 generation’ (Rumbaut, 1976) and earlier members of the second generation — which embody challenges of integration and identity, to develop my argument, underlining the socio-spatial development of the diasporic community and its impact on the social and identity formation of young Alevis.

The earlier Alevi youth and the challenges of integration

The experiences of immigrant children differ over time depending on changing social contexts and processes. Though the effects of migration may begin to weaken over time and generations, new factors, settings and changing circumstances come into play in the social formation of the younger generation (Rumbaut, 2004). Rumbaut explains this in relation to migrant children in the US:

Time in the United States for these immigrant children thus was not solely a measure of length of exposure to American life, but also an indicator of qualitatively different life stages and sociodevelopmental contexts (p. 1163).

The crucial point here is the influence of the socio-developmental context on their early socialisation that shapes their later experiences and social and cultural formations. It may explain why the experiences of earlier and the present-day Alevi youth who form the second generation show quite different characteristics.

As outlined in Chapter 3, in the earlier years of migration in the 80s and 90s, many Alevis on arrival worked in textile factories and then after their collapse that left many Alevis without a job, many began to establish small-scale family businesses, mostly kebab shops and off-licences. Whilst working hard to make a living, the first generation unwittingly neglected to support their children’s education. In an informal discussion with a first-generation female participant (early 50s), she explained, in her words,

how they 'neglected' their children because of 'the ambition to earn money'.¹⁶⁴ By the 2000s, Alevis had grown into a community that was financially stronger but it came at a cost for their children in their disengagement and exclusion from school, gang membership, drug use, and suicide. The following 1.5 generation participant (female, 37), while explaining how, unlike their parents, she was taking care of her children, describes the lack of parental control, underachievement in education and criminal involvements faced by Alevi youth at that time:

There was a decline among Turkish children. Most of the children in the first generation were lost. Due to the families' neglect, they could not study and went wrong, such as this gang called Tottenham Boys or the armed fight in Haringey.¹⁶⁵

In the first decade of the 2000s, the involvement of young migrants in gangs and gang violence,¹⁶⁶ 'whose activities ranged from petty crime to more serious ones such as drug dealing, armed robbery, bribery and murder' (U. Cetin, 2020:1-2), signalled the severity of the issue. At this time, there were forty-eight cases of suicide of young Alevi men in the community (Güneş, 2021) which Cetin (2014:72) explains as a reflection of the disengagement from the community and the lack of a sense of belonging, what he calls 'anomie'. Using a Durkheimian framework, Cetin's doctoral thesis on suicide among young Alevi Kurds in London¹⁶⁷ examines the suicides within the wider migration and settlement process in the UK that 'brought changes affecting the social equilibrium of the community' (p. 20). The study provides significant insights into the contextual factors and processes directing them 'towards particular trajectories and predispose[d] them to join gangs and commit suicide' (p. 72). The common element in these cases of suicide is that while many families worked hard to earn money to give their children a better start in life than their own, they neglected to support their children's education who

¹⁶⁴ Informal discussion, 5 August 2019, Enfield

¹⁶⁵ Interview 9, 10 February 2018, Wood Green

¹⁶⁶ *Could Turkish and Kurdish gangs become new 'mafia'?* 21 October 2010, BBC, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-11325134>

¹⁶⁷ Cetin describes the young men in his cohort as 'second generation' although technically they were a mixture of those born in Turkey and the UK, representing more the 1.5 and less the second generation.

underachieved at school and came under the influence of drug gangs (U. Cetin, 2020). Cetin argues that these young men found themselves in ‘an anomic social position with a lack of integration and regulation’ (U. Cetin, 2016a). Similarly, Jenkins and Cetin (2017) suggest that the negative identity of young Alevi Kurds in the UK has been transmitted intergenerationally and linked to both their history of persecuted exclusion in Turkey and the settlement of Alevi migrants in the UK. They identify education ‘as a starting point for the underachievement and disaffection of Alevi pupils, which can lead them into more serious trouble and descent into the rainbow underclass’ (Jenkins and Cetin, 2017:1).

Such issues and concerns led to a unique collaborative action research project between EACC, local schools and Westminster University to develop the first pedagogical resources to be used to teach about Alevism as part of the compulsory Religious Education curriculum in British schools. This project was the initial phase in the accommodation of Alevism into education in state schools in Alevi areas. This paved the way for an institutional shift (see Chapter 5) and should be considered as a cornerstone in the socio-developmental trajectory of the British Alevi community and, in particular, Alevi youth. The institutional and spatial developments that followed seem linked to the intention of the community to overcome the issues affecting young Alevis. In a meeting at the London Cemevi, the Chair spoke of the importance of developing Alevi identity amongst young people to combat crime:

We are trying to create identity awareness among our children in London, a city where homicide rates have increased as much as New York.¹⁶⁸

Indeed, such identity and integration issues do not appear among the later members of the second generation. Their early socialisation occurred when the community had become more organised, settled and spatialised in which a more positive approach to identity could be developed. Many young participants are well-educated and successful professionals who stress the importance of the *cemevi* for their own social and personal development. The rest of this chapter focuses on present-day Alevi youth associated with the London Cemevi and BAF and explores their social formation, the construction of an Alevi identity and the socio-spatial context shaping this process.

¹⁶⁸ Fieldwork notes, 8 April 2018, membership meeting, London Cemevi, Wood Green

In between 'home', homeland and Britishness

The meaning of 'home' and the importance attached to the 'homeland' differ across generations. For the first-generation migrant Alevi, 'home' and 'homeland' have a similar meaning or are synonymous; whether village, town, city or country, all emphasise the geographical location in which they were born. Their responses, not surprisingly, reveal a strong sentiment toward the homeland, particularly their village often defined as 'home' despite having lived in London for decades. However, the understanding of 'home' and 'homeland' changes among the second generation, those born in the UK or were young children when they arrived. Though 'homeland' is the same for parents and children, 'home' is identified as the UK, their birthplace and the place they live. Their homeland signifies a 'nostalgia without memory' (Appadurai, 1990:3) and something that is largely imagined. The focus of young people, Lacroix (2015:100) suggests, is 'the place where they live' rather than 'the place of origin', as the young participants do not consider permanently living in Turkey. The following participant (23, female), who emigrated to London from south-eastern Turkey when she was two, is one of those young Alevi, defining herself as 'British Kurdish Alevi' that emphasises a self-designated identity combining her religious and ethnic identity with Britishness. Despite her attachment to her homeland, particularly in terms of Kurdish politics, her expression models the changing perspectives of the younger Alevi generation in regard to belonging, home and homeland:

I am not going to lie to you; I feel more at home in the UK. I feel more at home in my own house in the UK. When I go to Turkey, I feel like even after forty years, I could not live in Turkey. I mean, I could not do it in any way. I could not do it in the south-east [Turkey] either. Even if Kurdistan were established, I could not live in Kurdistan. Definitely, I could not live. Because, imagine you grew up here, the culture of here given to you. So, when I go to Turkey for a holiday, it seems like a completely different world to me. I do not belong in south-eastern Turkey. I do not think I belong in Kurdistan¹⁶⁹ either. I think I belong in the UK.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁹ By Kurdistan she is referring the south-eastern part of Turkey where Kurds are the predominant population.

¹⁷⁰ Interview 15, 19 Jan 2019, London Cemevi, Wood Green

Many young participants stated that they felt strongly as Londoners and feel comfortable in London due to its multicultural diversity and less discrimination and exclusion. The above participant, who could not imagine living in Turkey, is one of those 'happy' to be in London. She explains the similarities between Alevi culture and British culture in London in accommodating diversity as she thinks other British regions are, in her view, 'white' where discrimination is rife:

Multiculturalism is the first similarity. In Alevi culture, for example, when in the *cemevi*, you become a *can*¹⁷¹ rather than being Ali, Veli, Hasan or Fatma.¹⁷² This perspective of seeing everyone in the same way (*herkesi bir nazarda görmek*), I think, is very very important. Because we live in London and everyone is different, you know, seeing everyone equal, I think it's very very important, spreading love, equality, stuff like that. I think that is a very British thing in London. Not outside London. Outside London, as you know, very racist, very Brexit, very in that mentality. But London definitely is this diversity that's also what's Alevism, you know. [...] I definitely feel a Londoner. My dad's business is in Cambridge. I went to Cambridge once, and never again, I was like 'no, no, no!'. Thank God I didn't study there, it is too white for me. They will not accept me, so I was very happy to be studying and doing everything in London.¹⁷³

Like this participant, the narratives about self-identification are often linked to location, socially and spatially. They locate themselves in various social categories and geographies of belonging. As with many others, this young participant locates herself in the social category of non-whiteness and the geography of belonging, London. Multiculturalism is the most prominent element in their accounts about the feeling of belonging to London. For them, the more multicultural it is, the more comfortable they are.

Choosing or adopting identities are negotiated in relation to the wider multi-ethnic society where individuals and groups contest and assert meanings and representations of their identity in numerous

¹⁷¹ *Can* is literally soul, used to refer to an Alevi individual.

¹⁷² Usual names

¹⁷³ Interview 15, 19 Jan 2019, London Cemevi, Wood Green

ways (Song, 2003). The narration of Britishness shows how the young Alevis see themselves in relation to British society and how they locate themselves within it. The young Alevis see citizenship as an element of Britishness that includes them. As Garbin and Godin (2013:126) comment in relation to their study of Congolese youth in the diaspora, the attachment to an imagined homeland 'coexisted with a sense of hybrid belonging combining British, ethnic or religious identities'. Indeed, most of them expressed their Alevi identity with an affiliation to Britain. When asked how they define themselves in terms of identity, most of them added the word 'British' to their response, most often as 'British Alevi', but also 'British Kurdish Alevi', 'British Kurd' or even 'British-Alevi student'. This hyphenated expression of identity emphasises both an affiliation with their native culture and a level of assimilation into British culture. Hyphenating identities for ethnic minorities, as Modood (2021) suggests, is their way of embracing British identity. Like many other young migrant generations, such as Muslim youth in the UK (Modood, 2009), the self-identification of young Alevis in such terms indicates hybridity, combining their religious identity (and sometimes ethnic) with identification with Britain.

This conveys a sense of belonging and inclusion. These modes of self-identification, often designating different combinations of religious, ethnic and national identities, carry an intention to avoid exclusive or limiting identities and instead use more inclusive markers that point to commonalities with the wider society (and multiple groups). The following young participant (male, 23) tells how his British Alevi identity makes him feel part of society as well as a valuable member of it:

Yes, I am British, but not just British, British as well as Alevi. When you can carry it comfortably, when you think 'yes I am British and I am part of this society', you also exist as an individual. It makes you feel cared for. If I can express my own thoughts, I am really valuable. Feeling valued is a very important thing to me. I think it is a feeling that people should have in every society, in every environment.¹⁷⁴

Though some participants reported having experienced racism in the past, even if rarely, many stated that they had no difficulty establishing friendships with non-Alevis. Almost all young participants have Alevi and non-Alevi friends among their closest circles, and many have had a non-Alevi boyfriend or

¹⁷⁴ Interview 14, 21 Nov 2018, Dalston

girlfriend at some point in their life, a demonstration of their engagement with both the UK and Alevi community. Questions about personal interests, such as music or sport, also indicate an affiliation with both cultures and countries. When asked which football team they support, participants usually identified two teams, one from the UK and one from Turkey (such as Arsenal and Galatasaray, Tottenham and Galatasaray, Fenerbahce and Arsenal or Tottenham and Fenerbahce). Their musical preferences also reflect this hybrid formation, embodying cultural exchange across multi-cultural diaspora space, citing hip-hop, rap, rock along with *deyiş* (religious songs/hymns) and other types of Alevi music.

Their political attachments also reveal a dual affiliation, as both British and Turkish politics are regarded as equally important. All follow the political developments in the UK and Turkey through Turkish and British TV channels and media. Their voting preferences show that the Labour Party attracts young Alevis much more than other political parties. Considering that Alevi associations visibly support the Labour Party, this may also exemplify the influence of the Alevi associations (and the first generation) on Alevi youth as well as the fact that in the UK young people are more likely to vote Labour. Their engagement with local politics is also visible in the rising number of young Alevi councillors. The comment of the following participant (male, 23) on the Alevi involvement in local politics indicates the level of their attachment to the UK, the place where they live:

It is good for Alevis to engage with politics and the society around them. It always annoys me that whenever we meet in a place or families meet, the only subject of politics is the events that are occurring two thousand miles away. However, when they get to the hospital, they wait for five hours [...] So, if you don't care about this, it doesn't make sense to care about something else. So, it is very important to engage with the politics around you.¹⁷⁵

Of interest is how identity and belonging are articulated and narrated in relation to the *cemevi* as it allows for an exploration of the role space plays in the social and identity formation of young Alevis, a topic to which we now turn.

¹⁷⁵ Interview 14, 21 Nov 2018, Dalston

The role of the *cemevi*

Driven by the processes of migration and urbanisation, during the last three decades theologically-based Alevism has given way to an emphasis on identity and culture. How young participants practise Alevism shows the effects of diasporic transformation on beliefs and rituals, marking a shift in the mode of believing. It emphasises a performative belief in Alevi identity, rather than a theological one that I described as believing in ‘belonging to Alevism’ (see Chapter 4). Young Alevi perceive practising Alevism as something beyond worship: it is performing Alevi identity as a cultural identity that grafts a humanistic philosophy onto its theological foundations.

Most young participants see engaging in activities in the *cemevi* as a way of performing Alevism. They repeatedly identify activities such as volunteering in the *cemevi* and the BAF, attending Alevism classes and learning the *bağlama* (a musical instrument of religious and cultural significance). Here, I must stress the spatial dimension of performative believing in ‘belonging to Alevism’ where the *cemevi* plays an important role in their claim to Alevi identity. The following expression of a participant (male, 22), answering how he practices Alevism or what he does as an Alevi, supports this sense of performative believing that is embodied in the *cemevi* as the place of belonging:

The simplest of the rituals I practise is to go to the *cemevi* and help someone there in any subject, for example, teaching children. If there is an event, such as *kırk* meals, funeral or concert, helping by holding a chair.¹⁷⁶

This link between practising Alevism and the *cemevi* shows the critical role that space (and place) plays in identity construction. Such an attachment to the *cemevi* echoes the first-generation’s hopes for these very children. For example, the nurturing of children into Alevi identity was a key motivation for the collective involvement in the construction of the London Cemevi (see Chapter 6). Given that every year hundreds of children attend classes or events at the *cemevi*, the spatial indicator of Alevi identity, it seems their parents’ hopes were fulfilled as the *cemevi* is now instrumental in transmitting religious identity and tradition. It shows how holding a vision of the future can lead to the transformation of

¹⁷⁶ Interview 14, 21 Nov 2018, Dalston

social (community) structures, as noted by Mische (2009) in her discussion of the cognitive dimensions of the projected future.

The connection with the *cemevi* is the most common characteristic found in young people's narratives of identity and belonging. This is closely linked to the essential part the *cemevi* plays in their early socialisation. Many reported that they began to visit the *cemevi* with their mothers in their childhood; even a few participants said they grew up in the *cemevi*. Many were sent to the *cemevi* by their parents to take various courses, in their view to become more aware of their Alevi identity. Especially the mothers' connection with the *cemevi* seems to have influenced their approach to it and its place in their self-identification since their childhood. This is explained by a young participant (female, 23) who later became an Alevi youth leader:

For me, it started at the age of thirteen. When I was very young, my mother took us to the *bağlama* class by force. She was trying to infuse Alevism to us. She was telling us, 'You are Alevi, don't forget this'. Besides *bağlama*, she even sent me to Turkish classes there. [...] I have gained awareness at a young age there.¹⁷⁷

Religious education is one of the primary functions of the *cemevi* and the BAF. From Alevism classes to publications (for example, those produced by the BAF discussed in Chapter 4), the London Cemevi and BAF provide a wide range of opportunities for young Alevis to learn about Alevism. Almost all the young participants attended classes and lectures at some point run especially for them. The following comment of a participant (25, female) who describe the *cemevi* as their 'own' also stresses the centrality of the *cemevi* in terms of the transmission of Alevism:

If you do not perceive *cemevi* as your own, the question will arise, how would you be living your Alevism and according to what? If you are not connected to there, if you are not going there,

¹⁷⁷ Interview 15, 19 Jan 2019, London Cemevi, Wood Green

okay, you may still be an Alevi, but how will you know if that Alevism is right or wrong? [...] So, it is necessary to be connected.¹⁷⁸

Besides religious and cultural classes (such as Alevism, *semah* and *bağlama*), the *cemevi* also provides various GCSE support classes (such as physics, maths and English) for young Alevis. I heard much positive feedback about the benefits of these GCSE classes from parents and students. Such provision sometimes gains support for educational youth projects from UK public foundations.¹⁷⁹ Just before the Covid-19 pandemic, I was told that the *cemevi* had four hundred students attending classes.¹⁸⁰

The activities at the London Cemevi and the BAF contribute to young people's orientation and integration into both the home and the homeland. Cemevi host various events and meetings, inviting artists and representatives from Turkey and holding discussions about political developments in Turkey. The young people's engagements with the *cemevi* sustain their connection and commitment to their roots. The following participant (female, 26) speaks positively about how the *cemevi* helped her to learn about 'her roots' and the situation in the homeland:

I think it is valuable in terms of learning your own history. It is important in terms of learning Alevism and Alevi history. For example, all writers, *dedes* or artists who came there from somewhere else have knowledge. It may be a story from their own life, but it makes you understand the situation and certain conditions in Turkey. It's hard to understand, learn in any other way. There is some information on the internet about it but learning it from their point of view is valuable for me, broadens my horizons.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁸ Interview 18, 21 December, 2019, Wood Green

¹⁷⁹ 'Cemevi will work with Prince Philip's charity', *Londra Gazete*, 2 June 2016, <https://londragazete.com/english/66106/djemevi-will-work-with-prince-philips-charity/>

¹⁸⁰ Informal phone discussion with the London Cemevi Education Secretary, 28 February 2021

¹⁸¹ Interview 20, 22 Nov 2019, Wood Green

The connection with the homeland coexists with attachments and orientations to life in the UK. The London Cemevi plays a critical role in this. While the GCSE classes provide education, the activities and facilities that the *cemevi* and BAF provide for their wider socialisation play a key role in young people's individual and collective lives. The young participants visit the *cemevi* often several times a month, some weekly and some at least once a month. They often indicate the positive effects of the *cemevi* as a community space and in their socialisation and personal development, as in the following statement (male, 22):

It has had a positive effect on me. So at least in terms of socialisation [...] because, as I said, our families do not engage in social activities as much as in the English culture. Actually, our parents were taking us to the birthdays of our friends in primary school. Yes, it was a social activity but didn't continue after primary school. Families don't come together with other families. Going to the community centre helped me to socialise and to have a bit more self-confidence. [...] Because you had to talk to different people there, for example when there were youth meetings or activities, everyone had to say something or get involved. For example, you had to get up in front of a hundred people and say something. Even if it's just an idea, doing it at least improved my self-confidence.¹⁸²

Similarly, another participant (female, 26) who also, in her words, 'grew up in the *cemevi*' and was actively involved in the establishment of the Alevi youth branch, thinks that the *cemevi* 'formed her personality':

Cemevi absolutely influenced us positively. I am the biggest example. For example, I used to come to the *cemevi* in all my spare times. Even though I didn't do anything, I would come and stand in the empty room. Let me tell you, the people you met at the *cemevi*, the help you gave, the '*hizmet*' [service] you provided, all form your personality. Well, it formed my personality. That's for sure. So, it had a huge impact.¹⁸³

¹⁸² Interview 14, 21 Nov 2018, Dalston

¹⁸³ Interview 15, 19 Jan 2019, London Cemevi, Wood Green

Like this participant, many stated that they began to go to the *cemevi* to join *bağlama* or GCSE classes, then started to take religious education classes before becoming members of Alevi youth groups. The foundation of the youth branch in the London Cemevi soon after 2010 was followed by many events for young people and stimulated their engagement in Alevi associations. I was told that in the first year of the youth branch they organised many sporting and social activities, such as football, picnics, drama classes and cinema nights, to attract young Alevis to the *cemevi* and, in their words, to keep them away from doing 'bad things', such as being involved in gangs.¹⁸⁴ The following young participant (female, 23) describes her involvement in the *cemevi*:

I was so young, a teenager at that time. In the first year, we set up a great youth group. Everyone felt safe and comfortable. We started to learn and headed towards Alevism in our second year. For example, we began meeting with *dedes*. Turan Eser [an Alevi writer] gave us both a management course and a separate seminar. So, we concentrated more on Alevism. Altogether, we had almost three hundred young people at the *cemevi* in Dalston at that time. [...] You know we have Friday meetings. Friday meetings have been around for seven to eight years. We had a set up for those youth meetings; we first were doing Alevism for one and a half to two hours, then social interaction, then fun activity. It still continues with the same set-up since that time.¹⁸⁵

Indeed, Friday meetings are an important and regular space for young Alevis who start attending at a very young age. In the two meetings I attended as an observer, the age of those present was between twelve and seventeen years of age (with most of those either fourteen or fifteen). These meetings, attended by about twenty young people included a presentation about '*ulu ozanlar*' (the great Alevi poets), talks about their activities and what they are planning to do, and a discussion about British politics such as Brexit which was a hot topic at the time. The discussions and the presentations (which they prepare beforehand at home) expand their knowledge of UK politics, Alevi history and Alevism. The youth branches of the BAF and London Cemevi (such as the Britain Alevi Youth Federation and Cemevi

¹⁸⁴ Interview 18, 21 December 2019, London Cemevi, Wood Green

¹⁸⁵ Interview 15, 19 Jan 2019, London Cemevi, Wood Green

Youth) organise summer camps, picnics, music nights and other activities that attract Alevi youth to join. In recent years, many more youth activities have been organised, especially with the development of the large facilities at the new London Cemevi and BAF headquarters, allowing more opportunities for social events, such as the BAF cycling club. Large-scale events also form other important youth spaces, especially for volunteering, such as at the Alevi Festival (see Chapter 5).

The growth in the number and size of Alevi organisations has had a profound influence on young Alevis. The desire for visibility and recognition within the wider society has led to the creation of a religious terminology in English to describe Alevism which has also helped mould the self-identification of the younger generation. For example, when discussing Alevism, young Alevis often use the terminology adopted by the Alevi associations and in their publications. Also, almost all young participants stated that the leaders of the Alevi associations represent them and many even quoted them when defining Alevism. This demonstrates the influence of associations and leaders on their social formations and identity configuration.

Lastly, many youngsters join Alevi online networks and follow social media pages managed by the London Cemevi and the BAF, and share posts about events and other matters. The video series explaining Alevism in English on YouTube is an example of the virtual youth space made by young British Alevis. The YouTube channel called School of Alevism¹⁸⁶ streams well-designed lectures about beliefs, rituals, poetry and history for those interested in learning more about Alevism. Moreover, one of the recent videos delivered by three young Alevis (who appear to be eleven to twelve years old), called 'What is Alevism for young learners', starts with saying that 'Alevism is a religion'. This confirms how Alevism is now definitely being defined as a 'religion', a view shared by the young participants. The first-generation Alevis avoided using the term '*din*' (religion) to define Alevism despite practising it more in terms of traditional ritual, preferring the term '*inanç*' (faith) or '*yol*' (spiritual path). However, young participants, despite adopting Alevism as a 'philosophy of life' (see Chapter 4), were more likely to use the term 'religion'. It confirms how the interpretation and definition of Alevism have 'moved' from '*yol*' to 'religion' in its striving for recognition.

¹⁸⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCaoPHJ1iXIEk40YibQPWp1A/featured>

Concluding discussion

This chapter has discussed the historical contexts, discourses, social processes and political and ethnic positionalities shaping the formation of Alevi identity. Though contingent and continuously negotiated and positioned within discourses, Alevi identity is always prioritised over other ethnic and national identities. For the younger generations, Alevi identity coexists with other identities – though it remains dominant. Their narratives about identity and belonging often form different combinations of self-designated hyphenated identities combining their Alevi identity with other ethnic or national identities. Such self-identification represents their attachments to the broader society, rather than an exclusive and limiting one. Unlike the first generation, they explicitly associate themselves with London and Britain.

The memory of victimhood and the boundaries with Islam are essential and permanent dynamics of Alevi identity, continuously reproduced in the diaspora and stimulated by it. The history of persecution and victimhood is a prominent feature shaping identity formation and reinforcing Alevis' commitment to an Alevi identity. The second-generation participants, too, share this memory of persecution (albeit second-hand so to speak) which is closely linked to their involvement in Alevi associations that invoke a victimhood culture to consolidate community cohesion and identity. The boundary with Islam is also a key dynamic factor involving many facets of Alevi identity politics. The positionalities in relation to Islam appear to be sharper among young Alevis, which is also closely linked to the Alevi associations rearticulating and politicising boundaries as part of their campaigns for recognition.

The repercussions of diasporic transition for the experience of the younger generation provide complementary insights into researching diasporic Alevism. The fact that integration and identity issues experienced by the earlier Alevi youth were not reflected in the present-day Alevi youth indicates the influence of socio-spatial developments that the community has undergone over time. As they grew up, the Alevi community became more organised, institutionalised and territorialised in the UK. Thus, the experiences of today's young Alevis reflects the evolution of diasporic institutions and confirms their impact on social and identity formation.

Young Alevis today are raised in an environment formed within the diasporic transformation, marking a shift into community space, a *cemevi*-centred Alevism. The *cemevi* plays a significant role in the

construction of Alevi identity among the young generation as it is a channel for the transmission of memory, tradition and identity. The connection with the *cemevi* is the most common characteristic found in young people's narratives of identity and belonging. The *cemevi* is the place of belonging to which young Alevis link themselves and their Alevi identity. It plays a crucial role in their self-identification, socialisation and integration into both home and homeland. Such spaces shape young people's social, cultural and political formations and adaptation into diasporic Alevism. It affirms the crucial role space (and place) play in the community and in the identity building process discussed throughout the thesis.

Conclusion

This thesis is an ethnographic study of the Alevi community in the UK in which the main focus is the socio-spatial dynamics of diasporic transition, encapsulating the interplay between diaspora, religion and space. The research, focusing on the socio-spatial and transterritorial dynamics of a 'faith in motion' adopted an analytical lens pertinent to the study of the contemporary experience of diasporic religions. In this research, the following questions have been addressed: how has Alevism, as a marginal minority faith in Turkey, been transformed in diasporic settings?; how is 'Alevi space' produced and practised in the diaspora landscape?; and how and to what extent do diasporic dynamics shape the cultural and religious landscape of the homeland, in particular in the rural context?

Diasporic trajectory of a minority faith

The diasporic transition of the British Alevi community has been studied to understand how a once marginalised migrant faith has been transformed in diaspora settings. Alevis first arrived in the late 1980s and early 1990s and have three decades as a community in the UK. Since settlement, they have developed considerably as a community with marked changes to their local, national and transnational engagements. As my research charts, the Alevi politics of identity, visibility and recognition together with governmental legal frameworks that protect freedom of religion and religious pluralism have been key elements in encouraging a more organised and institutionalised Alevism. This change in Alevism has accordingly been accompanied by it becoming more spatialised. For example, the establishment of the Britain Alevi Federation encouraged Alevi leaders to open *cemevis* around the country and as a result there are now eighteen in the UK. The increasing placemaking performances — from the Britain Alevi Festival to the construction of the large London Cemevi to the establishment of the BAF Headquarters on a large green park site in north London — indicate how British Alevis have improved financially, politically and spatially. In sum, my findings demonstrate that the diaspora experience has made Alevism more institutionalised, organised and spatialised in its striving for recognition and continuity.

Turkey's political context significantly influences Alevi diasporic politics and shapes their moral and citizenship claims. The political activism and lobbying strategies of British Alevis, echoing other Alevi diasporas in Europe and beyond, is concentrated on protesting against Turkey's discriminatory policies and demanding recognition of *cemevis* as places of worship. The Alevi claim for visibility and recognition

is constantly produced and reproduced within transnational social fields. Transnational linkages allowing Alevi to engage, communicate and constantly exchange information help their claims for identity and recognition in settlement territories. This aspect of the Alevi case exemplifies how transnational linkages shape diasporic identity and the community building process in their countries of settlement, which is one of the central themes in the analytical framework of the thesis.

Lived Alevism in diaspora space

This thesis has examined how Alevism is lived, ritualised and practised in diaspora space in order to understand the process of transformation in the context of a religion 'on the move'. It demonstrates that the diasporic experience has profoundly transformed ritualised Alevi culture and the way in which the religious structures established through history have dealt with many challenges and have been updated and re-oriented in diaspora settings. Firstly, the diasporisation of Alevi marked the decline of the charismatic influence of *ocaks* and initiated a new era centred on the bureaucratic power of *cemevis* and federations. *Ocak*-centred Alevism turned into *cemevi*-centred Alevism, a change that weakened the influence and position of the *dedes*, the Alevi clerics who derived their power from charismatic sacred lineages. It generated tension between them and the association leaders who held bureaucratic power legitimised through elections. Secondly, besides institutional changes, the diasporic transition also emphasises a spatial shift. Alevism in the diaspora is now centred on the community space that *cemevis* provide which substantially differentiates post-migration Alevism from its old, pre-migration form that was not characterised by purpose-built communal spaces. Thirdly, such structural changes have coexisted with a ritual modification that involves a gradual routinisation, folklorisation and standardisation in worship in contrast to the old essence of Alevism that praised an inner focus and accommodated a diversity of interpretations and practices.

Fourthly, diasporic transformation also involves a shift in the understanding of religion, religious practice and accordingly the mode of believing. Theologically based Alevism has shifted towards an emphasis on identity and culture. My findings demonstrate that practising Alevism has moved beyond an act of worship to become more a performance of cultural identity, especially among younger generations. It emphasises performative believing in Alevi identity rather than theology, that is a belief in belonging, which, as Day (2011:194) says, entails 'accepting religious identifications to complement other social and emotional experiences of belongings'. I consider the change in mode of believing as a shift from

believing in Alevism into believing in 'belonging to Alevism' in which *cemevis* play a leading role in shaping this performative belief. Indeed, for the young Alevis, it has almost become believing in 'belonging to *cemevi*'.

In sum, the more symbolic and increasingly standardised (*cismani*) interpretation of Alevism represents a less 'imagistic' (Whitehouse, 2004) mode remodelled in the diaspora. Given these changes, I would concur here with Johnson (2007:42) who argues that 'diasporas do not merely express or carry religions: in a certain sense, they make them'. The diasporic transformation has changed the essence of Alevism, moving it from a spiritual path (*yo/*) towards a gradually standardised diasporic religion. This also accompanied a change in the interpretation and definition of Alevism, now firmly a 'religion', in a striving for recognition. This is not something imported from Turkey, as 'traditionally' Alevis define their faith as *yo/*, a spiritual path. Though we cannot say that all diasporic Alevis define themselves in this new way, since the first generation still avoids the word 'religion', it has widened as a tactic for recognition and increasingly become more settled among the second generation.

Challenges of migrant Alevism in the Western context

My research examined how a religion 'on the move' responds to the challenges of diaspora conditions. Similar to other migrant faith groups, the diaspora experience has required Alevism to navigate new social, spatial and institutional settings and has involved the re-production and re-formation of a religious culture. This diasporic rebuilding of migrant religions involves a tension between continuity and change. Studies on the transformation of migrant religions confirm significant alterations occur in traditional religious institutions (such as churches, synagogues, mosques or temples) and the affiliations to them when they orient themselves in diaspora settings (Garbin, 2013; 2014; Johnson, 2007:42; Tweed, 1997; Vásquez and Knott, 2014). However, the diasporic journey of Alevism shows essential differences due to the inability of its old institutions, the *ocaks*, to adapt to a new setting and so have faded away in the diaspora resulting in organisational and operational challenges and significant change. Moreover, Alevism also changed in response to the need for collectivisation and the attention to expression and presentation in response to the quest for visibility and recognition.

Furthermore, the legal frameworks that protect religious pluralism while providing religious freedom and community spaces also transformed the organisational structures of the Alevi community. The

expectations of what a religion should be have pushed Alevi to structure their faith within a Western Christian understanding of religion encompassing a systematic belief system and rituals with a bureaucratically organised hierarchical structure. Such a reading of religion has presented organisational and institutional challenges for migrant Alevism in meeting these requirements. In contrast to Alevism in the homeland, Alevi have established community places and structured them according to expectations of the host society. This echoes Yang and Ebaugh's (2001) claim that the congregational form that new immigrant religions adopt in their organisational structure amounts to organisational assimilation.

The production and practice of space

This thesis explored how diasporic structures transform the spatial practices of Alevi society and the dynamics shaping identity and community building processes in the new socio-spatial context. The diaspora has advanced and revitalised the Alevi politics of identity, visibility and recognition that has shaped their 'placemaking' experiences. Whether permanently or temporarily, Alevi collective performances in the public diaspora space serve the purpose of publicly presenting Alevi culture and identity, producing and practising space as a strategy. Alevi spatial performances always carry religiopolitical significance in the way they create heterotopic spaces (Foucault, 1984) embodying homeland, memory and the politics of belonging that empower the diasporic Alevi community. Occupying public spaces is a tactic for recognition and planting Alevi's legitimate presence into the diaspora landscape while raising their engagements with the public domain.

The institutional developments and increasing participation in domestic politics have also expanded their transnational political activism. Homeland politics, conveying a sense of cross-border solidarity and a 'chaordic' transnationalism (Werbner, 2002a), create transnational social spaces that link the experiences of Alevi worldwide. Taking diasporic public spaces and claiming Alevi identity simultaneously in Turkey, the UK and Europe, such performances create 'triadic' (Vertovec, 1997) diaspora spaces. Diasporic Alevism also involves the creation of spaces in the homeland. Their homeland engagements proceed through transnational social or religious spaces. The diaspora finances the construction of new houses and *cemevis* in the villages of migrant Alevi where they play a leading role in the re-creation of social space as well as in shifting the social, economic and cultural landscape of the rural homeland.

Space is also instrumental in the transformation of ritualised religious culture. Giving more attention to expression and presentation in quest of visibility and recognition, *cemevis* played a leading part in the alteration of ritualised religious culture. In this sense, diaspora is involved in 'remaking' religion through space, and diasporic transformation embodies a space-related, a *cemevi*-promoted modification of the ritual structures of Alevism. The wider implications of the production and practice of Alevi space will now be discussed.

Dynamics of Alevi place-making in the diaspora

While every religious placemaking experience has different meanings and significance particular to each community, the general characteristics are the same. The practices and strategies of religious territorialisation in diaspora underline the complex interplay between religion and politics. Alevi placemaking confirms the performative dimension of diasporic religion that links the public and private and the religious and secular and is bound up with the spatial politics of recognition (Vásquez and Knott, 2014). It is also about power negotiations within the community and with locals, other migrant groups and secular authorities, as in Afro-Christian diasporic churches (Garbin, 2012b) and the Ahmadiyya Mosque in London (Balzani, 2015).

Alevi placemaking practices reveal various overlapping, conflicting and intersecting dynamics that makes placemaking a complex process involving a range of actors. First of all, the general nature of Alevi placemaking performances is that they are bound up with the politics of identity, visibility and recognition. They affirm a sense of belonging and identity and contribute to the consolidation of the community. Second, placemaking performances increase Alevis' engagement with the UK public domain and expand it beyond their socio-spatial boundaries. They allow Alevis to engage with locals, communicate with other migrant groups, and negotiate with secular agencies. They shape and are shaped by a broader integration process. The expanding scope of collective performances and the increasing attendee profile from the UK public domain, in both local and national politics, indicate Alevis' growing institutionalisation and legitimacy. Third, Alevi placemaking experiences convey conflict and cohesion simultaneously. On the one hand, religious placemaking is a product of tensions involving conflicts and power negotiations. As we saw in the construction of the London Cemevi, the organisation of the Britain Alevi Festival, the modification of funeral customs, and many other examples, placemaking performances often involve internal conflicts and power negotiations between community leaders and

among members. The 'fractured' (Pasura, 2014) character of the British Alevi diaspora feeds these conflicts and disagreements. On the other hand, despite these internal conflicts, placemaking performances also emphasise a common purpose for the community and help to create unity. As explored in the case study of Alevi placemaking (Chapter 6), the community went through both a period of intense conflict and also remarkable unity and solidarity when it came to placemaking aspirations. Both the collective involvement in the construction of the London Cemevi and commitment to the Britain Alevi Festival demonstrate that, despite the tension, Alevi placemaking performances create a sense of co-responsibility and cohesion that mobilise the community for common purposes. This denotes its 'chaordic' (Werbner, 2002a) character which is necessary in understanding the Alevi case that conflict and cohesion are crystallised and operate together in placemaking.

Role of *cemevis* in the reconstruction of identity and community in the diaspora

The *cemevi* is the symbolic and spatial marker of Alevism, leading its communal life and shaping Alevi communities. There is no Alevism without the *cemevi* in the diaspora. *Cemevis* mark the socio-spatial context of diasporic Alevism, as they represent the transformation of Alevism into a community space centred Alevism. *Cemevis* are imaginary territories of Alevis bound up with religious significance, Alevi identity, belonging and shared experiences. They channel the transmission of memory, tradition and identity, reinforcing the sense of community, thus playing a vital role in diasporic identity and community building. As explored in the case study of Alevi placemaking, the strong commitment to the inter-generational transmission of religious identity and a collective imagination of a future, that is to say continuity, were key motivations behind the collective action to build the new *cemevi*. Thus, *cemevi* plays an essential part in shaping the future of the community through the transmission of religious identity and 'tradition'.

The collective remittances sent to construct the *cemevi* in Alevi villages also affirm the centrality of the *cemevi* since Alevi actors see it as an investment in their faith (see Chapter 7). In this way, they are seen as a way of creating and maintaining a spiritual connection which strengthens Alevis' sense of belonging to their faith as well as their birthplace. They are thus closely linked to the diasporic politics of belonging. Also, as explored in Chapter 8, the London Cemevi (and the BAF) are places of belonging to which young Alevis link themselves and their Alevi identity and which play a crucial role in their self-identification, socialisation and integration into both home and homeland. The emotional attachment

and feelings of belonging to the *cemevi* do not merely promote the consolidation of religious identity but also evoke a sense of rootedness in the diaspora. *Cemevis* enlarge Alevi engagement with the public domain and channel collective opportunities and community developments. For example, the official recognition of Alevi as a faith community and delivering Alevism lessons in the UK is closely related to the networks built around the *cemevi*.

The influence of diaspora on the changing rural landscape

This study, by looking at diasporic markers in emigrant villages in Turkey, examined how and to what extent diaspora shapes the rural homeland landscape. The influence of transnational engagements and remittances on the rural landscape has manifold implications. Firstly, remittances of Alevi migrants emphasise a significant investment in the construction of new houses. The emigrant houses (and *cemevis*) characterise what I call 'diasporic spatial markers' as they serve as a proxy presence of migrants. They embody the physical transformation of the rural landscape. Secondly, this spatial transformation in migrant hometowns coexists with dynamics of socio-cultural change.

Transnationalisation is the principal impact of the migrants' engagements on their hometown along with the transformation of the socio-economic and religious spheres. Moreover, the Alevi case exemplifies the significance of placemaking practices in the homeland to the study of transnational engagements of contemporary diasporic communities.

My findings suggest that diasporic Alevi mobilise a diasporic 'culture' to redesign the spatial, social, cultural and religious context of the rural homeland. The diasporic practices in the homeland draw a spatial circle shaped within the migration experience. The trajectory is as follows: Alevism was generated in its homeland; it then migrated to the diaspora where it became a migrant faith; it was then restructured in and oriented to diaspora conditions turning it into a diasporic religion; and now it is travelling back to the homeland via transnational networks. However, as explained above, during the diasporic transition, the ritualised religious culture profoundly changed; thus, the Alevism arriving back from diaspora represents a restructured religious culture that substantially distinguishes it from the one that first left its natural habitat.

The thesis explores the principal types of relationships between migrants and their villages, namely, building houses, sending collective remittances to construct a *cemevi*, and regular holiday visits, and the

consequences of these spatial practices. In addition to these primary engagements explored in detail, there are other kinds of engagements, for example, sending remittances to families which sustain their economic stability. However, this cannot be considered a principal characteristic of British Alevis' relationship to their village. Their emigration took the form of chain migration that included bringing over extended families and kin so that a considerable majority had no one left in the village to send remittances to with many villages having no more than four or five non-migrant families. In this way, this study differs from other ethnographies of emigrant regions (such as Gardner, 1992; Levitt, 2001b; Lopez, 2015).

The wider implications of the 'diasporic spatial markers' are as follows.

Migrant houses and the rural homeland landscape

First, migrant houses create a physical transformation in the rural landscape. The old vernacular architecture and dwellings have been replaced with more modern grand remittance houses in a very different architectural style. Second, by rebuilding the environment and returning regularly, though seasonally, diasporic Alevis become dwellers in their villages again. Their homeland practices emphasise their re-territorialisation in their birthplace. They live in-between diaspora and homeland and reside in both territories and are involved in both settings. This may explain why the notion of 'return' to the homeland is no longer important (see Chapter 3) as they already have a transnational sense of belonging to both the territories in which their existence is spatially placed. Third, the re-dwelling practices that channel an ongoing attachment to the homeland involve the transnationalisation of the hometown community, of which remittance *cemevis* are also a medium. While collective remittances bond community members in diaspora and engage migrants with their hometowns, remittance *cemevis* allow them to play an active role in re-organising their communities. Fourth, besides the significant investment in the construction of new houses, villages financially depend on remittances. However, there has been almost no investment in agriculture, rather remittances seem to devalue such economic activity. In generating a construction boom, these remittance houses also create significant employment in the region providing opportunities for skilled and unskilled workers in the construction sector. In addition to new houses, the maintenance of old houses also continues to support the construction sector, local suppliers, and local craft trades. Thus, from suppliers to labour, Alevi migrants' investment in housing significantly contributes to the local economy, a feature of other migrant communities (such

as Ballard, 2003; Gardner, 2008; Lopez, 2010). Fifth, the grand migrant houses that redesign the regional character are what I call 'spatial feedback' and demonstrate the benefits of international migration. The spatial transformation of the villages inspires in the non-migrants, especially the young, a fascination with the West and a motivation to emigrate themselves, thus maintaining a continuous migration.

The growth of *cemevis* with diaspora remittances

The collective remittances sent to construct village *cemevis* has religious significance as Alevi see it as an investment in their faith. This use of remittances, as creating and maintaining a spiritual connection, also strengthens the sense of belonging to their faith as well as their birthplace. These remittances, therefore, in producing a moral economy of transterritorial religious life (Garbin, 2019) are closely linked to the diasporic politics of belonging. The spread of remittance *cemevis* has many implications. Firstly, building *cemevis* constitute a spatial performance, openly marking the religious identity of the village population for the first time. Thus, spreading *cemevis* to the homeland, migrant Alevi make Alevi identity spatially visible, a contrast to the Alevi history marked by invisibility. In this way, it is the diasporic politics of identity and visibility that has shaped the spread of village *cemevis*. Funerals that were a primary motivation of diasporic Alevi to fundraise for village *cemevis* are also about identity and visibility since it allows Alevi to conduct customary funerals in accordance with their religious rites manifesting their collective identity. Secondly, *cemevis* became the spatial indicator of Alevi identity after the rural-urban migration and initially were found only in urban spaces until diasporic Alevi began to send collective remittances to build them in their villages. By spreading *cemevis* to their birthplace, diasporic Alevi implant this urban-born 'tradition' into the rural Alevi context. Thirdly, by means of remittance *cemevis*, the *cemevi*-centred diasporic Alevism is introduced into the 'natural habitat' of Alevism which before had not been characterised by permanent religious buildings. Remittance *cemevis* are the spatial and material indicators of an Alevism remade in the diaspora and embody a proxy presence of diasporic Alevism in the rural homeland. Those migrants involved in 'remaking' Alevism in the diaspora are now transferring that restructured religious culture back to its old habitat where Alevism originated.

Homeland, memory and the territories of exile

Collective memory, the homeland, and their influence on the formation of identity and solidarity have been central points in classical diaspora theories (R. Cohen, 2008; Safran, 1991; Tölölyan, 2007). The group consciousness producing a sense of a distinctive collectivity, shared historical experiences and solidarity are seen as an essential condition of diasporas, binding members of a diasporic community together. However, many scholars criticising classical diaspora theories point to hybridity, diversity and the changing structures of communities within increasing transnational and global interactions (Bhabha, 1994; Clifford, 1994; Gilroy, 1997; Hall, 1990). My thesis demonstrates that despite the hybridity and other dynamics of the cosmopolitan diaspora environment influencing the configuration of diasporic identity, collective 'exilic' memory and homeland are still key elements in understanding diasporas. They are important in diasporic transition, consolidating diasporic identity and community and shaping boundary maintenance.

Besides collective memory and the idealisation of an ancestral home, the emphasis on the homeland in classical diaspora theories also includes an intention to return as a central theme and trope. However, my research suggests that with the changing structures of communities within various transnational and global interactions and developments, the homeland keeps its salience through a continuous connection with it, rather than the dream of a return to it. For my research participants, the homeland is not a place of return anymore. There are many reasons for this. First, in virtue of growing communication and travel opportunities that ease regular engagements, migrants never leave their homeland in both the literal and metaphorical sense, and consequently, the idea of return loses its urgency. In other words, their transterritorial life embodied simultaneously in the UK and Turkey (see chapter 7) has made the idea of return less relevant. Second, the re-creation of the community in their new country also lessens the significance of return. Third, migrants' political and religious contestations with Turkey, which acted as a push factor in their migration, also lessen the attraction of return, especially in the light of recent political developments under the pro-Islamic government which is seen as not providing a secure environment for Alevis. Despite their emotional ties and feelings of belonging, Turkey is no longer a place they want to return to. Thus, unlike the way it is classically theorised, 'return' does not preserve its relevance in the Alevi case, even though homeland remains a salient dynamic.

A shared history and boundaries give essential insights into the construction and reconstruction of collective diasporic identity. The memory of victimhood and boundaries with Islam are two essential dynamics acting as permanent aspects of Alevi identity transported from Turkey to the diaspora context. Though understood and adopted differently among Alevi worldwide, these two elements are continuously produced and reproduced to consolidate identity and community. Both dynamics are closely linked to Alevi associations, rearticulating and politicising boundaries with Islam and reproducing a culture of victimhood to consolidate community and identity in striving for recognition. In particular, the question of Islam, as the key pattern of Alevi boundary-making, is continuously articulated in the diaspora to claim recognition for Alevism as a 'unique faith'.

British Alevi, due to their particular links with the Maraş Massacre, are probably involved in the reproduction of diasporic victim culture and boundaries with Islam more than other diasporas. Unlike other Alevi diasporas gathered from various regions of Turkey, the vast majority of British Alevi come from the Maraş Province, the site of a massacre. Most of them have either lost relatives, friends and neighbours, or are connected to those who have, and so came to the UK with the traumatic memory of the massacre. This terrible experience that targeted them because of their religious affiliation appears as a dominant factor strengthening their commitment to Alevi identity as well as marking its clear boundaries with Islam, more so than in other Alevi diasporas. Besides this characteristic, British Alevi differ from other European Alevi diasporas in many other ways, especially the German which is the most studied Alevi diaspora. For example, Alevi have a relatively short presence in the UK. Unlike the Alevi migration to Europe that began in the 1960s, migration to the UK only intensified in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Their organisational development is also newer. While Alevi in Germany started to be organised into associations in the 1980s, in the UK, even though the first *cemevi* (London Cemevi) was established in 1993, Alevi organisations did not begin to exercise significant power until the 2000s when, for example, the British Alevi Federation was established in 2009. This is linked to another difference. While Alevi in Germany are scattered across various cities, in the UK, eighty per cent of Alevi live in London. Hence, despite their relatively short presence in the UK, the residential concentration of Alevi helped to consolidate the institutionalisation and unity of the community.

Placemaking and temporality

Religious placemaking is closely linked to the diasporic politics of identity, memory and homeland. It operates through temporal horizons that emphasise ancestral home, collective memory and exile, similar to the Congolese diaspora in London (Garbin, 2014) and Cuban exiles in Miami (Tweed, 1997). Alevi placemaking also cannot be understood without understanding the temporal dynamics and viewing it from a transterritorial perspective. It encapsulates the interplay of collective identity, place and diasporic politics and is closely linked to the diasporic politics of belonging as well as to claims of legitimacy and recognition. Memory and boundaries play an important part in placemaking. As we saw in the Alevi case, placemaking performances always underline the boundaries with Islam that inform the politics of recognition and consolidate community, something closely linked to the memory of homeland. The way in which religious placemaking involves the reproduction of identity and memory to consolidate community can be seen in the modification of funeral customs and the religious materiality of the *cemevi*. The changing funeral rituals affirm that the positionality in relation to Islam has increasingly become the primary matter of identity negotiations and boundary making in the diaspora, and religious placemaking play a crucial part in this. Similarly, the case study of Alevi placemaking demonstrates how diasporic re-articulations are reflected in religious materiality that avoids the pious symbolism formed under Islamic influences, again highlighting the role *cemevis* plays in articulating the boundaries with Islam. Religious placemaking, thus, is a medium of diasporic reconstruction and the politicisation of ritualised culture and memory.

The placemaking practices of Alevis affirm that the diasporic associations (the London Cemevi and BAF) retrospectively construct a particular view of Alevism and its roots that involves a conscious reproduction of identity and memory that reconfigures the past in the present. The common past, in this manner, is a social construction viewed through the lens of diasporic realities and needs. It is a reminder of the saying that 'to build a future; we need to build a past' (Otto Frank). It explains why Alevi placemaking in the UK is a process of re-materialisation and re-memorialisation of Alevism beyond its usual frame. Indeed, it is a material manifestation of an imagined Alevism formed in the diaspora.

The transmission of identity and culture is the main challenge for diasporas, especially those whose members have been oppressed, marginalised, forced to hide their identity, and thus lack a materialised tradition. Fieldwork data suggest that what Alevis feel most at risk from is not maintaining continuity in

the diaspora which is, of course, possible only if their children continue to practise their Alevi identity and traditions. The intergenerational transmission of Alevi identity and the continuity of culture and tradition provide a dominant reason in mobilising the community to make their own place in which to have a spatial and institutionalised existence. The case study of religious placemaking, highlighting the collective expectations of the future that are invested in the new *cemevi*, confirms the significance of temporality in placemaking not only through the shared past but also the future. Placemaking is a means of constructing strong sentiments that provide a bridge between the past and the imagination of a collective future in the present.

Further questions

Placemaking plays an essential part in diasporic rebuilding, but there are other spaces, such as virtual spaces, whose investigation was beyond the scope of this thesis. The link between migration, religion and globalisation is complex, embodying diverse processes and actors, including global media, especially given the spectacular growth of computer-mediated communications such as the internet and, more recently, social media (Vásquez and Garbin, 2016). Thus, how the reciprocal relationship between 'local' and 'global' (Robertson, 2012; Vásquez and Garbin, 2016) is shaped within the globalisation of religion deserves a detailed account. Virtual spaces are also significant youth spaces as the younger generation use them more than the older. Young Alevis join online Alevi networks, follow social media intensively and share posts representing their Alevi identity. Thus, how young Alevis produce virtual spaces and how they perform their identity claims in virtual space, a largely under-researched topic, also deserves detailed attention as does more generally the role of new global media in building, developing and connecting Alevi communities in the UK and beyond.

The ethnography of the Alevi community in the UK undertaken in this study also provided some insights into gendered religious practice and power relations in community spaces but any discussion of them, beyond them as a marker of boundaries with Islam, takes us beyond the scope of my research. In relation to the position of Alevi women in Turkey, Okan (2018:69) argues that 'the claim of equality is found to be more to do with marking the boundaries of Alevi identity than putting equality into practice'. Indeed, gender mixity has always been a marker of difference with Islam but while serving as a key element in constructing Alevi women's gender identity and, to some extent, empowerment, the claim to gender equality may actually conceal areas of gender imbalance. For example, in the diaspora,

Alevi women seem to play a relatively passive role in the associational world. Although *cemevis* often function thanks to women's volunteer work, as they carry out some of the most significant duties necessary to run *cemevis*, very few women take a visible part in the decision-making process. To my knowledge, only men occupy the positions of president or leader of *cemevis* and federations in Turkey and Europe. In the UK, although the London Cemevi and the BAF boards always have female members, there has been no female president since the establishment of the *cemevi* in 1993. Some new works on gender dynamics in the Alevi context have begun to appear in recent years (such as Akdemir, 2020; Okan, 2018b; Salman, 2016), but gender remains an under-researched area of Alevi studies. In sum, the implications of the positive representation of gender mixity (as a marker of difference with Islam) for the gendered religious practice and power relations in Alevi communities, especially in regard to Alevi women, is a valuable topic that clearly needs further research.

While my examination of the homeland engagements of migrants gives some insights into the migration-development nexus in the homeland context, more needs to be done. For example, my observations in the Alevi villages that experienced high levels of emigration indicate a difference between the experiences of Alevi Kurds and Turks suggesting that the ethnopolitical dimension of the link between migration and development is a topic worthy of future investigation.

Finally, the intergenerational transmission of Alevism has been a key component of the socio-spatial dynamics of diasporic transition. The first-generation immigrants are also the last generation of those who lived their religion in its 'natural habitat'. Later generations, who were born or at least grew up in the diaspora, experienced different social and spatial settings. As explored here, the living practices of later generations form a hybrid formation embodying articulated (and rearticulated) practices and newly invented ones. This thesis has explored the social and identity formation of younger generations, in particular its link to their engagement with *cemevis*. However, the interaction of religion, space (and place) and diaspora in the context of the young deserve more discussion from a wider perspective. They are the first generation of diasporic Alevism and their practices offer significant insights into the future of diasporic religions. They, indeed, are the future of the community and the future of Alevism and Alevi identity.

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Appendix

Abbreviations

AABK: Avrupa Alevi Birlikleri Konfederasyonu (Europe confederation of Alevi Unions)

AKP: Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (Justice and Development Party)

BAF: Britain Alevi Federation (Britanya Alevi Federasyonu)

CHP: Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi (The Republican People's Party)

CUP: The Committee of Union and Progress (İttihad ve Terakki Cemiyeti)

EACC: England Alevi Culture Centre and Cemevi (İngiltere Alevi Kùltür Merkezi ve Cemevi)

HDP: Halkın Demokrasi Partisi (Peoples' Democratic Party)

HMP: Her Majesty's Prison

HTO: Hometown organisation

ONS: Office for National Statistics

PKK: Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan (Kurdistan Workers Party)

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